

MOJADA

by

Luis Alfaro

Rehearsal Draft

as of

February 25, 2017

Oregon Shakespeare Festival 2017

CHARACTERS

Medea, 20's

Hason, 30's

Acan, 10

Tita, 60's

Josefina, 30's

Armida, 50's

All of the characters are Mexican.

PROLOGUE

Summer in the yard of a house in Boyle Heights, old world, maybe ancient. The backdrop is a typical two-story old Victorian, way past her prime, but unique in her blend of wood and brick.

The furniture, a rustic wooden table, potted plants of herbs and vegetables are unmistakably Mexican. A little table houses a portable sewing machine connected to extension cords that snake through the yard and into the house, a milk crate in the corner.

We hear an ancient sound, something sustained.

A mother and son, MEDEA and ACAN, can be seen up on a landing. She holds him in her arms. They begin a dance, something ancient; it is clear she is teaching him a ritual. It is joyful, playful and full of love. Maybe funny even.

TITA, a viejita, worn but enduring, enters the yard and goes to the garden, pulling a pair of very large discarded banana palms. MEDEA and ACAN reach for banana palms as well. She stands in the center of the yard and conjures as she holds the banana leaves in each hand, gripping them as if they were talons or wings. She holds them up to the sky as all three sing a prayer in Nahuatl.

TITA, MEDEA, ACAN

In ic nauhcan (from the four directions)
Niquintzatzilia (I call you)
Ic axcan yez (to my grip...)
Tla xihuallauh (come forth)
Tlatecuin (cross my path)

As they slap the palms together, they produce the sound of 'back there,' and there goes TITA in her memories; Slap - the sound of the old country. Slap - a party with music. Slap - rain. Slap - lovers making love. Slap - a baby crying. Slap - a woman laughing. Slap - the sound a bird, in flight, wings flapping. MEDEA and ACAN listen for the sound as well.

The bird is drowned out when suddenly old world meets new, when in the distance we hear a helicopter circling and shining its spotlight. TITA comes closer to see if she can get a glimpse of the copter. She lowers the palms and throws them back in the garden. She picks up a bag, her mandado, and ACAN rushes to her side, holding her hand, as MEDEA goes to her sewing machine in the yard. TITA speaks to the audience.

TITA

Buenas tardes! I SAID, BUENAS TARDES! That's better. So, who has the gossip?

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

Back home, I see a *vecina* on the street and I say, "Oye, *mujer*, your husband, he looks like a bull, does he make love like one too?" And she says, "Yes he does!" But here, if I ask about the bull, they say, "*Ai*, how can you ask that, and on the street too, *vieja sin verguenza!*" As if I ask to see the bull in action!

They hide their *chisme* here because someone always wants to steal your secrets, your smile, your bull. That is why it is better to have nothing in this country, which is exactly what I have.

The sewing machine begins. We hear MEDEA humming to herself.

TITA (CONT'D)

Yo soy Tita. Here, they tell me "Oh - housekeeper," but back home, I am family. I cook, I clean, I shop, I take the boy to school and pick him up, right?

ACAN nods his head.

And sometimes, I buy him some American candy when he is good, but today, no candy, right?

ACAN nods his head again.

This is a lot of work for a woman of my age, but, you know, family...

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

I have been with her since she was born. I came to her *familia* as a *niña* myself. Her mother dies in childbirth, the men need their meals, and she needs someone to raise her, to teach her the old ways. I was sold to her family with a herd of cattle and a little goat. That was the first thing they ate. I had no idea he was food, I thought he was my friend, *pero* he was delicious...

I am a curandera, a healer. We rub, we touch, we look inside you. Everything I know I have taught *mi* Medea, but her gift is *en las manos*... Here they think she is just a seamstress, but what she does with the cloth and the pattern and the sewing is *puro pinche* DaVinci.

Late at night they deliver stacks of fabrics. They say, "No name, no social, we pay you cash. You complain, we go to someone else." They check her seams, her hems, and they are always *muy* impressed, but they can't show it, because then...

She does a gesture for money

Welcome to the factory inside your house.

Back home she is an artist, *la reina del vestido*, here she is a sewing machine. In this country, you can only be one thing; here or there, lost or found, man or woman, but back there we have - *en medio*. Like me, I smile, but I hate you...

She looks at the audience with the most hateful smile

I know, I know, you thinking, 'Why is she so unhappy?'. I am not unhappy, I am a senior citizen! And I have so much to do. And my time is not long. She is not well. I need to get her out of the house.

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

This is *Jason*, her husband's dream, not ours. She will do anything for him. He is her first and her last, she says. *Ai que mensa!*

What is going to become of us? I hardly cook anymore. It's all McDonald's *por aqui*. *Pero*, I will stay with her until I die. If she dies before me, I will jump into her grave, and they can bury us both. These things do not matter to me. I say, better to die with *mi niña* than to live with nothing to do.

We hear a call in the distance, the sound of a bird...

JASON (OFFSTAGE)

Gwa, Gwa, Gwa...

MEDEA looks up, hearing it. ACAN runs toward the sound. TITA hears it too and moves toward her milk crate.

TITA

Pinche bird...

ACAN

Papi!

ACAN appears at the top of the stairs.

ACAN (CONT'D)

Papi!

JASON enters. A cell-phone to his ear, he motions for ACAN to come down the stairs where he hugs him. He kicks the ball and the boy runs off after it.

ONE

JASON

Speaking on his cell

No, no, no, don't you worry. Figueroa will go off without a hitch, missus. We have it all under control, the Orsini's are the same apartment, we just copy the last one.

JASON laughs and TITA copies his laugh as she rolls her eyes, under her breath...

TITA

*Idiota...**(JASON glares at her.)*

JASON

I will. And once again, thank you for everything, missus.

He smiles

Oh! well thank you...

Suddenly shy

I would love to...

JASON hangs up, turns to look at MEDEA sewing and goes to her.

TITA

'You would love to' what?

JASON

Mind your own business, *chismosa!*

to MEDEA

How is my *Guaco?*

MEDEA

I feel like a bird who has lost her feathers.

JASON

I thought I was the only one.

MEDEA

Gwa!

noticing his shoes

Where did you get those shoes?

JASON

You notice everything, the old lady taught you well.

TITA

Callate pendejo.

JASON

That *vieja*'s tongue, I swear to God!

MEDEA

Dejalo Tita!

TITA

Baboso!

MEDEA

Tita!

back to the issue at hand

Entonces?

JASON

They bought them for me.

MEDEA

Who did?

JASON

My job.

MEDEA

A job buys you shoes? We haven't even been here a year.

JASON

My boss.

He spits out a loogie

MEDEA

Ai, Jason!

TITA

Que romantico!

JASON

Callate, viejita nosy.

MEDEA

It's disgusting.

JASON

Then you must love a disgusting man, because this is what men do, I am only following the rules.

MEDEA

Is that what you are going to do when you get promoted?

JASON

When I get promoted I will go to CVS and buy a handkerchief like Villaraigoza, but I promise you that when no one is looking, Villaraigoza is spitting too. Are you almost done?

MEDEA

I will never be done, it's all collars and cuffs, twice the work. You know how much they sell this for over at the, what did you say it was...

TITA
...Bloomingdales....

MEDEA
Tell him what they told you.

TITA
One hundred and twenty dollars...

MEDEA
I get eight dollars for making it. And look, I got myself good today.

She unpeels a bandage and shows him her finger. He kisses it.

I had to do three hundred pieces twice over because they changed their mind on the stitch. When we complained, he told Tita he could take the work somewhere else.

JASON
What did you say?

TITA
We will do them again.

MEDEA
And I smiled. How did I smile Tita?

TITA smiles her 'I hate you' smile.

JASON
Don't smile at them.

MEDEA
They don't come back otherwise.

JASON
What you do is special, Medea, no matter how they treat us here.

MEDEA

In this country, special pays the same.

JASON

I promise that when I am in charge, my wife is going to stay home and get fat and make me *tamales* all day, real ones made with lard.

MEDEA

I thought you wanted us to look more American?

JASON

And you, old lady, will mix *la masa* just so you can know what it feels like to do labor.

TITA

I work!

JASON

Is that what they call gossiping these days?

TITA

When we go back to *Michoacan* I am going to get a job better than this one, as a *puta*!

MEDEA

Tita!

They can't help but laugh

JASON

I am going to take the boy to the pier.

MEDEA

There's a pier?

JASON

At the ocean, Medea! In *Santa Monica*, it has a big Ferris wheel. Two metros to get there.

MEDEA

Really?

JASON
We are all going to go, this weekend.

TITA
Yo tambien?

JASON
Yes, you too, old lady.

JASON turns to look at MEDEA.

MEDEA
You know I can't go.

JASON
I don't know that.

MEDEA
We'll see...

JASON
Medea, *por favor*. We've been here almost a year,
and we haven't gone anywhere. For the boy.

MEDEA
Feeling trapped
I don't know... It seems far.

JASON
Mi Reina, how do you know how far it is?

MEDEA
It's on the other side of the buildings, right?

JASON
looking at TITA
Tell her it's not that far.

TITA
Only two Metros, Medea. And they're clean!

JASON

At least leave the house, Medea! We can't keep depending on the old lady for everything.

TITA

See, I work!

JASON

Callate! Seriously Medea...

MEDEA

I don't know...

She goes back to sewing, but he puts his arms around her.

JASON

I am putting my foot down. We are going to go to the beach as a family!

An outburst.

MEDEA

NO! I CAN'T!

*Whoa, where did that come from?
TITA stands*

JASON

Okay, okay... I am sorry. It was too much to ask. I'll take the boy myself. I was hoping... I just... I'll make it better, Medea. I will.

They are interrupted by the chifle of ACAN whistling down the street. MEDEA goes inside the house. TITA stands to go with her, but M()EDEA nods for her to stay. TITA and JASON look at each other as TITA sits at her milk crate.

TWO

A soccer ball rolls into the yard as JASON goes for it, followed by ACAN, dressed in a Futbol Soccer outfit with a homemade jersey emblazoned with the name Chicharito on the back, runs after it.

ACAN

Papi!

JASON does tricks with the ball and kicks it to ACAN.

JASON

Call me DAD.

ACAN

What's the difference?

JASON

That's the way they say it here.

ACAN

But you're *Papi*.

JASON

It's the same thing, but here in this country it sounds like this...

(in a tough guy voice)

DAD! See? It's strong.

(he mimics his voice)

Papi! See? That sounds like a duck that's lost in a pond.

(doing the tough guy again)

DAD! It makes you sound like a man.

ACAN

DAAAD!

JASON

Yeah, like that.

*JASON picks up ACAN and spins him around.
They laugh as he puts him down and points
to his jersey.*

Where is your Donovan?

ACAN

Mami said I could only wear *Mexico*.

JASON's cell gets a text.

JASON

We'll see about that.

ACAN

Can I have one?

JASON

What?

ACAN

A cell.

JASON

What do you need a cell for?

ACAN

So I can call you.

JASON

We're never apart.

ACAN

We could be if you bought me a cell.

JASON

Acan, you are my future, we will never be apart.
Now let's get you into something a little more
American. But don't tell your *mami*...

*They kick the soccer ball to each other.
Finally, JASON kicks the soccer ball off
towards the front of the house and ACAN
runs after it while JASON leaves checking his
cell.*

THREE

TITA picks up a large rusted machete as she stares at the Banana tree. MEDEA enters, surprised by her.

MEDEA

Ay, Tita!

TITA

Ooh sorry sorry, it's just that this *pinche* banana tree, I keep pruning and feeding *y nada*.

MEDEA

It's too dry here. It's not going to give off any fruit, let it remind us of *Zamora*.

MEDEA goes to the sewing machine and begins to work.

TITA

It refuses to settle here as much as you and I...

(The sound of a helicopter, TITA looks at up at it as it passes)

Jason didn't come home...

MEDEA

He has to work all night. There are a lot of Orsini's.

TITA

What do you know about Orsini's?

MEDEA

Lots of apartments, they will take advantage of him before they reward him, that's the way it works.

TITA

And you believe him?

MEDEA

Why wouldn't I?

TITA

Everyone else goes home to sleep.

MEDEA

He is not everyone else, he is going to be the boss.
He is showing them what he is willing to do.

TITA

I bet he is.

MEDEA

Ai Tita... that tongue...

TITA

But you trust him...

MEDEA

With all of my heart, I would die for him.

TITA

Porque eres una ciega.

MEDEA

Not blind.

TITA

Love is like a good *mole*, rich and delicious, but then
it gets cold and you can't stand to look at him, I
mean the *mole*...

MEDEA

My love is not mole.

TITA

Ay, Medea, you almost make me believe it.

The sound of a horn on a cart.

Ay! Josefina!

We hear a woman's voice yell out...

JOSEFINA

(off stage)

MUÑECAS...

TITA yells back. MEDEA stiffens.

TITA

AQUI ESTAMOS!

She found us! This is the one I told you about that makes the sweet bread.

TITA notices MEDEA's apprehension.

Ai, don't worry, Medea, she's one of us, I promise. I asked her to come, maybe she could be a friend. And don't argue with me, you need a friend. If you won't go out, then I will bring them to you...

JOSEFINA, a no nonsense street vendor, in apron, with a scarf on her head, appears. She holds a bag with pan dulce.

JOSEFINA

Hola viejita! Como estas?

TITA

Doing what I do best, nothing!

This makes JOSEFINA laugh. MEDEA stands in front of her sewing machine.

Esta es mi Medea.

JOSEFINA

Hola Medea!

JOSEFINA hugs MEDEA with abandon.

Wow, you are so beautiful, I don't know why but I was expecting to meet an old *bruja* for some reason.

Tita told me all about you, but to be honest, I already knew. People talk about your gift. *La Costurera*, oh wow! I'm from near you. *Carapan*.

MEDEA

Carapan!

San Juan Bautista.

JOSEFINA

Our patron saint, very good, but your people have *El Guaco*, your own bird!

TITA

And the monarchs and the avocados...

JOSEFINA

No bragging *viejita!* Hey, did you hear they found a *Guaco* out here?

MEDEA

They did?

JOSEFINA

Who knew a bird from our country could travel this far, but if we can, why can't our birds? I hope they're not as desperate as we are. I am so happy to meet you Medea, already you feel like family. I know some people from *Zamora*, but you know, our soccer teams, we should be enemies.

MEDEA

How do you know each other?

JOSEFINA

Oh, she comes to my cart almost every morning, we spend an hour gossiping, but it's never enough, right Tita?

TITA

I could *chismear* all day. Medea, the only way to see Boyle Heights is from the *pan dulce* cart.

JOSEFINA

It's true, I know everyone en *el barrio* now.

(Looks down at her hands)

Oh forgive me, I must be nervous, I brought you some *pan dulce* from my cart!

I never see you on the street, so I am bringing the cart to you. Hey, wait a minute, this could be like a new kind of service, like *Chino* food or pizza - *pan dulce* delivered to your door!

MEDEA

Ay gracias, you shouldn't have. Jason, my husband, says we should watch our weight.

JOSEFINA

Que? I think every Mexican woman should have a big ass. I do! We should look like the old country - plump and full of possibility. I know your husband.

MEDEA

You do?

JOSEFINA

Bien conocido, he's very charming *tu esposo*, he comes by my cart. Hey, when he was a kid did he tour with Ricky Martin?

MEDEA

What!

JOSEFINA

I knew he was lying!

MEDEA

You work all day?

JOSEFINA

And night. All I do is work. I get up at three in the morning to bake the bread, on the street by five and then home by four in the afternoon, if I am lucky... I'm usually over on *Cesar Chavez*.

TITA

She doesn't know the *barrio*. She doesn't go out, like the mother *en esa telenovela "Una Familia Con Suerte"*?

JOSEFINA

You mean the one that stays inside her house all day and makes her poor little dog *Abeja* sad?

TITA

Si, esa!

MEDEA

Tita...

JOSEFINA

Oh, don't be embarrassed, Medea, when we come to this country, we become each other's family. I just met you and I already learned something about you. You are like my sister. Come visit me down on *Cesar Chavez* and you can see the *gabachos*, they call them 'hipsters'.

TITA

She sells every last *pan dulce*, *que no Josefina?*

JOSEFINA

Even the 'hipsters' buy my bread. I wanted to charge all the White people moving into the neighborhood more money, because, come on, lets face it, you know they have it. But then my friend, *Aurora*, you know, the lady who sells the *tamales* in front of the bus stop at *Mariachi Plaza*?

TITA

Si la conozco.

JOSEFINA

She told me I could get a ticket for that! She says its 'discrimination'.

MEDEA

Really?

JOSEFINA

In *Mexico*, I had two prices, one for the rich and one for the poor, and no one ever said anything. Everybody accepts it. But in this country, they want everyone to be treated the same, even though they know not everyone is.

MEDEA

I don't understand this country?

JOSEFINA

You know *esta Teresa* who sells the *chicharrones* in front of the Metro stop at First and Soto? She told me the rich people in Bel Air make their dogs walk on two legs!

TITA

No me digas.

JOSEFINA

In little mink coats. I hope it is okay to say, Medea, but your husband, Jason is *tan guapo*, sexy.

TITA

He's not.

JOSEFINA

Is he a good lover?

MEDEA is caught off guard

Ai, don't be embarrassed Medea, we're open books, we have nothing to hide. Only people with money have secrets.

It must be a lot of work to keep a beautiful man satisfied. I prefer my ugly husband. The only one that wants him is me! No no, mine is good, but I have to keep pointing him in the right direction.

(She points downward.)

Poor thing, he's always tired.

MEDEA

What does he do?

JOSEFINA

He works in the fields, oh, which reminds me, I came with a favor, is that okay? I wouldn't normally, but you know, family. I bought a dress to seduce him with, but it's too big, could you bring it in for me?

MEDEA

Let's see it.

JOSEFINA pulls it out of the bag.

Oh... Put it on.

JOSEFINA begins to undress in the yard.

Ai Josefina, you can dress inside.

JOSEFINA

What for? I do everything out on the street except make love. To be honest, I would love to do it outside. Between the Payless and the King Taco.

JOSEFINA changes into the dress, she spins around in it.

TITA

A nun is more seducing than that dress.

MEDEA

Tita!

I can make you a better one if you want. I can already see you in it.

JOSEFINA

Really? Wow. I could pay you in layaway or give you free *pan dulce* in exchange.

MEDEA

Just pay me when you can.

MEDEA goes to the sewing machine and gets some pins and measurement tape. TITA pulls her milk crate over and extends a hand for balance as JOSEFINA stands on it. But before she does, JOSEFINA reaches over and hugs MEDEA deeply, she does something intimate and affectionate, like maybe fix her hair a bit.

JOSEFINA

Thank you, sister.

JOSEFINA gets up on the crate with TITA's help and MEDEA begins to pin the dress up

We should try speaking English.

TITA

No speaking English - this is America!
(*they all laugh*)

JOSEFINA

We need to learn it. I am losing too much money. Have you seen all the White people in the neighborhood? I'm learning how to make bagels now.

(MORE)

JOSEFINA (CONT'D)

Oh, by the way, call me by my American name - Josie.
I am trying to get used to it.

MEDEA

Okay, Josie...

MEDEA works.

JOSEFINA

How is Jason's job?

MEDEA

Busy. Do you know *Memo* and *Quique*?

JOSEFINA

Of course, the laziest nice guys I know.

MEDEA

Jason got a promotion supervising them.

JOSEFINA

Ah ha! Good to know.

*She reaches into her bra and pulls out a little
black book with a pen and writes a note.*

They can finally pay their *pan dulce* balance!

MEDEA

I hope he gets another promotion, but with less hours.

JOSEFINA

Back home a promotion was less work and a few more *pesos*. Here you work twice as hard and lose your friends.

MEDEA

And what about your husband?

JOSEFINA

Gone, the whole season.

MEDEA

Where does he work?

JOSEFINA

Sometimes he gets a job in *Ventura*, but this time he is in Oregon.

MEDEA

Is that far?

JOSEFINA

It's another state!

MEDEA

Oh.

JOSEFINA

Picking, picking, picking. His specialty is blueberries, four gallons in one hour! But it's very hard on his back, he can't straighten up all the way anymore.

A very proud man who understands the honor of being able to work. I just wish for him that it wasn't so painful, the heat, the time away, his body...

JOSEFINA breaks down and puts her hands up to her face. Standing on the milk crate, she looks like a saint. MEDEA and TITA look at each other.

MEDEA

Josie, *que paso?*

JOSEFINA

I'm sorry, I usually cry in our garage. I must feel at home with the both of you. *Por favor*, don't tell anyone.

MEDEA

I won't, Josie.

JOSEFINA

I cry because I long for my own child, my own flesh and blood, but my husband only likes to make love on Saturday nights. He's been like that since I met him.

TITA

Forgive me for asking, but is he loyal?

JOSEFINA

Too loyal! I wish he would have an affair, but that's not who we are.

MEDEA

That's right, Josie. We are of the past, the old country. It's not here.

(She touches her head)

It's here.

(She touches her heart).

I understand.

JOSEFINA

I knew you would. A baby made from us.

TITA

Any child would make you happy.

JOSEFINA

Yes, but my Progeny. Isn't that a beautiful name? I saw it on a brochure at the Boyle Heights Clinic. That is what I would name my child; *Progeny Elpidia Alcazar Hernandez*.

My husband thinks it's too obvious, he prefers 'Destiny'. He says it's a very American name. That's like a Disney name, right? I don't want my kid to sound like a flying elephant.

JOSEFINA looks down at MEDEA.

Down on the street, I hear the children playing... I shoo them away towards *Cesar Chavez* and the noise and the traffic... I know I know! Don't say it, I just heard that come out of my mouth and it sounds terrible.

MEDEA

I understand...

JOSEFINA

It's not for lack of trying. We try a lot, at least on Saturday nights.

MEDEA

Tita is a *curandera*. She can help.

JOSEFINA

You're a healer?

TITA

We will make you some herbs, a blessing for a baby.

TITA takes out a bird feather and does a blessing over JOSEFINA while they talk.

MEDEA

I will make you a dress a husband cannot resist.

JOSEFINA

But don't make me look like *Shakira*, okay? I want to be sensual, but decente.

MEDEA

It's all about the fabric, the stitch, the way it flows, moves and gives life.

TITA

And it will be blessed.

JOSEFINA

Muñecas, I am very happy to know the both of you. To be honest, I don't have many friends, well any friends, all I do is work, I have customers, not friends, and I miss home so much, don't you?

TITA

Everyday.

JOSEFINA

You remind me of Michoacan, Medea. I can see the land on you. Suddenly I am surrounded with family and our customs. I am in your debt, *gracias* my friends.

She breaks down in tears.

Oh damnit, I swear, I only do this in our garage.

MEDEA reaches up and takes her hand.

I wonder if I will never have a baby and spend the rest of my life in Boyle Heights pushing a cart and selling *pan dulce*?

Just then, a soccer ball bounces in. Followed by ACAN. JOSEFINA jumps off the milk crate.

Acan!

MEDEA

You know my son?

JOSEFINA

Of course, he and Jason buy my *pan dulce*.

MEDEA

They do?

MEDEA looks at ACAN.

Los zapatos.

ACAN

Dang, man.

MEDEA

Que?

ACAN

Nada...

ACAN runs to a corner in the yard, takes off his shirt and switches from Vans to huaraches.

JOSEFINA

Medea, he's growing so fast, what a tragedy.

JOSEFINA reaches into her bra and pulls out a dollar, which she gives to ACAN.

MEDEA

Oh, you don't have to do that.

JOSEFINA

Are you kidding me? This makes the obligation of work a joy.

ACAN

Gracias, Tía Josefina.

JOSEFINA

Josie! Say my name like a hipster.

ACAN

Josie.

JOSEFINA

He is everything, isn't he?

MEDEA

He is.

JOSEFINA

The reason we live. Why we endure the pain of this country. This is all we have, Medea, this hope. Don't ever let him go.

MEDEA
Never.

JOSEFINA leaves as TITA ushers ACAN into the house. MEDEA is left alone in the yard. She looks towards the big buildings, contemplative. She goes toward the edge of the yard, but thinks better and backs off. ACAN enters the yard dressed in his Donovan soccer shirt. He can tell that MEDEA has seen it.

ACAN
Please?

She looks at him, torn, but loving him.

MEDEA
Gracias?...

ACAN
Gracias.

MEDEA
Axqueniuhqui.

(Yuck)

ACAN
Lo puedo decir en Espanol?

MEDEA nods her head no. ACAN grimaces, but says it.

ACAN (CONT'D)
Axqueniuhqui.

She smiles and he runs into the house.

FOUR

JASON steps into the yard, the wear of a work day under him. MEDEA is waiting for him.

MEDEA

Let's make love out here.

It catches him off guard.

JASON

Excuse me?

MEDEA

Let's make love out here.

He looks around, as if a joke is being played on him

JASON

In the yard?

MEDEA

You wanted to before.

JASON

Well, before it was late and I was horny. What is this all about?

MEDEA

I have a friend who has always wanted to make love outside and I remembered how we used to...

JASON

You have a friend?

MEDEA

Before we came here. We used to make love everywhere.

JASON

Because we had nowhere to go! It was a big country, *Mexico*. What about the neighbors?

MEDEA

We had neighbors back home.

JASON

We lived on a farm, all we had was God's eyes.

MEDEA

Are you ashamed of him now too, Mr. *Americano*?

JASON

God is looking at you, Medea.

MEDEA

He should, I look good.

JASON

Silly *niña*.

MEDEA

I don't want it to feel like a prison. I want to love in this yard and make it a special place for us. Like before.

JASON

Are you sure about this?

MEDEA

Nobody can see...

JASON

Tell me you can do this.

MEDEA

I think so.

He looks around the perimeter, horniness getting the better of him.

JASON

What the hell...

They giggle as MEDEA places a blanket on the floor. It's sweet and romantic as JASON begins to take off his shirt. They kneel on the blanket, like two young lovers and he slowly, cautiously almost, reaches out to gently touch her, softly kissing her. She is almost trembling.

I've missed you.

MEDEA

Me too.

They began to kiss and touch, it's sensual and sweet, JASON is taking his time, very careful.

We can see in his ease and patience that he is a great lover. He attempts to take something off MEDEA, she is trying her best to be brave, but as it goes on, you can see that she is beginning to suffocate, it's too much and she quickly freezes up in terror, trying to just breath.

I can't. I can't...

JASON

Okay...

MEDEA

I'm sorry.

JASON

It's okay...

The moment seems long and painful as they both get dressed.

Armida gave me another promotion. Half the day I am in the front office with her.

MEDEA

In the office with her, you don't think having a lady boss is strange?

JASON

She's older than me.

MEDEA

You are older than me.

JASON

It's not the same.

MEDEA

It's worse.

JASON

You have nothing to worry about, we like our women to be girls, then mothers, then grandmothers, and finally, saints.

MEDEA

And bosses?

JASON

They don't count.

JASON points to her breasts.

I promise that when these fall, I will make the trip down to kiss them.

They laugh.

She has big plans for me, Medea.

I told her that we own land in *Michoacan*...

MEDEA

Why would you do that? We don't own that land.

JASON

It doesn't matter. I didn't mention your brother.

MEDEA

Why would you say anything?

JASON

I had to... To get her to notice me. You think I'm the only one out there? All of a sudden, I wasn't just a worker, but a friend from back home. I told you it would open a door.

MEDEA

Be careful.

JASON

I'm doing this for the boy. Every nail I hammer, every wall I put up, every condo I build here in this country is for our son.

MEDEA

You don't have to tell her everything.

JASON

She's one of the biggest contractors in the *barrio*. She is counting on me. Months and months of standing in front of a Home Depot taking anything I can get, and now here I am. I can't let this slip away.

MEDEA

Don't get carried away, please, you know how you are.

JASON

I'm just lucky she likes me.

MEDEA

And don't flirt!

JASON

Whatever it takes...

(he smiles, she frowns)

So what if she has a little crush on me, I know why I am doing what I do, for my son. Besides, she wants to meet you.

MEDEA

She does?

JASON

She treats me like family, like a son, Medea. She's not so disconnected from the old country that she doesn't realize she needs a man.

MEDEA rolls her eyes.

Oh, come on. You need a man, why wouldn't she? Look at these hands - less drywall, more paperwork. Look at yours. These hands are too special to look this way.

She is letting us stay here.

MEDEA

She is? Here? Why didn't you tell me?

JASON

Would you prefer to live out in the San Fernando Valley? You don't even know where that is, do you? I hope you never do.

You need to learn to be of this place, Medea. Learn how to be American. This *barrio* is going to look very different very soon. So should you. Dress like them. Learn to talk like them. Be like this place. And you will see, we can be in charge, for once. One day this dream will be ours.

MEDEA

I love you, Jason.

He kisses her softly on the forehead.

JASON

Medea, there are things we have to do, to get ahead in this country. I want you to trust me.

MEDEA

I do.

JASON

I will do what is asked of me, for us, for the boy. There are going to be hard choices to make.

But no matter what, I want you to know your heart is mine always...

She reaches for his hand and places it on her chest. When she does, the loud sound of a heart beating can be heard.

FIVE

TITA enters and a new narrative starts, the company shifts into a different performance style, aided by sounds and images.

TITA

A year ago on a farm in *Zamora*, she says

MEDEA

'Vamonos'...

TITA

And off we go. To this America.

JASON grabs a backpack and a jug of water from the yard. MEDEA and TITA each grab a small duffel bag. ACAN clutches a toy and TITA's hand.

We walk to the edge of the farm. The four of us.
Medea, Jason, *el nino Acan*, y yo.

Barely anything we own between all of us.
We leave it all behind.

I wear *mis tenis*. Some water, food and a change of clothes, *es todo*.

Jason says...

JASON

"Don't worry, it's easy..."

TITA

A truck pulls up, old and beaten, like me.
No window, just a big box.

A truck for car parts and dead animals.

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

And still we get in.

Two men, stand and look at us.
They are like us, but they are also them. *Narcos*.
Killers of our country, they run everything now.

We lie to ourselves. We will carry something for them.

That is why this journey is cheap. But still more than
we can afford.

Jason pays, like we are getting on a bus. But this is
no bus.

"Two days" the driver says.

I look at Medea. She is more determined than I
have ever seen her.

The four of us join two young men looking for work -
Juan Felipe from our town - and a quiet man from *Morelia*.

I also see an older man from *Guatemala* holding a
bible. He is already tired, traveled so far.
I look at him and worry. But I worry more for Acan.

We pray for a safe trip.

They are joined by the actor playing Josefina.
A young girl runs up at the last minute, on her way
to *Arizona*. She is alone. I say, "Sit with me".

YOUNG GIRL
Gracias

TITA
The driver says, "Don't worry, I won't abandon you."

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

We don't know him and I don't understand why we would go in the middle of the night, but this is how it is done.

The road is full of bumps. We bounce around for hours. Filled with fear and dread. The driver sings to himself and perspires.

We are hot, sweating like animals, and burning up. No air in the back. I can feel that we are hiding our desperation. Please God, let the driver know what he is doing.

The old man holds his bible tightly.
The girl is afraid but tries not to show it.
We talk, look at each other, smile, distract and slowly the heat and the sweat quiets us.

So hard not to know anything, we take small breaths in silence.

All day we are moving, moving, moving, the endless hours.

We stop for a rest and the driver opens the door. We are all surprised. It is still light out. Our sense of time is gone.

The driver tells us
"We are going into the desert. We are near the border. Stay calm if we get stopped. I will bribe the patrol to let us go. This is going to be the hardest part. Drink water."

Even if I cannot see it, I can feel the desert.

Everyone is exhausted and struggles for breath.

You can see everyone's chest and stomach, up and down, trying to find and hold as little air as possible.

Maybe this is what the *Narcos* do.

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

They kill you before you arrive.

I didn't even bring a feather! An offering. Protection.
I am such a fool...

Time passes. Becomes desperation. We whimper.

Then the quiet man from *Morelia* pounds his fist on the wall of the truck. The driver stops. Unhooks the door and it opens widely. A gasp. We all breathe in the air.

The man from *Morelia* jumps off the truck.
"I'm done", he says. "It isn't worth it."

He starts walking away into the desert.
He screams to us "I have a terrible feeling. Be safe..."

Seven of us remain.
The door bolts shut.
We drive and drive, the only hope knowing it has to end.

Panic. No air. We find small holes on the floor of the truck. We lie down and stick our noses and mouths on the tiny openings. Like pigs, cows, off to slaughter. You can hear us gasping for air.

Suddenly, the truck brakes quickly. We are quiet and trying to hear.

The doors open. It is night.

Standing and staring at us, are soldiers from our country. They look at us. They are short, dark and in their green fatigues. They hold guns and rifles across their shoulders. They don't say anything.

Suddenly, two jump in grabbing the young girl. I try to hold onto her, but one of the soldiers slaps me across the face. She screams.

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

They pull her out of the truck. She is wild in her desperation.

I can see three of them dragging her off to the darkness of the desert.

The young girl, screaming, is dragged off by the soldier.

Her muffled screams. Unbearable. And then it stops...

We wait. Unsure of what to do. Do we run?

And then without warning they return.

Two grab Medea, who doesn't scream. She tries to hold her ground.

Jason, Acan and I hold on to her.
A soldier holds a gun to Jason's face. He is crying.
I try to push them away, but one points a gun towards Acan's head.

We don't know what to do. I can't let go of Medea.

She walks willingly into the desert with the soldier where she is raped.

TITA (CONT'D)

We wait. And wait.

They do what men do and they leave them out there.

After a while, you can hear drunken laughter.
They come back with their flashlights. They look in the truck again.

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

One of the soldier's gives a nod to the men and Jason and the other man run into the desert.

Meanwhile, the leader, a man who is boy, jumps onto the truck. He moves closer toward Acan. I stand in front of him. He laughs at me drunkenly.

SOLDIER

"You are too old for me, *vieja*."

TITA

I raise my hand. Two soldiers draw their guns. I scream "*AHMOTSIN!*"

He goes back a thousand years. His spirit understands. I don't take my eyes off of him. I am eating his heart and he knows it.

"Tlen mo tokatsin?"

I have become a serpent. I show him my teeth. His eyes widen in fear.

"Quizazsssss!"

He is shaken, unnerved, but... still the leader. He feigns a laugh and jumps off the truck. The soldiers slash the tires. They take the *Narco's* merchandise. And they leave.

JASON and MEDEA enter. He is holding her gently as she hobbles, limping.

Jason returns, holding Medea softly. She is in shock.

The other man has the young girl over his shoulder. She is now a carcass. No one weeps.

I sing to Acan softly.

She sings
'Cucurrucucú paloma...
Cucurrucucú, no llores.'

He never let's go of my hand.

We bury the girl in the desert. At least she gets rest.

We get the old man up and he lays his bible on her.
 I look at the moon. *Tlazocamati.*

TITA mimes picking herbs and sticking them in
her mouth as she chews but not swallows.

I go out into the desert and find our herbs. I make
 a concoction.

She spits it out into her hand and offers it to
MEDEA who eats it.

Medea drinks it. It kills the soldier inside her.

Morning comes. We begin to walk.

We walk for hours without talking or even looking
 at each other. The morning dew evaporates into
 thirsty afternoon. A lizard scrambles.

We find a shack. With water.
 And a little stall for a shower.

I wash away some of the dirt
 And some of the pain too.

But I still hear the girl screaming in the desert.
 And I see the face of a soldier who is a boy. And the
 old man, I can hear him sleep, with the bible at his
 side.

I let the water run and my tears follow
(she begins to cry)

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

Someone knocks, "You okay?"

"*Si, si, okay...*"

There is still more journey.

I ache just to think of it.

I keep thinking, they can never build a wall big
enough.

They never will, but they will always try.

To walk in the desert is to walk everywhere and nowhere.
But... after a while... It is clear...

There is no sign, no line, no welcome.

We are in the other America.

We are back in Boyle Heights at the house.

SIX

The backyard is transformed for a party. The wooden table is covered with plates, glasses and beers. JASON is dressed up. TITA has a rebozo draped across her shoulders. She sits on her milk crate away from the table. MEDEA looks beautiful in a simple traditional huipil. ARMIDA, la mera mera, is dressed in an elegant but simple shimmering striped blouse, skirt and big heels. She is truly a señora. It is post meal as the music fades to their laughter. They are all transfixed by a story.

ARMIDA

Sometimes I scream to all the people moving into Boyle Heights - "You are welcome, *pendejos!* If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't have central heating."

Do they think all these apartments were born this way?

JASON

That's right.

ARMIDA

I'm not saying that to be arrogant. That is something you learn in this country - to take pride and credit for the things that you do. Back home we are taught humility and silence. That doesn't work here, it's a sign of weakness.

Everything changes.

ARMIDA Looks at JASON.

It's the one constant in this industry, remember that.

(CONT'D)

*She gives JASON a familial pat on the hand
and MEDEA notices*

Nobody cared about this *barrio* for years. The city
fathers built four freeways through East L.A., do
you think they were trying to build community?

ARMIDA reaches for a beer, but it's empty.

MEDEA

I'll get you another one

MEDEA stands.

ARMIDA

No, you should let the *viejita* do it, that's her job
isn't it?

Viejita?

JASON

Tita!

*While they talk, TITA rises and slowly gets
another beer for ARMIDA. MEDEA sits.*

JASON (CONT'D)

So, missus, what is the trick to getting ahead?

ARMIDA

Marry them.

I said to myself, "If I am going to move ahead in this country, I am going to have to get me a *gabacho!*" I didn't buy him, I know that must sound like I got married just to get ahead, but I promise you, I loved him. Those things you cannot help.

MEDEA

You are married?

ARMIDA

Was. He's been gone almost ten years now. Rest his soul.

MEDEA and ARMIDA both do a sign of the cross.

His name was Yaroslavsky. He was Boyle Heights before any of us were here. But to me he was just Yaro. I used to take him to *fiestas* just to show him off. He was my life.

You need something to get by. We all do. We sacrificed a lot. We didn't even have time for children...

You can say that every building I own is a child of mine. They take just as much energy to keep up.

I know I'm lucky. Drive by a Home Depot and see all those men out front, and you will know that.

JASON

Missus, I've been meaning to ask you...

ARMIDA

Please...

JASON

How did you cross?

ARMIDA
I flew.

MEDEA

You flew?

ARMIDA

It wasn't like it is now. I bought a Student Visa and a dress from Ann Taylor. Do you know what that is?

MEDEA shakes head no.

It's a dress for women who are in business, you can't spread your legs, the skirt is too tight...

TITA finally hands her a beer.

Thank you...

And I had a certificate from Los Angeles City College, where I had registered by mail using a P.O. Box, remember those?

No one knows what that is, but she continues talking.

When I landed at LAX, the customs agent was a very serious Polish man who towered over me. He looked like he worked in a prison. I gave him my Student Visa and he barked, "What classes are you taking?"

He was trying to make me nervous, but you see, the dress was firmly in place. I quickly shot back, "Business Management".

He wasn't convinced and he volleyed back, "And why do you want to take that?"

I smiled, looked him directly in the face and said, "So that I can be your boss!"

She laughs and takes a swig.

Nowadays, I have a cousin who walked through the desert, swam through the ocean, and still they caught her at a McDonald's in *San Ysidro!*

I told her she would have done better at the Olympics...

JASON

Missus, in my humble opinion, it's not luck, it's work.

TITA

(to herself)

Now he has humble opinions...

ARMIDA

I reel them in with a shot of tequila, some cleavage and then... BAM! We do business! Enough about me, let's talk about that *mole*.

A proud JASON looks at MEDEA.

MEDEA

A family recipe.

ARMIDA raises her glass.

ARMIDA

To Medea's family recipe!

MEDEA

They are Tita's recipes.

ARMIDA turns to look at TITA.

ARMIDA

Viejita, you are the cook?

TITA

No, the slave *pendeja*...

MEDEA

TITA!

JASON stands up. ARMIDA reaches for his hand and makes him sit.

ARMIDA

Now now, *viejita*, you know that we don't have slaves in this country anymore.

TITA

Then how do you make your money?

JASON shakes his head in disgust, but ARMIDA laughs. She looks at MEDEA.

ARMIDA

I am sure she's worth all that, if just for the *mole*.
(to TITA)

Why don't you come sit with us?

TITA

No.

MEDEA

She's of another time.

ARMIDA

Like you?

MEDEA is embarrassed.

Is that why you fell in love with her, Jason?

He doesn't say anything, MEDEA offers.

MEDEA

He fell in love with me because he thought I was a bird.

ARMIDA

(smiling)

A bird?

JASON

It's silly.

MEDEA

Silly?

ARMIDA

Silly or not, I want to know.

Although hurt, MEDEA keeps her cool.

MEDEA

No, he's right. It's 'silly'... I am sure you have more important things to talk about.

ARMIDA puts her hand on MEDEA's with force, there is nothing reassuring about it,

ARMIDA

I want to hear it.

MEDEA looks at JASON.

MEDEA

Jason and I grew up near each other but he went all the way to *Irapuato* to join the army when he was young.

JASON

I deserted.

(He looks at MEDEA)

It's okay, I told her. They thought I lived in *Irapuato* so it was easy to come back home.

MEDEA

He came back to *Michoacan* and hid on our little farm. He knew my brother. In *Zamora* there are a lot of farms, someone always leaves you a little something to get by outside your door - one day a chicken, another day a *tamale* still steaming from the pot, but Jason was in love with the birds.

ARMIDA

A bird watcher?

MEDEA

Just one bird, *El Guaco*.

ARMIDA

The bird of *Michoacan*...

MEDEA

That's right, in the fields picking, he hears this call.

MEDEA cups her hands and does the most amazing bird call. It sounds like a song.

Gwa, Gwa, Gwa...

During the day it is the music of the land, a *Guaco's* notes travel far.

ARMIDA

I remember that.

MEDEA

A storm arrived and everyone was running to get under a tree, but Jason hears the call of *El Guaco* and thinks to him self "I know that bird is hiding in a dry place and I am going to find it!" He starts running towards the call and as he gets closer he sees that it is not a bird at all, but me imitating *El Guaco*. I was just a girl, muddy, with no shoes, playing in the rain...

JASON

And already so beautiful and ripe for the taking.

Impulsively, MEDEA reaches over and kisses JASON on the lips, who becomes visibly embarrassed. ARMIDA stares at her. MEDEA walks away from the table.

ARMIDA

Okay, enough about birds.

ARMIDA looks at JASON.

Jason, can I have a moment alone with your little *Guaco*?

MEDEA clearly does not want the moment alone, but JASON is dutiful.

JASON

It's fine. You should talk. I should go be with the night crew.

MEDEA

Tonight?

JASON kisses MEDEA on the forehead. He hugs ARMIDA. He looks at TITA.

JASON

Tita, the plates.

Sensing something, TITA sits instead.

TITA

No no, I tired...

JASON disgusted, leaves. ARMIDA looks at TITA for a moment, smiles and then, looks away.

MEDEA

I didn't know you owned this building. Thank you for letting us stay here.

ARMIDA

I buy these properties but I never go in. Jason goes out to the sites and gives me a report. You're a beautiful young woman.

MEDEA

Thank you.

ARMIDA

You look like where we came from. It's very comforting. I see you and think about the part of myself that I have lost...

You know I have big plans for Jason.

MEDEA

You are like a mother to him.

ARMIDA

No. That is not how I work. He has a lot of potential. He is very willing. But the question is, are you?

MEDEA

For his success, always.

ARMIDA

What about yours? He says you are a legend in the *barrio* with your sewing. He showed me some of your work...

MEDEA

He did?

ARMIDA

I want you to make me something.

MEDEA

It would be my honor.

ARMIDA

But he says you don't get out much...We can set up a shop for you, rent - free. I just bought a strip mall in Montebello. I could put you between a 7-11 and a Subway Sandwiches.

MEDEA

No, thank you.

ARMIDA
No?

MEDEA
It's too much, I couldn't.

ARMIDA
You need to stop thinking that way.

MEDEA
What way?

ARMIDA
Like an immigrant...The reason I ask is because every request I have for Jason will affect you as well. I am bringing him more and more into my business because he never says no. I am hoping that you will not either.

MEDEA
Well, he is very clear about the decisions he makes.

ARMIDA
He is very hungry. Are you as ambitious as him?

MEDEA
With all due respect, *Señora Armida*, I think it is a wife's duty...

ARMIDA
But you're not married.

MEDEA
Excuse me?

ARMIDA
You are not married.

MEDEA
He told you that?

ARMIDA

I don't mean to be cruel, Medea, my time is short. I don't tell stories about birds.

MEDEA is caught off guard.

MEDEA

Forgive me. I don't understand you.

ARMIDA

You don't have to. Jason says you're not married.

MEDEA

I don't know why he would say that.

ARMIDA

I do.

MEDEA tries to recover. ARMIDA looks over at TITA and smiles.

MEDEA

We don't have a piece of paper, but we have something more important.

ARMIDA

What is that?

MEDEA

A child.

ARMIDA

That's when he should have married you.

MEDEA

That's not always our custom.

ARMIDA

A family from *Zamora*, your parents must have been praying for it...

MEDEA

I don't mean to be rude, *Señora Armida*, but family matters are personal.

ARMIDA

Jason tells me everything.

MEDEA

Not meant for strangers!

ARMIDA

I'm not a stranger, little girl.

MEDEA

I think we have spoken enough.

ARMIDA

All my years here, the hard work, would be in vain if I didn't make sure something survived, to live beyond me. Do you understand?

MEDEA

I think you should go.

ARMIDA

I will leave the house that I own when I am ready.

Just then, ACAN runs in, dressed in his pajamas, kicking the soccer ball. This stops ARMIDA in her tracks.

ACAN

Armida!

This shocks MEDEA and she looks at ARMIDA who smiles at the boy. ACAN runs to ARMIDA and hugs her.

ARMIDA

Como estas, mi amor?

MEDEA

Acan!

ARMIDA does not let ACAN go.

ARMIDA

Give him room to grow, Medea.

MEDEA

Acan...

ARMIDA

If you hold on too tight, I promise, you will get hurt...

ARMIDA holds ACAN in her arms as the lights fade. ARMIDA leaves as ACAN goes to a skateboard in the yard.

SEVEN

MEDEA and ACAN in the yard. He is holding his skateboard.

MEDEA

Where are your *huaraches*?

ACAN

Dad threw them away.

MEDEA tries her best to keep calm.

MEDEA

Where did you get that?

ACAN

From someone...

MEDEA

Someone?

(Hesitant.)

You can tell me.

ACAN

Armida.

MEDEA

Señora Armida.

ACAN

It's just Armida, *Mami*..

MEDEA

She told you to call her that?

He doesn't say anything.
She's *Papi's* friend?

ACAN

I think so. We go to her house.

MEDEA

Her house? What do you do there?

ACAN

Play Wii.

MEDEA

Wii? What is that?

ACAN

You wouldn't know, you don't even have a cell.

Hey, do you want me to ask her if you can come to her house?

MEDEA

Is that all you do, play Wii?

ACAN

We swim.

MEDEA

Who swims?

ACAN

Me. Dad.

MEDEA

Does he work there?

ACAN

Are you going to ask me everything?

MEDEA

Does he, does he work there?

ACAN

I don't know!

MEDEA

What do you like about *Señora Armida*?

ACAN

She dresses funny.

MEDEA

She does?

ACAN

She wears all these clothes that shine with squiggly lines, even her swimming suit has shiny lines on it.

MEDEA

She swims?

ACAN

It's her house, what do you think!

Mami, I was thinking... Can you make her something?

MEDEA

What do you mean?

ACAN

A dress. With shiny lines on it, she would like that.
Can you please?

*It's too much and MEDEA turns away from him.
Are you okay, Mami?*

MEDEA

I have a headache.

ACAN

Try making her a dress, I bet it will make you feel better.

*MEDEA does not turn back.
Can I go outside?*

MEDEA

Yes, go, be careful.

*ACAN gets on his skateboard and starts to
roll away.*

ACAN

Make her a dress!!

He is gone. MEDEA looks at TITA.

EIGHT

TITA gets the banana leaves from the yard and hands them to MEDEA. MEDEA turns and holds the leaves up.

TITA

Clear your mind.

MEDEA

The Four Directions, to the ancestors.

TITA

Who are you?

MEDEA

I am *El Guaco*, the mighty falcon gripping my hurt in my claws. I must make an offering. I flap my wings and they reward me with the gift of sound.

TITA

You must come to *el conjuro*, clean, pure.

*The jolting sound of the horn on Josefina's cart.
Ay, pinche Josefina, me asusto!*

MEDEA puts down the leaves, defeated. We hear Josefina shout..

JOSEFINA

MUÑECAS!

TITA

I am getting tired of all that bread...

They turn and wait for her. JOSEFINA enters with a bag of pan dulce.

JOSEFINA

Hola ladies.

TITA takes the bag from her and feigns surprise.

TITA

Oh *pan dulce!* Gracias, Josefina.

JOSEFINA

Josie, *viejita!*

JOSEFINA hugs MEDEA.

Sister, I love my dress. When I put it on it makes me feel like I should be on television. Now, feel free to say no, I won't be hurt, but I brought some fabric for another one. Is that okay?

MEDEA

For a friend, of course.

JOSEFINA

Let me kiss your hands.

MEDEA

Don't be silly.

JOSEFINA

There's nothing silly about the gifts that God gives you, right, *viejita?*

TITA nods her head.

You look tired Medea. If it's too much, don't worry about the dress.

MEDEA

I need to be busy, my mind fills with thoughts day and night. Sewing clears my head.

JOSEFINA

Oh! By the way, I talked to my husband! He agreed that when he comes back, we are going to do it more often, including Wednesdays.

TITA

Que bueno.

JOSEFINA

I even stopped crying. Apparently, I was much louder than I realized and I was waking the family that rents us our garage.

MEDEA

Good for you.

JOSEFINA

I changed my life once. I can do it again. I came to this country like everyone - to survive.

I put my head to the ground and worked, at first, just in the fields, but then out of the blue, one night I bake an old family recipe for my husband, an *empanada de calabaza*. And he tells me I should sell some during the soccer games at *el hoyo*, and sure enough everyone starts buying my bread and I go from *empanadas* to *conchas* and before I knew it I had enough to buy my cart. And by the grace of God, no one hassles me on the street. I do have a sign that says, "All police eat for free"

TITA

She does.

She looks at MEDEA and debates telling her.

JOSEFINA

Medea, you okay?

MEDEA

What do you mean?

JOSEFINA

I feel embarrassed telling you this...

MEDEA

You say what you need to, Josie.

JOSEFINA

They are talking about you.

MEDEA

Who is?

JOSEFINA

I am telling you this as your sister. Be careful *mi costurera*. Can I ask you something?

MEDEA

We have been open books, Josie.

JOSEFINA

Do you talk to Jason?

MEDEA

What do you mean?

JOSEFINA

Does he treat you like a husband from back home or do you tell each other everything like they do in this country?

MEDEA

I think so.

JOSEFINA

Has he told you his plans?

MEDEA

Yes...

JOSEFINA

And you are okay with them?

MEDEA

Why wouldn't I be?

JOSEFINA

Oh, I didn't realize you were so modern, is that why you never married him?

MEDEA

Who told you that?

JOSEFINA

You need the Marriage Certificate in this country, Medea.

MEDEA

Our faith is in each other.

JOSEFINA

That's not the way it works for us. The rules for people like us are very old and clear.

MEDEA

You are not being very clear, Josie.

JOSEFINA

What is Jason doing with Armida?

Afraid to taint her husband.

MEDEA

He is her employee.

JOSEFINA

Is that what he says?

MEDEA

It may be just a job, but he takes it very seriously.

JOSEFINA

You don't have your Immigration papers, do you?

MEDEA

Is that all the women on the street do, talk about each other?

JOSEFINA

Don't tell anyone, Medea. *En serio*. They will use it against you.

JOSEFINA looks at TITA and MEDEA.

You don't know what is going on, do you?

MEDEA

Josie! If you have something to say, just say it.

JOSEFINA

Even in a *barrio* like this, Medea, someone always wants to be king. A city, a *barrio*, a *rancho*, it doesn't matter, someone always wants to rule. And the truth is there is always someone like Jason, someone with his ambition, who wants it... but, *mi costurera*, I'm not sure they are offering you queen.

Silence.

I should go. Can Tita deliver the dress?

Medea goes to the sewing machine and begins to work. TITA looks at JOSEFINA, who starts to go.

I said too much. That's the thing about this country, too many rules for speaking. Next time I'll make up the truth and I'm sure they'll make me president. I'll see you on the street, *viejita*.

JOSEFINA is gone. TITA looks at MEDEA.

TITA

It's just the things they say on the street. I've heard it, but I don't believe it. If you believe it, Medea, then I will believe it too. You know Jason, he's nothing if he's not liked.

MEDEA stops sewing.

TITA (CONT'D)

But he's keeping too many secrets.

(END OF SCENE)

NINE

JASON enters, dressed in a work suit. Medea is waiting for him.

MEDEA

Why are you swimming in her pool?

JASON

Who told you that?

MEDEA

Is that what you do for work?

JASON

Of course not. I am doing what she asks, Medea.
What the boss asks for.

MEDEA

Does she care that you are married?

JASON

Why are you listening to what people are saying?
Who is spreading all this gossip?

TITA

Everyone knows your *chisme, cabron*.

JASON

Callate la boca! Stop filling her head with lies.

TITA

Not lies!

JASON

Don't listen to her, she hangs out in the gutter.

TITA

This man is filled with secrets, Medea.

JASON

The only secret I have is how much I do for all of us.
You too, *chismosa*!

We all have to sacrifice. This is an opportunity that will not come again. You and I both know that. This is what we have been waiting for. Yes, she has me by the balls and she's going to make me work for it, but you know that I can't live with a foot always on my neck. You know that is not me. I don't have to be king, but something better than beggar.

TITA

She doesn't have the experience that you have, Jason. Can't you see that? She doesn't live out there like you do.

JASON

Is that my fault? You know I have tried, Medea.
Don't make me feel bad for trying.

When *Memo* and *Quique's* wives went to work at the Holiday Inn, I told you to go. It wasn't just a job. It was a chance to go downtown, to see how it works, to make friends.

Your mind is full of thoughts because you lock yourself in here day and night.

MEDEA

I work like you, Jason!

JASON

Yes, and too much, Medea.

This is not a job for the city. We can't keep living in the past when the future is calling us. What we want is waiting for us.

MEDEA

This is more than what we ever wanted.

JASON

More than what you ever wanted.

What are you worried about? Her? Let her flirt, let her fall in love, it's a small price to pay.

Everyone pays in this country. My heart is here, with you, always. We've worked so hard for this.

MEDEA breaks down.

MEDEA

It's too much.

JASON is surprised by the intensity of her feelings, he goes to hug her.

I have an idea...

JASON

What?

MEDEA

Marry me.

JASON

Medea...

MEDEA

Marry me. Make it real.

JASON

You're being silly.

MEDEA

It's just a paper, right? Most of the people here don't believe in it anyway. Some of them do it five, six times. If all they want is a contract, let's make one. Maybe then Armida will see us differently.

JASON

It's not like that.

MEDEA can't control herself.

MEDEA

Tell me you don't love her!

TITA

Medea...

MEDEA

TELL ME...

A beat. JASON sees her desperation.

JASON

I don't love her.

She breaks.

MEDEA

Thank you... Oh God, I feel so ridiculous right now. I'm acting like a little girl. I am sorry, but I can't control my feelings. I've become some jealous fool inventing things in my head. I hate myself for it. But... I can't help it. I am... so full of so many feelings.

A moment of embarrassment perhaps, thoughts running in her head, an immature idea.

Let's put a curse on her.

JASON

What?

MEDEA

Yes, un mal de ojo.

TITA

Niña!

MEDEA

Tita showed me how to do it once. She will suffer so she'll have to give you more power.

He pushes her away.

JASON

Why would you even think of doing such a thing?
That's childish.

MEDEA

You said it yourself - she's ruthless. This will humble her. She will share with you even more. You get what you need even quicker. That's your plan, isn't it?

JASON

It's not like that. She's one of us, Medea, our *gente!*

MEDEA

She may be from back home, but she is not one of us.

JASON

She's a door, Medea. That's all she is. A door. What's important is that she has given us an opportunity, a chance, to get what we want.

MEDEA

Then, *un mal de ojo* for *Tía Armida!*

JASON steps even farther away. TITA steps in.

JASON

You can't do that, Medea.

MEDEA

Why not?

TITA

Yes, why not?

JASON

Listen to me...this is going to sound more ridiculous than what it is, but I promise you, it's not what it seems.

MEDEA

Tell me...

*Beat. He stares at her, sees her desperation.
He cannot lie to her.*

JASON

I married her.

MEDEA

WHAT!

TITA

Hijo de la chingada...

JASON

It's not what you think. In name only! It was nothing. They do it all the time. She set it all up --? a business transaction.

MEDEA

Oh my God...

JASON

She's even going to give us some money for it! Lots of people do it, people who have never even met. It's just a way, to keep a business alive, a way to stay in the country.

TITA

Que te dije!

JASON

It wasn't what you think it is. We went to a court building. Like getting a permit to build property. That's all it was. It was just like going to do taxes, a transaction.

MEDEA

Why, Jason?

JASON

She made me an offer I didn't want to lose.

She slaps him hard across the face. He takes it.

Once you realize what we are going to get out of this, you will forgive me. I know you will. Do you think anything in this country is free? It all comes with a price, Medea.

She can barely bring herself to ask. JASON glares at TITA.

MEDEA

Did you make love to her?

He can't bring himself to look at her. He can't answer.

GET OUT!

JASON

If she adopts Acan, he will inherit what she has.

TITA

Nunca!

JASON

It's just business. We put him on a piece of paper. It's that simple. Don't complicate it with your feelings, Medea. I haven't.

MEDEA

And what about me?

JASON

You will always be my wife.

MEDEA spits into his face, and without warning, JASON grabs her by the hair and drags her away from TITA, who screams.

(in a rageful whisper)

We all have secrets, don't forget!

TITA grabs the large rusted machete in the yard and moves toward JASON. More hurt than scared, JASON runs out. TITA looks at MEDEA.

TEN

ARMIDA enters. TITA backs away.

ARMIDA

I want you out.

MEDEA

Out? Where will we go?

ARMIDA

That's not for me to answer, you just can't stay here. Not in this house. Not in this city. You need to disappear.

MEDEA

You invited us to live here.

ARMIDA

I invited him. Let's not make things ugly. We can shake hands, smile and be done with it.

ARMIDA goes to shake her hand. MEDEA backs away.

He's not yours to keep, Medea.

MEDEA

He is my life.

ARMIDA

Listen, I'm not blaming you. In this world, men are allowed mistakes. I didn't make the rules. I'll tell you what, name a price.

MEDEA

I could never put a price on our bond.

ARMIDA

He has.

MEDEA

I have his child.

ARMIDA

I am giving Acan his future.

MEDEA

Acan is staying with me.

ARMIDA

I want you out of here by tonight.

MEDEA

Tonight?

ARMIDA

This is not a hotel.

MEDEA

Where will we go...

ARMIDA

Acan is staying with us.

MEDEA

NO!

ARMIDA

Young lady, I am going to take you to court and make a case for why the child should not be allowed to stay with someone who has been living in the country illegally, when his father, recently married, is already working on obtaining the boy's citizenship. And let's not forget that you have been working without papers in a sweatshop you made in your house without the landlord's permission.

MEDEA

You will invent anything.

ARMIDA

I didn't create the laws of this country, I just use them for negotiation. By the way, I am taking the old lady.

MEDEA

Tita?

ARMIDA

We don't want Acan to suffer. He needs her. I am going to cut out her tongue. But you, I want you out.

MEDEA bows her head and drops to her knees, something very old, and sadly pathetic.

MEDEA

Please...

ARMIDA

Don't do this to yourself, Medea.

MEDEA

I am begging you.

ARMIDA reaches down and touches her face, pulling it up from the chin to look at her.

ARMIDA

Look at me. We don't need your shame.

I can give him what he wants.

MEDEA

Please, I beg like a dog.

ARMIDA

Don't beg, it's pathetic.

MEDEA

I am pathetic. I am a wetback, *una mojada*. Show me mercy. I need time. Just a little bit. A moment. Hours.

ARMIDA

It's too late.

MEDEA

I will give you anything.

ARMIDA

Anything?

TITA looks on in horror. MEDEA looks at her for a moment and then back to ARMIDA.

MEDEA

I will...

(she starts to cry)

leave Acan.

ARMIDA

Very good.

MEDEA

Grant me a day. Let me go with my dignity, please.

ARMIDA thinks.

ARMIDA

It might be hard to believe Medea, but I was there once. Where you are now...

Exhales.

One day. Twenty-four hours. Make them matter.

MEDEA

Oh, I will.

ARMIDA

But if you are not out in a day, I will call the *migra* myself.

You are invisible now Medea. Get lost in this country.

ARMIDA leaves and MEDEA rushes to her sewing machine, as she begins to furiously sew away.

ELEVEN

The sound of the horn on the cart. Medea is caught off guard. JOSEFINA enters.

JOSEFINA

Oh, I am so happy you asked for me. I missed you, friends.

MEDEA

Josie, thank you for coming.

TITA

You're the closest thing to family. We have no one.

MEDEA

Desperate

Please, I need your help.

JOSEFINA

My friend...

MEDEA

Sister. I won't make it without you. I need a place to stay.

JOSEFINA

I thought you couldn't leave the house?

The thought of it happening hits her for the first time. She looks out.

MEDEA

I am going to have to...

JOSEFINA

What did that bastard do to you?

MEDEA

He lost his way.

JOSIE

Medea, listen to me, you can't raise Acan here in the city on your own. You will lose him, to gangs or drugs or worse. Please, go back home. It's our country.

MEDEA

I can't. It's not mine anymore.

JOSEFINA

Why Medea? I swear, that is where you should be.

Josefina goes to her and kisses her hands.

If someone like you, so much of the old world, can't go back, how can I? Tell me what happened to you, I need to know.

MEDEA

I can't.

JOSEFINA

Please sister, if I am going to help you, I want to know that I did it because you are family, and that we keep no secrets between us.

MEDEA turns to look at TITA, who comes to her and hugs her.

TITA

Tell her. She is family. Let the secret that is Acat stay here in this country.

A moment has arrived for MEDEA. Something clicks in her, maybe hurt. She pulls away and gives herself an ancient permission.

MEDEA

Tla xihuallauh... Tlatecuin...

She conjures

My brother, Acat, my twin... was born three full minutes after me, but he inherited everything. That is because women do not contribute, we adorn, that is our country. I loved him. He was my equal, but he was born a man.

I took care of my father. I did everything for him and my brother. We fed the animals. We planted the crop. We were servants. Our land was small, but it was rich with resource, but he and my brother wasted it.

When *mi Papa* got sick, we made a potion but it was too late. Cancer had spread through most of his body. In his last days, I soothed his fears, made sure he was comfortable. I can still see him on his deathbed, cigarette in hand, barking orders, hour after hour...

In his last moment, he pushed me aside and asked to speak to my twin. My brother ushered me out of the room. Even then, I could tell that something was changing in him, by the second. My father willed him the land, giving him everything that was on it, including me.

When he died, I wept for him, but Acat did not. No grief, just ownership. Everything was his and he knew it. Honestly, I didn't care, I knew we would go.

It was Jason's dream to come here, to *El Norte*. All I could think about was making his dream come true, this man who gave me so much happiness.

(MORE)

MEDEA (CONT'D)

I went to tell my brother that we would be leaving, but he said that I belonged to the farm like one of the animals. What? I couldn't believe that came out of his mouth. We had never spoken like that, he was... my other. We shared a language.

We argued, we had never argued like that before, and then...he hit me. Hit me... He had never laid a hand on me until that moment. But, you see, I wasn't his sister anymore. I was property. And just like that, he said, "Get back to work."

He couldn't even look at me. It made me so angry. I don't know where it came out of me, my love for Jason, I guess, but I screamed at the top of my lungs, "I AM LEAVING!"

It feels like a blur now, but he grabbed me by the hair and dragged me out to where the pigs were and threw me in the muddy pen. I was in shock. He just kept hitting me... Slapping and punching, I didn't know what to do...

I ran to where the banana tree was, I could hear him close behind, cursing me. I was struggling for breath. It was as if a dark spirit was right there in front of me. I reached for the first thing that I could find, the *machete* we used to cut down the leaves...

JOSEFINA

Medea, no...

MEDEA

He said he would take Acan and destroy Jason. Our dreams...I was so afraid. I called on the gods and asked for protection. *Y nada*.

He lunged at me and I lifted the blade, to scare him...

MEDEA (CONT'D)

but all I could feel was the weight of his body
against mine, my brother, my twin, Acat... His body
fell, bloodied, and the pigs...they were so ravenous,
they descended on him, I ran out...

I wanted to scream, but no sound would come out.
It was as if I wasn't there at all.

JOSEFINA

Oh, Medea...

It's as if a spell is broken. TITA goes to her.

MEDEA

In lak ech. I killed the other me.

JOSEFINA

You did what you had to do...

MEDEA

That night we left. Jason's dream. I wanted it for
him so badly...He is my only love.

TITA

Even after what he's done to you?

MEDEA

I'll make him come back.

TITA bows her head in disgust.

JOSEFINA

Ai Dios... Medea, my *corazon* is breaking. Please
forgive me, but I can't help you anymore, my sister.

MEDEA

What?

JOSEFINA

I can't risk this. Jason is helping me to get a little bakery at a strip-mall in Montebello. Armida owns the property. I can't be in the middle of things, you understand.

MEDEA

I don't.

JOSEFINA

Medea, you know us. In the end, we're tribal. How can I not want to help you survive this place? But, you need to understand how things work here. It's just the way it is here.

MEDEA

Josie, just go.

JOSEFINA

I can't risk this. It took me so long just to get this far. This is my dream, Medea.

MEDEA

Pues, entonces.

JOSEFINA quickly leaves

TWELVE

MEDEA goes into the house and returns with a box.

MEDEA

Get yourself ready.

TITA

Are we going?

MEDEA

You are going to go to Armida's house. Josie gave you her address. Take a taxi.

TITA

You're going to let go of me, just like that?

MEDEA

Jason is right. I've been too selfish. He said it best - she is a door. That is what I am going to make her. You are going to deliver this gift, as a sign of gratitude for the few hours in this house that Armida has granted us.

Acan asked me to make her a dress. *A su estilo*. I made it of a fabric that glimmers and shines, something with movement for her....

TITA

Por favor, guardate la brujeria. I beg you.

MEDEA

Don't beg! We never will again. Armida has given us a gift, now we give her one back.

Did the box just move? MEDEA hands it to TITA.

Go!

TITA leaves with the box in hand.

FOURTEEN

JASON enters the yard. He pulls out a stack of money, folds it in half and hands it to MEDEA.

JASON

Let me know if you need more. Have the boy ready in the morning. You don't need to pack anything. He has better clothes at Armida's.

MEDEA

Even I know this is not how one succeeds in this country.

JASON

Medea, listen to me, the price you paid for coming here. I'll never be able to forgive myself for not being able to protect you. Never. But to come this far, even after all that, and not take what is ours, it would be a sin. I never stopped loving you.

MEDEA

I know.

(MORE)

MEDEA (CONT'D)

JASON goes to MEDEA and kisses her.

JASON

Me voy...

MEDEA

I'll be waiting....

JASON leaves the house.

FIFTEEN

Silence. Time. Waiting. TITA walks into the yard, dazed and in shock. Drops of blood on her clothes and face. She looks up and sees MEDEA on the stairs. In another part of the stage, ARMIDA appears in another space with the gift box.

TITA

Armida opens the gift. A smile.

I'm so stupid, I think nothing of it...

The dress is so delicate and vibrant. Your best work, Medea...

Hundreds of threads, sitting side-by-side, shimmering, like rain on a sidewalk.

She is in awe of the construction. She makes me promise to thank you...

Then it hits me... but it's too late...

The dress begins to slither...

The movement confuses her. The threads are alive and quickly encircle her. They begin to squeeze. She panics and jerks, but their constriction holds her with a vengeance.

The ones in the middle tighten, and violently shrink her waist. She bleeds from her nose and mouth. There is nothing I can do. She is terrified and shrieking.

Jason runs in, the look on his face...All he can do is watch, it is happening so quickly.

(MORE)

TITA (CONT'D)

Armida tries to pull the dress off her, but the seams strike her hands with their sharp fangs. She starts to convulse. Armida's body is exploding.

She tries to say something to Jason, she never takes her eyes off him.

A last breath. He pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket. He leans down and places it over her face and... kisses her.

MEDEA

What?

TITA

He starts to cry. He begs her forgiveness. He weeps like a little boy.

MEDEA

No...

TITA

Me traicionaste!

TITA walks up to MEDEA and slaps her. She goes out of the yard and down the street.

SIXTEEN

ACAN enters. He looks different, almost a completely new outfit.

MEDEA

Mocehui. Let's do our poem.

ACAN

I don't want to.

MEDEA

Que?

ACAN

He goes into the house, a vision of his father, as he speaks...

Mom, speak English.

Slowly, MEDEA turns and looks up at the house. She begins to walk toward it, following after him. She looks at the banana tree, stops and reaches over for the machete that sits next to the banana leaves. Slowly she climbs the stairs. There is tense silence. And then...

Mami?

Mami! No!

Papi! Papi!

Mami!

Noooooooo...

A bloody hacking sound. Off in the distance we hear JASON scream...

JASON

(off stage)

MEDEEEEEAAAAA.

JASON bolts into the yard desperate and out of breath. He pounds on the door trying to kick it down. It slowly opens and MEDEA walks out, dazed, dripping in blood and holding the bloody machete. JASON backs away. MEDEA leaves the yard and JASON makes his way into the house searching desperately.

ACAN! ACAN!

JASON, frantic, as we can hear him pushing and pulling at doors.

No... No...

And then a scream when he finds him...

MI HIJOOOOOOOOOOO.

EPILOGUE

JASON enters, bloodied by his child. He falls to his knees in the center of the yard. TITA enters and watches from behind the fence. JOSEFINA enters and watches from behind the fence as well.

Time passes. Day to night.

JASON sits in the yard.

He looks up at the moon.

From somewhere deep in the barrio, we hear a woman's voice answering back.

MEDEA

Gwa, gwa, gwa...

We see MEDEA in flight, a dress of Guaco feathers, her wings make a great sound. MEDEA looks out over the barrio. And off she goes... The sound of flight is drowned out by the sound of a helicopter quickly approaching.

- EL FIN -