

JUANA--MONOLOGUE

(Prelude. Music fades. As lights begin to dim for the commencement of the play, there is a focus on a still image of Sor Juana. The audience hears JUANA's words.)

JUANA.

With all the hazards of the sea in mind
No one would dare embark
If in advance the dangers were foretold
She would tread not in the dark

If the rider were to ponder
The furious thrust of the beast below
She would never saddle the fury wild
No human hand could rein the flow

But if one chose brave audacity
Despite the perils therein
And steered a blazing chariot
To reach Apollo's breath
Then she would live life, its all
Not blandly endure her days 'til death.

(Lights out. The play begins...)

START JUANA. Dear Madre, as you can see, I hardly get a daylight hour to myself, and when I do, I am never lonely.

FILOTHEA. And yet, you should practice other activities than solitude.

JUANA. Oh! I do.

FILOTHEA. I know.

SARA. Sor Juana, you and I are quite similar...in age... why, we should spend more time together...cross-stitching. You know how to cross-stitch, do you not? We could spend hours like that. You and me...sewing and talking, talking and sewing. Sewing for the glory of the Lord.

JUANA (*beat*). The last time I cross-stitched, I drew blood.

SARA. Perhaps if you practiced...

JUANA. No! (*Beat*.) Thank you, holy sister.

FILOTHEA. Juana, you've been here for many years and yet, in many ways you are renowned in the province and unknown to us. Sor Sara is eager to reach out to you...to spend time with you, to be your friend.

SARA. Very eager.

FILOTHEA (*pause. Deeply sincere*). As am I. With age one begins to cherish true connection of mind, of heart.

JUANA (*touched*). Madre Filothea. (*Pause*.) Why not attend one of my salons? (*Beat*.) You too, Sor Sara, join us for our discussions of philosophy, or mathematics...or our games of poetry.

FILOTHEA. Oh, Juana, I'm afraid we would have nothing to contribute, sitting with all those illustrious and worldly men and women, discussing matters so difficult.

JUANA. You can learn. Use your God-given gift. I have all the books.

SARA. So many books.

JUANA. Yes, and all of them have something to teach. Oh, where to start? Aesop? Aristotle?

SARA. Your favorite books would be best, no?

FILOTHEA. Could I suggest, perhaps this one? (*Points to a book on the shelf*.)

JUANA. Oh! Sophocles...a wonderful choice...his plays sing off the page and onto the stage. (*JUANA hands the book to FILOTHEA. FILOTHEA hands it to SARA.*)

FILOTHEA. And that one?

JUANA. Ah, Copernicus. (*JUANA hands the book to FILOTHEA who hands it to SARA.*) The moon, the stars, the earth all in your hands. Although, (*Beat—in a whisper.*) Galileo has a more logical argument, placing the sun as the center of the universe...with the earth rotating— (*SARA and FILOTHEA, scandalized, cross themselves. JUANA quickly jumps in and does the same.*) And however mistaken, these theories bring us closer to God by contemplating the beauty of His labor.

FILOTHEA. Amen. (*Looks at the books.*) Well, these are a start...

SARA. But Madre Filothea, this book on her table...?

JUANA. The one that I am reading... would enchant you. It is poetry. Góngora. Please. (*Hands the book to SARA.*) Knowledge is the best weight to carry.

FILOTHEA. So true.

SARA. Sor Juana, I care to see that one. (*She takes a book.*)

JUANA. Certainly.

SARA. And, if Madre Filothea does not mind, this one. END

JUANA (*realizes what is happening*). With all due respect...

START PADRE. For years I have defended your work, your studies, to skeptical clerics; I believed that learning and writing were invaluable tools for a woman of God. But your weakness has proven me wrong. You cannot handle your learning, look where it has led! Blasphemy! These are troubled times, the rains, the ruined crops, the native rebellions. God's wrath is upon us. The Inquisition is relentless and your hunger has put all of us, ALL OF US, at risk. God forgive me for indulging your talent. I forgot to mentor your soul. Sor Juana, do you love God?

JUANA. Padre, you know my answer.

PADRE. Do I?

JUANA. Yes. *(Pause.)* I love the Lord.

PADRE. Again.

JUANA *(breathes)*. I love the Lord.

PADRE. Say it with your soul!

JUANA. I love the Lord! *(Long pause.)*

PADRE. I made exceptions for you, but you have forsaken my tolerance and abused my trust. You have been living in religion without religion. Save yourself, Sor Juana. Renounce. Pull out every single word you have stitched onto that cloth. Now.

JUANA. Lope de Vega, Calderón, Góngora are all published writers and men of the cloth. Man has always ...

PADRE. You are not a man!

JUANA. I know.

PADRE. Until you see the grave errors of your ways, until you destroy this stitch...I will not see you. I will not accept your confession.

(FILOTHEA, SARA and NOVICE are shocked.)

JUANA *(shocked and scared)*. Padre ...

PADRE. I will not recognize you, nor bless you. Nor hold your hand in the search for God. *(Beat.)* I will recommend ex-communication.

JUANA. Please, no!

FILOTHEA. God have mercy!

PADRE. Remember what you did that drove you here.

JUANA. Padre, remember what saved me.

PADRE. My daughter: please. Pull the thread from the cloth and renounce the words that hold you captive from God. I beg you.

(Pause. JUANA, moved by PADRE's plea, tacitly takes the cloth and truly attempts to destroy it. She looks at the cloth, slowly shaking her head. She doesn't understand herself why she is refusing.)

JUANA *(softly)*. No.

PADRE. You are dead to me. *(Beat.)* Take Sor Juana back to her room. *(Coughs.)*

FILOTHEA. Father, your heart.

PADRE. What heart? *(Coughs.)* God will grant the time He sees fit. *(Pause.)* May God save you, Sor Juana.

END

(PADRE exits. SARA and NOVICE stare at JUANA. JUANA is devastated.)

NOVICE. It's but a cloth with thread.

SARA. Shhh!

FILOTHEA. Come, Sor Juana.

XOCHITL. Tufts sticking out in every direction. She looked like a hen that had survived a rooster fight.

JUANA. I was fourteen. I was trying to learn Greek.

XOCHITL. And every time you stumbled, off came a tuft of hair.

VICEREINE. And this drab clothing?

JUANA. Take it off! Off! Off! ...

XOCHITL. Patience, *mi'jita*. (*XOCHITL unhooks JUANA's habit.*)

VICEREINE. Yes, take it off!

XOCHITL. Patience, *mi Doña*. All good things take time.

START (*XOCHITL removes JUANA's habit, revealing a colorful, beautiful, alluring gown. JUANA looks at herself, touching her hair, her body, her gown. The crucifix is lifted.*)

JUANA. Look at me. (*The room becomes a colorful palace room. A fanfare is heard.*) *Dios mio!*

VICEREINE. Now, that's what I like to see. That dress is so pretty on you. (*VICEREINE places her hands on JUANA's hips and guides her to a long mirror. She stands right behind JUANA as she looks at her own reflection.*) Now, tell me, what do you see?

JUANA. It's you and it's me. And yet, it's not. (*She rearranges the dress...pulls off some frill until it's "her way." Like a young girl.*) There, that's better. Oh, I like this dress. It makes me look pretty, doesn't it?

VICEREINE. No... you make the dress beautiful.

JUANA. But underneath, there's an angry old spirit.

(*VICEREINE and XOCHITL look at each other, VICEREINE erupts in laughter.*)

VICEREINE (*throws her arms around JUANA*). You are so funny. So funny. I love it when you say things like that. (*Takes her hands and they both spin around.*) Juana is an angry old spirit, Juana is an angry old spirit! An angry old spirit that looks good in a dress. (*Stops spinning and then hugs.*) Did you hear her? This country is so wonderfully... odd. Isn't this a funny land, Xochitl?

XOCHITL. Yes. Ha-ha. Only laughter in our bellies.

VICEREINE. Grumpy old woman.

XOCHITL. Juana is right. She's the oldest person in this whole palace. But she just doesn't have enough experience to be her true age. Not yet.

VICEREINE. You Mayans say the strangest things.

XOCHITL. *Mi Doña*, I am Aztec.

VICEREINE (*laughs*). Regardless, I want Juana to turn into an old woman by my side, so we can be two cranky ladies together.

XOCHITL. But the Viceroy just announced that all ladies without noble lineage must leave the court.

JUANA. And there's only one "lady" with no title.

VICEREINE. I don't think he knows how much Juana means to me.

XOCHITL. I think he does.

JUANA. Did you speak to him?

VICEREINE. Oh, why speak to that man these days? He says his hands are tied... Spanish decorum must be kept even in her colonies. HA! He who has probably spawned a little colony of bastards. Oh, nothing like you. (*Beat.*) Juana, I want you to stay.

JUANA. So do I, and I wrote a persuasive letter to the Viceroy listing all the reasons why I should.

XOCHITL. Twenty-five pages long.

VICEREINE. I know. *(Pulls it out.)* Thank God I got to it before he saw it. Juana, you are no longer a child. You cannot directly ask for things.

JUANA. He needs to hear me.

VICEREINE. Beg forgiveness, not permission. An aristocrat always employs more subtle and successful solutions!

JUANA. Hence my problem.

VICEREINE. My dear, you weren't born with nobility—

JUANA. And I'm certainly not going to marry it. *(Long pause.)* No! There must be a better alternative.

VICEREINE. If you marry my uncle Fabio, you will always be a part of the household.

JUANA. Don Fabio?

XOCHITL. That sore, dry, cranky man?

JUANA. I have no dowry ...

VICEREINE. I have offered Don Fabio a dowry in your name. And now he wishes to ask for your hand in marriage.

JUANA. Mi señora! You should have spoken with me before ...

VICEREINE. Juanita, it's the simplest way. You are the most wonderful friend I've ever had.

JUANA. Then why marry me to Don Fabio?

XOCHITL. That man has never laughed in his life.

VICEREINE. He can provide.

JUANA. Señora, you told me that marriage was the devil's hunting ground.

VICEREINE. Oh, only on the bad days. Besides, Don Fabio is nothing like the Viceroy.

XOCHITL. True. The Viceroy is handsome.

VICEREINE. Fabio is Fabio.

XOCHITL. Is he sickly? Could he die soon?

VICEREINE. He's a healthy man with many years ahead.

XOCHITL. Decades and decades of boredom.

JUANA. There must be another way.

VICEREINE. Juana, my words are weak and ephemeral and subject to my husband's whims. Marriage is the only protection and insurance you can have.

JUANA. But I don't love him.

VICEREINE. How fortunate. Believe me, the less you love him, the better.

JUANA. But, I really don't...

VICEREINE. Would you rather we never see each other again?

JUANA. No! No... it is simply that...

VICEREINE. Listen, Juana, it's time that you learn a little about being a woman. Compromise. Never aim to win and you will never lose... negotiate... yield... and you will get further than you think. Do not try to conquer... it will make others want to destroy you. Men who conquer win or die; women who compromise always survive. ---END

JUANA. Marriage is not...

VICEREINE. You're frightened, are you not?

JUANA. Yes! No! I don't know! Forgive me, señora, but I've heard that men are like farmers... they spread a little seed and then think they own the land.

XOCHITL. And the plow, and the horse, and the—

VICEREINE. Allow them to think they own you. There's power in passivity, my dear. Strong women are like the

XOCHITL. I'm Aztec!

VICEREINE. —This maid—by her given Christian name, Agnes. (*XOCHITL makes a face. PEDRO is still staring at JUANA.*) Come, Pedro, Padre Nuñez is waiting.

PEDRO. Si señora. (*VICEREINE and PEDRO exit.*)

JUANA (*trying to grasp*). Xochitl, I just agreed to marry Don Fabio.

XOCHITL. Listen, *mi'jita*, I can stop the Vicereine right now and tell her you've decided against it.

JUANA. I used to be a poor girl on a poor farm. No one ever believed I would be able to get out. Now my poems are read in the great salons of the Viceroy's court. I have the Vicereine's favor. I left my family and past for this. All possibilities start and end here. So, if I must marry a dour man—

XOCHITL. You will find no poetry in his bed.

JUANA. Bodies are just clothes for our sexless and eternal souls. If they use my femaleness to trap me, I will use my femaleness to liberate me.

XOCHITL. The gods have provided you with a gift. They've chosen you to whisper in your ear. You should honor their gift... not sell it like a merchant.

JUANA. I'm not selling anything. (*Pause.*) I will write.

XOCHITL. But you will find no inspiration. A frog that wants to fly should not climb on a dodo's back. You have no affection for this man.

JUANA. Passion is for the primitive, Xochitl. You can't even write or read. You do not understand the decisions of the intellect.

XOCHITL. Then why do I know this decision is not sound?

JUANA. Curb your instincts, Agnes. We are in a civilized world now. There are no spirits here. I will marry Don Fabio.

(*A strong wind blows through the bedroom. XOCHITL is the only one that feels and hears it.*)

START

SCENE FOUR

AT RISE: *VICEROY is sitting on his throne. A bound SILVIO is on his knees in front the VICEROY.*

VICEROY (*pulls out a paper*). Silvio Burgas?

SILVIO. Yes.

VICEROY. Call me sir!

SILVIO. Yes, sir.

VICEROY. It says here that my guards caught you in one of my foyers, stealing.

SILVIO. It was a mistake... (*VICEROY looks at him.*) sir.

VICEROY. This is the fourth time we've been robbed. I have also heard that the Marqués de Laguna and the Duque de Granada were robbed. You wouldn't know anything about that? Would you?

SILVIO. Sir, you flatter me.

VICEROY. You unrepentant little bastard. I thought I'd seen the last of your sorry face when I left from Spain.

SILVIO. I came to find the riches of the Americas.

VICEROY. Well don't take them from me. If your father was still alive...

SILVIO. As far as I know, my father is still quite dead.

VICEROY. Which is what *you* should be. Silvio, you had an honorable father.

SILVIO. Who did nothing for me and my mother but pretend we didn't exist.

VICEROY. He had his *real* family to attend to. No whore can change that. And when your mother died, he did provide you with an education. Where is your gratitude?

SILVIO. Gratitude? I barely had anything to eat.

VICEROY. But you learned!

SILVIO. Knowledge does not make up for money.

VICEROY. There is no need to show you any mercy. Your father is dead. You are here and not in Spain. You are nothing but an ungrateful boy with no money and no title who has the nerve to steal from me.

(Enter PEDRO.)

PEDRO. Who's this?

VICEROY. This is Silvio Burgas, from Madrid, son of the Marqués de Salta.

PEDRO. Of the Marqués? Good evening, sir. *(Bows to SILVIO.)*

SILVIO. Better evening for you, I suppose.

VICEROY. No need for formality, Don Pedro. This is one of the Marqués' bastards.

PEDRO *(wrinkles his nose)*. Oh, I see. What did the little bastard do?

VICEROY. He's a thief. I'm trying to decide what to do about him. So what do you have to tell me. How is my dear wife? *(PEDRO whispers something in the VICEROY's ear.)* What???

(The VICEROY stands and starts to pace.)
PEDRO. Mi señor, I beg you, please calm down.

VICEROY. Calm down? You wish me to be calm?

PEDRO. I beseech you, señor. Be seated.

VICEROY. I issued that order to get rid of Juana! And now you are saying that... that...

PEDRO. She is now engaged to Don Fabio.

VICEROY. No! That Juana child is affecting my wife in the strangest ways. Oh, what is in the air of this odd new land? My constant wife is becoming defiant, distracted, disappearing before my very eyes. She's reading books behind locked doors; writing in hidden journals. Developing her thinking, she says. This cannot be good for her.

PEDRO. If it is any reassurance, señor, the Vicereine seems quite content.

VICEROY. And that is very troubling to me. I haven't seen her like this since the first year of our marriage. None of my actions seem to affect her anymore. Her mind is elsewhere. But she's mine, and I love her. I cannot lose Laura, you understand?

PEDRO. Well, perhaps the wedding shouldn't happen.

VICEROY. I cannot cancel another nobleman's wedding. *(Beat.)* Can I?

PEDRO. No, *(Pause.)* but perhaps you could encourage Don Fabio to cancel his own wedding.

VICEROY. The fool is so in love with Juana, he perspires at the very mention of her name. He thinks she is worth more than diamonds and gold. He would never cancel the proceeding.

PEDRO. He wouldn't *(Pause.)* unless Juana became less valuable. The girl is pure and untouched. But I could change that. END

(VICEREINE opens the door. JUANA lets the dust ruffle fall. XOCHITL turns to face VICEREINE.)

VICEREINE. Where is that girl?

XOCHITL. Mi Doña, I'm certain she's not far from here.

VICEREINE. We are all waiting for her. Did she do as I asked and write a poem in honor of Don Fabio?

XOCHITL. Yes, mi Doña.

VICEREINE. As long as all her poems are about her husband's virtues... Don Fabio will allow her to write, recite, and certainly publish.

XOCHITL. I think she is practicing her very *short* ode as we speak.

VICEREINE. Let us go find her. The time to perform is now.

(VICEREINE rushes back out, XOCHITL picks up the tray, follows her and looks around the room before closing the door behind her. JUANA begins to crawl out from under her bed but hears someone open the door and she goes back into hiding. SILVIO sneaks into the room and quietly closes the door behind him. He is obviously looking for information on JUANA. He stops at her writings. He picks them up.)

SILVIO. "A poem for Don Fabio." Let's see... Blah-Blah-Blah.

(An offended JUANA hits her head on the bed. SILVIO begins to look at the bed. A noise at the door. SILVIO rushes to hide in the closet and slams the door. JUANA

thinks he exited the room. PEDRO opens the door to JUANA's room.)

START PEDRO. Juana, the Viceroy commands that you... *(Noticing she is not in the room, he does not close the door.)* Where is the little...? *(Sniffs.)* Ah, but it still carries her scent. *(To an imaginary JUANA.)* Ah, it appears we are alone, little Juana. *(PEDRO walks around the room. He eyes the bed and walks toward it.)* Where are you, Juanita? *(He pauses and sits on the bed.)* Is this the bed where you lie, little Juanita? *(He grabs a pillow and talks to it.)* Is this where you dream, your woman dreams? *(He hugs the pillow tenderly.)* Is this where your heart trembles with anticipation of...of... *(Listens to the pillow, with disgust.)* a book? How many times have you met my gaze and dismissed me by simply turning the page? WHY? You can love me, want me, fear me. But do not dismiss me! I too have a heart and mind...and I hate being so alone. *(Tenderly.)* Are you listening to me? *(Beat.)* I said, are you listening to me? Take this poetry, you wench. END

(PEDRO jams and rubs the pillow onto his crotch. XOCHITL appears at the doorway.)

XOCHITL. Señor!

PEDRO *(stops shocked)*. Xochitl!

PEDRO & XOCHITL *(in unison)*. What are you doing here?

XOCHITL *(curtsies but is outraged)*. Señor, this is Juana's room.

PEDRO. It is?

XOCHITL. And that is Juana's bed!

PEDRO (*changing strategy*). I know. And thank God you are here, for I've suffered a terrible accident. In my search for Juana, I have fallen.

XOCHITL. It certainly seems that way.

PEDRO. I carelessly tripped. And I have injured myself so badly, that I had to drag myself to this position.

XOCHITL. It is quite a position.

PEDRO. I fear I cannot walk.

XOCHITL. You are in pain?

PEDRO. I am sore.

XOCHITL. I see.

PEDRO. And now, you must help me.

XOCHITL. Señor, I will do what I can.

(XOCHITL does not move. PEDRO realizes this and must crawl to XOCHITL and pull himself up. PEDRO uses XOCHITL as a crutch.)

PEDRO. Do not mention this incident to the Vicereine. I do not wish for her to worry about my health. (*XOCHITL grunts and sighs.*) Am I too heavy?

XOCHITL. No, señor. (*Grunts.*) My shoulders are used to this type of burden.

PEDRO. You Mayans are so strong.

XOCHITL (*jams the pillow in his mouth*). Bite this, señor; it will muffle the agony.

(Exeunt. Pause. JUANA begins to crawl out from under the bed.)

JUANA. That insolent little...

(SILVIO opens the door to the closet. JUANA, in a crawling position, and SILVIO look at each other in shock.)

START SILVIO. I'm sorry. (*Beat.*) I beg your pardon. (*SILVIO shuts himself in the closet. JUANA is stunned. She stands up, covers herself with a shawl, and opens the closet door. A warm light from the closet; SILVIO bows. There is an immediate tension and attraction between the two.*) Don Silvio Granadera, Marqués de las Tampas. Master of Letters and Philosophy. (*Beat.*) May I? (*He steps out of the closet.*)

JUANA. Are you looking for a dress?

SILVIO. I am looking for Juana Inés Ramirez de Asbaje.

JUANA. In there? No. No. No. She's much too complicated to fit in such a small space. (*She pulls out a dress.*) Here, try the blue one.

SILVIO. I beg your pardon?

JUANA. Sir, you are a gentleman. Surely you know that it is highly improper for a gentleman to speak alone in a young woman's bedroom. You are either here to steal from me or borrow clothes.

SILVIO. I prefer the red one. It's in the back.

JUANA. It is a favorite of mine as well. (*She hands him the red dress.*) I hope it fits. On your way out, please shut the door. (*SILVIO starts to pull off his shirt.*) Señor, what are you doing?

SILVIO. I am changing.

JUANA. Here?

SILVIO. Certainly, what if I should return to my room and the dress should not fit?

JUANA. Señor, surely you do not intend to... SEÑOR!

SILVIO (*pulls on the skirt*). If these are the trappings I must wear to allow my soul to speak to yours, so be it. What do you think?

JUANA. Lovely.

SILVIO. This is rather uncomfortable. How can you stand wearing something this tight every day?

JUANA. Tight? You are not even wearing the bustier.

SILVIO. Should I?

JUANA. If you wish to be dressed correctly, yes. (*Hands SILVIO the bustier.*)

SILVIO. I see. (*Takes off the shirt.*)

JUANA. Señor!

SILVIO. Really, Señorita Juana, I'm surprised by your surprise. Aren't you the one that wrote "Souls are sexless"?

JUANA. Sir, you are not exposing your soul.

SILVIO. Unless this is too much for you.

JUANA. Allow me.

(JUANA puts on SILVIO's coat to cover herself and helps SILVIO with the bustier. She is now dressed as a man, he as a woman.)

SILVIO. Thank you, señorita, I appreciate your cooperation. And I simply don't want people to speak ill of me at the party. You know how society events are. So many tedious rules. Somebody would be sure to comment on the impropriety of my lack of bustier. (*Gasps.*) Delicately. Delicately. Santa Madre de Jesus (Holy Mother of Jesus), how do you breathe with these on?

JUANA. We are not supposed to. Don't you know, we spend our whole lives holding our breath and our tongue. (*Beat.*) Why are you here?

SILVIO. I am here to meet you.

JUANA. I'm impressed. A man that dares dress like a woman to meet a woman must be quite a man.

SILVIO. I hear you are quite a woman

JUANA. It depends on what "quite a woman" is.

SILVIO. I also heard you were beautiful.

JUANA. And now you can see if you heard correctly.

SILVIO. There are certain men that say there are only so many virtues a woman can shoulder.

JUANA. And then there is you.

SILVIO. There is always an exception for the exceptional. And you, *querida*, are wise in noting it.

JUANA. Oh, you fancy yourself different from other men?

SILVIO. No. It is quite plain; I am different.

JUANA. Underneath it all, you still look like other men.

You walk like other men. Your scent is like others. END

SILVIO (*sexy*). But I can assure you, my dear, my taste is quite different. (*Pause. Sees a book on the desk.*) Ah, the clever girl reads. *Don Quixote* ... Cervantes ... quite the master ... pursuit of windmills.

JUANA. A wonderful book. "It is a mark of well-born men to show gratitude for benefits received and ingratitude ..." (*Overlapping with SILVIO.*)

SILVIO. "...and ingratitude is one of the sins which most offends God."

JUANA. You know the quote.

SILVIO. I know the book.

JUANA. "The reason for the unreason with which you treat my reason so weakens ..." (*Overlapping with SILVIO.*)

SILVIO. "...so weakens my reason, that with reason, I complain of your beauty."

JUANA. Impressive.

SILVIO.

"You've undressed my heart, dissolved it
Your hands drowning in its liquid"

(*Beat.*) I would suggest a different word here than
"drowning."

JUANA. But that is the precise word.

SILVIO. Vagueness has its virtues.

START

JUANA. If I wasn't a lady and you weren't a gentleman,
and you were forced to speak your honest mind, with no
rules, no avoidance of cruelty. (*Places her hand firmly
on his lower arm.*) What would you say of the works
before you?

SILVIO (*pause; honest*). I would say that they are by no
means perfect...the meter dances to a strange beat, the
rhyme is sometimes forced, and the length on some is...
But they are eloquent and ferocious...betraying a wis-
dom too ripe for your young years. I would say that
whatever you do, you must keep writing. Imperfect po-
ems are the only ones that make a significant impact on
the soul. (*JUANA kisses the inside of SILVIO's hand.*)
Juana?

JUANA. Please do not tell the Vicereine or Don Fabio
about my behavior. I assure you, I am usually a virtuous,
controlled woman.

SILVIO. What a pity.

JUANA. Don Silvio, I have not been able to sleep since the
eve we met. I close my eyes and I see you. You are
caught between my heart and my voice, trapped inside
my eyelids at night. Nothing is right: My blood is think-

ing and my mind is feeling; I'm going mad...and you
are making me this way.

SILVIO. But you are to wed another man.

JUANA. Yes! And my reason judged that as the most intel-
ligent, prudent choice to make.

SILVIO. A very sound decision indeed. It ensures your
safety and maintenance for the rest of your days. Juana,
rest assured that this "impulse" towards me could be
nothing more than a whim, a sweet fancy, a craving of
some sort...

JUANA. Please stop pretending!

SILVIO. Pretending?

JUANA. You are not like the others who pass through
these halls. Don't be so polite, so reasonable, so proper.
I know what you want.

SILVIO. What do I want?

JUANA (*pause*). Everything. You dare hope for everything.
It's in your eyes, Don Silvio. (*Beat.*) Why did you come
here? My life was decided and clear. I had no pangs. I
don't want any man. I don't want any marriage. Ever!
And yet, I want you. Why?

SILVIO. I could leave.

JUANA. Yes, but I'm afraid you (*Touches her head.*) will
not go away. You spoke words I had thought but had
never said out loud.

SILVIO. Words are syllables and air.

JUANA. You said, in your world, a woman would have
access to the world. Is that true?

SILVIO (*pause*). I stand by my name. END

JUANA. And she would be allowed—no, encouraged—to
write, to read, to partake in social intellectual functions?
Allowed to shine without compromise or fear? To speak

START PEDRO. The cad got away!
 VICEREINE. Silence, Pedro! (*To JUANA.*) Do not worry, my dear, your true love will never leave you. Juana. Now go eat something and lie down, you look so pale
 JUANA. Of course. Thank you, señora. (*JUANA exits.*)
 PEDRO. The man is a rogue and Juana a...
 VICEREINE. Silence, Don Pedro! You must be respectful of the man Juana loves. (*Pause.*) Which is why, you must be merciful and quick, when you kill him.
 PEDRO. I beg your pardon?
 VICEREINE. Don Pedro, you must run your blade swiftly when you slice his throat. Or spear that heart of his in two. I will not allow him to destroy that girl's future. Don Silvio, philosopher, nobleman, and Master of Letters, shall not live to see another day. No others shall know about any of this, especially the Viceroy.
 PEDRO. Señora, the knave is gone.
 VICEREINE. Pedro, do you really think a man like Don Silvio would leave a woman like Juana? He'll be back. You will wait outside with sword in hand.
 PEDRO. But Don Silvio is a gifted swordsman. And I have never—
 VICEREINE. No time for thoughts. Attack from all sides. Wear down all defenses. Exhaust him. Confuse him. Overpower him. Do you understand, Pedro?
 PEDRO. A murder?
 VICEREINE (*pause. Aware of the sin she's committing.*) Let us just call it: an act of passion. (*VICEREINE exits.*)
 PEDRO (*ambivalent*). An errand of weight and dignity ... END

(*Enter XOCHITL.*)

XOCHITL. Forgive me, Don Pedro, I was looking for the Vicereine.
 PEDRO. Xochitl! I am glad you are here! Just the person I was looking for.
 XOCHITL. Señor?
 PEDRO. I have an important errand I must do but I must notify the Viceroy before I leave. (*PEDRO takes out paper and pen and scribbles quickly on the paper.*) Xochitl, can you understand what is written here?
 XOCHITL. No, señor.
 PEDRO. Good. Take this message to the Viceroy immediately. It involves an affair of state.
 XOCHITL. I will deliver it to the appropriate hands.

(*XOCHITL exits, PEDRO draws his sword and crosses himself.*)

SCENE THREE

AT RISE: *JUANA is in her room, packing. She is more interested in bringing books than clothes. Enter XOCHITL.*

XOCHITL. Juana! Juana Inés! What are you doing?
 JUANA. Nothing.
 XOCHITL. You have your favorite books all in one bag.
 JUANA. The Vicereine is interested in reading them.
 XOCHITL (*pulls a brush from the bag*). Is she interested in using your brush as well?
 JUANA (*pulls it away from XOCHITL*). I knew I had misplaced it.

PADRE. God has granted you a blessing and a burden.
(Pause.) In my convent, you will always be allowed to write.

JUANA. Padre, will you be my confessor, my tutor, my protector?

PADRE. My child, I will be your Father.

JUANA (pause. JUANA kneels and gives him gold chain).
Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.

PADRE. Redeem yourself, my child; be true to God.

JUANA. I will be Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

(Lights dim. Everything that was colorful and decorative, that resembled the court, is returned into the trunk, taken away. Stark grays. It is now the present again. A sole lit candle. JUANA, dressed in habit, lies with her head on the table. NOVICE is shuffling outside her door.)

START JUANA. Who's there? (No response. JUANA stands and walks over to the door.) Once again, who is there? (No response.) The devil have your tongue? You bring no food, no linen, barely any water. You've taken everything and given nothing. Why would you possibly need to be outside my door?

(NOVICE pushes a stack of paper under the door. JUANA picks it up. She opens the door and is surprised to see the NOVICE who stands with a basket, nervously looking around to see if anyone has seen her. NOVICE scoots in the door past JUANA. JUANA closes the door. Silence. NOVICE places an inkwell and pen on the table.)

NOVICE. For you, Sor Juana. (JUANA is moved, overwhelmed.) The paper, the pen. (Pause.) They are a gift (Pause.) from Father Nuñez. (Pause.) He wanted you to have them (Pause.) so you could write. (JUANA looks up.) Write poems.

JUANA. Father Nuñez has forgiven me?

NOVICE. Padre Nuñez does not want your talent to waste away. But you must eat. You've been twelve days without food. Here, some bread, please.

JUANA (ignores the food). Padre Nuñez will allow me to write again? To write poems?

NOVICE. Yes! (Pause.) In honor of the Bishop of Puebla.

JUANA. The Bishop?

NOVICE. In honor of the Church. Padre Nuñez, in his graciousness, gives you these gifts on the condition that, on your promise, he will see what you write. You are to stay within the topic or form that he requests. You are always to share your writing with him. You are to write within the confines of what he ordains appropriate for a woman. And although you are not to publish again, your beautiful poems will honor God.

JUANA. And I can write again?

NOVICE. Yes. (JUANA gently reaches for the pen and paper and picks up a piece of bread.) As soon as you destroy the cross-stitch, you ... you are free to write again.

(JUANA picks up the cross-stitch. She reads it.)

JUANA. Hand me the instrument.

(NOVICE does. JUANA looks at the cross-stitch again, closes her hand around the blade and runs the knife

along the inside of her palm. Blood drips out of her clenched fist. NOVICE screams:)

NOVICE. Sor Juana!

JUANA (*low and fierce*). You tell Padre Nuñez that I will not tear out these lines. Tell him that I will not be constrained by what he ordains appropriate for a woman. I have many things wrong but I will not ask forgiveness for my sex or the talent that God granted.

NOVICE. God have mercy. Are you crazy, Sor Juana?

JUANA. Tell *el Padre* I will not write any poems honoring the Bishop, or Earth or Heaven because I never intend to write again. Never.

NOVICE. Sor Juana, be reasonable, Compromise. Padre Nuñez has not altogether prohibited you from ...

JUANA. I have "negotiated" on everything that has ever crossed my path ... and with every agreement lost a little of myself. And I have hurt others. I have betrayed family, friends, freedom ... I have betrayed love. (*She holds up the cross-stitching.*) I will not betray this. Let God hear my testimony, let my words be etched in blood. I, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, swear never to write again. (*She presses her palm on the paper and hands the bloodied paper to the NOVICE.*) Listen to my silence. Go tell Padre Nuñez. END

(NOVICE takes the paper and scoots away. JUANA walks around the room, wraps her cross-stitching around her wound. She throws the papers on the floor and lowers herself into her chair. She places her head on the table.)

JUANA. I vowed. I vowed. I vowed.

(All the court characters appear: SILVIO, VICEREINE, VICEROY, PEDRO, XOCHITL, in shadows around her.)

JUANA (*looks up*). Are you not aware that it is a sin for me to speak to the memories of the dead? You are all dead. Gone. (*Laughs bitinglly. Pause.*) I have truly lost everything. I vowed ... (*Beat.*) I gave my word ... (*Beat.*) I am here for a reason! (*ALL CHARACTERS retreat, except SILVIO. He and JUANA lock gazes. Beat.*) Why is Loss the Sacred Price of love? (*SILVIO takes off JUANA's wrapping and kisses the palm of her hurt hand and exits. JUANA watches him go. A wind blows.*)

All could be yours, all could be mine.

If we had lived (*Beat.*) and died.

Different place, different time.

(JUANA returns to her desk. Sits. She instinctively reaches out for her pen. She retracts her hand. She pushes the pen and paper off her desk. She sits and waits.)

God have mercy on our souls.

(JUANA blows out the candle. Rests her head on the table. Lights go down. A light comes up on the NOVICE. She is looking at the paper with JUANA's bloodied handprint. She sets it down, opens a journal and begins to write.)

END OF PLAY