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MEN ON THE VERGE OF A HIS-PANIC BREAKDOWN

A Play in Monologues

by

GUILLERMO REYES



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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GUILLERMO REYES

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(MEN ON THE VERGE OF A HIS-PANIC BREAKDOWN)

ISBN 0-87129-899-6

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

MEN ON THE VERGE OF A HIS-PANIC BREAK-DOWN originally premiered in Los Angeles at the Celebration Theater, June 1994, starring Felix Pire. The production was directed by Joseph Megel. Set and costume design was by Leonard Pollack.

A subsequent production opened in San Francisco at the Theatre Rhinoceros, September 1994, starring George Castillo, directed by Joseph Megel. It also played at the City Lights Theatre in San Jose in the summer of 1995.

MEN ON THE VERGE OF A HIS-PANIC BREAK-DOWN was produced off-Broadway in March 1997 by Playwrights Preview Productions/Francis Hill Associates at the 47th Street Playhouse, starring Felix Pire, and directed by Joseph Megel.

MEN ON THE VERGE OF A HIS-PANIC BREAKDOWN

A Series of Comedic Monologues

For 1 to 7 Men

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Running time: Approximately 1 hour, 40 minutes.

Simple unit set.

PROLOGUE

(All the props, costumes and furniture hang on a rack as if in an all-purpose bazaar of improbable pieces brought together. The table tops for the "Castro's Queen" monologue, for instance, look like giant Carmen Miranda hats, and yet when they're turned over and placed in a stool, they create a restaurant table.

The Man on the Verge enters as the music plays. He sees his set hanging up there. It's time to put on the show, to live out the fantasy, the laughter, the pathos, to do it all over again as if somewhere, in metaphysical space, he's destined to do this many times, preferably off-Broadway, but on the road as well, in a big theatre, or a small theatre anywhere on earth.

He takes down the T-shirt that he'll need for the first monologue, and the show's ready to start. Throughout the transitions, he'll continue to discard the props and take off the new ones until, by the end of the play, the stage will lay bare as if the truth has been spoken and stands there naked in space for the audience to see. The actor will not have left the stage, all the transitions and changes of costume will have been done in front of the audience in dim light and choreographed to the beat of the music.)

SCENE ONE:

THE GAY LITTLE IMMIGRANT THAT COULD

(FEDERICO: a young man, early 20s, thick accent.)

April 29, 1992

Querida Madre,
Dear Mother,

My first day in Los Angeles, and I already have everything I want.

I arrived with the address book in my hand full of possibilities, and phone numbers of potential wealthy backers... So I go, "Knock, knock, knock. Hello, it's me Federico. Remember me? You come to my country to help fight for social justice and help pick, ah, native fruits? You are courageous American student of native ways who say to me if ever I come to the United States of America, and experience openly gay lifestyle, you help me settle down, find a job, and introduce me to atmosphere rife with sexual openings." *(Blast!)* The door come shut on my face on my first attempt to fit into openly gay lifestyle.

But not to worry, Mamacita, I try again. Because I believe when you try and try again, doors open. That is the American way of life! You keep trying for that one door to open!

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I walk the streets of Los Angeles, and I for myself, see the excitement of the American lifestyle. I see fire and smoke in the horizon, and I say: "Oh, must be those Hollywood folk making another *Lethal Weapon* sequel!" People running, fire trucks rushing back and forth, policemen in riot gear hiding behind doughnut shops. And I see for myself that America lives up to its image in the movies. I hear a blast! I look around me, a drug store is on fire, people rush into a shoe store and pick out whatever they want! That is America, Mamá, such enthusiastic consumer appetite!

I go to my next address: "Knock, knock, it's me Federico. Remember me? You and I experienced compromising positions while you got away from your country to study fertility rituals among same-sex indigenous couples. Well, I come to experience openly gay lifestyle in your homeland." (*Blast!*)

The door comes shut on my face again, Mamacita. And one by one, doors shut on my face, and my potential wealthy backers forget all the promises they make when they come to my country to deflower native bottom like myself ...

Well, I had one more address to go to. So I go... "Knock, knock, knock. I'm Federico. I am your pen pal. You write to me for the last five years and you say if ever I come to America, you help me settle down. You are financially stable man eager to meet men from my country willing to submit themselves to socioeconomic dependency. Well, here I am, gringuito. Make me your love slave!"

Of course, now I am standing on the entrance to this building, and I notice things very different from what he say in

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his letter. He is supposed to be handsome young man who work as a model, live in a neighborhood worthy of American prosperous lifestyle, so that we spend weekends together in Palm Springs sprinkling our seed through the desert. But here I am standing on the doorstep of his building—and there is a drunk man lying on the mat.

I am knocking on his door now, and the knocker falls off on my hand. I am beginning to suspect he is going through a recession... “Knock, knock, knock. Remember me? I’m Federico.” Then the door open, and a wheelchair pop out, a blanket covering his feet, and a large pink toupee sticks out almost covering his face...and I tell him, “You are not the man I correspond with all these years. You don’t live in prosperous economic indulgence. You are not model with tight chest, rippling biceps and solid wardrobe.” And then he say—and this is where his voice turn deep and spooky, and the wind stirs the palm trees which are now on fire—he say, “Young man, curfew begins at sundown!” And I stand, oh, mesmerized. “Go home or the L.A.P.D. is gonna get ya!”

The L.A.P.D.—what deep meaning was held in such words? But people are running inside, shutting their doors, as the palm trees burn... “Riot,” they shout. “Riot!” I begin to understand. There I stand in the hallway of my cockroach-infested American Dream.

I really have no more addresses or phone numbers to go to this time... Night begin to fall. People drive fast home, passing me by. “Curfew!” they shout, “Go home! Curfew!” And I say, “Ay, que curfew ni que na! In my coun-

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try curfew last fifteen years, curfew!” And I am walking. And then I see them again—it’s the mob of Hollywood extras! They are taking furnitures from the store. And I tell myself, “I will need a bed to sleep in tonight.” So I go get myself one...

I run inside and choose from a wide selection of merchandise. There is a sign: “CLEARANCE! EVERYTHING MUST GO!” Okay. I pick out my little mattress with tiny, heavenly angels drawn on it to remind me of my Catholic upbringing, and I set it up in the parking lot. But then I tell myself, “This is not enough for prosperous American lifestyle. I must have some more!” So I run in again, and again until I have my couch, my sofa chair, my beanbag, my love seat for the series of lovers I will meet in the United States once I start to lead openly gay lifestyle full of economic indulgence... Soon enough, I have an entire American living room! It is comfortable, Mamá. It is the most comfortable living room in the world. And America—my America—is one large living room, where anyone can steal his own couch! And to think, I already have it all in my first day in the United States of America.

But something is missing, Mamá, something else is missing in my new, prosperous lifestyle, now that I have everything. And that is a man. Can I go looting for a man? Well, that is exactly what I do! I break into the Porno Pleasure House on Santa Monica and find myself ten inches worth of a man, and I bring him into my living room, all ten inches of him staring me in the face—and I hold him in my arms—you always said I liked to play with dolls, Mamá... I have it all then, Mamá. I have a living room with a couch

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and coffee table and a rug and a ten-inch man in my hand. I am an American success. But all it takes is some pendejo with a cigarette lighter to set the couch on fire. And there it goes, Mamá, the couch first, then the lamp-table, the lamp, the bed, the rug, and then finally even the dildo is on fire! And there I stand, watching my American Dream go up in flames, and the looters gather around me and applaud, and tell me, "Welcome! Welcome to Los Angeles!" As the ten-inch dildo melts away into the night ...

So you see, Mamacita, I write you this letter from the fire zone. With a piece of paper and pen I took from Thrifty. I write to you as the National Guard moves into my street—and I say, "Hello! Remember me? I'm Federico! You invaded my country a couple of years ago. I slept with a few of you." Men, how quickly they forget ... So there they are again, bringing order back to the city. And we all return again to the life we had before ... with twenty dollars in my pocket, a phone book full of wrong numbers, and the hope that the fires will die out and that I will find a place of my own to stay. A place to start again. And buy my first bed, my first couch, and my first man ...

Good night, Mamacita. Your son, Federico.

(Lights fade out.)

SCENE TWO:

GOOD-BYE TO SUGAR DADDY

(VINNIE: youthful, pretty, but 30. Turning 30 is for him a crisis.)

He's 18? ... No, no bother.

The point is well-taken, Sugar Daddy. Don't worry, it doesn't take me that long to pack. I can be out of here in a matter of minutes.

Now, if you could just sign here, and here, and down here ... This form will help me seek compensation from the Society of West Hollywood Kept Boys Over 30 ...

Please, say no more. You'll be late for the Gay Republican fund-raiser.

I am *not* upset. Please. Let's be businesslike about this. And I'll leave a receipt for your taxes, yes ...

Don't worry about me. I've been meaning to visit the folks back in Colombia, the ones who survived the last volcano eruption.

I've got all the bases covered. Self-reliant, independent, one-man show—that's me.

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Oh, I'll leave written instructions for the new 18-year-old from Wichita, Kansas, so he can deal with your prostate gland medicine.

You'll be late... Good-bye, Sugar Daddy.

(He watches Sugar Daddy go. A half-hearted wave good-bye... He's left alone. He looks around the room. He lights a cigarette. He makes a phone call.)

Hello, is this Lenny? Lenny, darling, how are you? Nice to hear your voice again after all these years. Why, it's Vinnie. Vinnie Contreras. Oh, come now... I was 20, you were 29. Ten years or so ago, remember?

I came in clutching Sugar Daddy's arm and we kindly asked you to depart from our presence. Yes, I helped you pack. But no, I don't remember throwing your bags out the window. Let memory be more selective, Lenny! Lenny!?

So what have you been doing with your life? What? Oh, no particular reason, just wanted to keep in touch. No, no, it's not that at all—all right, Lenny, he's 18, he's blonde, fresh from Kansas. What am I to do, Lenny? Oh, oh, Lenny...

But please let me ask you, and I hope it's not too personal. What did you do after you voluntarily departed from Sugar Daddy's presence?... How many years at the shelter? I can't stand poor lighting, you know. But OK, afterwards, what did you do afterwards? Dry-cleaning? Oh, I love dry-cleaning, you know, I love the hangers and the plastic wrap that makes the clothes look so, you know, pressed! So, how

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much do they pay?... Oh, well, that's just slightly below the minimum wage... And no health care—well, that would be too Hillary, wouldn't it?

Listen, Lenny, do you think there might be an opening at the dry cleaners' any time soon? No, I just figured at this time in my life, I could use some...some flexibility. I'm exploring different venues for making a living. I'd like to be open to career alternatives... So, when do you think there might be an opening? Soon, you said? Oh, you didn't say.

Well, you'll keep me in mind, won't you, Lenny? Oh, no, no, Colombia is not for me these days, you know. I'm not sure if I belong at home at all, you know. No, I couldn't. I couldn't go back. I burnt too many bridges. Literally ... Too many people tend to die when I burn bridges...

Lenny, wait! One more thing—

How did you ever feel about Sugar Daddy? You know, feelings. As in emotion? I know that about a half century separates me from him, but it can happen, right? Can it happen that after so many years, you can begin to feel a certain attachment to the creature? Oh, Lenny, there comes a time when even people like us develop feelings, don't you think?...

No, I'm *not*—I'm *not* crazy, Lenny.

After a while, you begin to develop feelings for those who pay your rent, feelings as noble and complex as any others.

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Feelings for his loose skin against your thighs, his dentures stuck in your pubic hair, his cancer-ridden lungs breathing sweet, warm air against your face.

Yes, Lenny, I love Sugar Daddy. I love Sugar Daddy! Only now do I realize it. Only now have I come to that conclusion.

Please don't. Don't hang up! ... (*Desperate to keep him on the phone.*) We must get together for cappuccino at the Abby. Tea at Trumps? Attitude at the Studio? You no longer "do" attitude? Lenny!

(He hangs up the phone. He grabs his suitcase and holds it in his arms as a barrier against the world before him.)

Well, I suppose I understand why you had to hang up. I am alone now, ready to hit the streets. So here I go... I am one of the few, one of the brave, one of the Aging Kept Boys of West Hollywood.

I am not afraid. You hear that, world?

(As he "clicks his heels" three times.)

I am not afraid. I am not afraid. I AM NOT AFRAID!

(Lights fade out.)

SCENE THREE:

HISPANICALLY CORRECT

(EDWARD: a glamorous young man, mid-20s, California San Fernando Valley accent)

Hello ... Is this, like, the Hispanic Hotline?

OK, this is my first time, you know. So, like, I'm supposed to give you the dirt and you're, like, supposed to tell me it's, like, *Hispanically Correct*. Is that right?

OK, so I'm, like, young and I'm, like, glamorous, OK? And when I first came to Hollywood a couple of years ago I, like, changed my name, I bleached my skin and I started frequenting the trendiest straight bars in town. My name now is, like, Edward Thornhill the Third. Well, never mind my real name. I can't even pronounce it, OK?

OK, so, like, recently this famous American movie actress whose name I couldn't possibly reveal—she, like, bought the rights to a well-known Mexican novel. And all of a sudden there was this wonderful part for, like, a Hispanic actor, OK? But my agent doesn't even know I'm, like, ethnic. And I have to sneak off to the audition all by myself and I'm really nervous, OK? But once I get there, I'm, like, really good, OK?