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Mojada

A Medea in Los Angeles

New York premiere produced by The Public Theater (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director; Patrick Willingham, Executive Director).

World premiere produced by Victory Gardens Theater, Chicago, Illinois (Chay Yew, Artistic Director; Chris Mannelli, Managing Director).

Brujia, a first adaptation of *Medea*, was commissioned, developed and received its world premiere in 2012 by Magic Theatre, San Francisco, CA (Loretta Greco, Producing Artistic Director).

The West Coast premiere of *Mojada* was at the Getty Villa on September 10, 2015.

Characters

Medea, twenties
Hason, thirties
Acan, ten
Tita, sixties
Josefina, thirties
Armida, fifties

All of the characters are Mexican.

Prologue

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

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

We hear an ancient sound, something sustained.

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

Tita

In ic nanhecan (from the four directions)

Niquintatitilia (I call you)

Ic axcan yez (to my grip)

Tla ximallianh (come forth)

Tlatecuin (cross my path)

She slaps the palms together and they produce the sound of "back there" and there she goes in her memories. Slap—the sound of the old country. Slap—a party with music. Slap—rain. Slap—lovers making love. Slap—a baby crying. Slap—a woman laughing. Slap—the sound a bird, in flight, wings flapping.

The bird is drowned out when suddenly old world meets new when in the distance we hear a helicopter circling and shining its spotlight. She comes closer to see if she can get a glimpse of the copter. She lowers the palms and throws them back in the garden. She turns to the audience.

Tita *Buenas tardes! Como estan? (They are timid, she is not.)*

DIE, COMO ESTAN?

So who has the chisme?

Back home, I go to a vecina and say, "Tell me some gossip." And just like that, "Ai yai yai, y eso, eso eso, y blah blah blah." Minutes later, up it goes, like mubes in the sky, all is forgotten.

But here, everyone guards their laughter and their chisme.

Back home, I see a *mujer* on the street, I say, "Oye, *mujer*, your husband, he is a bull!"

She laughs and says "And he makes love like one too!"

But here, if I ask about the bull, they say, "*Ai*, how can you ask that? And on the street too, *vieja sin vergüenza!*"

As if I ask to see the bull in action!

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

I know, you think "this woman does not like Los Angeles," at my age I don't have to! If I could I would go back, but there are only so many trips one can make in a lifetime and mine have come to an end. *Ya no!*

A beautiful, but worn young woman, Medea, enters carrying a stack of cloth pieces, placing them on the table as she sits and begins to sew, humming to herself.

Tita I am *la sirvienta*—the servant. I am a mother with no children; it's okay it's okay . . . I serve, I cook, I clean and I tell *mi Medea* everyone's *chisme*. That is a lot of work for a woman of my age, but she is my *familia*.

I have been with her since she was born.

I came to her *familia* as a *niña* myself—sold to her family with a herd of cattle and a little goat. That was the first thing they ate. I had no idea he was food, I thought he was my friend! *Pero* he was delicious. . . .

I come from a long line of *curanderas*, healers. We rub, we touch and we look inside you. Everything I know I have taught *mi Medea*, but her gift is *en las manos* . . . Here they think she is just a seamstress, but what she does with the cloth and the pattern and the sewing is *puro pinche* Da Vinci.

Late at night they deliver stacks of fabrics. They say, "No name, no social, we pay you cash, you complain we go to someone else."

They check her seams, her hems and they are always *my* impressed, but they can't show it, because then . . . (*She does a gesture for money.*) Welcome to the factory in your yard.

She work like a dog on a leash to a sewing machine. Sometimes I help, *pero* I can barely see the *pinche* needle, better to focus on my *telenovela*, *que no?*

Back home she is an artist, here she is a sewing machine.

In this country you can only be one thing; here or there, lost or found, man or woman. But back there, we have—*en medio*. Like me, I smile, but I hate you.

She looks at the audience with the most hateful smile.

But what can you do? I raise the boy, I clean and I worry for *mi Medea*.

Suddenly, worry:

Oh, why did we come here? This is Hason, her husband's dream, not ours. She will do anything for him. He is her first and her only. *Al que mensa*, I had at least twenty men begging for me before I even found one I wanted to cook for, and even him I said, "You're not worth my *chilacuites*."

I say to her, "Why we leave in the middle of the night? Why we have to run here, as if we were criminals?"

What is going to become of us? I hardly cook anymore. It's all McDonald's *por aquí*.

Pero, I will stay with her until I die. If she dies before me, I will jump into her grave and they can cover us both. These things do not matter to me. I say, better to die with the boss, than to live with nothing to do.

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

Hason (*offstage*) *Gwa, Gwa, Gwa. . . .*

Medea looks up, hearing it. **Tita** moves toward her milk crate.

Tita *Pinche* bird. . . .

Acan appears at the top of the stairs.

Acan *Papí!*

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

Scene One

Hason (*on his cell*) Figueroa will go off without a hitch. Don't worry, missus, I have it all under control, *Si, si*, I know, the Orsinis are the same apartment, we just copy the last one.

He offers a complimentary laugh. Tita rolls her eyes, and under her breath. . . .

Tita *Idiota. . . .*

Hason I will. And thank you for everything. I appreciate it. (*He smiles.*) Oh, well, thank you. . . . (*Suddenly shy.*) I would love to. . . .

He hangs up, turns to look at Medea sewing and goes to her.

Hason How is my *guaco*?

Medea Your bird is now working without the sun!

Hason I thought I was the only one.

Medea *Gwa!*

Where did you get those shoes?

Hason I always think you have your head buried in that machine but you notice everything. The old lady taught you well.

Tita *Callate, pendejo.*

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

Medea Tita, *dejalo*.

Tita *Baboso!*

Medea Tita!

Back to the issue at hand.

Emtonces?

Hason They bought them for me.

Medea Who did?

Hason My job.

Medea A job buys you shoes?

Hason My boss.

He spits out a loogie.

Medea *Ai*, Hason!

Tita *Que románico!*

Hason *Callate, viejita* nosy.

Medea It's disgusting.

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

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

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

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

Tita . . . Bloomingdales . . .

Medea Tell him what they told you.

Tita One hundred and twenty dollars . . .

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

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

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

Hason What did you say?

Medea "Give them to me I will do them again." Then I smiled. How did I smile, Tita?

Tita smiles her "I hate you" smile.

Hason Don't smile at them.

Medea They don't come back otherwise.

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

Medea In this country, special pays the same.

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

Tita We will wait forever . . .

Hason And you will be in charge of mixing *la masa*, old lady, just so you can know what it feels like to do labor.

Tita I work!

Hason Is that what they call gossiping these days?

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

Hason I am going to take the boy to the pier.

Medea There's a pier?

Hason At the ocean, Medea, in Santa Monica, it has a big Ferris wheel. Two buses to get there, we are all going to go, this weekend.

Tita *Yo tambien?*

Hason Yes, you too, old lady.

He turns to look at Medea.

Medea I have . . . too much work.

Hason All weekend?

Medea We'll see . . .

Hason Medea, *por favor*.

Feeling trapped.

Medea I don't know if I want to go all the way out there.

Hason *Mi reina*, how do you know how far it is?

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

Hason It's only two buses. (*Looking at Tita.*) Tell her it's not that far.

Tita Two buses, easy, Medea.

Hason At least leave the house, Medea! Tita goes to the market, to the clinic, picks up Acan at school . . .

Tita See, I work!

Hason *Callate!* Seriously, Medea . . .

Medea I will try my best.

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

Hason You can't let the past be the future. I will protect you, *mi reina*. I am putting my foot down. We are going to go to the beach as a family!

An outburst.

Medea NO! I CAN'T!

Whoa, where did that come from? **Tita** stands.

Medea I can't . . .

Hason Okay . . . I'll take the boy myself. I was hoping . . . I just . . . I'll make it better, Medea. I will.

They are interrupted by the chifle of Acan whistling down the street. Medea goes inside the house. Tita stands to go with her, but Medea nods for her to stay. Tita and Hason look at each other as Tita sits at her milk crate.

Scene Two

A soccer ball rolls into the yard as Hason goes for it, followed by Acan, dressed in a futbol soccer outfit with a homemade jersey emblazoned with the name "Chicharito" on the back, running after it.

Acan Papi!

Hason *does tricks with the ball and kicks it to Acan.*

Hason Call me Dad.

Acan What's the difference?

Hason That's the way they say it here.

Acan But you're Papi.

Hason It's the same thing, but here in this country it sounds like this . . . *(In a tough guy voice.)* DAD! See? It's strong. *(He mimics his voice.)* Papi! See? That sounds like a duck that's lost in a pond. *(Doing the tough guy again.)* DAD! It makes you sound like a man.

Acan DAAAAD!

Hason Yeah, like that.

He picks up Acan and spins him around. They laugh as he puts him down and points to his jersey.

Hason Where is your Donovan?

Acan *Mami* said I could only wear Mexico.

Hason *'s cell gets a text.*

Hason We'll see about that.

Acan Can I have one?

Hason What?

Acan A cell.

Hason What do you need a cell for?

Acan So I can call you.

Hason We're never apart.

Acan We could be if you bought me a cell.

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

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

Scene Three

Tita picks up a large rusted machete as she stares at the banana tree. Medea enters, surprised by her.

Medea Ay, Tita! Why are you standing there with that thing?

Tita This *pinche* banana tree, I keep pruning and feeding *y nada*.

Medea It's too dry here. It's not going to give off any fruit, but at least it reminds us of Zamora.

She goes to the sewing machine and begins to work.

Tita It refuses to settle here as much as you and I . . . The only smart one was your brother, you should have left me with him. *(The sound of a helicopter. She looks at up at it.)*

Hason didn't come home last night . . .

Medea He has to work all night, there are a lot of Orsinis.

Tita What do you know about Orsinis?

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

Tita And you believe him?

Medea Of course I do.

Tita Everyone else goes home to sleep.

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

Tita I bet he is . . .

Medea *At*, Tita . . . that tongue . . .

Tita Do you really trust him?

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

Tita *Porque eres ciega.*

Medea Not blind.

Tita I have seen a lot of love in my life as well.

Medea Then you know how it is.

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

Medea My love is not *mole*.

Tita That's because he is your first.

Medea My only.

Tita *Ay*, Medea, you almost make me believe it. I just don't want you to suffer, we've suffered enough already.

The sound of a horn on a cart.

Ay, Josefina!

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

Josefina (*offstage*) *MUNECA* . . .

Tita yells back. Medea stiffens.

Tita *AQUÍ ESTAMOS!*

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

Tita notices Medea's apprehension.

Tita *At*, don't worry, Medea, she's one of us, I promise.

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

Josefina *Hola, viejita! Como estas?*

Tita Doing what I do best, nothing!

This makes Josefina laugh. Medea stands in front of her sewing machine.

Tita *Esta es mi Medea.*

Josefina *Hola, Medea!*

She hugs Medea with abandon.

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

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

Medea Carapan!

San Juan Bautista.

Josefina Our patron saint, very good, but your people have *el guaco*, your own bird!

Tita The monarchs, the *avocados* . . .

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

Medea No.

Josefina Who knew a bird from our country could travel this far, but if we can, why can't our birds? I hope they're not as desperate as we are. I know some people from Zamora, but you know, our soccer teams, we should be enemies.

Medea How do you know Tita?

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

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

Josefina It's true, I know everyone *en el barrio* now. (*Looks down at her hands.*) Oh forgive me, I must be nervous, I brought you some *pan dulce* from my cart!

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

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

Josefina *Bah!* I think every Mexican woman should have a big ass. I do! We should look like the old country—plump and full of possibility. I know your husband.

Medea You do?

Josefina *Bien conocido*, he's very charming *tu esposo*, he comes by my cart.

Hey, when he was a kid was he in the group Menudo?

Medea What!

Josefina I knew he was lying!

Medea You work all day?

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

Tita She doesn't know the *barrio*. She's like the mother in that *telenovela Una Familia Con Suerte*?

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

Tita That one.

Medea Tita . . .

Josefina Oh don't be embarrassed, Medea, when we come to this country, we become family. Come visit me down on Cesar Chavez and you can see the *gabachos*, they call them "hipsters."

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

Josefina Even the "hipsters" buy my bread.

I wanted to charge all the white people moving into the neighborhood more money, because, come on, let's face it, you know they have it, but then my friend, Aurora, you know, the lady who sells the *tamales* in front of the bus stop at Mariachi Plaza?

Tita *Si, la comozco.*

Josefina She told me I could get a ticket for that, she says its "discrimination."

Medea Really?

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

Tita I don't understand this country.

Josefina Me neither. You know *esa* Teresa who sells the *chicharrones* in front of the Metro stop at First and Soto? She told me the rich people in Bel Air make their dogs walk on two legs!

Tita *No me digas.*

Josefina I hope it is okay to say, Medea, but your husband, Hason, is *tan guapo*, sexy.

Tita He's not.

Josefina Is he a good lover? (Medea is caught off guard.) *Al*, don't be embarrassed Medea, we're open books, we have nothing to hide. Only people with money have secrets.

It must be a lot of work to keep a beautiful man satisfied. I prefer my ugly husband. The only one that wants him is me! No no, mine is good, but I have to keep pointing him in the right direction. (She points downward.) Poor thing, he's always tired.

Medea What does he do?

Josefina He works in the fields, which reminds me, I came with a favor, is that okay? I bought a dress to seduce him with but it's too big, could you bring it in for me?

Medea Let's see it.

Josefina pulls it out of the bag.

Medea Oh . . . Put it on.

Josefina begins to undress in the yard.

Medea *Al*, Josefina, you can dress inside.

Josefina What for? I do everything out on the street except make love.

I would love to make love outside, between the Payless and the King Taco.

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

Tita A nun is more seducing than that dress.

Medea Tita!

I can make you a better one if you want.

Josefina Can you, Medea? I could pay you in layaway or give you free *pan dulce* in exchange.

Medea Just pay me when you can.

She goes to the sewing machine and gets some pins and measurement tape. Tita pulls her milk crate over and extends a hand for balance as Josefina stands on it. Medea begins to pin the dress up.

Josefina I need a baby-making dress.

Medea works.

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

Medea Okay, Josie . . .

She works.

Josefina How is Hason's job?

Medea Busy. Do you know Memo and Quique?

Josefina Of course, the laziest nice guys I know.

Medea Hason got a promotion supervising them.

Josefina Ah ha! Good to know.

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

They can finally pay their *pan dulce* balance!

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

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

Medea And what about your husband?

Josefina Gone, the whole season.

Medea Where does he work?

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

Medea Is that far?

Josefina It's another state!

Medea Oh.

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

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

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

Medea Josie, *que paso?*

Josefina I'm sorry, I usually cry in our garage.

Por favor, don't tell anyone.

Medea I won't, Josie.

Josefina I hope it's okay to tell you this. My husband only likes to make love on Saturday nights. He's been like that since I met him.

Tita Forgive me for asking, but is he loyal?

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

Medea That's right, Josie. We are of the past, the old country. It's not here. (*She touches her head.*) It's here. (*She touches her heart.*) I understand.

Josefina I cry because I long for my own child, my own flesh and blood, a baby made from us.

Tita Any child would make you happy.

Josefina Yes, but my Progeny. Isn't that a beautiful name? I saw it on a brochure at the White Memorial. That is what I would name my child: Progeny Maria Alcazar Hernandez.

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

She looks down at Medea.

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

Medea I understand . . .

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

Medea Tita is a *curandera*. She can help.

Josefina You're a healer?

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

She takes out a bird feather and does a blessing over Josefina while they talk.

Medea I will make you a dress a husband cannot resist.

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

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

Tita And it will be blessed.

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

Tita Every day. Her brother is still there.

Josefina He is?

Tita Her twin. You should have them seen them when they were little, they would talk without saying a word . . .

Medea Tita, stop.

Josefina Have you been back?

Medea I never will.

Josefina But you're so traditional, Medea, I can't believe you'd never want to go back. It's all I think about. You remind me of my sister, I can see the land on you. And as generous as her too. I am in your debt, *gracias* my friends.

She breaks down in tears.

I'm sorry I only do this in our garage.

Medea reaches up and takes her hand.

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

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

Josefina Acan!

Medea You know my son?

Josefina Of course, he and Hason buy my *pan dulce*.

Medea They do?

She looks at Acan.

Medea *Los zapatos.*

Acan Dang, man.

Medea *Que?*

Acan *Nada...*

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

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

She reaches into her bra and pulls out a dollar, which she gives to Acan.

Medea Oh, you don't have to do that.

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

Acan *Gracias, Tita Josefina.*

Josefina Josie! Say my name like a hipster.

Acan Josie.

Josefina He is everything, isn't he?

Medea He is.

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

Medea Never.

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

Acan Please?

She looks at him, torn, but loving him.

Medea *Gracias?* ...

He grimaces, but says it.

Acan *Axquēnhiqui.*

She smiles and he runs into the house.

Scene Four

Hason steps into the yard, the wear of a work day under him. Medea turns to him.

Medea Let's make love out here.

It catches him off guard.

Hason Excuse me?

Medea Let's make love out here.

Hason In the yard?

Medea You wanted to before.

Hason Well, before it was late and I was horny.

Medea I have a friend who wants to make love outside and I remembered how we used to.

Hason You have a friend?

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

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

Medea We had neighbors back home.

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

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

Hason God is looking at you, Medea.

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

Hason Do you really want to?

Medea Nobody can see . . .

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

Hason What the hell . . .

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

Hason Are you sure?

Medea I think so.

They began to kiss and touch, it's sensual and sweet, Hason is taking his time, very careful. He attempts to take something off Medea, she is trying her best to be brave, but as it goes on, you can see that she is beginning to suffocate, it's too much and she quickly freezes up in terror, trying to just breathe.

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

Hason Okay . . .

Medea I'm sorry.

Hason It's okay . . .

The moment seems long. He breaks it.

Arnida gave me another promotion.

Medea She did?

Hason Half the day I am in the front office with her.

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

Hason She's older than me.

Medea You are older than me.

Hason It's not the same.

Medea It's worse.

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

Medea And bosses?

Hason They don't count.

He points to her breasts.

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

They laugh.

She has big plans for me, Medea.

I told her we own land in Michoacan . . .

Medea Why would you do that?

Hason I had to . . . To get her to notice me. You think I'm the only one out there? I told you it would open a door.

Medea We have to be careful.

Hason I told her it's your family's land, don't worry. I'm doing this for the boy. Every nail I hammer, every wall I put up, every condo I build here in this country is for our son.

Medea Don't let her see your desperation, Hason.

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

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

Hason I'm just lucky she likes me.

Medea And don't flirt!

Hason Whatever it takes . . . *(He smiles, she frowns.)* So what if she has a little crush on me, I know why I am doing what I do, for my son. I want the boy to know this country.

Medea He has to remember who he is.

Hason Let him taste this country, it won't kill him.

Medea See all the herbs in Tina's box? Some of them are poisonous, you have to know the difference.

Hason Just let him eat a Little Caesar's pizza, that's all I am saying.

Medea Never.

Hason laughs and smiles at her.

Hason Never?

She smiles back.

Medea Maybe . . .

Hason She wants to meet you.

Medea She does?

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

She rolls her eyes.

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

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

Hason Would you prefer to live out in Pacoima? You don't even know where that is, do you? I hope you never do.

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

Medea I love you, Hason.

He kisses her softly on the forehead.

Hason Medea, there are things we have to do, to get ahead in this country. There are going to be hard choices to make.

I want to know your heart is mine always . . .

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

Scene Five

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

Tita Four years ago on a farm in Zamora, she wakes me.

Medea "¡Vamos!" . . .

Tita . . . she says, and off we go. To this America.

Hason *grabs a backpack and a jug of water from the yard. Medea and Tita each grab a small duffel bag. Acan clutches a toy and Tita's hand.*

Tita We walk to the edge of the farm. The four of us.

Medea, Hason, *el niño* Acan, y yo.

Sleepy and confused, I say, "Why we leave now?" No answer.

Her brother, Acat, is nowhere to be seen, *huerfano*.

Barely anything we own between all of us.

We leave it all behind. We must go.

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

Hason says . . .

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

Tita A truck pulls up, old and beaten, like me.

No window, no door, just a big box.

A truck for car parts and dead animals.

And still we get in.

Two men, stand and look at us.

They are like us, but they are also them. *Narcos*.

Killers of our country, they run everything now.

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

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

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

"Two days", the driver says.

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

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

I also see an older man from Guatemala holding a Bible.

He is already tired, traveled so far.

I look at him and worry. But I worry more for Acan.

We pray for a safe trip.

They are joined by the actor playing Josefina.

Tita A young girl runs up at the last minute, darker than all of us, on her way to Arizona.

She is alone. I say, "Sit with me."

Young Girl *Gracias*.

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

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

The road is full of bumps. We bounce around for hours. Filled with fear and dread.

The driver sings to himself and perspires.

We are hot, sweating like animals, and burning up.

No air in the back. I can feel that we are hiding our desperation.

Please, God, let the driver know what he is doing.

The old man holds his Bible tightly.

The girl is afraid but tries not to show it.

We talk, look at each other, smile, distract

and slowly the heat and the sweat quiets us.

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

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

We stop for a rest and the driver opens the door.

We are all surprised. It is still light out. Our sense of time is gone.

The driver tells us

"We are going into the desert. We are near the border.

Stay calm if we get stopped. I will bribe the patrol to let us go.

This is going to be the hardest part. Drink water."

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

Everyone is exhausted and struggles for breath.

You can see everyone's chest and stomach, up and down,

trying to find and hold as little air as possible.

Maybe this is what the *Narcos* do. They kill you before you arrive.

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

Time passes. Becomes desperation. We whimper.

Then the quiet man from Morelia pounds his fist on the wall of the truck.

The driver stops. Unhooks the door and it opens widely.

A gasp. We all breathe in the air.

The man from Morelia jumps off the truck.

"I'm done," he says. "It isn't worth it."

He starts walking away into the desert.

He screams to us, "I have a terrible feeling. Be safe . . ."

Seven of us remain.

The door bolts shut.

We drive and drive, the only hope knowing it has to end.

Panic. No air. We find small holes on the floor of the truck.

We lie down and stick our noses and mouths on the tiny openings.

Like pigs, cows, off to slaughter. You can hear us gasping for air.

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

The doors open. It is night.

The actor playing Armida plays the soldier.

Tita Standing and staring at us, are soldiers from our country.

They look at us. They are short, dark and in their green fatigues.

They hold guns and rifles across their shoulders. They don't say anything.

Suddenly, two jump in grabbing the young girl.

I try to hold onto her, but one of the soldiers slaps me across the face.

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

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

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

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

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

And then without warning they return.

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

Hason, Acan and I hold on to her.

A soldier holds a gun to Hason's face. He is crying.

I try to push them away, but one points a gun towards Acan's head.

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

Finally, Hason, struggling between tears, says . . .

Hason "Medea . . . Please . . ."

He looks at Medea and they silently agree that she should be sacrificed. She walks willingly into the desert with the soldier where she is roped.

Tita We wait and wait.

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

After a while, you can hear drunken laughter.

They come back with their flashlights. They look in the truck again.

One of the soldiers gives a nod to the men and Hason and the other man run into the desert.

Meanwhile, the leader, a man who is boy, jumps onto the truck.

He moves closer toward Acan.

I stand in front of him. He laughs at me drunkenly.

Soldier "You are too old for me, *viejita*."

Tita I raise my hand. Two soldiers draw their guns.

I scream "*AHMOTSIN!*"

He goes back a thousand years. His spirit understands.

I don't take my eyes off of him. I am eating his heart and he knows it.

"*Tlen mo tokatsin?*"

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

"*Quizassss!*"

He is shaken, unnerved, but . . . still the leader.

He feigns a laugh and jumps off the truck.

The soldiers slash the tires.

They take the *Narcos'* merchandise. And they leave.

Hason and Medea enter. *He is holding her gently as she hobbles, limping.*

Tita Hason returns, holding Medea softly. She is in shock.

The other man has the young girl over his shoulder. She is now a carcass.

No one weeps.

I sing to Acan softly.

She sings.

"*Cucurrucucú paloma . . .
Cucurrucucú, no llores.*"

He never lets go of my hand.

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

We get the old man up and he lays his Bible on her.

I look at the moon. *Tlazocamali.*

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

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

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

Tita Medea drinks it. It kills the soldier inside her.

Morning comes. We begin to walk.

We walk for hours without talking or even looking at each other.

The morning dew evaporates into thirsty afternoon. A lizard scrambles.

To walk in the desert is to walk everywhere and nowhere.

But . . . after a while . . . It is clear . . .

There is no sign, no line, no welcome.

We are in the other America.

We are back in Boyle Heights at the house.

Scene Six

The backyard is transformed for a party. The wooden table is covered with plates, glasses, and beers. Hason is dressed up. Tita has a rebozo draped across her shoulders. She sits on her milk crate away from the table. Medea looks beautiful in a simple traditional huipil. Armida, la mera mera, is dressed in an elegant but simple shimmering striped blouse, skirt, and big heels. She is truly a senora. It is clear that they are post-meal as the music fades to their laughter.

Armida When I first came to Los Angeles there weren't even *pinche* avocados from Zamora!

A giggle escapes from Tita as Armida leans over to look at her.

Armida *Viejita, tu sabes?*

Tita deflects the comment.

Hason Now it's the only thing they sell.

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

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

Do they think all these apartments were born this way?

Hason That's right.

Armida Everything changes.

She looks at Hason.

Armida You have to remember that.

She gives Hason a familial pat on the hand and Medea notices.

Armida Nobody cared about this *barrio* for years. They built four freeways through East L.A., how's that for community building?

She reaches for a beer, but it's empty. Medea stands.

Medea Can I get you another beer?

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

Hason Tita?

While they talk, Tita rises and slowly gets another beer for Armida. Medea sits.

Hason How do you know all this?

Armida I used to work at City Hall, in Building Permits. Nobody let me get a foot in any farther than my thigh, but I learned how to play the game.

Hason So what is the trick?

Armida Marry them.

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

Medea So you are married?

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

Medea and Armida both do a sign of the cross.

Armida His name was Weisman. He was Boyle Heights before any of us were here. But to me he was just WiseGuy. I used to take him to *fiestas* just to show him off.

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

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

I know I'm lucky. You just have to drive by a Home Depot and see all those men out front to know that.

Hason *Maestra*, I've been meaning to ask you . . .

Armida Please . . .

Hason How did you cross?

Armida I flew.

Medea You flew?

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

Medea shakes head no.

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

Tita finally hands her a beer.

Armida Thank you . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She takes a swig of her beer.

Hason *Maestra*, in my humble opinion, it's not luck, it's work.

Tita (to herself) Now he has humble opinions . . .

Armida I reel them in with a tight skirt, vodka, some cleavage and then . . . we do business!

Enough about me, let's talk about that *mole*.

A proud Hason looks at Medea.

Medea A family recipe.

Armida raises her glass.

Armida To Medea's family recipe!

Medea Tita is the cook in this house.

Armida turns to look at Tita.

Armida *Viejita*, you are the cook?

Tita No, the slave, *pendeja* . . .

Medea Tita!

Hason stands up. Armida reaches for his hand and makes him sit.

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

Tita Then how do you make your money?

Hason shakes his head in disgust, but Armida laughs. She looks at Medea.

Armida I am sure she's worth all that, if just for the *mole*. (To Tita.) Why don't you join the conversation?

Tita No.

Medea She's of another time.

Armida Like you?

Medea is embarrassed.

Armida Is that why you fell in love with her, Hason?

He doesn't say anything. Medea offers.

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

Armida (smiling) A bird?

Hason It's silly.

Medea Silly?

Armida Silly or not, I want to know.

Although hurt, Medea keeps her cool.

Medea No, he's right. It's "silly" . . .

Armida puts her hand on Medea's with force, there is nothing reassuring about it.

Armida I want to hear it. Please . . .

Medea looks at Hason.

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

Hason I deserted. (He looks at Medea.) It's okay, I told her. They thought I lived in Irapuato so it was easy to come back home.

Medea He came back to Michoacan and hid on our farm. He knew my brother.

Armida Hm . . .

Medea In Zamora there are a lot of farms, someone always leaves you a little something to get by outside your door—one day a chicken, another day a *tamale* still steaming from the pot, but Hason was in love with the birds.

Armida A bird watcher?

Medea Just one bird, *el guaco*.

Armida The bird of Michoacan . . .

Medea That's right, the *guaco* is wild and free. In the fields picking, he hears this call.

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

Gwa, Gwa, Gwa . . .

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

Armida I remember that.

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

Hason And already so beautiful and ripe for the taking.

Impulsively, Medea reaches over and kisses Hason on the lips, who becomes visibly embarrassed. Armida stares at her. Medea walks away from the table.

Armida Okay, enough about birds.

She looks at Hason.

Armida Hason, can I have a moment alone with your little *guaco*?

Medea clearly does not want the moment alone, but Hason is dutiful.

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

Medea Tonight?

Hason kisses Medea on the forehead. He hugs Armida. He looks at Tita.

Hason *Vieja*, the plates.

Sensing something, Tita sits instead.

Tita No no, I tired . . .

Hason disgusted, leaves. Armida looks at Tita for a moment, smiles and then looks away.

Medea I didn't know you owned this building.

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

Medea Thank you.

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

You know I have big plans for Hason.

Medea You are like a mother to him.

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

Medea For his success, always.

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

Medea He did?

Armida I want you to make me something.

Medea It would be my honor.

Armida We can set up a shop for you, rent-free. I just bought a strip mall in Montebello. I could put you between a 7-Eleven and a Subway Sandwiches.

Medea No, thank you.

Armida No?

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

Armida You have to stop thinking that way.

Medea What way?

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

Armida He is very hungry, and I like that. Are you as ambitious as him?

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

Armida But you're not married.

Medea What?

Armida You are not married.

Medea Excuse me?

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

Medea *is caught off guard.*

Medea Forgive me. I don't understand you.

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

Medea I don't know why he would say that.

Armida I do.

Medea *tries to recover. Armida looks over at Tita and smiles.*

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

Armida What is that?

Medea A child.

Armida That's when you should have married him.

Medea That's not always our custom.

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

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

Armida Hason tells me everything.

Medea Not meant for strangers!

Armida I'm not a stranger, little girl.

Medea I think we have spoken enough.

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

Medea No, I do not.

Armida Do you want Hason to succeed?

Medea It's all I've ever wanted for him.

Armida Then you should understand how things work in this country.

Medea I have done everything he has asked me to do.

Armida We are going to ask more of you.

Medea I think you should go.

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

Medea I don't know what's happening here, so I am asking you kindly, please leave.

Armida Hason is going to become a part of my business now. I have many plans for him. Him. Not you.

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

Acan Armida!

This shocks Medea and she looks at Armida who smiles at the boy. Acan runs to Armida and hugs her.

Armida My precious boy! *Como estas, mi amor?*

Medea Acan!

Armida *does not let Acan go.*

Armida Give him room to grow, Medea.

Medea Acan . . .

Armida If you hold on too tight, you will get hurt . . .

She holds Acan in her arms as the lights fade. She leaves as Acan goes to a skateboard in the yard.

Scene Seven

Medea and Acan in the yard. He is holding his skateboard.

Medea Your huaraches?

Acan Dad threw them away.

Medea tries her best to keep calm.

Medea Where did you get that?

Acan From someone . . .

Medea Someone?

Hesitant.

Acan Armida.

Medea Why didn't you want to tell me?

Acan I don't know.

Medea *Senora* Armida.

Acan It's just Armida, *Mami*.

Medea She told you to call her that?

He doesn't say anything.

She's Papi's friend?

Acan We go to her house.

Medea Her house?

Acan Are you okay, *Mami*?

Medea What do you do there?

Acan Play Wii.

Medea Wii?

Acan Nintendo, Mom!

Medea What is that?

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

Do you want me to ask her if you can come to her house?

Medea Is that all you do, play Wii?

Acan No.

Medea What else do you do?

Acan We swim.

Medea Swim?

Acan In her pool, she has a big pool, like for Olympics.

Medea Who swims?

Acan Me. *Papi*.

Medea Does he work there?

Acan Are you going to ask me everything?

Medea Does he, does he work there?

Acan I don't know!

Medea What do you like about *Senora* Armida?

Acan She dresses funny.

Medea She does?

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

Medea She swims?

Acan It's her house, what do you think!

Medea Yes, of course.

Acan *Mami*, I was thinking . . . Can you make her a dress?

Medea A dress?

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

It's too much and Medea turns away from him.

Acan Are you okay, *Mami*?

Medea I have a headache.

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

Medea does not turn back.

Acan Can I go play in the street?

Medea Yes, go, be careful.

Acan gets on his skateboard and starts to roll away.

Acan Make her a dress, Mami!

He is gone. Medea looks at Tita.

Scene Eight

Medea gets the banana leaves from the yard. Tita sits on her milk crate watching her.

Medea turns and holds the leaves up.

Medea The Four Directions, to the ancestors.

Tita Uh huh . . .

Medea I am *el guaco*, the mighty falcon gripping a burden in my claws. I must make an offering. I flap my wings and they reward me with the gift of sound.

Tita Clear your mind, Medea, you must come to *el conjuro*, clean, pure.

The jolting sound of the horn on Josefina's cart.

Tita Ay, *pinche Josefina*, me asusto!

Medea puts down the leaves, defeated. In the distance we hear Josefina shout . . .

Josefina MUNECA!

Tita I am getting tired of all that bread . . .

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

Josefina Hola, ladies.

Tita takes the bag from her.

Tita Oh *pan dulce*! Gracias, Josefina.

Josefina Josie, *viejita*!

She hugs Medea.

Josefina I love my dress.

Can you make another one, is that okay?

Medea For a friend. Of course.

Josefina Let me kiss your hands.

Medea Don't be silly.

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

Tita just nods her head.

Josefina You look tired, Medea.

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

Josefina I talked to my husband! He agreed to do it more often, including Wednesdays.

Tita *Que bueno*.

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

Medea Good for you.

Josefina I changed my life once. I can do it again. I came to this country like everyone—to survive. It's simple really, you are hungry and you go where there is food. I didn't know you had to become a new person to do that.

Medea You think so?

Josefina I put my head to the ground and worked, at first, just in the fields, but then out of the blue, one night I bake an old family recipe for my husband, an *empanada de calabaza*. And he tells me I should sell some during the soccer games at *el hoyo*.

Sure enough everyone starts buying my bread and I go from *empanadas* to *conchas* and before I knew it I had enough to rent, then buy my cart. And by the grace of God, no one hassles me on the street. I do have a sign that says, "All police eat for free."

Tita She does.

She looks at Medea and debates telling her.

Josefina Medea, is everything okay?

Medea What do you mean?

Josefina I feel embarrassed telling you this . . .

Medea You say what you need, Josie.

Josefina They are talking about you.

Medea Who is?

Josefina I am telling you this as a friend. Be careful, *mi costurera*. Can I ask you something?

Medea We have been open books, Josie.

Josefina Do you talk to Hason?

Medea I do.

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

Medea I think so.

Josefina Has he told you his plans?

Medea Yes . . .

Josefina And you are okay with them?

Medea Why wouldn't I be?

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

Medea Who told you that?

Josefina You need the marriage certificate in this country, Medea.

Medea Our faith is in each other.

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

Medea You are not being very clear, Josie.

Josefina What is Hason doing with Armida?

Afraid to taint her husband.

Medea He is her employee.

Josefina Is that what he says?

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

Josefina You don't have your immigration papers, do you?

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

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

She looks at Tita and Medea.

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

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

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

Silence.

I should go.

Medea Yes, please.

Josefina Medea, *me da tanta pena*, but I can't come here again.

Medea What?

Josefina It's very complicated when you can't get involved. Hason is helping me to get a little bakery at a strip-mall in Montebello. Armida owns the property.

I can't be in the middle of things. You understand?

Medea I don't.

Josefina Medea, you know us. In the end, we're tribal. How can I not want to help you survive this place? But you have to try to understand how things work here.

Medea Just go then.

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

Medea *Pues, entonces . . .*

Josefina *hugs a reluctant Medea. She looks at Tita as she makes her way out.*

Josefina Can you have Tita deliver the dress?

She quickly leaves.

Scene Nine

Hason *enters, dressed in a work suit.*

Medea Why are you swimming in her pool?

Hason Who told you that?

Medea Is that what you do for work?

Hason I am doing what she asks, Medea. What the boss asks for.

Medea Does she care that you are married?

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

Tita Everyone knows your *chisme*, *cabron*.

Hason *Callate la boca!* Stop filling her head with lies.

Tita Not lies.

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

Tita This man is filled with secrets, Medea.

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

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

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

Hason Is that my fault? You know I have tried, Medea.

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

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

Medea I work like you, Hason!

Hason Yes, and too much, Medea.

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

Medea More than what we ever wanted.

Hason More than what you ever wanted.

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

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

Medea breaks down.

Medea It's too much.

Hason *is surprised by the intensity of her feelings. He goes to hug her.*

Medea I have an idea . . .

Hason What?

Medea Marry me.

Hason Medea . . .

Medea Marry me. Make it real.

Hason You're being silly.

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

Hason It's not like that.

Medea *can't control herself.*

Medea Tell me you don't love her!

Tita Medea . . .

Medea TELL ME . . .

A beat. Hason sees her desperation.

Hason I don't love her.

She breaks.

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

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

Let's put a curse on her.

Hason What?

Medea Yes, *un mal de ojo*.

Tita *Niña!*

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

He pushes her away.

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

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

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

Medea She's not a nice person, Hason!

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

Medea I want you.

Hason I want more . . .

Medea Then, *un mal de ojo* for Tia Arnida!

Hason *steps even farther away. Tita steps in.*

Hason You can't do that, Medea.

Medea Why not?

Tita Yes, why not?

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

Medea Tell me . . .

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

Hason I married her.

Medea WHAT?

Tita *Hijo de la chingada . . .*

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

Medea Oh my God . . .

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

Tita *Que te dije!*

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

Medea Why, Hason?

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

Medea *slaps him hard across the face. He takes it.*

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

She can barely bring herself to ask. Hason glares at Tita.

Medea Did you make love to her?

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

GET OUT!

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

Tita *Nunca!*

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

Medea And what do I become?

Hason You will always be my wife.

Medea spits into his face, and without warning, Hason grabs her by the hair and drags her away from Tita, who screams.

Hason *(in a rageful whisper)* Don't forget, we have our own sins, Medea.

Tita What sins?

Hason Yes, tell Tita, *la chismosa*, so she can spread it all the way down Cesar Chavez.

Tita What is he talking about?

She grabs the large rusted machete in the yard and moves toward Hason. More hurt than scared, Hason runs out. Tita looks at Medea.

Scene Ten

Armida enters. Tita backs away.

Armida I want you out.

Medea Where will we live?

Armida That's not for me to answer, I am sure Hason will help you.

Medea But you are the one kicking us out.

Armida You knew at some point this would happen, Medea. He's not yours to keep.

Medea He is my life.

Armida He's free to make his own choices.

Medea I have his child.

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

Medea I could never put a price on our bond.

Armida He has.

If you go quietly, Hason will share everything with you, I know he will. So, you see, it's a win-win for everyone. I am being very generous with you. But you just can't stay here. Not in this house. Not in this city. You have to disappear.

Medea You invited us to live here.

Armida I invited him. Had I known you were not his wife . . . Let's not make things ugly. We can shake hands, smile and be done with it.

She goes to shake Medea's hand. Medea backs away.

Medea I am a mother.

Armida That doesn't impress me. I am giving him an opportunity to join me in my business.

Medea I have nothing to go back to.

Armida I want you out of here by tonight.

Medea Tonight?

Armida This is not a hotel.

Medea But Acan and I, where will we go . . .

Armida Acan is staying with us.

Medea NO! He will go with me.

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

Medea You will invent anything.

Armida I don't have to invent anything, Hason says you stole your brother's land.

Tita Acat?

Medea That's a lie!

Armida I didn't create the morality of this country, I just use it for negotiation. I am taking the old lady.

Medea Tita?

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

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

Medea Please . . .

Armida Let's not go there.

Medea I am begging you.

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

Armida I don't need to be ashamed by you, Medea.

I need him. More than you. If I can give him what he wants, why not, It's just money. But the heart, that's harder, for a woman . . . like me.

Medea Please, I beg like a dog.

Armida This is pathetic.

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

Armida I can't.

Medea I will go quietly, I promise.

Armida Enough!

Medea I will give you anything.

Armida Anything?

Tita *looks on in horror.*

Medea I will . . . *(She starts to cry.)* leave Acan.

Armida Very good.

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

Armida *thinks.*

Armida I was there once. Where you are now . . . Don't make me regret this.

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

Medea Oh, I will . . .

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

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

She leaves and Medea rushes to her sewing machine, as she begins to furiously sew away.

Scene Eleven

Josefina *enters.*

Medea Josie, thank you for coming, forgive me, please, I was a fool.

Josefina The fault is mine, *compañera*, I'm sorry I abandoned you.

Medea I need your help.

Josefina I know, Medea, anything my friend.

Medea I need a place to stay.

Josefina I thought you couldn't leave?

Medea I have to . . .

Josefina You're leaving Hason? What did that bastard do to you? You can't raise Acan here in the city on your own, Medea. You will lose him, to gangs or drugs or worse. Go back home.

Medea I can't.

Josefina *Ai Dios . . . (An idea.)* Okay, listen, and *por favor*, no one can find out about this.

Medea *Te lo prometo.*

Josefina You can stay in our garage.

Medea Garage?

Josefina I will tell the family upstairs that you just arrived and are my relatives. They will understand, they came over the same way. You can stay long enough to figure out where you can go to next. The garage is yours if you need it.

Medea *Gracias, Josie.*

Josefina I will house you, Medea, but I can't get involved in any other way.

Medea You don't have to. You have been a great friend and I am in your debt.

Josefina Medea, we haven't been friends, we have been family. I'm not helping you because we're from Michoacan, I am helping you because we're sisters. It's the only way we survive, as a tribe.

She goes to Medea and kisses her hands.

Josefina To know you is to know our country, you are like the soil, something ancient. I never felt like I was in exile until I met you. If someone like you, so much of the old world, can't go back, how can I? Please, sister, tell me, did Hason hurt you?

Medea He loved me.

Josefina If he loved you, why is he setting you up? Armida says your land in Mexico is not yours. It doesn't make sense. Why doesn't your brother help?

Josefina He can't. . . .

Tita Why?

Josefina Have you not asked him? Without Hason you'll need help, Medea.

An isolation. Medea seems to stand alone in space. She looks at Tita who implores her . . .

Tita Clear your mind, Medea.

A moment has arrived.

Medea My brother, Acat, my twin . . . was born three full minutes after me, but he inherited everything. He was my equal, but he was born a man.

I took care of my father. I did everything for him and my brother. We fed the animals. We planted the crop.

When *mi papa* got sick, Tita and I made a potion, but it was too late. Cancer had spread through most of his body. I can still see him on his deathbed, cigarette in hand, barking orders, hour after hour . . .

In his last moment, he pushed me aside and asked to speak to Acat. My brother ushered me out of the room and my father willed him the land, giving him everything that was on it, including me.

When he died I wept for him, but Acat did not cry. Everything was his and he knew it.

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

So the day after my father died, we decided it was time to plan. I went to tell my brother that we would be leaving, but he said that Hason needed to pay back what he had taken from the land, which is a lie, and that I belonged to the farm like one of the animals.

We screamed at each other, we had never argued like that before, and he hit me. He had never laid a hand on me until that moment. But you see, I wasn't his sister anymore. I was property.

Something came out of me, my love for Hason I guess, and I screamed at the top of my lungs, "YOU CAN'T STOP US, WE ARE LEAVING!"

He grabbed me by the hair and dragged me out to where the pigs were and threw me in the muddy pen. I was in shock. He just kept hitting me . . . I didn't know what to do . . .

I ran to where the banana tree was, I could hear him close behind, cursing me. Was he drunk or was he just trying to hold on to his inheritance? I reached for the first thing that I could find, the machete we used to cut down the leaves. . . .

Tita *Medea, no . . .*

Medea He said he would take Acan and destroy Hason. Our dreams . . .

I don't know what came over me. I called on the gods, I begged for mercy, *pero nada!*

He ran for me and I lifted the blade and all I could feel was the weight of his body against mine, my brother, my twin, Acat . . . I wanted to scream, but no sound would come out. It was as if I wasn't there at all.

At that point . . . I needed to make a choice. I steadied the machete and hacked him to pieces.

Josefina *gasps.*

Medea The pigs were so ravenous they ate every last trace of him. I went to the house. I showered. I found the deed. And that night, we left.

Josefina Oh Medea . . .

She runs out. Medea looks over at Tita, who in horror is hearing this for the first time.

Medea Hason's dream. I wanted it for him so badly . . .

In Lak'ech. I killed the other me. He is my only love.

Tita Even after what he's done to you?

Medea I'll make him come back.

Tita bows her head in disgust.

Scene Twelve

Medea goes into the house and returns with a box.

Medea Get yourself ready.

Tita Where are we going?

Medea You are going to go to her house.

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

Medea Hason is right. I've been too selfish. He said it best—she is a door. That is what I am going to make her.

You are going to deliver this gift, as a sign of gratitude for the few hours in this house that Armida has granted us.

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

Tita *Por favor, guarda la brujería*. I beg you.

Medea Don't beg! We never will again.

Did the box just move? Medea hands it to Tita.

Medea Go!

Tita leaves with the box in hand.

Scene Thirteen

Hason enters the yard. He goes into the house looking for Acan. He comes out holding the old and distressed stuffed animal Acan carried during the crossing.

Hason It's out of my hands, Medea.

Medea You did a lot for a new pair of pants.

Hason If you want to live in the past, you can live there, but this isn't why we came here. Where's the boy?

Medea Tita took him to his *Tita* Armida.

Hason Tita doesn't know where Armida lives?

Medea She does now . . .

Hason Acan is never going to amount to anything if he stays here, you know that. Let him go.

Medea Never.

Hason I am giving him his future.

Medea And I am giving him his past.

Hason You don't need that in this country.

Medea I never knew you were so desperate.

Hason Only for my family.

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

Hason Oh really, what do you know, Medea?

Medea That your place is here, Hason. And I am going to be waiting for you.

She disarms him for the moment, a wave of regret washes over him.

Hason Medea, the price you paid for coming here . . . I'll never be able to forgive myself for not being able to protect you. Never. But to come this far, even after all that, and not take what is ours . . . I know you don't believe it, but I never stopped loving you. This . . . this is just . . . sacrifice. I promise you, I will come back for you.

Medea Of course you will, Hason.

Hason is surprised by her reaction.

Hason *Me voy* . . .

Medea I'll be waiting . . .

Hason is disturbed and quickly leaves the house.

Scene Fourteen

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

Tita She opens the gift. A smile.

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

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

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

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

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

The dress begins to slither . . .

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

The ones in the middle tighten, and violently shrink her waist. She bleeds from her nose and mouth.

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

Armida tries to pull the dress off her, but the seams strike her hands with their sharp fangs. The poison enters her and she starts to convulse. Armida's body is exploding from the chemicals.

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

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

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

She exits.

Medea calls.

Medea Acan? Acan?

Acan What? I'm playing.

Medea Come here.

Acan enters, looking fully assimilated. Medea grabs him and hugs him. Acan squirms.

Acan Mami . . .

Medea Do you want to live with her?

He doesn't say anything.

You can tell me.

Do you want to live with her?

Acan Yes.

Medea Go upstairs and get your bag . . .

Acan Thank you, Mami!

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

Acan Mami?

Mami!

Nooooooooo . . .

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

Hason (*offstage*) Acan! Acan!

MEDEEEEAAAAAA.

He bolts into the yard desperate and out of breath. Tita enters desperate as well, rushing to the milk crate in fear. He pounds on the door trying to kick it down. It slowly opens and Medea walks out, dazed, dripping in blood and holding the bloody machete. Hason backs away. Medea leaves the yard and Hason makes his way into the house searching desperately.

Hason Acan! Acan!

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

No . . . No . . .

And then a scream when he finds him . . .

MI HIIOOOOOOOOOOO!

Epilogue

Silence. Time. Tita sits at her milk crate. After a while, she gets up and goes to the garden, where she picks up the banana palms and begins quietly her incantation. Slap, slap, slap. Suddenly she hears the echo of a bird in the distance.

Medea Gwa, gwa, gwa . . .

Tita turns towards the house and sees Medea, perched on a corner of the roof, wearing a dress made of guaco feathers. She begins to flap and her wings make a great sound. Medea looks out over the barrio. And off she goes . . . The sound of flight is drowned out by the sound of a helicopter quickly approaching.

Fin.