

HOUSE OF BUENDÍA
(excerpt)

by

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*A first draft was written in residency at the Edward F. Albee Foundation's "The Barn."
HOUSE OF BUENDÍA is the second of three tragedies from THE HOUSING PROJECT.*

THE FAMILY

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|------------------|---|
| MATEO BUENDÍA | <i>Mid 30's. The son. Chilean ex-pat. A playwright.</i> |
| PABLO BUENDÍA | <i>Late 50's. His father. Chilean Marxist. A poet.</i> |
| GABRIELA BUENDÍA | <i>Late 50's. His mother. Chilean Marxist. A poet.</i> |

TIME AND PLACE

A one-bedroom apartment in the Lower East Side of Manhattan.
September 11. Any year past 2001.

The action takes place in one day.

The play should be performed with no intermission.

ACT I

At rise: A one-bedroom apartment in the Lower East side of Manhattan. There is a barren living room, a door leading to the bedroom upstage, a door to the left, exiting to the streets and a hallway on the right, leading to the kitchen. It is morning.

PABLO enters the living room and paces up and down.

PABLO

Hey you! Yeah *you*,
up there, in here, in me,
wherever you are!
¿Quién cresta te crees?

Putting me in this box,
behind these walls,
trapping me in *silence*,
assuming I'll be quiet?

Por la mierda,
play a cueca, play it!

A cueca plays.

Eso camarada! Canta mi Chile—
canta por lo que queda.

He takes out a white handkerchief from his pocket and starts waving it to the air.

The Andes, holds you from the east
as you bathe in the Pacific.
Wash the blood from your past away.
Wash the Earth that holds my comrades—

The music stops.

No mierda, no! Don't do this to me. I will not stop until I dance the cueca!

The music continues.

Viva Chile, mierda!

He takes a few steps forwards and invites the air to dance. They walk back and forth, delineating their space.

Gabriela, linda, tell me your words.
Be my queen and dance with me.
Tell me your thoughts.
Write me your pain.

Tell me of everything I wished
was done just to me—to us—
to our Marxist brothers that in terror
waited for death to knock at our door.

By this point, Pablo has left the air at one side of the dance space, and he's at the other. As the lyrics begin, he dances in semi-circles, first to the right, then to the left, waving his handkerchief.

That Tuesday, September 11,
the planes flew over our heads
and blew up La Moneda.
Allende bid us farewell and
they took us away from our homes,
stealing our journals, confiscating our thoughts.

They think they got us.
They called us “the disappeared”.
They tortured us, humiliated us,
but my comrades are still here.
That “Marxist cancer” is not gone,
it grows—it grows!

Vuelta!

Pablo turns a vuelta, throwing his handkerchief to the air and begins to do the escobillado: a basic dance step where one leg sweeps in front of the other in an angle. The right leg sweeps in front of the left, then the left sweeps in front of the right, and so on and so forth.

They thought they would get us all.
They thought they could kill us all.
But the revolution was lived—is relieved—
and repeats!

Like the cueca, it comes in threes,
un pie, the other, and then a third
that you don't even see coming.

You hear that up there? You too are in this.
No one gets away—you can stop this music
but I shall dance!

Vuelta!

Pablo turns another vuelta, and proceeds to do the zapateo, stomping on the floor with the right foot, the left, and then together, as he flirtatiously moves forward, seducing the air.

Baila conmigo—hermano chileno,
hermana chilena.
Rise from silence, take your handkerchiefs,
hold them up to the air and
wave them with pino!

*MATEO enters the living room from his bedroom.
The music stops.*

MATEO

Shut up, will you ever shut up? I can't concentrate with this noise.

PABLO

It's not noise, it's a cueca!

MATEO

I'm writing.

PABLO

Since when do you write? Don't you have *business* to do?

MATEO

Don't mock my job. I do important work. And if you don't like what I do, there's the door.

The door swings open and GABRIELA enters carrying a suitcase.

GABRIELA

Ay-ya-yai! Hombres!

¡Gabi!

PABLO

¡Pablo!

GABRIELA

¿Mamá?

MATEO

¡Hijo!

GABRIELA

You're back!

PABLO

They let me go.

GABRIELA

No!

MATEO

(To Gabriela.) Ven a papi.

PABLO

(To Mateo.) Ven a mami.

GABRIELA

No, no, this isn't happening!

MATEO

Mateo locks himself in his room. Pablo runs to Gabriela and kisses and hugs her.

PABLO

Gabi! *Gabriela!* Here, let me help you. Come in... This is where we live now. The kitchen is down the hall. Mateo's room is in there. I've waited for you for so long—

Gabriela sits on a chair and starts crying.

Mujer, no llores...

GABRIELA

Lo siento... This trip has made me tired. I almost gave up on the way. My body couldn't take it.

PABLO

Shhh...

GABRIELA

How many years has it been? The last time we saw each other was that morning... That hopeless morning...

PABLO

Don't think about it.

GABRIELA

I was going to call you when I heard the navy was taking over Valparaíso, but they caught me as I left the presses.

PABLO

Take my handkerchief.

GABRIELA

(*Contd.*) And I couldn't call you. I didn't want to. I was afraid they'd go after you and Mateo, so I remained silent— And I let them take me away—

PABLO

Traitors...

GABRIELA

They put machine guns to my head, they asked me for names. I didn't want to betray our comrades but they knew who I was. They knew about you. They knew where we lived. About Mateo. They knew everything!

Mateo enters, dressed for work.

PABLO

Shh...

MATEO

¿Mamá?

GABRIELA

Mateo, ven... Give me a hug. I have dreamt about this day.

MATEO

Are you OK?

GABRIELA

I'm just tired.

MATEO

Dad never stopped talking about you.

PABLO

I knew you'd be back. It was just a matter of time.

GABRIELA

And we lost so much of it... Look at me. I'm old.

PABLO

You're beautiful! Never has the sun seen a woman as radiant as you...

GABRIELA

Even with tears rolling down her eyes?

PABLO

How I wish to be in that tear to swim across your face...

GABRIELA

Ay Pablito, you haven't lost your way with words.

MATEO

I want you to be gone when I come back.

GABRIELA

¿Cómo que: *gone*?

MATEO

You can't follow me like this, to New York—

PABLO

Nueva York? (*Looks out the window.*) ¿Y los Andes? ¿Y el Pacífico? Where are our mountains, the ocean, the people riding their horses and the children playing la pelota? Where are our people?

MATEO

Not in America.

GABRIELA

(*Looking out as well.*) All these buildings... This noise. ¿Jesús, qué pasó con la casa? Why aren't we in our house?

MATEO

I sold it.

GABRIELA

What?

MATEO

Time has passed, mamá! Santiago went up in flames, the military took everywhere, and you left me alone for too long! (*To Gabriela.*) I called you at the printers but no one answered. (*To Pablo.*) And you said you'd go find mamá but you never came back. That night, I waited for you two until the city went pitch black. It was silent; all I could hear were the guns going off in the neighborhood. Then, there was this knock—

GABRIELA

No!

MATEO

I thought it was them! I thought they were going to kill me. But it wasn't the army. Or the police. They were nuns.

GABRIELA

Madre santa.

MATEO

They gave me cake.

PABLO

Cake?

MATEO

The nuns were hiding flour to bake bread for the homeless, but they thought it was too dangerous to have it that night. The army was breaking in to everyone's houses, searching for evidence, to incriminate them, and the nuns got scared! So they baked cakes all day long and under the shadows of the night they went around the block, giving it away to the people—

PABLO

The people didn't want cake!

GABRIELA

Ay, hombres. *Silencio*. Tell me what happened with our *house*.

MATEO

That night I locked myself in. I turned off the lights and I waited. I slept under my bed. Grandma came to live with me starting the next day. When I turned eighteen, we celebrated my birthday. And at night, she started yelling gibberish until she finally said: "mamá y papá han desaparecido," and died.

GABRIELA

Madre!

MATEO

I grew up in treason and curfews; that damn toque de queda that trapped me in that house, the house of Buendía, where nothing was well. It was empty, so empty. You weren't there—

GABRIELA

Niño...

MATEO

So I sold it. I got rid of those walls full of emptiness and I came to New York.

GABRIELA

What a choice. And what are you doing here?

PABLO

Just wait for this one.

MATEO

I'm a writer.

PABLO

Ha! Liar. He does business.

GABRIELA

¡Oh, qué locura! ¡No entiendo nada!

MATEO

I *am* a writer. But I don't make any money as one. So I have a day job, working in the trade market.

GABRIELA

Pablo, this has to be your fault 'cause there were no businessmen in my family.

PABLO

I'm no businessman. ¡Yo soy un revolucionario!

GABRIELA

Salta pa'l la'ó! I know what you and your friends talked about with the pisco you got from the black market! You'd smoke your pipes, get drunk and talk about money until the night was over.

PABLO

We were visionaries!

GABRIELA

¡No, borrachos! ¡Borrachos poetas! ¡Negociantes borrachos! But at least he's *also* a poet. Like us.

MATEO

No, I'm a playwright.

PABLO

Playwright?

MATEO

Yes, I write plays. Well, this is my first one, but I *am* a playwright.

PABLO

Gabi, this has to be your fault. There weren't any playwrights in my family. Not one.

GABRIELA

My fault?

PABLO

No one did *theatre* in my side of the family. This has to be your influence.

MATEO

I have started to write a play about Chile. About a man and a woman that were kidnapped during the coup—

PABLO

Oh, sounds like us.

MATEO

And how they were tortured by armed forces—

GABRIELA

That definitely sounds like us.

MATEO

How the man told his son he'd go find his wife and be *right back*—

PABLO

You're writing about me!

GABRIELA

And what happens to the wife?

Silence.

GABRIELA

What happens to the son?

Silence.

Well, what happens in the story?

MATEO

I can't tell you. It's not finished.

PABLO

And Gabi, do you want to know why he hasn't been able to finish at least *one* play? Mateo, please tell your mother was kind of job my *playwright* son has.

MATEO

I work in the World Trade Center.

GABRIELA

World Trade?

MATEO

Yes, America is opening free trade with Chile—

GABRIELA

No.

MATEO

Capitalism has won.

GABRIELA

¡Dios mío! That is not true! You're a capitalist playwright? ¡¿Hijo, cómo pudiste?!

PABLO

After all we've suffered. You shouldn't have turned your back on us.

MATEO

The world moved on.

GABRIELA

But we succeeded, didn't we? When the people chose Allende as their Marxist president and were betrayed by Kissinger and that dirty green dollar, the people fought back, *didn't they?*

MATEO

No, they couldn't. That Tuesday, September 11th, the planes blew up La Moneda, Allende bid us farewell and they took you away from our homes, stealing your journals,

confiscating your thoughts and the people were killed. And now Chile's opening up its seaports to America, selling our lands to the gringos, NASA built an airport on Easter Island, the capitalist are mining our copper, chopping our lumber, clothing the people and soon the people will no longer be people!

PABLO

¡Traición!

GABRIELA

Ay-ya-yai, Pablito. How can this be true? How did this happen?

MATEO

I have to go work.

GABRIELA

But I've come back.

MATEO

I must be going insane.

PABLO

Stay with us!

MATEO

No. I want you to be gone when I come back.

PABLO

(To Gabriela.) And listen to why.

MATEO

Because you're dead! *You're dead!*

Mateo exits to work. Pablo laughs.

GABRIELA

¿Díos santo, muertos? ¿Estamos muertos?

PABLO

He's just angry at us.

GABRIELA

¿Tú crees?

PABLO

Por supuesto. If we were dead, could I kiss you like this? Could I touch you like this?

GABRIELA

Ay, Pablito.

PABLO

My queen, tell me your thoughts. Write me your pain. Can you do it?

GABRIELA

The elevated concrete I tread on,
are the autumn leaves of the Alameda.
I walk, barefoot, on the streets
which were marched on by Balmaceda.

The fight for the people that once rose,
built a new life for the child I bore—

Oh, I can't do it! I can't talk about this.

PABLO

Tranquila...

GABRIELA

No sabes, Pablo. You don't know what they did to me! Sometimes, I can't sleep at night. I'm so afraid that they'll take me again—

PABLO

That won't happen.

GABRIELA

¿Me lo prometes? Promise me.

PABLO

Over my dead body.

GABRIELA

What are we going to do about Mateo? He hates us.

PABLO

It's only natural. He's been alone for so long, he doesn't know how to live with his parents anymore. He *thinks* he'd be much happier living without us, but what kind of selfish thought is that?

He walks to Mateo's door.

PABLO

There's only one thing we can do. Read his play.

GABRIELA

What?

PABLO

This door is locked.

GABRIELA

You can't do that!

PABLO

It's the only way we'll know what he thinks about us.

GABRIELA

He wishes us dead.

PABLO

(Struggling to open the door.) But we're not; so he is obviously hiding something, avoiding the fact that he is betraying our brothers by working in this *World Trade Center*; and until we know what he's thinking, we won't know what to do about this! *Goddamn door!*

He kicks the door open.

GABRIELA

Pablo! Don't do it.

PABLO

Just stay here.

Pablo enters Mateo's room. Gabriela opens her suitcase and takes out books.

GABRIELA

Oh, my poems. My beautiful poems. How I missed every single one of you. They were going to burn them on the streets, like it was the Third Reich, but I saved these from the fire—I saved each one of these. Pablo, what about your poems?

PABLO (OFF-STAGE)

They're up in the shelves. I had copies mailed to me from our friends in Italy.

Gabriela goes to the shelves and picks up a book. Pablo enters with a stack of papers.

PABLO

Ya, los papeles.

GABRIELA

They're so many.

PABLO

Listen to this. (*Reading.*) "He abandoned me to find mother and it wasn't until fifteen years later that I discovered they had killed him."

GABRIELA

They what?

PABLO

"He was taken to a concentration camp north of Santiago, where he was imprisoned with his brothers—"

GABRIELA

Concentration camp? Killed you? Is this true?

PABLO

Do I look dead to you?

GABRIELA

Give me that. (*She takes the play and reads it.*) "A report says that they interrogated their prisoners with bats—"

PABLO

Now that's true... Malditos.

GABRIELA

"Sometimes they just did it to torture the men."

PABLO

But we survived.

GABRIELA

"And some men were knocked dead if they didn't answer their questions."

PABLO

Skip that part.

GABRIELA

(*Flipping through pages*) "My friends in Chile marched down the streets holding pictures of their missing parents. They said I've betrayed them by not being there."

PABLO

Pobre hijo.

GABRIELA

“But they made Pinochet a senator for life—”

PABLO

They what?

GABRIELA

“He’s sitting in congress on a seat he appointed to himself. He rewrote the constitution—”

PABLO

(Taking the play away.) “People kiss his picture as the protestors stand across the street from them, asking for their missing families.” ¿Qué mierda es esto?

GABRIELA

Don’t get upset.

PABLO

This must be science fiction—this can’t be true! Mi reina, what kind of pain did he go through to have written such lies?

GABRIELA

Maybe they’re not.

PABLO

Chile es Marxista. We had a vision. The people had chosen. Yes, we struggled, but we struggled to win!

GABRIELA

(Reading a page in terror.) Oh Pablo, I am so afraid. We shouldn’t have read this.

PABLO

Give me that.

GABRIELA

No. Don’t read this. Let’s go out for a walk. Let’s put these away. Let’s buy a doorknob, fix that door and let Mateo finish his play alone.

PABLO

Give me that page! *(He takes it away from her and reads it.)* Is this true? Is it?

GABRIELA

(Quietly.) No...

PABLO

Mi reina, they hurt you.

GABRIELA

Make it go away. I can't stand this play.

PABLO

This says they killed you too.

GABRIELA

¡No más, silencio!

PABLO

"The Junta took over the country for seventeen years. And Pinochet wore those dark glasses, promising the people that the terrorists would be extracted from our country, imprisoned, tortured—killed."

GABRIELA

Mi rey, give me that. (*She takes the pages.*) This play should be no more.

PABLO

¿Qué dices?

GABRIELA

We've read enough. I won't believe these treasons—this attack—to what was sacred to us. I don't want to read callous stories of death and torture. I can't stand these words that deny my existence, like the world moved past me while those men *raped me*.

PABLO

Gabi, so it's true...

GABRIELA

Yes! They forced their sex inside me as the army forced guns to the people—magnanimous rape of fertile Chile. (*Gathering the pages into one pile.*) *Yes, that is true.* But those people *hurt me*, when my words meant to hurt no one, and Mateo has become one of them, writing this play—our story—killing our spirit, *with no mercy!*

PABLO

Then, he is right... We are dead.

GABRIELA

Pablito... If you were dead, could I touch you like this? Could I kiss you like that? (*Kisses Pablo.*) We must burn this.

**THIS PLAY HAS BEEN ABANDONED.
BUT, IF YOU'D LIKE TO READ THE REST, PLEASE EMAIL ME AT
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THANKS!