

With prominent themes of betrayal, jealousy, and revenge, Euripides' *Medea* has been one of the most frequently staged and adapted of all ancient tragedies.<sup>1</sup> As a foreign heroine on the Greek stage, her perceived "Otherness" has in particular attracted playwrights interested in in-depth explorations of gender and racial issues. Some modern adaptations and productions present their Medea as a woman wronged and scorned, particularly with a view to illuminate women's second-class status in society.<sup>2</sup> Others capitalize on Euripides' complex portrait of an outsider in an unsympathetic land in order to emphasize her disadvantaged or marginalized position.<sup>3</sup> From the mid-twentieth century onward, Medea becomes a symbol for the racially oppressed: adaptations such as Henri-René Lenormand's *Asie* ("Asia": France, 1931), José Triana's *Medea en el Espejo* ("Medea in the Mirror": Cuba, 1960), Agostinho Olavo's *Além do Rio* ("Beyond the River": Brazil, 1961), Ernest Ferlita's *Black Medea* (USA, 1976), and Guy Butler's *Demea* (South Africa, written in the 1950s but performed in 1990) feature non-white, black, or mixed-race Medeas.<sup>4</sup>

In *Mojada*, Alfaro continues to explore the limits of Medea's vulnerability both as a woman and a foreigner, this time casting her as a recent migrant from Mexico. Rather than focusing on Medea herself, Alfaro's spotlight is on the challenges of migration and the arduous journey that the entire family endures, as well as the complex reality in which they exist as undocumented migrants. Given that the migration experience disrupts notions of past and present, all while unsettling the general sense of home, *Mojada* engages not only with the actual trauma of the border crossing,<sup>5</sup> but also with the larger questions of integration and assimilation, processes which themselves have the potential to be painful and alienating. This is evident from the play's title, *Mojada*, a Spanish slur that is the equivalent of "wetback." As a result, the play foregrounds and queries the larger themes of foreignness, belonging, and isolation from multiple and varied perspectives: from Medea's refusal to integrate and her overall isolation to the insistence on swift acclimatization by Hason (Alfaro's Jason figure), with other characters occupying positions in between these two extremes. All of these correspond to vital debates of crucial and ongoing relevance for the Chicanx and Latinx communities in the United States, particularly in the twenty-first century. As a recent report by the Pew Research Center reveals, the demographics of the U.S. have radically changed, with the nation's Latinx population in particular growing by nearly ninefold from 1960 to 2015, from 6.3 million people to 56.5 million. Partly responsible for this growth is the upsurge in the foreign-born Latinx population which increased from less than 1 million in 1960 to 19.4 million in 2015.<sup>6</sup> In this context, various key scenes in *Mojada*, which were nevertheless inspired by the arguments between Medea and Jason in Euripides' source text, take on added resonance and new meaning. For example, Hason's exhortation to Medea in Scene Four rehashes an old and popular argument for cultural assimilation:

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.<sup>7</sup>

Such an argument has profound implications for the future of their son, Acan, who in various scenes is shown wavering between a Mexican and an American lifestyle.<sup>8</sup> When Hason later chooses Armida over Medea, not only is he copying his ancient counterpart's desire for a wife who would better his status, but he is now also embracing and pursuing an American life for himself and his son. Hason's betrayal is thus all the more poignant in this new context, as it is also a direct rebuttal of Medea's desires to maintain intact the family's cultural and ethnic sense of itself. In this manner, Medea's plight in *Mojada* evolves beyond the dimensions of gender and race which have dominated recent adaptations of the ancient play.

Against this backdrop of the impact of migration and the question of assimilation, Alfaro enacts a novel transformation in his migrant Medea, who is characterized by an extreme shyness and reticence. Though later in the play her taciturn behavior is revealed to be the result of her traumatic crossing and sexual assault, this change becomes all the more remarkable when we consider the general outspokenness of her ancient counterpart in Euripides' eponymous play (431 BCE). Fiona Macintosh, for example, considers her "the most theatrical of all Greek characters,"<sup>9</sup> citing the manner in which her outlandish "performances" dominate the drama:

From the off-stage wailing victim of marital infidelity, that we first overhear during the Nurse's opening speech, to the shrewd onstage commentator on the shortcomings of Athenian democracy in her "Women of Corinth" speech, Euripides' Medea impresses us with her wide-ranging and deeply disjunctive repertoire.<sup>10</sup>

To these other remarkable performances must be added the famous scene in which she deliberates with herself over her intentions to kill her children, as well as her final appearance in the play, in which she appears triumphant—both metaphorically and literally, as she appears above the stage—before Jason in the chariot of her grandfather, the god Helios.<sup>11</sup> Seneca's *Medea* (written around 50 CE) depicts a heroine who is even more fearsome than Euripides' protagonist: she is a sorceress who opens the play by calling on the underworld gods and the Furies to enact vengeance against Jason. In contrast, Alfaro's Medea is shockingly silent by comparison. Not only does she refuse to leave the house, but she sacrifices everything for her family, diligently and silently working as a seamstress for her family's sake. Hason's abandonment leaves her entirely destitute and without any voice, given both her undocumented and unmarried legal status.<sup>12</sup> Such a subservient and all-sacrificing heroine arguably epitomizes potent Latinx stereotypes about motherhood and femininity. As one reviewer summarizes, Alfaro's Medea "embodies all the sacrifice, sexuality, and subservience necessary to create a dynamic hybrid between the archetypes of 'La Virgen' and 'La Madre'."<sup>13</sup>

Beneath this voiceless and powerless veneer, Alfaro has retained one of Medea's identifying features: her history as a witch. In ancient Greek myth, Medea is of prominent divine stock: she is the granddaughter of the god Helios, the niece of Circe (the witch who turns Odysseus' men into pigs in Homer's *Odyssey*), and also priestess of the moon-goddess Hecate. Whereas Euripides' play downplays this magical heritage,



ancient mythical narratives about Medea regularly emphasize her awesome yet terrifying power. These allude to her involvement in various unsavory events, such as killing her own brother, or the manner in which she deceptively persuades Pelias' daughters to dismember him first in order to rejuvenate him;<sup>14</sup> the latter was also a popular subject in art.<sup>15</sup> Though Euripides' *Medea* is the sole surviving ancient Greek tragedy in which she features, evidence and testimonia of other lost plays reveal her presence elsewhere on the Athenian stage.<sup>16</sup> According to the ancient plot summary which survives with Euripides' *Medea* itself, it seems that Aeschylus' lost play *Nurses of Dionysus* (date unknown) stages the rejuvenation of the nurses by Medea, who cooks them.<sup>17</sup> Sophocles' *Women of Colchis* (date also unknown) features Medea's murder of her younger brother Apsyrtus.<sup>18</sup> Early in his career, Euripides also wrote *Daughters of Pelias* (455 BCE), which dramatizes Medea's deception of Pelias' daughters, mentioned above.<sup>19</sup>

Though *Mojada* only includes the death of Medea's brother, now cast as her twin Acat,<sup>20</sup> Alfaro subtly alludes to her powers as a witch,<sup>21</sup> revising his earlier approach in his first adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*, *Bruja*.<sup>22</sup> In incorporating Nahuatl rituals, Alfaro echoes other modern adaptations in which Medea is linked with Native American cultures, such as Jesús Sotelo Inclán's *Malintzin: Medea Americana* ("Malintzin: An American Medea": Mexico, 1957), David Cureses' *La Frontera* ("The Frontier": Argentina, 1960), Sergio Magaña's *Los Argonautas, o Cortés y la Malinche* ("The Argonauts, or Cortés and the Malinche": Mexico, 1964), Juan Radrigán's *Medea Mapuche* ("Mapuche Medea": Chile, 2001), and most notably, Chicano playwright Cherríe Moraga's *Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (USA, 1995). Whereas her role as a witch is now downplayed, Medea's murder of her son as well as the ambiguous end of *Mojada* nevertheless suggest a great other-worldly power. It is perhaps for this reason that Alfaro has claimed that his Medea, despite her silence and the sacrificing nature described above, is in no way a victim.<sup>23</sup>

In *Mojada*, Alfaro evokes a world of women, who possess the majority of the roles, just as he had in *Electricidad*. In the ancient play, apart from Medea, her nurse, and the Corinthian princess for whom Jason abandons his wife, all major speaking roles were male. In addition to Jason, Euripides featured two kings, Creon of Corinth and Aegeus of Athens; the former, who looks forward to having Jason as his son-in-law, forces Medea out of his kingdom, whereas the latter promises to welcome her in Athens. In *Mojada*, Armida and Josefina replace these two key roles, with Armida additionally taking on the role of the Corinthian princess.<sup>24</sup> Armida's role in particular highlights the impact of class on the migrant experience: in a key scene she declares that she "bought a Student Visa" and describes how, armed with dress from Ann Taylor, she was able to face the customs agent at LAX after her flight from Mexico.<sup>25</sup> This advantage is undoubtedly responsible for her economic success in the U.S., where she owns various buildings, including a strip mall.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, Josefina lives a more precarious existence; in one scene she describes how she became a *pan dulce* street seller after working in the fields,<sup>27</sup> and in another she discusses her husband's unstable work as a fruit picker.<sup>28</sup> Their opposing experiences speak to the complicated and multi-layered nature of migrant life in the contemporary U.S.

To date, *Mojada* has been adapted for other cities besides Los Angeles, namely Chicago and New York.<sup>29</sup> In particular, the recent 2019 production in New York's Public Theater transformed the roles of Josefina and Armida, who were recast as

Caribbean migrants: Josefina became Puerto Rican Luisa, and Armida is transformed into Pilar, who arrived in the U.S. from Cuba. In addition to addressing New York City's distinct demographics,<sup>30</sup> the inclusion of these two non-Mexican characters enabled Alfaro to conduct a wider exploration of diverging Latinx migrations and access to the U.S. On the one hand, these Cuban and Puerto Rican characters shared the same challenges of living in a new country where they are seen as foreigners; in various scenes they openly discussed the experiences they had faced with respect to integrating into a new country. On the other, their ability to access the United States legally formed an important contrast to the experience of Medea and her family who endured a traumatic border crossing from Mexico: Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since the passage of the Jones Act in 1917, and until January 2017, Cubans benefited from settled status as soon as they stepped on U.S. soil under the aptly named "wet foot, dry foot" policy. In Scene Six of *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles*, Hason asks Armida "how did you cross", and both he and Medea are shocked to learn that she was able to fly to the United States from Mexico with a visa, as discussed above.<sup>31</sup> The equivalent scene in the New York production was directed at Cuban-born Pilar, who laughed in response, before detailing her treacherous journey by boat as part of the Mariel boatlift, in which Cuban refugees were eventually able to receive permanent legal status in the U.S. Furthermore, the inclusion of these other Latinx characters allowed Alfaro to touch on the issue of *Latinidad*, that is, the shared affinity that Latinx communities of different ethnicities in the U.S. often perceive towards one another. In various scenes, for example, Luisa continually mentioned the familial bond that she felt with Medea, despite the fact that the two hail from different countries. Part of this affinity has to do with their shared economic reality of life in the U.S. Working as a seamstress and a street vendor, Medea and Josefina/Luisa are made invisible by a harsh economy which readily exploits them.<sup>32</sup> The changing ways in which Alfaro has reworked the story of Medea for these various settings confirms the flexibility of the myth, as a source for understanding both the distinctive experiences of different Hispanic groups, and the wider economic realities faced by the Latinx community as a whole, and indeed by all migrants in the U.S. This flexibility makes *Mojada* a multifaceted and timely exploration of the twenty-first-century migrant experience.

## Notes

1. Hall, Macintosh, and Taplin (2000); Macintosh, Kenward, and Wrobel (2016).
2. Macintosh, Kenward, and Wrobel (2016: esp. 53–64).
3. Foley (2012: 200–10).
4. Wetmore (2003: 132–204); Macintosh (2005); Foley (2012: 210–24).
5. This trauma includes a sexual assault, which is an unfortunate reality for many migrants; see, e.g., Amnesty USA's 2010 report, *Invisible Victims: Migrants on the Move in Mexico*, esp. pp. 11–15: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/36000/amr410142010eng.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2020). See also Regan (2010).
6. A. Flores, "2015, Hispanic Population in the United States Statistical Portrait," September 18, 2017: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2017/09/18/2015-statistical-information-on-hispanics-in-united-states> (accessed January 24, 2020).
7. P. 208 in this volume.



8. See, e.g., on p. 204 and p. 220 in this volume.
9. Macintosh, Kenward, and Wrobel (2016: 89).
10. Ibid. Cf. Macintosh (2000).
11. Euripides, *Medea* 1021–80 and 1317–end, respectively.
12. This is in direct contrast to Euripides' *Medea* who arranges a future for herself in Athens taking advantage of King Aegeus' brief visit to Corinth.
13. Corona (2016: 295).
14. On the murder of her brother, see Euripides' *Medea* 166–7 and 1334; on her role in the death of Pelias, Pindar, *Pythian* 4. Other fragmentary and lost works also related the manner in which she used her magic skills to rejuvenate characters, including Jason's father Aeson (in the lost epic *Nostoi*, fr. 6 *EGF*; this is also told in Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book VII) and Jason himself (Simonides fr. 548 *PMG*; cf. Pherecydes *FGH* 3 F 113). Gantz (1993: 358–73) provides an overview.
15. See, e.g., this black-figured hydria at the British Museum (BM 1843,1103.59), dated 510–500 BCE and attributed to The Leagros Group: [https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=398771&partId=1](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=398771&partId=1) (accessed January 24, 2020)
16. Allan (2002: 20–4) provides a summary; see also Wright (2019: 227–36).
17. *TrGF*<sup>3</sup> F 246a–d; Sommerstein (2008: 248–9).
18. *TrGF*<sup>4</sup> F 337–46; Lloyd-Jones (1996: 186–189).
19. *TrGF*<sup>5,2</sup> F 601–16; Collard and Cropp (2008: 60–71).
20. This is told in flashback in Scene Eleven; see p. 233 in this volume.
21. Josefina's first meeting of Medea acknowledges this: "Wow, you are so beautiful, I don't know why but I was expecting to meet an old *bruja* for some reason"; see p. 199 in this volume.
22. See "Production History" in this volume, as well as "Interview with Luis Alfaro" pp. 289–90.
23. As Alfaro has stated (speaking on the 2013 production at Victory Gardens): "as Medea, Sandra (Delgado), possesses this emotional complexity that's fascinating. She's physically small, but there's a force and a rage within her that makes things pop. She—Medea—is not a victim"; cited in Sullivan (2013).
24. Alfaro has discussed the manner in which Josefina and Armida replace the respective roles of Aegeus and Creon: "Charin brings a beautiful vulnerability to the role of Josefina (King Aegeus in the original). She has a driving need, a want to succeed in this new place. There's also this sense of the eternal optimist in her. This is a character who speaks her heart, names her history. And Charin's voice, her voice is just so beautiful. I love the sound of it. Sandra (Marquez), plays the role of King Creon, who I made into a female character, Armida. She has an authority and a sharpness to her. From the moment she arrives, she's in charge"; cited in Sullivan (2013, on the 2013 production at Victory Gardens). See also "Interview with Luis Alfaro" in this volume, p. 290.
25. Scene Six, pp. 214–15 in this volume.
26. See, e.g., p. 218 in this volume.
27. Scene Eight, p. 223 in this volume.
28. Scene Three, p. 202 in this volume.
29. *Mojada*'s first production at Victory Gardens in 2013 was set in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood; in 2019 it had a sold-out run at the Public Theater in New York, where it was set in Corona, Queens. See "Production History" in this volume, as well as "Interview with Luis Alfaro," p. 290.
30. Puerto Ricans and Cubans are one of the most established Latinx communities in New York; by contrast, Mexicans are New York City's most recent Latinx community. See Badillo 2009.

31. Page 214 in this volume.
32. Both L.A. and New York have both had thriving garment industries, so casting Medea as a seamstress in either city is not unrealistic. For a history of these industries in L.A., see Maram, Long and Berg 1980; Ibarra Escobar 2003; Carracedo and Bahar 2007; Godsey 2013. For New York, Chin 2005. Alfaro's *Downtown* features a segment entitled "Lupe" which describes the sweatshops populated by undocumented Latinx women who work for less than minimum wage; see Román 1998: 190–2. In the New York production, Josefina undergoes a major transformation, as discussed above. In addition to becoming Puerto Rican, the character changes her food offerings: whereas Josefina sells *pan dulce* in the streets of East L.A., Luisa peddles *churros* in her food cart across Queens. A few months after *Mojada* was produced at The Public Theater, a woman was arrested for selling churros on the New York Subway; see Azi Paybarah, "Police Face a Backlash After Woman Selling Churros is Handcuffed," *New York Times*, November 11, 2019: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/11/nyregion/churro-lady-subway-arrest.html> (accessed January 24, 2020).

## Works Cited

### Abbreviations

- EGF* = Davies, M. (ed.), (1988) *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.
- FGH* = Jacoby, F. (ed.) (1923–58), *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Leiden: Brill.
- PMG* = Page, D. L. (ed.) (1962), *Poetae Melici Graeci*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- TrGF*<sup>3</sup> = Radt, S. (ed.) (1985), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Vol. 3 (Aeschylus), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- TrGF*<sup>4</sup> = Radt, S. (ed.) (1977) *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Vol. 4 (Sophocles), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- TrGF*<sup>5,2</sup> = Kannicht, R. (ed.) (2004) *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Vol. 5.2 (Euripides), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
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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).

*Bruja*, 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 nauhcan (from the four directions)*

*Niquintatzilia (I call you)*

*Ic axcan yez (to my grip)*

*Tla xihualauh (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.)*

**DIJE, 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 *nubes* 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 verguenza!*"

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 *muuy* 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. *Ai 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 *chilaquiles*."

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 aqui*.

*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** *Papi!*

**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.*

*Entonces?*

**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 romantico!*

**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** DAAAD!

**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** *Ai*, 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) *MUNECAS . . .*

**Tita** yells back. **Medea** stiffens.

**Tita** *AQUI ESTAMOS!*

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

**Tita** notices **Medea's** apprehension.

**Tita** *Ai*, 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 conozco.*

**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.*) *Ai*, 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** *Ai*, 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, Tía 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** *Axquēniuhqui.*

*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.*

Armida 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 Tita'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** "Vamonos" . . .

**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, *huevo*.

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 raped.*  
**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, *vieja*."

**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.

"*Quizasssss!*"

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. *Tlazocamatli.*

*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 LAX, 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 Try 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** *MUNECAS!*

**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 *rancho*, 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, *chismosa!* 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 Armida 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 Tía Armida!

**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, *companera*, 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 brujeria.* 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 *Tía* 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!

Noooooooo . . .

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

**Hason** (offstage) Acan! Acan!

MEDEEEEEAAAAA.

*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 HIJOOOOOOOOOOOO!

## 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.*



## Production History

This production history is as complete as current information has allowed. It includes only professional productions of Luis Alfaro's Greek plays which have been staged until January 2020; staged readings have been excluded. This history stems from information provided to me directly by various theaters and directors, as well as from archival and web research. At times, casting and creative team information could only be gleaned from reviews. All names below are listed as they are found in the official material from that production, such as the printed programs or the production's official website. I have also included a selection of reviews and web sources for each production; these are listed in order of publication date. All web links were last accessed on January 24, 2020.

### *Electricidad*

#### 1. Borderlands Theater (Tucson, AZ): September 17–28, 2003

##### *Creative Team*

*Director:* Barclay Goldsmith

*Set:* John Longhofer

*Lighting:* John Dahlstrand

*Costume:* Maryann Trombino

*Sound:* T. Greg Squires

*Stage Manager:* John Sweeney

*Choreography:* Eva Tessler

##### *Cast*

*Clemencia:* Alma Martinez

*Electricidad:* Minerva García

*Orestes:* Justin Huen

*Unspecified cast:* Alida Wilson-Gunn, Mike Rabago, Norma Medina, Rosanne Couston, Carolota Wilson, Rene Skinner, Eva Tessler

##### *Reviews*

- James Reel, *Tucson Weekly*, September 25, 2003: <https://www.tucsonweekly.com/tucson/adaptation/Content?oid=1074009>

##### *Web Sources*

- About the Artists listing: <http://www.abouttheartists.com/productions/110413-electricidad-at-pima-community-college-center-for-the-arts-proscenium-theatre-2003>
- "World Premiere of *Electricidad* in Tucson," *Green Valley News*, August 22, 2003: [https://www.gvnews.com/news/world-premiere-of-electricidad-in-tucson/article\\_f8029f0f-1894-5a46-b980-c5bdfd448158.html](https://www.gvnews.com/news/world-premiere-of-electricidad-in-tucson/article_f8029f0f-1894-5a46-b980-c5bdfd448158.html)

#### 2. Goodman Theatre (Chicago, IL): June 19–July 25, 2004 (in association with Teatro Vista)

##### *Creative Team*

*Director:* Henry Godinez

*Scenic Design:* Riccardo Hernández

*Lighting Design:* Christopher Akerlind

*Costume Design:* Christopher Acebo

*Sound Design:* Ray Nardelli and Joshua Horvath

*Music:* Gustavo Leone

*Choreography:* Wilfredo Rivera

*Fight Consultant:* Nick Sandys

*Stage Management:* Alden Vasquez and Rolando Linares

*Production Dramaturg:* Rick Desrochers

##### *Cast*

*Clemencia:* Sandra Marquez

*Electricidad:* Cecilia Suárez

*Ifigenia:* Charín Alvarez

*Orestes:* Maximino Arciniega, Jr.

*Abuela:* Ivonne Coll

*Nino:* Edward Torres

*Las Vecinas:* Laura E. Crotte, Sandra Delgado, Tanya Saracho, Marisabel Suarez

##### *Reviews*

- Jonathan Abarbanel, *Theater Mania*, July 7, 2004: [https://www.theatermania.com/chicago/reviews/electricidad\\_4896.html](https://www.theatermania.com/chicago/reviews/electricidad_4896.html)
- Mary Shen Barnidge, *Windy City Times*, July 7, 2004: <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Theater-Electricidad/5558.html>
- Kerry Reid, *Chicago Reader*, July 8, 2004: <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/electricidad/Content?oid=916007>

##### *Web Sources*

- Production webpage: <https://www.goodmantheatre.org/season/0304/electricidad/>

#### 3. Mark Taper Forum (Los Angeles, CA): March 27–May 15, 2005

##### *Creative Team*

*Director:* Lisa Peterson

*Set Design:* Rachel Hauck

*Lighting Design:* Geoff Korf

*Costume Design:* Christopher Acebo

*Music and Sound Design:* Paul James Prendergast

*Fight Direction:* Steve Rankin

*Production Stage Manager:* James T. McDermott

*Stage Managers:* Susie Walsh and David Frandlin

*Production Dramaturg:* John Glore

##### *Cast*

*Clemencia:* Bertila Damas

*Electricidad:* Zilah Mendoza