THE ROMANCE OF MAGNO RUBIO

A play by Lonnie Carter

with Loy Arcenas

for the Ma-Yi Theatre Company

Based on the short story

"The Romance of Magno Rubio"

by Carlos Bulosan

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (in order of speaking):

Chorus, 3-5 men

Magno Rubio, the first among equals

Nick, our Narrator

Claro, in search of El Dorado

Prudencio, the Cook

Atoy, the Instigator

Clarabelle

TIME: 1930’s and beyond

SPACE: A bunkhouse for migrant farm workers. California.

Nota bene -

There are some scattered attempts at writing simple Tagalog.

Maraming salamat po. Paki magpatawad kamali.

PRUDENCIO

Sus Maria ‘Sef,

You'll make deaf yet
Let's hear the drop of the pin
And let the games begin *(Rhythm Starts)*

CHORUS
Magno Rubio Filipino boy.
Magno Rubio Fili-Pinoy.
Magno Rubio four feet six inches tall.
Magno Rubio dark as a coconut ball.

NICK
We were FOB's fresh off the boats
When some SOB's in ties and coats
Said,

ATOY
"Good jobs are yours, wages so fine.
Sign your X's and O's on the dotted line.

CLARO
We love all Filipinos, especially you.

PRUDENCIO
We treat you with respect and dignity too."

CLARO
We put down our marks and some signed our names
We got so excited,

ALL
Like kissing new dames

NICK
America the land of honey and cream

MAGNO
We met our new boss,

PRUDENCIO
We were Foreman Pena's team

MAGNO
We jumped in the back of a pickup truck

PRUDENCIO
Filipinos on wheels, now S.O.L. outta luck

CLARO
They showed us our bunk –

ATOY
Stunk funk who'd a-thunk

CLARO
Where recently hens
Had died from disease and shrieked in their pens.

MAGNO
A mattress of metal,

PRUDENCIO
A floor of wood

CLARO
Or concrete

NICK
Or dirt

MAGNO
Was home to our backs,

ALL
Our joints all hurt

CLARO
Up at dawn

NICK
Out in the field

MAGNO
Picking the crop,

PRUDENCIO
Gleaning the yield.

ALL
Neighbor to neighbor in labor called 'stoop'

CLARO
Then back after dusk to our chicken coop.

ATOY
Bitter and angry, but not without humor,

NICK
It keeps us all breathing

PRUDENCIO
But one of our kind, amid all the seething

CLARO
Yes, one among us is innocent still

ALL
He’s Magno the Rube, he climbs every hill *(Rhythm starts)*

ATOY
Magno Rubio

ALL
Filipino boy

ATOY
Magno Rubio

ALL
Fili - Pinoy
Magno Rubio four feet six inches tall
Magno Rubio dark as a coconut ball

MAGNO
With a head small

ATOY
And limbs like a turtle

CLARO
A lusty young hare

NICK
And twice as fertile

PRUDENCIO
Now picking peas in the San Jose hills

MAGNO
A quarter an hour

ALL
Don’t pay our bills

ATOY
In rain, shine or mudslide he’s always stooped

CLARO
Pagod na pagod, palaging pooped

MAGNO
He’s not without hope, todos los dias

ATOY
Fantasia amor for all senoritas

PRUDENCIO
One sticks in his brain and drains his cabeza
With jugs of wine

ALL
And frio cerveza

NICK
He moons and moans at the lovelorn adverts

CLARO
Tangina! He’s found one

ATOY
From the back page he flirts

MAGNO
In love with a girl he has never seen

PRUDENCIO
From the Arkansas hills and Little Rock mean

ATOY
A girl twice his size sideward and upward

CLARO
Binibining panaginip,

ATOY
Wideward and cupward *(then ALL ‘whistles’ 2x)*

PRUDENCIO
Magno screws up his fish eyes, they shine like mud

ATOY
They’re about to pop out, they’re pounding with blood

CLARO
He jumps up so fast like a monkey in heat

NICK
He bites of a chunk of chewing tabac

ATOY
He coughs up a wad and spits on his feet

ALL
Then leaps in the air and rolls on his back

MAGNO
I LOVE HER!

The Narrator/NICK appears.

NARRATOR

It was early spring and the sun outside was glittering on the dew-laden hills, where the royal crowns of edelweiss, the long blue petals of multi-colored poppies were shaking slightly in the wind.

It was morning and we had no work.

Some members of our crew were sleeping in their straw beds, some playing cards in a corner of the bunkhouse, some playing musical instruments on the porch.

The CHORUS pounces.

ATOY

Hey, Magno, let's play some blackjack
Give you a chance to win your money back
Fill your pockets with dollars, fives, even a ten

CLARO

Then we'll drive into town to Jezebel's den
Atoy will play the mandolin
Nickie will dance - look at him grin!

ATOY

Prudencio's got his shoes polished real slick

PRUDENCIO

Atoy the Peanut oils his kabayo dick

CLARO

Prudencio is stirring the pot
We'll drag him along, like it or not

ATOY

The ladies are begging for you, Magno
They want your special brand of touch
They're aching for you, Magno
Muchacha gordita wants you extra mucho much

MAGNO

No more whore
NO MORE WHORE!

CLARO, ATOY, PRUDENCIO

More whore
MORE WHORE!

MAGNO

I am pure of heart - once again
I save myself for my angel

I am good of soul - once again
Magandang Clarabelle – angel

ATOY

Angel?

CLARO

With a wingspread of a condor

ATOY

Angel?

CLARO

What was that about a tall blonde whore

ATOY

Six feet tall and one ninety-five

PRUDENCIO

Holy Moly, she'll eat him alive

CLARO

I don't mind to be there and see him stop breathing

ATOY

Though I'd like some myself, for her I'd stop breathing

PRUDENCIO

O no you wouldn't, you've a wife back home

ATOY

Not seen in three years, a man's got to roam

MAGNO

I like women tall

CHORUS

Don't short men all

MAGNO

I like women big

CHORUS

All small men dig

MAGNO

I like the six feet one ninety-five

PRUDENCIO

Jesus Cristo, she'll eat you alive
She'll chew you up fine in small little pieces
You won't know what hit you, your mouse will be meeses

CLARO

In love with a girl he has never seen
From Arkansas

ATOY,CLARO

Via
A magazine

MAGNO

I LOVE HER!

NICK as NARRATOR addresses us.

NARRATOR
We were pursuing the daily routine of our lives when we had no work. And we were thinking of Magno Rubio's romance with a girl in the mountains of Arkansas. A girl he'd found, with Claro's help, in a lonely heart's magazine.

CLARO
You're out of your gourd! She's twice your size, sideward and upward.

MAGNO
Has size got anything to do with love?

CLARO
That's what I've heard from my uncle.

MAGNO
Your uncle could be wrong.

CLARO
My uncle couldn't be wrong. He was a gentleman. Ask Prudencio.

PRUDENCIO
He is cooking. Do not ask Prudencio when he is cooking.

CLARO
'Sus, Maria, 'Sef, what are you cooking now?

PRUDENCIO
Balut under glass/Prairie dog adobo/Pinyas for dessert/with snot sauce for bobo

CLARO
Oooo, Manong, watch your snout/I'll yank your nose hairs out

PRUDENCIO
The uncle in question – a gentleman's gent
His motto for lent – Keep it limp, keep it bent
From Mardi Gras to Easter
He strapped it to his keester
But 40 days later he already went

CLARO
Supot!

PRUDENCIO
They'll catch you up right soon and you'll be sunk
Before you know it, looking out at Alcatraz
And thinking about

PRUDENCIO, ATOY & MAGNO
All that Jazz

CLARO
I have a plan, dear old man

PRUDENCIO
What does it involve, school, college, marriage?

ATOY
Prostitution?

CLARO

Bakla? Tomboy?

PRUDENCIO
Talk to Nickie, he has plan

(MAGNO turns to NICK, our Narrator.)

MAGNO
Nick, you go to college? College Boy Nick!

CLARO
College Boy Nickie!

NICK
Now and again I matriculate, Magno.

CLARO
Hey Magno - matriculate - that means he does your mother.
You going to let him get away with that?

NICK
It means I go to school, Magno, when I have enough money.

MAGNO
Like now?

NICK
Like NOT now.
What do you need to know about love, Magno?
I've read all the poems.

MAGNO
O.K., what do the poems say?
Has size got anything to do with love?

NICK
"And when I feel, fair creature of an hour
That I shall never look upon thee more
Never have relish in the fairy power
Of unreflecting love, then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone and think
'Til love and fame to nothingness do sink."

No, Magno, I don't think size has anything to do with love.

MAGNO
See, Claro, now go away to your El Dorado.

CLARO
This illiterate peasant tells me to go away? I will go to MY El Dorado when I am good and ready to claim my fortune. Oh di ba, Prudencio?

PRUDENCIO
Do not ask Prudencio when he is cooking.

CLARO
From now on I cook for myself.

PRUDENCIO
Hell is other cooks.

CLARO
Cooks and illiterate peasants.

MAGNO
Claro, out of my sight!

CLARO
This ignoramus tells a man who has gone to the second grade ‘out of my sight’! Listen, peon -

MAGNO
Here’s a dollar. Now go away. Drink the wine in your El Dorado room. I was crazy to pay for it anyway.

CLARO
Look, Igorot -

MAGNO
Here’s two dollars. Be a gentleman like your uncle.

CLARO
My uncle Tio Pepe was not wrong

God bless his soul, in all the years he spoke

He never gave me bad advice, so long

As I was not the one who said, ‘Your joke...’

For God bless Tio Pepe, he had one

Joke that he told every time he saw you

One joke about a little dog who runs

Right over to the big dog and says,

CLARO/PRUDENCIO
‘Boo!’

CLARO
Now big dog’s the watchdog who’s been asleep

And little dog’s job’s to watch big dog snore

And when the burglar sees the sleeping heap

CLARO/ATOY/PRUDENCIO
It’s little dog who saves the day and more

CLARO
And that’s my uncle’s joke, not once did I

Say, Tio Pepe, why o why o why

MAGNO

What are you saying? You're driving me crazy!

CLARO
You ask if size has WHAT to do with love?
You hear my Unc? This small dog big dog shove
You think big dog love little dog at all?
That big dog not little dog ball.

MAGNO
What are you talking, you're driving me nuts?
You and your stupid Unc and his dogs' butts
Blow it out your blow-hole, you ugly goat
Throw you and your bunghole in a shithouse boat
Here's FIVE dollars! Be a gentleman's gentleman like your uncle's uncle

CHORUS enchains CLARO.

ATOY
See, Claro - money before you
grab that jug of wine
and off to your room
where pleasures await you

PRUDENCIO
Your uncle rests very nice in his grave
The only place he can't misbehave

ATOY
Your uncle's uncle?

PRUDENCIO
Wasn't he the one
so drunk that he fell off a carabao
and croaked face down in a pile of carabao plop

ATOY
Or was that your uncle's uncle's fish-faced whoreson's mother's pimpshit cop?!

CLARO
Igorots all!

CLARO storms off to his room, money and wine in hand.

PRUDENCIO
Deal from the top of the deck
Or risk your tawny neck

ATOY
This one's shaved just right

PRUDENCIO
Okay, guwapo, you've got a fight

MAGNO
I like you to write a letter for me, Nick.

[10 page sample excerpt ends here.]