

THE ISLAND OF NO TOMORROWS

(a postmodern fable with songs)

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*“The hour of vengeance falls, and I love you.
Body of skin, of moss, of eager and firm milk.
Oh, the goblets of the breasts! Oh, the eyes of absence!
Oh, the roses of the pubis! Oh, your voice, slow and sad!*

*Body of my woman, I will persist in your grace.
My thirst, my boundless desire, my shifting road!
Dark river-beds where the eternal thirst flows
And weariness follows, and the infinite ache.”*

Pablo Neruda

CHARACTERS:

(one man; seven women)

DON HILARDO HIDALGO DE LA CONQUISTA, a poet-farmer; age 34 through 49

ESPERANZA DE LA CONQUISTA, Don Hilardo's daughter; from infancy to age 15

MARIA DELUNA SANTERA, the manager of Villa Leche; age 22 through 37

PITA THEOPHILUS, the nurse of Villa Leche; age 20 through 35

CONSUELO ALPHONSO, the cook and gardener of Villa Leche; age 25 through 40

ISABELLE BEAUMONT, the seamstress of Villa Leche; age 19 through 34

ROZA KAZAKU, the laundress of Villa Leche; age 21 through 36

GABRIELLA MASTRODOMENICO, the composer of Villa Leche; age 40 through 55

NOTE:

The role of Esperanza is intended to be played by a young adult woman who remains on stage, evolving from birth to adolescence.

Isla Fortuna is part of Latin American, the citizens of mixed racial ancestry; to indicate this and suggest a sense of estrangement through "slanted speech," the actors should employ Hispanic accents.

TIME:

The present

PLACE:

Isla Fortuna, a fictitious island nation off the coast of Argentina. A stylized set suggests a hospital room, the study in Don Hilardo's home, the estate of "Villa Leche," and a Los Angeles nightclub.

ACT I**SCENE 1**

(A hospital where MARIA, dressed in mourning, and nurse PITA observe a covered corpse on a gurney gliding past. As natives of Isla Fortuna, they speak with Spanish accents.)

PITA

The poor senora, too frail for bearing children.

MARIA

Where is Father Morales?! He should have given last rites!

PITA

If you find him, send him to the nursery. The infant's heart: it is...

MARIA

What?

PITA

Defective.

MARIA

Is she...?

PITA

Not yet. They have replaced it with an artificial one.

MARIA

In one so small? Is it possible?

PITA

Wagers are being taken as to how long she will last. Doctor Faustino is down for six hours; the nurses give her three. Already two have passed.

MARIA

Then we must hurry with the baptism!

PITA

Without a priest?

MARIA

We have no choice.

(MARIA follows Nurse PITA to a bed where DON HILARDO stands gazing at his daughter. A pulsating red light can be seen beneath the sheets.)

DON HILARDO

I removed the bars from her crib; it is cruel to glimpse the world from a prison. *(pause)* Look at her: from womb to tomb: the life span of a sneeze. What does God do with infant souls? They are too small to fill his belly, so does he spit them out like fishbones?

MARIA

Shush, Don Hilardo, we must baptize the child. What is her name?

DON HILARDO

Why bother? She will never hear it.

MARIA

She has a soul, a privilege that deserves a name. Hurry, God is waiting.

DON HILARDO

God is greedy. He already has my wife; now he wants my Esperanza.

MARIA

Esperanza! *(splattering the child)* I baptize you! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,...

MARIA

...amen.

PITA

Amen!

DON HILARDO

Leave us, Maria! I do not want her brief life spoiled by pious platitudes or the sight of your black dress. I want only the nurse here, with her white frock and smiling face.

(MARIA, offended, marches off.)

DON HILARDO

(to Pita) Do you sing, senora? Will you let her hear a song before she dies?

(PITA sings an inappropriate nonsense lullaby.)

PITA

*Poco a poco, two pussy pies,
Hot on the stove attracting flies.
Cool them on the window sill;
The wolf comes by to have his fill.*

(PITA hums as MARIA hovers nearby, addressing the audience.)

MARIA

But Esperanza refused to die. Two weeks later she was sent home. New wagers were made, and Doctor Faustino said she would not last the month.

SCENE 2

(As MARIA continues speaking, DON HILARDO and PITA appear staring at a computer screen in his study.)

MARIA

Don Hilardo took nurse Pita with him to help monitor the heart on a computer he kept in his study. Pita was weaning her own child, but Don Hilardo asked her to...

MARIA

...hold on.

DON HILARDO

Hold on...

DON HILARDO

...another week, keep it flowing, and eat plenty of pastries to sweeten the cream. Now go, freshen her linens.

(PITA scurries off.)

MARIA

That is when Don Hilardo called me...

DON HILARDO

Maria!

MARIA

...in a way he had never called me before.

DON HILARDO

Maria!

MARIA

There was no tenderness, no longing, only...

DON HILARDO

Maria!

(MARIA enters the study.)

DON HILARDO

I have made a decision: Esperanza and I are growing too attached. The hacienda on my sheep ranch -- you and Pita must take her there. My computer can monitor her pulse from here.

MARIA

Please, Don Hilardo, you are still in mourning; your mind is distraught.

DON HILARDO

My dreams are unbearable! Last night I was lying on a marble slab, dying of degenerative organs -- my liver, my lungs, everything shriveling to a cluster of black beans. The doctors were hovering, sneering like devils. One whispered, "It was not so much her death as its anticipation." He is right! If only she would hurry and get on with it, but no, no! Every morning she is wide awake and howling for Pita's tits. She may go on another week, a month, but I will not! Don't you see? (*gesturing to the computer*) This way only bright electric peaks will flatten and expire, not a little cherub whose fat bottom fits into the cup of my hand, whose amber eyes are already a reflection of my own.

MARIA

My poor Don Hilardo, you must reconsider.

DON HILARDO

I shall inform the doctors that she is gone -- perished.

MARIA

No!

DON HILARDO

Forgive me; I am desperate. Attend to Esperanza; make her happy.

MARIA

What can I say?

DON HILARDO

Say "yes" if you care for her, for me.

MARIA

How can you question...?

DON HILARDO

Then say it, say "yes!"

MARIA

Yes.

DON HILARDO

Bless you! First send instructions for her room to be painted yellow, the brightest primrose; then shutter the windows to shield her from darkness. She must only behold beautiful visions and hear melodious sounds: Her eyes, ears, nose; whatever she tastes and touches, every sensation must be pleasing to the soul.

MARIA

We must always be cheerful?

DON HILARDO

And always singing: every sentence, every word, from this moment forward!

MARIA

You are joking, of course.

DON HILARDO

Sing or be silent. Sing light notes, airy tunes: boleros, waltzes, more allegro than andante. We must also employ more wet nurses. Pita has a cousin, Consuelo. Her child is nearly weaned.

MARIA

Ah, but can she sing?

DON HILARDO

You must all wear colorful dresses, long and flowing like angels. Everything must be well formed, harmonious, a refuge of graceful symmetries in space. If she is one of the deficient of this world, then at least this world will be our ideal of heaven.

MARIA

Don Hilardo's ideal of heaven!

DON HILARDO

Find enough wet nurses to quench her every thirst! Pita and Consuelo may be drying up. She might need more, three, perhaps four.

MARIA

Why this obsession with wet nurses? Why not use formula?

DON HILARDO

Why not use cows?! Do we suckle our infants on udders? No! Mother's milk is the primordial nectar, the liqueur of life: the temperature always warm, the supply always generous, the holiest of holy waters. Think of Esperanza: first deprived of her natural mother and then her natural heart. At least I can replace one mother with many, all brimming with fountains of living tissue! Find them, Maria, find nursing mothers of every creed and color. Leaving their families is a sacrifice, but there will be compensations: generous wages and the comforts of my estate, though they must forego invasive technology -- no televisions, no computers, no phones. They will perform domestic duties, but nothing too strenuous, nothing to upset the glandular plenitude. Furthermore, I shall name the estate in their honor, in honor of all motherhood: I shall name it Villa Leche! City of Milk!

MARIA

And I shall name it Villa Loca: City of Lunatics!

DON HILARDO

Villa Leche will show God what his paradise should be. He has made such a piss pot of Earth, we can no longer trust him with heaven!

SCENE 3

(MARIA and DON HILARDO remain in his study as lights reveal Villa Leche where ESPERANZA sleeps in a bed bounded by pillows. As MARIA speaks, PITA hangs "Madonna and Child" paintings, and ISABELLE, ROZA, and CONSUELO enter, wearing long, colorful skirts.)

MARIA

Villa Loca was a fortress with a well stocked library, but sealed from the world by Don Hilardo. Outside was the treeless pampas; inside was Esperanza's yellow room where Pita placed reproductions of Don Hilardo's favorite paintings. (*To Don Hilardo*) I have hired a nursing seamstress to sew her frocks; a nursing laundress to wash the linens; Pita's cousin, Consuelo, will serve as the nursing gardener and cook the mothers' meals; and Pita will remain the nursing nurse.

DON HILARDO

Bless you, Maria.

MARIA

Not a single man among all these women? You will have to let them out at night.

DON HILARDO

Dogs are let out at night. Our mothers must take vows of chastity.

MARIA

I shall keep the accounts and text my reports to you daily.

DON HILARDO

No texting, no e-mail, no electronic trails of any kind. You may bring your reports to my home or leave them in the postbox by the gate.

MARIA

As you wish. They have all signed their contracts agreeing to remain at Villa Loca...

DON HILARDO

Leche!

MARIA

...until Esperanza's heart...fails.

DON HILARDO

There must be a clause covering chastity. Nothing must distract them from their nurturing instincts.

MARIA

I won't sign it!

DON HILARDO

You are not expected to. After all, you are barren.

(An infant's wail is heard as MARIA enters Villa Leche to address the MOTHERS, standing at attention, beyond Esperanza's hearing.)

MARIA

Crib rails are forbidden, so someone must be in attendance at all times to adjust the pillows. Our task is to form a paradise where all language is sung. I have named the language "Speaksong." Now go, sing to Esperanza.

ROZA

I told you, senora, I only know nursery rhymes.

CONSUELO

Me too.

MARIA

Then sing them!

(The MOTHERS flutter around Esperanza's crib, overlapping their songs, increasing their volumes.)

PITA

*Poco a poco, four pussy pies,
Hot on the stove attracting flies.
Cool them on the window sill;
The wolf comes by to have his fill!*

CONSUELO

*My cheek to your cheek,
Dimple to dimple;
If only we were born this way,
Oh, wouldn't life be simple?*

ROZA

*Smooth out the tucks,
Smooth out the wrinkles;
Wash the sheets
And dry the sheets
Whenever baby tinkles.*

ISABELLE

*Where are my bloomers
With stockings to match,
Spun from the silk in the cat-pillar patch?
Cat-pillar, cat-pillar, where did you go?
Why did you tie all your threads in a bow?*

(The singing fades as MARIA returns to DON HILARDO.)

MARIA

Your paradise has backfired! Your songbirds are screeching cuckoos! The same idiotic rhymes over and over until even Esperanza is retching!

DON HILARDO

Then I will hire a composer. If they have something to say, she will put it to music -- fresh and inspired!

MARIA

Where will you find such a fool?

DON HILARDO

You will find her. It should be simple enough; there are always poor musicians.

MARIA

Does it have to be another woman?

DON HILARDO

Another woman is another mother.

MARIA

Esperanza has enough mothers, and enough milk to flood the pampas! Consuelo and Roza are wearing ice packs.

DON HILARDO

Ice packs...?

MARIA

To keep their balloons from bursting. Since Esperanza is nursing from four mothers, she takes only a little from each breast. We have a rotation system: Roza and Isabelle are scheduled for one breast each every two hours. Then Pita and Consuelo the next two hours and so on. They pump out what she does not drink.

DON HILARDO

Pump it out? Into bottles?

MARIA

Yes.

DON HILARDO

These bottles -- what do you do with them?

MARIA

Throw them out; the milk sours.

DON HILARDO

From now on you must save it -- every drop! Churn it into blocks of butter; separate the curds for cheese!

MARIA

What?! You should hear yourself: your paradise is a dairy farm! Moo, moooooo.

DON HILARDO

Ridicule does not become you, Maria. What a pity you cannot know the joy of feeding new life.

MARIA

No, only the pain of feeding an obsession. Perhaps I should leave...

DON HILARDO

(embracing her) No, please, Maria, my precious, my sweet, you cannot abandon me. You are my emissary: my eyes and ears. If I am a brute, it is only the weight of my responsibility: the fate of an infant whose destiny has been twisted by the vanity of doctors. They tricked me, Maria. When I said save her, I did not mean tear out her heart; I did not mean stitch her veins and arteries to a pump and pinwheel that will snap and turn her blue.

MARIA

But she is *not* blue! She is flushed with life, and so lovely, such a miracle; she would inspire your poetry. Please, Don Hilardo, bring her home and trust in God's mercy.

DON HILARDO

I prefer to trust in his irony. Forgive me, Maria, I am angry, vengeful, probably infectious. Please stay at Villa Leche. Obey my instructions and find a composer, a woman.

MARIA

Someone mature.

DON HILARDO

A grandmother!

MARIA

Someone educated, someone who can discuss something beside the tortures of childbirth!

DON HILARDO

You must triumph over envy, Maria. It has no place at Villa Leche.

MARIA

Why not? It was founded on pride.

DON HILARDO

Pity.

MARIA

Pride! And fear.

DON HILARDO

And love. Tomorrow: post notices in the papers. Soon our mothers will be singing like divas!

SCENE 4

(In an isolated area, GABRIELLA a middle-aged soprano, sings to the wind.)

GABRIELLA

*Once in old Fortunia,
I found a red petunia.
Now I think it might have been
A mirage, a mirage.*

SCENE 5

(In Villa Leche outside the range of Esperanza's hearing, CONSUELO sits, making squirting sounds, squeezing an arch-stream of milk from her breast into a large jar. MARIA approaches, her notebook in hand.)

CONSUELO

Lucky you, Maria, queen of the castle.

MARIA

Ha! The queen is only a court jester, juggling the accounts.

CONSUELO

Try juggling these melons -- ten pounds each. I'd chop them off tomorrow if my Pepe didn't want his nibbles.

MARIA

Is it painful nursing Esperaza?

CONSUELO

No, no, she goes right for the root. Sometimes for a treat, I dip them in honey. Pita smears hers with molasses.

MARIA

Is it a competition?

CONSUELO

A little game we play.

MARIA

Still, it must please you to be so close. She is always so happy to see you. Her eyes grow wide and her little hands open and close.

CONSUELO

Poor Maria, I would loan you one of mine if I could.

MARIA

I don't want it!

CONSUELO

I know a virgin in Santa Cruz who made herself milk.

MARIA

No...?

CONSUELO

In a drought, people will do anything, ha, ha!

SCENE 6

(MARIA speaks as she returns to DON HILARDO'S study where HE is interviewing GABRIELLA.

MARIA

After six candidates, Gabriella was chosen as the composer of Villa Leche.

DON HILARDO

Your music is too melancholy. Increase the tempo and remember: a dying child is listening, a child who has streaming through her veins the fiery blood of the Conquistas. Her ancestors destroyed an empire, but you, Maria, and the mothers are building a small one of your own.

MARIA

Don Hilardo is the architect; we provide the plumbing.

DON HILARDO

Shush, Maria! (*to Gabriella*) I am afraid you will need forbearance. Maria was an orphan -- half Indian, half Argentine -- and though I have given her authority over the other women, but she may need the wisdom of your years.

MARIA

I have managed well enough without it!

DON HILARDO

And sometimes she needs a good scolding! (*swatting Maria's backside*) Now go! Sing to my child! Sing to my little Conquista!

SCENE 7

(Infant wailing sounds grow and subside as the MOTHERS stand by Esperanza's bedside. They are joined by GABRIELLA and MARIA.)

MARIA

(whispering) Well, Gabriella...? *Sing!*

GABRIELLA

*Here lies the infant, Esperanza,
Little muse of my little stanza.*

(ROZA and PITA applaud.)

MARIA

Shush! *(to Gabriella, whisper-singing)* *I hope you can do better than that!*

GABRIELLA

*Esperanza, Esperanza,
Lovely little sleeping child,
Esperanza, Esperanza,
You dream in a world
Of yellow skies.*

*May I introduce myself?
I am the one who fills the air
With new vibrations
To brush away your fears,
So you'll someday see the sun,
So you'll someday see the sun,
So you'll someday see the sun,
Above the rainbows.*

GABRIELLA, PITA, ROZA, ISABELLE, CONSUELO

*Esperanza, Esperanza,
Lovely little sleeping child,
Esperanza, Esperanza,
You dream in a world
Of yellow skies.*

(After the song MARIA steps aside.)

MARIA

While Esperanza was dozing, I called the mothers together. GABRIELLA says you must each be given a set of notes with which to express yourselves.

(GABRIELLA sings each mother's notes, conducting as the MOTHERS repeat them.)

GABRIELLA

(to Pita) La, la, la, la, la.

PITA

La, la, la, la, la.

GABRIELLA

(to Consuelo) Lee, lee, lee, lee, lee.

CONSUELO

Lee, lee, lee, lee, lee.

GABRIELLA

(to Roza) Loo, loo, loo, loo, loo.

ROZA

Loo, loo, loo...

GABRIELLA

No! Loo, loo, loo, loo, loo.

ROZA

Loo, loo, loo, loo, loo.

GABRIELLA

Yes, yes! (to Isabelle) Low, low, low, low, low.

ISABELLE

Low, low, low, low, low.

GABRIELLA

And I am lye, lye, lye, lye lye. Now, all together!

THE MOTHERS

La, lee, loo, low, lye.

(The MOTHERS sing in perfect harmony, then applaud with delight!)

CONSUELO

Wait! What about Maria's notes?

GABRIELLA

Lay, lay, lay, lay, laaaaaaaaaay!

MARIA

I don't want them! Now, please, attend to your chores! Esperanza will be waking soon.

(The MOTHERS disperse, leaving ROZA with Esperanza while GABRIELLA lingers.)

GABRIELLA

Perhaps my little tune does not suit you?

MARIA

They all sound very much alike.

GABRIELLA

Because the women seem very much alike. When I know them better, new melodies will reveal themselves, and soon they will not need me at all.

MARIA

Good.

GABRIELLA

For you I should compose a solemn little dirge.

MARIA

Yes, something to sing to the pope. His Holiness, Don Hilardo, has sent his latest proclamations to be posted in the parlor.

SCENE 8

(DON HILARDO is in his study, typing at his computer. Simultaneously, ISABELLE, GABRIELLA, PITA, and CONSUELO gather to read his posted proclamations while MARIA stands between them.)

DON HILARDO

I have divided the laws of Villa Leche into two columns: Permission and Denial. In the "Permission" column, I write: Plato urges us to begin in youth to appreciate fair forms from which we create virtuous thoughts. Therefore, arrange yourselves in fair clothing, fair scents, and temperaments. Eat abundantly of fish and fowl as well as fruits, roots, and greens. Save all clippings of Esperanza's hair and nails, and remember: God is watching. In the "Denial" column: words not set to music cannot be spoken in Esperanza's presence. There will be no smoking, drinking of intoxicants,...

CONSUELO

Shit!

DON HILARDO

...no profanity, impiety, electronic devices, or indulging in activities that lead to the subversion of maternal pursuits.

ISABELLE

Does that mean no fucking?

CONSUELO and PITA

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

DON HILARDO

There will be no wastage of milk...

ISABELLE

Hah! Let him come and have his fill!

CONSUELO and PITA

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

DON HILARDO

...no visitors, and no leaving Villa Leche under penalty of expulsion. This excludes attendance at Sunday Mass. Esperanza's personal history -- from genesis to quietus -- will be a short chapter, but you shall span its pages. Signed: Your Grateful Shepherd, Don Hilardo Hidalgo de la Conquista.

CONSUELO

Shepherd?

ISABELLE

Baa, baa.

Baa, baa, baa.

CONSUELO, PITA, ISABELLE

(DON HILARDO and the MOTHERS depart.)

SCENE 9

(MARIA strolls about Villa Leche, eavesdropping on PITA and GABRIELLA as THEY sing to Esperanza.)

PITA and GABRIELLA

*In the beginning,
God created heaven
And Villa Leche.*

(During the song, ROZA is seen folding diapers while ISABELLE crochets.)

ROZA

Gabriella is a godsend. Her notes suit my personality and everything I have to say.

ISABELLE

Which is nothing. Washing laundry takes all the brains of a goat.

ROZA

Go to hell!

MARIA

Shush! You must stop bickering! Remember, we are here to bring joy, and there are indications it will not be much longer.

ISABELLE

That may be, but as her seamstress I can tell you, she is growing like a wild pig.

ROZA

And pissing like one too! Her diapers are sopping, rivers of gold.

ISABELLE

Because she is drinking oceans, the little glutton.

ROZA

My milk is her favorite. She grabs the minute she sees me.

ISABELLE

Ha! Your milk could topple the government. One sniff and she passes out cold.

ROZA

She is tired. My milk is rich and heavy.

ISABELLE

And pickled!

MARIA

You drink?! *(pause)* Answer me!

ROZA

Only a small glass -- for digestion.

ISABELLE

Hah!

ROZA

I...I found wine bottles in the cellar. I brought one up for Consuelo to add to her stews.

MARIA

You have violated your contract! You will have to leave!

ROZA

Please, senora, have pity. I adore Esperanza and need the money, and you must admit, no one can wash and fold like me -- not a pucker to be seen, everything fresh as rose petals -- even after Isabelle's milk when her stools are like soup.

ISABELLE

Bitch! My milk is flawless!

MARIA

Lower your voice! Your breath smells of garlic! Don Hilardo insists she be exposed to only the sweetest scents.

ISABELLE

But I love garlic!

MARIA

You are free to eat whole cloves, but not here! *(to Roza)* How much wine is left in the cellar?!

ROZA

I...I do not know.

MARIA

I want the bottles counted! Every last one! *(to Isabelle)* You help her! Then I will lock the door and bury the key!

ROZA

Yes, senora, whatever you wish. *(pause)* Then I may stay?

MARIA

Only because our time here is too limited to find replacements. Any further infractions and you will both be sent packing!

ROZA

Thank you, senora. It is just that sometimes we are...well...

MARIA

What...?

ISABELLE

Bored! We are bored!

ROZA

If only we had television.

ISABELLE

If only we had men!

MARIA

You can play cards or table tennis. There is also a library.

ROZA

I cannot read.

MARIA

Isabelle can teach you, or you can help Consuelo in the kitchen. Are you infants who have to be told every move?!

ISABELLE

No.

ROZA

No, senora, thank you, senora.

(MARIA continues her stroll, approaching CONSUELO while GABRIELLA and PITA resume singing.)

PITA and GABRIELLA

*And the spirit of God
Moved upon the pampas...*

CONSUELO

Ah, senora, I hate to complain, but the garden is full of beetles. When I pick the vegetables, I find dozens scurrying about. They make me lose my appetite.

MARIA

Do you have to have an appetite to cook?

CONSUELO

Not to cook, but to eat, and Don Hilardo wants us to “eat abundantly”.

MARIA

You look abundant enough to me.

CONSUELO

Already I have made a nice square of cheese like so.

MARIA

Congratulations, but I’m here to confiscate the wine Roza brought you.

CONSUELO

Why? It is only for flavoring sauce.

MARIA

You will do as you are told! And I suggest you develop a stronger digestion. Was your farm in Bahia Blanca so free of beetles?

CONSUELO

We had worms, but no beetles. Worms I can stomach, but beetles make me vomit. By the way, senora, have you had any luck? You know -- making your own? There is a secret recipe for activating the glands, but if you go like this (*squeezing her breasts*) five times a day for ten minutes, who can say? In six weeks a drop; later (*spraying a jet*) a geyser, ha ha!

MARIA

Ahhh! How disgusting!

(MARIA walks towards Esperanza's room where PITA and GABRIELLA continue singing.)

PITA and GABRIELLA

*And God said let their be Esperanza,
And there was Esperanza.*

MARIA

At last, a quiet corner of paradise. Pita and Gabriella took advantage of our serenity, setting their rhymes to music and praying our shared daughter would live forever.

GABRIELLA

*Lay your head upon my moons,
Close your eyes and press your ears;*

PITA and GABRIELLA

*Can't you hear the milk waves pounding,
Beat by beat the surge resounding.*

(All the MOTHERS join the singing from their posts at Villa Leche.)

PITA, GABRIELLA, ISABELLE, CONSUELO, ROZA

*Baa baby, baa baby,
Drink from my moon;
Baa baby, baa baby,
Child of my womb.*

*Baa baby, baa baby,
No need to cry;
Baa baby, baa baby,
Mama's nearby.*

SCENE 10

(MARIA approaches DON HILARDO in his study.)

MARIA

Esperanza fooled us all. One month, six months, a year, and still she lived. It should be no surprise that her first word was....

ESPERANZA

Mahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh....

MARIA

It so delighted the mothers, I begged to record it, but Don Hilardo said...

MARIA

...no.

DON HILARDO

No,...

DON HILARDO

...I shall never see her, so why should I want to hear her?

MARIA

Because she is yours, because she is beautiful, because she has already lived a year!
Perhaps she will live longer -- two years, three!

DON HILARDO

Impossible. Look at the cardiograph: an erratic fitful sierra descending to a mesa.

MARIA

But she is so healthy, so alive!

DON HILARDO

Too alive! She is straining the mechanism.

MARIA

It is only a bad case of colic.

DON HILARDO

No, it is constant, since last week. You must calm her, sing more largo than allegro, and keep her happy.

MARIA

Of course she is happy! One squeal and eight tits are thrown in her face; one burp and they race to pat her back. If she lives, she will be spoiled rotten.

DON HILARDO

A pity she will not have that privilege.

MARIA

She should have the privilege of a father.

DON HILARDO

And a father should have the privilege of a -- never mind!

MARIA

What..? A son? Is that why she is dispensable? Without a son, you are the last Conquista.

DON HILARDO

That is a blessing. The Conquistas were ruthless, our history stained with blood. I was proud to have a daughter, but I wanted a whole daughter born of a whole woman. The night we married, I dreamt I saw a blizzard in Sonia's womb, my seeds turning to hailstones, coupling with her ice egg and producing nothing, not even a shudder. At first I could not believe we had finally conceived. Then, at her birth, the moment I saw those tiny blue fingers and toes, I thought: frostbite! She has frostbite! Of course, I was mistaken, and soon I will return her to God well tended -- but not by me. My only wish is to be left alone.

MARIA

Even by me?

DON HILARDO

I need seclusion. I am weary of ruins, pernicious wars, mindless, nihilistic destruction. I want to make something beautiful.

MARIA

But you have: Esperanza!

DON HILARDO

Something that endures. If I am condemned to have no heirs, then at least I can leave my poetry. Be patient, Maria; for now tend to Esperanza -- and her ministering angels.

MARIA

Angels...?

DON HILARDO

Fathers are superfluous. They lack the instinct for the rituals of infancy, all the drips and drools of life.

MARIA

You think our wombs make us angels?

DON HILARDO

Not you, Maria. You have a tongue that makes you cluck, cluck, cluck.

MARIA

While you cock-a-doodle-do from your roost!

DON HILARDO

(embracing her) Come here, Maria...

MARIA

Our honcho of the hen house!

DON HILARDO

You excite me when you're angry.

MARIA

Stay away!

DON HILARDO

I love your hot, fevered blood...

MARIA

Don't touch me!

DON HILARDO

...how it flushes your face.

MARIA

Stop!

DON HILARDO

Kiss me...

MARIA

Don't...

MARIA

...kiss.

DON HILARDO

Kiss!

(THEY kiss, then fall to the floor, reaching swift, orgasmic ecstasy!)

SCENE 11

(MARIA collects herself, then speaks as the MOTHERS are revealed at Villa Leche.)

MARIA

I was blind, but not deaf. At Villa Leche I could hear my beatified biddies making restless sounds, longing for their other lives, especially Roza with her four sons.

ROZA

(praying) Gustavo, Hector, Jorge, and Juan. Bless them, God, keep Esperanza ticking, and make me rich, amen.

MARIA

Isabelle had given up her son for adoption because the father was a...

MARIA

...shit.

ISABELLE

(to Consuelo) Shit,...

ISABELLE

...My son has his face. I could grow to hate the little bastard.

CONSUELO

My oldest girl watches the rest. Pita and I are content with our photographs and...

CONSUELO

...Sundays.

MARIA

Sundays...

MARIA

...instead of Mass, they met secretly with their families and lovers. I was defying Don Hilardo, but then I had Esperanza to myself. The mothers left bottles for her feedings.

(The MOTHERS file by, presenting their filled bottles.)

ISABELLE

Poor Maria, you want to feed her yourself.

MARIA

How dare you?! *(to Consuelo)* You are spreading vicious rumors!

CONSUELO

There are no secrets here -- besides, I saw you practicing.

ROZA

Never mind secrets -- keep pumping!

MARIA

I know what you think: You think I am incompetent, defective. You think I know nothing of infants, that I am excluded from the...mystery.

PITA

(patting Maria's shoulder) The trick is in the rhythm.

ISABELLE

Use both hands, like this.

CONSUELO

A little patience; your milk will come.

MARIA

What is the use if she is...gone?

CONSUELO

She will last the month.

ISABELLE

The summer at least!

PITA

Her pulse is irregular, but strong, very strong.

MARIA

No. I have seen the patterns: cruel jagged spikes followed by a drowning sea.

PITA

Nooooooooo....

CONSUELO

Oh, holy mother.

ROZA

But the stools! They're the perfect color! Forget spikes; go by the stools!

ISABELLE

Ha! A shit-sniffing fortune teller!

ROZA

Don't laugh, shit doesn't lie! (*marching off*) She will bury us all!

(The MOTHERS depart.)

MARIA

Later I went to replace Gabriella who was singing a lullaby before leaving to report her snoopings to Don Hilardo.

GABRIELLA

*While you sleep
The dragon wakes,
With tongues of flame
To steal your dreams.
From the clouds
Come swords of lightning,
Blade by blade, their fires igniting.*

*Baa baby, baa baby,
Drink from my moon;*

*Baa baby, baa baby,
Child of my womb.
Baa baby, baa baby,
No need to cry;
Baa baby, baa baby,
Mama's nearby.*

GABRIELLA and MARIA

(Darkness descends.)

SCENE 12

(A rooster crows as lights reveal ESPERANZA singing, surrounded by her MOTHERS as MARIA speaks.)

ESPERANZA

Mama, mama, mama, mama, mama, mama.

MARIA

Roza proved herself our oracle. Esperanza lived, sprouting like a lone palm in the pampas. Every new shoot, every limb and frond was reported to Don Hilardo, followed by invitations which he predictably refused. Songs were composed for every occasion, and every occasion became a celebration! There was the first...

(ESPERANZA crawls about, trailed by the MOTHERS.)

GABRIELLA, MARIA, and THE MOTHERS

*Crawling on knees
On your own,
Soon you'll be dancing,
Soon you'll be groooooown.*

(After the MOTHERS sing, PITA approaches MARIA.)

MARIA

By this time, Pita had developed...

MARIA
...plugged ducts!

PITA
Plugged ducts...

PITA

... are a torment. I have to stop nursing, but cannot bear to leave Esperanza.

MARIA

Do not worry, Pita. My own milk is coming in -- only a trickle, but it is a start.

PITA

We told you: practice and patience!

MARIA

Soon we were celebrating the second occasion!

GABRIELLA, MARIA and THE MOTHERS

*Standing erect
On your own,
Soon you'll be dancing,
Soon you'll be groooooown.*

(CONSUELO approaches MARIA.)

MARIA

Consuelo announced that...

MARIA
...Esperanza is eating.

CONSUELO
Esperanza is eating...

CONSUELO

...cakes of the mothers' curds, (*whispering*) but refuses to drink from Roza and Isabelle.

MARIA

No matter! My own is flowing a steady stream!

GABRIELLA, MARIA, and THE MOTHERS

*Taking a step
On your own,
Soon you'll be dancing,
Soon you'll be groooooown!*

(Now MARIA speaks to DON HILARDO in his study.)

MARIA

Please, Don Hilardo, you cannot keep a growing child in a single room. She has a distorted view of the world.

DON HILARDO

In a distorted world, that is a blessing.

MARIA

But why must your paradise be so narrow? Without windows she never sees the sky or feels the rain.

DON HILARDO

They would kill her: sunstroke, pneumonia! Viruses are everywhere!

MARIA

She is as strong as any child, but lately she seems...discontent.

DON HILARDO

Of course; she is teething.

MARIA

No, no, it is frustration -- because she knows when we leave we go someplace else, someplace she would like to see.

DON HILARDO

Where? You merely vanish and reappear. Perhaps she believes she conjures you at will. Who knows what a child thinks?

MARIA

(pause) Esperanza's room is not well insulated. She can hear the cracking of thunder, the howls of a dog.

DON HILARDO

What of it? Life is full of mysteries, but if she sees something, a hawk flying by, she might acquire a longing to follow it.

MARIA

Only to the courtyard. She will not go beyond the gate!

DON HILARDO

But the hawk will! And she will want to know how and where and what to call it. Then you will have to name it.

MARIA

A hawk is a hawk.

DON HILARDO

Precisely! To endow it with a name implies a past that evolved to the present, and the present intimates a future -- a future she can never know! I will draw up a new law: "All plant and animal life as yet unseen by Esperanza existed prior to or after, but not during Esperanza."

MARIA

You cannot erase history!

DON HILARDO

Villa Leche has no history -- except for Esperanza: The Golden Age of Esperanza!

MARIA

But it is too late! She has heard the words in our songs: bullfrogs, magpies, elepha...

DON HILARDO

Strike them! Another law: "Nothing outside Villa Leche can have a name, not even the days of the week. No dawn, no noon, no dusk!"

MARIA

Let me phrase it this way: Esperanza's yellow ceiling has sprung a leak and is peeling. It is ugly! Ugly!!

DON HILARDO

Fix it; paint it!

MARIA

She will have to be removed to another room!

DON HILARDO

Then do it while she sleeps!

MARIA

She is too restless to sleep! Her little body needs exercise, fresh breezes. Please, Don Hilardo, let her see Consuelo's garden: the sparrows, the butterflies...

DON HILARDO

No names! She sees the art I have provided; it is sacred and beautiful.

MARIA

But the forms in art where first in nature. You must pay homage.

DON HILARDO

Art is the greatest homage! Apparently your literal mind cannot grasp the subtle power of icons and metaphors.

MARIA

Esperanza is neither! Are her eyes carved of stone?

DON HILARDO

Stop...

MARIA

Are her legs cut from wood so she cannot crawl to the courtyard? Just to the courtyard?

DON HILARDO

Stop it! Stop! (*pause*) Not a step beyond! And no names! No "sparrows", no "butterflies!" Call all living things "creatures of Paradise." They come from heaven; they return to heaven. But only a heaven of sunshine and clouds -- no darkness, no rain! Hire carpenters to build a surrounding wall. Make it thirty feet high, but be certain she sleeps while the wall is constructed. Remember, she must never think of Villa Leche as outside our worldly life, but as the Earth itself with...

DON HILARDO

...sides and a top!

MARIA

Sides and a top!

SCENE 13

(MARIA returns to Villa Leche.)

MARIA

So bricks were laid in time for Consuelo's breasts to exhaust themselves just as my own brewed a new surge of whitecaps.

(GABRIELLA speaks to MARIA in the present while
CONSUELO approaches GABRIELLA in the past.)

GABRIELLA

(to Maria) Consuelo blames...

GABRIELLA

...the wall.

CONSUELO

The Wall...

CONSUELO

...is draining my milk. I feel I am living in the barrel of a cannon.

MARIA

Then tell her to leave!

GABRIELLA

She says she is hopelessly attached to...

GABRIELLA

...Esperanza.

CONSUELO

Esperanza...

CONSUELO

...is like my own precious child.

MARIA

Then tell her to stay! I don't know! Why don't you ask Don Hilardo?

GABRIELLA

How can I? You are the only one who sees him. *(pause)* You are wrong to distrust me, Maria. I am your friend.

MARIA

Friends do not speak in patronizing tones.

GABRIELLA

I do not mean to offend, but sometimes you seem...lost.

MARIA

You resent my power!

GABRIELLA

You mean Don Hilardo's power?

MARIA

I am in charge here!

GABRIELLA

Then tell me what I should say to Consuelo.

MARIA

Tell her to stay!

(The MOTHERS surround the teetering ESPERANZA.)

MARIA, GABRIELLA, and THE MOTHERS

Walking about

On her own!

Soon you'll be dancing,

Soon you'll be groooooown!

(The MOTHERS scurry after ESPERANZA whose joy turns to wails of frustration.)

SCENE 14

(MARIA has returned to DON HILARDO in his study.)

MARIA

Don Hilardo, my darling, it has happened: the moment I have been waiting for. Not only is Esperanza walking, but she has weaned herself of all but one of the mothers, the mother she trails like a little ferret in a rabbit's tracks.

DON HILARDO

Such singular attachments are inevitable. Witnessing such affection must be painful for the others.

MARIA

Not for me -- because *I* am the mother. Look! (*squeezing her breast, spraying a stream*) Remember how you called it "the primordial nectar, the liqueur of life?" So sweet and delicious and all my own, nearly thirty liters! (*approaching to embrace Don Hilardo*) Now we can bring Esperanza home, and I can nurse her till she weans herself.

DON HILARDO

Don't touch me!

MARIA

But I...I thought you would be pleased. I wanted to...surprise you.

DON HILARDO

Oh, you surprised me! Amazed me! I expected you to instruct, to inspire, to *lead* the herd, not join them!

MARIA

(pause, trembling) A rigid hierarchy is impossible in paradise. Bullied servants do not feel like singing. We are allies now. How else would we conspire to raise a child with no concept of normal speech?

DON HILARDO

A voice raised in song is the most glorious speech!

MARIA

She has no vision of her country or the vastness of the sea.

DON HILARDO

Internal spaces are what matter: the soul ascending, soaring!

MARIA

She never sees a man or a child like herself.

DON HILARDO

In infancy only mothers are crucial, and she has four.

MARIA

Five! Five! You have had your experiment! She is a wonderful child, strong and beautiful. Take her back, she needs you; she needs a father's love.

DON HILARDO

Love takes many forms. For now Villa Leche is my love, my single living poem. All I ask is that she remain with her mothers and know nothing of evil.

MARIA

She knows nothing of life!

DON HILARDO

You are wrong, Maria. She knows love. It is the berry left neglected that ripens, then rots.

MARIA

And what about my berry? Pluck me, Hilardo, please! I want us together, a family.

DON HILARDO

I need more time. Fortuna's heat and winds have made me melancholic. I want her happy in a world without men, without brutality, so please, Maria, be gentle. I will make another law: "No swattings or scoldings. The word 'no' must be stricken."

MARIA

Then I cannot refuse her feedings at my breast.

DON HILARDO

If she lives another year, the roots of her character will begin to sprout.

MARIA

Another year? By then she will begin asking questions.

DON HILARDO

I have given you the answers.

MARIA

Another year...

DON HILARDO

Another year,...

DON HILARDO

...it will pass, and so will she.

MARIA

Then we shall marry and disband...

MARIA

...Villa Leche!

DON HILARDO

Villa Leche.

(Now the MOTHERS continue singing "The Growing Song" as a round while ESPERANZA enacts it.)

CONSUELO and PITA

Skipping in circles

On your own,

Soon you'll be dancing,

Soon you'll be groooooown!

ISABELLE and ROZA

Tossing a ball

On your own,

Soon you'll be dancing,

Soon you'll be groooooown!

MARIA and GABRIELLA

*Leaping through hoops
On your own,
Soon you'll be dancing,
Soon you'll be groooooown!*

ESPERANZA

Esperanza! Esperanza! Esperanzaaaaa!

(ESPERANZA leaps joyously: a girl of three! Then SHE turns, furiously stomping off, followed by the MOTHERS.)

SCENE 15

(Evening at Villa Leche. MARIA speaks as GABRIELLA sits nearby, pouring wine into glasses.)

MARIA

The year passed. Don Hilardo begged for yet another and another. He commanded us to begin saving her teeth, then left for a religious retreat in Cordoba saying he would return a changed man. With Esperanza free to come and go, we were forced to speak the entire day. I opened the wine cellar, and continued my escape into the books of the library.

GABRIELLA

A month's wages says he will want another year and on and on till his own teeth fall out!

MARIA

You should be more respectful! Don't forget: he saved you from fat-fingered piano students and an empty belly to boot!

GABRIELLA

He has also given me a bad case of vertigo -- forcing a retreat to the stone age. What are we doing?

MARIA

Preparing a human soul for God.

GABRIELLA

God will get quite a shock. In your reports -- have you told Don Hilardo you cannot toilet train without saying "no?"

MARIA

He says she is a free spirit.

GABRIELLA

She is a savage! Six years old and still suckling, still wetting herself! No wonder we drink! In your next report -- write about her questions. Write how a storm blew open the secret gate and a stray sheep wandered into the courtyard.

(Lights reveal ESPERANZA and ROZA singing.)

ESPERANZA

What is she?

ROZA

*A creature from heaven,
A gift dropped by angels.*

ESPERANZA

Where did she go?

ROZA

Back where she came from.

ESPERANZA

But how?

ROZA

The wind.

ESPERANZA

Why?

ROZA

God said so.

ESPERANZA

Who is God?

ROZA

Our heavenly father.

ESPERANZA

What is father?

ROZA

A man.

ESPERANZA

What is a man?

ROZA

God.

GABRIELLA

Wonderful! If she ever meets Don Hilardo, she will think he is God.

MARIA

And he will agree!

GABRIELLA and MARIA

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

MARIA

I will report that a sheep has been introduced to our...culture.

(As GABRIELLA continues, ESPERANZA is seen taunting the MOTHERS.)

GABRIELLA

Everyday she sticks her face in Consuelo's pots.

CONSUELO

She stuffs onions in her ears and swallows whole potatoes! Never mind her heart, it is a miracle she hasn't choked to death!

ESPERANZA

*My feet in the berries,
My hands in the cakes,
My nose in the puddings
That Consuelo bakes!*

GABRIELLA

You should include a paragraph about what she is doing to her clothes.

ISABELLE

When she was a baby, I sewed the finest silks. Now I use the strongest woolens, and still she rips them to shreds.

ESPERANZA

*Mud on my fingers,
Mud on my frocks,
Stones in my pockets,
Holes in my socks!*

GABRIELLA

And Roza! Poor Roza! There is no bleach strong enough!

ROZA

She shits in her sheets night after night.

ESPERANZA

*Silly Roza, see her cry,
I am, I am a purple pie.*

GABRIELLA

And look at this bite from trying to give her a bath! How can you do nothing?!
Have you lost your mind from the hormonal imbalance of nursing too long?

MARIA

The rest are dry as dust, but I can go on indefinitely!

GABRIELLA

(marching off) Then so will Villa Leche!

SCENE 16

(Now MARIA stands alone, bringing forth a large goblet.)

MARIA

Gabriella was right: Don Hilardo demanded yet another three years of seclusion, then another three followed by two more. I began my own retreat, reading and rereading all the books in the library, emerging only to serve Esperanza my great golden goblets of milk, whipped to a luscious froth.

(MARIA brings the goblet to ESPERANZA who is now fourteen. SHE gulps its contents, then dashes off. MARIA strolls towards the MOTHERS, eavesdropping on their whisperings.)

MARIA

As for the others, I heard them -- their treachery and deceit!

CONSUELO

Sssshe's escaping into stories in books.

ISABELLE

Sssshe's writing morbid journals.

PITA

Sssshe's sulking in her room.

ROZA

Sssshe's drunk.

PITA

Sssshe's depressed.

ISABELLE

Sssshe's horny.

CONSUELO

Who isn't?

PITA

Consuelo has tried every recipe, but still her milk flows.

ROZA

There are women in China who nurse till they die. Then their coffins start leaking.

ISABELLE

For years we have blamed Esperanza, but listen: After Maria serves her spiked milkshakes, Esperanza is quiet as a clam; an hour later she is shrieking like a wild coyote. Then she is cross and cranky till her nap. Later she will wake and be fine until her next feeding, and the cycle starts all over again.

PITA

Exactly! She has developed an allergy.

ISABELLE

Worse, an addiction!

ROZA

Ahhh, this explains the black pebbles.

ISABELLE

I can tell the time of day by her tantrums!

PITA

And to think I had dreams of her becoming a great doctor.

CONSUELO

No, no, she will be rich!

ROZA

Yes! Canning beans like my Uncle Romero.

CONSUELO

Not beans!

ISABELLE

Humph! She will be just like Maria: a stinking wino, two pigs in a poke!

(MARIA struts towards GABRIELLA.)

MARIA

Sssssows! They hate me! Envy me! I'm throwing them out -- tonight!

GABRIELLA

Without a trial? At least come and see for yourself. Follow Esperanza while she finger paints the courtyard walls -- abstracts in blueberry jam. The flies are a nuisance, but Esperanza calls them angel droppings. Then she eats them alive.

MARIA

Never mind the flies! Those bitches have to go!

GABRIELLA

If they go, who will do the cooking? The laundry? Who will watch Esperanza while you play the lovesick drunkard?

MARIA

How dare you?!

(MARIA starts to slap GABRIELLA who grasps her wrist, twisting her arm.)

MARIA

Stop! You're hurting me!

GABRIELLA

I should whip you! (*grasping Maria's hand*) The others were afraid to show you, but the time has come. Now stand up!

MARIA

Ouch!

(GABRIELLA drags MARIA to Esperanza's room where PITA is attending her. THEY whisper.)

GABRIELLA

There she is -- sound asleep. Now look closely: her cheeks.

PITA

(*pause*) It began last week: a few drops, then a trickle, now a steady stream of tears.

MARIA

Don Hilardo's melancholia; it must be genetic.

GABRIELLA

Bullshit! It is exhaustion from running in circles with no one to give her direction because directions are forbidden, because Villa Leche is the universe and Esperanza its only center. And your milk: it makes her colicky, hysterical one moment and sullen the next.

MARIA

No...

GABRIELLA

Look, Maria, here are the boxes of her teeth and nails. Touch them, feel them: these were not stitched to a doll; they were growths on a sacred human child. Don Hilardo is playing games, testing his lofty principles...

MARIA

His ideals! He is a poet!

GABRIELLA

A tyrant! Oh, Maria, how can you keep surrendering your dignity? Your sense of logic?

MARIA

There is a higher wisdom than logic. I love him, I love him...

GABRIELLA

Your kind of love is pathetic. I pity you.

MARIA

And I pity you! Sometimes, when desire is too strong, you can finally feel your...soul. When I was a girl working in his kitchen, his swagger drove me mad with yearnings, and even before we were lovers, he gave me the gift of literature and history -- because he taught me how to read.

GABRIELLA

He taught you how to spread your legs!

MARIA

(smiling) Ah, yes! Torture me all you like, what does it matter? He is my salvation.

GABRIELLA

It matters to our daughter and to us. Oh, Maria, Maria, open your eyes! Villa Leche is hell and our lovely Esperanza full of the devil! Listen to me: don't you trim back the brush wood so it grows with beauty and grace? A slight reproach is also an act of love.

MARIA

But I...I promised...

GABRIELLA

What you do not condemn, you absolve, then condone.

(ESPERANZA sobs in her sleep.)

GABRIELLA

Look, Maria, more tears. Our child is not happy in paradise.

(GABRIELLA leaves, gesturing for PITA to follow, then THEY linger nearby, eavesdropping on MARIA who sits on the bed and sings to ESPERANZA.)

MARIA

*Together we've come such a long long way,
Just you and I, just you and I.
You were a ribbon to unravel, unwind,
To throw to the winds like a spiraling kite;*

ISABELLE

(pause) Excuse me, Maria, but do you mean you will bring Esperanza to Don Hilardo's house, knock on the door, and say, "Surprise, papa!"

MARIA

Yes.

CONSUELO

He could still refuse to see her.

ROZA

He could send her to an orphanage!

ISABELLE

Ha! They will take one look and throw her in a cage!

PITA

No, he will hire new mothers who will make her even crazier!

GABRIELLA

Shhhhh! We must not be too hasty. If we care for Esperanza, then it may be best to keep her from Don Hilardo. He has wreaked havoc from a distance; at closer range he may...

MARIA

You hypocrite! I thought this was what you wanted! You are as much a prisoner here as Esperanza!

GABRIELLA

True, Villa Leche is my home and speaksong second nature.

ROZA

I speaksong in my dreams.

MARIA

But surely you know -- you have always known -- that eventually you must leave.

GABRIELLA

Yes, but not now.

MARIA

Nonsense! You said it yourself -- we are long overdue!

GABRIELLA

Which is why now is too soon! We must remedy the damage. Let Don Hilardo continue in his delusions while we set about making Esperanza a true daughter of paradise.

CONSUELO
Brava, Gabriella!

ISABELLE
I agree!

PITA and ROZA
Yes!!

GABRIELLA

You cannot do it alone, Maria. You need us; Esperanza needs us. Haven't you waited long enough? How old are you now?

ISABELLE
I was nineteen when I came. I am thirty-four now.

ROZA
I am twenty-nine.

ISABELLE
Liar! You are thirty-six!

CONSUELO
I am forty with the gray hairs to prove it.

GABRIELLA
Maria, you were twenty-two when Villa Leche...

MARIA
Stop! *(pause)* All these years I have wanted Don Hilardo to have his daughter in his life, but if he saw her now...

ISABELLE
Oh, fuck.

PITA
He would reject her.

ISABELLE
And he would blame us; it is always the mother's fault!

PITA
Gabriella is right; we must remedy the damage. In the end, Don Hilardo will be grateful.

GABRIELLA
First we must introduce normal speech.

ROZA

Toilet training must be next on the list!

PITA

Yes! And lessons on washing!

CONSUELO

Eating with a spoon!

ISABELLE

Dressing herself!

PITA

Reading and writing!

GABRIELLA

And weaning herself from your milkshakes!

MARIA

But mothers' milk is our very foundation...

GABRIELLA

The foundation has been laid!

MARIA

But my milk...

GABRIELLA

...is toxic! Don Hilardo has squeezed the last drop from our bosoms! It is time for revolution!

CONSUELO and ROZA
Revolution!

PITA
Brava! Brava!

ISABELLE
Finally! Brava!

PITA

Remember the tears, Maria.

MARIA

Yes, beginning tomorrow...

GABRIELLA

Begin now!

ISABELLE

She is right! Begin now!

ROZA, PITA, CONSUELO

Now!!

MARIA

Yes! The old laws will be abolished; the doors and windows thrown open!

ROZA and PITA
(*applauding*) Brava! Brava!

ISABELLE
Thank God!

GABRIELLA
Shush! Let her speak!

MARIA

His Villa Leche was static; mine will evolve. His had no past, no future; mine will begin at the beginning and end at the limits of learning. We will introduce her to oceans! Forests! Rainbows!

PITA

Bicycles!

ROZA

Balloons!

CONSUELO

Umbrellas!

MARIA

Poetry! Art!

ISABELLE

Planes! Trains!

ROZA

Televisions!

PITA

Shopping!

MARIA

All things perishable and all things eternal! We will transform Villa Leche into a true paradise beyond anything the Conquistadors ever dreamed: a paradise that inspires a new empire that challenges every empire before it!

ROZA, PITA, CONSUELO
Brava! Brava! Bravaaaa!!!

GABRIELLA
Viva Maria!

ISABELLE
Let's move, pronto! Wake her up!

GABRIELLA
But without music -- just words.

ROZA
Yes, but which ones?

GABRIELLA
Only a few at a time. We must not overwhelm her.

PITA
But who will say them? Maria...?

CONSUELO
Yes, Maria!

ROZA
Maria! Maria!

GABRIELLA
Come, let us wake her.

(THE MOTHERS approach ESPERANZA. MARIA pulls back the covers to reveal only crumpled pillows.)

MARIA, PITA
(*gasp!*) Ahhh!

ISABELLE
Oh, fuck!

ROZA
Nooooooooooo!!!

CONSUELO
Where is she?!

GABRIELLA
While we were plotting: the kitchen! *Esperanza!*

CONSUELO
The garden! *Esperanza!*

ISABELLE
The gate! The gate is open! *Esperanza!!*

(MARIA and the MOTHERS dash about, searching in different directions as GABRIELLA sings.)

GABRIELLA

*Esperanza, little darling,
Little starling, little song;
Where in the pampas,
Where in the sunlight,
Where in the moonlight
Have you gone?*

GABRIELLA, MARIA, and THE MOTHERS

*Thorns will prick her,
Poor little feet;
Dogs will tear her gown;
Dust will blind her,
Will blind her vision;
Winds will blow her down!
Esperanza, little darling,
Little starling, little song;
Where in the pampas,
Where in the sunlight,
Where in the moonlight,
Have you gone?*

(GABRIELLA, MARIA, and the MOTHERS hold their final note as lights reveal DON HILARDO watching the pattern on his computer screen grow wild.)

DON HILARDO

Esperanza...?

(The screen blacks out, the MOTHERS cease singing.)

DON HILARDO

No...Nooooooooooo!!!

(DON HILARDO clutches his heart and collapses as the MOTHERS stop, singing in harmonic hysteria.)

THE MOTHERS

Esperanza! Esperanza!! Esperanza!!!

(Blackout.)

End of Act I

ACT II**SCENE 18**

(Howling winds resound as the MOTHERS hum
“The Searching Song” and MARIA speaks.)

MARIA

The mothers continued their searching song till the winds captured the melody, filling the air with echoes. I shouted, “Consuelo! Boil great pots of her favorite sweets! The rest of you: tie long strips of colorful fabrics, then lay them out like the spokes of a giant wheel with Villa Leche at its hub. We will tease her back through the senses: smells, sights, and sounds.”

(The MOTHERS stretch out clotheslines made from
colorful strips of braided fabric.)

THE MOTHERS and MARIA

*Esperanza, little darling,
Little starling, little song;
Where in the pampas,
Where in the sunlight,
Where in the moonlight,
Have you gone, gone, gone...*

(The MOTHERS disperse and continue humming.)

SCENE 19

(MARIA approaches a weary DON HILARDO.)

MARIA

We prayed that Esperanza was alive, but what were we to do about Don Hilardo’s cardiograph? If she roamed beyond its range, the pattern of her heart would be flattened like her footprints by the wind. *(to Don Hilardo)* I am afraid I have some unfortunate...

DON HILARDO

I know! Give the mothers their wages and send them home with my gratitude.

MARIA

Please, listen to me: Esperanza is still alive. The monitoring device connected to her heart seems to have dislodged itself. It penetrated the digestive track and found its way...out. Roza reported it late last night.

DON HILARDO

She...she is still alive? (*embracing Maria*) Oh, Maria, Maria! Oh, blessed life! Oh, sweet fortune! When I saw, I thought I would be relieved, but then I...I knew I had missed her completely, and the sorrow... Oh, please, please, Maria, bring her here! No! I shall come to her!

MARIA

No! Not...not like this. You must...prepare yourself. I mean, you will have to give us time to prepare her.

DON HILARDO

What is there to prepare? I am her father.

MARIA

Father?! Ha! You seem to forget -- she has no conception of what a man is, never mind a father! Just because you have finally come to your senses, you cannot expect her to meet you without some...precautions.

DON HILARDO

(*pause*) Ah, yes, yes, of course. I am at fault, I admit, but children are resilient.

MARIA

You have waited fifteen years. What is a few more days?

DON HILARDO

Please, make it a few more hours.

MARIA

I will tell you when. In the meantime, you must learn to put your new found sentiments to music. Otherwise she will think you some defective derivative of the species.

DON HILARDO

Ah. (*he sighs*) Oh, Maria, will you ever forgive me? I was too proud, too vain; I didn't see what God had given me, had given every Conquista ever born: a chance for redemption. Please, do not be angry. Isn't this what you have always wanted?

MARIA

Yes, but now it is your turn to be patient. Someone must inform Esperanza that civilization as she knows it will cease to exist!

(MARIA marches off, grasping her breasts, moaning.)

SCENE 20

(GABRIELLA is seen strolling about Villa Leche, keeping watch, as MARIA approaches.)

MARIA

My breasts are engorged, but Esperanza is in greater pain, withdrawing from my milk.

GABRIELLA

And are you weaning yourself from the wine cellar?

MARIA

Yes, but now I have a double dose of phobias: inside Villa Leche I have claustrophobia; outside I have agoraphobia. Either way, it is hell. If she feels what I feel... Oh, Gabriella, why didn't I pretend she had died long ago? Why did he have to wait for a cataclysm? Why has he never listened?!

GABRIELLA

You have a woman's voice.

MARIA

What if someone should find her -- a vagabond or predator? Oh, kneel, Gabriella, kneel and pray! Hear us, oh, blessed guardian angel of Esperanza's immortal soul. We implore you: guide and deliver her back to our arms.

GABRIELLA and MARIA

Amen.

SCENE 21

(Echoes of "The Searching Song" are heard as a frantic ESPERANZA is seen grasping the clothesline, crawling back to Villa Leche.)

ROZA

Ahhhhh! Look! Our baby! Our Esperanza! She picked *my* clothesline!

(The MOTHERS run towards ESPERANZA, embracing her, then carry her home while singing.)

ISABELLE

I think she's frozen!

I think she's sun stroked!
 CONSUELO

I think it's trauma!
 PITA

Welcome home!
 MARIA, GABRIELLA, and the MOTHERS

(ESPERANZA opens her mouth, speechless, then crawls away.)

MARIA
 Pita! Consuelo! Follow her, put her to bed.

ISABELLE
 Did you see her eyes?

ROZA
 Did you hear her voice?

GABRIELLA
 Nothing! Not a whimper.

MARIA
 Listen to us -- we speak as if she were dying! She is broken, not dead! Don Hilardo wants her back, but he cannot have her! Her muteness will work to our advantage. The reunion will be staged, and he will never know what happened.

GABRIELLA
 Ah, has the viper entered paradise?

MARIA
 Only to gain possession!

CONSUELO
 Brava!

ISABELLE
 Maria, I have never seen you so full of fire!

GABRIELLA
 So magnificent! What happened?

MARIA
 Esperanza -- seeing her crawling like an insect. I want her upright, proud; I want her to...

GABRIELLA
 What...?

MARIA
 Fight!

GABRIELLA and the MOTHERS
 Brava, brava! Bravvvvaaaaa!!!

SCENE 22

(DON HILARDO is home, rehearsing while MARIA stands between him and Villa Leche.)

DON HILARDO
*Don Hilardo Conquista,
 Your servant most neglectful...*

MARIA
 He was so impatient, so anxious to see her, always composing new introductions.

DON HILARDO
*Don Hilardo Conquista,
 Your father most unworthy...*

MARIA
 Don Hilardo autocractico! How I hate little gods; I am tired of heroes!

DON HILARDO
*Don Hilardo Conquista,
 A fool most unwise,
 To have lost all the summers
 The sun danced in your eyes.*

MARIA
 A week later Don Hilardo was scheduled to arrive.

(GABRIELLA approaches MARIA.)

GABRIELLA
 Everything is ready: Consuelo managed to force-feed a spoonful of custard; Pita bathed her; and Isabelle has her dressed.

MARIA

Can she walk?

GABRIELLA

Slowly, a sleepwalk.

MARIA

Are they ready to play their parts?

GABRIELLA

Yes, but Roza is too melodramatic.

MARIA

Tell them to meet here, and I will bring Don Hilardo.

(DON HILARDO enters, and MARIA escorts him to the MOTHERS who stand in line to receive him.)

MARIA

Remember, she has never seen a man. The shock may affect her; it may even...harm her.

DON HILARDO

Pray it will please her.

MARIA

First, I shall introduce the mothers of Villa Leche: you remember Pita and Gabriella? And this is Consuelo, Isabelle, and Roza. May I present Don Hilardo Hidalgo de la Conquista: Master of the Universe.

DON HILARDO

(bowing) I'm afraid Maria's epithet is a just reproach. I am deeply indebted to you all.

MARIA

Pita, please bring Esperanza.

(PITA escorts a dazed ESPERANZA.)

MARIA

Esperanza, may I present your father: Don Hilardo Conquista.

DON HILARDO

Ah...

MARIA

Sing!

DON HILARDO

*(bungling his song) At your service most humbly,
Your father most unworthy,
Your servant most neglectful.*

MARIA

Esperanza, your father has come to take you home.

DON HILARDO

*I promise fair winds
On your every sea,
And full, full sails
If you'll come with me.
Don Hilardo, your minion,
My home is your dominion!*

(DON HILARDO reaches to embrace ESPERANZA who faints with fright. The MOTHERS respond with operatic passion.)

PITA

My poor baby!

ROZA

Holy Mother of God! What has he done?!

CONSUELO, ISABELLE, PITA

Esperanza!

MARIA

Please, take her to her room!

(The MOTHERS and ESPERANZA depart.)

DON HILARDO

Ah, I have frightened her. *(pause)* She is so beautiful, so delicate: her hair shimmers like threads of silk; her eyes are like raven storms transfixed; and her cheeks -- the petals of a tea rose. How could something so lovely have been born of me?

(ROZA and GABRIELLA return in haste.)

GABRIELLA

Excuse me, señor, but I am afraid she is...

ROZA

A coma!

GABRIELLA

...mute. She opens her mouth, but nothing, not a sound.

DON HILARDO

Dear God, what have I done?

ROZA

She was so young, so full of promise.

(GABRIELLA and ROZA depart.)

MARIA

I warned you. If you had presented yourself earlier, but *(she sighs)*...

DON HILARDO

We will bring her to Doctor Faustino.

MARIA

How? You declared her legally dead.

DON HILARDO

I could take her to Buenos Aires.

MARIA

Suppose they cure her and she starts to sing? How will you explain that? Will you say she is an angel dropped from heaven? If you don't, she will! They would lock her up and throw away the key!

DON HILARDO

Dear God...

MARIA

(pause) Of course, there is one solution...

DON HILARDO

What?! Tell me!

MARIA

It is conceivable, she could...

DON HILARDO

What...? What?!

MARIA

Recover -- at Villa Leche. But only if you permit me to supervise a gradual readjustment.

DON HILARDO

Yes, of course! Anything!

MARIA

Unfortunately, the mothers... *(pause, she sighs)* They may not wish to stay. I may not stay myself.

DON HILARDO

But you must; I will pay anything, anything!

MARIA

You think a mother's passion can be purchased with pesos?

DON HILARDO

Please, whatever you ask; anything you wish.

MARIA

(pause) I want the walls torn down and the whole of civilization ushered in -- from the most primitive tools to microchips that launch rockets. We will wear modern clothing, and Gabriella will teach music, Roza dancing, Consuelo cooking, Pita medicine, and Isabelle can sew and paint objects in nature. As for me, I will cultivate her mind, disseminating daily the seeds of history. Together we will guide Esperanza past infancy through six thousand years of war and hypocrisy to a new and glorious society without hierarchy, without oppression! *(pause)* I will begin by speaking the mother tongue, by bestowing the great and glorious dignity of names, names like "morning," "noon," and "night."

DON HILARDO

I still want to see her.

MARIA

"Rain!" "Thunder!" "Lightning!"

DON HILARDO

Did you hear me?!

MARIA

You'll see her when she is ready! *(pause)* Well? Do you agree?

DON HILARDO

You must promise to tell me everything,...

MARIA

I will draw up a contract.

DON HILARDO

...every development! I will set up computers.

MARIA

Fine, and on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays we will meet in the evenings. While she sleeps, we may discuss her progress and you in turn may continue as my lover.

DON HILARDO

Is that included in the contract? I hope you will be as resourceful in bed!

(DON HILARDO marches off.)

SCENE 23

(The MOTHERS, now dressed in modern clothing, are positioned throughout Villa Leche. MARIA enters, wearing slacks, instructing ROZA.)

MARIA

All these paintings -- take them away. We do not want Esperanza surrounded by groveling madonnas.

ROZA

But the priests say the mado...

MARIA

Never mind the priests! Just do as you are told!

ROZA

Yes, senora. *(mimicking Maria)* "Just do as you are told!"

(ROZA removes the paintings as CONSUELO, PITA, ISABELLE, and GABRIELLA approach MARIA for their daily meeting.)

MARIA

Have you anything to report?

CONSUELO

She eats nothing, not a crumb.

PITA

Her blood pressure is low.

CONSUELO

It is terrible to admit, but before...well, at least she laughed.

MARIA

Who wouldn't laugh in a perpetual nursery? Now we are presenting the facts.

PITA

Maybe if we go back to Speaksong?

MARIA

No! No more lies!

GABRIELLA

Perhaps if we bring in other children...? You must admit, there is much still missing.

ISABELLE

Men for instance; men are missing!

MARIA

You may go to your men and your children whenever you wish, but there will be none at Villa Leche. Not yet, not until she knows who they are.

ISABELLE

And when will that be?

MARIA

When I am convinced she understands. She has no voice and is still weak, but she listens, she listens.

(The MOTHERS depart.)

SCENE 24

(DON HILARDO remains exiled in his study. HE addresses MARIA who stands between him and the traumatized ESPERANZA seated on her bed.)

DON HILARDO

Maria, since you are introducing Esperanza to the modern world, permit me to participate. Let me give her the little inventions I denied her. This for instance...

MARIA

(to *Esperanza*) Here you see...

DON HILARDO

...a watch.

MARIA

...a watch,...

MARIA

...a calculating device, a machine perverted by dons like Hilardo to order nature into sequential units called "time" within which they eat, sleep, murder, and die. Time that has passed is called history, and history recounts the feats of hidalgos, their kingdoms, armies, violence and atrocities. But women sense time's passage in the flow of their blood, forming a harmony with nature they cannot control, so they learn to cooperate while hidalgos obliterate.

DON HILARDO

Tell her about...

DON HILARDO

...the watch.

MARIA

The watch...

MARIA

...is from your father, Don Hilardo *Hidalgo* de la Conquista.

DON HILARDO

Please, Maria, give Esperanza these few coins. She will need to learn about...

DON HILARDO

...money.

MARIA

Money...

MARIA

...has debased all definitions of good and evil. Good is anything that generates money. For good we endure long hours in long lines screwing nuts to bolts, pins into processors which is how we make money to buy things that wear away so we have to endure longer

MARIA(cont'd)

hours in longer lines. The price we pay is the price of our dreams. But dreams do not generate money; sympathy, compassion, faith -- none of these generate money. They are dispensable commodities along with the whole human race. Even as I speak, greedy investors make fortunes on the backs of the poor, and rich, power-crazed hidalgos build jets that drop flaming missiles on mothers and children turning them into pyramids of soot. These missiles are too large to bring to Villa Leche, so your father has given you some coins instead.

DON HILARDO

Did you tell her the coins were from me?

MARIA

Of course.

DON HILARDO

And now I have a special surprise,...

DON HILARDO

...a smartphone!

MARIA

A smartphone?

(MARIA presents a smartphone to ESPERANZA.)

DON HILARDO

Tell Esperanza it is not only a phone, but a compass, camera, dictionary, and library of books, films and music. The screen is small but the merest touch opens a window on the world. One stroke of a finger will introduce her to the Internet and accustom her to men and their voices.

MARIA

Your father gave you this smartphone with earbuds that fit like so. (*attaching them to Esperanza*) It is a cruel, noxious weapon used to destroy human relations and create masses of obedient, game-playing puppets. Yes, if you tap it like this, soon you will soon see disembodied images telling you what to eat, drink, think, and feel, when in fact you are nothing but a maggot at the mercy of yet another machine controlled by -- Esperanza?! Esperanza, are you listening?!

(ESPERANZA scampers off.)

MARIA

Where are you going?! Come back here! Come back! Consuelo, stop her! Roza! Pita!

(The MOTHERS surround ESPERANZA as she crouches, clutching the smartphone.)

ROZA

What is she holding?

MARIA

A smartphone! Shhhhhiiiiitt!

(MARIA lunges, but ESPERANZA scurries away.)

ISABELLE

Wait! Let her go! This is the liveliest we have seen her since...

MARIA

No! Take it away!

GABRIELLA

But the voices -- they may help her regain her own!

MARIA

You forget -- it was Don Hilardo who gave it to her!

GABRIELLA

Sometimes the germ leads to the cure.

PITA

I agree! Let her keep it!

GABRIELLA

Whatever she is watching, at least she is being exposed to the world. Now here is your chance to prove your ideals. Let us put it to a vote!

MARIA

(pause) All in favor of subjecting Esperanza's fragile mind to further contamination from Don Hilardo's diabolical device, please...

GABRIELLA

Aye!

PITA, ROZA, CONSUELO, ISABELLE

Aye!

MARIA

(to Gabriella) Bitch. *(to the others)* Bitches! All of you!

GABRIELLA

We have exhausted the alternatives, and she has not made a peep since her escape. You may be outvoted, but at least you still have your democracy.

MARIA

Democracy! Ha! This is anarchy! Hexarchy!!

(MARIA marches off.)

SCENE 25

(A few days later, several measures of rock music are heard as ESPERANZA is revealed, standing with her smartphone. Suddenly her foot starts tapping, then her head bobs, followed by her shoulders. GABRIELLA and the MOTHERS surround ESPERANZA, mimicking her actions until THEY are all shimmying with delight!)

SCENE 26

(As MARIA speaks, GABRIELLA and the MOTHERS gather while ESPERANZA remains in her room.)

MARIA

Three mornings later, Esperanza seemed somehow...

MARIA

...hungry.

CONSUELO

Hungry!

CONSUELO

She ate her pudding!

PITA

Healthy! Her blood pressure is rising!

ROZA

Her bowels are moving!

ESPERANZA

Hey.

GABRIELLA

Her voice: I heard a sound.

MARIA

What? A word?

GABRIELLA

No, not exactly...

MARIA

Spoken or sung?

GABRIELLA

Sung, definitely sung. It sounded like...

GABRIELLA

...*Hey.*

ESPERANZA

Hey!

MARIA

“*Hey?*”

GABRIELLA

We are on the verge of a...

GABRIELLA

...a breakthrough!

MARIA

A breakthrough?

(Suddenly ESPERANZA bursts forth singing, and the MOTHERS and GABRIELLA rush to her side.)

ESPERANZA

*Hey, hey, she's queen of the screen,
My late show dream,
Her beautiful voice in the light;
Hey, hey, she's queen of the screen,
My new machine,
Helping me through the night.*

*She's high velocity data flow,
Through the glass transmitting vision;
She's bleeding herself across the room
To trap me in her prison! Yeah, yeah, yeah!*

THE MOTHERS and GABRIELLA

(applauding) Brava! Brava, Esperanza!!

(By the end of the song, MARIA stands between Villa Leche and Don Hilardo's study, witnessing and relating Esperanza's recovery.)

DON HILARDO

Wonderful! How did you do it?

MARIA

With a new therapeutic device: *(pause)* the smartphone.

DON HILARDO

Of course! Ha, ha!

MARIA

She seems to prefer songs streaming from a studio in Los Angeles.

DON HILARDO

From heaven itself! She is cured! I can see her!

MARIA

Not yet! There is much yet to do. We need more computers: for drawing charts, timetables, measuring the rise of her body, the span of her mind: musical, mathematical, linguistical, geographical, astronomical. She is astounding us all!

ESPERANZA

"A" as in acorn, the fruit of the oak.

MARIA

July first: Esperanza has begun to speak again, but with new found rhythms. She has us all tapping our toes.

DON HILARDO

I want to tap my toes too; I want to hear her, applaud her!

MARIA

August fifth: Esperanza is a model student, delighting in words, naming everything: her shoes, the furniture, the beetles in Consuelo's garden.

ESPERANZA

Ruffles hanks, zigwood, dweeple, fip.

MARIA

September third: I was trying to teach her the states of the mind, but she still refuses to *(turning to Esperanza)* speak! Say “euphoria!”

ESPERANZA

(singing) Speak, say “euphoria”.

MARIA

No, no! Say “concentrate!”

ESPERANZA

Say “concentrate”.

MARIA

Speak! Say “discouraging.”

ESPERANZA

Discouraging.

MARIA

You cannot go to school if you cannot speak. When I try to explain, she sings...

ESPERANZA

*When I try speaking,
The words come creeping,
So heavy, so hushed.
But when I sing,
There is a wind in me,
Running through the heart of me;
When I sing,
There is a wind in me,
Like a wave that makes me brave,
That makes me free.*

THE MOTHERS
Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh....

(ESPERANZA departs as MARIA enters DON HILARDO’S study.)

DON HILARDO

Come Maria, October seventh is her fifteenth birthday. Please, make a new law: Villa Leche expands its perimeters. Don Hilardo is allowed to participate.

MARIA

Not yet; you could cause a relapse.

DON HILARDO

Has it occurred to you, Maria, that you are perpetuating the same exclusive society I inflicted on you?

MARIA

You pursued ignorance and bliss; we pursue knowledge, wisdom, serenity.

DON HILARDO

All right then, show me, punish me, let me suffer the pain of wrenching the music from her throat. Even if I succeed, I fail.

MARIA

Really, Don Hilardo, such melodrama!

DON HILARDO

You inspire me! Come here, my little wildcat. (*embracing her*) Marry me, Maria.

MARIA

Hah! You are only proposing because you want Esperanza.

DON HILARDO

I want you both. Come, let us marry and make that family you always dreamed about.

MARIA

You know nothing of my dreams! I am free now; I would rather have my eyes gouged by vultures than be enslaved to any hidalgo! Now go away; I'm not in the mood.

DON HILARDO

Please...?

MARIA

No!

DON HILARDO

(*grasping her shoulders*) You can be a shrew, a vicious, blackmailing shrew!

MARIA

(*pushing him away*) Tame your violence! At Villa Leche we settle our disputes with language, with dignity.

DON HILARDO

Dignity?! You have stripped me of my dignity! I pay for everything but participate in nothing. All I do is pace -- back and forth, waiting, waiting!

MARIA

Like women wait -- for men!

SCENE 27

(GABRIELLA is seen strolling about Villa Leche as MARIA approaches.)

GABRIELLA

You've finished your rendezvous early tonight.

MARIA

He keeps pestering me!

GABRIELLA

Afraid he will steal back the scepter?

MARIA

His only scepter is between his legs.

GABRIELLA

Perhaps it is time to let him in.

MARIA

What if he takes her from us? He could ruin our progress, destroy our discipline.

GABRIELLA

You think he will have the same power over Esperanza that he had over you?

MARIA

She is all he ever talks about! He worships her.

GABRIELLA

Perhaps that is natural for fathers and daughters.

MARIA

I wouldn't know; I never had one.

GABRIELLA

Neither did I.

MARIA

Ah, and has it crippled us?

GABRIELLA

Yes, and it may cripple Esperanza. She is recovering, but imagine her terror: the bitter blackness of night followed by the blazing sun and vast, empty spaces.

(As MARIA speaks, ESPERANZA is seen standing by a map of the world while the MOTHERS observe.)

MARIA

At least whatever frightened her has not tamed her curiosity.

ESPERANZA

*I want to step to Egypt,
Step to France,
Watch my little fingers
Dance, dance, dance!*

MARIA

Listen, Gabriella, if I let him in, we must still continue to feed our rage, to fuel its fury -- for Esperanza's sake as well as our own.

ESPERANZA

*Up to the Baltic,
And down along the Nile,
I'm going to cruise along in style...*

MARIA

I want her to witness women who are stronger, braver, more invincible than any hidalgo!

ESPERANZA

*The world's on my wall now,
I want to see it all now,
I will, I will!*

ESPERANZA, PITA, CONSUELO, ISABELLE, ROZA

Just you wait, just you wait!

ESPERANZA

I will, I will!

PITA, CONSUELO, ISABELLE, ROZA

*The world's on your wall now,
You want to see it all now!
You will, you will!*

SCENE 28

(MARIA marches towards ESPERANZA and the MOTHERS.)

MARIA

Esperanza, darling, before you see the world, there is something you should know.

ISABELLE

Ah, finally!

MARIA

Now, Esperanza, about men...

ISABELLE

Yes, Maria, tell us about men, ha, ha!

MARIA

Shush! (*displaying a chart of a naked man*) You have seen men on the Internet, but now you will have to live with one: He is your father. He is hairy like a baboon with deflated breasts and a pickle shaped projectile. Being a father, he was once a son who grew larger than his mother. You see, Esperanza, in a man's world size is everything.

ISABELLE

In a woman's world too.

MARIA

Shhhhhush!

ROZA, PITA, CONSUELO

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

MARIA

Size makes them think they have more wisdom with which to hold the kingdom, the power, and the glory for themselves! You see, they fear being drawn back into dark, watery wombs. There are men so afraid, they make us shroud our bodies in black like the living dead; others are bold and try to grope our bosoms in the name of courtship; bend our backs in the name of matrimony; and finally, in the name of motherhood, they bloat our bellies and shackle our souls with shrill cries of duty! Destiny!...

ISABELLE

Diapers!

PITA, ROZA, CONSUELO

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

MARIA

Go away! You heard me -- go!

(The MOTHERS depart, but PITA lingers, listening.)

MARIA

Now listen carefully, Esperanza: Being a girl, you were lucky to be born at all. In some countries, girls are murdered before they emerge. In other countries, their growing bodies are mutilated; their minds judged unfit for learning, their private lives confined to a single house, their public lives so limited they cannot read the ballot much less vote, and who would they vote for? Men! Men! Always men!

PITA

Maria...

MARIA

All over the world the great talents of women are lost to lives of servitude. Yes, Esperanza, this war against us is even waged in the name of God. Remember God, being male, favors boys, and boys grow into men who fear being attacked by larger, angrier men -- some even fear their own growing sons.

PITA

Uh, Maria...

MARIA

If you were a son, you'd be sent to kill other sons by older, powerful men you'd be eager to please. These men would say they are fighting for their countries, their families, but they are really fighting because they love fighting. Oh yes, they call themselves warriors but beware, Esperanza: even ruthless warriors can be seductive, blinding your judgment with a word here, a touch there...

PITA

Shame on you, Maria!

MARIA

But never, never fear them! Know them, name them, and remember you were raised by brave, proud mothers, mothers whose milk was fortified to defend you -- even against the charms of the most vicious, most depraved, most diabolic of predators!!!

ESPERANZA

(wailing, terrified) Waaaaaaaahhhhhh!!!

(PITA runs to embrace a terrified ESPERANZA.)

SCENE 29

(DON HILARDO approaches Villa Leche, escorted by GABRIELLA.)

GABRIELLA

Maria has instructed me to inform you of your duties: You may help Esperanza with her studies, but do not attempt to regain authority. We meet daily and vote on everything: answers to moral questions, the scheduling of classes, our menus, and diversions.

DON HILARDO

How admirable.

GABRIELLA

Maria has explained the male of the species.

DON HILARDO

Ah, she must tell me sometime.

GABRIELLA

We have even explained the death of her biological mother. Of course, we still continue in the one deception: she knows nothing of her heart.

(The MOTHERS are standing in attendance as DON HILARDO approaches ESPERANZA.)

MARIA

Esperanza, do you recall meeting your father, Don Hilardo? He is a man. You remember, I explained about men.

DON HILARDO

(pause) My “daughter.” What a lovely word. You are even more beautiful than the last time I saw you. *(pause)* Please, do not be afraid; I promise not to hurt you. *(pause)* I am told you have a magical voice. Won’t you let me hear it?

MARIA

Sing the song you sing when I try to make you speak. You know, “*When I sing*”...

ESPERANZA

*When I sing,
There is a wind in me,
Running through the heart of me;
When I sing,
There is a wind in me,*

ESPERANZA (cont'd)

*Like a wave that makes me brave,
That makes me free.*

DON HILARDO

(pause, falling to his knees) Dear God, forgive me.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 30

(Weeks later, waltz music is heard as ROZA teaches ESPERANZA to dance while DON HILARDO, the MOTHERS, and GABRIELLA observe. MARIA paces with annoyance as SHE speaks.)

MARIA

Didn't I warn them? Didn't I predict it?!

ROZA

Esperanza, today I am going to teach you the Isla Fortuna Waltz. Your father, Don Hilardo, has consented to demonstrate the man's position. See how he clutches my waist, and we waltz one two, waltz one two...

ISABELLE

Oh, please, Roza, let me have a turn!

(ISABELLE snatches DON HILARDO'S arm.)

ISABELLE

(while dancing) I teach Esperanza painting. You can pose for us as a juggler, but do not worry. We can imagine the balls, ha, ha!

CONSUELO

May I dance too?

(Now CONSUELO waltzes with DON HILARDO.)

CONSUELO

It is good to have a man around. Esperanza is embroidering handkerchiefs with golden threads that spell "papa."

PITA

Oh, please, Consuelo, it is my turn!

(Now PITA waltzes with DON HILARDO.)

PITA

Poor Don Hilardo, why don't you ask Esperanza to dance?

(DON HILARDO whisks PITA towards ESPERANZA then stops. ESPERANZA hides behind Pita's skirt.)

DON HILARDO

Pardon me, my dear Esperanza. May I have the pleasure of this dance?

PITA

Do not be afraid, little one. I know, we will all dance together! Come Roza! Isabelle!

(PITA reaches for ROZA who reaches for ESPERANZA, then ISABELLE and DON HILARDO join in, clasping hands in a circle.)

PITA

Come join us, Consuelo! We need Gabriella and Maria! Come, Gabriella!

(GABRIELLA snatches MARIA by the hand, then finally THEY all dance in a circle and sing.)

GABRIELLA, MARIA, the MOTHERS and DON HILARDO

On Monday I strolled with my pretty Juanita;

On Tuesday I danced with Marie;

On Wednesday I dined with my cousin Bonita;

Oh, hombres, a man must stay free, stay free,

Oh, hombres, a man must stay free!

On Thursday I met with my darling Clarita;

On Friday I took her to bed;

On Saturday came her six angry brothers;

On Sunday we had to be wed, be wed,

Oh, hombres, a man must be wed!

(The circle breaks up as PITA pushes ESPERANZA towards DON HILARDO.)

PITA

Your turn, Esperanza, your turn to dance with Don Hilardo!

(DON HILARDO extends his hand; ESPERANZA responds shyly. THEY dance while the MOTHERS and GABRIELLA watch, speaking in whispers.)

MARIA

Look at him, leering, ogling, his knees touching her thighs.

GABRIELLA

Perfect timing; such a charming pair.

MARIA

Really, Gabriella, you should see a doctor. I think you are going blind.

(ISABELLE and ROZA approach Maria.)

ROZA

Did Esperanza tell you? She has a new electric piano, and is forming a trio with Roza and myself!

MARIA

How pathetic -- trying to buy her affection. Look, he is kissing her cheek!

ISABELLE

Tsk, tsk, you are jealous.

ROZA

Notice how Esperanza is always watching him.

ISABELLE

Of course, at Villa Leche he is unique. He has (*mimicking*) "a pickle-shaped projectile."

(MARIA, GABRIELLA, and the MOTHERS watch as DON HILARDO and ESPERANZA continue dancing.)

ESPERANZA

Am I going to grow like you?

DON HILARDO

You will grow into Esperanza, only there will be more of you than now: more height, more weight, more memories.

ESPERANZA

I want to be like you!

DON HILARDO

Well, for now I am a novelty, but soon you will see that you are destined to be a woman -- like your mamas.

ESPERANZA

But papas are so big, so strong.

DON HILARDO

Mamas are strong in other ways, and though you live in a world where men still rule, women can never be stopped from doing what women have done for centuries: bringing new life, beauty, love, and hope into this mad world.

(ESPERANZA and DON HILARDO separate, dancing off in different directions.)

SCENE 31

(DON HILARDO joins MARIA.)

DON HILARDO

She is so lovely, Maria. Her voice has a rich, haunting resonance.

MARIA

I have seen you recording it. So do you want to hear the Conquista name on C Ds, the Internet, and television?

DON HILARDO

No, I only want Esperanza to please herself. There is no one like her: her laugh is Consuelo's; her impudence, Isabelle's; her gentleness, Pita.

MARIA

What about Gabriella?

DON HILARDO

Gabriella is her first love of music.

MARIA

And me? What am I? Her appetite!

DON HILARDO

Yes! Her hunger for knowledge!

MARIA

And you? What are you?

DON HILARDO

The color of her eyes, the slant of her nose.

MARIA

You are her restlessness, her need to penetrate.

DON HILARDO

No, *you* are her restlessness; I want her safe at home.

MARIA

And I want her fearless and free -- to be better than her mothers. We were raised to be humble, but Esperanza will nurture her talents; she may even escape marriage and motherhood, but if she fails, if she chooses to marry, she must have daughters, only daughters!

DON HILARDO

Nonsense, Maria! All children are precious, sons as well as daughters.

MARIA

Too many sons grow into stone throwing bullies -- arrogant, domineering...

DON HILARDO

Like you, Maria, like you! Sometimes I fear you want Esperanza to become as ruthless as the hidalgos you teach her to despise. Oh, yes, I know all about your lessons, but it is too late. Esperanza is Esperanza, too full of goodness to despise anyone, even herself -- because of you and her mothers who came when she cried and rejoiced in her gifts.

MARIA

Gifts you would have let wither and rot!

(Loud rock music is heard.)

DON HILARDO

What is that?

MARIA

Esperanza's new band!

(MARIA stomps off while DON HILARDO lingers to listen.)

SCENE 32

(ESPERANZA appears, rehearsing with ISABELLE and ROZA, singing to electronic accompaniment.)

ESPERANZA

*She flew the womb much too soon,
Her mother left her thirsting;
Heart, heart, a bubble in her breast,
Puffed to nearly bursting.*

*The bubble popped,
The mother died;
The child lived on,
'Twas matricide.*

(Lights dim to black.)

SCENE 33

(A month later, MARIA speaks as the MOTHERS and GABRIELLA convene around her.)

MARIA

I was fearful, watchful; I called a secret meeting. *(to the mothers)* Notice anything unusual?

CONSUELO

You look a little tired, Maria.

ISABELLE

And fat! You have gained weight.

MARIA

Shush! I did not mean myself! It is Esperanza: she and Don Hilardo are becoming too...dependent.

CONSUELO

Because she loves Don Hilardo's stories. There are always more stories to tell, but I have run out of recipes.

ROZA

She dances with the grace of a ballerina.

ISABELLE

She paints with her own bold brushstrokes, and there isn't a stitch she hasn't mastered.

GABRIELLA

It is a case of the pupil becoming more proficient than her teachers -- except for you and Don Hilardo, of course.

ROZA

And even you will run out of history!

MARIA

Don't be an idiot! She is growing prideful and vain, and why not? Look how he dotes on her, and she is always singing papa this, papa that.

ISABELLE

Poor Maria, are you afraid of sharing your lover? Meeeeeeow.

MARIA

Shush! I have my reasons.

ISABELLE

The "possessive" mother.

MARIA

No, the "expectant" mother.

ISABELLE

Ahhhhhhhhh!

ROZA

Brava! Brava!

PITA

Finally! Congratulations!

CONSUELO

(to Pita) I knew it! I could tell by her appetite: the chili peppers!

PITA

How many months?

MARIA

Two, but you must not tell Don Hilardo -- not yet. *(pause, she sighs)* You see, for years, even before Villa Leche, every cell in my body yearned to nurture new life, but now I feel...fretful.

PITA

Ah, that is perfectly normal! And now Esperanza will be a sister!

MARIA

No, Esperanza will be giving concerts and changing the world!

ROZA

(to Consuelo) Ha! Being pregnant is making her loca.

MARIA

Is it loca to have ambitions?! Don Hilardo would keep our fledgling pecking on the ground, but she sings about China and Egypt -- because she wants to travel, to fly, so her voice will be heard!

PITA

You mean like the rock stars on YouTube?

MARIA

I have made inquiries: there are schools for gifted children in Buenos Aires, and American schools in New York and Los Angeles. Think of it: once her talent is discovered, she will have everyone singing, parroting her words, hearing our message, saturating the airways as we saturate the earth -- with the goodness of our milk!

ROZA

Ah! You want Esperanza to sing about Villa Leche so people will drink our milk?

CONSUELO

The way cripples go to Lourdes for the water?!

ROZA

Can men come too?

ISABELLE

What about fucking? I refuse to live without fucking, and for fucking you need men!

ROZA and PITA

(applauding) Brava! Brava!

CONSUELO

Yes, yes, ha, ha!

MARIA

Men will be welcomed. Our goal is not to exclude or dominate. We only want to make them more like us -- so we are not annihilated!

ROZA

How do we make them more like us?

ISABELLE

Maria's magic milk: it grows tits! Ha, ha!

MARIA

Yes! And melts missiles! Evaporates armies! Turns murdering nations into mothering nations!

ISABELLE

I knew a murdering mother.

ROZA
Noooo!

CONSUELO
Who?

PITA
Shhh! Let her speak!

MARIA

Esperanza will be our emissary, but to accomplish this she must leave Villa Leche!

GABRIELLA

Don Hilardo will want to go with her.

MARIA

News of the baby will keep him here.

ISABELLE

Ha! Wet diapers never hold a man for long.

MARIA

This baby will.

ISABELLE

Already she is boasting! Ha, ha!

GABRIELLA

When do you plan this exodus?

MARIA

When she has had her initiation -- after her first bleedings.

ROZA

She is late, but any day now!

MARIA

This meeting is adjourned!

(ALL but GABRIELLA exit.)

GABRIELLA

Maria, you may not be able to separate Esperanza and her father.

MARIA

Please, Gabriella, trust me to have her interests at heart. I am not the fool you first met.

GABRIELLA

True, you have progressed to full-fledged megalomania.

MARIA

(pause) We no longer have the same dreams, Gabriella, yet you stay. Why is that?

GABRIELLA

You are my family, Villa Leche my home. *(pause)* Now that Don Hilardo is here, I confess I am drawn to his charms, and believe he truly loves you, Maria -- nearly as much as I do.

MARIA

(pause) Don Hilardo loves himself -- in Esperanza.

GABRIELLA

Perhaps, but he also loves her as we do.

MARIA

We are women; we know the rapture between mothers and daughters.

GABRIELLA

He has a rapture of his own -- where are you going?

MARIA

To vomit!

(MARIA dashes off.)

SCENE 34

(ROZA enters, skipping, waving a sheet with a crimson stain in the shape of a bird. SHE is followed by a blushing ESPERANZA.)

ROZA

Look, look, Esperanza's initiation! Consuelo will be baking a cake and Gabriella has composed a song of celebration.

(MARIA and the MOTHERS gather with GABRIELLA conducting as THEY sing in perfect harmony.)

GABRIELLA

Are we ready? One, two, three...

MARIA, THE MOTHERS, GABRIELLA

*Oh, your river of red
Is the bloodstream we said
Would come with the tide
From inside.*

*Oh, your river of red,
Like the rivers we've bled,
Flows through women we mourn,
Flows through women unborn;
Then it surges through time,
Forms an ocean sublime,
You must cross all alone
Now you're grown!*

(MARIA, GABRIELLA, and the MOTHERS form a circle to embrace ESPERANZA who leaps up, singing.)

ESPERANZA

Then I can sing to the world on the Internet?

MARIA

Is that what you truly want?

ESPERANZA

*Why not? I could be hot!
I want to sing, to lose control,
To shatter glass and shake my ass!
I want to sing to the world
On the Internet!*

MARIA

And what will you sing about?

ESPERANZA

Villa Leche! Villa Leche!

MARIA

Then you will sing about how we turned our principles into a way of life, how we sustain ourselves in harmony.

ESPERANZA

Villa Leche! Villa Leche!

MARIA

Does papa know you want to leave?

ESPERANZA

*When I say I must leave,
Papa touches my heart;
Papa says it is strong,
Papa says it will last
A lifetime long.*

MARIA

Good! Tomorrow you must be packed and ready to leave with Isabelle and Roza.
(*embracing her*) Oh, how can we let you go? Who will make us laugh? Who will we scold? I hope your mamas have given you the courage of a queen, the wisdom of a sage.

PITA

Remember to be kind and gentle like papa.

MARIA

Be a leader like mama!

ISABELLE

Remember papa!

MARIA

Mama!

ISABELLE, CONSUELO, ROZA

Papa!

GABRIELLA

Just be yourself, Esperanza, yourself!

MARIA

Go now, but please, do not tell papa you are leaving. I will tell him.

(ESPERANZA, GABRIELLA, and the MOTHERS depart.)

SCENE 35

(MARIA speaks as DON HILARDO approaches.)

MARIA

The next day I called Don Hilardo to announce that *(to Don Hilardo)* we are bringing a new spirit into the world, a child of our own.

DON HILARDO

(pause, then embracing her) Oh, Maria, Maria, I...I am very pleased -- amazed! I did not think it was possible. Are you certain?

MARIA

Five months certain! For a poet you are not very observant.

DON HILARDO

I shall trace the day, the very hour of conception, and Esperanza will be a sister!

MARIA

Yes, a sister who has become a woman -- in one way at least.

DON HILARDO

Ah.

MARIA

She is jubilant because now she is free to continue her education -- in Los Angeles!

DON HILARDO

Where...? What are you saying?!

MARIA

It is your own fault: your computers have allowed other cultures to intrude. Esperanza has become too worldly for Villa Leche.

DON HILARDO

You should have consulted me?! If she leaves, I will go with her!

MARIA

Isabelle and Roza are going.

DON HILARDO

Then I will make certain they are protected.

MARIA

Fine, but I refuse to bring another orphan into this world. If you leave I will abort!

DON HILARDO

(pause, stunned) You would not imperil your soul...

MARIA

My soul?! Ha! What good is my soul if I am no longer loved?

DON HILARDO

Ah, Maria, Maria, you are still the abandoned girl I met years ago. When will you find a home in my heart as I once had in yours?

MARIA

When you stay and father your child! Listen, Don Hilardo, Esperanza will be our emissary; she will become the most illustrious, most celebrated Conquista ever born!

DON HILARDO

To hell with the Conquistas! Let her sing from here! Los Angeles is brutal: a barbarous city with reckless traffic, drugs, guns, and stress! Yes, stress which raises the blood pressure and affects the vital organs, the vitalist of organs! We must not forget why Villa Leche was founded in the first place.

MARIA

It is too late; she is waiting at the gate!

SCENE 36

(DON HILARDO, followed by MARIA, rushes to the gate where ESPERANZA, ISABELLE, and ROZA are waiting, baggage in hand. CONSUELO, ISABELLE, and GABRIELLA stand nearby.)

DON HILARDO

Esperanza, you must not leave Villa Leche!

MARIA

Nonsense, Esperanza! Mama says the world is yours!

(ESPERANZA becomes increasingly torn, running between DON HILARDO and MARIA.)

DON HILARDO

Listen to papa: this is where you belong!

MARIA

Trust mama, run to your freedom!

DON HILARDO

Trust papa, freedom is a state of mind!

MARIA

Leave now -- while you are young!

DON HILARDO

Stay! You are not like other girls!

MARIA

Leave! You are braver, brighter!

DON HILARDO

Stay! You are weaker, more vulnerable; your heart: it is...

MARIA

Stop!

DON HILARDO

...a pinwheel!

MARIA

Noooooo!

DON HILARDO

A plastic pinwheel!!!

ESPERANZA

Yiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!!!!

(ESPERANZA shrieks, then collapses. Glass shattering sounds are heard, and lights black out.)

SCENE 37

(Later that night, dim candlelight reveals ESPERANZA surrounded by MARIA, DON HILARDO, GABRIELLA, and the MOTHERS with PITA fanning her face.)

MARIA

Imagine: a voice that shatters every bulb and pane of glass. Finally when Esperanza was revived...

ESPERANZA

(whisper-singing) Will I die? Will I die?

GABRIELLA

You will live to be the oldest crone in Fortuna!

ROZA

In the world!

PITA

Everyone will want a heart like yours.

ESPERANZA

Is it a good one?

MARIA

Tell her, Don Hilardo.

DON HILARDO

(pause) Yes, yes, the best ever made. You see how hysterical we are? Because we speak from our hearts -- unreliable organs at best.

MARIA

Please, my darling, never forget us; never forget...

MARIA

...Villa Leche.

DON HILARDO

Villa Leche...

MARIA

*Together we've come such a long long way,
Just you and I, just you and I.*

MARIA, GABRIELLA, and the MOTHERS

*You were a ribbon to unravel, unwind,
To throw to the winds like a spiralling kite;
Your kite will break free, your ribbon unfurl,
Over clouds never formed, into valleys unseen.
You'll be a pilgrim, traveling so far,
With your heart tied to ribbons*

MARIA, GABRIELLA, and the MOTHERS (cont'd)

*Wherever you are.
You'll be a pilgrim traveling so far
With your heart tied to ribbons
Wherever you are.
And all the hearts your ribbon's tied to,
Go inside you, go inside you.*

DON HILARDO, MARIA, GABRIELLA, and the MOTHERS

*And all the hearts your ribbon's tied to,
Go inside you, go inside you....*

(ESPERANZA, ROZA, and ISABELLE depart as
those left behind wave farewell.)

CONSUELO

Maria and Don Hilardo, we have something to say. *(pause)* Since Esperanza has gone, Pita and I decided... Well, we thought it best if...

PITA

We are leaving! We need a change of scenery, and since Esperanza is gone...

MARIA

No, no, please stay! We can follow her career from here! I even thought of a stage name: Arrhythmianna Lana! Soon there will be concerts, CDs, movie rights.

PITA

Sorry, Maria, it is time we left.

MARIA

But my baby will be our new beginning! If it is a man you want, take Don Hilardo. I will share him.

DON HILARDO

What...?!

MARIA

He will impregnate us all; we will have dozens of infants, oceans of milk!

CONSUELO

Thank you, Maria, but I have a man of my own.

PITA

You need rest, Maria. You are acting like my cousin Bianca before she set fire to her foot.

GABRIELLA

Villa Leche is over; the mothers will be gone.

MARIA

Recruit new ones! In the new Villa Leche, our breasts will produce an antidote to suffering.

GABRIELLA

Ha! Listen to yourself. You expect us to live in an economy based on milk.

DON HILARDO

And music -- an economy of dreams.

MARIA

It was your dream too, Don Hilardo -- yours before mine!

DON HILARDO

The dream of romantics, isolationists, imposing our ideals on reality in the name of God, in the name of heaven...

MARIA

Yes! And in the name of heaven they will live! They will live!

SCENE 38

(Instantly lights reveal a Los Angeles club where ESPERANZA, wearing flashing neon breasts, performs dancing wildly, seductively, accompanied by ISABELLE and ROZA.)

ESPERANZA

*Oh, my lover,
I gave him a tasty treat;
Oh, my lover,
I gave him a red hot teat;*

*Oh, my lover,
I said, come and take a bite;
Oh, my lover,
I said, whet your appetite!*

ISABELLE, ROZA, ESPERANZA

*Oh, my lover, my lover,
My leche Tom;
I'm your leche woman,
Don't drop that bomb!
Oh, my lover, my lover,
It's time you see;
Poco a poco for harmony!*

(Camera lights flash as ESPERANZA, ISABELLE,
and ROZA freeze, holding their last note.)

EPILOGUE

(MARIA'S scream is heard and a pop! DON HILARDO enters holding twins: a boy wrapped in a blue blanket, a girl wrapped in pink. GABRIELLA strolls beside him, pushing MARIA in a wheelchair.)

GABRIELLA

(whispering to Don Hilardo) Doctor Faustino said it was the most traumatic birth he has ever witnessed.

DON HILARDO

My poor darling, you must learn to walk all over again.

GABRIELLA

She will explore Villa Leche with little Marta and Francisco.

DON HILARDO

I am thinking of taking a percentage of Esperanza's royalties to commission a fountain in her honor.

GABRIELLA

A fountain of breasts!

DON HILARDO

Look: Maria is standing!

MARIA

Yes, taking my first step in an innocent world. Shhhhh, listen, can you hear the echoes?
Can you hear our songs...?

(The MOTHERS' VOICES are heard from a distance.)

THE MOTHERS' VOICES

*Esperanza, little darling,
Little starling,
Little song...*

MARIA and the MOTHERS

*Where in the pampas,
Where in the sunlight,
Where in the moonlight
Have you gone?*

(Fade to darkness.)

End of Play

End of Play