

Impure Thoughts (*without apology*)

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a drama between friends
a sacramental *loa*
a clown play
a defiance
and an impure apology

The events occur in a nun's cell in a cloister, Mexico City, 1693 and in Juana's mind. Both contain a library and a baroque sensibility.

CHARACTERS:

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a nun in Mexico (d. 1695)
Loa (not her real name); Juana's African-descendent slave
Manuel Fernández, Juana's friend and a priest

A Clown, she is a novice in the cloister, but also plays Juana's mother, a priest, and unworthy worthies (female saints) and other characters

Archbishop Francisco Aguiar y Seijas (Topdog), Juana's nemesis (may be played by Juana or one of the others above or a giant puppet)

“Why do you wound my heart
And then refuse to make it heal?
And since you took it from me,
Why do you leave it now
Abandoning the thing you robbed?”

- *St. John of the Cross*

-

*Early morning, before morning prayers.
A nun's cell in Mexico City, 1694.
Sor Juana sits at her desk.
A row of shelves behind her.
The shelves have been raided and stripped of her books and collection.
A Novice is loading the last of the books into a wheelbarrow.
She never dares to look at Sor Juana as she carts her belongings off.
Juana takes out one book from her garments and places it on the desk in front of her.
One last book remains.*

A priest enters. He looks at the book in her hands.

Juana opens the book and reads her name.

JUANA

*Awarded to Juan Inés de la Cruz, age eight.
First place.*

She corrects.

*Juana. Juana Inés de la Cruz.
Not a boy. A girl.
Autodidact.
Aberration.
Fairground freak.
Most unworthy of all.
First place.
First place.
My first "first place."
No one told the judges Juan was a girl age eight.
My mother was so angry when they arrived and said her son had written an astonishing
play about the body of Christ. *May we see this little boy? This prodigy. This little
genius sprung from your womb like Athena from the brain of Zeus.**

*Who? she asked. Zeus, they laughed. Athena. Your son can explain the myths to you.
It's obvious he's well read. Who taught him?*

*He taught himself, I said. I could feel my mother turning red above me. My grandfather
has a library.*

*Little girl, we didn't see you hiding there, behind your mother's skirts. You should be
very proud of your brother. He's going to be an amazing scholar. Who knows, he may
choose to study at Jesuit college and become Pope one day.*

My son Juan is dead, my mother told them as she hit me on the back of my head.

JUANA

O, the looks of the committee when she said that. I could see in their eyes how hurt they were, to be reminded once again how cruel God the Father could be. To kill this bright star Juan, at age eight! Why would God do such a thing? One of them began to cry. One of them was able to speak: *God must need little Juan more than we. Trust in His wisdom. He has taken him to keep his mind pure, untainted by the ignorance that would have corrupted him in this world. Dear woman, our hearts go out to you, but trust in God's love, that He has saved your son from the evils that would have tempted him to think on our limited world here, rather than on God's divine grace.*

Where's the book, I cried. Leave his prize! Another smack to the head. But I could suffer anything now. I had won and I wanted my prize. My first book.

MANUEL

What have they done to your library? We must get it all back. Every book. Every memento. Every piece of art. Every scientific model.

JUANA

Our astute Archbishop wrote our Mother Superior that my library served my vanity and not God. Was I a male peacock, showing off my feathers to impress the world, or a humble bride of our Savior, Jesus Christ? *Self-aggrandizement, daughter, is Satan's disease.*

MANUEL

Ignorance is not a holy state of being. How do these men get positions of leadership?

JUANA

All personal belongings must go. Take everything away. All my sins. And then, maybe, the drought will end.

MANUEL

Fuck him. Your library was the only oasis in godforsaken Mexico! Yes, I'll say it again. God forsaken. How else can we explain Seijas being named Archbishop? You could have written a letter of protest. We Jesuits would have...this is my fault.

JUANA

Protest? I am the shamed nun. His Holiness is waiting for my apology.

MANUEL

Yes, you must play your part with him. We all get it.

JUANA

I told our dear Mother Superior to at least sell them for charity.

MANUEL

You may drop the act with me.

JUANA

I'm not playing. It was give up the books or begin the Inquisition. Chastity, obedience, poverty.

MANUEL

How did the old zealots get back in charge? This is New Spain, damnit! We were promised new thinking! Progress!

JUANA

Leave the book, I cried. Give the prize for writing a play about the body and blood of Jesus Christ to me.

Give it to the boy who won second place, my mother said. But I shrieked so loud, the hot summer sky broke and black rain fell from the sky. The drought has ended, they cried. That's why your son Juan had to die. It's a miracle! Everyone ran out and clapped in the rain. I grabbed the first-place book, my prize, and up the ladder to the top of the barn and hid it there until the very day I was to come here. It was the first book in my very own library.

MANUEL

Your library had no rival in the new world. It's a crime.

JUANA

My mother cupped my chin that night and looked into my eyes and sighed. *What's wrong with you? Signing a false name could put you in jail for the rest of your life. Why would you do such a thing? Juan? Son? Answer me. Don't ask me...*, I told her.

MANUEL

Ask God.

JUANA

Ask God.

MANUEL

Now it's Archbishop Shit-face asking the question.

JUANA

Because you did me the negative favor of publishing my little critique of his sermon.

MANUEL

Fuck me. It was too good not to. If only we had said your dead brother Juan wrote it.

JUANA

Credit a dead eight year old boy? A phantom eight year old boy can criticize the man's sermon without consequence, but God forbid an educated woman should point out a certain theological argument is little more than chicken scratch.

MANUEL

God forbid.

JUANA

What I write should bear my name.

MANUEL

Ah. What you write should but serve in the name of...

JUANA

Shut up. Don't you start play-acting the Father with me. I knew better. At age eight I knew. If only I had stuck with my little girl's wisdom and not been swayed that times had changed.

MANUEL

What prize did we think we would win?

JUANA

If only I had signed it Juan. Juan de Infancia.

MANUEL

If you had been born Juan, you would've have entered the Jesuit order with me and we all would've been spared this ridiculous grief.

JUANA

You are spared. It's my library. My signature. My grief. My first place.

MANUEL

I've bowed and scraped and kissed his ring. If I can survive that you can survive writing a public apology.

JUANA

I never doubted I deserved first place. Even at age eight.

MANUEL

You're no longer eight. Being precious won't save you today.

JUANA

My mother backhanded me across the face. Do not ever bring attention to yourself again. Like a nail. Crying out to an army of hammers, *here I am! Do you understand me? Tell me you understand.* I nodded my head yes. Then pressed the book against my chest. My grandfather owned many books. I read each one in his library from cover to cover, even if the content bored me to tears. Books were everything. And I wanted one that was mine. That I could love as my own. My first. You always remember your first. All other loves grow from that first one.

MANUEL

Juan.

JUANA

My first love...

Bells.

Juana laughs.

She hands him the book.

Take good care of her.

MANUEL

I'm not here to take your love. I'm to collect your written apology. Yes. Under orders. Isn't it nice that Archbishop Shit-face assigned me to be the one to collect it from you?

JUANA

Who else but you?

MANUEL

I'll let you write.

The priest exits without the book.

Juana sits at her desk.

JUANA

One. A girl learns to think.

Two. She thinks she can escape.

Three. She thinks she can escape Love.

Four. She cannot. She's a prisoner of Love's imagination.

Juana does not move from her desk.

Time passes.

Afternoon sun; dusk; night. Morning sun.

The morning prayers of her sisters can be heard echoing in the building.

Loa, a young woman of African descent and a slave enters with water and bread.

She sets them on the desk.

Juana sips the water.

She pushes the bread away.

Loa takes the bread away; she eats it as she exits.

Loa enters with pen and paper and sets them on the desk.

LOA

They said to bring you pen and paper so you may write your apology.

Juana stares at the pen and paper.

LOA

But I must rip them out of your hands – without mercy! – if you write anything but the apology. How will I know, I asked. I can't read. If she is lit by God when she writes, you will know. The God of Seeds, I asked? That's when they hit me. Obscene Blackie! Hmm. Your sisters have no sense of humor when it comes to Jesus Christ and the God of Seeds..

*Juana writes. She writes and writes.
She lifts the paper to hand it to Loa.
Loa takes the pen and paper and exits.
Juana waits.
She smiles.
Time shift.
The priest enters. He is not smiling.
Juana hides her smile.
He holds her writing in his hand:*

MANUEL

“A little girl stands with her hands held tight.
She stares at the feet of a statue of Christ.
She asks: who is this Man, son of God?
Must my love for Him make me His prisoner?”

What is this?

JUANA

A poem.

MANUEL

A poem is not an apology.

JUANA

I disagree. All poems are apologies since none can achieve perfection.

MANUEL

Try again.

JUANA

At perfection?

MANUEL

Not funny. Try again.

He exits.

JUANA

Being funny?

She stares at the paper.

Time passes.

She laughs.

He returns.

He sees she has not written.

He exits.

Time passes.

He returns.

JUANA

Nothing yet. I don't know why I'm not inspired. May I be permitted to rehearse my play? The girls don't know how to make choices without me...

MANUEL

You know the answer. You will not be rehearsing your play until you apologize.

JUANA

But the girls...

MANUEL

Fuck the girls. Fuck your play. Fuck this whole act we have to put on.

JUANA

The girls will have to rehearse without me. I'll send notes.

MANUEL

No paper, no pen, until...

JUANA

Loa will give my notes for me.

MANUEL

No.

JUANA

The girls can still be told where to stand and sing to do the play.

MANUEL

There will be no play! And you cannot win. Say it after me.

JUANA

You're wrong.

MANUEL

I'm not leaving until...

JUANA

You cannot stay. You can't stay without my permission.

MANUEL

I what?

JUANA

If I refuse you as my confessor, you cannot stay.

MANUEL

I'm your friend. Your only friend.

JUANA

You cannot stay without my permission.

MANUEL

It's always been you and me against the idiots. Dear God, without my intervention you would be talking to the Inquisition.

JUANA

I'll win. Don't underestimate me.

MANUEL

There were two intellects left in Mexico. And now one has lost her mind!

JUANA

Manuel.

MANUEL

Why is an apology so hard for you? It means nothing. But it would mean we get to go back to our old lives again.

JUANA

I'll be happy to discuss this with you after the rehearsal...

MANUEL

Fuck me for having ever become friends with a woman. I was warned.

JUANA

I warned you.

MANUEL

I'm warning you. As your friend.

The priest exits.
Juana thinks about what was said.

JUANA

A friend exits.
Loa.

Loa enters.

You will have to rehearse the girls. No faces.

LOA

There are too many problems.

JUANA

I'm the problem. They want to turn me over to the Inquisition.

LOA

With the play.

JUANA

The play is perfect.

LOA

With a few minor changes it will be.

JUANA

Such as?

LOA

It needs more blood and guts.

JUANA

The play is about the blood and body of Christ.

LOA

There should be a massacre.

JUANA

It needs to be rehearsed.

LOA

Blood. Guts. And sacrificial sex. Then the song and prayers. And when the God of Seeds shows up, everyone gets naked.

JUANA

Yes, yes, yes.

They laugh.

Quiet.

Juana silently cries.

LOA

Don't be sad.

JUANA

You have to be in charge of them. I'm not allowed out of my cell. Not until I offer my written apology to his Holiness, our beloved Archbishop Francisco Aguiar y Seijas.

Loa spits.

I said his Holiness Francisco Aguiar y Seijas

Spits.

Show respect. To our Anointed Francisco Aguiar y Seijas.

Loa farts.

Juana fans the air.

Awful. Awful. We'll both be whipped.

A novice (clown) enters. She is both a clown and a nun in training. She hovers at the door. Too nervous to speak. She tries Juana's patience.

JUANA

What? What. What? What what what what what.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

I didn't mean to intrude, or eavesdrop, or overhear, or upset... *(she continues in this way until Juana interrupts)*

JUANA

What do you want.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

I apologize.

JUANA

Get out.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

I apologize.

JUANA

The worst.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

Please, I don't mean to offend, or disturb, or anger, or rile, or...*(she continues in this way until Juana interrupts)*

JUANA

Stop. Speak. Please. Just speak.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

I'm ashamed of how stupid I am.

JUANA

Not again.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

There's not a thought in my head that could interest you. I was never taught how to read. Properly. And you're so well read. Your thoughts. They frighten me. Not because they are awful or terrifying. But because God gave you so much ability. To think things out. Loud. I know we ninnies are such awful company. I do so love to be in your play. I hardly know what it means. But I can feel how smart it is. I can feel the intelligence of your words on my skin, even when I sleep. Is that a sinful stupid thing to say? I hope you understand what I mean. I wish I could be the audience you deserve. Why did they make you give away your books and everything? I have never said a word to Mother Superior before today. But today I spoke up. I said I thought they were wrong for taking your books. I said they were jealous and small and God would frown on them from this day on. Mother said I could not eat with the others all week. And that I was never to speak to her that way again. And that I was never under no circumstance to talk to you or be in your play. But here I am. Talking to you. And if they want to punish me, let them. I don't have to become a nun. I can leave and marry any one of my cousins. You watch me. I'll take my wedding dowry and leave, you watch me. Now, now, now, Mother Not So Superior said, this nonsense with Juana should not come between you and your Lord, your sweet groom, our handsome Jesus. My father promised her a big dowry. I wish I could give it to you. So you could buy a whole new library. It's awful what is happening. Are you really not going to apologize? No one believed you could hold out for a week, and now it's been three, and we're all getting a little giddy. At first we were all hoping you would apologize right away and everything could go back to how it was, but now, now, o my, no one can sleep, we're starting to believe you never will and the others wanted me to tell you how important that is.

JUANA

Thank you. Please go.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

They said we could no longer do your play, but I prayed and God said He loves to hear us rehearsing your play, so we will do your play, even if it is only He who hears it.

JUANA

You're very sweet, but please go away.

Juana stares at her blankly.

The novice is embarrassed and exits.

LOA

You're not going to win.

JUANA

I'll find a way.

LOA

Ha. You think you can escape. Ha ha. You think you can escape your fate.

JUANA

I've already escaped my fate. I was born a girl and a bastard.

LOA

Ha.

JUANA

Fate belongs to the past. I'm the proof of God's future design and imagination.

LOA

Yeah? You're proof. And me? Is your God imagining me too? Is being a slave to a rich holy lady in his design? Or does it belong in the past?

JUANA

God did not invent slavery.

LOA

Ha. Did you?

JUANA

The cloister gave you to me...

LOA

You all pay to get in. And you each get one of us when you do. Those who pay more get two.

JUANA

You're my responsibility.

LOA

Responsibility. Nice word.

JUANA

Yes.

LOA

And your charity? I know. We're told. Charity. Responsibility. We're grateful. We're not in the fields. We don't have to breed. We live within the walls of your vows. Poverty. Chastity. Obedience. I thank God for his imagining a house only for women. I thank God he imagined you every day. You taught me to read.

JUANA

No more reading. Not until the Archbishop goes back to Spain. You'll be whipped and I'll get the Inquisition. Do you understand?

LOA

We understand more than you and your God imagine we do.

JUANA

I love you, Loa.

Silence.

Do you love me?

LOA

I love my Mistress. I love all the Sisters. I love Jesus most of all. Black as I am.

JUANA

Of course, you don't love me. Why should you?

LOA

Why did you name me Loa?

JUANA

You said you liked the name. It's a compliment. It is the love that helps us understand our relationship to Jesus as the Eucharist.

LOA

I don't like the name.

JUANA

You never said.

LOA

I've never said many things.

JUANA

You can. You can say anything to me.

LOA

No. Telling people your thoughts is not the best thing to do. Look what's it done to you.

JUANA

But God's love for me is still the same.

LOA

You're a prisoner of the Archbishop's imagination. It's the Archbishop's love for you that will determine what happens to you. Not God's. Shall I rehearse the girls in your play?

JUANA

Maybe it's best you don't.

LOA

Then may I go wash your underthings? There's a lot of work I need to do.

Loa exits.

Juana sits at her desk.

Juana writes.

She is not happy with what she writes.

She starts again. She writes. The novice enters, hovers.

Juana waits for her to leave.

She attempts to write.

The novice(clown) hovers. Hovers.

JUANA

What? What! What! What! What! What!

NOVICE (CLOWN)

I don't know! What?

JUANA

What does Love expect of us?

NOVICE (CLOWN)

A kiss? What?

JUANA

Love gives without expectation.
It's why we wash the feet of Christ.
Talk.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

What?

JUANA

No simpering. Please. Why are you so afraid? Stand up for yourself. Say what you have to say. SAY WHAT...

The novice (clown) exits.

JUANA

...or don't.

Manuel enters, stands at the threshold. He brings a tray of gifts: good wine, cheese, desserts. He has Loa arrange the salon edibles as he pours red wine for Juana and himself.

Who are you today? Friend? Foe? Confessor? Enter.

MANUEL

What do you have to confess?

JUANA

Only thoughts. Impure.

MANUEL

Have you written your response?

JUANA

Without apology.

The novice(clown) runs in.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

We think it's awful you've abandoned your play. We've memorized all of it and everything and we want to rehearse. We will too, with or without you. O, Father. I didn't see you there. Never mind. Of course, we won't do anything you or the Archbishop thinks is blasphemy. Like rehearse her play. If it's blasphemy. Is it...? Theater is a sin when done for the wrong reasons. Good day.

The novice(clown) exits.

MANUEL

They're letting in idiots now? What happened to standards?

JUANA

You scared her.

MANUEL

Have you written your response?

JUANA

Writer's block.

MANUEL

It's simple. Three words. I was wrong.

JUANA

I was wrong.

MANUEL

Write it down.

She walks away from her desk.

JUANA

I will. But first. I've been thinking.

MANUEL

Dear God, no.

JUANA

I've no defense against my own thoughts. A million in an afternoon.

MANUEL

Count them like sheep and fall asleep. Dream them away. Wake up. Take pen and paper. Write: "I was wrong. Forgive me please."

She looks at herself in the full-length mirror.

JUANA

I look in the mirror for hours. Not because I'm vain. To help me think. I used to believe God sent them to me. My thoughts. And I *improved* upon them. Ha. I was such an arrogant little girl. I liked her. That girl. Little show off. I can still see her in the mirror. A little girl who reads and eats the thoughts of geniuses as if they were candy.

MANUEL

Be kind to her. The only way to protect her is with your apology. Simple. No showing off. No curlicues. Blunt. Economic. Complete. "I was wrong. Forgive me please."

JUANA

Little girl thoughts. My mother said to keep them to myself. Always. Why? To protect them, she said. Once they get out, some will be struck down. Some will be struck dumb. Some will die of the shakes. Some will die of the drought. I thought my mother was backwards, didn't know anything about the real world, because she lived on a farm! I knew if I escaped her, the Court and the Church would want me and know my worth. You are not leaving this farm she said, unless you marry a man that I pick out for you. O yes, I am, I thought. I'll think myself to the city where I will be with those who can finally appreciate me. Ha.

MANUEL

People like us...

JUANA

Are you like me? Are we sisters?

MANUEL

If you choose a life of the mind...

JUANA

Like me!

MANUEL

"I was wrong. Forgive me please."

JUANA

But I'm exceptional. Rules for everyone else don't apply to me.

MANUEL

Yes. And that is exactly why you must ask for forgiveness.

JUANA

I wrote my mother, my mother set in her ways, closed minded, who never visited me here, I wrote her that I would be taken to Spain, because I was so admired. Spain would call for me!

MANUEL

Spain! I know! Spain was to recognize we were gold, that we were the most important treasure in the New World.

JUANA

We would be given seats in its Court. My plays would be performed for everyone. You would become Pope. And all would surrender to our philosophy.

MANUEL

I would become Pope and God would whisper in my ear that I should permit priests and nuns to marry.

JUANA

Don't say that. Not even in fun.

MANUEL

May I think it?

JUANA

No. I said no.

MANUEL

I was wrong. Forgive me please.

JUANA

My mother never trusted priests, not a single one.

MANUEL

You're never rational when you bring your mother into the argument...

The clown enters as Juana's Mother.

MOTHER (clown)

What is your answer? Well, girl? What will it be? Home on the farm with your mother or made precious with them, those nuns and priests who suck on the blood of goats and other living things?

JUANA

You won't let me sit in grandfather's library and read.

MOTHER(clown)

This is a farm. We work here. We work hard. And we obey. I'm the mother. Are you still my daughter?

JUANA

Mama, I don't belong to you.

MOTHER(clown)

This is not the life I want for my daughter.

JUANA

I like my life. I have my own library, Come see.

MOTHER(clown)

They stole you from me.

JUANA

You give my sisters away to unwashed men.

MOTHER(clown)

I give them to men who work hard on my farm.

JUANA

You give them away as if they're prized cows. I'm meant to live a different life.

MOTHER (clown)

What different life.

JUANA

I don't know. One that hasn't been invented yet.

MOTHER (clown)

Then who does know? Do we ask the saints? Our Holy Mother? Or...Him?

JUANA

All I know is that I don't want to be given away to anyone.

MOTHER (clown)

You think you're too good. But you're too afraid. Afraid of your own body. What it tells you. And what it doesn't tell you. I'm your mother. I know you. You're my body too. Your sisters were pleased with the men I got for them. But I would not have given you to a man. Not my Juanita. Do you think I don't see what you are, my little girl, my little freak, my aberration? I knew since you were a baby you were not born to live under the rule of a man. Neither was I. I have my farm. I wanted to pass it on to you.

JUANA

I want the world. Spain.

MOTHER (clown)

The Court and the Church don't love you. I do. I'm not giving your dowry to those perverts and murderers.

JUANA

Mama.

MOTHER (clown)

Fine. Have your different life. The farm is not for you. No husbands for you. A plot of earth and a grateful man are too beneath you, too common for your beauty and cruel wit. I see how you admire yourself. Once it was a virtue to be a manly woman like me. No more. Now it's better to be a whore. Or a nun.

JUANA

Since I can't belong to myself, I'll belong to God.

MOTHER (clown)

You think you can find a corner where no one but God will bother you? What about your audience? Your need for prizes? You think you can live a life of poverty? That means no attention. No prizes. And you love attention. It's your bread and wine. I've tried to break you of it. Attention to a woman is never a good thing. Poverty. Chastity. What else? Obedience! Obedience. Do you even know the meaning of the word?

JUANA

I can fake it as all women can.

MOTHER (clown)

You a nun? A nun? You're not even legitimate. You're a bastard child.

Juana's mother exits.

MANUEL

What.

JUANA

I was wrong from birth.

MANUEL

How then?

JUANA

Mother never told anyone. She never had a confessor.

MANUEL

Fuck. That's all we need. If Seijas ever found out. You have to ask for forgiveness. And no more drawing attention to yourself. No more plays. No more theological treatises telling men how to think.

JUANA

All wrong.

MANUEL

Yes.

JUANA

Forgive me please.

MANUEL

Yes.

JUANA

Come back tomorrow.

MANUEL

Illegitimate. What next. God stop testing me.

The priest exits.

Loa enters. She prepares the cell for sleeping.

The nun and slave undress.

They kneel and pray.

Juana gets into her bed.

Loa blows out the candle and gets into her bed.

JUANA

Tomorrow we'll rehearse my play. I'll give them their apology.

Time shift.

Moonlight enters the cell.

A dream version of the loa written by Juana Inés de la Cruz:

The novice enters as a priest.

Loa becomes the image of America.

PRIEST (clown)

She killed my greatest Love.

AMERICA (Loa)

I hate you and all your children. Even the ones you gave to me.

PRIEST (clown)

I will find Him again.

AMERICA (Loa)

All you priests. All you priests with children. I curse and hate you.

PRIEST (clown)

I will raise Him up.

Let me kiss you.

AMERICA (Loa)

We will tear your palaces down one by one, brick by brick. We will push all your children into the mud and bury them. They will be the foundation of our new temples. We will dance on the broken necks of your children. We will sing Hallelujah. We will toss seeds. We will praise the God of Seeds. And you will die in the hot sun.

JUANA

She can't dance on the children!

LOA

The nun is silent. She's bound and gagged and in the tomb.

PRIEST (clown)

I want my Love.
I want my Love.
Give me my Love.

AMERICA (Loa)

You are a little infant. Come here. Take my breast.

PRIEST (clown)

My greatest Love.

Pause.

CLOWN/LOA

What happens next? What's next.

JUANA

I don't know.

CLOWN

She gives him her breast. She suckles him.

LOA

She snaps his neck. Yes, she snaps his neck.

CLOWN

Yes! Then all the young girls enter. They dance and toss the seeds. They dance and toss the Seeds for a very long time.

LOA

The sun beats down on everyone. We hear the drums. The sun beats. It beats down. It turns us a reddish brown. Red and brown. Red. Brown. Red. Brown. Red. Brown. To welcome the god of seeds. In America..

CLOWN

We eat the god of seeds.

LOA

We eat him.

CLOWN

Like Jesus Christ. We eat the body.

LOA

We eat the god of seeds.

CLOWN

We bake him into a pie and eat him to make us fat.

LOA

Round and fat. Sow and reap.

JUANA

America lifts up the False Friend high above her head.
The priest with the broken neck. The women dance.
America strips the priest. The women dance.
America strips the clothes off her own body.

CLOWN

The red brown women laugh
And dance. They shriek. They -
They dance.
They toss the seeds.

LOA

America tears her body into two halves. She joins the dance. She is wild. She dances so fast she splits the world wide open and it too is torn apart. A girl-child steps out of the womb, out of the scarred earth. This girl is an aberration, something no one has seen before. She's a beauty. She looks like me. She laughs. She laughs like me. She loves the sun. She laughs. She laughs and laughs.

CLOWN

They dance and dance and dance!

JUANA

The sun goes black.

LOA

Oh.

*A cloud covers the moon
It is black in the cell.
Juana and Loa are back in bed.
The clown is gone.*

LOA

And what happens to Religion? The nun?

JUANA

Everyone forgets about her. She stays in the cave. Like Plato's thoughts.

LOA

Forever?

JUANA

Maybe in three hundred years they remember she was there and dig her out.

LOA

Did she at least have her books with her?

JUANA

No, the False Friend took them away.

LOA

How terrible. To be alone for three hundred years.

JUANA

She had her thoughts.

LOA

Was she lonely?

JUANA

No. She had her thoughts to keep her company.

LOA

Hell on earth.

JUANA

Her thoughts set her free.

LOA

That's what I did wrong. When they came and put my family in chains I was not thinking hard enough to stay free.

JUANA

Are you angry at me?

LOA

No, Sister Mistress, I'm never angry at you. I'm only grateful. Always grateful. That's what I was taught. Gratitude.

Silence.
Juana turns away.

LOA
Is there anything you would like me to do?

Silence.

Are you crying?

Am I in trouble, Sister Mistress?

JUANA
I want my friend.

LOA
The chickenshit priest?

JUANA
My Lady. My lady friend.

LOA
She went back to Spain.

JUANA
She said she would take my plays to the King and Queen, and then, and then, she would send a ship for me; I'd be commissioned to write for the King and Queen. In Spain, I would be celebrated and free.

LOA
Why didn't the Marquis' wife take you with her to Spain?

JUANA
I was afraid.

LOA
She asked you and you didn't go?

JUANA
She never asked. We must rehearse the play. I could be arrested any day...

LOA
About your play. I have a few ideas.

JUANA
I don't need more ideas. I need you to gather the girls and do as I say.

LOA

Listen. Religion needs to make friends with America. America could teach her to sing and dance.

JUANA

I told you I don't like your suggestions.

LOA

America could teach her to sing and dance.

JUANA

That would be silly. That would be a silly play.

LOA

Religion is silly. America is silly. And women living together in big flapping dresses counting on beads is the most silly.

JUANA

We're not counting. We're pleading. PRAYING.

LOA

That's what I said.

JUANA

STOP ATTACKING ME. DO AS YOU'RE TOLD OR BE PUNISHED.

Both are shocked.

Loa waits.

You know I wouldn't...

The novice (clown) enters.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

I'm ready to rehearse.

Oh.

Why is she crying?

LOA

She hates her play.

NOVICE (CLOWN)

I love her play. Don't cry.

LOA

She's proud she's crying. She's proud she's super critical.

JUANA

I only cry over silly things...

NOVICE (clown)

Your *loa* is the best one ever written.

LOA

One day it will be performed for the King and Queen of Spain.

NOVICE (clown)

Oh! Are the King and Queen on their way to visit us here? They're in New Spain? When did they arrive? We need to start rehearsing immediately. I'll tell everyone.

LOA

No...

The novice is too quick to exit to be corrected.

LOA

If they ever summon you to Spain, take me with you, please.

JUANA

Archbishop Shitty-face will never give permission, even if I crawl on my knees through gravel shouting out my impurities.

LOA

With apology!

JUANA and LOA

FORGIVE ME PLEASE!

LOA

He'll die one day.

JUANA

Shhh.

LOA

What do you think slaves pray for every day?

JUANA

That is not to be said out loud! Or even thought.

LOA

It's not a thought.

JUANA

Nor a prayer.

LOA

I never asked to be taught to pray!

Silence.

JUANA

Why are three words so difficult for me? “Forgive me please.”

LOA

Six. There’s “I was wrong.” I’m just saying what he said. Father Fernandez said you had to write “I was wrong.” Then, “forgive me please.”

Juana sits at her desk.

Time shift.

Morning.

They wash and dress.

Bells for first prayers.

Manuel returns.

She sits at her desk. She writes. She stops.

Loa hands the paper to Manuel. He reads it:

MANUEL

“My Love is gone, His Love remains.

This riddle must serve us all.

This riddle must set us free.

What does Love want? Nothing at all.”

More poetry?

JUANA

My apology.

MANUEL

Sweet Jesus. It must be: I was wrong. Forgive me please.

JUANA

If I write those six words...

MANUEL

The drought will end.

JUANA

Manuel.

MANUEL

Talk to me.

JUANA

I'm afraid.

MANUEL

This storm will end.

JUANA

I'm afraid if I write those six words. I may never write again.

MANUEL

Don't be silly.

He touches her writing hand, kisses it.

We will survive this. Shall I come back tomorrow?

He exits. Loa smooths out the crumbled poem

LOA

I could post it in the market square. Anonymous hasn't posted lately.

Juana nods. Loa smooths out the poem and exits. Juana sits at her desk.

JUANA

It may take more than six.

If an intermission is desired, it may happen here.

(Act Two)

Juana at her desk, waiting.

Juana centers her new apology on her desk.

Loa escorts Manuel into the cell.

JUANA

It's more than six words. With four hundred and twenty-seven words, I found one hundred and forty nine ways to say I was wrong.

Juana stands and looks at herself in the full-length mirror.

MANUEL

Six would have been plenty. Four hundred and twenty seven seem excessive to me.

JUANA

Always the editor.

Manuel goes to her desk and reads what she has written.

Bells call the nuns to prayer.

Manuel finishes reading.

She waits.

MANUEL

It's actually very good. Humble. Who would have guessed? A humble recantation. And it's excess is a proper excess at that, a great excess. The Church will be happy to receive this. A great gift.

JUANA

It does the trick.

MANUEL

You accept everything they said you did. Every accusation. Every false argument. Breathtaking, really. Complete. Great...

JUANA

But...?

MANUEL

If you could only also add...*(he picks up a quill and writes on the paper)* you are willing to crawl to the church on your knees; it's a bit much, a flourish, but Seijas goes for that kind of thing. And at the church you will ask to be forgiven, kissed on the crown of your head. We both know the Archbishop can't resist such sentiment. That's what it still needs. A bit of old-fashioned emotion. Let him see how dependent and tender you are, how much you need his protection. We both know it's nothing more than a performance. He knows it as well. But if it saves us all, it's not artificial or false in the least. Your apology is magnificent. Why not go full gallop?

MANUEL

It's perfect as is. I'll take it to them.

He makes one more little mark.

The worst is over. The worst has been revealed to us, so the worst is behind us as well. But we've remained loyal friends. I was wrong to publish your essay without your permission. It was to be our little game. Stick it to the Archbishop. Who knew he would've been smart enough to seize the opportunity to persecute you for blasphemy? And make an event of it.

Never underestimate a powerful man's need to be a drama Queen. Such a hateful little man. But it's over, this solves everything.

It's magnificent. Generous even.

I admit I thought you wouldn't do it. That you'd fight to the end. I misjudged my friend. My dear wronged friend. If Seijas had arrested you, excommunicated you, I don't know how I would have suffered it. But we're safe now. No Inquisition. We can go back to being private and ignored. Happy in our little cells. Our salons. No one need know what we really think. Why should they? Dear God, we're saved.

Just one more thing. You forgot to sign your name.

*He hands her the written apology. She stares at it.
He offers her the pen. She does not take it.*

JUANA

This response is unworthy of me. I, the most unworthy of all.

She tears the papers.

I can do better. You'll receive an improved response in three days.

MANUEL

I can't go back and beg them for three more days!

JUANA

No one's asking you to beg. Three days. I'll give you the worthy response in three days. Three days. What choice do you have?

*A break between them.
Manuel exits.*

*Juana cannot write.
She cannot write.*

*Because she cannot write, Juana tears at her clothes, bares her back.
She whips herself until she bleeds.
Loa waits.
Juana stops.
Loa bathes her wounds.
Time shift.
Loa dresses Juana.
Manuel returns.
He will not look into Juana's eyes.
Loa takes the bedpans and exits.*

JUANA

It hasn't been three days.

MANUEL

I will come every day until it's done.

JUANA

I have to write the *loa* first. Once I'm happy with that, I shall return to my Response.
The one is impeding the other.

MANUEL

Why draw this out? Why suffer? Once it's done...

JUANA

Let them wait, it's the one thing left me.

MANUEL

Ah.

JUANA

Return in two days.

MANUEL

I accept my sin in this. God is using Seijas so we may humble ourselves. Do not think this is for Seijas. Think on your relationship to God and you will be able to write your apology.

JUANA

Thank you for your council.

MANUEL

Have you forsaken God, Juana?

Juana crosses herself and prays silently on her beads.

MANUEL

Mocking the Church is a very dangerous game. Mocking your Faith is even worse.

She prays.

Do you hear Him when you pray? Juana? I'm asking as your priest. Answer me.

JUANA

No.

MANUEL

No.

JUANA

No.

MANUEL

What do you hear? Juana. When you pray? What do you...

JUANA

I hear my heart.

MANUEL

No. You do not. You have not. You have not prepared your heart. Your heart. You have not. Confessed. Your heart. You have not. You do not listen. You do not. You do not. I see what you are doing. You want to give them a reason to denounce you. You want them to call you a heretic. Is that it?

JUANA

I must write from my heart if I'm to write with God.

MANUEL

GOD IS NOT CONCERNED ABOUT THIS. THIS IS MEXICO CITY POLITICS. A LITTLE MAN WANTS TO FEEL BIG AND A WOMAN HAS MADE HIM FEEL SMALL. HE WILL PUBLICALLY PUNISH YOU UNTIL YOU TELL HIM HOW BIG HE IS AND HOW SMALL YOU ARE. NOW WRITE YOUR VERY BIG PUBLIC APOLOGY. HEART AND GOD MEAN NOTHING HERE.

JUANA

You are nothing.

He grabs her. Will he strike her?

Loa cries out.

He lets her go.

He immediately wants her forgiveness.

She kneels.

*Neither can speak.
Juana crosses herself and prays on her beads.
Manuel watches her.
Loa watches Manuel.*

MANUEL

I wanted to show you off to the world. And that was wrong.
I want to save you from my error. Is that wrong too?
Answer me. Answer me. I love you.

She does not answer. She keeps her head bowed and prays.

I love you. And you mock me. Mock me. Why...?

JUANA

Return in two days.

MANUEL

Two days?...I'm your champion. Let me be your guide. But no. You refuse. Your last friend. You want to be alone in this. Fine. Be alone. Martyr yourself. You and Seijas are the same. It's all on you now.

JUANA

Every priest may absolve himself, but a woman...

MANUEL

I tried.

*He exits.
Juana stops praying.*

LOA

You were fake praying. I know you. I know when you fake it.

JUANA

Do you pray? Or do you only fake it for us fools?

LOA

Yes.

JUANA

You pray to the God of Spain?

LOA

Always.

JUANA

But you hate Him.

LOA

To let him know he may choose my love over those who make me a slave.

JUANA

You believe He will choose you over Spain?

Silence.

Over me?

LOA

If he loves me, he will. If he is my Father, he will. If he is not my Father, then I must pray harder to change him, pray with more anger than all you people from Spain. Then he will be. If I'm strong enough, my prayers will make him my father, not yours. And then he will crush you.

JUANA

Who taught you that is what prayer is for?

LOA

You dead people. You ghosts.

JUANA

Praying shouldn't make you angry.

LOA

I'm angry I pray.

JUANA

How does your mind work? Anger is your definition of Faith?

LOA

I pray for him to choose me over all others. As I would pray for a Lover. And sometimes I feel him answer. His Breath. His breath pulses under my eyelids. He breathes in my lungs. His breath is inside me. His breath is inside my breath. And I become calm. And because I'm calm, I can see the truth. Your Archbishop will hurt you no matter what you write. Pray God takes revenge on him first.

JUANA

We're done praying. Time for bed.

LOA

Yes, Sister Mistress.

JUANA

Time to clear our heads.

Juana looks at herself in the mirror.

Loa undresses Juana. As they undress for bed, they talk:

JUANA

He and I were each other's only friend.

LOA

He failed the test.

They get into their beds, while...

JUANA

What test?

LOA

If I were a white man I would have saddled you on a horse and rode with you to El Dorado.

JUANA

The City of Gold is a fairy tale.

LOA

Spain?

JUANA

They say it exists. Maybe it's also a fantasy.

LOA

Heaven?

JUANA

In God's mind, yes. Heaven exists.

LOA

Hell?

JUANA

Very real. Invented every new day from the hearts of men.

LOA

Ha.

JUANA

Ha what?

LOA

We live in a house of women. I'd take men's Hell any day.

JUANA

Poor Manuel. He's in Hell now. I know he is. I'm in Hell too, but I'll be able to sleep.

LOA

God loves me. I can always sleep.

JUANA

Listen. The women from town must be singing their daughters to sleep.

LOA

I don't hear any singing.

JUANA

Listen.

They listen. No singing is heard, but all hear the singing.

LOA

I want my mother.

JUANA

I want mine too.

They listen.

LOA

Time for bed.

JUANA

Why did I ever leave her and come into this world?

Time and reality shift.

Loa sleeps. Juana stays awake.

The play dreams. The characters' dreams drift and visit each other.

JUANA

Are you asleep?

She is.

JUANA

There are too many thoughts in my head.

Moonlight transforms the cell.

The Novice (clown) enters in her bridal whites for her ceremony.

The moonlight bathes her.

The following dialogue overlaps:

NOVICE (clown)

Tomorrow is my wedding ceremony.

LOA

I leave my body on the wings of a hawk.

NOVICE (clown)

I'm so giddy. Tomorrow is the last time I will see my family as their sinful daughter.

Tomorrow I become devoted to one Love only. My Lord, Jesus Christ.

LOA

I look below me.

NOVICE (clown)

With this ring, I thee wed.

LOA

The Spaniards are very small.

JUANA

I must write a new play. Not with pen or paper. All in my head.

NOVICE (clown)

I must rehearse. Tomorrow is my wedding day. But I'm afraid.

JUANA

I'm afraid.

LOA

My soul cries out:

JUANA/LOA/NOVICE

I who am the most unworthy of all.

Silence.

JUANA

I will name the new character America.

LOA
A hawk. Stares down from the sky. Her talons grab my heart.

JUANA
I bleed.

NOVICE (CLOWN)
I bleed.

LOA
I bleed and my soul soars.

JUANA
A hawk.

NOVICE (clown)
A bride.

LOA
A heretic.

NOVICE (clown)
I take Jesus Christ to be my life.

LOA
She looks for rodents to grab and eat.

NOVICE (clown)
Unworthy, unworthy, as I am. I'm His bride.

LOA
Hawk.

JUANA
Heretic.

NOVICE (clown)
With this ring.

LOA
Keeeee Keeee.

NOVICE (clown)
I thee wed.

JUANA

A heretic is the most dangerous thing to be.

LOA

Aye aye aye...

NOVICE (clown)

Scrub my flesh, wash my feet, bind my breasts, make me bleed.

LOA

She and the sky are one.

JUANA

America the Heretic.

LOA

Aye aye aye...

JUANA

I'm afraid.

NOVICE (clown)

I'm afraid.

LOA

I am America. We will tear your palaces down one by one, brick by brick.

NOVICE (clown)

Praise God.

LOA

We will shove your children into mud, bury them alive.

NOVICE (clown)

Praise God.

LOA

We will dance on the broken necks of your children. We will sing Hallejuah.

NOVICE (clown)

Toss the seeds. O, the seeds! Praise God.

LOA

Praise the god of seeds.

Toss the seeds. NOVICE (clown)

Praise the mud. LOA

Shout up to the sky. LOA and NOVICE (clown)

America! JUANA/LOA/NOVICE(clown)

Blessed is the fruit of thy womb. LOA

Jesus. NOVICE(clown)

Jesus. JUANA

He is the one true Love. NOVICE (clown)

The Inspiration. JUANA

I am his Slave. LOA

Lord, you have called me by name. Behold. NOVICE (clown)

Manuel enters, shirtless. His back reveals welts from a self-flagellation.

I come to do your holy will. NOVICE (clown)

Forgive me. Forgive me. Forgive me. MANUEL

*Loa gets basin and water.
In this dream, Juana sits Manuel down and bathes his back.*

NOVICE (clown)

One thing I have asked of the Lord, this I seek, to dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life.

JUANA

Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man, your Spouse, had nowhere to lay His head. Are you prepared to follow Him completely until the end?

MANUEL

I was wrong. Forgive me. Please.

JUANA

What you hold now, may you hold forever. What you promise now, may you never abandon, but with swift pace, light step and unswerving feet go forward, securely, joyfully, swiftly and prudently on the path of happiness, so that you may offer your vows to the Most High in that perfection to which the Spirit of the Lord has called you.

NOVICE (clown)

Praise mud.

LOA

Shout up to the sky.

LOA and NOVICE (clown)

America.

Juana opens her arms and mouth to the sky.

A cry of a hawk fills the stage.

We hear wind, wings, and the cry flying fast, beyond our imagination.

Then the stage goes black.

We hear the wind, wings and the cry in the blackness.

Then silence.

Dawn touches the corners of the room.

Loa stands center in Juana's cell.

She stands as America, but there is no costuming that tells us this.

LOA (AMERICA)

I am magnificent. Magnificent.

The tenth muse of the New World.

A hawk.

Endless sky.

Juana wakes.

Loa is a woman forced to be a slave again.

*Loa sits in her corner.
Juana sits at her desk.
The novice appears and stands at the threshold. She hovers.
She does not have the courage to enter.
Juana finally looks up from her desk and addresses her.*

JUANA

What? Speak.

NOVICE (clown)

Tomorrow...*(she makes a strange coded gesture that no one should be able to decipher).*

JUANA

What.

NOVICE (clown)

Have you ever had a crisis of faith?

JUANA

Holy Mary, are you kidding me?

NOVICE (clown)

I don't have anyone I can ask.

JUANA

Ask.

NOVICE (clown)

I don't know if I...

JUANA

What.

NOVICE (clown)

Should...

JUANA

Yes.

NOVICE (clown)

My vows. Should I? I mean, the world. When I. Take the veil. What if. Am I bothering you?

JUANA

Are you asking if you're ready to take your vows?

I'm afraid. Will it change me? NOVICE (clown)

Who are you? JUANA

Who am I? NOVICE (clown)

Answer. Who are you? JUANA

I am nothing. NOVICE (clown)

Correct. Why have you come here? JUANA

He is my All. NOVICE (clown)

Do you vow obedience? JUANA

So...must I be obedient in everything? NOVICE (clown)

Do you vow obedience? JUANA

I have a confession to make. NOVICE (clown)

No, do not stray from the text. Do you vow obedience? JUANA

I... NOVICE (clown)

JUANA
...vow to do all He asks of me. I vow obedience. Say it. And then our Mother will say:
What you hold now, may you hold forever. May His grace save you from your flesh.
May His passion chase out all that's false and evil in your mind. Go forward on the path
of happiness and offer your vows to the Most High in that perfection to which the Spirit
of the Lord has called you.

NOVICE (clown)
He has not called me to perfection.

JUANA
Do you forsake all worldly desires and enter here?

NOVICE
That word forsake...

JUANA
Have you desires other than living as a bride of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the divine?

NOVICE (clown)
None.

JUANA
Liar.

NOVICE (clown)
How did you know!

JUANA
I see myself in you.

NOVICE (clown)
That's terrible. You're in so much trouble.

JUANA
I am.

NOVICE (clown)
What am I going to do?

JUANA
Leave. Go back home.

NOVICE (clown)
Is that what you would do, knowing everything now that you do?

JUANA
I would sail the world.

NOVICE (clown)
Yes, I would too. If I were me, and that was something I could do...

The novice nods vigorously so as not to cry.

NOVICE (clown)

I'm not ready to give up on the world.

JUANA

O. O, o, oh. How beautiful you are. Shh.

LOA

O boo hoo.

JUANA

God loves you. You can take your vows and not forsake the world. God doesn't ask what the Church asks of you. You can take your vows and have the world too. As long as no one's paying attention to you.

LOA

Don't. You'll only confuse her.

NOVICE (clown)

No one pays attention to me. In fact, they're always telling me to get out of the way.

JUANA

What I'm about to tell you...

LOA

She's too young.

JUANA

When I was your age, an older Sister told me there was a way to keep my vows and get out in the world Sister Philosophia.

LOA

Who?

NOVICE (clown)

Who?

JUANA

You don't know her. She croaked and died. She taught me God had expectations and the Church had rules.

NOVICE (clown)

I don't think I'm good with rules. That's why I'm afraid tomorrow will be a mistake.

JUANA

Listen, there are secret doors in the walls of the cloister. We are never so isolated from the world as the Church would pretend. Now, this is how we who need the world, but must leave it survive. Do you need the world? I see that you do. Loa, get my special weeds.

Loa exits and returns with a closed basket.

Loa, will show you the wall where young priests are known to suddenly appear and walk out into the streets. Yes, we older sisters get out in the world once in a while disguised as our brother priests.

Juana takes out a priest's frock and holds it up against her.

I won't need these anymore. I haven't ventured out in years. Here, I suggest you also take this beard.

NOVICE (clown)

I love you.

JUANA

You may leave as a priest and never return. Some never do. If you don't return, I will miss you, my special one. Let me go. Yes, yes, let me go. Feel better now? There are many paths to heaven, don't fret if the one your on is not going there. Take another. Now, take a vow of silence before you leave this room.

The novice kisses Juana's rosary beads.

NOVICE (clown)

God bless you.

She exits.

LOA

Won't you miss your man weeds?

JUANA

It's time to give things away. God is testing me. Enter the wilderness with nothing.

Loa exits.

Morning, after prayers.

Manuel stands at the threshold.

MANUEL

Without Christ, there is no life. Only wilderness.

JUANA

It was you who called me the Tenth Muse.

MANUEL

Last year...

JUANA

You thought I could do no wrong

MANUEL

Last year...

JUANA

I made you laugh. My genius had no compare!

MANUEL

Last year the world was rational. There was no drought. No fear. Faith and wealth were one. The Church was strong. That's all done. Disappeared. The world's turned mean.

JUANA

I'm the same.

MANUEL

We're all to be punished and no one knows why or when it will end. We no longer live in a golden rational age.

JUANA

I'm the same.

MANUEL

The times have changed. Blame and rage fly flags on the streets. People of faith cry themselves to sleep.

JUANA

I trusted we would remain the same. Sane.

MANUEL

Sane? When you drive the Archbishop mad? Your refusal makes him want to drag you out of the henhouse and put you naked on the rack. Men are insisting you be whipped for all to see.

JUANA

You published my essay, and no one's asked you to be flogged.

MANUEL

You're not innocent. You knew I would, when you gave it to me. Don't. You played me. You're politic - a high stakes gambler. And you lost.

JUANA

I expect the church to protect the powerless.

MANUEL

Well.

JUANA

My Mother Church should not terrorize me because of my sex. Nor refuse me a defense.

MANUEL

How is it, you think, the Church keeps its power if not with terror, blood and Conquest? How did it acquire gold and slaves, if not with threats and silence?

JUANA

Why is one essay by an educated woman such a threat to men in high places?

MANUEL

You now must understand the essay is their opportunity, not their reason.

JUANA

They waited for us to dig our own trap, and as smart as we are, we did.

MANUEL

Yes.

JUANA

This is ridiculous.

MANUEL

Yes.

JUANA

He hates the fact that I exist.

MANUEL

Yes. He hates all Sin. Sin made flesh.

JUANA

I'm not a Sin.

MANUEL

All Temptation.

JUANA

All Women.

MANUEL

Yes. The only thing to do is...

JUANA

What. A thousand Hail Mary's?

MANUEL

Two thousand. For good measure.

JUANA

Tell me you're as angry as I am.

MANUEL

Juanita.

JUANA

I need you to be as angry as I am.

MANUEL

It does no good.

JUANA

If I knew you were angry too maybe I wouldn't have to feel all this by myself and...

MANUEL

This is not about you any more. They are writing petitions. Festivals are being cancelled. The Archbishop is making everyone feel the consequences of your refusal. Yes, I'm angry. I'm angry that you could have stopped all of this from getting so ridiculous but you refused. And now...

JUANA

And now...and now, if you don't get me to apologize, it's over for you. Did you promise them you could move me...?

Silence.

MANUEL

I promised them you would not refuse.

JUANA

Silly you. How many petitions?

MANUEL

Because I believe women are capable of being rational.

JUANA

I know the Archbishop hates that he is forced to think on me, that is what makes me hold out one day longer, knowing the very thought of me makes him squirm in agony.

MANUEL

You don't understand men like him. Men who live to rule. Your refusal is his happiness. He loves that you're humiliating him. He'd love to keep raging against you for the next ten years. There's a drought and now he has your sins to blame. You're his new patron saint. Agony? I've never seen him happier. I congratulate you.

The walls fall away to reveal the Archbishop.

Juana herself plays the Archbishop.

Yes, perhaps Juana plays the Archbishop.

He lives in a brick enclosed mansion that is always baking in a hot afternoon sun.

ARCHBISHOP (Juana)

I am calm. She does not anger me. I direct my thoughts to charity, good deeds and humility. And so should she.

Bring her to me. This worried woman. The nun who believes she may correct how God and I communicate. This worrisome one. This woman. God's pet. God's little protégé. Women should study. Many are gifted. But it was St. Paul who said women should not teach. Women should not. The danger is too great. A woman teaching a man is too close to tempting him. Bring her to me. This talented one. This defect. This Eve. This snakebite. This deceit hiding in devout weeds. Has she forgot who she is? This nun? This blackest ink on a white page. Read it here. What she writes. A crime. A crime that is born of a secular mind. A crime that is a showcase of the vanity embedded in a female mind. I pity her. Will she presume to instruct our Papal Father next, after she is done with me? And who after him? God? Will she instruct God on the proper method of converting the infidels? Does she believe she can reason her way to paradise? Shall I bite of her apple? Bite the cheek of this nun who writes of Greek myths as she listens with her hips to the natives' drums? Shall I? Shall I bite her? This nun? Greek myths and lewd drums, that's her answer! She should focus her mind on God's great love. On His love and His wrath that humbles us all. Damnation. O, proud woman beware. I will not allow you to lead others astray. Nun or no, how dare this harlot with her breasts and her bare feet presume to instruct me? She will think us all to hell if we allow her.

MANUEL

Let me speak to her.

ARCHBISHOP

Do. Save her from herself. Remind her that Satan too thought herself too smart to sit at the feet of God. How far she fell. She too.

MANUEL

I will speak to her. She will see the error.

ARCHBISHOP

Danger.

MANUEL

She is in. She will see the error - danger.

ARCHBISHOP

She will do more than that. She will retract her words. She will apologize. It will be a public apology. Every Christian must see that she sees the error – the danger of her argument. I blame you. You have been too permissive. See where it leads?

The novice walks across the brick path in obscenely bare feet.

The Archbishop freezes. Did he see this? He did. He stands there in black horror at the temptation now smeared across the brick pathway.

Did she step on a brick?

Her foot

tread upon the brick. Her foot the woman's foot.

And now it's all the brick can think about

The press of her step – ah -

The curve of her foot – ah -

Her foot curves and the devil smiles. Both can make you slip, admit:

I want that foot. It's all the brick can think. Each brick. Remove it.

Each brick. Get rid of it. Her foot. Her bare foot. Temptation is merciless.

Her foot attached to her leg. Legs beneath her skirt. Open and close.

Everyday. In the morning. Between meals. Between prayers. At night, when she

dreams. The dark wetness of her dreams. She opens and closes everyday. As we pray.

We pray.

We must save ourselves.

Remove all the bricks. Tear up the streets. Remove the bricks. And the books. Hide the

breasts. Cover her head. Wrap her head to toe. The devil is in her every move. The

devil is in every curve. The devil is in her foot. Remove the bricks! Remove all

temptations toward Sin.

MANUEL

Amen.

ARCHBISHOP

A virgin's naked foot will push you off the cliff.

A virgin thinks she lives free of base desires, but -

The devil makes his nest between each false thought she thinks

Between her legs

Ready to lick the harlot's pride.

ARCHBISHOP

Pray for her
Pray for her
God gave her many gifts
Pray for her
Lord hear our prayer

MANUEL

Lord hear our prayer.

ARCHBISHOP

God does not want perfection from a woman
Lord hear our prayer

MANUEL

Lord hear our prayer.

God wants to love her
Lord hear our prayer

Lord hear our prayer.

He asks her to submit.
Love must be selfless.
She must submit.

Lord hear our prayer.

Pray for her.
Pray for her.
We love you, dear sister
We will bathe you in our love
We will fast and pray for you
This is your trial. This is your test. Submit.
No human intellect can outwit the searing eye of God.
Direct your thoughts to charity, good deeds and humility.
Give up your books, the temptation of the intellect.
Your sins have brought the drought.
Yours the worst of all. Submit.

*The walls close. We're back in Juana's cell.
Juana, Loa and Manuel sit in silence.*

JUANA

God does not ask me to be his slave.

Silence.

LOA

He doesn't ask me either.

MANUEL

It's the very idea of you is what is being called a sin.
The idea. The very idea...he has called you a heretic.
He will turn your refusal into a spectacle.
He desires nothing less than a public display.
He will save you. God demands it. That's his winning argument.
You know as well as I do, the politics of salvation is as merciless as a mathematical equation.

JUANA

A woman cannot oppose those who most want to save her. It's not logical.

MANUEL

God's not logical. Neither are you. I've explained that very truth to the Archbishop agrees. He agrees. And that is how it is I come today with a gift. A gift from the Archbishop. Yes.

JUANA

A fineza?

MANUEL

A concession. A concession from the Archbishop. How about that? You won a concession. Would you like to hear it?

JUANA

No.

MANUEL

You need not write the apology letter to the Archbishop. You may write anyone. Or no one. Write a pot of jam. As long as you apologize and submit and we make it public. If that helps you pick up the pen...write the letter to me.

JUANA

Write to you?

MANUEL

Write to Sor Filotea.

JUANA

Write you?

MANUEL

Yes, write me, your Sister Philosophia. Sor Filotea. If that helps to take away the sting. And then we publish every word and Archbishop Shitty-face gets to save his dignity.

MANUEL

A win-win, if you ask me.

Write Sor Filotea your letter of contrition.
Win back your solitude.
And then this will all be over, I promise you.

JUANA

Does he know you're Sor Filotea?

MANUEL

Yes. We all have other identities. It doesn't bother him. Write her to get this over and done with.

JUANA

You'll publish every word?

MANUEL

I promise you.

JUANA

Do you promise God? Your promises to me are no good. Promise God.
Then I'll believe you. Promise. Filotea.

MANUEL

I promise.

JUANA

Every word. Or may my soul be damned.

MANUEL

Every word. Or may my soul be damned.

*She sits at her desk and writes.
He approaches her to take his leave.
He reads over her shoulder.*

“My dear very illustrious pious Lady, my dear sister, Sor Filotea, I ask you to forgive my long silence in writing this letter, it is not my will, health or fear that prevented me...”

He takes her hand to kiss it.

JUANA

Let me write.

He exits.

LOA

He's Filotea? Do they all have female avatars?

Juana returns to writing with a new and different energy.

Time passes. Loa lights candles, prepares the beds, undresses Juana all the while Juana continues writing.

JUANA

My dear very illustrious pious Lady, my dear Sor Filotea, forgive me, please.

The walls fall away to reveal the night sky.

Manuel enters the cell dressed in drag as Sor Filotea.

JUANA

I was silent for so long, because there was nothing I could write that seemed worthy of you. My exalted Lady.

MANUEL in drag as FILOTEA

I have always admired the liveliness of your ideas, and have thanked God for you, for the great gift He has bestowed on you that is your debt and burden too. Apprehending your mind is the most arduous and pleasing sacrifice you can offer Him in return.

JUANA

Thank you for your patient guidance. I was taken so unaware, by the unexpected concern all had for me, you most of all. I was also so overwhelmed with gratitude on your publication of my critique -

MANUEL/FILOTEA

We admire the subtlety of your theories, the sheen of your presentation –your wit.

JUANA

My notes, my weak sentences, my scribblings.

MANUEL/FILOTEA

But remember, St. Jerome was whipped by angels because he delighted in his own eloquence. I come to you now as Sor Filotea de la Cruz, your affectionate servant, to remind you that all knowledge not tied to the pursuit of salvation is but gross stupidity. God said, let there be light on all things. Let there be clarity. Wit is not clarity.

JUANA

It's not my wish to refuse the task you put to me.

MANUEL/FILOTEA

Wit has become your punishment.

MANUEL/FILOTEA

You have let God's great gift become confused by the trivial dusty bits of the earth and its sciences. Desire to penetrate the mysteries of heaven. Wound your pride with the sweet love of God and repent. Force your genius to set sail on the ocean of divine Perfection. Let God enter your heart. Only then will He illuminate your mind. Step out of the darkness, my sister.

JUANA

I ask, poor nun that I am, why me?
Why speak these words to me?
Why would any of you, my betters, do me the favor of your attentions?
I am unworthy.

It was you, my sister, Filotea, who watch over and correct me, you gave me freedom to know myself. I saw myself not in the mirror but in your eyes. It's your faith in me, that makes my faith strong. Your love for me. Your love for me awoke my faith in His love.

Through you I found God.
I can only thank you by saying I am not capable of thanking you.

MANUEL/FILOTEA

I kiss the palms of your hands, and await your letter in response.
Yours in the light of God and all He holds holy, Sor Filotea de la Cruz.

JUANA

You remind me, it is God who knows us first and most of all.
Not the mirror. We must always look to Him.

I cannot refuse. I must respond. I thank you.
May God light both our paths.

Manuel/Filotea kisses the palms of her hands and exits.

JUANA

And we part.

You admonish me.
You warn me.
Apply myself to a better cause.
Study the holy scripture.
Unworthy as I am.
To write on the holy book with my unworthy hands
Contradicts my age
My sex
Custom

JUANA

They say Moses stuttered.
Moses was afraid to speak before the pharaoh.
God gave him courage.

The walls sing.

Female saints are hidden behind the altar.

The walls open up to reveal saint tableaus.

Beautified and canonized female saints. They are the unworthy worthies.

We hear female voices in prayer.

Unworthy as I am.

PRAYER ONE

Agatha
Unworthy worthy
You answered the call

Agatha
They cut off your breasts.
Don't slouch. Stand tall. Do you hear the bells?
Do you hear your lover's call?
The lion cannot be denied.
The man cries out as he falls.
Women hide behind veils
Agatha dances on the tongue of God
Danger is in the air, danger everywhere
When will He speak for her?
Yes, the Word off His tongue will make her bloom!
Agatha
How pretty your breasts are
Displayed on a plate for us all
Unworthy, as we are
And you, the most
Unworthy of All

PRAYER TWO

O Lucy,
Unworthy worthy
You answered the call

O Lucille
They plucked out your eyes.
Look with the eyes of God
He will blink for Her
Beware how the Dark tickles your frown

Do you hear your black-hearted lover call?
She swoons, o my, see how Lucy swoons and falls
O, Lucy,
How pretty your eyes are
Displayed like jewels for us on the ground
Unworthy, as we are
And you, the most
Unworthy of All

PRAYER THREE

Beatriz
Unworthy worthy
You answered the call
Beatriz
Show us your knees.
Your scars. Be strong.
Do you Do you Do you Do you Do you
hear hear hear hear the bells?
Do you hear Do you hear
your lover's call? your lover's call?
Like a loon, a loon, you must fly to him
Your webbed feet never touching the pond
The Pain in your song fills us with Awe
We pray – you never falter, you never Fall!
Unworthy, as we are
And you, the most
Unworthy of All

The novice enters. She undresses and shows the scars and wounds of every martyred female saint.

NOVICE

My answer my mirror my fingers my tresses. My darling, my dearest, my love. My
nothing, my noodle, my glove. My secret, my sunshine, my dove. My worry, my
warthog, my dung. My unworthy one.

LOA

My comb My soap My powder My bath My bedpan.

NOVICE

My beetle my torture my prayers my beads my mouth my laugh my unworthy one.

LOA

My worthy unworthy worldly unworldly worldly one.

NOVICE

My halo, my candle, my lung.

JUANA

My little wit. My bit of fun.

PRAYER FOUR 4

We are the sweet fancies
The wicked goslings
The kitchen slop
The bitter taste in his master plan
The harpies
Die for us. Die for our sins. Die for Love.

JUANA

Look upon me, O Lord
I'm a flamingo
No angel
I'm a flamingo
No pimped out whore
I'm a flamingo
No lost soul
No mean nun
I'm a flamingo

They dance, all flamingos, strange birds of paradise.

A young girl should know her own mind before she becomes a bride!

!!

*however stage-possible, the following happens, at least emotionally:
the moon becomes a hot sun at midnight
the nuns spin like tops
the women spin like Sufi dancers
they spin and fall to the ground - drunk
they undress, murmur prays, kiss each other, dress one as the bride of Christ
this girl-Christ spins in reverse, she spins up.
up
up
up*

*Juana watches her spin up into the heavens.
Juana is alone in the mind of God.*

JUANA

An imagination can be a terrifying thing.

the girl falls from the sky - thwack

*smack into the pile of unworthy worthies and flamingos
she shakes it off, looks around
her eyes meet Juana's (as if to say what was that?). she brushes herself off, bows like a circus
performer. applause. the ocean. applause. the girl blows a kiss and exits.*

JUANA

I'm glad you like my new play. I call it the Song of the Flamingos.

One may fail at art and poetry and still be granted Communion.
God forgives so much bad art done in his name.
And a woman poet is the most imperfect and abhorrent.
If it were permitted of me, I would burn her alive.
So I may jump into the fire and smile back at God.

Look down upon me, O Lord, I'm a flamingo.

And I am Ariadne. And Daedalus, inventor of the labyrinth. And the beast. The bull.
The one that makes everyone else lose sleep. And Theseus, the one who comes to kill all
myths. The unimaginable contradiction. A monster in the Golden Age trapped in New
Spain. Why did I ever learn to read!

She looks at her empty shelves.

I learned to read before I knew I was a girl. And when they said girls were not sent away
to school I begged my mother to dress me as a boy and send me to the City so I could I
know all God makes possible:

Rhetoric. Music. Astronomy. Arithmetic. Architecture. Geometry. Logic.
History.

Mother, may I?

Juana tips over her writing desk.

Juana plays her mother speaking to her daughter:

JUANA'S MOTHER (Juana)

You will think yourself too smart for any but God.
And then you will think yourself too smart for Him!

Who will love you?

You will end up blind, childless and alone reading as much as you do.

(Even worse horror:) You'll become vain!

JUANA'S MOTHER (Juana)

Listen to your illiterate mother. I know you say your Aristotle had a lot to say because he had access to the best libraries. But how much more he would have written if he were a cook. Juanita. You frighten me. My beautiful girl.

What.

You win. Here. Here is the key to your grandfather's library. But remember. I never asked you to apologize, Juana Inés de la Cruz, the most unworthy of all.

Time passes during the following, we go from dawn, through morning, to afternoon, to evening prayers. Three days.

JUANA

Forgive me.
I've been too vain.
My love for knowledge distracts me from the argument I wish to make.

My dear very illustrious pious Lady, my sweet sister, Sor Filotea,
The argument:
Is it permissible for a woman to study scripture?
Is it permissible for her to interpret it?
Even if she is virtuous. Prudent. Private and disciplined.

No more flamingos. No more mutilated forms.

Sweet Filotea,
We know it is fanatics who are at the root of heresies.
Men who do not know their own lusts and jealousies but proclaim they know God's mysteries...

I fear such men, lovely lady.
I fear the pen in their hands, the raging fire on their tongues.

The more they are allowed to love us, for our own good, the more dangerous they become. And they are allowed.

The Pharisees hated Christ.
They hated him.
He was a man.
But when they stared into his eyes.
They stared into his mind.
They stared into infinity.
Beauty without time.
Logic without fail.
Love without pride.

They stared into the divine.
And they hated him.

Beauty is the cause of violence more often than hate.

They accused Him: "this man is a criminal."
His beauty transgresses all laws.
He has performed signs! He has spoken of God's love as if it was his own!
He has become too significant!
He seeks to live among us and love without limit.
He speaks without recourse to sin and shame.
Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?
My husband.
His one desire is to teach the truth.
To teach: God is reason.

And what is my life's devotion?
To know God's reason.

Love Christ.
Love Christ.

How may I love Him if I forgo all that makes Him wise???
Command me not to breathe.

*Juana stops breathing.
Her body fights her, and she breathes.*

You may take my books.
But you may not take away God's universe.
It surrounds me.
God's creation is my letters.
His universe is my book.
Command me not to live in God's world.
You cannot.
As long as I breathe, I study.
In every creature, every material, no matter how lowly, the workings of God's mind can
be found. I may not refuse.

I am obedient.
There is no other happiness.

I must answer
It is you, dear lady, my sister, Sor Filotea, who compel me.
My response.

God is my teacher.
His love. His wisdom. His imagination.

May the oil of the wicked never touch my head.
Nor cloud my mind.
Blacken my thoughts.

If what I wrote is heretical simply because I wrote it...then I am not free.
Am I a heretic because my thoughts run towards poetry...then I am not free.
The Song of Songs speaks of our soul's love for our church.
Shall I not study what it says because it is poetry...?
Am I to be a slave to men who fear a woman's freedom and her literacy?

Did not God love us enough to set our minds free? Isn't that His greatest gift?
Reason tells me it is.

Juana unlocks and opens a cabinet. She looks through her legal papers, finds the one she wants, and signs it.

Loa.

LOA

What is it? Why are you giving this to me?

JUANA

This paper is your freedom. I've signed your papers. I've made you a free woman.
Take them. You may leave the cloister.

LOA

I'm no longer owned by you nuns? You sign your name and I'm a new thing?

They stare into each as if the other is a mirror showing their image to themselves for the first time.

I may leave the madhouse? This cell? Sleep wherever I want to sleep?

JUANA

Yes. May I kiss you?

LOA

No.

JUANA

I love you, Loa.

LOA

That's not my name. I may go? I may leave this hell-hole?

JUANA

Go, in the name of God.

LOA

In the name...? Do you even know what his real name is?

JUANA

His name is...

LOA

You call me Loa. But that is not my name. That is your slave name for me. I have kept my own name safe from people like you. Loa is the sound a cow makes before it dies. Loa is the name of a slave.

JUANA

Will you tell me your name?

LOA

No.

JUANA

You're a free woman. I've signed.

LOA

I dreamt I was a she-lion and saw you sleeping naked on a riverbank in Africa. I approached you carefully and licked your body with my rough tongue. "What do you want from me," you asked. "Are you a symbol? Are you a message from God, a sign of the End of Days?" "Am I? Yes," I said. "I am the violence in your mother's grave. I am the ache in your body that will never go away. I am the Christ, I said. I am the Christ. What's your name? Who are you that you make God's children slaves? God will punish you for making His children slaves."

You have signed your name. I will not thank you.
I am the Christ. You can give me nothing that I don't already have.

Loa exits.

Three days have passed.

JUANA

Fineza.

The bells for morning prayers are heard.

JUANA

Happiness.

Manuel enters.

MANUEL

Three days.

JUANA

Here's my letter, Sister. In three days, as promised. Publish it. May it serve all purposes. I accept my circumstance. I'm happy.

He reads.

He reads.

He darkens.

He stops reading.

MANUEL

Impossible. Always impossible. Always, always an argument. A diatribe! Against your sex. Against your place. Against Christ and his disciples. Against us, here and now.

JUANA

Never Christ.

I accept my circumstances as unworthy as I am.

I accept His blessing, His wish and His desire for me: that I succeed.

Magnificently.

MANUEL

I will not publish your response.

JUANA

You promised God.

MANUEL

We'll never see each other again.

JUANA

It breaks my heart.

They look into each other. Can it end differently?

Manuel exits, knowing it is for the last time.

He takes her written Response with him.

Juana addresses the audience.

JUANA

Don't worry. I wrote out a second copy.
Now what?

I'll bare my back and ask to be whipped. With the blood from my back, I will fill an ink well and write a new play and then I'll never write again.

In my new *loa* there is a young girl who believes her secret name is America. She demands she be allowed to sing her own words. With no apology. The theatre is a great place to be in times like these.

I ask for nothing more, my sisters, my friend, dear audience.
May God grant you much increase and keep you safe.
I pray I am worthy of the same.

Your most loving servant,
Juana Inés de la Cruz

End of play.