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Dramatic Publishing

Simply Maria or the American Dream

A One-Act Play

by

JOSEFINA LOPEZ



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(SIMPLY MARIA OR THE AMERICAN DREAM)

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SIMPLY MARIA OR THE AMERICAN DREAM

is dedicated to Luis Valdez, who showed me that theater
belonged to all people, to my mother Catalina
who taught me how to tell stories,
and to my father Rosendo
who gave me the courage to dream.

SIMPLY MARIA OR THE AMERICAN DREAM was first produced by the California Young Playwrights Project at the Gaslamp Quarter Theatre, in San Diego, California, January 13, 1988. The production was directed by Luis Torner; set design by Beeb Salzer; light design by J.A. Roth; costume design by Ingrid Helton. The cast was as follows:

MARIA Amy Jacobson
 CARMEN/ENSEMBLE Pola Allen
 RICARDO/ENSEMBLE Andres Monreal
 JOSE/ENSEMBLE Daniel Mora
 PRIEST/ENSEMBLE Don Loper
 GIRL 1/MARY/ENSEMBLE Claire Engel
 GIRL 2/MARIA 2/ENSEMBLE Margarita Cota
 GIRL 3/MYTH/ENSEMBLE Leila Knocks
 PROSECUTOR/ENSEMBLE Alberto Borrego
 CARMEN’S MOTHER/JURY/AJAX LADY Connie Collier

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Playwright's Notes

I had thought about committing suicide, but I knew I wanted to live. I just wanted so badly to get my parents' attention and for them to understand me. So I wrote a play! I wrote *SIMPLY MARIA OR THE AMERICAN DREAM* when I was 17.

I wrote this play because I had to. I was so angry at my father for his machismo and all of his affairs. I was so angry at my mother for allowing my father to disrespect her and for being so dependent on him. I wanted to go to college because I knew that would be the only way I could become economically independent and self-sufficient. However, because I was undocumented at that time I couldn't get financial aid and my parents didn't have any money to give me or lend me. They would just tell me it was going to be a waste of time anyway and I should just get married. It is painful to think about this period in my life because I was hurting, I was confused, and I was mad as hell.

Very early on in my life I learned to channel my anger into something positive. I remember wanting to scream back at my father when he was yelling about house chores not being done. I couldn't yell back at him and disrespect him but my throat hurt as I held back the scream. I quickly grabbed a pen and stabbed the paper with my words. I wrote viciously with rage and said all the things that were in my gut and heart that I couldn't say out loud. The next day I read the piece of paper and was very impressed with what I had written. Writing became a tool of empowerment.

I was a junior in high school and I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I was so confused and I kept hearing three different voices. I thought I was going crazy. Nothing made sense. My parents would tell me to do one thing and

then I would go to school and my teachers would tell me to reach for the stars. I was living in two different worlds that kept clashing. I wrote *Simply Maria* to make sense of all this confusion.

Also, I saw a play by Luis Valdez called “I Don’t Have To Show You No Stinking Badges” that dealt with the racism in Hollywood. It opened my eyes and I realized that as a Latina studying theater at the Los Angeles County High School For The Arts I had no future. I could either change my last name to something Anglo or I could do something about it. I decided to start writing to create roles for Latinas and for myself.

I write to empower myself because I grew up feeling very helpless. I grew up feeling like my life as a Latina woman was not important. After I wrote *SIMPLY MARIA OR THE AMERICAN DREAM* and realized how important my experience is, that of a Mexican-American immigrant woman, I became the protagonist of all my plays and took charge of my life and went on to college. I had to drop out of college three times, but I eventually graduated May 27, 1993.

Josefina López
Los Angeles
April 5, 1996

SIMPLY MARIA OR THE AMERICAN DREAM

A One-Act Play
For 4 Men and 6 Women

CHARACTERS

MARIA daughter of Carmen and Ricardo; an ambitious Latino with a wild imagination who wants to go to college
CARMEN Maria's mother; submissive and traditional
RICARDO Maria's father; a hard-working man, very macho and traditional
JOSE Maria's macho husband
GIRL 1, MARY Maria's angel and later her "American Self"
GIRL 2, MYTH Maria's angel and later her "Writer Self"
GIRL 3, MARIA 2 . . . Maria's angel and later her "Mexican Self"

ENSEMBLE

PRIEST PERSON 1
CARMEN'S MOTHER VENDOR 1
WOMAN VENDOR 2
NARRATOR BAG LADY
IMMIGRANT 1 PROTESTER
IMMIGRANT 2 MAN 1
IMMIGRANT 3 DIRTY OLD MAN
IMMIGRANT 4 CHOLO 1
STATUE OF LIBERTY VALLEY GIRL 1
MEXICAN MAN VALLEY GIRL 2
MEXICAN WOMAN CHOLO 2
POSTMAN PERSON 2

PERSON 3	HEAD NURSE
PERSON 4	NURSE 2
ANGLO BUYER	NURSE 3
REFEREE	NURSE 4
ANNOUNCER	BAILIFF
FLOOR MANAGER	JUDGE
HUSBAND	PROSECUTER
WIFE	JUROR 1
SALESMAN	JUROR 2

SETTING:

The play begins in a small village in Mexico; moves to downtown Los Angeles and then to East Los Angeles.

TIME:

The play takes place over a period of years following the growth of Maria from birth to womanhood.

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

PRODUCTION NOTES

COSTUME LIST

Carmen wears a basic dress and so will Maria until she reaches the U.S. Then Maria will wear sweatpants and a blouse or T-shirt. Ricardo can wear black pants and a white shirt.

The three women who play the roles of the Girl 1,2,3, wear dresses, lace veils and low white pumps. They will become Mary, Myth and Maria 2. Mary will wear a “Wonder Woman” type of outfit, Myth will wear a crown made of flowers and ribbons, and Maria 2 will wear a “Señorita” ruffles-everywhere type of outfit.

The Ensemble players wear all black and a piece or two of clothing that they can slip in and out in seconds.

The following is a minimum of costumes needed to play the many other characters:

- 1 robe for a priest
- 3 coats for “Immigrants”
- 1 handkerchief for “Mexican Woman’s” head
- 1 denim jacket for Maria
- 1 coat for Carmen
- 1 postman’s hat
- 1 trench coat
- 1 black with white lace Mexican charro vest
- 1 man’s blouse from the Elizabethan period fit for a prince
- 1 referee’s shirt
- 1 blazer
- 1 fake mink coat for “Actress”
- 1 black blazer for “Actor”
- 1 loud and colorful blazer for Announcer

1 pair red rubber gloves
3 nurses' hats
1 bailiff's hat
1 robe for judge
2 Mexican shawls

PROPERTY LIST

Scene One

1 bicycle
1 rag bag
3 large candle holders

Scene Two

1 letter
1 baby in a blanket
1 morral (traditional Mexican campesino bag)

Scene Three

1 Statue Of Liberty crown
1 Statue Of Liberty torch made from a flashlight
1 ship's sail

Scene Four

1 paper airplane
2 handbags

Scene Five

2 pairs sunglasses
1 bandanna

Scene Six

1 table
3 chairs
1 small platform to resemble a bed
4 sealed letters
1 typewriter

Scene Seven

1 bundle of clothes
1 tool box with a few tools

Scene Eight

1 whip
1 broom
1 dog collar
1 wedding lasso of flowers
1 gun

Scene Nine

1 TV set
1 headset
2 chairs
1 makeup vest with brushes and other accessories
1 can Ajax

1 broom
1 bed

Scene Ten

3 chairs
1 white bed sheet
6 “baby” dolls

Scene Eleven

1 table
6 “baby” dolls
1 wedding dress
1 trench coat
1 giant tortilla with an Aztec emblem on it
1 plate
1 bunch of clothes
1 dozen tortillas
5 chairs

Scene Twelve

1 table
3 chairs
1 bed
1 pen
1 piece of paper
1 suitcase

Glossary / Spanish

Adiós - goodbye

¡Aguas! - Watch out! / Look out!

¡¡Amá!! - Mom!!

¿Aquí? - here

¡¡Ayy!! - Oh!!

¡Ayy, que floja! - Oh, how lazy you are!

¡Ayyy, mi madre! - Oh, it's my mother!

¡Callate! - Shut up!

cartuchos, dos dolares - cassettes, two dollars!

charro - Mexican cowboy

chile - hot peppers

Con mis propios ojos - With my own eyes

¡Corranle! - Run! Get away!

corrido - Mexican ballad that tells a story

¿Cuanto? ¿Salsa? ¿Cervesa? - How much? Salsa? Beer?

¿Dónde estás hija mia?! - My daughter where are you?

el norte - the north, U.S.A.

Esperanza - Hope

¿Estás contenta? - Are you happy now?

¡¿Estas loca?! - Are you crazy?

figate - look

gringitos - Anglos

¡Hoye mi carnal! - Hey, homeboy!

¡La migra! - the border patrol

la Señora - Mrs.

¡Lo hicimos! - We did it!

Los quiero mucho, nunca los olvidare - I love you very much,
I will never forget you.

Mamá - mother

Mamí - mommy

¡mi amor! - my love

Mi querida - My dear
¡M'ija! - My daughter!
¡Mira! - Look!
moral - a traditional Mexican bag made of cloth
Ni modo - Nothing can be done about it.
No se - I don't know.
¡Nos nortearon! - they confused us, lost us
Papá - father
Papá, ¿Esta ocupado? - Father, are you busy?
Pendejadita - stupid mistake
Perdone señora - Excuse me, lady
Por favor - please
¡¿Por qué?! - Why?!
Pues bueno - well, all right
puta - whore
¿Qué? - What?
¡Que atrevida! - How dare you!
¿Que van a decir? - What are they going to say?
¡Que verguenza! - How embarrassing!
quieren virgenes - they want virgins
¿Ricardo, eres tú? - Ricardo, is that you?
¡Se va acabar el mundo! - The world is coming to an end!
Señora - Mrs.
señorita - a young lady
¡Sí! - Yes!
Simon, que - Yeah, sure
Sombras para verte como una estrella de cine. Eye shadows
to make you look like a movie star.
'Ta barato - It's cheap
¡Tanto estudio y para nada! - All that education and for nothing.
¡Vamonos por alla! - Let's go that way!
vato - Home boy / guy
¡ven aquí! - come here

¡Venganse por aquí! - Come this way!
¡Viva la huelga! - Long live the boycott!
¿Y ahora qué hacemos? - What do we do now?
¡Ya basta! - Enough!

SIMPLY MARIA OR THE AMERICAN DREAM

SCENE ONE

AT RISE: *Dim lights slowly come on. RICARDO, a tall, dark, and handsome Mexican man enters. He tries to hide in the darkness of the night. He whistles carefully, trying to make it part of the noises of the night.*

CARMEN (*from her balcony*). ¡Ricardo, eres tú?

RICARDO. Yes! Ready?

CARMEN. ¡Sí!

(CARMEN climbs down from her balcony, then runs to RICARDO, kissing and consuming him in her embrace.)

CARMEN. Where's the horse?

RICARDO. What horse?

CARMEN. The one we are going to elope on.

RICARDO. You didn't say to bring one. All we agreed on was that I would meet you here at midnight.

CARMEN. I would have thought that you would have thought to...

RICARDO. Shhh!!!! ¡Mira! (*He points to CARMEN's room.*)

CARMEN. ¡Ayyyyy! ¡Mi madre!! Let's go! And on what are we going?

RICARDO. On this. (*He brings an old bike.*)

CARMEN. ¿¡Qué?! On that? No! How could you...? Everyone knows that when you elope, you elope on a horse. Not on a...Ricardo, you promised!

(Offstage CARMEN's MOTHER discovers her missing.)

MAMA. Carmencita! Carmen! She's gone!!!

CARMEN. Oh, no! Hurry! Let's go!

RICARDO *(hops on the bike)*. Carmen, hurry! Get on!

CARMEN. No! We don't fit!

MAMA. ¡M'ija! Where are you?

CARMEN. We better fit! *(She jumps on, and they take off. She falls off the bike, but quickly gets back on.)* Ricardo, marry me! *(Crickets are heard, lights fade.)*

SCENE TWO

AT RISE: *Lights come on. THREE WOMEN enter a church with candles. A FOURTH WOMAN, much older, enters with a lighted candle and lights the other candles. The THREE WOMEN then transform into STATUES of saints in the church. The PRIEST comes downstage, waiting for a wedding to begin. CARMEN enters, pregnant.*

PRIEST. Will he be here soon?

CARMEN. Soon, he promised.

PRIEST. I was suppose to start half an hour ago.

(A WOMAN enters with a note.)

WOMAN. Is there anyone here named Carmen?

CARMEN. Is it from Ricardo? (*The WOMAN does not know. CARMEN reads the letter.*) “I haven’t been able to get a divorce. It’s sometime soon, believe me...Just wait. I’m working hard so that I can save money to buy a little house or a ranch for the three of us. If you wait, good things will come.” (*To PRIEST.*) There won’t be a wedding today.

(*CARMEN exits, crying, with PRIEST. The STATUES become WOMEN and they all ad lib malicious gossip about the pregnant bride. The PRIEST enters and the WOMEN stop gossiping. CARMEN enters again. This time she is no longer pregnant, but is holding her baby.*)

PRIEST. Will he be here?

(*RICARDO enters.*)

CARMEN. He is here.

PRIEST. Good. Now we can begin.

CARMEN (*to RICARDO*). I thought you wouldn’t show up. (*RICARDO shushes her. The PRIEST begins his speech which is more or less mumbled and not heard except for:*)

PRIEST. Do you, Carmen, accept Ricardo as your lawfully wedded husband?

CARMEN. I do.

PRIEST. Do you, Ricardo, accept Carmen as your lawfully wedded wife?

RICARDO (*hesitates*). I do.

PRIEST. Under the Catholic church in the holy house of God, I pronounce you man and wife. (*The PRIEST takes the baby from CARMEN and sprinkles holy water on the baby.*) Under the Catholic church, in the holy house of God, this child shall be known as María.

(The PRIEST gives the baby to the OLD WOMAN. CARMEN, RICARDO, and PRIEST exit. The STATUES now transform into THREE ANGELIC GIRLS who begin to hum, then sing beautifully with only the word "María." The OLD WOMAN gives the baby to one of the GIRLS. They come center stage and deliver the following facing the audience.)

ALL. María

GIRL 1. As a girl you are to be:

GIRL 2. Nice,

GIRL 3. forgiving,

GIRL 1. considerate,

GIRL 2. obedient,

GIRL 3. gentle,

GIRL 1. hard-working,

GIRL 2. gracious.

GIRL 3. You are to like:

GIRL 1. Dolls,

GIRL 2. kitchens,

GIRL 3. houses,

GIRL 1. cleaning,

GIRL 2. caring for children,

GIRL 3. cooking,

GIRL 1. laundry,

GIRL 2. dishes.

GIRL 3. You are not to:

GIRL 1. Be independent,

GIRL 2. enjoy sex,

GIRL 3. but must endure it as your duty to your husband,

GIRL 1. and bearing his children.

GIRL 2. Do not shame your society!

GIRL 3. Never,

GIRL 1. never,

GIRL 2. never,

ALL. never!!!

GIRL 1. Your goal is to reproduce.

GIRL 2. And your only purpose in life is to serve three men:

GIRL 3. Your father,

GIRL 1. your husband,

GIRL 2. and your son.

GIRL 3. Your father...

*(RICARDO enters carrying a **moral** with his belongings.)*

RICARDO. Carmen, I must go.

CARMEN. Ricardo, don't go. Not after all I've waited.

RICARDO. I don't want to leave, but we need the money.

There's no work here. I must go to **el norte**, so I can find work and send for you.

CARMEN. I don't want to be alone.

RICARDO. You have María. I'm going so that we can have the things we don't have.

CARMEN. I would prefer to have you than the things I don't have.

RICARDO. It's not just for the money, but for me. I want something else besides a life on this farm.

CARMEN. María will not see you.

RICARDO. She will, when I am on the other side. I will send for you, she will be very proud of me.

CARMEN. You promise?

RICARDO. I promise.

CARMEN. Well, then, I will wait. We will wait.

RICARDO. I will write. *(He kisses CARMEN on the forehead.)*

CARMEN. Ricardo, remember that I love you. *(RICARDO leaves.)* Don't forget to write! *(Lights slowly fade.)*

SCENE THREE

AT RISE: *Spotlight on NARRATOR.*

NARRATOR. Yes, write a lot. They will miss you...And all who are in search of opportunity go to the same place; America. And America belongs to all who are willing to risk.

(Lights come on. A giant sail enters the stage, brought on by some EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS.)

IMMIGRANT 1. All for a dream.

IMMIGRANT 2. *Ciao mia Italia!*

IMMIGRANT 3. *Auf wiederzein mein Deutschland!*

IMMIGRANT 1. *Au revoir ma France!*

IMMIGRANT 2. Hello, America!

(In the background “America the Beautiful” starts playing. The STATUE OF LIBERTY enters.)

IMMIGRANT 3. The Lady!

IMMIGRANT 1. Up high in the sky...

IMMIGRANT 2. ...incapable of being brought down.

IMMIGRANT 3. And like her...

IMMIGRANT 1. ...we carry...

IMMIGRANTS 2 & 3. ...a similar torch.

ALL. A torch of hope.

STATUE OF LIBERTY. Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...

(At the bottom of the STATUE OF LIBERTY appear THREE MEXICAN PEOPLE [RICARDO is one of them] trying to cross the border. They run around hiding, sneak-

ing, and crawling, trying not to get spotted by the border patrol.)

RICARDO. ¡Venganse por aquí!

MEXICAN MAN. ¿Y ahora qué hacemos?

MEXICAN WOMAN. What do we do now?

MEXICAN MAN. ¡Vamonos por alla!

MEXICAN WOMAN. ¡Nos nortearon!

RICARDO. Let's go back. *(They hide behind the EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS. The STATUE OF LIBERTY composes herself and continues.)*

STATUE OF LIBERTY. I give you life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, for the price of your heritage, your roots, your history, your family, your language... Conform, adapt, give up what is yours, and I will give you the opportunity to have what is mine.

MEXICAN MAN. Pues bueno, if we have to.

MEXICAN WOMAN. Sounds good.

IMMIGRANT 3. Look, fireworks!

RICARDO. ¡Lo hicimos!

(“America the Beautiful” becomes overwhelming, lights flash representing the fireworks. A few seconds later the same lights that adorn the celebration for the EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS become the lights from the border patrol helicopters hunting the MEXICAN PEOPLE. Hound dogs are heard barking, and the MEXICAN PEOPLE scatter and try to hide.)

RICARDO. ¡La migra!

MEXICAN MAN. ¡Corranle! *(The EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS and the STATUE OF LIBERTY all keep pointing at the MEXICAN PEOPLE so they can be caught. The*

STATUE OF LIBERTY uses her torch to light every place the MEXICAN PEOPLE run to hide. The MEXICAN PEOPLE run offstage, and with the sail tilted down, they charge after them. Lights fade.)

SCENE FOUR

AT RISE: *Spotlight on POSTMAN who throws in paper airplane.*

POSTMAN. Air mail for Carmen García.

(CARMEN runs onstage and picks up the letter from the floor. She reads the letter out loud.)

CARMEN. “**Mi Querida** Carmen, how are you? How is María? I’ve sent you some more money. This is the last letter I write to you because I am now sending for you. I fixed my papers with the help of a friend, and I got an apartment where we can live. Tell María I love her, and to you I send all my love...” María!!... “Leave as soon as possible...” María, **¡ven aquí!**

(MARIA enters.)

MARIA. Yes, **Mamí**.

CARMEN. María, get ready, we’re going.

MARIA. Going where?

CARMEN. To join your father in the city of the angels.

MARIA. Angels? *(MARIA puts on her coat for the journey. Lights fade.)*

SCENE FIVE

AT RISE: The following is the making of a city. Actors will work as an ensemble to create many roles. It will be organized chaos. Noises of police and fire truck sirens, along with other common city noises are heard. The stage lights up with vendors selling on the streets and all sorts of unusual and not so unusual people found in downtown L.A. on Broadway Street. CARMEN and MARIA become engulfed in the scene, appalled to see what they have come to.

PERSON 1. Broadway! Downtown L.A.!

VENDOR 1. Cassettes, **cartuchos, dos dolares!**

MAN 1. Hey, you wanna buy a gold chain?

CARMEN. **Perdone señora**, could you tell me...

BAG LADY. Get out of my way!

PROTESTER. Homosexuality is wrong! No sex! **¡Se va acabar el mundo!** The world is coming to and end! (*The PROTESTER comes between CARMEN and MARIA and separates them. MARIA becomes lost. CARMEN searches frantically for her.*)

CARMEN. María! María, where are you?!

MARIA (*crying*). **¡Mamí, Mamí!**

WOMAN 1. Buy this. **Sombras para verte como una estrella de cine.**

WOMAN 2. Hair brushes, all kinds, a dollar!

WOMAN 3. You want to buy a handbag?

WOMAN 1. **¡Aguas!** Here comes the police! (*All the street VENDORS run away.*)

MAN 1. Jesus loves you! He died for our sins! (*MAN 1 hands CARMEN a pamphlet.*)

CARMEN. **¿Qué?**

WOMAN 1. That RTD bus is always late!

DIRTY OLD MAN. Hey! Little girl! You want to get married? The world is coming to an end and you shouldn't die without having done it.

CARMEN. María, **¿dónde estás hija mia?!**

CHOLO 1. East L.A.!

TWO VALLEY GIRLS. We love it!

CHOLO 2. Hey **vato!**

TWO VALLEY GIRLS. Party and let party!

CHOLO 2. **¡Hoye mi carnal!**

PERSON 2. **¡Viva la huelga!** Boycott grapes!

PERSON 3. Chicano Power!

TWO VALLEY GIRLS. We love it!

PERSON 3. Chicano Power!

TWO VALLEY GIRLS. We love it!

PERSON 4. A little culture for the **gringitos.**

ANGLO BUYER. **¿Cuanto? ¿Salsa? ¿Cervesa?**

CARMEN. María!

*(MARIA runs scared and bumps into CARMEN. They hug each other. RICARDO, dressed in a **charro** outfit enters and gives some yells as if ready to sing a **corrido**. All the chaos of the city stops, and all the city people recoil in fear. RICARDO becomes the hero rescuing CARMEN and MARIA from their nightmare.)*

TWO VALLEY GIRLS. We love it!

CARMEN. **¡¡Ayy!!** What a crazy city! It's so awful! People here are crazy! *(CARMEN is about to cry, she embraces RICARDO instead.)* But Ricardo, I'm so happy to be here.

MARIA *(trying to get his attention)*. An ugly man chased me!

RICARDO. But are you all right?

MARIA. **Sí.** Now that you are here.

RICARDO. Carmen, we are finally together like I promised.

CARMEN. Ricardo, where's our home?

RICARDO. Follow me. (*They exit. Lights fade.*)