

From Migdalia Cruz's EL GRITO DEL BRONX

**ACT TWO/ SCENE 5**

In PAPO's cell, 1991.

PAPO examines his hands in the florescent light of his cell.

PAPO

They got bad soap in this place. My hands are never real clean. You know the skin around my nails looks so dark—like it belongs to somebody else—somebody who bleeds from there. I used to help my Ma cut up vegetables sometimes. She hated cutting vegetables. She said she din't like their smell on her. That the smell of peppers would get into her blood and then when she peed or shit you could smell it—the peppers. But I thought, damn that sounds better than shit-smelling shit—You know what I mean? So me I loved to cut up those things. But it din't work on me like that. I guess you know that.

(PAPO moves his hands into the shadows outside his cell. GUY NEXT DOOR takes his hand and begins to file PAPO's nails with an emery board.)

PAPO

I thought they wouldn't let you have a nail file in a prison.

GUY

A file, no. But an emery board won't get you through any doors—even though it is an essential tool. Never underestimate the power of good grooming.

(As HE continues to file PAPO's nails, GUY begins to sing,

“The Bare Necessities” from Disney's “The Jungle Book” a la Louis Armstrong.)

“Look for the bare necessities, the simple, bare necessities,  
forget about your worries and your strife.

I mean, the bare necessities, mother nature's recipes,  
grin and bare necessities of life.”

PAPO

That was a good movie.

GUY

Yeah. But I liked “Cinderella” better. More magic. There.

(HE tries to give PAPO his hand back, but PAPO doesn't let go.)

All done.

PAPO

The only thing better than having your nails filed is having your hair washed. My sister used to wash mines. Maggie had great hands. The kind that feel every knot and unknot it. Like yours.

(PAPO holds GUY's hand in a tight handshake.)

Thanks, man.

GUY

Sure. Anytime. The sound of the nail file filing away always mellows me out.

PAPO

I like that sound because it cuts the silence. And you know something real is happening. Something you can touch.

(HE gives GUY's hand one last squeeze and pulls away.)

When's your date?

GUY

In the Spring.

PAPO

You got some time then. I was set for this month, but it got delayed because I got sick. So it'll probably be November or December now. My lawyer gave me the date, but I keep forgetting it.

GUY

Some things are better that way.

PAPO

Nah. Always better to remember...

(Pause; HE lets his hand wander down to his crotch and holds it there between his legs.)

And you know what? Especially in the case of pussy, because women remember so much more about dick than we do about pussy that if you don't remember any little detail, like—it was yay deep, or yay wet, or she came yay many times. And yo, she likes the horizontal flick not the vertical thrust. And yay, and yo, on and on like that.

Don't you think?

GUY

Women are complicated that way. They have expectations.

PAPO

Yeah. Guys don't have that. Expectations.

(Pause)

I thought they would let me have some books at least.

(Pause)

Maggie used to tell me stories. Right from her head. Always cooled me out.

GUY

(As HE tells his story the sound of a solo alto sax plays in the background.)

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a dinosaur named Jo-Jo, who played the alto sax in an all dinosaur band. He was a hip cat Bronto-dino who only hung with other leaf-eaters until he fell for Gladys and her liquid chocolate eyes. Like all of the other T-Rexes, she had real bad eyesight and only ate meat. They made an instant electric connection when their frames touched. He wore shades because he played jazz and the ladies coming to his club expected him to wear the night on his eyes. Gladys wore light blue horn-rimmed glasses with little sparkly jewels at the tips that made her eyes shimmer and shake like morning sunbeams.

(As GUY continues to tell his story, PAPO curls up on his bed and listens.)

He would never kill anything that was alive and Gladys thought everything alive was hers to eat. Until she met Jo-Jo and it was love at first note. When she heard the sound of his saxophone, it made her forget all about meat. But in the beginning, Jo-Jo wasn't too sure about Gladys. He thought she might have eaten some of his relatives, but still there was something special about this girl. Oh, yeah!

(LULU enters wearing the horn-rimmed glasses and sits at the edge of PAPO's bed. SHE gently rubs his head like she is washing his hair.)

He couldn't get Gladys out of his mind so he decided to drop his juice on her egg sac. And Gladys, being a Latin dinosaur, got pregnant the first time they made sweet delicious prehistoric jam. A family! It was something Jo-Jo dreamed about, but it gave Gladys nightmares. What if she couldn't control herself and ate the baby she and Jo-Jo conjured from their magic love?? Every night Gladys lay awake staring at the egg about to hatch and thought about not eating it. Was it possible? Could she change the way of her tribe? The fate of her happiness lay in the life of one little dino-babe. And what if her baby was more like her than him and ate her father? Those questions would soon be answered for the ripe egg began to quake and slowly crack...

(PAPO sighs deeply and continues to sleep. LULU exits.)

I wish I could fall asleep like that. But I'm the type that needs to stay up and watch the egg.

(Lights cross to ED & LULU's apartment.)