

IDB PLAYWRITING "HISPANICS IN THE USA" AWARD, 3rd PLACE 2010

JUANITA CLAXTON

by
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*“You
angel of hard delight
languid rebel orgasm
skin-tingling tremor
vulnerable gunpowder*

*return to me
and annihilate me.”*

Dina Posada

Characters:

JUANITA CLAXTON
JESUSA CAMACHO
JOSEFINA CRAUZE
CHRISTY

Set:

RED CROSS OFFICE.
WINDOW, DESK, TWO CHAIRS.

1/ angel of hard delight

We hear the second movement of Beethoven's violin concerto, at the violin solo, beginning five and a half minutes into the movement. To one side, Jesusa appears. We see only her shining face.

JESUSA: You leave it all behind and come to another country. You travel a thousand miles and floating in the flying waters, or rather sinking in the flying waters, tormented by the wind, or rather disfigured by the wind, only to find that poem you already had back home and didn't know was yours when you were there.

(READS FROM A VIBRANT BLUE PAPER)

*"You, angel of hard delight
languid rebel orgasm
skin-tingling tremor
vulnerable gunpowder
return to me
and annihilate me"*

That's Beethoven playing. His Violin Concerto. Music's finest moment. Pretty, isn't it?

(THE MUSIC MIXES WITH THE WEATHER BULLETIN AS THE LIGHTS SLOWLY COME UP ON A RED CROSS BRANCH OFFICE. WE SEE JUANITA AT HER DESK, SURROUNDED BY PHONES. SHE TALKS TO SOMEONE)

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER)...The Government of the Bahamas has just issued a Tropical Storm Warning following the formation of Tropical Depression 12. The warning covers the Abaco Islands, Andros, Berry, Bimini, Eleuthera, Grand Bahama and New Providence...

(JUANITA STOPS TALKING TO SOMEONE. BEHIND HER, JESUSA APPEARS. SHE PLACES THE VIBRANT BLUE PAPER ON ONE SIDE OF JUANITA'S DESK)

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER)...The center of Tropical Depression 12 is located near latitude 23.3 north, longitude 75.5 west, southeast of Nassau.

JESUSA: It all started the night of the second to last Saturday in August...

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER)...Tropical Depression 12 is moving northeast at 8 mph, with winds of 34 mph and stronger gusts. Pressure is 1007 mb. The Storm is expected to strengthen in the next 24 hours...

JESUSA: ...when a woman was saved by Juanita Claxton (POINTS TO JUANITA) and yours truly, Jesusa Camacho, at your service, just say the word.

(THE MUSIC STOPS. THE PHONE RINGS)

JUANITA: Good afternoon, Red Cross.

CALL1: Hi. Look, my husband was in an accident and he's been stuck in a wheelchair for two years. I'm a waitress and I can't ask for any more time off work or they'll toss me out on the street. Plus I work all weekend as a maid, taking care of kids and ironing shirts.

JUANITA: And what is your problem, ma'am?

CALL1: What do you mean what's my problem? Weren't you listening?

JUANITA: Yes, of course I was. But this is the Red Cross. What is your problem?

CALL1: Well to start with I don't have time to go buy supplies for my kids for back to school.

JUANITA: Dial 217 for the Mayor's office, maybe they can help you. (JUANITA HANGS UP. THE PHONE RINGS AGAIN) Good afternoon, Red Cross.

CALL2: Hello. I want to sell my house and I need a lawyer.

JUANITA: This is the Red Cross, sir.

CALL2: Yeah, you already said that.

JUANITA: Then call a lawyer.

CALL2: That's why I called you. Do you know a lawyer who's good and a good person?

JUANITA: It just so happens I do. Take his number: 619-4311. Call him and he'll advise you. Tell him you got his name from Juanita Claxton, that's me.

(HANGS UP. THE PHONE RINGS)

Good afternoon, Red Cross.

CALL3: Good afternoon. When does the next CPR course start?

JUANITA: Our next CPR Certification class begins Monday the 29th.

CALL3: And the cost?

JUANITA: It's forty-five dollars. But you can take the course free if you sign up to volunteer.

CALL3: And here nothing's free anymore!

JUANITA: Saving still is. Thank you.

(JUANITA HANDS UP THE PHONE. SHE WAITS FOR IT TO RING AGAIN IMMEDIATELY, BUT IT DOESN'T. SHE SEES THE VIBRANT BLUE PAPER AND PUTS A HAND TO HER HEAD, AS THOUGH IT HURT.

JUANITA IS ABOUT TO GET UP BUT THE PHONE RINGS AGAIN)

JESUSA: (TO AUDIENCE) Then, with that call, we met Josefina Crauze.

(ON THE OTHER SIDE, LIGHTS UP ON JOSEFINA)

JUANITA: Good afternoon, Red Cross.

JOSEFINA: What do you know about the rain falling in the city?

JUANITA: I don't have that information, ma'am, but I can find out in a moment.

JOSEFINA: I'm not a ma'am, I'm a miss.

JUANITA: Sorry, I just say that automatically.

JOSEFINA: Don't worry about it. You have such a soothing voice, it makes you want to call the Red Cross just to talk to you. You have a sweet voice. As if you choose your words very carefully.

JUANITA: That's nice, thank you. What's your name?

JOSEFINA: I'm Josefina Crauze, with a "C." And what I have to say is if the Red Cross is allowing itself the luxury of a receptionist like you it must mean people are donating more than they should.

JUANITA: Not at all. We never have enough money, you can be sure of that.

JOSEFINA: Of course, and anyway there's plenty of people who need saving.

JUANITA: And we do what we can.

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) I always liked being part of the Red Cross, even if I was a janitor. The thing is when you come to this country, whether you're Maria, Rita, Emily, Jesusa, Juanita, Josefina or Vilma, life, the streets and the fifty stars lead you first to selling oranges by the side of the highway, taking care of someone's hideous kids or cleaning toilets for people who can't shit straight. But the Red Cross, even with a bucket and mop and dirty water, makes me feel like I'm part of the rescue too, like the firewoman who saves Juanita's decoy cat; or the one who saves the woman trapped in the mudslide; or the one who risks her life saving the man drowning in the waves of a raging sea. Juanita and Jesusa, receptionist and maintenance, two particles of aid, two drops of grief in a song, two ropes holding up the firemen, two rescue helicopters, two red stretchers, two yellow blankets, two hands holding the ladder, untangling the hoses, pulling the line, turning on the oxygen. That what the two of us are; a peripheral yet essential part in the machinery of saving people.

JOSEFINA: (CHANGING TONE) I, for example, don't have anyone to save this Saturday night.

JUANITA: (WORRIED) What's going to happen Saturday night?

JOSEFINA: Well I'm going to overdose on T.V.

JUANITA: (NERVOUS, TO THE PHONE) What?

JOSEFINA: Sweetheart, are you going to save me tonight or what?

JUANITA: You mean you... (LOOKS AT JESUSA, IN HORROR) You think you'll try to take your own life?

JOSEFINA: Of course, silly. It's a revolting Saturday and I think the best thing to do now is kill myself.

JUANITA: You...Are you serious?

JOSEFINA: And how do you joke about killing yourself, honey?

JUANITA: Wait a second, I'm going to going to transfer you to the hotline for...!

JOSEFINA: Don't even think it!

JUANITA: No, of course not. (COVERING THE RECEIVER) Oh my God, oh my God...!

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Juanita got nervous, of course.

JUANITA: The thing is there are people who can help you more than I can!

JOSEFINA: Don't you know how to help people?

JUANITA: Yes, I do! I think. I knew how. Or I will. What do I know?! I've only been here ten days!

JOSEFINA: If you don't know, then bye. I'm sick of amateurs in my life.

JUANITA: No! Wait!! Don't hang up! I'm here! Talk to me!

JOSEFINA: Are you an amateur or do you really believe it?

JUANITA: I believe it! I'm the real thing!

JOSEFINA: Good, because I called to hear a voice, one last voice and I was going to hang up. But right away, your tone, your registers, were so pleasant. I thought: there's a woman there, a young woman, between twenty-four and twenty-six. An immigrant, but not like other immigrants, because she's made an extraordinary effort not to let it show. Not because she hates her country, but because she loves ours. She wants to fit in and hates when they ask her...

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Where are you from? What are your plans? Why are you taking away our jobs when we were born in this prosperous country? Why don't you go back to your filthy, dirty country you filthy, dirty woman?

JOSEFINA: Because you think there are better questions when two people meet; words that are more worthwhile, more suggestive, more unusual, more urgent. Questions like: do rainy afternoons make you happy?

JESUSA: Do you want to spend time with me?

JUANITA: And see you again, if I have seen you before.

JOSEFINA: Why am I alone?

JUANITA: I left words unsaid.

JESUSA: What's your favorite thing about kissing?

JUANITA: When he closes his eyes...

JOSEFINA: Do you dream about reality or is reality your dreams?

JUANITA: Like a character in a play.

JESUSA: Is it true you want to go back to your country but as a little girl again?

JOSEFINA: To see him again

JESUSA: So he can rescue you again?

JOSEFINA: And while he does, you hear music.

JESUSA: And you wonder...

JOSEFINA: What is that music?

JESUSA: And he tells you:

JOSEFINA: It's Beethoven. Music's finest moment. Pretty, isn't it?

JUANITA: (TO THE PHONE, LOUD) How do you know all that? Do we know each other?

JOSEFINA: And from your voice I also could hear you'd gone to school, in your country. You had a career, something much bigger than what you're doing now, but you don't care. To you, being a secretary at the Red Cross is like being a Cabinet Member or an Executive. Or am I

wrong? Tell me I'm wrong, deny it at least so I can hang up and go on my way. What's your name? Maria? Juanita?

JUANITA: Juanita, how'd you kn..?

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Incredible, right?

JOSEFINA: I knew you were Juanita and that you have wide eyes, that you like to wear your hair up and you're wearing lovely linen.

JESUSA: Lovely linen like your eyes...

JOSEFINA: Like your lovely linen eyes and that you like to cross your long legs...

JESUSA: When you talk on the phone...

JOSEFINA: That your phrases trail off like a bell that goes on ringing five seconds after it's been struck by a passionate, rebel nun; like an echo in the absurd forest where the living spirits dwell, perhaps his spirit, for he hasn't died. And you know that, they've told you that and you like doing it, before as a crutch to help you fit in, but now on purpose, because you can only do it in our language, not in your own, you can't do it in your own, Juanita.

And that's why you've decided, for that and nothing else, to live here. For that final cadence of your words, certain words, not all of them, when you speak our language. Or am I wrong?

JESUSA: Aha, Juanita Claxton, let's see what you say to that! Go on, then.

JOSEFINA: So since you've said nothing and nothing's what you've said, I'll ask you a few other questions that are pertinent and cardinal for two people getting to know each other. First: why do you think you feel better speaking a language not your own, where you have no memories of your childhood, or your family, or of him? Why do you understand me like no one else in a language I want to leave?-- for that's one thing about death, among other things, it puts an end to words and injures languages. Tell me, Juanita, angel of hard delight, tell me before I hang up the phone in dismay at your silence.

JESUSA: But Juanita Claxton, while she may be very much a Claxton, is also very South American, and tries to change the subject.

JUANITA: (TO THE PHONE, TENSE) Josefina, please, let me help you!

JOSEFINA: That's what I want, Juanita.

JUANITA: I can transfer you to...!

JOSEFINA: But I want you to help me.

JUANITA: Oh my God, oh my God...!

JESUSA: Your God, your God! Where are you hiding when Juanita needs you most?

JOSEFINA: Don't you know? If you transfer me to the suicide hotline, I'll hang up. And tomorrow you'll go to buy the paper and you'll look for the story about the woman who killed herself at home one Saturday night because Saturdays have that inevitable pall of ruin; Saturdays are a blazing menace; Saturdays expose with dazzling lights all those who don't want to go on living. And the story of the woman who can stand Saturdays no longer will be there and then you'll say...

JESUSA: You'll say...

JOSEFINA: I'm responsible for that life because that woman called me, asked for my help, and I, Juanita South American Immigrant Claxton, I sent her to the suicide hotline even though she had asked me, begged me, prayed, that I wouldn't do it. But I did. And now she's dead. Or not. Because maybe you won't see the story tomorrow. Maybe you'll look for it the next day and maybe it won't make the papers, it all depends on what's happened in national politics or sports, because then they cut less important stories and mine, ours, our story, Juanita, my death and in a certain way, yours, isn't transcendent, primordial or necessary.

(JUANITA TRIES TO SPEAK, BUT JOSEFINA DOESN'T LET HER)

JOSEFINA: Besides, it'll depend on how I do it, what form it takes, form is everything, my dear Juana Juanita love of my life. Do you kill yourself with a cliché or with creativity? Do you confound expectations or stick with the strength of tradition? What's more attention-getting on these godforsaken Saturdays? Overdosed women, hanged men. Or improvisation: hanged women, slash-wristed men. What would make a stronger headline?

(JUANITA TRIES TO SPEAK, BUT JOSEFINA DOESN'T LET HER)

JOSEFINA: Maybe, the best suicide is with language Juanita; a criminal act with adjectives, assailant, bandit, repeated, musical adjectives. A death in past progressive future conditional in this cataclysmic grammar of tragedy. And if I did it like that? What do you think? If you don't hear me, that can happen to you, Juanita of the golden heavens, all that remains of whirlwind August and what's to come of homicide September, almost holy ground October, searching for the story never knowing, the anxiety will gnaw at your days and your soul. Did I kill myself or didn't I? Are you responsible or aren't you? What are you going to do Juanita?
What are you going to do?

(JUANITA COVERS THE MOUTHPIECE AND LETS OUT A RESTRAINED SHRIEK. SHE CALLS JESUSA OVER WITH HER HEAD, BUT SHE SIGNALS SHE'S NOT WILLING TO GET INVOLVED)

JUANITA: Come here Jesusa!

JESUSA: I'm cleaning!

JUANITA: What should I do?

JESUSA: Put a little vinegar in the water so the floor looks cleaner.

JUANITA: Please!

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Aha! Suddenly, selling oranges by the side of the highway, taking care of someone's hideous kids or cleaning toilets for people who can't shit straight, seemed more substantial to me, more real than life and death, more immigrant and safe than the save-yourself-if-you-can Red Cross.

JOSEFINA: Did you notice, Juanita, that our names start with the same letter?

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) But Juanita had no words, they'd been assaulted. A robbery had taken place and right then, over the phone, Josefina Crauze jumped over the Red Cross counter with her suicide weapon in one hand and in the other, a bag full of Juanita's words. The very same Juanita Claxton who comes in early and says hi to me

every morning, it's true, but who never fails to put me in my I-clean-her-office-miss-that'll-be-all place. That Juanita who's more her south "South Latin American" than I am my north "Central Latin American," is left wordless and no longer in control of the call or anything else during these minutes of God. And then, she feels like crying.

JOSEFINA: Juanita, don't you start crying and don't hang up on me!

JUANITA: (HOLDING BACK TEARS) I'm not crying!

JOSEFINA: You've got a couple of fat tears ready to leap off into the void!

JESUSA: Witch!

JUANITA: You can see me!

JOSEFINA: Of course not!

JUANITA: How do you know so much?

JOSEFINA: Because I'm on the edge of the abyss!

JUANITA: That's not enough!

JOSEFINA: And how do you know?

JUANITA: I don't know!

JOSEFINA: Then don't talk!

JUANITA: (ALMOST CRYING) Don't talk to me like that, I just started here ten days ago!

JOSEFINA: Then don't get nervous!

JUANITA: (YELLING) I'm not nervous!

JOSEFINA: And lower your voice!

JUANITA: (LOWERS HER VOICE) All right...

JOSEFINA: Good. You're not nervous. (JUANITA NODS) Let's go over what will happen in the next few minutes so there won't be any surprises. Ok?

JUANITA: (SNIFFLING) Ok...

JOSEFINA: Good. What if you get another call? Are you going to abandon me?

JUANITA: No, I won't abandon you.

JOSEFINA: Now tell me...

JUANITA: What?

JOSEFINA: What do you want to know?

JUANITA: About what?

JOSEFINA: To help you calm down.

JUANITA: Tell me the reason.

JESUSA: Behind all this.

JUANITA: So tell me.

JESUSA: And tell us now.

JUANITA: Josefina... Why do you want to kill yourself?

(WE HEAR ANOTHER CALL. JUANITA CUTS IT OFF VIOLENTLY ON HER SWITCHBOARD PHONE. PAUSE)

JOSEFINA: Xeroxil.

JESUSA: Medicine?

JOSEFINA: It keeps me balanced and in contact with myself and all the people I am. But lately, Xeroxil isn't helping. Xeroxil's like God, it's there, but it doesn't do anything. Sometimes it doesn't answer the phone. Especially on Saturday nights. Do you believe in God, Juanita?

JUANITA: I'm Catholic.

JESUSA: That wasn't what she asked.

JOSEFINA: But do you believe?

JUANITA: Of course. Do you?

JESUSA: It depends on the traffic.

JOSEFINA: Why do you believe, Juanita?

JUANITA: I believe God exists, that's all. It's faith.

JOSEFINA: And that's enough, you go to heaven?

JESUSA: What did you expect? She's pretty, she gets everything handed to her. The right measurements, a suitable face, white skin. She's going to heaven, of course.

JUANITA: It's not enough, of course not, but it helps a lot.

JOSEFINA: And me, I don't believe, so I'm sure to go to hell. Tonight. Or tomorrow. Do you go right away? If I kill myself today, when do I get there? Tomorrow morning or the same night? Or maybe there's a waiting list. Hell can't be very popular but I bet there's a long line of people waiting outside heaven. Maybe they give out numbers, like at the bank, and you have to wait until they check your information, just in case there's another Josefina Crauze out there, meaner than mange, who's trying to pass herself off as me and get into the cloud of beauty, in that glorious cloud room they've reserved for me in heaven. Or do I go to hell just because I decided to kill myself? Isn't Xeroxil a mitigating factor? Meds make us do stuff we don't want to, they should take that into consideration when they make their cloudy decision. Because hell, well I don't deserve it, that's all. I probably won't be burning till Monday or Tuesday, if I'm lucky. Because a lot of people die on weekends and things get backed up. But since I'm an induced suicide, a Xeroxil suicide as it's known in those white fields of heaven, I suppose there's a kind of fast track, a VIP room, a Gold pass. What do you know about that, Juanita, tell me?

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) And our Latina here, more terrified than a cockroach looking at a raised shoe, tried to change the subject a second time.

JUANITA: Have you poisoned yourself with that medicine? Do you have Xeroxil

poisoning? Josefina, maybe I should send help.

JOSEFINA: I haven't taken anything yet, my love. But I have it ready. But first, tell me I won't go to hell, Juanita, because heat kills me. Is God on call on Saturday nights or does he blow it all off watching TV?

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Just between us, if Josefina Xeroxil Crauze doesn't believe in God, why is she so stuck on the subject?

JOSEFINA: Anyway, Juanita, if the big guy doesn't exist, it's a shame, because it's a fabulous idea. (JUST THEN, THREE CALLS START RINGING AND ALL THE RED BUTTONS LIGHT UP) A God who says salvation lies in love. And if you've made mistakes in your life, then you're not definitively condemned because if you repent really and truly, you can be forgiven. I repent for being cruel to the taxi driver; I repent for spending too much time watching TV; I repent for being stupid; I repent for being so bad to those who are no longer with me. I repent and I repent for being, in the end, so horrible down in my soul.

(THE PHONE STOPS RINGING AND ALL THE LIGHTS GO OFF. SILENCE. JESUSA FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE)

JUANITA: Josefina...

JOSEFINA: Yes, love.

JUANITA: I think that's a beautiful thing you said.

JOSEFINA: It always happens to me when I'm going to kill myself. I say things I'd never thought of before. I feel better about myself. Maybe I should try killing myself more often, then I wouldn't feel so stupid.

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE, FROM THE SAME SPOT WHERE SHE BEGAN THE SCENE) ...And that's how a woman was saved by Juanita Claxton (POINTS TO JUANITA) and yours truly, Jesusa Camacho, at your service, just say the word.

(JUANITA LAUGHS. JESUSA BEGINS CLEANING)

JUANITA: You're not going to kill yourself anymore?

JOSEFINA: Not today. Thanks, Juanita dear. I was thinking of coming to visit you at your office. Do you think I could?

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) And I don't know why, but I said yes.

JUANITA: Come whenever you like. And if you feel like doing "that" again, don't hesitate to call me. Do you have anyone who can stay with you tonight? A friend? Someone you love?

JOSEFINA: Loves? I've left them all.

JUANITA: The thing is the day you stop loving, is the happiest day of our lives.

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) She said it in a Juanita of Arc pose, recalling her impossible love in Caracas. And me, Jesusa of Arc, I'm not excluding myself, I left my husband behind in Querétaro and when they ask, I say I'm single, with a smile, thanks very much.

JOSEFINA: (TO JUANITA) You said a very beautiful thing.

JESUSA: (AS THOUGH ADDRESSED TO HER) Thanks, but it wasn't to you. (TO THE AUDIENCE) So the two or rather three of us, very "Arc-ish", felt a little less like immigrants from commitment, from love and even a little horrible ourselves.

JOSEFINA: Then let's go back to the beginning and the reason I called: Does the Red Cross know something about the rain falling in the city? Do you have an answer, Juanita Claxton of my sorrows?

JESUSA: And that was how we discovered that drizzly Saturday afternoon storm and a hurricane was coming.

JUANITA: Don't be silly, Jesusa. It won't come here. New Orleans has never been hit by hurricanes.

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) ...The National Hurricane Center has named Tropical Depression 12 Hurricane Katrina, a strong Category 1 with winds of up to 83 mph. The eye of the hurricane is currently located at Latitude 25.6 north, Longitude 77.2 west, with sustained winds of 75 mph...

(JESUSA TAKES THE VIBRANT BLUE PAPER AND DISAPPEARS)

JOSEFINA: Hello?

JUANITA: Hello?

JOSEFINA: Juanita. Are you there?

JUANITA: I can't hear you...

JOSEFINA: I can't hear you...

JUANITA: Hello?

JOSEFINA: Juanita?

JUANITA: She hung up.

(JUANITA FEELS A DROP OF WATER THAT FALLS FROM
THE CEILING. SHE HOLDS UP HER HAND TO LOCATE IT)

JUANITA: A drip?

(WE HEAR THE ADAGGIO FROM BEETHOVEN'S PIANO
CONCERTO NO. 5)

2 / *Skin-tingling tremor*

Juanita's desk and the area Jesusa cleans are lit up. The desk is empty. Jesusa appears just as she did in Scene 1.

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Squall Saturday was done, Downpour Tuesday came and the hurricane had crossed the Bahamas and Nassau, destroying everything. They named it Katrina and she'd never come to New Orleans. And I figured: it's true, maybe she won't, but because of her name. If she were a Maria, Rita, Emily, Jesusa, Juanita, Josefina or Vilma, no doubt she'd come here to try her luck like all the rest. But, Katrina? Russian Bitch!

(GOING TO ONE SIDE)

Ah! That's Piano Concerto No. 5 playing. The Emperor Concerto. Beautiful. Isn't it?

(LIGHTS UP ON JUANITA)

JUANITA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) When they offered me the receptionist's job at the Red Cross, everyone at home was surprised. The thing is new arrivals to this God's country, whether they're Marias, Ritas, Emilys, Jesusas, Juanitas, Josefinas, Vilmas or Katrinas, the first job you get is selling oranges by the side of the highway, taking care of someone's hideous kids or cleaning toilets for people who can't shit straight.

JESUSA: Copy cat.

JUANITA: But for me, the Red Cross, look at that!

JESUSA: (ASKING THE OBVIOUS QUESTION) So how did you do it?

JUANITA: How did I do it? It was chance, like nearly everything that happens to me these days: leaving my family, my love, my country. All by accident, quite a Red Cross word too. Huh?

JESUSA: Get to the point, pencil. How'd it happen?

JUANITA: Well I walked past the office and went in to ask for brochures on hurricanes. (JESUSA MIMICS HER, COMICALLY) After all, three have already come through the Caribbean. One close one, Dennis, and a real pain, Emily, I never did like Emilys.

In my country, all this hurricane stuff doesn't exist. Earthquakes, mudslides, tidal waves, bullets chasing you down, plenty of tragedy, and all, but hurricanes, no sir.

That day I walked in the office (LIGHTS ON THE OFFICE. AT THE DESK, CHRISTY) And, what luck, the Branch Manager, Christy, was there, the nicest lady.

CHRISTY: How can I help you?

JUANITA: I wanted information about hurricanes.

CHRISTY: Here, take this brochure.

JUANITA: Do you have them in Spanish? (TO THE AUDIENCE) And that was the question that caught her attention.

CHRISTY: Actually no. We don't. And you can't imagine how we could use them.

JUANITA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Then I, being generous...

JESUSA: Venezuelan and pushy...

JUANITA: Available and supportive...

JESUSA: Meddlesome and nosy...

JUANITA: I said (TO CHRISTY) If you want, I can translate them.

JESUSA: How sweet.

CHRISTY: That would be great, but we don't have the money.

JUANITA: Don't worry, I'm doing it to help.

JESUSA: Clever, huh? Yeah, well pretty girls, no matter how dumb they may be, always get in the easy way.

- JUANITA: (CHRISTY STARTS HANDING HER BROCHURES. TO THE AUDIENCE) And so began my relationship with the Red Cross, or should I say the American Red Cross, for those of us who've integrated.
- JESUSA: And forgotten their own culture.
- JUANITA: From my selfless translation of the brochure: "*Planning in the Hurricane Zone,*" that I changed in Spanish to: "*Ready, Set: Hurricane!*" I moved on to "*What to do in case of a fire*", then to the brochure "Area shelters" and...
- JESUSA: "*Immigration's after me: Where do I hide?*"
- JUANITA: "*Smell gas in your home?*"
- JESUSA: And the latest fashion:
- JUANITA: "*Terrorist attacks with atomic bombs in our community. Steps and recommendations.*"
- JESUSA: A nice brochure that recommends ducking and covering under a table in the event of a thermonuclear explosion. You see they make some very sturdy tables here, Made in America.
- JUANITA: The next week I brought in the translations and Christy offered me a job.
- JESUSA: Janitor's assistant, perhaps? Babysitter? Gofer?
- JUANITA: Receptionist!
- JESUSA: White girls, they may be poor and stupid, but they've got it good, sista.
- JUANITA: And, me... Wow! Receptionist! I can't believe it!
- JESUSA: What a South American smile and not coming from shitty Central Mexico can do. Because here, even African Americans, you know blacks, get treated better than us. And here I'm American, just not from Africa. Though we're all from Africa, that's what I heard. Maybe I'm African American and I don't even know it? It's possible!

- CHRISTY: You'll answer phones for the Red Cross. Will you know what to do, Juanita, if there's a tragedy?
- JUANITA: You can count on me, Miss Christy.
- JESUSA: She called the old bag "Miss." This one will go far, as a brownnoser, bootlicker and ass-kisser.
- JUANITA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) The thing is, according to what MISS Christy told me, everyone wants us to answer the most important calls of their lives. Us, women, young women if possible, they want us to be the ones to say, "We're always ready!" when the desperate demand rescue. One female voice...
- JESUSA: Without ties.
- JUANITA: Preferably single.
- JESUSA: And white.
- CHRISTY: Giving them hope.
- JUANITA: A chance.
- CHRISTY: A yes from the start.
- JUANITA: An opportunity.
- CHRISTY: That's what everyone wants from us. For us to offer them an opportunity to save themselves.
- JUANITA: And we're the ones doing the saving.
- CHRISTY: Or at least, the saving begins with us.
- JUANITA: Even though sometimes you have to say no.
- CHRISTY: Even so, a no in a young female voice suggests... hope.
- JESUSA: While a no from an old, half-indigenous woman from Querétano, up to her neck in cleaning for the last fourteen years, suggests instead a serial killer, first-degree burns, carbon monoxide poisoning and a last breath reeking of tartar.

CHRISTY: And hope, Juanita, is a powerful weapon.

JUANITA: As I, Juanita Claxton, well know.

JESUSA: And I, Jesusa Camacho.

BOTH: Hope is what I live on.

JESUSA: And my hopelessness is what, truthfully,

BOTH: Many of us live on.

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) A Hurricane warning has been issued for Florida's east coast from Vero Beach to Titusville, including Merritt Island. Katrina is moving northeast with winds of 89 mph. The storm is moving slowly and producing heavy rainfall with a strong chance of flooding...

(JUANITA TAKES OVER HER DESK AND PLACES ALL THE KNICKKNACKS SEEN IN SCENE 1.

CHRISTY HANDS HER SOME KEYS AND PINS HER RED CROSS NAMETAG ON HER CHEST AND EXITS. DURING ALL THIS, JESUSA HUMS THE U.S. NATIONAL ANTHEM AND TOSSES RED, WHITE AND BLUE CONFETTI IN THE AIR)

JESUSA: They gave her a jet-black executive chair just like mine, that's made of dirty plastic, with a broken leg and smells like a dead man's saliva. Who knows what hanged man they took it from to give it to me.

(THEN, ON JESUSA'S SIGNAL, JUANITA'S CHAIR DROPS DOWN COMICALLY. JESUSA GOES OVER TO HER. THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER, THOUGH JUANITA IS PRACTICALLY ON THE FLOOR IN HER CHAIR. SHE TRIES TO RAISE IT BUT CAN'T. JESUSA, WITH A SINGLE BLOW, RAISES IT. JUANITA SHAKES AND NEARLY FALLS)

JESUSA: Hello, I'm Jesusa Camacho, I'm from Querétaro, capital of the Lord in Mexico, at your service.

JUANITA: So what do you do in the Red Cross?

JESUSA: I wipe the ass of the butt of salvation.

JUANITA: Oh, Jesusa, you're so "colorful"

JESUSA: Yeah, I'm a real water painting

JUANITA: I meant...

JESUSA: I'm like a rainbow. I've got more colors than Benetton. Yeah, I got it, perfectly.

JUANITA: What part of Mexico? Southern?

JESUSA: Central, north Mexico.

JUANITA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) From central, north Mexico, she likes to clarify, maybe because she thinks that coming from the central north makes her less foreign. I love to listen to her talk because she tells all kinds of lies. Like the one about coming from the north, you can tell easy that she's from the south, far south, north Guatamala practically. But what do I care if she comes from central Guatamala, or even south, if in the end I can talk to her till I drop, all very much in Spanish and I have fun and it clears my head. (TO JESUSA) Jesusa?

JESUSA: Jesusa like Jesus. Mom wanted a boy, but out I came, so she named me Jesusa and that was that. No so much to honor God's son at that point, but to shame him for not giving her what she wanted.

JUANITA: The only problem with Jesusa, south Guatemala, north El Salvador, is she likes to gossip, or as she likes to call it...

JESUSA: It's not gossip, it's the heroic path on the way to truth.

JUANITA: And even though she's nosier than an elephant, really, she stands by me when things get a bit red. Especially these lights (TO THE PHONE) when they're red, they're frightening.

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) ...The National Hurricane Center predicts Katrina will pass over south Florida and will most likely head toward the Yucatan Peninsula...

JUANITA: I don't work all that much, because help-rescue me-save me-really, are maybe two calls a week. The rest of the time, it's more like I direct traffic sending calls from one place to another, stopping some, hurrying others along.

(JESUSA GOES TO THE FAR SIDE TO CLEAN)

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) ...Katrina is moving at 6 mph and is now a Category 2 Hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Scale, with winds of up to 95 mph.

JUANITA: (TO THE AUDIENCE, SHOWING THE OFFICE) And that's how I've spent my days at the Red Cross, no less. That should look great when I go to ask for citizenship. (TO SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE) Don't you think? (TO THE AUDIENCE) An immigrant who helps people, a careerwoman in her own country who decides to come here and work helping out all the miserable people for a salary that's equally miserable but enough. An immigrant who acts like a citizen right from the start, with a real patriotic streak, that's me; an immigrant who's a true friend of the country and especially, close to the unfortunate and downtrodden in it, who she supports from her switchboard phone with a voice that's sweet and verifiably single, homey ways and indisputable decency.

Childless, no one to answer to -though I have a cat or maybe two, because one ran away and I don't know if he's mine anyway, I'm a poet and I didn't know it- in any case, and that's the case, this lovely immigrant, I was saying, with strong legs, of medium height, is available to marry any rescue worker or fireman from this country and she'll give him lots of nationalist and patriotic sons ready to defend America's homeland and interests against any lurking danger.

Because children are the future and if the future holds anything it promises plenty of fantastic wars that our country, or rather their country, but very much mine too since ten days ago, will bravely fight and win. We'll have a future of soldier sons who are smart and super macho with a DNA to die for and healthy genes without hereditary diseases because this Miss Claxton may be very Juanita, but she comes from a Latino, Hispanic, Spanglish, bombproof family that's done nothing but work their whole life. So Juanita Claxton, the beautiful and celibate receptionist, sends you all a fighting salute from the Red Cross, with faith in the future and reminds you she's an asset to the nation. And so, without delay, give her a visa with U.S. citizenship like any other and give her a twenty-six gun salute, -which is her current and real age, more or less, one gunshot more or less won't bring down the country- to celebrate that this valuable woman will be, legally, another "one of us", a green-card carrying citizen with light skin, white skin, nearly blonde with windblown highlights, a citizen of the United States of America. In God we Trust. Amen.

(JUANITA FEELS A DROP OF WATER FALL FROM THE CEILING. FINDS IT WITH HER HAND. PUTS OUT A BUCKET AND WE HEAR THE DRIP. BUT, WHEN SHE MOVES AWAY, SHE STEPS IN A PUDDLE.

THE PHONE RINGS)

JUANITA: Hello, Red Cross? (LISTENS, TIRED)
I'm the Secretary. (LISTENS) Category 2. (LISTENS) It's heading south. It will probably hit Mexico, thank goodness.
(HANGS UP)

JESUSA: Yeah, with all the dirt-poor people we've got there, what's five thousand more, five thousand less?

(PHONE RINGS)

JUANITA: Hello, Red Cross? (LISTENS) The next CPR course starts Monday the 29th. (LISTENS) No, today's not Monday the 29th. Next week. You're welcome.

(HANGS UP. FINDS THE VIBRANT BLUE PAPER AGAIN)

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) And everything was going fine, till she showed up.

(JOSEFINA APPEARS, VERY WELL DRESSED, LIKE A MOVIE STAR. JUANITA SETS THE PAPER ASIDE)

JUANITA: How can I help you?

JOSEFINA: You're Juanita, right?

JUANITA: At your service. Are you here for the CPR course?

JOSEFINA: I came to see you.

JUANITA: Do I know you?

JOSEFINA: Very well.

JUANITA: I don't recall...

JOSEFINA: It's the first time you've seen me.

JUANITA: So I know you without having seen you?

JOSEFINA: On the phone

JUANITA: Josefina!

JOSEFINA: I still haven't killed myself.

(JUANITA HUGS HER)

JUANITA: I'm so glad you're here!

JOSEFINA: I put on my fanciest dress to see you.

JUANITA: Welcome to the Red Cross!

JOSEFINA: I thought your office was bigger, Juanita. But it's still fine. Everything at your fingertips. But what I got right was your desk; I knew you had decorated it in seven colors.

(JUANITA COUNTS THE COLORS AND THERE ARE SEVEN, THOUGH SHE HESITATES OVER ONE. JESUSA INTRODUCES HERSELF)

JESUSA: Hi. I'm Jesusa

JOSEFINA: Are you?

JESUSA: (GETS NERVOUS) I, honestly, I, I, well I don't know.

JOSEFINA: The vastly eerie Jesusa. Like a dry tree.

JESUSA: Thank you. At your service.

JOSEFINA: Dutiful and humble.

JESUSA: At your service, I'll get out of your way. Go on in.

(JESUSA GOES BACK TO HER THINGS, STABBED BY JOSEFINA'S LOOK)

JUANITA: (TO JOSEFINA) When was it we talked? Three or four days ago?

JOSEFINA: I was going to come yesterday, but with all this rain. It hasn't stopped raining since we talked. Hadn't you noticed?

JUANITA: But everything's fine, don't worry, Josefina.

JOSEFINA: Still, I was thinking that now I could spend some of my time doing something better for my soul. What do you think?

JUANITA: That sounds great.

JOSEFINA: Well then, I'm here to help.

JUANITA: You came to help?

JOSEFINA: Yeah, your friend God spoke to me, he suggested it. Since you're not going to kill yourself anymore, he said. Why not help others? After all, even if you don't believe, there are other people in the world, besides you. And since you're sitting around all day, how hard is a Christian gesture or at least a humane one?-- so you ask your friend, Red Cross Juanita, to let you volunteer.

JUANITA: He said all that to you? And you don't even believe! And me, devoted as I am, I don't get even a syllable.

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE. LOOKING AT THEM WITH RANCOR)
And that's how the leaky faucet and the full bladder met.

JOSEFINA: Besides, if the miserable need saving, well, who better than me?

JUANITA: Josefina, you're not miserable.

JOSEFINA: But I have a calling.

JESUSA: She does have that, the bitch with a capital B, pardon me Lord.

JOSEFINA: Tell me what I have to do.

JUANITA: To work as a volunteer first you have to fill out this form. (HANDS IT TO HER) The boss reads it and they'll call you in 24 hours. There aren't that many people who help and there aren't that many requirements, especially if they're not getting paid. (TAKING THE FORM FROM HER) Let's see, full name: Josefina Crauze, right? address...

JOSEFINA: Hotel Le Cirque, 22 Canal Place.

(JUANITA WRITES)

JUANITA: Last job?

JOSEFINA: Juanita, I haven't had a job in five years.

JUANITA: Well, how come? How've you made a living?

JOSEFINA: I was in prison.

JUANITA: What?

JESUSA: I knew it the moment I saw her!

JUANITA: Prison?

JOSEFINA: Is that a problem?

JUANITA: Good Lord. But... Why were you in prison, Josefina?

JESUSA: Exactly. Why?

JUANITA: Forms are forms and it says "fill in all the blanks." And here's a rather interesting one on criminal background. And it's not just a box to check, because after you pick "yes" there's another place that says: "EXPLAIN." That's what we're doing, Josefina, that's what we're doing.

JESUSA: Besides, the curiosity's killing me.

JUANITA: It's routine and honestly we don't care why you were in prison. We don't judge people here, we rescue them. But we have to follow procedures and the most important thing is to tell the truth.

JOSEFINA: An ex-con, yeah, but a liar, never.

JUANITA: Now, why were you in prison?

JOSEFINA: Attempted murder.

JESUSA: Good God!

JUANITA: Are you pulling my leg?

JOSEFINA: Yours is very nice, but I don't need to pull it, honey. I've got my own.

JUANITA: Don't make jokes.

JOSEFINA: Juanita, I'm incapable of lying. And it's not because I don't know how, but life, and I've had several of them, life's taught me a few lessons. One of them is that lying is one of the most senseless acts we can perform in this life. Lying is clumsy and it's a disaster too, an act that invariably ends in calamity. Lying is useless. So I don't lie.

JUANITA: Can I ask you, and now it's just out of curiosity, because it doesn't ask for any reference or special description of your crime, but can I ask, I mean, how did it happen, this attempted....?

JOSEFINA: I tried to kill my doctor.

JESUSA: And they call me third world, just because I have dark skin!

JUANITA: But, what did he do to you?

JOSEFINA: He prescribed medications that were bad.

JUANITA: The Xeroxil you talked about? The one you were thinking of taking on Saturday?

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) National Hurricane Center Bulletin number 9. Katrina has crossed south Florida and a Hurricane warning has been issued for the entire coast of the Gulf of Mexico. With winds of 100 mph, Katrina is still a Category 2 Hurricane, but could strengthen over the next few hours....

(JOSEFINA GOES TO ONE SIDE. WHEN SHE TURNS AROUND, SHE SEES JESUSA AND JUANITA, WAITING FOR HER TO SPEAK. ANOTHER DRIP STARTS AND JUANITA PLACES A BUCKET UNDERNEATH IT AUTOMATICALLY. SHORT PAUSE)

JOSEFINA: Fine, I'll tell you about it. Though the last time I did was in Court and they sent me to prison for five years anyway.

(WALKS TO ONE SIDE) The first wasn't Xeroxil, but Beycol, a drug to control cholesterol. It gave me muscle pain, made it

impossible to walk and destroyed muscle fiber. I couldn't even put on my socks. I lost control of my emotions.

Then he prescribed Arava, for my arthritis, but it produced toxic attacks on my liver. It's like Vioxx, the one that's prohibited but still gets sold under a different name and causes fatal cardiac failure. Like Zetra and Plevix. Then he prescribed Prempro hormone replacement therapy. It gives you breast cancer and strokes. And he prescribed Accutane for my skin, which causes kidney failure and attacks the liver and heart.

JESUSA: And here it's our hearts that are already giving us trouble.

JOSEFINA: And when I got the flu, he gave me Relenza, excellent for body aches, but it causes asthma, oh and Motrin, which really didn't agree with me, especially when I found out it leads to blindness.

JESUSA: How many problems did you have, Good Lord?

JOSEFINA: On my second-to-last appointment I had head and body aches, so he prescribed Celebrex, which has the highest incidence of heart attacks for any drug in the last fifteen years.

JESUSA: It's a good thing I only take weight loss pills.

JOSEFINA: He recommended those too. Starting with Redux, which can destabilize your heartbeat, cause pain in the chest and arm and pulmonary hypertension.

JESUSA: That's what I take! Redux! For weight "reduction."

JOSEFINA: They're dangerous because they have fatal side effects and because they're addictive. They tie the patient to the drug.

JESUSA: I've been taking Redux for a year and it works for me.

JOSEFINA: Let me remind you that the treatment for pulmonary hypertension is nothing less than a lung transplant. Anything else is death by asphyxiation.

JUANITA: Starving to death is safer, Jesusa, before you get "Reduxed" from the face of the earth.

JESUSA: Look what a comedian you've become. All you're missing is the mop, the cart and a white smock.

(THEY STICK THEIR TONGUES OUT AT EACH OTHER AT THE SAME TIME)

JOSEFINA: Then, when my body was one big bag of chemicals as it was and I fell into depression, bulimia, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and panic attacks, he prescribed the star antidepressants: first Prozan and then, Xeroxil.

JUANITA: Xeroxil, the one you were going to use to kill yourself.

JOSEFINA: The thing is the sadness is so deep and so sustained, that even the drugs lead you to suicide.

JESUSA: But they heal. You die, yes. But the depression, it's gone.

JUANITA: So you tried to kill your doctor.

JOSEFINA: Xeroxil induces people to suicide or crime. It wasn't me, it was Xeroxil.

JESUSA: So what do you know about aspirin? Do they kill you or just destroy you?

JOSEFINA: I've tried to kill myself, I've tried to kill someone else. I've been in prison for 5 years. Will that look really bad on my Red Cross application?

JUANITA: Maybe I better check "yes" lightly in the criminal background box and where it says "Explain" I'll put "Minor." We'll say you haven't been working for a while, taking care of things at home.

JESUSA: A cell's real homey, sure.

(JUANITAGOES ON FILLING OUT THE FORM, QUICKLY)

JUANITA: ... We don't have to answer that. Or that....that's not necessary. Here it asks if you've traveled.

JESUSA: From prison to jail, round trip.

JOSEFINA: I've been to India five times.

(ANOTHER DRIP FORMS. JOSEFINA SEES IT)

JESUSA: Five times!

(JOSEFINA TAKES OUT A BOTTLE OF PILLS. WE CAN'T SEE THE NAME, BUT JESUSA AND JUANITA NOTICE IT, WITH SOME TENSION)

JUANITA: Wow! What were you doing there?

(WE HEAR THE SOUND OF RAIN)

JOSEFINA: I went to hunt the great Golden Tiger of India.

JESUSA: Now she's got a whole box of screws loose.

JUANITA: What did you say?

JOSEFINA: The Golden Tiger of India.

JUANITA: A tiger? A real one?

(RAINS HARDER)

JOSEFINA: There was only one left in the world. I chased it for months, in the rain, at night, following the silver light of the moon, in the damp jungle. I fought with so many common tigers, confusing them with that single golden one that my failure hurt more than my injuries.

Until one day, the last day, when I was leaving, giving up my search, in the middle of the night, I was awakened by two yellow beams.

(RAINS HARDER. WE SEE TWO BRIGHT YELLOW LIGHTS)

They were his eyes.

The Golden Tiger was waiting for me in the jungle, inviting me to a cosmic, final battle.

When I could see his face, I felt a skin-tingling tremor, but still I aimed my rifle at his head. He readied his claws, opened his mouth, showed me his teeth and leapt on me.

I shot at him, but I missed. Then, the battle with the tiger was body-to-body, personal. We fought for nearly twenty minutes. He wounded me with his claws and I blinded him, gouging out his eyes with my bare hands.

In the end, with the scent of blood and brute hatred, the great Golden Tiger of India devoured me, taking my life little by little, slowly.

(PAUSE. WE HEAR NOTHING BUT THE RAIN AND THE DRIPPING)

JUANITA: Josefina, you said you didn't lie.

JOSEFINA: I never tell lies.

JUANITA: But you're lying.

JOSEFINA: I'm telling the truth.

JUANITA: You're saying the tiger devoured you?

JOSEFINA: Just like that. Mercilessly.

JUANITA: But, Josefina, you're alive.

JOSEFINA: Oh really? Alive?

(SHOWS THE PILLS)

And you call this life?

(WE HEAR A TERRIBLE THUNDERCLAP. QUICKLY, JOSEFINA TAKES THE PILL. JESUSA AND JUANITA TRY TO STOP HER, BUT SHE STILL TAKES IT. THE THREE LOOK AT EACH OTHER. SHE SHOWS THEM THE BOTTLE, AS IF TO SAY "IT WAS JUST ONE." BEETHOVEN'S PIANO TRIO NO. 5 OPUS 70 "GHOST" BEGINS TO PLAY)

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) The eye of Hurricane Katrina is located at latitude 24.8, longitude 82.9 and is expected to take a turn toward the north in the next 24 hours.

JOSEFINA: This morning, on the corner of Ninth Street, while I was waiting for a green light, I started switching radio stations and suddenly, there was this sad music, overwhelmingly sad, alarmingly sad.

I sat there listening to it, so at the end they'd say whose it was. And then, I don't know why, I saw the city's levees. I saw them and I thought they looked like two gigantic hands that were tired of holding back the water flying around, with our names on it.

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) Katrina is now a Category 3 hurricane with winds of 112 mph and is expected to grow stronger as it enters the warm Gulf waters...

JOSEFINA: Then I watched the birds on Ninth Street and I noticed they had stopped flying. They were hanging, in a line, one beside the other, as though waiting. They were in the branches of the trees, hiding, as though they were waiting for devastation.

JESUSA: Some tropical depression!

JUANITA: Forget about that, Josefina. This city's protected by partying, by tourists and by its history. Those levees can withstand winds of up to a Category 5 hurricane. The brochure says so. If you want I can swear to it for you.

JESUSA: Now that would reassure me: Juanita Claxton's oath.

JOSEFINA: They're words, honey. Words like cars, sliding along the open road, no traffic, no bodies on the shoulder. Formula 1 words, well-oiled, multicolor Nascar words circulating at high speed, drunk or overdosed, desperate to reach the finish line. He'll come here, he'll be Category 1000, the levees will crumble, no one will help and, calmly, he'll destroy us all. And I'm telling you, they're words, that's all.

And you see it's with words and through words, I've come to help.

After all, while there's death, there's poetry.

(AT THE DESK)

Where do I sign?

JUANITA: Sign here. Tomorrow you'll be Red Cross.

(JOSEFINA SIGNS)

JUANITA: Wait...

JOSEFINA: Yes?

JUANITA: What about the music?

JOSEFINA: What music?

JUANITA: The sad music on the radio. Whose was it?

JOSEFINA: Beethoven's Piano trio no. 5.

JESUSA: Beethoven. Pretty. Isn't it?

JOSEFINA: The Ghost Sonata.

JUANITA: What else could it be!

JOSEFINA OFFERS JESUSA HER PILLS. SHE REJECTS THEM AS THOUGH THEY WERE THE DEVIL HIMSELF. THEN SHE OFFERS THEM TO JUANITA. JUANITA TAKES THE BOTTLE. LOOKS AT IT.

ANOTHER DRIP STARTS.

ALL THREE LOOK AT THE CEILING

BLACKOUT

3/ *Vulnerable gunpowder*

Dimly lit Red Cross office. A shadow moves. Suddenly, the lights go on and the shadow, Josefina, throws her purse behind the desk. She waits silently, expecting to hear another noise. She hears nothing.

The office is the same as in the previous scene, only now there are three dummy torsos, the kind the Red Cross uses to teach CPR courses.

Josefina picks up her purse. The phone rings.

CALL5: I'm calling to cancel the CPR course.

JOSEFINA: The course isn't going to be cancelled because you called.

CALL5: I mean I can't go to the course today.

JOSEFINA: That's different.

CALL5: My name is...

(JOSEFINA HANGS UP ON HIM. ENTER JESUSA, WITH BOXES OF PASTRIES, DOUGHNUTS AND A LARGE CLOTH WITH THE RED CROSS SYMBOL)

JESUSA: Look what they gave me! (UNFURLS THE CLOTH) A Hispanic African-American or whatever those Cuban mulattos are. She's got a tailor, laundry, legalization, photocopy, Internet and coffee shop next door and she made this for us special. Pretty, isn't it? Like Beethoven. Pretty. The Cross looks a bit thick, sure. I don't picture Jesus that fat when they nailed it to him. At least he looks decent in movies and the crosses are always brown. What do you think? Was the Cross on Calvary Red or did they paint it afterwards?

JOSEFINA: It's red because of the blood.

JESUSA: Ewww! That's creepy. Still, it's a gift. We can put it on one of the desks and it'll work as a tablecloth for the doughnuts, pastries and juice.

JOSEFINA: We give out pastries and doughnuts in the CPR courses?

JESUSA: Of course we do. People come here to learn but also to have a good time. You make tons of friends here. It's saving, but with social hour.

JOSEFINA: So where do the doughnuts come from?

JESUSA: Juanita goes out and asks for them at stores. They're free. Cause when you say "Red Cross," they all get that look on their face like they found an abandoned puppy. And they give us stuff. Doughnuts, pastries and muffins in particular. I don't know why they think us rescuers are low on sugar.

JOSEFINA: You're a janitor, honey. You don't rescue anyone.

JESUSA: It's all the same, cause heroes, believe it or not, go to the bathroom too. And they do their business just like everyone else. Some have such, and I mean such, bad aim, it makes you wonder: how is it possible this fireman can throw a line thirty feet dead on, but he can't get the aim right on his serpent of Satan only a few inches from the urinal?

JOSEFINA: Serpent of Satan?

JESUSA: That's what my mother called what men got down there.

(ENTER JUANITA WITH ANOTHER BAG OF FOOD: MUFFINS, DOUGHNUTS, HAMBURGERS, ETC)

JUANITA: This time they handed us the whole store. They were going to throw it away anyhow, cause it's a bit stale, but we can use it.

(GIVES JESUSA A DOUGHNUT AND SHE, ALMOST INCREDIBLY, STICKS THE WHOLE THING IN HER MOUTH. SHE OFFERS ONE TO JOSEFINA, WHO REJECTS IT)

JESUSA: (WITH MOUTH FULL) Want one?

JOSEFINA: I don't eat sweets

JESUSA: That's why you're so bitter?

JUANITA: You're Evil.

JESUSA: But poetic.

JUANITA: Jesusa, if you're going to insult people, at least swallow first.

JOSEFINA: How many do we have for today's course?

JUANITA: A lot. We've got... (CHECKS HER FOLDER)...five.

JOSEFINA: Five?

JESUSA: Rescue's not in style.

JUANITA: Since it's been raining so much...

JESUSA: Everyone insists on being rescued. But, help? Let someone else.

JUANITA: (TO JOSEFINA) By the way, I signed you up for the course.

JOSEFINA: Me?

JUANITA: I figured it wouldn't hurt for you to learn CPR. It's really useful. You never know when you might need it. In a restaurant, on a plane, when you're out. There's always someone who keels over and no one ever knows how to do the most basic stuff.

JOSEFINA: I don't like touching people.

JUANITA: You do it with the dummy.

JESUSA: And you don't use your tongue.

JUANITA: (TAKES ONE AND DEMONSTRATES) They're for practicing on. Sometimes they do it right on the students, but it's voluntary, because it makes some people uncomfortable.

JESUSA: Especially between men.

JUANITA: And women... Lots of people, instead of learning to save people...

JESUSA: They come here looking for love. Because at home they haven't found the gun loaded with seven bullets and one name on it.

JUANITA: Because they've left the gas on...

JESUSA: Because they haven't found the razorblades for their veins...

JUANITA: The rope that won't hold their weight...

JESUSA: So then they come here.

JUANITA: To learn to rescue someone.

JESUSA: Or for them to rescue you.

JUANITA: Rescue is a dream.

JESUSA: A fairy tale in the midst of misfortune.

JUANITA: Because love is a catastrophe too.

JESUSA: And that's why it's better to do it with dummies.

JUANITA: (TO JOSEFINA, EXITING) See if you like it. Call me if you need me, Josefina. I'll be in the front office.

JOSEFINA: You won't be in the class?

JUANITA: No, I can't.

JOSEFINA: You can't?

JESUSA: It's just she has a "problem."

JUANITA: Jesusa, please!

JESUSA: I better keep quiet and not say another word.

JOSEFINA: What's your problem? Why can't you take the class?

(JUANITA, GOES BACK TO HER)

JUANITA: Josefina... there are things we all know about everyone but there are things no one knows about me in this office

JOSEFINA: Like for instance...

JUANITA: Like for instance, I, myself Juanita Claxton...

JESUSA: With an accent like a ringing bell.

JUANITA: Have epileptic seizures

JOSEFINA: Really?

JESUSA: Nah, she just fakes it but with such skill you buy the whole thing. Besides, being epileptic's really useful, guys love it...

JOSEFINA: And they don't know.

JESUSA: And they don't need to.

JOSEFINA: When did you have your first seizure? (THERE IS A BRIEF BLACKOUT) Wait. Don't tell me in the dark. (PAUSE. THE LIGHT COMES BACK ON. THE THREE LOOK AT EACH OTHER WITH A CERTAIN SUSPICION. JUANITA BREAKS THE TENSION)

JUANITA: It was after a party, I was sixteen. I was walking with my friends on Saturday at midnight when all of a sudden my head started to hurt and I lost control. I fell down, writhing like a worm cut in two and my friends, who were idiotic teenagers too, ran off, terrified. A man stopped and like it was something he did all the time, he gave me first aid. First, he helped me calm my breathing, but then, then it was his breath and his mouth on mine. He stayed with me until I calmed down, he got me in his car and took me home. Then, on the way, he put on this wonderful music. And I asked him: That music? What is it? And he said: "It's Beethoven. Music's finest moment. Pretty, isn't it?" And I said: yeah, pretty, yeah.

JESUSA: And you fell in love with that man.

JUANITA: And I fell in love with that man. In love with someone who knows how to help others, like that's what he does every day. Rescuing and saving, very Red Cross, I told myself. And that what I should do with my life: rescue others.

JOSEFINA: Like me.

JUANITA: So epileptic restrictions, just like attempted murder and abandoned husbands, are best kept secret at the Red Cross. We're here to rescue others and we're not hanging around this side of saving looking to get rescued ourselves.

(JUANITA SUDDENLY FINDS JOSEFINA'S PURSE AND THE VIBRANT BLUE PAPER)

What's this?

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) Bulletin 18. (DURING THE BULLETIN, JOSEFINA IS THE MOST NERVOUS) ...Hurricane Katrina is moving northeast and a Hurricane warning has been issued for the Alabama coast.

(JOSEFINA LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW, NERVOUS. WE HEAR RAINFALL)

JUANITA: (READING THE NOTE) "Goodbye, I can't stand this useless place anymore. The Red Cross is a medicine with side effects." I don't understand, Josefina... Were you leaving? Walking out on us?

JESUSA: Without saying a thing, sneaking off...

JUANITA: Running? Why? Are you afraid? Are you afraid of the Hurricane? Is that it? Are you afraid?

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) Katrina is now a dangerous Category 4 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson scale, with winds of 132 mph. Experts fear it could grow even stronger and become a category 5 hurricane within a few hours....

(THEN WE HEAR THE SOUND OF THE WIND. A SPECIAL SOUND, MENACING, AS THOUGH THE GROUND WERE MOVING RATHER THAN THE AIR.

THUNDERCLAPS AND TORRENTIAL RAIN ACCOMPANY THE TERRIBLE WIND.

A DISTANT SIREN MOVES TOWARD THE OFFICE. THE THREE LOOK AT EACH OTHER, EXPECTING THE SIREN TO COME FOR THEM. IT PASSES NEARBY BUT DOESN'T STOP. MOVES OFF. THE WIND WORSENS)

JOSEFINA: (LOUD, LOSING CONTROL) As though being rescued in the afternoon was as important as being lost in the morning! After all, Juanita Claxton, epilepsy of my resentments, being rescued is the worst on the Saffir-Simpson scale; the end before the end, the culmination of the odyssey, the heroes' humiliating fall!

JUANITA: It's people asking for help, Josefina, no one's a hero here.

JOSEFINA: Heroes don't get rescued, Juanita! Heroes don't ask for help or give help. They save an idea, a thought, a concept, not the lady trapped in an elevator, or the little girl devoured by the tiger, the stupid woman in prison for doing justice or the girl expelled from school because they found traces of neurosis on her fingers!

It's not humans, it's ideas and there is no tragedy, just the fall!

(PICKS UP THE CPR DUMMY)

And the higher the better, so no one can get underneath and think you can be rescued. The higher, the more destructive to crush the rescue workers; the higher you go, the more monumental and catastrophic your fall will be!

(JUANITA AND JESUSA ARE NOW IN ONE SPOT AND SHE THROWS THE DUMMY AT THEM, WITHOUT HITTING THEM. THE SOUNDS OF WIND AND RAIN RISE. A DEEP YELLOW COLOR TAKES OVER THE SET)

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) So, it's eight something in the morning...

JUANITA: And Josefina, all of a sudden, becomes a stranger.

JESUSA: And swishes her weakened hair from side to side like a curtain on a stage.

JUANITA: As if we were in a play.

JESUSA: As if we were characters

JUANITA: As if they had the right to put us here.

JESUSA: In the middle of the storm

JUANITA: With everyone saying

JESUSA: “But their voices are the same.”

JUANITA: “But they look the same.”

JESUSA: “Like they were made by the same author.”

(THE SOUND OF THE WIND GROWS. IT MAKES ITS PRESENCE MORE FELT AND NOW WE HEAR THE DRIVING RAIN. THERE ARE MORE LEAKS AND A SMALL TRICKLE OF WATER ENTERS THE SET)

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) The pressure at Katrina’s eye is dropping dangerously to 944 mb and the Hurricane warning, now a strong Category 4 with winds of 149 mph, has been raised to one of potentially Catastrophic damage for the entire north Gulf coast, from Morgan City, Louisiana, to Alabama, including the city of New Orelans!

JESUSA: Oh my God!

JUANITA: Love of my life!

JOSEFINA: Don’t be a fool, Juanita. The bright blue letter has finally arrived.

(TWO STREAMS OF WATER ENTER, MORE COLOSSAL THAN THE PREVIOUS. JOSEFINA BEGINS TO TREMBLE, UNCONTROLLABLY, FIRST HER HANDS, HER ARMS, THEN ALL OF HER. SHE SAYS HER LINES AS THOUGH THEY WERE PUT TOGETHER FROM WORDS PULLED FROM A SHAKEN BAG, AS THOUGH THE WORDS WERE CANDIES IN DIFFERENT COLORS AND FLAVORS)

JUANITA: Josefina, what danger did you see?

JESUSA: What’s wrong? Why are you shaking?

JUANITA: What is the bright blue letter?

JESUSA: I think she’s a paranoid schizophrenic and we’re trapped in her delirium.

JOSEFINA: (LOUD)
August 29th Trio, 96 knots.
The best course, pathetic,
Clair de Lune, intensity of the
tornadoes Louisiana the
strongest ever Beethoven on
Xeroxil, Beycol, cholesterol
muscle pains, Concerto, Arava
destruction, arthritis, Ghost,
toxic liver Vioxx cardiac Zetra
Plevix Prempo hormones
sonata, menopause cancer

JUANITA: I'm not trapped in
anyone's delirium!

JESUSA: That's why she called,
why the Red Cross. Why you,
why the tears, why the
medicines, why the murder, why
the rain, why she was running
away and why she needs to be
rescued.

brain, Accutane kidney, liver,
heart, Relenza, asthma,
Motrin, blindness. Celebrex,
Redux, Fen Phen, breast,
hypertension, addictive, lung,
asphyxiation. Prozac Xeroxil.
Music's finest moment. Pretty,
isn't it?

(THE SOUND OF WIND AND RAIN WORSENS. MORE WATER ENTERS THE SET)

JOSEFINA: (LOUD, NEARLY SHOUTING) I hear words and they have their own objective, a reason for being, or rather for sounding, a sound from within. A word, two written words, three spoken words, that point me toward one thing and then another. I hear words announcing conspiracies, that warn of dangers, that don't see, that help rescue, that ask for assistance, they're Red Cross words, words that exist as the last recourse for the godforsaken!

JUANITA: What words? Whose?

(SOMETHING STRIKES THE OFFICE HARD. THE NOISE IS LOUD AND SHAKES THE SET. WATER FALLS, THE WIND HOWLS, EVEN LOUDER)

JOSEFINA: Words in pursuit!
(JOSEFINA CONTINUES, GATHERING SPEED AS SHE TALKS AND THE SECONDS TICK PAST, LIKE A RACE CAR, LIKE A ROCKET SHOT INTO SPACE) Words that want to kill, that do things, that steal, that use, loves that run off; words that suck blood! God isn't the word, or who he says he is, God is a dummy, God is the Golden Tiger, tiger that looks at me and wants to devour me! Katrina the God! Nice to meet you! We've been expecting you!

JESUSA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Then, it occurred to Juanita to ask her the question.

JUANITA: Josefina!

JESUSA: That she never ever should have asked.

JUANITA: Josefina, I want to ask you a question

JESUSA: Juanita, please, don't do it.

JUANITA: Josefina: Why don't you take your medicine?

JESUSA: And then, the crisis hit.

(JOSEFINA CHANGES DIRECTION. SHE TAKES AN UNEXPECTED, TOTALLY IMPLAUSIBLE TURN, AND WITH A

FELINE LEAP FACES THE OTHER WAY. SOMETHING
BREAKS AND MORE WATER ENTERS)

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) Katrina has taken a totally unexpected turn and is bearing down definitively on the city of New Orleans with maximum sustained winds of up to 158 mph. Katrina is now a Category 5, potentially catastrophic hurricane. Warning: the city must be evacuated as soon as possible!

(THE INTENSITY OF THE WIND AND THE LEAKS GROW)

JOSEFINA: (TERRIBLE SCREAM, LOUD, HOARSE) Couldn't it be the medicine that wants to kill you, Juanita? Hah? Or maybe, maybe worse. Maybe the medicine has an exemplary doubt, the mother of all doubts, the biggest doubt: Can God be in the medicine or is it the medicine that's becoming God?

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) ...Winds will have greatest effect on tall buildings and the levees. Storm surge could reach 30 feet. URGENT: All New Orleans residents; you must evacuate the city!!!

JUANITA: And without giving me time.

JESUSA: And without any chance of escape.

JUANITA: With all her strength, so devastating.

JESUSA: Telephonic.

JUANITA: Menacing.

JESUSA: Raging.

JESUSA: Glassy.

JUANITA: Drugged.

JESUSA: Addicted.

JUANITA: Lurid.

JESUSA: Caustic.

JUANITA: Piercing.

JESUSA: And categoric.

JUANITA: Josefina hit us, Category 1000, on the Jesusa-Juanita Claxton scale.

(THE SOUND OF THE WIND REACHES MAXIMUM VOLUME. THE RAIN WORSENS. THE HURRICANE WARNING ALARM GOES OFF. CONSTANT BLOWS. JOSEFINA MOVES FURIOUSLY AROUND THE WHOLE OFFICE, THROWING OBJECTS. FIRST SHE THROWS THE CPR DUMMIES AT THE WINDOWS, WHICH BREAK, SENDING GLASS FLYING TO THE FLOOR, THROUGH THE AIR AND MOSTLY TOWARD JESUSA AND JUANITA'S FLESH)

JESUSA: Sweeping us away with her strength.

JUANITA: Destroying everything in her path.

JESUSA: Opening her arms.

JUANITA: And covering everything she can.

JESUSA: Her arms.

JUANITA: Before she hit they weren't so long.

JESUSA: Or so colossal.

JUANITA: But they grow and move like the gigantic blades of vast fan.

JESUSA: Josefina sweeps me away with her cataclysmic force.

JUANITA: I try to hold onto the desk but everything flies through the air anyway, like guided missiles they head straight for me...

JESUSA: Homing in on my face!

JUANITA: Beating my body!

JESUSA: Cutting my legs!

JUANITA: Josefina hits at Category 5!

JESUSA: She bears down on us churning words!

JUANITA: Inundating me with her energy!

JESUSA: A mouth-to-mouth storm!

JUANITA: Trailing the sea behind her!

JESUSA: And spilling pent up waters!

JUANITA: Those waters just waiting for me to say something!

JESUSA: “Medicine” for example.

JUANITA: ...to pour down on me with all their violence!

JESUSA: Flooding everything!

JUANITA: Drowning us mercilessly!

JESUSA: Discoloring our cadavers with the oil from her dirty, polluted water reeking of filth!

JUANITA: This Tsunami Josefina in vulnerable gunpowder, who decides because of the medicine it's better to asphyxiate us all, including herself, since the catastrophic medicine, and there she's right, is also suicide, is capable of killing herself and that's where the force of the calamity comes from. Devastation kills itself and its destruction is finalized by taking all of us with her.

(THE WIND WORSENS. WATER AND INCREDIBLE OBJECTS THAT WOULD NEVER BE THERE IF NOT FOR THE UNCOMMON POWER UNLEASHED BLOW IN. THE TWO GOLD LIGHTS OF THE TIGER COME ON AGAIN. JOSEFINA SEES THEM. THEN SHE THROWS HERSELF TO THE GROUND, SHAKING, SPITTING UP FOAM)

JUANITA: Her scream is a reckless downpour and the noise grows with the water, the lightning, the bent trees, the roofs caving in.

JESUSA: Her fury mounts and with it, the strength and number of noises and rumblings coming all together, at once, in a line, decibels spiraling with each second, the tumult extending with each gust.

- JUANITA: Or is this torrent not only Josefina but also my doubt: Is She the reality and we are the dream?
- JESUSA: And there is no sickness or rescue but only people's tenacious desire to annihilate themselves.
- JUANITA: The world's secret desire to self-destruct.
- JESUSA: The collective perversion for extermination.
- JUANITA: God's appetite for sending calamities and carrying off all his inventions at once.
- JESUSA: Devoured tigers and lambs.
- JUANITA: The guilty and innocent, saviors and victims, created together by the same hand and by the same eye of the divine Hurricane, right now in these breaths.
- JESUSA: With no chance of rescue, showing that help is small and insignificant, putting rescue in its humiliating place in the face of overwhelming destruction.
- JUANITA: Her, stray bullet.
- JESUSA: Her, Storm on legs.
- JUANITA: Her, Deafening symmetry of tigers
- JESUSA: Shouting out words like weeds.
- JUANITA: While her strength blows me into the walls.
- JESUSA: And what was seconds are hours.
- JUANITA: A whole life told through disaster.
- JESUSA: My God, when will it end?
- JUANITA: How long will I have to stay here, withstanding Josefina?
- JESUSA: Josefina, my freak storm!
- JUANITA: Whirlwind that lives with me!

JESUSA: That undoes me every day!

JUANITA: Tragedy that eats from my plate!

JESUSA: Habitual disaster that dresses like me!

JUANITA: Calamity Josefina that moves in like a toxin in your Xeroxil bottle and makes me take them all, commanded and witnessed!

JESUSA: A bottle a day and quick Juanita, with the debacle there's no time to lose!

(THE ELECTRICITY GOES OUT AND THERE'S A BLACKOUT WITH ONLY THE TENUOUS ILLUMINATION OF THE EMERGENCY LIGHTING AND SPARKS. THE THUNDER, LIGHTNING AND TERRIBLE NOISE OF THE WIND GROWS)

BULLETIN: (VOICEOVER) Pressure at 904 mb, waves up to 35 feet high, thirty inches of rain, forty-five tornadoes; the levees have broken and floods are sweeping the city...

(JUANITA AT CENTERSTAGE. JESUSA AND JOSEFINA MOVE AWAY FROM HER, CARRYING THE THIRD CPR DUMMY, AS THOUGH PLANNING TO THROW IT)

JUANITA: And it is at that moment, in the middle of the hecatomb, that doesn't end once all has been destroyed, but now begins my annihilation, that I feel a certain peace and so I no longer see her or the faded Red Cross; or acrobat God the puppet-master of misery who passes us without saying hello; or the switchboard phone that lights up like it's shooting lasers all over the office; or the somersaults and pirouettes of Josefina and Jesusa who now move like ghosts spinning as they say goodbye to me, hoping to disappear just like that...

(THE OFFICE GRADUALLY DISAPPEARS. ONLY JUANITA REMAINS IN A BEAM OF LIGHT, THE OTHER TWO ARE SHADOWS BEHIND HER. WE HEAR BEETHOVEN'S PIANO SONATA NUMBER 14, "CLAIR DU LUNE.")

...asking me, begging me, insisting I disappear with them. Me, Juanita, who I am and not even that, Juanita at your service, this Juanita Claxton the lost cat, man who comes to the rescue, listen-how-pretty Beethoven, who leaves the Red Cross in disgrace,

goodbye, nice to meet you Mrs. Red and your daughter Cross, thanks for all your kindness, what a shame, what a shame. What do I have to do with all this? Why did they involve me in this story? Why me? What did I do? What did I do, my God?

(NOW JUANITA'S LIGHT GOES OUT TOO.
WE SEE ONLY THREE SHADOWS, BARELY ILLUMINATED
FROM BEHIND.

THE NOISE WORSENS AND REACHES A CLIMAX IN THE
DARKNESS. THE MUSIC GOES ON PLAYING.

THEN, THE NOISES GRADUALLY STOP. UNTIL ALL WE
HEAR ARE THE WAVES HITTING AND THE MUSIC.

A DIM LIGHT ILLUMINATES A BED.
WE STILL HEAR THE RAIN.

AROUND THE BED, JUANITA, JOSEFINA AND JESUSA.

JOSEFINA: You don't hear that deafening roar anymore, but there's shouting in the distance and waves hitting the sidewalk.

JESUSA: Water in the streets?

JOSEFINA: Water crashing against the Golden Tigers of India?

JESUSA: Did God stop holding back the waters and now they're flying through the air?

(JESUSA'S SHADOW DISAPPEARS)

JOSEFINA: Has the sea learned to fly?

(JOSEFINA'S SHADOW DISAPPEARS)

JUANITA: Has something happened and I didn't realize it?

(JUANITA'S SHADOW DISAPPEARS AND THE MUSIC STOPS.
BUT IMMEDIATELY, A LIGHT APPEARS. THE BEAM OF A
FLASHLIGHT. THE PERSON CARRYING THE FLASHLIGHT
OPENS A WINDOW AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE PLAY
WE SEE SUNLIGHT, A STRONG, REAL LIGHT. SHOUTS IN
THE DISTANCE MIX WITH A NEARBY VOICE)

SHOUTS: Come up to the roof, come up to the roof!

VOICE: Juanita...Juanita!

SHOUTS: Come up to the roof, come up to the roof!

VOICE: Juanita...Juanita!

(JUANITA APPEARS IN THE HOSPITAL BED. BY HER SIDE,
CHRISTY)

CHRISTY: You finally opened your eyes! Juanita...How do you feel?

JUANITA: Dizzy, I'm very dizzy. I want to die.

CHRISTY: Yes, we all feel like that.

JUANITA: Miss Christy? What are you doing here?

CHRISTY: I came to help you. Though I didn't know that until I saw you lying on the office floor, almost dead, with an empty bottle of pills by your side.

JUANITA: Josefina tried to poison me!

CHRISTY: Josefina isn't coming back.

JUANITA: What about Jesusa? Did they rescue Jesusa?

CHRISTY: The thing is... They don't exist, Juanita. They don't exist.

JUANITA: They're dead?

CHRISTY: I mean they don't exist, honey. They never did. They're only in your head.

JUANITA: What do you mean they don't exist? What are you saying?

CHRISTY: That it's you, honey. Only you exist. There's no one else. And if there were others, then, they're all Juanita. Just you. And, with incredible luck, you're alive.

JUANITA: (TRIES TO GET UP) What do you mean they don't? The lost cat, the suicide call, Josefina's crime, Beethoven, the Xeroxil, the bright blue letter?

CHRISTY: Calm down, Juanita.

JUANITA: (UPSET) Where am I?

CHRISTY: In the hospital.

JUANITA: What am I doing in the hospital? Why are the lights off? Why is there so much water on the floor, on the walls? When's the Hurricane coming?

CHRISTY: Katrina passed over us three days ago, Juanita. It brought the seawater and then the levees broke. All New Orleans is flooded. The Red Cross is completely underwater and we found you trapped there in the rubble. You were there for two days, in the mud and contaminated water, more cadaver than anything.

And we rescued you. Thanks to a cat that wouldn't stop meowing and made us look for him so we'd find you.

But the rescue isn't over. Not for you or for me. It's been three days and no one's come to help us. The people are dying in mass. The water's flooded the hospital, it's up to our knees and it's still rising. The sick are drowning in the hospital, the survivors are dying in the hospital and no one seems to be doing a thing. "Come up to the roof, come up to the roof," they say. The hospital's sinking, Juanita. We have to escape!

(JUANITA GETS UP. SHE WALKS TO ONE SIDE. SHE SEES THE LEAKS)

JUANITA: The ceiling's spitting water.

CHRISTY: It's the flying water.

JUANITA: The flying water?

CHRISTY: That's what you said in your sleep.

(WE HEAR VOICES IN THE DISTANCE AND THE SOUND OF AN APPROACHING HELICOPTER)

VOICE1: Help!

VOICE2: Help!

VOICE3: Someone help us!

JUANITA: (TO THE AUDIENCE) It's a dream, I told myself. Christy's a dream like Katrina, that hasn't gotten here yet but it's coming. Katrina breaks up at dream's edge.

(A HELICOPTER APPROACHES AND A BRILLIANT LIGHT SEARCHES AROUND THE SET)

CHRISTY: (TO THE WINDOW) Here! Over here!

(JUANITA PICKS UP THE VIBRANT BLUE PAPER FROM THE FLOOR AND HAS ANOTHER ATTACK)

CHRISTY: They're coming to help us, Juanita! They're coming to help us!

JUANITA: It's clear that the wind, the water, the people asking for help, the floating bodies coming out the elevator door, the three hundred parked school buses helping no one, the police shooting victims, the hunger in the Superdome, and the lack of electricity, food and water are yet to come in Josefina's delirium and my lost-love epilepsy...

CHRISTY: (TO THE BED, AS THOUGH JUANITA WERE THERE) Don't go, Juanita. There is no Josefina. Don't let her do this to you!

(JESUSA AND JOSEFINA'S SHADOWS GRADUALLY APPEAR)

CHRISTY: Juanita, wake up, wake up! No Juanita!

(CHRISTY TALKS NOW WITH SOMEONE IN THE BED, BUT JUANITA MOVES UPSTAGE TO THE AUDIENCE)

JUANITA: It all has to be a dream, God, or a nightmare rather. It can't be true, it's not real, it's not possible that this is what we are.

CHRISTY: Juanita! My God! She's not responding!

VOICE: Leave her there! Save yourself! Leave her!

CHRISTY: How can I leave her?

VOICE: We're leaving. We're getting out of here.

JUANITA: And since it's a dream, I tell myself; whatever I do won't mean anything, because in dreams you can die, it never happens, but still you wake up.

(THE HOSPITAL BED AND CHRISTY DISAPPEAR.

THE RED CROSS OFFICE RETURNS. AND WITH IT COME JOSEFINA AND JESUSA, THE SOUND OF THE WIND AND THE MUSIC. WE HEAR THE BEGINNING OF BEETHOVEN'S PIANO CONCERTO NO. 5)

JUANITA: Now, if we're sensible, we have to add several more problems to the ones I already have.

JOSEFINA: How do I escape from the water in my dream?

JESUSA: Why is it so hot if this isn't real?

JUANITA: What are so many desperate people doing in a drowning hospital?

JOSEFINA: And the cat? Where'd you go cat? Naked, crochet cat. Where did you go to hide when you remembered the storm?

JESUSA: Where are our rescuers?

JUANITA: What happened to my love when the storm passed?

JOSEFINA: Where's the man who never was?

JESUSA: When will I see you again if I've never seen you?

JUANITA: And my biggest problem, my saddest problem: how am I going to wake myself up?

(THE WIND STOPS. WE SEE THE TIGER'S EYES –THE GOLD LIGHTS, BUT THIS TIME, HE LIES IN WAIT. JUANITA TAKES THE VIBRANT BLUE PAPER FROM THE DESK AND HANDS IT TO JOSEFINA. SHE OPENS IT. THE CONCERTO CONTINUES PLAYING. BRILLIANT LIGHT)

JESUSA: “You, angel of hard delight

JOSEFINA: languid rebel orgasm

JESUSA: skin-tingling tremor

JOSEFINA: vulnerable gunpowder

JESUSA: return to me

JOSEFINA: and annihilate me.”

(JOSEFINA AND JESUSA DISAPPEAR, LIKE GHOSTS. WITH THEM, THE OFFICE DISAPPEARS. EVERYTHING GOES DARK, BUT JUANITA, WHO IS ALONE ONSTAGE. IN THE DISTANCE, A MAN’S VOICE)

MAN’S VOICE: Juanita?

JUANITA: And in the dream, I fell asleep.
But then, his voice, the voice I hear when the dream’s created in an emergency to calm myself and reassure me the attack is over.

It’s the voice I don’t know but that’s been with me ever since I started having these charging hurricanes.

And it tells me, among other things, that I shouldn’t be out walking by myself and that’s Beethoven playing, music’s finest moment, pretty, isn’t it?

It’s the voice from inside me, the voice of a man never seen, a profound man who says goodbye to me so that I can live on the inspiration of finding him again.

And telling him:

Come, come back to me. And annihilate me.

The day you stop loving is the last day of your life.

And I fall asleep with a tear, saying goodbye to him.

(THE TIGER’S EYES AND JUANITA REMAIN)

And with the happiness of saving lives.

(BLACKOUT, EXCEPT ON JUANITA)

You leave it all behind and come to another country. You travel a thousand miles and floating in the flying waters, or rather sinking in the flying waters, tormented by the wind, or rather disfigured by the wind, only to find that poem you already had back home and didn't know was yours when you were there.

BLACKOUT

THE MUSIC CONTINUES TO PLAY

THE END