Animal Acts

Hughes, Holly, Chaudhuri, Una

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Hughes, Holly and Una Chaudhuri.

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Carmelita Tropicana (aka Alina Troyano)

With What Ass Does the Cockroach Sit? / ¿Con Qué Culo Se Sienta la Cucaracha?

[Note: A few scenes have been omitted here, for reasons of space; the events that occur in them are summarized in brackets.]

The Old Man’s apartment in Havana, where Catalina, a parrot, and Martina, a roach, reside. We hear sound on a radio—the Cuban national anthem—as the Radio Announcer gives the time and weather and music comes on.

RADIO ANNOUNCER: Nueve de la mañana en La Habana Cuba. La temperatura 37 grados y ahora la música . . . (music on).

Small spotlight on the face of Martina, a roach, who clings to the leg of an oversized chair on the back of the stage.

MARTINA: Quick hide, quick hide. That should be my name, not Martina.

That’s what they should put in my tombstone. Here lies quick hide.

Martina runs to front of stage and addresses the audience.

The life of a cucaracha is tough. Everyone thinks roaches are dirty. But what do they expec when we gotta hide all the time. Inside a greasy stove, underneath a dresser with a dust bunny the size of a bullfrog. And only if you are lucky behind a can of Planters peanuts that’s been opened so you can lick the salt. We suffer so much anxiety. You gotta have eyes on the back of your head. You never know where the danger is coming from. But I shouldn’t complain. This is a good family situation for me. The Old Man is eighty years old and slow as molasses. That’s good. And Catalina is a very generous parrot but bossy. I have to do all her legwork cause I have six
legs and can run, and she has two and has to be inside her cage. Every day at nine I gotta come into her Old Man’s bedroom to see if he’s packing his suitcases for a trip. She is so afraid he is going to leave her. She don’t know how to relax. She is so strick with me. We have to have vocabulary lessons at twelve before lunch, and then at three café con leche, but not just regular café con leche. Café con leche with a discussion. And she gets upset if I say somepin she don’t want to hear. My grandfather used to say: Al Rey no se le dice lo que no quiere oir. You don’t tell the king what he don’t want to hear. Lights change as Catalina, a parrot in her cage, is fluffing her feathers and vocalizing like an opera singer. She addresses the audience.

**CATALINA:** Cu cu ru cu cu. Cu cu ru cu cu. Cu cu ru. Practice makes perfect. Virgen Santísima, I almost forgot the time. Where is Martina? I have never met a cucaracha more resistant. Any kind of intellectual stimulation is a punishment. How many times have I told her we must feed our brains, our souls as well as our body. To think I was once like her—a wild savage, una salvaje. I was not born in Havana, though some call me La Señorona de la Habana Vieja. No, this grande dame of colonial Havana was born in the jungle and taken by a man who took Cuban parrots to sell in the black market. That’s how my brother Francisco, now Harry, ended up in Chicago and I ended up with my Old Man, the Grammy-winning singer of the Nueva Vista Social Club. Mi guapo, so handsome, big bags under his eyes and magic fingers that can pluck a guitar and massage my cranium. My Old Man sings Cu cu ru cu cu, and he is going to do a duet on a CD with me. That’s why I work hard to elevate myself. I try to learn a new vocabulary word every day. Yesterday’s word was succinct. And then I teach Martina. She should be grateful. How many roaches are there that learn vocabulary and live in such splendor—a cage that’s the exact replica of the Palace of Versailles, the mirrors, the Louis Quatorze chair, and my divan. Most people are hungry in Cuba but I am like Marie Antoinette. I say let them eat cake o pastelito de guayaba. Martina, Martina (screeching). ¿Dónde te metiste? My Old Man left an hour ago. I’m assuming there is nothing to report, no suitcases?

**MARTINA:** No, no suitcases, no packing going on.

**CATALINA:** Good. Now let’s get on with our vocabulary lesson. Today’s word is petit pois. That’s French for peas. Repeat after me. Petit pois. Again, again. Now a sentence.

**MARTINA:** I love my petit pois.

**CATALINA:** Is that it? My, you are in a hurry. Aren’t you going to stay to hear the Animal Internet’s reporter Bertha the bee “Keep on buzzing Bertha!” What, you think she’s dry? Don’t you mean succinct? Yes, I know you liked
Lumumba the lizard, but you must admit Lumumba’s reporting is not what it used to be. He’s old. You should give Bertha a chance. She comes from one of the most reputable families in Atlanta: Los Macabees. Yes, you can go meet Lumumba. But remember café con leche is at three, and our discussion is going to be a good one. All about . . . Ygh, esta cucaracha.

Martina leaves the old man’s apartment and goes to meet Lumumba the lizard, in the apartment below, where she used to live before she met Catalina.

Martina: Lumumba? Lumumba. Poor guy his legs don’t have good suction no more. To think I used to live in this apartment with maladjusted twelve-year-old twin boys and their mother Olga. This was a very bad family situation for me. A lotta danger with those twin boys and no food. One week I was on a strick diet of hair. Hair is bad for digestion. Somebody’s at this door.

Sound of door opening mixed with low background chatter. Martina leans to look at who’s come in. She looks up as if tracking people coming in.

It’s Olga’s best friend and her five-year-old boy, the mama’s boy. Now that is a good best friend always bringing food to eat. She’s gotta tell Olga somepin important, in the kitchen. The twins go play with the boy. I smell ham and pork. They’re eating? ¿Y yo que con la boca cuadrá? Olga’s best friend has a secret. Olga closes the curtains so the neighbors don’t see them, and she puts the radio on so the neighbors don’t hear them.

The best friend asks, “Do you believe in love at first sight?” Olga did, but that was before her husband left her. Well I believe in the sandwich in sight, right there I think I can get it . . . no.

Martina takes a step toward the sandwich but cannot make it and steps back.

The best friend says she has a boyfriend with a boat and has gone to Miami but he missed her so much, he came back to get her, and wants to take her again by boat to Miami. Olga says it’s dangerous. And the best friend says love is tough and cries. This is great cause she dropped the sandwich. Now it’s my turn. Now this is what I call a sandwich. The best. That’s why they call it the Cuban sandwich. The mustard always gives me gas, but I don’t complain. What’s that I hear the twins yelling they are going outside. With a belly full of Cuban sandwich and the twins outside, life is good. Estoy que reviento. I can’t run I’m so full.

As she moves across the stage, a large shadow appears. She is pinned down, and we hear a little kid’s giggles.

A shadow all around—what—oh my antenna, hey kid your finger on my antenna is killing me, what you’re a good boy so you gotta kill me because no one likes roaches in the house? Roaches are dirty, who told you that? That’s a lie. You’re a good boy you don’t lie and you play with the tour-
ist children in the hotel where your father works. The tourist children have bigger better toys than your Power Rangers and SUVs. But you got a rock and a stick and they are magic because they can fly—what a smart boy, and you like to help your daddy wash his car, so bye-bye dirty roach, I kill you! Noooh no, kid, I’m clean so clean I’m friends with the queen. What queen you ax? What’s your name? Elian Gonzalez. Eliancito. The queen of Spain. Did you see the queen on TV? You love TV, me too. Take your finger off and I tell you about the queen, no, I won’t run.

_Elian lifts his finger off Martina’s antenna, and she straightens up._

What, the twins made you pee in the balcony? You didn’t want to, but then they said it was for a contest? Yeah well, I was in a contest too. And I won the cucaracha flamenco-dancing contest. I was the best flamenco-dancing cucaracha in Cuba, and that’s how I got to be a roach in waiting for the queen of Spain. Sit down, I’ll tell you all about it.

_Martina moves and starts to dance flamenco when the music comes on._

And I got to wear a mantilla on my head when I was dancing. Yes, that’s right, they cut two little holes in the mantilla so my antennas could stick out. And when we went to eat—Elian, what do queens usually have when they eat? A crown. Yes, but she doesn’t want to wear one because she wants to eat with the people and be more democratic, no more communist. Oh, the politics got me confused. Queens have banquets. Tremendo banquetazo. The problem is that the banquet was in a restaurant and there is nothing that restaurant owners hate more than us roaches. So I jump on the queen’s dress and hang on to the back of the dress and the restaurant owner stares at me with such hate, but I stare back because he can’t do a thing. If he whacks me, he whacks the queen. I went down the stairs on the back of the queen’s dress waving just like the queen. Come on, try the royal wave.

_She shows him how royalty waves._

That’s it. I made the headline in the A.I., that’s the Animal Internet, where we get the news. La cucarachita Martina dines with the queen of Spain. You want to kiss me so I turn into a princess—no, niño, that’s what happens in fairy tales. If you kiss me I’ll be a roach, but a roach in waiting to the queen of Spain—it’s the twins—what did you say—quick hide, quick hide—thanks, kid. Cuidate, niño. Look at that, he’s waving at me.

_Martina runs to hide and runs into Lumumba the lizard._

Lumumba, what happen? You’re all wet.

_LUMUMBA:_ Malditos niños, those kids were peeing all over me. This old lizard can’t get any respect.

_Martina goes into the Old Man’s apartment, where Catalina has been waiting to have their three p.m. café con leche._
CATALINA: Martina, how could you? You missed Bertha and our café con leche.

MARTINA: Catalina. Sorry. I couldn't find Lumumba and then this five-year-old boy almost yanked my antennas. But I told him a story and he wanted to kiss me. Isn't that somepin?

CATALINA: You and your excuses. We were going to have a great discussion. All about Spain becoming the biggest investor in the Cuban economy. But you missed Bertha's broadcast.

Sounds of footsteps, keys. Door opens. It is the Old Man. Catalina fluffs her feathers excitedly.

There's my Old Man, quick hide. Hide under the sunflower seeds (composing herself). Hola, guapo guapo.

Lights up on microphone in the back. Music comes on, underscoring his speech.

OLD MAN: Catalina, how is the flower of my existence? I am so tired my hair hurts. But now that I see you, my princess, all my pains disappear. This is what I treasure coming home to you, mi cotorra del alma. You my rum and cigar—this is heaven. You, Catalina, are my confidante, I can tell you my deepest secrets. When I was a kid, I had another confidante, my cousin, mi prima.

Catalina flies away.

CATALINA: No (screeches jealously).

The Old Man follows her, trying to catch her.

OLD MAN: No, darling. You don't have to be jealous. Come, I show you a photo.

CATALINA: Photo?

She flies further off; the Old Man follows her, and finally she perches on his hand.

OLD MAN: See, that's prima. We were teenagers. I was serenading her with my guitar. I tried to loosen her up. I know you won't believe me, but I had a wild streak back then, I was la candela. Prima calmed me down. Even when she left and went to Miami she was taking care of this Old Man. Thank god to those who leave who send dollars to those who stay. Catalina, you never had it so bad, but back then we were the only ones in our building that didn't have to fry grapefruit rind and call it steak. Poor prima. When she was six she got appendicitis, she walked doubled over, shuffling, kids called her the Old Lady. She cried. They called me palitroque, breadstick. But anything with a stick is good for a guy. Last time I saw prima was at Christmas, back when we celebrated Christmas, but who knows? With the pope coming maybe we celebrate Christmas again. It's good to believe in Santi Claus, the Three Kings, or Miami.
Darling, I have to tell you something very important. Very hush-hush.
I’m going on a singing tour to Miami and Tokyo . . .

Lights change. Catalina flies off terrified and hides high up.

CATALINA: Miami! No Miami, no Miami.

OLD MAN: Catalina—come down from there. Darling, these separations hurt
me as much as you. But Papi has to sing for a living. Look at your beautiful
cage. And all the food you have, Papi has to work for that. We all have to
make sacrifices. Should I get up on a chair? I could fall and die. I’m an Old
Man and then who’s going to take care of you? I don’t have many years left.

He fakes a heart attack, and she flies down to him. She lands on his shoulder.

OLD MAN: That’s a good girl. You’re the flower of my existence. You know
what would cheer us both up? Your singing. Come on, sing our song, just
for Papi.

CATALINA: Cu cu ru Cu Cu (screching off-key).

OLD MAN: What a voice! Our duet is going to be something. Our CD will
get us a Grammy. Please, darling, say you’ll let me go. It means a lot, and
you know I will get to see prima, who I haven’t seen in forty years and
that's too long. I made a deal with the officer from the Minister of Culture
to let me see her, and I have to give him CD player, Walkman, telephone
answering machine. But it’s worth it. And you know I have always wanted
to play Miami.

In the fifties I heard of Frank Sinatra, the Fountainbleu. I remember a
movie poster of a girl with shorts looking up at the moon. Moon over Mi-
ami. Well, I want to see that moon for myself. So now we have to give a bon
voyage party to celebrate the tour, and you will be my hostess.

CATALINA: Oh, Papi (sexily).

OLD MAN: But you have to watch your mouth. You don’t want Papi to get
into trouble. You can say: buenas noches. You can repeat what they tell you.
Pero ni se te ocurra mencionar Clinton, Gore, or Bush.

CATALINA: No Hillary? (coyly)

OLD MAN: No Hillary, tampoco. And no questions. You ask questions, people
get suspicious. They think you work for this side, that side. Now, mi amor,
when I go my friend the taxi driver will be taking care of you. I know how
you fluff your feathers when he calls you señorona. But be a good girl, no
biting. ¿How about some cariñito? Let’s get a cushion for my lap so your
claws don’t damage my equipment. Is mademoiselle ready for her massage?

CATALINA (screching sexily as if about to come): Ay, sí, Papi, dámelio, dámelio. 
dámelio, Papi. Give it to me.

MARTINA (disapprovingly addressing the audience): An old man and a parrot.
Mira, if you ax me, that relationship is not healthy. Qué va. But life is good
for me here. All I gotta do is keep my mouth shut. Like my grandfather says: El que sabe hablar sabe callar. He who knows when to talk, knows when to shut up. I could use a little contemplating.

Martina runs to the chair and climbs on it. She lies on her back with legs twitching as she contemplates.

I’m getting good at climbing the Old Man’s dresser where he keeps the postcards. I don’t try to read them cause I never know what the Old Man means. I tried to read one postcard once, it don’t make sense. I ax Catalina and she says: Papi has to write in a secret code so he doesn’t get into trouble. Who cares, I like the photos. Ah, this is my favorite: “Rio de Janeiro. Where Yemalla the Goddess of the sea has her feast day.” I am devoted to Yemalla because she respects roaches. Thank you Yemalla for not letting Elian believe I was a dirty, dumb, disgusting roach. Ah . . . there is nothing more relaxing than lying on a postcard. I never been to the beach, but I can imagine the sound of the ocean.

Sound effect of toilet flushing, and then music comes on.

We roaches like to contemplate. The bees and the ants are the workaholics. We roaches are the bon vivants: eat, drink, and be merry for the exterminator cometh. Sometimes I don’t understand why people hate us. People think dinosaurs are great. Well, we been in this planet since the day of the dinosaur. Before humans. We are not extinct. Why? Cause we are easygoing, we outsmart people. How many times they hit us with a broom and they go to find a pan or a newspaper to pick the cadaver up and surprise, and then they yell: “Coño, where did that maldita cucaracha go?” We know how to play dead.

We roaches are not extinct cause we are survivors. We can take anything. We roaches live, even if our lives are full of insult.

[When Martina tells Catalina the Old Man was unfaithful, an enraged Catalina slaps Martina so hard she accidentally falls into the Old Man’s suitcase, bound for Miami. We also learn that Elian survived the shipwreck at sea, which took his mother’s life; two dolphins that delivered him safely to Miami saved him.]

The Old Man arrives in Miami with Martina in his suitcase. The stage is dark when the following announcement comes on.

voice o/s: Welcome to Miami International Airport. Bienvenidos al aeropuerto internacional de Miami.

Martina has a little flashlight around her neck that illuminates only her face as she speaks.

Martina: Miami. It’s so dark inside this suitcase. I can’t even see any of my legs. Buried in photos. I feel trapped like in a tunnel. Tunnel—mine—
mine—shaft—air—canary! No, I’m a roach, a survivor of brooms, chancletazos, and toilet bowl flushes. Viejo, where are you? Damn that Johnny Walker, one instant and my whole life is ruined.

*Martina moves from one side of stage to other as if being carried in suitcase.*

We’re moving. Where are we going? I hear the Old Man saying: Aquí. Cousin—prima. Forty years, forty years. They sob and sob and sob. You look the same, no, you look the same. They catch up on their life. He’s got hypertension, diabetes. She’s got arthritis, cataracts, triple bypass. I don’t care who takes Lipitor, prednisone, or Synthroid.

*She stops moving.*

Yemalla, why did I open my mouth? I have lost everything. Catalina, her food, the palace of Versailles, the peanut I used to sit on when she told me the news. Why didn’t I listen? What do I know about Miami: old Jews, loud Cubans, Raid? Cuba, my paradise lost.

*Sounds of a car, traffic, and a car engine off, as if a car has stopped.*

*MARTINA:* The car stops. The Old Lady says: “llegamos.” We are at her house. I better pull myself together. I have to go back to Havana with the Old Man. There are only three people going into the house: the Old Man, the Old Lady Cousin, and her Granddaughter, who carries me in the suitcase. Inside the house the Old Lady puts the radio on so loud it hurts my antennas.

*A radio commercial comes on, and Martina holds on to her antennas as if in pain from the loudness.*

*RADIO ANNOUNCER:* Is that a bird? A rocket? A UFO? No. It’s a flying saucer sandwich that’s out of this world. La Sandwichera platillos voladores jamón queso puerco pollo planchaitos a tu gusto echa un patín y vuela a La Sandwichera. La Sandwichera opens tonight—buy one flying saucer sandwich and get one free—La Sandwichera te espera.

*During the scene, when Martina speaks, the stage turns dark and we see her face illuminated by a little flashlight. When others speak, there is light on stage.*

*MARTINA:* Coño. I’m all tangled in the silver hairbrush the Old Man didn’t clean. When I’m hair free, I’m gonna run for my life into that Old Man’s guayabera pocket, ooh, I can almost taste the lint. Old Man, I never heard you so quiet say something. All I can hear is the Old Lady talks, talks, talks . . .

*OLD LADY/COUSIN:* That ad on the radio will be playing all day today. For the grand opening of my son-in-law’s sandwich shop, La Sandwichera. That’s why my son-in-law won’t be with us today. It will just be the three of us. My granddaughter es mi paño de lágrimas, the handkerchief that picks up all my tears. Since I got sick.

I haven’t been the same. You ask me how I am. What can I say: jodida pero contenta.
MARTINA: All messed up but happy? Que eso vieja.
She mimes going to the Old Man, taking him by the hand, and sitting him down.

OLD LADY/COUSIN: To have you here after these years . . . I have all your CDs, and I listen to them on the Walkman my granddaughter gave me. With the headphones on she says I look muy hip-hoppy. Sometimes I go to sleep listening to you singing “Lágrimas Negras.”

MARTINA: Yeah, the Old Man’s singing puts me to sleep too.
The Old Lady mimes getting a glass of water to serve the Old Man.

OLD LADY COUSIN: Pero viejo, at your age, your success—is a miracle, a miracle bigger than the Immaculate Conception. And I tell you something no hay mal que por bien no venga. When you wrote you had an eye infection and couldn’t buy medicine I got a job so I could send you money. I worked in a factory making gift boxes. The kind with red felt lining. Muy fancy.

MARTINA: A red felt box, hmm, a nice place for a siesta.

OLD LADY COUSIN: One day I remember I got scared, I blew my nose and saw red. I thought it was blood, but no, it was dust from the red felt. Remember when they used to call you bread stick and I got called Old Lady? You never called me that. Ah, here comes my beauty queen. Wait till you taste her flying saucer sandwiches. And she made café con leche just for you.

MARTINA: Café con leche. It must be three o’clock. And soon I’m gonna have some back in Cuba cause now I’m hair free. Old Man, don’t you want to open the suitcase and show the Old Lady all the photos you got in the suitcase. Come on . . . open up.

Sound of car door slamming and dog barking.

OLD LADY/COUSIN: Oh, Virgen Santísima, my son-in-law. Why is he here? He was supposed to be at the sandwich shop for the opening. We have to go. Niña, go get the car keys.

MARTINA: Go? Car keys? The Son-in-Law?

Lights up on a microphone in the back. The Son-in-Law appears.

SON-IN-LAW: Niña, ayúdame, I have a truckload. Carlitos, stop barking. Did you hear the news?

Immigration officials want to send the boy back. I had to cancel the opening of the shop. Did you hear me?
The Son-in-Law comes into the living room where they all are, and when he sees the Old Man, he is shocked. This speech is done with a microphone in hand. The sound is loud and there is reverb, so when the Son-in-Law is screaming, sometimes it’s not understood, but the rage is clear.

¡Qué! I don’t believe it. I can’t believe this is happening in my house, I hope no one saw you come in. Thank God the curtains are closed so people can’t see in. How could you? How could you? I am speechless. I can’t talk.
Your cousin who gives concerts and has his picture taken with a dictator who has killed millions, ruined a country, and destroyed us. You bring him into my house? What, you’re leaving, Old Man? You can’t take hearing the truth? Are you a traitor, or worse, an opportunist who believes in nothing? Go, vete coño. Go back to Cuba where you cannot say what you think. You want to see freedom, mira—listen to me, coño: se van todos pal carajo: Clinton, Castro, Janet Reno, fuck you fuck you fuck fuck you all. *Sound of door slamming and dog barking. The stage is once again dark, and Martina with the little flashlight appears.*

**Martina:** Coño! This is not a good family situation for me. Waiting is an eternity. But I know one thing, I gotta get outta here. The Old Lady’s back. She’s dragging the suitcase. She opens it: wow, the light is blinding. I jump and run through the shag rug, my adrenalin is pumping. The tile floor is easy, I’m almost at the front door. Damn, a dog.

When Carlitos the dog barks, underscoring his speech are sounds of marching foot soldiers chanting.

**Carlitos (growling, barking):** Halt. Who goes there? Hands up in the air. Name, rank, and serial number.

**Martina:** Martina, la cucarachita.

**Carlitos:** A cucaracha? How can that be? We’ve exterminated all roaches. Hey, you are not a traitor roach, are you? Did you come with the Old Man, the communist who was here?

**Martina:** Noo. I’m Puerto Rican from Ponce. My cousins are all from Jamaica. *Man (Jamaican accent),* I love reggae. Do you?

**Carlitos:** No, we listen to Olga Guillot and Gloria Estefan and JLo. That’s what soldiers listen to. I’m Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, named after the Cuban patriot. You know the Grito de Yara? Huh? That’s the cry for independence from Spain in Cuba’s Ten Years War. My master showed me *(howling).* I’m in the Infantry Division under the General. The General is from Cuba, the good Cuba, not the bad Cuba under the dictator. There things are bad, so bad. You and me, we couldn’t be Cuban. Why? There are no animals, no pets, no insects left. Cubans ate them all. They had to. My master told me. Our command post is in the yard. The lawn chair with the Cuban and American flag—that’s our central command post. My master is informed. He knows what the enemy is thinking from the communist newspapers—*Granma* from Cuba and the *New York Times* from New York. He reads them, I pee on them. We believe in freedom. You know what freedom means, roach? Freedom means having balls. Check mine out.

_He lifts his legs to show her._
martina: Pretty.
carlitos: In Cuba only one man can have balls, but here even a bulldog like me can have them. No one is going to take that freedom away. Not even CNN, those communists. They report from Cuba the bad one (confused) and the good one. Oh, I hear and see the General. I let you go this time, roach, but don’t you ever come back here, and watch out, cause I’m on patrol, one false move and it’s (threatening) Guantanamo for you. There are big demonstrations planned as part of OSE—Operation Save Elian, the little boy next door. This is not going to be another Bay of Pigs. No sir. Freedom for Elian is freedom for all.
carlitos leaves, howling.
martina: Elian is the boy next door. I need air. I’m a little nervous, I never been outside before.
lights change. A beautiful melody with birds chirping comes on. Martina walks on grass.
    Wow! The great outdoors. A lawn, awesome. Hey, I’m already speaking like a native. It’s hard to walk on grass. I’m gonna use a blade like a trampoline—y voy como un cañón, six, seven inches at a time. Look at that moon, so big. But the moon in Cuba is bigger. That’s a nice bottle cap. Well, it’s not a peanut or a divan. Wow, qué pasa, who be shoving me back and forth? Woh, it’s a cat.
cassandra, a cat, meows as she slowly approaches Martina.
cassandra: Where are you going, roach? You’re not afraid of a cat’s paw, are you? You are not from around here. The nose knows (smelling her). Café con leche, parrot feathers, Cuban tobacco—you’re a Cuban national.
martina: Is that okay? Sorry.
cassandra: Relax, roach.
music comes on.
    I’m here to welcome you to America: Land of the Free. Fat free, smoke free, pest free. My name’s Cassandra. That was my pet name. My owner didn’t know I was male. She never got to see me fully developed. I hit the road Jack when I was just a kitten. And that’s how my story goes. We’re alike, roach, you and I, independents. Mucho simpatico. Hey, I could help you relocate here. We got job openings. We’re testing a new affirmative action program, trying to give insects like you an opportunity. We’re looking for fast, tough bugs, bugs who’ve been around for centuries, nocturnal bugs who can work the night shift. That’s when passion stirs most in animal and human kind (meowing loudly). Sweet smoking roach, you’re smack in the middle of the biggest news story ever: Elian.
MARTINA: Elian?

CASSANDRA: Yeah, Elian. I have a nose for news. I’ll teach you the ropes. I’ll make you a lead reporter in the A.I.

MARTINA: Ah, no thanks, Cassandra. It’s a lot of work, pressure. I saw what it did to Bertha the bee, her stinger is sagging down to her kneecap, está acabá.

CASSANDRA: You should consider my offer, roach. There are a lot of dangers out here, you dig? Have you ever heard of a roach motel?

MARTINA: No, are they in South Beach?

CASSANDRA: Cucaracha, you gotta get with it. Enter a roach motel, and you die a painful, slow, sticky death. Then there’s that dog next door, the bulldog with the Chihuahua head, he’s a mean mutt.

If he knows you’re a Cuban national, meoooow. He won’t touch you if you’re with me. Working for the A.I. Come on, I can show you to your quarters, a deluxe Coca-Cola bottle under the shade of a palm tree. How about a Kentucky Fried Chicken wing?

MARTINA: A chicken wing? Okay. I’m in. And on, on in five. But my chicken wing?

A ding sound. Martina goes to report the news to the back, where there is a microphone. She speaks into the mic. She mimes being on headphones and hearing someone telling her where to go.

Where do I go? Here? I’m on. This is Martina from A.I. with the roach report. Janet Reno—said that Elian’s grandmothers are in Miami but the government will let the families decide where the two families will visit with the boy.

She moves across the stage as if directed by a voice on headphones, and a green light appears on the floor.

I am standing outside Elian’s house. The green you see is all the lawn in front of the house. Marisleysis, Elian’s cousin, just walked in very upset. She made paella for the grandmothers, but they don’t want to eat her paella. And I hear the Miami Cubans are calling the Cubans from the island cowards. And the Cubans from the island are calling the people from Miami the Cuban Mafia. The mud is flying. And now people are coming and chanting: “Clinton Cobarde, Miami está que arde.” Clinton, you coward, Miami is burning. Oh, what—

Martina touches her headphones as if she’s getting a special report.

Oh, this is a special report.

She moves to another side of the stage.

Tico the tick who was covering Janet Reno’s conference was found in a reporter’s hairpiece plucked with a tweezer and burnt. Oh, it’s dangerous
out there. What can I say, I . . . I offer my (pronouncing the word slowly and deliberately) condolences to Tico’s family. This is Martina reporting with A.I.

Martina walks off and has to continue coverage.

What? I have to go on again, cause Tico is gone? But my chicken wing? Moving to another side of stage. A yellow light comes on the floor. She points to the sidewalk.

This is Martina with the roach report. As you can see on the sidewalk, that yellow is melted cheese from a flying saucer sandwich that the Fox reporter was eating. He’s a lucky guy who got the sandwich after reporting that Elian is happy with his family in Miami. The Cuban people in Miami are strong, united, and fighting for the freedom of a little boy.

She moves to another spot on the sidewalk where there is a red light.

But over here on the sidewalk, that red scuff mark is from the shoe of the CNN reporter, who fell as she was running away from a mob of angry Cubans who were calling her communist. And that way over there in the back is the silver metal leg from the walker of the old lady who tripped her. And the old lady is trying to get a van big enough to fit two walkers and a wheelchair because she wants to go and join the demonstrations that will close the port of Miami. She says in Cuba people have to make a line to get food, here people will make a line to get arrested. And she will get arrested (to herself). Where’s the food line?

Martina goes back to where the mic stand is, puts the mic down.

All I can ask is: is ten p.m. Do you know where is your grandmother? This is Martina reporting for A.I.

A ding sound. Lights change.

Cassandra (clapping): Fabulous, kid. You’re a natural. What a pro. But I tell you what we need. We need to get to the source. Elian—you own interview up close and personal.

Martina: Oh no, Cassandra. Everybody wants a piece of the kid. When I met him in Cuba he . . .

Cassandra: Whoa! Back up, roach. You met this kid, you know Elian, and you’ve been holding out on me? Diane Sawyer beat us to the interview! I just can’t believe that. This is how you treat a friend who gave you everything? Are you that ungrateful?

Martina: Don’t say that. I hate that word. I’m very grateful. I work a lot, I can’t remember when was the last time I contemplated. I haven’t even had my chicken wing. Coño, como se trabaja en este país, all you do is this country is work, work, work. How I wish I was back in Cuba with Catalina having some café con leche.
Back in Miami Martina goes to Elian’s house to interview him. She stands in front of the microphone. (It coincides with the day the SWAT team was sent in to take him to his father so they can return to Cuba.)

**MARTINA:** This is Martina reporting live from A.I. I am going into Elian’s bedroom.

*Sound of child crying.*

He’s crying. Eliancito, look over here, the window. It’s me, la cucarachita Martina. Remember I showed you how to wave like the queen of Spain? Yeah. You’re big boy. Estás muy grande. Why are you crying? ¿Qué te pasa, niño? Tell me.

**ELIAN:** I don’t want to go to Cuba. Don’t send me to Cuba. I don’t want to be alone in the water on a tube. Please, I promise to be a capitalist, communist, capitalist. No tube, please. No tube.

**MARTINA:** Eliancito, come down, I’m gonna tell you something. You are not going to Cuba on a life preserver tube, no, you are gonna go by plane. You are going to fly.

**ELIAN:** Really? Fly?

As he turns around to face the audience, a strong single light in the back has Elian in a shadow, and we see his gestures in silhouette.

You are smart. You know what? I told my pretty cousin Marisleysis about how you dance flamenco with a mantilla on your head, the two little holes so your antennae could stick out, but she don’t believe me. But I know you’re real, like my dolphin friends Dolores and Dominique. They can echolocate. And you know what, my cousin Marisleysis teach me to talk on TV. She tells me to say like this *(wagging his finger no)*: No, Papi. I don’t wanna go to Cuba. No. I go on the radio and say tomorrow I get my citizenship. I got Nintendo. I can watch TV all day. I’m here, here *(jumping)* and on TV, here and on TV. You want me to show you how I draw?

**ELIAN:** *Mimes getting a big piece of chalk and drawing on the floor. First he draws a big circle and then a small one.*

This is Cuba *(drawing it very big).* And this is the United States of Miami *(drawing it small).* In Cuba we sit in chairs in school. Here you can lie on the floor. But I don’t like to cause I get my Fubu jeans messed up. I don’t like to get messed up. I never go outside without my hair gel. You gotta have good image if you are balsero, raft boy like me. Is important for balsero to have good hair. I’m the gangsta of love. Jennifer and Shaquanna and Desiree all wanna be my girlfriends, but I like girls with big breasts
like Marisleysis. She’s so fine, when she fainted I went to give her mouth to mouth resusci . . . resusci stuff. My papi he’s going to come and marry Marisleysis so I can sleep in the bed with her. I like that. Sometimes I pretend I’m sleepy so I can put my head on her pillow breasts. My papi says I’m on vacation, but this vacation is so long. I got a brother Hianny, he’s a baby. He should go on vacation far, far away. My uncle Lazaro got upset wid me because he say: Elian show the people outside what I teach you and I do this (he gives the finger) and I gotta do this (he gives a victory sign) but I get confuse. This is what the twin boys in Cuba teach me. They are bad boys and I suppose to do this. And Uncle Lazaro say that if I misbehave the people with the cameras are not gonna like me no more. But my grandmothers, mis abuelitas, they like me. That’s why they come on vacation with me. And my abuelita say: ”Eliancito, how big you grow, show it to me.”

He looks down at his crotch.

I say, Abuelita, no. Only hillbilly hicks do that. You could get arrested for child abuse and I could sue you cause I got seven lawyers. Everybody sue each other here. No, I’m kidding, Abuelita. Besito, besito. But if you get arrested, Abuelita, is okay, because my uncles got DWI and two cousins got felonies.

He sits down.

I’m sad because my puppy got taken away. Because he make doodoo on a letter to la bruja who shake all the time. La bruja, the witch Reno, she wants to send me to Cuba on a tube. But I don’t have to go to Cuba on a tube. I can go by plane. And my mami is in the sky, en el cielo, and she got that sickness where you forget so she got lost. First she had to go down, down into the ocean, so she could jump up high into the sky, so I’m gonna pick her up on the plane. Oh, I think I hear a plane outside. I’m gonna go outside and yell: Hey plane take me back to my papi Juan Miguel Gonzalez.

Sound of helicopters, sound of cars, and theme song from TV show action sequence, cars, sirens.

MARTINA: That’s not a plane, that’s a helicopter, kid. This is Martina with . . . quick hide, SWAT team coming in, SWAT team, Elian, I’m jumping into you sneaker, don’t be scared.

Lights change. She mimes going into a sneaker and, flying off, strikes a pose.

[In the final scene Martina returns to Cuba to the one family member she has, her best friend, Catalina.]