

From Migdalia Cruz's SALT

ACT TWO/SCENE 9

POTATO-BABY

Late night.

BELEN & GUADALUPE plan their escape.
THEY are huddled together in a salt mound.

BELEN

When are we gonna get out of here, Lupe? You promised it would be soon.

GUADALUPE

It will be. Look at this.

(HE takes out a metro-map of Chicago.)

We are right here.

BELEN

But where are we going?

GUADALUPE

That I don't know yet.

BELEN

Oh, Lupe!

GUADALUPE

But I'll know soon—prob'ly by tomorrow. I promise we won't be here come New Year's. It's gonna be a real new year for us.

BELEN

I hope so.

(THEY hear a snoring sound from behind them.)

GUADALUPE

Who's that?

BELEN

Vasques. He won't leave me alone. He keeps watching me. It's giving me the creeps.

GUADALUPE

Awh, he's okay.

BELEN

No, he's not. He's not right in the head. Belilah says it's from all the fish he eats from the river. That fish is not for people to eat. They come outta there all wierd colors. I wouldn't eat that fish.

GUADALUPE

Yeah, me neither. It's nice to be all alone like this. Lucky to have both of them gone.

BELEN

You think they're together?

GUADALAUPE

Who cares?! As long as they're not here. Where's the freak?

BELEN

I don't know. He's not talking to me so much any more.

GUADALUPE

Good. Then you can spend more time with me.

BELEN

I spend a lot of time with you. Anyway, we don't always have to be together. You're my brother and no matter where you are you know I love you.

GUADALUPE

I don't know that. Not always.

BELEN

(Kissing his face many times)

How about now? And now? And this? And a big one right here!

GUADALUPE

Let me hold you.

BELEN

You don't gotta ask.

(THEY hold each other tightly for a moment.)

GUADALUPE

You're so beautiful, Belen. Your skin feels so nice—like toasted marshmallows.

BELEN

Toasted marshmallows?! That sounds burned and gooey.

GUADALUPE

Yeah. So? I like burned and gooey.

BELEN

Whatever...but it don't sound very beautiful. Anyway, you saying I'm beautiful, is like you saying you're beautiful. I mean, us being twins and all.

GUADALUPE

But we don't look that much alike. Maybe we're not even related. Maybe the people who said they was our parents, really bought us at a baby factory and we come from two completely different places. Like you—you're probably from Egypt. And me—I'm from Alaska. And they took us and put us together and pretended we was theirs. We musta not really been theirs or they wouldn't've given us to Belilah. I don't think real family would've sold us like that.

BELEN

I haven't thought about them in a long time...at least, a week.

GUADALUPE

Yeah...you start to get over things. When you grow up, I mean.

BELEN

(Teasing)

So you're all grewed up now, huh? When did that happen? You wasn't supposed to do that without me.

GUADALUPE

I'm not.

(HE kisses her passionately, SHE doesn't resist.)

So? What do you think?

BELEN

Different.

GUADALUPE

Different?

BELEN

Yeah...from when men kiss me. I mean they do the same thing—but it didn't make me sick to my stomach like it does with them.

GUADALUPE

I didn't make you sick. That's good...I guess. But that was all?

BELEN

No. I felt scared too. Like a small little shaky thing in my whole body.

GUADALUPE

Maybe that's not scared. Maybe it's—I dunno, something else.

BELEN

What else?

GUADALUPE

In love—like to be in love—not just love somebody like a brother. Like maybe we should get married or something.

BELEN

You can't marry your own brother.

GUADALUPE

Yeah, you can. I already asked God and everything. He said it was okay.

BELEN

He did? When did you talk to him?

GUADALUPE

I dunno...a couple of days ago, I guess. He definitely said yes. I mean, as long as you want to. If you don't want to—

BELEN

I don't know what I want. I want to get outta here, that's all. Maybe I could think better somewhere else. Alls I do here is tell myself stories. To keep my mind to myself. Anybody can do anything to me as long I still keep that for myself.

GUADALUPE

Tell me one of your stories.

BELEN

For real?

GUADALUPE

Yeah, it's better than wasting them on freaky-decky.

BELEN

Don't keep being like that.

(Pause)

There's this new one that just come to me. It goes like this: There was once a house that everybody was scared of. Nobody would go there because they thought their souls was gonna get sucked out of their mouths.

GUADALUPE

I know some people like that.

BELEN

And in this house—

(LUCIA enters and listens unseen by GUADALUPE & BELEN. A few moments later, GRACE enters behind LUCIA.)

—lived a little boy and girl who grew a garden inside. They was afraid to go out because all the people on the outside thought they was witches, because they lived in such a dirty old house with no windows. But inside it was beautiful. It was like a jungle. And they made animals for their jungle from the old furniture and newspapers—

GUADALUPE

And maps?

BELEN

And maps they had left from when they had parents who really loved them, but went out to the store one day and never come back, because they was hit by a schoolbus.

GUADALUPE

I knew school was dangerous.

BELEN

Yeah...those buses anyway. But when they didn't come back, the boy and girl had to make a family without them. And food too. So they growed the food right in their livingroom. They had corn and potatoes and lettuce and strawberries and cherries. Right there—as much as they could eat. So they never went hungry, but they missed seeing people, so they had a baby.

GUADALUPE

How'd they do that?

BELEN

You know...They grew one.

GUADALUPE

Like the vegetables? Like a Mr. Potato-Head baby?! Musta been cute.

BELEN

It sure was. It was the cutest baby they ever seen. Of course they never seen no other babies to compare him with—but still even from what they remembered on t.v. there was never a cuter baby. And it loved them so much, that the first word it said was “love.” Not “Mommy” or “daddy” like other lame babies do—but “love.”

GUADALUPE

That was one wierd baby.

BELEN

One special baby. And the baby grew up and learned to use the plants in the garden to heal anything. [Note: Possible cuts: That boy could cure coughs and headaches, and stomachaches. And when his mother got Cancer, he cured that too. And one time his father fell down the stairs and broke his back, and that boy figured out how to straighten his spine and his legs and made him walk again.] This was a very wonderful boy. The boy was so wonderful that he gave his ma and pa the courage to leave the house again. They weren't afraid no more of the bad neighbors, who cursed them out and threw rocks at them. [They was proud now and nothing could keep them from showing it.] But one day—

GUADALUPE

Uh, oh! I feel the bad part coming up.

BELEN

—one snowy and icy day, the ma and pa went out to the church to give thanks for their beautiful child, and the neighbors got into the house and grabbed the boy, put him on a pile of wood, and set him on fire—

GUADALUPE

I thought your stories had happy endings.

BELEN

—they set him on fire, but he didn't burn. He became a part of the flames and shot into the sky like a rocket, [burst into the blackness of space] and became a star. Now when the ma and pa want to see their baby, alls they gotta do is look up and there he is, twinkling and smiling. And the neighbors felt so bad about burning up their son, that they helped them re-build their house—and now they have windows to open and put their heads out and they all face North where their boy lives with the other stars of cold winter nights. [And everybody in the town looks up and remembers.]

GUADALUPE

Hmmm...that was like a Christmas story, huh?

BELEN

Yeah. Did you like it?

GUADALUPE

Yeah, whatever. Pretty much. Except for that part about growing the baby, I believed it all. I mean, it's like something that could happen.

BELEN

Yeah. It's exactly something that could happen...

(Lights cross to LUCIA & GRACE.)

GRACE

That was a piss-fart of a dumb-ass story.

LUCIA

I think it was pretty.

GRACE

What are you doing over here anyway? You know you have a date.

LUCIA

I thought maybe, click, click, maybe he wouldn't come.

GRACE

It's your regular guy. He always comes.

LUCIA

I guess.

GRACE

(Pushing him roughly)

Do I have to carry you over there?

LUCIA

I'll go. But how come you act like that?

GRACE

Like what?

LUCIA

Like Belilah. You don't have to act like her.

GRACE

I am my own woman, Lula, and nobody, especially not a little chiclet like you, needs to tell me how to act. Get to work!

LUCIA

I guess 'cause she's your ma, you can't help it.

GRACE

Get going. And leave that doll here. No customers like seeing dolls.

LUCIA

Mine do. They all like Angie.

GRACE

Just do like I tell you!

(LUCIA places ANGIE carefully in a pile of salt.)

LUCIA

Don't be lonely now. I'll be right back.

(LUCIA exits. GRACE waits for him to get out of sight and then picks up ANGIE.)

GRACE

You are an ugly hunk of stupid junk, Miss Angie. But you are so useful.

(SHE takes the knife out of ANGIE's head, and looks at it as VASQUES appears behind her, watching and listening.)

What's this? Dried up blood. What's that boy been doing with you, precious? Using you for his own slicing. Maybe the "boys" are growing back. That would be something.

(Licks the knife and then wipes it clean on her dress)

Shiny. I like you all shiny. The only blood I want on this knife is Belen's. Then I'm gonna never wash it. I'll just keep it forever. In a box tied with one of those dumbass ribbons she always wears. It'll be a little memory box. And I'll put you right by Arlene's knife, so you won't be alone. She's not gonna die—she'll just be part of a new family—like in that little story of hers. She'll just be another star...

(VASQUES covers his mouth to keep from shouting out. This is first true evidence HE's gotten that GRACE is responsible for ARLENE's death. Lights fade on GRACE and come up more brightly on him.)

VASQUES

No, Gracie! Why?! Why are you doing this? And I helped, didn't I?! It was me who delivered Arlene's body to the fire. I thought we were saving the other children from having to see—from getting afraid. That's what you said. And now Belen's in danger too.

(Pause)

I gotta stay awake. I gotta trust my brain more. Now everything you tell me is a lie.

(Pause)

We can't be family anymore.

(Pause)

I remember how I cried when I saw you coming out of Miss Belilah. It was a miracle, I thought. I counted all your fingers and your toes. Checked all your limbs.

And I cried... 'cause you were normal.

(Lights cross to the Slide Inn.)