

GABRIELA

One-act Opera by Andy Gaus

Based on "La Fotografia" by Enrique Amorim

Cast

GABRIELA--Soprano

GABRIELA'S MOTHER/THE SCHOOLTEACHER--Mezzo-soprano

THE PHOTOGRAPHER-- Baritone

Scenes

Scene 1--Gabriela's House

Scene 2--The Schoolteacher's porch

Scene 3--The Photographer's Studio

Scene 4--The Schoolteacher's Porch

Scene 5--The Photographer's Studio

Scene 6--The Schoolteacher's Porch

Scene 1--Gabriela's House

(A bell rings.)

GABRIELA

Oh, the postman!

(She goes off and comes on again with two letters.)

Oh, it's from Mama.

(She opens the first letter and reads.)

GABRIELA'S MOTHER (offstage)

How have you been?

How's the big city?

Do you get lots of fresh air in your room?

Are there tall buildings

And streets full of motorcars?

Try not to breathe any poisonous fumes!

Write to your mother soon.

Who are your friends?

Are they nice people?

Do the young men come to ask for your hand?

Don't be a fool,

Don't let them swindle you.

Make sure that marriage is part of their plans.

That's how to treat a man!

Since I took sick,

I can't come see you.

All the way north, I can't travel so far.

Hope you're all right,

Just hope you're feeling well.

Drop me a line so I know how you are.

All of my love, Mama!

GABRIELA

Dearest Mama,

I meant to write you.

But the things I could say are too sad to be true.

The people up here,
They're not like back where we came from.
They don't have time to stop and say Howdedo.
They just walk right by.
They don't even look at you.

The schoolteacher who lives across the way,
Who has a porch full of lovely flowers,
Sometimes nods as I go by,
But she doesn't say "Hi."
And you know, it isn't really such a big city either.
There isn't all that much to see and do--
Especially by yourself.

In the evenings
I wash dishes at the Paradiso.
Mornings I mostly sleep.
In the afternoons
I sometimes go to the Café Grimaldo
And have one of their strawberry tortes.
They're pretty good.

But Mama, I wish
For someone to talk to,
To stop on the street or to pay me a call.
The days keep on passing,
My house is getting smaller.
The sound of my voice seems to bounce off the walls.
And there's no one, no one at all.

Oh, I have another letter here that I haven't even opened. My, my.

PHOTOGRAPHER (offstage)

Roberto Victor, photographer for all your needs,
Located on the Calle Jazmin, number 23,
Is proud to announce that for the duration of this week alone,

A beautiful Roberto Victor portrait may be your own
At a 25-percent reduction in the fee.
Suitable for framing,
Suitable for hanging,
A perfect gift for every occasion.
A quality portrait by Roberto Victor:
Here's looking at you!

GABRIELA

Maybe...maybe that's what I should get for Mama!
Dearest Mama, I haven't forgotten.
I owe you a letter that's long overdue.
So I'll send you a picture
To keep on your mantelpiece.
Please understand if that's all I can do
To send all my love to you!

Scene 2--The Schoolteacher's Porch

SCHOOLTEACHER

(As Gabriela passes, to her plants.)

How are you this morning?

How are you today?

How are you?

And how are you this morning?

How are all of you today?

(She nods at Gabriela, then back to her plants.)

Oh that's nice!

That's what I like to hear!

Scene 3--The Photographer's Studio

(Gabriela enters and is transfixed by the beauty of the place. She walks around and admires several photographs hanging on the walls.)

GABRIELA

Oh it's beautiful here!
I could stay right here forever.
The skylight letting in the light of day,
And all these lovely pictures on display--
I could stay and look at them forever.
I would never go back home again
To my cottage on the edge of town,
The shingles missing and the gutters sagging down.
I would stay here in this studio forever.

(Enter Photographer.)

PHOTOGRAPHER

You can stay as long as you like, señorita.

GABRIELA

Oh señor, did you take all these pictures?
They're all so beautiful--especially this one:
All the folds of cloth, and the roses in her hair...

PHOTOGRAPHER

I could take one of you like that, señorita.

GABRIELA

But I'll bet you couldn't make me look as beautiful as that.

PHOTOGRAPHER

But señorita: I cannot make anyone look beautiful. I can only find the right way to let you be as beautiful as you are. (Attempts to start his song.)

When I--

GABRIELA

Well I just want you to take it any way you think it'll look real nice.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Señorita, I will do what I can.

When I look through the eye,
Through the eye my camera gives me,
A thousand beauties, a thousand beauties,
Tremble into view.
And I reach out my hand
And I pluck, if my luck is with me,
From all those beauties,
The beauty that is you.

(He places an Egyptian headdress on her head.)

What will it be?
As you float down the Nile
Will you show them a smile
That the sages interpret but all in vain?

(He exchanges it for a straight black wig with feathers.)

What will it be?
Looking out with the eyes
Of an eagle that flies
On the Arkansas plain?

(He clasps a necklace around her neck and unrolls a painted shade.)

Or will you stand in the piazza by the fountain,
Soft as the sighing among the Roman pines?
Around the world isn't far to travel
When you seek for the beauty divine.

BOTH

Around the world isn't far to travel
When you seek for the beauty divine.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Have you made up your mind?

GABRIELA

I can't decide.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Small wonder. For every girl wants something different when it comes
to looking lovely for a man.

GABRIELA

But I don't want to look lovely for a man. I just want it to look really nice for Mama.

PHOTOGRAPHER

For Mama? Why didn't you say so? Cause when it comes to looking nice for Mama, every girl wants the same thing:

(He assembles a table, two chairs, and a fake wrought-iron railing.)

Tea in the garden,
On the terrace, in the sunlight,
What a perfect thing, what a pretty sight
For a mother to see.

GABRIELA

(speaks) Why did you put two chairs?

PHOTOGRAPHER

(speaks) So you can bring a friend, señorita:

(sings) Just you and your companion,

In the morning, on the verandah.
You have set a plate of cake before her,
And she's smiling at you as you pour her
Another cup of tea.
And it costs you no extra for her;
We will throw her in for free.

PHOTOGRAPHER

(speaks) Well, how do you like it?

GABRIELA

(speaks) Oh, it's perfect!

(sings) Tea in the garden,

On the terrace, in the sunlight,

BOTH

What a perfect thing,
What a pretty sight
For a mother to see.
Just you and your companion--
(Gabriela looks worried.)

Is there something wrong, señorita?

GABRIELA

(speaks) So I have to bring somebody with me if I want a picture like this?

PHOTOGRAPHER

(speaks) You don't have to, señorita. But having your friend there will make you more congenial and relaxed, and that will make you beautiful.

GABRIELA

(Thinks a second.) What sort of person should I bring?

PHOTOGRAPHER

Why, any friend of yours, señorita.

GABRIELA

You don't think I should get somebody who's like a professional model to be in the picture with me? Cause I want it to look just right.

PHOTOGRAPHER

No need, señorita. Any friend of yours will be good enough for your mother. Look here. These ladies are not professional models--

GABRIELA

But it came out perfect! Do you think you could do as good for me?

PHOTOGRAPHER

Why not, señorita? The friend, of course, is your department. The rest leave to me. Do you wish to make an appointment? You can come tomorrow if you wish.

GABRIELA

Tomorrow? Well, it depends whether...

PHOTOGRAPHER

It depends on your friend's schedule, of course.

GABRIELA

That's right.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Anytime you want to come will be good, señorita. I am always at your service.

GABRIELA

Oh thank you, thank you so much.

GABRIELA

Tea in the garden,

PHOTOGRAPHER

On the terrace,

GABRIELA

In the sunlight,

BOTH

What a perfect thing, what a pretty sight

For a mother's eyes to see,

For a mother's eyes to see,

For a mother's eyes to see!

Scene 4--The Schoolteacher's Porch

SCHOOLTEACHER

(To her plants.)

Oh! You look a fright!
I can't leave you here for half a day
But you're drooping all to pieces
And flopping on the floor
Like a bunch of rag dolls with the straw sticking out.
That comes from looking at the sun all the time:
When it gets so hot,
You ought to turn away.
Well, here's your water.
And if you didn't drink it up so fast,
It'd last longer.
As for you, you'd better straighten up
Or you'll be a wrinkled little plant
With a crooked stem
Cause you didn't stand up straight and tall
Like a little lady!
And you need a pruning,
Especially this big lopsided branch
That's dragging you down on your side.
Isn't that always the way:
One branch gets out of line
And the whole plant suffers!
So (snip) we'll put you off by yourself
Where you won't cause any more trouble
And you can grow some roots of your own.
Don't feel bad:
You're a good cutting.
Your Mama and your Dad were cuttings too.
And they were just as confused and all-mixed-up as you.
Now I'm going to leave you here, and I want you to stay right here
and--

GABRIELA

Señora... Excuse me, I was just looking at your flowers. They're really beautiful, señora. (The Schoolteacher nods her thanks.) In fact you might say they're as pretty as a-- (Fly buzz.)

SCHOOLTEACHER

Shoo, fly, shoo! Get away! (Buzz subsides.) Well, I'm glad you like the flowers. Thank you, señorita.

GABRIELA

Yes, in fact you might say they're as pretty as a-- (The fly returns.)

SCHOOLTEACHER

Shoo! Get away! (Buzz subsides.) Well, thank you again, señorita.

GABRIELA

Oh, you're very welcome. In fact I was going to say that they're as pretty as a picture! (Forced laugh.) Oh isn't it funny I should use that expression! That's probably cause I was just at the photographer's. Isn't life funny sometimes, señora?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Yes it is, señorita, and I'm glad you like the flowers--

GABRIELA

Have you ever been there?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Where?

GABRIELA

The photographer's. Roberto Victor, on the Calle Jazmin.

SCHOOLTEACHER

No...

GABRIELA

Oh, you should go! He has such wonderful things there! He can make you look like an Italian beauty or an Egyptian princess!

SCHOOLTEACHER

That may not be possible for me, señorita. Now if you'll excuse me... (She starts to leave.)

GABRIELA

(speaks) Señora...

(The Schoolteacher turns round with unconcealed irritation.)

SCHOOLTEACHER

(speaks) Yes?

GABRIELA

I was going to ask if you wanted to have your picture taken. For free!

SCHOOLTEACHER

As an Egyptian princess?

GABRIELA

No, just sitting in a garden with me. Having tea. It would be a real nice picture, and you could have a copy, and you wouldn't have to pay or anything.

SCHOOLTEACHER

Well that's very nice of you to offer, señorita. But surely some friend of yours would like to come be in the picture with you.

GABRIELA

Well...the photographer said that wouldn't matter. He says it's just that a picture of...two women looks better than a picture of...one woman. (Quickly.) It's something about the composition, or he can get a better angle or something. (Long pause. Then sings.) And I just want it to be really nice for Mama!

SCHOOLTEACHER

(sings) For Mama? (Another pause.) What do you want me to do? I will do it.

GABRIELA

Will you come to the photographer's?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Yes.

GABRIELA

When? Tomorrow?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Tomorrow afternoon.

GABRIELA

You really will?

	SCHOOLTEACHER	
Yes.		
	GABRIELA	
You really will?		
	SCHOOLTEACHER	
Yes, I'll be there.		
	GABRIELA	
Tomorrow afternoon?		
	SCHOOLTEACHER	
When the children leave.		
	GABRIELA	
Shall I meet you there?		
	SCHOOLTEACHER	
At quarter after three.		
	GABRIELA	
I can't believe my ears.		
	SCHOOLTEACHER	
And now excuse me please.		
GABRIELA		SCHOOLTEACHER
But you'll be there?		Yes I'll be there.
Tomorrow afternoon?		When the children leave.
So I'll meet you there?		At quarter after three.
I can't believe my ears.		And now excuse me please.
I can't believe my ears.		And now excuse me please.
Thank you, you've been		And now, if you'll
so nice to me,		excuse me please,
Goodbye!		Goodbye!

Scene 5---The Photographer's Studio

(The Photographer is whistling as Gabriela enters.)

GABRIELA

(speaks) Buenos dias.

PHOTOGRAPHER

(speaks) Ah, buenos dias, señorita. (sings) I see you've decided on a solo picture after all. The señorita is a person of simple and elegant tastes.

GABRIELA

Oh no, my friend's meeting me here. I want "Tea in the Garden," just like you showed me. And you know what?

Last night I was even

Rehearsing a little,

With a couple of teacups

On my kitchen table.

I tried a few poses

I thought I might be able to--

How's this?

(She strikes a ludicrously affected pose.)

PHOTOGRAPHER

(speaks) Señorita, it will be a beautiful picture.

GABRIELA

Maybe you could focus the camera or something while we're waiting for her to come.

PHOTOGRAPHER

As soon as your friend arrives, all the needed adjustments will instantly be done.

GABRIELA

She just has to wait for school to let out cause she's a schoolteacher.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Oh, my little Juanita is in school. Perhaps she knows her. What's your friend's name?

GABRIELA

Her name?

(She begins to blanch. There is the sound of a bell and a great shout of children being let out from school. She looks through a window and follows with her eyes. The children pass and the sound dies down.) I don't see her. Maybe she has to correct some papers or something before she can come.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Will the señorita excuse me for a moment? The instant that your friend appears, just ring and I'll at once be there.

(The Photographer leaves. Gabriela sits for a second, then goes to the window again. Still no Schoolteacher.)

GABRIELA

But I don't mind waiting; it's like home here... Oh, I have to think what I'm going to write on the inscription!

Dearest Mama...

(She corrects herself.)

Mamacita...

Mamacita, enclosed is a picture.

I know you've been anxious to see my new home.

Mama, the city is so big and exciting.

And the life here is grander than in Egypt or Rome.

Mama, at night

The streets are alive with music and light and laughter

And fancy shops

With beautiful clothes from Lima and Curaçao.

I'll never forget

Our own little place, the donkey that grazed in the courtyard.

But it was never like this; I wish you could see me now.

Mamacita, it's getting towards Christmas.

I'm sorry to tell you that I won't be home.

Such a long distance and I am so busy...

But Mama, don't worry, cause I'm not alone.

On sunny days

I love to receive my neighbors right here in the garden.

Why, half the town

Comes over to call and stays for a cup of tea.

This is my friend;

I've told her of you so often she thinks she knows you.

So best wishes we send, my very best friend and me.

I've told her of you so often she thinks she knows you.

So best wishes we send, my very best friend and me.

(A bell tolls five.)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Five o'clock, señorita.

Time to close up shop.

GABRIELA

Oh, she must have forgotten! She must have forgotten all about it.

Isn't that silly! It must have completely slipped her mind! Oh, señor photographer, I'm so sorry! She said she was going to come, she really did. Oh señor, can we come another time?

PHOTOGRAPHER

Of course, señorita. Tomorrow or any other day.

GABRIELA

I'll stop by her house and remind her. I'll be sure she comes on time this time.

PHOTOGRAPHER

That's all right, señorita. I am always at your service.

GABRIELA

Oh thank you, señor. Señor, I could stay here in your studio forever...

PHOTOGRAPHER

Good night, señorita.

GABRIELA

Good night.

Scene 6--The Schoolteacher's Porch

SCHOOLTEACHER

(To her plants.)

Well now, that's a little more like it!

You look a little nicer when your posture's better!

Oh you're much improved.

In fact, I think you're the most improved plant on the porch.

Well, young Mr. Cutting, look at you.

You're not quite as tall as the other plants, but aaalmost!

GABRIELA

(From offstage.) Señora!

(The Schoolteacher looks round in panic. Gabriela calls from even closer.)

GABRIELA

Señora!

(The Schoolteacher flees from the porch, knocking over several plants, and slams the door to the porch behind her, just as Gabriela rushes in.)

GABRIELA

Señora???

(She bows her head as the realization and shame come over her and stands there till the lights come down.)

THE END