

TOMÁS



URTUSÁSTEGUI

Born in Mexico City on March 12, 1933, Urtusástegui was a medical doctor for the National Institute of Social Security in Mexico City until his retirement in the early nineties. As he

was approaching retirement he felt that something was missing in his life and wanted to be a participant in life instead of being merely an spectator. He wanted to do something creative but felt that he had no talent for the arts. However, he began exploring different creative endeavors from guitar playing to art.

He was a dismal failure in all. He was allowed to audit a theater class taught by Hugo Argüelles. Here he began writing -- from children theater to television scripts. Soon his plays were being staged and sought out by T.V. and theater groups and to his surprise, his theater career was launched. According to Myra S. Gann "One of the most surprising phenomena of the Mexican theater of the second half of the twentieth century has been the sudden arrival and success of Tomas Urtusástegui." Since his retirement he has written more than one hundred twenty plays, lectured all over Mexico and founded his own play writing workshop. His plays are very popular in Latin America and have also been staged in English in the United States. Some of his most popular plays are: **Do you Smell Gas?/Huele a gas?**, **Limited Capacity/ Cupo limitado** and **The Doubt/La duda**.

On My Plays and Mexican Theater

By Tomás Urtusástegui

Unlike my colleagues who say that they began to explore theater when they were very young, improvising dialogues with a box of puppets, the truth is that I never had any close contact with the theater except in the form of a spectator. The same can be

said for my involvement with the other arts. So I was surprised that at the age of forty-six I found myself anxious to be an actor and not only a spectator -- that is to say an actor in life and in the arts. When I came to this realization I first thought of music which was what truly interested me the most. But what area of music? Composer, musician, singer? A singer would have been my answer but knowing how enormously out of tune I am, I decided to learn to play the guitar. I began studying classical guitar with López Ramos, a master renowned the world over. However, the months and countless hours that I stubbornly dedicated to this were of no use. I couldn't even play the *changuitos guitarreros* (a sort of chop sticks).

Upon abandoning music, I opted for painting. I managed to create various abstract paintings which I gave to friends and which subsequently disappeared rather mysteriously. I was told that they were stolen but I'm sure not even the frames were kept. After painting I attempted the short story, enrolling in the Point of Departure workshop at the university that was directed by the Ecuadorian author, Miguel Donoso Pareja. It went much better for me with the short story. At least I was able to write several of them which, although they were never published, they were greatly appreciated by my family and my friends -- no one else but them. When I had finished I was painfully aware that I didn't have any artistic possibilities left. I was no longer young enough to do ballet. My wife wasn't going to permit me to bring rocks into the house to sculpt and everything else was very far from my realm of possibilities. I knew at this moment that I would have to return to my roll as a spectator. Never mind! Not everyone can be an artist! Still, it's not easy to resign oneself to what one doesn't want. And so I returned to my short stories which were the most hopeful of my artistic endeavors. Going over them, I realized that they were very full of dialogue. Of course, what a fool I'd been! I still hadn't tried theater! And yes, the theater was my last possibility. But where to study it and with whom?

My contact with the theatrical world was totally nonexistent. Nobody knew me and although I knew many theater people, I knew them by name only. Finally I saw an announcement about the inauguration of a new academy of dramatic arts named

EON. I went over to register as fast as humanly possible. The secretary assisted me and told me to return in a few days when the group would be formed. So I returned in 15 days, again in a month and later after two months. I continued to be the only student and the course was canceled but the school connected me with Hugo Argüelles who had been a colleague of mine in medical school. He left medicine to dedicate his energies to the theater and now he had become very famous and offered classes on playwriting. As it turned out he lived just a block from my house. I went to see him and he told me that he wouldn't accept me as a student as he was sure that my interest in writing plays would only last a few days. Besides he wasn't interested in children's theater, which is what I had in mind. After we talked about my aspirations he agreed to let me audit some classes. It took some time for him to accept me as a serious student and to make me part of the group. Soon afterwards Enrique Alonso, who was a famous television director for a children series came to the workshop. Alonso asked the Argüelles workshop to write some works for television but I was the only one who would do it. Within a short time they were recording my material which was getting better and better. I wrote several works for him and later for Silvia Pinal on educational television as well as other genres: comedy, didactic, informational, etc. Television opened up to me and put me in contact with hundreds of actors and directors.

I was fortunate to have the first theatrical works that I wrote put into production very soon. One of them, **Do I Smell Gas?**, was inspired by the stomach gases of Hugo Argüelles' dogs during the workshop. The play continues to be performed frequently with more than fifty different productions to date. At present I have written more than 120 plays, including some very short ones and some very long ones. I now teach drama classes, workshops, direct plays and judge theatrical material. It's an enormous activity, more so than I ever could have imagined. The theater rose up suddenly like a miracle but this miracle had to fit in with my medical activities, my social activities as well as my family. Fortunately I worked as a doctor for a state health institution where I had a fixed schedule for my patients. This

allowed me the time to write and to learn. I do realize that I am obsessive in everything, particularly with respect to work. When I discovered that I could write plays I began to write day and night -- between patients in the clinic, in the street, during dinner with the family, in hallways, etc. Fortunately I don't need much sleep. I can write until two or later in the morning and wake up at 6:30 in order to work. In 1993 I retired from medicine due to my age and began to dedicate my time completely to the theater.

Theater has taught me to break taboos, social norms and doubts. I was terrified to speak in public, face a microphone or even more so, a television camera. By nature I'm shy but it was necessary to change. And I did. Now after teaching classes, speaking frequently in public and facing all sorts of interviews from very friendly to very aggressive people, I see that I have changed a lot. I am no longer so afraid of appearing ridiculous. It will be a new experience and a lesson for the future. This is valid for me not only as a human being but also as a playwright. For example, when I decided to write a play about the overpopulation in the big cities I thought I would fill a subway car with my characters; however, this would have been impossible as it would have required hundreds of actors. In the end I chose a small elevator with eight people trapped between floors in an old building. This was an enormous challenge. What kind of people? How could I give it action and make it believable without turning it into a cheap melodrama? I wrote and rewrote, starting over many times but in the end I had my play **Cupo limitado/Limited Capacity**, which became my best known work outside Mexico. When I finished writing it, I felt that I had discovered what I had been looking for. An elevator trapped between floors is a place without a possible exit, surrounded by four walls where anything can happen. Even so, after I made the final corrections I was sure that nobody would produce this play. I was completely mistaken. Many national and international groups have been interested in it. It has been put into production and even taped for home video.

When I started in the theater I used to get a huge satisfaction just to have a friend read one of my plays I couldn't believe my good fortune when the first public

reading was done of one of my plays , **The Power of Men**. During the reading I had to stand up against a wall as there was an excessively large audience. As the reading started, nothing happened. I thought that with a farce, the audience would laugh at lot but no one did. When I wanted to leave -- to run away, the audience began laugh — each time stronger and more enthusiastic than the previous time until finally the text couldn't be heard above the laughter. "I finally did it", I told myself.

However, it wasn't quite that easy because during the eighties nobody believed in Mexican theater. Mexican plays weren't produced or they were produced only by amateur groups with poor productions. Then, almost suddenly, our plays jumped into the best theaters with the finest directors and they remained much longer on the billboard than foreign plays. Some plays achieved five hundred performances and some reached one thousand with a given theater company. If we add up the quantity of performances put on by different companies as in the case of **Do I Smell Gas?** the total is higher. Felipe Santander's **The Extensionist** broke all records and continues to be number one, followed perhaps by **The Rose of Two Aromas** by Emilio Carballido. I am fortunate in that **Limited Capacity** and **The Doubt** have both passed the five hundredth performance with a single company. Several of my plays have passed the one hundred mark which is quite significant in Mexico. Currently Mexican theater is having a great success and it is written by Mexican playwrights such as Victor Hugo Rascón Banda, Jesús González Dávila, Hugo Argiuelles, Vicente Leñero, and many others. This theater is much more important to us than the North American musicals. That isn't to say that those aren't pleasing or that they don't have a large audience but they aren't performed as frequently. Still we look at this phenomenon frankly, we still see that what has topped the billboards in the last few years are the comedies that exhibit vulgarity or those that exploit the personality of a certain television star. But this happens the world over.

The plays of which I speak in this essay are serious theater; those which explores new areas and takes risks. Mexico has had great writers in the past but the difference is that in the past, as during the time of Rodolfo Usigli, there were very

few writers. Now we number in the hundreds, not all of the same quality, but all trying to write good plays. This is not only manifested in the theaters here in Mexico but our plays are also performed all over and are of great interest throughout Latin America as well as in the U. S. Personally. I believe that this interest in Mexican theater can be credited to the public's increased education and participation. That isn't to say that the entire audience likes good theater but a great number of people do.

I think there are several causes that account for this dramatic increase in the number of playwrights. One of them is the overall improvement in education with its interest in communicating reality by means of dramatic performances as seen in the proliferation of writers' schools all over Mexico by SOGEM (The General Society of Mexican Writers) and the increase of drama workshops. Currently we have workshops in Mexico City directed by playwrights such as Hugo Argiuelles, Vicente Leñero, Alejandro Licona and myself. The same is occurring throughout the country. An enormous number of students attend these workshops as well as the official theater departments at the universities. Many of these students fall by the wayside while others join the group of Mexican playwrights. Although I don't have the exact figures, I believe the number of students currently attending these workshops to be more than five hundred in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Tijuana. It is also true that many students are more interested in television and radio scripts than in the theater. Each year some four or five important playwrights appear on the scene. But not everyone agrees with my assessment that Mexican theater is living another golden age as much for quantity as for quality. Never before have we had so many playwrights with important works or so many groups performing their plays or so many performances abroad as well as translations, book editions and so much public interest. Although I'm sure that this will grow and evolve in the coming years this is our golden age. No one denies that there is an economic crisis or that the public does not attend performances as often as we would like but that does nothing to invalidate the theatrical production.

Current dramatic production is so diverse that it is difficult to define what is

really Mexican theater. For some people it means that whoever puts on the production whether written by Shakespeare or a Mexican and if the cast, crew and the audience are Mexican -- then it is Mexican theater. For others Mexican theater is that which deals with our own reality and written by Mexicans. I fall in the latter category. If there is something among the great diversity that unites us, I think it is mainly our preoccupation with presenting the Mexican reality. Some writers, such as myself, try to describe the middle and upper classes while others, such as Jesús González Dávila, deal with the lower classes. Others, like Victor Hugo Rascón, deal with what is happening outside the capital city; others are preoccupied with the Mexican family, political problems, the church, corruption, etc. But in the end all of us look at Mexico in our plays. Some do this by using elements from the theater of the absurd. Others use realistic theater. Some mix all the genres and styles.

This tendency to concentrate on our national reality is also reflected in many of the plays written by young playwrights. There is some violence and a search for new theatrical formulas. Others look to break with their antecedents by experimenting with new genres, styles and theories. For these writers the only valid theater is their own. This is also a reflection of our theater. For example, Jorge Celaya's plays tell us about the mafia. Chabaud writes about police corruption and drug addiction. Others are interested in sexual or political freedom, feminist liberation, abortion or euthanasia. But all issues are seen from the Mexican point of view. It's not that important that young playwrights do away with the structure of traditional theater or write collectively as has been done in South America. They have their own captive audience in the universities and other schools. The adult public rejects these plays as much for their language as for their violence. But when the work merits their attention they still end up acknowledging its quality.

If I were to be asked which Mexican writers are most important to me, I wouldn't be able to answer. Jesús González Dávila makes an impact on me for his social compassion and the strength with which he drives his scripts. Victor Rascón is noted for his profound analysis of the situations and the characters; Sabina Berman

for her humor; Elana Garro for her magic realism; Vicente Leñero has the patience for carefully studying each one of the situations and characters taken from history or real life, and presenting them in an excellently structured play. Hugo Argüelles pleases me with a humor that is different from anyone else. I could go on with many others. But I also feel that it is necessary to mention the importance of female playwrights in the current period. More than half the students in the workshops are women and half the plays on the billboards belong to them. From the middle of the century to the present their number has grown dramatically; among them -- Sabina Berman, Elena Garro, Maruxa Vilalta, María Elena Aura and many others. Unlike their male counterparts they have known how to unite to form national and international groups, bringing together conferences and seminars to get their plays performed and published. This is a huge change because it was difficult even for male playwrights to get their works published or performed; for women it was nearly impossible. Now everything is different. They have managed to break down family and social prejudices and are no longer content to be just housewives. Their plays reveal their ancestral fury at being repressed and enslaved. Now they are free and everything that was repressed throughout the centuries is part of their expression.

People have asked me who has influenced my work. I'm sure that all of them have influenced me in some way but nobody in particular stands out. If a play makes an impact on me, whoever the writer is, it is logical that it will have an influence on my manner of writing, not to copy from, but to learn from. This is how the culture of theater evolves. From Shakespeare we learn some things; from Moliere others things; from Euripides other things still. The mixture of all that which is learned plus our own individual style is what results in theater.

I read very fast and without any order. Upon finishing a book by Kundera I'll follow with a play by Buenaventura and afterwards with a text about the sexuality of the pygmies. I know I should read in a more orderly manner, study each work more in depth and analyze the texts. But I can't. My curiosity or necessity to know about everything impedes me from focusing on a given author or subject. For this reason I

don't believe that any of them could have a very profound influence on me as in the case with certain authors. I abandon authors and subjects quickly in search of others and later return to them. Perhaps now that I'm retired my reading habits will change, but I doubt it. I had little free time to read before retiring now with all my theatrical activities I have even less. Right now I'm promoting one of my plays that has recently opened which deals with the influence of radio during the forties. The play is titled **Radoranza 42**. At the same time I just finished a play for children about mathematics which hasn't yet opened. I am also writing a monologue for a Mexican actress and I have another project that deals with the current condition of women in Mexico. My teaching takes additional time as I give classes at the Society of Writers, as well as in other workshops throughout the country when I'm invited. I am revising my text about play writing entitled **A Manual For Writing Plays**.

As if all these weren't enough I agreed to edit along with playwright Filipe Galván various authors' scripts for a collection titled **Iberian American Theater**. At the present time we have published twenty titles. They are small inexpensive books as our idea is to enable young people to read plays without spending much money. In this collection there are writers from all parts of Latin America as well as Spain and the Spanish speaking parts of the U. S. I'm also very close to the various productions of my works as well as that of some other writers. I'm in permanent contact with youth groups who ask for my help. I'm continually serving as judge for performances and for scripts. Currently I'm serving as a judge in the jails for plays performed by inmates.

My other desire is to travel to the U. S. To give drama courses to groups of Chicanos or Latinos to let them know Mexican authors. I know there are many theater people and researchers in the U.S. who are interested in our theater but who don't have the opportunity to be in contact with Mexican authors or to read their scripts. I would like to meet people from various countries and to work on some projects together - projects of creation and teaching. I know such an exchange would enrich us all.

LIMITED CAPACITY

By

Tomas Urtusástegui

Translated by Raúl Moncada

SET DESIGN

A small elevator from the 1950s in an apartment building in Colonia del Valle. It can fit six people and measures 2.50 meters in height by 1 meter in width and 1.50 meters in length. The metal door functions automatically with the buttons on the panel. A small sign posted on the wall explains that maximum capacity is for six people. On the ceiling there is a metal tray. The elevator should be built of metal to give a feeling of weight and closeness.

COSTUMES

ALMA and FERNANDO wear modern denim outfits and running shoes. CECILIA is in a very provocative dress. FRANCISCA is dressed in a dark, two-piece outfit and wears loafers. VIRGINIA'S outfit is plain and sober. RAMON has on a grey suit with a blue sweater. AMPARO, the maid, wears simple but provocative clothes. MIGUEL is wearing his school uniform.

TIME

The present.

(The action begins as the elevator is going down. Due to a power failure, it stops about 30 centimeters above the stage floor. In the event mechanical movement is not possible, action should begin in the dark. A noise is heard coming from the elevator. A brief pause as they wait.)

VIRGINIA: What happened?

FRANCISCA: Power's out again. That's the second time today.

RAMON: Press all the buttons. One of them should work.

FERNANDO: Can't see a thing.

MIGUEL: (Frightened) Gran!

VIRGINIA: I'm here. Don't move.

(CECILIA flicks a lighter. She tries to light the whole space.)

FERNANDO: (Asking for the lighter) Let me have it, please.
(He takes it, it goes out, he flicks it on again,
crosses over to the control panel) Excuse me,
excuse me.

VIRGINIA: Be careful! You stepped on me!

FERNANDO: Sorry.

VIRGINIA: Quite obviously it wasn't your foot.

FERNANDO: (Pushing the buttons) Not working.

MIGUEL: Are we gonna stay here?

VIRGINIA: Of course not.

ALMA: Have you already tried the alarm button?

FERNANDO: Which alarm? I can't see. Give me a light.

ALMA: You press it.

FERNANDO: I'd rather press you.

ALMA: (Laughing) Stop that!

FERNANDO: All right already.

FRANCISCA: Young man, you are in the presence of a minor.

FERNANDO: Ahh!

CECILIA: I'm already late.

AMPARO: I left my baby alone.

RAMON: (Banging on the door) Open up!

FRANCISCA: You scared me.

MIGUEL: I want to get out.

VIRGINIA: We all want to get out, you're not the only one.

(The lights suddenly come on again. There's a murmur of general satisfaction. They are all facing the door. Aside from the actors, there is also a grocery cart which is full and contains fruits, vegetables and other groceries. Each of the characters carries a different personal prop, i.e. a briefcase, a backpack, newspapers, handbags, shopping bag, sports bag, etc.)

VIRGINIA: Thank goodness.

FRANCISCA: That didn't last very long. (To FERNANDO) Could you press number four, please.

FERNANDO: I've already pressed them all. (smiles) We'll let destiny decide

which floor to take us to.

MIGUEL: It's not moving

FERNANDO: It must be warming up, like a car.

ALMA: Quit clowning.

FERNANDO: I have a feeling they only turned the generator on, that's why this mother's not working.

ALMA: What generator?

FERNANDO: Don't tell me you don't have a power generator in

this dump? Next time don't bother asking me up.

ALMA: (Laughing) You should be grateful we at least have an elevator. VIRGINIA: Please, could you have this conversation later?

AMPARO: Is it really not opening? I left a pot on the stove.

FRANCISCA: Before you said you'd left your child.

AMPARO: I did, but I left him in my bedroom, up on the roof.

CECILIA: How old is he?

AMPARO: Nine months.

(FRANCISCA gives her a disapproving look.)

RAMON: (Coughs discreetly) Excuse me. Allow me to try pressing the buttons.

FERNANDO: I already pressed them again.

RAMON: (Crossing to the panel) Excuse me . . .

FERNANDO: (Giving him room) Wow, maybe he has bionic fingers.

(He and ALMA and the boy laugh. The boy's grandmother smacks him lightly.)

RAMON: Excuse me.

(RAMON is now facing the panel and presses one of the buttons. When there is no action, he impatiently tries again. He bangs on the door.)

FERNANDO: (Mockingly) See, now you've screwed it up.

RAMON: (Banging again on the door) It's impossible. (He has a coughing

fit) A person could die and nobody gives a darn.

CECILIA: Why isn't it moving?

FERNANDO: Well, you see, it's just like that cucaracha - won't move without a hit.

ALMA: (Singing and pretending to smoke) . . .
"marihuana que fumar."

FRANCISCA: If the power is back on there's no reason why it shouldn't be working.

VIRGINIA: Everything in this building is a mess. People do whatever they please, the janitor is never around, the stairs are filthy. You'd think that the least you could expect when you pay the rent promptly is minimum maintenance service . . . never mind anything better. That would be asking for the moon.

(Long pause. They watch each other. They shift and settle again. ALMA turns on her transistor radio. She hums to the music. The others, except the young man and the child, stare at her meaningfully.)

VIRGINIA: If you wouldn't mind, could you please turn the

radio off?

(ALMA pays no attention. Now she hums louder. FERNANDO sways to the music.)

CECILIA: (Nervous but keeping her calm) What time is it?

RAMON: Five past eight.

CECILIA: I won't be on time even if I fly there.

AMPARO: (To RAMON) Press number six again.

FERNANDO: (Pressing ALMA'S stomach) There, I've pressed it.

ALMA: I told you to quit that.

MIGUEL: (Laughs) I'm going to press my granny's.

(He does so and she smacks his hands.)

VIRGINIA: That's all you ever learn, the bad things.

AMPARO: (To RAMON) Please.

RAMON: Don't you see it's not working?

FRANCISCA: (After a pause, to AMPARO) Move a little, you're squeezing me.

(AMPARO moves and now she's up against VIRGINIA).

VIRGINIA: Girl, I'm not just painted on here. What are you trying to do, squeeze me to death?

AMPARO: There's no room.

VIRGINIA: You could easily have used the stairs, this is for the elderly, like us.

FRANCISCA: It's true. Young people are strong. They can walk up and down. Look how crowded it is in

here.

FERNANDO: It just so happens that we were all very comfortable until the seventh floor. Then you and this gentleman got on. (Points to RAMON)

RAMON: It's our building, we have a right to use the elevator.

FERNANDO: (Points to the sign) It says here very clearly that this elevator is for six people, and, with the two of you, there are eight of us . . . and that doesn't include the lady's cart.

VIRGINIA: You don't expect me to carry it down, do you?

FERNANDO: Down or up? Aren't you on your way back from the market?

VIRGINIA: No, since it seems to interest you so much. I'm taking this to my daughter's house, groceries she ordered. Is that all right?

RAMON: These things never used to happen. There were fewer people living in these buildings, not like nowadays. . .

ALMA: There are more everywhere. Haven't you ever tried to get on the subway at Pino Suarez?

FRANCISCA: In a few years' time we'll all be living on top of each other.

ALMA: (Hugging FERNANDO from behind) Sounds great!

FRANCISCA: (Upset) Colonia del Valle is a decent neighborhood. (Looks straight at ALMA) Or used to be.

ALMA: Isn't it anymore?

FRANCISCA: Anybody can live here now.

FERNANDO: Nothing personal, but if we die of asphyxiation due to lack of oxygen, the last two people who got on will be responsible.

RAMON: (Starts coughing) Don't say that. I have pulmonary emphysema.

FERNANDO: (To ALMA) What does one eat with that?

ALMA: Who knows?

VIRGINIA: It's tuberculosis.

RAMON: Emphysema. It's not tuberculosis.

AMPARO: (Banging on the wall) Open up!

(All watch her. She's ashamed. Another long pause. The looks on their faces become more tense. The two young people also betray their anxiety but only when the others are not watching them.)

FRANCISCA: What floor are we on?

MIGUEL: Fifth.

VIRGINIA: How would you know?

FRANCISCA: Oh, Holy Mother! If it's the fifth floor nobody's going to hear us. This is the floor they're turning

into a condo and selling. Nobody lives here.

VIRGINIA: Soon they'll be getting rid of us all.

RAMON: Only if we let them.

AMPARO: (Banging on the wall harder than before) Open up, please open!

VIRGINIA: Didn't you just hear? Nobody lives on this floor.

AMPARO: I have to get out. Something might happen to my son.

FRANCISCA: Only you would think of leaving him alone.

AMPARO: I went down to help the senora get her car out.

RAMON: (Mockingly) You drive?

AMPARO: I went to open the garage door.

FRANCISCA: We can't stay here all day.

CECILIA: (Increasingly frantic) I'm going to get fired if I don't get there on time.

VIRGINIA: (To MIGUEL) Stop wiggling.

MIGUEL: I'm tired.

VIRGINIA: I'm old and I'm not complaining.

(Another long pause. They fidget. CECILIA touches up her make-up. MIGUEL sits on his backpack. FRANCISCA cleans her glasses. VIRGINIA rearranges the contents of the shopping cart.)

ALMA: Anybody got a cigarette?

FRANCISCA: A cigarette? What for?

ALMA: To smoke. What else would it be for?

FRANCISCA: Have you noticed the size of this place, the amount of oxygen we have in here?

ALMA: There are cracks in the elevator.

RAMON: Nobody in here is going to smoke. I won't allow it!

ALMA: It's a free country!

RAMON: Smoking in elevators is not allowed anywhere in the world.

ALMA: That's when they're in working order.

VIRGINIA: Only young people would think of something like that.

ALMA: Okay, forget the cigarette. I'll smoke a joint.
(She and FERNANDO laugh. Another pause, not as long as the previous one.)

MIGUEL: (To VIRGINIA) May I eat an apple?

VIRGINIA: No, they aren't washed. Anyway, if you eat one now you won't want your breakfast. Your mother's waiting for you.

FRANCISCA: He must be hungry -- the boy.

CECILIA: Apples aren't filling.

VIRGINIA: He's my grandson. His mother left him in my care. He will do as I say.

FRANCISCA: Fruit is good for you when you're scared.

MIGUEL: I'm not scared.

(The young people laugh. Another pause. CECILIA puts her bag on the floor. She tries to pry the door open with her fingers, but can't manage it.)

FRANCISCA: Leave it, you could make it worse.

RAMON: (Bangs on the wall) I'll sue the landlord.

VRGINIA: (Discreetly giving AMPARO a shove) I told you that you were squeezing me.

CECILIA: (To Virginia) Don't push her, now she's bumped me.

VIRGINIA: I'm sorry.

AMPARO: I wasn't pushing you. She's the one pushing us with her cart.

(points to the cart).

VIRGINIA: Can you tell me where else I can put it?

ALMA: Elevators are for people.

VIRGINIA: You're mistaken. They're also to bring our things in.

FRANCISCA: You could put it in a better place.

(VIRGINIA places the cart against the back wall. She is obviously upset. Another pause. The power goes out. All let out a muffled scream. There is a short silence.)

FERNANDO: That does it . . . I smell smoke!

FRANCISCA: Heaven help us! What could be burning!?

FERNANDO: (His tone very serious) The elevator!
(RAMON has another coughing fit, spits in the dark.)

CECILIA: You spit at me, idiot!

RAMON: I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

AMPARO: Stop pushing me!

MIGUEL Grandma . . . they stepped on me.

VIRGINIA: It must have been the maid.

ALMA: (Playing FERNANDO'S game) We'll be roasted
alive!

FERNANDO: They'll make soap out of our fat!

FRANCISCA: Shut up! Death isn't a game.

RAMON: (Banging on the walls) Janitor! Why aren't you
opening this door?

(CECILIA flicks on the lighter, holds it high for a minute, burns
herself. The lighter drops to the floor. CECILIA tries to pick it
up in the dark. She cries out. At that moment the power
comes back on.)

CECILIA: Creeps!

FRANCISCA: (Simultaneously with previous line) Thank God it's
back on!

CECILIA: Who did it?

FRANCISCA: What happened?

CECILIA: One of these pigs pinched me when I bent down
to pick up my lighter.

FERNANDO: He or she? It takes all kinds.

FRANCISCA: That's all we need.

RAMON: (Coughs) Don't generalize.

CECILIA: Put your hand in front of your mouth when you cough. You're disgusting!

RAMON: (Upset) If you had your behind pinched it's because of the way you're dressed.

CECILIA: I dress any way I please.

RAMON: Then don't complain.

CECILIA: Was it you?

RAMON: I'd prefer not to answer.

CECILIA: Cowards! All men are cowards!

FERNANDO: And if it turned out to be a woman? I insist, you never know.

ALMA: I pass. (Hugs FERNANDO) I only like men. (Goes to the cart, takes out a sausage, holds it up, kisses it, laughs).

VIRGINIA: (Indignant snatches the sausage and puts it back in the cart) Don't touch my things.

ALMA: Sorry, sorry, didn't know it was yours. (She and FERNANDO laugh).

VIRGINIA: You brutes!

MIGUEL: What did they say?

VIRGINIA: Nothing.

(Another pause. VIRGINIA pulls the cart towards her, examines it, pushes it back in its place.)

MIGUEL: Didn't they say we were gonna burn?

FRANCISCA: Fortunately, it was a false alarm.

FERNANDO: It would've been like being in Hell. That way we'll pay for our sins. *In nomine Pater et filii et . . .*

FRANCISCA: Don't make fun of sacred things.

FERNANDO: Brooother! Everything bothers you people. We're just trying to make this business of waiting around a little more pleasant.

FRANCISCA: You don't even live in this building.

FERNANDO: But my babe does.

ALMA: I live in 712.

FRANCISCA: With your parents?

ALMA: No, of course not, with him. My parents are in Philadelphia.

FRANCISCO: With him?

VIRGINIA: I don't suppose you're married.

ALMA: No, I'm his . . . (to FERNANDO) What did the unemployment officer say I was, you know, registered?

FERNANDO: My concubine.

ALMA: That's it, concubine. Doesn't that sound neat? Like something out of "The Thousand and One

Nights."

AMPARO: (After a short pause) Can't anyone do anything?

RAMON: Like what?

AMPARO: Like open. My baby . . .

FRANCISCA: If anything happens to him, you'll be guilty.

AMPARO: (To FRANCISCA) Guilty of what?

FRANCISCA: I don't know why they have children if they can't take care of them.

RAMON: We've already spent more than fifteen minutes locked up in here. I need fresh air. (Coughs and spits into a handkerchief).

VIRGINIA: I do too. The doctor said I should always be in places with good ventilation because of my heart condition.

FERNANDO: Now we've had it. One's got emphysema, the other a bad heart. Anybody else got a disease?

ALMA: (Writhing) I'm fine.

VIRGINIA: I haven't had a heart attack, but I could get one.

CECILIA: You only get them if you strain a lot.

VIRGINIA: And lack of oxygen and nervous tension.

ALMA: (Laughs) Well then, you should just stay quietly at home.

FRANCISCA: It's all right for you to laugh now because you're young. But youth comes to an end. Health is

something you only borrow.

FERNANDO: Why don't you buy it from whoever lent it to you, then you'll be

all set.

VIRGINIA: If you're healthy enough to be poking fun at the rest of us, opening that trapdoor up there should be quite a simple thing for you to do.

FERNANDO: Me? And why should I do it? I don't need air.

VIRGINIA: I knew you couldn't do it. That's what all young people are like. All talk, no action.

FRANCISCA: You're right, they're just barking dogs.

ALMA: (To FERNANDO) Show them you can do it.

(FERNANDO barks. They both laugh.)

RAMON: (To FERNANDO) You'd be doing us all a favor.

FERNANDO: How can I open it? I have nothing to open it with.

RAMON: Those trapdoors can just be pushed aside.

MIGUEL: (Climbing up on FERNANDO) Let me do it. I can do it.

VIRGINIA: (Pulling him toward her) You had better be still.

FERNANDO: (Stretching upwards) I can't reach. If you want me to open it you've got to help me.

AMPARO: (Looks up) Can we get out through there?

FRANCISCA: I doubt it.

CECILIA: (Banging feebly on the door) Somebody must realize we're locked up in here, at least the people who need to go up or down.

VIRGINIA: When they realize the elevator's not working, they'll just take the stairs. They won't stand around, waiting. This isn't the first time this has happened.

FERNANDO: Do you want me to climb up there or not?

RAMON: (Coughing) Who would've thought I'd die in an elevator?

FERNANDO: (Banging lightly on the walls) Well, you won't need to buy a coffin. This box'll do fine.

RAMON: Moron.

FERNANDO: If you don't apologize for that, I won't open the trapdoor.

(RAMON turns his back to him.)

RAMON: (After a long pause) Please forgive me.

FERNANDO: That's better.

(Another pause.)

VIRGINIA: (Breathing deeply) Are you or aren't you going to open it? I'm already feeling dizzy.

ALMA: It's the smell. Somebody didn't take a shower this morning

(Looking at FERNANDO) And I know who that

was. (Whispering to the others) He hasn't showered in three days.

FERNANDO: (Giving him a shove) Sooo, you've been spying on me, huh?

FRANCISCA: (To VIRGINIA) Some people don't even change their underwear.

FERNANDO: That's not me. My underpants are not dirty . . . they're not clean, either. I don't wear any! (He starts unzipping his fly) Care to have a look?

ALMA: (Covering him up with her hands) Don't show it to them. It's mine.

RAMON: Your youth does not give you license to be disrespectful, especially towards ladies.

FERNANDO: (Zipping up his fly) Okay, if you don't want to take a look . . . but you're the ones missing out.

FRANCISCA: I am going to write a letter of complaint about this.

VIRGINIA: I'll back you up. They have got to get this thing repaired.

FRANCISCA: I am going to complain about them (pointing to FERNANDO and ALMA) and the fact that people like them are allowed to live in this building.

(FERNANDO gestures vaguely. He kisses ALMA. The others watch them, irritated. VIRGINIA starts gasping for air.)

VIRGINIA: I need air.

FRANCISCA: Holy Mother! Really!

VIRGINIA: (Breathing rapidly) God!

MIGUEL: Granny, what's wrong?

CECILIA: (To FERNANDO) Please, I beg you, open it - this lady needs fresh air.

FERNANDO: Only because you have asked me.

RAMON: We are all asking you.

FERNANDO: I am only interested in her.

ALMA: Hey, wait a minute, I'm here too.

FERNANDO: (Goes over and kisses her) I know.

ALMA: (Smiles) Need help?

FERNANDO: Everybody's got to help. Give me a boost.

(He tries to climb up, leans on ALMA's hands and on shoulders of the others. As he gets to the top, he slips and falls clumsily. Everyone reacts.)

ALMA: (As he's about to fall) Watch out!

FERNANDO: (Already on the floor) See, I've busted my ass and it's your fault!

VIRGINIA: (Contemptuously) I knew he couldn't do it.

ALMA: (To VIRGINIA) Weren't you choking to death?

VIRGINIA: I am.

FRANCISCA: (To FERNANDO who tries to stand up) You hit me with your shoe.

ALMA: Are you hurt?

FERNANDO: What do you want? None of you helped.

ALMA: You didn't tell us what to do.

FERNANDO: Forget it. Anyway, we're going to die of asphyxiation.

RAMON: (Coughing due to his agitation) Try again. We'll help you.

MIGUEL: Lift me up. I don't weigh as much.

VIRGINIA: You be quiet.

AMPARO: I could climb up.

FERNANDO: (Looks at her, moves aside) Up you go. (He lifts her, trying to get his hands on her buttocks).

ALMA: (Jolting him) Go ahead, keep it up.

FERNANDO: Keep what up?

ALMA: Only don't complain later.

CECILIA: (Smiles at FERNANDO) I am asking you again.

FERNANDO: Sure, and I can just crack my skull, right? No way! None of you was strong enough to hold me.

VIRGINIA: (Sighing deeply, her voice low, she starts praying) Sinner that I am, I do confess to Almighty God . . .

(She faints, falls on the others, they make room for her

and stretch her out on the floor).

FERNANDO: Oh, shit! She's croaked! (He laughs)

FRANCISCA: Too bad she's not your mother.

FERNANDO: Or yours.

CECILIA: (Fanning VIRGINIA with her hand) It looks bad.

FRANCISCA: We've got to call a doctor.

ALMA: We could try telepathy.

AMPARO: (Pushes away VIRGINIA'S head which is resting against her) She's hurting me.

MIGUEL: Grandma?

FERNANDO: (To MIGUEL) She's fainted, that's all.

CECILIA: No, she's going to die.

(CECILIA bangs desperately on the door, so do all the others except FERNANDO and MIGUEL. The latter takes advantage of the situation and snatches an apple from the cart and starts eating it).

ALL: (Ad libs) Open . . . help . . . janitor! . . .
There's a dying woman in here . . . Please . . .
. somebody . . .

ALMA: (Going back to her original place) We should give her more room so she can breathe.

FRANCISCA: What room?

AMPARO: (Giving FRANCISCA a good push) Move!

FRANCISCA: How dare you touch me?!

AMPARO: (Rubbing herself) You had your elbow stuck into me.

(They look at VIRGINIA for a moment. She starts coming around.)

FERNANDO: Didn't I tell you . . . she's coming to.

CECILIA: She shouldn't move. If she had a stroke, it's dangerous.

RAMON: Let's move her so she doesn't take up so much space.

(They all move VIRGINIA like a doll, sitting her up. She starts mumbling, complaining, trying to sit up alone, and as she does so, she throws up, vomiting on some of the others. This causes a lot of confusion, insults fly, they push each other, they shout, all at the same time).

FERNANDO: That's it. I'm covered in it.

FRANCISCA: Lord help us! How revolting!

ALMA: This really stinks. Gross!

CECILIA: (Moving to a corner, feels nauseated) I think I'm going to throw up, too.

FRANCISCA: Take a deep breath.

RAMON: (Cleaning his face with a handkerchief) I got some on my face.

ALMA: I've got beans all over my clothes.

CECILIA: (Disgusted) Shut up, please! (Begins making

sounds as though she might throw up, they all
move away from her)

ALMA: Would you like to sniff some cologne? I've got
some here.

CECILIA: (Wiping the sweat off her forehead) I think I'll be
OK. Vomit really makes me sick.

VIRGINIA: I need air.

FERNANDO: What you needed was to eat less.

(VIRGINIA gets up slowly. She wipes her dress. AMPARO
starts crying silently. She turns away from the others so they
can't see her crying. ALMA crosses to her).

ALMA: What's wrong?

FERNANDO: Let her cry.

ALMA: (Hugs AMPARO) They'll open soon. This can't go
on forever.

AMPARO: I shouldn't have left him alone.

ALMA: I promise you, he's asleep.

AMPARO: It's time for his bottle. He'll start crying and
when he cries a lot, he doesn't breathe right;
one day he turned purple. I thought he was
going to die on me.

ALMA: Nothing will happen to him.

(VIRGINIA turns around and sees her grandson eating the
apple.)

VIRGINIA: What are you eating?

MIGUEL: (Hiding his hands behind his back) Nothing.

VIRGINIA: What do you mean, nothing? Show me your hands.

(The boy puts out his hands. VIRGINIA takes the apple, then gives it back to him. The boy starts crying, or becomes very frightened).

ALMA: Don't hit him!

VIRGINIA: (To MIGUEL) What did I tell you? Don't you understand?

CECILIA: Children understand a lot more when they aren't being bullied.

VIRGINIA: (To MIGUEL) Today is the last time I am going to allow your mother to dump you on me. I'm too old to be looking after brats.

FRANCISCA: (Going to the door, breathes through a crack in it) I can't stand that stink.

ALMA: (Taking a lemon from the cart, she gives it to FRANCISCA) Here, suck on it. It'll help you get over it.

VIRGINIA: Stop taking my things.

ALMA: (Pointing to the vomit) That's also yours and this lady is feeling ill because of it.

RAMON: I need to sit down, I can't stay on my feet any

longer.

FERNANDO: Go ahead. But, don't complain if your ass gets wet in all that muck.

RAMON: Thanks, I'll stay like this.

(Brief pause)

FRANCISCA: They say that if you pray and have faith in San Antonio, he'll grant you anything you want. Why don't we try it?

ALMA: Isn't he the saint who finds husbands for old maids?

FRANCISCA: (Seriously) He grants matrimony to couples who request it.

ALMA: They say you've got to stand him on his head.

FERNANDO: Right, so his skirts fly!

ALMA: (Laughs) His cassock.

FRANCISCA: (Pretending to ignore their comments) He's a very miraculous saint. Let's pray for the elevator to start moving so that we can get out. (She starts praying very earnestly) Blessed St. Anthony . . . (Looks at the others for their answers) Blessed St. Anthony!

ALL: Blessed St. Anthony . . .

FRANCISCA: Saint among all saints.

ALL: Saint among all saints.

FRANCISCA: We come to you in all humility and dare to request . . .

ALL: (FERNANDO's tone is mocking) We come to you in all humility and dare to request . . .

FRANCISCA: That, through your divine intervention, this elevator may start moving again.

ALL: (Now both ALMA's and FERNANDO's voices are playful) That, through your divine intervention, this elevator may start moving again.

FRANCISCA: In exchange, we offer alms for your poor and, during thirteen consecutive Tuesdays, we will say a rosary in your temple. Grant us this, our request!

ALL: Grant us this, our request!

FRANCISCA: Amen.

ALL: Amen.

(After a moment, FERNANDO crosses to the panel, pushes the buttons, smiles)

FERNANDO: (To FRANCISCA) Looks like he didn't pay much attention.

FRANCISCA: We all have to pray at the same time.

ALMA: Like a choir?

FRANCISCA: If we all pray together, it's stronger than if we pray individually. That way he'll hear us better.

ALMA: Is he deaf?

FRANCISCA: Don't you believe in him?

ALMA: No one's introduced us.

FRANCISCA: All saints belong to the Church of God.

ALMA: Don't know him either.

FRANCISCA: (Indignant) You don't believe in God?

ALMA: I do and I don't. I never think about it.

FRANCISCA: So what do you believe in?

ALMA: My self, and sometimes in others.

FRANCISCA: That's not enough.

ALMA: It is for me.

FRANCISCA: God and His saints . . .

FERNANDO: Could you leave that crap for some other time?

FRANCISCA: It is not crap. It's something of the utmost importance.

FERNANDO: The important thing is to get out of here.

FRANCISCA: You don't believe in Him, either?

FERNANDO: What for?

FRANCISCA: To know that God loves us, that He forgives us, that He'll resurrect us.

FERNANDO: That I know of, He's got nothing to forgive me, but I've got lots to forgive Him.

FRANCISCA: To forgive God? How dare you!

VIRGINIA: God will punish you.

FERNANDO: Just tell me why He gives some people everything and others nothing?

RAMON: There must be a reason.

FERNANDO: Just to screw around.

VIRGINIA: Don't be vulgar.

FERNANDO: Don't listen.

CECILIA: Is it possible that no one will open? We don't live alone. Somebody should be worrying about us.

ALMA: (To CECILIA) Another optimist. So, you worry about someone else?

CECILIA: Yes, believe it or not, as much as I can, I do worry about my family.

ALMA: About those who serve us.

RAMON: That's not true.

FERNANDO: Isn't it?

AMPARO: It's not like that in my village.

FRANCISCA: You should have stayed there then.

VIRGINIA: (To FERNANDO) People with no manners, like the two of you.

FERNANDO: Weren't you dying?

VIRGINIA: You'd like that, wouldn't you? To have me die, to have all educated people die so you can keep everything without ever having worked for it or in

any way deserving it.

FERNANDO: Hey, now you're talking. And who knows, I might even land myself a brand new car. (He and ALMA laugh)

(A long pause. RAMON coughs again, only now he's no longer concerned about spitting on the others. They all move around, pushing each other)

MIGUEL: (Showing his grandmother his leg) Look, Gran, that man spit on me.

VIRGINIA: Filthy pig!

MIGUEL: Clean it!

VIRGINIA: (Disgusted) Clean it with your hanky.

MIGUEL: I haven't got one.

VIRGINIA: I gave you one today.

MIGUEL: Didn't bring it.

VIRGINIA: Does anybody have a Kleenex?

(CECILIA gives her one. VIRGINIA gives it to the boy)

VIRGINIA: Clean it properly. (Watches him) Careful, don't touch it with your fingers. That's right. Higher up! Look, there - can't you see? Now, throw it away. (The boy puts the Kleenex into RAMON'S coat pocket. RAMON says nothing)

(A brief pause. AMPARO looks around, changes her place)

AMPARO: Help me. I can open the trapdoor. Please.

(Tries climbing on all the others, pushes them, they push her, they insult her, she doesn't give up trying, screaming out that she has to get to her son. ALMA and FERNANDO help her.

Finally she falls. Shouting is renewed.)

AMPARO: (On the floor, crying) My son, I must go to my son.

FRANCISCA: Fool! You're hurting me!

VIRGINIA: And me. (to AMPARO) Damn peasants!

(A longer pause. AMPARO gets up, sniveling, and finds a place to stand. ALMA and FERNANDO listen to the radio. The time is announced. We should hear that it is 8:40 a.m.)

RAMON: (Has another coughing fit, this one is more intense; covers his mouth with his coat and spits into it) I can't breathe.

CECILIA: (Bangs on the wall) Have pity! Open!

RAMON: The air in here is foul already.

FRANCISCA: So's the air in the whole city.

AMPARO: He'll die. I know he'll die. My poor son will die all alone.

FRANCISCA: If somebody doesn't open, we'll be the ones to die.

FERNANDO: We'll die like true citizens of the nation's capital: squashed, squashed like common roaches.

ALMA: Hungry roaches. (Takes a banana from the cart

and starts eating it)

FERNANDO: (Helps himself to another banana, peels it, starts eating; speaks with his mouth full) That's right, like hungry roaches.

VIRGINIA: Who gave you permission to eat my fruit?

ALMA: (To FERNANDO) How can you swallow with the way this place stinks of puke?

FERNANDO: (Eating) Puke, armpit and fart. Don't think I didn't smell it, whoever it was. (they both laugh)

VIRGINIA: (To RAMON) Tell these young people not to eat my fruit.

FERNANDO: Everything in here belongs to everyone.

RAMON: (To VIRGINIA) Me? Why should I?

VIRGINIA: Because you're a man. It's your duty to protect women.

ALMA: (To VIRGINIA) You want a man like him to defend us? (Laughs) You'd be better off if I protect you.

RAMON: (Upset) How can you make that kind of comparison?

ALMA: Why not? What have you got that we don't have? Balls? If that's the case, we've got ovaries. And a man's balls aren't much good without us.

VIRGINIA: What language.

FRANCISCA: Young people like these think that being vulgar makes them modern and liberated. They're just crass, crass and common. And common things are worthless, they just get thrown in the garbage.

MIGUEL: Can't hold on, Gran, I'm going to pee in my pants.

FERNANDO: Another vulgar creature. (To MIGUEL) Don't you know, little boy, that you should say, "I need to go potty" or "I need to do number one?" You shouldn't say, "I'm going to pee" or "I'm going to take a leak." What kind of upbringing have you had?

VIRGINIA: Leave my grandson alone.

MIGUEL: I've been holding on for a long time.

VIRGINIA: Well, you can hold on for a bit longer.

MIGUEL: I have to go.

FERNANDO: Go to the toilet, (Pointing) it's down that way and then to the right, do one for me at the same time. (He, ALMA and the boy laugh) And if you can't make it, must piss on the floor. He'll piss and puke and spit, great combination. (Imitating a commercial announcer, gets closer to the woman) Would you care for some cream to

prevent premature wrinkles? Would you like to change the color of your hair? Take one part red vomit, two parts yellow urine and one green phlegm and mix well. Once its ready, apply twice a day, massaging gently. It never fails.

ALMA: (Laughing) You are so gross.

FERNANDO: You're accusing me? I haven't peed, puked or spat. Why don't you tell them, they're the pigs.

FRANCISCA: (Very coldly) May I have your attention.

FERNANDO: (Imitating an airport announcer) May I have your attention, the elevator will begin moving three hours behind schedule.

ALMA: That didn't work.

FERNANDO: Jealousy is eating away at your guts.

ALMA: Cut it out, O.K.?

FRANCISCA: I am begging you, please.

ALMA: Who are we praying to now?

FRANCISCA: I'd like to say something else.

AMPARO: Someone's coming to open!

(They all bunch up against the door, they call out asking for the door to be opened, they bang on the wall. FRANCISCA'S shouting can be heard above the others. Then they start calming down.)

FRANCISCA: I want to make an appeal to sanity. We are all

civilized people, we live in a respectable community, we have an education and we have principles. This is a difficult moment, I know, but that doesn't mean to say we have to behave like savages. We have insulted and hurt each other over very trivial matters. Why? In situations like this we should be able to show our manners, our solidarity, our love toward our fellow creatures. I ask you to forgive me for everything I have said and done to this moment. I think it's time we all shook hands and join in a common effort to find a solution to this minor incident. (Offers her hand) Here it is.

FERNANDO: (Laughs and puts his hand out) Here's mine. (He shakes FRANCISCA'S hand and says) To each his own: that deserves an eight.

FRANCISCA: (Hurt) I meant what I said.

FERNANDO: So did I. That was a great speech.

FRANCISCA: (Disturbed, not sure if he's being honest or laughing at her) Thank you.

RAMON: Shh, quiet, I think I hear someone out there.

CECILIA: (Bangs on the wall on impulse) Open! Open!

(They all pick up on her and start banging and shouting)

AMPARO: We're here, we're here!

RAMON: They could be trying to say something and we wouldn't hear them.

(Complete silence, some with their ears up against the wall.

AMPARO cries quietly. A few seconds go by)

FERNANDO: Rats! There's nobody.

RAMON: I heard something that sounded like a woman's heels.

ALMA: You just imagined it.

RAMON: I'm positive.

AMPARO: (Throws herself against the door, desperate)
Señora, please, open and if you can't, then tell Pancho the janitor to go up and check on my son. I left him alone, please, please!

FERNANDO: There's no one out there. We'd have heard them if they were there.

RAMON: Yes, I think I made a mistake.

ALMA: (To AMPARO) I promise you, it won't be long now.

(Pause. MIGUEL moves. He goes to the edge where he won't be noticed)

MIGUEL: (Whispering to his grandmother) I did it.

VIRGINIA: (Feeling the boys pants, gets angry and starts smacking his behind) I told you to hold it! You dirty pig!

MIGUEL: I couldn't.

(VIRGINIA keeps spanking him because of her own anxiety)

AMPARO: (Taking VIRGINIA's hands) Let him go!

VIRGINIA: Don't you interfere!

AMPARO: (Squeezing VIRGINIA'S arm, hurting her) I'm telling you to let him go!

VIRGINIA: Let go of me!

AMPARO: Not until you promise to stop hitting him.

VIRGINIA: You miserable cow!

RAMON: (Tries to pull AMPARO away) Let her go!

FERNANDO: (Threatening) Butt out, this is between women.

FRANCISCA: You mean between a lady and a maid.

ALMA: They are both women.

VIRGINIA: (Starts breathing rapidly, grabs her chest as she lets go of AMPARO) Have mercy, Mother of God!

FERNANDO: If you're thinking of falling down, remember the pee and the puke.

VIRGINIA: (Leaning against the wall) I feel very ill.

ALMA: She's very pale, it could be real this time.

FRANCISCA: (To AMPARO) It'll be your fault if she dies.

AMPARO: (Frightened) I didn't do anything.

FRANCISCA: They'll put you in jail and they'll take your son away from you.

AMPARO: (Desperately grabbing FRANCISCA'S dress and

shaking her) Say that's a lie, say it! (FRANCISCA becomes terrified by AMPARO'S reaction and doesn't know what to do, FERNANDO separates them)

FERNANDO: (Quieting AMPARO) Leave her alone.

AMPARO: She says I killed her.

ALMA: We are witnesses that you didn't.

MIGUEL: Is my grandma going to die?

CECILIA: No. She's having a dizzy spell.

FRANCISCA: (She stands far from AMPARO. From there, she menaces her). You are going to pay for this. I am going to do something so they'll fire you.

AMPARO: (Once again she approaches her. In her fury, she breaks her string and the beads fall to the floor) If you do that, I swear I'll kill you.

FRANCISCA: (Talking to all. Trying to set free from AMPARO) You are witnesses that she wants to kill me.

FERNANDO: And that she is threatening to have you fired.

(Another tense pause. Francisca asks Miguel to help her pick up the beads. They start to put them in her purse.)

RAMON: (Banging on the wall) You brutes! Get this thing opened!

(He gets another coughing fit and spits on VIRGINIA. She

recovers.)

VIRGINIA: You disgusting old pig!

FERNANDO: (Laughs) Your illnesses don't last long, do they, lady?

VIRGINIA: (To RAMON) You should be in a hospital, not here.

FERNANDO: (To RAMON) Did you know that coughing is one of the first symptoms of AIDS?

RAMON: (Indignant) I'd like to hit you.

FERNANDO: Don't hold back, go ahead.

(He gives RAMON a shove, RAMON defends himself. The others separate them. There is another pause).

CECILIA: How long have we been in here?

FRANCISCA: That's not what is important. How long we have left, that's what counts.

CECILIA: And if someone did this on purpose?

FRANCISCA: Did what on purpose?

CECILIA: This. Locking us up, stopping the elevator. Doesn't it make sense that it's taking so long.

FRANCISCA: Why would anybody want to do it?

CECILIA: Could be burglars who are emptying out our apartments.

FERNANDO: (Frightened) True, why hadn't I thought of that. This could be Rocky's trick.

ALMA: (Catching onto his game) Rocky's? Can't be.
You told me you don't see him anymore.

FERNANDO: He must want us to die slowly. We won't have
any food, or water, or oxygen, for hours and
hours.

FRANCISCA: Who is this Rocky character?

ALMA: Don't tell her.

FERNANDO: A guy that lives in this building, sells drugs. I
owe him a lot of money. This is his revenge.

ALMA: But FERNANDO, I told you to pay him.

FERNANDO: Please tell me how?

ALMA: This is all because of your addictions.

FERNANDO: (Violently) They're mine, not yours.

ALMA: Right, all yours, but it just so happens that
because of them we're all going to die.

FERNANDO: In short, where did you want me to get the
money from . . . did you want me to steal it?

ALMA: You know he gave you a second chance. Well,
he did the last time.

FERNANDO: A chance? That guy doesn't give anything to
anybody.

ALMA: He asked you to go to bed with him. Tell me
it's not true.

FERNANDO: You think I should have?

ALMA: That's your business, but I think it would've been better than being locked up in here and left to die, asphyxiated.

FERNANDO: I'm a man, I don't go for that stuff.

ALMA: Doing it once wouldn't have turned you into a sissy.

FERNANDO: Never, do you hear me, NEVER.

ALMA: You're problem is that you're so selfish.

AMPARO: (Scared, to FERNANDO) Do you really think we'll die? What about my son?

FERNANDO: (Bursts out laughing) Don't worry, we were just kidding!

ALMA: (Laughing) You were really getting turned on with that Rocky stuff. I saw you. I think you're bi.

VIRGINIA: Well, I guess you couldn't care less that a child is listening to you, an innocent child.

CECILIA: No one's innocent these days. (To MIGUEL) Tell your grandmother how children are made.

MIGUEL: (ashamed) I ... I ...

CECILIA: Don't you know?

MIGUEL: At school they taught us that when a man and woman . . .

VIRGINIA: Child!

ALMA: (Laughs) They get the theory, they just need the

practice!

FRANCISCA: If we have to spend time together, let's do it with love.

FERNANDO: Right, now you're talking! How many are we? I'll do it with Alma. (He hugs her erotically and then gives RAMON a push) You with her (points to FRANCISCA) The lady can take the maid and you, kid, with her (he pushes the boy toward CECILIA, he hugs and kisses ALMA in a corner, FRANCISCA attempts separating them).

FRANCISCA: I've put up with your insolence long enough. I have tried to make things peaceful but I see it's not possible.

AMPARO: (Desperately, in a low voice, almost to herself) Open, open, open.

VIRGINIA: Air.

(RAMON coughs, spits into a handkerchief. CECILIA breaks down).

CECILIA: Enough! This is enough! I can't spend another minute in here! I'm going to get fired from my job. (She bangs against the wall and starts biting her hand).

FERNANDO: (Tries to calm her down) They won't be long now. I'm sure of it; in fact, they must be fixing

it downstairs by now.

CECILIA: (Controls herself and then bursts into tears again)
I don't care about the job, I can get another
one . . . I'm terrified of being locked in, I'm
going to go nuts if we don't get out of here
(She stifles her sobs).

FERNANDO: I'll try and open.

CECILIA: I'm begging you.

FERNANDO: (To the others) But you've got to help me.

(This time they all cooperate, lifting him toward the trapdoor, he
maneuvers, bangs, but to no effect).

RAMON: See if it has screws.

FERNANDO: Can't see any.

FRANCISCA: You've got to push hard.

(FERNANDO does so, loses his balance and falls. Screams
and shoves. FERNANDO moans and grabs one hand with his
other one. Furious, he gets up and goes over to the cart and
starts kicking it).

VIRGINIA: My groceries!

FERNANDO: The hell with everything!

ALMA: Did something happen to you!

FERNANDO: I think I fucked up my hand.

ALMA: Let me see.

(Takes his hand, FERNANDO screams in pain in spite of

himself.)

FERNANDO: Watch out, you're hurting me!

ALMA: Don't move it.

(Takes the hand, he screams again and sweats from the pain)

FRANCISCA: Must be broken.

ALMA: Now what?

CECILIA: Best thing would be to take him and get it X-rayed.

FERNANDO: Hurts like hell.

CECILIA: I'll bandage it up for you.

ALMA: (Jealous) It's Ok, I'll do it. (looks around for something to use) Anybody have a piece of cloth of some sort?

(They all shake their heads and turn away not willing to give up anything of their own. ALMA takes off her blouse or her skirt. With it she bandages his hand and FERNANDO relaxes).

FRANCISCA: (Noticing ALMA'S state of undress offers something for her to wear, a scarf or a sweater) Cover yourself up!

ALMA: (To FERNANDO without paying any attention to FRANCISCA, mockingly) You were screaming louder than a woman giving birth.

FERNANDO: Yeah, you weren't the one in pain.

RAMON: Great. You should've broken your head, too, not just your hand.

FERNANDO: Fucking old sourpuss!

RAMON: (Confronting FERNANDO) Repeat that, so I can break something else.

(FERNANDO gives him a hard push with his free hand. They fight. They fall down. The women try to separate them.

RAMON almost chokes. ALMA asks FERNANDO to watch his hand).

MIGUEL: You're squishing me.

(His grandmother rescues him. The boy gasps. She gasps from the effort).

RAMON: (Getting up to catch his breath, he's dirty) Air, I need lots of air!

(VIRGINIA moans, FRANCISCA prays, FERNANDO complains about his hand).

CECILIA: (Covering up her ears with her hands) Please, stop complaining. Please! I can't stand it any more.

AMPARO: (Her voice somber) It doesn't matter what you say or do. We're all going to die, locked up in here or out there. It's God's will.

FRANCISCA: Why did you say that?

AMPARO: It's shaking!

ALMA: (Her face changes completely, she's frightened now) Shaking?

CECILIA: Don't move! (They all stop, tense)

AMPARO: That's what we get for living in the city, for abandoning our roots. Our punishment, to die broken, crushed, our guts bursting out.

FRANCISCA: Merciful God! It is shaking!

(Terrified, they all react to the tremor. They try pressing up against the walls, some crouch to protect themselves. ALMA becomes hysterical. MIGUEL clings to his grandmother. FRANCISCA prays out loud. AMPARO is the only one who's not scared.)

AMPARO: We will die all together. Your leg will be my leg.
Your blood will be my blood. The Earth is calling us.

FERNANDO: I don't feel anything.

ALMA: I don't want to die like that.

FERNANDO: (Embracing her) It is not shaking.

AMPARO: The earth opens it's gate to receive us.

FERNANDO: (Shouting) It is not shaking.

ALMA: (Very upset, afraid) Mother, mother.

AMPARO: In the deepness of earth I am going to join my son. He has to be waiting for me.

RAMON: (Coughing) It is true. It is not shaking.

CECILIA: My God.

FRANCISCA: It was time to remember God. You never prayed with me.

CECILIA: It was an expression. He is not going to save us.
Or is he?

AMPARO: Nobody can escape from the designs. The earth
has mixed with the water, with the blood. Now
everything is mud, and in the mud everything
submerges.

CECILIA: This thing will never work after that earthquake.

FERNANDO: It didn't shake, there was no earthquake. You
hear and feel earthquakes, everything creaks and rumbles.

ALMA: (A little calmer) Swear that it isn't shaking anymore.

FERNANDO: I swear it.

(FERNANDO hugs her protectively. A longer pause. The
power goes out and the
complaints will become more violent, they bank, shout, insult one
another, kick the floor, moan and groan. The power will be
out quite a while. The noise will increase. Short intervals of
silence. AMPARO hums louder. The others insult her. When
the power comes back on MIGUEL is lying on the floor,
motionless. CECILIA threatens them all with a pistol. RAMON
cannot stop coughing. VIRGINIA has a hard time breathing.
CECILIA slaps RAMON with her free hand; he can hardly
breathe).

CECILIA: (After she slaps RAMON) You're the one who
grabbed my breast. Do you deny it?

RAMON: (Choking) I, I . . .

CECILIA: (Points the pistol at FERNANDO) Or was it you?

FERNANDO: (Half joking, a little scared) You can frisk me.

CECILIA: Whoever it was is a piece of shit.

VIRGINIA: (Sees MIGUEL at the other end and starts crossing to him, frightened) My boy! (to CECILIA) Please, young lady, put that thing away. (CECILIA does so) Is he dead? (reaches the boy and tries picking him up).

ALMA: I think he was trampled.

(The two of them carry the boy. They push the others out of the way. VIRGINIA gives CECILIA a hard shove and, upset, CECILIA returns it).

CECILIA: Stay away from me. You stink.

FRANCISCA: You're the one who stinks.

ALMA: I can't hold him any longer.

FERNANDO: Put him on the floor.

ALMA: It's dirty.

CECILIA: (To FRANCISCA) Hypocrite! (Gives her a push).

FRANCISCA: (Pushing her back) Prostitute!

CECILIA: (Pulls her pistol out again and threatens FRANCISCA with it) Say that again.

VIRGINIA: (Helping ALMA to put MIGUEL down) Can't you see my boy's dying or is almost dead.

AMPARO: We all killed him, and that's how we'll all murder each other, parents will murder their children, husbands will murder their wives, friends will murder their friends. Nobody will be left alive and only scavengers will remain on earth.

FERNANDO: (Pointing to MIGUEL) He's still breathing.

VIRGINIA: Holy mother, in exchange for his life I sacrifice my agony to you!

FRANCISCA: (Kneeling, extends her arms and sings) "Oh Mary, Mother of mine, oh comfort of mortals, protect me and take me to my heavenly Father."

VIRGINIA: (Praying and then kissing the child) Miguel, Miguelito!

AMPARO: The first to die will be the children and the virgins will follow.

RAMON: (Coughs and spits near VIRGINIA) Excuse me.

VIRGINIA: I beg you to spit on me. God is punishing me for my sin, because of my pride. Lord, I am your most humble servant!

(RAMON coughs again and, following VIRGINIA'S request, spits on her neck. VIRGINIA can't suppress her revolt and her anger and she reacts).

VIRGINIA: You syphilitic, tuberculous old piece of filth!

(FERNANDO standing beside RAMON laughs).

FERNANDO: Syphilitic and tuberculous. That's a pretty heavy load, man.

(RAMON is very upset by VIRGINIA'S insult and he suddenly strikes a blow to FERNANDO'S groin. FERNANDO falls. Uproar starts up again).

RAMON: Nobody's going to laugh at me.

AMPARO: Then the young will die, those who have not yet sinned.

ALMA: (Believing he is dead, she throws herself on his body, pushing the others away) FERNANDO! (He doesn't react; she turns on RAMON) Murderer!

(ALMA stands and tries to snatch CECILIA'S pistol away from her. They struggle over the weapon. Everyone shouts and becomes involved in the struggle. Screams. Suddenly the power goes out again. The struggle continues in the dark. A shot is heard and immediately after a stifled scream. Then silence. Everyone's agitated breathing can be heard. A voice we must not recognize should be heard).

VOICE: Dead!

(Absolute silence. Music. Actors leave in the dark. When the lights come up the elevator is empty).

THE END

