

KIDNAP ROAD

By
Catherine Filloux

KIDNAP ROAD

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To my father and mother, Jean and Odette Filloux

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La MaMa presented the world premiere of *Kidnap Road* at La MaMa's First Floor Theatre in New York City. The cast and staff were as follows:

Woman.....Kimber Riddle

Man.....Marco Antonio Rodriguez

Directed by Elena Araoz; Set Design by Justin Townsend; Lighting Design by Michael McGee; Sound Design by Nathan Leigh; Costume Design by Christopher Vergara; Production Stage Management by Karen Oughtred

Voiceovers by: Valeria A. Avina, Jorge Eliézer Chacón, James Martinez, Luis E. Mora, María Cristina Pimiento, Adriana Santos

Kidnap Road was presented by Anna Deavere Smith for a workshop at NYU's Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, New York City; and was presented for a workshop at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (IPJ) University of San Diego, The Art of Peace symposium

CAST: 1 Woman/1 Man

A WOMAN

A MAN, plays many roles fluidly

The play's design includes a detailed soundscape; the play is performed without an intermission.

Details of Ingrid Betancourt's story can be found in the public record. This story is imagined as a two-person play based in part on those events.

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The WOMAN is in her cage. Lights shift and we hear a crowd and applause, as an ANNOUNCER introduces her during her presidential campaign: “Y ahora vamos a escuchar a la candidata del partido oxígeno verde.” (“And now we’re going to hear from the candidate of the Oxygen Green Party.”)

WOMAN. Here is a condom. If you vote for me you are wearing a condom against corruption. On Election Day let your vote for me be like Viagra for Colombia. *(She shifts to a different audience.)* When you decided to become a *guerilla*, when each of you decided, “I’m going to the mountains to fight,” what was your intention? Was your intention to take away water and electricity from the poor people you wanted to defend? I don’t think so. I believe you joined to say, “We’re going to fight for a better society, for social justice.” The war makes us all suffer. Together we can make our country a better place. For our children. A consensus for peace will strengthen your movement. A consensus for war will destroy Colombia. I propose that we make unilateral gestures that will allow Colombians to embrace the peace process. *There is a gesture for the FARC: “No más secuestros, no más secuestros, no más secuestros.” (We hear the faint sounds of a helicopter engine.)* The night when the game is played. The sky. Blue with a few clouds. Wide open. The beautiful sky, silent sky. *(We hear chimes.)* *Quand je parle, je parle en français. O en español?* But I am in England, Oxford, so, the language for now will be...English. *(She picks up a book).* And this is the book

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they gave me. The bible. A best seller. (*We hear sounds of a helicopter.*)

MEN'S VOICES. (*Loudly.*) *Todos, vamos! Vamos! Vamos!* (Let's go everyone! Let's go! Let's go!) (*The LEADER dashes by her.*)

LEADER. (*Loudly.*) *Vamos! Vamos!*

WOMAN. We are in the middle of a coca field. A helicopter is waiting.

LEADER. (*Loudly.*) *Vamos! Vamos!*

WOMAN. The men from the helicopter are dressed in Che Guevara T-shirts, and one man--the leader--is holding a clipboard. The Absurd.

LEADER. (*Loudly.*) *Entren en el helicóptero! Entren en el helicóptero!* (Get into the helicopter!) *La tenemos que esposar!* (We need to handcuff you!)

WOMAN. The leader wraps plastic around my wrists. A Venezuelan news station films me. What made me get in the helicopter? With the people dressed in Che Guevara T-shirts? (*Helicopter sound dies out and turns into the sound of a ticking clock. The COMMANDER forces her to march.*)

COMMANDER. *Muévete! Camina! Muévete!* (Move! Let's get walking!) (*The Woman marches with the Commander.*)

WOMAN. There are sixty seconds in a minute. Sixty minutes in an hour. Twenty-four hours in a day. If I see the hands moving then I know that you are here. That you are in the same time as me. But time is not chronological, nor logical, and what does it even mean here, time? (*The Commander makes a halting sound to stop marching, takes off his gun and lies down. We hear an assortment of jungle sounds.*) Just before dawn the jungle is at its most still. But there is never silence. Ever. The flies buzz, the birds make their very *special* sounds. (*Sounds of jungle*

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birds shrieking and croaking.) Sometimes you have to laugh. A praying mantis crawls up the side of my cage. Then a scorpion. The light slowly turns the color black to green. God, if you give me a little bit of sky today, I'll give you...*(GOD appears.)*

GOD. What will you give me?

WOMAN. Why do we bargain, God? Why do we have to bargain all the time?

GOD. *(Waiting.)* Well?

WOMAN. I don't have anything left to give, God.

GOD. *(God laughs.)* What about humility? *(A beat.)*

WOMAN. Those words, God? The ones I kept repeating in front of the guerillas...?

GOD. *(Laughing.)* Yes?

WOMAN. "*No mas sequestros, no mas sequestros, no mas sequestros.*" They were laughing at me. *(God continues to laugh as he exits.)*

Okay, okay, okay, I am pretty. I am privileged. I come from a well-known Colombian family. I have strong ties to France. This is particularly offensive to those who hate me. But a woman shouldn't fight. Right, God?

GUARD'S VOICE. *(Loudly.) Póngansen en fila!* (Line up!) *Preséntesen!* (Present yourselves!)

MALE HOSTAGE 1's VOICE. Number One.

MALE HOSTAGE 2's VOICE. Number Two. *(MALE HOSTAGE 3 presents himself.)*

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Number Three.

WOMAN. *(She presents herself.)* Use my name! *(We hear more hostages, "Number Five, Number Six, Number Seven.")*

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Hey, can't you just give them a number?

WOMAN. Why?

MALE HOSTAGE 3. You always have to act special. You know, everyone says you're a diva. You deserve a

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birthday cake for your daughter? You need special books of your own. You always have to make everything harder for us.

WOMAN. *WHY* do you want to be a number?

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Be quiet!

WOMAN. It all begins with that “WHY?” (*A plane is heard overhead. The Commander orders.*)

COMMANDER. *Todos al suelo!* (Get down!) (*He quickly lies down on the ground as we hear the plane passing. The Woman continues to stand, listening to the motor as it disappears.*)

WOMAN. *WHY* don’t you stop the kidnappings?

COMMANDER. (*Making fun of her.*) *No mas secuestros, ay Doctora. Somos las FARC.* (We are the FARC.) We are the *people’s* army, working to fight for the rights of peasants, fighting against imperialism. You’re running for president but you’re no better than one of our own hundreds of guerilla prisoners rotting in your government’s jail cells. When you were a Senator, why didn’t you arrange for a prisoner exchange with us?

WOMAN. I came to your village--I tried to work with you...

COMMANDER. You aren’t in touch with the real people, *Doctora*--your presidential campaign is going nowhere. No one remembers you.

WOMAN. I gave you a chance, I talked with you--we shared a meal together.

COMMANDER. Kidnapping is a trade in Colombia.

WOMAN. I listened to you.

COMMANDER. Wasn’t it you who just appeared on TV so earnest with your makeup and your fancy sunglasses, your jewelry, repeating: “*No más secuestros, no más secuestros, no más secuestros...*” (*No more kidnappings.*)

WOMAN. (*Overlapping.*) When everyone said, peace is impossible, I said, it is possible. And this is what you do

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to me--while I'm running for president, you take me hostage?

COMMANDER. (*Overlapping.*) This is a good lesson for you, *Doctora*. How long will it take you to understand the lesson of what it really means, to be poor and a peasant, fighting for your basic rights, with no privileges, no mansions, chandeliers, high fashion suits, five-star restaurants? And with that air of false humility you've learned so well from your politician mother and your diplomat father.

WOMAN. (*She repeats the following to herself like a mantra and her FATHER appears echoing those words with her. We hear a piano.*) *Has tenido tantas oportunidades en la vida...yo te veo...has tenido tantas oportunidades en la vida...yo te veo...*

FATHER. The naïve romantic, *mija*, you never learn. You want to risk your life and the lives of your children?

WOMAN. I have no choice, you never wanted my mother to do this kind of work and you feel the same about me.

FATHER. You are my daughter and I want you to be safe.

WOMAN. I have to fight. Look, I don't want to fight with you.

FATHER. You're full of contradictions. You are right--I had opinions about your mother.

WOMAN. I wish you could see her, I wish you could see me. You are not treating me for who I am. You want to see someone else.

FATHER. You don't actually know what you want. *Mija*, listen, there is nothing more dangerous than a feminine feminist.

WOMAN. Was it the condom, Father? Did that shock you? And the Viagra?

FATHER. It is beneath you. Beneath us!

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WOMAN. Corruption is beneath us all. It worked. I won in the Senate. This is my country.

FATHER. You shame me. (*Sounds of rain and boards cracking.*)

WOMAN. My wooden cage has a flimsy board. I begin to press my foot on it. It makes a cracking sound. (*A GUARD looks over at her.*) Does he hear what I did? (*The Guard looks away.*) I check my pocket, the vitamins, save them. At night, in the dark, the best time to think. The flashlight I stole, that I hid in the *chontos*. Crumple the paper into a mound, a fake body so it looks like someone is still sleeping there. A sleeping body. (*Sounds of a storm.*) The wind. Finally. There's no choice. Who knows when there will be another storm like this? Crack open the board wider. Match the cracking with the thunder. (*Cracking sounds.*) Squeeze through the hole in the wood, out of the cage. (*Rain sounds.*) The pouring rain. Feel only the leaves, the roots, tripping, running, one foot in front of the other, slipping downward, towards the river. Never turn on the light, it's too dangerous, if I am seen. The dark is safer than the flashlight. (*Jungle sounds intensify.*) The dark is safer. Pitch dark. (*Lights go out completely.*) I put my hands out in front of me. To feel my way. What is there? A pit in the ground? A landmine? The sharp teeth of an animal? I turn on the flashlight. (*Explosion of light.*) A gigantic banyan tree, vines strangling upward to the invisible sky. I turn it off. I'm free. I'm free. Running. Get as far away while it's still dark. The river should be soon. Dawn, alone in the jungle. Bury myself under leaves. Body under leaves. To return. Small orchids that look like little red birds...The space of being out of the cage. (*She looks up at the sky.*) The space to move. The sky. (*A YOUNG GUERRILLA finds her, pointing his rifle.*)

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YOUNG GUERILLA. *Señora*, please, listen to me. You have to think clearly. To understand us better. My father was a coca farmer--he got killed in a raid...

WOMAN. Listen, we'll go together--you can do it. We can run away together.

YOUNG GUERILLA. I grew up with the FARC, they gave me food, clothes, when I had nothing, they taught me to read and write...

WOMAN. You know the jungle--you know the way. We can do it, don't use the handcuffs...

YOUNG GUERILLA. No one believed in my dignity that way, *Señora*, I'm a communist, I believe in the revolution. Now come, come with me. (*He handcuffs her.*) They are going to punish you. That is what is going to happen. It will be very bad. Try to say nothing to them, *Señora*.

WOMAN. I will say something! You are pigs!

YOUNG GUERILLA. Then you will only suffer more.

WOMAN. During my rape, he...they...Nothing. The love of my mother and father, their strength like a mountain, their voices, their world. My children--her joy--his trust--their sweetness. The way their hands lace themselves in mine. In the fire of my center, their spirit is like a flame that never goes out. It simply burns steady. It cannot ever go out because of this love. It will never go out.

After

In cold muddy river water

Skin broken

Bathing.

Washing my dirty hair,

My body

Salt water falling in

Shock

For as long as they let me

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Stay

In the green water, before they chain me.

COMMANDER. Okay, *Doctora*, we're filming the Proof of Life. Come on! (*Sound of whirring video camera. The Commander provides her with a stool, motioning for the filming to begin. She sits and bows down her head, sick, completely silent, during her "Proof of Life."* He motions to turn off the camera.) This silence is only going to make things worse for you, *Doctora*. You need to show the world a Proof of Life, that's your only chance for survival, *Doctora*. Laugh on camera a little for them, sing a little, tap your foot. Say something! (*He motions for the camera to roll again. She speaks her internal thoughts.*)

WOMAN. Here, now, God, in front of the commander's camera, I give up on you. Skin yellow. The waving of the white flag. These are the bargains I make.

Don't come up for air

Don't look out the hole

Don't look for creatures who light up in the dark

Stay in this cocoon of the sleeping criminal

Limbo between life and death.

--I promise to let you know when you can come and take me for good.

Heart beating

Mouth breathing

Skin pores open

Shitting

Pissing

Tear ducts

Soul a crater with *stagnant poison*.

It's over. No "Proof of Life" for anyone, especially not you, God! I've finally lost the "WHY?" I surrender.

COMMANDER. (*He motions for the camera to stop.*)

You better talk soon. Those special blue jeans you've tried to hide for so long, they won't fit you anymore,

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anyway. Put some fat on that ass! And your hair and your moustache. (*The Commander takes away her stool. We hear the sound of a woman speaking on a radio.*)

MOTHER'S VOICE ON RADIO: *Te amamos, ma chérie.* (We love you, my dear.)

WOMAN. *Maman,* I wait every day for your voice on the radio.

MOTHER'S VOICE ON RADIO. *Estamos pensando en ti. Nos vas a ver muy pronto, te lo prometemos.* (We are thinking of you. You will see us again very soon, we promise.)

WOMAN. I promise too, I'll see you soon.

MOTHER'S VOICE ON RADIO. *No podemos comer tu plato favorito, coq au vin, hasta que te volvamos a ver.* (We can't eat your favorite dish until we see you again.)

WOMAN. You're so funny--you stopped cooking *coq au vin*?

MOTHER'S VOICE ON RADIO. *Vamos a hacer coq au vin para tí cuando regreses. Estamos trabajando duro.* (We will make *coq au vin* for you again when you return. We are working hard.)

WOMAN. You hear that, God? She's working with the government on my rescue. She is always there because she knows. The stakes are in our bones.

GOD. She left her children for politics too. That's why you're being punished. Because you left your children. The legacy of leaving.

WOMAN. (*Overlapping.*) Oh, shut up. Then why did the bullet hit him and not my mother?

GOD. You're asking that again?

WOMAN. Why did you take Galán? The best president we could've had? And my mother escaped his bullet by a *fraction*.

GOD. Fate?

WOMAN. What?

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GOD. That's why you came back to fight like your mother. It would be good for you to think about fate.

WOMAN. When she speaks to me on the radio, does she think I'm dead?

GOD. She has the same audacity as you. The entitlement of the wealthy, of those who have been handed everything on a silver platter!

WOMAN. I need them to know I'm trying to get back to them, God.

MOTHER'S IMAGINED VOICE ON THE RADIO.

Lo sabemos, amor. (We know, ma chérie.)

WOMAN. *Maman?*

MOTHER'S IMAGINED VOICE ON THE RADIO.

Sabemos que estás haciendo el intento.

WOMAN. You can hear me?

MOTHER'S IMAGINED VOICE ON THE RADIO.

Yo sé que estás viva, hija. Eres valiente, cariño. Entonces pues. Vamos a tomarnos una tacita de té. (We know you're trying. Yes, I know you're alive, hija. You're brave, ma chérie. Now, let's go out for a nice cup of tea.)

WOMAN. I can't have a cup of tea, *Mamita*. I'm imagining things.

GUARD'S VOICE. *(Loudly.) Póngansen en fila! (Line up!)*

MALE HOSTAGE 1's VOICE. Number One.

MALE HOSTAGE 2's VOICE. Number Two.

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Number Three.

WOMAN. Use my name! *(We hear more hostages, "Number Five, Number Six, Number Seven.")*

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Hey, hey, hey, I'm really, really sorry you lost your election.

WOMAN. I never think about my election anymore.

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Oh, hey, wow, forgive me--I never should have brought it up. *So-rry.*

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WOMAN. There's a word I've heard about in English. It's "passive-aggressive"?

MALE HOSTAGE 3. That's two words.

WOMAN. *(To him.)* I'm no longer a politician! *(She becomes the politician, as we hear a crowd and applause.)* Because of you, President Semper--you are aware--Colombians cannot travel abroad without being instantly suspected as drug traffickers. You have ruined our international image and plunged the country into terror and uncertainty. I am demanding an independent investigation of your corruption, one that is not infiltrated by the drug Cartel. I call a hunger strike. I won't eat again until our country is given an honest investigation. *(God appears.)* Okay, I lied to the "passive-aggressive" American hostage--I obviously *do* still think about my presidential election. It makes me angry that I lost, God.

GOD. You didn't have a chance in *hell* of winning.

WOMAN. Hell?

GOD. Yes, I use that word. When it applies.

WOMAN. Why?

GOD. You're asking that again?

WOMAN. I should have won. That's a secret! Please don't repeat it. *(God laughs.)* The problem is, there are no secrets from God. And God says different things on different days. *(MALE HOSTAGE 3 pulls out the strands of steel wool from brillo pads and throws them up in the trees. Woman makes fun of the American way he speaks.)* Hey, hey, hey, hey. What are you doing?

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Stole a box of brillo pads from the kitchen--to get better radio reception. Hey, why are they buildin' a fence around the camp?

WOMAN. To make it harder for us to escape.

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Right, you are the celebrity.

WOMAN. I'm not a celebrity.

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MALE HOSTAGE 3. You're a star in France. Joan of Arc.

WOMAN. Not exactly Jeanne d'Arc.

MALE HOSTAGE 3. The guerillas' biggest trophy. As long as they have you alive they have negotiating power.

WOMAN. They have no negotiating power--the government won't agree to exchange their prisoners for us hostages.

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Having you alive brings them fame. You keep the light on them.

WOMAN. How d'you think of that with the brillo pads?

MALE HOSTAGE 3. That's all I have, TIME TO THINK.

WOMAN. Thank you.

GUARD'S VOICE. (*Loudly.*) *Póngansen en fila! Preséntesen!* (Line up! Present yourselves!)

MALE HOSTAGE 1's VOICE. *Número Uno.* (Number One.)

MALE HOSTAGE 2's VOICE. *Número Dos.* (Number Two.)

WOMAN. *Número Tres.* (Number Three.)

FELLOW PRISONER (MALE COLOMBIAN).

Número Cuatro. (Number Four.)

WOMAN. *Querido.* (Dear.)

FELLOW PRISONER (MALE COLOMBIAN).

Querida. (*We hear more hostages, "Número Cinco, Número Seis, Número Siete. She smiles at him optimistically. Note: The Fellow Prisoner [Male Colombian] always speaks in Spanish in the La MaMa production. The Spanish text may be found at the end of the play.*) Someday we'll find each other, *querida*, on a street corner and we'll say let's go in the middle of the day for a paella.

WOMAN: We had an imagined language. I could read my friend's face like a book. He actually said *nothing*.

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I said to him: Don't. Leave. Me. *No me dejes.* A guard takes him away. I knew him in the Senate, before we were hostages. Water is punching behind my lids. *Ne me quitte pas.* (She hears the radio.)

FELLOW COLOMBIAN PRISONER'S VOICE ON RADIO. *Estoy vivo querida, los venezolanos me ayudaron a escapar y ahora Francia te va a ayudar a tí. Los gobiernos de Francia y de Colombia están luchando por tí!* (I am alive, querida, the Venezuelans helped me to escape and now France is going to help you! The French and Colombian governments are fighting for you!)

WOMAN. *Querido,* you've been rescued! Venezuela, France, Colombia--they're fighting for me.

FELLOW COLOMBIAN PRISONER'S VOICE ON RADIO. *No te preocupes, todos te están esperando, tu volverás!* (Don't worry, everyone is waiting for you, you are coming home!)

WOMAN. Yes, I will come home.

MOTHER'S VOICE ON RADIO. *Mi querida hija, todos los niños en nuestro orfanato están cantando y rezando por tí!* (My dear daughter, all the children at our orphanage are singing and praying for you!)

WOMAN. The orphanage is praying for me.

MOTHER'S VOICE ON RADIO. *Ellos están muy agradecidos contigo por el trabajo que has hecho y agradecidos con nuestra familia.* (They are so grateful to you for the work you have done, and to our family.)

WOMAN. No, I'm so grateful for the work you've done, *Maman.*

MALE SPOKESMAN'S VOICE ON RADIO. The American government refuses to negotiate with these terrorists, we simply have to sacrifice the hostages. They are like terminally ill patients.

WOMAN. We are terminally ill. Actually we *are* ill and the guerillas put us into a boat and we take a long boat

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ride down the river. (*Sounds of splashing water.*) The same river where you and I tried to escape, *Querido*.

Why, God?

GOD. “WHY?” is your torturer.

WOMAN. “Why?” is not my torturer, God, “Why?” is my salvation! You *see* the children--they know everything about peace. *Why* do the adults act like roosters at a cockfight? You know, the roosters are given muscle-building hormones and antibiotics so they can fight longer.

GOD. You are getting off track with these roosters.

WOMAN. You’re right. But the children, God. My children. (*Bright sunlight. To herself:*) The sun. Oh my god he’s so happy. The water...

BOY’S VOICE. Try to catch me! Come in further, *Maman*.

WOMAN. Don’t go too far, *mon chéri*.

BOY’S VOICE. You can see me, look!

GIRL’S VOICE. You can see me too, *Maman*, look!

WOMAN. Yes, *ma chérie*, you’re doing so well.

GIRL’S VOICE. Can I go further?

WOMAN. Not past your belly button. (*To herself:*) Frothy all around. I can taste it. Salt on my tongue.

BOY’S VOICE. I can swim!

WOMAN. I see you.

BOY’S VOICE. Come and get me. *Maman!*

WOMAN. Sun on my skin, hot, bright...

GIRL’S VOICE. Why does he get to go further, *Maman*? That’s not fair.

WOMAN. Because he can swim, *chérie*. Just make sure your feet can touch the bottom.

GIRL’S VOICE. I want to swim! Your hand under my stomach, *Maman*.

WOMAN. Yes, here. (*Placing her hand.*) Now, move your arms and your feet...Good...At the same time.

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GIRL'S VOICE. I'm swimming!

WOMAN. You are, darling.

BOY'S VOICE. I can swim, Maman!

WOMAN. They're both so happy. We all are.

BOY ON RADIO. *Eres buena gente madre--eres dulce.*

(You are good, Mother--you are sweet.)

WOMAN. You're my sweet.

GIRL ON RADIO. *Todavía estas viva! Se fuerte. Como siempre nos enseñaste, mami.* (You are still alive! Be strong. Like you always taught us, Mommy.)

GIRL/BOY ON RADIO. *Te adoramos.* (We adore you.)

WOMAN. (*Overlapping.*) When you say I'm still alive, do you believe it? There is only what we were. Our *love* sewn together: a trip we took... Wave goodbye to your father.

BOY'S VOICE. Goodbye, Papa!

GIRL'S VOICE. Goodbye, Papa!

WOMAN. Come--do you want to walk or take the bus?

GIRL'S VOICE. The bus!

BOY'S VOICE. I can't see his car anymore, *Maman*.

WOMAN. He'll come back to get you, and I am with you now.

BOY'S VOICE. Why don't you live with us?

WOMAN. It's too dangerous for you in Colombia.

BOY'S VOICE. Why don't you like Papa?

WOMAN. I like him. I need to work for our country, like your grandmother. Do you want to put the money into the coin box?

BOY'S VOICE. Yes! I paid for the bus by myself!

WOMAN. You did, sweetie.

GIRL'S VOICE. *Maman*, look at the flames burning in the lamps outside.

WOMAN. They are coach lights. It's the Dakota. A famous lady lives there.

GIRL'S VOICE. Who?

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WOMAN. Yoko Ono.

GIRL'S VOICE. *You're famous.*

WOMAN. No.

GIRL'S VOICE. You're on the cover of magazines in France.

WOMAN. I'm your mother.

GIRL'S VOICE. The flames look like a campfire.

WOMAN. They will never go out. What do you want to see today?

BOY'S VOICE. The dinosaurs. Dinosaurs!

GIRL'S VOICE. The whales, with sprouts...spouts!

WOMAN. They run ahead up the stairs. Her white stockings--my son's blue coat. His beautiful smile, her hair cut to her jawbone.

YOUNG GUERRILLA. *Señora--despiertate!*

WOMAN. I wake up with a start.

Always

With a start. It is the sameness.

How has this happened? Stasis, based on illness, hepatitis, complete and utter capitulation of the body. I move my neck. Can you take off the chain? No I won't ask. Not asking is a victory. (*A plane is heard overhead. The Guard whistles.*)

YOUNG GUERRILLA. *Todos al suelo! (Get down!) (He quickly lies down on the ground as we hear the plane passing. The Woman listens to the motor as it disappears.)*

WOMAN. Today is my daughter's birthday.

YOUNG GUERRILLA. Pack up your things, we're moving to a new compound.

WOMAN. I need to make her a cake. I need a birthday cake.

YOUNG GUERRILLA. We're late--I'll talk to the commander in a minute!

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WOMAN. What is a minute right now? It is sixty ticks of a clock. Ticks. Are all clocks the same? Every day I do twenty pushups. *Real* ones. For two years I do twenty-five. Increase until I reach twenty-seven. More years I stay at twenty-seven. Then for a while I can only reach thirty. I watch some of the guys doing...a lot more.

Ugggh. That makes me so mad. Now, I start to do one more for me and one for my *querido*, my fellow Colombian. Right now, he's ill. (*Jungle sounds.*)

FELLOW PRISONER. *Querida*, I found three more *tagua* seeds.

WOMAN. Good! And I know you're making a calendar to remember your wife's birthday. *I'm* making a backpack. Time *used* to feel like claustrophobia. The same claustrophobia as not seeing the sky. No light. I felt as if I was going crazy.

FELLOW PRISONER. And now?

WOMAN. My bones feel like the soft bones of birds and at the same time like sharp needles.

FELLOW PRISONER. Don't be so dramatic!

WOMAN. Everything is in contradiction. I hold only contradictions now. I want to drink something cool and refreshing like orange juice. I want to fall asleep, parched, as if the sweet liquid itself will kill me.

FELLOW PRISONER. Drink some water!

WOMAN. What is the French word for 'fly'?

FELLOW PRISONER. *Mouche.* (*He pronounces it terribly. She takes a breath.*)

WOMAN. ...You are a brilliant student. And *se moucher* also means to blow your nose. I *mouche le nez de la mouche*.

FELLOW PRISONER. (*Laughing.*) I like that. *Mouche le nez de la mouche*.

WOMAN. See, you just needed the encouragement. Don't show repugnance for the flies, or the sand where

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they burrow. It's the disease you get from sand flies. They feast on his flesh. (*We hear buzzing sounds.*) Who wrote *Les Mouches*?

FELLOW PRISONER. Charles Darwin?

WOMAN. Try...again. Charles Darwin? You have no idea. Jean Paul Sartre wrote *The Flies*, based on the Electra myth. Existential. You never would have imagined you'd get to spend so much 'quality time' in the jungle with me!

FELLOW PRISONER. 'Quality time' is a gringo concept--in Colombia there is no time that isn't 'quality.'

WOMAN. I never was that good at English.

FELLOW PRISONER. You speak perfect English.

WOMAN. You're always biased. Maybe you're in love with me? I am in love with you. You're my only reason for being and I have no reason for being at all, another contradiction. But we can talk of everything--that's why it's "quality time," right? Remember Rilke? *Letters to a Young Poet*? My boy would listen to a tape from school, of Catherine Deneuve reading it. Could anything be more beautiful than his face listening to her calm, serene voice? This is what I remember of Rilke now: "Even if you were in jail and robbed of all your senses, you would still have your childhood, that precious house of memories. Turn to that. Look for the hidden sensations in your plentiful past and you will grow stronger, your solitude will blossom and the noise of others will go away." (*Joking.*) Well, Rilke is a liar, an asshole, a charlatan, and a blowhard. Who wants solitude? I want my family. My 'precious house of memories' is nothing! I despise Rilke! If I had his book right now I would burn it!

FELLOW PRISONER. (*Laughing.*) You are a terrible liar. If you had his book you would devour it. If only we had more books besides Harry Potter.

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WOMAN. I finished the backpack, but our food is rotting. We must make it to the river. With you I will succeed.

FELLOW PRISONER. What's a river full of piranhas after the corrupt politicians you've been fighting?
Querida, I can't go--the booster shots are making me sick.

WOMAN. You need to eat more. You'll get better. Soon we'll go.

FELLOW PRISONER. *Querida*, you're mad at Rilke--you want to make *new* memories, is that it? (*Pause.*) No one is looking. You have a beautiful body. I noticed that long ago.

WOMAN. Really? You never said. We'd pass each other in the halls--you barely looked.

FELLOW PRISONER. You're the most beautiful woman I've ever known.

WOMAN. You are a terrible liar.

FELLOW PRISONER. "Quality time." (*He makes a gentle preparatory step.*)

WOMAN. For Camus it's all *Absurd*. Time moves fluidly, there is no past, present, future in the jungle. The existentialists, the absurdists, it's the perfect time to talk about the Absurd. Camus was happy in the theater. He called the theater "The night when the game is played." *Le soir où la partie se joue*. I was a philosophy student in France before I became a politician.

FELLOW PRISONER. Really?

WOMAN. I directed Camus' play, *The Misunderstanding*, in college.

FELLOW PRISONER. Woah.

WOMAN. I used a *film noir* style. Here is the play performed for you in the jungle.

FELLOW PRISONER. Theater, for me? Now?

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MARTHA. *(In a film noir style she speaks Martha's role in the play in French.) On dit que, dans ces régions, il y a des plages tout à fait désertes?*

JAN. *(The Fellow Prisoner joins in, becoming the role of Jan.)* It's true. Nothing recalls man. At dawn one finds on the sand the traces left by the feet of the sea birds. These are the only signs of life. As for the evenings...

MARTHA. *Quant aux soirs, Monsieur...?*

JAN. The evenings are shattering. Yes, it's a beautiful country.

MARTHA. *J'y ai souvent pensé. Des voyageurs m'en ont parlé, j'ai lu ce que j'ai pu.*

FELLOW PRISONER. I don't get it.

MARTHA. *Je pense à la mer et aux fleurs de là-bas. Et ce que j'imagine me rend aveugle à tout ce qui m'entoure.*

FELLOW PRISONER. I still don't understand. *(Sounds of helicopter.)*

WOMAN. Camus says: Certainty is impossible. You don't know how long you're staying, or if you Exist. It's about you--all of us. How did we lose our country? No one can understand that. *(Sounds of a helicopter. The Leader quickly dashes by her.)*

LEADER. *(Loudly.) Entren en el helicóptero! Entren en el helicóptero! (Get into the helicopter!) (The Leader begins to handcuff her with a plastic twist tie.) La tenemos que esposar! (We need to handcuff you!)*

WOMAN. The leader wraps plastic around my wrists. A Venezuelan news station films me to show we're alive. The news station wants to interview our guerilla commander.

COMMANDER. *Somos las FARC. Hablamos en el helicóptero! (We're the FARC. We'll talk in the helicopter!)*

WOMAN. Who are these people in the Che Guevara T-shirts? There is a divide between the stagnant air of the

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jungle and the fluid air where the birds fly to get away.

God, why not let me fly away to them, my boy and girl?

GOD. Because you're not a bird. You can't fly.

WOMAN. Why do you have to be so damn literal, God?

GOD. Why do you have to be such a dreamer?

WOMAN. I'm not.

GOD. The naïve romantic. (*A beat.*)

WOMAN. The terrible guilt of leaving them.

GOD. The legacy of leaving your children.

WOMAN. For a higher cause, God.

GOD. What cause can be higher?

WOMAN. That's easy for you to say. All the children are supposed to be *your* children, but I don't understand what you are doing to them!

GOD. The misunderstanding. (*Sounds of loud rain.*)

FELLOW PRISONER. *Querida*, hurry it's coming down!

WOMAN. Get the backpack. (*Banging sound.*)

FELLOW PRISONER. The drums make too much noise.

WOMAN. We'll need them to float--keep going--don't stop.

FELLOW PRISONER. Pitch dark.

WOMAN. Hold on--hold on. (*We hear guards talking, laughing.*) Run, the guards aren't paying attention.

FELLOW PRISONER. The mud.

WOMAN. Crawl.

FELLOW PRISONER. I can't.

WOMAN. Yes, one foot in front of the other.

FELLOW PRISONER. I'm *crawling*.

WOMAN. One knee, then.

FELLOW PRISONER. Okay, one knee.

WOMAN. Jump in--float.

FELLOW PRISONER. Black--

WOMAN. Like obsidian.

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FELLOW PRISONER. *Querida*, the oil drums, you're a genius.

WOMAN. Jeanne d'Arc.

FELLOW PRISONER. Jeanne d'Arc never got kissed like that.

WOMAN. No.

FELLOW PRISONER. Piranha water. (*They are suspended in current that carries them.*) Look, the egrets, the birds.

WOMAN. The clouds are so dark--the sky seems to go on forever. I'm soaked, you can't see my tears. The special jeans are wet in my backpack.

FELLOW PRISONER. You're still carrying those?

WOMAN. There is never any sun. We can't transform into water animals. As the days go by, we are still human.

FELLOW PRISONER. So cold.

WOMAN. We'll catch fish.

FELLOW PRISONER. We have too many fishhooks, and zero matches.

WOMAN. Didn't someone teach you how to make a fire?

FELLOW PRISONER. Didn't someone teach you?

WOMAN. Raw fish--sushi. Delicious. Really, delicious.

FELLOW PRISONER. (*Laughing.*) Okay. This is a great delicacy, created by you, on a leaf.

WOMAN. Please, I insist, eat more. (*A beat.*)

FELLOW PRISONER. You need to go on without me, *querida*. I'm holding you back. Please. I just need to go to sleep.

WOMAN. If you fall asleep you might not wake up.

FELLOW PRISONER. Go! This is your only chance--you'll make it. (*A beat.*)

WOMAN. Don't. Leave. Me. I heard him say, in our imagined language. *No me dejes.*

FELLOW PRISONER. You can do anything, go! You almost ousted the President from office.

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WOMAN. But I didn't succeed, a good portion of the Senate was paid by the Cartel.

FELLOW PRISONER. (*Laughing.*) I wasn't.

WOMAN. Would you tell me if you were?

FELLOW PRISONER. ...Of course.

WOMAN. Really?

FELLOW PRISONER. You were on fire. No one dared do what you did.

WOMAN. The President was found innocent.

FELLOW PRISONER. So you'll try again!

WOMAN. We'll wait for someone to come by in a boat. A fisherman. *Querido*, I won't leave you. (*We hear chimes. She picks up the book, the bible.*) It's been years--my watch is still on jungle time, it's strange. But now the feelings I have for it are completely different. I'm a student again. In England. Oxford, PHD, theology. I was trying to negotiate with the guerillas before I was kidnapped. For the peace talks to work the guerillas have to be given the chance to participate in the government. We must suspend their jail sentences. It is essential that we make that move now! Land reform, disarmament--the high commander, who gave me this bible, died--he is with God now. And forgiveness...? (*Startling gun sound.*) I wake up with a gashed face? The machete goes through my forehead like an egg it cracks so fast. They are trying to stitch me up and the blood is pouring out. The guerilla is barely a teenager. In camouflage. His skin so smooth. Sleek.

YOUNG GUERILLA. *Señora, no se preocupe*, we have our own hospital out here in the jungle.

WOMAN. It would be okay for me to live without a face. I would depend instead, on my soul...?

YOUNG GUERILLA. *No se preocupe*, we have very good surgical care here in the jungle, but you'll just have to wait your turn!

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WOMAN. Eyes, eyeballs are swimming in front of me into nostrils that dissolve into aquiline cheekbones that sag under the weight of a knife that went in too deep, with the neck shot in by an assault rifle. Look, mercenaries are training here in the jungle. Flesh splatters everywhere so we are running across the forest to try to collect, fingers, ears? Yes ears. If you can just retrieve the appendages for your face to be whole again... (*Startling gun sound.*)

I was dreaming. Dreams within dreams.

COMMANDER. That look on your face, *Doctora*.

WOMAN. Why are you forcing a sick man to walk barefoot? The jungle is filled with snakes.

COMMANDER. Your LOVER is being punished for your escape together down the river! You know you should never speak back to the guards. That just makes it worse.

WOMAN. Why are you torturing him? Give him back his shoes!

COMMANDER. You better stop!

WOMAN. Give them back!

COMMANDER. Now you will live in chains forever.
(*Jungle sounds increase. She is marching.*)

WOMAN. I'll carry my chains. The Amazon is
Existential it goes on forever.

COMMANDER. (*Laughing.*) *La ingénua romántica,*
Doctora. Usted nunca aprende! (The naïve romantic,
Doctora. You never learn!)

WOMAN. You guerillas aren't communists with a plan to help your countrymen--I grew up on Che Guevara too, the romance of revolution. (*The Commander laughs.*) I thought you were rebelling against what I also hated. But you're drug lords--the army of the drug cartels. All you care about is *power*--the biggest trucks, rifles--the most beautiful girls to seduce with your toys. You're just as corrupt as the system you say you hate!

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COMMANDER. (*Laughing.*) *Ay Doctora*, the truth is like this jungle. Look at this jungle. Is it predictable? You have to be ready for *anything*, like me and my woman. (*Whistling.*) Come to daddy, baby, I know what my girl can do, but that's because *love* is unpredictable. Isn't that right? (*A plane is heard overhead. The Commander whistles.*) *Todos al suelo!* (Get down!) (*He quickly lies down on the ground as we hear the plane passing. The Woman continues to stand, listening to the motor as it disappears. Sounds of rain. Laughing.*) You're the weakest of the group. Your books are too heavy, they're slowing you down, *Doctora*.

WOMAN. I won't give up the books. (*They march.*) It's raining--can I take shelter in the tent?

COMMANDER. Shut up, you know the answer! (*They march.*)

WOMAN. Can I use the *chontos*?

COMMANDER. From now on, no *chontos*--you'll have to do it out here, in front of everyone. You don't get any special treatment. You're just an animal.

WOMAN. You are the animal! DON'T YOU DARE DO THIS TO ME!

COMMANDER. Get down on the ground and shit. (*She stumbles, falls.*)

YOUNG GUERILLA. *Señora.* (*Young Guerilla catches her. They are back on a forced march. She is sick with hepatitis and weak.*) Some of the *guerillas* spread rumors that you're a snake. I know you're not.

WOMAN. I'm sorry you have to carry me.

YOUNG GUERILLA. We are always pushed aside by the government, *Señora*, so we know the true heart of the poor.

WOMAN. What do you think it is?

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YOUNG GUERILLA. I tell people, here, we have a place to start over, we protect our own--this land belongs to us all.

WOMAN. Your smile reminds me of my son's.

YOUNG GUERILLA. We are talking about new kinds of crops for the locals...

WOMAN. Which ones?

YOUNG GUERILLA. Yucca, corn, peas. Our roots grow deep with the locals. We are their government. You see, we understand that they have no jobs...

WOMAN. You're right, they need to be given better chances.

YOUNG GUERILLA. So many have been killed by the military, *Señora*.

WOMAN. Yes and by the paramilitaries.

YOUNG GUERILLA. The fight is to give us back lives that matter. Why is your backpack so light?

WOMAN. I got rid of everything. Except the bible. Even the jeans. A present from my daughter. I was wearing them the day I was kidnapped...gives me such sweet presents...

YOUNG GUERILLA. You really need to eat! We're stopping for the day by this stream. *(She starts to croak like a frog.)* What are you doing?

WOMAN. They're so happy. The frogs, watching them land, on lily pads. Croak, croak, croak. With the pink flowers. *(Sound of whirring video camera. We are back to the Commander filming the Proof of Life. She is silent.)*

COMMANDER. We're filming the Proof of Life.

Doctora, you're getting lazy, sleeping all the time. Your mother said something *very* important on the radio this morning. Don't you want to know? How do you think the other hostages feel when *you* get all the attention on the radio? You wonder why everyone hates you? We'll have to hand out this *silent, sick* Proof of Life and what will it

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do to help us negotiate your release? (*He motions for the camera to roll.*) Say something. (*He motions for the camera to stop and starts to leave.*) *Perra.* (Bitch.)

WOMAN. Lying in my hammock falling into the place of succumbing, I count five times trying to escape, the same excitement of getting away and the terrible crash of recapture. But all the escapes have Absurdly run into each other--I can't try again. Instead I will see the breezy white church with the blue mosaic of the Virgin...

YOUNG GUERILLA. What, *Señora*?

WOMAN. I sit quietly with my mother as she prays. God is in the gold stars of the mosaic sky above the altar. He demands peace and serenity. She looks down at me and squeezes my hand, smiling. She has a smile that makes all my uncertainties disappear. I look down at my hand in her hand.

YOUNG GUERILLA. Whose hand, *Señora*?

WOMAN. I wear little white gloves and even sometimes lace for the head. It is white and quiet and holy. My mother has the courage of the carelessly faithful, a faith equal to the gold stars of the mosaic sky, the courage of the Virgin Mary. Where is my mother? Father! (*We hear the sound of an oxygen machine, breathing, and the distorted piano, as her Father appears.*) Father, they put me on oxygen.

FATHER. *Mija, has tenido tantas oportunidades en la vida.* (My daughter, you have had so many opportunities in life.)

WOMAN. The President is corrupt. I told him I won't eat until he returns all the money to the people.

FATHER. You have had so many opportunities in life. You're right, you have to give back. You have a debt to Colombia to serve your countrymen. Even if you have to die. *Yo te veo.* I see you, *mija.* *Yo te veo. Yo te veo.*

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WOMAN. You've been converted to my cause and to my mother's. Goodness, and kindness, and dedication. A man who opens his heart and *changes*, now that is true love--when someone can transform his heart. How can there be sadness when you, Father, are here? The news of my father's funeral is printed on a piece of newspaper that is wrapped around a squash. They don't want me to know my father has died. That's why they took away the radios. I don't say anything. I try to show no expression to them. My father was sick when I was kidnapped. On the last day I saw him there was beautiful piano music playing in the house.

FATHER. I'll be here, *mija*, waiting for you. (*He crosses himself as he prays.*) Jesus, take care of my child.

WOMAN. Why am I not with you when you die, Father? Why can't I hold your hand, comfort you? (*The Young Guerilla approaches with a book.*)

YOUNG GUERILLA. *Señora*, I know with the chain you can do nothing. If you vomit again tonight, I'll help you clean it up. Here take this, hold onto it.

WOMAN. Yes, my son. God is in the love of my mother and father, my children, their strength like a mountain, their voices, their world.

YOUNG GUERILLA. From the high commander.

WOMAN. (*Surprised.*) A bible?

YOUNG GUERILLA. You've been asking for it for years.

WOMAN. Suspicion is no longer worthy of my time. (*She takes it and starts to read.*)

U.S. AMBASSADOR'S VOICE ON RADIO. Our government is looking for the hostages, in an area the size of Texas. Triple Canopy Jungle. The pilots can't see down from the sky.

WOMAN. God is an existentialist. He comes in the uncertainty. How many years?

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PILOT'S VOICE. Darkness, green. 'N we're told they keep moving. But we can't see. We really don't see distinguishing bodies. Don't know what they're doing down there...

GUARD'S VOICE. (*Loudly.*) *Póngansen en fila!* (Line up!) *Preséntesen!* (Present yourselves!)

MALE HOSTAGE 1's VOICE. Number One.

MALE HOSTAGE 2's VOICE. Number Two. (MALE HOSTAGE 3 presents himself next to the Woman. We hear more hostages, "Number Five, Number Six, Number Seven" under Male Hostage 3's following lines.)

MALE HOSTAGE 3. Number Three. Hey, hey, they arrested the commander's girlfriend and sent her to the U.S. The commander has two U.S. indictments: one for our kidnapping, the other for the narco-trafficking.

WOMAN. They're making deals. (*Sounds of helicopter.*)

COMMANDER. *Somos las FARC. Hablamos en el helicóptero!* (We're the FARC. We'll talk in the helicopter!)

WOMAN. Who are these people? What is happening?

COMMANDER. You will be taken in a helicopter to meet the top guerilla commander. *Vamos!*

WOMAN. (*She crosses herself as she begins to pray.*)

"Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name..."

(*She has so many bug bites.*) I'm sorry but I have to scratch myself. I'm burning up with bites. I hear the distant voices of the families on the radio--there are entire radio stations dedicated to those who have been kidnapped in Colombia. I have been here two thousand three hundred and twenty one days. (*Sounds of a helicopter.*) The leader wraps plastic around my wrists.

LEADER. It's just precautionary, hurry and get in, don't waste time! (*Calling.*) Get into the helicopter! (*The Leader handcuffs her.*) *Suelten las armas!* (Put down your guns!) *Rápido, tírala!* (Hurry, throw it down!)

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WOMAN. In the last minute the leader tosses down some cases of beer for the guerillas on the ground. The Absurd. Camus says: Certainty is impossible. (*Helicopter sounds get louder.*) The helicopter ascends. When we are in the air, the leader beats up the two commanders and injects them with a needle.

LEADER. Are they down?

WOMAN. The commanders pass out. The leader calls out to us.

LEADER. “We are the Colombian army...!”

WOMAN. I am happy in the theater, Camus says. Why?

LEADER. You are free! (*The helicopter sounds die out. Now as in the beginning, the woman holds the bible.*)

WOMAN. The beautiful sky, silent sky. (*We hear chimes.*) *Quand je parle, je parle en français. O en español?* but I am in England, Oxford, a student, theology, so, the language for now will be...English... And this is the book they gave me. The rescue? A helicopter
Out of nowhere.

I am here.

It is not for the faint of heart.

To allow *life* to touch you completely,

To allow yourself to touch it

There is a profound loneliness

So that I say every day, may I see you all one more time again. (*She exits from the cage. Her children appear in the distance.*) Is that you...? You're both so much taller.

END

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Text for Fellow Prisoner [Male Colombian]:

(Colombian translation by Juan Posada, John Araoz and Marco Antonio Rodriguez)

Page 16

-Algún día nos encontraremos en la esquina de una calle, a medio día, y nos diremos...Sabes, vamos por una paella.

Page 21

-Querida, encontré tres más semillas de tagua.

-Y ahora?

-No seas tan dramática!

-Toma agua, pues!

-(Laughing.) Me gusta esa.

Page 22

-Esta cosa de “quality time”...eso es puro concepto de gringos. En Colombia no hay tiempo que no sea “quality”.

-Hablas un inglés perfecto.

-(Laughing.) No te hagas. Si tuvieras el libro delante de ti, lo devorarías. Ojalá y tuviéramos mas libros que el del tal Harry Potter.

Page 23

-Un rio repleto de pirañas no es nada comparado con todos esos políticos corruptos con los que haz luchado en contra.

Querida, no puedo ir. Las inyecciones me están enfermando.

-Querida, estás enojada con el Rilke. Quieres crear nuevos recuerdos, verdad? Pues...Nadie nos esta mirando. Y tu tienes un cuerpo espectacular. Lo noté hace tiempo.

-Eres la mujer mas bella que he visto en mi vida.

-De veras?

-Caramba!

-Teatro? Para mi? Ahora?

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Page 24

- Así es... Nada recuerda a el hombre. Al amanecer solo se encuentra las huellas dejadas sobre la arena por las gaviotas. Las únicas señales de vida. Pero, en la noche...
- Las noches son desgarradoras. Si... es un bello país.
- No te entiendo nada.
- Todavía no te entiendo ni un pelo.

Page 25

- Querida, apúrate. Está cayendo!
- Los tambores hacen demasiado ruido.
- Obscuro.
- Lodo.
- No puedo.
- Estoy Tratando.
- Esta bien. Una rodilla entonces.
- Negro.

Page 26

- Querida, esta cosa de los tambores...eres un genio.
- A Juana de Arco nunca la besaron así.
- Pirañas.
- Mira...Las garcetas. Pájaros.
- Todavía cargas con eso?
- Mucho frio.
- Tenemos demasiados anzuelos y nada de fósforos .
- Y a ti, nadie te enseñó?
- Okay. Una gran delicia creada por ti... En una hoja
- Querida, Tienes que seguir sin mi. Te estoy reteniendo. Por favor. Solo necesito dormir un poco.
- Vete! Es tu única oportunidad. Tu lo puedes lograr.
- Que te vayas! Tu logras todo lo que te propones. Por poco y tumbas a un Presidente de su puesto.

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Page 27

-(Laughing.) Yo no.

-Si, claro.

-Estabas encendida, querida! Nadie se atrevió a hacer lo que hiciste.

-Lo volverás a intentar, pues!

Notes:

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