

A.K.A La Comadre

(A play told through Latin-American Music)

By Nora Montañez Patterson

Characters

La Comadre, 40-50. Must be Afro-Latina or Indigenous Latina. Strong, gregarious, childlike but maternal. Sexual. Stubborn. A heavy smoker. La Comadre has been living in that 318 Union Ave., the apartment complex for 25 years. Fluent Spanish speaker from Puerto Rico.

Ester, 40-50's. Must be Black/African American or Afro-Latina. She is sharp and quick. She is resilient, maternal and the voice of reason. A caretaker. Ester lives in the neighborhood.

Alejandro, 22. Any ethnicity. Not white. He is gentle and reserved. He is a caretaker. He tends to his sick mother. They are tenants at 318 Union Ave.

Hector Morales, 40's. Latino. Married to Melinda. Hard working, dedicated to his wife and children. The Morales family has been tenants at 318 Union Ave. for years. They are in the process of moving to Florida. The Morales feels indebted to La Comadre, as she has supported them financially through rent party. Fluent Spanish speaker from Mexico.

Melinda Morales, Late 30's. Any ethnicity. Not white. Married to Hector. Loving. Reserved but strong and honest. Speaks basic Spanish, which she has earned being married to Hector.

The Salsa Band/Tenants: A group of musicians (not gender specific) who traditionally play congas, bongos, bass, piano, tres, a horn section, and the smaller hand-held percussion instruments: claves, guíro, or maracas and/or trumpets.

Time: 2018. 2000.

Place: The apartment complex at 318 Union Ave. of La Comadre located in the inner city neighborhood of Paterson, New Jersey.

Projections: The projections are used in various different ways. The projections are used as a vehicle to communicate the specificity of La Comadre's emotions. They are used to project the lyrics of the songs as well as project a full day in the city of Patterson, NJ.

Music: The music listed is a marker to either use the copyrighted song or an idea of how the music should sound like once composed.

Altar: When the altar is revealed, the altar should be an honest representation of a borinquen ceremonial offering.

Songs:

El Yerberito Moderno by Celia Cruz	La Comadre	Page 10
“Piel Canela” by Bobby Capo	La Comadre/Alejandro	Page 18
“Besame Mucho” by Consuelo Velázquez	Hector	Page 29
“La Murga” by Hector LaVoe	Intro to Act 2	Page 36
“Mi Gente” by Hector LaVoe.	La Comadre/Band	Page 36
“Quitate tu Pa’ponerme Yo” by Fania All-Star	Everyone	Page 39
“Todo Tiene Su Final by Hector LaVoe”	Hector	Page 41
“Te Regalo Una Rosa” by Juan Luis Guerra	Hector	Page 49
““Carnaval” by Celia Cruz”	Everyone	Page 59

Act 1: Scene 1

Early Morning. Lights come up on the apartment of La Comadre. (OS) We hear a deep heavy cough.

Projections: The tiny specks appear on the apartment walls and disappear like shooting stars.

La Comadre appears from her bedroom wearing a thick robe and slippers. She opens the blinds from her living room windows to let in the morning sun.

Projections: The morning sun shines down on the top half of buildings (e.g a corner store, other tenement buildings, a money lending store, a Peruvian bakery sign, etc.).

La Comadre turns on her television and we hear the WXTV Channel 41 Station morning news music. She walks into the kitchen and returns with a café con leche. She stands and watches a bit of the news...it's depressing. La Comadre walks over to the corner of her living room where a white sheet covers an altar, she removes a lighter from under the sheet walks over to a planter and removes a pack of cigarettes. She opens her window that leads to her fire escape.

We hear busy city sounds of steel shutters opening, children playing before school ect. La Comadre sits on her windowsill, lights up her cigarette and enjoying the morning sounds. La Comadre, notices that from one floor up, Elena is sitting on her fire escape.

La Comadre

Elenita, buenos dias? What a beautiful morning, eh? How you feeling today? Oh, good. I was worried porque I didn't see you yesterday morning with your café Bustelo in hand. El dentist?! (snaps her fingers) I think the last time I was at el dentist was...(she thinks). Aye, I don't remember. I don't think that's good, no?! (She laughs)

Bueno, I hope you can still taste your café con leche. Salud!

(They cheers from afar) So, I heard your nieta moved to Nueva York. I can't believe it?! Colombia Univesity! She's gonna be an artista? Mira pa' ya!

(To the street below) Buenos dia, Mr. Wen. Starting early today, no? That's nice! Que tenga un buen dia.

(La Comadre starts to have a coughing fit)

Projections: The tiny specks appear on the apartment walls and disappear like shooting stars.

Uyyyyy! Aye no, I'm fine, nothing that Café Bustelo can't fix. You know, I lived in New York once. Bueno, it was for two months pero I lived there. When I left the island the first time I had a cousin who had a house in Queens. "Ven live in my house. We have rooms. We have a job for you." I thought bueno, there's always talk about how the United States is rich con oportunidad. Y como the island's economic crisis wasn't debilitating I thought..."Vamos, this way I can support mi family back home". Pero, those who make money in this country don't look like you and me, Sra. Elenita. Eso es sierto!

(Beat) Pero tu nieta...she's something else...I might not have dinero to give her pero I have spirit and food.

(To the street below) Señora Morales! Señora Morales, up here. We will see you tonight? Ay, no?! Que pena. We will miss you. Que tenga un buen dia.

(To Elena) Tu sabe, when I moved to Nueva York I dreamed to become a singer. I wanted to get on that stage con las luces y cantar until my voice was gone. Sing the songs of my people so they won't feel alone. I didn't last long en Nueva York por el dinero but I still dream about until this day. It's true, it's only over the river. Pero Jersey is my home. You know, people got it all wrong about Jersey. Paterson is a little valley of culture. Viejos playing dominoes, family weekend BBQ's at Woodland Park, blasting hip hop y salsa music from your windows is a greeting here. La gente no saben, that when Paterson was founded it was the cradle of the industrial revolution in America, pero no, people stopped taking about that when people like us moved in and the white people moved out y la policia went with them. That's why we protect la comunidad. A community that the police won't step into. Que se jodan!

(Looks down at the street) Aqui viene the bus. Adios, mijos! (She does the sign of the cross) Aye, que dios los bendigan!

(La Comadre clears her throat as to relieve a cough from starting.)

(To Elena) Aye, Sra. Elena, we think we're brave?! Those children are braver. With all of the things in our world happeing they still get up and go to school. We don't think of our future enough. What we leave behind. If we thought of our children seriamos mejores humanos. Imaginate un mundo without hate. Is that even posible? Un mundo where there was no poverty, no abuse, no guns just compasión! Pero, no we need more money, we need more things, we need to compete with one another. We. We. We! (An aggressive cough. She takes a deep breath in to relieve it.)
Si, estoy bien, Sra. Elenita. I get to excited algunas veses. Oh, the cigarettes, no...this is my only one for the day.

(Beat)

I'm trying to quit. I need to quit. No, I will quit! It's just...I remember watching the adults gathering con un cigarillo telling stories, laughing, drinking café or rum. I wanted to be in that circle so badly. I wanted to be included in their little secret, their jokes. I thought this little stick was a magical baton to mend the soul. So, I took it in and made room for its smoke inside of me and now...I know...I'm wrong.

Pero, I'm gonna quit. I will quit!

(Looks down at the street) Aye! Me voy, amor. I see Ester. If she smells anything on me...

Will we see you tonight? Because of your puffy cheek? Ay, Señora Elenita, I can't even tell it's puffy. Rum is a cure for everything. Just hold it for four seconds y...Coño! She's here. Me voy. Bendiciones!

(La Comadre slinks back into her apartment to avoid being seen. She hides her cigarette packet in the planter. She tries to fan out the cigarette smoke from her apartments out the window. She then goes to the covered alter and pulls out a palo santo. She lights it up and aggressively begins to bless herself with it.)

Projections: The smoke of the palo santo dances around her walls.

We hear the buzzing of the intercom. La Comadre begins to have a coughing fit.

Projections: A visualization of tiny specks (like stars) appears on the apartment walls but fall like shooting stars.) She chugs the café to sooth her throat. We hear the buzz.

La Comadre

¡He-lo!

Ester

It's me.

(La Comadre buzzes her in. She puts out the palo santo and goes to her front door and casually opens it. Ester is standing there waiting.)

(Projections: Sharp edges like icicles begin to form around the room.)

La Comadre

Buenos Di-

Ester

-It's smells like smoke in here.

La Comadre

Es palo santo. By the way your late.

Ester

Late for what?

(La Comadre points to the window)

Ester (cont.)

Oh! No I couldn't today. I was just-I was at the pharmacy this morning-

La Comadre

Y?

(Ester shows her a prescription bag.)

La Comadre

I was going to pick it up later.

(La Comadre takes the prescription bag.)

Ester

Señora Alminda gave it to me to give to you.

La Comadre

Well, she didn't have to do that.

Ester

Uh Huh! Did you eat? I brought some Pan Frances.

La Comadre

I could smell it this morning. Oh, it's still hot. So...are you staying?

Ester

No. I finally have the energy to do some errands.

La Comadre

You said that the last time.

Ester

I just told you that I feel well enough to do errands and that's what I gotta do.

Eso lo que pasa when you quit drinking café. You're brain doesn't function the right way.

La Comadre

. So that means, you're coming tonight.

(An awkward silence)

Ester

I thought you canceled it.

La Comadre

Y porque? (Eating some bread) It's not a rent party.

Ester

A party is still a party...baptisms, birthdays, Fourth of July-

La Comadre

Que se vaya al carajo, el Fourth of July. Who wants to celebrate that shit right now?

Ester

It doesn't matter what you call it? You throw a party when you pay your rent.

La Comadre

Everyone should throw a party when they pay the rent now days. It means we haven't been pushed out.

(A stare.)

La Comadre (cont.)

We have to say goodbye the right way.

Ester

Well, buy a card or a bottle of something like normal people.

La Comadre

Normal? ! Musica is beautiful way to say goodbye. Music can say more than plain words in a card. Plus, when was the last time you danced?

Ester

You just threw a rent party for Sra. Elenita. Remember that?

La Comadre

That was three months ago and we made \$400.00 that night and gave it all to Sra. Elenita.

Ester

Do you remember the next morning? You called me at 6am. "Vente, I'm in critical condition. Bring sopa."

La Comadre

You had fun that night. Remember when you use to have fun. Now you're...

Ester

...Not today.

La Comadre

So I guess I'll just do everything.

Ester

That never stopped you.

(A silence)

Ester

I think you should let people be. Go to bed early for once.

La Comadre

Early to bed? Mujer, por favor. Don't you want to sing until you have no voice.

Ester

No one wants to hear me sing. (Ester's phone rings) Shit! I gotta go.

(La Comadre leads her to the door. She tried to stifle a cough.)

La Comadre

You always gotta go.

Ester

Take you're med-

(La Comadre shuts the door on her.)

La Comadre

Okkkkaaay!

(La Comadre takes a deep breath in. **Projections: The sharp edges dissipate.**) La Comadre walk towards the altar and considers uncovering it. Instead, she gets the impulse for a cigarette. She goes to the planter but then decides to keep the pack in place. She grabs the bag of medication and put it in a drawer. La Comadre goes into the kitchen and returns with a broom, a mop and a bucket of cleaning supplies. She goes to the record player and pulls out a record and places it on the turntable. From her living room (behind the projection scrim) a salsa band is revealed. **Projections: Old grainy sepia color appears on the apartment walls. The lyrics are projected above the band.** We hear the intro to "El Yerberito Moderno" by Celia Cruz. While La Comadre sings she begins to clean.)

El Yerberito Moderno

Se oye el rumor de un pregonar

Que dice así:

El yerberito llegó, llegó

Traigo yerba santa pa' la garganta

Traigo keisimon pa' la hinchazón

Traigo abrecaminos pa' tu destino

Traigo la ruda pa' el que estornuda

Tambien traigo albahaca pa' la gente flaca

El apasote para los brotes

El vetiver para el que no ve

Y con esa yerba se casa usted

Yerberero!

(Projections: A white smoke envelops around La Comadre.)

(A sudden shift, a moment frozen in time. A flashback. The music continues under the text. La Comadre opens up the door to find Ester with a bottle of wine in hand. She is out of breath.)

Ester

Azúcar!!! It smells like smoke.

La Comadre

I had to do something while I waited for you.

Ester

I'm not late! Oye, I thought you quit?

La Comadre

Did you quit?

Ester

No.

La Comadre

Bueno.

Ester

They still haven't fixed the elevator?

La Comadre

Querida, you know que los apartamentos on the way up to Wayne y Franklyn Lakes are a priority. Down here, we're the ones who suffer.

Ester

Don't I know it?!!!

La Comadre

You bought one botella de vino?

Ester

I left one here yesterday.

La Comadre

Y?

Ester

You drank it, without me?

La Comadre

How you decompress?

Ester

I go for walks. I exercise.

La Comadre

You also smoke. I sing, tomo and smoke mi cigarillos. I exercise by dancing.

(La Comadre dances to *El Yeberito Moreno*.)

Ester

Fine! Let's have a quick one before they arrive.

(La Comadre pulls a two cigarettes from out of her bra. They smoke and dance.)

Ester

Oye, you know the old police headquarters downtown?

La Comadre

The one that has been boarded up since the 70's?

Ester

Yup, they found some remains in there a few days ago.

La Comadre

Que, que?!

Ester

They sayin' someone recently snuck in and died.

La Comadre

Espera, didn't someone just buy that building?

Ester

Ya, the white woman owner was like "I've never been to the back before so I never knew there were any remains."

La Comadre

Only white people buy some crazy shit like an old prison.

Ester

Ya, get this...the cell was lock.

La Comadre

Cerado?!

Ester

The steel doors where locked.

La Comadre

Aye, Porfavor! That body has been there for decades. Yo me imagino que that body was locked up and was forgotten about for years. Que dios lo bendiga!

Ester

Right?! Ain't that some shit. Can you imagine being locked away and then one day you wake up and everyone is gone?

La Comadre

Eso es una pesadilla!

Ester

That's your worst nightmare?

La Comadre

Porsupuesto que si! No one to talk to, to take care of or touch. Just to be forgotten. Aye, no!

Ester

(She takes a long puff)

Speaking of being forgotten, they're almost here.

La Comadre

(Putting out her cigarette)

Pues! Let's get into position. Sra. Elenita is probably there already.

(They both grab binoculars and step out into the fire escape.)

(We hear the sounds of a school bus pulling up and the sounds of children arriving.)

Ester

Here they come!

(We hear the apartment buzzer rings. The record starts skipping. Ester and the salsa band disappear. A shift forward in time. La Comadre coughs.)

Projections: More tiny specks (like stars) appear on the apartment walls but of course fall again.

(La Comadre stops the record player and looks out the window and realizes who it is. She runs into the kitchen and returns with a glass of water. She quickly drinks. We hear the buzzer again. La Comadre quickly removes her robe, which reveals a laced slip. She goes to the buzzer.)

La Comadre

He-llo!

Alejandro

It's me.

La Comadre

Pasa!

(She buzzes Alejandro in and kicks off her slippers. She unlatches her door and positions herself sensually on her hands and knees like she is scrubbing the floor.)

Alejandro (OS)

Buenos dias, Sra. Elenita! Here let me get the door for you.

(La Comadre waits in position. It's taking longer than she expected.)

Alejandro (OS)

Oh, gracias, I've been practicing my Spanish. Have a good ummm...un buen dia.

(La Comadre continues to wait.)

Alejandro (OS)

Adios.

(We hear Alejandro getting closer. La Comadre repositions herself. Alejandro (22) appears at the door with two grocery bags. He wears jeans a tee with a hoody. He looks like a casual dream.)

(Projections: A deep blood red playfully colors the apartment walls.)

Alejandro

Buenos dias!

La Comadre

Aye' Alejandro, I didn't see you there. I wasn't expecting you until the afternoon.

Alejandro

Ya, I decided to go to the grocery store early. I have to take my moms to her doctor's appointment in the afternoon.

(La Comadre stays in position scrubbing. Projections: The blood red color slightly pumps.)

La Comadre

Por supuesto. How is she doing?

Alejandro

Ok! She's been sleeping a lot. It's the chemo, I think.

La Comadre

Aye bendito! Please send her my love.

Alejandro

I will. She really liked your sopa con fideo.

La Comadre

It's my specialty. If she needs anything-or if you need anything.

(Projections: A steady pump of red.)

(A smile. An awkward silence.)

Alejandro

I got everything you needed for tonight.

(Projections: A slightly rapid pump of red.)

La Comadre

Right!

Alejandro

I look forward to tasting your food. You're such a good cook.

La Comadre

Aye, stop!

(Scrubbing at nothing. A long stare. **Projections: A rapid pump of red.**)

Alejandro

I think that spot good.

La Comadre

Pues, sometime you can't tell.

Alejandro

Should I take these into the kitchen?

La Comadre

Aye, si mi amor. Perdon, please, come in.

(Alejandro goes into the kitchen and starts taking items out of the bags.)

Alejandro

It looks like you're making some amarillos tonight.

La Comadre

Yes! Are they ripe enough?

Alejandro

Oh, ya! I mean they were pretty picked out but I searched for the best ones.

La Comadre

You know what's best.

(Alejandro peeks into the living room)

Alejandro

This one! (Holding a platano in his hand) This one is very ripe. Feel it.

(Alejandro holds the plantano out for her to feel.)

It feels like it's about to burst in my hands.

(Projections: The pump of red picks up pace.)

La Comadre

Pues, you have such strong hands so I wouldn't be surprised.

(Alejandro goes back into the kitchen. La Comadre tries to control herself.)

Alejandro

Nah! I've been told I have my mom's hands, very gentle.

(Projections: The pump of red slows down.)

La Comadre

Sometimes gentle is good.

Alejandro

I also bought you two beautiful Mangos. Señor Sanchez said they just came in. You didn't have it on the list but I couldn't resist. I mean, look at them.

(Alejandro returns to the living room with two glowing mangos in his hand. He caresses them slightly.)

(Projections: The pump of red picks up pace.)

La Comadre

Are they ripe?

Alejandro

Ripe?! They are so ripe that I bet when you cut into the juice will go everywhere.

(Projections: A pump of red picks up speed.)

La Comadre

And then it drips all over your arm.

(Projections: A steady pump of red.)

Alejandro

When that happens I have no choice then to lick it off, right?!

La Comadre

Right?!

Alejandro

And look they're the right size too. Not too big and not too small.

(Projections: The red pumps faster.)

La Comadre

How did you learn how to choose them?

Alejandro

Oh, all you gotta do is smell the end of the stem. Here smell it!

(Projections: The red pumps rapidly.)

(La Comadre is tentative but can't control herself. Alejandro gets really close to her and places the mangos under her nose. La Comadre takes a long sniff.)

(Projections: The red pumps faster and faster as if it's about to burst.)

(A climax.)

(Projections: A burst of red!)

Coño!!!
La Comadre

(Beat)
Alejandro
My moms taught me that.

(Projections: The pump of red slows down again.)

Por Dios!!!
La Comadre

(A coughs suddenly emerges. ***(Projections: The tiny specks reappear but of course fall again.)***)

Alejandro
You ok/Sra

La Comadre
/Si. Si!

Alejandro
Oh, I have your change. I can set it down on-

La Comadre (cont.)
No! Keep it.

(Alejandro notices the covered alter.)

Alejandro
Oh! Gracias. Hey, do you need help with that?

La Comadre
No, esta bien. I'm cleaning.

Alejandro
Right! Well I'll get out of your way. I have to go and check on my Moms.

La Comadre

Si, of course.

(La Comadre uses her slip to fan between her legs)

Alejandro (cont.)

I'll see you/ tonight.

La Comadre

Tonight/si! Por supuesto.

(Alejandro exits.)

(La Comadre is flushed. She drinks water. She saunters to the planter and pulls out her packet of cigarettes. She pulls one out and places it softly on her lips. She lights up. **(Projections: The color of cinnamon dusts the walls)** She goes to the record player and replaces the previous record with another record. We hear "Piel Canela" by Bobby Capo. The band reappears)

Piel Canela

By Bobby Capo

Que se quede el infinito sin estrellas
O que pierda el ancho mar su inmensidad
Pero el negro de tus ojos que no muera
Y el canela de tu piel se quede igual
Si perdiera el arco iris su belleza
Y las flores su perfume y su color
No sería tan inmensa mi tristeza
Como aquella de quedarme sin tu amor

(La Comadre sultry dances with herself.)

Me importas tú, y tú, y tú
Y solamente tú, y tú, y tú
Me importas tú, y tú, y tú
Y nadie mas que tú

(Projections: A white smoke envelops around La Comadre.) A sudden shift, a moment frozen in time. A flashback. The music continues. Alejandro returns with a large textbook in hand.)

Alejandro

Here it is.

La Comadre
A ver. Ok! Read it to me.

Alejandro
Escrib-e una history-

La Comadre
Historia.

Alejandro
Hi-storia.

La Comadre
Muy bien!

Alejandro
De tu familia.

La Comadre
Eso mismo

Alejandro
You know, I understand it better than I speak.

La Comadre
They don't test you on how well you understand it pero como lo
hablas.

Alejandro
Hablo un pocito

La Comadre
Muy bien!

Alejandro
I also know..."Chinga tu madre!".

La Comadre
Woah!!! Ok, where did you learn that.

Alejandro
Sr. Hector.

La Comadre
Great! Well you can use that on special purposes.

Alejandro
Oh, I know when to use it.

La Comadre
Bueno...regresamos-

Alejandro
Can't we just listen to it?

(Alejandro goes to the record.)

La Comadre
Que haces?! Vamos! Otra vez.

Alejandro
Espera un ratito.

(He puts the needle on the record.)

La Comadre
You're procrastinating.

Alejandro
I'm practicing.

Alejandro
Me importas tú, y tú, y tú
Y solamente tú, y tú, y tú

(He dances)

Alejandro
See?

La Comadre
No es lo mismo.

Me importas tú, y tú, y tú
Y nadie mas que tú

Alejandro
I know what it means.

Ojos negros piel canela

Alejandro
Skin like cinnamon.

Que me llegan a desesperar

Alejandro
That make me desperate.

Me importas tú

Alejandro
You matter to me.

Y tú y tú

(Alejandro extends his hand to La Comadre who grabs his hand and places the book into his palm. La Comadre opens her front door and he dances out the door.)

Y solamente tú

Alejandro
“And you. And you.”

Y tú y tú

Me importas tú

Y tú y tú

La Comadre
“Y nadie más que tú”

(They laugh while dance. La Comadre is interrupted by her cellphone ringing. Alejandro disappears. We shift back to present time. La Comadre releases a heavy cough. **(Projections: More tiny specks reappear and fall away.)** She turns off the record. The band disappears. She drinks water before answering.)

La Comadra
He-llo', Mami?!

Bendiciones! Que tu'ta siendo?
Bien. Bien. Haqi limpiando pa' el benbe esta la noche, más na.
The part-y to-night. Si, tonight!

(She puts her robe back on. She searches for her flying slippers, and then puts them on. While she speaks into the phone she tries to multi-task cleaning her apartment.)

Y tu, Mami?

...Umhum...

...Umhum...

...Deveras! Oh! Real-ly?

...Umhum...si. Really?!

(Gasping) Oye, como es posible?

...Umhum...

...Si. No?...

...Que idiota! En ingles?
Pues, idiota.

...Aye, Mami!

...Si, por supuesto.

...umhum...

...Aye, bueno. Voy a cocina amarillos con habichu-
...En Ingles? Aye, Mami pa'que...no se suena bien cuando digo "Sweet
plantains with uhhhh...(she thinks) Habi-chue-las.
Como que, como lo cocino?!

...Como tu.

...Ave Maria purisima, I'll cook my food the way I want to cook it.

(She coughs) (***Projections: Small tiny specks reappear and fall away.***)

...Que no me entiendes?

...Pues, que pena.

(She coughs again. (***Projections: More small specks reappear and fall away.***) She
drinks water.)

Estoy bien, Mami!

(We hear a whistle from outside)

...Mami, me voy me silban.

...whistling...

...si, someone is whis-ting.

(We hear the whistle again.)

Mami, me voy. Hablamo ahorita. Te amo.

(She hangs up. La Comadre goes and opens the window. She hangs over the railing to whistle back.)

La Comadre

Hola Hector. Melinda, suban. Come up!

(La Comadre rushes to get rid of all her cleaning supplies. She exits into her bedroom and returns with a long floral style robe. She stands by the door waiting to be greeted. Think Dolores Del Rio. Hector and Melinda bursts through the door.

(Projections: A colorful glitter illuminates the apartment walls following La Comadre).

Hector
Comadre! (He kisses her hand)/
You look beautiful today.

Melinda
/Comai!

La Comadre

Gracias! Gracias. Como los puedo servirles?

(Projections: A colorful glitter expands and contracts.)

Hector
We want to thank you in/
advance for tonight.

Melinda
/Really. Thank you!

Hector
Let us pay you for something/

Melinda
/Just give her some money, Amor

La Comadre

Es un placer. No se preocupen.

Hector
Your pleasure?/
It's our pleasure.

Melinda
Give her something./We
won't take "No" for an
answer.

(Hector hands La Comadre a wad of cash)

La Comadre

I can't accept this.

Hector

Melinda said it "We won't take No for an answer." You have done enough for our family.

Melinda

It can help pay for the food/ or drinks.

Hector

/Bringing in a band,
that has to be
expensive.

(Projections: A colorful glitter expands and contracts.)

La Comadre

You will need it for the move.

Hector

Please take it. When we moved here we knew nobody. We had no family. I didn't know English-

Melinda

You knew enough, amor.

Hector

That's right. Pero, we had no one. You, Comai you made us feel like we had family.

Melinda

Your rent parties were a true blessing. Otherwise, we would have been out on the streets a long time ago. Plus, you were there when Isabelita was born and cried all the time and you held her just to give us a break and now look at her. It's the least thing we can do.

La Comadre

Aye, por favor. You would have done the same for me. We are survive and thirving together.

(Projections: A colorful glitter expands and contracts.)

Hector

Te vamos ha estrañar.

La Comadre

The community won't be the same without you. Pero entiendo, you have to be with your child. La Universidad! I can't believe it.

Melinda

We're proud of her too. Imagine...a lawyer in the family.

Hector

Ehhhehhh...an immigration lawyer!

I remember when she was pequeña and would say "Papi, I'm going to be a lawyer and help people not be afraid."

La Comadre

I believed her then and more so now. She has never been afraid to speak out. Y ahora mira la, on her way to exercise su voz as an immigration lawyer.

Bendito!

Melinda

Uyyyy...and she was opinionated...

Hector

She spirited.

Melinda

Is that what you call it?

Hector

She was practicing. I just wish she practiced more Spanish. Spanish was her first language and now...

Melinda

She's figuring it out. If I could I learn and now speak toddler Spanish. Ella va estar bien.

La Comadre

She will be more than fine. She will be amazing.

Hector

That's cuz we raised her well.

Melinda

It takes a village.

La Comadre

Bueno, eso si.

Melinda

So, tomorrow the van will be here early and then off to Miami by the end of day.

La Comadre

Miami, alli hay lots of Cubanos, no?

Hector

Little Havana.

La Comadre

Tu sabe, a lot of people retire there.

Melinda

Oh no, we're retiring in Mexico! We talked about that.

Once Isabel has graduated we plan on finding a little place in Mexico. Get a little farm or a place by the water and just breath. That's the plan!

La Comadre

Deveras?!

Hector

I wonder where Isabel gets it?

Melinda

Stop?!

La Comadre

So, you'd go home?

Hector

You know, very country has problems, no?! Pero, Mexico lives in my veins. That's my home. Plus, I need to take care of mis padres. I promised them that.

La Comadre

Entiendo.

Melinda

Y tu, comai? Will you ever move back home?

(A long beat.)

La Comadre

When you live in Puerto Rico you wear an armor of resilience and pride to your patria. We're Tainos. We're warriors. We've weathered the storm over and over. When Irma hit, I thought..."that's the life of living en la isla, right?!" Pero, a week later when Maria hit and it went straight to the heart of the island and that...that...was devastating. I was here but all I wanted to be con mi familia, mi gente y seguir adelante like we always have. I couldn't reach

my Mami for days. Mi familia for days. There was not water. There was no electricity. Nothing for days! And then being ridiculed by that president, falsify the death toll to benefit him politically and blaming the financial crisis on us...that...that you never forget.

My childhood home en la Perla was gone. There was nothing left. It was all gone. Pero here. Here! I promised myself that I would make more of impact here. At least my vote matters here to get rid of that President.

(Projections: The colorful glitter begins to close in on La Comadre.)

Hector

I hear you, Comai. I hear his name and I still can't believe he's our President.

La Comadre

He's not my President.

Melinda

Exacto! Isabel is counting down until she can make her first vote.

La Comadre

Ay, bandito! (A breath) Bueno, I know you didn't come here and he me talk about my struggles. Como les puedo ayudar?

Hector

Comai, you are helping enough with tonight's celebration.

La Comadre

How can we not celebrate?

Hector

Si! Of course.

Melinda

That is how we want to leave, celebrating con la comunidad.

(Hector notices the covered altar.)

La Comadre

SPEAKING of celebrating...maybe a song or two tonight?

Melinda

I already told him he should warm up his voice.

Hector

Maybe, I mean it's a big day tomorrow.

Melinda

What's that have anything to do with singing una cancion.

La Comadre

(Going to Hector)

Unita! You have to sing "Todo Tiene Su Final"

Melinda

Si, amor.

Hector

...ok...Ok! Una cansion. No one wants to hear me sing?

La Comadre

Mentira! We hear you all the time.

Melinda

I told you they could hear you.

Hector

There is nothing wrong with serenating tu amor every once in a while.

(Hector kisses Melinda's hand.)

Melinda

It's the only way you can redeem yourself.

Hector

What can I say?

Melinda

Nothing. You have said enough. We should go. We have a lot of packing to do.

Hector

Si, of course.

La Comadre

We'll see you esta noche.

(Hector kisses her hand. Melinda drags Hector to the door.)

Hector

Te lo agradezco.

Melinda

Aye, mi amor.

La Comadre

Nos vemos esta noche!

Melinda

Porsupuesto!

(Hector and Melinda exit. La Comadre smiles at the hand that Hector just kissed. She coughs.)

(Projections: The multi-colored glitter blows way and the specks reappear but this time linger a little longer.)

(Her smile begins to deflate. She walks over to her window. She grabs a cigarette and lights up. A sudden shift, a moment frozen in time. A flashback. In the distance we hear Hector singing “Besame Mucho” by Consuelo Velázquez.

Besame Mucho

By Consuelo Velázquez

Hector

Bésame, bésame mucho

Como si fuera esta la noche

La última vez

(La Comadre sits on her windowsill and listens to Hector sing.)

La Comadre

Es como, he’s singing to us too, no Sra. Elenita?

Hector

Bésame, bésame mucho

Que tengo miedo a perderte

Perderte después

(La Comadre yells down to Melinda one floor down.)

La Comadre

Que romantico, Melinda.

(Melinda appears having climbed the fire escape.)

Hector

*Quiero tenerte muy cerca
Mirarme en tus ojos
Verte junto a mi*

Melinda

Everyone can hear him. He just put Isabel down for a nap.

Hector

*Piensa que tal vez mañana
Yo ya estaré lejos
Muy lejos de aquí*

La Comadre

Esta bien! He's siging to all of us. How's Isabelita?

Melinda

Good. Good.

La Comadre

Y tu?

Melinda

I'm...I'm fine.

La Comadre

You sure?

(Beat)

Melinda

No. Isabel...she's...she's attached to my breast all day and night. I swear I feel lik my body isn't mine anymore. Nobody ever talks about how hard it is to bring a baby home. You don't sleep. You don't ever eat. I feel like a mummy. (She cries) A-Mummy Mommy.

La Comadre

Ohhhh...Melinda.

Melinda

I feel so guilty. I love her, I really do. What if I can't do it? What if we made a mistake? We brought her into this shitty world were children can't go to school without feeling safe. The recount in Florida placed us with Bush and I can't even begin to imagine a worst president.

(Melinda cries. La Comadre holds her.

Aye, amor. We hear you. La Comadre

I suck! Melinda

No! Porsupesto que no. You. Are. A. Good. Mami. Do you hear me? La Comadre

Si. Melinda

What do you need right now?! La Comadre

A vacation. Melinda

Puñita...so do I. La Comadre

(Melinda cries.)

Que dijo, Sra. Elenita?! Melinda
(to Sra. Elenita)

Si, she's still asleep?

(Then they all burst into laughter)

Sra. Elenita!!! La Comadre

Ohmygod. Melinda

No, tiene razon. She's right it does cure all things...well...most things. La Comadre
Querida, you release any way you can. I mean, escuchalo?!

(They listen to Hector sing.)

He's so charming, right?! Melinda

La Comadre

Go! Before the Isabelita wakes up. Give your body a vacation. Tu fuego sigue alli, they might be embers pero they are still there. Go!

Melinda

Muchas gracias.

(To Sra. Elenita above.)

Both of you!

(Melinda exits)

Hector

Que tengo miedo a perderte

Perderte después

(We hear a loud whistle. We quickly shift back in time. La Comadre coughs.
(Projections: The multi-colored glitter blows way and the specks reappear but this time linger a little longer.) La Comadre looks down the fire escape.

La Comadre

Mr. Williams?! Up here!
Oye, I can smell the BBQ from up here.
It's killing me. I know I've tasted that sauce.

How are the grandkids?
I know they're big. I see them every morning, bendito.

Well, save me some and I'll save you some maduros tonight.
Ok, Mr. Williams, nos vemos.

(La Comadre watches the neighborhood from above. There was nothing out of the ordinary. No one to talk to. No one to take care of. La Comadre steps back into her apartment and found her cellphone. She contemplates whom to call first. She dials.)

La Comadre

Mami! Te estaba regressando la llamada. Hablamos!

(La Comadre walks over to the altar and contemplates to uncover it. Instead she makes another call.)

La Comadre

Hey! It's me. Are you coming today or not?

(She hangs up. La Comadre turns on the television. She flips through a game show, a talk show finally landing on the news.)

News Person

Good Evening! I'm Sandra Espinosa for Eyewitness News and we begin tonight with that deadly shooting in New Jersey. A young woman gun down inside a bar. Carla Miles spoke with the victim's family. She is in Pat-

(La Comadre erruptly turns off the television and tosses the remote into the couch. She goes to the planter and removes a cigarette and aggressively lights up. She steps out into the fire escape. She begins to aggressively clears her throat.)

La Comadre

Aye, Sra. Elenita! Perdoname if I was being too loud. Estaba limpiando and the dust. Tu sabe?

(We hear the city sounds get louder)

I just needed un descanso before the kids come-

(A honk.)

Eh?!!!

(Another honk)

Que tu dice? Aye, disculpa.

(To the street bellow)

Ave maria purisima!!! Cállate con esa mierda. There are babies napping.

(The honking stops.)

(To the street bellow)

Ayyyy...Mr. Wen, I know the nerve?! No respect! Que tengan un buen día.

(Beat)

Haci es Sra. Elenita, one minute you hate the city and how loud it is pero the next you love the city and the people in it. Usted, you said that to me that first time I smoke my first cigarette on the fire escape.

(She coughs)

No puede ser!!! Deveras?! Aye, no me haga recordar otherwise we both will be up here llorando cuando the kids arrive. Wow! 26 años. No lo puedo creer. How I wish que mi madre estaria aqui. You would love her. Estariamos sentadas aqui taking care of these children from the sky. (She smokes)

Sabe, I worry about these kids, Sra. Elenita. There is so much hate en este mundo. Guns are replacing pencils y there is a school shooting time after time after time. The threat of this country is power y los guns are the spark the feeds the flame.

(She smokes)

Hace visto la noticias? No, pues it's filled with shootings y ese presidente calling immigrantes aliens, criminals and invaders. The police are eliminating black men and women y nuestro mundo...(a deep breath in) There are times...taking the words of one of the kids a few days ago, "Being a human is hard."

(Looking at the city being illuminated by late afternoon sun.)

Mire, el sol is beginning the journey to leave nuestro barrio. It's like the sun is cleansing us.

(She looks at her watch then puts out her cigarette.)

Mire pa' ya, aqui vienen.

(We hear the distant sound of a school bus and children sounds.)

(To the street bellow)
Buenas tardes, mucha-
Oye, look both ways before you cross.
Ave' Maria purisima!
You know we can see you from up here.

(La Comadre waves.)

Hola. Hola!!! Don't forget about your homework.

Sra. Franklyn?! Como le va? I'm good. I'm good. We'll catch up at the laundry mat this weekend.

(We hear salsa/merengue being played out of windows in the distant. She listens.)

Ohhh...it sounds like its time to cook.
Oye, coño!!! Es tiempo para cocinar and I'm just sitting here
like como que I'm on vacation. Sra. Elenita, nos vemos mas
tarde.

(She realizes.)

Sra. Elenita? Thank you for listening.

(In a hurry, La Comadre slides back into her apartment. She quickly grabs a record
and places it on the turntable. The band reappears and begins to play. We hear a fast
paced instrumental salsa (e.i Ran Kan Kan by Tito Puentes or Merecumbé by Johnny
Colon.)

(Projections: Sunset colors illuminate with the beat of the band.)

(La Comadre runs into the kitchen and begins to cook dressing the stage with
glorious smells like lime, garlic, and sweet plantains. The band plays as an interlude
to La Comadre's cooking to inform time passing. While she dances and cooks the
active city life is performed around the stage (i.e Alejandro coming home from work,
Melinda and Hector packing, Ester walking past La Comadre's building.)
The last song decrescendos as each band mate disappear from behind the screen. La
Comadre tastes her cooking.)

La Comadre

Mmmmmm!!! Perfecto.

Lights fade.

Act 2: Scene 1.

(In the darkness of the dim lights we hear a trombone play the beginning of *La Murga* by Hector LaVoe. **(Projections: The walls of La Comrade's apartment beam multi-colored with the beat of the song.)** From the audience each band mate enters La Comadre's apartment as if they are invited tenants. Melinda, Hector and Alejandro also arrive. They all mingle, drink and listen to the music as they wait for La Comadre to appear. The band plays *La Murga* and then slowly transitioning into *Mi Gente* by Hector LaVoe. La Comadre enters dressed in a silver glimmer dress, hair flowing with curls and makeup beautifully highlighted.

Mi Gente

By Hector LaVoe

La Comadre:

Oigan mi gente
Lo más grande de este mundo
Siempre me hacen sentir
Un orgullo profundo
Los llamé
No me preguntaron dónde
Orgullo tengo de ustedes
Mi gente siempre responde
Vinieron todos para oírme guarachar
Pero como soy de ustedes
Yo los invitaré a cantar
Vinieron todos, ay, para oírme guarachar
Pero como soy de ustedes
Yo los invitare a gozar
Conmigo sí van a bailar
Yo los invitare a cantar
Conmigo sí, ¡ehh pa!, ¡esa va!

(Que cante mi gente, que cante mi gente)
Ay, que cante mi gente *(Que cante mi gente)*
Ahora que yo estoy presente *(Que cante mi gente)*
Díganme lo que tienen que decir *(Que cante mi gente)*
Que yo canto como el coquí *(Que cante mi gente)*
El coquí de Puerto Rico *(Que cante mi gente)*
Y te digo que suena mejor que El Jibarito *(Que cante mi gente)*
Lo le lo lay, lo le lo lay, le lo lay *(Que cante mi gente)*
Yo te canto de verdad, mamá *(Que cante mi gente)*
Y yo le canto al presidente *(Que cante mi gente)*
Y yo le canto a Papá Dios
Y pa' todo el mundo y mi gente *(Que cante mi gente)*
Ay, que rico está, mamá

Y ten para gozar y ten para bailar (*Que cante mi gente*)

(Projections: A rhythmic visual beat to the La la la la la la la (either sounds waves or dancing music notes))

(Alejandro offers La Comadre a drink. She coyly takes his offer. She flirts with the crowd as she sings. Ester enters and watches from the door.)

Band/Everyone

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

La Comadre

La le lo lay, le lo lay

Ay, pero que rico que está

(La Comadre raises her glass as a cheer. The crowd cheers back.)

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

Ey, lo le lo lay, le lo lay

Alegre va cantando, mamá

Ese es su moro

Ay, see you tomorrow

Porque tú eres la vaca, mamita, y yo soy el toro

Eh, ah la lay, le lo lay

Se soltaron los caballos

Se soltaron los dementes, ¿pa' 'ónde van?

No se olle nada, pero que más duro ¿qué pasa?,
que se oíga

¡Yo'!

(La la la la la la la)

(La la la la la la la)

Todo el mundo que cante, la la la la la la la

(The band wraps up the song. The gathering erupts in applause and la Comadre bows.)

La Comadre

(Clears her throat.)

Good evening, mi familia. Welcome to 318 Union Ave. Apartamento 201. Donde la musica continues until you wake up; Mr. Wen's arroz frito y Mr. Franklyn's BBQ blesses our noses. Where the laughter of our children mixes con la musica de nuestro barrio and our community gets lifted. Glad you could make it to nuestra celebracion. Tonight we honor Hector y Melinda Morales as we say adios to these beautiful souls. We will miss you both especialmente falling asleep to the sounds of Hector cantando Javier Solis from the fire escape.

Melinda

You mean when he would serenade me after an argument.

Hector
What can I say; I'm a lover not a fighter.

A Bandmate
How about you serenate us for once?

Hector
Quizas. Quizas!

La Comadre
(To Hector) I will get to you in a minute. Pero en serio, you both have been a light to this community. And your presence will be a loss to our comunidad. Pero sabemos que it's a great opportunity and a great new start next to Isabelita.

Melinda
Isabel wanted to be here tonight pero-

Hector
-Pero she didn't want to party con estos viejos.

La Comadre
I don't see any old people here.

(They all cheers)

La Comadre
Bueno, una gran bendicion para la familia Morales, may everyone around show you how special you both are. Y recuerda que you will always have a home waiting for you on Union Street. Salud!

(An uplifting cheers)

Salud!
Everyone

Ay mira, we made Hector cry.
Bandmate

Ohhhh, mi amor.
Melinda

Oye, men cry, too.
Hector

Bandmate
Don't give him the mic he'll make us all sad.

La Comadre
(to Bandmate)
Like it will take much.
(To Hector)
Ven compadre. Speak if you want.

(Hector takes the mic)

Hector
Melinda and I are lost for words and as you know we are not one's without words. Pero, les agradezco con todo mi alma y los voy ha extrañar muchisimo. Thank you for being my familia.

(Hector begins to cry. Melinda goes to him.)

La Comade
Aye, Hector by the end of the night I'll have no make up on.
Musica maestro!

(La Comadre takes a big swig of a drink. We hear be beginning of "Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo" by Fania All-Star)

Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo"

by Fania All-Star

Everyone
Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo quitate tu
Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo quitate tu

La Comadre
Con este ritmo sabroso
les canto pa' gosar.
Con este ritmo sabroso
Les canto pa' bailar
Con un trago en la mano
Nos vamos a vacilar. Eh, eh.

Bandmates
Dale!
Baila. Baila!

Everyone
Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo quitate tu
Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo quitate tu

Bandmate #1
Cualquiera puede cantar

Bandmates
Anyone can sing?

'date quieto y con calma
Porque en la sangre nos sale
La palabras de la alma.

Everyone

Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo quitate tu
Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo quitate tu

Hector
Ahora quiero decirles
El orgullo de estar aqui
Ahora quiero cantarles
De mi vida viviendo ha qui
Con la mano de mi esposa
Le canto como el coqui.

Bandmates
Habla! Habla...

Then sing!

...Melinda!

Everyone

Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo quitate tu
Quitate tu pa'ponerme yo quitate tu

Quitate tu
Quitate tu

Quitate tu
Quitate tu

(Ester appears at the door. Alejandro goes over and offers her a drink. Ester rejects it.)

Melinda

Otra! Otra!

Melinda/Alejandro/Bandmates

Otra! Otra! Otra!

(A joyful laugh)

La Comadre

(To the bandmates) Ustedes saben, I don't share this mic with just anyone.
(She winks.) Saben que no se puede ir hasta que cante. Ven, Hector.

(We hear the trumpets start the beginning of "Todo Tiene Su Final by Hector LaVoe")

Everyone

Hector! Hector! Hector!
Let him sing.
No, si canta llora.

La Comadre

Familia, ese hombre does not need no introducion. The one, the only, el
Maestro de la hora. Hector Ramirez!

(A familiar applause.)

Todo Tiene Su Final

By Hector LaVoe

Todo Tiene Su Final
Nada dura para siempre
Tenemos que recordar
Que no existe eternidad
Como el lindo clavel
Sólo quiso florecer
Y enseñaron su bellez
Y marchite perecer
Todo tiene su final

(La Comadre dances by herself. Ester goes to her. Hector continues to sing through
their interaction.)

La Comadre

Por fin', pero mira quien llego?

(Projections: Sharp edges reappear on the walls.)

Hector:

Nada dura para siempre

Ester

I came to say goodbye to Hector y
Melinda then I'm going home.

Hector:

Tenemos que recordar
Que no existe eternidad

La Comadre

What we're not worthy of your
time?

Hector:

Como el campeón mundial
Dio su vida por llegar

Ester

That's how it's going to be?

Y perder lo más querido
En las masas otro más

La Comadre
That's how you're making it.
Donde estabas hoy?

Ester
The time went past me.

La Comadre
Como ayer and /two days
before that and...

Ester
I was busy.

La Comadre
Too busy for them?

Ester
Not tonight.

Hector:
Eh, alalale, lalelele

La Comadre/Everyone
(alalale, lalelele/)

Ester
/Do you
really want
people to
hear you
down the
street?

Todo tiene su final

(Todo tiene su final)

Si no me quieres dimelo ahora

(Todo tiene su final)/

You want the
cops to come?

A mi velorio no venga a llorar, no no

Que te jodas.

Screw me?!

(Melinda offers a drink to Ester.)

(To Melinda)
No gracias!

Ay, mamita rica
Yo sabia que un día tenia que acabar

(Todo tiene su final)
(Todo tiene su final)

(La Comadre takes the drink from Melinda and forcefully offers it to Ester.)

Hector:
Punto final, todo se acabo

La Comadre
Go medicate yourself.
Maybe it would help

Ester
I said, no!

Hector:
Y va a llegar un demonio atómico
y te va a limpiar
Porque todo tiene su final

(Todo tiene su final)
(Todo tiene su final)

(La Comadre dances by herself and chugs Ester's drink.)

Hector:
Echa pa' alante, mamá

(The band transitions into the instrumental part of the song.)

Ester
Are you really forcing me to drink?

La Comadre
Relajate, mujer!

(Hector takes Ester's hand. They dance.)

La Comadre
Wepa!

(Ester hesitantly dances. Slowly we see her let's go. The crowd claps to the beat. Alejandro offers to cut in. They dance. We hear La Comadre cough. She eases herself by chugging another drink. After a while, La Comadre intervenes and dances with Alejandro.)

(Projections: A deep blood red playfully colors the apartment walls.)

(Alejandro tries on some flashy salsa steps. La Comadre squeals like a young schoolgirl. The crowd claps to the beat of the song. Ester watches. Alejandro pulls her in closer. As the song reaches the end, Alejandro and La Comadre are wrapped in each other's arms like a couple finishing making love.)

(Projections: Projections: A steady pump of color.)

(La Comadre slides her hand up the back of Alejandro's head. She pulls him towards her and kisses him deeply.)

(Projections: Projections: A solid pump of color into a firework.)

(Everyone laughs and erupts into applause.)

Hector

My singing will do that to people.

A Bandmate

Is that all it does?

(Laughter. La Comadre takes to the mic.)

La Comadre

The apartment esta a fuego esta noche, no?!

(She coughs as she tries to clear her throat.)

(Projections: The tiny specks (like stars) reappear on the apartment walls. They linger.)

I just want to say- (she coughs) descuplame, queria decir-(another cough)

(Projections: A few specks fall.)

(Melinda offers her a drink. La Comadre takes a sip. She breathes.)

La Comadre (cont.)

Uyyyy...mucha par---yyyy. Bueno, we have such amazing people blessing mi apartamento esta noche. We don't have the same crew here tonight pero la celebracion continua con nosotros. Mis compañeros de la salsa, gracias por el regalo de musica esta noche. Each and every one of you gives me life. Alejandro, you are a dream come true thank you for keeping me young. Y...Ester...we made a pact that we would protect our community. Well-here we are. Pero tonight isn't like any other night. No, this is not a rent party. Porque how can we let Hector y Melinda leave sin apoyo de nuestra comunidad. (A Bandmate hands La Comadre a closed envelope) This envelope is not charity. This is a gift, an offering to guide your way as you search for new traditions and new meanings. (She tries to clear her throat. A cough escapes.)

(Projections: A few specks fall again.) (She drinks. A bandmate tries to assist.)

I'm just getting emotional. Es nada. (She laughs it off). Oh, it's hot in here, no?! Bueno, let's raise a glass to Hector y Melinda. El barrio won't be the same with out you two, pero como dijo el gran Hector LaVoe, todo tiene su final. Salud!

Salud! Everyone

Que siga la musica. La Comadre

Que siga!!! Everyone

Uy, it's hot in here. Let's open up a window. La Comadre
(A loud cough)

(Projections/Sound: The sound of a heart beating.)

(We hear "Tu Me Vuelves Loco" by Frankie Ruiz. Alejandro goes to the mic. Hector finds La Comadre.)

Comai, we are lost for words. Hector

This is too much. Melinda

Esta bien. La Comadre

Pero we can't. Melinda

(Projections/Sound: The sound of a heart beating picks up the pace. We begin to see droplets of red paint dripping in unison to the beat.)

Yes, you can and you will. Es un regalito. La Comadre

(Melinda wraps her arms around La Comadre. La Comadre releases a rumbling cough.)

(Projections/Sound: The heart beating sound, the droplets and music morph together.)

Melinda
Are you ok, Comadre?

La Comadre
Si! Estoy bien.

A Bandmate
Comadre, te hago un plato?

La Comadre
No, gracias.

Hector
We can't thank you enough.

La Comadre
Thank me by eating. Discuplame! (Clears her throat)

(La Comadre exits her apartment. A haunting silence. Lights in the apartment and music decrescendo. La Comadre pulls a cigarette out and tries to light it. Ester appears at the door.)

(Projections/Sound: Sharp edges like icles appear around them.)

Ester
How long?

La Comadre
Que?

(Ester shows La Comadre the squished up cigarette package.)

(Projections: Coldness envelops them. Projections: Icicles appear beneath La Comadre's feet.)

(Silence)

Ester (cont.)
This is what you mean about a pact?
You can barely take care of yourself/
and now you're blaring your music/
you want the cops to come?/
Remember the last time?

La Comadre
I broke the pact?
Blaring?
Es una fiesta
Vete al carajo!

(Projections: More icicles appear beneath La Comadre's feet.)

Ester

We made a pact. We watch out for each other and make the effort of taking care of our damn selves so we could take care of our community.

La Comadre

Y adonde estabas tu? I sit here like una mierda waiting for you while Sra. Elenita y yo take care of the community.

Ester

So, grinding up on a 17 year old is taking care of our community?

(Projections: One of the icicles crack beneath La Comadre.)

La Comadre

(Clearing her throat)

El tiene 24 años. There's a difference.

Ester

His mother is dying.

La Comadre

It's called decompressing. Quizas lo puedes trata.

Ester

Is that why you covered the altar?

(Projections: Icicles begin to break underneath La Comadre's feet.)

La Comadre

I was cleaning.

Ester

For a more than a month now?

(Silence)

Ester

Covering the altar won't change anything. I would rather make myself invisible then make them invisible.

La Comadre

Vete al-

(Alejandro opens the apartment door.)

Alejandro

I'm sorry to interrupt. The police are downstairs.

Mierda...
La Comadre

(Hector appears at the door.)

Hector
(Joking)
Maybe it was my singing?

La Comadre
Esos come mierdas, only come here to-

Alejandro
I'll go see what they want/

La Comadre
No! Por favor others can go.

Alejandro
It's ok. I'll be right back and then we'll have another dance.

Ester
I'll go with you.

(Alejandro exits. La Comadre starts to have a coughing fit. **Projections: The specks reappear and fall.**)

Hector
Comai, you need another shot for your throat.

La Comadre
Si, porfavor.

(Hector exits)

La Comadre
(To Ester)
Watch after him.

Ester
I know what I need to do. How about take care of yourself for once...Iveeth.

(Projections: All the icicles break beneath La Comadre.) (La Comadre begins to have another coughing fit. Ester exits)

La Comadre
Es Ivette! You know my mother spelled it wrong on my birth certificate.
Cabrona!

(Hector reappears with a shot and leads her into the apartment.)

Hector

Comai, I won't leave this apartment without serenading a gift to you.

Bandmates

Oh no!!!

Hector

(Joking)

¡Cállense ya!

Bandmates

Te jodemos porque te queremos.

(A playful banter and laughter)

Hector

Ya, play the song, huey.

(The band gently begins to play. A bandmate hands Hector a bouquet of roses.)

(Projections: Rose petals cascade from the walls.)

'Te Regalo Una Rosa'

by Juan Luis Guerra

Te regalo una rosa
la encontré en el camino
no sé si está desnuda
o tiene un solo vestido
no, no lo sé
Si la riega el verano
o se embriaga de olvido
si alguna vez fue amada
o tiene amores escondidos
ay, ayayay, amor
eres la rosa que me da calor

(Projections: Rose petals cascade from the walls.)

eres el sueño de mi soledad
un letargo de azul
un eclipse de mar, pero...

(Projections: The rose petals begin to mix with the police strobe lights.)

ay, ayayay, amor
yo soy satélite y tú eres mi sol
un universo de agua minerals
un espacio de luz
que sólo llenas tú, ay amor
ayayayay...

(Projections/Sound: The rose petals transform into police strobe lights while the music begins to mix with police sirens.) (The music is interrupted. La Comadre goes and opens the window to hear a disturbance down the street.)

Melinda

What is going on?

La Comadre

(Going to the window)

No...no...no...

(To Sra. Elenita)

Sra. Elenita, que esta pasando? Noooooo, please no.

(La Comadre steps outside the fire escape.)

La Comadre

DEJEN LOS YA! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT BEING HERE!

Bandmate

Voy ha-

(Projections: A cloud of strobe lights begins to close in on La Comadre.)

La Comadre

(To Bandmate)

No!

Melinda

Ester is down there.

La Comadre

Alejandro, tambien.

Melinda

Aye dios mio! Why do they keep doing this?

La Comadre
Because our lives don't matter to them.
(To the street bellow)
LEAVE OUR KIDS ALONE.

Bandmate
They have nothing better to do.

La Comadre
(To the guests)
The kids need to go inside. The kids are watching.

Melinda
Comai, let's go.

La Comadre
NO! I can't. I don't think I can.

(Projections: The cloud begins to throb.)

Bandmate
I'll go.

La Comadre
NO!!! Please stay. Eso es lo que quieren for all of us to die.

Hector
Pero Comadre-

La Comadre
They want to rile us up so they can justify sus acciones.

(La Comadre release a deepening cough. She searches for her cigarettes.)

Melinda
Comai-

(Projections: The cloud throbs louder causing La Comadre to have a panic attach.)

La Comadre
Necesito, agua. (Breathing) Ellos son-
(Breathing) Nosotros- we-we are the ones who-
(Swallowing a breath) live in terror. Afraid to even listen to music or drive a
car, go to school or work.
(Pacing) We-the ones who end up-

(Shots rung. *Projections: A cold fear comes over the apartment.*)

(Silence.)

(Light Dim)

Act 2: Scene 2

(Projections: A sunshine begins to peak above the buildings. We see La Comadre covered with a blanket sleeping on the fire escape. Ester appears at the front door with café and a bakery bag. She sets the apartment keys near the altar. Ester goes to La Comadre.)

Ester
Hey!

La Comadre
Hey!

Ester
I took you're keys last-

La Comadre
Yo se.

(Ester offers La Comadre a cup of coffee.)

Ester
Café?

La Comadre
Café con-

Ester
-Leche y azucar y pan frances.

La Comadre
Gracias.

Ester
How'd you sleep?

La Comadre
(A scuff)
How'd you sleep?

Ester
Terrible!

La Comadre
Igual! How's the city down there?

Ester
Like we “got up again”.

La Comadre
Every time.

Ester
I checked in on Alejandro.

La Comadre
Y?

Ester
He’s ok. He’s shook and a little bruised but he’s ok. You should go and see him.

La Comadre
No. I think I’ve helped enough.

(Silence)

La Comadre
Hey, quiero decirte-ayer/

No, I’m sorry/

Lo que dije yo/

Ester
I’m sorry/

I didn’t mean what I said.

Ester
I know/ what I said. I’m sorry. I am in no power to control your life. Everyone grieves differently.

La Comadre
I know but you were right. You’re always right.

(Beat)
Tengo miedo.

Ester
Who isn’t afraid right now?!

La Comadre
I’m tired of being resilient. I just need-

Ester

A break?

(A forgiving laugh.)

La Comadre

Si!

Ester

I hear you. The fact that we are still alive is a blessing. We came here with nothing. Some of us arrived here having been taken away from family. We recreated it here. This is our home. We built it. It's our responsibility that our people aren't invisible in it.

La Comadre

Si!

I love you, hermana.

Ester

Te amo tambien.

(Looking out into the city.)

La Comadre

It's quiet out there. It's weird.

Ester

Ya, I know.

La Comadre

Oye, como estas tu?

Ester

I'm-I'm tired. I'm angry. I'm mostly heartbroken. I feel like my heart never mends. It just keeps getting cut and cut and cut but it does it heal.

La Comadre

How can we heal? Como? Es imposible. How long? Really how long will this continue to go on? I'm not sure how much hope I have left. Anoche...I'm glad nothing happened.

Ester

It's ended worst.

La Comadre

Lo se?!

(Ester walks over to the altar. Ester looks at La Comadre as to inform; it's time. La Comadre take a deep inhale and no words come out.)

Ester

I hear you. I get it. However, I don't have a choice and neither should you. How could we not call our peoples' names?

La Comadre

Little by little I put the altar together. Un foto aqui y alla. Pero now...it become much bigger and too much weight and I know I shouldn't silence them. I know es que...can we just get a fucking break.

(Silence)

Ester

Come we'll rebuilt it together.

(Silence)

Ester

Entiendo. Hiding is easier. Maybe it will regenerate our collective breath. Hiding feels good...until it doesn't. Both you and I know that avoidance creates more harm. We gotta speak their names in order to acknowledge that they left us too soon.

Come.

We'll do it together.

(La Comadre agrees. Both slowly unravel the white sheet and reveal an intricate unattended altar with moldy offerings, dried herbs and with pictures of community members that have died from the injustices of societal living.

(Projections/Sound: A cold lost grieving feeling.) La Comadre begins to have difficulties breathing which she releases into a heavy guttural cough that she can't control which slowly transforms into a deep sob. **(Projections: The tiny specks (like stars) reappear on the apartment walls however this time they look like tears.)** Ester holds La Comadre. La Comadre begins to breathe. They breathe together.)

Ester

I got you. I got you. I got you. (A wait.) You ok?

(A soft nod from La Comadre)

Ester

Juntas!

(La Comadre agrees. La Comadre grabs the roses that were left on a table. Ester grabs a lighter and dusts off the candles and begins to light them. Ester then grabs the palo santo from the altar and lights it. **(Projections: A spiritual purity begins to engulf both of them like spirits being released.)**)

Ester

Christopher Clark. Florencio Figueroa. Edward C. Gandy Jr. Scott Mielentz. Amir Johnson.

(La Comadre places roses around the altar and refreshes the glass of water. La Comadre goes to the planter and removes the packet of cigarettes. She places into a bowl and lights it on fire. **Projections: The spirits walk around them and are released into the world.)**)

La Comadre

Timothy O'Shea. Witney Rivera. Jamahl Smith. Jason Williams. Winston Espino Sanchez. Ramon Andrade. Limichael Shine.

Ester

Oscar Camacho. Raymond Peralta-Lantigua. Shawn Clyde. Wait!
(A pause) There's too many.

La Comadre

Lo se.

(A deep sigh. A long silence.)

La Comadre

How's your soul?

Ester

Like it's searching for radical self-love but all I want is a drink.

(A laugh)

Ester

You?

La Comadre

Same but with a cigarette in hand.

(A full body embrace.)

Ester
You wanna settle for some café?

La Comadre
Por favor.

(They both sit on the windowsill and take in the city. La Comadre looks up to find Elena sitting above her on the fire escape.)

La Comadre
Sra. Elenita! Disculpa no la vi alli. Como se siente?
Igual, Sra. Elenita. Same!

(Silence)

Ester
Si, I know. But I'm back. I needed some time to recuperate.

La Comadre
Ohhhh, gracias Sra. Elenita. You too are a gift para nuestro barrio.

Ester
Sra. Elenita, how do you take care of yourself?

(A laughter)

Ester
Did she just say?!

La Comadre
WEPA...Sra. Elenita!

Ester
Sensual radical self-loving. That's what that is?

La Comadre
Si, Sra. Elenita.

"Que en la vida no hay nadie solo, siempre hay alguien"

Celia Cruz.

Ester
In life there is always somebody. "La Guarachera de Cuba"

La Comadre

Espere!

Ester

What are you doing?

La Comadre

We started this cleansing and now we need to complete it. They're here, right?! Plus, they need to be celebrated to. They deserve that much, no?

Ester

I hear you.

(La Comadre steps inside her apartment and pulls out a Celia Cruz album. She puts it into the turntable. "Carnaval" by Celia Cruz plays. La Comadre turns up the sound and begins to sing.)

Ester

Oye', it's 9 am in the morning.

La Comadre

What a better way para despertar al barrio.

(She steps out on the fire escape.)

La Comadre

Canta, Sra. Elenita. No hay que llorar.

(Ester and La Comadre sing and dance on the fire escape with intermitted greetings of the community bellow. **Projections: A glowing carnival beams through the walls.**)

Carnaval

by Celia Cruz

La Comadre/Ester/Everyone

Todo aquel que piense que la vida es desigual
Tiene que saber que no es así
Que la vida es una hermosura, hay que vivirla
Todo aquel que piense que está solo y que está mal
Tiene que saber que no es así
Que en la vida no hay nadie solo, siempre hay alguien
Ay, no hay que llorar (No hay que llorar)
Que la vida es un carnaval
Y es más bello vivir cantando

Oh-oh-oh, ay, no hay que llorar (No hay que llorar)
Que la vida es un carnaval
Y las penas se van cantando
Oh-oh-oh, ay, no hay que llorar (No hay que llorar)
Que la vida es un carnaval
Y es más bello vivir cantando
Oh-oh-oh, ay, no hay que llorar (No hay que llorar)
Que la vida es un carnaval
Y las penas se van cantando
Todo aquel que piense que la vida siempre es cruel
Tiene que saber que no es así
Que tan solo hay momentos malos y todo pasa
Todo aquel que piense que esto nunca va a cambiar
Tiene que saber que no es así
Que al mal tiempo, buena cara, y todo cambia
Ay, no hay que llorar (No hay que llorar)
Que la vida es un carnaval
Y es más bello vivir cantando
Oh-oh-oh, ay, no hay que llorar (No hay que llorar)
Que la vida es un carnaval
Y las penas se van cantando
Oh-oh-oh, ay, no hay que llorar (No hay que llorar)
Que la vida es un carnaval
Y es más bello vivir cantando
Oh-oh-oh, ay, no hay que llorar (No hay que llorar)
Que la vida es un carnaval
Y las penas se van cantando
Es para reír
(No hay que llorar) Para gozar
(Carnaval) Para disfrutar
(Hay que vivir cantando)
La vida es un carnaval
(No hay que llorar) Todos podemos cantar
(Carnaval) Ay, señores
(Hay que vivir cantando)
Todo aquel que piense
(No hay que llorar) Que la vida es cruel
(Carnaval) Nunca estará solo
(Hay que vivir cantando)
Dios está con él
Para aquellos que se quejan tanto (Wua)
Para aquellos que solo critican (Wua)
Para aquellos que usan las armas (Wua)
Para aquellos que nos contaminan (Wua)
Para aquellos que hacen la guerra (Wua)
Para aquellos que viven pecando (Wua)

Para aquellos que nos maltratan (Wua)
Para aquellos que nos contagian (Wua)

(The community carries on with their daily “lo mismo”, Hector is carrying boxes Melinda is gently attending to Alejandro as he tries to lift a box, Bandmates sit on neighbors stoop drinking café con leche. Lights dim as the music rings out to the community as a greeting.)

(Black out)

END OF PLAY