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Dramatic Publishing

A Comedy by JOSEFINA LOPEZ



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is dedicated to the women on whom these characters are loosely based, my mother Catalina Perales and my sister Esther López, S. Orbach, the author of <u>Fat is a Feminist Issue</u>, and to all the undocumented and now documented garment workers of Los Angeles. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES was first presented by El Teatro De La Esperanza at the Mission Cultural Center in San Francisco, California, May 25, 1990. The production was directed by Hector Correa; set design by Kate Boyd; light design by Elaine Buckholtz; costume design by Anastasia Powers. The cast was as follows:

ANA Francine Torre	s
ESTELA Jennifer Procto	r
CARMEN Marta Del Ri	0
PANCHA Martine Tessa Koning-Martine	z
ROSALI Miraida Río	s

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Playwright's Notes

When I was very young my best friend and I were walking to the corner store. My parents had warned me not to tell anyone I didn't have "papers" and to be careful walking the streets. On the way to the store we saw "la migra" (INS/immigration/Border Patrol). I quickly turned to my friend and tried to "act white." I spoke in English and talked about Jordache jeans and Barbie dolls hoping no one would suspect us. When I finally got my legal residence card, I remembered this incident knowing that I would never have to hide and be afraid again. I also laughed at my *naivete* and fear because what I had thought was la migra was only the L.A. Police Meter Maid.

In 1987 the Simpson-Rodino Amnesty Law, designed to stop the influx of undocumented people entering the country, granted thousands of undocumented people living in the U.S. since 1982 legal residency. This was an opportunity of a lifetime. However, thousands, not trusting the government, hesitated to apply, fearing this was a scheme to deport them. They, like me, couldn't believe that after hiding and being persecuted for so long they were finally going to have the freedom to live and work in this country.

I got my residence card soon after I graduated from high school and was then able to apply to college. I had been accepted to New York University, but I had to wait a year to be eligible for financial aid. During this year I worked at Mc-Donald's, but I hated it. Then, desperate for a new job, I asked my sister to let me work at her tiny sewing factory. I worked there for five months and my experiences at the factory served as inspiration for *REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES*. At the factory there were a few Latina women, all older than me. They liked working for my sister because she wasn't stingy. We spent so much time together working, sweating and laughing, that we bonded. I remember feeling blessed that I was a woman because male bonding could never compare with what happens when women work together. We had something special and I wanted to show the world.

In the U.S. undocumented people are referred to as "illegal aliens" which conjures up in our minds the image of extraterrestrial beings who are not human, who do not bleed when they're cut, who do not cry when they feel pain, who do not have fears, dreams and hopes...Undocumented people have been used as scapegoats for so many of the problems in the U.S., from drugs and violence, to the economy. I hope that someday this country recognizes the very important contributions of undocumented people and remembers that they too came to this country in search of a better life.

> Josefina López Los Angeles March, 1992

A Full-length Play For Five Women

CHARACTERS

ANA 18, plump and pretty, sister of Estela, daughter of Carmen. She is a recent high school graduate and a young feminist

ESTELA24, plump, plain-looking, owner of the "Garcia Sewing Factory"

CARMEN 48, a short, large woman, mother of Ana and Estela. She has a talent for storytelling

PANCHA 32, a huge woman who is very mellow in her ways, but quick with her tongue

ROSALI ... 29, only a bit plump in comparison to the rest of the women. She is sweet and easygoing

SETTING:

A tiny sewing factory in East Los Angeles.

TIME:

The first week of September 1987.

NOTE: Words in Spanish are in **bold** print. You will find a glossary and Spanish terms in the back of the play.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

- Scene 1: Monday morning, September 7, 1987, about 7:00 a.m.
- Scene 2: A few hours later, about 11:30 a.m.
- Scene 3: A few hours later, about 3:45 p.m.
- Scene 4: The following day, about 7:10 a.m.
- Scene 5: Later the same day. Late afternoon.

<u>ACT TWO</u>

- Scene 1: Wednesday, September 9th, about 8:15 a.m.
- Scene 2: Thursday, September 10th, about 2:00 a.m.
- Scene 3: Same day, about 2:00 p.m.
- Scene 4: Friday, September 11th, about 2:25 p.m.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

- AT RISE: The stage becomes visible. The clock on the wall shows it is 6:59 a.m. Keys are heard outside the door. The door opens. ANA and CARMEN enter. ANA drags herself in, goes directly to the electricity box and switches it on. Automatically all the machines "hummm" loudly. The lights turn on at different times. The radio also blasts on with a song in Spanish. CARMEN quickly turns off the radio. She puts her lunch on the table. ANA slumps on a machine. CARMEN then gets a broom and uses it to get a mousetrap from underneath the table. She prays that today will be the day she caught the mouse. She sees the mousetrap empty and is very disappointed.
- CARMEN. ;Pinche rata! I'll get you. (CARMEN returns the broom. She takes two dollars from her purse, approaches ANA and presents them to her.) Ten. Go to the bakery.

ANA. No. I want to go back to sleep!

- CARMEN. ;Huevona! If we don't help your sister who else is going to? She already works all hours of the night trying to finish the dresses. Por fin she's doing something productive with her life.
- ANA. I know I'm trying to be supportive, ayy! I don't want to go to the bakery. I don't want any bread.

CARMEN. That's good, at least you won't get fatter.

ANA. ;Amá!

- CARMEN. I only tell you for your own good. Bueno, I'll go get the bread myself, but you better not get any when I bring it. (CARMEN walks to the door.) Ana, don't forget to close the doors. This street is full of winos and drug addicts. And don't you open the door to any strangers!
- ANA. Yeah, yeah, I know! I'm not a kid. (ANA locks both doors with a key. She goes toward the toilet and turns on the water in the sink. ANA splashes water on her face to awaken. She sticks her hand behind the toilet seat and gets out a notebook and a pen. Spotlight on ANA. She sits and writes the following:) Monday, September 7, 1987...I don't want to be here! I only come because my mother practically drags me out of bed and into the car and into the factory. She pounds on the...No...(Scratches "pounds.") She knocks on...No...(She scratches "knocks.") She pounds on the garage wall, and since I think it's an earthquake, I run out. Then she catches me and I become her prisoner...Is it selfish of me not to want to wake up every morning at 6:30 a.m., Saturdays included, to come work here for 67 dollars a week? Oh, but such is the life of a Chicana in the garment industry. Cheap labor...I've been trying to hint to my sister for a raise, but she says I don't work fast enough for her to pay me minimum wage...The weeks get longer and I can't believe I've ended up here. I just graduated from high school...Most of my friends are in college...It's as if I'm going backwards. I'm doing the work that mostly illegal aliens do...(Scratches "illegal aliens.") No, "undocumented workers"...or else it sounds like these people come from Mars...Soon I will have my "Temporary Residence Card," then after two years, my green card...I'm happy to finally be legal, but I thought things would be different...What I really want to do is write...

CARMEN (off, interrupting). Ana, open the door! (CARMEN pounds on the door outside. ANA quickly puts her writing away and goes to open the door.) Hurry up! There's a wino following me! (ANA gets the keys and unlocks both doors.) Hurry! He's been following me from the bakery.

(ANA opens the first door. CARMEN is behind the bar door and is impatiently waiting for ANA to open it. ANA opens the door. CARMEN hurries in nervously. ANA quickly shuts the doors. ANA looks out the window.)

- ANA. Amá, that's not a wino, it's an "Alelullah"!
- CARMEN. But he was following me!
- ANA. I know, those witnesses don't give up. (CARMEN puts the bag of bread on the table. She fills a small pot with water and puts it on the little hot plate to boil the water for coffee.)
- CARMEN. Pos yo ya no veo. I can't see a thing. (CARMEN goes to her purse and takes out her glasses. She puts them on. She looks out the window and sees no one.) I should retire and be an abuelita by now, taking care of grandchildren...I don't know why I work, I have arthritis in my hands, I'm losing my sight from all this sewing, and this arm, I can hardly move it anymore...(ANA does not pay attention as usual.)
- ANA (unsympathetically). Yeah, Amá.
- CARMEN. I wonder where's Estela. She should have been here by now.
- ANA. I thought she left the house early.

(PANCHA appears behind the bar door.)

- PANCHA. Buenos días, Doña Carmen. Can you open the door?
- CARMEN. Buenos días, Pancha. ¿Cómo está?
- PANCHA. Not too bad.
- CARMEN. Que bien. I brought my mole today for all of us.
- PANCHA. You're so generous, Doña Carmen.
- CARMEN. It was in the 'frigerator for three days, and I thought it was turning green, so I brought it. Why let it go to waste?
- PANCHA. Is it still good?
- CARMEN. Of course, I make great mole.

(ROSALI appears behind the bar door.)

ROSALI. Doña Carmen, the door.

CARMEN. It's open, Rosalí. Buenos días. How are you?

ROSALI (entering). Okay, like always, Doña Carmen.

CARMEN. I brought my mole for all of us.

- ROSALI. Did you? Ayy, gracias, but remember I'm on a diet.
- CARMEN. Just try a small taco, no te va hacer daño. Try it.
- ROSALI. I'm sure it's delicious, but I'm this close to being a size seven.
- CARMEN. Si. You're looking thinner now. How are you doing it?
- ROSALI. I'm on a secret diet...It's from the Orient.
- CARMEN. A-ha...It's true, those Japanese women are always skinny. Pues, give me your secret, Rosalí. Maybe this way I can lose this ball of fat! (*She squeezes her stomach.*) No mas mira que paresco. You can't even see my waist anymore. But you know what it really is. It's just water. After having so many babies I just stopped getting rid of the water. It's as if I'm clogged. (*ROSALI and ANA laugh.*)

ROSALI. Sí, Doña Carmen.

ANA. Yeah, sure, Amá!

- CARMEN. ¿Y tu? Why do you laugh? You're getting there yourself. When I was your age I wasn't as fat as you. And look at your chichis.
- ANA. ;Amá!
- CARMEN (grabs ANA's breasts as if weighing them). They must weigh five pounds each.

ANA. Amá, don't touch me like that!

ROSALI. Where's Estela?

CARMEN. We don't know. Ana, I think you better call home now and check if she's there.

ROSALI. Because her torment is outside washing his car.

ALL. He is?

(From under a large blanket on the floor ESTELA jumps out. The WOMEN are startled and scream, but they quickly join her as she runs to the window to spy on her Tormento.)

ESTELA. ; Ayy que buenote! He's so cute.

ANA. Don't exaggerate.

ESTELA. ¡Mi Tormento! ¡O mi Tormento!

CARMEN. We thought you left home early.

- ESTELA. No, I worked so late last night I decided to sleep here.
- CARMEN. Then why didn't you tell us when-
- ESTELA. I heard you come in, but I wanted to listen in on your chisme about me, Amá.

CARMEN. Me? I don't gossip!

ESTELA. Sure, Amá...I'm going to the store. (ESTELA runs to the mirror.)

- PANCHA. I don't know why you bother, all he cares about is his car.
- CARMEN. Vénganse, I think the water is ready. (The WOMEN gather around the table for coffee. PANCHA and CARMEN grab bread. ESTELA goes to the bathroom and brushes her hair, puts on lipstick, then she puts on a girdle under her skirt, which she has great trouble getting on, but she is determined. She grabs a deodorant stick and applies it. She also gets a bottle of perfume and sprays it accordingly.)
- ESTELA. Aquí por si me abraza. (She sprays her wrist.)
- ANA (mocks ESTELA in front of the WOMEN). Here in case he hugs me.
- ESTELA. Aquí por si me besa. (She sprays her neck.)
- ANA. Here in case he kisses me.
- ESTELA. Y aquí por si se pasa. (She sprays under her skirt.)
- ANA. And here in case he...you know what. (The WOMEN are by the door and windows looking out. ESTELA comes out of the bathroom.)
- ROSALI. He's gone.
- CARMEN. Sí, ya se fue.
- ESTELA. No! Are you sure? (ESTELA goes toward the door, before she reaches it CARMEN shuts the door.)
- CARMEN (scared). ;Dios mio! (CARMEN quickly takes a drink of her coffee and can hardly breathe afterwards.)
- ESTELA. ¿Qué? ¿Amá, qué pasa?

CARMEN. I saw a van!

ROSALI. What van?

- CARMEN. ;La migra! (All the WOMEN scatter and hide waiting to be discovered. Then after a few seconds PANCHA makes a realization.)
- PANCHA. Pero, why are we hiding? We're all legal now.

- CARMEN. ; Ayy, de veras! I forget! All those years of being an ilegal, I still can't get used to it.
- PANCHA. Me too! (She picks up a piece of bread.) I think I just lost my appetite.
- ROSALI. I'm not scared of it! I used to work in factories and whenever they did a raid, I'd always sneak out through the bathroom window, y ya.
- ANA. Last night I heard on the news that la migra patrol is planning to raid a lot of places.
- PANCHA. They're going to get mean trying to enforce that Amnesty law.
- ANA. Thank God, I'm legal. I will never have to lie on applications anymore, except maybe about my weight...

ROSALI. ¿Saben qué? Yesterday I got my first credit card.

CARMEN. ¿Pos cómo le hiciste? How?

- ROSALI. I lied on the application and I got an Americana Express.
- ANA. And now you have two green cards and you never leave home without them. (ANA laughs her head off, but none of the WOMEN get the joke. ANA slowly shuts up.)
- PANCHA. Doña Carmen, let those men in their van come! Who cares? We're all legal now! (PANCHA goes to the door and opens it all the way. They all smile in relief and pride, then ESTELA, who has been stuffing her face, finally speaks up.)

ESTELA. I'm not. (PANCHA slams the door shut.)

EVERYONE. You're not?!!!

- ANA. But you went with me to get the fingerprints and the medical examination.
- ESTELA. I didn't send them in.
- ROSALI. But you qualify.
- ESTELA. I have a criminal record.
- EVERYONE. No!

- ESTELA. So I won't apply until I clear it.
- CARMEN. Estela, what did you do?
- PANCHA. ¿Qué hiciste?
- ESTELA. Well, actually, I did two things.
- CARMEN. Two?! ¿Y por qué no me habias dicho? Why is the mother always the last one to know?
- ESTELA. Because one is very embarrassing-
- CARMEN. ; Aver dime, condenada! What have you done?
- ESTELA. I was arrested for illegal possession of-
- ROSALI. Marijuana?!
- PANCHA. A gun?!
- ESTELA. A lobster.
- EVERYONE. No!
- ESTELA. Out of season!
- CARMEN. ;Mentirosa!
- WOMEN. You're kidding!
- ESTELA. A-ha! I'm not lying! I almost got handcuffed and taken to jail. Trying to "abduct" a lobster is taken very seriously in Santa Monica Beach. They wanted me to appear in court and I never did.
- PANCHA. That's not a serious crime; ¿de qué te apuras? Why worry?
- CARMEN (not amused). That was the first crime? You mentioned two.
- ESTELA. I'm being sued for not keeping up with my payments on the machines.
- ANA. Y los eight thousand dollars you got from your accident settlement weren't enough?
- CARMEN. But I thought that everything was paid for.
- ESTELA. I used most of it for a down-payment, but I still needed a new steam iron, the over-lock...I thought I could make the monthly payments if everything went as planned.

CARMEN. ¿Pos qué paso?

- PANCHA. What happened?
- ESTELA. You know that we never finish on time. So the Glitz company doesn't pay me until we do.
- ROSALI. Pero the orders are too big. We need at least two more seamstresses.
- ESTELA. Pues sí. But the money they pay me is not enough to hire any more help. So because we get behind, they don't pay, I can't pay you, and I can't pay those pigs that sold me those machines.
- CARMEN. Ayyy, Estela, how much do you owe?
- ESTELA. Two thousand dollars...
- CARMEN. ¡Hora si que estamos bien jodidas! (The WOMEN sigh hopelessly.)
- ESTELA. ... I tried. I sent some money and explained the situation to them two weeks ago, but I got a letter from their lawyer. They're taking me to court...
- PANCHA. So you had money two weeks ago? Hey, hey, you told us you couldn't pay us because you didn't have any money. You had money! Here we are **bien pobres**, I can't even pay for the bus sometimes, and you care more about your machines than us.
- ESTELA. They're going to take everything!
- ROSALI. ;¿Qué?!
- ESTELA. They're going to reposess everything if I don't pay them. And if I appear in court they'll find out that I don't have any papers.
- ANA. Then why don't you apply for Amnesty?
- ESTELA. Because I won't get it if they find out about my lawsuit.
- ANA. You don't know that. Estela, you should talk to this lawyer I know..
- ESTELA. Ana, you know I can't afford a lawyer!

- CARMEN. Ayy, Estela, ;ya ni la friegas! (ESTELA fights the urge to cry.)
- ROSALI. If I had money I'd lend it to you.
- PANCHA (aside). I wouldn't.
- ROSALI (kindly). But I don't have any money because you haven't paid me.
- ESTELA. Miren, the Glitz company has promised to pay me for the last two weeks and this week if we get the order in by Friday.
- ANA. How much of the order is left?
- ESTELA. About 100 dresses.
- PANCHA. N'ombre. By this Friday? What do they think we are? Machines?
- ESTELA. But they're not that difficult! Amá, you're so fast. This would be a cinch for you. All you have to do are the blusas on the dresses. Rosalí, the over-lock work is simple. It's a lot, but you're the best at it. And, Pancha, all you have to do is sew the skirts. The skirts are the easiest to sew. Now, Ana, with you doing all the ironing, we'll get it done by Friday. You see if we do little by little at what we do best...;Andenle! We can do it. ¿Verá que sí, Ana?

ANA (uncertain). Sure we can.

ESTELA. ¿Vera que sí, Amá?

CARMEN. Pos we can try.

- ROSALI. Estela, we can do it. (ESTELA looks to PANCHA. PANCHA remains quiet. CARMEN breaks their stare.)
- CARMEN. Wouldn't it be funny if the migra came and instead of taking the employees like they usually do, they take the patrona. (*The WOMEN laugh at the thought.*)
- ESTELA. Don't laugh! It could happen. (The WOMEN become silent.)
- CARMEN. Ayy, Estela, I'm just kidding. I'm just trying to make you feel better. (Beat.)

Act I

Act I REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES Page 19

- ROSALI. Bueno, let's try to be serious...I'll do the zippers.
- ESTELA. Yes, por favor. And, Pancha, please do the hems on the skirts.

PANCHA. The machine is not working.

ESTELA. Not again! (ESTELA goes to the machine. She fusses around with it trying to make it work. With confidence.) There. It should be ready. Try it. (PANCHA sits down on a chair and tries the machine. She steps on the pedal and the machine makes an awful noise. Then it shoots off electric sparks and explodes. PANCHA quickly gets away from the machine. The WOMEN hide under the machines.)

WOMEN. ;Ay, ay, ay!

- ESTELA. Augghh! All this equipment is junk! (ESTELA throws a thread spool at the machine and it explodes again.) I was so stupid to buy this factory! (ESTELA fights the urge to cry in frustration. The WOMEN stare at her helplessly.)
- CARMEN. Pos no nos queda otra. Pancha, can you do the hems by hand?
- PANCHA. Bueno, I guess I have to.
- ESTELA. Gracias...Ana, turn on the iron, I'm going to need you to do the ironing all this week...Tell me when the iron gets hot and I'll show you what you have to do.

CARMEN. I'll help Rosalí with the zippers.

ESTELA. No... I need you to do the blusas on size 7/8.

CARMEN. Didn't I already do them?

ESTELA. No.

- CARMEN. I guess it was size 13/14 then.
- ESTELA. You couldn't have, because there is no size 13/14 for this dress style, Amá.
- CARMEN. No?...Hoye did you get any more pink thread from the Glitz?

- ESTELA. Oh, no. I forgot...Go ahead and use the over-lock machine. That is already set up with thread.
- ANA. What does the over-lock do?
- ROSALI. It's what keeps the material from coming apart. (ROSALI shows ANA.)
- CARMEN. Why don't you give me the pink thread from the over-lock machine, then when you get the thread you can set it up again?
- ESTELA. No. I don't know how to set it up on that new machine.
- CARMEN. Rosalí can do that later. She knows how to do it; qué no, Rosalí?
- ROSALI. Sí, Doña Carmen.
- ESTELA. Why don't you just do what I'm asking you to do?
- CARMEN. Estela, no seas terca. I know what I'm telling you.
- ESTELA. So do I. I want to do things differently. I want us to work like an assembly line.
- CARMEN. Leave that to the big factories. I've been working long enough to know—
- ESTELA. I haven't been working long enough, but I'm intelligent enough to-
- CARMEN. Estela, my way is better!
- ESTELA. Why do you think your way is better? All my life your way has been better. Maybe that's why my life is so screwed up!
- CARMEN. ;Desgraciada! I'm only doing it to help you!
- ESTELA. Because you know I won't be getting married any time soon so you want to make sure I'm doing something productive with my life so I can support myself. I don't need your help! (*Beat.*)
- CARMEN. Where did all that come from? I thought we were arguing about the thread.