

# The Spell Caster

Fengar Gael  
135 West 70th (2C)  
New York, NY 10023  
Phone (646) 707-0903  
Fengar@aol.com

**Representation:**

Alexis Williams  
448 West 44th Street  
New York, NY 10036  
Phone: (212) 765-5630  
awilliams@bretadamsltd.net

*“Invisible ancestors  
walk with us  
through these back streets;  
car noises,  
the stares of children,  
the young girls’ bodies  
cross through them.  
Weightless, vague,  
we travel through them  
at doorways that are no longer;  
on bridges that are empty,  
while with the sun on our faces  
we too move toward transparency.”*

By Homero Aridjis  
“Letter from Mexico”

**CHARACTERS:**

LOUISA GAMBOLLINI, an elderly clown and fortune teller

PATCH RUBENSTEIN, the carnival barker and manager, fifties

VERONICA HICKEY, “Lulu Leroux,” the French kooch operator, thirties

RAY POOLE, “Sarkhov the Siberian Assassin,” the Russian gorilla fighter, twenties

MAXINE POOLE, “Kiki NaConga,” the African rubber lady; married to Ray, twenties

GERTRUDE MARKS, “Helga the Tattooed Teuton,” covered with tattoos, late twenties

HOWIE SHILLER, “Akira Kazumi,” the Japanese sword swallower, early thirties

MAYRA RIOS-BENITEZ, (pronounced Myra); a Mexican snake charmer, mid-teens

Note: The role of Mayra is intended to be played by a young adult woman.

**TIME:**

1933

**PLACE:**

Gastonia and Shelby, North Carolina, at various campsites bordering the carnival midway, with crates, barrels, cots, draped tent materials, and a careworn sign reading: Gambollini’s International Amusements.

## ACT I

### PROLOGUE: THE BALLYHOOS

(A calliope tune bellows as the carnival TROUPERS enter, PATCH RUBENSTEIN, the middle-aged manager who shouts directly at the audience.)

PATCH

Hurry, hurry, hurry! Ten cents buys the ride of a lifetime on the death-defyin', bone bustin' whip-whacker! And for all you kiddies, there's the merry-go-round in the heart of the midway! That's right, folks, the heart of the midway!

(HOWIE SHILLER enters, speaking with an exaggerated Japanese accent, out-pitching PATCH who turns aside, lowering his voice to a whisper, repeating his ballyhoo.)

HOWIE

Step wight up here, fat boy! You too, baby cakes! See famous Akira Kazumi all way from Tokyo, Yapan! See him shove flaming twee foot sword stwaight down gullet wight before your vally eyes!

(VERONICA HICKEY approaches, speaking with a southern drawl, but singing with a French accent while HOWIE lowers and redirects his ballyhoo.)

VERONICA

Here she comes, the most razzlin', dazzlin', all-consumin' hootchie kootchie queen you'll ever wanna lay your eyeballs on!

*Ou la la, ou la la,*

*The girl from gay Paree;*

*Ou la la, ou la la,*

*She always says wee wee!*

(The dashing RAY POOLE enters, stealing focus, shouting with a Russian accent as VERONICA turns aside.)

RAY

Beat it, you lily-livered faggots! You yellow-bellied pussies! But if you got grits, grits in craw where it counts, come see Sarkhov, Great Siberian Assassin! He fight six hundred pound gorilla with bare knees knuckles!

(Now LOUISA GAMBOLLINI, an elderly, unkempt clown enters, as RAY lowers and redirects his ballyhoo. SHE speaks with an Italian accent.)

LOUISA

For five cents, the Great Genie Gambollini will guessa your name! (*to someone in the audience*) Frankie, right? You've been married -- what? --four years! And you're thirty years old, eh? For ten cents I throw in your weight and sizea hat!

(MAXINE POOLE, steps on the midway, speaking with a Swahili accent as LOUISA weaves her way through the troupers, meandering around the stage.)

MAXINE

Sneak a peek at the freak: Kiki NaConga! She world's only rubber-skinned lady. Raised by Pygmies in darkest Africa, she tie herself limb to limbo in knots the navy never dreamed!

(MAXINE lowers and redirects her ballyhoo.)

LOUISA

The Great Gambollini has predicted presidential elections, droughts, and an avalanche in China!

(GERTRUDE MARKS enters, shouting with a German accent, pointing to her tattoos.)

GERTRUDE

Take ein gander at Helga duh Tattooed Teuton! See duh vadder of our country tattooed right between duh campaign slogans of Franklin Delano Roosevelt! See dancing cherubs on her cheeks, tigers on her gams, and Old Glory blowin' just below her boobs!

(GERTRUDE re-directs her ballyhoo.)

LOUISA

I feel a disaster, an earthquake or a flood...

(Now the TROUPERS speak their ballyhoos simultaneously, increasing their volume as the lights swirl and flash. LOUISA, disoriented, falls to her knees, her hands clasping her ears. The ballyhoos reach a cacophonous crescendo, then cease abruptly, leaving only the sound of a CHILD singing.)

## CHILD'S VOICE

*Oh, circus, my wagon,  
Oh, circus, my dream;  
Oh, circus, my circus,  
Is all that it seems.*

**SCENE 1: BEHOLD: THE CONVERGENCE**

(LOUISA, still on her knees, glances towards heaven, addressing her deceased husband. Her usual speaking voice is a slight Italian accent.)

## LOUISA

Rico, Rico, husband of mine, I fast and I pray, but I see only shadows: an arm, a leg, sometimes a breast or an eye. And now, now I hear her song.

(The TROUPERS gather around the campsite, smoking, removing wigs, donning robes to cover their costumes. THEY speak with southern accents.)

## PATCH

Don't nobody leave! I wanna see everybody pronto!

## LOUISA

Please send a miracle or your carnival will fold like the money they steal by short-changing the marks and selling their flesh. It has been a bad day, Rico. They only made two stacks, both of them small, so they will hate me even more. I pretend to be deaf as a post, but I hear everything, and today...*(she sighs)* today the rich stayed home.

## HOWIE

Cheapest bastards I ever seen.

## MAXINE

I hate this lousy dump!

## RAY

They puttin' every forty miler here?

## PATCH

Yeah, yeah. Everybody pipe down! *(pause)* I know don't haveta tell y'all we ain't breakin' no records.

## HOWIE

We gonna be pickin' tobacco?

PATCH

I give it another week-- two tops.

LOUISA

If only my Rico were here.

MAXINE

Well, he ain't so shut up!

LOUISA

Rico would save us.

GERTRUDE

Rico didn't have no Depression.

LOUISA

He had talent; he was an artist, not a cheat.

HOWIE

Aw, shut your trap!

PATCH

Tomorrow, Howie, you an' Maxie be the sticks. Grandma, you run the grab joint.

MAXINE

There's your problem. She gives the stuff away, 'specially the cokes. She's gotta ice 'em down more.

HOWIE

I gotta buy parts for the diesel. They'll want a deposit.

PATCH

Everybody shut up! She's gotta run the grab joint 'cause there ain't nobody else. *(to Ray)* Don't tighten the peach basket, an' no more gaffin' the dart wheel 'cause they're lookin' for it from last time. *(snapping his fingers)* Pay attention! Jesus! Let the gorilla give you an armlock or let the rubes fight 'im themselves. You gotta give 'em somethin' for their money. An' Howie, wear the pigtail or get out. 'Cept for the games, this is supposeta be an international outfit, so let's not forget it!

HOWIE

I'd liketa say somethin'. *(gesturing toward Louisa)* She's supposeta be a clown sellin' food, but she's goin' around tellin' fortunes an' peddlin' them putrid medicines.

LOUISA

They are true remedies, restoratives, secret recipes from ancient priests!

HOWIE

She's scarin' folks off, an' she stinks -- Like catpiss an' cheese.

LOUISA

You are the one who stinks -- you and your cheap cigars!

PATCH

Listen, Louisa, you're not the Great Gambollini anymore; you're a clown. You're supposed to smile an' sell candy an' balloons, an' you gotta take a bath once in a while.

RAY

Yuh done yet?

PATCH

Yeah, yeah.

(RAY exits.)

MAXINE

Ray! Where you goin'?! Things is bad enough without you tyin' one on!

PATCH

Look, Ronnie, how 'bout cuttin' the ballet crap, more bump an' grind, stuff they don't see at home, an' take off the skirt, let 'em see what you got.

GERTRUDE

Just what this country needs -- a fat-assed whale.

(The CHILD'S VOICE is heard again, humming the circus song. LOUISA laughs, delighted, then grasps the top of her head.)

VERONICA

Louisa...?

PATCH

Hey, grandma! You okay? Snap outta it!

(The melody ceases as LOUISA sits, shaken, drinking medicine from a small bottle.)

VERONICA

Louisa, honey, are you all right?

LOUISA

For a moment I saw, but then I...I lost her.

PATCH

You gotta stop drinkin' that crap. It's makin' you sick.

MAXINE

You keep driftin' off like that an' someday you ain't comin back.

GERTRUDE

Where y'all figure on a-headin'? I mean, if we split.

MAXINE

Whaddayuh mean "if"?

GERTRUDE

Howie, why don't we go south? Stay with my sister in Selma.

MAXINE

Yuh still gonna work carnies?

GERTRUDE

Sure.

HOWIE

Hell, no.

MAXINE

Ray's got family in Texas. Three generations of carnies -- all of 'em settled near Waco.

PATCH

I got some land, twenty acres I invested in.

HOWIE

Where's that?

PATCH

Florida.

LOUISA

No! We must never split, never, never!

(The child's melody returns even louder as LOUISA stands, her fingers splayed towards heaven.)

LOUISA

Hurry, hurry...

GERTRUDE

Oh, Lordy.

MAXINE

She's at it again, Patch.

HOWIE

She can't even hear us. Lookit 'er eyes.

LOUISA

Ohhh, ohhh, I see her coming closer, closer, over the meadow...

VERONICA

Come on, honey, why don't we take a nice long nap?

LOUISA

Yes, yes, a little girl in a white dress carrying a brown valise...

(LOUISA collapses; the music ceases.)

HOWIE

Goddamn!

VERONICA

She's out cold.

PATCH

Help me get 'er to bed.

(PATCH and HOWIE carry LOUISA to a cot.)

HOWIE

Sure she ain't dead?

GERTRUDE

Her heart's a-poundin' a mile a minute.

MAXINE

Well, Patch, ole buddy, looks like yuh gotta do somethin'.

PATCH

It's happenin' so fast. Seems like just yesterday she was fine, an' today...

GERTRUDE

She's a-seein' things -- that's the first sign.

HOWIE

Hearin' things is the first sign; seein's the second.

VERONICA

Well, she's doin' both.

PATCH

It ain't easy for her, y'all talkin' 'bout splittin' up. Her ole man started this rig.

MAXINE

The stupid shit.

PATCH

Rico was all right. Hell, he even died workin' a tip.

MAXINE

How come -- if he was such a big deal -- he hooked up with her?

PATCH

He hooked up with plenty besides Louisa. The old goat couldn't keep it in his pants.

HOWIE

No shit?

MAXINE

You're kiddin'?!

PATCH

Screwed any gal that was willin' -- long as she had hefty knockers.

HOWIE

So how come you never told us?

PATCH

'Cause you'd throw it in 'er face.

MAXINE

I say we pack up an' leave 'er, just take off in the middle of the night. She'll wake up an' croak. We'd be doin' her a favor.

HOWIE

She's right, Patch.

PATCH

We all get old.

MAXINE

Not me! I'm gonna kill myself first.

PATCH

You're so mean, somebody'll do it for you.

MAXINE

Everybody past sixty oughtta be shot, an' twice if you're crazy.

VERONICA

I got an aunt put away in Richmond. They shaved her head.

HOWIE

At least hose 'er down, get rid of the stink!

GERTRUDE

Lordy! There's more hair in 'er ears than on 'er head! An' lookit all them warts a-growin' on 'er neck.

VERONICA

She's droolin' like a baby.

HOWIE

An' pissin' like one too. Pee yewwww!

MAXINE

Ten cents says she croaks by sundown.

HOWIE

You're on!

VERONICA

It cost forty dollars to bury my ma. Where we gonna get forty dollars?

HOWIE

We'll bury 'er in the woods. Nobody'd be the wiser.

PATCH

For chrissake, leave 'er alone! Y'all got no respect.

MAXINE

Bullshit! You're wishin' 'er dead same as us.

GERTRUDE

An' you're a-hopin' she hurries up!

PATCH

Maybe, but I ain't braggin' about it.

(PATCH steps aside to light a cigarette while the TROUPERS conspire, whispering.)

GERTRUDE

A strong guy like Howie could snap 'er neck in two seconds flat.

HOWIE

Nah, one punch to the heart; she won't feel a thing.

MAXINE

If the punch don't work, how 'bout a pillow?

(MAXINE lifts the pillow beneath Louisa's head and tosses it to HOWIE.)

MAXINE

Just cover her puss nice an' easy.

GERTRUDE

Like Max says, we'd be doin' 'er a favor.

(As HOWIE places the pillow over Louisa's face, MAYRA RIOS-BENITEZ enters, and HE quickly tosses the pillow aside. MARYA is a dark haired girl of fourteen wearing a white dress, carrying a suitcase and covered basket. SHE approaches PATCH, speaking with a Spanish accent. The TROUPERS have turned their backs on LOUISA who slowly sits up, unharmed and unnoticed.)

MAYRA

Excuse me, sir, are you the manager of Gambollini's International Amusements?

PATCH

Well, lookit here!

MAXINE

That's some outfit!

VERONICA

What's in the basket? A picnic?

HOWIE

We ain't et a decent meal since Charlotte.

(VERONICA lifts the cloth and shrieks!)

HOWIE

Goddamn snakes!

PATCH, MAXINE

*(laughing)* Ha, ha, ha!

GERTRUDE

Lordy, whadda yuh doin' with the creepers?

PATCH

Speak up kid. What's your name?

MAYRA

I am Mayra Rios-Benitez, and I wish to join your carnival.

MAXINE

Not now yuh don't.

GERTRUDE

Ain't she somethin'?

HOWIE

You a spick, kid?

LOUISA

I told you I have powers!

(LOUISA, fully recovered, approaches the troupers.)

HOWIE

Oh, Jesus!

VERONICA

Louisa! We thought you was dyin'!

PATCH

Hey, get backta bed!

LOUISA

She is my vision, my miracle! You see: the dress, the valise. I knew it! My prayers have been answered -- everything, everything but the snakes.

MAXINE

Get 'er outta here.

LOUISA

No! I am staying!

PATCH

Sit down an' keep quiet or you're gonna haveta leave.

VERONICA

Them snakes look like rattlers.

MAYRA

I found them on my journey, and will teach them to obey my commands.

MAXINE

Yeah? Well, command 'em to disappear.

GERTRUDE

This country could use a good snake act!

PATCH

Now, lookit, I hatea break your heart, kid, but we can't take you on.

VERONICA

She's too young for the kootch.

MAXINE

An' you're too old!

HOWIE, GERTRUDE, MAXINE

*(laughing)* Ha, ha, ha!

PATCH

Go home, doll. We're nothin' but a busted gilly. You don't want no part of it.

MAYRA

Please, sir, I have very special gifts.

LOUISA

Open your eyes! She is blessed, a true talent!

MAXINE

Yeah, well we all got talent. Patch here has a talent for gaffin' a wheel, Ronnie here drops her drawers,...

VERONICA

Hey!

MAXINE

...an' we even got a gorilla act 'cept Howie's the gorilla. In other words, every act in this outfit's a con, so go home.

MAYRA

But I am genuine. I charm snakes, and see what others are thinking.

PATCH

Sorry, kid. Hey, we all agree.

MAYRA

Oh, no, sir, they do not all agree. *(pointing to Louisa)* She does not agree; *(pointing to Veronica)* she does not agree; *(to Gertrude)* she is uncertain; *(to Howie)* and no, sir, I am not a midget with no tits trying to make you think I read minds.

HOWIE

Damn!

MAYRA

*(to Patch)* And yes, I know you are only a broke Jew with three rolls of dimes in your pocket. *(to Gertrude)* And do not worry, you are not yet with child.

GERTRUDE

Thank the Lord!

HOWIE

Doggone!

HOWIE

Oh, baby, this kid's got possibilities!

GERTRUDE

The kid's a genius!

MAXINE

The kid's a con.

HOWIE

Ain't never seen nothin' like this before.

MAXINE

I have -- at every sucker stand in the world, and so have you.

HOWIE

No, sirree, not like this lil' gal.

MAXINE

Anybody with eyes can see by your puss what you're thinkin'.

HOWIE

Not word for word! An' how'd she know 'bout them dimes?!

GERTRUDE

Or me bein' late?!

PATCH

What'd you say your name was?

LOUISA

Mayra Rios-Benitez.

PATCH

S'that right?

MAYRA

Yes.

PATCH

Where you from, kid?

HOWIE

She sounds like a spick.

GERTRUDE

Your folks musta been Mexican, huh?

VERONICA

Look, honey, you promise not to read my thoughts without warnin' me?

HOWIE

Yeah, the traffic gets pretty nasty up there.

GERTRUDE and HOWIE

*(laughing)* Ha, ha, ha!

PATCH

Y'all pipe down. Now tell me somethin', kid. How do you do it? How do you read inside people's minds?

MAYRA

First, I feel small tremblings up my spine to my neck, to the top of my head. Then I hear the tingling of bells as your thoughts come to me as pictures. Then when I speak, the words are your words.

HOWIE

Sorta like the movies?

VERONICA

Honey, can yuh dance?

HOWIE

We ain't wastin' her talents dancin'!

MAXINE

You guys are really somethin' else. Here we are, seven starvin' carnies eatin' leftover fly food, an' now we're gonna be eight?

HOWIE

When granny croaks, we'll be backta seven.

MAYRA

Do not worry, Louisa, you will not die.

LOUISA

Bless you, bless you, my child.

GERTRUDE

Yuh mean she's a-gonna keep livin'?

MAYRA

For many years.

MAXINE

Now there's good news.

HOWIE

Hell, she's half dead already!

PATCH

Y'all shut up! Now, lookit -- (*indicating Howie and Gertrude*) are those two related?

MAYRA

No, they are...unmarried, but living as man and wife.

HOWIE

Goddamn!

GERTRUDE

And we ain't a-fixin' on hitchin' till June!

HOWIE

Hey, I got one: does Maxie here have a hubby?

MAYRA

Yes.

GERTRUDE

What's his name? His "show" name.

MAYRA

Sarkhov the Siberian Assassin.

GERTRUDE

What's he look like?

(Dim lights reveal RAY seated at a table by a bottle of whiskey.)

MAYRA

He is...tall, with dark eyes and hair. He has strong arms and full lips.

GERTRUDE

Lordy!

HOWIE

That's him!

MAXINE

A real prince. So where's he at?

MAYRA

In the Gastonia Bar and Grill sitting at a table.

MAXINE  
Anybody with 'im?

MAYRA  
No.

LOUISA  
Hah! He is drunk, he is always drunk.

MAXINE  
Aw, shuddup!

PATCH  
Can you control people, make 'em do things? Could you make a person laugh or cry?

MAYRA  
They would have to submit to my powers.

MAXINE  
Not on your life!

HOWIE  
Well, hell, I'll be a guinea pig.

GERTRUDE  
Sure, why not?

VERONICA  
Honey, I'll try anythin' once!

MAYRA  
Then please, stand here, facing me.

(GERTRUDE, VERONICA and HOWIE stand aligned  
as PATCH, MAXINE and LOUISA observe them.)

MAYRA  
Now, slowly close your eyes.

HOWIE  
They're closin', baby, they're closin'.

MAYRA  
Imagine riding a Ferris wheel, climbing higher and higher, higher than any Ferris wheel  
has ever climbed. Beneath you is the Earth turning on its axis, and and now you are at the  
top.

LOUISA

The sparrows have built a nest!

MAYRA

Now as you descend: the air grows heavy, the clouds caress you gently as you rock slowly back and forth, back and forth,...

LOUISA

Asleep in the sky.

MAYRA

...but for my voice, nothing exists. *(to Patch)* What do you wish them to do?

PATCH

Let's make Gert dance! Yeah, make 'er dance like she's part of the kootch.

MAXINE

Oh, she's gonna love that.

PATCH

An' make Ronnie think she's some kinda animal.

MAXINE

How 'bout a horse's ass?

PATCH

Nah, a bird, one of them buzzards or a goose. An' what about Howie?

LOUISA

Make him old, very old.

PATCH

Sure, why not?

MAYRA

Slowly, slowly, open your eyes. When I raise my hand, Helga the Tattooed Teuton will dance the dance of the kootch; Lulu Leroux will become a goose; and Akira Kazumi will be...how old?

PATCH

Make 'im sixty.

LOUISA

No, sixty is young! Make him eighty!

MAYRA

You will be eighty,...

LOUISA

Make him stone deaf and blind!

MAYRA

...stone deaf and blind,...

LOUISA

With a wooden leg!

MAYRA

...with a wooden leg.

(MAYRA raises her hand and the TROUPERS respond instantly, grotesquely, with HOWIE limping and groping, GERTRUDE stripping and gyrating seductively, and VERONICA honking and waddling furiously towards MAXINE, chasing her in circles.)

PATCH

Okay, kid, that's enough. Let 'em outta the trance!

PATCH

'An make it snappy!

MAXINE

For chrissake, hurry!

(MAYRA claps her hands and THE TROUPERS return to their former selves.)

HOWIE

Feels like my leg's gone gimpy.

GERTRUDE

Hey, where's my shirt?!

MAXINE

*(to Gertrude)* You were dancin' the kootch!

GERTRUDE

Shhhit!

MAXINE

*(to Howie)* You were limpin' like a geezer.

VERONICA

So how come my neck's got a crick?

HOWIE

How come my ear's ringin'?

PATCH

Everybody pipe down! *(pause)* Well, kid, we got nothin' to lose, so it looks like we're takin' on a new act. Welcome to Gambollini's International Amusements!

HOWIE

Fiiiiine with me, yes sirree!

GERTRUDE

Welcome aboard, pumpkin!

VERONICA

It ain't much, but it's home sweet home.

PATCH

Sit down an' let me tell you about the operation. I'm the manager, the fixer. I keep the peace with the local cops and throw out the drunks. I handle all the details and decide what spots we're playin'.

GERTRUDE

We keep a-pitchin' cause we're born carnies.

HOWIE

An' 'cause we can't do nothin' else.

PATCH

In the business they say you got sawdust in your blood.

GERTRUDE

'Course our show ain't exactly a knockout.

PATCH

The rides is in rough shape -- the carousel's been busted for a week, an' the skywinder's almost gone.

MAXINE

Yuh know, kid, if I was you, I'd be a millionaire: bettin' races, settin' up crap joints.

HOWIE

Yeah, what about them snakes? We could call 'er "The Wild Amazon Snake Woman!"

PATCH

Nah, we'll can the snakes an' do a straight hypno act.

VERONICA

Honey, we haveta get you a better lookin' get-up.

PATCH

Got any other tricks up your sleeve? You know what I'm sayin'?

MAYRA

Sometimes yearnings can manifest themselves, so the shadows of desire become real. On my journey here, I met a boy named Moon who found a fiddle. He said he wished to play so his friends could dance. Then, in a trance, I told him, "Yes, Moon, you can play the fiddle."

LOUISA

For God -- an instrument of his peace!

HOWIE

Shuddup!

GERTRUDE

Shush!

PATCH

Yeah? Then what? Did he play?

MAYRA

He will soon be giving concerts.

HOWIE

Doggone!

GERTRUDE

Lordy, Lord!

PATCH

So you think you could hypno us into playin' fiddles or some other kinda act?

MAYRA

Only if it is inside you.

HOWIE

Whadda yuh mean?

MAXINE

She means yuh gotta have somethin' to work with, right? Somethin' to start with?

(MAYRA nods.)

MAXINE

Look, I don't think, an' nobody else here thinks we got enough talent -- an' I mean honest-to-god talent -- to turn into anythin' but a pile of shit!

HOWIE

Speak for yourself.

GERTRUDE

Thanks, Max.

MAXINE

'Course that's just fine 'cause Patch here attracts nothin' but flies, all of 'em cheapskates.

VERONICA

Well, you ain't nothin' to bark about neither, so lay off!

GERTRUDE

Yeah!

LOUISA

My husband, God rest his soul, he wanted his carnival to be the best in the world.

PATCH

How 'bout we all get some shut eye, see what we can do about the show tomorra. We're gonna forget Shelby, stay in Gastonia a few more days. Mayra, you bunk with Ronnie.

LOUISA

No, she will sleep in my tent. It has been blessed by a priest.

GERTRUDE

I don't think that's a good idea.

PATCH

She's right, kid -- bunk with Ronnie.

MAYRA

I will stay with Louisa.

VERONICA

Suit yourself.

(VERONICA departs.)

LOUISA

Come, Mayra, but leave the snakes outside.

MAXINE

What's wrong, granny? You afraid of snakes?

LOUISA

Your mother eats them like noodles!

MAXINE

Least she was good at what she done; least she earned 'er keep!

PATCH

Come on, y'all, break it up.

(GERTRUDE, HOWIE and MAXINE walk off.)

MAYRA

Kiki NaConga's mother eats snakes...?

PATCH

Yeah, she's a gloomin' geek, the best in the biz. She's in Jacksonville now, but I seen 'er eat live frogs, chicks, an' rats. But snakes was 'er favorite.

(PATCH leaves.)

LOUISA

She bites off their heads and swallows them whole.

MAYRA

*(indicating her snakes)* Please, Louisa, may I keep them beside me? They will not harm you.

LOUISA

I am already harmed. Oh, Mayra, it is terrible to grow old in this country: no respect, no tenderness, no one wants me -- except for you, little one, except for you.

(The lights fade to darkness.)

**SCENE 2: MORNING OF MIRACLES**

(A cock crows as lights reveal MAYRA and the drowsy TROUPERS in their bathrobes. VERONICA wears a scarf to cover pin curls. LOUISA stands aside, praying.)

PATCH

All right, everybody, wake up! Look alive!

LOUISA

Rejoice, Rico! Our savior has come in glory! This morning everything will change, not only in Gambollini's International Amusements, but on Earth and in the Universe as well.

PATCH

Okay, Mayra, now here's what we've got: Howie here swallows swords, an' makes his pitch with a Jap accent. They're all supposeta be foreign 'cept me. Come on, stand right here.

HOWIE

Yuh want me to show 'er?

PATCH

No. Then we got Maxie, the rubber lady. She's supposeta be African so she paints 'erself an' wears a wig. Stand next to Howie.

MAXINE

Suppose I don't want to?

PATCH

Come on, cooperate!

RAY

Move your butt, Max!

PATCH

We call Gert "The Tattooed Teuton", an' Ronnie's "Lulu Leroux". Stand by Max.

MAXINE

*(mocking Veronica's kootch song) Ou la, la, ou la, la,  
The girl from gay Paree!*

PATCH

Ray's the Russian strong man, an' grandma runs the grab joint. I'm in charge of the hankypank, the games, most of 'em gaffed, and the prizes are real slum -- you know, stale candy, leftovers after Mother's Day, job lots. Okay, there they are: do your stuff.

MAYRA

Stuff?

PATCH

Transform 'em! Give 'em talent!

HOWIE

For chrissake, Patch!

MAXINE

Suppose I don't wanna be transformed?!

RAY

What's the big idea?

PATCH

The big idea is that we ain't got no talent and no class. The kid's the only real thing we got goin' so maybe she can help us out 'cause if we don't shape up before Shelby, we're goin' to hell with the rest of the country. So go on, Howie, tell 'er what you wanna be!

HOWIE

Hell, Patch, I dunno.

VERONICA

Well, if he don't, I do! Honey, I wanna be the Queen of France, a perfect 38-26-38. I wanna dance like a ballerina an' wear stockin's of pure silk; I wanna be so blond an' so beautiful they make a legend outta me in my own time! Honey, I want the marks to fall on their knees, on their knees!

MAXINE, HOWIE, GERTRUDE

*(laughing)* Ha, ha, ha, ha!

MAYRA

I will try, but my magic works only if the gift is inside you or around you. *(making circular motions)* Now, let your eyes roll with my hands.

HOWIE

Roll, baby, roll!

VERONICA

Honey, I think they're rollin'!

*(As MAYRA speaks, music fades in.)*

MAYRA

Now slowly close your eyes and imagine you are Queen Lulu Leroux of France. You speak perfect French, possess a perfect body, and dance like a prima ballerina.

(VERONICA starts turning in circles, whisking off her robe and scarf, revealing an exquisite figure and blond hair. SHE squeals with glee, spins on her toes, then leaps across the campgrounds as the music soars!)

HOWIE

*(whistling)* Geeze...

GERTRUDE

*(bowing)* Your highness!

PATCH

Your hubba hubba highness!

HOWIE

Your goddamn majesty!

PATCH

Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Step right up! Catch the most gorgeous little snatch on any midway anywhere in the world! See her dance, see her entrance, see her parlez genuine French!

VERONICA

Lulu Leroux Premier! Je suis francais! Oh, God, will yuh listen to that! I'm never gonna speak another word in English!

GERTRUDE

Louisa, look! Mayra's just made Ronnie a hot shot dancer!

LOUISA

Ah, my Rico could waltz like an angel.

PATCH

Look alive, grandma, tell Mayra here what you wanna be.

LOUISA

I want my youth.

PATCH

Hah! Who doesn't?

GERTRUDE

*(to Mayra)* Can yuh do that?

LOUISA

I wish to read and write. Old or young, I want many voices.

(MAYRA grasps Louisa's ears.)

LOUISA and MAYRA

Ahhhhhhhhh.

MAXINE

Some class act you're gonna be.

HOWIE

Shoulda asked 'er to tighten your screws!

PATCH

Let's see if it worked. (*handing her a pen and notebook*) Here, Louisa, write somethin'.

(LOUISA writes with a flourish as PATCH reads.)

PATCH

"My first words are dedicated to the memory of the great....

PATCH

...Rico Gambollini,...

LOUISA

Rico Gambollini...

LOUISA

...and to Lulu Leroux who has mastered every language with her toes."

HOWIE

Doggone!

VERONICA

(*kissing Louisa*) Merci beaucoup. Vous etes tres aimable!

GERTRUDE

How's about tryin' me next? All my life I've been a-hankerin' to be a great artist. I gotta sign says, "Helga the Tattooed Teuton will tattoo anything anywhere for two bits." Trouble is, I haveta use stencils. I know a guy in Atlanta does it all freehand: girls, dragons triple-masted schooners, an' he's a quick-draw artist too, the kind that paints your picture in one minute flat.

MAYRA

Follow my hand. You are now drifting into a deep sleep. You are Helga the Tattooed Teuton, you are a great artist, you are...

LOUISA

Michelangelo!

MAYRA

Yes, Michelangelo! You see the world as Michelangelo saw the world. You possess the passion, the wisdom, the hands and the eyes of Michelangelo; therefore, the talents of Michelangelo are yours to command.

(GERTRUDE trembles; her fingers fluttering.)

PATCH

Somebody fetch the paint! She can start by paintin' the sign!

HOWIE

Screw the sign! (*handing Gertrude a plank of wood*) Here! Paint Ronnie dancin'!

(MAXINE brings a can of paint and a brush as  
GERTRUDE starts painting Veronica flourishes.

HOWIE

Goddamn, she's doin' it like it's second nature!

MAXINE

Sweet Jesus...

PATCH

Ray, what about you? Whadda yuh wanna be?

RAY

Don't know yet, boss. I still gotta think.

PATCH

Maxie? Come on, Max, whadda yuh wanna be?

RAY

Besides a bitch.

PATCH and RAY

(*laughing*) Ha, ha, ha!

RAY

Now stop sulkin', sugar. Come on, there must be somethin' yuh wanna be.

MAXINE

Anythin' so long as it's away from you jackasses! I need more time.

HOWIE

Christ almighty! Will you look at Trudy paint!

(HOWIE holds up Gertrude's painting of Veronica.)

VERONICA

C'est magnifique!

PATCH

That's great, Gert!

HOWIE

She can paint all of us -- doin' our acts!

LOUISA

Rico painted wagons: murals of the saints on elephants.

PATCH

Your turn, Howie. You figured what yuh wanna be?

HOWIE

I dunno. I guess I wanna be millions of things, just can't think of nothin'.

PATCH

You still wanna swallow swords?

HOWIE

Hell, no. Wasn't no good at it anyway. (*addressing Mayra*) The swords I swallow fold up when I press 'em on my tongue. Sometimes the marks find out an' want their money back. 'Course, I'm great at the Dunk Doris.

MAXINE

Any moron can do the Dunk Doris.

HOWIE

Yuh see, one of us gives the pitch, that's Ray or Patch, an' I get dressed up like Doris an' stand on a divin' board over a big tub of water. Yuh get three balls for a nickel, an' if yuh hit the gadget that sets off the board, Doris falls in the water. I'm supposeta get the marks mad so they wanna get me dunked. I yell stuff like "Hey, you fairy chicken-shit, I'll bet you can't hit the broad side of a barn." You know, insults, stuff like (*turning towards Louisa*) "Hey, you old gasbag! When are yuh gonna have the decency to drop dead an' leave us in peace?!"

LOUISA

Never!

PATCH

Hey!

(LOUISA starts throwing apples at HOWIE who catches them.)

HOWIE

If I was old an' ugly and pissin' in my shorts, I'd put a fuckin' noose 'round my neck!

MAXINE

You tell 'er, Howie!

PATCH

Hey, cut it out!

HOWIE

It's folks like you that's ruinin' the country -- livin' too damn long, takin' jobs an' stinkin' up the air!

PATCH

I said that's enough! What the hell's gotten into you? *(to Maxine)* An' you too! Sorry, kid, they ain't usually that mean.

LOUISA

Hah! They are always mean, *always*.

(HOWIE, almost unconsciously, begins juggling apples.)

MAXINE

How 'bout you, Patch? You gonna ask 'er to make you somethin'?

RAY

Yeah, what about *you*?

PATCH

What? You think I'm nothin' now?

MAXINE

Nothin' much.

PATCH

Well, you tell me, lil' girl. Read my mind.

MAYRA

Sing.

PATCH

Yeah! You know, like Caruso. I useta sing in the school choir, so you got somethin' to start with, but what the hell? Carnies don't need singers.

LOUISA

My Rico could sing -- serenades in the moonlight.

HOWIE

Hey, Patch, look! Look at me! Look what I'm doin'! I'm jugglin'! I always wanted to juggle!

PATCH

Jugglers are a dime a dozen.

LOUISA

Rico juggled -- six, seven, twenty balls at a time.

HOWIE

But I'd be the best, the best arm an' leg juggler in the whole goddamn country! An' maybe I'll be a Turk instead of a Jap. I'll ditch the pigtail, wear one of them turbans.

MAXINE

Yeah, an' I'm sick of bein' African. I wanna be Russian!

PATCH

Ray's the Russian.

HOWIE

Then I'll be the African: "The Jugglin' Jig of the Jungle!" *You* be the Jap!

MAXINE

I don't wanna be the Jap! Let Gert be the Jap.

HOWIE

Now that she paints, she's gotta be the wop.

LOUISA

I am the wop!

PATCH

Look, y'all gotta be who you already are till we get new fronts!

RAY

Patch, I think I'm gonna stay a fighter, 'cept instead of wrestlin', I'm gonna be a *real* fighter, a boxer.

MAXINE

Are you crazy?! You already got half your brains knocked out!

RAY

She'll make me sharper. If I'm sharper, I won't get hurt so bad.

PATCH

Yeah, the town puts up the meanest, toughest, son-of-a-bitch they got, maybe two an' three at a time. They lay out their bets, Ray beats the tar outta 'em, an' then we collect!

MAXINE

Look, kid, if yuh wanna do him a favor, make him puke very time he sees a bottle.

RAY

Aw, lay off, Max. You'll see, I'll be bettern' I ever was. So go on, Mayra, do your stuff. I'm ready!

HOWIE

Take me first! Make me a juggler! I'm already feelin' the power!

MAYRA

You may stand together. Your eyes are very heavy, your limbs relaxed; you are moving gently, in continuous motion;...

HOWIE and RAY

In continuous motion,...

MAYRA

...hands nimble-fingered, feet sure-footed.

HOWIE and RAY

...nimble fingered,...sure-footed.

MAYRA

You will perform swiftly, deftly, slight-of-hand.

(RAY boxes; HOWIE juggles.)

PATCH

Hurry, hurry, hurry! Standin' room only! In this tent see Akira Kazumi jugglin' six live grenades an' seven sticks of dynamite! An' over here at ringside, see Sarkhov the Siberian Assassin single-handedly challengin' any fightin' rube, that's any rube fightin' rube in any town we play!

MAXINE

Look, kid, if you're gonna make him a fighter, than yuh better make me a flyer. I wanna do somethin' up high, as far away from the son-of-a-bitch as I can get.

PATCH

You don't know nothin' 'bout high wires!

MAXINE

Yeah, but somethin' high takes guts, an' I got guts. An' I also got a sense of balance. I was ridin' bareback when most kids was still in diapers.

PATCH

Carnies don't have high acts!

MAXINE

I'll be the first!

PATCH

Talk sense!

MAXINE

I am talkin' sense! The best act I ever seen was a little guy walkin' on tiptoes, wearin' fancy tights an' carryin' a pole.

LOUISA

It wasn't Rico. He hated heights.

MAXINE

He didn't have a net or nothin'.

PATCH

Suppose you fall?

MAXINE

She'll make me too good to fall. I'm gonna do cartwheels, handstands, I'll even hang by my hair!

(Music as MAYRA makes a gesture of transformation.)

LOUISA

My Rico could stand on his...



**SCENE 3: BETRAYAL AND SALVATION**

(In the evening, PATCH is approached by the happy TROUPERS, carrying suitcases and sacks as MAYRA watches and LOUISA whispers her prayer.)

LOUISA

It is unfortunate, Rico, but when you are the greatest, you no longer wish to be a part of what was once the worst.

MAYRA

They are leaving the carnival.

PATCH

Where y'all goin'?

MAXINE

Everywhere!

PATCH

What the hell! Get off your high horses an 'come back here! Come on, Max, I'll get you great riggin'! Star billin'!

MAXINE

The circus can use me now, Patch! So long!

PATCH

Hey, Ray, ole buddy, you've been with Patch for ten years. You can't just...

RAY

Sorry, boss, I'm gonna fight for big stakes now -- no more phoney gorillas.

(RAY and MAXINE exit.)

PATCH

Howie, you can't leave me! Who's gonna want a jugglin' Jap?

HOWIE

Everybody, you damn Hebe, that's who! I can juggle anytime, anywhere. Life's gonna be a dream!

(HOWIE and GERTRUDE wave and depart.)

PATCH

Gert! Damn you, Gert! *(to Veronica)* An' you? I suppose you're gonna be a hot shot dancer?!

VERONICA

Au revoir, Patch! Je vais a Paris!

*(VERONICA kisses Patch and dances off.)*

PATCH

This ain't happenin', tell me this ain't happenin'.

*(LOUISA lumbers off, suitcase in hand.)*

PATCH

Grandma! Hey, grandma, where you goin'? Your ole man started this rig!

LOUISA

Now that I write, I must search for inspiration!

*(The TROUPERS have departed, leaving MAYRA and PATCH alone. LOUISA only pretends to leave and skulks to the side.)*

PATCH

You're dreamers, dreamers alla you! Your talents ain't real! She's got you under a spell!

MAYRA

Oh, no, sir, that is the way they are now.

PATCH

Well, what good are they gonna do me if they ain't here?! Jesus, I want 'em to be good, but not for some other outfit.

MAYRA

You have me and my snakes.

PATCH

Now, sit down, kid, sit down, thatsa girl. Now I hate to break your heart, but snakes ain't a big draw. Some folks hate 'em with a passion, an' wouldn't pay a nickel to see 'em turn somersaults. Now the kootch show's the hot sell, an' the rides an' games, but with just us that just ain't possible. We gotta can all that an' concentrate on your mind readin' act. First, we gotta change your name. Your front could be Cuban. We'll call you Bella. Yeah,

PATCH (cont'd)

Bella ain't bad: Bella Bandida, the Cuban Conjuror! Yeah, I'll bring in the marks:  
"Step right up, folks, for fifty cents the Great Bella will read your mind word for word --  
provided you're thinkin' somethin' decent, ha, ha! An' for ten cents extra, the Great Bella  
will predict your future!" Can you do that?

MAYRA

Yes.

PATCH

"Every prediction the genuine gospel truth!" How's that sound?

MAYRA

Yes. Then I will hold their hands and stare into their eyes...

PATCH

Yeah! Say I'm a mark. Say I got some land near Gainesville, and I wanna know what it's  
gonna be worth.

MAYRA

Nothing.

PATCH

Well, who am I gonna marry?

MAYRA

No one.

PATCH

You mean I ain't gonna have kids?

MAYRA

No.

PATCH

No family?

MAYRA

None.

PATCH

I'm gonna die all alone?

MAYRA

A cancer will grow in your belly. You will be found in a trailer, swollen and covered with flies while strangers steal your...

PATCH

Hey! Hey! Lookit, kid, you gotta be careful. Don't go tellin' folks too much. Jesus! *(pause)* Well, hell, if that's my future, why don't I shoot myself now?

MAYRA

Because you will have great fame, great riches -- more than you ever dreamed.

PATCH

Yeah? How's that?

MAYRA

You will ask me to bring back the carnival.

PATCH

Yeah? Can you do that?! It ain't that I don't think we can make it as a team. It's just that now that they're decent acts, we could make a real go of it, be a top notch carnie. I need 'em, kid. This ain't a two man rig, never was.

MAYRA

Once it was, in the beginning: Louisa and Rico, Rico and Louisa.

PATCH

Yeah, but those days are long gone, so bring 'em back! Get Ray, get him back, pronto!

MAYRA

Sarkhov the Siberian Assassin...

PATCH

Yeah, tell him to come back 'cause...hell, I don't know, 'cause he's got sawdust in his blood! An' get Maxie, an' Howie, an' Gert!

MAYRA

Kiki NaConga, Akira Kazumi, Helga the Tattooed Teuton,...

PATCH

Yeah, yeah, an' Ronnie!

MAYRA

...Lulu Leroux.

PATCH

That's good! That's great!

MAYRA

But what about Louisa?

LOUISA

Yes! What about Louisa?!

PATCH

Grandma? Nah, let 'er go.

MAYRA

No! No! She must come back!

PATCH

Well,...all right, sure, if that's what you want.

(MAYRA rolls back her eyes, extending her arms as a high note is heard, followed by five others, forming a harmonious chord.)

PATCH

Tomorra we'll pull into Shelby an' go straight through town like a parade! Ray'll drive as usual, an' grandma, she'll bring up the rear.

LOUISA

I have been with Gambollini's International Amusements from the beginning, and now I must bring up the rear?!

MAYRA

Why must Louisa bring up the rear?

PATCH

Hell, you know we always save the best for last!

#### **SCENE 4: REJOICE: A PARADE!**

(Wild, colorful lights reveal the TROUPERS enter in spectacular costumes, sporting feathered headdresses and glittering capes. THEY circle the stage, enacting their new talents, waving to the audience as PATCH sings "La donna e mobile" from Riggoletto.)

LOUISA

Look at us, Rico! How we march down the streets, accompanied by Patch whose voice echoes everywhere, luring unsuspecting citizens who are having visions it would take a lifetime to describe.

VERONICA

Quelle foule sur les troittours!

GERTRUDE

See that guy with the flag? He's a-pointin' an' a-sayin' he never seen such gorgeous green tigers in all his born days!

VERONICA

Tout bonnement!

HOWIE

Blow the guy a kiss! Knock 'em dead!

LOUISA

To some the parade is a magnificent mural!

HOWIE

Patch! There's some drunks out there seein' blue foxes an' bears, a goddamn parade of foxes an' bears!

GERTRUDE

There's a lil' gal a-sayin' she's never seen fish wearin' feathers!

LOUISA

There is no language to describe the parade. To see it you must open your eyes!

VERONICA

Allons donc! Allons donc!

LOUISA

There is a special magic that interpenetrates the known world with another world like the thin stream of oil that coats the gears...

MAXINE

Hah! Did you hear that?!

LOUISA

...that turns the wheels...

MAXINE

He pointed to me!

LOUISA

...that moves the parade!

MAXINE

He said, “Oh, Lord, if only I coulda seen ‘er when my pecker was prime!”

LOUISA

So you see, Rico, Mayra is our saint and sorceress, our mistress of mirage. Everywhere we go people see what they wish to see, and it leaves them in love for the rest of their lives.

MAYRA

Louisa? Louisa, where are you?

LOUISA

I hear you!

MAYRA

Hurry!

LOUISA

I am coming!

(The TROUPERS freeze in time.)

LOUISA

Ah, how happy we are! The fallen angels have returned to the fold, the city has declared a holiday, and *everyone* is coming to Gambollini’s International Amusements!

PATCH

*Oh, circus, my wagon,  
Oh, circus, my dream,  
Oh, circus, my circus,  
Is all that it seems.*

## SCENE 5: BONE OF MY BONES

(As PATCH finishes his song, the TROUPERS return to the squalid campsite and swiftly transform it, draping lustrous fabrics, and hanging an elaborate new sign. MAYRA sits off to the side and LOUISA crosses downstage, wheeling a 1933 movie camera.)

LOUISA

It has been six weeks since Mayra came, and we are rich, so rich that as historian and poet of Gambollini's International Amusements, I have purchased a moving picture camera.

(LOUISA wheels her camera towards the TROUPERS:  
PATCH and MAXINE are relaxing and smoking;  
HOWIE and GERTRUDE are playing cards.)

HOWIE

Will yuh get that goddamn thing offa me?!

PATCH

Did you check out the hanky pank? Not a single slum item on the shelf. The radios play, the watches work, every prize is top of the line.

MAXINE

Where's the freak?

PATCH

Now Max...

LOUISA

You should be grateful, on your knees!

MAXINE

All I'm sayin' is every time I ask 'er somethin' personal, she clams up.

HOWIE

So don't ask!

LOUISA

She speaks to me.

MAXINE

An' how come she don't eat? You ever seen 'er eat?

LOUISA

She drinks my medicines.

GERTRUDE

She's shy is all.

MAXINE

An' how come, outta all of us here, she hangs out with *her*?

LOUISA

She protects me.

PATCH

Kids an' old folks get along.

GERTRUDE

'Member when she first joined up? She was all starry-eyed about carnies, a-showin' off her snakes an' all.

PATCH

Hell, she's just a kid. Some kids is different.

MAXINE

Yeah, well, "just a kid's" got us booked in Miami, three new trailers, new rides, an' money to burn, so stop givin' me this "just a kid" crap!

PATCH

Baby cakes, the only thing I'm givin' you is a good kick in the kiester. Now, why don't you remember that neat little list you just gave me, and shut your trap! You oughtta be thankin' the kid. What the hell's the matter with you?!

HOWIE

You oughtta be feelin' good, real good. The whole damn country's lookin' up!

GERTRUDE

It's them snakes, ain't it? They remind you of your ma.

MAXINE

It's got nothin' to do with that! I just wanna know who she is, an' where she's from, an' how come she can do all that hocus pocus!

(In another area of the campsite, RAY limps towards MAYRA as the TROUPERS freeze.)

MAYRA

You...you have been hurt. How? You are so strong.

RAY

Well, there's guys out there even stronger.

MAYRA

But I have made you the strongest.

RAY

Sugar, the strongest my size still ain't the strongest twice as big an half as old. Hey, don't look so sad; I still won.

MAYRA

There is music playing inside the tent.

RAY

Yeah? That's nice.

MAYRA

Will you dance with me?

RAY

Don't you think you oughtta find a fella your own size?

MAYRA

I wish to dance with you.

RAY

Well, sure, if that's what you want.

MAYRA

That is what I want.

(Music fades in as they dance, the TROUPERS continue their discussion.)

GERTRUDE

If she sees what we're a-thinkin', an' says what we're a-thinkin', can she feel what we're a-feelin'?

LOUISA

If you listen, I will explain, but your maggot-infested minds cannot conceive of her greatness.

MAXINE

Has somebody got a gun?

LOUISA

You despise her youth and beauty, a star among parasites. You are only the sideshow.

MAXINE

If she's so great, how come she don't use them powers to make everybody happy: no wars, no bread lines, everybody workin'.

PATCH

Nothin' but fun an' games, right?

MAXINE

Why not?

HOWIE

Yeah.

PATCH

'Cause then we wouldn't need carnies. We'd all be out of a job, an' you'd have nothin' to bitch about!

(The TROUPERS freeze as MAYRA and RAY continue dancing.)

MAYRA

You are so handsome, so wise.

RAY

Nah, I'm just a regular guy.

MAYRA

No, no, you could start a carnival of your own. You would be the manager, and I would help you.

RAY

You're dreamin', lil' girl. This carnie's my life; the only way I'm leavin' is belly up.

MAYRA

If you stare into my eyes, I can see your future.

RAY

Don't! Please don't! You keep that voodoo to yourself.

MAYRA

But it is not...

RAY

You heard me! I ain't interested.

(RAY stops dancing.)

MAYRA

Please, do not stop. I...I feel yearnings.

RAY

Yeah, well, it's just part of growin' up, is all. You're pretty enough to get plenty of guys.

MAYRA

But you are the one I want.

RAY

Now look, sugar, you're real nice, but nobody gets everythin' they want.

MAYRA

All I want is a kiss.

RAY

Well,...alright, just a peck. Then you run along an' let ole Ray get some shut eye.

(RAY attempts to kiss her on the cheek, but MAYRA pulls his face towards her own, kissing him passionately as the focus returns to the TROUPERS.)

HOWIE

There's plenty she can't do. I asked 'er to strip Trudy's knockers back the way they was. Some of them tattoos is ugly as a stump fence.

MAXINE

You ever sorry you done it?

GERTRUDE

Lord, no! When your family's dirt poor farmers, the only way to escape is a-makin' your self special, an' one way to be special is a-lettin' a jab-artist have a field day.

HOWIE

The only place she ain't tattooed is 'er face, 'er hands, an' the soles of 'er feet.

(MAYRA enters.)

HOWIE

Well, doggone.

LOUISA

Ah, Mayra, sit down. There are questions they wish you to answer.

GERTRUDE

Yuh know, somethin', pumpkin, you ain't a-lookin' too good. You'll feel better in Miami.

MAXINE

Yeah, maybe we oughtta contact your family in case you're sick. I mean, if you run away, yuh still gotta be from somewhere, right? I mean, everybody's gotta be from somewhere.

LOUISA

She is from...

MAYRA and LOUISA

...Mexico.

HOWIE

I knew it! Didn't I say Mexico?

MAXINE

Where in Mexico?

LOUISA

Chihuahua.

MAXINE

Shush! Let 'er speak!

MAYRA

Chihuahua.

MAXINE

How old are you?

LOUISA

Tell them, tell them the truth!

HOWIE

Don't you ever shut up?!

LOUISA

Mayra is my youth,...

MAYRA

Louisa...

LOUISA

...myself as a child, flesh of my flesh, bone of my bones, Louisa Mayra Rios-Benitez.  
Louisa is Mayra; Mayra is Louisa.

MAYRA

She thinks I am her child.

GERTRUDE

Oh, Lordy.

LOUISA

I was born in Chihuahua...

PATCH

Shush! Now, Louisa, you're Italian -- like Rico. Remember Rico?

LOUISA

Of course I remember! But a woman can claim a man's country as well as his name. You think I am cuckoo, but finally, finally, I found her! I took her from another time, another plane, and do you know why? Who else would protect an old woman from hatred? From death, from being murdered in my bed?! Only *me*!! Only *myself*!!!

MAXINE

Somebody got a net handy?

LOUISA

You will know! Someday you will know...

MAYRA

Shhh, Louisa.

PATCH

Now, calm down, Louisa.

HOWIE

Here she goes again.

LOUISA

...deep, deep in your souls...

MAYRA

You must not say such things.

LOUISA

...that I, Louisa Gambollini,...

PATCH

Let's leave 'er in peace.

LOUISA

...called forth my youth...

PATCH  
Come on, Gert! Howie!

LOUISA  
...through my medicines...

PATCH  
You comin' Mayra?

(MAYRA shakes her head as the TROUPERS depart.)

LOUISA  
... and the divine intercession of Rico... (*noticing the troupers have left*) Oh, Mayra, why...? Why do they never listen? Please, you must make them listen.

MAYRA  
They do not have our faith. If they knew, their hatred would be strengthened by fear.

LOUISA  
Then tonight, while they sleep, put them in a trance: tell them to love me, tell them to love Louisa like a mother.

MAYRA  
Such feelings must first dwell within, but they are...missing.

LOUISA  
But why? Why are they missing?

MAYRA  
You remind them of their destiny, and you are not well preserved.

LOUISA  
Ah, but I am! I am! Oh, Mayra, you are even more beautiful than I remember. And you smell like fresh apples and lavender.

(LOUISA and MAYRA sit across from each other, mirroring their gestures.)

MAYRA  
I wish I were tall -- like Lulu Leroux.

LOUISA  
Nonsense, you are perfect! Perfect!

MAYRA

You are even shorter.

LOUISA

The spine collapses with age.

MAYRA

My breasts are too small.

LOUISA

Our body has been fat and thin, with breasts of many sizes, skin of many textures.

MAYRA

No, I do not want your skin. It is...

LOUISA

What...? A few warts appear with the years.

MAYRA

Does the body decay slowly or all at once?

LOUISA

In the carnival you are moving too much to notice. That is what I love the most: the movement. Then one day you see your reflection and find a tooth turning black. Soon silver hairs begin to appear, and lines etched by winds deepen into furrows. Then later you feel a shortness of breath, a crackling in the knees, and then there are the deaths -- of people even younger who they are calling old.

MAYRA

Akira Kazumi says you will grow deaf and blind, and your brain will shrink to a gumball.

LOUISA

Humph! I can still shoot a bullseye and hear whispers in the night. Look at me: before I was only reflected, reversed in the glass, my back always hidden from my front, but through you I see everything: your eyes are my eyes, black as pitch; your hair is mine, so thick and shining; and your teeth are mine -- but still attached to the gums.

(THEY cease mirroring their gestures as MAYRA turns away, pacing restlessly.)

LOUISA

Tell me, Mayra, what is it like where you came from?

MAYRA

I forget. The moment you leave you begin to forget, but there are many lights glowing in giant wheels.

LOUISA

How did you leave?

MAYRA

The wheels are spinning all at once, but finally one came close and stopped. Then I stepped inside.

LOUISA

If you forget the past, do you forget the future?

MAYRA

Only my own.

LOUISA

Then you do not remember Rico? The fairgrounds in Tijuana?

MAYRA

No.

LOUISA

That is where we met. I was older than myself as you, and many years older than Rico.

MAYRA

Was he as handsome as Sarkhov?

LOUISA

Better! He was an acrobat with the Italian Circus, and I was a hypnotist and healer in the Culebra de Cascabel Medicine Show. I cured hundreds of the pox, but only Rico proposed marriage. We crossed the border to California, and travelled east to make a carnival of our own. Before you came it was a carnival of misery, but now...now you have brought such powers.

MAYRA

They are your powers.

LOUISA

Was I too foolish to know the strength of my gifts?

MAYRA

It is only a gift for seeing through others. Tomorrow Patch will open the new mirror maze, and Helga the Tattooed Teuton will paint my portrait.

LOUISA

*Our* portrait. Pose with your head held high, little Mayra, flesh of my flesh, bone of my bones.

(LOUISA and MAYRA freeze as the CHILD'S VOICE (Mayra's) from the first scene is heard singing, and lights fade.)

CHILD'S VOICE

*Oh, circus, my wagon,  
Oh, circus, my dream;  
Oh, circus, my circus,  
Is all that it seems.*

END OF ACT I

**ACT II****SCENE 6: THE MIRROR MAZE**

(Inside the mirror maze, PATCH, RAY, VERONICA, HOWIE, and MAXINE are delighting in their distorted reflections. In another area, GERTRUDE stands at her easel as MAYRA sits posing. LOUISA joins them, setting aside her camera, glancing at her journal.)

GERTRUDE

Chin up, honey.

LOUISA

Dear Rico, the past becomes more recent every day, so a historian cannot judge anything, even time. *(pause, to Gertrude)* I am undertaking the composition of a poem that celebrates the tattoos of your body.

GERTRUDE

Uh huh.

LOUISA

Nobody listens. There is no one to escort me but myself.

*(LOUISA departs, hauling her camera.)*

GERTRUDE

*(to Mayra)* Poor ole gal. Kinda gives me the willies.

*(MAYRA takes a swallow of Louisa's medicine.)*

GERTRUDE

Howie says that crap you're a-drinkin' ain't nothin' but branch water an weeds. Look, maybe I'm a-buttin' in, but don't you wanna be with kids your own age, a-goin' to picture shows, you know, a-gettin' some fun outta life?

MAYRA

I must stay with Louisa.

GERTRUDE

Boys'll be a-chasin' yuh like bees after a honey pot! An' don't you be a-thinkin' you're too young. My sister, Vine, was married at fourteen. Now turn your head a lil' more to the left, thatsa girl. *(pause)* Hey, where's everybody gone? It's like a graveyard.

MAYRA

They are in the mirror maze.

GERTRUDE

What mirror maze?

MAYRA

Patch has purchased two new rides and a mirror maze.

GERTRUDE

No kiddin'? Now, if I was to ask yuh what Howie's a-doin', could yuh find 'im in your head an' tell me?

(Crossfade to HOWIE who has joined VERONICA in the mirror maze.)

MAYRA

He is with Lulu Leroux, admiring her reflection.

VERONICA

Quelle belle femme!

GERTRUDE

She's always a-paintin' 'erself up somethin' awful. 'Course I should talk.

HOWIE

Shoulda asked Mayra to make your twat big enough for that ping pong act.

VERONICA

Sortez! Et allez apprendre la politesse.

HOWIE

Hannah the Heathen gets six of 'em up 'er an' pops 'em out one at a time. It's the best kootch act I ever seen!

VERONICA

Foutaise!

MAYRA

He is telling Lulu that she should be like Hannah the Heathen and make her twat large enough for ping...

GERTRUDE

Lordy, Lord, child! You shouldn't be a-hearin' about Hannah!

MAYRA

If I am old enough to marry, then I should know about Hannah.

HOWIE

Did I tell yuh I was takin' up yo yos, eight of 'em, eight goddamn yo yos, all of 'em spinnin' at once. It's a beautiful sight!

VERONICA

Allez vous faire voir! Brute.

GERTRUDE

Howie's been a-workin' on a new act...

MAYRA and GERTRUDE

...with yo yos.

GERTRUDE

Doggone! You're really somethin'. Why don't you tune in...

MAYRA and GERTRUDE

...Patch.

(PATCH is in the mirror maze with RAY.)

MAYRA

He is with Sarkhov the Siberian Assassin.

PATCH

I'm thinkin' of gettin' an animal act. A bunch of chimps an' a real gorilla. Ole Rico will be spinnin' in his grave. He hated anythin' kept in a cage, anythin' that shits or spits. He was a horny lil' toad, but neat as a pin.

MAYRA

Patch said Rico was a horny little toad.

GERTRUDE

Yeah, seems he laid every skirt in the carnie, but granny don't think we know.

MAYRA

You mean he was not faithful to Louisa?

GERTRUDE

It's the studs that crave the buds, honey. Chin up. Smile. So what's a-happenin' now?

(MAXINE approaches PATCH and RAY.)

MAXINE

Jesus, these mirrors are the best in the biz!

MAYRA

Kiki NaConga has found them.

MAXINE

Ray, honey, you ain't lookin' too good.

RAY

I took on twenty comers last night. Every bone in my body aches.

MAXINE

Too many years of bad moonshine.

RAY

Just gettin' tired, sugar.

MAXINE

Gettin' old! Ray, maybe yuh shoulda been somethin' else, somethin' easier, maybe a juggler like Howie, or ask 'er to conjure you an extra head. Patch'll put yuh in the freak show.

PATCH and MAXINE

*(laughing)* Ha, ha, ha!

RAY

Shit, I ain't askin' that kid for nothin'. She's funny, she...she eyeballs me funny.

PATCH

Yeah?

MAXINE

Like how?!

RAY

She...she likes me, brushes against me an' ...you know.

PATCH

Jesus.

MAXINE

You shittin' me?!

RAY

Honest to God. She's always askin' me to dance.

MAXINE

Why that lil'... You ain't...?!

RAY

Hell no!

PATCH

She ain't got no daddy, so maybe she figures Ray for a good-lookin' guy to lean on.

MAXINE

Or a good lookin' poke in the petunia! Give 'er a good smack on the butt an' tell 'er to find a fella her own age!

MAYRA

I do not like Kiki NaConga.

MAXINE

Sweet Jesus! Ain't life a scream?

MAYRA

Sarkhov needs a younger, more beautiful woman.

MAXINE

If Mayra's so hot, let's put 'er in the kootch!

PATCH

The kootch ain't a nursery.

MAYRA

They think I am a child!

GERTRUDE

Yeah, well, my ma had two kids by sixteen -- was a granny by thirty.

(PATCH meanders in another direction. RAY and MAXINE remain, staring into the mirrors while MAYRA continues to observe them.)

GERTRUDE

I don't mean to be a-buttin' in, but have yuh ever had a boyfriend?

Yes. MAYRA  
 Really? Did yuh hold hands? GERTRUDE  
 Can I feel your tits? RAY  
 Yeah. MAXINE Yes. MAYRA  
 Did yuh kiss an' all? GERTRUDE  
 Kiss me, baby. RAY  
 Yeah. MAXINE Yes. MAYRA  
 Come on, you can tell your Aunt Gert. GERTRUDE  
 (RAY kisses MAXINE on the lips.)  
 My lips,... MAYRA  
 (RAY kisses MAXINE on the neck.)  
 ...my neck,... MAYRA  
 (RAY kisses MAXINE on the breasts.)  
 ...my breasts,... MAYRA  
 (RAY kisses MAXINE on the navel.)  
 ...my belly. MAYRA

(Lights fade on RAY and MAXINE as they collapse in passionate love-making.)

MAXINE  
Ohhhhhhhhh...

MAYRA  
Ahhhhhhhhhh...

GERTRUDE  
Aw, ain't love grand? What's his name?

MAYRA  
He is dead.

GERTRUDE  
Geeze! I mean, that's tough, real tough. He musta been awful young.

MAYRA  
No.

GERTRUDE  
An older fella, huh?

MAYRA  
A horny little toad.

(Suddenly LOUISA appears, panicking, groping at the mirrors. MAYRA stands.)

LOUISA  
Holy Mother of God! Everywhere I see my duplicates! My triplicates! Helllllllp!  
Helllllllllp!!

LOUISA  
I am...

MAYRA  
Louisa is...

LOUISA  
...lost!

MAYRA  
....lost...

MAYRA  
...in the mirror maze!

GERTRUDE  
Don't you worry, honey, they'll find 'er.

(The TROUPERS respond from different corners of the maze, overlapping their dialog, while LOUISA gropes in circles, gasping for breath.)

PATCH  
Over here, Louisa, can you hear me?

RAY  
Follow my voice!

MAXINE  
Over here, bat brains! Head north!

VERONICA  
Par ici, Louisa!

HOWIE  
Head south! I'm closest to the exit!

VERONICA  
Ou etes-vous?

(The TROUPERS voices echo as they converge on LOUISA, calling her name. By the time they find her, they are shouting in unison.)

PATCH, VERONICA, HOWIE, MAXINE, RAY  
Louisa! Louisa!! Louisa!!! Louisa!!! Louisa!!!!

(Terrified, LOUISA screams and collapses in a heap as MAYRA reaches out.)

MAYRA  
Louisa!!

(HOWIE and the TROUPERS approach LOUISA.)

HOWIE  
I found 'er!

MAYRA  
They found her!

PATCH  
Stand back an' give 'er some air!

MAXINE  
She still breathin'?

MAYRA  
Yes!

HOWIE  
Yeah.

MAXINE  
Damn!

HOWIE

Now's your chance, Patch. Pack 'er up an' drive straight to the rest home.

MAYRA

They want to send Louisa away!

HOWIE

Hell, you could set 'er up real nice.

PATCH

It ain't my call. The kid likes 'er.

MAXINE

Well, then *do* somethin' so she ain't always under foot.

HOWIE

Put 'er in the freak show. Hell, she's already got a moustache -- so give 'er a beard! Her skin's like a gator's. Paint 'er green an' call 'er "The Gator Lady!" Yeah, "The Bearded Gator Lady!"

PATCH

Somebody loosen 'er dress. She's chokin' on 'er windpipe.

(As VERONICA bends to unbutton her dress, LOUISA awakens and slaps her hand!)

VERONICA

Owww! Vieux baveux!

PATCH

Hey, grandma, welcome home.

LOUISA

Where am I?

MAXINE

In heaven with the angels.

PATCH

You passed out in the mirror maze. You shouldn't come here by yourself. Max, you take 'er home. Ray, Howie, help me set up the duck pond.

(The MEN depart and VERONICA follows while LOUISA and MAXINE remains in the Mirror Maze.)

VERONICA

En bien, allons-y!

MAXINE

(to Louisa) Come on, let's get outta here.

LOUISA

(staring into the mirror) Wait, wait. Do you see what I see?

MAXINE

I hope not.

LOUISA

The mirror dims and narrows our bodies so we are like children. I look like Mayra. We have the same eyes, the same nose.

MAYRA

Louisa is telling Kiki NaConga that she looks like me.

GERTRUDE

Sure, I noticed that;...

GERTRUDE

...are you two related?

MAXINE

Are you two related?

MAXINE

What was your name before you got married?

LOUISA

Louisa Mayra Rios-Benitez.

MAXINE

Did yuh have kids who could've had kids?

LOUISA

What does it matter? I am too old to remember petty details.

MAXINE

Well, come on, stop draggin' your feet. (*mumbling*) Loony ole hag.

LOUISA

I heard that! There is evil in all of us, but you -- you prey upon the innocent!

MAXINE

You ain't innocent, just crazy.

LOUISA

I have two things you will never have: the love of Rico Gambollini and the eternal devotion of Mayra Rios-Benitez.

MAXINE

Yeah, well, I got somethin' even better.

MAYRA

Kiki NaConga says she is better than Louisa. She says...

MAXINE

I'm young and beautiful.

MAYRA

I'm young and beautiful,...

MAXINE

...an' I got a man in my bed. I'll even have kids, a family.

MAYRA

She says she will have a family.

GERTRUDE

Aw, the carnie's her family.

MAYRA

She means "a *real* family."

GERTRUDE

Families is where you find 'em. The ones you're a-born in yuh gotta escape.

LOUISA

Mayra is my family, the joy of my life -- such goodness, such a blessing.

MAXINE

If she's so good, how come she's tryin' to get in Ray's pants?

LOUISA

No!

MAXINE

It's the truth! You ask Ray!

LOUISA

Liar! You would say anything to hurt me!

MAXINE

Yeah, but I ain't lyin' about Mayra. I was riled at first, but at least it proves she's half human. Gert and I say it's time you cut 'er loose. She'll meet other fellas an' leave Ray in peace. Christ, here I am, defendin' the brat.

LOUISA

If Mayra covets your husband, she must be punished.

MAXINE

Aw, come on, Louisa, you were young once.

LOUISA

Twice.

MAXINE

What I wanna know is how come -- with all her powers -- she ain't made Ray hot for her?

LOUISA

Sometimes she is...weak.

MAXINE

What's wrong? She sick or somethin'?

LOUISA

She has limits. She depends on me, on my prayers and medicines.

MAYRA

*(to Gertrude)* Hah! I am making my own medicines!

MAXINE

So long, granny, you're on your own now.

*(MAXINE exits, leaving LOUISA gazing at her reflection while MAYRA continues talking to Gertrude.)*

MAYRA

Louisa thinks I need her, but I...I would like to be...

GERTRUDE

What, honey? What would you like to be?

Myself. MAYRA

(MAYRA and LOUISA freeze as lights reveal PATCH singing.)

PATCH  
*I met her on the sawdust trail,  
 She led the way, stone by stone;  
 I asked her where the trail leads,  
 Inside, she said, you go alone.*

### SCENE 7: FEASTING THE EYES

(One week later. Several colorful snakes are coiled in random areas of the campsite where LOUISA is writing in her journal and MAYRA sits beside her.)

MAYRA  
 Am I as beautiful as Lulu Leroux?

LOUISA  
 Yes.

MAYRA  
 As beautiful as Kiki NaConga?

LOUISA  
 They cannot compare.

MAYRA  
 Louisa? Do I have to become like you? When I look for myself in you, I feel I have... vanished.

LOUISA  
 Through time and the folds of my skin, but the eyes! I still have your eyes, and behind the eyes lives the soul. Remember, the soul is what matters, singing and soaring to paradise!

MAYRA  
 Do I have the same soul as you or only a fragment?

LOUISA  
 Only God knows.

MAYRA

What if you have many souls and I am only one?

LOUISA

Then pray it is a good one, though my own is sometimes bitter. Age has many virtues, but my children are ungrateful. Someday I will leave a great legacy: in my suitcase, in the Box of Myself, are the secret formulas for my restoratives, and also my journals, my poetry.

MAYRA

They will think them worthless -- like you.

LOUISA

No, no they do not show it, but I know they feel something.

MAYRA

Revulsion -- from watching you rot. Oh, Louisa, how do you endure being despised? Why do the old not kill themselves? Why do they go on living?

LOUISA

Why do *you* go on living? There is corn to be popped, motorcars to ride, books to read,...

MAYRA

...dresses to buy, tobacco to smoke,...

LOUISA

...moving pictures to make...

MAYRA

...cold beers to drink,...

LOUISA

...poems to write. Listen: this is for Helga the Tattooed Teuton.

Illustrated flesh,  
 A work of living art,  
 Deftly drawn from head to toe,  
 Ink seeping towards her heart.  
 Time distorts, the sketches fade;  
 A clouded eye has dimmed the shade.  
 Soon Death has but her bones defaced;  
 A tattooed lady now erased.

(MAYRA is inattentive; LOUISA sighs and exits, wheeling her camera.)

**SCENE 8: FLESH OF MY FLESH**

(GERTRUDE enters, carrying Mayra's portrait.)

GERTRUDE

Mayra, honey, I'm a-takin' your portrait to town and a-havin' it framed in gold.

MAYRA

Louisa says I am more beautiful than Kiki NaConga and Lulu Leroux.

GERTRUDE

Aw, they don't hold a candle to you.

MAYRA

Before you leave, would you do something for me?

GERTRUDE

Sure, pumpkin, you name it.

MAYRA

I want a tattoo, a green snake coiling from my wrist to *(pointing to her elbow)*...here.

GERTRUDE

Lordly, no! Lookit, I had no choice, but why would a pretty gal -- with all your talent -- be a-wantin' to scar up her body?

MAYRA

*(pause, slowly)* Every day, every hour, we are weakening, growing closer to death, losing everything we have, everyone we know. Our senses decay, our memory dims,...

GERTRUDE

Lord! You're too young to be a-thinkin' such things!

MAYRA

I want a tattoo!

GERTRUDE

Now, listen: yuh know what it's like at the doctor's? When he starts a-jabbin' that needle in your butt? How'd yuh like a-gettin' jabbed a hundred times at once? Hurts like hell!

MAYRA

But it will never come off.

GERTRUDE

Never! Yuh wear it all the way to the marble garden.

MAYRA

But it will always be mine, only mine.

GERTRUDE

Look, tell yuh what I'm a-gonna do. I'll paint yuh a lil' pony right there.

MAYRA

No, a snake, it must be a snake, but not with paint! Paint will wash away!

GERTRUDE

Yeah, an' so will the tears when you're a-changin' your mind an' it's too damn late!

MAYRA

I know what I want! I want a tattoo -- a *real* tattoo -- and I want it now! Please, you must!

GERTRUDE

Oh, all right, all right! (*collecting her tattooing gear*) Yuh wanna shot of whiskey first? 'Cause you'll be a-bleedin' like a stuck hog.

MAYRA

Bleeding...?

GERTRUDE

Grown men go down like wet firecrackers.

MAYRA

Give me the whiskey. Then I will concentrate my mind.

(Music as MAYRA closes her eyes, and lights reveal her vision: the hootchie kootchie show with VERONICA performing a slithery ballet. A MAN leaps on stage to join her in an erotic dance.)

GERTRUDE

You let me know when you're ready for the first prick.

I am ready.

MAYRA

(As VERONICA and the MAN thrust their torsos,  
GERTRUDE pricks Mayra with the tattoo needle.)

VERONICA  
(with pleasure) Ouuuuuuuuuuu...

MAYRA  
(with pain) Ouuuuuuuuuuu...

VERONICA  
...la, la!

(Lights black out.)

### SCENE 9: CURSE OF THE SERPENT

(Several hours later. HOWIE and RAY enter, carrying  
a coffin, and propping it up as PATCH bellows.)

PATCH  
Hurry, hurry, hurry! Step right on up, ladies and gents! See Hairy Carrie, my own dear  
granny. We had ‘er embalmed an’ ready for plantin’ when lo and behold: She grew ‘erself  
a beard! All right, boys, open ‘er up!

(HOWIE and RAY open the coffin lid, revealing  
LOUISA with a long white beard.)

PATCH  
Yes, sirree, her hair’s still growin’, her eyes still glowin’! A miracle of modern medicine  
if there ever was one! (to *Howie and Ray*) Well, whadda yuh think?

LOUISA  
It is stupid! I will suffocate!

RAY  
I don’t know.

HOWIE  
Somethin’s wrong;...

HOWIE  
...they might think she’s a guy. Broads that old start lookin’ like guys.

RAY  
He’s right, Patch. They’ll be wantin’ proof. She’ll haveta show ‘er boobs.

LOUISA

Never!

HOWIE

Hell, make 'er wear tights to prove she ain't got a dick.

LOUISA

Never! I will never wear tights!

(GERTRUDE and MAYRA enter. MAYRA has a tattooed snake spiralling up her arm.)

LOUISA

Mayra, look! They are burying me alive, wasting my talent!

PATCH

Relax, kid, we just thought we'd give 'er a spot in the freak show. The coffin's just part of the act.

HOWIE

I still say paint 'er green an' make 'er a gator. Don't matter what sex a gator is.

LOUISA

Mayra! Your arm! You have a serpent on your arm!

HOWIE

So Trudy tattooed yuh, huh?

LOUISA

Great God in heaven! What have you done?!

HOWIE

Looks real nice, yes sirree.

LOUISA

Mutilating your body! How dare you?! I forbid it!

GERTRUDE

Lord, will yuh leave the kid alone!

PATCH

For chrissake...

(MAXINE and VERONICA enter.)

MAXINE  
What's goin' on?

HOWIE  
Trudy tattooed Mayra!

MAXINE  
Jesus!

GERTRUDE  
Hell, she begged me!

LOUISA  
You fool, you stupid little fool!

MAYRA  
It is *my* body. I will do as I please!

LOUISA  
Believe me, I know what it's like to live with a serpent, a serpent you can never escape,...

VERONICA  
Quel dommage.

LOUISA  
...a cruel blue serpent coiled on my breast.

GERTRUDE  
Louisa?! You got a tattoo?

MAXINE  
Now this I gotta see!

LOUISA  
No! Go away!

MAXINE  
Aw, come on, just a peek...

(MAXINE signals to the TROUPERS who approach menacingly.)

LOUISA  
Stop it! Stay back! Back!!!

MAXINE  
Grab 'er!

(HOWIE and GERTRUDE pin back Louisa's arms  
as MAXINE opens her blouse.)

PATCH  
Hey, leave 'er alone!

LOUISA  
Mayra! Stop them! Help me! Helllllllp!!!

(MAYRA stands stunned as MAXINE exposes a coiled  
viper above Louisa's breasts.)

VERONICA  
Je ne peux pas voir!

MAXINE  
Sweet Jesus. Somebody pinch me!

HOWIE  
Well, I'll be goddamned!

RAY  
(*whistles!*)

PATCH  
Well, grandma, looks like you've been holdin' out on me.

GERTRUDE  
It's a beaut, Louisa, a real beaut!

(LOUISA glares at Mayra while buttoning her dress.)

LOUISA  
Go away! I will never forget this, never, never!

MAXINE  
What I wanna know is how come a preachy ole Bible-back like you's got a tattoo?

LOUISA  
To please my mother.

MAYRA  
Mother...?

LOUISA  
A Mayan girl who danced with pythons. To protect my soul from evil, she had a viper  
carved on my bosom. (*pause*) There are religions from long ago. We worshipped in the  
Temple of Kukil Can, the sacred serpent.

MAYRA  
Please, let me see it again.

LOUISA

No! I have regretted it all my life, and so will you! So will you!

(LOUISA stomps off. Blackout.)

**SCENE 10:: HOT BUTTERED BUNS**

(PATCH is heard humming as LOUISA addresses the heavens.)

LOUISA

Mayra and I have not spoken for three days and nights. Oh, Rico, she is so headstrong, so wild, and her snakes are breeding everywhere!

(Crossfade to another area of the campsite where MAYRA approaches RAY.)

MAYRA

Please, could I have a cigarette?

RAY

Ain't yuh a little young to smoke?

MAYRA

I am old for my years.

RAY

*(handing her his cigarette)* Here, take it easy; don't inhale till you're used to it. *(pause)* Tobacco tastes great, don't it?

MAYRA

I would like you to kiss me the way you kiss Kiki NaConga.

RAY

Now, sugar, that ain't a good idea. If yuh can read my mind, yuh know I ain't at all comfortable 'bout that. You're just too young, an' besides, I'm a married man.

MAYRA

You already kissed me once.

RAY

Yeah, but that's only 'cause I'm grateful for all you've done for Max an' me.

MAYRA

I want another kiss. Please, just one.

RAY

Then you promise to be a good girl, an' leave ole Ray in peace?

(MAYRA draws RAY to her, kissing him passionately.)

RAY

Whoa, you're defrostin' way too fast for a lil' chickerino.

MAYRA

Kiss me, kiss me again...

RAY

Oh, baby, you're goin' down like hot buttered buns.

(MAYRA and RAY fall to the floor, moaning with orgasmic ecstasy as PATCH sings an operatic aria. Suddenly LOUISA enters, wheeling her camera.)

LOUISA

Mayra? Is that Mayra?!

RAY

What the hell? Jesus H!

MAYRA

Stop following me! Go away!

(PATCH ceases singing as RAY dashes off and MAYRA turns furiously to Louisa.)

MAYRA

Turn off that damn camera!

LOUISA

A poet records everything -- even lechery and deceit! Where are you going?!

MAYRA

Away from you! Look what you have done! Now Sarkhov is gone!

LOUISA

Never mind Sarkhov. Look at yourself, your tangled hair. Please, let me comb it.

(MAYRA sits sullenly as LOUISA combs her hair.)

LOUISA

I have missed you, Mayra.

MAYRA

Why? What do you want of me?!

LOUISA

I want you to be a true friend, to share everything I possess: all my stories, my remedies. Such a friend I would follow like a dog, weeping at her sorrows, laughing at her joys...

MAYRA

...spying on her lovers!

LOUISA

Oh, Mayra, I was so proud when you came. You were so generous with your gifts, so gentle and wise. That first night, when I saw your unmarked bosom, I thought: she is not the child I was, she is better. She is the child I *should* have been.

MAYRA

No! The child you *could* have been, *would* have been -- if you had courage, freedom!

LOUISA

Yes, but why did I keep you hidden? Why did I wait till I was desperate and afraid to die? Why didn't I know I had the power to see, to feel, to transform the world? But what would I have done with it?

MAYRA

Everything! You would have lovers, children, and great riches, and build a better carnival, the best in the world.! You will see, I will show you; I will show you how to live!

LOUISA

You have already shown me, but sometimes you make me feel...ashamed.

MAYRA

Ashamed...?

LOUISA

Of myself, of all I have missed, and of you. I try to have patience; I know you are young, but sometimes I feel the color rush to my face, a deep crimson blush.

MAYRA

And I blush for you! No one respects you! They say you do nothing but make bad movies and drool in your sleep. Kiki NaConga says you are useless.

LOUISA

Humph! Someone must sit and watch the peach trees blossom, the crows pecking the earth, the drifters spending their money to forget. Someone must dream of the past and pray for the future. Believe me, I am not useless. I am the one keeping the carnival alive.

MAYRA

It is *me* you must keep alive, me! Sometimes I feel that I am...fading, and I am tired of being The Cuban Conjuror. I want to be Greek! Or Egyptian!

LOUISA

You are an artist. You transcend the body to be anything you wish, anything you imagine. Before I became The Great Gambollini, I was a Persian princess, and before that a Spanish contessa.

MAYRA

Then I will be a queen, an Egyptian queen -- with veils of silk!

LOUISA

Be a good queen, Mayra. Remember that Sarkhov belongs to Kiki NaConga.

MAYRA

You are envious. You have forgotten how it feels to be desired.

LOUISA

Leave Sarkhov alone; we belong to Rico.

MAYRA

Rico, Rico! I am sick of the dead! Patch calls Rico a horny little toad; Helga says he had many lovers. Everyone knows he grew tired of your body, but no one will grow tired of mine!

(MAYRA struts off; LOUISA gazes heavenward.)

LOUISA

Oh, Rico, Rico, it is terrible to be young in this country. Children are like cotton candy: spun from sugar only to be licked and devoured.

(Fade out.)

### SCENE 11: SEARCHING FOR THE SHE-CAT

(The next evening. VERONICA is dancing, imitating animals inspired by carvings on the carnival carousel.)

VERONICA

Voici un lion, un tigre, un elephant!

(In another area, LOUISA addresses Rico.)

LOUISA

Mayra has removed her belongings from my trailer, and now I am searching, but I am not the only one searching. With my new zoom lens, I see everything.

(LOUISA directs her camera towards RAY who approaches HOWIE in another area of the campsite.)

RAY

Where's Mayra?

HOWIE

Ain't seen 'er since yesterday. Patch is steamin' 'cause she's doin' the kootch.

RAY

No kiddin'?

LOUISA

The kootch...?

HOWIE

Ronnie taught 'er the moves. She strips down an' shows 'em everythin' she's got.

RAY

Jesus, that lil' she-cat's got spunk.

HOWIE

Hell, last night she jumped me, then humped me till I keeled over.

RAY

Yeah?

LOUISA

*(gasps!)*

HOWIE

She does these quick little feelies with her tongue -- drives me plumb crazy,

LOUISA

Wicked Mayra, I must save her from sin!

(LOUISA aims her camera at PATCH approaching VERONICA who is miming more carousel animals.)

VERONICA

Voici un cheval, un zebre, une autruche!

PATCH

Where's Mayra?

VERONICA

Je ne sais pas.

PATCH

Ronnie, they got labor laws, an' I don't want that kid doin' the kootch! If I ever catch 'er buck naked again, you're both gonna get a lickin', you hear me?!

VERONICA

Fichez-nous la paix!

PATCH

We gotta find somethin' else for 'er. The fortune tellin' ain't workin' out. Maybe she oughtta start workin' with them snakes.

LOUISA

No!

VERONICA

C'est une profession bien dangereuse.

PATCH

She don't draw the line 'tween tellin' folks futures that's good, an' tellin' 'em stuff so bad they heave up their hot dogs.

LOUISA

Foolish Mayra! I must keep a closer watch. Oh, Mayra,...

(LOUISA focuses on MAXINE approaching GERTRUDE in another area of the campsite.)

LOUISA

...where's Mayra?

MAXINE

Where's Mayra!?

GERTRUDE

Last I saw she was a-bettin' the rubes at the pokerino stand. Poor suckers.

MAXINE

She's screwin' Ray! I caught 'em by the trap shoot.

GERTRUDE

Lord! Jesus, I'm sorry, Max. 'Course nothin' that kid does surprises me.

MAXINE

Good. 'Cause she's screwin' Howie too!

GERTRUDE

What?!

MAXINE

What'll we do? Shoot 'er, stab 'er, or drown 'er in the duck pond?

GERTRUDE

Maybe it's Howie we oughtta be a-drownin'!

MAXINE

Then we'll drown Ray!

LOUISA

Better yet! God forgive me, I must save my Mayra.

(Now LOUISA stands in the center of the three groupings (Patch and Veronica, Maxine and Gertrude, Ray and Howie), aiming her camera in dizzying circles.)

PATCH

*(to Veronica)* Seems lil' Mayra's taken a tumble with our boys.

MAXINE

*(to Gertrude)* Well, hell, they ain't the only ones.

HOWIE

*(to Ray)* We ain't the only ones.

PATCH

*(to Veronica)* Howie's seen 'er with geezers old enough to be 'er grandpappy.

LOUISA

No!

VERONICA

No!

HOWIE

*(to Ray)* Last one was cross-eyed with a gimp leg.

GERTRUDE

*(to Maxine)* She's a-booizin' too.

PATCH

*(to Veronica)* Smelled somethin' on 'er breath last night,....

PATCH

...whiskey.

GERTRUDE

Whiskey.

LOUISA

Oh, Mayra!

PATCH

*(to Veronica)* Seems she's got this terrible cravin'.

HOWIE

*(to Ray)* You ain't gonna be 'er stud an' lose Max?

MAXINE

*(to Gertrude)* Trouble is, she flashes that sassy lil' ass, an' their spark plugs catch fire.

GERTRUDE

*(to Maxine)* Honey, it's always sex that sours the cream!

PATCH

*(to Veronica)* No wonder morale's gettin' outta hand.

HOWIE

*(to Ray)* We're finally a class operation, an' shit...

HOWIE

...I wanna quit!

GERTRUDE

I wanna quit!

PATCH

*(to Veronica)* Well, one ray of sunshine...

GERTRUDE

*(to Maxine)* Like Patch's been a-sayin'...

HOWIE

*(to Ray)* Least we can...

HOWIE                  GERTRUDE                  PATCH  
 ...thank God for Louisa.    Thank God for Louisa.    Thank God for Louisa.

  LOUISA  
 What?!

  PATCH  
*(to Veronica)* Least she's givin' Mayra hell.

  GERTRUDE  
*(to Maxine)* Louisa speaks 'er mind!

  HOWIE  
*(to Ray)* Louisa ain't afraid of nothin', no sirree.

  MAXINE  
*(to Gertrude)* 'Course they both belong in the booby hatch.

                  HOWIE  
 Birds of a feather!

  GERTRUDE  
 Birds of a feather!

## SCENE 12: HEART OF THE MIDWAY

(Lights reveal MAYRA, dressed in a glittery kootch costume, singing and gyrating sensually, with snakes wrapped around her arms.)

  MAYRA  
*Ou la la, ou la la,  
 The girl from Once Before;  
 Ou la la, ou la la,  
 She'll lick your stick amour!*

(Crossfade to LOUISA addressing the heavens.)

  LOUISA  
 Rico, Rico, do not despair. Innocence can be reclaimed. Today Patch purchased a bright new carousel that revolves against the prevailing winds, countering the Earth's rotation. At the heart of the midway the universe contracts! Time reverses! And everyone... remembers.

(LOUISA wheels her camera towards MAYRA.)

MAYRA

*Ou la la, ou la la,  
The girl who's old and young;  
Ou la la, ou la la,  
She'll screw you till you come!*

LOUISA

You shameless harlot! Remove those vipers and cover yourself!

MAYRA

Patch thinks I am too young to dance with Lulu Leroux, so I am starting my own kooch!

LOUISA

How can you let strangers -- drunken fools with foul breath -- Oh, Mayra!

MAYRA

I have done what you wished! You summoned me to protect you and I have! Now I am the one they hate! They no longer even think about you!

LOUISA

That is not how I wish to be forgotten!

MAYRA

Why do you expect only virtue? I can only be myself who is you -- so why can't you remember? Remember!

LOUISA

But I do remember. That is my sorrow. *(pause)* Come here, Mayra, look at me, look into my eyes. Can't you see? Go back, go back to my wedding night. Rico is gently unbuttoning my dress, pulling it past my shoulders, my breasts, and then he sees...

LOUISA

...the tattoo.

MAYRA

The tattoo.

LOUISA

He despises serpents of any kind. His flesh grows cold, and he...he never touches me again.

MAYRA

Never...?

*(LOUISA shakes her head sadly.)*

MAYRA

And you...? Did you find other men?

(LOUISA shakes her head and sighs.)

MAYRA

Oh, Louisa, my poor Louisa. Has no one ever...? *(pause)* I hate him!! I hate Rico! Why didn't you leave him? Why?!

LOUISA

He loved me in other ways. Through Rico I converted to the Holy Catholic Church, and he was kind and generous, my friend unto death. For me that was enough.

MAYRA

But I want more, much more! To taste, to smell, to feel the tremors, the eruptions like volcanoes. Please, Louisa, let me show you, let me touch your breasts, your belly...

LOUISA

No! Stop! *(pause as she shudders)* Oh, Mayra, I had the courage to summon you, but to live with you... Why...? Why can we not comfort each other?

MAYRA

Because you won't let me be myself!

LOUISA

You are so insistent on growing up...

MAYRA

Yes!

LOUISA

Then take responsibility -- for your snakes! They are molting, shedding their skins in our beds. It is disgusting!

MAYRA

You! You are the snake! You shed your skin layer by layer, but when you finally find your youth, you want to keep her in a cage.

LOUISA

If that is how you feel, perhaps it is time for you to...return.

MAYRA

No! Never! You think I need you to stay, but I have seen how you mix the herbs and medicines, and now I can make my own. It is only when you sleep too long that I...I feel my flesh growing cold.

LOUISA

Medicines are not enough. You must have faith -- where there is darkness, you must sow light, where there is sadness, joy...

MAYRA

...where there is age, youth! Death, life! I only want to live, to live!

LOUISA

Then come with me. Patch has invited us to ride the new carousel. Lulu Leroux has created a dance to honor her maiden voyage. But first you must put on your dress!

MAYRA

No! I hate it!

LOUISA

As you wish, but then you may not ride the carousel.

MAYRA

You cannot stop me!

LOUISA

I should whip you!

MAYRA

You would have to catch me first, and hah! You are too old! To old!!

(MAYRA runs pursued by LOUISA. Then suddenly MAYRA turns, grasping Louisa's hand and spins her in circles!)

LOUISA

Stop it, stop it! What are you doing?!

MAYRA

Now *you* are the carousel, an ancient one-horse carousel!

LOUISA

Helllllllp me! Hellllllllllp!!!

(MAYRA releases LOUISA who trips and falls. The TROUPERS enter, responding to her cries.)

HOWIE  
What the hell's goin' on?!

MAXINE  
Sweet Jesus!

VERONICA  
Vous en avez tue combien aujourd'hui?

PATCH  
Louisa, are you all right?

MAYRA  
She forbids me to ride the carousel. She is envious of my youth, my powers!

PATCH  
You shouldn't hurt an' ole lady like that. Ronnie, Gert, help me get 'er to bed.

LOUISA  
No! I can walk by myself.

(LOUISA staggers to her cot.)

MAYRA  
Now we can ride the carousel!

MAXINE  
I ain't ridin' with no husband-stealin' hussy!

GERTRUDE  
You tell 'er, Max!

VERONICA  
Foutaise!

MAYRA  
They crave me.

MAXINE  
Dream on, lil' girl.

MAYRA  
My wishes have great force.

MAXINE  
Yeah? Well try stoppin' this!

(MAXINE moves to punch MAYRA who instinctively avoids the blow.)

MAYRA  
Hah!

HOWIE  
Doggone!

PATCH  
Cut it out, Max!

(MAXINE swings again, but MAYRA ducks until RAY intervenes, grasping Maxine's arm, pulling her aside.)

RAY  
Now, stop fightin', both of yuh! Listen, Mayra, you gotta leave us alone, yuh hear?

MAYRA  
But you want me, you desire me.

RAY  
Yeah, sugar, but it ain't right, and you can't make me.

MAXINE  
An' if you ever try again, I'm gonna cut out your heart -- if you got a heart. Come on, Ray, let's go.

(MAXINE and RAY exit.)

GERTRUDE  
Time to start a-findin' a fella of your own, and that don't mean Howie or them geezers at the kootch!

PATCH  
The kootch is off limits! And there'll be no ridin' the carousel 'cause I ain't got all the parts.

MAYRA  
I will make it move!

HOWIE  
Goddamn! Can yuh do that?

MAYRA  
I can do anything!

PATCH  
Come on, y'all break it up! Me an' Mayra are gonna have ourselves a lil' talk.

(The TROUPERS exit, leaving PATCH and MAYRA who shouts after them.)

MAYRA

Hah! You are all afraid! I can see you in the mirror maze, touching yourselves, touching each other! I see everything you do, everything you think!

PATCH

*(pause)* Listen, Mayra, ‘member when we had that talk? When everybody was runnin’ out on me, an’ we were thinkin’ of bein’ a team? Well, you knew what I was thinkin’ then an’ you know now, so come on, tell ole Patch what’s happenin’.

MAYRA

I will not go back!

PATCH

Back where? We carnies are a clan; we’ll take you wherever you wanna go.

MAYRA

I must go where she goes.

PATCH

Who? Louisa? Aw, she ain’t goin’ nowhere without you and you oughtta treat her better. She’s taken quite a shine to you. ‘Course she’s gettin’ on, an’ nobody lives forever.

MAYRA

I have seen her valise. Inside is a wooden box she calls the Box of Myself. My snakes guard her secrets, but if something happens and she goes away, you must open it. Promise me you will open it!

PATCH

Sure, ‘an speakin’ of snakes, how ‘bout you workin’ up a snake act instead of the fortune tellin’? I can get my hands on a twenty foot rock python.

MAYRA

Diamondbacks are better.

PATCH

Yeah?

MAYRA

Twenty snakes: coiled to spring. Then I will make them dance!

PATCH

Yeah!

MAYRA

Later I will eat them alive!

PATCH

You'll what...?

MAYRA

Eat them -- like the mother of Kiki NaConga.

PATCH

Jesus, Mayra, you ain't no geek. I mean, it's just plain sickenin'. Hell, even the pros don't do it sober.

MAYRA

I will do it sober.

PATCH

Why? Why would you wanna do such a terrible thing?

MAYRA

To show Rico! To show Rico how to love my snakes!

(MAYRA snatches a snake and bites off its head as  
PATCH stands agape.)

MAYRA

Hah! There! You see! You can call me "Carnita the Hungry Chaquita". Hurry, hurry, hurry! See the world's greatest geek! Watch Carnita eat the meat of anything living or dead. She even eats old ladies like leftover turkeys.

PATCH

That ain't funny, Mayra!

MAYRA

And for ten cents extra, you can take home the bones! Ha, ha!

PATCH

You cut that out! You're actin' crazy, and don't you ever hurt Louisa again, you hear?!

MAYRA

Go away!

PATCH

An' get some sleep. You ain't lookin' too good.

(PATCH exits as MAYRA falls to her knees.)

MAYRA

Please hear my prayer, Rico. Look at me, at your young Louisa. How could you refuse to love me? You betrayed me in life, but in death you must help me, help me survive. Are the medicines too weak? Am I not praying enough? Sometimes I cannot concentrate and sometimes my dreams are so wicked -- we devour each other, the old and the young. So please, Rico, make the dreams go away, and your young Louisa will learn to love you again, and she will learn to love...herself.

(MAYRA crawls onto the cot beside Louisa as PATCH is heard humming a lullaby.)

### SCENE 13: THE MUTINY

(Later that night. The TROUPERS, carrying lanterns, are convening a secret meeting. LOUISA is roused and slips out of her cot to eavesdrop, leaving MAYRA sleeping.)

LOUISA

Shhh, Rico, I am awakened by the sound of voices. They are calling a special meeting, but why are we are not invited?

(The TROUPERS have surrounded PATCH.)

PATCH

So what's goin' on? Why are we whisperin'?

HOWIE

'Cause we don't wanna wake the kid. Look, Patch, I don't know how to tell yuh this, but Trudy an' me, well,...hell.

GERTRUDE

We're a-pullin' out! Gonna get us a horse farm near Charlotte.

PATCH

*(to Howie)* You bum, you're a born carnie! You ain't gonna live on no farm!

HOWIE

I'm sure as hell gonna try.

MAXINE

Listen, Patch, I got an offer to team up with the D'Olimpio Brothers. It ain't a class outfit yet, but Ray an' me, we need a change.

PATCH

Now, lookit...

MAXINE

No deal this time, Patch! Consider this a week's notice!

VERONICA

J'irai probablement dans les Alpes. Tout est bien finit bien!

PATCH

Tell me this ain't happenin', not again! I'll get Mayra. She'll do somethin'!

MAXINE

Hell, she's the reason we're leavin'!

GERTRUDE

An' them damn snakes is a-breedin' everywhere!

HOWIE

Listen, Patch, you could retire, go back to Florida, start havin' some fun.

GERTRUDE

Don't be a-lookin' so down at the mouth.

HOWIE

You could sell the trailers to Earl Fine's outfit, an' the rides. Hell, we're all rich, even grandma's rich.

PATCH

But what about Mayra? Where's she gonna go?

HOWIE

Hell, Mayra could find a good agent just about anywhere. Call Buddy Cataldo. He'll jump at the chance.

MAXINE

Cheer up, Patch. If yuh don't like Florida, you could keep singin', join an opera company. You got quite a reputation.

PATCH

So when are you leavin'?

HOWIE

Like Max said -- consider this a week's notice.

RAY

Sorry, boss.

(The TROUPERS exit as PATCH sings, and LOUISA approaches.)

PATCH

*She told me I would be a king,  
Three rings of gold to call my home;  
I asked her where I'd find my queen,  
She said your heart's your own.*

(LOUISA pats Patch on the shoulder. HE covers her hand with his own, sighs sadly, then departs.)

#### SCENE 14: THE RETURNING

(MAYRA has awakened, and approaches LOUISA.)

MAYRA

Louisa...? Louisa, I have been looking for you.

LOUISA

Mutiny! I cannot let them leave again! Forgive me, Mayra, but to save the carnival, I must gather my strength. I have been squandering it all on myself.

MAYRA

Have you...? Have you stopped praying?

LOUISA

I never stopped praying, but now I am praying for your return.

MAYRA

But if I leave, they will kill you.

LOUISA

No, I will pretend to be dying, then they will search for my secrets. They will open the Box of Myself.

MAYRA

Oh, Louisa, I...I am feeling so strange.

LOUISA

Already the skin of your hands is transparent, I can see through the veins to the bones.

MAYRA

I knew you would stop wanting me.

LOUISA

Wanting you? Oh, Mayra, through you I found new feelings, and re-visited the old, and now, finally, finally, I am living in the present more than the past.

MAYRA

Will I become a mist, a memory?

LOUISA

You will always live in me, in everyone you know. We carry your innocence, your courage.

MAYRA

Will...will anyone miss me?

LOUISA

Oh, my dear Mayra, my sweet lovely child, please listen: you must never think your life did not matter. You have been loved.

MAYRA

*(pause, weeping)* Will I feel pain?

LOUISA

Only the sorrow of passing, then sleep will follow.

MAYRA

And after sleep...?

LOUISA

A bliss we cannot fathom.

MAYRA

*(pause)* Please, Louisa, won't you kiss me, kiss me good bye.

(THEY kiss tenderly, then MAYRA grasps the sides of Louisa's head, covering her ears.)

LOUISA

What...what are you doing?

MAYRA

Sucking the soul from your breast!!!

(In a burst of energy, MAYRA presses her lips to LOUISA'S, muffling her scream, hideously sucking her life force with a snake-hissing sound. Then suddenly THEY spring apart, falling to the floor! Blackout.)

### **SCENE 15: THE AWAKENING**

(The next morning. The TROUPERS surround LOUISA lying on a cot, covered by a blanket.)

HOWIE

I found a clearin' in the woods. Who's gonna help me dig the grave?

PATCH

Wait till she's gone, for chrissake! She's still breathin'!

MAXINE

Here's her suitcase. She ain't got much stuff.

PATCH

Gimme that. Mayra said she's got a box fulla secrets.

(PATCH opens a wooden box filled with official papers and vials of medicines.)

GERTRUDE

Lord, lookit them medicines. Pure snake oil!

PATCH

Well, looky here, a birth certificate: Louisa Mayra Rios-Benitez. Chihuahua, Mexico, Septiembre 15, 1803.

GERTRUDE

So they really was related!

HOWIE

Well, I'll be damned!

MAXINE

Lemme see that. 1803? That's too old! It's 1933 now, so up to 1903's a hundred years, subtract three from thirty-three...

PATCH

A hundred an' thirty! She's a hundred an' thirty!

HOWIE  
No way!

RAY  
(*laughs!*)

VERONICA  
Foutaise!

GERTRUDE

It's gotta be her granny's certificate. Hell, her great-granny's!

HOWIE

Patch, how old were they when you joined up?

PATCH

Let's see. That's 1908, twenty-five years ago. Rico died two years later, an' he was old, past eighty. Don't remember exactly.

MAXINE

Well, how old was she?

PATCH

Old, hell, she's always been old.

MAXINE

Here's her marriage certificate.

PATCH

Gimme that! Louisa Mayra Rios-Benitez et Enrico Gambollini, El contrato matrimonial, Mayo 5, 1840, Tijuana. He was twenty an' she was -- Jesus! Thirty-seven! If she was thirty-seven in 1840, add sixty years to the end of the century. That's ninety-seven plus thirty-three an' that makes...

MAXINE and PATCH

...one hundred an' thirty!

(Pause as the TROUPERS ponder this.)

GERTRUDE  
Lordy, lord!

RAY  
(*whistles!*)

HOWIE  
Doggone!

PATCH

Y'all thinkin' what I'm thinkin'? *(pause)* What we got here is the oldest old lady in the whole goddamn country!

HOWIE

In the whole goddamn world!

GERTRUDE

This country could use an old lady! Hey, gimme them medicines. If they kept Louisa tickin', they'll keep us a-tickin' too!

HOWIE

When's 'er next birthday?

PATCH

September fifteenth...

GERTRUDE

Oh, Lordy, that's ten days from now. She'll be...

MAXINE

...dead! What the hell good's she gonna do us dead?

HOWIE

How 'bout we dunk 'er in water?

GERTRUDE

Try a-ticklin' her toes.

MAXINE

Ray, gimme some of your whiskey. Come on, I know yuh got some.

*(MAXINE snatches the flask from Ray and pours the whiskey down LOUISA'S throat.)*

MAXINE

Down the hatch, granny! Wake up, wake up...

*(Pause, then LOUISA sits bolt upright!)*

LOUISA

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!

PATCH

Well, thank the Lord!

HOWIE

Pipe down, for chrissake!

GERTRUDE

Louisa, honey, can yuh hear me?

VERONICA

Louisa? Vous avez bien dormi?

LOUISA

Where...? Where is Mayra?

HOWIE

She musta quit, took off in the middle of the night. Ain't nobody seen 'er.

MAXINE

We thought you was a goner.

LOUISA

No, no, I am still here, praying for our salvation.

GERTRUDE

*(laughing)* Ha, ha, ha!

HOWIE

Heh, heh.

LOUISA

You do not believe me, you have never believed me. You think the old have no powers.

PATCH

Speakin' of age, just how old are you, Louisa?

LOUISA

I forget; I should be dead.

PATCH

Not yet, grandma! We got a big birthday party planned, an' guess who's gonna be the star attraction?

LOUISA

I refuse to wear tights!

PATCH

Anythin' you say! We're invitin' the whole damn country: the papers, the mayor, even the president. In ten days you're gonna be one hundred an' thirty!

LOUISA

If the heat does not kill me.

(Instantly, VERONICA employs her feathers as a fan.)

PATCH

Hurry, hurry, hurry!

LOUISA

The sun is blinding,...

(HOWIE fetches a parasol.)

PATCH

Step right up, ladies and gents!

LOUISA

...a Coca-Cola would be very refreshing,...

(GERTRUDE retrieves a coke.)

PATCH

See the miracle of modern medicine: The World's Oldest Old Lady!

LOUISA

...and my feet are killing me.

PATCH

Watch 'er eat, watch 'er sleep, an' listen to 'er talk about the good ole days!

(HOWIE shades LOUISA with a parasol, GERTRUDE offers a Coke, and MAXINE and RAY massage her feet.)

LOUISA

Ahhh...

PATCH

An' for ten cents extra, buy a bottle of Gambollini's Elixir of Eternal Life! The Joy Juice of Juvenation! The Serum for Survival!

(Music swells as LOUISA slowly stands, then starts marching followed by the TROUPERS who parade across the stage, then freeze.)

LOUISA

And so, Mayra, Gambollini's International Amusements has a new star. For how long only God knows, but finally, finally! I am leading the parade!

(From a distance LOUISA spies MAYRA dressed in her original white dress.)

MAYRA

*Oh, circus, my wagon,  
Oh, circus, my dream,...*

LOUISA and MAYRA

*Oh, circus, my circus,  
Is all that it seems.*

(MAYRA and LOUISA gesture towards each other as the lights fade.)

*End of Play*



