The Mathematics of Love

By Cherrie Moraga

With Ricardo A. Bracho

Production–in-Progress Version
1 February 2016

[As this is a new play, the script will continue to undergo changes in the early part of the production process. Generally, they should not affect design considerations in a major way.]

Design Elements:

- Red = sound/music
- Highlighted Yellow = costume and pertinent set descriptions.
- Green = lighting

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Playwright’s Note:

This play was first conceived as a 30-minute one act and as part of a collaboration with several Latin@ playwrights entitled “Amor Eterno”, under the direction of Diane Rodríguez. The project was initially commissioned by Latino Initiative of the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in 2002. The original title of my one act was “Waiting for Da God.”

Ricardo Bracho’s ten-minute play, “Ni Madre or Malinxe Takes a Vacation” was part of the “Amor Eterno” project. With Bracho’s permission I adapted several scenes from that play, featuring the character of Malinxe and her entourage, weaving them into the first act of “Mathematics.” Bracho’s queer Xicano take on the infamous Malinxe challenged my own perspective. And the play took off from there. I am indebted to Ricardo for the disquiet.

Setting/Set:
At the turn of the century. An elegant ballroom/lobby of a grand hotel in Los Angeles, California. The décor corresponds to its 1920s origins with some “post-modern” chrome beam and glass alterations, a touch of Spanish colonial and Indigenous pre-colonial California, as well as ragged suggestions of the hotel’s more deteriorated days. A vintage-looking velveteen couch and a tacky 1960s coffee table designate the lobby area. A TV remote lies on top. Across from this sits a humble California pine wooden chair and a small writing table (equally humble) with a desktop computer. The registration desk is of an elegant Mission-style.

The lobby is the focal place of the set, but not necessarily centerstage. A small bar area should be visible from the lobby, as well as Malinxe’s hotel room. The set should also give a sense of the various portals of the grand hotel, leading to the service workers area, the pool/fitness room, the “ladies’ room,” the ballroom, and the back alley where the 18th c. servants sleep.
Characters

PEACHES  Mexican-American, mid-80s.
Also plays GIRL, an 18th c. Yaqui pre-teen.

POPPA  Anglo, early 80s.

NANA  18th c. and contemporary Gabrielson (Tongva) hotel worker; 60s to 80s.

DAUGHTER  Mixed - Chicana/Anglo, late 40s.

MALINXE  Early 16th century Mexican Indígena – a young woman of indeterminate, but ever-mating age.

BARTENDER  Contemporary Latino Bartender – late 20s /early 30s
Also plays AMADO, 1930s chauffeur/1940s hotel worker
Scene Order

ACT ONE

Scene One: “All the beautiful hoteles”
Scene Two: “This Far North”
Scene Three: “Too Old to Be Called New”
Scene Four: “Breaking History”
Scene Five: “Baile conmigo”
Scene Six: “The Passion”
Scene Seven: “Pour Me”
Scene Eight: “Ashes to Ashes”
Scene Nine: “Queen of Slaves”
Scene Ten: “This Far North Again” *

ACT TWO

Scene One: “Cortés’ Thigh”
Scene Two: “Hot Water”
Scene Three: “Sip?”
Scene Four: “Lazy Boy”
Scene Five: “Wild Indian”
Scene Six: “Housekeeping”
Scene Seven: “Put Salt on It”
Scene Eight: “Got My Bag, Got My Reservation”
Scene Nine: “Las Matemáticas del Amor”
Scene Ten: “Bougainvillea”
Prologue

At rise, characters assume frozen postures on stage. It is a kind of tableau reflective of many amores and eras. As a danzón rises, they begin to dance in a manner emblematic of their character. Dancing arrangements might look as follows:

PEACHES dances with POPPA, her purse hung off her wrist; DAUGHTER dances with MALINXE; NANA dances with bucket and mop. BARTENDER enters, a tray of drinks raised in one hand, as he swoops NANA into a dance with the other.

Upstage a screen as backdrop shows mural and codex images of the Spanish Conquest of México, several depicting the Indigenous woman, Malinztin Tenepal (MALINXE), in her sexual/political relation to Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador.

Music transition. Mexica (Aztec) rattles and tambor; everyone shifts their movement to Danza Azteca. “La Danza de la Conquista is performed, featuring a figure wearing a double-sided mask: one side with the face of Malinche, the Native interpreter and slave-mistress of Cortés, the other, of the conquistador.

Black out.
Act One

Scene One: “All the beautiful hoteles”

At rise, NANA, wearing 18th century California Native servant attire, with contemporary bandana as headscarf, crosses to a corner of the stage floor and begins to scrub. (Sound of grinding acorn) POPPA sits before the hotel guest computer. He types out numbers very slowly and methodically with his two index fingers. The computer remains a kind of alien creature to him, yet he is forthright in his attempt to manage it. PEACHES sits upright at the edge of the couch. She is the high energy her husband is not. She watches people in the lobby pass in front of her, trying to be well placed, clutching the purse in her lap. She wears heavy make up, too much foundation, white against Indian skin.

PEACHES: What time is it? When are the kids coming?

POPPA: Real soon.

PEACHES: Where’s your watch?

POPPA: It’s busted.

PEACHES: We been waiting too long.

POPPA: It hasn’t been that long.

PEACHES: Not for you, you got something to pass the time. Numbers. That’s all you know.

POPPA: I’m paying the bills (like a foreign word) e-lec-tronically.

PEACHES: How? Do you stamp out the money with your little soft fingertips?  
*He looks at his soft fingertips.*
PEACHES: Look at my hands. There is nothing soft about them. They’re just tired hands. Sick and tired. Because I worked in my life and not in my head. Thinking is not working. Working is working. *(She stands up, straightens the pillows on the couch.)* Where are the kids? Shouldn’t they be home from school by now?

POPPA: *(Beat)* They don’t go to school no more. They have jobs.

*PEACHES is suddenly disoriented.*

POPPA: They’re all grown-up now, honey. We’re at a hotel.

PEACHES: What hotel? *(Nervous, she pulls out her compact; applies face powder.)* What are you talking about?

POPPA: The kids. God said to meet him here. We’re been waiting for him.

PEACHES: My son?

POPPA: Yes.

PEACHES: Don’t try to make me crazy. My nerves can’t take it.

POPPA: It’s true. He reserved a room for us. The “honey moon suite” at the Biltmore!

PEACHES: He paid for it?

POPPA: You betcha.

PEACHES: The Biltmore?

POPPA: Just like you always wanted. Happy anniversary!

PEACHES: *(Looks around, for the first time noticing her surroundings.)* The place looks so different.

POPPA: Oughta. They fixed it up pretty nice though, after all those years of letting it go all to pot. *(Beat)* Hard to believe, fifty years together. Isn’t, it honey, hard to believe?
PEACHES: *(Sighs)* That’s a long time.

*POPPA watches her for a moment, then returns to his work.*

POPPA: First of the month comes like clock work. Bills gotta be paid.

PEACHES: God is meeting me at the Biltmore. *(She rises)*

POPPA: *(Not lifting his eyes from the keyboard)* That’s right, honey. He should be here any minute now.

PEACHES: Will there be a party?

POPPA: Yep, tomorrow night. The whole family’s gonna come. God’s footing the bill.

PEACHES: I hope Cuca’s kids aren’t coming. They’ll bring the grandchildren and the whole place will be like a zoo. I told Cuca that’s what happens when you have kids too damn young, then the daughter goes and does the same thing, then her daughter, then the next thing you know you gotta big bola of brats on your hands and the grandma’s the one that’s gotta take care of them. Cuca’s too damn old for that. She made fun of me cuz I waited, for only having two, but my kids turn out good.

POPPA: God told Daughter to invite “only the closest relatives.”

PEACHES: Bueno.

POPPA: Yep, he took care of everything. Put it on his credit card. He said he got one room for himself and one for us.

PEACHES: Is she coming?

POPPA: The wife? Tomorrow, I think. Tonight we have God all to ourselves.

PEACHES: It doesn’t matter. My son is footing the bill.

POPPA: That’s really something, isn’t it, honey?

PEACHES: You better believe it. It’s a miracle she let him open up the wallet for someone else besides her. *(Suddenly nervous)* What I am going to
wear? (She rummages through her purse; takes out the compact again; more powder) Is this okay, what I got on?

POPPA: Daughter’ll bring you a dress.

PEACHES: Where is she?

POPPA: She’s coming.

PEACHES: I hope she doesn’t bring the girlfriend.

POPPA: (Beat) Emma’s dead, honey.

PEACHES: . . . Oh.

POPPA: Two months ago. Poor thing.

PEACHES: Mejor. She’s was holding her down. (She crosses toward the upstage curtain, dreamlike) The Biltmore.

POPPA: Now, don’t be goin’ nowhere, sweetheart. The registration people told us to wait right here until God arrives.

PEACHES drapes the red velvet curtain around her like an evening gown. Early 1930s Duke Ellington sounds play in her imagination. PEACHES dances in place for a few moments.

PEACHES: I remember all the beautiful hoteles, the elegant clubs, like in the Hollywood movies. When I was a girl in Tijuana, I worked only in the best places: The Agua Caliente, The Foreign Club where all the movie stars came . . . Gary Cooper, Jean Harlow, even el mafioso, Al Capone. Puros americanos!

POPPA: Yep, that sure was something, honey.

PEACHES: (Emerging from the curtain, she is all youth and “in charge.” She mimes carrying a sales tray as a “cigarette girl”) “Cigarettes, Candy, Chewing Gum!” (Then “hat check” girl) “Check your hats and coats here please!” “Cigarettes, Candy, Chewing Gum!” “Check your hats and coats here, please!” They’d tip me good.

POPPA: They sure did.
DAUGHTER enters, a woman in her late 40s. She wears nurse’s scrubs. Her arms are full of various items of clothing: an evening gown hung from a hanger and covered in dry cleaner plastic, a box of shoes, a man’s dress suit, etc. She crosses to PEACHES, kisses her on the cheek.

DAUGHTER: Hi, Mom.

PEACHES: Oh, mija. Eres tú.

DAUGHTER: Sorry, I’m late, got out of my shift late.

PEACHES: Shift?

DAUGHTER: And there was tons of traffic coming into downtown, some celebrity or something . . . a whole entourage following . . .

POPPA: Probably a Laker. Staples Center gonna make a mess of the traffic downtown.

PEACHES: Your clothes look like piyamas.

DAUGHTER: (Kisses him on top of the head.) No God yet?

POPPA: He’s late, I guess.

DAUGHTER: Figures.

PEACHES: Mija.

DAUGHTER: It’s my job, Mom.

PEACHES: Where’s the baby?

DAUGHTER: Home.

PEACHES: Is your friend watching her tonight?

DAUGHTER: My . . . Emma.

PEACHES: Sí, ésa.
POPPA: *(Softly)* She don’t remember, Daughter.

DAUGHTER: Mom, Baby’s big now. She can stay by herself.

PEACHES: Oh. *(Beat)* And your brother?

DAUGHTER: *(To POPPA)* Did he call?

POPPA: How could he call us here?

DAUGHTER: I gave you my cell. He’s got the number.

POPPA: Oh, I forgot.

PEACHES: He forgets everything.

DAUGHTER: You got it on you?

POPPA: What?

DAUGHTER: The phone.

PEACHES: He’d be an orphan on the street if it weren’t for me.

DAUGHTER: Check your jacket pocket.

POPPA: *(Finds it, hands it to her)* I’m sorry, daughter.

PEACHES: We haven’t budged since we got here.

POPPA: We went to the bathroom a few times.

DAUGHTER: *(Checking for messages)* Nada.

PEACHES: I told him I could go by myself. But no, he sticks to me like glue. I betchu God came and didn’t see us, so he left.

DAUGHTER: Did you check on the reservation?

POPPA: No, I figured God’d show up any time now.
DAUGHTER: I’m gonna go see.

PEACHES: Your brother took care of it.

DAUGHTER: Lemme just check, Mom. (To POPPA) You guys ate?

POPPA: Well, no. We wanted to wait for you, Daughter . . . so we could all eat together.

DAUGHTER: Okay. I ordered sandwiches.

She exits. PEACHES rewinds herself into the red drape. 30s music.

PEACHES: People don’t believe it, but when I was a young girl in Tijuana, I uset go dancing with Rita Hayworth in the same clubs where she danced with her father. At the Agua Caliente, to see the two of them on stage, they were beautiful, like novios! When she walked off the stage, though, she was nothing. She could barely say two sentences, she was so shy. Then I found out why the father held her to him like she was on a leash. Qué feo.

POPPA: (Half-listening) Yep, she had a sad life, poor thing. Then the Alzheimer’s...

PEACHES: She was rich and famous, but look how she suffered, five pendejo husbands, and I live twenty something years longer than her.

POPPA: Eighty-five years old.

DAUGHTER can be seen upstage, taking tray of food from the BARTENDER. He wears a short flamenco style jacket. She hands him a tip and crosses into lobby with the food.

DAUGHTER: You all hungry?

PEACHES: Ay, mija.

POPPA: Yep, we were getting’ a little bit hungry here.

Using a cane, he moves laboriously from the computer to the stuffed chair. He waits for his sandwich.
PEACHES: *(Noticing BARTENDER)* Joven, Joven. Ven p’aca. *(He looks over to PEACHES confused.)*

DAUGHTER: Mom . . .?

PEACHES: *(Going for her purse.)* I just wannu give the young man a tip. Es muy guapo.

DAUGHTER: Who . . . it’s okay, Mom. I tipped . . . him already.

*PEACHES starts rummaging inside her purse, pulling out several rumpled unused Kleenexes. She dumps the purse over, jiggles it, the compact, lipstick, and a holy card fall out. Not much else. DAUGHTER prepares the sandwiches.*

PEACHES: Yo sé que tenía dinero aquí. They stole all my money. It was the girls who clean the house. I tell him but he doesn’t believe me.

*She looks over to BARTENDER.*

PEACHES: It’s all lost . . . I could make a list of all the things I lost every day. One two, three four five, but I am not the one with the numbers, he is. *(POPPA now sits at the chair waiting for his sandwich, his handkerchief tucked under his chin).* He is always found, not lost, always forty fifty sixty years, he is still here. I am la perdida, la perdida pendeja. I remember a lot of small things, cositas importantes que nobody gives a damn about no more. Sure, sometimes I forget if I eat breakfast or take my pills, but that’s natural, I’m no spring chicken. I don’t even have to think about the bills no more, he says, I should feel lucky. It’s not lucky to be inútil.

DAUGHTER: You aren’t useless, Mom.

*She stuffs everything back into her purse, begins applying more white powder.*

PEACHES: That’s what you tell me, but you’re trying to control me just like him. He took away my money, my credit cards, even the Penny’s card, so I can’t even buy a damn pair of calzones without asking permission from my husband. You think that makes me feel good?
DAUGHTER: No.

POPPA: Is there a sandwich there for me, daughter?

PEACHES: That’s all he knows, when it’s time to eat.

DAUGHTER: It’s coming.

PEACHES: You might as well throw me into the garbage can, if I can’t do nothing for myself no more, if I go around with my purse empty. But I got eyes. Puedo ver lo que ‘stá pasando.


POPPA: You got it! You sure are somethin’, daughter.

PEACHES: Cuz she pays attention. (*Beat*) He doesn’t believe me, but the mexicanos who clean the yard, they don’t do a good job. And why should they? Is there a man around to tell them to pull up the weeds from the roots so they don’t grow back in two days? No, there’s no man around, just me, la vieja regañona who’s always complaining pa’nada.

POPPA: Okay, okay, that’s enough. Let’s just enjoy our meal together.

PEACHES: Don’t you try to shut me up.

POPPA: I’m not, honey, I just want us to enjoy this time with our daughter.

_**DAUGHTER serves PEACHES a sandwich.**_

DAUGHTER: Here, Mom. (*She opens a small jar of jalapeños.*) I brought you some chiles.

PEACHES: Gracias, mija. (*Taking the chiles*) Do you think they respect him, those workers? They don’t respect him because he’s not a man.

DAUGHTER: Mom...
Act One/Scene One – All the Beautiful Hoteles

PEACHES: I only say it cuz it’s true. They just steal his money. I try to treat them good. I know what it’s like to come to this country new. I invite them para un cafecito, un pan dulce . . . algo. Then when my back is turn, they sneak inside the house. They steal my identification, my house keys...

DAUGHTER: Dad?

PEACHES: Why ask him? I could be hanging with my neck in a knot and he’d still be there with his face inside the computer.

POPPA: I love her daughter. She won’t believe it.

PEACHES: I believe actions, not words. You think I wanted to marry you?

DAUGHTER: Por favor, ‘ama.

PEACHES: No, I don’t give a damn no more que piense la gente.

POPPA: Fine, you didn’t. Leave it at that.

PEACHES: It wasn’t romantic. It was just need. I didn’t love him.

POPPA: You barely knew me.

PEACHES: I know you now. Do you think I love you now?

DAUGHTER: Mom.

PEACHES: You bought a wife.

POPPA: Buy you! I barely had nothin’ after the war. Barely a family. Nothin’. I was free to --

PEACHES: Así son los gringos... free! What holds them to the dirt? They can buy it, but no feelings hold them to it. You didn’t have me, just cause of that piece of paper. You didn’t buy me.

POPPA: Damnit! I didn’t try to buy you!

DAUGHTER: C’mon, let’s just forget it.
PEACHES: I don’t forget nothing. I don’t forget how I feel.

POPPA: I lost my appetite. I’m going back now. (*He doesn’t move.*)

DAUGHTER: Where?

PEACHES: To the numbers. That’s all he knows.

DAUGHTER: He’s paying the bills, Mom.

PEACHES: Go ‘head, take his side. (*Beat*) Was he a father to you?

DAUGHTER: Mom.

PEACHES: Answer me the truth! What did he know about being a father?

POPPA: I admit it, I could’ve done better, but I had to work . . .

PEACHES: I taught your son how to be a man, not you!

DAUGHTER: You married him, Mom.

PEACHES: There’s was nothing left for me in Tijuana.

DAUGHTER: Ya lo sé.

PEACHES: The casinos were closed already for a long time. My father was dead. We came back to the states with our pockets empty. Entiendes? Con nada!

NANA’s cleaning has now crossed into the scene. NANA’s nose is running and she stops to search for a Kleenex in her apron pocket. PEACHES notices and hands her a tissue.

PEACHES: (*To NANA*) When you’re the only one left to support la familia, how could I think about myself? Next thing you know you’re already a thirty-something year old woman without your own baby to hold.

POPPA (*A plea*): I just thought she was beautiful, Daughter. Is that a crime? You know your mother, a real lady.
DAUGHTER: I know.

PEACHES: ¿Ya ves?

_NANA ‘eyes’ PEACHES to say ‘give the viejo a chance._

DAUGHTER: He said you were beautiful.

POPPA: She won’t listen.

PEACHES: *(Softening)* Not to lies!

POPPA: Yessiree, Beautiful. I asked her to marry me right there on the dance floor of the Trianon.

PEACHES: He did. *(POPPA smiles)* I didn’t let him touch me for a whole week. It was in the Imperial Valley. We were staying with my tía Espie. Que honeymoon! They had put us in my primo’s room. He was out picking walnuts near Sacramento. I had drunk two three beers. Poppa looked good to me.

POPPA: She was drunk. *(They start laughing).*

PEACHES: Afterwards, I was too tired to get up and clean myself. Pretty soon after, your brother was born.

POPPA: It was 1948. The war was long over. Truman was president. And I had a Mexican wife.

DAUGHTER: God was a “love child” then. . . ?

PEACHES: A what?

DAUGHTER: A child conceived in love, you know . . .

PEACHES: We had our papeles –

POPPA: Well, almost. We were on our way to Tia Juana. Just took a little detour for a day or two.

_They laugh and continue eating. Outside, the downtown cathedral bells begin to toll._
PEACHES: Mija, you know what I could use right now?

DAUGHTER: Una cervezita.

PEACHES: Sí. Una nomás. Or you could share one with me . . . ?

DAUGHTER (Rising): Nah, I’ll get you your own. I’ll go to the bar. You want one too, Dad?

POPPA: No, no . . . coffee’s fine. (Daughter exits.)

PEACHES: It’s four o’clock already.

POPPA: What?

PEACHES: The church bells. Son las cautro. I counted them. (Looking to NANA) In México, you tell the time that way. You don’t have to look, you just listen.

Fade out.
Scene Two: “This Far North”

“Cuatro Milpas” (Four Cornfields) from the Kronos Quartet’s album “Nuevo” rises. PEACHES’ mind time travels back to a previous life as a Yaqui twelve-year-old and to when the hotel was a colonial outpost, a short jaunt off the De Anza Trail -- what is now downtown Los Angeles. MALINXE enters (Music motif). She pauses and replaces one pair of black sunglasses with another pair of large red-frame sunglasses and touches up her lipstick. Other than that, she is dressed in the 16th century multi-layered native Mexican huipil of her royal class standing. NANA still scrubs.

MALINXE: Girl. Girl.

PEACHES realizes she is being addressed, rises, goes to MALINXE, who points to offstage. PEACHES exits, then moments later returns as GIRL wearing a servant’s sack dress and pulling a cart with a small pyramid of Louis Vuitton luggage. MALINXE and GIRL stand at the front desk, waiting to be served. MALINXE speaks to GIRL who doesn’t pay her much mind.

Music – “Consciously European”

MALINXE: I, Malinxe, have never been this far north. Don Cortés took me as far south as Honduras and what an adventure that expedition was. I met all manner of people and spoke at the subjugation of many. Strange, to ride through a battlefield translating Spanish and Náhuatl into Maya telling bloodied limbs and half faces they were now part of the Spanish Crown. I didn’t mind except for all the dust. But upon my return, little girl, why poets wrote of me, calling me Mother, quite an honorific especially when I had yet to give birth. (Pause) And to think, Cortés in his early letters to the King and Queen addressed me as simply the Indian woman.

MALINXE laughs. GIRL rolls her eyes and NANA stands, removes bandana from her head, folds it neatly into her apron, replacing it with a red cap. When she crosses behind lobby desk, NANA’s entire demeanor changes.

NANA: How may I serve you?

They exchange looks in silence.
MALINXE: I have a reservation.

    NANA looks down.

NANA: Let’s see, Malinche Cortés.

MALINXE: That is a prior name and previous relat . . . husband. I am Doña Malinche Jaramillo. Or just Malinxe.

NANA: Yes, of course, here you are, please sign here.

    MALINXE signs parchment, a giant “X” with a flare.

NANA: Equis?

MALINXE: I’m traveling incognito.

NANA: And a few centuries into the future.

MALINXE: Excusez-moi.

NANA: This is the 18th century, Señora

GIRL: Ooops.

    MALINXE looks around, taking in her surroundings.

MALINXE: (Beat) I need some . . . rest.

NANA: Well here at Mission Spa & Towers we provide the finest in New Spain’s care and services. As one of the uppermost outposts in the viceroy’s magistrate we think of ourselves as her crown jewel. But like any jewel, we could all use a good buffing now and then. We offer purgatives and a special Indian package, including a sweat and purification with thistle.

MALINXE: Thistle?

NANA: A thorned plant, specially imported from the Mission down in San Diego. The Indians there use it to beat the impurities out of you.

MALINXE: Me?
NANA: One.

MALINXE: I’ll just need a large room con vista and a day bed. See to it that my slave, I picked her up en route, and one of yours here at the hotel carry my luggage upstairs with great care and unpack my things. Then send mine down to accompany me on my walk before we retire for siesta.

*An awkward silence and then NANA whispers in confidence to MALINXE*

NANA: We don’t allow them to sleep in the rooms. We have daily baptisms and accelerated catechism, and hope to soon have these local rascal nacos under the rule of God and Spain, but we can’t allow slaves to sleep in the rooms. Fray Junipero ---

MALINXE: Who?

NANA: Ni modo. *(In a more hushed but clearly audible tone)* Their (referencing GIRL with her eyes) feet stain everything and we can never get the smell out of the sheets. You understand? *(Back to full volume.)* We allow them to sleep out in the back here for two to four hours nightly depending on your schedule of needs. And for servants of the house, we provide this mat. *(She pulls from behind her desk a rolled straw mat.)* Here.

*NANA holds mat out to MALINXE who doesn’t move. GIRL goes for it.*

GIRL: Just give it here.

MALINXE: *(To NANA)* Yes, well thank you. I’d like to sign the girl up for catechism. She has been baptized but I’d like to have her do her holy communion while I rest. *(To GIRL)* We’ll get the Indian out of you yet and who knows, my little slave girl may grow up to become my Christian lady in waiting.

NANA: Like mother, like . . . Never mind.

MALINXE: *(To NANA)* Can you have my luggage delivered to my room?

NANA: I’ll have it brought up right away.

*MALINXE exits. NANA, looking at GIRL, scowls.*
NANA: Well???

    GIRL trudges off with the luggage.
Scene Three: “Too Old to Be Called New”

The blue-black dark of night floods the back alley area where the servants sleep. NANA enters in sleeping gown, weary from a day, like all of her days, of cooking, chopping, scrubbing, sweating, answering to, wiping some asses and kissing others. (Tongva sounds. Acorn grinding, hands fingering seashells in a basket, the clatter of whale bone, the call of bone whistles, the brush of soapwood, the pounding of a wicker beater, a woman’s voice singing in the distant.)

GIRL enters wearing sleepwear. She is surprised to see NANA rolling out a mat.

NANA: What girl? (GIRL says nothing.) Whose feet do you think they made the rule for? (NANA laughs. GIRL remains silent, rolls out her mat and lies down. After a beat, GIRL stirs.)

GIRL: Tell me a story.

NANA: Better yet. I’ll tell you a secret.

GIRL: Is it about mi Doña Malinxe? I know all those. All she did was “weedi weedi weedi” (She mimes a blabbing mouth.) all the way up the De Anza trail.

NANA: Is she a big shot?

GIRL: According to her. I don’t know for sure, it was before my time.

NANA: Cuéntame.

GIRL: Bueno. (Rote) She was stolen by traveling merchants or was sold to them by either her stepdad or her mother and brother, know one knows for sure – and she’s not telling. Then she was given to El Capitán –

NANA: ¿A quién?

GIRL: Hernán Cortés.

NANA: ¿El mero Chingón?
GIRL: (Nods) Her, and about eighteen other girls, when she was just a little older than me. Then she learned Spanish real quick and translated for ... el chingón from Maya to Náhuatl and became a Christian named Marina and traveled all over Mexico. And then she had Cortés’ son, el Bastardo.

NANA: That’s unkind.

GIRL: Yes, but not untrue . . . who got sent off to Spain. I hear her weeping at night over it. Then she married el Don and had his daughter but still weeps over the boy and lives in wealth and luxury in the great capital of New Spain.

NANA: Teotihuacán is far too old to be called new, no matter what the visitors say.

GIRL: Enough history. What about the secret? I have to wake up soon – before the sun does. I have to bring her food and sponge her in the morning. Help her dress and then clean the room. Then go to catechism.

NANA: I can time travel.

GIRL: Then after that I have to return and see to her needs, which are many. You can what?

NANA: Travel in and through time – mostly backward but some forward. You could do it too, one day, if you concentrate. Why I can even make time disappear.

GIRL: Can you disappear too?

NANA: If I could, I wouldn’t be here.

GIRL: I don’t believe you. I mean soon it will be time to get up and time to feed her and time to fix her bed and clean up her mess in the room and time to help her dress and time to steal some of her copal perfume and leftover blackberries while she naps. How can you time travel when you can’t even tell a good story?

NANA: You are a very rude.

GIRL: I know, una niña mala.
NANA: Good night bad girl.

GIRL: Good night worse woman.

They both go to sleep smiling. Night sounds.
Scene Four: “Breaking History”

DAUGHTER and MALINXE, still in full regalia, sit at hotel bar. DAUGHTER is now out of her scrubs and wears a white tailored shirt and black dress trousers. Well pressed. They drink. BARTENDER is washing a tray.

DAUGHTER: My kid’s got this calendar. Of some rock star or another, this straggly-haired pale dude with no ass. She’s keeping a countdown of the days until her high school graduation. So, as each day of the month goes by, she draws a giant “X” across the date with a black marker. Every time I go into her room, I see this whole page of big black X’s. It gets me. Only youth can afford to count like that – just begging for time to pass.

BARTENDER: Or prisoners.

DAUGHTER: She imagines she’ll live forever. (Aside) My mom, too, I think. And I’m the sandwich meat between the bread of their seventy years.

MALINXE: That’s harsh. (She glances at her watch.) That’s why it’s better this way. Better than just dying off without a protest.

DAUGHTER: On-line dating is your protest?

MALINXE: I’m . . . bored. (Pause). Once I dreamed I was an Indian princess. [Mesoamerican moment?] That’s something . . . different. I was betrayed or maybe it was I who . . . I confess I do walk around, always, with an intangible sense of guilt.

DAUGHTER: We’re mexicanas. We can’t help ourselves.

MALINXE: You’re . . . Mexican?

DAUGHTER: How late is he?

MALINXE: God? My e-date?

DAUGHTER: (Amused) That’s his name?

MALINXE: Yes. 40 minutes.
BARTENDER: In L.A., after 35 . . . it usually means they aren’t going to show.

MALINXE: Years or minutes . . . ?

*Bartender just smiles.*

MALINXE: It’s entertainment I admit. Makes you feel . . . hopeful, I guess, that there’s life after . . .

DAUGHTER: Death?

MALINXE/BARTENDER: *(Overlapping)* Divorce.

MALINXE: She dump you?

BARTENDER: Like last month’s electronics. *(Beat)* What’s your name?

MALINXE: Ma – rina.

BARTENDER: Let me put it this way, Marina. My wife had black hair, dark brown eyes and a Spanish surname . . .

MALINXE: *(Flirting)* As do I . . .

BARTENDER: So, I thought she understood the program.

MALINXE: The program.

BARTENDER: Frijoles on the stove, the comal always warm and ready, and --

DAUGHTER: “Don’t ask, don’t tell.”

BARTENDER: I bring home the paycheck. That’s how I was raised.

MALINXE: One indiscretion does not make or break history.

DAUGHTER: No?

BARTENDER: And you . . . your “ex?”

MALINXE: Oh, he wanted una gachupina.
BARTENDER: A what? *(Hands DAUGHTER the clean tray.)*

DAUGHTER: A white girl. Thanks. *(DAUGHTER exits.)*

*Lights fade to black.*
Scene Five: “Baile Conmigo”

Big Band sound from the grand ballroom. The clatter of dishes and drinks, of hundreds packed to shoulder to shoulder, partying. BARTENDER as AMADO suddenly sprints across the stage, wearing a white busboy’s jacket, and holding flat-handed a large serving tray up in the air. He exits into the ball room.

DAUGHTER crosses to the lobby where POPPA has fallen asleep in the reading chair. PEACHES stares out in an almost stupor, then lightly closes her eyes. A few empty bottles of beer stand in front of her. DAUGHTER starts cleaning up.

PEACHES: I knew a man once. Amado was very good-looking. He usetu work here in the Biltmore hace muchos años. One time, Rita Hayworth came in with a big group of people. We both knew Rita from Tijuana when she was just Margarita Cansino and not famosa yet. Rita was the kind of person that she liked you, no matter who you were. The money didn’t matter. So, when she saw Amado, she called out to him. “Amado, amigo!” And he looked over and there she was at the table with all of the rich people. But he felt ashamed that he was only there to collect the dirty dishes. So, he pretended like he didn’t hear her.

DAUGHTER starts to collect the bottles in front of PEACHES.

PEACHES: Déjalos, joven.

DAUGHTER: Mom?

PEACHES pulls DAUGHTER down to sit next to her.

PEACHES: Amor Eterno. I don’t believe in it. I believe in Amor Perdido, Amor Abandonado, Amor Quebrado . . . broken, lost love. At the end of your life, you make a long list in your heart to see if all the numbers add up, and you just come out losing.

DAUGHTER: . . . Mom.

PEACHES: No pedí mucho.

DAUGHTER: Yo sé.
PEACHES: When you are a girl, it is romance. A man has a nice haircut, a good smell...his perfume light from a clean shave. He does not spend too much time en el baño preparándose como si fuera mujer. No, he is simple in his preparation to see you. A perfectly starched shirt. The shoes shined, they do not have to be new, but the soles are in good shape and the leather, shiny. (Pause) A veces . . . (Stroking her daughter's hand) I look at the white of a man’s cuff, the way it cuts como un cuchillo across his wrist . . . Dark café skin against a clean starched white -- that is beauty in a man.

DAUGHTER: That’s nice.

PEACHES: (Beat) Find a good woman, hijo. Not too pretty, but clean and neat and some body you can have confidence in.

DAUGHTER: I did.

PEACHES: When they hurt you, leave them. Don’t wait around.

DAUGHTER: There was never another woman --.

PEACHES: I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about when death grabs your hand and there’s no one there to pull you back to the other side. You’re all alone. It is better to be alone alone.

DAUGHTER: But you’re here now. Someone still sits next you, pays the bills, calls you ‘honey.’

PEACHES: You think it matters to me?

DAUGHTER: I . . . don’t know.

Music rises. “Sentimental Journey” (Les Brown)

DAUGHTER: "Would you like to dance, Señora.

PEACHES looks at Daughter, confused.

PEACHES: You want to dance with me?

DAUGHTER: Por favor.

PEACHES: Here?
DAUGHTER: Please.

Peaches reaches for her compact. Daughter stops her, brings Peaches to her feet, and takes her into her arms. They dance.

DAUGHTER: (After a moment) I miss her, Mom.

Peaches: Who?

DAUGHTER: My . . . mujer.

Peaches: (Beat) Ay! We’re gonna make her so jealous.

They keep dancing as music and lights fade.
Scene Six: “The Passion”

POPPA wakes up from his nap. PEACHES is gone. MALINXE types expertly on the computer. NANA with red cap holds her post at hotel desk


MALINXE: (Reading aloud as she composes) “Seeking Xicano who knows how to be keep a low profile and a high maintenance mujer. Multilingual and well-traveled, I can broaden your horizons…”

POPPA: (To NANA) You seen my wife? (She shakes her head ‘no.’) POPPA wanders off.) Peaches . . . Mother . . .?

PEACHES as GIRL enters in passion fruit flower costume.

MALINXE: (Laughing) What, pray tell, are you girl?

GIRL: (Bowling with much pomp and circumstance) I am the passion fruit flower. (Drops the act.) Or I was today in our rehearsal.

MALINXE: Rehearsal?

GIRL: Yes. We perform tonight at the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse. I begged to wear the costume to show you and promised to clean the classroom and yard if Fray Bernadino let me wear it a bit longer.

MALINXE: But what does that have to do with your study of the scriptures girl? [Brief Church Organ for monologue?]

GIRL: Study? They aren’t teaching us to read. But we are memorizing important lessons. Like that of the passion fruit flower and the suffering of Christ. See my outer green petals? There are twelve; one for each apostle. And the inner ones, all white and purple? They are my favorites. There are five and they represent Jesus’ wounds: 1 head, 2 hands and 2 feet. And the three fuzzy brown ones are the nails they used to crucify our Savior.

MALINXE: I love parcha.
GIRL: Yes and that shows that you love Christ. *(Quoting the catechism instructor.)* “The Indians love for the passion fruit shows their hunger to know Christ.”

MALINXE: Well, I would enjoy some parcha. *(To NANA) Can you see to that?*

NANA: Right away, Ma’am. *(NANA calls for bellhop.)* Ding. Ding. *(She exits)*

MALINXE: And you, get out of that get-up.

*Disheartened, GIRL exits. After a beat, MALINXE returns to the computer. She writes:*

MALINXE: “Seeking a dark stranger who wants to get familiar. If you like warm beaches, a brilliant Tonatiuh rising from warm turquoise gulf waters, then I’m...”

*As NANA enters with the parcha, MALINXE abruptly closes desktop and pulls out a map of New Spain. She returns to the formality of her colonial status as MALINXE.*

MALINXE: I would like to see the sea upon my return. I get tired of the lakes of Mexico City, puddles of stagnant water really. I miss the Vera Cruz ocean of my youth.

NANA: Of course, Ma’am. I’ll speak to the concierge about arranging your travel.

*She exits. MALINXE enjoys the parcha. PEACHES enters.*

PEACHES: Where did he go?

MALINXE: The elderly gentleman?

PEACHES: Yes, my husband. He was right there where you are now.

MALINXE: He was looking for you.

PEACHES: No, he went to pee. He can’t control his pee. You’ll see. When he comes back, he’ll have a spot right there . . . in front of his you-know-what. *(MALINXE returns to her writing.)* Was she with him?
MALINXE: Pardon me?

PEACHES: The woman.

MALINXE: Who?

PEACHES: . . . You.

MALINXE: Me?

PEACHES: I know it’s you. Aren’t you his woman? Cuz I don’t give a damn, if you are. I don’t need him no more. I got my own money. (Starts to rummage in her purse again.) Why did you marry the Spaniard?

MALINXE: The Spaniard?

PEACHES: They’re a mean people. Se creen muy muy . . . (Sticking her nose in the air.)

MALINXE: I . . . I had my God.

PEACHES: Me, too. (Observing her) Puta.

_NANA crosses stage with a toilet scrubber and a bucket of soapy water. Spying her, PEACHES follows._
Scene Seven: “Pour Me.”

POPPA sits a the bar.

POPPA: Well, yeah . . . I guess Peaches was right . . . left to my own devices, well those guys kina took advantage of me. I should’ve acted different. Just plain better. But, when you look back, you know, as you get older, you think about how young you were at the time and you kina gotta forgive yourself some things. Hell, I was just a teenager when left for the war. And barely a few years after my discharge, I’m married and the kids start coming.

BARTENDER: Wow.

POPPA: These fellas were kind of the same way, y’know, like in the service. Peaches was right about that. They’ll take you for every cent you got in your pocket. (Pause) I’d think of Peaches in that hospital bed, hooked up to every kind of tube and contraption and I just didn’t know what I was supposed to do. They thought it was cancer; opened her all up to find out it wasn’t. Ulcers as big as my fist though.

BARTENDER: Damn.

POPPA: Still there were complications. The cure can kill you, that’s for sure.

BARTENDER: Yeah, I know that.

POPPA: Shoot, the kids were still in grade school. Whad I know ‘bout being a father without Peaches? Her whole family was lookin’ at me like this kinda stupid gringo. They weren’t prejudiced or nuthin, but I could feel it. My mother was dead just a few years before . . . never had a father, really. Just quite a few “uncles,” if you know what I mean?

BARTENDER: I think I do.

POPPA: My mother was a kind of free spirit, when I was a boy, god bless her. (Pause) I thought I was losing my wife, so I turned to the liquor. Okay, I admit it, I drowned my troubles. Pretty much abandoned my kids for that time. But I never had another woman. Sure, the guys would tease me about it, but no one could
compare. Not to my Peaches. *(Pause)* Thing is . . . nobody bothers you at a bar. You can say whatever you want or nothing at all and nobody holds it against you, especially, like I said, if you have a few dollars in your pocket.

BARTENDER: Poor me, poor me, pour me another one.

POPPA: Hey, that’s a good one. Funny. *(Beat)*

BARTENDER: *(Pouring him a shot)* On the house.

POPPA: Why thank you. *(Beat)* I never even cooked myself a meal before, ’sides peeling potatoes on KP duty. With Peaches, all I had to do was bring home the bacon, little as it was.

BARTENDER: You’ve been a lucky man.

POPPA: Fifty years together. Never another woman.

BARTENDER: ---

BARTENDER: Really.

POPPA: Yep.

*Long pause. Crossfade.*
Scene Eight: Ashes to Ashes.

*PEACHES and NANA are scrubbing toilet bowls.*

PEACHES: Que anniversary present! I felt like telling him ...

NANA: Who? *(Flips down toilet lid, sits.)*

PEACHES: My comadre’s son. ‘Why did you bother coming to me with your cenizas of despair?’ “You were her best friend back-in-the-day,” he says. “I thought you would like to scatter some of her ashes.” Así me dijo.

NANA: En dónde?

PEACHES: No sé. Maybe he wanted me to throw them over the fence to Tijuana. As if México needs more dust!

NANA: “Ashes to ashes.” *(They both laugh.)*

PEACHES: Menso. Didn’t she suffer enough? She should be lying on a grassy pillow, her face lifted up to the estrellas. I could never forgive my children for treating me like that, letting my hard bones, my broken heart and teeth clatter around against some stone box that my shoes couldn’t even fit into.

NANA: The kids nowadays, they only want to do what’s postmodern.

PEACHES: ¿ . . . Verdad? It takes a shovel to dig a real grave.

PEACHES: My comadre sleeps in a jar. Who can rest that way, really? After so many years of us scrubbing the same damn toilet bowls together in a joint like this. ¡Qué barbaridad!

*PEACHES flushes the toilet, then pulls out a small vial of grey ash from her purse, smiles conspiratorially at NANA.*

NANA: Las cenizas?

*PEACHES nods, then empties the ashes from the jar into the toilet.*

PEACHES: *(Flushing) I never like her that much anyway.*
They laugh. Service bell sounds.

NANA: Allí voy. Allí voy.

Nana exits, leaves PEACHES standing with toilet brush in her hands.
Scene Nine: “Queen of Slaves”

NANA enters the hotel pool area, out of breath. She carries a stack of books. MALINXE sits in a lounge chair, the green hue of the pool water washes over her.


MALINXE: Been there, done that .

NANA: “The History of the Indies of New Spain” por Fray Diego Durán

MALINXE: I’ve had enough of these celibates . . .

NANA: (Aside) Hardly .


NANA: Sí. It’s a sad story . . . I wouldn’t recommend it.

MALINXE thumbs through it.

MALINXE: What’s a pachuco?

NANA: My nephew, that’s who. Marijuano. (Beat) I’d skip the chapter on the conjugation of “chingar” --

MALINXE: Nasty word. I am aware that there has been talk.

NANA: No, señora. No sé nada.

MALINXE: It was on the road to Tenochtitlán.

NANA: Bueno, yes, I did hear que –

MALINXE: Los Cholulans were prepared to ambush Cortés and --

NANA: You went and spilled the beans. (She covers her mouth.)

MALINXE: That is common knowledge. But, what you may not know is . . . well . . .
NANA: Well . . .

MALINXE: In barter for my loyalty, I was offered a Cholulan prince.

NANA: Shaddup!

MALINXE: His mother came to me in the middle of the night, proffered her young warrior son to me on a silver platter, promising marriage. Fíjate!

NANA: Just like that?

MALINXE: With the caveat, of course, that I bring with me my dowry of plated gold. So, I respond ‘yes’ out of one side of my mouth and I spill the beans, as you so eloquently put it, to El Capitán out the other.

NANA: You are a vendida!

MALINCHE: Excuse me!

NANA: Vencida.

MALINCHE: Peor. Do the math, mujer. I would not get pregnant for the first full two years of my relationship con Don Hernán. The Cholulan would’ve had me with child in two weeks. My tongue saved me. (She smiles.) El Don needed me more to translate than to birth the mestizo nation. Literally, the man stopped touching me the moment he tasted the multilingual syrup that flowed out of these lips. (Touches her mouth) Not the other ones. (Gestures to ‘down there.’)

Maya, Spanish, every nuance of Nahuatl spoken from pauper to prince. Fíjate! When we arrived en la capital, it was I who had to tell el gran chingón Motecuhzoma himself, that the wheat-haired man con barba standing before him was to take him prisoner.

NANA: Qué vergüenza.

MALINXE: It was embarrassing. And el bruto Cortés goes to hug el Tlatoani like he’s petting a pinche esquincle. This, to an Aztec Lord whose station was such that his feet never touched the earth. He was carried everywhere --
NANA: Y ¿qué pasó?

MALINXE: Bueno, I grabbed el Don by the hem of his little skirt-shirt and pull him back. I tried to preserve at least an ounce of dignity for the soon-to-be-fallen Emperor.

NANA: Well, that was thoughtful.

MALINXE: Tlazocamatli.

_They are interrupted._ GIRL enters wearing a jacket of ropes, a headdress of heron feathers and a tumpline (or headstrap) holding a bundle. She has been crying.

MALINXE: What have you done?

GIRL: When I went to return the costume after the show, I got some passion fruit juice on it. It stained.

MALINXE: You thieving witch.

GIRL: And the friar made me wear this, so I would remember what it would be like to be a slave who didn’t know God.

NANA: *(Examining the costume)* My heron feathers disintegrated over time. And this is a good tumpline, I would like one just like it. Take the jacket off girl.

MALINXE: She’s mine to command, you insolent hag. But yes, do remove the headdress and tumpline and ropes. And you, *(To NANA)* you, take her outside and find a very wooden branch or some of that thistle you have imported and open up her back with it.

_GIRL is stunned and methodically removes headdress, tumpline and ropes and gingerly folds them. NANA leads her out by the hand. MALINXE goes to the headdress, fingers it, then awkwardly puts it on._

MALINXE: Let me see if I remember, I must, I was sold at least three times. *(Beat)* The slave. She who is an axe, a tumpline, the earth, the mud, the the the – oh what is it – the stones, yes and then something something, she who has heron feathers and a jacket of ropes, and then I forget but yes the ending I remember, she
whose dwelling place is the cesspool, the dung heap. (Happy at first at the prowess of her memory and then dejected by the meaning of it, MALINXE paces.) Here I am, with wealth and recognition in the Church, Spain and all her possessions. Wearing my rightful crown (She adjusts the headdress)... the Queen of the Slaves.

Black out.
Scene Ten: “This Far North Again”

Lights rise on GIRL who stands on stage alone in a white holy communion veil. She holds white pumps in her hands. The back of her dress is open and she wears a gauze bandage over her wound. Music.

Upstage MALINXE can be seen, removing the outer ankle length huipil of her 16th c. regalia.

GIRL: I’m healing now. She didn’t use a branch or the thistle, said it cost too much to waste on a slave. Instead she used bougainvillea, said the thorns would make it look worse than it felt. She told me to stand very still and concentrate. . . . And I did it! I time traveled. As the red petals flew around me and my back bled tears, I traveled through time. Mostly forward . . . or was it backward? I will return to the far south under a different guise.

Mi Doña will be dead in a year but spoken about throughout time. The legal husband will marry again, Spanish, this time and disinherit the mestizo daughter. Her only son will die beneath a Spanish flag in the war against Islam.

Malinxe will turn in her grave.

And I . . .? I will outlive them all, long enough to forget my original name and answer to ‘cabrona.’

[Music: Nana motif.] When Nana was done whipping me, she blew on my back and cooed that she would make me a poultice with medicine she grew. I gave her the tumpline, the nuns will just think I stole it, and I won’t be beaten for it twice. And then she turned me toward her and held me soft and told me she loved me.

GIRL stiffly begins to exit, then stops.

GIRL: I will travel this far north again.

MALINXE observes her. GIRL glances back. A son jarochoblasts. Black out.

End of Act One
Act Two

Scene One: “Cortés’ Thigh”

MALINXE’s hotel room. A stack of books are on the nightstand. She has stripped down to undergarments. A dark moment. Faints sounds in the distance – the vague memory of war -- swords clash, cries of death, trodding horses—hardly discernible. NANA knocks. MALINXE quickly stretches out on her back like a giant “X” across the king-sized bed. NANA comes in with more books.

MALINXE: I thought it would be more extravagant than this. I thought they would provide four pillows, not two.

NANA (Muttering): Nació para ser rica. Something’s never change.

MALINXE: King-sized ones, the size of El Capitán’s thigh. I do recall his left thigh, the one with the scar on the inside. I always wondered how he got the scar. Surely, at some off-guard moment when he happened to have his thighs open. A jealous husband, a mistress? His thighs, as I remember them, were a soft fur, the only pillow aspect to him, really. I wouldn’t lay my head there, of course, unless he were completely satiated because the gesture, bringing my head down in such a fashion, would warrant other actions. This is how he saw all things. Sexually.

Still (bouncing a tad on the mattress) the bed is firm and it supports where there is a weariness in me. This is good, as is the smell of Hexol coming from the baño. I came to know the disinfectant from scrubbing toilets some time, some time not so long ago. The nineteen fifties maybe. Have I just been chasing this vieja down like bad news? Have I been following her for decades? Centuries?
MALINXE turns on the TV set with remote.

MALINXE: Ay El Norte! They think it’s a scandal when a president puts a cigar into a woman’s panocha.

NANA: And not even the lit end.

MALINXE: I’ve put el nopal inside me to keep out intruders. (She smiles.) Or so it’s been written.

NANA: There are many sides to you, Malinxe . . .

MALINXE: Who cares to know?

NANA: The old woman.

MALINXE: No.

NANA: She showed up for a reason.

MALINXE: For her god. (Beat) She hates me.

NANA: Por qué dices --

MALINXE: Es envidia. She might have sold me down the bloody river of Colón --

NANA: Don’t believe everything you read.

MALINXE: But I’m the one who ends up with the lakefront property in Tenochtitlán. (Beat) Well, it is no longer called that, is it now? Mexico City. Sin lago.

NANA: Try her.

Music can be heard.

MALINXE: That electric bass from the ballroom five floors below batters these walls. War drums. They bother me in the same way.

Slow Crossfade. Cathedral Bells. Seven times.
Scene Two: “Hot Water”

**POPPA** sits at the bar with a drink and eating peanuts. **BARTENDER** is wiping down the bar. **PEACHES** sits at a small table in the bar area, also with a coffee. She sips at it occasionally, staring self-consciously at the bartender, then periodically rummages into her handbag, takes out her compact and powders her face. When she speaks (it is an intimate conversation), her hands softly moving.

**PEACHES:** After my shift at the casino, I would walk home alone at three, four o’clock in the morning. The streets of Tijuana were not safe. Not even then.

**BARTENDER:** She all right?

**POPPA:** It’s the dementia talkin’. (To PEACHES) You doing okay, honey?

**PEACHES:** If I turned the corner and found mi apá coming toward me, borracho, staggering around, his belly full of tequila, I would real quick . . . before he had a chance to see me, before he looked up from the ditch his face had fallen into . . . I would take a detour, the long way home. I never told no one, not even Mr. Bowman.

**POPPA:** Memory lane, huh, honey? (BARTENDER) Peaches worked for him. That’s who she’s talkin’ about.

**BARTENDER:** Who?

**POPPA:** Wirt Bowman. A big casino owner in Tiajuana in the 1930s. You never heard of him and the ole “Agua Caliente.

**BARTENDER:** The race track, sure.

**POPPA:** Well, Bowman owned it. He was one of those big wheeler-dealers, you know one of those big industrialist sonovaguns.

* A blast of- Big Band music circa 1930. Neon Light & glitter. Scene shifts to “El Salón de Oro,” the high-roller room of Agua Caliente Casino. **PEACHES** sits up at the table, suddenly animated. She watches intently. Roulette spinning, lots of flash. **DAUGHTER** enters with a bulldagger swagger, cruising MALINXE, wrapped in a fur coat. . She inserts her arm into DAUGHTER’s and they hit the
tables. BARTENDER deals chips. NANA enters wearing a “cigarette girl” sales tray.

NANA: Cigarettes, Candy, Chewing Gum! Cigarettes, Candy, Chewing Gum!”

Action freezes. BARTENDER (as AMADO) dons a chofér hat. He comes downstage

AMADO: It was a 1932 Packard De Luxe. A classic. It had those wide white walls and those trumpet horns mounted under the headlights. It’d be the last time I’d drive for Bowman. Peaches had just turned eighteen. I remember because the day before, me and a buncha the boys at the casino, decide . . .

DAUGHTER (One of the “boys”): “Vamos a dar una serenata a la Peaches.”

“Las Mañanitas rises in the background.”

Everyone loved Peaches at el Salon – todos los trabajadores. She treated everyone real nice, no matter what your job was. Y bueno, también era muy bella. So, a half dozen traguitos later, just as the sun is coming up, we all pile into el troque and head into town to to her mother’s house to serenade a la Peaches. (Singing): “En el día que tu naciste, nacieron todos las flores.”

AMADO: But “El Señor” Bowman was no song and dance man. The next day when me and him pull up in front of the house, I see la mamá peeking out from behind las cortinas. Not to keep us chavalos tijuanenses in line like the morning before, but to make sure her hija didn’t crack, as Peaches drags her heart to her own funeral. La mama must’ve known.

Still I get it. Bowman was the bossman, la tortilla and el frijol para la familia. And it was a big family... the father gone.

I couldn’t look Peaches in the eyes though when I open the car door for her. I knew que tenía vergüenza. Me, too, for both of us. And I hear El Patrón slap the leather seat for her to come and slide on over next to him. So she does and I slam the door closed. Too hard, I guess, because el viejo throws a look at me --

Offstage: “Con calma, hombre,”
AMADO: I hated it when he spoke to me in Spanish. My English was fine. And then,

Offstage: “Llena el tanque.”

AMADO: So, I go to the gas station and step out to shoot the breeze con el gasolinero. We talk about the car a little, a little bit de la política sobre Cárdenas y todo. I can see that Bowman’s not even looking at me. He’s still got his fedora on and it’s covering his face and hers, too. I hated how he would always lean into her like that, like he already had a piece of her. I know he’s telling her some kina pedo – flattering her with air. Y me enojé. So, I tell the attendant. “Déjalo vacío.” And pass him a few dollars and we drive off with less than a gallon of gas left in the tank.

PEACHES smiles.

AMADO: When we hit the road, I keep checking out the scene in back through my side mirrors. Somehow she managed to put a little room between him and her. She has her face turned away to the window, como fuera tan enamorada de la vista. But mostly I watch her lips, they’re moving hundred miles an hour, but nothing’s coming out of her mouth.

She was praying! That’s what got me the most. She was praying half way down to Rosarito, waiting for some milagro to save her from this cabrón’s evening of ‘payback.’

Offstage: “So, you’re eighteen now,”

AMADO: I heard him say more than once. El Viejo had to be already in his sixties! She knew what was ahead of her.

PEACHES: Rosarito.

AMADO: Hotel Rosarito was the kind of place that the only mexicanas that go there were either holding a wash bin or their governor-husband’s elbow. Any one else, . . . bueno, tú sabes . . .

PEACHES: Sí.

AMADO: So, true to form, that beautiful Packard starts spitting up and sputtering to a dead stop, right there en el desierto and not a gas station for miles.
I can see her looking at me through the side mirror. She’s got such relief in her eyes. So, I give it my best mexicano ‘pobre de mí’ number. “I don’t know what’s wrong, Señor. You saw it yourself, I filled the tank.” (Beat) After that, he let me go.

AMADO: I was glad. Casinos were closing down anyway. There was plenty of work in L.A. I heard.

_Suddenly NANA rises, put her sales tray back on._

NANA: Break’s over. *Music, casino lights return.*

PEACHES: Ya se van?

NANA: Gotta get those tips while they last. Cigarettes, Candy, Chewing Gum! Cigarettes, Candy, Chewing Gum!”

_She exits, as the casino closes down. Everyone packs it up. The music fades and lights return to the present. PEACHES is still watching the BARTENDER as he crosses back to the bar._

POPPA: By 1934 Laz-a-row Car-deen-uz was elected president. Lazarus. Good name for him beause it was like that man just rose up from the dead of México’s revolution. The minute he got in office, he outlawed gambling and the Agua Caliente went cold! *(Laughs at himself.)* Get it. Agua Caliente means “hot water,” . . . well, you know that.

BARTENDER: Yes. And you know your history.

PEACHES: Pura política.

_Irritated, PEACHES gets up with no place to go. NANA passes through, pushing hotel laundry cart. She sings._

NANA:

“Gonna take a sentimental journey, 
gonna set my heart at ease, 
gonna take a sentimental journey 
 to renew old memories."

_Peaches follows her, exits. POPPA doesn’t notice._
POPPA: Yeah, Bowman was kind of like a god to Peaches.

BARTENDER: Nah, I never heard of him.
Scene Three: “Sip?”

Crossfade to hotel lobby. DAUGHTER now sits at computer. MALINXE enters.

MALINXE: Hi.

DAUGHTER: Hi.

MALINXE: (Offering her glass) Sip?

DAUGHTER: Nah, thanks. The date dis you?

MALINXE: That’s history.

DAUGHTER laughs.

MALINXE: You’re cute when you laugh.

DAUGHTER: I’m . . . cute.

MALINXE: You should do it more. Laugh.

DAUGHTER: I’ll take that under advisement.

MALINXE: (Ref. computer) E-dating?

DAUGHTER: Studying. The NCLEX.

MALINXE: What?

DAUGHRTR: Nurse’s exam.

MALINXE: You’re too old to study.

DAUGHTER: I’m a single mother.

MALINXE: (Beat) Do you have a thesaurus there?

DAUGHTER: Word?

MALINXE: Look up -- “opprobrium.” I saw it on line today.
DAUGHTER: Because . . .?

MALINXE: Just research.

*MALINXE looks at monitor over DAUGHTER’s shoulder.*


MALINXE: No. Better the dictionary.

*DAUGHTER searches.*

DAUGHTER: “The public disgrace arising from someone’s shameful conduct --”


DAUGHTER: (Still staring at the monitor) Something else?

*MALINXE touches the back of DAUGHTER’s neck.*

MALINXE: You’re good aren’t you? You’re good and new.

DAUGHTER: I don’t know what you mean. *(Her eyes do not leave the monitor screen.)*

*MALINXE bends over, kisses her lightly on the neck. There is a moment no one moves. MALINXE again extends her wine glass to DAUGHTER.*

MALINXE: You sure?

*Black out.*
Scene Four: Lazy Boy

PEACHES stands by the hotel service entrance. She is folding towels on a hotel laundry cart. NANA cleans rugs with a sweeper.

PEACHES: (To self) I don’t always remember. Sometimes a long time goes by before I remember. When I wake up, I got to think for a minute where I am. These are the things I think: I think I am going to get up out of my bed and my children, already teenagers, will be down the hallway asleep and my husband will smell of bad breath from rotten teeth and his mouth dreaming open all night. I think I will get to the bathroom before all of them, wash my face and brush my hair before they start pounding on the door to get in. (Beat) I am always the first one up. Always before the rest, I am already outside with the pajaritos, the bougainvillea is so bright red en la madrugada. I water the earth beneath the rose bushes, before the wet morning air turns to smog con el calor.

But that isn’t how it is now. That isn’t the way I wake up. I wake up alone and sometimes I’m in the lazy boy chair. Someone, I guess him, put a blanket over me. I have pijamas on but I don’t remember putting them on. I try to force my chair back down. But it’s hard. He comes and helps me, and I start my day.

Siempre tengo mucho que hacer. I make the kids’ lonches. Prepare unos burritos de carne picado for the ladies at the plant. Do some laundry antes que irme. The towels. I know how to fold them perfect. First, I make the corners meet (She demonstrates) and then I press the fold along the line with my fingertips like this. And then fold it again and press it again. Como una plancha. Y así está bien.

She observes her pile of folded towels with pride. POPPA enters.

POPPA: I was looking for you, honey. Daughter said . . .

PEACHES: (Under her breath) He already forgot about me.

POPPA: We should maybe go over to the coffee shop, get something to eat.

PEACHES: I’m not hungry.
POPPA: Now, you know you oughta eat. Daughter said for us . . .
(Nervous) Honey, where’d you get the towels?

PEACHES: ---

POPPA: You didn’t take them, did ya?

PEACHES glares at him.

POPPA: Nah, you did a good job there, honey.

PEACHES: He doesn’t know nothing.

POPPA: You folded them just right, like a professional.

PEACHES: He never fold a towel in his life.

POPPA: Yesirreee, honey...

PEACHES: “Yessiree Honey.” “Yessiree.” He sounds like a payaso.

POPPA: You finished folding?

PEACHES: (Finally acknowledging him) ‘a course. Does anybody ever help me? (She rises with towels in her arms, confused about what to do with them.)

POPPA: I’ll take them back for you. (Taking the towels from PEACHES)

PEACHES: Okay, put them in the . . . Oh, you know where they go.

POPPA: Sure, I’ll take care of it.

He starts for the laundry cart.

PEACHES: Poppa! (PEACHES crosses to him, and with sudden tenderness, tucks in a bit of his shirt tale.)

POPPA: Thank you, honey. Don’t know what I’d do without ya. (He kisses her cheek.)

PEACHES: You smell like gin.
She exits, leaving POPPA with his hands full of towels. NANA crosses to him, takes them from him. She piles towels onto laundry cart, rolls it out.

**Transition:** Regina Carter’s “Sentimental Journey.” Cross fade.
Scene Five: Wild Indian

Lobby. MALINXE and BARTENDER can be seen upstage talking at the bar. PEACHES, eating some saltine crackers, observes DAUGHTER who watches MALINXE.

PEACHES: Ya ves? Ya anda con otro. I don’t like her for you.

DAUGHTER: What?

PEACHES: I see your eyes.

DAUGHTER: I just met the woman . . . not even . . . a few hours ago.

PEACHES: I know what I know. With some peepo, it takes a few seconds.

MALINXE can be seen approaching, towel over her shoulder.

DAUGHTER: Quiet. Here she comes. (To MALINXE) Good work-out?

MALINXE: Never quite got there.

PEACHES: I folded that towel.

MALINXE: I’m sorry?

PEACHES: Dámela. (She takes it off her shoulder, sniffs it.) You smell like church.

MALINXE: It’s copal.

DAUGHTER: It’s . . . nice.

PEACHES: Glares at DAUGHTER) It smells like the bartender.

PEACHES returns the towel, now folded, back to her.

PEACHES: Ten. You got something else for me to do for you, Miss La Reina. I punch the clock already.

DAUGHTER: What is with you?
MALINXE: Did I do something . . .?

PEACHES: I wipe your nalgas in another life.

DAUGHTER: Mom!

MALINXE: You . . . You really wanna go there?

_Silence. MALINXE and PEACHES lock eyes._

PEACHES: (To DAUGHTER) Mija, go get la ---

DAUGHTER/MALINXE: Marina

PEACHES: Marina, a cold glass of water. Parece que tiene sed, la señora, after so much “working out.”

DAUGHTER: I’ll go check on the room. (_She exits._)

PEACHES: You stay away from her.

MALINXE: Why should I?

PEACHES: Cuz I can already smell her blood on the temple steps, cabrona, that’s why.

MALINXE: And my blood, ‘ama?

PEACHES: Oh now, I remember you. You had a very big mouth.

MALINXE: . . . Yes.

PEACHES: You came out of me screaming.

MALINXE: . . . Yes.

PEACHES: Una gritona! I find you on the rooftop de un gran palacio. You were a thousand steps up into the sky. Your senos small volcanos de fuego.

MALINXE: Yes.

PEACHES: You were screaming like . . . like a wild Indian, your greñas flying. You scare the whole pinche pueblo.
MALINXE: I had . . . have visions.

PEACHES: No.

MALINXE: Nightmares. Day and night. Of --

PEACHES: No quiero/ saber.

MALINXE: Of this. All of this.

PEACHES: I got to go find my husband.

MALINXE: Wait. Please.

PEACHES: --

MALINXE: Tell me.

PEACHES: What?

MALINXE: Why did you forsake me?

PEACHES: ¿Qué quiere decir . . .? I didn’t sell you. (Exiting) You went for free.

MALINXE: . . . Free.

Crossfade. DAUGHTER stands at hotel desk, which NANA manages as red-capped hotel clerk. DAUGHTER hands her a credit card.

DAUGHTER: Try this one.

NANA: (Runs the card) Nope. Rejected.

DAUGHTER: Please, m’am. My mom needs to lay down. She’s exhausted.

NANA: You have to get the original credit card holder to sign in, I’m afraid. It’s hotel policy.

DAUGHTER checks her pockets for her cell phone.
Act Two/Scene Five – Wild Indian

NANA: The hotel operator can help you access outside numbers.
(Indicating off stage phone) Thata way.

DAUGHTER: Yes, thank you.

She crosses to the lobby, runs into PEACHES.

DAUGHTER: Mom.

PEACHES: No viene, verdad? God’s not coming.
Scene Six: “Housekeeping”

NANA knocks on MALINXE’s hotel room door.

NANA: Housekeeping. Fresh towels.

MALINXE is flagellating herself with bougainvillea branches, the red petals falling about her. NANA enters, sets down the towels and begins collecting the petals nonchalantly and putting them in a trash can.

NANA: Do you think that’s necessary?

MALINXE: It’s . . . There is some relief in it.

NANA: Sigh. The stain of the Spanish.

MALINXE glares at her, continues.

NANA: Will you quit it? Ya!

MALINXE stops, crosses to the bed, flops on it. NANA continues cleaning. Paz’s “Labyrinth of Solitude lies open, face down on nightstand.

MALINXE: The bartender wanted to come up to my room.

NANA: He could get fired for that.

MALINXE: I refused him.

NANA: Why? He’s handsome.

MALINXE: And Mexican.

NANA: What’s wrong with that?

MALINXE: The names he would call me . . .

NANA: If the huarache fits?

MALINXE: It doesn’t. I took the marimacha instead.
NANA: The Daughter?

MALINXE: Esa.

NANA: And . . .?

MALINXE: And . . . nothing.

NANA: Liar.

MALINXE: (Smiling) Bueno, I wasn’t called “La Lengua” for nothing.

NANA: (Laughing) Cochina!

MALINXE: (After a beat) I felt bad afterwards . . .

NANA: Really.

MALINXE tosses book to NANA.

MALINXE: Read.

NANA: I warned you.

MALINXE: Léalo. It’s marked. Right after “in the very flesh of Indian women . . .” (NANA glances at her “flesh.”)

NANA: (Labored) “The symbol of this vi-o-la-tion is doña . . .
Malinche . . .“

MALINXE: Go on.

NANA: “The mistress of Cortés. It is true that she gave herself vol . . .
volu ---

MALINXE: “ Voluntarily!” (Grabs the book back from her.) How the hell does this pendejo Paz know. Was he there? Cabrón criollo.

Crosses to window

NANA: Te molesta.

MALINXE: No. Yes.
She crosses to window, looks out onto the city lights. The sun is setting. Cathedral Bells eight times.

MALINXE: (After a beat) It’s hard to see it now, but at the time, there was no México like you think of it now. No mariachi, no Grito de Dolores, no frontera. No... Cinco de Mayo. Each people was its own country. Los Aztecas as murderous and greed hungry as any foreign invader. It is true that I could not (the small pox that would kill me too. I could not presage the travesty that is Cancún, the Marriott and Hilton ascending like pyramids on the beaches de los Maya. I could not presage that one day the descendants of the Cholulans, the Tlaxcalans, the Mexicas would return en masse to Aztlán. Their bellies scraped raw, dragging their bodies like criminal reptiles across the border sands of Sonora.

I could not have known. But there was a calling in me... that I suppressed, I admit. Or perhaps... I misinterpreted. Perhaps it was just the cry of a woman wanting freedom.

NANA: I told you not to read it.

MALINXE: Help me dress. I need some air.

NANA pulls huipil over her head, notices a wine spot on it.

NANA: Tiene una mancha –

MALINXE: I think that’s the point.

NANA: No, I mean there is a stain en su huipil. Mira. (MALINXE gives it a quick glance) Se lo limpio.

MALINXE: Don’t bother. I’ll deal with it later.
Scene Seven: “Put Salt on It”

Later. Hotel “Ladies Room.” MALINXE and PEACHES stand at the sinks. PEACHES “fixes her face.” She’s doing a bad job of it. MALINXE tries to remove a red wine stain from her huipil.

PEACHES: You shouldn’t rub it. It makes it worse.

MALINXE: Are you speaking to me?

PEACHES: Put salt on it. It soaks up the wine stain good.

MALINXE looks around like ‘what salt?’

PEACHES: Well, it’s too late now. (Observing her) . . . You know, you aren’t so special.

MALINXE: I’m not?

PEACHES: I had my Cortés, too.

MALINXE: It was written in our books, his arrival on the sea.

PEACHES: His eyes were blue blue blue like a pale ocean.

MALINXE: Like a god, a star rising on the Eastern horizon.

PEACHES: You sound like the bible. (Beat) No me oyes?

MALINXE: I hear you. I met your husband in the lobby.

PEACHES: I’m not talking about him.

MALINXE: Who then?

PEACHES: Mr. Bowman. He was a big shot in Tijuana. He owned everything.

MALINXE: Even you?

PEACHES: No fue así.

MALINXE: Era tu patrón.
PEACHES: Not so much. *(Beat)* They got books about him.

MALINXE: I know, “El Pozo del Mundo.”

PEACHES: Mr. Bowman made history.

MALINXE: I made history.

PEACHES: You made trouble.

MALINXE: Then you do remember me. You call me by his name.

PEACHES: ¿Cómo?

MALINXE: Cortés.

PEACHES: I didn’t say nothing about that.

*PEACHES continues to apply her make-up, worsening it.*

PEACHES: I’m not ashamed. I never did nothing to be ashamed of.

*MALINXE starts toward her . . .

MALINXE: Señora, let me . . . *(PEACHES steps away.)*

PEACHES: I hate this place. What I got to celebrate here? Oh, the Biltmore, big deal. Not to me. It’s not a big deal to me. *(Starts to exit.)*

MALINXE: No te vayas.

PEACHES: ¿Qué?

MALINXE: You don’t want to go out like that, Señora.

*PEACHES goes to the mirror. Studies her face.*

PEACHES: He told me to meet him in the hotel bar. This same one here. I thought after I left Tijuana, I was free from him, pero no, he track me down, like a piece a meat. He wanted something more, ya lo supe.
I sat in the booth waiting. A long time. By the time he got there, I got a fever, I was so scared. He orders a drink. For me, too. He could see I was shaking and white as a ghost. Se enojó. I couldn’t help it, to show I was afraid.

Then from the bar, the phone rang y el mesero le trajo el teléfono. Bowman says five words into the phone, then he hangs up.

Offstage: I don’t know what god you’re praying to . . .

PEACHES: Me pega con las palabras con si fuera un insulto. And he got up and left. (Beginning to cry) It was the last time I saw him, god forgive me.

There is a pause. MALINXE studies PEACHES who nervously returns to her face in the mirror.

MALINXE: It wasn’t the last time.

PEACHES: ¿No Entiendes? I knew he would never let it . . . me go. He threw la llave en la mesa. I see him whisper something al mesero and then he leaves. I just sit there like a pendeja. I can’t move. Until I feel someone standing over me. It’s the bell boy, un mexicano. (Pause)

DAUGHTER enters, hearing her mother’s voice. She stops unnoticed, stays by the door.

PEACHES: The boy picks up the key and doesn’t say nuthing. He knows I’m gointu follow him. He takes me to Bowman’s room. We went up up up to the top. But it’s not a room, es un palacio, like nuthing I ever seen before. Puro oro, but for me it was all black. All I remember is darkness.

The hour I wait for Bowman was the longest in my life. I could of left. I didn’t (Pause) When he came back, he’s got a big smile on his face. (Pause) And that was it. One time was all it took. I never saw him again.

MALINXE: (Going to her) Dame la cara, mi indita.

DAUGHTER appears. PEACHES sees her.

MALINXE: You look como la muerte/ con tanta --
DAUGHTER: Mom.

PEACHES snaps. Pushes MALINXE away.

PEACHES: No me toques..

DAUGHTER: I . . . I didn’t know

PEACHES: A la chingada, what dint you know? You dint hear nuthing!

DAUGHTER: Mom.

PEACHES: Esta puta she trick me --

DAUGHTER: She was trying to help you.

PEACHES: Like you trying to help me? You coulda help me better along time ago if you was born a man.

PEACHES pushes her way past them both and out. Black out.
Scene Eight: “Got my Bag; Got my Reservation”

Rise on hotel room. MALINXE changes her clothes. NANA helps pack Malinxe’s things. A long pause.

NANA: I went over to the park down the street.

MALINXE: Pershing Square. Hardly La Alameda.

NANA: I don’t know La Alameda.

MALINXE: Mexico City.

NANA: Bueno, there was a lady there. Well, she had the voice of a lady.

MALINXE: A bag lady.

NANA: She had a bag, yes, woven of tule. The old way. And a pretty voice, but she looked like a man. (Beat) She sang in Tongva.

MALINXE: What?

NANA: My language. I knew it because she said the word “Yangna.”

MALINXE: Yangna.

NANA: It was the first name for L.A. How could she know a word 500 years later?

MALINXE: She remembered, I guess.

They are done packing. MALINXE throws a backpack over one shoulder. She wears jeans and a short huipil blouse.

NANA: Y Las maletas?

MALINXE: I wont’ be needing them.

NANA: Ahora, ¿qué? Pa’ donde vas?

MALINXE: I’m going back.
NANA: Pa’ el sur?

MALINXE: In time.

NANA: Me, too. I hope. *(Cathedral Bells sound.)* Mission bells. I still hate them. *(Beat)* Lista?

MALINXE: Sí.

NANA: *(Putting on her red cap)* Vámonos, I’ll check you out.

*MALINXE smiles as they exit.*
Scene Nine: Las Matemáticas del amor


DAUGHTER: Mom, I paid for the room. Just waiting for it to be ready ---

PEACHES: Mija, tell me one good thing about love.

DAUGHTER sits next to her.

DAUGHTER: (After a moment) You were both young.

PEACHES: Yes.

DAUGHTER: (Taking her hand.) He took your hand into his. And he draws un dedo along the cracked cañón that is your palm.

PEACHES: Amado.

DAUGHTER: He wants you por toda la historia que tienes allí. For the muted llanto of your prayers, your mother’s regañadas, the factory work that will curl your fingers into fists.

Peaches looks at her hands.

DAUGHTER: He wants you because you are used. He doesn’t say this aloud, only fingers the words inside the palm of your hand. You grip back . . . and you are already together in the borrowed room.

AMADO enters. PEACHES holds his eyes.

He is embarrassed that you have to sneak. And his shame calms you because you know he knows that you are the kind of girl that deserves to be married and maybe he will marry you against his wife’s wishes. But you are not romantic because you have seen a man’s body and want to see his instead.

He goes to PEACHES, takes her in his arms. Lights dim upstage where they slowly dance in silence. A circle of light gradually closes in around DAUGHTER, as she speaks.
DAUGHTER: And your want spins you around and down onto the bed. The naked skin of his chest, your cuna, he cradles you. Your legs open and you are wet when he touches you. *Why is he touching you there...? Those hands...* 

Your body like water. He brings his mouth down into the lake of you. And the wool of his pants falls like drapes around your feet. He presses against you and enters you. And it lasts and lasts and lasts... until it’s over. (*Pause, a breath*)

*Emma...*

*Lights fade on DAUGHTER. The dance has ended. PEACHES looks at AMADO, her expression impassive. He watches as she walks away. He exits. PEACHES sits alone on stage. She does not see MALINXE enter.*

PEACHES: We take the long bus ride home en todo silencio. I don’t let him hold my hand. I know this kind of love is never married. It is meant to ruin you. I want a man’s sex. And I have to pretend I don’t.

MALINXE: Do you blame me, Madre? Do you blame Malinxe?

*There is a long pause.*

PEACHES: 
As women do we think, 
*I am making history?* 
Do we think beyond our shackles, our bracelets de oro our children’s hungry mouths, our fear of prison?

Do we look at our pitiful places on this earth and ask, *Is there a plan in this?*

You tell me, Malinalli, what Mexican country is there to return to now?

Es verdad que they called him Malinche. But you are no Cortés.
They make us slaves and then condemn us when we act like one.

*Within a few moments, PEACHES is already somewhere else in her mind, her hands speaking to figures in the air as she heads back toward the lobby. MALINXE picks up her mochila and exits the hotel (downstage). It is nighttime. LA Traffic central city sounds. The Tongva “bag lady” can be heard still singing in Pershing Square.*

MALINXE: I don’t pretend to rewrite history, the story of my capture and regret. I can only say, madre, that I have counted on you to remember me like this. Relieved of history’s burden.

At this, your most important hour.

*Lights fade, sound of cell phone ringing in the dark.*
Scene Ten: “Bougainvillea”

*POPPA and PEACHES* once again occupy the hotel lobby together, as in the beginning of the play. *POPPA* is on the phone. *PEACHES* stands downstage right, clutching her purse. *POPPA* finishes a phone conversation.

POPPA: Sure, son. You betcha... Sure, we understand... All right now... Sure, God... Love to the family. *(He disconnects the cell with some difficulty.)* He says he’ll be here tomorrow by noon.

PEACHES: It’s the wife.

POPPA: Let’s get our things together, honey. As soon as Daughter comes back with the key, I’ll take you to the room.

PEACHES: I got a bed at home. I don’t need to stay in a stranger’s house.

POPPA: It’s the Biltmore, honey.

PEACHES: I don’t care what the hell it is. I want to sleep in my own damn bed.

*Stubborn, she sits on the couch.*

PEACHES: Put on the TV, Poppa.

POPPA: Honey...?

PEACHES: You heard what I said. It helps me sleep.

POPPA: But, Peaches...?

PEACHES: And I don’t want no party. You call my son back and tell him, no.

POPPA: It’s for you, dear... for both of us.

PEACHES: Maybe for you. You go by yourself if you want. *(POPPA hesitates)* Put the TV.
He gets the remote. They both sit down to watch TV. DAUGHTER enters.

DAUGHTER: I got the key, took your stuff up to the room. It’s small, but nice --

PEACHES: (Rummaging in her purse) I can’t find my keys --

POPPA: She’s says she doesn’t want the party. God’ll --

PEACHES: (To DAUGHTER) Have you met my son, God?

DAUGHTER: Is he here? Dad?

POPPA: He can’t make it tonight.

PEACHES: Do you know him?

DAUGHTER: What? He --

PEACHES: My son.

DAUGHTER: Yes, I . . . (DAUGHTER looks over to POPPA. He is helpless.)

PEACHES: ---

DAUGHTER: I had a brother by the same name.

PEACHES: Tell me.

DAUGHTER: What?

PEACHES: Tell me about him.

DAUGHTER: He’s . . . I worshipped him.

PEACHES: Yes.

DAUGHTER: ---

PEACHES: Yes . . . ?

DAUGHTER: When we were young he’d play a game with me.
PEACHES: How?

DAUGHTER: He’d twist my arm behind my back and press it to the point of breaking.

PEACHES: Oh.

DAUGHTER: “Kneel down and call me God,” he’d say. And so, I’d whisper, “god.” And he’d keep pressing until I’d say it louder and louder. He’d have me down to my knees, before I’d submit.

PEACHES: You gave in.

DAUGHTER: I had to. And then he’d let me go.

PEACHES: I don’t remember that.

DAUGHTER: I know.

PEACHES: (After a beat) You go home, now, mija, it’s late.

DAUGHTER: No, I’ll take you up.

PEACHES: Call me when you get there. The baby’s waiting for you.

DAUGHTER: . . . Dad?

POPPA: Go on, Daughter. We’ll be all right here.

PEACHES: Don’t forget to call the house the minute you get in the door. (To TV) Ay! They don’t leave nuthing to the imagination. Change the station, Poppa. (He does.)

DAUGHTER: Well here’s the key. You’ll go up later...?

POPPA: Sure thing.

PEACHES: Andale, hija.

DAUGHTER: ...Okay. (She kisses them both ‘goodnight.’)

PEACHES: Oh, and mija . . . I don’t want no party.
POPPA: But –

*DAUGHTER signals to him*– ‘Let it go. She won’t remember.’

PEACHES: Tell your brother, I’ll see him later.

DAUGHTER: Okay, Mom. I’ll tell God.

*DAUGHTER leans down to kiss her.*

PEACHES: Mija . . . ?

DAUGHTER: Sí, amá.

PEACHES: I’m sorry about tu mujer. La . . . Emma. You loved her very much?

DAUGHTER: Oh, yes.

PEACHES: I remember her. She was a beautiful woman.

DAUGHTER: You just get some rest now, Mom. G’ night. *(Another kiss and exits.)*

*PEACHES and POPPA sit and watch TV in the hotel lobby. A late night show is on. Within minutes, PEACHES has fallen asleep, mouth open, head thrown back against the sofa. She snores lightly. POPPA observes her, and then returns to the TV program. A spot rises on DAUGHTER driving home in a light rain. The neon of city lights and the shimmer of wet roadways and night traffic travel across her face.*

DAUGHTER: *(Voice-over. Bar sounds in the background)* Emma would talk to the stars. She claimed she saw me up there in the cosmos, when I was right there in front of her, eating my morning eggs or sweeping the front steps. She acted like some part of me was already gone or had never come. It spooked me, her collapsing time and space in that way, how a person could be down here on the earth and at the same time be up there floating around like a small Pluto. Go figure.
The lights fade on DAUGHTER as they rise back on the hotel lobby. POPPA and PEACHES have dozed off and the bar has closed for the night. The old TV drops out of signal, the snow of the screen reflecting off PEACHES’ and POPPA’s face. Gradually the hotel falls into a deep sleep.

A few bougainvillea petals begin to fall from above. POPPA awakens. A bit disoriented at first, his eyes scan the empty lobby. He rises to turn off the TV, observes his wife. She has not changed position.

POPPA: Honey? You coming to bed?

PEACHES: ---

POPPA: Honey. . .?

He crosses to her, lightly shakes her. Her head collapses onto her chest. He runs his hand in front of her mouth in search of breath. POPPA looks up and around the hotel lobby nervously. He comes downstage. He does not know what to do.

Daughter?

He takes out the cell, but can’t quite get himself to use it. He returns to the sofa, takes off his jacket and lays it across PEACHES. He lifts her head gently back against the couch. He opens her purse, finds her compact, and awkwardly begins to apply face powder. She is a ghostly white. The bell tolls for the sixth time. It is dawn. Helpless, POPPA looks around again. It is morning. He sits at his wife’s side. The sound of the ocean in the distance. Bougainvillea petals rain down lightly upon their heads.

Slow fade. [closing music?]

End of play.