23 Flights Home

By Joey A. Chavez

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DEDICATION

To Robin, Joey, and the rest of my family.

ORIGINAL PERFORMANCE

The world premier took place April 30th, 2008 at The Lensic Performing Arts Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Original Company members were:

NARRATOR, ATTENDANT, GREG: Gilbert Lawson; RUBEN: William Collier; NARRATOR: Nicole Potter; NARRATOR: Daniel Fierro; NICOLASA, NARRATOR: Carly Moses; NARRATOR, THIEF: Gabriela Bregin; NARRATOR, VICTOR: William Johnson; NICO, NARRATOR: Arlen Cooke; NARRATOR, JESSICA: Monica Rainer; NARRATOR, BRAD: Elliot Marlowe; MARGARET, NARRATOR: Jennifer Lange; NARRATOR, PRIVATE MARY GIBSON: Crystal Foley; TRISH, NARRATOR: Grace Clark; NARRATOR, NANCY: Jessica Colclough; NARRATOR, THOMAS: Eli Barnes; NARRATOR, VICTORIA: Sarah Livingston; NARRATOR, PUNT: Jason Shain; NARRATOR, PAUL: Cory Mandel; NARRATOR, RAMONA: Kathryn Harrell; PAM, NARRATOR: Kathleen Brewster; NOVEL NARRATOR: Maren Geisler; EDDY: Janos Perez Waller; EDNA: Hannah Kramm; TINA, NARRATOR: Joanna Becker; RUTH, NARRATOR: Kir Kipness.

SETTING

The action of the play takes place on a bare stage with the company bringing in all hand props and simple furniture pieces. There are two large screens above the actors. Stage left will have projections of northern New Mexico and stage right will have projections of New York City.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Ruben Delgado, a young writer from New Mexico, is spending his last twenty dollars to fill up his 1972 canary yellow Cutlass. This is his final day in New York City. He left home eight months earlier to seek his fame and fortune, convinced he could sell his eight hundred and ninety-six-page novel about a family who resides in the Rio Grande Valley, but all he found was rejection.

Ruben has to sneak back into his apartment (he owes three months rent) to retrieve his single box of possessions and his original manuscript. As he gazes out over the city for what he thinks will be the last time, he sees his car being hooked up to one of the dreaded brown NYC traffic control tow trucks.

In an attempt to stop his means of escape from being towed, he tosses the unbound original out of his twenty-third floor window. As sheets of paper rain down on the city, we are transported into the novel one page at a time. In the novel, Eddy Martinez just wants to marry Edna, build an adobe home, raise a family, and farm pumpkins. Edna has to take a part-time job editing a “Letters Home” column, not knowing she will be the eventual recipient of unfortunate news. Thomas, their eldest and only surviving son, doesn’t want the home Eddy spent his life building.

There are now three plot lines interwoven with action and narration: the novel, Ruben’s flashbacks over the past eight months, and Ruben’s real time descent down twenty-three flights of stairs.

In the end, Ruben’s novel does have relevance for the readers as each one of their lives is touched in a way he hadn’t planned. He also doesn’t know that page eight hundred and ninety-six managed to make it into the back seat of his 1972 canary yellow Cutlass and is riding home with him.

Performance time: about an hour.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(10 m, 15 w, or with doubling 6 m, 6 w)

These characters are always played by the same actor.

RUBEN DELGADO: Novelist from Espanola, NM. Mid-20s.
EDDY MARTINEZ: A pumpkin farmer from northern NM. Ages from his twenties through mid fifties.
EDNA MARTINEZ: Wife of Eddy. She also ages from her late teens through her sixties.
NOVEL NARRATOR: Female.

Played by the rest of the company. Listed in order of appearance.

NARRATOR: Played by rotating company members or a single actor.
ATTENDENT: NYC gas station attendant.
NICOLASA DELGADO: Ruben's mother.
NICO: NYC deli worker.
MARGARET: NYC secretary to a publisher.
TRISH: NYC art student and receptionist.
PUNT: NYC homeless man.
PAM: NYC young mother.
TINA: NYC young professional.
PAUL: NYC young professional/Tina's husband.
VICTOR: New Mexico landowner.
RUTH: NYC widow, 88.
NANCY: NYC cancer survivor, 50.
GREG: NYC publisher, 45.
THOMAS MARTINEZ: Eldest son of Eddy and Edna. Ages from 18 to 35.
RAMONA: NYC Puerto Rican activist, early 20s.
MIGUEL/RITA: Young Latino writers.
MARY L. GIBSON: Veteran.
JESSICA: NYC mother in her mid-40s.
BRAD: NYC building super.
VICTORIA: NYC tow truck driver.
ADDITIONAL ROLES: THIEF *(non-speaking)* and assorted LETTER READERS.

HOME … IS A WORK IN PROGRESS

(AT RISE: Hot LIGHT. A blank stage except for a small table DL, upon which is a large stack of papers. MUSIC. The NARRATOR enters down right. Music fades. As the narrator speaks, ACTORS complete the action. NYC projection up.)

NARRATOR: Ruben peeled himself off the white vinyl seat and out of his 1972 canary yellow Cutlass and onto the steaming black top of a gas station on the east side of Manhattan. He looked across the island where he could just see the top of the Empire State Building hovering over the forest of skyscrapers.

RUBEN: I used to love this view.

NARRATOR: Ruben walked over to the window of the station attendant and pulled out his wallet. He flipped through it to give the impression he was looking for just the right bill, when in fact there was only twenty-three dollars. The rest was old credit card receipts which he was sure had maxed out his card by now.

ATTENDANT: What do you need?

RUBEN: Aww, just give me twenty on number six. Man, it's hot today.

ATTENDANT: Will be all summer.

NARRATOR: Ruben walked back to his car and began to pump the twenty dollars worth into that beautiful car. At this point it was the only good thing in his life.

RUBEN: You're the only thing decent in my life. God, I hate this heat. I hate this humidity and it never stops! It feels like it gets hotter at night. Not cooler like back home. Why the hell did I come here? What made me think these people would be the slightest bit interested in my work?

(LIGHTS change to neutral. NYC projection out, NEW MEXICO up. NICOLASA enters.)

NICOLASA: I don't see why you have to leave town, especially to go there.
RUBEN: There's nothing for me here.
NICOLASA: Everything is here! Your friends, your family, work … and what about Lupita?
RUBEN: Lupita doesn't want to see me anymore.
NICOLASA: Well, then she's stupid, but you'll find someone else.
RUBEN: There is no one here, Mamma! Don't you see that? There is nothing and no one here for me. If I want to be something I have to get out of here.
NICOLASA: You could teach at the college.
RUBEN: What … what could I teach? Remedial English to a bunch of knuckleheads who were too stoned to study in high school? I have bigger things in mind. If I'm going to be a writer I have to get out of here and go to where things are happening.
NICOLASA: But people get killed in New York!
RUBEN: They get killed here too.
NICOLASA: I'm afraid for you!
RUBEN: I'll be fine, Mamma. I have to do this.

(NICOLASA exits. LIGHTS change to hot. NM out, NYC up.)

NARRATOR: Ruben finished pumping the gas. He looked up and down the avenue where the haze of the day was just starting to blur out the details of the buildings.
RUBEN: I used to love this sight.
NARRATOR: Ruben got back into his car and headed across town to his apartment on the west side.
RUBEN: I don't believe it. There's a parking spot right in front of the building. That never happens except in commercials and movies. Maybe it's a sign. I'm doing the right thing. Thank you, Lord!
NARRATOR: Ruben parked his 1972 canary yellow Cutlass in front of the thirty-six story building which had been his home for the past eight months.

End of Freeview

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