

Cradle Song

By

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Characters

Frida Polanski: In her mid to late sixties.

Maria Duarte: In her late fifties.

Babe: In her early to late fifties.

Gabriel: Seventeen.

The action will take place in an apartment somewhere in Florida by the ocean. The only required elements are the ones mentioned in the script. An area down stage center should be reserved for the balcony door facing the ocean.

The phone rings, after a while it stops ringing.

ANNE'S VOICE

Darling! I tried you at the hospital, but you were gone. I thought you'd be home by now. Please do call me as soon as you arrive. It took some convincing but finally Peter caved. Of course I'll come, you can't be on your own. Terrible circumstances, but I'm very much looking forward to seeing you. Anyhow, BABE should have made an effort.

MARIA'S VOICE

Cómo añoro ese rosario de días acurrucados en mi torpeza.

Se quedaron allá contigo, los dejé haciendo cadenas y esclavos.

Cuánta melancolía me traje en su lugar, cuánta...

GRABRIEL'S VOICE

(In Spanish)

A, e, i, o, u.

BABE'S VOICE

If the window's opened the light will find its way.

FRIDA, on a wheelchair, will be wrapping a small box while the voices are heard.

LIFE

Scene1

Sunday November 23, early afternoon.

FRIDA

FRIDA is on a wheelchair. On the phone. She will be juggling between the phone conversation and wrapping a small box that she will leave by the bar.

Yes 2345 South Ocean Boulevard, penthouse 5, The Avalon. Yes... Yes, that's the one with the ocean view. Yes, I would like to order a case of Louis Jadot Beaujolais... Yes and please send me one bottle of Gray

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FRIDA (cont'd)

Goose. Do you carry champagne?... Well if I had my way it would definitely be Dom Perignon, but... California? You must be out of your mind. Do you carry food? ... What do you mean "what kind of food"? Food is food.... Only snacks, what kind of snacks? ... Popcorn? No, it's not good for your health... No, no, no, not in my wildest dreams would I think of having tostitos with salsa. What about peanuts? Cashews? ... No Cashews, no.... Macadamia nuts, no. The peanuts will do.... How many? How do you have them, by the bag? ... By the can. How big is the can? ... The family size will do.... The champagne, well, we'll have to make do with the Wycliff, four of those. Very well ... How much? ... Would you be so kind as to give me the specific price of each item? ... Thank you... No, I'd rather pay with my American Express... You don't take American Express?. Why? This is ridiculous... No. How much did you say again? ... Fine, thank you.

BABE enters while FRIDA on the phone.

FRIDA (cont'd)

You're late.

BABE

I'm not. Sorry, but we don't both fit in here.

FRIDA

I've got to make sure everything is done properly.

BABE

As soon as I'm done.

FRIDA

Once you're done you'll be gone and there's nothing I'll be able to do about it.

FRIDA lights a cigarette and starts smoking.

BABE

We've gone over this several times, Ms. Polanski: If you want me to do a thorough job I need three full days. You can't expect me to do my job in two. Especially if you chop it up. It was so much easier before: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Now, after the accident, you're all over the place. One hour Monday mornings, three hours Tuesday afternoons... I could go on forever. I understand you need help every day now, but you're killing me. Why I agreed to come today, for fifteen minutes, is beyond me. It's killing me! And please empty your ashtrays.

(CONTINUED)

FRIDA

Because Anne is coming. Yes, I smoke, I have the right.

BABE

'Cause Ms. Gilmore is coming, right. You need to relax and let me finish. Soon you'll be out of that wheelchair and feeling better. And maybe we'll go back to our usual schedule, like normal people. But what am I saying? There's nothing normal about you, not even before the cast or the wheelchair, not even before, you know... besides smoking is not good for you.

FRIDA

Anne is coming.

BABE

No kidding! Get out of my way.

FRIDA

There! You see this spot over here?

BABE

Where?

FRIDA

Right here. Are you blind?

BABE

You know darn well I'm not blind. It doesn't come out. We've been over this before. How many years I've been coming here? Uh? How many?... That spot has been there forever. It probably was there even before you transformed... or were born, or whatever that was you...

FRIDA

Don't you dare start mentioning that issue. Make sure the refrigerator is clean inside.

BABE

I did the refrigerator yesterday. And I had my nails done...

FRIDA

Your nails?! Those things aren't nails. They're claws.

BABE

They're not! They're instruments.

FRIDA

To play what?

BABE

To defend myself.

FRIDA

You should've left him years ago.

BABE

You should've married that nice doctor you were dating. Although I thought you were doing better before, you know... I'm sure Ms. Gilmore agrees with me.

FRIDA

You know better, marriage is forever... You're getting too personal.

BABE

Except for me, right?

FRIDA

You can't compare Joe to my love.

BABE

So what's wrong with trying to save my marriage, ah?

FRIDA

Everything! There's no marriage to save. He's unsavable..

BABE

Your opinion, not mine.

FRIDA

He's not good for you.

BABE

You don't want me to tell you what I think.

FRIDA

You're getting too personal.

BABE

You started it...

FRIDA

I'm just making sure I get my money's worth.

BABE

I'm not going down that road! Get out of my way.

BABE takes the wrapped box to clean around it.

FRIDA

What are you doing? Don't touch that, leave it there.

BABE

I'm not touching, I'm just cleaning. A present, ah? Let me guess...

FRIDA

Yes, for Ann. Where are you going? You're not done here.

BABE

Do you want me to do the guest room bathroom?

FRIDA

Of course I do.

BABE

Then, let me! I agreed to fifteen minutes, you agreed to fifteen minutes, you'll get the fifteen minutes. I've got to be out of here in five.

FRIDA

You don't expect me to believe you've been here for fifteen minutes already.

BABE

I've been here exactly 10 minutes and 36 seconds. So relax. I'm cleaning the bathroom one more time and then I'm out of here. And before you begin complaining, you owe me \$30.

FRIDA

All you care about is money.

BABE

Really? In any case, why in God's name were you riding your bike by the main road?

FRIDA

I wasn't riding on the main road. I got merged into the main road. I was caught in the middle. This older man was trying to cross the intersection on a red light. I was just trying to protect him, but instead I ended up on the other side and couldn't get back... Is that so hard to understand?

BABE

Wow! We need to meet the lucky gentleman.

FRIDA

I'm expecting a delivery.

BABE

I've got to go! You know what's going to happen to you if I miss my flight? If you don't, you should think about it, 'cause it ain't nice.

FRIDA

You could've postponed your trip. This is an emergency.

BABE

Postpone?! Thanksgiving?!!! Take a good look! These are my nails and you don't want to know what I can do with them.

FRIDA

I guess not. Anyway, Thanksgiving is a four day holiday at the most and you're leaving for two weeks! You know it's my birthday.

BABE

I do.

FRIDA

Fine, I guess I'll have to grow mine while you're gone.

BABE

Good luck with that! I'm almost done here.

The doorbell rings. GABRIEL enters carrying a box.

GABRIEL

Excuse me, where do I put this?

BABE

I'll see you in two weeks.

FRIDA

It's a good thing Anne is coming.

BABE

Sure is. I just hope you survive her going back. The last time she was here...

FRIDA

Then I must pay you.

BABE

Yes.

GABRIEL

Excuse me. Where do you want me to put this?

FRIDA

Then I suppose I'll see you Monday.

BABE

In two weeks.

FRIDA

Yes, Monday.

BABE

Yes, Monday.

GABRIEL

These are heavy! Where should I put them?

FRIDA

Over there on your right. Thank you.

BABE

I'm leaving.

GABRIEL

It's \$486.60

FRIDA

Here you go.

GABRIEL

You need any change, Mam?

BABE

Tip the boy.

FRIDA

It's OK you may keep the change.

BABE

And you owe me \$30.

FRIDA

I know. I'll see in two weeks.

GABRIEL

Thank you!

BABE

Thank you. Yes, in two weeks! Don't forget to relax.
Happy birthday!

BABE and GABRIEL exit.

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FRIDA opens the box takes out a bottle of vodka, pours herself a drink, plays Edith Piaf /Je ne regrette rien full volume and sings along. The phone rings while FRIDA is singing, she doesn't hear the phone nor the message. The singing and dialogue will be simultaneous.

FRIDA

Non, rien de rien, non, je ne regrette rien

Ni le bien qu'on m'a fait, ni le mal

Tout ça m'est bien égal

Non, rien de rien, non, je ne regrette rien

C'est paye, balaye, oublie, je me fous do passe

Avec mes souvenirs j'ai allume le feu

Mes chagrins, mes plaisirs,

Je n'ai plus besoin d'eux

Balaye les amours avec leurs trémolos

Balaye pour toujours

Je réparas a zéro

Non, rien de rien, non, je ne regrette rien

Ni le bien qu'on m'a fait, ni le mal

Tout ça m'est bien égal

Non, rien de rien, non, je ne regrette rien

Car ma vie, car me joies

Aujourd'hui'hui ça commence avec toi

ANNE'S VOICE

Where are you?... Darling, I'm so sorry but I won't be able to make it. I know you're expecting me, but I couldn't, I just couldn't maneuver around the boys. My friend Maria Duarte needs a place to stay. I took the liberty of sending her your way, maybe you can help each other. You can't be there all alone. You don't know her but you're going to adore her. Please forgive me and call me.

THE STRANGER/ THE ARRIVALScene 2

Sunday November 23, evening

MARIA enters carrying a small suitcase with her.

MARIA

Ms. Polanski, thank you so much, but I'd rather leave. I believe a bad start is a bad omen. It's always best not to insist.

FRIDA

Nonsense, I owe you an apology. I was expecting Anne so please excuse me, I had no idea. I should have never sent you away. It's a good thing that George at the front desk was quick enough to stop the taxi, besides I can use the company. Please, you're probably very tired from the trip. I really do apologize. At least freshen up a bit, have a glass of champagne and if you still want to leave after all, I won't get in your way.

MARIA

If you insist, thank you. I'm so sorry for the misunderstanding. I though Anne and you... Never mind.

FRIDA

Come, come. Please make yourself comfortable. How do you know Anne? It's surprising that I've never heard about you before.

MARIA

We went to school together.

FRIDA

Really?

MARIA

Yes, high school.

FRIDA

Mhm, I see. Strange that she never mentioned you. You think you know people and then again, in the end, you don't. Well, I'll have to impose on you the burden of getting the champagne. I can barely move in this... The champagne is in the refrigerator and the glasses are right here. Please feel free to get whatever you need.

MARIA

I appreciate your generosity, but it's quite all right.

(CONTINUED)

FRIDA

Nonsense! I was expecting Anne and quite ready for a party, I even had a gift for her. We might as well enjoy. Besides you don't expect me to roll into the kitchen and make a fool of myself as I try in vain to open a bottle of champagne?

MARIA

No, I don't...

FRIDA

Then just go in there open the refrigerator and bring the bottle.

MARIA

If you insist.

FRIDA

I do!

MARIA gets the champagne bottle wrapped in a napkin.

I know, it's American, but there's no need to hide it.

MARIA

No, that wasn't my intention at all.

FRIDA

Open it then. Maybe it'll be easier if you let go of your handbag.

MARIA

It's quite all right, thank you.

Maria removes the foil from the cork, loosens the wire cage, takes the napkin, wraps it around the cork and effortlessly waits for the cork to ease out.

FRIDA

Well done!

MARIA

Glasses?

FRIDA

Right there. Would you be so kind as to hand me my cigarette case? Do you care for a cigarette?

MARIA

No, thank you.

FRIDA

How about some peanuts?

MARIA

No, thank you. I appreciate your kindness. Rest assured I'll be leaving early tomorrow morning.

FRIDA

There's no need. Tomorrow we'll see... Cheers. I hope the smoke doesn't bother you

MARIA

Don't worry. Cheers.

FRIDA

Good! I do like to smoke and I find it insulting that nowadays you practically have to hide to do so. Do you like Edith Piaf?

MARIA

Yes, very much.

FRIDA

My favorite!

MARIA

She was definitely one of the great singers of her time.

FRIDA

More than that, she was a symbol.

MARIA

A tragic life.

FRIDA

You know her life story?

MARIA

Some.

FRIDA

What a surprise. Not many people nowadays care to know.

MARIA

Well, I hope that speaks well of me. Please excuse me, but I would rather get some rest now.

FRIDA

Please feel at home. I'll see you tomorrow. The guest room door is on your right. You should find everything you need.

MARIA

Thank you. And please don't worry, I'll be leaving early in the morning.

FRIDA

There's no need. It was all a huge misunderstanding.

MARIA

Goodnight and thank you again.

FRIDA pours her self another glass of champagne, lights a cigarette and smokes while we hear once more Edith Piaf's "Non, rien de rien"

COMPASSION

Scene 3

Monday November 24, morning,

A huge bump is heard. MARIA enters from the guest room to find FRIDA lying on the floor by her wheelchair and an empty bottle of champagne.

MARIA

Are you all right? What happened?

FRIDA

I don't know, I must have fell asleep. I'm fine. I can do this on my own...

MARIA tries to help her.

Let go of my arm! I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself.

MARIA

Please, let me give you a hand.

FRIDA

I've got a terrible headache.

MARIA

Do you have any aspirin?

FRIDA

I'm allergic to aspirin.

MARIA

I have Tylenol. Do you care for one?

(CONTINUED)

FRIDA

Better two. Are you leaving?

MARIA

Please let me help you get up. You can't stay there.

FRIDA

Oh, all right! Be careful, my ankle hurts terribly and I'm heavier than I look. There's more than meets the eye.

MARIA

Hold on to my arm.

MARIA smoothly picks her up and sits her on the wheelchair.

FRIDA

I really have a terrible headache.

MARIA

Is there anyone you can call? I don't feel comfortable leaving you on your own.

FRIDA

You're leaving.

MARIA

I'm very sorry, but I really don't think it's a good idea for me to stay.

FRIDA

You're right, I hardly know you.

MARIA

And I hardly know you. This wasn't a good idea to begin with.

FRIDA

Whose idea was it, anyway?

MARIA

Anne's.

FRIDA

Really?

MARIA

Really.

FRIDA

I'm not sure it goes with her character. How well do you know her?

MARIA

Most certainly not as well as you.

FRIDA

Did you meet Peter?

MARIA

Yes, I did and the boys as well.

FRIDA

Did you know she had a first husband?

MARIA

No, that I didn't know.

FRIDA

Well she did. Why would she do something like this?

MARIA

You probably should ask her. I met Ann in school when we were both teenagers, we were close then, didn't see each other for decades, became the women we are now, so we probably don't even know each other anymore. She was kind enough to avoid asking questions and I was lucky enough to have remembered her. I really would like to leave now. Is there anyone you can call?

FRIDA

Yes, I guess this could be considered an emergency. I'll call my housekeeper.

MARIA

Well. Thank you again for your hospitality and I hope we have the opportunity to meet again under better circumstances.

FRIDA

Are you always so well mannered?

MARIA

You should get something to eat. You'll feel better. You probably didn't have dinner... and with all the champagne...

FRIDA

Are you implying that I drank too much? I'm known for holding my liquor.

MARIA

I'm not implying anything...

FRIDA

Good! Then I shall buy you breakfast as a way of thanking you for your kindness. There's a lovely cafe by the pool. I will not take no for an answer. It'll take me just one minute to freshen up. You look lovely... Anne tells me you need a place to stay.

MARIA

Thank you but...

FRIDA

Nothing, don't say a word. Please just help me get this chair pointing in the right direction.

MARIA

I appreciate your invitation, but...

FRIDA

Do you have a bathing suit? You should bring it. The pool is lovely at this time in the morning; maybe you'd like to take a swim before you leave. Do you like the ocean? We've got the most beautiful shoreline right in front of the building...It's quite impressive you now?

MARIA

Yes, I do like the ocean. I grew up by the sea. But I really don't want to swim today.

FRIDA

How nice! But I'm sure you are in for a surprise. This particular beach is one of the most beautiful in all of Florida. Please help me push the chair over the door, there's a slight drop that I can never manage. I need someone to help me while I get rid of this cast. Maybe you would consider staying here for a couple of weeks? How much do you expect to make by the hour? Or better, shall we make it a weekly payment?

MARIA

I'm not expecting any payment. Did Anne say anything to you about my circumstances?

FRIDA

No, as I'm sure she told you little about mine. I haven't had the chance to speak to her yet, but I've got a clear picture. Don't bang your head against the wall. It's simple my dear, it seems we can help each other.

MARIA

I don't know what to say.

FRIDA

Don't say a word. I've got it all figured out. I'll come up with an arrangement that will suit us both. Meanwhile push and we'll discuss the details over breakfast while we enjoy a beautiful view and a soothing warm morning breeze. You know that the ocean breeze can work wonders on your state of mind.

MARIA

Ms. Polanski...

FRIDA

Don't Ms. Polanski me, call me Frida. Any friend of Anne's is a friend of mine. Push! Let's get out for some fresh air and a couple of very cold mimosas, I'm dying to know what brings you here. You can't turn such an offer down. Or can you?

MARIA

I guess not. I do need a place to stay.

FRIDA

So, what brings you here?

MARIA

I have an appointment to renew my expired passport.

FRIDA

All the way here?

MARIA

It's random, that's how they control you even when you're not there. If you don't show up you have to start the process again. It can take up to 6 months.

FRIDA

Unbelievable!

MARIA

But true.

FRIDA

Well, then those mimosa are a must.

MARIA

I have to be in Paris as soon as possible.

FRIDA

Paris! May I ask why?