

Two-Scented Rose

(Fragment)

A Comedy

by Emilio Carballido¹

A rose, by any other name, would smell as sweet.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

SCENE 7:

Gabriela's dining room. The table is full of dishes and the remains of a meal. Off: violent music, shots, dying cries. It's the TV.

Gabriela, *off*. Turn that damned thing down! You're not deaf!

Marlene, *entering*. They're going to be, and so are we.

(She is all dolled up to go out. Begins clearing the table.)

Gabriela, *entering*. Leave it, please. Tomorrow I'll pick it up. *(She is also very dressed up.)*

Marlene. It's horrible to wake up to a pigsty. It'll just take a minute...

Gabriela. I'm telling you, leave it. I'll do it in a sec. Adrián will help me.

Marlene. Adrián has to go with Héctor to pick up the money from the savers group. *(leaves carrying plates)*

Gabriela. Well. Okay. Your loin roast was delicious. *(leaves with things from the table)*

Marlene, *entering and going to the table for more*. I put a ton of capers in it. It's the most expensive part, so I'm always stingy with them. But not today! And raisins, bacon, olives, almonds... So, when you cut it, you get little pieces of whatever you put in it in every slice. *(licks and smacks her lips)* That's what I like the most!

(Exits)

Gabriela, *entering*. I hope it doesn't make the kids sick. Pork is pretty heavy, and they wolfed it down! Just like convalescent ogres, you know.

(Exits)

Marlene, *entering*. Hopefully they won't burst. You'd think they were starving little orphans. Just once they can fill their stomachs, right? Your spaghetti was delicious. What do you put in it? Héctor downed so much of it; he almost didn't have room for the pork.
(Exits)

Gabriela, *entering*. There's no mystery about it. The key is the cheese, good parmesan, and it was imported. And the tomatoes have to be fresh, not out of a can. Well, of course I get the pasta from some Italians, and it turns out tasty. Oh dear, my table cloth. What a mess they made here. The wine is going to those children's heads. (Exits)

Marlene, *entering*. The cake was great, but it would have been good to make flan, too. I already put salt on the tablecloth; that'll keep it from staining.

(picks up tablecloth by its four corners, including all the crumbs on it. Exiting, she crashes into Gabriela, hard. Both shout and laugh.)

Marlene. What's going on? We're drunk, girl.

Gabriela. We must think we're Chaplin, hon.

(they rub the sore spots)

Marlene. Look what a mess it is. Where did I see a broom?

(Exits)

Gabriela. Leave it. It was my fault. You didn't bust anything, did you?

Marlene, *entering*. Nothing, very little. (*sweeping*) My fender hit one of your bones. (*she rubs herself*)

Gabriela. My muffler. (*she rubs herself, too*)

Marlene. So that's where you keep it? What a modern muffler. There: all clean. We'll wash the dishes later, before I go. (*leaves with the broom*)

Gabriela. You're like one of the Seven Dwarves. You don't stop. Say, I'm going to have you over every day.

Marlene, *entering*. You're on.

Gabriela. Forget the dishes. You want some rum?

Marlene. Another one?! Mmm. Well, okay.

Gabriela. Superb, like cognac. Maybe better. After a meal, a good shot of rum settles *everything*. And as an aperitif, on the rocks, it's manna from heaven. At any time of the day, really! Maco says I'm like a motorcycle, rrrrum-rrrrum-rrrrum.

(They both freeze and look at each other. They drink. They sit. Sudden gloom. Silence. They take several sips, avoiding each other's eyes.)

Marlene. Why did you have to mention that son-of-a-bitch? We were so happy.

(Short pause)

Gabriela. Son-of-a-bitch, sub-standard jerk.

(Short pause)

Marlene. Idiot shithead.

(Short pause)

Gabriela. Imbecile. Prick. Moron.

(Short pause)

Marlene. Fucking degenerate.

(Short pause)

Gabriela. Lecher, freeloader, sponger.

(Short pause)

Marlene. Jack-off, asshole, evil bastard. *(short pause)* Go on, it's your turn.

Gabriela, *trying to find something.* Liar, traitor, asshole, wannabe pimp.

(Short pause)

Marlene. Weakling, loafer, conceited shit, woman teaser.

Gabriela. Infra-midget, traitor, pseudo-Marxist, fart machine. *(short pause)* You go on.

Marlene. No, girl, you're hard to beat. Rich-ass-kisser, PRI-member, ass licker, no-balls imbecile. You go.



Gabriela. Fake man, fake husband, fake father, fake eyes, faker. What do you think? That was good! You go!

(Marlene applauds her and takes a big breath)

Marlene. Wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am, eats-everything-in-sight, ball-licker, cry baby, wimp, dweeb.

(Both burst out laughing)

Gabriela. Fifth-rate lady's man, little-girl's vampire, piggy-bank robber, black hole of the universe, masturbator, big buzzard, bat, broken umbrella.

Marlene. Nightmare, indigestion, loony-toon, broken rattle, ball of shit.

Gabriela. Pot belly, tapeworm-eater, mean son-of-a-bitch.

Marlene. Shit-kicker.

Gabriela. Toothpick-legs.

Marlene. Droopy butt.

(They laugh so much that they choke, shout, hit each other on the back, and they drink more between guffaws. They end up crying together, with whimpering and sobs. They calm down. They drink, blow their noses, and fix themselves up.)

Marlene. When do they finish paying you for my things?

Gabriela. Next Tuesday.

Marlene. We should tell Molina.

Gabriela. I already told him.

(Silence)

Marlene. You pick him up.

Gabriela. I wouldn't be seen dead there. You go.

Marlene. Why, if he's going to come to your house?

Gabriela. I don't want him here.

Marlene. I don't want him there, either!

Gabriela. He should go to the idiot he knocked up.²

Marlene. He'd be overjoyed, but they'd welcome him with a hail of bullets.

(Pause)

Gabriela. Marlene, seriously, you go for him. Take him with you.

Marlene. I wouldn't knowingly take anybody's old man away from another woman.

Gabriela. Sweetie, you're not taking anything away from me. I'm leaving him to you.

Marlene. That's real nice of you. Thanks. Sure, before, he had thought of living with me. I don't want him anymore. He's all yours.

Gabriela. Thanks, but no thanks. Put him wherever he fits.

Marlene. That's what I've always done, and very successfully, too.

Gabriela. Well, keep it up, and if you don't have any more room, I'll give you some suppositories.

Marlene. The kind you use?

Gabriela. The kind we use.

(*Silence*)

Marlene. I told you we were plastered.

Gabriela. Bad news. Sorry about that.

Marlene. Forget it, girl. The truth is...

Gabriela. Yes?

Marlene. That it's just a pipedream to think we're going to decide. We have to let him come out all by himself and see which house he goes to.

Gabriela. He might have another one, you know, that neither you or I even imagine.

Marlene. Yes.

Gabriela. Let-him-decide...I don't want that.

Marlene. Neither do I, but ...that's the way it is, isn't it?

Gabriela. And you say I'm the cynical one.

Marlene. How much do we decide?

Gabriela. My career...my father decided that. He saw that I had a gift for languages. "You can be independent with that." Yeah, right, big time. Independent and free to work my butt off like a machine, translating things I don't care about. To support the children of two goldbricks, and...actually, to support their fathers. A boarding house would cost them more than this house.

Marlene. Well, I didn't pick the beauty salon. I started sweeping up hair, holding the curlers my mother was putting in. When I turned around, I already knew everything about it. Just like the kitchen: I followed her around, watching her cook...And then, because I felt capable, I did everything better than her. I've always liked to feel capable.

Gabriela. Me, too.

Marlene. But that wasn't choosing my life. I didn't choose Tony either. He took me home from the party and got into my bed without asking me. He's not affectionate. He doesn't help with anything, or almost anything. He gives a little bit so you can't complain. Lots cheaper than a whorehouse.

Gabriela. Then he shows his wallet, full of money, and he uses it to buy big books he doesn't read in a language he doesn't understand to decorate his cubicle. (*Pause*) And he's getting out next week...Wednesday or Thursday.

Marlene. And we're going to wait and see what he decides. Don't pretend you're not. We're going to wait for him to decide.

Gabriela. Yes, we are, aren't we? Marlene, I'm very mad at him, but...it's been so many years together, so much living together, two children! Even Adrián thinks of him a little as his father. Well, he's used to him. It's horrible to think about changing things, or being alone! I could end up with somebody just like him, or worse! This one I already know. Maybe that's love: knowing the entire repertory of the crap they can do to you.

Marlene. And the hots, too, sweetheart. Don't forget them. Knowing the good program that your Maco and my Tony have for between the sheets...When you get the urge. I don't know about you, but, there, he pulls his weight with me.

Gabriela. Yeah, he pulls his weight there with me, too. When he feels like it. And you know, sometimes, just out of pride, I tell him I don't want to? Sure, if he pushes a

little, I let myself be convinced. Isn't there any way that those bastards can be made to depend on a devious, bad-assed, demanding bitch?

Marlene. Yeah, but that kind isn't available. And neither you nor I would like being like them. Exploiting bitches they're called and the whole thing boils down to them not loving anybody. They love themselves; they kiss the mirror. One or two of them come into the salon. I prefer knowing how to love, even if I get what I've gotten!

Gabriela. Knowing how to love, knowing how to give yourself. Yes, it's nice. But what happens to us? And what about the men?! Aren't they ever going to love us as equals?

Marlene. I never see anybody, of any sex, who loves anybody as an equal. Any man who knows how to love gets set upon by some skank who sucks him dry.

Gabriela. And maybe you love each other a lot...Yes, it happens, it does. It happened to me. And you start to change; the bedroom stops being electric; it becomes routine; and he's just a little bit different, and me too, a little more...And one morning you wake up and you're strangers, and it's better if somebody moves out or the fights are going to start.

Marlene. And is it always, always like that?





Gabriela. To make sure it doesn't happen, you have to make the effort together. And if one of you makes the effort and the other doesn't, it all goes to hell.

Marlene. Are you saying that love is an effort of will?

Gabriela. That's what I'm saying.

Marlene. If you're lucky. Friendship's easier. When we find it.

Gabriela. Which is also an effort of will, but...a little less sad.

(Pause)

Marlene. Will you give the money to Molina?

Gabriela. We both will. *(pause)* Let him do what he wants when he gets out. Cheers, friend.

Marlene. Cheers...friend. *(they drink)* I'm going to wake Héctor. We're leaving. Call me a cab, would you?

(They leave with their arms around each other.) ■■■

NOTES

¹ Mexican playwright and writer. This fragment is Scene 7 of *Orinoco. Rosa de dos aromas. El mar y sus misterios. Escrito en el cuerpo de la noche. Los esclavos de Estambul* (Mexico City: FCE: 2008), pp. 74-82. *Voices of Mexico* wishes to thank the permission given by the Fondo de Cultura Económica publishing house, the publishers of Carballido's work, to print this fragment of one of his best known, most successful works.

² Marco Antonio (also known as "Maco" or "Tony") got involved with one of his students who, at the time the action takes place, is expecting his child. [Editor's Note.]