

¡CURANDERAS!
Serpents of the Clouds

a new play by
Elaine Romero

¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds was originally developed and given a workshop production at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, TX under the direction of José Manuel Galvan, Jorge Piña, Theatre Director. The play was funded through their Gateways Program, sponsored by a generous grant from the Ford Foundation.

¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds received its World Premiere Production at the Invisible Theatre, Tucson, Arizona, under the direction of Deborah Dickey, Susan Claassen, Producer.

¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds was produced at Kitchen Dog Theatre Company, Dallas, Texas, under the direction of Christopher Carlos, Tina Parker and Chris Carlos, Artistic Directors.

¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds was produced at Phoenix Theatre, Indianapolis, Indiana, under the direction of Bryan Fonseca, Bryan Fonseca, Artistic Director.

¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds was produced at Santa Fe Playhouse, Santa Fe, New Mexico, under the direction of Vallí M. Rivera.

¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds appears in Women Playwrights: Best Plays of 2000, Smith and Kraus, 2002.

¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds is excerpted in Cantos Al Sexto Sol, Wings Press, San Antonio, TX.

¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds also received staged readings at Teatro Brava, Teatro Luna, and Stages Repertory Theatre, where it received First Prize.

An excerpt of *¡Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds* was featured in the American National Theatre's Founder's Day Celebration *Voices of America*, in honor of August Wilson, at Dodger Stages, NY, NY.

CHARACTERS

(3F, 1M)

PALOMA – A Latina curandera, a folk healer, in her early forties.

VICTORIA – A pocha. A young doctor in her twenties.

MAN – An everyman. At times, he appears as neutral man. At other times, he transforms into VICTORIA's thirtyish fiancé, JESUS, and PALOMA's HUSBAND who is in his early forties.

WOMAN – Aztec Woman. She appears in full Aztec regalia. She is Paloma's spiritual guide. She appears under a number of disguises—an announcer, a hotel clerk, a tour guide, and dream woman—always remaining Aztec Woman.

Time: The ancient and recent past. The present.

Place: On the road from Aztlan (San Antonio/American Southwest). In and around Mexico City. Physical and spiritual worlds (The bellybutton of the moon). Dreams, visions, and nightmares.

Setting: The stage is a flexible space, with an implied set, where the scenes transpire.

Notes: In Nahautl, Serpents of the Clouds refers to curanderos (healers). The *Mexica* were an Aztec tribe who were in power at the time of Cortez.

Act and Scenes

Act 1: Prologue, Train, Hotel, Museum, Beach

Act 2: Bellybutton of the moon, Hotel, Dream

**¡CURANDERAS!
SERPENTS OF THE CLOUDS**

Prologue

(VICTORIA, a Chicana in her twenties, moves alone on stage. She carries a satchel of books in one hand. She circles around, leaves the satchel behind her. MAN, dressed in dark colors, enters. He is Jesús. The more he moves around her, the more disoriented she becomes, turning in circles. She cries into one hand. As Jesús exits opposite her, she keeps her eyes covered with her hand. VICTORIA ends up prone on the floor. In this final moment of susto—her soul leaves her body in her grief.

PALOMA, a curandera (a healer) in her early forties, enters, carrying two overstuffed suitcases. She looks like a little girl running away from home, distraught and scared.

WOMAN, Paloma's guide, appears behind the scrim in full Aztec regalia. She watches PALOMA, but PALOMA does not see her. WOMAN gestures for the revels to begin.)

SCENE ONE

(WOMAN transforms into train announcer. The sound of a train whistle. VICTORIA sits in a window seat, leaning against the window somewhat dreamily. She hears the sounds of rain splashing against the window. WOMAN enters.)

WOMAN

Pasajeros con destino a la Ciudad de México favor de abordar el tren.
Ultima llamada.

(PALOMA enters, carrying her oversized suitcases. She lifts them overhead as if pushing through a crowd of people. She plops down into the seat next to VICTORIA, placing one of the suitcases momentarily on VICTORIA's lap. VICTORIA tries to help PALOMA lift the suitcase up. VICTORIA hurts her finger.)

VICTORIA

Ouch.

(VICTORIA shakes her finger in pain. PALOMA quickly grabs VICTORIA's finger and does a quick little soba—massage to heal the finger. It is a healing moment. VICTORIA looks at her finger, surprised and relieved.)

What'd you do? (Denying the healing) It must not have been that bad.

PALOMA

(Belated) Perdóneme.

(VICTORIA nods, moves closer to the window.)

Mire nomás a todos esos tontos empapándose. Tengo el último boleto.

VICTORIA

(Bad Spanish) No entiendo.

(VICTORIA gives PALOMA a blank look. PALOMA excitedly taps her feet on the

ground; she energetically leans back, arms outstretched, drinking in the joy of her seat. This woman causes a tornado wherever she goes.)

PALOMA

A veces la gente no sabe cuando quitárseme de enfrente.

VICTORIA

I know you people have different space bubbles, but Christ.

PALOMA

Perdone usted. Aren't you a Mexican?

VICTORIA

(Embarrassed) You speak English.

PALOMA

I don't know nothing about no space bubbles, and all that fancy stuff, but I do know when you have to get going, you have to go.

VICTORIA

Yeah, right. Well, I'm just gonna drift off here for a second.

PALOMA

Where are you gonna drift off to?

VICTORIA

So, if you could refrain from engaging me in conversation, I'd appreciate it.

(PALOMA shakes her hand as if to say this woman thinks she is too big a deal.)

PALOMA

I won't say a word. Shhh.

(PALOMA zips her mouth shut. VICTORIA closes her eyes, enjoying a moment of peace.)

Didn't your parents teach you Spanish?

(VICTORIA is startled.)

VICTORIA

(To herself; reflective) My Spanish is lost somewhere in my cells.

(PALOMA starts munching down a bag of chicharrones, fried pork rinds.)

Would you mind?

PALOMA

I don't know. It's a public place, public train, public bathroom.

VICTORIA

I came here to think. I just need some peace and quiet.

PALOMA

You came to México for peace and quiet?

VICTORIA

Be careful. I understand some Spanish.

PALOMA

(Continuing) Between all the babies crying, mariachis playing and little old ladies gossiping until their teeth fall out, I don't think you're gonna find no peace and quiet here.

VICTORIA

You don't understand. I'm going through a hard time. I just finished medical school.

PALOMA

You finished medical school, but you can't learn Spanish?

VICTORIA

It's very stressful.

PALOMA

Excuse me for being born. If you don't want to share no air . . .

VICTORIA

I don't mean that.

(PALOMA blows on her. VICTORIA smells the stench. She brushes PALOMA's breath out of her face.)

Christ, what'd you eat for breakfast?

PALOMA

Garlic cloves and rattlesnake pills. They're good for the blood.

VICTORIA

(Doubling over) My God, I think I'm gonna be sick.

PALOMA

They drive away all sorts of nasty diseases and creepy witch doctors. Have you ever smelled a brujo up close? ¡Hijole!

VICTORIA

Can't say that I have.

PALOMA

They make pigs smell like perfume. And they're always trying to kiss me with their pinche bad breath. But I know what they really want. They want to steal my power.

VICTORIA

Are you a witch or something?

(PALOMA takes a map out of her bag.)

PALOMA

Where are we anyways?

(PALOMA in a quick few seconds has entangled herself in the map, even ripping it in a few places.)

VICTORIA

Here, let me see that. What are you looking for?

PALOMA

I always find where I am anyways. Or people find me. They just drive up and ask me, "May I help you?" See, the power draws them. The world takes care of curanderos, healers, because we take care of the world. (With a tinge of sadness) That's what the people say. (After a second) One man gave me a ride all the way to Houston, and it was four hours out of his way. For nothing more than for me to cure a viejita, a little old lady. And she lived for four more years to the date, one year for every hour he went out of his way.

VICTORIA

Charming story.

PALOMA

God helps us when we're willing to make a sacrifice. Like that stranger made a sacrifice and he didn't even know it. Most sacrifices are like that. They don't happen in the mind. They happen in the heart. (Another tinge of sadness) Los dioses listen to the heart.

VICTORIA

Did you say gods?

PALOMA

I meant God.

(PALOMA makes a quick sign of the cross,
and then she chews her finger.)

VICTORIA

I was beginning to think you weren't even Catholic.

PALOMA

Have these things happened to you? People coming to you when you needed them? Even when you didn't want them to?

VICTORIA

No one's ever driven me to Houston for no reason.

(PALOMA motions her disapproval.)

PALOMA

I had a reason.

VICTORIA

Oh, that's right. You were going to heal somebody.

PALOMA

Yes, I was.

VICTORIA

You can't heal anybody. Well, not unless it's some trumped up folk disease like the evil eye.

PALOMA

Mal ojo.

VICTORIA

I read an article about that in medical school. Do you really think a baby will get sick if someone admires it too much? C'mon.

PALOMA

Or susto, illness from fright. I bet you don't believe in susto either.

(PALOMA looks VICTORIA straight in the
eye as if she is peering into her.)

It's when something so upsetting happens to a person that their soul leaves their body. It can even lead to death. You can tell if someone has susto because their nose feels soft como algodón, like cotton.

(PALOMA does the susto diagnosis on
VICTORIA's nose. VICTORIA recoils.)

And to bring that soul back, you have to say the Apostle's Creed three times, clap your hands, and say that person's name.

(PALOMA releases one very haunting cupped clap.)

Victoria!

VICTORIA

(Defensive) How'd you know my name?

PALOMA

It's carved in your eyes.

(PALOMA snaps her fingers. PALOMA drops her hand, frustrated.)

It didn't work. You have to believe in it first.

(Hypnotized, VICTORIA does not move.)

VICTORIA

One time though something really strange happened. A stranger came to me. He asked me if I'd heal—oh, forget it.

PALOMA

What was it?

VICTORIA

Nothing.

PALOMA

You've had these experiences. You just don't want to admit it.

VICTORIA

I haven't.

PALOMA

(Teasingly) Liar.

VICTORIA

Hey, I haven't.

PALOMA

Okay, I'll believe you.

VICTORIA

It's just I don't believe in all that spiritual stuff.

PALOMA
 ¿No?
 VICTORIA
 It's not rational.
 PALOMA
 ¿No?
 VICTORIA
 All these wacky beliefs—like thinking dead people hang around us all the time. It's spooky.
 PALOMA
 Who am I to fight with a medical doctor?
 VICTORIA
 I'm gonna be an emergency room doctor. After my residency.
 PALOMA
 Stressful.
 VICTORIA
 I like buckets of blood.
 PALOMA
 Really?
 VICTORIA
 A little medical humor.
 PALOMA
 It wasn't funny.
 VICTORIA
 (Short beat) Blood spurting out of jugular veins, gun shot wounds, severed limbs—that visceral stuff doesn't bother me. I'm tough. Tough as nails.
 PALOMA
 It should bother you.
 VICTORIA
 I guess, I'm just like you. I'm special.

(VICTORIA leans back self-satisfied.
PALOMA takes the map back.)

PALOMA

It's just some pyramids or something. I'm sure we'll find them when we get there. They should be standing up into the clouds.

(VICTORIA twists her engagement ring,
gazing out the window. Silence.)

VICTORIA

(Dreamily) The pyramids. He wanted to see them.

PALOMA

Who?

VICTORIA

Oh, my boyfriend. I mean, my fiancé. He wanted to come, but . . .

PALOMA

He had to work.

VICTORIA

Yeah, he was working.

PALOMA

So, when's your last day of freedom?

VICTORIA

I don't see it that way. He isn't like that. He's very open.

PALOMA

A feminist?

VICTORIA

And a communist.

PALOMA

Doesn't seem your type.

VICTORIA

(Defensive) He is. He is exactly my type.

PALOMA

Are you sure you know what you're getting into? People can't always live up to what they say they are.

VICTORIA

He is who he says he is. I'm sure of that.

PALOMA

So, when's the big day?

VICTORIA

I'm not telling you. You're not being supportive.

PALOMA

I don't care whether you tell me or not. I was just asking to be polite. I'll just take a nap right here.

(She closes her eyes, leans back, feigning a lack of interest.)

VICTORIA

(Beat) The wedding's in June.

PALOMA

Nice. June wedding. You don't have much time left to get ready, muchachita. ¿Qué haces por aquí?

VICTORIA

(Getting worked up) Don't make me nervous. I've got it all planned.

PALOMA

Sure you didn't miss any little details?

(VICTORIA glares at her.)

Just checking. (Short beat) Now, you're sure about this man?

VICTORIA

He's the most wonderful man in the world.

PALOMA

(Simultaneously) . . . wonderful man in the world.

(MAN appears behind the scrim as neutral man.)

VICTORIA

How'd you know?

PALOMA

It's what all young brides say.

VICTORIA

(Sad) He is though. He really is. He's different.

PALOMA

I believe you. I'm sure your man is great.

(MAN transforms into Jesús.)

VICTORIA

Jesús. His name is Jesús. (Beat) What about you? You married?

(MAN transforms into Husband and disappears.)

PALOMA

Do you know what time we're supposed to get there?

VICTORIA

In a hurry?

PALOMA

Just want to get there. I wanna know what it's like to stand on top of a pyramid and talk to the gods.

VICTORIA

Oh yeah?

PALOMA

You?

VICTORIA

The beach.

PALOMA

In Mexico City?

VICTORIA

It isn't on the beach? I'm an idiot.

PALOMA

The word is pendeja, mi amor.

VICTORIA

My travel agent said they had white sandy beaches that stretch for miles. (Slightly defensive) A simple vacation. That's all I'm here for. Nothing more.

PALOMA

(Beat) You're going to be a lovely bride.

VICTORIA

(Touched) You think so?

PALOMA

And him, do you have a picture?

(VICTORIA takes a picture out of her wallet. When PALOMA looks at the picture, she looks concerned.)

VICTORIA

That was taken last year. (No response) That's my favorite one.

PALOMA

Is he ill? Your fiancé.

VICTORIA

Why do you say that? He's perfectly fine.

(VICTORIA quickly puts the picture away.)

PALOMA

It's just. In that picture I sensed he was ill.

VICTORIA

He did not look ill.

PALOMA

Okay, he looked fine. Healthy and strong.

VICTORIA

I'm a doctor. I should know about things like that.

PALOMA

You should. You should see things coming, but you don't always trust that feeling inside.

VICTORIA

You think you know everything. How do you know what I feel and don't feel?

PALOMA

You can see more than other doctors do if you try. Illness isn't just in the body, you know. It invades the mind. It infects the spirit. Sometimes you can see it like a cloud over people, stealing their breath out of the tops of their heads. We can snatch that illness away with the force of our hands. We're that powerful.

VICTORIA

I've always found antibiotics to be effective myself.

PALOMA

We, curanderos, don't live long, you know, because we're willing to fight that thing—that unseen thing. Doctors don't see nothing like that. Can't stand the cabrones myself.

VICTORIA

You're going to insult me to my face?

PALOMA

You're one of them, but you're also one of us.

VICTORIA

It's research and experience in the medical community that count, not voodoo and shit. I have too much tangible information to be one of you.

PALOMA

Oh, education can cause trouble for the young.

VICTORIA

I'm very proud of my education.

PALOMA

Your education has made you proud. (Short beat) Believe me, mija, human beings knew something about medicine before they discovered penicillin.

(PALOMA takes out her lipstick and draws a line between herself and VICTORIA.)

VICTORIA

Excuse me? What're you doing?

PALOMA

Making it bigger—this space bubble.

VICTORIA

Fine. Don't call me if you're ever bleeding to death.

PALOMA

Don't call me if you ever get susto. If something traumatic happens to you and your soul leaves your body, I'll just stand here on earth and wave goodbye. ¡Que te vaya bien!

VICTORIA

Nothing traumatic has ever happened to me.

(Ignoring PALOMA, VICTORIA gazes out the window.)

PALOMA

You keep looking out the window, but it's like you're not even here. It's like you left your soul in a field two farms back.

VICTORIA

I'm here. I'm here.

PALOMA

You walk this land, you learn things. You got plants that talk to you. Waters that heal when they kiss your skin. And people walking around con el don—the gift—carved into their hands. They don't know it, but it's there.

VICTORIA

You some kind of palm reader or something?

(PALOMA shows her own palm to VICTORIA.)

PALOMA

See, a star. It's proof. I didn't have a choice about who I was going to become.

(VICTORIA looks at her own palm, discovers a star, tracing it with her finger.)

VICTORIA

That star doesn't mean anything. I've got one of those. Look.

(The sound of the train stopping. WOMAN enters as the train announcer, late for her announcement. She rubs her eyes as if she just woke up.)

WOMAN

Dos minutos para llegar a la Ciudad de México.

PALOMA

Two minutes? But we're already here. Aye, mi gente.

WOMAN

Señores pasajeros, última parada.

VICTORIA

Wish I could say it's been a pleasure.

(As they shuffle off the train.)

PALOMA

Study your hand. It will show you where to go.

VICTORIA

That star business is a bunch of bull.

PALOMA

That picture you showed me. You as the happy couple? It doesn't tell the whole truth.

VICTORIA

Are you calling me a liar?

PALOMA

You are a woman who is alone in this world.

VICTORIA

I have a fiancé. We're getting married at Mission San José in San Antonio.

PALOMA

You are a woman who is alone in this world and you don't like it very much.

VICTORIA

You're probably just one of those bitter divorced women who wants to infect others with your unhappiness. You've all been trying to ruin my wedding. I just came here to get some peace and quiet.

PALOMA

(Simultaneously) Peace and quiet.

VICTORIA

Don't taunt me.

PALOMA

There's only one problem with the truth. It follows you like a snake.

VICTORIA

Me? A problem with the truth. (Raising her voice) I am the most honest— (Suddenly self-conscious; people are looking. A hush) The most honest person I've ever met. And I've met a lot of people.

PALOMA

I'm sure you have. (Pointing at the train exit) Your exit.

VICTORIA

(With an edge) Good luck crawling on top of that pyramid.

PALOMA

(Mismatched sincerity) Thank you.

(VICTORIA pushes ahead.)

It's like that with all of us. It's written in our hands.

(PALOMA looks at her own hand, touches her star, lights shift.)

WOMAN, now a hotel clerk, accepts money from PALOMA at a hotel reception desk. VICTORIA enters, frazzled. She does not see PALOMA. PALOMA occupies herself with her bulging bags. Perhaps one has popped open and she is stuffing the contents back into her suitcase.)

VICTORIA

(Struggling with the Spanish) Perdóneme, Señora. (A mistake) ¿Hay *cuartas* por noche? Hoy.

WOMAN

(Correcting her) Cuartos. Cuartos.

VICTORIA

(Frustrated) God, I hate this language.

(WOMAN shoots VICTORIA a nasty look. She understood that.)

WOMAN

I already rented the last one.

VICTORIA

You're kidding me.

WOMAN

I'm not. We don't have nothing.

VICTORIA

I really need a room. I don't take a lot of space. Don't you have something?

WOMAN

I have a broom closet.

VICTORIA

I'll take it.

WOMAN

That was a joke. (To herself) Muchacha pendeja.

VICTORIA

What are you saying? I really need a place to spend the night. I went to eight hotels already. No rooms.

WOMAN

Do I look like the kind of person that can just snap my fingers, and voila, there's a room. Do I look like a magician or what?

VICTORIA

What am I supposed to do?

WOMAN

This lady got the last one. Live with it.

VICTORIA

You're right. It's not your problem. It's my problem.

(PALOMA turns. VICTORIA realizes it is PALOMA.)

PALOMA

If you're nice, I'll rent you the other bed.

VICTORIA

Christ.

PALOMA

Christ doesn't like it when you say that.

VICTORIA

I just want to be alone.

PALOMA

You don't look like you'd make it on the street, princesa. What do you say?

VICTORIA

(Without enthusiasm) Thanks.

PALOMA

I'll stay out of your hair. We can just ignore each other.

WOMAN

Gringas locas. Sharing rooms with people you don't even know. (To PALOMA) Don't come crying to me if she robs you blind. First your money, then your man. Cuidate. Some cabrona did it to me. And now I've got to work this maldito trabajo to support my five kids. (Beat) I guess you don't want to hear about it. Nobody wants to hear about my pinche life.

(WOMAN shows them to the room and exits. There are two single beds and two nightstands. Stone silence as PALOMA and VICTORIA go about their business, setting up, claiming space without exchanging words. VICTORIA pulls out Lysol and PALOMA pulls out rose-scented Virgin of Guadalupe spray. Each woman sprays her own side of the room until she turns and sees the other.)

PALOMA hums relentlessly. She whips out her portable altar, installed in an old hard cover suitcase. Religious candles, crosses, statues of saints (like the Infant of Prague), are all glued into place. This should be a visual gag. Her humming gets louder.)

VICTORIA

Are you going to hum the whole time because that's going to drive me nuts?

(PALOMA blesses the space with copal and lights religious candles. She has brought San Antonio, the Virgin de Guadalupe, Don Pedrito Jaramillo, and San Martin de Porres.)

PALOMA hums to herself. She kisses Don Pedrito Jaramillo on the forehead. She says the following in a loud whisper as not to disturb VICTORIA.)

PALOMA

My favorite Saint.

(Fearful that she might have slighted San Antonio, she kisses San Antonio on the forehead.)

Oh, you're my favorite, too. Ah, there's enough love in my heart for the both of you.

(VICTORIA, on the other hand, takes an obscene number of books out of her suitcase. No clothes.)

VICTORIA

Damn. (No response) I forgot one of my books. I've got a lot of reading to do. It has to be absolutely quiet for me to concentrate.

You people know nothing of privacy. Talk to each other through the bathroom door. Read each other's diaries. I hate it. Oh, candles. You remind me of my grandmother. You think the whole world's going to turn around for the better if you just light a damn candle. Well, it's not. A candle can't do a damn thing. It is not a magical object. Nothing is.

PALOMA

I'm trying to pray.

VICTORIA

Praying isn't going to do a damn thing either. I've prayed really hard. Really hard on my knees until they bled and it didn't do a damn thing. It's just all this superstition and bullshit. How did I come from people like you? From bullshit?

PALOMA

Maybe you didn't come from people like me.

VICTORIA

Maybe I didn't.

(Silence falls.)

You're being very quiet, but it's like you're listening. It's like you're hearing everything. And that's what it's like to be in my family. They hear things you don't say and then they act on them. I just wish people would say what they think sometimes. Get it all out there. None of this communication non-communication bullshit.

PALOMA

Where are your clothes?

VICTORIA

What?

PALOMA

You didn't bring any clothes?

VICTORIA

I've got a lot of reading to do. You can pack these things full of clothes and there's no room for the books.

PALOMA

I see.

VICTORIA

I'm not one of those fashion girls. I brought a few changes of underwear, okay? I've got good hygiene, all right?

PALOMA

I can't heal, right now.

VICTORIA

Right now. How 'bout never?

PALOMA

I can't heal you.

VICTORIA

Well, I think I'll survive. I don't need your strange powers and your hocus pocus.

PALOMA

Didn't your mother teach you respect?

VICTORIA

I don't learn very fast. Facts, I do. It's just the other part, the people part--

PALOMA

Is that an apology?

VICTORIA

Sort of. Kind of. Supposed to be.

PALOMA

I accept.

VICTORIA

And I came here to not talk to anyone, so let's not talk.

PALOMA

Yeah, I came here for that, too.

VICTORIA

You?

PALOMA

For peace.

VICTORIA

The thing about peace is—when you chase it. It always runs away.

PALOMA

That's the thing about peace.

VICTORIA

And love's like that.

PALOMA

It all just runs away.

VICTORIA

And I--

PALOMA

I can't heal you right now.

VICTORIA

(Beat) Something really bad happened to me before I came here.

PALOMA

I'm sure you'll get through it.

VICTORIA

Maybe someday I'll be able to tell you—maybe someday I'll be able to tell another living person.

(Paloma moves away.)

I will think happy thoughts. I will focus on smiling things. I will make myself forget.

PALOMA

Good.

VICTORIA

Good?

Once upon a time there was this man and this woman who didn't have much in common except he reminded her of who she used to be and she made him think of who he could become. And when they met on that path at the crossroads of past and present, which is situated by a very pretty lake, they decided to swap places for a moment. So she could remember her past and he could dream his future. And at this moment of exchanging places, they fell desperately in love. Like a crevice, like a great big hole the earth makes when it splits apart. They fell in there. And when they looked up, they were holding hands because they'd grabbed onto each other to break the fall. And when the woman looked away. She saw the lake. So she took him down

by the lake and sat him on the grass. They both knew that this talking and sitting would lead to their first kiss. And she liked him because he seemed scared. He was beautiful but he was scared. And she was so certain of his growing love for her that she promised him that she would kiss him only if he ate the tiny spider that had started to crawl up her arm. She didn't mean it, but he didn't know that, so he did it.

(VICTORIA is suddenly sad.)

He did that for me. And I kissed him—hmm (a hum)—that was the first time.

PALOMA

With the spider in his mouth? (Beat) Too bad he couldn't come with you.

VICTORIA

Yeah. But he comes to Mexico a lot. Some political thing.

PALOMA

You're angry?

VICTORIA

No, I try to understand.

PALOMA

I'm sure you'll come to know him as the years go on.

VICTORIA

(Defensively) I will. He won't hide anything from me. He won't hide his heart.

PALOMA

Nor you from him.

VICTORIA

That's right. We aren't going to be that kind of couple. I refuse it.

PALOMA

(Self irony) You can't always control what kind of couple you'll become.

VICTORIA

How do you know? You're not even married.

PALOMA

¡Oh, sí?

VICTORIA

You're not the kind of woman that would ever marry.

PALOMA
 What kind of woman is that?

VICTORIA
 Strong.

(PALOMA hears her, considers.)

PALOMA
 You'll be okay.

(PALOMA pats VICTORIA on the back. It is a healing moment, something transpires between them even against PALOMA's will. VICTORIA senses something.)

VICTORIA
 What'd you do?

PALOMA
 Nothing.

VICTORIA
 I felt something.

PALOMA
 I thought you didn't believe in me.

VICTORIA
 You did something. I felt it.

PALOMA
 I wasn't trying to.

VICTORIA
 (Touching her chest) Ouch, my heart. Why'd you have to do that? It's making me want to cry.

PALOMA
 Be strong, mija. You must look into the past and not be afraid.

(MAN, as Jesús, moves on to the stage around VICTORIA. VICTORIA breaks into a scene with him. The past.)

VICTORIA
 I wish you wouldn't go.

MAN

You know our agreement.

VICTORIA

(Ambivalent) Perfect freedom?

MAN

It works.

(MAN coughs lightly.)

VICTORIA

I wish you'd at least quit smoking.

MAN

It's that mother thing again. You've got to stop that.

VICTORIA

I will, after we're married.

MAN

Promises, promises.

VICTORIA

It's just with your asthma.

MAN

(Beat) I'll quit for you. After my next birthday, okay?

VICTORIA

Okay. Kiss me then.

MAN

I'll taste like spiders.

VICTORIA

You've got to forgive me for that.

(They kiss.)

Don't go this time.

(MAN pulls back.)

MAN

They're expecting me.

VICTORIA

What are you trying to prove? People know you care.

MAN

Maybe if you went with me. I know you can't, but someday school's gonna end, and I just wonder if you're gonna be up for this.

VICTORIA

(Unsure) I am.

MAN

(Beat) How can you make people better if you don't feel their pain?

VICTORIA

I know what I'm doing.

MAN

Is there anybody you'd die for, Vicky?

VICTORIA

(Beat) I don't know.

MAN

Would you die for me?

(VICTORIA is unable to answer. MAN disappears.)

VICTORIA

(To Paloma) You don't know how hard I tried to understand.

PALOMA

You've got to break yourself open and see what's inside. You've got to peel away some skin, and let someone touch underneath.

VICTORIA

I can't. You know I can't.

PALOMA

It hurts when they touch you, but you know they feel something, too.

VICTORIA

What makes you such an expert on love?

PALOMA

Nothing. I watch people. I sense them, and sometimes I know what they're feeling. My mother when I was a child told me that was a gift, so I watched and watched. Always on the outside, never on the inside. Then, I stepped through that invisible wall I used to guard my heart. I touched under somebody's flesh, and let him touch under mine. It hurt. That was a long time ago.

VICTORIA

And you really do that? You let people touch you all the way to your heart?

PALOMA

Something happens when people like us love people like them.

VICTORIA

What happens?

PALOMA

You should get some rest.

VICTORIA

(Ironically) Me? Right.

PALOMA

Why not?

VICTORIA

I don't sleep anymore. Nightmares.

PALOMA

What kind?

VICTORIA

The kind you think about all day. The kind that chew on your stomach and you can't let go.

(PALOMA touches VICTORIA's head.)

PALOMA

I guess, they're there to teach you something.

(PALOMA withdraws.)

VICTORIA

You can't do anything about them anyway. You can't cure anything.

PALOMA

I can, but it isn't time.

VICTORIA

(Angry) What about cancer? Can you cure lung cancer? Can you cure lung in a young person when it's metastasizing out of control?

PALOMA

I don't cure. God cures through me.

VICTORIA

Well, God's asleep or comatose, isn't He?

(PALOMA makes a quick sign of the cross.)

PALOMA

Watch your tongue. He might take you away for speaking that way about Him.

VICTORIA

He can have me.

PALOMA

You want to die?

VICTORIA

I don't want to feel love anymore.

PALOMA

But you love your fiancé.

VICTORIA

Right. I love him. (Beat) I wish he were here. Mexico City. He would like this. All of it.

PALOMA

(Beat) Maybe he can come someday.

VICTORIA

Maybe.

PALOMA

Maybe for your honeymoon.

VICTORIA

He'll probably want to go to southern Mexico again. He was very upset that I didn't have time to go with him.

PALOMA

What's there?

VICTORIA

Indians. That's the way he is. He can't just go somewhere for fun. He has to have a reason—he has to chase a cause.

PALOMA

He believes with his heart.

VICTORIA

He just wants people to admire him. He would die, you know. He would die for the people down there if somebody'd let him. (Light laugh) I don't know why I love him, but I do. (Beat) I always tell him. If you don't shut up, I'm gonna nail you to a crucifix, so you can know what the real Jesús felt like.

PALOMA

You're in love with a martyr.

VICTORIA

Can we shut up about my heart already? It's starting to beat harder and I don't like that feeling.

(Lights change and light up the codex. PALOMA and VICTORIA are tourists, visiting the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia, the National Anthropological Museum, the site of the ancient codex. VICTORIA leads the way.)

VICTORIA

What the hell time is it? I'm on vacation.

PALOMA

We had to get here first. They say you could spend your entire life trying to see the whole thing.

VICTORIA

Yeah, right.

(They step further into the museum.)

This place is huge.

PALOMA

Where shall we start?

VICTORIA

Do they have a café or something? Maybe we could get a cappuccino.

PALOMA

You wouldn't need that if you weren't up half the night—reading.

VICTORIA

Did the light bother you?

PALOMA

No, I like sleeping with the lights on. (Beat) Don't you want to look at the art? I thought you were addicted to learning.

VICTORIA

I am.

PALOMA

Prove it.

VICTORIA

It's just this problem I'm trying to solve. It's like an equation or something. Every problem has a solution. That's what makes sense, right? That's the logical thing.

PALOMA

You're such a hostage of everything you know.

VICTORIA

I'm not a hostage.

PALOMA

You're like your own little prison guard—trapped inside your own little brain.

VICTORIA

I'm not my own little prison guard.

PALOMA

The mind wants to fly—be free.

VICTORIA

The mind wants to conquer the truth.

PALOMA

Like Cortez got the Indians. So you came all the way here to connect to your Spanish roots?

VICTORIA

I'm going back to the room.

PALOMA

(Beat) Do what you want. You're on your own.

VICTORIA

Well, since you pulled me away from my reading. Since you compare me to some ruthless killer of the Aztecs. Since you make me feel all warm and cozy like that--

Fine. Stay. I don't care.

PALOMA

I don't care either.

VICTORIA

(PALOMA gets instantly entangled in the map.)

(Looking at the map) I don't know why I read these things.

PALOMA

(Taking the map) Let's try this room. Ancient cultures. Aztecs and stuff.

VICTORIA

Are you coming?

PALOMA

(VICTORIA follows PALOMA.)

You'd never make it back to the hotel on your own. I don't want to get stuck with the bill. In case someone doesn't find you and point you in the right direction.

VICTORIA

Suit yourself.

PALOMA

(PALOMA anoints herself with a dab of holy water that she stores in a pendant that she wears around her neck. VICTORIA watches her with disapproval.)

What're you doing?

VICTORIA

Preparing.

PALOMA

You're embarrassing me.

VICTORIA

Okay, we can go our separate ways. You go to that side of the room, and I'll go over there.

PALOMA

(VICTORIA does not seem entirely comfortable with the slight parting. PALOMA whips out a bright colored fan and fans herself for emphasis. VICTORIA goes her own way. While VICTORIA wanders around looking for something interesting, PALOMA finds La Gran Coatlicue. The engraved stone image appears of La Gran Coatlicue.)

¡Madre Santísima!

(VICTORIA tries to act disinterested.)

The Grand Coatlicue. Serpent Skirt. Earth Goddess. The Goddess of life and death.

(Fighting her interest, VICTORIA tries to occupy herself with something else.)

(Too loudly) But she has lost her head. La madre tierra is decapitated.

VICTORIA

Shh!

PALOMA

This isn't a library, a church, or ...

VICTORIA

I'm looking at a very interesting pole, okay.

(PALOMA bows her head in respect. WOMAN enters as the tour guide. VICTORIA has taken interest in something else.)

WOMAN

Here, we have the Codex Boturini, an ancient Aztec scroll, depicting the journey of the Aztecs from their homeland in Aztlan to the founding of Tenochtitlan—

Mexico City. Painted on paper made from fig bark, we classify this document as a Pre-Colombian Historical Pictography of the Mexica (me-shee-ka) Civilization.

And in our next room.

(WOMAN leaves.)

Come here.

 VICTORIA

No, you come here.

 PALOMA

No, you come here.

 VICTORIA

(PALOMA whips out a sage smudge stick. She smudges herself with sage, taking the smoke in from La Gran Coatlicue. VICTORIA gestures for PALOMA to come over.)

What's that?

 PALOMA

Sage.

 VICTORIA

You're not supposed to mess with the artifacts.

 (VICTORIA grabs PALOMA by the hand.)

Come over and see this. There're a whole bunch of little angels with wings.

 (VICTORIA leads PALOMA to the codex. PALOMA and VICTORIA study the images from the codex. The image of the broken tree appears.)

Do you see anything?

 (PALOMA looks uneasy, like she wants to flee.)

Let's go.

 PALOMA

You're the one who roused me out of bed. The least you can do is look at the damn thing.

 VICTORIA

I've got some other things to do.

 PALOMA

Don't give me that. Here's some barbecued brains. Yum.

 VICTORIA

PALOMA

You have to respect these things. These ancient things.

VICTORIA

But you want to leave?

PALOMA

Sometimes. Sometimes I do.

VICTORIA

What'd you see?

PALOMA

I saw nothing.

VICTORIA

Look, at this tree. It's broken.

PALOMA

I saw that.

VICTORIA

See, all these people with headdresses. They're silly.

(PALOMA has turned away from the codex, but VICTORIA has gotten that much more into it. Seated, PALOMA takes deep breaths.)

Hey, what's this? It's like a hand with leaves for fingers.

(VICTORIA reads the image of the Malinalca—the twisters.)

It's turning and twisting.

(VICTORIA sinks to the floor, twisting her hair.

WOMAN enters and stands behind PALOMA.)

WOMAN

(Warmly) Think about it, Paloma. How did your tree break?

PALOMA

(Beat) The wood rotted from the inside out. The wind came and it cracked in two. Dead.

WOMAN
It isn't easy to be your guide.

PALOMA
I imagine that's true.

WOMAN
Truthfully though.

PALOMA
Truthfully.

WOMAN
It takes a lot of strength to break a tree.

PALOMA
It takes a lot of strength to heal a person.

WOMAN
Do you think you know everything?

PALOMA
More than that little girl. I'm not going to heal her.

WOMAN
Once you let yourself feel something you might. It isn't just in the head, you know. You feel it in your body and then you can't--

PALOMA
Help myself? I'm looking at this tree—at this marriage. I've seen a lot, but . .

.

WOMAN
Nothing like this?

PALOMA
No, not in me.

WOMAN
When somebody breaks apart a wise old tree, the world stops, because in its broken trunk, there is still life. (Beat) The sap falls to the earth like blood. (Beat) There's a reason to cry. (Beat) There's a reason to mourn the death of a brave and aged tree. (Beat) You know these things. I've taught them to you.

(WOMAN exits. MAN enters as PALOMA's husband. A vision where their spirits speak to each other across time.)

MAN

If you just—if you just--

PALOMA

I'm waiting.

MAN

Needed me more. My God, you're like stone inside.

PALOMA

I'm not. I love people.

MAN

You love the world, but you don't think about us. You go out and fight with spirits, and come back with a bloodied face and scratches this close to your eye.

(MAN demonstrates with his fingers how close to her eye he means.)

And here I am, your husband, lying next to you in bed, and I'm not supposed to want to protect you?

PALOMA

You don't have the power.

MAN

You remind me again. And again.

PALOMA

I didn't create your spirit.

MAN

You didn't create it, but--

PALOMA

You never finish your sentences.

MAN

You steal my words.

PALOMA

I don't take them. You forget them. (Beat) I just want to know why you did it.

MAN
 You destroy me.

PALOMA
 I loved you.

MAN
 You don't care if you tear me apart.

PALOMA
 Why wouldn't I care?

MAN
 I don't matter to you.

PALOMA
 ¿O . . . no?

MAN
 I spend everyday in the same house with you and I don't feel any better.
 Maybe you're not a curandera.

PALOMA
 Maybe you're not my husband. Maybe you're just some vato—some vato
 who doesn't give a shit.

MAN
 You never needed me. It's true.

PALOMA
 You're right. I never needed you. (Beat) But, viejo, I chose you.

MAN
 Lucky me. Thanks a lot.

PALOMA
 You're welcome.

(The silliness of the last exchange cracks
 PALOMA up for a second. MAN tries to
 move in on the moment.)

MAN
 Paloma, you can love me again. I know you can.

PALOMA
 (A burst of disgust) Why with her? Just go away.

(She whisks him off. MAN transforms into Jesús. VICTORIA gets up. Vision begins. It spans across worlds, linking the spiritual world and the physical world. VICTORIA sees him, but she keeps trying to block him out.)

MAN

(Calmly) Victoria.

VICTORIA

Logic tells me that there is no way you could be here. Logic tells me that when a person dies, they die forever, that's the hard fast truth of our wretched existence.

MAN

(A little louder) Victoria.

VICTORIA

(Breaking) Logic tells me. It tells me things I don't want to believe anymore. That I can't believe.

MAN

(Louder) Victoria.

VICTORIA

(Beat; to him) I break down crying most days. That is, on good days I cry. On bad days I sit in the dark with the lights off. I leave her there. Over there. On the couch, and I hang up in the corner of the ceiling looking down at her. I feel sorry for her, I do, but I'm not her. I can't be her. I can't be a person whose fiancé died. I cannot be that unfortunate person. Bad things don't happen to me. I'm good. I'm smart. (An example; proudly) I could wrap my words around his brain and make him dizzy. That's what I used to do when we fought. Me and my love. That's what I used to do to you.

MAN

You did.

VICTORIA

(Beat) You're not here. You can't be here. I deny your existence. I obliterate you.

(MAN just stares at her. It is difficult to deny his presence.)

(Beat) When I start to feel you. Your presence like this. It shakes the hell out of me. It's shaking the hell out of me. It shakes everything away. It makes me believe in magic. But not enough magic. Not the kind of magic that would bring you back.

I'll speak with you. I will. I won't believe you are real, not until that thing moves inside me—that continental drift—when the world—the worlds shift and reorganize and I realize that I'm somewhere else and somebody else, not the woman who loved you at all, but someone better.

MAN

You had something you wanted to say to me.

VICTORIA

You and your notebook. You and your camera. Did you really think you were going to change the world?

MAN

I thought there was a chance. If we got the right exposure. The right newspaper.

VICTORIA

You are so naive. You're like a child.

MAN

I love the people there. They matter to me.

(VICTORIA takes offense.)

Well, you matter to me, too.

VICTORIA

There's so much they can do nowadays. When they know in time.

MAN

You want to make hope where there is none.

VICTORIA

That spot on your lung was probably nothing when you left for Mexico.

MAN

You don't know that.

VICTORIA

You didn't have to die.

MAN

Didn't you ever wonder about all those meetings I attended?

VICTORIA

I'm a doctor, not a politician.

MAN

You never knew who I was.

VICTORIA

Don't brush me off. Like you never loved me. (Short beat) You hurt me.

MAN

I didn't know you had time to be hurt.

VICTORIA

I had to study all those times. I wanted to be with you. You knew that.

MAN

You think some book's gonna give you the answers—some book's gonna give you the truth.

VICTORIA

I've found a lot of answers in books.

MAN

And I've found lots of answers in earth and air. That's the difference between you and me.

(MAN turns, rejecting her.)

VICTORIA

"Don't go to bed with a grudge." That's what the nuns in the barrio told us.

MAN

I'm surprised you remember anything about the barrio, Dr. Victoria.

VICTORIA

You know I left when I was a kid.

(He starts to leave.)

Don't go. Don't leave while you're still angry.

MAN

That's how I leave. That's how I left this world.

(He leaves.)

VICTORIA

Hey, I love you. (Beat) Why do you always have to go away?

(VICTORIA breaks out of the moment. PALOMA looks at the broken tree. PALOMA turns. They leave the building.)

I hated that.

It's just a scroll. PALOMA
 It doesn't mean anything. VICTORIA
 Well, it does, but-- PALOMA
 I forgot. You're superstitious. You don't want to curse the ancients. VICTORIA
 I suggest you be careful, too. PALOMA
 You're right about my fiancé. He's sick. VICTORIA
 With what? PALOMA
 Sick of me. (Beat) No, he's got pneumonia. He'll get over it. VICTORIA
 (She knows more than she is letting on) And you just left him in the hospital? PALOMA
 He told me to go. See, we had to put off the wedding because of that. Just a temporary setback. We'll be back on track soon. (Uncomfortable silence) You don't wear a ring. You never married, huh? VICTORIA
 Once. PALOMA
 Divorced? VICTORIA
 (No answer.)
 What was he like?
 (No answer.)
 It must have been miserable.
 I'm still married to him. PALOMA

VICTORIA

For a long time?

PALOMA

Longer than some people's lives.

VICTORIA

What's he like?

PALOMA

(With a dismissive flick of her hand.) I don't know. He's just a husband.

(They exit.)

Mexican music comes up. VICTORIA with swim gear: a large beach umbrella, suntan oil: the works. PALOMA has on a wide-brimmed straw hat and a flowered cotton dress. VICTORIA has put out two beach towels for them. PALOMA moves awkwardly on the towel. She seems unaccustomed to sunning. VICTORIA splashes herself with suntan oil.)

VICTORIA

I'm glad you wanted to come to Acapulco. Never been to the ocean. (An admission) Never been—to Mexico. Never told you that.

PALOMA

Never?

(VICTORIA shrugs.)

VICTORIA

(Beat) Will you look at that water? It's so vast. It puts my bathtub to shame.

PALOMA

Why are you using that stuff? You're a Mexican.

(VICTORIA shrugs.)

Besides, it causes cancer.

VICTORIA

Well, you can cure that, so I guess, I'm okay.

PALOMA

Cancer can kill you.

VICTORIA

Would you stop saying that word? I'm trying to relax.

PALOMA

Your peace and quiet? Mi'ja buscate otra agencia de viaje.

(VICTORIA stretches in the sun.)

VICTORIA

(Beat) This is the life.

PALOMA

That's what I always say. When I'm a viejita, I will wear floppy hats and live on the beach.

VICTORIA

You're not an old lady.

PALOMA

My job makes me tired. Wrestling with spirits.

VICTORIA

Whipping up potions in your cauldron.

PALOMA

(Staring at Victoria) Picking up people that are on the brink of suicide and giving them enough hope to keep living.

VICTORIA

(A statement) That's what you do for other people.

PALOMA

Yes, other people.

VICTORIA

And yourself?

PALOMA

My life is not my own.

VICTORIA

(Beat) Where's your husband?

PALOMA

He told me to come alone. He's not very traditional.

Let's go in the water. **VICTORIA**

(They come downstage and get their feet wet in the surf. **VICTORIA** becomes mesmerized by something far away.)

What a cute little girl.

(Lights shift. **VICTORIA** wears a pained expression. It is Victoria's first moment of intuitive insight.)

(Beat; to herself) Oh, little girl, your parents don't love each other anymore.

PALOMA

(Beat) You saw inside her.

VICTORIA

I don't believe in all that.

PALOMA

(Beat) That scroll we saw yesterday. It has awoken some things.

VICTORIA

Oh yeah?

PALOMA

You looked inside that child and you saw the future of her heart.

VICTORIA

No.

PALOMA

You have the gift.

VICTORIA

The gift?

PALOMA

You know it's true.

VICTORIA

I don't know about that, but a spirit spoke to me. Yesterday. If I'll only let myself believe it.

PALOMA

It's your journey. I feel it.

VICTORIA

And yours?

PALOMA

(Beat) I did something very, very bad before I left home. Something you won't understand. (Beat) I left. I took all the things I need to heal. It's the only thing I know how to do. (Self-irony) But, you know, you can't always heal yourself. Your heart could be broken in two and there could be nothing you could do about it. That's the joke God plays on you when he gives you the gift. (Beat) I bought that train ticket. I didn't tell my husband where I was going.

VICTORIA

You abandoned him?

(PALOMA nods her head.)

PALOMA

I told you, you wouldn't approve.

VICTORIA

That's why there are so many problems in the world. People can't stick to their commitments.

PALOMA

I don't have to explain myself to you.

VICTORIA

Go call him right now.

PALOMA

I can't. I had to leave. He made me go.

VICTORIA

You have to at least let him know where you are.

PALOMA

I didn't even kiss my little boy goodbye.

VICTORIA

You have a little boy?

PALOMA

Four years old. We call him Angel. (Beat) This whole thing's really stupid, but I can't go back.

VICTORIA

Why didn't you tell me? I asked you about your husband. I thought we were friends. You can't do that. You can't abandon your family like that.

PALOMA

I just need to be here—to be away.

VICTORIA

(A statement) You just ran off to Mexico when someone needed you back home.

PALOMA

Aren't you running away, too? From Jesús with the pneumonia?

VICTORIA

I'm gonna call your husband.

PALOMA

(Beat) I gave my husband my heart on a platter and he stuck a knife in it.

(PALOMA gives VICTORIA a cool stare.)

VICTORIA

(Nervously) Your heart on a platter? Like an Aztec heart sacrifice?

PALOMA

My heart. That didn't need to be given away, I gave to him. And he did not hold it gently in his hands as he had promised.

VICTORIA

Your son's never gonna get over this, and the worst thing is, you don't care.

(Upset, VICTORIA grabs her things.)

PALOMA

I care.

VICTORIA

And your husband. Did you even think about him?

PALOMA

I thought about him. I thought about him all the time.

VICTORIA

What'd he ever do to you?

PALOMA

Nothing. He did nothing for a long time. Have you ever promised someone your whole life and he gave you nothing in return? Not a minute, not a thing. But nothing was okay. I'm strong. I never needed anyone. But then I saw he had something—something to give. But he didn't give that something to me. It's just so ridiculous.

(WOMAN enters as Aztec Woman. She watches PALOMA. VICTORIA does not see or hear WOMAN.)

We had a party. For my parents. They'd been married 50 years. Not all of them happy. There were many years where they had nothing, but they had that. They had the marriage. So, I guess, they had something. And he, getting drunk, hanging out with my cousins and my brothers. Never me. (Beat) And him. Well, you see, we had the party by the river, and there were lights hanging, and red and white lanterns from the Chinito store. We had it all made up real pretty for my mother. She'd always dreamed of a fancy 50th anniversary party with lots of lights and Mexican food. And he, laughing with my brothers, roughhousing with the men, and it's later, and there's music. Romantic music. And I don't care about him. I don't dream of dancing with him. My husband. Not anymore. I learned to run that love out of my heart long ago. And I turn, and out by the river. He's there. And he's not there with my brothers or my crazy cousins. He's there with my sister, giving her the sweetest kiss. And later, he says, he was drunk, he didn't know what he was doing, he thought she was me. And I'm supposed to believe him, like all those times, in the early days, when he'd tell me things, and I'd let him break my heart.

(PALOMA rustles the air in front of her face, perhaps brushing away some internal tears. The tree changes hue.)

WOMAN

If someone could put back together that three hundred year old tree, the dead would dance in heaven with joy.

PALOMA

But it's already broken.

WOMAN

If you close your eyes, you will see inside its soul.

(PALOMA resists closing her eyes.)

Cierralos.

(WOMAN brushes her hand down PALOMA's face, closing her eyes.)

In its veins runs a story, a story that only you and your husband know.

PALOMA

Nuestra historia.

It's worth saving.

WOMAN

I'd rather forget.

PALOMA

WOMAN
 (Softly) Don't lie. (Beat) If you put back together that three hundred year-old tree, you will know how to reach into somebody's body, how to peel open his chest until you hold, in your hands, his human heart. This is as our Aztec ancestors did before us, the curanderos of the past, the serpents of the clouds.

(Long beat. A spiritual phone call. On some level, PALOMA has reached her husband's soul. MAN enters as husband. He answers.)

Bueno.

MAN

(PALOMA turns as if she has hung up. VICTORIA and WOMAN watch on.)

Paloma?

Not yet.

PALOMA

(WOMAN grabs PALOMA's hand. She motions for PALOMA to grab VICTORIA's hand. She does.)

Where are you taking us?

WOMAN
 Far inside México. That country called the bellybutton of the moon.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

(PALOMA and WOMAN stand behind the scrim. VICTORIA is gone.)

PALOMA

Where's Victoria? What'd you do with her?

WOMAN

Like rings in a tree, Paloma. This bellybutton contains all. Past. Present. Future. Hell and heaven.

PALOMA

And the way out?

WOMAN

Go further in. Delve deeply into her core. And when she sees fit, México will spit you out.

(They exit. Lights shift. VICTORIA has found her way far inside the bellybutton of the moon to Mictlan—the realm of the ancient dead. MAN enters as Jesús. They breathe heavily like they have been running.)

VICTORIA

(Happy) See, I have this theory. About cancer. It's really a very simple solution. That's why no one's found it. Too easy. I'm right, Jesús. I'm right.

MAN

You can stop trying to save me.

VICTORIA

If I get this last bit of information, I'll have it.

MAN

I want my ring back.

VICTORIA

(Beat) You want to break up?

MAN

You need to go back.

VICTORIA

Back where?

MAN

You aren't where you think you are.

VICTORIA

In my hotel?

MAN

You're not there. I mean, your soul isn't.

VICTORIA

Then where is it?

MAN

It followed me.

VICTORIA

To where?

MAN

To Mictlan. The realm of the ancient dead.

VICTORIA

(Smiling; in disbelief) What kind of nightmare is this? My soul's not with the ancient dead.

MAN

It left your body in your grief. You cried it out through your tears, and then it found its way to me.

VICTORIA

(To herself) Wake up, Victoria. Wake up.

MAN

(As his urgency turns to sadness) Give me our ring.

VICTORIA

(Saddened) I know you want me to, but I just can't.

(VICTORIA protects her left hand, afraid.)

MAN

When you pass back through to the other side, you'll cross a valley of obsidian knives, slashing in the wind. Those knives will tear at your face, your arms, your lungs. You'll have to walk through there.

VICTORIA

I can do that. Knives don't scare me. Death doesn't.

MAN

I know. But your death scares me.

VICTORIA

(Smiling) I won't die.

MAN

You're closer to death than you think.

VICTORIA

I'm gonna try something else first.

MAN

Please give me the ring and let me go.

VICTORIA

(Harried) Just let me try one more thing.

MAN

(Yells; he is fighting for her life) No.

(VICTORIA turns. MAN disappears.
PALOMA appears in the bellybutton of the
moon. MAN transforms into husband.)

MAN

Paloma.

PALOMA

What you meant to say is that you wished you loved me—you would like to have loved me someday. What you meant to say is something different than what you said.

MAN

Where are you?

PALOMA

That place where my soul talks to yours.

MAN

Are you gonna come home?

PALOMA

I don't know. Do I have anything to come home to or are you still doing my sister?

MAN

It was just a kiss.

PALOMA

Yeah.

MAN

Hey, it was dark. I didn't realize what I was doing.

PALOMA

That's bullshit.

MAN

(Sincere; he breaks) It is. (Beat; sincere) Did I ever tell you that you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen?

(PALOMA fights the fact that he moves her.)

PALOMA

(Covering) Don't try to sweeten me up.

MAN

It's how I feel.

PALOMA

I'm sure you don't lie to me anymore than you lie to yourself.

MAN

I'm not lying now.

PALOMA

You said you'd love me for all the days of your life. I suppose that was the truth, too. I suppose you can love many people at one time. I suppose there's so much love in your heart that there's no place to put it all.

MAN

(Beat; the truth) Sometimes. Sometimes that's true. I don't know where to put it all.

PALOMA

You're pathetic.

MAN

Am I?

PALOMA

I just want your honest love.

MAN

I want yours.

PALOMA

You have mine.

MAN

How much love do you have left for me? When your life's so cluttered with sick people, seeking a cure, seeking your strength, grabbing your hand, kissing your cheek, falling down before you in adoration. Just to have you lift them up and say, "No, mijo. It's not me who heals, it's God."

(Beat; Hurt) And here I am, broken inside, and you won't heal me.

PALOMA

Is that my job? To be your nurse? To take care of you?

MAN

You're right. It's not your job. It's my job.

PALOMA

It is.

MAN

(Honest) I know it is. (Beat) You hurt me. I know you never meant to but you did.

PALOMA

Don't switch this thing around on me.

MAN

Look, I'm just trying to tell you how I feel. Before you leave. (Beat) I wait for you. Every day. I sit there on the couch—okay, and sometimes I have a beer and watch the Cowboys. Is that so bad? I sit there while you disappear into your little room with the candles. You disappear in there. Away from me. The door opens and shuts all day long, but you never look out to see if I'm still there. (Loud) Because you know I am.

They come from morning until night—the sick, the wounded, the brokenhearted. And they leave our house, content, and usually that makes me happy, but I still wait.

PALOMA

You're free to leave.

MAN

Healing makes you tired, you say, so your cousin cooks for us. Your cousin answers the phone. She even pays our bills. You have her watch our son. I'd like to cook for you sometime, write some checks, and God knows, I'd like you to trust me with our child, but you never think to let me. I don't suppose you think a man could cook or understand finances. And how could a man love a child? Is that what you think?

PALOMA

(Lightly) I know you love him.

MAN

I love him so much. I love you both so much. Can't you see all this love burning inside me? (Beat) Am I such a disappointment to you?

(Beat) That love scorched me from the inside out. I couldn't stand to keep it inside anymore. (Strong) Sometimes, I drink, and bury it under my skin because you won't take it from me. But there's too much. Do you understand? There's still too much goddamn love. It has to go somewhere. It has to catch something. Someone. (Pained) 'Cause I am worth it, Paloma. (Loud) I'm worth it.

That night, at your parents' anniversary party, I kept thinking about fifty years. Our fifty years. I asked myself if in fifty years you would still reject my love—my touch? I thought yes, you would. You would waste the one thing I know how to give. (A hush) That's how you destroy me.

(Beat) I looked to give it to you that night. Do you remember? When I tried to touch you during that song they played for our wedding? But you brushed me aside like I didn't matter. You ran over me with a glance, a brush of your hand, a flick of your finger. (Stronger) I am your husband.

(Beat) That night, there wasn't enough beer in the world to make me forget how I feel. (Laughs) And the Cowboys lost. (Real) And I was lost. (Beat) I didn't love her. I don't even know how I convinced myself to do it.

Do you understand me? I've promised my life to you, but it seems you don't want it. I can't convince you to look my way with kindness in your heart, or to give me your affection in a kiss. That affection I see you pour out onto the world all day long. Do you know what I settle for? (Pain) I drink your love in through the eyes of strangers as they pass me when they leave.

(A moment where they just stand looking at each other, paralyzed by MAN's revelation.)

PALOMA

(Long beat) I'm sorry.

(PALOMA turns her back to him.)

MAN

Don't go.

PALOMA

(Huge beat; Sadly) I have to— I have to go.

(PALOMA crosses to VICTORIA. They are in the hotel room. VICTORIA looks frazzled as if she has been up all night and she is losing it. She takes copious notes, writing furiously into a red notebook, surrounded by open books. Every once in awhile she underlines something in one of her books, and then writes it into her notebook. She moves quickly and erratically. Nothing makes sense.)

What are you doing?

VICTORIA

Trying to find the cure for cancer.

(PALOMA picks up one of the books. VICTORIA snatches the book out of PALOMA's hand.)

(Shaky) The cure for cancer is not that hard.

(PALOMA blesses VICTORIA on the forehead with holy water.)

What's that?

PALOMA

You're shaky.

VICTORIA

Get that stuff away from me.

(VICTORIA intersects the water with her hand. She stops. She thinks, reconsiders her method.)

The answer's not in books. That's what he said. The answer's in earth and air. (Frustrated) I don't remember. I've got to try something else. I've got to do something better.

PALOMA

Cálmate.

VICTORIA

(Upset) No. I will not calm down. I will not just dull myself and forget about him. Like you all want me to. (Quick beat) Haven't you ever been in love?

(VICTORIA hastily tries to find another solution. She finds her scalpel. She drains the blood out of her arm.)

PALOMA

What're you doing?

VICTORIA

Giving him my blood.

PALOMA

Stop.

VICTORIA

(Harried) See, the good blood can blot out the bad blood if you just say the right prayer, or do the right thing; it can make all the bad blood go away.

PALOMA

You misunderstand the meaning of a sacrifice. Your blood will not bring him back.

VICTORIA

What else is there for me to do? You told me the gods understand a sacrifice.

PALOMA

See, what a mess you've made.

VICTORIA

They listen to a sacrifice.

(PALOMA lifts up VICTORIA's weak arm over VICTORIA's head to stop the bleeding.)

PALOMA

Your blood's everywhere.

VICTORIA

I'm just trying to make up my own thing because everything they try doesn't work.

PALOMA

Doctors don't know everything.

VICTORIA

They know a lot. I believed in them. But it's starting to feel like it's not going to work. And I don't know what happens to me if he dies in the end.

(VICTORIA pulls away from PALOMA and pushes more blood out of her arm.)

PALOMA

Stop.

VICTORIA

If I'm such a powerful curandera in training, the gods should take this from me.

PALOMA

Here, let me.

(PALOMA tries to take VICTORIA's arm away, VICTORIA swings back.)

VICTORIA

(Getting irrational and vulnerable) See, I talked to him. On the phone. He wants to break up. I don't want to break up. I love him.

(PALOMA takes VICTORIA's arm, holds it. She moves a crystal over the arm.)

PALOMA

You have to concentrate for this to work.

VICTORIA

He wants his ring back. He wants me to let go of him, but I can't. Do you understand? I just can't.

PALOMA

You're bleeding all over the place.

VICTORIA

He wants things to be different.

PALOMA

You look white as a ghost.

VICTORIA

He's trying to change our agreement, but I won't let him.

PALOMA

You're bleeding all over the place.

VICTORIA

He can't do this to us.

PALOMA

You only have so much blood.

VICTORIA

You're frightening me.

PALOMA

(A hush) You're frightening me.

VICTORIA

(Frantic) Am I leaving this body? Did I already leave like he said? (Really upset) Does anyone know where my soul went?

PALOMA

You've got to take your soul back to live.

VICTORIA

I won't die.

PALOMA

(Almost crying) You know you will.

VICTORIA

(Crying) He abandoned me. Just like your husband abandoned you when he did that thing.

PALOMA

Your love didn't abandon you.

VICTORIA

He's gone. Same thing.

PALOMA

(Beat) I will heal you. Do you believe me?

VICTORIA

Yes.

(PALOMA puts her arms around VICTORIA.)

PALOMA

Breathe. Think hard about your soul. You can't stay long on earth without it. And I promise you, this world would miss you if you were gone.

(WOMAN enters as Aztec Woman. She freezes VICTORIA who holds the knife.)

WOMAN

Are you going to heal her?

PALOMA

I feel it in my body now. I'm ready.

WOMAN

You can't this time.

PALOMA

(A long beat) I have to heal myself first and let myself love?

WOMAN

I've taught you well. (Long beat) Her susto could lead to death.

PALOMA

I know.

WOMAN

(Beat) I will keep her in this moment, but you must be willing to let yourself change. Are you?

(PALOMA looks worried. This sounds hard to do.)

PALOMA

I don't know.

WOMAN

The spirits will lead. Like they have before. Ask us, Paloma, we will help you.

(MAN enters as PALOMA's husband. They are in the bellybutton of the moon.)

MAN

Hello, Paloma.

PALOMA

Hello, Husband.

MAN

I want to talk.

Yeah? PALOMA

(Gently) Tell me where you are. MAN

(Playful) It's a secret. PALOMA

Forever? MAN

For as long as I need it to be. PALOMA

(Sincerely) If I knew how to start over, I'd give you that. MAN

You would? PALOMA

(PALOMA resists MAN emotionally, but he moves her. He does not realize he has touched her.)

(Beat; hurt) You can heal anything, Paloma. Why don't you heal us? MAN

I don't have the power. PALOMA

(Long beat; maybe grasping at his hair) It's too late, isn't it? I've done too much wrong and you can't forgive me. MAN

(He touches her tenderly. She has her back to him.)

(Beat) Shall I let you go?

(A moment where it seems like PALOMA will leave.)

(Long beat) They say when you love someone, you should be willing to do that.

(PALOMA does not turn around. She starts to leave.)

Adiós, mi esposa. Te quiero.

(PALOMA moves to another space.)

(Broken) I love you with all my heart.

(Husband exits.)

PALOMA

(Beat) You talk about your heart, but my heart's missing in action. My heart just disappeared. Like all those boys from our barrio who went to war and never came back. (Beat) If it's true that you love me, my husband, the spirits will show me in a dream.

(WOMAN enters as Dream Woman and induces PALOMA into a dream from which she quickly arises.)

Help, I misplaced my heart. Someone did something with it.

WOMAN

Who stole it?

PALOMA

I don't know.

WOMAN

What does it look like?

PALOMA

I'm not sure. (Remembering) It's got a knife in it.

WOMAN

Is it still beating?

PALOMA

Hurry. Someone send out a search party to look for my heart.

(WOMAN puts on her search party gear, a miner's hat with a light on it.)

WOMAN

I will. I'll head the search party.

(WOMAN flips the light on.)

PALOMA

You gonna look?

WOMAN

Do you think it's buried somewhere?

PALOMA

Buried?

WOMAN

Deep in the ground where it can't be seen.

PALOMA

It's an emergency. I have to find it. Por favor.

WOMAN

Buried somewhere.

PALOMA

You mean buried alive?

WOMAN

(Beat) If you search hard enough, you'll find it.

PALOMA

I will?

(PALOMA looks up and down, nowhere near herself.)

WOMAN

You know where it is.

(PALOMA shakes her head as if she does not know where it is. Beat. PALOMA peels some layers away from her chest. She takes in a deep breath and bravely scoops her hand as if to get her heart out of her chest.)

PALOMA

I found my heart.

WOMAN

You found it.

PALOMA

(To her heart) Ay, Dios mío, I was worried about you. (Beat) What happened to the knife?

WOMAN

It's gone.

(The WOMAN points to a place on the heart.)

PALOMA
(Emotional; still disbelieving) That's my heart?

WOMAN
It's yours.

(PALOMA cradles her heart, relieved. She feels something underneath the heart.)

PALOMA
Mira, what's this back here? There's something stuck to it.

WOMAN
That's his heart. Your husband's.

(PALOMA lifts it up to get a better look.)

PALOMA
(With childlike awe) It's so large. I had no idea. (Beat) And he loves me with this?

WOMAN
All of it. Like he said.

PALOMA
My husband. He has a beautiful heart.

(PALOMA lifts both their hearts up, and then cradles them against her chest. WOMAN exits. MAN enters as PALOMA's husband.)

MAN
You're a powerful woman.

PALOMA
And you're a powerful man.

MAN
(Smiles) Don't steal my compliments.

PALOMA
Love is a powerful thing.

(PALOMA holds his heart.)

This is yours.

(PALOMA presses MAN's heart back into his chest where it belongs. He takes it in, inhaling, as if he were swallowing her love into himself. A beat. She begins to put her heart back into her own chest.)

MAN

Wait.

(PALOMA stops. She hesitates, covering her heart with her hand. He gazes at her. She removes her hand.)

Did I ever tell you, you have the most beautiful heart I've ever seen?

(PALOMA smiles. She starts pressing her heart in again. He stops her hand.)

MAN gives her heart the sweetest kiss. She lets him press it into her chest, inhaling as well. She sighs when he has completed putting it back.

MAN steps closer to her. They give each other a long, long embrace, heart against heart. They step back gazing at each other, holding hands.)

Your heart wants to heal somebody. I better let you go.

PALOMA

You understand my heart now?

MAN

When I touched it, I knew. Go ahead.

(PALOMA steps away, looks back, lingers for a moment.)

Go.

(PALOMA props VICTORIA up, sitting with her back to VICTORIA on the bed. PALOMA links their arms together. VICTORIA begins speaking groggily, as if drugged, but comes out of it.)

PALOMA

Why did you start bleeding yourself?

It's my fiancé.

VICTORIA

With the pneumonia?

PALOMA

Lung cancer.

VICTORIA

Oh.

PALOMA

The doctor said he had five months. He didn't have five months. He's dead.

VICTORIA

(Simultaneously) He's dead.

PALOMA

I guess you already knew that. Dead and gone.

VICTORIA

(Beat) He loved you. He never tried to break up with you.

PALOMA

I'd do anything to have any part of him now. That's why I keep this ring, but it's not enough. I want more. I want him. And last night. In my sleep. He came asking for my ring. Tell me. What's he gonna do with it in heaven?

(PALOMA starts to turn toward VICTORIA to comfort her. VICTORIA keeps giving her back.)

PALOMA

What do you want me to do?

VICTORIA

Bring him back. Conjure him up with a spell or something.

PALOMA

I thought you didn't believe in my magic.

VICTORIA

I do now.

PALOMA

And your own?

VICTORIA

Not without a prescription.

PALOMA

(Beat) I can't bring him back. Nobody can.

VICTORIA

I don't think people should die young, do you?

PALOMA

I think they should die when they're supposed to die, and we shouldn't question it.

VICTORIA

I question it—I challenge it every day. I have saved people that were supposed to be dead. In the emergency room I did.

PALOMA

I believe you.

VICTORIA

And it felt great, and when he got sick, I thought, I'll save him, too. I know how to do this. I'm a doctor with a spanking new medical degree. Top of my class. I can lick this thing. (Beat) He wasted away, did I tell you? Not a graceful death. Not a beautiful death. Not a death that was meant to be.

PALOMA

Let him go.

VICTORIA

How?

PALOMA

Let it burn. Walk into a fire and burn everything to the ground. Everything you are. Everything you were. Everything you thought you might become.

VICTORIA

Like his wife?

PALOMA

You burn it to the ground and let it become something new. The Aztecs taught us fire doesn't only destroy, it creates. Do this, and then you might be able to start living again.

VICTORIA

Do you know how to do all that?

PALOMA

I did something just like that today. And I found my heart again.

VICTORIA

I have to go.

PALOMA

(Simultaneously) You have to go.

(VICTORIA does not even see PALOMA exit as MAN enters. He is JESUS.)

VICTORIA

Are you still angry with me?

MAN

It was never anger.

VICTORIA

I'm studying things. For you. (Quick beat) In memory of you. Maybe I can save someone else. I just wanted to make you better.

MAN

I wanted to make the world better, but I didn't.

VICTORIA

(Long beat; soft) How can you be dead when I still love you?

(They grasp hands.)

MAN

(Beat) I always thought you would come with me. I always dreamed you'd be my compañera.

VICTORIA

I wanted to come with you, I did. I want to come with you now.

MAN

(A fantasy) We would negotiate jungles together with our machetes, your ponytail behind you, blowing in my face. And every once in awhile, we'd forget who was chasing us, and wrap ourselves around each other like vines. And with the air so thick and wet in that tropical place, your sweat would meld with mine and trickle down our bodies in a tiny stream.

VICTORIA

Please, let me come with you.

MAN

(Beat) Love doesn't end with death. It's the only thing that doesn't.

VICTORIA

I'm going to cure cancer.

MAN
If anyone can, you will.

VICTORIA
You've got faith in me.

MAN
I've got faith.

(MAN reaches into VICTORIA's backpack and pulls out a manila envelope. He hands it to VICTORIA.)

VICTORIA
What's that?

MAN
I left these in your backpack for you.

VICTORIA
You did? I never found them. (Ironically) I'm—a pendeja.

MAN
No, you're not. (Beat) Pictures of my trip to México. Taped interviews with the people there. I want you just to hold these from time to time. And maybe when you're in your car—the tapes. You can hear my voice. If you want to listen. They're in Spanish, but . . .

VICTORIA
(Firm) I'll learn.

(VICTORIA breaks into the envelope. VICTORIA shuffles through the pictures. MAN looks over her shoulder as she looks at the pictures. It is intimate—close.)

They're wonderful. The colors. Colors that could sear your eyes.

(VICTORIA notices something in the pictures. She shuffles through them quickly, trying to confirm her suspicion.)

(Realizing) These pictures are all of children, Jesús.

MAN
(Beat) Something happened to me when I went far into México. (Short beat) I went there looking for revolutionaries with angry faces—but I found their

smiling children instead. People can be happy no matter what the circumstances.

(MAN gets sad. Perhaps, he wishes he could have done more.)

VICTORIA

(Short beat; slowly) You never wanted children. (Quoting him; enjoying it) "The world is overpopulated, so I'm not having any." (Laughs to herself)

MAN

I said that?

VICTORIA

You did.

MAN

(A smile) I used to think I was pretty smart.

VICTORIA

(Beat) That stuff I told you. About not wanting kids because of my career. That wasn't true. I only said that because I thought that's what you wanted.

(MAN sighs.)

(Beat) I would have liked to have had--

MAN

(Gently) Don't say it.

(MAN puts his finger over VICTORIA's mouth, so she will not say a word. She breaks away.)

VICTORIA

(Finishing; slowly) Your children. (Beat) I won't let your dreams die with you, Jesús. I'll learn the map—the roads—of México like the lines in my hand. I'll spread whatever truth I find in the world. No matter how hideous. I'll try to be happy no matter what the circumstances. I'll do that for you. (Short beat) It's funny. All those times, watching you, admiring you from afar, I never dreamed there was part of you inside me.

(He touches her.)

MAN

I found my way inside there.

VICTORIA

You are—in me. You know. When you feel that way. When your feelings rustle inside you like leaves. That's how you always made me feel. Still do. (Beat) You're not coming back, are you?

(Silence)

(Long beat; new urgency like she is trying to save him again) If you really want something, and you're part of a certain people, part of a certain tribe, you give something up. I've been giving you blood.

MAN

But you've got to stop.

VICTORIA

I want to let it keep going, flow out of me, maybe find it's way through the ground into your ashes to give you life. (Beat) I can see you. In a healed new body, breaking out of the earth like a fresh blade of grass. I whisk the dirt away from your face and kiss you. Your beard pricks my lip. You are my love.

(MAN shakes his head no.)

Are we saying goodbye?

MAN

You need to let yourself love a living person someday. Don't die with me. Promise. (Beat) Will you let somebody heal you?

VICTORIA

(A grin) Don't tell me you're a curandero, too.

(VICTORIA laughs. Tension breaks. MAN takes her hand. VICTORIA starts to speak. He places one finger gently over her mouth.)

Just kiss me goodbye. That's all I ask. Just one kiss.

(MAN shakes his head no. MAN moves his hand up the ring finger of her left hand.)

I'm not giving that to you. It was a gift.

(MAN strokes her face. Beat as she tears up. MAN moves his hand gently on hers as she lets him release the ring. He slowly releases her hand. Although we can still see MAN, it seems VICTORIA no longer can. She does not seem to be able to see or hear PALOMA

either. VICTORIA wrings her hands. After a long silence, MAN stops, looks back, watches her. Then, he slowly disappears. VICTORIA remains completely alone.)

Paloma. Paloma!

(PALOMA does not come. VICTORIA cannot see her. VICTORIA crumples to the ground. It appears that she is dead.

PALOMA enters, carrying a white sheet, distraught to find VICTORIA in this condition. She hurriedly moves VICTORIA's limp arms until they make a cross in an outstretched position and begins her healing work. She fluffs the sheet into the air and lays it down on VICTORIA's body, covering her completely. PALOMA burns copal and herbs. PALOMA sweeps VICTORIA, in the sign of a cross, using a large navel orange. As she sweeps, she recites her version of the Apostles' Creed.)

PALOMA

Creo en Dios, Padre Todopoderoso. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

WOMAN

We believe in the gods, the fathers and the mothers, the creators of the heavens and of the earth, of the rivers that run until they spill into the sea.

PALOMA

And the trees that live for hundreds of years and reach their arms up through the clouds, of the oceans that flow from the sun on to the beach to touch our feet, of all these things that have no end. We ask that you see our daughter, Victoria. We ask that you return her soul to her body, so she may stay here on earth.

WOMAN

(Simultaneously) That you return her soul to her body, so she may stay here on earth.

PALOMA

Amén.

WOMAN

Amén.

(WOMAN lays her hand on PALOMA. A transfer of power. WOMAN exits. A beat.)

PALOMA

(To VICTORIA) Vente. No te quedes allí. Come back. Don't stay over there.

(PALOMA claps once loudly with arms outstretched and cupped hands. This calls VICTORIA's soul back to earth.)

Victoria!

(PALOMA flips the sheet off VICTORIA's body as she rises up. In this moment, her soul integrates back into her body.)

VICTORIA

Aquí vengo. Mi alma ha regresado a la tierra. (Beat; Excited) I spoke Spanish. (Short beat) I'm here. My soul came back to earth.

PALOMA

You are going to become a serpent. And you will slither through the clouds.

(Although PALOMA has not exited, VICTORIA cannot see her. VICTORIA looks ahead, sees a vision. VICTORIA can clearly see into the spiritual realm. The SOUND of romantic Mexican MUSIC.)

VICTORIA

You got back together with your husband.

PALOMA

You saw inside me.

VICTORIA

(Excited) I can see right into both of you—through the spirit world into your hearts.

PALOMA

(To Victoria) In this world there are many things that will rip us apart. Men and women. Healing comes when we come back together. No matter how much it hurts. And I promise you it will hurt. It will incinerate your hearts, but healing comes.

(VICTORIA touches her own heart. PALOMA senses VICTORIA's pain.)

VICTORIA

(Beat) He took his ring.

PALOMA

(Short beat) Our dead are always with us, Victoria. (Beat) Consider him a martyr to your heart.

VICTORIA

Jesús would have liked that. He would have liked to have died for something.

PALOMA

That would be you, mija. (Beat) He died so that you could love. Your love will heal the world.

(PALOMA looks at own hand, places it on VICTORIA's shoulder to give VICTORIA power. A serpent appears.

VICTORIA traces the star on her hand with her finger. She raises her hand into the air, exposing what would be her star. VICTORIA has el don, the gift of healing.)

END OF PLAY