

**A Night in Paris**  
**(Dialogue)**

Characters

1. Mercedes Jaruco – Countess of Merlin (Cuban-born aristocrat, writer and singer of note, the queen of French salons)
2. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda – (Cuban poet. A leading Spanish speaking Romantic poet, )
3. Maria Malibran (famous Spanish singer )
4. Rachel Félix – (famous French tragedienne)
5. Henriette Sontag – (famous German singer)
6. Teresa de Merlin- (daughter of Mercedes)
7. Frederic Chopin - (famous Polish-French pianist and composer)
8. Luigi Lablache (famous Italian singer) -

| <b>Scene One: Cuba in the Distance</b>                     |   |  |
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| <b>Characters: Mercedes, María, Gertrudis and Lablache</b> |   |  |
| Character  | Indication  | Text   |
| Mercedes, Maria and Gertrudis , Lablache                   | They enter from the left coming from the dining room, where they just had dinner. |  |
| Mercedes   |   | A veil of sadness has oppressed me for days, <b>after sad news reached</b> me. O how I miss Cuba, from where I was taken all too soon! Tonight I would forgo all the bustle of Paris for the warmth of a night in Havana. (pauses) Thank you for dining with me....  |
| Gertrudis  |   | You are too kind, Mercedes. It is I who am in your debt. And how well I understand you... Cuba beckons in the distance and completes itself in the imagination. Many nights I have poured over your <i>Viaje a la Habana-</i> even before having the honor of writing the foreword to the Spanish edition. Your vivid and elegant style does justice to every detail. I recall the passage where you compare travel by steamship to that by sail. Yes, now everything has to be fast. The idea of “ <i>progress</i> ” is all around. |
| Mercedes   |   | Yes, but progress at which cost?   |
| Lablache   |   | Even Queen Victoria rides the train now!   |
| Maria  |   | Yes, the railway is the rage all over Europe...  |
| Lablache   |   | And there is so much soot everywhere, especially in London...  |
| Gertrudis  |   | Not so in Havana. The pace is much slower. People still enjoy the customary siesta....But could you not perhaps read a passage from your book to mitigate our longing?   |
| Mercedes   |   | Yes, Gertrudis! How my soul yearns for Cuba tonight ...Let me find a passage, ( <i>winking in a friendly</i>   |

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|           |   | <i>way, turning to Gertrudis</i> ) and I ask only that you recite <i>Al Partir</i> in return.  |
| Maria     |   | Why don't you read about the night that you spent on the bridge? May God allow me to see the land that you so lovingly describe...   |
| Lablache  |   | Please take me along....   |
| Mercedes  | opens the book, and as if going inward, searches for the passage. Then passes the book to Lablache. | J'ai passé une partie de la nuit sur le pont.... (chokes) Excuse moi! I cannot....Lablache, par pitié, would you mind reading it?  |
| Gertrudis | Holds Mercedes' hand  |  |
| Lablache  | Begins reading slowly and with beautiful nuances:   | Gladly !<br>J'ai passé une partie de la nuit sur le pont.... dans mon hamac, baignée des rayons de la lune et abritée par la voûte étoilée du ciel. Toutes les voiles étaient déployées ; la brise, légère et tiède, frisait à peine la surface de la mer, splendide, frémissante, semée d'étincelles. Le navire glissait doucement, et l'eau, brisée par la quille, tournoyait, bondissait, et se brisant en écume blanche, laissait après elle de longs sillons de lumière: tout était éclat et richesse dans la nature ! et lorsque moi, pauvre et faible mortelle, les yeux fixés sur la voûte du ciel, j'apercevais les oscillations des voiles et des cordages doucement balancés dans les airs ; lorsque j'apercevais les étoiles, lançant des jets de lumière, s'agiter et s'incliner mollement vers moi, j'étais saisie d'une enivrante et divine extase: des larmes mouillaient mes paupières, et mon âme s'élevait à Dieu; tout ce qu'il y a de beau et de bon dans la nature de l'homme devenait l'objet de mon ambition. Il me semblait que, sans cette beauté intérieure, je n'étais pas digne de contempler tant de magnificence. Un désir ardent de perfection s'emparait de moi et se mêlait à la |

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|           |              | conscience de ma misère. Alors, inclinant mon front dans la poussière, j'offrais à Dieu ma bonne volonté, modeste holocauste d'une créature faible et bornée. J'ai beaucoup entendu parler de cette substance merveilleuse que les chimistes nomment, je crois, protoxyde d'azote, de cette vie factice qu'elle excite et qui peut résumer, dans un moment d'hallucination, toutes les joies de la vie humaine. Je ne crois pas qu'elle ait jamais fait naître d'enchantement pareil à celui d'une belle nuit passée en face du ciel, sur la mer des Tropiques. |
| Gertrudis |              | Sur la mer des Tropiques.....Sounds like the title of a poem. The rhythm of your prose captures the cadence of the waves.   |
| Maria     |              | Divine inspiration! And beautifully read!   |
| Gertrudis |              | Sublime!  |
| Lablache  |              | Très belle!   |
| Mercedes  |              | Merci!  |
| Gertrudis | (dreamingly) | Ah, el Pan de Matanzas!   |
| Mercedes  |              | El Paseo del Prado!   |
| Gertrudis |              | Las palmas reales!  |
| Maria     |              | You are dreaming now! Descend (pronounced in French)! But please tell us your poem, Gertrudis!  |
| Mercedes  |              | May your noble verses comfort me.   |
| Gertrudis |              | Both have as backdrop the Sea. Your passage mirrors the anticipation on the eve of your arrival. Nature appears as your ally, while my sonnet depicts the moment when I was torn from Cuba. Behind I was leaving one of those attachments that come to a woman's heart when opening itself to love for the first time.  |

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| Maria   |                                     | How tender are your words!   |
| Gertrudis   | Stands and declaims<br>Al Partir    | <p>¡Perla del mar! ¡Estrella de occidente!</p> <p>¡Hermosa Cuba! Tu brillante cielo<br/>la noche cubre con su opaco velo,<br/>como cubre el dolor mi triste frente.</p> <p>¡Voy a partir!... La chusma diligente,<br/>para arrancarme del nativo suelo<br/>las velas iza, y pronta a su desvelo<br/>la brisa acude de tu zona ardiente.</p> <p>¡Adiós, patria feliz, edén querido!</p> <p>¡Doquier que el hado en su furor me impela,<br/>tu dulce nombre halagará mi oído!</p> <p>¡Adiós!... Ya cruje la turgente vela...<br/>el ancla se alza... el buque, estremecido,<br/>las olas corta y silencioso vuela.</p> |
|   | Applause, Mercedes<br>embraces her. |  |
| <p><b>Scene Two: Chopin in England</b></p> <p><b>Mercedes, Maria, Gertrudis, Lablache, Chopin</b></p> |                                     |  |

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| Mercedes             | Acknowledges Chopin<br>A l izquierda del escenario  | Greets Chopin and indicates to approach  |
| Chopin               | Signals he will wait while<br>Gertrudis recites.  |  |
| Chopin (at the door) | Applauds, standing  | What passion! (to Gertrudis)<br>Ma cherie Mercedes, please forgive my lateness. I was unwell.  |
| Mercedes             | Advancing towards him<br>and is met by Chopin<br>halfway. Chopin falters<br>midway. Greetings | Thank you for coming! Glad to have you in Paris again! May I have the pleasure of<br>introducing my compatriot Madame De Avellaneda. But come, rest yourself near the<br>fire. Have you gotten a chill? ( <i>alarmed</i> ) |
| Chopin               | kisses Mercedes and Ma.   | I was cold but I feel fine now. A bit of cordial, if you may, would do me good   |
| Mercedes             |   | I would like to offer you a glass of the finest Rum from Cuba. It will surely warm you<br>up.  |
|                      | Chopin Sips a little  |  |
| Chopin               |   | Forgive my ignorance- for I speak not a word of Spanish, but the music in your poetry,<br>conjured in me the image of a farewell...  |
| Gertrudis            |   | You are quite right indeed! But I never imagined I would make your acquaintance<br>tonight. Enchanté! I am a fan of your music. ..Your ideals of freedom and your .....  |
| Mercedes             | Interrupting Gertrudis  | Forgive me, dear Gertrudis, but let us please not venture into politics... I promised my<br>late husband never again to wade those murky waters. Let the Maestro instead speak<br>through his sublime music.               |
| Gertrudis            |   | Understood! I have gotten into a lot of trouble myself and I know you have too!  |

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| Mercedes  |   | Indeed!   |
| Mercedes  | Turning to Chopin   | But, Frederic, I do not believe you have tried our new piano. It has been brought from New York. It is made by Steinway.... They have made tremendous improvements on the mechanism and the sound is huge!  |
|           | Chopin goes to the piano and plays a few arpeggios, trying the instrument                           |   |
|           |   | Applauses and reactions!  |
| Chopin    |   | What a magnificent instrument!  |
| Mercedes  |   | I am happy you approve!   |
| Maria     |   | Yes, indeed! It has a ringing bass and beautiful high notes, like bells...  |
| Chopin    |   | And so solid! I bet it holds the tuning well!..   |
| Chopin    | The ladies gather by the piano while Chopin takes off his gloves. Chopin plays the Waltz in f minor | Let me become acquainted with it. I will gladly play one of my waltzes. (gulps a drink of Rum) Delicious! Granted, the Viennese did not care for them. They said they could not be danced to. I hope my humble waltz may fare better with you....<br>Waltz in F minor |
| Gertrudis |   | Your music has cut through my soul. And when music speaks, poetry must be silent. (pauses) But how can you make the melody speak and breathe, floating upon the accompaniment in such a splendid manner? Are you God or mortal?                                       |
| Chopin    |   | You flatter me! I imitate the freedom of the singer's cantilena against the stricter rhythm of the orchestra. The orchestra is the left hand (pauses) Of course, that takes a lifetime to master.... The pedal alone is an art in itself.                             |
| Maria     |   | Now you <i>really</i> flatter us. That the great Chopin may learn from us could make us   |