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Maria Antonia

ACT I

SCENE ONE

THE MARKETPLACE

Images of the marketplace and the city flash on simultaneously.

IMAGE 1

(A group of youths smoking marijuana.)

FIRST YOUTH

Gimme that, the cops are coming.

SECOND YOUTH

The roach, c'mon, gimme the roach.

THIRD YOUTH

Take a hit, girl, and get inspired.

IMAGE 2

MOTHER

(Pounding wildly on a door) Open up or I'll kill you, low-life! Open up! May God make the roof fall in on you!

(In an uncontrollable rage, she breaks down the door.)

SON

I didn't do anything wrong.

MOTHER

I'm gonna kill you, worthless scum. *(Hitting him.)* When I call you, you answer me right away, you hear? Now take off your pants and don't go out in the

Calabash

street anymore. Don't cry. Men don't cry. I don't want any faggots in this family. I birthed a man!

IMAGE 3

WOMAN'S VOICE

(locked in her room) Get me out of here, it's collapsing! Oh God, it's collapsing!

IMAGE 4

CHOPA

(playing an instrument)

Alms for this poor little blind man, alms for the love of God.

(A boy steals a woman's purse. He runs away. The crowd pursues him.)

IMAGE 5

A PIOUS WOMAN

(in front of a religious image) Our Lady of Loreto, please keep a roof over my head! Make Pedro find work! Do you think this is any kind of life? *(Hitting the image.)* I'm gonna turn you upside your head if you don't listen to me! We'll see how long you're gonna keep me this way!

IMAGE 6

A man enters pursued by a pregnant woman.

MAN

Don't screw up my life anymore. It's all over between us.

WOMAN

So you think you're gonna go away and leave me with this little present?

MAN

Leave me alone!

WOMAN

Who do you think you are?! Help me! Help!

MAN

You crazy??

Calabash

WOMAN

Crazy? You can't leave me in this mess. Help! Help me!

MAN

(beating her savagely) Get outta my face.

WOMAN

Kill me! Kill me!

(The man keeps on hitting her. People pass by.)

MAN

(leaving) Keep on following me and I'll pull it out your mouth.

(Exits. A man tries to help her stand up. She refuses his help and exits moaning.)

IMAGE 7

MADMAN

(walking amidst the crowd) Man must be good, a light for this darkness! I don't want money, I don't want money, I don't want money. *(They mistreat him.)* Oh, damn this earth that births vultures at every moment! Bastards! I don't want money. Man must be good, a light for this darkness!

A VOICE

Shut that crazy fool up! Shut him up!

(A group of boys hang him by his shoulders from a pole. They poke and prod him.)

FIRST BOY

If you are the son of God, descend!

(They grab LA CUMACHELA.)

CUMACHELA

Turn me loose, what are you gonna do to me? He's not my husband.

SECOND BOY

(dragging her over to the MADMAN) Behold your mother!

IMAGE 8

MOTHER

(to her daughter, while ironing) Me ironing and you messing around out there. Where've you been?

Calabash

DAUGHTER

None of your business where.

MOTHER

I'm your mother!

DAUGHTER

Stop bothering me and leave me alone. I went looking for a husband, you hear me? a husband.

MOTHER

(pressing the iron on her shoulder) Trash!

IMAGE 9

FATHER

(giving his son a knife) To defend yourself with. Prison's better than the grave. Men don't cry. They'd rip out their eyes first.

(The son grabs the knife and exits.)

IMAGE 10

(A group of people sing and dance a guaguancó on the corner. They're getting drunk and having fun.)

WOMAN

(To a soldier. Both are drunk.) This is what life's about, Genaro, having a good time, dancing, and drinking until the Reaper comes our way.

VOICE

They're taking Bones away, they're taking Bones away! He split a man's head in half!

ANOTHER VOICE

That son of mine will be the end of me. Why don't they just kill him and get it over with? I'm tired of chasing after him behind the cops! He'll do fine inside, at least he'll eat every day.

IMAGE 11

CUMACHELA

(to a passer-by) Gimme two bits for a cup of coffee. Just two bits.

Calabash

(The MAN ignores her. She grabs somebody else walking by and begins to cry.)

MAN

What's up?

CUMACHELA

(tragically) My daughter just died and I got nothing to bury her with.

MAN

So eat her.

CUMACHELA

Your grandmother's who I'm gonna eat, low-life. *(To CHOPA, who approaches.)*

The street's getting so you can't even go and die in it.

(CHOPA and CUMACHELA rush over to the garbage and, panting, rummage through it.)

FIRST HIGGLER

Nine candles for the dead. D'you want candles for the dead? Nine candles!

SECOND HIGGLER

C'mon, this is for the day after tomorrow! Turkey vulture, priest, big dead man. Buy, m'lady, buy from me. Ten times I've won someone the grand prize and I never told a soul about the names. Buy from me, I'm a poor woman.

IMAGE 12

FIRST BOY

(holding the other boy's head under his armpit and squeezing until he almost suffocates)

Give up?

SECOND BOY

Turn...me...loose!

FIRST BOY

Who's the man here?

SECOND BOY

Turn me...loose!

FIRST BOY

(squeezing harder) Who's the man here?

SECOND BOY

You.

Calabash

FIRST BOY

(releasing him) That's so you'll learn how to play with men.

IMAGE 13

FIRST POLICEMAN

C'mon, keep moving, keep moving.

WOMAN

And where are we supposed to go?

SECOND POLICEMAN

Don't you have a husband? Let him worry about finding you a room.

WOMAN

He's out of work.

THIRD POLICEMAN

Move it, move it. You can't afford a room, but you can afford to get drunk.

(The HUSBAND crosses the stage pulling a cart full of old junk.)

THE MARKET

HERBALIST

(crying his wares) Who'll buy, blessed thistle, chinaberry, Spanish needles, sage, abre camino! Christmas bush!

(MARIA ANTONIA enters running from the wings with a MAN behind her. All action stops.)

PITICO

(restraining her) I'm gonna teach you to respect men.

FIRST ONLOOKER

Kill her!

SECOND ONLOOKER

Teach her a lesson so she'll stop acting so damn tough!

THIRD ONLOOKER

(warning him) That's Julián's woman.

(MARIA ANTONIA abruptly freezes.)

PITICO

(showing off) What? Your man's run out on you again?

(The PEOPLE laugh.) Go feel up a dog, that's what you need.

Calabash

(The PEOPLE are enjoying themselves. MARIA ANTONIA grabs a knife from one of the food stands. In a boastful gesture, the man tries to jump on her. The people try to restrain him, while she brandishes the knife.)

MARIA ANTONIA

Turn him loose! I'm the one you all are gonna have to deal with, 'cause I'm gonna cut his ass.

(The PEOPLE laugh.)

PITICO

Turn me loose, turn me loose!

FIRST HIGGLER

Leave the bitch alone. She doesn't care if she dies, don't you see that?

PITICO

Turn me loose, I'm gonna finish her off once and for all!

(The PEOPLE give in and PITICO breaks loose.)

FIRST ONLOOKER

Get him going good, María Antonia!

SECOND ONLOOKER

Watch out for that woman, she fights like a man.

*(PITICO and MARIA ANTONIA are face to face.
He hesitates when he sees MARIA ANTONIA grasping the knife.)*

MARIA ANTONIA

You're pretty dumb if you think you can scare me! Guys like you, I can whip their ass in crap games!

FIRST ONLOOKER

C'mon, Pitico, show that one what you're made of.

SECOND ONLOOKER

Go ahead, brother, go ahead now.

PITICO

They should have left you in jail until you rot!

(He tries to leave, but a group blocks his way.)

MARIA ANTONIA

(to a food seller) Yuyo, gimme your knife.

YUYO

You're gonna get in trouble, María Antonia.

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Calabash

MARIA ANTONIA

Gimme that! *(She wrests the knife from him and throws it at PITICO's feet.)* So you can defend yourself, so you know what I'm after.

FIRST ONLOOKER

C'mon, Pitico, the table's all set.

SECOND ONLOOKER

Get her, man!

THIRD ONLOOKER

Defend yourself and quit acting the fool.

FOURTH ONLOOKER

Just go away and leave the bitch alone.

FIFTH ONLOOKER

Stick him, María Antonia, stick him.

SIXTH ONLOOKER

I mean, Pitico, a woman!

SEVENTH ONLOOKER

Whistle, Pitico, whistle!

PITICO

(showing off) Look, I'm not gonna get burned over someone like you. You're living on borrowed time. Sooner or later your hour will come.

(PITICO walks away and a group seizes him.)

SECOND HIGGLER

María Antonia! What do we do with him?

MARIA ANTONIA

Why don't you go look for your mother so she can stick up for you? Or don't you have a mother?

FIRST ONLOOKER

She capped you, Pitico.

SECOND ONLOOKER

Cut his ass, María Antonia!

THIRD ONLOOKER

After this, brother, you better start wearing a dress!

(A group of boys fondle his buttocks. The PEOPLE approach MARÍA ANTONIA.)

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Calabash

HERBALIST

Elm, slippery elm! Ofá. Abaíle. Iggolé. Ikí yenyé. Ewo olá.

MARIA ANTONIA

What kind of abracadabra are you talking?

HERBALIST

Light and life for your spirit and ashé for your body: Christmas bush!

MARIA ANTONIA

Bah! Quit showing off, your fifteen minutes are up.

CIPRIANO

Hey, black girl, what's happening?

MARIA ANTONIA

Just passing for white until they find out.

CIPRIANO

You don't have to be white to be worth something.

MARIA ANTONIA

In this country, being white's a full-time job.

THIRD HIGGLER

You really lost it, you know? We all thought you'd had it.

MARIA ANTONIA

That's what a lot of people want, to see me behind bars or in my grave, but I'm not gonna give them that pleasure. María Antonia's gonna be around for a good long time. From now on, as long as there's breath in my body, jail and me are strangers.

FOURTH HIGGLER

There's no man alive who can get in your way. What happened with that guy?

MARIA ANTONIA

Poor guy, he thought he was going to shut me up.

FIRST HIGGLER

Women like you, daughters of the flame, deserve a toast. Here, my queen, have some rum from my special supply.

(MARÍA ANTONIA drains the glass.)

PEOPLE

Long live the boldest black woman to walk this earth! Hurray for María Antonia! Viva!

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Calabash

MARIA ANTONIA

(pushing one of the carts) Alright, who's gonna keep me from looking for whoever I please?

CIPRIANO

When will people learn to know you?

MARIA ANTONIA

Cipriano, where's Julián?

CIPRIANO

How should I know? You think I'm his shadow, or what? Come with me, I'm off to the gym now to look for him.

MARIA ANTONIA

They saw him in the marketplace and he was saying he was gonna walk his whole life through, on this last day, to retrace his footsteps. *(To a passing stevedore)* Hey, Cheo, where's Julián?

CHEO

Out of sight and uptight. Since he's nailing Spider with his right, he's keeping cool. This time around I'm betting my pants on Julián.

MARIA ANTONIA

Watch out you don't lose them.

(A fight is about to start. To break the tension, CIPRIANO starts singing a guaguancó.)

CIPRIANO

Bele Bele bele bele belebá.

ALL

La la la...

CIPRIANO

Bele Bele bele bele belebá.

ALL

La la la...

(The PEOPLE begin to clap their hands rhythmically and to play on boxes.)

CIPRIANO

(singing) And now the time has come
to sing to your glory
the undying lesson
of my guaguancó:
so mistreated

mean mistreater
Maria of the switchblades
black girl of fire and rum
o lady
lady
like you there's no other
crazy, don't mean maybe
flower gone astray
so lost so lifeless
faded and withered
by a love
a love unseen
María Antonia of the switchblades
black girl of fire and rum
Ay, such a shame!
Ay, such a shame!...

ALL

Ay, such a shame!

(The PEOPLE dance, blocking MARIA ANTONIA'S way. The guaguancó builds in a crescendo. The dancers are able to draw MARIA ANTONIA into the dance. Swaggeringly, she executes "vaccinates" (wines up) for the dancers. MARIA ANTONIA enters the marketplace. The dancers disperse.)

MARIA ANTONIA

(shouting all around the marketplace) Julián! Julián!

HERBALIST

Wait. Don't go. I've got something to bind him.

MARIA ANTONIA

Bind? Bind who?

HERBALIST

The wind that swirls around your waist. Come on, don't give me that. Who else could it be? That black hick who doesn't let you live in peace. That man — and both you and I know who he is — who's taking baths in my herbs so he won't get arrested or sick. Whoever sees that Negro anymore since he's gotten so famous? It's been a while since you've been together. What, did he leave you?

MARIA ANTONIA

I didn't spend so much time talking to you. Have you seen him around here?

—//—
Calabash

HERBALIST

No, but I'm seeing *you*.

MARIA ANTONIA

Here comes Godmother, old man, don't tell her where I am.

(She hurriedly hides behind one of the stands in the marketplace.)

HERBALIST

(to GODMOTHER, who is approaching) How wonderful it is to see you again!

GODMOTHER

Have you seen María Antonia?

HERBALIST

It's been a while since I've heard about her. What's going on with that black girl?

GODMOTHER

How should I know? She's not at peace. Since Julián got himself mixed up in boxing, she cannot find relief. Tomorrow I will dance, sing, and celebrate until Oshún comes down and refreshes my child's eleddá. The shells have gotten all turned around.

HERBALIST

There's always something good for what's bad. I've got blessed thistle. Orosú of the earth. Herbs for her spirit. With this, peace will come back to her.

GODMOTHER

(taking the herbs) Don't forget to come by my house tomorrow. Let me go on looking for her. They already told me about the fight, they did! The good-for-nothing! If you see her, remind her to see Yuyo. *(She comes forward, calling out.)* María Antonia! María Antonia! *(Exits.)*

HERBALIST

*(To MARÍA ANTONIA, who leaves her hiding place,
while showing her a bottle of honey)*

With this Oshún got Oggún out of the forest. Look, oñi, oñi, to sweeten your voice, your body, to sweeten your life, m'lady.

MARIA ANTONIA

Listen, I know how to take care of those myself. And up until now, that Negro hasn't stopped eating out of my hand whenever I wanted him to. *(Leaving the HERBALIST'S stall)* Now then, let me bless you with epazote, since I believe you're the one that needs protection.

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Calabash

(She cleanses him mockingly. MARIA ANTONIA vanishes among the market stalls.)

HERBALIST

One day the world will fall apart, and that laugh of yours — please God it changes into knives! *(Exits.)*

MARIA ANTONIA

(calling out) Julián! Julián! *(To a PUSH CART VENDOR)* Hey you, where's Julián?

PUSH CART VENDOR

I don't know.

MARIA ANTONIA

(walking towards YUYO's stall) Hey, white boy! Now I'm gonna spend a little time with you.

YUYO

You're a sight for sore eyes. It's been a while since we've seen each other.

MARIA ANTONIA

Every now and then it's good to get lost and breathe some other kind of air.

YUYO

As long as it's for one's own good. *(To MARIA ANTONIA, who is throwing produce into her bag)* Hey, hey, hold on a minute, okay? You're taking all the best ones.

MARIA ANTONIA

(sensuously) Are you going to deny me, your own family, two or three yams? Madrina wants to make fritters.

YUYO

You know how things are, really bad. People don't have bread, and when there's no bread they get all bent out of shape and don't pay. Business is going from bad to worse every day. Yesterday I didn't even make enough money for the trip.

MARIA ANTONIA

And this plantain here? How's that bunch over there?

YUYO

You know I've never denied you anything, but...

MARIA ANTONIA

Oh! Scratch me here...on my back. Scratch me! What were you saying?

//
Calabash

YUYO

What I promised you cannot happen.

MARIA ANTONIA

Promised me? The promise would be to Godmother or Oshún, which isn't the same thing. And what's promised to Oshún...

YUYO

But you must understand, things are down to yucca and yams for poor folks. I can't let you have this food.

MARIA ANTONIA

(throwing the food back on the stall) Don't go crying poverty to me. What's happening is that you got somebody else.

YUYO

(throwing the food back in her bag) You know damn well how crazy I am about you. My brain's turning into water because I can't think of anything but you. No, no, no, don't make fun of me. Look, all I do is touch you and I start shaking. *(He grabs her and she escapes. Violently)* I like you a lot!

MARIA ANTONIA

(at a distance, violently) That papaya over there, I like that a lot. *(YUYO throws it into her bag.)* And those soursops. *(He throws them in.)* And that melon. *(He throws it in and gives her the bag.)* I'm telling you, in all this earth there's no one as good as you. *(Leaving)* May Eleggua protect you and open all your paths!

YUYO

But if you take away all the goods, Eleggua won't be opening any paths for me 'cause you'll have closed them all.

MARIA ANTONIA

If those coconuts stay in the cart, someone's gonna put the evil eye on them, and Godmother needs them to do a moyuba for the saints. Put them in my bag. *(She opens the bag and YUYO puts them in.)*

YUYO

I don't know what the hell it is with you, 'cause everything you want, you get.

MARIA ANTONIA

No, no, don't think that I get everything, no, no, not everything.

YUYO

All you have to do is move, and the earth kneels before you. What you

//
Calabash

need is love and affection. Now everything tastes like glory to you, but when the years begin to fall... You have to start thinking about the future and about me.

MARIA ANTONIA

(sarcastically) Little pickaninnies to watch over me in my old age!

YUYO

(imploringly) Why don't we see each other tonight?

MARIA ANTONIA

(mockingly) I got a date with the devil.

YUYO

A man like me's what you need.

MARIA ANTONIA

No, no. I don't want you to ruin yourself for me. I don't want to corrupt you. You're a good man. You like me without any self-interest.

YUYO

Everything in life is about self-interest. You come to me because you know that sooner or later, you get away with what you want...

MARIA ANTONIA

Don't get all evil-minded.

YUYO

...and I give it to you, because I'm hoping that one day you'll invite me to your room. *(tries to embrace her violently)*

MARIA ANTONIA

(out of his reach) Nobody, nobody gives anything for the good of it, that's the truth. So don't be such a jerk and learn to have fun in life, like me, and I'm one helluva woman. *(She withdraws, calling out.)* Julián! Julián!

YUYO

I'm not letting this go. Tomorrow you and I'll see each other at the drumming.

MARIA ANTONIA

(calling out) Julián! Julián!

