

Homeward Bound

by

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Homeward Bound

DESCRIPTION

Homeward Bound distills into a theatrical form the stories of many women who have experienced abuse in their lives. The play begins in Mexico at the "quinceañera" of Juanita, a rite of passage into adulthood, where her father spells out her proper place as a woman in the world. She then meets a charming man from the United States, Hank Armstrong, who promises to marry her and sponsor her to become a citizen after bringing her back to his home in the mid-West. But when they arrive, he states his expectations for a wife, isolates her from her family and friends, and prevents her from learning the language that will allow her to make new connections with the outside world.

As Juanita begins to confront Hank's actions, he becomes more abusive, exercising his power over her life by threatening to have her deported and to hurt her family if she does not do what he says. Finally, Juanita escapes, and with help from Asistencia, Inc., run by Cristina Lefcacia, she is able to find the support to change her life.

Homeward Bound examines how domestic violence is not simply a problem of dangerous relationships between individuals but is also an expression of larger conflicts about power, gender, and politics. The play uses elements like the "quinceañera," the tango (a dance in which seduction and aggression have blurred boundaries), vacuously dangerous speeches by politicians, dreams, and symbols of Mexican culture to dramatize Juanita's journey of self-discovery and healing.

CHARACTERS

- JUANITA -- An undocumented immigrant -- she represents all women in this condition, regardless of national origin; she speaks in a delicate Mexican accent, though a specific nationality is not the main issue. She will wear a blue shawl.
- MAN 1 -- This actor performs two roles: JUANITA'S FATHER at the Quinceañera celebration and REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM BARTLETT. He must be able to speak in a Mexican and an American Mid-Western accent. If needed, this role can be split into two, but for symbolic purposes every effort should be made to have one actor play both roles.
- MAN 2 -- This actor will play several roles: PETER SCHIST, a journalist; a spokesperson for WILLIAM BARTLETT; the talk show host IÑIGO QUIROGA. Must be able to speak in a Spanish and American accent.
- HANK ARMSTRONG -- He will play JUANITA'S "Dream Man," then boyfriend, and her eventual husband. "American-looking," charming.
- MOTHER -- JUANITA'S mother, who wears a white shawl. Must be able to speak in a Spanish accent.
- CRISTINA LEFCADIA -- Executive director of Asistencia, Inc., an organization helping battered immigrant women. Must be able to pronounce Spanish well. She will wear a red shawl.
- (TOTAL: 3 women, 3 men)

SETTING

- Mexico; mid-West; dream time

TIME

- Fluid

NOTES

Note 1: All the actors must have some dance/movement experience.

Note 2: There are no scene changes, *per se*. All action is continuous and without intermission. Props, clothing, etc. must be placed on stage for easy access, and the actors will make all changes in sight of the audience. In addition, the actors never leave the stage -- when not in a scene, they will sit upstage.

Note 3: A color scheme runs throughout the play of pink, purple, and white (lilac is also used as an intermediate color between pink and purple). This scheme follows the dominant colors in the *Los Dias de Los Muertos*: pink = celebration; purple = pain; white = hope. The colors are used in this way:

Scene 1 -- HANK, as the "Dream Man," should wear a pink scarf around his throat, tied as a cravat, and the *chambergo*, the classic hat for male tango dancers (like a fedora, with a soft, broad brim). JUANITA should wear a triangle of pink material wrapped around her waist to match.

Scene 2 -- A pink tablecloth should drape JUANITA's "vanity."

Scene 3 -- HANK, as the "Dream Man," should now wear a lilac scarf and the *chambergo*; JUANITA wears a lilac triangle wrapped around her waist.

Scene 4 -- A purple tablecloth should drape the table where JUANITA and MOTHER sit to talk about HANK.

Scene 5 -- HANK now wears simple street clothes; JUANITA wears a purple triangle wrapped around her waist.

Scene 9 -- Where possible, purple should be used in this scene. One suggestion is to consider each sub-scene as a different place in the house: if a scene takes place in the bedroom, then JUANITA could be wearing a purple bathrobe (or with a dominant color of purple).

Note 4: There are eight tango sequences, five with music: Scene 1, Scene 3, Scene 4 (as JUANITA speaks about HANK, they do a duplicate of the tango done in Scene 1 but without the music), Scene 5, Scene 7 (two: the "proposition" and "elopement" tangos), and Scene 9 (the "abuse" tango, done without music). As a recurring action throughout the play, each tango (except for the brief reprise in Scene 4) should shift the balance from seduction to aggression. It will document, in movement, the arc of the abuse.

Suggested music:

- *La Cumparsita* (a traditional and well-known tango tune) -- for Scene 1
- Selections from Astor Piazzolla's *Libertango*: "Verano Porteño" (for Scene 3); "Milonga de Angel" (for Scene 9, the "marriage" tango).
- "Mi Buenos Aires Querido" by Carlos Gardel (for Scene 5).
- Anything by Piazzolla (for Scene 7).

The dances last as long as needed (though 1 to 2 minutes should suffice).

Note 5: Each scene change will need either music or some kind of sound effect. This especially needs to be done in Scene 9, between each of the sub-scenes.

COSTUME LIST

- It is suggested that there be on stage a clothes rack for hanging clothes as well as a clothes tree for hanging the tango scarves for HANK and the colored triangles for JUANITA.
- It is suggested that JUANITA wear a black dress over which she can put her other costumes and materials. She will also need to change shoes between the tango sequences and her scenes as JUANITA.
- HANK and MAN 2 will need to make slight changes as they move through the play.
- MOTHER will add an apron in Scene 4.

Scene 1

- HANK: As "Dream Man," a pink neck scarf and a *chambergo*; a basic white shirt; basic black pants and shoes.
- JUANITA: A pink triangle wrapped around her waist; basic black dress; shoes with heels for tango.

Scene 2

- JUANITA: Quinceañera dress.

Scene 3

- HANK: As "Dream Man," a lilac neck scarf and a *chambergo*; same pants, shirt, and shoes.
- JUANITA: A lilac triangle wrapped around her waist; basic black dress; shoes with heels for tango.

Scene 4

- JUANITA: A long skirt over the basic black dress; flat shoes.
- MOTHER: An apron.

Scene 5

- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.
- JUANITA: A purple triangle wrapped around her waist; basic black dress; shoes with heels for tango.

Scene 6

- MAN 2: White shirt, tie, jacket -- looks like an aide.
- BARTLETT: Simple suit, white shirt, red tie.

Scene 7

- HANK: Same as Scene 5.
- JUANITA: Same as Scene 4, but without the shoes.

Scene 8

- MAN 2 (Peter Schist): No tie; can wear a suit coat, but rumpled.
- CRISTINA: Business suit; red shawl.

Scene 9a: "Marriage" tango

- JUANITA: White triangle wrapped around her waist; black dress; shoes with heels for tango.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 9b - in the living room

- JUANITA: Same as Scene 4.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 9c - in the dining room

- JUANITA: Basic black dress without skirt, apron.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 9d - in the bedroom

- JUANITA: Purple bathrobe; no shoes.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 9e - somewhere in the house

- JUANITA: Same as 9d.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 10

- JUANITA: Continues wearing the purple bathrobe.
- MOTHER: Basic clothing and JUANITA's blue shawl.

Scene 11

- JUANITA: Same as Scene 4 and her blue shawl.
- CRISTINA: Same as Scene 8.

Scene 12

- BARTLETT: Same as Scene 6.
- IÑIGO: Same white shirt and pants, some kind of colorful or embroidered vest.
- CRISTINA: Same as Scene 8.
- JUANITA: Same as Scene 11.
- MOTHER: Basic clothing and her own white shawl.

PROP LIST

Scene 2

- Table (also used in Scenes 4, 8, 11, & 12)
- Pink tablecloth (see Note 3)
- Hairbrush
- Something to gather up JUANITA's hair
- Chair

Scene 4

- Table
- Lilac tablecloth (see Note 3)
- Coffee set: 2 cups, saucers, spoons, coffee pot
- 2 chairs

Scene 6

- Folder for MAN 2 with press releases, papers, etc. in it.
- Copy of prepared statement that MAN 2 hands to BARTLETT.

Scene 8

- Table
- Blotter with pens, papers, etc. on it (should be easy to pick up as one piece)
- Briefcase for CRISTINA
- Bound manuscript in briefcase
- Phone
- 2 chairs
- Steno pad, pen for MAN 2

Scene 9a

- Wedding ring

Scene 9b

- Chair

Scene 9c

- Two chairs (add one to the chair in 9b)
- Apron for JUANITA, with a purple napkin in it

Scene 9d

- Second hairbrush in bathrobe pocket (pre-set)

Scene 9e

- Letter with picture for HANK

Scene 10

- Four marigolds

Scene 11

- Same as Scene 8
- Manila file folder for CRISTINA
- Waist-high white table for the "visual monologue" -- this is the only scene in which the table is used
- Stainless steel bowl
- Cleaver
- Paring knife
- Cutting board (preferably wood)
- Large ripe tomato
- White kitchen towel

Scene 12

- Table draped with black cloth
- Copy of CRISTINA's report and BARTLETT's press release.

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Scene 1: The Tango

As the lights rise, we see JUANITA and HANK, as the "Dream Man," dance the first tango, a dance of initial contact and mutual attraction. It ends in a final pose. Lights out, then to ghost for scene change, with music to cover it.

Scene 2: The Quinceañera (Sweet Fifteen)

JUANITA's quinceañera, the celebration of her fifteenth birthday and the ritual that announces her change from a child into a woman. During the scene transition, JUANITA will change into the quinceañera dress with the help of MOTHER. JUANITA sits at the table, which is draped with a pink tablecloth, as if in front of a mirror. MOTHER will help brush her hair and pull it back. The banter is playful.

NOTE: It is **very** important in this scene that the FATHER play the scene with a mix of tenderness and firmness in his voice, the iron fist in the velvet glove. Do not overplay the sternness. There is no need for him to be overly authoritarian because he knows he has complete power in the situation; however, when challenged, he is swift to remind those around him who holds the power and the consequences of challenging it. He is not without his charm, and it should be clear why MOTHER would have fallen for him as a young man.

MOTHER

You look so beautiful, Juanita.

JUANITA

Do you really think so?

MOTHER

Claro, claro! A beautiful child --

JUANITA

I think so, too!

MOTHER

-- and a beautiful woman.

FATHER

This is an important day for you, niña.

MOTHER

M'hijita, so, so happy for you.

FATHER

This day is very important.

JUANITA

Yes, Papá.

FATHER

Your quinceañera is an important day for all of us. You are getting older --

JUANITA

(aside to MOTHER)

Fifteen is sooo old!

FATHER

-- and you must now think --

MOTHER

Listen to your father.

FATHER

-- seriously of your future --

JUANITA

(makes a long face, a funny face)

Like this, Papá? Serious?

MOTHER

(to JUANITA)

Juanita!

JUANITA

Oh, I understand -- an important day. Today I am -- a woman! See?

(vamps playfully)

So mature? Heh?

(slumps)

But I am fifteen just this once, Papá --

FATHER

You are supposed to think seriously --

JUANITA

Seriously, yes, Papá --

FATHER

-- about what you are going to do with your life.

JUANITA

(flippantly, but not too much)

My life, yes. Yes, my life --

FATHER

That is what today is for --

JUANITA

Sí, sí, Papá.

FATHER

It is not about your enjoyment, your fun.

JUANITA

Yes, Papá, my life -

MOTHER
(softly)

Papá -- Papá --

FATHER

But from today on, you must remember that people will look at you differently --

JUANITA

Men will, you mean.

MOTHER
(mock shock)

Nena!

JUANITA

They already do.

FATHER

People will look at you differently --

MOTHER
(conspiratorial)

Los ojos, eh?

FATHER

-- people will treat you differently --

MOTHER
(making a grabbing motion)

Los manos --

FATHER

-- after today -- Don't distract her!

MOTHER

Yes, Papá.

FATHER

And you must learn how to behave so that you bring no shame on yourself or on us. No shame.

MOTHER

Let her enjoy her quince, Papá --

JUANITA

I agree!

MOTHER

-- without all the lessons. There will be plenty of time later -- plenty of time -- for the lessons.

JUANITA

(laughs)

I can barely wait to dance the vals with padrino Pedro -- all that hair curling around in his old ears! The high point of the day!

Pulls MOTHER to her feet and uses her to mimic "Pedro." JUANITA "leads" MOTHER, as a man would.

JUANITA

He will tell me his stories -- again -- of the old times, when he was a gran bailarín, dancing with the famous so-and-so and so-and-so until dawn. (He never uses the same name twice) Then he'll do one-two-three once on top of my feet, give me over to somebody else, and go back to his whiskey.

MOTHER and JUANITA dance a parody of Pedro.

FATHER

(claps his hands)

Vamos! Vamos!

They stop dancing.

FATHER

(to JUANITA)

If you are to dance the vals, as you must, then you must do it correctly.

JUANITA

I already know, Papá.

FATHER

I doubt it. Come here. Your first lesson -- a woman should never lead.

JUANITA

And the second, Papá?

FATHER

Let me.

FATHER faces JUANITA.

FATHER

Mamá, show her.

MOTHER, with some reluctance, comes up behind JUANITA and makes physical adjustments as FATHER speaks.

FATHER

Your hand, like this.

(MOTHER adjusts)

Receptive. Open. Pliable. Your hand in my hand.

(MOTHER joins their hands)

Feel which way it moves -- feel how it steers you, like the wind in a sail.

Places his other hand against the small of her back. MOTHER presses it firmly against JUANITA.

FATHER

This hand -- like a rudder -- let it escort you. Arms like so -- the ribs of the boat that keep it strong yet supple. Then we move out.

(in rhythm)

One-two-three, follow me --

(they take their first steps; FATHER stops)

Looser -- let the captain guide you. Mamá, tell her.

They continue dancing.

MOTHER

(with mixed feelings)

Feel how he slips you this way, then that. Sense him. Anticipate him. Look into his face -- go ahead -- read it so that he can tell you, "Move here," "go there," "turn now," "pause." You are the boat in the hands of the captain.

FATHER

And not only dancing with your padrino. There will be others --

MOTHER

(mischievously)

And if they let their hands wander --

FATHER

Cállate, mujer!

MOTHER

Or hold you too close --

FATHER

This can be discussed in private.

MOTHER

Just push them gently away -- they'll understand.

JUANITA stops the dance and, playfully looking at MOTHER, then at FATHER, pushes him gently away.

JUANITA

Like this, Mamá?

Beat.

FATHER

(indicating JUANITA's face)

Mamá, what is this?

MOTHER

It is not much.

JUANITA

Papá!

FATHER

It makes you look provocativa!

MOTHER

It's not that much.

FATHER

(ignoring MOTHER)

That's not a word a señorita should have said of her.

JUANITA

But, Papá --

FATHER

(to MOTHER)

Why did you allow this?

JUANITA

It's not her fault. All my friends are using some -- I just wanted a little --

NOTE: The following speech should be said with affection for JUANITA -
- go against the impulse to make a lecture.

FATHER

(takes JUANITA's chin in his hands)

Do you understand what I am saying?

(looking at MOTHER as he says the word)

Provocativa -- do you understand?

(JUANITA shakes her head no)

I did not think so. Because you do not yet understand your true calling in life. Do you know what your true calling is?

(JUANITA shakes her head no; to MOTHER)

Someone has not been teaching you well. Listen closely, niña. Today you will give a prayer to Our Blessed Mother Mary -- do you know why? Because your true life is a holy one -- holy, Juanita, holy. You must follow Mary's example in keeping the home sacred. That is your true calling in life. You see, Juanita, there are two kinds of women in the world: those a man will "visit" because of certain needs in life -- but they are not women he will ever take into his home.

(touching her face)

Not what a man wants in his home. No, men desire a woman who will keep a home as Blessed Mary kept herself: clean and modest, quiet and chaste. That is why you offer up the prayer, so that you can find the humility to bring peace to your husband and command obedience from your children. A man honor such a woman all the days of his life. It is -- It is as if you are a lighthouse, niña, your goodness guiding us. If you paint over the light with this, if you lose your place, then we lose ours. You provoke chaos -- and then the world becomes full of beasts.

MOTHER

Is that what the rouge on my lips and cheeks did to you? Is it?

FATHER

Not to me. Not in my house.

MOTHER

You didn't listen to my first "no," then --

FATHER

Cheep, cheep, cheep --

MOTHER

-- did you?

FATHER

-- like a little hen.

MOTHER

And I did not say the second "no" to myself --

FATHER
(mockingly)
Yo confieso ante Dios --

MOTHER
-- that I should have. That I should have!

FATHER
You made your choice.

(to JUANITA)
She made her choice.

JUANITA
Don't.

MOTHER
I made your choice.

FATHER
You said yes all on your own.

MOTHER
And it has not bothered you --

FATHER
No one moved your lips for you.

MOTHER
-- not bothered you one bit --

FATHER
Lower your voice.

MOTHER
-- to give me "no" -- no! -- all the rest of your
life.

FATHER
Para ti -- No. You don't know your own luck
here. I have made you honorable. I have done
the duty I was taught to do.

MOTHER
And made everyone pay.

JUANITA
Don't.

MOTHER
My life is my life --

FATHER
Such a horrible life for you--

MOTHER
No reason to make it hers.

FATHER
(to JUANITA)
Save yourself trouble and do not listen --

JUANITA
(to them both, but looking straight ahead)
Don't.

MOTHER
Don't spoil her day.

JUANITA
(with no emotion, straight ahead)
I am only fifteen.

FATHER
Your mother had you at seventeen.

MOTHER
Things are different now.

FATHER
They may be. But they shouldn't be.

MOTHER
Que Dios nos libre. God save us all, then.

FATHER
Enough.

MOTHER
Never enough for you.

FATHER
Enough!

MOTHER
I have things to do.

JUANITA
Mamá, you don't have to leave.

MOTHER walks upstage and sits. FATHER stands behind JUANITA for a moment, looking at her.

FATHER
(tenderly but firmly)
You have grown up so fast, niña -- but still so much to learn.

FATHER puts his hands on JUANITA's shoulders, near her throat, in a gesture that is both affectionate and threatening. She involuntarily flinches. He either does not notice or does not care because he does not remove his hands.

FATHER

(again, affectionately, but with power)
You carry a powerful name, Juanita, the name of my grandmother, Juana Maria. She had ten children -- all lived, drawing life from her strength, from her grace. She kept a firm and peaceful house where my grandfather could come away from the world. After today, the spirit of her name will become your spirit. And I will be here mi pequeñita, and teach you how to honor her name by living your life in the proper ways. It is a very special day. And you are very special to me.

Lights to ghost for scene change, with music.

Scene 3: The Tango

The next segment of the dance between JUANITA and HANK as the "Dream Man": forceful but not dangerous -- still a seduction. At the end, lights down, then to ghost for scene change with music.

Scene 4: The Instruction

JUANITA and MOTHER are at the table, draped in a lilac tablecloth. Coffee cups, saucers, spoons, coffee pot. JUANITA is now 17.

JUANITA

Mamá, I think I've met him. I really think I have.

MOTHER

I can tell by your voice that you have found something.

JUANITA

Do you want me to tell you about him?

MOTHER

Tell me, niña, tell me everything.

JUANITA

All right.

JUANITA

Well, come on.

MOTHER
Qué?

JUANITA
Ask me questions!

MOTHER
(tenderly)
Just tell me the tale, chiquilla tonta.

JUANITA
No, you have to ask me questions.

MOTHER
I'm very tired.

JUANITA
Come on.

MOTHER
Por donde do I start?

JUANITA
Where did I meet him.

MOTHER
Where did you meet him?

Now just HANK and no longer the "Dream Man," HANK rises and walks towards JUANITA, and as she speaks, they do a reprise of the tango movements in Scene 1. It is all MOTHER can do to stay in her place because she can see what is unfolding.

JUANITA
In the park. After school. A week ago. I was sitting, reading, like I like to do. And he just sat next to me. I acted as if I didn't notice him -- but I noticed him. I noticed him. He was feeding the pigeons, and he speaks to me in this Spanish that had an accent I couldn't catch --

MAN 1
(in a Mid-Western drawl)
Comó está usted? Qué libro está leyendo?

JUANITA
The Mid-West, he said. Breadbasket, he called it. Family values. Hogs. Chanchos, Mamá. Illinois and Nebraska and Missouri -- such strange-sounding words! He seemed nice.

They stop dancing, and JUANITA sits down. HANK moves his chair to listen to the conversation.

JUANITA

But you know me -- not giving away too much --

MOTHER

What is too much these days?

JUANITA

Very discreet. I say this, I say that -- but I like him. Gringo, yes, but nice, not pushy -- good Spanish. We've met every day -- the pigeons are getting to know us. He's so gentle that they even eat out of his hands.

MOTHER is staring out.

JUANITA

Mamá, pay attention!

MOTHER

So he wants to catch pigeons.

JUANITA

No! Just feed them.

MOTHER

It amounts to the same thing.

JUANITA

You can be so oblique, Mamá. Next question.

MOTHER

So he's American?

JUANITA

Yes.

MOTHER

What is his name?

JUANITA

Hank.

JUANITA pronounces the "a" as an "ah": Hahnk.

MOTHER

Hank?

MOTHER pronounces the word with a heavy emphasis on the "h" and an open "a."

MOTHER

What sort of name is Hank?

JUANITA
Es un sobrenombre for Henry. [the "r" would be strong]

MOTHER
Henry?

JUANITA
Enrique.

MOTHER
So why doesn't he use Henry?

JUANITA
Gringos like things short and quick.

MOTHER
A syllable is all that important? Caramba. Y su apellido?

JUANITA
Armstrong. Hank Armstrong.

The last name is a real mouthful.

MOTHER
You can barely get it out of your mouth. Why is he in Mexico?

JUANITA
Working here -- "NAFTA'd", he called it. Something about -- oh, I don't remember. Something technical. I didn't pay attention -- how could I with that Mid-West Spanish accent!
(trying to imitate)
Vaya con Dios. The way he would spread the crumbs, the way his gentle hands --

MOTHER
Did he touch you?

JUANITA
(playfully)
Mamá, no! I was just looking at him -- the way you taught me to inspect the vegetables at the market! I wouldn't want to bring anything rotten home. He wants to see me, again.

MOTHER
Cuantos años tiene?

JUANITA
He's twenty-six.

MOTHER

Is it a stable job he has?

JUANITA

I didn't ask him that!

MOTHER

What do you know about his family?

JUANITA

Both his parents are alive and still married to each other.

MOTHER

Is he married?

JUANITA

(holding up her fingers)

When I inspected his "carrots," I didn't notice a ring.

MOTHER

(dismissive gesture)

Many men don't wear a wedding ring; your abuelo didn't wear a ring. What does that tell you about them?

JUANITA

(tenderly)

You are always seeing the worst, viejita.

MOTHER

Because I have seen so much, jovencita.

JUANITA

Isn't it true that we see what we want to see?

MOTHER

It is not always a matter of what we want. So you want to see him again?

JUANITA

He wants to see me as well.

MOTHER

Ah!

JUANITA

This does not make you happy?

MOTHER

Happy -- eh. You meet a stranger, you feed some pigeons, they fly up and away like visions, there

is this cloud of love -- and you're going to live
in -- Nebraska.

JUANITA

I'm not going to Nebraska!

MOTHER

How do you know? Palomita, how can you know
anything at your age?

JUANITA

At my age, you had me. Isn't this a little
better than that?

MOTHER

What do you mean?

JUANITA

We sit. We talk. He doesn't push -- he hasn't
touched me --

MOTHER

You cannot trust --

JUANITA

We talk books --

MOTHER

Do not trust--

JUANITA

He buys me ices --

MOTHER

Stop it!

JUANITA

Why? Just because you --

MOTHER

Because I what?

JUANITA

Nothing, Mamá.

MOTHER

Because I what?

JUANITA

Lo siento, Mamá, perdóname.

MOTHER

Say it -- because I what? Because I -- was with your father and had to go to my wedding day swelled up like a melon? So I am what?

JUANITA

I'm sorry.

MOTHER

Say it!

JUANITA

There is nothing to say.

MOTHER

He made me do that. Your father.

JUANITA

You have told me this.

MOTHER

No, listen to me. He waited, he made the day wait until I was como un globo, and then he marched me into the church with that look on his face, to say to all, "Mine." Others, they changed the date on the birth certificates, saved face -- not your father. "Mine." Save face? Not him. His face right out there, in everyone's! He did his duty, all right -- he has always done his duty.

They look at one another, unsure how to proceed.

JUANITA

(tenderly)

I'm not going to marry him, Mamá.

MOTHER

Well, that is a comfort --

JUANITA

He hasn't even asked me! Not even a whisper! I just want to -- see him again. You know -- just a little --

(makes a gesture of flirtation)

Mamá?

MOTHER

Your abuela used to say --

JUANITA

You always do this!

MOTHER

What?

JUANITA

When you don't want to say something directly,
out comes mi abuelita.

MOTHER

Your abuela used to say --

JUANITA

Yes, yes, abuela --

MOTHER

Remember that the serpent is always trying to get
the woman to bite his apple.

JUANITA

I am not going to "bite" his apple, Mamá.

MOTHER

You say --

JUANITA

Just -- look over the fruit. And I am going to
show you that it is possible to have a happy
time, Mamá. With a man.

MOTHER

Anything is possible.

JUANITA

We're not stuck the way you were.

MOTHER

Too many telenovelas.

JUANITA

I don't watch them.

MOTHER

But they watch you. They're in the air.

MOTHER begins collecting cups, plates, etc.

MOTHER

If you see him, you see him. You must tell your
father.

JUANITA

El Señor Toro.

MOTHER

Respect.

JUANITA

For him, I will probably have to count Hank's teeth.

MOTHER

Your father has the heart of an accountant.

They exchange a look, the MOTHER brings the props upstage and sits. JUANITA looks out at the audience.

JUANITA

(in the Mid-West accent)

Vaya con Díos!

Lights come down, then up to ghost for scene change. NOTE: If you use Gardel's "Mi Buenos Aires Querido," the first thirty seconds or so can be used for scene change music. JUANITA joins HANK, and they dance.

Scene 5: The Tango Lesson

A little more seduction, a little more edge and danger. In this scene, MOTHER will interact with the dance of JUANITA and HANK in an effort to break them apart, but as she does, she is either displaced or put aside until it is clear she has no more control over the situation. Lights go to black.

Scene 6: The Politician

In the darkness, a crowd murmur, as if at a press conference. Lights up. MAN 2, dressed as WILLIAM BARTLETT's spokesperson, steps forward with a folder. He shades his eyes, as if looking into a glaring light, points as if he is pointing at people he knows, gives a thumbs up, etc. Then begins to speak. The crowd sounds fade out.

MAN 2

Good afternoon. Excuse me. Excuse me. Your attention, please? Good, good. Great. Thank you all for coming. Thanks. You all look so prepared! That's great. We'll have a Q & A after the Representative gives you a short prepared statement, which you all have in your press packets and which I am sure you will all find very interesting.

MAN 2 looks for BARTLETT, then continues.

MAN 2

Seems the Representative is a little late coming from his important committee work, but I know he's on his way -- yes, he surely is. Um, well,

just to give you a little background to start with. As you know, among the issues nearest to the Representative's heart is his concern that all American citizens get a fair deal. But just as -- just as important to the Representative is determining who really is an American citizen, and thus deserving of the country's protection and appreciation --

BARTLETT enters, flusters MAN 2 momentarily.

MAN 2

(to the crowd)

Representative Bartlett.

As BARTLETT begins speaking, MAN 2 changes into the reporter PETER SCHIST. He moves two of the chairs stage right and sits -- this is where he will interview BARTLETT. He holds one of the press releases as well as the folder; also, a pad of paper and pen.

BARTLETT

Thank you. Over the past few weeks I have been putting the finishing edges on what one columnist has mis-named "a massive gutting of the Immigration and Naturalization Service." He was not entirely accurate. I don't want to dissolve just the INS -- penny-ante stuff, only "half-vast," as my grandson might say. No, I want to dissolve it and then the whole immigration regime based on it. That is the real focus of my initiative, what I am calling "The America for Americans/Americans for America Campaign," or, as we call it around the office, the "4-A Campaign." Over the next five years, I want to end all unwanted immigration into the United States. I want to nullify any immigration services that use direct grants, loans, matching funds, or any other combination of federal money. In other words, no more handouts. It is time for all illegal immigrants either to become full citizens and pay their dues or be deported. No "green card," no amnesty. Either here or there, but not both. And, as some of the more -- emphatic immigrant rights organizations have been endlessly pointing out, "4-A" would eliminate certain sections of the Violence Against Women Act. Some -- maybe even some of you -- might consider all of this harsh, but we consider it a matter of simple justice. We will always continue to welcome those who want to contribute. But illegal aliens cost taxpayers billion of dollars a year while our own citizens go wanting. It is time for this to stop, and I am going to

stop it because the federal government and the state governments have failed to control our borders. America must be made safe for Americans. Thank you.

BARTLETT moves seamlessly from the press conference to the interview with SCHIST.

BARTLETT

Peter Schist?

They shake hands.

SCHIST

I appreciate your taking --

BARTLETT

Schist, Schist --

SCHIST

-- the time to meet with me.

BARTLETT

-- isn't that a geological term?

SCHIST

Yes.

(as if he has said this before)

"Any of various medium- to coarse-grained metamorphic rocks -- "

BARTLETT

Fissile --

SCHIST

What?

BARTLETT

Fissile -- that's the term, right?

SCHIST

Easily split, yes -- fissile.

BARTLETT

I suppose "fissile" 'snot a bad quality for a journalist.

SCHIST

I prefer to think I have a rock's more -- enduring qualities.

BARTLETT

And so should we all. And so we shall. Like your newspaper -- it's been very -- important to

have your paper's "unfissiled" support in my efforts.

SCHIST

But what you're proposing here --
(indicating the press release)
-- is pretty -- steep.

BARTLETT

(indicating the press release)
You mean that? That's for them out there -- for those "media outlets" who think cutting and pasting press releases into column inches equals journalism. For them, it's got to be flat -- middle of the strike zone. In here -- between us -- we can go through the complexities.

SCHIST

To be honest, Representative -- and I don't mean to be impolite here -- but I don't see many of what you call "complexities" --

BARTLETT

In effect -- but in reasons why, in philosophy, very rich.

SCHIST

Detentions, deportations, denial of appeals -- and deleting the Violence Against Woman Act --

BARTLETT

I'm going to hear your litany spoken in a tone of -- what? -- scholarly inquisition, probing the roots of my philosophy. Should I go ahead and assume that?

SCHIST

Yes, of course.

BARTLETT

I think assuming that will make this interview flow much more smoothly. Now, where would you like to begin?

SCHIST

How would you like to begin, Representative?

BARTLETT

I would never encroach on the freedom of the press to ask its own questions in its own way.

SCHIST

In a sentence or two, how would you summarize your "4-A Campaign"?

BARTLETT

Good pitch -- inside the strike zone --

BARTLETT chuckles.

SCHIST

What?

BARTLETT

Fissile -- doesn't that word just roll off the tongue?

Beat -- then lights out.

Scene 7: The Proposition

JUANITA uses her shawl as a cape to play the bullfighter with him.

NOTE 1: Throughout the scene, HANK should be played as charming and engaging; we should see why JUANITA would risk so much for him. But there is a disconnect between **what** he says and the **way** he says it.

NOTE 2: The use of the shawl as a connective device in this scene is **very** important. At all times it should be a "character" in the scene.

JUANITA

Olé, olé, toro!

HANK goes after the shawl. JUANITA spins and sets up for another pass.

JUANITA

Olé, torito, olé! I am not afraid of you.

HANK makes another pass, and as he does so, he grabs one end of the shawl.

JUANITA

Oh, now like a fish on the line. Hooked.

HANK

A willing fish.

She pulls him close.

JUANITA

Landed.

HANK

Breathless.

They kiss. He takes the shawl and puts it around her to hold her to him.

HANK

Have you thought about it?

JUANITA

Thought and thought.

HANK

And?

JUANITA tries to move away, but HANK has her in the shawl, and he pulls her against him.

HANK

And?

JUANITA

It's not that simple.

HANK

What's not that simple?

JUANITA

What you ask.

HANK

And what am I asking, querida? I am only asking for you.

JUANITA

That is what is not so simple.

HANK

Sure it is.

JUANITA

That American breeze --

HANK

I ask -- you smile at my asking -- go ahead, smile!

JUANITA makes a funny face.

HANK

I will take that as a smile -- you answer "yes" -
-

HANK playfully tries to get her to answer "yes," but JUANITA, equally playful, refuses, just like a little child.

HANK
(in JUANITA's "voice.")
"Yes, Hank."

JUANITA
Is that how I sound?

HANK
And when you say "yes," we go to -- let's see -- Nebraska! -- simple! -- and we become married. Which is what I really want to become with you. Now, isn't that the simplest, the sweetest thing you have ever heard in your life?

JUANITA
We cannot just do it that way.

JUANITA slips out of the shawl.

HANK
That way -- or any way it seems.

JUANITA
Don't be angry.

HANK
But the idea of marriage -- with me -- a life -- yes, no? -- or should I just fold up my tent now?

JUANITA hesitates.

HANK
(folds the shawl)
I can start folding.

JUANITA shakes her head "no."

HANK
(relieved)
It's a bear to get that tent back in the bag.

JUANITA
I have these -- doors --

HANK
You've said that --

JUANITA
-- that must be opened and walked through.

HANK

And I've said that if you trust this --

JUANITA

I do trust you!

HANK

Then you don't need to worry about all those doors. We just -- go around.

(makes a funny gesture to indicate "go around.")
Outflank 'em.

HANK takes the shawl and wraps it around her hands.

HANK

I will take care of you, linda. You will be safe with me.

(child-like voice)

I love you, you know. Yes? Huh? That has to count for something, yes?

She walks away from him, unwrapping her hands.

JUANITA

For me, yes, of course, you count, but for my family --

HANK

Come back, palomita.

JUANITA

Different loves, Enrique -- divided --

HANK

Come, come --

JUANITA

(drawing a line down her body)

This is the border where I am split. Do you see? What passport do you have for me?

HANK

Your poetry -- Let's pretend -- for the moment -- that we don't tell them.

JUANITA

That's not possible.

HANK

Just wait -- I can arrange all the paperwork --

JUANITA

Enrique --

HANK

Imagine --

JUANITA

Listen to me.

HANK

Listen to me.

JUANITA

(she puts the shawl around her shoulders)
You are asking me to deny my family. No, no,
wait -- please. You are asking me to change my
heart completely.

HANK

I am not asking you to change your heart.

JUANITA

You are.

HANK

I wouldn't want that heart because that would not
be the heart I love. I want something very
different: I want you to see that there is so
much new to be known -- our own life -- that's
your passport --

JUANITA

The rules are strong --

HANK

We can be stronger.

JUANITA

They are carved into my bones --

HANK takes her hand into his and "carves" his next lines.

HANK

Then let me carve one more, like we used to on
a tree back home to declare to the world: "Hank
loves Juanita."

It tickles JUANITA delightfully.

JUANITA

I can feel that in my bones --

HANK

Good bones. Haven't you ever -- naw --

JUANITA

What?

HANK

Haven't you ever just once -- just one little
once -- wanted to -- break free?

JUANITA

Claro.

HANK

(soft mimic)

Claro.

JUANITA

But "wanting" is not the same as "doing" in my
life.

HANK

But why should the pleasure be guilty -- to just
let go?

He comes up behind her and, taking the shawl, slides it down to her
waist and pulls her to him. It also pins her arms to her side.

HANK

Let go of all the rules? To have them let go of
you? Finally free. Think how -- good -- how --
right -- that would feel. With me.

JUANITA melts but does not give in -- she will not show him that yet.
She slides through the shawl to sit on the floor.

JUANITA

No.

HANK

No?

JUANITA

No.

HANK

Oh?

JUANITA

You are so American --

HANK sits on the floor as well.

HANK

Is that not part of my charm?

JUANITA

My exotic blossom del norte --

HANK
Can't resist the bouquet --

JUANITA
My hothouse bloom --

HANK
You cannot resist the power of the exotic --

JUANITA
It's true -- that mid-West Spanish accent!

HANK
Qué libro está leyendo?

JUANITA
Vengan, palomitas!
(trying to say it in English)
Come here, my pee-jons [pigeons].

HANK
Eating out of my hand --

JUANITA
And that -- that! The eating out of your hands!
As if, American, you can have whatever you want.

HANK
And why not, mi pequeño Mejico?

JUANITA
(mimicking)
And why not?

HANK
That's how we acquired Texas to California.

JUANITA
Stole.

HANK
Liberated.

JUANITA
And I am to be one more conquered territory?

He tosses her one end of the shawl.

HANK
(speaking playfully)
Yield, woman, to the superior force of Yankee imperialism.

He pulls on the shawl.

JUANITA

(also playfully)

Only as "superior" as you think so.

She pulls back on the shawl. It becomes a gentle but determined tug of war.

HANK

Oh, but it is. I don't see a whole lot of Mexican businesses going north --

JUANITA

To Grindgolandia --

HANK

-- but I sure do see a lot of American businesses coming south of the Rio.

JUANITA

But we have siestas.

HANK

And that's your crucial geopolitical mistake -- we get all our conquering done in the afternoon.

JUANITA

But siestas can be very -- collaborative.

HANK

Is that an invitation?

She stands up, holding onto one end of the shawl.

JUANITA

As mi abuelita said -- never invite the charming leopard inside the house for dinner.

HANK

Then come outside -- ven, palomita.

He pulls on the shawl, and she falls forward and rests her hands on his shoulders. They kiss, and then she sits on him, forcing him to lean back.

HANK

When you come to my home, you'll see how the American values of hard work and fair play --

JUANITA

And the woman under the thumb of the man --

HANK

Well, under the man, at least!

JUANITA

Stop it! I read about that. About your churches.

HANK

Not always -- though not a bad scheme.

JUANITA

Do you believe that?

HANK

I'm not much of a church-goer.

JUANITA

But do you believe that?

JUANITA stands; HANK continues to sit.

HANK

Makes sense of a kind -- someone to take care of the kids, someone to win the bread. Made sense to my parents. Makes sense to me. A natural division of labor.

JUANITA

You make it sound like a factory.

HANK

Come down my assembly line!

JUANITA

Enrique, my heart does not do well in a factory.

HANK holds out the shawl like a toreador's cape.

HANK

Then we won't even crack the spine of a Bible.

JUANITA and HANK start the "proposition tango" here -- simple, without music; this tango will be echoed at the end of Scene 9. HANK speaks as they dance.

HANK

If you agree to marry me -- if -- you will have someone who will protect you always. My father brought me up right: be strong in the sight of your woman, provide well for her, honor her all the days of your life. Imagine the future, Juanita; don't just look at what you know. The future will be good. It will be good for us.

Tango ends. HANK slips his hands to her shoulders, reminiscent of FATHER's hands in Scene 2.

HANK

A new kind of life, a new start, in a new place.
It will just be you and I, sailing off for our
brave new world.

HANK, JUANITA, MOTHER, and FATHER move into the "elopement tango," which has the core story of HANK taking JUANITA away from FATHER and MOTHER and all the "rules." The tango has all possible combinations of the four characters dancing.

Scene 8: Asistencia, Inc.

The offices of Asistencia, Inc.: desk, with blotter and other articles; two chairs, one behind the desk. In the office, seated, is PETER SCHIST, with his pad of paper and pen.

The phone rings -- 6 times altogether. SCHIST is undecided about whether to pick it up, but just as he decides, it stops ringing. He sits -- there is a ten-second delay, then another round of rings. As they begin, CRISTINA enters, carrying a briefcase.

CRISTINA

I'll get it. Don't get up.

CRISTINA answers the phone, but no one is on the other end.

CRISTINA

(very softly)

Damn!

(to SCHIST)

Sorry. We hope and pray for the new phone system. Care to add a prayer?

SCHIST

I can take one out of my deep freeze.

CRISTINA

Spare two while you're down there?

SCHIST

Done.

CRISTINA

Then we're that much farther along.

CRISTINA shakes SCHIST's hand.

CRISTINA

Peter Schist?

SCHIST

Like the rock. Cristina Lefcadia?

CRISTINA

When I woke up this morning. Thank you for waiting for me -- an hour behind! -- did my secretary give you the message --

SCHIST

Yes, she did.

CRISTINA

-- about being late?

SCHIST

Yes, she did. Thank you for calling.

CRISTINA

I'm tempted to apologize --

SCHIST

No need --

CRISTINA

-- I hate to be kept waiting --

SCHIST

It's okay --

CRISTINA

-- but I'm sure you can imagine --

SCHIST

I can imagine. This Luisa Ortiz story must be running you ragged --

CRISTINA

(makes a pulling motion with her hands)
Four horses in five directions at once.

SCHIST

Painful --

CRISTINA

But unavoidable.

SCHIST

I'm sure.

CRISTINA

Every time -- we'll -- interview in a minute, Mr. Schist, but before we slip on our roles -- reporter, executive director -- I want to share something with you. Every time a Luisa Ortiz -- what? happens? bursts? -- whatever the word -- those of us out here get cut three ways.

SCHIST asks by holding up his pad and pen if he should write.

CRISTINA

No, don't write yet -- just listen. A -- prelude, of sorts. Luisa Ortiz loses her life to a batterer: a bad cut. Especially at the hands of someone who brought her here and made her believe she'd be safe. But then lots of people suddenly discover this "hidden" problem of battered immigrant women, and that's a good cut. That's good. And that's why you've come.

SCHIST

Take a "good cut" at the story.

CRISTINA

And I appreciate that -- it's an important story.

SCHIST

Yes, it is.

CRISTINA

And I'm glad you agree. But in here --
(tapping her breastbone)
-- in here -- the cut that cuts the deepest, Mr. Schist, and this is the title it carries: We lost another one. And that sticks. Right. Here.

SCHIST

I can understand.

Beat.

CRISTINA

I confess sometimes I still can't. But life marches on, which is what has made me late getting to you -- two other interviews and a phone-in show already this morning -- that's three horses, I think --

SCHIST

Lost count already --

CRISTINA

-- squeezed in between a meeting with some of our funders, and this afternoon's calendar -- well, enough horses.

SCHIST

A whole stable.

CRISTINA

But I'm glad you waited because you are someone I wanted to talk to.

SCHIST

Me.

CRISTINA

Yes, because you are a person who does important stories -- I read your interview with Representative Bartlett.

SCHIST

Ah.

CRISTINA

I thought it was good --

SCHIST

You did.

CRISTINA

I thought you treated him squarely enough, gave him room for his world-view to spread out.

SCHIST

Even though you dis[agree] --

CRISTINA

Even though Asistencia, Inc. disagrees pretty completely with him, yes -- I still thought you did a good job.

SCHIST

We all like such good reviews.

CRISTINA

Now, Mr. Schist -- and this, I think, is the moment where we put the roles on -- you need something from me about Luisa Ortiz because Luisa had been working with Asistencia before what -- happened -- to her. And I could do that very easily for both of us -- something like this: "Cristina Lefcacia, Executive Director of Asistencia, Inc., an organization dedicated to helping battered women, especially immigrants, deeply regrets that Luisa Ortiz lost her life at the hands of a U.S. citizen." There -- complete, contained --

SCHIST

Not to mention dry --

CRISTINA

Yes.

SCHIST

Not to mention short --

CRISTINA

Not to mention not useful to someone who writes important stories. Something longer, then.

SCHIST

Of course.

CRISTINA

Because important stories need more room -- good, we are agreed there. But "the story" -- the story -- the story is not going to be what you think it is: the story is not going to be Luisa Ortiz.

SCHIST

No.

CRISTINA

No.

SCHIST

Not Luisa Ortiz.

CRISTINA

No.

SCHIST

I don't understand.

CRISTINA

She is not the important story.

SCHIST

She's not.

CRISTINA

No.

Beat.

SCHIST

Then what is?

CRISTINA

Then what, indeed? Have you ever covered anything like this?

SCHIST shakes his head no.

CRISTINA

There's an importance to this "important story" you may have missed --

SCHIST

Really --

CRISTINA

-- because of your industry's insistence -- mind, I'm not blaming you personally -- but there's a pressure that "if it bleeds, it leads" -- you've heard of that?

SCHIST

"If it dies, it flies."

CRISTINA

And if a story like Luisa Ortiz leads, there usually isn't much that follows up the bleeding. Yes? No post-funeral interviews, no six-month re-visit, not even covering the trial -- you see my point?

SCHIST

Not all "importance" is equal to an editor -- that's true.

CRISTINA

And your editor, to you -- I'll guess, but something like this? "You talk to Lefcacia since Bartlett said the Violence Against Women Act stuff, so there's a hook -- get a good pull quote -- mix the police reports with some boilerplate about Asistencia, spice it if you can get some of the, uh, backstory about Luisa's life, but don't push that -- chop, puree, bake -- and then let's move to the next." Is that far off?

SCHIST

Mostly on.

CRISTINA

Representative Bartlett, on the other hand --

SCHIST

On the other hand.

CRISTINA

He gets --

SCHIST

Headline --

CRISTINA

By-line for you --

SCHIST

Above the fold --

CRISTINA

Jump-head to full page inside. Luisa Ortiz -- a brush-stroke.

SCHIST

Representative Bartlett --

CRISTINA

A landscape. Wall-wide.

SCHIST

And you want --

CRISTINA

Don't jump ahead of me, Mr. Schist. This is not about Lefcadia or Asistencia -- Luisa needs something more than another churned-out communique about "those people" and what they do to each other.

CRISTINA takes a manuscript out of her briefcase.

SCHIST

I have a deadline.

CRISTINA

We all have a deadline, Mr. Schist.

CRISTINA hands him the report.

CRISTINA

Here's the best way to meet yours.

SCHIST

Which would be how?

CRISTINA

As always.

SCHIST

Which is?

CRISTINA

The truth.

SCHIST

This --

CRISTINA

Our latest --

SCHIST

A report.

CRISTINA

Your real story -- analyzing the text of the new bill from Representative Bartlett that would, with what sounds like the soundest of reasons, de-activate the Violence Against Women Act. You have all the background from your interview -- here's the "hook."

SCHIST

I know, I know -- but possibly shorter?

CRISTINA

You wanted longer.

SCHIST

Deadline mercy?

CRISTINA

Aren't you fellows supposed to have grace under pressure?

SCHIST

Should the through-line be, "There will be more Luisa Ortizes if -- "

CRISTINA

No. I told you, Luisa is not the story. She got murdered because someone's dark heart exploded. The law couldn't have prevented that.

SCHIST

The point, then --

CRISTINA

Mr. Schist, you should have understood by now -- our exchange -- our dance is not going to be about my giving you a point to carry away. A point, a single point, is so small, almost weightless -- put my ten-second single point in ten-point newspaper type, and it will evaporate. Yes? Become point-less.

(does not wait for him to respond)

What I want you, the writer -- no, what Luisa needs you, the writer, to do -- is connect points, multiples with multiple lines, like those "connect the dot" games for children. Dot to dot to dot to dot until you've created -- Created

what, Mr. Schist? What did you and your newspaper create for Representative Bartlett?

SCHIST

An atmosphere.

CRISTINA

An atmosphere -- yes -- good word -- a bigger picture, right?

SCHIST

Right --

CRISTINA

With its own gravity and air supply. You've done that before -- you did it well with Representative Bartlett, so I know you can do it.

SCHIST

An atmosphere.

CRISTINA

(pointing to the report)

That -- that -- having the Act in place that Representative Bartlett wants to take away couldn't have saved Luisa -- but if he takes it away -- for no better logic that I can see except meanness -- I'm sorry, I don't want to be harsh, but that's what it sounds like to us -- it creates an atmosphere that, around here at least, reeks of -- well, I might as well say it -- of "open season."

SCHIST

That's a little strong --

CRISTINA

One of the dots, Mr. Schist -- if that goes, then the Luisas will have no barricades if they can get away. If they can -- one more point. Eliminate it -- another point -- and the batterers have one more tool to cut the Luisas down.

SCHIST

So where am I with all these points?

CRISTINA considers him.

SCHIST

Deadline mercy?

CRISTINA

I am going to take a risk with you, Mr. Schist. Perhaps I shouldn't do this, but I am going to trust you with some inside thoughts -- as part of the atmosphere -- and I hope you won't dishonor them. Can I trust you?

SCHIST

I can be trusted, but --

Schist holds out his watch.

CRISTINA

When you run Representative Bartlett down Column A and me down Column B -- the story looks equal, doesn't it -- two sides. But all the power is here, and then there's us -- we are allowed to politely and rationally propose while he -- and it's not even him, really, but the atmosphere -- disposes. And when power disposes of something -- another point, Mr. Schist -- someone will have a disposal problem -- and that's us -- that's our job -- emptying the -- well, I might as well say it because it's true -- emptying the piss pot. Waste management. That's our atmosphere. Yes, there is the Act --

SCHIST

And it does say --

CRISTINA

For now --

SCHIST

Yes, for now, but it does say that --

(checking his notes)

-- battered immigrant women married to U.S. citizens or permanent residents or "qualified aliens" can apply on their own for protection.

CRISTINA

Yes, but, again -- the atmosphere, Mr. Schist. To apply is not benign, like registering to vote. A hint, a whiff to their "politicians" at home and -- power disposeth -- they are "deported" -- a lá Luisa Ortiz. What's in the Act is just a beginning, minimal -- take it away -- well, I don't know what words you would use for "less than minimal," but I would use "Luisa Ortiz" and in the plural. In the atmosphere of the "4-A Campaign," Luisa Ortiz becomes just the latest unfortunate "waste" -- p[issed] -- placed -- in the pot to keep our borders pure.

(tapping her watch)
Deadline mercy is now in effect. I trust you
have enough points. Read that -- and connect,
connect, connect.

SCHIST
I do need to check something.

CRISTINA
I like a person who does his job. The spelling
of Luisa's name is --

SCHIST
No, not that.

CRISTINA
Then what?

SCHIST
She was --

CRISTINA
What?

SCHIST
Well --

CRISTINA
What, Mr. Schist?

SCHIST
She was illegal, right?

CRISTINA
Illegal.

SCHIST
Yes.

CRISTINA
Was I wrong to trust you?

SCHIST
It's not my personal --

CRISTINA
But it's your newspaper's angle, so you have to
ask, don't you?

SCHIST
She was --

CRISTINA
So?

SCHIST

So --

CRISTINA

So that made her deserve it?

SCHIST

No --

CRISTINA

Your point, then?

SCHIST

I'm just checking --

CRISTINA

And if you had bothered to check other facts, you'd know that she didn't wetback it here through the Rio Grande. She came as a wife. A wife. She had every right to expect safety.

SCHIST

But she was still --

CRISTINA makes some sort of physical gesture and/or movement that shows SCHIST that she wants to curse him but disciplines herself to hold it back -- it is the first time CRISTINA looks as if she is going to lose her control. SCHIST looks at her, a little abashed, and then looks at his watch again and stands.

SCHIST

Look, I do have to get going --

CRISTINA

Wait.

SCHIST

Do you want me to go with what -- little -- I have?

CRISTINA

Wait.

SCHIST

What?

CRISTINA

I don't want to think my trust was misplaced.

SCHIST

It wasn't.

CRISTINA

And, remember, four horses in five directions --

SCHIST

I said I can understand that.

CRISTINA

So, please, just sit, a few moments more -- just a few. I do want to show you something.

SCHIST

Another report?

CRISTINA

In a way, yes. It's not my first choice, but -- yes.

SCHIST sits down reluctantly.

CRISTINA

(holding out her scarf)

You wanted it short -- for deadline mercy.

CRISTINA puts her shawl around his shoulders. He is not sure how to respond.

CRISTINA

Relax -- don't worry about your objectivity -- you're in a safe place. Stare out there -- the middle distance, okay? Go blurry. Breathe. And listen.

She moves behind him and speaks to him; she can move from ear to ear, hover, etc. **NOTE:** If anything, these lines should be underplayed -- let the tension come out by restraint.

CRISTINA

Querida, querida, if only you hadn't shown me disrespect, I wouldn't have hit you. I didn't hit you hard, anyway -- but that disrespect -- no, no, no. If you tell anyone, I won't file the papers. I'll report you, and you'll have to go home in shame -- they can't do anything to me. It is your duty, palomita, to stay here and make a home for me -- feed me, make sure I'm happy -- and by law you have to have sex with me. Yes, it's the law. You can only talk to the people I tell you to talk to -- and I don't want you talking to anyone. No more magazines or newspapers. And if I hear beep, boop, boop -- nueve uno uno -- well, I will just have to teach you more respect. If you leave me and go back home -- I will find you there. I will find your whole family there. I will even go after your dogs. Someone, some thing, will pay for your

disrespect. There's more if you want to hear it
--

SCHIST

No. No.

CRISTINA

(takes back her shawl)

That fear every day, that atmosphere? Prisonered
by the hand, the fist, the foot, the belt, the
knife. All while the power over there --

SCHIST

It must have been terrible.

CRISTINA

That's your starting point, Mr. Schist.

SCHIST

That's the story.

CRISTINA

What?

SCHIST

That's the story.

CRISTINA

I have told you -- that's not the story. That's
--

SCHIST

You just gave it to me, so now it's out here to
be used. A good story -- in the mind of -- how
she feared -- photographs -- What? Wouldn't
you want people to know that? to feel that?
Isn't that why you gave me that "report"?

CRISTINA

I want people to know the whole story -- I want
you --

SCHIST

I don't mean to be impolite, Ms. Lefcadia -- but
you were an hour late for the interview, and my
chops feel pretty well busted by now, so let me
just say this before I get the quote you need to
give me. You truly know your business -- and I
truly know mine. I will read the report, believe
me -- all of them -- I do my homework. And I do
argue with my editor about atmosphere and "big
picture" up to where I don't lose my job. You
weren't wrong to trust me -- but, trust me, I

can't change the way the business makes nice with the Bartletts of the world.

CRISTINA

And makes lessons out of Luisa.

SCHIST

A good cut, you said wanted -- then you put Bartlett here and Luisa Ortiz here -- not you, not this --

(indicating the report)

-- but that --

(indicating the shawl)

Luisa Ortiz dead can be very much alive in this business --

(again, indicating the report)

-- but this? just "dead" dead, talking head dead

-- That is how "the common folks" make news that gets past page 29 to page 1. People will remember if it wears Luisa Ortiz's face, not a title page --

CRISTINA

And forget everything with tomorrow's lottery winner --

SCHIST

You could have sent me home with my toys -- you know why we come around. You tried your best, but the leopard's spots won't change.

CRISTINA

You will not get Luisa's story.

SCHIST

Then what do I get sent home with?

CRISTINA

You will not feed --

SCHIST

Then what?

CRISTINA

Waste management.

(in a "quoting" voice; SCHIST writes)

"The staff at Asistencia, Inc. works with all private and public groups to prevent violence against women, whether they are immigrants or not. The government, through ill-framed laws, should not put people like Luisa Ortiz in jeopardy. The batterer here was not just her husband but a system that could not, and would

not, hear her cries for help." Make the pull quote large.

SCHIST

I'll try to bump it up.

The phone rings.

CRISTINA

The fourth horse, the fifth direction. Excuse me.

(into the phone)

Hello? Can you hold for a moment, please?

(to SCHIST)

I have to take this. Above the fold at least?

SCHIST shrugs.

SCHIST

There is much that is out of my hands.

CRISTINA

We share that much at least.

(pointing to the report)

At least don't let it leave without a good thumbing. The dullest parts poison the hardest. I have to take this.

(into the phone)

Yes, yes, how are you?

CRISTINA motions goodbye; SCHIST exits.

CRISTINA

Yes, he's gone -- thanks for the buzz -- I have never learned well how to dance with the hyenas. Gracias.

She hangs up the phone.

CRISTINA

Luisa, Luisa. He never, never, never did bother to double-check your name.

Lights come down, then up to ghost for scene change.

Scene 9: The Abuse

NOTE: The scene will be composed of several smaller scenes, each indicated by a change in light, music/sound, and place.

Scene 9a -- the "marriage" tango

Tango music comes up: the "marriage" tango; in the dance, HANK will give JUANITA a ring. The Tango ends, and they are somewhere in the Mid-West, HANK's territory.

Scene 9b -- in the living room

NOTE: The assumption here is that they are speaking together in Spanish. At times it will be indicated that JUANITA is saying words in English, and her accent should change to indicate this.

HANK

Well, here you are -- home sweet home.

JUANITA

(in English)

Home sweet home. Where am I exactly again?

HANK

In the great American mid-West.

JUANITA

And where in that greatness am I?

HANK

In the "mid" of the mid-West.

JUANITA

Between?

HANK

Between the east coast and the left coast.

JUANITA

Don't make jokes with me -- just tell me where.

HANK

(lightly)

In the heartland. In the breadbasket.

JUANITA

Why won't you tell me?

HANK

Because you're here -- "mid" --

(takes her in his arms)

-- feel this east coast and then this left coast
around you? --

(gives her a playful squeeze)

-- the "mid" -- and that's all that matters.

JUANITA

"All that matters" has been so -- unusual. It's been such a -- hard journey for me, Enrique.

HANK

Coming to Nebraska -- that's where we are, palomita, Nebraska -- can you say it?

JUANITA

(in English)

Nebraska.

HANK

You'll get that mid-West accent yet!
(with emphasis)

Nebraska.

(holding her closer)

Settle in my "mid" here -- let me tell you something true. Coming to Nebraska has always been about making a hard journey. That's how my people built this place -- one hard journey after another. And it is good to be back home to that.

JUANITA

So you don't like Mexico as much as you said you did?

HANK

Honey, it certainly produced you, and for that I am as grateful as dry corn for wet rain -- but it doesn't have the -- kick. You know? It's old. Old! Here you are going to find the new. The dynamic. The solid. Out here, Juanita, you'll see we have the best; out here the important values haven't died off.

JUANITA

The important values --

HANK

Yes --

JUANITA

Help me understand them, Enrique.

HANK

Okay -- here's one, maybe the most important one -- this is what my father taught me, and his father taught him, going all the way back to all the fathers: In this land, if a man works hard and keeps himself independent, that man can stand tall and feel respect for himself.

JUANITA

(repeating it, slight emphasis on "man.")

If a "man" works hard --

HANK

(slight mockery of her emphasis)

If a "man" works hard --

JUANITA

What did I say wrong?

HANK

See --

JUANITA

See what?

HANK

You're already making fun --

(sees her confusion)

"Man" -- you're thinking that "man" doesn't
include women --

JUANITA

No, no, no, no -- I was t[rying] --

HANK

Don't worry, Juanita, our women work hard -- they
wear their share of the pants.

JUANITA

(confused by the phrase)

Pants?

HANK

Wear the pants in the family -- it means you
can't get any serious work done in a dress.

JUANITA

That's -- well, that's just silly. My mother --

HANK

(lightly but without humor)

Now we're silly in --

(using her accent)

-- Nebraska?

JUANITA

Enrique, wait --

(waves her hands around her head)

-- too many words buzzing. Let's let them go.
Shussh -- gone. Gone. Aire dulce -- now sweet
air -- each of us a breath, deep -- go ahead.

JUANITA takes a deep breath; HANK does not.

JUANITA

It is not in me to make fun of what I do not understand. All of it slowly to me -- slow-ly.

HANK

Are you sure it's not too silly for you?

JUANITA

Remember me -- Juanita, new immigrant? Tin ears --

(taps her ears)

-- chin-chin. You have to help me make them ring. You tell me to understand this "man" and this "hard" that you say he works, and I am trying to do that because this "man" is you, no?

HANK

This man is me, yes.

JUANITA

You see --

HANK

But not just me --

JUANITA

Yes, your father, your abuelo, your bisabuelo, your antepasados --

HANK

And not just them --

JUANITA

And Nebraska --

HANK

Nebraska, yes, but --

JUANITA

But what?

HANK

This --

JUANITA

(lost again)

This what?

HANK

This, the world -- the men I came from, these men -- they made this land! They made it produce!

The muscle -- vision -- man, the thrust forward,
right into the ocean and beyond. Emptiness into
gold, Juanita -- emptiness into gold, a whole
line of them --

JUANITA

Enrique, do not confuse --

HANK

And there are things, people, every day --

JUANITA

I am not trying to make you angry --

HANK

-- every day in this country that try to tear us
down -- that we did something wrong --

JUANITA

I know they're w[rong] --

HANK

-- turn everything upside down --

JUANITA

Enrique --

HANK

Why, even my job -- my job! -- making sure
American jobs get sent --

JUANITA

Enrique --

HANK

NAFTA'd!

JUANITA

Look at me!

HANK calms a bit.

JUANITA

Enrique --

HANK

I'm not angry --

JUANITA

No, no --

HANK

I'm not angry! I'm not. It's just that the way
-- the way you said it -- I heard it -- I may
work in an office, Juanita --

JUANITA

That does not matter to me --

HANK

-- I'm not working the land like my father and
his --

JUANITA

That does not matter.

HANK

-- but the blood still runs --

JUANITA

Enrique -- Enrique -- slowly, please.
(emphasizing as before)
Slow-ly. Please.

JUANITA faces HANK; she takes one of his hands and places it on her
hip. In English.

JUANITA

Left coast -- right?
(takes the other one, does the same. In English)
East coast -- eh?
(pats her stomach. In English)
Breadbasket.
(pats his stomach)
La canasta de pan. Oooh!
(puts her hand on his heart. In English)
Heartland. La tierra del corazon. Say it,
Enrique. Say it.

HANK

La tierra del corazon.

JUANITA

Again -- in that mid-West Spanish accent!

HANK

(laughing)

La tierra del corazon.

JUANITA

The land of the heart. In that honey Spanish you
once used, with pigeons flying all around us, the
language you said had poetry for its bones. Do
you remember those soft words?

HANK

I do.

JUANITA

Do you?

HANK

Yes.

JUANITA

Those sweet moments in the park?

HANK

I do.

JUANITA

(as if at the wedding ceremony)

I do.

JUANITIA holds his left hand, puts her hand on his wedding ring.

JUANITA

Amándote y respétandote --

HANK

(takes her ring finger as well)

Amándote y respétandote durante toda mi vida.

JUANITA

Durante toda mi vida. Amen.

HANK

Amen.

JUANITA

You seem very proud, Enrique. Very proud.

HANK

Because I am.

JUANITA

You have made me see that.

HANK

I'm proud to be a man in this country.

JUANITA

And that makes me proud of you.

HANK

Come here, my palomita from old Mejico.

JUANITA

Old picante Mejico!

HANKS takes her in his arms.

HANK

Say it.

JUANITA

What, Enrique?

HANK

Nope, nope -- from now on it is Hank --

JUANITA

To me you are --

HANK

"Hank" -- say it --

JUANITA

You know how it sounds.

HANK

(laughingly)

I love how it sounds! Say it.

JUANITA

(pause, self-consciously, in English)

Hank --

HANK

"Honk" -- I love it. "Honk, honk" -- it's so funny --

JUANITA

Why can't I call you Enrique?

HANK

Because in the great American mid-West my name is Hank Armstrong -- go on, say it --

JUANITA

(as before, a mouthful for her)

Hank Armstrong --

HANK

And you are Mrs. -- Miss-us --

JUANITA

Miss-us. Enrique, at least señora --

HANK

Not señora Armstrong but "miss-us" Hank Armstrong --

JUANITA
(again, a mouthful for her)
Miss-us Hank Armstrong --

HANK
(laughingly)
Mrs. Hank Armstrong --

JUANITA
Mrs. Hank Armstrong.

HANK
On your way to full American!

JUANITA
(bravely)
Yes, full-time American.

Beat.

HANK
What?
(softer)
What? What?

JUANITA
Don't forget --

JUANITA makes a gesture to indicate herself.

JUANITA
Don't forget --

HANK
You?

JUANITA
Some -- already.

HANK
You don't need to --

JUANITA
Already, Enrique -- already. Remember everything
-- everything!

HANK
I do --

JUANITA
Then remember to give me time.

HANK
How does a whole life sound?

JUANITA
(facing him, with a brave smile)
Well, Señor Toda Mi Vida --

HANK
Well, Missus All My Life --

JUANITA
(as she pronounces it, HANK says it along with her)
Well, Mister -- Mister Hank --

HANK
Excellent, Miss-us Juanita -- see, you aren't
forgotten --

JUANITA
What do I do now in my new world?

HANK
Not a thing, my pioneer -- this man Hank knows
his duty, learned from his daddy: P.H.P.
Provide. Honor. Protect.

JUANITA
And what will I do while you are doing all these
wonderful things for me?

HANK
You have the house --

JUANITA
Start my English classes --

HANK
I know.

JUANITA
Like you promised.

HANK
I agreed.

JUANITA
And the papers.

HANK
I will fill them out -- scout's honor.

JUANITA
Whatever that means.

HANK
It means -- Come here. It means all in good
time, honey. All in good time. Breathe -- deep

-- deep, all the way down from your canasta de pan! Here, lean against my tierra del corazon and look out there, the big Nebraska sky: you have your whole life in front of you. And you have me right behind you.

Lights down, with music for change, then up for the next small scene.

Scene 9c -- the dining room

Lights up. JUANITA, wearing an apron, takes a second chair and slams it down angrily. HANK is sitting, as if for dinner. Through all of this, HANK never raises his voice much -- he is completely in command.

JUANITA

(throwing a purple napkin on his lap)
Why can't I start the class? Why?

HANK

(picking up the handkerchief)
That is not necessary.

JUANITA

Why?

HANK

Is dinner ready?

Beat.

HANK

Is it?

JUANITA

I called the school today --

HANK

I guess it's not.

Beat.

HANK

You called the school?

JUANITA

Yes.

HANK

You did?

JUANITA

Yes. A class starts tomorrow.

HANK

You used the phone?

JUANITA

Yes. I did. I know what you said -- but I did.

Beat.

HANK

You shouldn't put yourself in danger.

JUANITA

I wouldn't be in "danger" if you would file the papers, as you promised! Scout's honor!

HANK

There is no need to shout. I filed them.

JUANITA

You did?

HANK

Yes.

JUANITA

Then why did I find them thrown away? In the garage?

HANK

The garage.

JUANITA

Yes.

HANK

And what were you doing in there?

JUANITA

How much do you think --

HANK

Your voice --

JUANITA

How clean can this house be before there's no smell of anyone living here?

HANK

You were cleaning the garage.

JUANITA

Why are you shaking your head -- my father used to do that --

HANK

You are making things difficult --

JUANITA

It is difficult to clean this house until it has
no soul --

HANK

So you decided to clean the garage.

JUANITA

I decided to "strike out" on my own --

HANK

On your own --

JUANITA

-- like your pioneers
(gives it an Spanish pronunciation: "peeoneers")
-- why are you laughing?

HANK

Pee-oneers --

JUANITA

Why were the papers there? Why were the papers
there?

Beat.

HANK

They weren't filled out right.

JUANITA

What was wrong with them?

HANK

You missed some information.

JUANITA

You could have brought them back to me.

HANK

I got busy.

JUANITA

So, you have new ones, then, right?

HANK

I've been trying to get them.

JUANITA

It's been a month!

HANK

And what a month it has been.

Beat.

JUANITA

What do you want me to do?

HANK

Stop making things complicated and be my wife.

JUANITA

I am already your wife. What is so complicated about what I am d[oing]--

HANK

What is so complicated is -- I'm surprised that I even have to explain this to you. You have your space -- I have mine.

(indicating the garage)

That is my place.

JUANITA

I thought this was our home.

HANK

It is -- but that is my place in our home. If you want me to honor you, palomita, you have to act in an honorable way.

JUANITA

Honorable?

HANK

And there are things --

JUANITA

Honorable?

HANK

-- you have to understand --

JUANITA

It dishonors you to ask you to keep your promises?

Beat.

HANK

You see, you see -- look at me --

JUANITA

What is in your face?

HANK

Look at me. Good.

JUANITA

Your face --

HANK

This is what I am talking about. You are pushing, Juanita, my little "pee-oneer," just like a little boat against the wind -- pushing and pushing and just being selfish --

JUANITA

You said you'd fill out the papers --

HANK

-- just wanting what you want whenever you want it --

JUANITA

My English classes!

HANK

Listen carefully -- listen: The wind will beat you back. Don't make things complicated, Juanita -- they are not very complicated at all, I'm not a complicated man: in here, your place, and, out there, my place. Very simple. I want to honor you, Juanita -- you me want me to do that too, don't you?

JUANITA

(more to herself)

I want you to love me --

HANK

Don't you want that? Look at me.

JUANITA

Yes, of course -- honor me --

HANK

Of course you do.

JUANITA

But --

HANK

No, no -- come here: a lesson about that word.

JUANITA

(unclear)

Which word?

HANK

This word: "But."

JUANITA

I cannot say "but"?

HANK

(imitating the converstaion)

I go, "Of course you do" -- referring to honoring you, which I assume you would want me to do. And instead of supporting me on that point -- instead, you go, "But" -- "But" -- "But" changes the conversation, querida, it changes the point I was making for your own good. "But" is a word that crosses lines, crosses them out -- don't answer me with "but."

JUANITA

But Enrique -- sorry --

HANK

Why do you insist --

JUANITA

Sorry --

HANK

-- on making it hard for me? "But" just comes rolling out naturally for you, doesn't it -- you can't resist going your own way. You can't resist crossing those lines. Don't cross the lines.

JUANITA
(faintly)

You promised --

HANK

Yes, I promised -- but -- see, I can use the word -- "but," palomita, you have to earn back your right to the papers -- you crossed the lines by going into the garage --

JUANITA

I didn't know --

HANK

It's up to you.

JUANITA

Are there other borders I shouldn't cross?

Beat.

HANK

You can cross into that kitchen and get my dinner.

JUANITA

And are there other words I cannot have?

HANK

"Dinner" is one you can own completely.

They look at each other as the lights come down. Music for scene change.

Scene 9d -- in the bedroom

JUANITA puts on the purple bathrobe and stands in front of a "mirror," brushing her hair with the comb in her bathrobe pocket.

NOTE: At no point in the scene does HANK ever touch JUANITA; all power and violence is implied.

JUANITA

Teach me to drive.

HANK

I take the car each day.

JUANITA

Let's buy another. We have the money.

HANK

How do you know that?

JUANITA

I looked at the check book.

(noticing his look)

I can't read English, but I can read numbers. I know that much about American money! We can afford a car. I see them on television all the time. You could teach me.

HANK

And you would do what?

JUANITA

What would I do? What wouldn't I do? We need milk, toilet paper -- I could go to the store instead of waiting for you to go to the store. I could get a newspaper in Spanish, for God's sake!
--

HANK

They don't sell those around here.

JUANITA
Yes, they do.

Beat.

JUANITA
Yes, they do.

HANK
Where?

JUANITA
I know where.

HANK
Where?

JUANITA
I looked in the Yellow Pages until I recognized something in Spanish, and I called it. I found a bodega -- I call it every day -- just to hear --

HANK
So you want a car to go out and do things on your own --

JUANITA
It gets lonely here!

HANK
I don't provide enough, is that it? You call up strange men to talk with them --

JUANITA
It is a woman!

HANK
How do I know that's true?

JUANITA
Why would you doubt me?

HANK
Your family would be ashamed of you, you know.

JUANITA
For what?

HANK
For betraying me --

JUANITA
Betraying you --

HANK

Yes --

JUANITA

-- with a toothless campesina who chews her words
--

HANK

I should write to them --

JUANITA

(clearly distressed but angry)
About what?

HANK

This and that.

JUANITA

That you keep me like a prisoner?

(HANK laughs)

That you won't fill out the papers?

HANK

Your father would understand.

JUANITA moves toward him, trying to calm the situation.

JUANITA

I am not asking for so very much --

HANK

Stay away from me. You betray me. I work hard,
I give you a house, I give you food, I do what I
am supposed to do -- all I ask is that you do
what a wife is supposed to do -- and you don't
even do that, lately.

JUANITA

If you would touch me rather than run over me, I
would open like a flower. But no -- in, out --
thrusting!

HANK

Don't. Don't.

JUANITA

I'm sorry.

HANK

Don't insult me again.

JUANITA

I won't.

HANK
Don't ever talk like that again.

JUANITA
I won't -- I won't.

HANK
You will not take over this house.

JUANITA
All I want --

HANK
Sshhh. Sshhh.

HANK gestures for her to move away.

HANK
Why are you doing this?

JUANITA
I am just trying --

HANK
You have a lot to learn.

Beat.

HANK
I don't even know who you are.

Lights down and almost up immediately.

Scene 9e -- somewhere in the house

HANK
No more phone. And I keep the cellular. I've already told your little Guatemalan bruja at the store never to call you again.

JUANITA
You're not going to fill out the papers, are you?

HANK
Not until you behave. Not until you are proper.

JUANITA
Oh, Mamá.

HANK
Speaking of -- I hear your mother is sick.

JUANITA
You hear --

Takes a letter out of his pocket.

JUANITA

When did that come?

HANK

It came.

JUANITA tries to grab it, but HANK easily keeps it out of her reach. As she tries to get it, their struggles become a parody of the Tango steps they had done earlier. Finally, he lets her have the letter.

JUANITA

A month ago? Why didn't you --

HANK

You haven't earned it.

JUANITA

It's my mother!

(reads)

This is not good. This is not good. I have to go.

HANK

She could be dead.

Beat.

HANK

She could be.

JUANITA

I have to go.

HANK

And how will you do that? I have all of your life.

HANK takes a photograph out of his shirt pocket.

HANK

This was in the letter.

JUANITA goes to grab it, but HANK plays with her by keeping it out of her reach; it is as if JUANITA is a puppet.

HANK

Ah, ah -- don't do that. You are very grabby tonight.

HANK finally gestures for her to stop and he shows her the photo.

HANK

Take a long last look at your family.

HANK very deliberately tears the photograph in half, and then in half again until it is confetti. HANK drizzles it over JUANITA. JUANITA falls to her knees to gather the pieces.

HANK

Like the snows of yesteryear.

HANK kneels down to talk with JUANITA.

HANK

Querida, querida. You have no place to go.

JUANITA

Yo no entiendo.

HANK

Is it my English?

JUANITA

Habla español.

HANK

You have no place to go.

JUANITA

Habla español!

HANK

You are here to stay. You have shown great disrespect.

JUANITA

Yo no entiendo.

HANK

You're still a little girl. You need to be led very carefully. You will learn.

HANK stands and pulls JUANITA to her feet, and they begin the "abuse tango," done without music, very physical, with grunts and out-breaths for punctuation -- it should include and parody steps from the previous tangos. When they finish, HANK goes upstage to sit. JUANITA kneels until the next scene starts.

Scene 10: The Decision

Music begins, something meditative. Tight bright light on JUANITA. She collects the torn pieces of photograph and tries to piece them back together. MOTHER stands just outside the light, watching. She is carrying JUANITA's blue shawl. JUANITA senses that she is there.

JUANITA

Mamá?

MOTHER enters and stands behind JUANITA.

JUANITA

Are you there?

MOTHER

Yes.

JUANITA

(startled but happy)

Oh, Mamá!

MOTHER

I have never left you, querida.

JUANITA lets the pieces of the photo cascade from one hand into the other.

JUANITA

So true. It is I who left you -- piece by piece
by piece --

MOTHER comes and takes them out of her hands, places them in the pocket of her dress.

MOTHER

You never fell from my heart.

MOTHER helps her rise.

MOTHER

But this heart -- piece by piece by piece --
until only pieces, little one. No shelter from
the storm.

JUANITA

Mamá --

MOTHER

I left you at the mercy of your father, and all
his fathers -- I left you with no shelter. But
now --

MOTHER gestures expansively, and there is a change of lights,
something meditative.

MOTHER

Shelter --

JUANITA

Why do I know this?

MOTHER

It is time.

JUANITA begins to move around, as if she is touching particular objects, trying to recall a memory. As JUANITA moves, MOTHER "echoes" her movements.

JUANITA

Candles, papel picado, candy skulls -- sí, sí,
Los Dias de Los Muertos! I remember -- I can
remember all of it!

MOTHER

Such a happy time for you.

JUANITA

Cempazuchil, the marigolds -- the flower of four
hundred lives! Rosquete. La ofrenda. Of
course, of course! Look, look, look, look, Mamá
-- pan de muerto!

(takes a bite)

Such sweetness -- right to the roof of my brain
that sweetness would go.

(crows like a rooster)

Look, look, look at it all --

MOTHER

Look at it all very hard --

JUANITA

-- oh, it all floods back into me --

They both take a deep breath.

JUANITA

The incense, the copal, in the sahumerio.

JUANITA makes the motions of placing things; MOTHER does the same gestures.

JUANITA

The singing, the decorating -- almost too
painful, Mamá -- but, let me carry it, more and
more of it --

Beat. JUANITA turns to MOTHER.

JUANITA

Why so painful?

MOTHER

Because it is time. We will travel this
together.

(indicating)

La ofrenda -- the altar. I place three candles.
Purple --

JUANITA

-- for pain. White --

MOTHER

-- for hope. Pink --

JUANITA

-- for celebration.

MOTHER

Their shivering flames --

JUANITA

-- las llamas titilantes --

MOTHER

-- lighting the dark night of tired souls.

JUANITA

I see flowers --

MOTHER

Food, liquor --

JUANITA

Water for the ghosts to wash their hands --

MOTHER

Crosses of wood, of ash --

JUANITA

(making the sign of the Cross)

Of air --

MOTHER

Four compass points --

JUANITA

Four voices of prayer --

Beat.

JUANITA

But one thing -- missing.

MOTHER

You noticed.

JUANITA

The most important -- missing.

Tell me. MOTHER

Whose picture -- JUANITA

Yes. MOTHER

Whose picture is here? JUANITA

For whom have we done all this -- yes. MOTHER

Only an empty frame. JUANITA
(gesturing)

It could be yours. MOTHER

Could be mine? JUANITA

Could be. MOTHER

Am I dead? JUANITA

What do you feel? MOTHER

Have you come to tell me that? JUANITA

I only echo you. MOTHER

Then you echo me what I feel already -- JUANITA

And you feel -- MOTHER

I feel so -- I have felt so -- JUANITA

Dead, yes? MOTHER

Yes. JUANITA

MOTHER
Say it.

JUANITA
Dead.

MOTHER
Spirit crushed --

JUANITA
Yes.

MOTHER
Soul scarred --

JUANITA
Yes.

MOTHER
There are more deaths you have not yet died.

JUANITA
More?

MOTHER
Cells in your body -- that is how many more. And
that is just the beginning.

MOTHER takes her by the face, as FATHER did in Scene 2.

MOTHER
Yes, that could be your picture.

JUANITA
What am I to do? What should I do?

MOTHER stands. She reaches into her pocket and takes out four marigolds. MOTHER hands them to JUANITA.

MOTHER
Compass. Cross. The four directions of your
life.

MOTHER takes two flowers from JUANITA, shows one.

MOTHER
You can stay and be killed.
(shows the other)
Or you can stay and be dead in life. By degrees
or explosion, it doesn't matter.

MOTHER crushes the heads of the marigolds and puts them in her pocket.

MOTHER

The anger --

JUANITA

The anger --

MOTHER

-- will wither your heart completely.

JUANITA

Is that what happened to you?

MOTHER takes a third flower from JUANITA.

MOTHER

You can kill. Vengeance.

JUANITA

Kill --

MOTHER

(presses the marigold into the palm of her hand)
A hot iron -- ssssss! -- that scars the wound
closed. Sssss! And done.

JUANITA

More death.

MOTHER

Possibly justice.

JUANITA

I couldn't. I have one more left.

MOTHER

Las mariposas. Las mariposas -- do you remember
the one time we went for Los Dias to El Rosario,
the sanctuary for the monarchs from the north?
Delicate, fragile. Millions, orange and black --
the trees flaming with their restless wings.

JUANITA

I remember.

MOTHER

On their wings return the souls of our dead --

JUANITA

Every soul --

MOTHER

In that air burning with monarchs, in the land of
our ancient blood, nuestras raices, we discovered
that death can give us wings.

(indicating the remaining flower)
There is one more choice.

JUANITA

What?

MOTHER takes the blue shawl and wraps around JUANITA.

MOTHER

You can fly --

JUANITA

I am so tired.

MOTHER

-- even with your legs like ice, your feet like
iron --

JUANITA

So tired --

MOTHER

-- your skin strangling every breath -- you can
fly.

(taking the last flower)

Cempazuchil.

JUANITA

The flower with four hundred lives.

MOTHER

One of them will lead you to the sanctuary.

There is a pause as MOTHER embraces JUANITA tenderly from behind, as if to say, "I cannot make this choice for you -- but I am here."
MOTHER exits.

Scene 11: Towards Resolution

Lights go to black, then up to ghost as music from Scene 10 plays through for the scene change. The office of Asistencia, Inc. is set. JUANITA takes off the robe, puts on her shirt and shawl, and sits in one of the chairs. As the music fades out and the phone rings, lights come up, and at the same moment, CRISTINA enters carrying her bag and a manila file folder. She sees JUANITA and she pauses. The phone rings two times more, then stops, for a total of four rings.

CRISTINA

The peaceful wonders of the new voice mail
system.

JUANITA turns slightly away from her, so that when CRISTINA sits, she will not be able to see JUANITA's face directly. CRISTINA opens the folder. She reads through it as she speaks. She will also change out of her suit jacket and put on her red shawl.

CRISTINA

Bienvenida a Asistencia, Juanita. Me llamo Cristina. Usted está a salvo aquí. Qué puedo servirle? Agua? Jugo? Comida?

(JUANITA shakes her head no)

If there is anything you need, don't hesitate to ask.

JUANITA turns even more slightly away from CRISTINA.

CRISTINA

It says here on the intake form that you wanted to talk only to me, that I was the only name you had. How did you get my name?

(JUANITA does not respond)

That's all right -- we'll get to that. I know you're feeling many confusing things right now -- I understand. I just want to tell you again, Juanita, that you are welcome, and you are safe. You are not alone here.

JUANITA remains silent.

CRISTINA

I know what you are feeling. Not all of it, but some. The worry. The self-doubt. The shame -- the shame. How you think your family will hate you. How everything you thought was correct has become dangerous, how your "protectors" now hunt you down. Juanita -- you are safe to feel that here. That is a lovely shawl -- I noticed it when I came in. Mexican, eh?

(JUANITA nods)

Do you come from Mexico?

(JUANITA nods again)

Ah! A gift?

(JUANITA nods)

From your mother, sí?

(JUANITA nods again)

Yes, a gift a mother would give a daughter she loves. Part of my own background is Mexican -- can't be born in the American Southwest -- in old Mejico, eh? -- without a little sangre Mejicana turning up. My people went far back. The stories they all tell, eh? I'm sure you have heard all of them. But sometimes too many stories, no? Too many. A person can get bribed

by those stories, misled, fooled; they can make you forget too much.

CRISTINA uses her own shawl. JUANITA has now turned enough to see CRISTINA and can respond to her movements as feels natural.

CRISTINA

My mother gave me a shawl, when I was eleven. Blue, with a white thread pattern. A blue like yours. A shawl is an amazing thing, no? I never wanted to lose its warm sheltering weight off my shoulders. The way it draped over my arms, tapped my young spine as I walked. So many things in a shawl, no? It made me feel wise. I remember a long line of women, hair pulled into tight knots, all firm in their shawls, tough women, survivors. You are in that line, Juanita. What would your blue and patient shawl tell me if I were to ask it politely and con respeto to speak to me?

The lights change, creating a very bright pool of light for JUANITA. CRISTINA sits. This is a "visual monologue" by JUANITA. JUANITA stands in the pool of light. MOTHER brings out a white table, on which rest a stainless steel bowl, a cleaver, a paring knife, a cutting board (preferably wood), and one large, very ripe tomato. A clean white kitchen towel is draped over MOTHER's arm, and she hands JUANITA the towel. MOTHER then stands behind CRISTINA, her hands on CRISTINA's shoulders. HANK comes into the scene and stands behind and to the left of MOTHER, dimly seen.

Very slowly and precisely, and without words, JUANITA dissects the tomato, slicing it neatly, gouging it out, and squeezing the contents into the bowl. It must look and feel like surgery on the human heart.

When she's done, she wipes her hands, the cleaver, and the knife on the towel. MOTHER returns to get the table, then moves back upstage, as does HANK. JUANITA moves her chair back to its original position.

CRISTINA

The old stories never die, do they? Do they? We need to set some things right away, Juanita, and give you choices. Will you answer some questions for me?

(JUANITA nods)

Bueno. How did you find us?

JUANITA

An old campesina at a bodega.

CRISTINA

A little louder.

JUANITA

An old campesina at a bodega.

(with only slight irony)

I found her through the Yellow Pages. I would read until I came across something in Spanish, and then I would call.

CRISTINA

He never let you learn English.

JUANITA

(JUANITA shakes her head "no.")

I kept calling until I found a voice I could trust. She had friends who sent me here and told me to look specifically for you. Asistencia -- the name is known among las olvidadas.

CRISTINA

The forgotten ones.

JUANITA

There are so many.

CRISTINA

Does Hank know how to find you?

JUANITA

I walked out. After he left for work. I had the phone number and the address of the campesina and some coins I found in the couch. A few dollars I had stolen from his wallet.

CRISTINA

When was this?

JUANITA

Yesterday.

CRISTINA

Where did you sleep last night?

JUANITA

I couldn't sleep at her house because he knew about her. She moved me in with some cousins.

CRISTINA

Are you there now?

JUANITA

I didn't want to put anyone into danger.

CRISTINA

So you have no place to go?

JUANITA

I have no place to go. I am here.

CRISTINA

We have many more things we need to do, Juanita. Doing these things means talking with strangers about what is most private in your life. It means setting a machine in motion that has as much pain as kindness built into it. Is this what you want to do?

JUANITA

I have no place to go. I am here.

CRISTINA

Then "here" is where it starts.

CRISTINA gently touches JUANITA's shawl. JUANITA and CRISTINA look at each other. Lights out., then up to ghost for scene change, with music for the talk show.

Scene 12: The Court of Public Opinion

SCHIST, now as IÑIGO QUIROGA, a talk show host. CRISTINA's desk contents are struck and the black table cloth used to cover the table. Three chairs. CRISTINA sits stage left of the table, BARTLETT stage right. Lights and music come up as if in a TV studio. A copy of CRISTINA's report and BARTLETT's press conference statement are on the table.

QUIROGA

Hello and welcome to La Vida, Hoy. I'm Iñigo Quiroga, your host, your coyote, and tonight, we continue with La Migración: Whose Frontera Is It?, our on-going look at the border issues America has with the Latino world. As you know, Latinos are the "greyhound" in American society - - moving up fast on the outside. And this "hot dog" worries some people because now it's not should we have some influence but of how much and when. And this fear often triggers calls for tighter and tighter limits on who gets in. But I'm here, not going anywhere, and we're going to have ourselves a lively exchange tonight because our two guests are, to put it politely, on opposite sides of the fence on this one. On my left --

The lights change slightly to indicate a camera shift to CRISTINA.

QUIROGA

-- is Cristina Lefcadia, Executive Director of Asistencia, Inc., an organization that helps immigrant women suffering domestic abuse, especially married to or involved with U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Welcome, Cristina.

CRISTINA

Gracias. Just a quick correction, Iñigo: we help all women involved in domestic abuse.

QUIROGA

Duly noted, and my apologies. On my right is Congressman William Bartlett, who represents this district. He just introduced legislation to cut back sharply on all aspects of immigration -- which will have the effect -- and here's an important point -- of also eliminating protections for the very women --

(indicating CRISTINA)

-- you want to protect. Welcome, Representative Bartlett.

BARTLETT

Glad to be here.

QUIROGA

Now, some ground rules, because I will bet there will be no eye-to-eye on any of this. Let the person finish speaking before jumping in with a response. And, for the benefit of the Congressman, everything in English. Congressman, let me start with you. Summarize for us why you want to restrict immigration as drastically as you do, especially when it will hurt people in your district? Aren't you supposed to protect your constituents?

BARTLETT

Of course I am -- and I'd like to think I've represented them well over the years. But "represent" is a delicate issue, Mr. Quiroga -- it really means, to whom do I owe my allegiance as a public servant? And I think that the answer is fairly clear: I owe it to those people who play by the rules of being an American citizen. I have to protect their interests -- they pay me to protect their interests -- that's my work -- wouldn't you agree?

QUIROGA

But there are many who play by the rules even if they aren't citizens --

BARTLETT

I know that.

QUIROGA

So why not include them?

BARTLETT

I see them every day in my district, and my heart is touched by their stories -- how could it not? But my oath -- my oath of office -- requires of me a harder duty: to protect the values that keep us free, which I try to do as best -- as best -- I can every day. America will always welcome those who want to work and produce and contribute. But we should discourage those who come here without, let us say, the best of intentions, even if they work hard --

QUIROGA

The "best of intentions" being citizenship --

BARTLETT

The "best of intentions" being to be an American.

QUIROGA

But as I understand it, if I have a million dollars to invest in an American business --

BARTLETT

Mr. Quiroga, that's a little crass --

QUIROGA

But it's true, isn't it?

BARTLETT

You make it sound like citizenship for sale. If you have resources to contribute, resources that we need, then I don't see any problem looking favorably on that.

QUIROGA

Technical skills --

BARTLETT

Same consideration, if we can use them.

QUIROGA

Guest worker programs, farm labor --

BARTLETT
Resources we need for the moment --

QUIROGA
But when the crops are in --

BARTLETT
When the need passes --

QUIROGA
No more huddled masses --

BARTLETT
Not if we want to preserve what makes us unique
and strong.

QUIROGA
Let me shift the focus a little off the
economics: if I'm a woman married to a U.S.
citizen, brought here and abused --

BARTLETT
Is that a segue, Mr. Quiroga?

QUIROGA
I think it's a natural progression --

BARLETT
You're sure it's not an ambush?

QUIROGA
(picking up release)
I am sure it's one of the objects of your "4-A"
campaign -- revoking the parts of the Violence
Against Women Act that would help abused women,
undocumented -- abused by American citizens --

BARLETT
Or resident aliens --

QUIROGA
Well, yes --

BARTLETT
Important to get the terms straight.

QUIROGA
Even if that means putting -- I'm looking at Ms.
Lefcadia's report --

BARTLETT
I've read that, yes.

QUIROGA

Then you know that these are not low numbers.

BARTLETT

If they're true -- counting people who don't want to be counted can be tricky.

QUIROGA

But even if it's only one, the "4-A" campaign would jeopardize --

BARTLETT

Yes -- unfortunate, but yes.

QUIROGA

How do you justify that?

CRISTINA

(to QUIROGA)

May I?

QUIROGA

Of course.

CRISTINA

Representative, you mentioned "heart" --

BARTLETT

Yes, I did.

CRISTINA

Wouldn't you say that heart also makes us unique and strong as a people? Not just duty, or principle, or logic.

BARTLETT

Many things make Americans strong -- certainly their "heart" is one. Certainly a desire for simple justice is another.

CRISTINA

Simple --

BARTLETT

Yes, a very simple contract: the law protects you if you agree to live your life in a certain way. That agreement is called "citizenship," and simple justice draws a simple line: on this side, yes; this side, no.

CRISTINA

Luisa Ortiz hardly had that choice --

BARTLETT

My heart feels for her death, just as yours does -- what that man did to her was brutal, and he should be punished. But we can't base policy on the heart -- our own actions, yes, we can move ourselves however we want -- but not policy -- otherwise, that simple line goes. My duty has to move me in a different direction, towards a greater good, even while my heart grieves for one single person.

CRISTINA

There was no greater good for Luisa Ortiz.

BARTLETT

But not as a matter of policy.

Beat.

QUIROGA

Ms. Lefcadia?

Beat.

QUIROGA

Ms. Lefcadia?

Beat.

CRISTINA

I have to say, Representative, I'm a little thrown by your -- style of compassion. Heartfelt for certain people, not for others, based on -- what is, after all -- an accident of landscape, really.

BARTLETT

Citizenship is not accidental.

CRISTINA

In your world, no, no, of course not -- it's a policy matter -- but in mine, in ours -- well, we just can't tally things up your way, abstractly -- dutifully. People's lives, textures, densities -- it's all too messy, all too rich for policy. Your life included, Representative -- you have a classic background.

BARTLETT

My background.

CRISTINA

Irish, isn't it?

BARTLETT

Is this where you want to take the discussion?

CRISTINA

Representative, it's in all your press materials
--

BARTLETT

All right. Irish, yes. By way of the potato
famine.

CRISTINA

Through the port of --

BARTLETT

Boston.

CRISTINA

Third generation?

BARTLETT

Fifth, actually.

CRISTINA

Four prior generations made their way to
Nebraska?

BARTLETT

Yes.

CRISTINA

And is five generations the tipping point,
Representative?

BARTLETT

I don't understand the term.

CRISTINA

The point where an immigrant "tips" into being a
native -- certified -- a constituent?

BARTLETT

I don't think it's about math.

CRISTINA

But I'm looking at your life trying to grasp your
calculus, Representative -- because you do have a
math, an obvious one.

BARTLETT

I do?

CRISTINA

Time, generations -- say, five of them -- and a person acquires some kind of -- protection. Shelter. Acquires your representation.

QUIROGA

Ms. Lefcadia, we have to move on --

CRISTINA

But if a protected one -- say, a young American man -- betrays a young non-American woman -- no protection for her because she is "non."

BARTLETT

As I said --

CRISTINA

Heartfelt regret, yes, you've said that -- but then comes policy and duty -- and constituents -- so many calculations about three small letters --

(spells it out)

-- "n-o-n." I am just trying to figure out how that adds up.

They overlap on the next lines.

BARTLETT

You make it sound --

CRISTINA

For instance -- pardon me for interrupting --

BARTLETT

That's all right -- go ahead --

CRISTINA

I just had this thought about the math of it all -- my blood has been in this country since Spain arrived -- actually, before -- mestiza -- more than five -- so should that give me even more protection? Or to try to figure it out another way: why do the sheltered people have problems with unsheltered people wanting to do what all our families did, yours and mine and --

(indicating QUIROGA)

-- yours? I have to confess, Representative, one more time, that all this calculating confuses me very, very much.

BARTLETT

Then let me explain once again --

CRISTINA

I wish you would clear it up, Representative
because --

QUIROGA

Let him get his word in --

CRISTINA

(ignoring him)

-- because we could never seem to get the
calculations right to see you to talk about it.
We were in your office day after day trying to
get an interview with you before you introduced
the legislation. You were out, you were in a
meeting, you were --

BARTLETT

I was out doing the work --

CRISTINA

Which meant that we had to be out preparing for
the next Luisa Ortiz.

BARTLETT

(softly, condescendingly)

Then we were both doing our jobs, weren't we?

QUIROGA

Ms. Lefcadia -- Ms. Lefcadia -- why don't you
talk a little about your organization?

CRISTINA

What?

QUIROGA

Why don't you talk about the work you do?

CRISTINA

The work?

QUIROGA

Yes.

BARTLETT

Yes, I would like to hear about your work.

CRISTINA

Waste m[anage] --

Cristina stops herself.

QUIROGA

The work?

CRISTINA

Yes. Yes. Ah -- Asistencia, Inc. is an organization which --

Lights change to downstage center; CRISTINA continues to talk as she steps into the light. MOTHER and MAN 2 take the desk. BARTLETT takes the chairs. They then sit upstage.

CRISTINA

-- which helps battered women, whether citizens, documented, or illegal, find the resources to get themselves out of -- Juanita, I talked. I got my mouth around the official language and spit it out. Bile at first, but I did it. I talked and the passion spilled back into my words, the passion that keeps me in this fight. Played the game out to the end so that the barbarians -- that barbarian -- would not win again. I did it for you. For Luisa Ortiz. For the campesina. For all of us.

CRISTINA puts her shawl over head, as if in mourning. As she speaks, MOTHER joins her, also wearing her shawl as if in mourning.

CRISTINA

As I spoke, I saw him lift his smiling face up to the light, and it struck me that death wears such a fashionable smile as it grinds all our souls -- all our souls, all of us -- into an obedient dust.

As MOTHER begins to talk, JUANITA joins them, also wearing her shawl as if in mourning.

MOTHER

Because the barbarian is not a man even if it wears a man's face.

JUANITA

The barbarian is the anger and shame woven through all our hearts.

CRISTINA

From doubt and violation --

JUANITA

From unhappiness and vast oppression --

MOTHER

From dreams denied and truth dismembered --

JUANITA

From our mortal flesh as brief and cheap as
morning dew.

CRISTINA

(she brings her shawl to her shoulders)
No more must any of us --

MOTHER

(she brings her shawl to her shoulders)
Man, woman, or child --

JUANITA

(she brings her shawl to her shoulders)
Walk the dry road of fear with a voiceless heart.

ALL

Because only we can turn the burden into song.

JUANITA

It can be now.

CRISTINA

It can be here.

MOTHER

It can be us.

ALL

Yes.

As each says her line, she will take off her shawl and hold it out in
front of her. They will link hands while holding the shawls.

MOTHER

Because love --

JUANITA

Because love --

CRISTINA

Rises to life --

MOTHER

Rises to life --

JUANITA

Over the dry bones of death.

MOTHER

Over the dry bones of death.

ALL

El amor sube a la vida sobre los huesos secos de
la muerte.

In one coördinated movement, they wrap the shawls around their
shoulders and present a line of strong women. The light remains on
the three of them, then bumps to black.