

THE BLADE OF JEALOUSY

By Henry Ong

INSPIRED AND ADAPTED FROM THE PLAY
“LA CELOSA DE SI MISMA” (JEALOUS OF HERSELF)
BY TIRSO DE MOLINA

© 2016, Henry Ong

Inquiries: Henry Ong
(323) 665-7612
Henryong.playwright@gmail.com

Cast of characters

Magdalena

Melchor

Quinones

Ventura

Angela

Jeronimo

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Although the play takes place in Los Angeles, productions may reset the locale to the cities where the play is produced. Locations can be changed to local sites.

Scene changes take place rather quickly. Transitions should be as seamless as possible. Light or sound cues can help but most of the time, it's the skill of the actors that counts.

Props should be used sparingly. Imaginary props are fine.

The set can be minimal. Videography to depict different locations is encouraged, though not required. Anything to augment the schizophrenic nature of the play is appreciated. Music. Sounds from actors.

Writer also offers a two-person version, in which all roles are played by two actors. Actor 1 plays Magdalena, Ventura (Melchor's friend) and Angela; while Actor 2 plays Melchor, Quinones (Magdalena's maid), and Jeronimo (Magdalena's brother). Using the conceit of two actors, both roles require actors to play male and female, as written; therefore both roles can be played by any actor, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, orientation, height, weight, or beauty. Actors are encouraged to vary their voices, employ accents, or adopt various body postures and whatever in their acting arsenal, to differentiate their various roles.

The streets of Los Angeles.

Melchor and Ventura take a walk. Melchor, a sling bag over his shoulder, navigates using a smart phone. Ventura takes pictures of passers-by (mostly men).

MELCHOR

Pay attention, Ven! We're trying to find our way to the Cathedral.

VENTURA

So many cuties! Melchor, Melchor, we're in L.A., land of the lecherous!

MELCHOR

You should be careful. You and your random sightings! We're not in Cedar Rapids anymore. You're more obvious than you think.

VENTURA

Don't worry. I've mastered the art of taking pictures of people without their realizing it.

MELCHOR

They'd punch you in the face if they knew.

VENTURA

The trick is to pretend as if you're doing something else.

MELCHOR

People don't like strangers taking their pictures.

VENTURA

Are you kidding? People in LA love the attention. They're the most egotistical people on earth. It's why they congregate here. To be admired. L.A. folks are the prettiest people in the world. Even the homeless are cute!

MELCHOR

Only you would find unwashed, smelly people cute. Didn't think there'd be so many people living on the streets. Scary.

VENTURA

And those Home Depot guys. Who'd have thought there'd be cute boys at Home Depot, milling around waiting to be picked up!

MELCHOR

They're waiting for jobs. Not to be picked up. Definitely not so you can take their picture. Confine your picture taking to buildings and landmarks. Disney Hall doesn't interest you?

VENTURA

A wreck! A mess of corrugated metal that does nothing but twist and turn, and blind the eyes!

Snaps another picture.

MELCHOR

There are pretty women in LA too! Equal opportunity, Ven.

VENTURA

L.A. women change their faces by the minute. Within the blink of the eye, you'd swear it's a different woman. They are mistresses of magic, using makeup and rouge in the disappearing act!

MELCHOR

Hey, the sun just peeked from behind the clouds! Perpetual sun, eternal sunshine!!!

VENTURA

And it's making you perspire. You're starting to stink.

MELCHOR

I feel so buoyant. I feel like I'm floating at sea, bobbing on the gentle waves, and on a permanent vacation. On a sea of adventure called LA!

VENTURA

Beware, Mel. While we delude ourselves that we're in a Californian Caribbean soaking up sun and ultra-violet light, we could actually be caught up in a Los Angeles Bermuda Triangle. At all times, keep your eyes and ears open for pick-pockets.

Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels.

Melchor is transfixed.

MELCHOR

OMG, the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels! Yay!

Ventura snaps a picture.

MELCHOR

You have such a one-track mind.

VENTURA

But he's so cute!

MELCHOR

So is the cathedral. Well, maybe cute is not the best description for a church. Simple elegance. Clean architectural lines.

VENTURA

I prefer more ornate design. Compared to the cathedrals in Europe this—

MELCHOR

This is Los Angeles, Ven! They do things differently here. Even their churches reflect a different sensibility.

Looks up at—

Our Lady of the Angels! Eight-foot tall. Wow!

VENTURA

She's different. That much I can say.

MELCHOR

Curious. She doesn't look European. Mexican, maybe? Native American? Even a touch of Asian.

VENTURA

Why go gaga over statues when there are so many glorious flesh-and-blood folks!

MELCHOR

Come, let's head into the church. To pray. For your poor depraved soul.

Light shift.

Interior of church. Church music plays.

Melchor nudges Ventura.

Enter Magdalena and her maid, Quinones. She's wearing a fashionable burka; her whole face is covered. She's carrying a Louis Vuitton bag.

MELCHOR

Do you see what I see?

VENTURA

What?

MELCHOR

Her. Over there.

VENTURA

The woman in a burka? What's a woman in a burka doing in a church?

Magdalena dips her hands in the holy water bowl.

MELCHOR

See how she dips her fingers in the holy water! Fingers so delicate—even the water quivers on contact! But oh, that hand! That, that hand!!!! Is there a more exquisite anatomical appendage?

Magdalena nudges Quinones.

MAGDALENA

Don't look, Quinones.

And, of course, Quinones looks.

QUINONES

What I not look, Senorita Magdalena?

MAGDALENA

That gentleman over there. Is he looking my way?

QUINONES

Everyone looking at you, Senorita. I tell senorita not wear *boorka*! They think you terrorist!

MAGDALENA

But I'm very proud of this burka line! It's a tribute to our Muslim sisters. And it's exactly my point. A woman ought to wear whatever she wants. Besides, what better way to combat prejudice and oppression than to make their traditional dress fashionable!

QUINONES

That *hombre*, he very good-look, senorita.

Light shift.

Outside the church again.

VENTURA

That priest. His mouth moved faster than the Metro Rail. He should be called His Holiness of the Supersonic Mumbling.

MELCHOR

The priest is right. I like his sermon. We focus too much on material beauty. In heaven, one's looks will not count for anything. I feel so guilty being gorgeous.

VENTURA

I didn't think you were listening. You were staring at that burka lady the whole time.

MELCHOR

When I saw that hand, angels started singing; the celestial orchestra crescendoed in concert with her sign of the cross.

VENTURA

It was *organ* music, Melchor. Yours!

MELCHOR

What was it the priest said? "Focus not on exterior beauty. Cleanse your soul of lascivious thoughts!" So true—the sight of the lady inspires only chaste, clean thoughts.

VENTURA

What a hypocrite! He reminds me of Father Damien—and the time he placed his hand on my thigh. "Such a pretty boy, Ventura!" he whispered in my ear. "Why did God make little boys so pretty?"

Melchor receives a text.

MELCHOR

Magdalena! I'll text her to let her know we'd be a little late. I wonder what she looks like.

Texts.

VENTURA

Who cares? If she's as rich as she says she is, she doesn't have to be a Jennifer Lawrence.

MELCHOR

You make me sound like a gold digger, Ven. OMG! There she is again! (speaks into the void) Show thyself, O Beauteous One!

VENTURA

The burka lady—there's something very fake about her.

MELCHOR

Oh that hand, that hand! Observe how the hand is revealed as it is raised in the sign of the cross. Then is it concealed as it retreats into the sleeve when the hand is lowered.

VENTURA

Will you stop it about the hand? I distrust anything that plays hide-and-seek like that! There's more to a person than a mere hand. Do you not wonder about the bubble-wrap and what's inside? A cocoon sheltering a caterpillar? A beautifully-wrapped box that's empty? A smooth egg shell, with rotten yolk bubbling within? Can we even be sure that she is a woman? She could be Quasimodo!

A bloodletting scream.

Magdalena fends off an attacker, yelling at the top of her voice.

MAGDALENA

My bag! My bag. My Louis Vuitton bag!

Melchor wastes no time. He pounces on the assailant. Job accomplished, he helps her to her feet.

MAGDALENA

Oh, thank you, kind sir! Thank you so much!

MELCHOR

It is my honor to come to the rescue of such a fine lady, lady!

Magdalena dusts herself off.

MAGDALENA

God bless you, gallant stranger, for saving my life.

MELCHOR

A life that is certainly worth saving.

MAGDALENA

And why would you say that? You know nothing about me.

MELCHOR

I know all there is to know from a glimpse of that exquisite hand.

MAGDALENA

My hand?

MELCHOR

A testament that God exists.

MAGDALENA

Do you always speak in hyperbole, sir?

MELCHOR

Only when so inspired. Would the dear lady do me the honor of letting me view the rest of her?

MAGDALENA

Are you being vulgar? Revelation of this holy shrine must be earned.

MELCHOR

I mean no offense, madam. The beauty of your hand lets me believe the rest of you is, art itself. Please accept my apology and accept this as a token of my esteem.

Exchanges his sling bag for hers.

MAGDALENA

What's this?

MELCHOR

Your bag, dear lady—the very same bag your assailant tried to covet in his assault of your good self.

MAGDALENA

But this is not my bag! It's not even a Louis Vi—

MELCHOR

As sure as the sun is now in its zenith, I redeemed it from the hands of your assailant. Unless, in his thievery, the assailant had in his possession many such bags and I grabbed the wrong one.

MAGDALENA

It is not right that I should keep in my possession a bag belonging to someone else.

MELCHOR

Why not hold onto it till the rightful owner makes that claim?

MAGDALENA

And if no claim is made?

MELCHOR

Then the bag belongs to you.

MAGDALENA

How would the lawful owner even know how to recover it?

MELCHOR

I will make inquiry everywhere—the church, the police station; I will post signs everywhere. Nearby laundromats, every lost-and-found possibility. When all effort is exhausted, if you will name a time and a place, I will be there and I will let you know if the owner has indeed appeared to claim the item. If not, finders, keepers.

MAGDALENA

But you, sir, are the finder.

MELCHOR

And you are the keeper by virtue of having your own bag snatched from you.

MAGDALENA

Very well, how about we meet here later today at the hour of four?

MELCHOR

What guarantee have I that you will show up?

MAGDALENA

My word should be enough, but if that is not sufficient, here, here is my guarantee!

Magdalena offers Melchor her hand. He is transfixed, as if it's the hand of the Pope himself. Finally he accepts and plants a kiss on Magdalena's hand.

Magdalena exits.

Angela enters. Melchor walks around in a daze. Angela is smitten!

Enter Jeronimo, looking for someone. Sees Angela. He is transfixed.

Angela notices Jeronimo staring at her. She pretends to file her nails. Her eyes continue to follow Melchor.

JEROMINO

Hi

Angela looks up from her ritual.

ANGELA
Are you talking to me?

ANGELA
Applies lip gloss.

JERONIMO
I thought I saw my sister.

ANGELA
What sister? Where?

JERONIMO
My sister, Magdalena. Doesn't matter. For a minute I thought I saw her.

Melchor exits.

ANGELA
Hey, that guy over there, do you know him?

JERONIMO
Should I?

ANGELA
I think he's very good-looking.

JERONIMO
Him? Nah. Look at his clothes! No one in L.A. dresses like that. Must be some farm boy from Nebraska. Or Idaho. (pause) Hey, have I met you before?

ANGELA
Don't think so.

JERONIMO
No, I never forget a face, especially one so pretty. I'm sure we've met.

ANGELA
Good for you. I, on the other hand, (have never met you).

JERONIMO
Got it! You—we live in the same building!

Smiles sweetly. Extends a hand.

Jeronimo.

Angela ignores the outstretched hand.

ANGELA

What building?

JERONIMO

The one on Broadway. In Chinatown? I live—we—live in the same building, my sister and I. And you, of course.

ANGELA

The one across from the senior center?

JERONIMO

That's it! Jesus! Who would have thought that I would run into someone living in the same building?

ANGELA

You realize there're at least 200 people in our building.

JERONIMO

Two hundred and three. You sure you've never seen me?

ANGELA

Positive.

JERONIMO

Of course you're not expected to notice someone like me; I'm nobody. But you—you're so striking, any of the two hundred residents who have run into you would remember you. I recall seeing you in an elevator, but there were several people between us so I could not strike up a conversation. We all lead such hectic lives, we hardly know our neighbors—

ANGELA

Do you always rattle on like that to strangers?

JERONIMO

Ah, but I don't think of you as a stranger. I feel a deep connection with you. Are you someone very famous?

ANGELA

Do you watch soaps?

JERONIMO

Not usually. Wait, you're an actress! In a soap opera? Which one?

ANGELA

“All My Boyfriends.”

JERONIMO

Wow, you're famous! Don't know it. Still, that's so cool. Me, talking to a soap opera star!

ANGELA

It's about a girl who has lots of boyfriends.

JERONIMO

So? Many girls have lots of boyfriends.

ANGELA

She is very promiscuous.

JERONIMO

Many girls are promiscuous.

ANGELA

She's a nympho.

JERONIMO

Men like women who like sex.

ANGELA

My character is a nympho with standards. She's very particular who she sleeps with. Her latest affair is with twins. Trouble is, she can't tell them apart. The only way she can tell who's who is through the size of their—thumb. A good set up for comedy, no?

JERONIMO

I haven't seen the series, or read the script, but it looks like you need better material.

ANGELA

I am very proud of my work. It stretches me.

JERONIMO

Hey, maybe I can get you better roles. I've always wanted to be a producer.

ANGELA

You and everyone else in LA. I take that back. Most people want to be actors, writers or directors. Producers, not so much.

JERONIMO

Honestly, the only talent I have is, producing money.

ANGELA

Are you telling me you have connections? Or that you're rich?

Filthy rich.

JERONIMO

ANGELA
Then what are you doing living in that rat-infested apartment building?

JERONIMO
What, there are rats!?

ANGELA
Let me tell you. Yesterday, just as I was about to leave my apartment, I heard a woman's scream down the hall. Naturally, I went to check. I saw a woman in a wedding dress rush out of her apartment as if someone had been killed. I tried to calm her down—

JERONIMO
Whoa, stop! Look who's rattling now!

They look at each other and burst out laughing.

ANGELA
Anyway, the reason for all that commotion was a mother rat stuck in a glue trap about to give birth.

JERONIMO
I will check into it—the rat problem.

ANGELA
Why? It's the responsibility of the landlords—

JERONIMO
I am the landlord.

ANGELA
Oh.

JERONIMO
My family owns the building. We own a lot of real estate. From East L.A. to Rancho Cucamonga. We're staying in the Chinatown building temporarily for a couple of reasons. One is, my sister Magdalena—the one I thought I saw—is starting a fashion line, and she wants to be near the garment district in Downtown.

ANGELA
Your sister is a designer?

JERONIMO

Yes, but she has a very bizarre sense of fashion. She has a burka line. Hey, have you been to Santee Alley? I'll be happy to show you around—or, if you prefer come up to the penthouse, I'll show you my etchings—

ANGELA

Not right now. But sometime, sure. I'm late for a rehearsal. Let's have lunch. To talk about my webseries.

JERONIMO

Webseries? What's that? Lunch? Sure. You still haven't told me your name.

ANGELA

Angela. Gotta go, I'm late. You promise you'll find that guy for my webseries?

Dashes off.

Jeronimo watches her leave—bursts into song.

JERONIMO

Angela! (sings her name to “Maria” from West Side Story) Angela, I just met a girl named Angela.

Lights.

Little Tokyo Hotel.

VENTURA

Are you nuts? You swapped our bag for hers? That bag contained our last two thousand dollars.

MELCHOR

What's money? I had to have an excuse to see her again.

VENTURA

We have yet to pay our hotel bill. Well, at least this is a Louis Vuitton bag. Maybe it has more than two thousand.

They look into the bag.

VENTURA

Lipstick and mascara and rouge. Kotex. A stick of chewing gum. Two quarters, a nickle and five pennies. You're a fool, Melchor!

MELCHOR

I have full confidence she will return the bag.

VENTURA

How do you know that?

MELCHOR

She told me to meet her at the Cathedral at four.

VENTURA

Assuming she will show up.

MELCHOR

She gave me her word.

VENTURA

And you believe her.

MELCHOR

Why wouldn't she?

VENTURA

Because she has our money! She will never come back.

Checks his iPhone.

Aren't we supposed to meet with Magdalena—

MELCHOR

OMG! Where did the time go?

VENTURA

She's the lady with the treasure. The reason we came to Los Angeles. Perhaps if we tell her we were robbed and held at gunpoint at a gas station, she'd give us some more money.

MELCHOR

But how can I face this Magdalena now that I have encountered an angel?

VENTURA

Magdalena might be even more alluring and stunning.

MELCHOR

Impossible!

Lights.

Chinatown apartment

Magdalena, sans covering, rants to Quinones.

MAGDALENA

Woe is me, woe is me! Oh, Quinones, Quinones, what am I going to do?

QUINONES

Wassa matta, senorita?

MAGDALENA

I don't know where to begin. Who is this gentleman? Where did he come from? Why is he so beautiful? Is this love at first sight?

QUINONES

You fall in love with man outside church?

Magdalena receives a text. [This is the text from Melchor earlier saying that he would be late.]

MAGDALENA

I did. I did.

QUINONES

Dios mio! But how 'bout Senor Melchor?

MAGDALENA

(looks at her iPhone). He's on his way. All week, I waited for him to show up. Now that his appearance is imminent, I don't want him to see him.

QUINONES

I tell him you not home.

MAGDALENA

That would be a lie. What if a car struck me down? I would go straight to hell.

QUINONES

You no go to hell for small lie.

MAGDALENA

It's more than a small lie. God will punish me for lusting. Lusting over a stranger. For wanting to have sex with this man—Jesus says, if you so much as conjure fornication in your head, you have committed that sin! And fornication is a sin punishable by hell fire.

QUINONES

Then Senorita must tell truth.

MAGDALENA

Tell Senor Melchor I love someone else? Someone I just met?

QUINONES

If that true, no afraid.

MAGDALENA

I don't even know if that would develop into anything. Luckily, I have his bag.

QUINONES

Senorita lucky he give bag back.

MAGDALENA

The strange thing is it's not my bag.

QUINONES

What in bag?

MAGDALENA

I don't know. Shall we look?

Looks in bag.

Oh my goodness. Two thousand dollars! Hmm. I wonder—no, it can't be. Too much of a coincidence.

QUINONES

Senorita should keep money.

MAGDALENA

I don't have any intention of keeping someone else's money. I have a feeling he gave me the wrong bag on purpose.

QUINONES

Senorita think *hombre* want give bag with two thousand dollar? I think he make mistake.

MAGDALENA

But what if it's not a mistake?

QUINONES

No make cents (sense). Like dollar, cents? (laughs at her joke)

MAGDALENA

I think it makes perfect sense, Quinones. It could be his way of testing me.

QUINONES

Como?

MAGDALENA

It's his way of saying he wants to see me again. So badly. Good thing I had the composure to tell him to be at the church at four.

QUINONES

Why *senorita* say that?

MAGDALENA

Because *I* want to see him again.

QUINONES

You both *stupido*.

MAGDALENA

Have you been in love, Quinones? Love has no price.

QUINONES

Not good, *senorita*, to fall in love so *rapido*—

MAGDALENA

I know that. But shouldn't I follow my heart when the opportunity presents itself? Opportunities don't come every day. Love is the most marvelous commodity in the world! It makes one's heart skip two thousand beats a second. It makes the world spin two thousand revolutions before you can say two thousand dollars!

Door bell rings.

QUINONES

Senorita, must be other *hombre*.

MAGDALENA

Melchor!!! Shit, shit, shit.

QUINONES

Answer door, *senorita*?

MAGDALENA

How can I face him now that my heart belongs to someone else?

QUINONES

Maybe Senor Melchor, more cute.

MAGDALENA

Impossible. No one can be more cute. I'm smitten. Quinones, smitten! Men have a way of doing these things to you. They make your head spin, like a washing machine that's out of control.

Door bells rings again, insistent.

MAGDALENA

I have no choice, I'll have to be strong. I'll just tell Melchor I found someone else.

Door bell rings again, even more insistent.

QUINONES

Can answer door, senorita?

MAGDALENA

There's so much I wanted to know about him. I wanted to know who shaves his face. Does he do it himself, or does he have a professional groomer? What is that fragrance wafting from the essence of his glorious self? Who picks his clothes? No one in LA wears clothes like that? Makes him—different, unique.

QUINONES

I think you interest in *hombre* because you no have man long time. No make boom, boom, so senorita horny. You know *nada* 'bout *el hombre*. When senorita know everything, senorita no care no more.

Door bell again.

MAGDALENA

You may be right, Quinones. I realize I am very shallow. I'm supposed to meet my betrothed, and here I am agonizing over another! Ay ya ya ya ya!

Door bell rings again.

Answer the fucking door!

Quinones answers that door.

Melchor enters, bows to Magdalena.

MELCHOR

Senorita, you must be Magdalena. I'm Melchor.

Magdalena heaves a sigh of relief.

MAGDALENA

(to Quinones) Quinones, oh my god, oh my god! This is the stranger who has claimed my heart! There is justice in the world after all!!! My goodness, my stranger and my betrothed are one and the same person! That explains the two thousand dollars. It's the spending money I gave him for his trip!

QUINONES

He very handsome, senorita.

MAGDALENA

(to Melchor) Melchor, Melchor! Welcome to my humble abode. I'm so glad to meet you. How was your journey? How do you like LA? Are you sad to leave Cedar Rapids? Melchor—that's such a lovely name! What's the etymology? Never mind. I don't need to know. Oh, sir, I can't tell you how relieved I am to see you. I've had nightmares that you might be a Quasimodo!

MELCHOR

If you will forgive me, madam—

MAGDALENA

Call me Magdalena.

MELCHOR

(coldly) Magdalena.

(to Ventura) OMG, Ventura, help me! This woman is urrr-gly! She needs to lose 65 pounds. Her nose is too Cyrano, her lips are thicker than a blow-fish's, her skin coarser than crocodile hide. And her chin—what's 2.76 times 64.8? That's how many chins she has! Her neck, where the fuck is her neck? Her boobs, God help me. They need uplifting. Is there a bra sale today? Ugh!

VENTURA

How can you say that? She is lovely.

MAGDALENA

(to Quinones) Am I wrong, Quinones, or do I sense that he doesn't really like me?

QUINONES

No, senorita. He just little confusing.

MAGDALENA

(to Melchor) So what have you seen of LA? I'd love to show you around. Tell me, have you been to the garment district? You'd love the hustle and bustle. It's so colorful and exciting. Do you like fabric? Never will you encounter so many textures and textiles. I only suggest this because you look like someone who's into fashion. I myself am starting

a clothing line. I would love to show you Santee Street, where you can shop for bargain suits. You can get a first-class Italian suit that would be three or four times the price elsewhere. I could actually buy you one—or two, or three—if you like.

MELCHOR

So far, we've mostly walked Downtown. And attended mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

MAGDALENA

The Cathedral—I was—(there). What do you think? Don't you think it's so inspiring? Do you enjoy going to church? Do you like our weather? What do you think of our freeways?

MELCHOR

Too many questions. One at a time, please.

MAGDALENA

Please forgive me. I'm a little nervous.

MELCHOR

The Cathedral is inspiring, I enjoy going to church. The weather is good. The freeway—a little congested. Excuse me, I have a headache.

VENTURA

Something happened at the church.

MAGDALENA

What?

VENTURA

(to Melchor) Don't blow it, Mel. Suss out the situation first. Don't forget this one has *dinero*. My hunch is, the other is penniless and is, at best, a figment of your imagination.

MELCHOR

(to Magdalena) Senorita, there was a commotion outside the church.

MAGDALENA

Oh?

MELCHOR

A robbery. Someone was trying to steal a bag from a very classy lady.

MAGDALENA

Interesting. We do have a lot of bag snatchers in this city. What did you do? Did you come to the rescue of this damsel in distress?

MELCHOR

It was nothing. But I have her bag.

MAGDALENA

How did you come (to have her bag)?

MELCHOR

A long story, madam; I'm sure it won't interest you, Senorita

MAGDALENA

On the contrary—please call me Magdalena, or I will think you hate me.

MELCHOR

Pardon, I keep forgetting. Magdalena. The truth is I have to meet this woman at four. To return her bag.

MAGDALENA

This woman sounds dubious. What's she like?

MELCHOR

She's very beautiful.

MAGDALENA

I'm sure. Can you describe her?

MELCHOR

She's beyond words.

MAGDALENA

What are you trying to tell me, Senor Melchor?

MELCHOR

I'm not sure. It's complicated.

MAGDALENA

I will not continue to pry. Now, for some tea?

MELCHOR

We should get going, Senorita. This headache is getting worse.

Pounds on his temple, as if trying to get rid of his headache.

Jeronimo enters.

MAGDALENA

Jeronimo. This is Senor Melchor.

JERONIMO

You? You're the guy from Cedar Rapids?

MELCHOR

I'm on my way out.

JERONIMO

Fantastic! You're just the guy I want to meet. I'll walk you out. There's something—

Exits with Ventura.

QUINONES

Senorita so lucky.

MAGDALENA

How do you figure that, Quinones?

QUINONES

Because, senorita, you find love.

MAGDALENA

You see how he scorns me! I hate him!!!! I hate him, I hate him, I hate him!!! (pause, sigh) I love him.

QUINONES

Poor senorita, you hate him, then you love him!

MAGDALENA

What can I say? He comes here all the way from Cedar Rapids, after months of texting, courtship, declarations of affection and love, and now I find out he's fallen in love with another woman.

QUINONES

But senorita, this other woman, this *mujer*, she you too!

MAGDALENA

She's not me, Quinones. She's but the figment of his imagination of who he would like me to be. She is the Burka Lady, the mysterious one. She doesn't even have a name, but she has stolen his heart. Is he so shallow that he would fall in love with the first thing he sets his eyes on? And not even a whole person. A hand! Men! They make no sense. They are never satisfied with what they have. They see the first woman shrouded in mystery, and immediately they're weak-kneed. They can't wait to undress her and ravish her. But if she were to appear as she really is, they don't give her a second look. You're right, of

course: the Burka Lady is me. But he does not know that. Goodness, do you hear what I'm saying? I am jealous of myself!

QUINONES

Senorita must see it like this. Why you jealous? Is you; with burka or no burka, is you. You is the one make his heart pump, pump. Even he not know you is Magdalena, you still is you, and he love you.

MAGDALENA

How am I going to resolve this dilemma?

QUINONES

You go see him like you say. Four cock?

MAGDALENA

Sometimes I think you deliberately try to be perverse. Clock has an "elle"; otherwise, it becomes a ding dong. Or something that crows. Four o'clock, not four cock. Actually it should be cocks. Plural. I could use four right now!

QUINONES

Sometime senorita make me feel stupido.

MAGDALENA

You must learn to speak better English. How long have you lived in this country, Quinones?

QUINONES

Thirty-five years. In my country—

MAGDALENA

I know. In your country, you could be a school teacher, a lawyer or someone higher than a maid. But you are in the U.S. of A. And unless you have a good command of the language—for crying out loud, Quinones, I don't mean to make you feel stupid. I'm just trying to help. Do you think I would have you in my employ if I didn't like you? I pay you good money, better than most people. I don't work you to the bone, like a lot of other employers. If it weren't for me, you'd be scrubbing floors and washing windows. I give you a variety of things to do to make your life less boring. Like listening to my woes.

QUINONES

I listen all time. I hear, senorita. I give good advice.

MAGDALENA

I know that, and I appreciate it. Which is why I promoted you to personal assistant. Who knows, if this fashion business takes off, you could be my manager. But to be fully effective, you must learn proper English.

QUINONES

So *senorita* give me time off, I take class at LACC.

MAGDALENA

That won't be necessary. Just study from the Berlitz tapes I got you from the library.

QUINONES

English very tough. Tough rhyme with rough, but not cough. *Por que?* Easier if I go class, have practice with other people.

MAGDALENA

How are you going to learn from people who are also learning? It will only confuse you all the more. You can practice with me. Right now, I need you here. This Melchor guy, he's driving me to distraction. What am I going to do about him?

QUINONES

Why *senorita* must do anything? Just accept he like you.

MAGDALENA

You saw how he talked to me!

QUINONES

Take from me, *senorita*, when Senor Melchor find out Burka Lady is you, he change mind. He only see *senorita* and Burka Lady, two different people. When he put two together and find one—

MAGDALENA

You mean he'll put two and two together.

QUINONES

Si, si. You make Senor Melchor start with hand. Make sure he agree hand is hand of Burka Lady. Then, let him see arm. Then shoulder. Then *booby*. Then whole body. When he see hand and every part body same person, he fall head down first, then leg in air, in love with *senorita*.

MAGDALENA

The expression is, fall head over heels in love with—no matter. I think you may have stumbled onto something, Quinones.

QUINONES

Stum—?

MAGDALENA

Stumble. It means inadvertently discovered a solution. I will keep the four o'clock appointment. If he does show up, it will mean that he's still infatuated with this Burka Lady. And in this game of love, I start from an advantageous position. Oh, Quinones,

your brilliance has put things into perspective for me. This man is dumb. He has no clue. Dumb man, smart woman equals marriage. You're right, let him start from the worship of this hand, that adoration then can be extrapolated to the rest of the person. I guess it's time to put our Senor Melchor to the test!

Lights.

The Cathedral. Four in the afternoon.

Ventura looks at his iPhone.

VENTURA

You've been waiting for 37.6 minutes.

MELCHOR

I'm sure she'll be here. Be patient.

VENTURA

I'm afraid she's taken you for a ride. The lady's an imposter. You've entrusted your last two thousand dollars to a stranger, and you expect her to show up?

MELCHOR

Maybe she's held up by traffic.

VENTURA

I hate to say this, Melchor. You've lost sight of why we came here.

MELCHOR

Remind me.

VENTURA

Do you want to go back to the failing farm? Monsanto has ruined us. You were never cut out to be a farmer.

MELCHOR

Can I help it when my heart tells me that this is the lady?

VENTURA

What's wrong with Magdalena? I swear I think you've been rendered temporarily blind. Magdalena is beautiful. OK, not super gorgeous, but she works at it. She's aware of the importance of dressing well, that's a plus. Besides, she has a fashion empire.

MELCHOR

She's starting a clothing line. Thanks to all that money from her family.

VENTURA

And what is wrong with that? You didn't think that was such a terrible thing when we ventured out of Cedar Rapid?

MELCHOR

Now that I met her, it doesn't seem right. There's more to life than money; it shouldn't be all we focus our energies on.

VENTURA

But it's OK that you focus all your energies on Invisible Woman? What if you find the Burka Lady to be as ugly as fungus, as fallow as a mire, and as frigid as ice? Worse, as poor as a church rat.

MELCHOR

I believe the expression is mouse. As poor as a church mouse.

VENTURA

Everything in LA is bigger. So rat is more appropriate.

MELCHOR

If the lady is poor, I'll willingly surrender all worldly pursuits and persuade her to return to Cedar Rapids with me as my wife.

VENTURA

You are a hopeless romantic. Do you think you are The Bachelor? Come, we are wasting our time here.

MELCHOR

A few more minutes, Ven. Are you sure your iPhone has the correct time?

VENTURA

It's a Six-Plus. Of course it gives good time.

MELCHOR

Wait, here she is now!

Magdalena in burka enters.

MAGDALENA

So glad to see you. Sorry I am late. Traffic!

MELCHOR

Of course, I understand. (pause) Where do you live?

MAGDALENA

Chinatown.

MELCHOR

Chinatown! That's just down the street.

MAGDALENA

Oh, I was coming from Santa Ana.

Ventura exits.

MELCHOR

I'm glad to finally see you. My friend—(turns to look for Ventura) where's he gone? Ventura?! Well, never mind. We—my friend and I—thought perhaps you decided to stand me up.

MAGDALENA

How could you think that! I gave you my word. Didn't I give you my hand—my hand is as good as my word.

MELCHOR

I'm glad you brought it up about the hand. My friend thinks you're an imposter.

MAGDALENA

An imposter! How dare you—

Feigns shortness of breath.

MELCHOR

Lady, lady! Are you alright? I didn't mean to—

MAGDALENA

(suddenly recovering) I dare say not!

MELCHOR

It's just that—

MAGDALENA

I have never been more insulted! Calling me an imposter! Honestly, do you know who you're talking to?

MELCHOR

Who?

MAGDALENA

The Countess of Los Angeles. I'm the Countess of Los Angeles.

MELCHOR

The Countess of Los Angeles?!

MAGDALENA

Yes, La Condesa de Los Angeles. I was married to the Count of Venice, not too long ago. God bless his soul (crosses herself)—

MELCHOR

Is he—dead?

MAGDALENA

Yes, he is. He met a very violent death. He was crossing the street when a Sanitation truck backed up from an intersection and took his life.

MELCHOR

I'm sorry.

MAGDALENA

I was going to tell you the whole story, but I see you're not worth it.

MELCHOR

I beg your pardon, madam. Oh dear, I don't even know your name!

MAGDALENA

Yet I know yours!

MELCHOR

— (gulps) You do?

MAGDALENA

Turns out, you're the one who's the imposter!

MELCHOR

Me?

MAGDALENA

Yes, you.

MELCHOR

Who told you this lie?

MAGDALENA

You, sir, you have cast a spell over me. After we met, I went out of my mind with passion and lust. Oh you think a woman cannot lust? Well, I can, and I do. When your hand took mine, I thought I would faint. I felt alternately the chills and then the hots. I was going mad. I had to call Kaiser. But when my senses returned, I made the rational decision to make inquiry about you. And that's when I found out the terrible truth. Turns out, the woman I'm staying with, she—she knows you!

MELCHOR

What woman? Who?

MAGDALENA
You are Senor Melchor, are you not?

MELCHOR
Yes.

MAGDALENA
And do you know a certain Senorita Magdalena?

MELCHOR
Magdalena!

MAGDALENA
Then you do know her!

MELCHOR
Of course I know her. But let me explain.

MAGDALENA
Explanations are not necessary. She told me all about you. She said that you came here from Cedar Rapids under false pretense. You came here to marry her!

MELCHOR
I cannot lie. I did. But I haven't married her yet.

MAGDALENA
Yet? Do you or do you not mean to marry her?

MELCHOR
No. Yes. I mean, of course not! I came with all good intention to marry Senorita Magdalena, it is true. But once I met your loveliness, I changed my mind.

MAGDALENA
Why?

MELCHOR
Because Magdalena cannot hold a candle—or a flash light, or klieg light—to you.

MAGDALENA
And why are you not enamored of Magdalena? She is no prettier than me, no more wise or noble.

MELCHOR
There is no comparison.

MAGDALENA

Is she so hideous?

MELCHOR

God forbid we should boil it down to looks. It goes far beyond that.

MAGDALENA

Does she not have nice hands like mine?

MELCHOR

They are stumps of plaster, compared to yours.

MAGDALENA

Really, señor! That's not very nice. God created every hand.

MELCHOR

Every hand, but not all alike.

MAGDALENA

All hands, if examined under the microscope, are made up of atoms with lots of spaces in between. Can you tell the difference between one hand and another under very powerful magnification?

MELCHOR

When the atoms are compacted in a hand, yes.

Magdalena puts out her hand.

MAGDALENA

You're sure then that this is the hand that you've fallen in love with?

MELCHOR

Yes. Can I call you Countess?

MAGDALENA

You know for a fact that I am the woman you met earlier?

MELCHOR

There is no doubt of that.

MAGDALENA

And there is no doubt that you love me more than Magdalena.

MELCHOR

Beyond a shadow of a doubt! I abhor the woman! I would not touch her with a—

MAGDALENA

With a ten-foot pole. How I hate clichés!

MELCHOR

If the pole were a thousand foot, it wouldn't be far enough.

MAGDALENA

Would you chop her into a thousand pieces to prove your love for me?

MELCHOR

Banish the thought! I would never hurt a woman.

MAGDALENA

And yet you have. You have hurt my friend.

MELCHOR

How?

MAGDALENA

You have insulted her. You say you abhor the woman when she is the one who so kindly made it possible for you come here to LA. She paid for the ticket that flew you out to LAX and gave you pocket money besides. She would have welcomed you into her home, given you half her wealth, cherished you and loved you to the end of your days. And this is how you repay her kindness!

MELCHOR

Stop, stop! Stop torturing me.

MAGDALENA

Torture! You don't know what torture is. We should send you to Guantanamo Bay, then you'd know the true meaning of torture.

MELCHOR

I deserve your censure. How can I explain it all? I did indeed come to California to seek a new life. To seek Magdalena's hand in marriage. We bonded on the Internet, but in person, there's just no magic. Not like between you and I. Life in Cedar Rapids is hard. It's not just a matter of getting good harvests anymore. There's escalating fuel costs. And transportation bottleneck. And competition—

MAGDALENA

I know. Blame it on Monsanto. You know what, I don't care. I tell you about my friend, and you talk about harvests. Magdalena was heart-broken when she found out that the person who claimed my heart is none other than her betrothed who betrayed her.

MELCHOR

All would have been well, I would gladly have married Magdalena, but how can I help it if we met in the meantime? Can you blame me for falling in love with you?

MAGDALENA

And simply from viewing my hand, this hand?

MELCHOR

Not just a hand. But a hand like no other. A hand so graceful and elegant, every painter from Michelangelo to Picasso would want to capture on canvas; a hand that should be profiled on every magazine cover and plastered on billboards all over the city.

MAGDALENA

What happens when, in later years, the skin withers and liver spots dot this bewitching hand? Will you then still swear allegiance?

MELCHOR

Dear Countess, love grows. For now I love the translucence of your skin. Tomorrow, I'll appreciate all the more the wisdom that seeps into the epidermis, adding character to it. Your hand will grow lovelier with each passing year.

MAGDALENA

Your tongue is golden and glib.

MELCHOR

If that's the case, it's you who has made it so, so inspired am I by your beauty.

MAGDALENA

What if, after I reveal myself, you find me no more, no less beautiful than Magdalena?

MELCHOR

Impossible!

MAGDALENA

You have put me in a generous mood. I will grant you one wish. What would it be?

MELCHOR

That I be allowed to glimpse more of your glorious self.

MAGDALENA

That is too much, too soon.

MELCHOR

One added feature then. Just one more feature of yourself. Please?

MAGDALENA

OK, then; what would you like to see?

MELCHOR

Since the *ojos* are the mirror of the soul, let me look into the liquid abyss of your soul.

MAGDALENA

Ah, that's it then. You wish to see the reflection of your beauty in my eyes.

MELCHOR

A reflection of myself in your eyes would make me a part of you.

MAGDALENA

Since you put it that way, how can I deny such a request?

She reveals one eye,

MELCHOR

Oh glorious heaven!

Magdalena reveals the other eye.

MELCHOR

OMG!

MAGDALENA

Art thou now satisfied?

MELCHOR

'tis true what poets say about the eyes being windows; to me, they are also doors and vistas and gates that lead to meadows, pastures, the sky, the universe and our planetary system.

MAGDALENA

It's good I think you are so cute. Otherwise I would pluck out your eyes for spouting platitudes and nonsense.

MELCHOR

Bark out your command, Countess, and I will execute it.

MAGDALENA

Tell me that you adore me. Tell me that no power in the universe can make you give me up. Tell me that, for me, you will give up your marriage plans with Magdalena.

MELCHOR

I do.

MAGDALENA

Then I will suffer the consequence of your ardor. This will put me into hardship, but I am willing to be inconvenienced for your love. For you, I will quit Magdalena's hospitality; for you, I will turn myself out of her house; for you, I will return to Santa Barbara where I hope you will come visit and tie the knot. Oh, Melchor, marry me!

MELCHOR

I will.

Magdalena pretends to receive a text, gets ready to leave.

MELCHOR

Are you leaving now?

MAGDALENA

I have to. (indicates her cell phone) Urgent business. Goodbye.

MELCHOR

Wait, I have something for you.

MAGDALENA

What?

Melchor hands her the bag.

MAGDALENA

My bag! Thank you.

MELCHOR

I found the rightful owner of the bag.

MAGDALENA

What bag?

MELCHOR

The one I gave you by mistake.

MAGDALENA

Oh, that. I honestly didn't think you'd be able to find its owner, so I gave it away.

MELCHOR

Gave it—?

MAGDALENA

Surely you weren't expecting the bag back? I thought it was a ruse on your part to see me again.

MELCHOR

It was.

MAGDALENA

Good. Then we are squared away. There was nothing particularly valuable in the bag, was there?

MELCHOR

Er, no.

MAGDALENA

That's good to know. I'd be glad to cover the loss of whatever valuables were in the bag. Sweet Melchor, till I see you again.

MELCHOR

But what about our marriage?

MAGDALENA

Ah, that. That will have to wait.

MELCHOR

Wait for what?

MAGDALENA

Furious as I am with Magdalena, I will have to speak with her first. I'm sure she'll be angry with me—that woman is vicious. Once we come to some understanding, I will send word for you. You live in the Omni Hotel in Little Tokyo, don't you? Room 278.

Exits.

Lights.

A Chinese supermarket.

Angela corners Quinones.

ANGELA

You are Quinones, are you not?

QUINONES

Si. And who are you?

[Quinones speaks perfect English!]

ANGELA

Angela. We live in the same building. Forgive me for approaching you like this. I didn't know who else to talk to.

QUINONES

What is it that you want?

ANGELA

First, can I get your complete confidence?

QUINONES

Confidence—Like, can this be just between the two of us? Keep my mouth shut?

ANGELA

Why, yes. It's our secret.

QUINONES

Secret is hard.

ANGELA

I'll make it easier. Here's—

Hands Quinones a twenty-dollar bill.

QUINONES

This is only good for one question. Only a yes or a no.

ANGELA

That's a little expensive. (considers) Oh well, OK. It has come to my attention that a certain gentleman by the name of Melchor intends to marry your mistress, Magdalena.

QUINONES

Yes.

ANGELA

I also understand that—

QUINONES

Uh uh. Twenty dollars only for a yes or no. For the first question.

ANGELA

Shit! I'm not sure if I can keep feeding you twenty dollar bills.

QUINONES

Two thousand and I'll answer every question.

ANGELA

Two thousand! Where am I going to find two thousand?

QUINONES

You're resourceful. You'll find it.

ANGELA

I have eighty dollars left in my purse. I'll take my chance that I'll get all my answers with four more questions.

Hands another twenty dollar bill.

Is it true that Melchor is in love with a lady in a burka and how does that affect his original intention to marry Magdalena?

QUINONES

Uh uh. That's more than one question.

ANGELA

Damn it, who is this fucking lady?

QUINONES

That is your question? Who is this fucking lady?

ANGELA

Damnit. (pause) Yes!

QUINONES

She is the Countess of Los Angeles.

ANGELA

And—? Tell me more about her.

QUINONES

Uh uh. Yes/no, twenty dollars.

ANGELA

Fine. Is Melchor in love with Magdalena or the Burka Lady?

QUINONES

Is Melchor in love with Magdalena, one question. Is Melchor in love with burka lady, two questions.

ANGELA

Fine. Two questions. But you must give me more than a yes or no.

Angela hands forty dollars.

QUINONES

Melchor's not in love with Magdalena.

ANGELA

And the Burka Lady?

QUINONES

Yes.

ANGELA

Yes, what?

Quinones holds out her hand.

ANGELA

That's not a question. It's a clarification.

QUINONES

Clarification is a question, when juxtaposed with "what" and a question mark.

Angela is clearly frustrated.

Lights.

Chinatown apartment.

Quinones stuffs money in her bra.
Magdalena enters.

QUINONES

Senorita Magdalena, come back short time.

MAGDALENA

You mean I was gone for a short time. You look flushed, Quinones. Are you alright?

QUINONES

Si. How meeting with Senor Melchor?

MAGDALENA

I don't know, Quinones. I give up. No progress. He loves me. He loves me not. He courts me; he rejects me. With my burka, I pump helium into his balloon of passion; sans veil, all the air is sucked out of him. Oh, for a suitor who will accept me for who I am, and not for what he thinks I represent!

QUINONES

Why senorita no take my advice?

MAGDALENA

You mean reveal myself a little at a time, starting from the glorious hand?

QUINONES

Senorita wrong to hide him in black place—

MAGDALENA

Wrong to keep him in the dark.

QUINONES

To thread him—

MAGDALENA

To string him along—

QUINONES

String, thread, same thing, no?

MAGDALENA

They are different, Quinones. But now's not the time for an English lesson. I like your logic, Quinones. I agree it's my fault. Still, what's a girl to do? I had to test him. I went to him because I wanted to be sure that he's not interested in Magdalena, the real me. Looks like, that is the case.

QUINONES

Only Senorita have power not cut heart into two with blade of jealousy.

MAGDALENA

Blade of jealousy! I like the metaphor. Your English is getting better.

QUINONES

Senorita not know. I practice metaphor, lesson 27, Berlitz tape.

MAGDALENA

Good for you. There is hope.

QUINONES

Senorita value I smart, but she put me down on how I speaking English. English tough.

MAGDALENA

I know: rice rhymes with ice, but not police.

QUINONES

Thank you Senorita for give me credit. I grow rich metaphor.

MAGDALENA

Metaphorically. "I grow rich metaphorically." Metaphorically is what we call an adverb. Adverbs modify verbs. In this case, the verb is "grow." How did it grow? It grew metaphorically. But good job, Quinones, you are indeed growing rich metaphorically! (laughs) Now, please deliver a note to Melchor for me.

Hands Quinones a piece of paper. Exits.

QUINONES

I'll show her, that bitch. I'll show her, metaphorically. Don't fuck with Quinones!

Lights.

Exterior of the cathedral.

Melchor reads a note. Looks up.

MELCHOR

Oh black, black night. Where is my lady? The lady who counts. The Countess of my Heart.

Magdalena (in burka) enters.

MAGDALENA

Here, sir. Thank you for meeting me here again.

MELCHOR

When your maid came with your message, my heart leapt in my breast. What did the Countess want? What is the urgency that requires the dark of night?

MAGDALENA

My apologies. The last time we talked, I received a text that made me quite upset.

MELCHOR

I hope it was not bad news?

MAGDALENA

Very bad. I hope I didn't upset you by leaving so abruptly.

MELCHOR

Admittedly, I was somewhat confused.

MAGDALENA

Understandable. But here's the deal. I have been summoned to a funeral of a good friend in Santa Cruz. I must go there to comfort dear sweet Juana over the death of her sister, an occurrence that happened very suddenly. I must ask for your patience once more. There is no way I can get out of this journey to Santa Barbara.

MELCHOR

(confused) You mean Santa Cruz?

MAGDALENA

Of course. Santa Cruz! See, how my mind is in a muddle? Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, Santa Monica—they're all the same to me. They take me away from you.

MELCHOR

Will I see you again when you return?

MAGDALENA

If you like.

MELCHOR

If I like! Of course, I like. How can you even suggest—how long will you be gone? A day, two? A week. One month?

MAGDALENA

I cannot say. It could be a day. Two. Weeks. Months. Years. I hope sooner than later.

MELCHOR

I would be more comfortable if I knew for sure.

MAGDALENA

How can I be sure? How can one be sure of anything?

Exits.

MELCHOR

Ventura!

Ventura enters.

VENTURA

You called?

MELCHOR

You heard? You heard our conversation?

VENTURA

Yes. I was hiding behind the pillar.

MELCHOR

I'm fed-up, Ventura. I don't know what to think anymore!

VENTURA

Want to hear what I think?

MELCHOR

What?

VENTURA

I think we should return to Cedar Rapids. L.A.'s too weird. Even for me.

MELCHOR

And why should we do that?

VENTURA

Because.

MELCHOR

Of course you would want us to leave.

VENTURA

What's that supposed to mean?

MELCHOR

You want me all to yourself. Admit it, Ven. You're jealous.

VENTURA

Jealous?

MELCHOR

—

VENTURA

Say it, Melchor. Say it. Jealous. Jealous of who? You? The Countess? Jealous that she so quickly won your love when I, your faithful friend, who stuck by you over the years, devoted my time and everything I have to you—I who am your childhood friend and buddy, I cater to your every whim and fancy—

MELCHOR

Ven, Ventura! I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. You know that I love you. Sometimes, I wish I were gay. Wouldn't it be easy if I could fall in love with you, Ven? I would marry you in a heartbeat if I were so inclined.

VENTURA

Everything is all about you, isn't it? Excuse me, but I think I'll go to that gay bar in West Hollywood.

Exits.

Lights reveal Quinones eavesdropping.

Lights down.

Chinatown apartment.

Next morning.

JERONIMO

Sister, what is this I hear?

MAGDALENA

Jeronimo. I don't know what you've heard.

JERONIMO

Are you, or are you not, marrying Senor Melchor?

MAGDALENA

It's too complicated to explain. Melchor did come here with the express intent of marrying me. But in the meantime, he met a Countess.

JERONIMO

A countess! Didn't he arrive just yesterday?

MAGDALENA

Yes.

JERONIMO

You're telling me that, in the space of one day of his arrival in L.A., he meets a Countess, and months of sexting with you goes down the drain, just like that?

Snaps his fingers.

MAGDALENA

In a nutshell, yes.

JERONIMO

I'll break his fucking nuts.

MAGDALENA

And what good would that do?

JERONIMO

Who is this Countess? I didn't know we had Countesses in LA.

MAGDALENA

Why does it surprise you? We have a Queen—Latifa; a Prince, or one formerly known as one—though (makes sign of the cross) God bless his soul. Once upon a time, we even had a King. King Vidor. So why not a Countess?

JERONIMO

Is Melchor planning to marry this Countess?

MAGDALENA

Yes.

JERONIMO

Has he set a date?

MAGDALENA

Tomorrow.

JERONIMO

Boy, he's a fast worker. Why tomorrow?

MAGDALENA

That's when she returns from her trip to Santa Barbara. (corrects herself) Santa Cruz.

JERONIMO

This is crazy!

MAGDALENA

What is it to you anyway? You're not the one who'll marry him.

JERONIMO

The fact that you're my sister, and he's the one who, up to yesterday, was supposed to marry you, I have a vested interest in the guy. Besides, I need him for the web-series.

MAGDALENA

Melchor's an actor?

JERONIMO

Not really.

MAGDALENA

I didn't know you were in the movie business.

JERONIMO

Until yesterday, neither did I.

Lights.

Little Tokyo hotel.

Ventura straggles in to a distracted Melchor who is busy packing.

MELCHOR

Had a good time at the gay bar?

VENTURA

You leaving?

MELCHOR

On your recommendation.

VENTURA

We mustn't.

MELCHOR

Why not? Yesterday, you said—

VENTURA

Yesterday's yesterday. Guess who I saw in the gay bar?

MELCHOR

Who?

Light shift. Flash back.

Gay bar in West Hollywood.

Ventura dances to disco music, bumps into—

VENTURA

Quinones!

Quinones joins in the dance.

QUINONES

Senor Ventura, forgive me.

VENTURA

What do I have to forgive you for?

QUINONES

Quinones stem you.

Huh?

VENTURA

Oh, sorry. Not stem. Stalk. Stem-stalk; I thinking same thing. English very tough. Quinones stalk you.

QUINONES

Why are you stalking me?

VENTURA

I have business.

QUINONES

Business? With me?

VENTURA

Si. Senor Jeronimo—how say, happy?

QUINONES

You mean gay. Duh!

VENTURA

Si. Gay. I know word “gay.” Quinones know many gay. Quinones fag-hag. Not want to say, want you say first. So, Quinones come gay to point. Senor get joke? No straight to point, but gay to point. My English improve every day. So. My nephew in Mexico, he gay.

QUINONES

Your nephew? This is rather abrupt. Is he cute?

VENTURA

Mucho cute. You want me make happen?

QUINONES

Make what happen?

VENTURA

Make you two be one couple.

QUINONES

I don’t even know him. But, hey, if he’s cute, I’m game.

VENTURA

But first I ask for myself.

QUINONES

VENTURA

Ask what? Money?

QUINONES

No need money. I have money. I give you money.

VENTURA

You want to give me money? What's the catch?

QUINONES

No need catch me.

VENTURA

I mean, what's the deal?

QUINONES

You want marry me?

VENTURA

Marry you, you gotta be kidding. What happened to your nephew?

QUINONES

No kidding. Cannot have kidding. Menopause. But yes, you marry me, I get green card, bring nephew so you can boom-boom.

VENTURA

That's horrible. (pause) When? Wait, what am I saying? I'm thinking with my dick. I don't even know if your nephew is my type.

QUINONES

He your type. I know. Look like Senor Melchor.

VENTURA

You know that I'm in love with Melchor?

QUINONES

Si. I see you eyes look at his *cajon*.

VENTURA

You mean crotch.

QUINONES

Si. Crotch. I learn new word every day.

Do you have a picture of your nephew?

VENTURA

Si.

Produces a picture. Ventura's eyes widen.

But he's—how old is your nephew?

VENTURA

Ten.

QUINONES

Ten! I'm not a pedophile.

VENTURA

No. But 10-year plan?

QUINONES

Insane. Well, in ten years, he'll be twenty—but no!!! *Loco. Mucho loco.*

VENTURA

Si. Loco. But we all *loco*. Your friend, Melchor, he come to LA. *Loco*. He not fall love with senorita Magdalena, *loco*. He fall head, then feet in air, with Countess, someone he not even see, *loco*. You, come with him to L.A., *loco*. You let him use you love, *loco*. What not *loco* is, one year after get green card, you divorce me, marry nephew. Now. We go church.

VENTURA

Gosh, you have all this planned out. This is too quick. It would be years before your nephew can even get here.

QUINONES

Si, years. Take long time get green card, citizen. But must start now.

VENTURA

There has to be a more immediate payback.

QUINONES

I give money now. And I have *informacion*.

VENTURA

What kind of *informacion*?

QUINONES

Good *informacion*. Very good *informacion*, señor. *Informacion* for Senor Melchor.

VENTURA

Spit it out then. Give me your *informacion*!

QUINONES

You marry me?

VENTURA

What the heck? No one else will marry me. Might as well be useful. I'll marry you if the *informacion* is good for Melchor. (offers to shake her hand) We have a deal. Shoot! This better be good.

QUINONES

Countess, she not go Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz.

VENTURA

What???

QUINONES

I have letter from Countess.

VENTURA

This is your *informacion*? Hold it, are you working for Magdalena or the Countess.

QUINONES

Both.

VENTURA

Both?

QUINONES

They same.

VENTURA

I see. You are a servant to two mistresses.

QUINONES

Si. You promise you marry me if I give good *informacion*.

VENTURA

You tricked me. You were supposed to give me the letter anyway.

Quinones shrugs. Hands letter to Ventura.
Plus a bundle of notes (dollar bills).

Light shift.

Back to Omni Hotel room.

Ventura hands letter to Melchor.

VENTURA

I won't go into detail—but this Quinones woman, she's quite a character. She gave me this letter for you.

Melchor takes letter.

Spotlight on Magdalena (as the Countess).

MAGDALENA

“My dearest Melchor! I would have texted you, but texting is so impersonal. What happened to the art of letter-writing? Yes, it takes more time, but time is a gift. So I'm taking the time to craft this letter to you to show you how much I value your love. For you, I have feigned journeys, for you I have made up non-existent marriages. Therefore, ponder these words carefully and give them import. I have learned that you plan to return to Cedar Rapids. Is there a more horrific prospect? To return to the prison from which you fled. The prison of the past, the prison of resignation, the prison of dreariness. The life I offer here is one of excitement, freedom and a future of unknown bliss. I know that you have expended your last two thousand dollars. You will need immediate cash to pay off your debts. All I ask is that you return to the cathedral. There will I reveal all that I have hitherto been forced to conceal. Ten o'clock tonight. The Countess.”

Lights fade on the Countess.

Back to Melchor and Ventura.

MELCHOR

Put away the bags. Ten o'clock. The cathedral!

Lights.

A supermarket in Chinatown.

QUINONES

Senorita Angela! *Gracias* for coming here.

ANGELA

I got your message, Quinones. Sounds urgent.

QUINONES

I have *informacion*, Senorita.

ANGELA

Good *informacion*, I hope.

QUINONES

Very good. Does Senorita have *dinero*?

ANGELA

More money! You'll put me in a poor house.

QUINONES

It is worth it.

ANGELA

How much?

QUINONES

Two thousand.

ANGELA

Two thousand. There goes my web-series!

Hands a bundle of notes to Quinones.

I'm surprised you're willing to sell out your mistress. Isn't your loyalty to Magdalena? Why are you doing this for me?

QUINONES

I'm doing this for *me*. When I first got the job as a maid for Senorita Magdalena, I quickly sussed out that she wanted someone who would put up with her bullshit. I knew that I had to pretend to be someone I wasn't. I knew that the minute she found out I could speak good English, I would be out of a job. There's more I can tell you, but for now—ten o'clock tonight. The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. This is the plan.

Lights.

Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

Clock strikes ten.

MELCHOR

(to himself) What is this that I see? Are my eyes deceiving me? Two veiled ladies?
 (to the ladies) Ladies, you amaze me. I came expecting to see one. Unless you have somehow cloned yourself, one of you must be the Countess and the other an imposter. Make plain your case, ladies. Which of you is the true Countess?

Both raise their hand.

MAGDALENA/ANGELA

I am!

MAGDALENA

I wonder though, Senor Melchor, if it is you who is playing the trick. Did you pay this lady to come here dressed as me to aggravate me? Or did this unworthy hussy come here of her own accord to win you over with deceit, not having the wherewithal to win you over on her own merits?

ANGELA

Ha! It takes one to know one. You are the imposter. You come dressed as me, just to confuse Senor Melchor. Because you know that Senor Melchor here has never seen beneath the exterior, you think you can trick him into believing you're the Countess. And you, Melchor, is there any merit to what this slut says? Did you deliberately bring in another woman to obfuscate the situation? Do you enjoy playing tricks and confusing my heart? How wrong was I to think that I could rely on your love!

MELCHOR

Whoever is the rightful Countess, please forgive my confusion. I have no need to play games. Indeed, I was all set to return to Cedar Rapids when I was cajoled to remain so that the mystery can be resolved.

ANGELA

Then tell me that I am your true love. I have proof that I am your true love, your real Countess.

MAGDALENA (veiled)

No, 'tis me. I am the true Countess.

MELCHOR

There is only one way we can resolve this. I must put each of you to the test. Is each of you willing to prove you are the true Countess?

MAGDALENA

Since you first fell in love with the Countess through her hand, let the hand be your proof.

MELCHOR

Very well, each of you, show me your hand.

Magdalena shows him her hand.

MELCHOR

(examines Magdalena's hand) Lovely lady, your hand is flawless. It is reminiscent of my Lady Love.

MAGDALENA

Thank you, kind sir. I therefore make my claim on your love?

ANGELA

Not so fast. He has not yet seen my hand.

Shows her hand.

MELCHOR

(to himself) Harder and harder! I can't tell the difference. But I must pretend I know.
(examines Angela's hand) An equally impressive hand.

MAGDALENA

Senor Melchor, are you stalling? Or, are you not able to tell the hands apart?

MELCHOR

Each hand is a good facsimile of the other.

ANGELA

How then do you propose to resolve this issue?

MELCHOR

Gemstones and fakes can only be distinguished when placed under a microscope.

ANGELA

I will not subject myself to the indignity of being put under a microscope.

MAGDALENA

Neither will I!

MELCHOR

Did you not also reveal to me your eye? May I see both your eyes?

MAGDALENA

This is too much. Why should I be subjected to be examined like a cow?

ANGELA

I have no problem with showing mine.

Angela shows an eye.

MELCHOR

The most beautiful eye did ever I see! You could be the true Countess of LA. Like hers your eye radiates like a flashlight that puts the inky blackness of night to shame.

MAGDALENA

Not so fast, the gentleman has yet to examine my eye.

Magdalena reveals an eye.

MELCHOR

(aside) Is it possible? Even more beautiful than the other!

MAGDALENA/ANGELA

So what is your verdict?

Melchor is in a dilemma.

ANGELA

Wait! I have proof that I am the true Countess.

Produces the Louis Vuitton bag.

ANGELA

Here is the bag. The bag that you gallantly rescued from my assailant.

MAGDALENA

Where did you get that bag, bitch?

MELCHOR

I thought, madam, that the bag was given away.

MAGDALENA

It wasn't. I told you I gave it away, but I didn't.

ANGELA

Ha, a liar to boot. She didn't give it away because she didn't have it in the first place. How can you give away something you never had? It proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am the Countess.

MAGDALENA

You must have stolen it from my apartment. I should call the police.

ANGELA

Go ahead, call the police. I dare you.

MELCHOR

No, no law enforcement, please.

MAGDALENA

Tell me how much money was in the bag?

MELCHOR

(aside) I should know this because it is my bag—two thousand dollars, but to admit it would be to expose myself as a liar.

(to the ladies) That's a good way to settle the argument. I have no idea. As a gentleman, I did not look into my lady's bag.

ANGELA

Regardless, I am the Countess because I'm in possession of the bag.

MAGDALENA

Possession proves nothing. But I have to hand it to you. You did your homework.

Both Magdalena and Angela see "Jeronimo" headed their way.

MAGDALENA/ANGELA

Goodness, here comes Jeronimo! I have to leave!

They exit, leaving Melchor very confused.

MELCHOR

Holy Mother of God! What is happening here? Both ladies appearing and departing at the same time! This confusing state of events is driving me *loco*. I should have returned to Cedar Rapids this morning.

Lights.

Magdalena's apartment. A short while later.

Quinones quickly puts away the bag.

QUINONES

Thank goodness, I retrieved the bag from Angela in the confusion, or my head would be on the chopping block.

Magdalena enters.

MAGDALENA

Quinones, where is my bag?

QUINONES

Your bag, Senorita?

MAGDALENA

Yes, my bag. You know the one Melchor gave me when I was attacked?

QUINONES

Here, here where it's always been.

Produces the bag.

MAGDALENA

Quinones, your English—

QUINONES

Yes, yes, improve, no, Senorita?

MAGDALENA

You won't believe what happened. An imposter came to the very spot where I was to have met Melchor, and she produced a bag that was remarkably like this.

QUINONES

No possible.

MAGDALENA

For a minute I thought you'd betrayed me.

QUINONES

Senorita think me betray? Many people have Louis Vuitton bag.

MAGDALENA

Yes, but how did she know it was a Louis Vuitton?

QUINONES

Why senorita no trust Quinones? Maybe I go find another job.

MAGDALENA

No one is accusing you, Quinones. Of course you didn't take the bag. You can't be that stupid! And how did that woman find out that I was going to meet Melchor at ten? More importantly, what am I going to do about this imposter?

QUINONES

Senorita must have strategy.

MAGDALENA

Strategy! I agree. Quinones, you are a genius! Thank Jesus we left at the same time, or that woman could have revealed herself, and Melchor could very well have fallen in love with her. Since he's not seen what the Burka Lady looks like, the image could have been imprinted in Melchor's mind that she is the Countess, and once the impression is made, it's very hard to eradicate it. Oh dear, I'm now not only jealous of myself, I'm jealous of a third person—this mysterious lady! The blade of jealousy cuts deep and spares no one. But what, oh what can I do?

Lights.

Omni Hotel.

A text comes in for Melchor.

MAGDALENA*

My dear Melchor. [wink, wink, wink] I am so sorry about the fiasco. [sad face] Who knew that someone would come and try and assume my identity [???] There's no time to clear up this mess. Come to the Chinatown building, but not to Magdalena's penthouse apartment [!!!!] Come to the ground floor apartment. Magdalena must not know that I'm seeking to see you again. I don't want another double-dealing. [scary face] Who knows she may have been that other imposter! [devil face] In any case, go to the side of the building, not the one facing Cesar Chavez, but the other side, to your right as you face the building on Broadway. You can't miss it. It has a graffiti painted in the shape of an erect penis. [eggplant] If you truly love me, [heart, heart, heart] give me one more chance. [prayer hands] I promise to make it up to you. [angel wings] Come! At midnight. [kiss, kiss, kiss, squirt]

MELCHOR

So what do you think, Ven?

VENTURA

How many times are you going to fall into her trap? I wouldn't go, if I were you.

MELCHOR

I must, if only to clear up all this confusion!

Lights.

* Actor, please read out loud, emoji's.

Midnight.

Melchor and Ventura arrive outside the Chinatown apartment building.

Magdalena (with veil) is perched on a box that represents the Chinatown building.

MELCHOR

This must be it. What a shame! A brand new building and already it's covered with graffiti. Impressive-looking penis though!

Sees Magdalena at the window.

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

MAGDALENA

Not so loud! Magdalena is sleeping in the other room. You should not speak too loudly, or you'd wake her.

MELCHOR

This is crazy. Can't we meet somewhere else?

MAGDALENA

And have what happened earlier repeat itself? We might as well invite two thousand other Countesses. Here, you'd know for sure that the person you're talking to is, indeed, *the* Countess.

MELCHOR

Now that we are by ourselves, I know for a fact that you are the Countess.

MAGDALENA

It's not so difficult when you are in her territory. You saw my hand, my eye; yet you could not differentiate between the two hands and two pairs of eyes!

MELCHOR

The Countess is right to chide me.

MAGDALENA

I am mad at you, Senor Melchor, for bringing another woman into the picture.

MELCHOR

It pains me, dear Countess, that I was the butt of a joke. Either that or I have an unknown admirer. I do not know who this woman is, where she comes from, or why she was there. Please, I am your love.

MAGDALENA

It is no secret that my heart belongs to you. You sure you don't know this imposter woman?

MELCHOR

Quite sure.

MAGDALENA

Then give me something to prove your love.

MELCHOR

How about this?

Produces a jade ring.

MAGDALENA

A ring!

MELCHOR

(to Ventura) I purchased it at the Chew Yuan Company in Chinatown. \$5.99.

MAGDALENA

Are you proposing marriage?

MELCHOR

I am.

MAGDALENA

Very well. You may seal it with a kiss.

MELCHOR

A kiss! A kiss! OMG! Ventura! Quick! The window is beyond my reach. I need you to crouch down so I can step on you to be level with my lady.

Ventura crouches down. On all fours.

VENTURA

The things I do for you!!! Go on! Mount me and kiss her. Story of my life.

Melchor steps on Ventura.

MELCHOR

Hold still, Ven.

VENTURA

You're heavier than a hippopotamus!

MAGDALENA

A gentle reminder: once our lips touch in holy consent, our union is sealed, and no one can put asunder that commitment.

MELCHOR

Agreed.

They kiss. Melchor slips the ring on her finger. Struggles to keep his balance.

Ventura! Keep still—

Loses his balance. Falls.

VENTURA

Oh my back! My poor back! No amount of yoga, chiropractic or acupuncture can put this back together again.

MAGDALENA

Senor Melchor, I have one more favor to ask.

MELCHOR

Say it and it will be done.

MAGDALENA

Nothing would please me more than if you marry Magdalena instead.

MELCHOR

What???

MAGDALENA

Jealous as I am of her, and she of me, she is the most worthy person to receive your love. There is no more noble way I can repay her kindness than to sacrifice my love so that she can be happy. Besides her love for you is boundless, and her treasury even more infinite.

Sudden stage lights to reveal Jeronimo.

JERONIMO

(to audience) Whoa! At this point, ladies and gentlemen—

Lights now reveal Angela (in a burka) and Quinones.

I must interrupt and tell you that, somehow, all the players in this tale are assembled here—outside this Chinatown apartment—so that the story can come to a happy

conclusion. Everything will be made plain, momentarily. Countess, will you please step into the alleyway?

Magdalena (as the Countess) steps down from her box. She turns to Angela

MAGDALENA

(to Angela) Ah, still pretending to be the Countess, I see. How can you be the Countess when you were here all along, listening in on said Countess' conversation with Melchor, the dialogue heard and witnessed by all.

Savagely, she pulls away Angela's head covering.

EVERYONE

Angela!

ANGELA

I am defeated. It is plain that I am not the Countess. In my defense, may I say that I pretended to be the Countess because I thought it was the only way I could win over Melchor's love? I found Senor Melchor to be fair of face and smooth of skin. It made me weak. But now that I see him up close, he is too much of a pretty boy for me. I cannot have someone who is prettier than I.

JERONIMO

With my main competitor no longer in the running, would you, sweet Angela, marry me? I will be good for your fledgling career.

ANGELA

Without much of a choice, sweet Jeronimo, I, Angela, am glad to accept.

MAGDALENA

Now that that is settled—

QUINONES

(interrupts) Senorita, you always forget me. Don't I need to wrap up as well?

MAGDALENA

Quinones! You speak—

QUINONES

Yes. Perfect English. English can be mastered through tough thorough thought. Does Senorita remember how she promised to find me a husband? For my green card. Every year goes by, and no husband. So, I decided I will not depend on Senorita and find a husband for myself, myself.

MAGDALENA

(scornful) Husband! Who will marry you?

VENTURA

I, Ventura, having been thwarted in my pursuit of true love, do give my hand to Quinones here. We have a 10-year plan, which I hope to God will come to fruition.

MAGDALENA

Well, good for you, Quinones. Congratulations. (abruptly) That leaves us, Melchor. See this ring? Is it not the ring you slipped on my finger?

Melchor nods.

And take a close look at my hand. Is this not the hand of the Countess, or the Burka Lady as you know her?

MELCHOR

It is.

MAGDALENA

But what about Magdalena? Did you not promise to marry Magdalena?

MELCHOR

I did.

MAGDALENA

Will you go back on your promise?

MELCHOR

As a man of honor, I will not. For my great love of you, I will marry Magdalena.

MAGDALENA

Fickle traitor! So foul are you, sir, that you could be so quickly persuaded to renounce your true love. Were it I, I would rather die a lonely, destitute man than obey so foul a request. Be gone, sir, I am done with you.

MELCHOR

I had expected to receive words of appreciation, instead I am heaped upon with scorn. What person orders her lover to abandon her and take on another? I only agreed out of love.

MAGDALENA

I was waiting for you to protest that it would be impossible for you to give up your love for me. That, even on the pain of death, you would be true to me to the end of your life. I was expecting you to detail her faults, proclaim your utter disdain of her person and the impossibility of sharing her bed.

MELCHOR

But I, lady, am a man of my word—

MAGDALENA

Oh, Melchor, Melchor! How glad am I to hear your word—words. Is it word or words? A man of your word. Your words. What are Wordsworth's words worth? English is tough. A man of his word is indeed a treasure. (pause) I do not wish to distress you any further, Melchor. I should now reveal to you—

Removes her burka covering.

EVERYONE

(gasp) Magdalena!

MAGDALENA

—that the Countess and I are one and the same person. As Magdalena, I hid behind the persona of the Countess, fearful that you could not love me for myself.

MELCHOR

I have been blind. Now that I see the person to which the hand I so admired is attached, I see your total beauty and I am ashamed of my shallowness. Magdalena, my love!

MAGDALENA

I am no longer afraid. I henceforth will never be jealous of herself. Myself.

Melchor and Magdalena kiss.

JERONIMO

And so, we come to the end of the play—and this web-series. The blade of jealousy spares no one. It cuts two ways, the one who is jealous and the object of that jealousy. We humbly ask, against the wishes of the playwright, for a generous applause, loath though he be to take credit for the story since this is an adaptation—a very loose adaptation. But in the spirit of the original work, since the playwright Tirso de Molina did ask his audience to “show how you’ve enjoyed” his play, the adaptor of this modern version also seeks a similar endorsement.

Lights fade.

END OF PLAY