

HEROES AND SAINTS
&
OTHER PLAYS

*Giving Up the Ghost,
Shadow of a Man, Heroes and Saints*

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West End Press

Before day breaks we shall
set out from these yards and
reach their city . . . in the dawn
showing in public places the full extent of our misery
appealing to anything with a human look.
What will come after, I don't know.

St. Joan of the Stockyards

"Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds,
water the fields, and gather the crops . . ."

For Aztlán's Children

Heroes and Saints had its world premiere on April 4, 1992, at El Teatro Misión of San Francisco, produced by Brava! For Women in the Arts under the artistic direction of Ellen Gavin. It included the following cast (in order of appearance):

Cerezita Valle	Jaime Lujan
Dolores	Juanita Estrada
Ana Pérez	Charo Toledo
Amparo	Viola Lucero
Bennie	Anna Marina Bensaud
Yolanda	Jennifer Proctor
Mario	Angelo Pagán
Father Juan	Hector Correa
Don Gilberto	Gary Martínez

It was directed by Albert Takazauckas, with sets by Barbara Mesney and Birch Thomas, lighting design by Kurt Landisman, sound design by Maurice Tani, and visual design installation by Estér Hernández.

Heroes and Saints was initially commissioned through José Luis Valenzuela's Latino Lab of the Los Angeles Theatre Center and was performed as a staged reading on October 7, 1989, under the direction of José Guadalupe Saucedo. The play was also presented in the Latin American Theatre Artist Staged Reading Series in San Francisco on April 28, 29, and 30, 1991, under the direction of the author.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Although *Heroes and Saints* is fiction, it came in response to the numerous events that took place in 1988 which brought growing visibility to the United Farm Workers' grape boycott in protest against pesticide poisoning. The greatest public attention came as a result of the 36-day fast by the president of the union, Cesar Chávez, which ended on August 21, 1988. Less than a month later, the vice-president of the union, Dolores Huerta, was brutally beaten by a San Francisco policeman while holding a press conference protesting George Bush's refusal to honor the boycott.

Behind the scenes of these events are the people whose personal tragedy inspired a national political response. In the town of McFarland in the San Joaquin Valley of California, a so-called cancer cluster was discovered. Within a ten-year period from 1978 to 1988, a highly disproportionate number of children were diagnosed with cancer and were born with birth defects. After viewing the UFW's documentary video *The Wrath of Grapes*, which describes the McFarland situation, an image remained in my mind—a child with no arms or legs, born of a farm worker mother. The mother had been picking in pesticide-sprayed fields while her baby was still in the womb. This child became Cerezita, a character who came to me when I wondered of the child's future as we turn into the next century.

I want to thank Luis Valdez for his play *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*, whose head character became, for me, a point of departure. I also wish to thank El Teatro Campesino for allowing me access to their archives on the McFarland situation. I am indebted to Marta Salinas, a mother and one of the chief organizers in McFarland, who opened her home and the homes of other McFarland families to me. The character of Doña Amparo is my tribute to her, as it is to Dolores Huerta, a woman whose courage and relentless commitment to Chicano/a freedom has served as a source of inspiration to two generations of Chicanas.

Finally, I dedicate this play to the memory and legacy of Cesar Chávez.

CHARACTERS

CEREZITA VALLE, *the head*
 AMPARO, *the comadre and activista*
 ANA PEREZ, *the news reporter*
 DOLORES, *the mother*
 BONNIE, *a neighbor's child "adopted" by AMPARO and DON GILBERTO*
 YOLANDA, *the hairdresser sister*
 MARIO, *the sometimes-student brother*
 FATHER JUAN, *the "half-breed" leftist priest*
 DON GILBERTO, *the compadre, AMPARO's husband*
 POLICEMAN
 EL PUEBLO, *the children and mothers of McLaughlin; THE PEOPLE / PROTESTORS / AUDIENCE participating in the struggle (ideally, EL PUEBLO should be made up of an ensemble of people from the local Latino community)*

Notes on CEREZITA

CEREZITA is a head of human dimension, but one who possesses such dignity of bearing and classical Indian beauty she can, at times, assume nearly religious proportions. (The huge head figures of the pre-Columbian Olmecas are an apt comparison.) This image, however, should be contrasted with the very real "humanness" she exhibits on a daily functioning level. Her mobility and its limits are critical aspects of her character. For most of the play, CEREZITA is positioned on a rolling, tablelike platform, which will be referred to as her "raite" (ride). It is automated by a button she operates with her chin. The low hum of its motor always anticipates her entrance. The raite can be disengaged at any time by flipping the hold on each wheel and pushing the chin piece out of her reach. At such times, CEREZITA has no control and can only be moved by someone manually.

SETTING

The play takes place in McLaughlin, California, a fictional town in the San Joaquin Valley. The year is 1988.

McLaughlin is a one-exit town off Highway 99. On the east side of the highway sits the old part of town, consisting primarily of a main street of three blocks of small businesses—the auto supply store, a small supermarket, the post office, a laundromat, an old central bank with a recently added automatic teller machine, a storefront Iglesia de Dios and, of course, a video movie rental shop. Crossing the two-lane bridge over Highway 99, a new McLaughlin has emerged. From the highest point of the overpass, a large island of single-family stucco houses and apartments can be seen. The tracts were built in the late '70s and reflect a manicured uniformity in appearance, each house with its obligatory crew-cut lawn and one-step front porch. Surrounding the island is an endless sea of agricultural fields which, like the houses, have been perfectly arranged into neatly juxtaposed rectangles.

The hundreds of miles of soil that surround the lives of Valley dwellers should not be confused with land. What was once land has become dirt, overworked dirt, overirrigated dirt, injected with deadly doses of chemicals and violated by every manner of ground- and back-breaking machinery. The people that worked the dirt do not call what was once the land their enemy. They remember what land used to be and await its second coming.

To that end, the grape vineyards, pecan tree orchards and the endless expanse of the Valley's agricultural life should be constant presences in the play and visibly press upon the intimate life of the Valle family home. The relentless fog and sudden dramatic sunbreaks in the Valley sky physically alter the mood of each scene. The Valle family home is modest in furnishing but always neat, and looks onto EL PUEBLO through a downstage window. Scenes outside the family home can be represented by simple, movable set pieces, e.g., a park bench for the street scenes, a wheelchair for the hospital, a set of steps for the church, etc.

ACT 1

Scene One

At rise in the distance, a group of children wearing calavera masks enters the grape vineyard. They carry a small, child-size cross which they erect quickly and exit, leaving its stark silhouetted image against the dawn's light. The barely distinguishable figure of a small child hangs from it. The child's hair and thin clothing flap in the wind. Moments pass. The wind subsides. The sound of squeaking wheels and a low, mechanical hum interrupt the silence. CEREZITA enters in shadow. She is transfixed by the image of the crucifixion. The sun suddenly explodes out of the horizon, bathing both the child and CEREZITA. CEREZITA is awesome and striking in the light. The crucified child glows, Christlike. The sound of a low-flying helicopter invades the silence. Its shadow passes over the field. Black out.

Scene Two

Mexican rancheras can be heard coming from a small radio in the Valle home. ANA PEREZ is on the street in front of the house. She holds a microphone and is expertly made up. AMPARO, a stocky woman in her fifties, is digging holes in the yard next door. She wears heavy-duty rubber gloves.

ANA PEREZ (to the "cameraman"): Bob, is my hair okay? What? . . . I have lipstick? Where? Here? (She wets her finger with her tongue, rubs the corner of her lip.) Okay? . . . Good. (Addressing the "cameraman.") Hello, I'm Ana Pérez and this is another edition of our Channel Five news special: "Hispanic California." Today I am speaking to you from the town of McLaughlin in the San Joaquin Valley. McLaughlin is commonly believed to be a cancer cluster area, where a disproportionate number of children have been diagnosed with cancer in the last few years. The town has seen the sudden death of numerous children, as well as a high incidence of birth defects. One of the most

alarming recent events which has brought sudden public attention to the McLaughlin situation has been a series of . . . crucifixions, performed in what seems to be a kind of ritualized protest against the dying of McLaughlin children. (DOLORES, a slender woman nearing fifty, enters. She carries groceries.) The last three children to die were each found with his corpse hanging from a cross in the middle of a grape vineyard. The Union of Campesinos, an outspoken advocate for pesticide control, is presently under investigation for the crime. (Spying DOLORES.) We now are approaching the house of Dolores Valle. Her daughter Cerezita is one of McLaughlin's most tragic cases.

Upon sight of ANA PEREZ coming toward her with her microphone, DOLORES hurries into the house. AMPARO intervenes.

AMPARO: You should maybe leave her alone; she don't like the television cameras too much no more.

ANA PEREZ (to the "camera"): Possibly this neighbor can provide us with some sense of the emotional climate prevalent in this small, largely Hispanic farm worker town.

AMPARO: She says es como un circo—

ANA PEREZ (to the camera): A circus.

AMPARO: Que la gente . . . the peepo like tha' kina t'ing, to look at somebody else's life like that t'ing coont never happen to them. But Cerezita's big now. She got a lot to say if they give her the chance. It's important for the peepo to realize what los rancheros—

ANA PEREZ (overlapping): The growers.

AMPARO: Are doing to us.

ANA PEREZ: Cerezita. That's an unusual name. Es una fruta ¿qué no?

AMPARO: That's what they call her because she look like tha' . . . a red little round cherry face. I think maybe all the blood tha' was apose to go to the resta her body got squeezed up into her head. I think tha's why she's so smart, too. Mario, her brother, el doctor-to-be, says the blood gets oxygen. Tha's gottu help with the brains. So pink pink pink she turn out.

ANA PEREZ: And how old is Cerezita now?

AMPARO: A big teenager already. Cerezita come out like this before anybody think too much about it. Now there's lotza nuevas because lotza kids are turning out all chuecos and with ugly things growing inside them. So our pueblito, pues it's on the map now. The gabachos, 'cuze me, los americanos are always coming through McLaughlin nowadays. Pero, not too much change. We still can' prove it's those

chemicals they put on the plantas. But we know Cere turn out this way because Dolores pick en los files cuando tenía panza.

ANA PEREZ: Uh . . . pregnant, I think.

AMPARO: Dolores tells me que no le importa a la gente and maybe she's right. She says all the publeesty gives peepo somet'ing to do. Peepo que got a lotta free time. It gives them a purpose, she says—like God.

ANA PEREZ: Señora, what about the boy?

AMPARO: ¿Qué boy?

ANA PEREZ: The boy on the cross . . . in the field.

AMPARO: Memo?

ANA PEREZ: Yes. Memo Delgado.

AMPARO: He died a little santito, son angelitos todos.

ANA PEREZ: That's the third one.

AMPARO: Yes.

ANA PEREZ: Why would someone be so cruel, to hang a child up like that? To steal him from his deathbed?

AMPARO: No, he was dead already. Already dead from the poison.

ANA PEREZ: But ma'am . . .

AMPARO: They always dead first. If you put the children in the ground, the world forgets about them. Who's gointu see them, buried in the dirt?

ANA PEREZ: A publicity stunt? But who's—

AMPARO: Señorita, I don' know who. But I know they not my enemy. (Beat.) Con su permiso. (AMPARO walks away.)

ANA PEREZ (with false bravado): That concludes our Hispanic hour for the week, but watch for next week's show where we will take a five-hour drive north to the heart of San Francisco's Latino Mission District, for an insider's observation of the Day of the Dead, the Mexican Halloween. (She holds a television smile for three full seconds. To the "cameraman":) Cut! We'll edit her out later.

BONNIE and a group of small CHILDREN enter wearing calavera masks. They startle her.

THE CHILDREN: Trick or treat!

ANA PEREZ: No. I mean . . . I don't . . . have anything to give you.

She exits nervously.

Scene Three

Crossfade to the Valle kitchen. It is late afternoon. YOLANDA is breastfeeding her baby. CEREZITA observes.

CEREZITA: I remember the first time I tasted fear, I smelled it in her sweat. It ran like a tiny river down her breast and mixed with her milk. I tasted it on my tongue. It was very bitter. Very bitter.

YOLANDA: That's why I try to keep calm. Lina knows when I'm upset.

CEREZITA: I stopped drinking. I refused to nurse from her again, bit at her breasts when she tried to force me.

YOLANDA: Formula is expensive. Breastfeeding is free. Healthier, too. I'll do it until Lina doesn't want it no more. (YOLANDA buttons her blouse, puts the infant into her crib, sings to her softly.) 'Duerme, duerme, negrito' . . . (Continues singing.)

CEREZITA: But imagine my sadness, my longing for the once-sweetness of her nipple.

YOLANDA positions CEREZITA for her weekly beauty treatment. She takes out various beauty supplies from a bag. MARIO enters, towel wrapped around his hips. He is well built, endearingly macho in his manner. He is drying himself briskly.

MARIO: ¡Hijo! It's freezing! These cold showers suck, man! We should all just get the fuck outta here. I'm gonna move us all the fuck outta here!

CEREZITA: Where to, Mario?

YOLANDA: Go 'head, chulo. You keep taking those showers purty boy and your skin's gonna fall off in sheets. Then who's gonna want you?

MARIO: The water was cold, man. Ice cold.

YOLANDA: I turned the water heater off.

MARIO: Great. My skin's gonna freeze off from the cold sooner than any chemicals. How can you stand it?

CEREZITA: Where you gonna move us to, Mario?

MARIO (looking out the window): What?

CEREZITA: Where we going?

MARIO: I dunno. Just away.

YOLANDA (has filled up a glass of water from the faucet): Here.

MARIO: Chale. The shit stinks.

YOLANDA: C'mon, chulo. Tómallo. Why don't you just throw it down your throat better? It's the same thing. You suck enough of it up through your skin taking those hot baths three times a day.

MARIO: Two.

YOLANDA *starts to spread the beauty mask onto CEREZITA's face.*
DOLORES *can be seen coming up the porch steps after her day's work.*

YOLANDA: You wanna see Lina's nalguitas? They're fried, man. The hot water opens your pores and just sucks up the stuff. She cried all night last night. This shit's getting outta hand! Doña Amparo told me—

DOLORES (*entering*): Es una metiche, Amparo.

YOLANDA: They shot through her windows the last night.

CEREZITA: Who?

YOLANDA: Who knows? The guys in the helicopters . . . God.

DOLORES: Por eso, te digo she better learn to keep her damn mouth shut. Ella siempre gottu be putting la cuchara en la olla. I saw her talking to the TV peepo last week right in front of the house. It scare me.

YOLANDA: What are you scared of?

DOLORES: They come to talk to Amparo on the job yesterday.

MARIO: Who?

DOLORES: The patrones.

MARIO: The owners?

DOLORES: Not the owners, pero their peepo. They give her a warning que they don' like her talking about the rancheros.

YOLANDA: Cabrones.

DOLORES: She gointu lose her job.

MARIO: Got to hand it to Nina Amparo. She's got huevos, man.

DOLORES: She got a husband, not huevos. Who's gointu support Cere if I stop working?

The room falls silent. CERE's face is now covered in a facial mask.

MARIO: Well, I better get ready. (*He starts to exit upstage, DOLORES stops him.*)

DOLORES: I better see you back el lunes temprano ¿m'oyes? I got the plaster falling down from the front of the house.

MARIO: Okay.

CEREZITA: Where you going, Mario?

DOLORES *goes to the stove, puts a pot of beans to boil.*

YOLANDA: Don't talk, Cere. You're gonna crack your face.

MARIO: ¡San Pancho, 'manita!

YOLANDA (*running a slab of facial down his cheek, softly*): Better stay away from the jotos, you don't wanna catch nothing.

MARIO (*"slabbing" it back, teasing*): I got it covered, hermana.

DOLORES: What are you two whispering about?

MARIO: Nothing, 'amá.

DOLORES: You know, secrets kill sometimes.

YOLANDA: It was nothing, 'amá.

DOLORES: You don' believe it, pero tha' place, it's crazy. They got all those crazy peepo que sleep on the street nowadays. You never know one could come up and shoot you right in the head.

YOLANDA: They're shooting us here anyway.

DOLORES: ¿Crees que soy una exagerada? We'll see.

MARIO (*mimicking*): "We'll see." ¡Hijo! I hate when she says that like she knows something we don't.

YOLANDA: I know.

DOLORES: Pues, maybe I do.

MARIO (*coming up behind DOLORES and wrapping his arms around her*): I'm fine, 'amá.

DOLORES (*softening*): "I'm fine, 'amá." ¿Qué sabes tú about "fine"?

AMPARO can be seen coming up onto the porch. JUAN trails behind her carrying a five-gallon tank of spring water. He wears jeans and a flannel shirt.

AMPARO: ¡Halo! Anybody home? I got a surprise for you!

DOLORES: Abra la puerta, hijo.

AMPARO (*calling out behind her*): Right here! This is the house!

MARIO (*going to the door*): What's up, Nina?

AMPARO: ¡Ay! Te vez bien sexy.

DOLORES (*spying JUAN at the porch*): ¡Ay, Dios! (*She quickly pushes CEREZITA out of sight, drawing a curtain around her.*)

YOLANDA (*whispering*): Why do you do that to her?

DOLORES: Cállete tú.

MARIO (*to JUAN, with interest*): Hello.

JUAN: Hello.

AMPARO: This is my godson, Mario. (MARIO takes the bottle from JUAN.)

JUAN: Thanks.

MARIO: No problem.

AMPARO: That's Yolanda y su baby, Evalina.

YOLANDA: Hi.

AMPARO: And this is my comadre, Dolores Valle.

DOLORES: Halo.

JUAN: Mucho gusto.

DOLORES: ¿Habla español?

JUAN: Soy mexicano.

DOLORES: ¿Verdad?

AMPARO (*aside*): Half y half.

MARIO (*suggestively*): Like the cream?

AMPARO: And a priest. Father Juan Cunningham.

DOLORES: Mario, why you standing around sin ropa? Go put some clothes on.

MARIO: All right. I was just helping the man. I mean, the priest.

He puts the water onto the dispenser, then exits. JUAN's eyes follow him.

DOLORES: Siéntese, Father.

YOLANDA: So, where'd you get the water, Doña Amparo?

AMPARO: The Arrowhead donated it.

JUAN: Thanks to Doña Amparo. Last week's newscast stirred up everyone!

AMPARO: It wasn't me. It was la crucifixión. That's what brought the newspeepo here.

DOLORES: ¡Es una barbaridad!

AMPARO: The newspeepo, they wanted to talk to Cereza, comadre.

DOLORES: Y ¿por qué?

YOLANDA: Cere knows, 'amá.

DOLORES: Cerezita don't know nothing.

YOLANDA: She sees.

DOLORES: She sees nothing. (*To JUAN:*) She looks out the window all day, nomás. What can she see?

The lights crossfade to CEREZITA at the window. BONNIE sits near her, playing with a doll. She prepares bandages for it, tearing a flour-sack cloth into strips and wrapping it around the doll's head.

CEREZITA: The sheep drink the same water we do from troughs outside my window. Today it is an orange-yellow color. The mothers dip their heads into the long rusty buckets and drink and drink while their babies deform inside them. Innocent, they sleep inside the same poison water and are born broken like me, their lamb limbs curling under them.

BONNIE (*takes out a thermometer and puts it into her doll's mouth*): ¿Estás malita, mija? (*Checking the temperature.*) Yes. I think you got "it." (*She rubs the top of its head, chanting.*)

'Sana sana colita de rana, si no sanas hoy sanarás mañana.
Sana sana colita de rana, si no sanas hoy sanarás mañana.
Sana sana colita de rana, si no sanas hoy sanarás mañana.'

She puts the doll into a small box and covers it tenderly with the remains of the cloth.

CEREZITA: I watch them from my window and weep.

Fade out.

Scene Four

DOLORES and JUAN are at the kitchen table. He is eating a taco of chorizo. She embroiders a dishcloth.

DOLORES: And then I started working in the packing houses and the same thing was happening. The poison they put on the almonds, it would make you sick. The women would run out of the place coz they had to throw up. Sure, I dint wannu go back in there, pero after awhile you start to accept it because you gottu have a job.

JUAN: Where do you work now?

DOLORES: Otro packing house. (*Pause.*) ¿Le gusta la comida, Father?

JUAN: Sí, está muy sabrosa.

DOLORES: Pues, I'm glad you came. Most a the priests, they not like you, they don' come to the house no more unless you got money. It's not right, Padre.

JUAN: No, no es justo, Señora Valle.

DOLORES: But the priests should be worried because a lot a peepo they leaving la iglesia. ¿Sabe qué? A buncha my vecinos already turn into the "Holy Rollie."

JUAN: Holy Rollie?

DOLORES: Tha's what my Yolie calls them. They turn from the Catholic god. They "Chrishins" now.

JUAN: Oh, you mean Pentecostals.

DOLORES: One time I was feeling so tire, so lonely, just dragging myself home from work and I hear a tamborin coming out of the panadería. Now it's a church, but it usetu be la panadería de la familia Hernández. It still smell like pandulce un poco when you go by. An' it was like the tamborin me 'staba llamando, telling me to come inside, if only para quitarme el cansancio a little. So I go in and sit in the back. And they were all jumping up and down and shaking their hands in the air. Pura raza, singing songs like children. It scare me, Father. Their faces look kina dopey-like, kina like their eyes had turned to hard glass por las lágrimas que tienen all lock up inside them. Se llama "Iglesia de Dios," but there wasn' no God there. And too much noise. How can your soul even find God con tanto ruido?

JUAN: I guess they feel they find him with one another.

DOLORES: No es posible. God es una cosa privada, un secreto que guardas and nobody can touch that part of you. Even the priest has to forget every secret you tell him. *(She observes JUAN as he finishes the dripping taco. He licks his fingers.)* ¡Ay, qué penal *(She brings him a clean dish towel.)* You been a father a long time, Father?

JUAN: About ten years.

DOLORES: You still have the eyes of a man.

JUAN: ¿Perdón?

DOLORES: No importa. It's good you experience the world a little. Some of these priests, you confess to them your sins y que consejo te pueben ofrecer? A little life doesn't hurt nobody. *(Pause.)* Come see my Cerezita. She'll like you. It's been years since a priest come to see her.

JUAN: Would you like me to hear her confession?

DOLORES: What sins could a girl like her have, Padre? She was born

this way. Es una santa. We should pray to her, I think.

They both rise.

Scene Five

Crossfade to CEREZITA speaking into a tape recorder.

CEREZITA: It is so, he came to meet her seeking the purity of nature he'd lost. He sought baptism in the fire of her original desire.

JUAN *(entering timidly)*: Hello . . . *(CEREZITA turns the tape recorder off with her chin.)* Am I . . . interrupting? *(She doesn't respond.)* Your mother asked me to come by. I hope it's . . . all right with you?

CEREZITA: She must like you. Few people get past her inspection.

JUAN: Can you turn around? I'd like to talk to you face to face.

CEREZITA: You're wasting your time, Padre. I have no use for God.

JUAN: You don't believe?

CEREZITA: I don't care.

JUAN: I see *(Pause.)* Can I read you something? Your mother says you are quite a reader.

CEREZITA *(reluctantly)*: What is it?

JUAN: Just something I'm reading. It struck me.

CEREZITA: I got ears.

JUAN *(reading from a small paperback)*: "Then, they named rich the man of God, and poor the man of flesh. And they determined that the rich would care for and protect the poor in as much that through them, the rich had received such benefits."

CEREZITA: "Entonces llamaron rico al hombre de oro y pobre al hombre de carne. Y dispusieron que el rico cuidara y amparara al pobre por cuanto que de él había recibido beneficios." . . .

JUAN *(impressed)*: "And they ordered that the poor would respond on behalf of the rich before the face of truth."

CEREZITA: "Y ordenaron que el pobre respondería por el rico ante la cara de la verdad." . . .

JUAN: "For this—"

CEREZITA *(slowly turning to him)*: "For this reason our law states that no rich person can enter heaven without the poor taking him by the hand."

Seeing her fully for the first time, JUAN's face registers both awe and tenderness.

JUAN: ~~Balun Canan. Rosario Castellanos.~~

CEREZITA: ~~First, the Maya.~~ (Pause.) Am I your pobre, Father?

Fade out.

Scene Six

Early morning. AMPARO and DOLORES come out of the house, wearing work clothes. DOLORES carries a small bucket of plaster and a trowel. AMPARO carries a shovel and heavy gloves.

DOLORES: This house is falling apart. ¡Ayúdanos, Dios!

AMPARO: You think God is gointu take care of it? Working is what changes things, not oraciones.

DOLORES: Ya te dije, I'm not going to your protesta.

AMPARO puts on the gloves, begins digging into the yard. DOLORES goes over to the side of the house and starts applying plaster to it.

AMPARO: ¿Sabes qué? I don't even go to church no more, ni recibir comunión . . . coz I'm tire of swallowing what they want to shove down my throat. Body of Christ . . . pedo.

DOLORES: I hate when you talk like this. It makes me sick to my stomach.

AMPARO (digging more vigorously): Pues, the truth aint so purty sometimes.

DOLORES: I'm not going. (To herself:) You'd think I could get the only son I got to do this for me, pero no. He's always gallivanting around con sus secretos.

AMPARO (hitting upon something on the ground): Mira. Hay algo aquí. Ayúdame.

DOLORES: Wha' chu find?

AMPARO: No sé. Help me.

They both get down on their hands and knees and dig. They pull out an old, thick rubber hose.

DOLORES: No es nada.

AMPARO: You don't believe me, but they bury all their poison under our houses. Wha' chu think that crack comes from? An earthquake? The house is sinking, te digo como quicksand.

DOLORES: It's the only house I got.

AMPARO: They lied to us, Lola. They thought we was too stupid to know the difernce. They throw some dirt over a dump, put some casas de cartón on top of it y dicen que it's the "American Dream." Pues, this dream has turned to pesadilla.

DOLORES: Where we apose to go? Every three houses got a For Sale sign. Nobody's gointu buy from us now.

AMPARO: The gov'ment owes us the money.

DOLORES: Oh sí, and they're gointu drop it de los cielos. (She sits on the porch step.)

AMPARO: No, pero not'ing gointu change if you don' do not'ing. How can you jus' sit with your hands folded? You see Yolie's baby, ya 'stá malita.

DOLORES: She got a little rash, nomás. Anyway, I do somet'ing before and what good did it do me? Somos mas pobres que antes. Aleast before I open my big mouth, Cerezita had a father.

AMPARO: What kina father? A father who wouldn't let his own child feel the sun on her face, who kept her hidden como algo cochino. And now you do the same thing to her. It's not right, Lola. You think hiding her is gointu bring Arturo back?

DOLORES: No. (Pause.) It wasn't fair what I did to him. I humiliate him.

AMPARO: Tha's an old tune, comadre. He never humiliate you?

DOLORES: The men are weaker. They can't take what a woman takes.

AMPARO: Adiós. You did it to educate the peepo.

DOLORES: I did it to make him ashamed. I tole him, "¿Ves? Half a father make half a baby." (Pause.) He believe it.

AMPARO: That was a long time ago. Wha' chu got to stop you now?

DOLORES (returning to plastering): Vete. Go to your marcha. No tiene nada que ver eso conmigo.

DOLORES slaps some more plaster onto the wall. AMPARO tosses the hose into the junk heap and exits. The sound of a low-flying crop duster fills the stage. DOLORES stares up at it as its shadow passes over her. *Fade out.*

Scene Seven

The wheels to CERE's mite can be heard in the darkness. At rise, MARIO is on his back, tightening a bolt under the wheelchair. CEREZITA is reading a medical book, periodically turning the pages with her mouth. The infant sleeps

in her crib.

CEREZITA: So, what kind of cancer did Memo have?

MARIO: He had a neuroblastoma. Hand me that screwdriver, will you, Cere? *(She picks it up with her mouth, drops it down to him.)* Watch it. You almost hit me.

CEREZITA: I can't see you from up here.

MARIO: Pues, wáchale. *(He rolls the raité back and forth, it squeaks loudly.)* How's that feel?

CEREZITA: Fine, but can you do something about the squeak?

MARIO: Where's the oil?

CEREZITA: Check under the sink. *(He does.)* What's a neuroblastoma?

MARIO *(coming back with the oil)*: A tumor. They usually arise in the adrenal gland or any place in the sympathetic chain. *(Pointing out a reference in the book.)* See.

CEREZITA: Like in the chest.

MARIO: Well, they can appear there. Memo's started in the abdomen.

CEREZITA: It says that the prognosis is worse than most leukemia.

MARIO *(applying the oil)*: Usually even surgery can't cure it. *(He puts her chin piece back in place. CEREZITA gives the raité a little test drive.)* There, a smooth ride. Memo didn't have a chance, Cere. Kids' bodies are so vulnerable. They pick up stuff way before adults. They got no buffer zone. "The canary in the mine shaft" . . . that's exactly what they are. *(He puts the tools away, washes his hands, then runs a comb through his hair.)*

CEREZITA: You going out, Mario?

MARIO: Yeah.

CEREZITA: Tell me the story about the Mayan god before you go.

MARIO: Ah, Cere, my ride's coming.

CEREZITA: Please, don't go just yet.

MARIO: Okay, but the short version. *(Sitting down next to her.)* Cousin Freddie—

CEREZITA: Hadn't been in the states too long, maybe a few months and he liked everything American . . .

MARIO *(amused)*: I guess even me. God, Freddie was beautiful. Dark. He had cheekbones to die for, like they were sculpted outta some holy Mayan rock. And he had this little twitch in the side of his jaw

that would pulse whenever he got excited or upset or something. The party was still going on and I was supposed to be sleeping in the next room. But Nino Gilberto started singing and letting out those famous gritos of his. . . . *(Imitates "los gritos.")* So, no way, man, was I gonna get any sleep. I could hear Freddie laughing in the patio and I started following his voice around. I'd think about his smile, I'd imagine him waving his hands in people's faces while he talked, getting a little pálido from all the pisto. The next thing I know he's standing—

CEREZITA: No, you forgot the boleros.

MARIO: Right. When the boleros came on, I could hear him singing along with them and I'd think about those veined hands around Yolie's back while they danced, wishing I was there inside those hands. The next thing I know, my young god is standing at the foot of my bed. His shirt's open to his waist . . . more Mayan rock. It's kinda sticking to him from the sweat he's worked up on the dance floor. My little heart is pounding as he tells me how he just came in to check on me. "Mijo," he calls me.

CEREZITA: Mijo.

MARIO: That little twitch pulsing. *(A car horn sounds from the street. He gives CEREZITA a peck on the cheek.)* That's it.

CEREZITA: Ah, Mario.

MARIO *(spotting YOLANDA through the window)*: Look-it, Yolie's coming home. Have her take you out back. It's nice out right now. Ay te watcho. *(He grabs a leather jacket, goes out the door.)*

YOLANDA: Your "friend" is waiting for you, ése. *(MARIO gives her a kiss and exits; YOLANDA comes indoors.)* That was one sleazy-looking gringo in that car.

CEREZITA: Mario doesn't like him.

YOLANDA: Well, for not liking him, he sure sees him a lot.

CEREZITA: He gives him things.

YOLANDA: That I believe.

CEREZITA: Take me outside, Yolie.

YOLANDA *(checking the baby in its crib)*: Did Lina wake up?

CEREZITA: No. Take me outside, Yolie. Mom's gonna be home soon.

YOLANDA: Okay, let's go. Your hair's lookin' raggedy. I'm gonna give you a good conditioning later. *(Pushing the raité.)* Hey! What happened to the squeak?

CEREZITA (*with pride*): Mario fixed it.

Fade out.

Scene Eight

That evening. CEREZITA is reading a book. YOLANDA passes by with a diaper over her shoulder and a small stack of them in her hands.

CEREZITA: It recommends making a tea from flor de muerto. It's good for indigestion.

YOLANDA: I'm not giving my baby anything called "flower of the dead."

CEREZITA: It worked for the Aztecs. Zempasuchitl, the yellow marigold.

YOLANDA: Forget it.

YOLANDA exits. CEREZITA shuts the book just as she spots JUAN coming up the front steps.

CEREZITA: Come in.

JUAN (*entering*): Hello. You alone?

CEREZITA: No, Yolie's in back with the baby. Lina's been throwing up her milk.

JUAN: Oh.

CEREZITA: If you came to see my mom, she's next door.

JUAN: No. I came to see you.

CEREZITA: She's trying to get Don Gilberto to stop Amparo from leading the protest at the school tomorrow. Can you hear them?

JUAN: No.

CEREZITA: Sure, my mom's going, "What kina man are you, you can't control your own wife?" And Don Gilberto answers, "I don't gotta control her, I love her."

JUAN: I can't hear them.

CEREZITA: Yeah, but that's what they're saying. Are you going to the demonstration, Father?

JUAN: Yes. I was hoping your mother would bring you.

CEREZITA: No, I don't go out.

JUAN: Never?

CEREZITA: Never. (*She observes JUAN for a moment.*)

JUAN: I . . .

CEREZITA: Touch my hair, Father.

JUAN: What?

CEREZITA: Touch my hair. (*He hesitates.*) Go 'head. It's not gonna hurt you. I'm normal from the neck up. (*He touches a strand very gingerly.*)

CEREZITA: Well?

JUAN: It's very . . . smooth.

CEREZITA: Like silk, huh?

JUAN: Yes.

CEREZITA: Oughtabe. Yolie just gave it the works. She studies all these beauty magazines and tries out every new item that hits the market. She's into "natural" these days, which I'm very grateful for. Over the last five years, Yolie experimented in every fashion from beehives to buzzcuts. It was fun for a while, until my hair started falling out. And if my hair doesn't look decent, I don't have much going for me now, do I, Father?

JUAN (*pause*): No, I guess . . . not.

CEREZITA: So now my hair tends to smell more like an overripe tropical garden than anything else. You know, coconut and mango juice shampoo, avocado conditioners, et cetera.

JUAN: I wouldn't know.

CEREZITA: Now it just grows long and thick like a beautiful dark curtain. Nice huh?

JUAN (*touching it again*): Yes.

CEREZITA: I like it, too . . . sometimes just spin my head around and around so I can feel it brush past my cheeks. I imagine it's what those Arab women with the veils must feel like . . . all those soft cloths secretly caressing their bodies.

JUAN: You think about that?

CEREZITA: What, the Arab women? Give me a break, Padre. All I've got is this imagination.

JUAN: Yes . . .

CEREZITA: And a tongue.

JUAN: A tongue?

CEREZITA: Yeah, and mine's got the best definition I bet in the world, unless there's some other vegetable heads like me who survived

this valley. Think about it, Padre. Imagine if your tongue and teeth and chin had to do the job of your hands . . . you know, *(She demonstrates.)* turning pages, picking up stuff, scratching an itch, pointing. I mean your tongue alone would have to have some very serious definition. For me . . . well, it's my most faithful organ. Look it up. *(She sticks out her tongue, "pointing" to the dictionary on the shelf.)*

JUAN: What?

CEREZITA: Get the dictionary. *(Pointing.)* Look up the word *tongue*.

JUAN: But why?

CEREZITA: You'll see. Check it out. *(JUAN gets the dictionary.)*

JUAN *(reading)*: "Ton. Tonality. Tone, Tongue. Latin: *Lingua*."

CEREZITA: Spanish: *Lengua*.

JUAN: "1 a: a fleshy movable process of the floor of the mouths of most vertebrates that bears sensory end organs and functions especially in taking and swallowing food."

CEREZITA *(reciting from memory)*: "2: The power of communication through speech." Your turn, Padre. *(He hesitates.)* Go on.

JUAN: "3: The flesh of the tongue used as food."

CEREZITA *(with JUAN)*: "4 a: Language, especially a spoken language."

JUAN: "b: ecstatic usually unintelligible utterance accompanying religious excitation. c: the charismatic gift—"

CEREZITA *(overlapping)*: "Of ecstatic speech."

JUAN: The gift of tongues!

CEREZITA: "d: the cry of a hound in sight of game—used especially in the phrase," italicized . . . *(Suggestively.)* "to give tongue." *(She pants like the hound.)*

JUAN: C'mon, now.

CEREZITA: Be a sport, Padre.

JUAN: "Verb 1 archaic: scold."

CEREZITA: "2: to touch or lick with; to project in a tongue."

JUAN: "3: to articulate," parenthetically, "notes by" . . . *(He hesitates.)*

CEREZITA: Yes? . . .

JUAN: "By tonguing."

CEREZITA: My brother Mario brought me a trumpet once, the old me-

dieval kind. No fingering needed . . . just a good, strong tongue. "Tongue in cheek."

JUAN: "Characterized by insincerity, irony, or whimsical exaggeration."

CEREZITA *(provocatively)*: "Tongue-lash."

JUAN: "To chide or—"

CEREZITA: Regañar.

JUAN: "Tongueless."

CEREZITA: "Lacking the power of speech."

JUAN: "Mute, Tongue-tied—disinclined or" . . . *(He looks up at her.)*

CEREZITA: "Unable to speak freely."

Fade out.

Scene Nine

The school grounds. McLaughlin Elementary. BONNIE enters carrying a lunch box. DON GILBERTO is pushing a broom. He wears a janitor's uniform which reads McLaughlin School District on back. BONNIE sits, opens her lunch box and takes out an apple. She watches him sweep for a moment.

BONNIE: Don Gilberto, I dreamed Memo before he died.

DON GILBERTO: You did?

BONNIE: Yeah. I dreamed Memo alive playing on the merry-go-round like we used to before he got sick. He's in the middle of it, holding on real tight and I'm pushing the merry-go-round faster and faster. And then I see his face starts to get scared, so I try to stop the merry-go-round but I can't. I can't grab the bars. They just keep hitting my hands harder and harder and he's spinning around so fast that finally his face just turns into a blur. And then he disappears.

DON GILBERTO: Just like that?

BONNIE: Well, then I woke up. *(Pause.)* Now when I go to sleep, I make a prayer so I don't dream about nobody.

DON GILBERTO: What kind of prayer?

BONNIE: Just one that asks God that . . . when I'm sleeping, that he'll keep all the kids outta me. Maybe you make your dreams come true. Maybe you kill people that way.

DON GILBERTO *(taking out a handkerchief from his back pocket and polishing the apple)*: Sometimes when you're worried or scared about some-

thing, hija, your dreams draw pictures in your sleep to show you what the feelings look like.

BONNIE: Like Memo blurring?

DON GILBERTO: Sí. *(He hands her back the polished apple.)*

BONNIE: I have to think about that, Don Gilberto.

DON GILBERTO: That's all right. You think about it. *(He kisses the top of her head, goes back to sweeping.)*

BONNIE: Look, Don Gilberto! It's the news lady!

ANA PEREZ appears in front of the "cameras." AMPARO and a group of PROTESTORS are approaching, including MARIO, JUAN, and YOLANDA. They are carrying placards reading, *The School Board Lies! Save Our Children! Sin Agua No Tenemos Vida*, etc. ANA PEREZ straightens her jacket, lightly brushes back her hair. She addresses the "camera."

ANA PEREZ: A crowd is beginning to form out here in front of the town of McLaughlin's elementary school. Mostly mothers and other neighbors have shown up this morning. There is no sign of school officials as of yet. Local residents are outraged by the school board's decision to refuse Arrowhead's offer of free drinking water for the schoolchildren. They believe local tap water, contaminated by pesticides, to be the chief cause of the high incidence of cancer among children in the area. They claim that the extensive spraying, especially aerial spraying, causes the toxic chemicals to seep into the public water system. The majority of residents are from a nearby housing tract of federally subsidized housing. It has been alleged that the housing was built on what was once a dump site for pesticides with the full knowledge of contractors. What we have here, Jack, appears to be a kind of 1980s Hispanic Love Canal.

The PROTESTORS have arrived at the school grounds, led by DOÑA AMPARO.

DON GILBERTO *(with affection)*: She's gonna get me fired, mi vieja.

AMPARO *(under her breath, to DON GILBERTO)*: I think I got the cold feet, Berto.

DON GILBERTO: Pues, warm 'em up quick. You got all this gente here esperándote. *(She hesitates.)* ¡Adelante, mujer!

ANA PEREZ: It looks like a local resident will be addressing the crowd.

DON GILBERTO helps AMPARO up onto a bench. The crowd goes quiet. As the speech progresses, the PROTESTORS become more and more receptive, calling out in response.

AMPARO *(tentatively)*: Our homes are no longer our homes. They have

become prisons. When the water that pours from the sink gets to be boiled three times before it can pass your children's lips, what good is the faucet, the indoor plumbing, the toilet that flushes pink with disease? *(Gaining confidence.)* We were better off when our padres hang some blankets from a tree and we slept under the perfection de las estrellas, because our roofs don't perfect us. At least then, even if you had to dig a hole in the ground to do your biznis and wipe yourself with newspaper, you could still look up hasta los cielos and see God. But where is God now, amigos? ¿Y el diablo? El diablo hides between the pages of the papeles we sign that makes us afraid. The papeles they have no weight. ¡Ay! They could fly away en la brisa, they could burn hasta una ceniza with a simple household mecha. But our children are flesh and bone. They weigh mucho. You put them all together and they make hunerds and hunerds a pounds of Razita. *(Pause.)* Yesterday, the school board refuse the gift of clean water for our chil'ren's already poisoned throats. The board says, No, there's not'ing wrong with our water. We don't know for sure, it hasn't been prove. How much prove you need? How many babies' bodies pile all up on top of each other in the grave? *(Pause, coming downstage.)* Comadres, compadres. ¿Qué significa que the three things in life—el aire, el agua, y la tierra—que we always had enough of, even in our pueblitos en México, ya no tenemos? Sí, parece que tenemos all that we need. In the morning the air is cool y fresco, the ground stretches for miles, and all that the ranchero puts into it grows big and bright and the water pours from our faucets sin término. Pero, todo es mentira. Look into your children's faces. They tell you the truth. They are our future. Pero no tendremos ningún futuro si seguimos siendo víctimas.

The PROTESTORS come down into the audience, passing out pamphlets of information about the pesticide problem. CEREZITA has been looking out the window at the demonstration. DOLORES is sweeping, trying to ignore the sounds of the protest invading her house.

CEREZITA: Mira, 'amá. They're all going house to house, giving out pamphlets. Father Juanito's there and Don Gilberto. They even got the news cameras.

DOLORES: Get your face out of the window.

CEREZITA: Nobody's looking over here.

DOLORES: Quítate de allí, te digo.

DOLORES disengages CEREZITA's ruite and moves her away from the window.

CEREZITA: Ah, 'amá!

DOLORES: Pues, you don't know who could be out there. All this pro-

testa is bringing the guns down from the sky.

CEREZITA: I just wanted to see.

DOLORES: You don't need to see. (*She gets down on her hands and knees and begins picking up various books and newspapers that CEREZITA has left around the floor.*) Mira todos los libros que tienes. One a these days your brain's gointu explode por tantas palabras.

CEREZITA: Wha' else am I supposed to do?

DOLORES: You're suppose to do nothing. I'm suppose to do everything.

CEREZITA: Martyrs don't survive, 'amá.

DOLORES: Your brother teaches you tha' kina talk. Don' get smart with me.

CEREZITA: I am smart.

DOLORES: Maybe you read a lot, but tha' doesn' mean you know about life. You think you find life in a book?

CEREZITA: No, I don't think I find life in a book. (*CERE tosses her hair around, trying to feel it against her cheeks.*)

DOLORES: It's a pig's pen around here, you leave all your junk laying around . . . candy wrappers, the little crumbs from the erasers. (*On her hands and knees, picking at the rug.*) What do you do with them? Chew them?

CEREZITA: Erase.

DOLORES: Mentirosa. I seen you chew them.

CEREZITA: Well, sometimes . . . when I'm thinking.

DOLORES: Well, stop it. It makes a big mess. I can' get those tiny pieces out of l'alfombra. (*CEREZITA lays her face down on the raite, rubs it back and forth, trying to feel her hair against her face. DOLORES finds an open book on the floor.*) ¿Qué's esto? Cere?

CEREZITA: Huh? . . . Nothing. It's just one of Mario's old anatomy books.

DOLORES: Es cochino. Tha's what it is? I thought he give you the books to study about the sick peepo. This is not the sick peepo.

CEREZITA: God, Mom, it's just the body.

DOLORES: So, what biznis you got with the body? This jus' puts thoughts in your head. (*She flips through the book.*) ¿Qué tiene que ver una señorita with this kind of pictures? (*Slams it shut.*) I should call in the father.

CEREZITA: Father Juan?

DOLORES: Jus' cuz you don' got a body doesn' mean you can't sin. The biggest sins are in the mind.

CEREZITA: Oh God.

DOLORES: Tu eres una inocente. That's how God wanted it. There's a reason he made you like this. You're old enough now . . .

CEREZITA: I'm old enough now to go out!

DOLORES: Pues vete. (*She engages CEREZITA's wheels, puts the chin piece in place.*) You think you're so tough, go on. But we'll see how you feel the first time some stranger looks at you with cruel eyes.

DOLORES goes to the table. After a pause, CEREZITA crosses to her.

CEREZITA: Give me a chance, 'amá. If nobody ever sees me, how will I know how I look? How will I know if I scare them or make them mad or . . . move them? If people could see me, 'amá, things would change.

DOLORES: No, hija. Dios es mi testigo. I'll never let nobody look at my baby that way.

DOLORES caresses her. CERE's face is rigid as the lights crossfade to MARIO and JUAN sitting on a park bench.

JUAN: Why didn't you bring Cerezita out to this?

MARIO: My mom. She protects her.

JUAN: From what?

MARIO: Ridicule. The world.

JUAN: She wanted to be here.

MARIO: You bring her out, then. Maybe Lola would let you. You're God on earth, after all. You're all the protection she'd ever need.

JUAN: She needs you.

MARIO: Oh, Padre, they all need me, but I got other plans.

JUAN: Like what?

MARIO: Getting out. Finishing school. Having a life. One life, not two.

JUAN: Two?

MARIO: You don't know what it's like growing up in this valley.

JUAN: I was born in Sanger, Mario.

MARIO: Yeah? Don't show.

JUAN: My family left when I was about twelve.

MARIO: To LA, right?

JUAN: Right.

MARIO: At least you got out. *(Pause.)* When I was in high school, I used to sit out there in those fields, smoking, watching the cars go by on 99. I'd think about the driver, having somewhere to go. His foot pressed to the floorboard, cruisin'. He was always a gringo. And he'd have one arm draped over the steering wheel and the other around the back of the seat and it'd never occur to him that anybody lived there between those big checkerboard plots of tomatoes, strawberries, artichokes, brussels sprouts, and . . .

JUAN: Grapes.

MARIO: Hundreds of miles of grapes. He'd be headed home to his woman and TV set and sleeping kids tucked into clean sheets and he'd have a wad of bills in his pocket and he'd think he'd live forever. But I'm twenty-five and stuck here in this valley and I know I won't.

JUAN: But twenty-five's so young, Mario.

MARIO: I get high, Padre. I smoke and snort and suck up anything and anyone that will have me. Those are the facts. *(A car horn sounds from the street. MARIO jumps to his feet. He motions to the driver.)* Why did you come back, Father? All you'd need is a nice Buick, a full tank of gas and you'd be indistinguishable on that highway. Just don't stop to pick me up. Your type can destroy me.

MARIO runs off. JUAN watches the car drive away. The lights fade to black.

Scene Ten

JUAN fills up a glass of water from the dispenser.

JUAN: Some of the union people were at the rally. They were trying to enlist people to join in the fast with them. I agreed.

CEREZITA: That's good. People like to see priests and celebrities sacrificing. I'd do it, too, if anyone would notice me. The trick is to be noticed.

JUAN: Six months ago, that's the very thing that brought me here . . . to the Valley.

CEREZITA: What?

JUAN: The union's fast. I saw this newspaper photo of Cesar Chávez. He had just finished a thirty-three-day fast. He looked like a damn saint, a veritable Ghandi. Even the number was holy. Thirty-three.

CEREZITA: The age of Christ's death.

JUAN: So I came home. I came home to the valley that gave birth to me. Maybe as a priest it's vanity to believe you can have a home. The whole church is supposed to be your family, your community, but I can't pretend I don't get lonely.

CEREZITA: Why did you become a priest, Father Juan?

JUAN: Too many years as an altar boy. *(He takes a drink of water.)* And because of the fabric.

CEREZITA: The fabric?

JUAN: Yes. Literally, the cloth itself drew me to be a "man of the cloth." The vestments, the priest's body asleep underneath that cloth, the heavy weight of it tranquilizing him.

CEREZITA: Will you always be a priest, Father Juan?

JUAN: Yes. There's no choice in the matter. Once ordained, you've given up volition in that sense. The priesthood is an indelible mark. You are bruised by it, not violently, but its presence is always felt. A slow dull ache, a slight discoloration in the skin . . .

CEREZITA: A purple-red spot between the eyes, the size of a small stone.

JUAN: I wish I had a third eye, Cere.

CEREZITA: But that's your job, isn't it, Father, to make people see? The 'theology of liberation.' It's a beautiful term. The spiritual practice of freedom. On earth. Do you practice what you preach, Father?

JUAN: It's the people that are to be liberated, not the priests. We're still caught in the Middle Ages somewhere, battling our internal doubts Spanish Inquisition-style. *(Pause.)* I always wanted that kind of sixteenth-century martyr's death. To die nobly and misunderstood, to be exonerated centuries later by a world that was finally ready for me.

CEREZITA *(smiling)*: You've been reading too much Lorca.

JUAN: He's my hero.

Fade out.

Scene Eleven

AMPARO and DOLORES return home from work, wearing white uniforms. They are a little tipsy, having stopped off at the local bar for a few beers first. They are singing a ranchera. They come into the house and pull out a few chairs onto the porch. BONNIE rides up on a bicycle. Nueva canción music can be heard coming from the radio indoors.

AMPARO: I dunno how much longer I could aguantar working in tha' place anyway. I dunno wha's worser, the bending to pick en los files or standing on your feet all day in the same damn spot. Me 'stoy poniendo vieja. *(They sit down in front of the house, take off their shoes.)* Mira los bunions. *(BONNIE joins them, AMPARO shows her her feet.)* You see how the toes all bunch up there on top of each other? . . . Mi viejo usetu tell me I had beautiful feet. Beautiful. Like a movie star. Ya no.

BONNIE: You want me to rub 'em, Doña Amparo?

AMPARO: ¿Qué, miya?

BONNIE: Your feet. You want me to rub 'em for you?

AMPARO: Pues, okay!

DOLORES: ¡Ay! The royal treatment. *(BONNIE massages AMPARO's feet.)*

AMPARO: Your feet get crooked when you gottu squeeze 'em into zapatos que take all the blood from you. They don't tell you cuando eras una chamaca tha' you suffer the rest a your life for the chooz you wear at sixteen. ¿Qué no?

DOLORES: Tha's for darn chure.

AMPARO: Tha's nice, hija. La verdad es que siempre he sido purá ranche-ra. If I had my way, I'd go barefoot. Ahora these patas don't fit into not'ing but the tenny shoes.

DOLORES *(rolling down her stockings)*: What I got is the varicose venas. It's from the cement floors. They squeeze you from the soles up and then el cansancio press you from the neck down. In between, your venas jus' pop out.

BONNIE: Ouch!

AMPARO: Pinche jale. Who needs it?

YOLANDA *comes out onto the porch. She wears rubber gloves, stained with black hair dye.*

YOLANDA: I thought I heard you out here.

DOLORES: You got a custmer, miya?

YOLANDA: Señora Reyes. She's under the dryer.

AMPARO: What color she want this time?

YOLANDA: Midnight blue.

AMPARO: Ya no quiere ser güera.

YOLANDA: I think she's given up . . . tired of fighting the roots.

DOLORES: Bonnie, go get us a coupla beers from the refrigerador, eh?

BONNIE: Okay, Doña Lola. *(She goes to get the beer.)*

DOLORES: ¿Quieres una, miya?

YOLANDA: No. Looks like you two have already had a few.

DOLORES: Una, nomás.

AMPARO: 'Stamus celebrando.

YOLANDA: What?

DOLORES: The varicose venas y los bunions.

AMPARO: They kicked me from the job, hija.

DOLORES *getures to YOLANDA not to ask*

YOLANDA: But . . . why?

AMPARO: They heard about the protesta. It affect "the workers' morale," me dijeron, que I set a bad example.

YOLANDA: They fired you for speaking at a rally?

AMPARO: Pues, también I was giving out los panfletos from the union.

DOLORES: I tole her not to.

YOLANDA: I can't believe they fired you.

AMPARO: Good thing I got the green card or right now I be on the bus back to Coahuila.

BONNIE *comes out with the beers, passes them to DOLORES and AMPARO.*

DOLORES: Gracias, miya.

BONNIE: Here you go, Doña Amparo.

AMPARO: Thank you, chula.

The radio music is suddenly interrupted by a news break.

RADIO VOICE: This is KKCF in Fresno. News brief. San Salvador. UPI reports that at 6 A.M. this morning six Jesuit priests, along with their housekeeper and her daughter, were found brutally murdered. The priests, from the Central American University, were outspoken opponents to the ruling rightist ARENA party.

DOLORES: Cere! ¡Baja la radio! *(To the women:)* We got enough bad news today without hearing about the rest a the world también. *(The volume lowers, then fades out.)* If she can't be in the world, she brings it into the house and we all gottu know about it. First, it's her

brother and now it's the priest. He got her all metida en cosas she got no biznis knowing about.

AMPARO: How long you think you can shelter her from the suffering of the world, Lola? (DOLORES *doesn't respond, puts her shoes back on.*)

DOLORES (to YOLANDA): Did your brother come home?

YOLANDA: No. What're you gonna do now without a job, Doña Amparo?

AMPARO: Pues, first thing I put that husband of mine on a diet. (DOLORES *gets up, looks down the street.*) He still got a job, mija. We'll make it all right. But if they wannu shut me up, they thinking of a purty good way to do it.

DOLORES (to YOLANDA): Did he call?

YOLANDA: Who?

DOLORES: Tu hermano.

YOLANDA: Yeah, he said he's leaving on Saturday. He's already packed, 'amá.

DOLORES: Fine. I'm tired of worrying for him. This way, if you don't know nothing, you got nothing to worry about.

YOLANDA: He said if you wanted he'd come by Friday night.

DOLORES: Dile que no thank you. I don' wan' no good-byes. I had enough good-byes already in my life.

AMPARO: Pues, you tell mi querido ahijado he better not move nowhere without saying good-bye to his padrinos. It would break his Nino's heart.

YOLANDA: I'll tell him, Doña Amparo.

YOLANDA *goes back inside to check on Señora Reyes. Crossfade to JUAN, who is walking to the Valle home, books stuffed under one arm. He reads from a newspaper article.*

JUAN: They blasted their brains out in their sleep! Just like that!

DON GILBERTO *enters carrying a lunch pail, returning home from work.*

DON GILBERTO: ¿Qué le pasa, Padre? It looks like you saw one of those holy ghosts of yours.

JUAN: 'Scuze me?

DON GILBERTO: Read some bad news, Father?

JUAN: Yes. (He shows DON GILBERTO the article.)

DON GILBERTO: Did you know the guys?

JUAN: No, but they were Jesuits, my order.

DON GILBERTO: You'd think a priest in a Catholic country couldn't get shot up in his pajamas.

JUAN: But they were intellectuals.

DON GILBERTO: That didn't seem to matter too much to the bullets, Padre.

DON GILBERTO *pats JUAN on the shoulder, continues on home. YOLANDA comes out onto the porch.*

DOLORES: ¿Y la Señora Reyes?

YOLANDA: She fell asleep under the dryer.

AMPARO: I hope she like el cabello frito.

BONNIE: Fried hair?

AMPARO: Un estilo nuevo, mija.

The laughter of the women calls JUAN's attention. He crosses to them.

DOLORES: Oh, hello, Father.

JUAN: Buenas tardes.

YOLANDA: Visiting the sick again, Padre?

JUAN: No. Yes . . . I mean I have some books for Cerezita. (To DOLORES:) If that's all right with you, señora?

DOLORES: Go 'head. What else she gottu do, la pobre. (He starts to go inside.) Oh, Father . . . (He stops at the door.) Can you come over to the house Friday night? Mi hijo is moving to San Francisco and we gointu have a little get-together, nothing fancy, just some enchiladas rojas. Son Mario's fav'rit.

JUAN: Of course, I'd love to. . . . ¿Con su permiso?

DOLORES: Pásale. Pásale. (He goes inside. To AMPARO:) And bring tu viejo. This way he gets some food in his estómago antes que you start to starve him to death.

YOLANDA: ¡Orale! ¡Una pachanga!

DOLORES: I dint say nothing about una pachanga.

YOLANDA: You know what happens when Don Gilberto comes—it's party time!

DOLORES: Pues, it'll be nice to have some men in the house for a change.

AMPARO: And tha' priest, he's plenty a man.

YOLANDA: Yeah. I don't trust him.

DOLORES: He means well, hija.

AMPARO: Pero you know wha' they say, Lola. A man is a man first, no matter wha' he is. If he's a priest or an uncle or a brother, no importa.

THE WOMEN (to BONNIE): ¡Un hombre es un hombre!

They laugh. The lights fade out.

Scene Twelve

Música Norteña. At rise, a pachanga in full swing. The records are spinning, the beer and tequila are flowing. JUAN sits at the kitchen table watching MARIO and AMPARO dance. CEREZITA is just finishing a game of Lotería with BONNIE. DON GILBERTO is playing la guitarra, while DOLORES sits on the couch, embroidering a dishcloth. YOLANDA sits next to her, holding the baby. After a few minutes, DON GILBERTO, who's pretty well plastered, puts his guitar down and pours himself another beer.

DON GILBERTO: ¿Sabe qué, Padre? I love that muchacho. He's lo máximo. You wanna know the truth, Padre? That boy's not just my godson, he's my real son. That's right, mi propio hijo cuz I love him that much. Right, hijo?

MARIO: That's right, Nino.

DON GILBERTO: An' he's getting outta this pinche valle.

DOLORES: Compadre!

DON GILBERTO: I can talk like that with you. ¿No, Padre? You're off duty right now.

JUAN: Sure you can.

DON GILBERTO: That's right. God's back there in the church. The only men we got at this table are hombres de carne y hueso. Vieja!

AMPARO: ¿Qué?

DOLORES (intervening): Wha' chu handsome men wan' here?

DON GILBERTO: Tenemos sed, comadre.

DOLORES: Coming right up.

AMPARO helps DOLORES with the drinks, preparing the tequila, salt and lemon. They take a few shots themselves. MARIO joins the men at the table.

DON GILBERTO: She's got a heart of gold, that woman. And she loves her kids ¿sabe? There aint nothin' she wouldn't do for her kids. Look-it Cerezita over there, (CEREZITA is radiant.) 'Sta contenta because she knows she got a family, a mother, that loves her. It's hard, Padre. . . . You listenin' to me, Padre?

JUAN (pulling his gaze from CEREZITA): . . . Yes.

DON GILBERTO: You can imagine how hard it's been for Dolores, but she did it, and alone. My compadre . . . bueno, it's hard to even call him that now after leaving his family like he did. When a man leaves his wife alone to raise his kids, well to me that no longer qualifies him to be a man. A big macho, maybe. Maybe he can fool las viejas, act like que tiene huevos. But that's the easy part, jumping in and out of the sack. A real man tiene brazos. Nos llaman braceros because we work and love with our arms. Because we aint afraid to lift a sack of potatoes, to defend our children, to put our arms around la waifa at night. This family, they've suffered a lot, Padre. When a father leaves, it's like cutting off the arms of the family. (Hugging MARIO.) Even this guy. He had a lot on his shoulders. ¡Chihuahua! I usetu remember this little mocoso coming home from school all the time with his nose all bloody. He wasn' a fighter. But after so many times, finally, Dolores tells me, "Compadre, tienes que hacer algo." (He brings MARIO to his feet, starts to box with him.) So, I put the gloves on him and showed him my famous "apricot." (DON GILBERTO winds up, lets out a wild "uppercut" in the air and ends up on his butt. They all rush to him.) And they never messed with him again. Right, hijo?

MARIO: Right.

DON GILBERTO: ¡Eso!

JUAN: So, all your kids are grown, Don Gilberto?

DON GILBERTO: Well, I guess that's why la vieja and me, we kina adopt these guys. We couldn't have no children. Amparo's a good woman, she wanted kids bad! But it was me. She never tells nobody cuz she thinks I get ashamed. But it's biology, right, Padre? Mi madre, she had two of us, see. And my cuate, well it seems he just hogged up all the jugo, if you know what I mean. He got a pile of kids, nietos too. (He takes another shot.) ¿Y tú, Padre? What's your excuse?

JUAN: . . . I'm a priest.

DON GILBERTO: That's no excuse! (Busting up.) When los conquistadores come to América with their priests, half the Mexican population got fathers for fathers! (Busting up again.)

JUAN (embarrassed): I don't know. You just make choices, . . . I guess,

DON GILBERTO: Pues, sometimes you don't get to choose. But that just teaches you que you gotta make familia any way you can.

AMPARO: Ya, viejo. You gointu put the father to sleep con tanta plática. Mira, the father's glass is almost empty.

DON GILBERTO: Pues, fill it up then.

DOLORES: Aquí lo tengo ya. (*She carries a tray with drinks.*)

DON GILBERTO: ¡Tequila! ¡Sí! ¡Celebremos! You watch, mi ahijado's gointu go to the big university. He's gointu be a doctor someday and cure all the sickness que tiene nuestra raza. Right, mijo?

MARIO: That's right, Nino.

DON GILBERTO: Pues, lez drink to that. (*Toasting.*) ¡Salud! (*They all raise their glasses.*)

JUAN: Amor, dinero.

MARIO: Y tiempo para gozarlos.

DON GILBERTO: ¡Eso! (DON GILBERTO picks up the guitar again and the family joins in singing "Volver.")

'Y volver, volver, volver
a tus brazos otra vez.
Llegaré hasta donde 'stés.
Yo sé perder, yo sé perder.
Quiero volver, volver, volver.'

MARIO rises, lights a cigarette, and steps out onto the porch. DOLORES's eyes follow him.

JUAN (to DOLORES): May I have this dance?

DOLORES: You don' dance to "Volver," Padre. You cry.

JUAN: May I have this cry?

DOLORES: Bueno, I think this one, pues . . . it's all mine.

Crossfade to MARIO smoking on the porch. He watches the sky as the fog begins to roll in. Sound of crop duster overhead. He waves back at it sarcastically. DOLORES comes out onto the porch.

DOLORES: Why they spraying at night now?

MARIO: Nobody sees them that way. Nobody that matters anyway.

DOLORES: I'm tired of it. I wish we were all going away.

MARIO: I'm sorry.

DOLORES: Really.

MARIO: Yes.

DOLORES: But it doesn't stop you from leaving us.

MARIO: I want a future, 'amá.

DOLORES: The school is not why you're going. It's something else.

MARIO: What?

DOLORES: You're leaving with a secret.

MARIO: It's no secret, 'amá. You're the only one that doesn't want to see it.

DOLORES: I'm not talking about that. I know already for a long time. You think I dint know since the time you was little? How you want to do everything like Yolie. Play with her dolls, put on her dresses. "Jus' pertend," you say, "jus' pertend, mami." Pertend, nada. Me chocó the first time I seen your hands digging into Yolie's purse like they belong there. (*Grabbing his hands.*) Look at your hands, hijo. Son las manos de tu padre, las manos de un obrero. Why you wannu make yourself como una mujer? Why you wannu do this to the peepo who love you?

MARIO (*pulling his hands away*): Who loves me, 'amá?

DOLORES: Tienes familia.

MARIO: Family you don't take to bed.

DOLORES: You think those men who put their arms around you in the night are gointu be there to take care of you in the morning?

MARIO: No.

DOLORES: Necesitas familia, hijo. What you do fuera del matrimonio is your own biznis. You could have familia. Eres hombre. You don' gottu be alone, not like Yolie. Who's gointu want her con una niña already?

MARIO: I can't do that, 'amá. I can't put my body one place and my heart another. I'm not my father.

DOLORES: He loved us, hijo.

MARIO: He loved his women, too.

DOLORES: Can't you forget that? You hold that in your heart, it's gointu poison you.

MARIO: Can you? We've always been lonely, 'amá. You and me waiting for someone to come along and just talk to us with a little bit of kindness, to tell us how fine and pretty we are, to lie to our face.