

THE SINS OF SOR JUANA

By Karen Zacarías

All translations of Sor Juana's poetry by Karen Zacarías.

<Author's pic here>

About the Author

Karen Zacarías was born in Mexico City, and now resides in Washington D.C. Her plays include *The Book Club Play*, *Legacy of Light*, *Mariela in the Desert*, the adaptation of Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, and several musicals: *Einstein Is a Dummy*, *Looking for Robert Clemente*, *Jane of the Jungle*, *Cinderella Eats Rice and Beans*, *Ferdinand the Bull* and *Frida Libre*. Her plays have been produced at The Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, Round House Theater, Goodman Theater, The Denver Center, Alliance Theater, Imagination Stage, GALA, Berkshire Theater Festival, South Coast Rep, La Jolla Playhouse, Cleveland Playhouse, San Jose Rep, Repertorio Español, and other venues. Her awards include: the 2010 Steinberg Citation for Best New Play, the National Francesca Primus Prize, the New Voices Award and the National Latino Playwriting Award; she was also a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in 2003. Zacarías is a playwright-in-residence at Arena Stage and teaches at Georgetown University. She is the founder of Young Playwrights' Theater, an award-winning theater company that teaches playwriting in local public schools.

About the Play

Zacarías began writing the original *The Sins of Sor Juana* in 1995. In 1998, the play was selected for the National Hispanic Playwrights' Project at South Coast Repertory. It won the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play at the Helen Hayes Awards ceremony in 2000, and was published by Dramatic Publishing in 2001. Zacarías has since revised the play; the revised version is what appears in this collection. *The Sins of Sor Juana* has been produced around the nation in various venues.

Production History

The Sins of Sor Juana had its world premiere on November 3, 1999, at George Mason University's Theatre of the First Amendment, Washington, D.C. It was directed by Tom Prewitt, with Rick Davis as the artistic director, Kevin Murray as managing director and Paul D'Andrea as artistic associate director.

CAST

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| JUANA..... | Maia Desanti |
| NOVICE..... | Andrea Maida |
| PADRE NÚÑEZ/VICEROY..... | Carlos J. González |
| MADRE FILOTHEA/XOCHITL..... | Jennifer Nelson |

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| SOR SARA/VICEREINE..... | Naomi Jacobson |
| SILVIO..... | John Lescault |
| PEDRO..... | John Benoit |
| GUARD..... | Michael Bryant |
| NUN..... | Angela Lee Pionk |

PRODUCTION STAFF

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Scenic Designer..... | Anne Gibson |
| Costume Designer..... | Muriel Stockdale |
| Lighting Designer..... | Adam Magazine |
| Sound Designer..... | Mark K. Anduss |
| Stage Manager..... | Molly E. Haws |
| Company Manager..... | Kira Hoffmann |
| Properties..... | Eileen Daly |

This revised version of *The Sins of Sor Juana* was produced by the Goodman Theatre in Chicago in 2010. It was directed Henry Godínez, with the following cast members and production staff:

CAST

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| JUANA..... | Malaya Rivera Drew |
| NOVICE..... | Christina Nieves |
| PADRE NÚÑEZ/VICEROY..... | Tony Plana |
| MADRE FILOTHEA/XOCHITL..... | Laura Crotte |
| SOR SARA/VICEREINE..... | Amy J. Carle |
| SILVIO..... | Dion Mucciaccito |
| PEDRO..... | Joe Minoso |
| ENSEMBLE..... | Ilana Faust |
| ENSEMBLE..... | Kevin Fugaro |
| ENSEMBLE..... | Elly Lachman, |
| ENSEMBLE..... | Isabel Quintero |

PRODUCTION STAFF

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Set Designer..... | Todd Rosenthal |
| Costume Designer..... | Mina Hyun-Ok Hong |
| Lighting Designer..... | Joseph Appelt |
| Sound Designers..... | Joshua Horvath & Ray |
| Nardelli | |
| Production Stage Manager..... | Alden Vásquez |
| Stage Manager..... | Jamie Wolfe |
| Dramaturg..... | Neena Arndt |
| Composer..... | Gustavo Leone |
| Fight Consultant..... | Nick Sandys |

Casting.....Adam Belcuore

Performance Rights

A previous version of *The Sins of Sor Juana* was published by Dramatic Publishing in 2001. All inquiries regarding performance rights should be addressed to:

Dramatic Publishing
311 Washington St.
Woodstock, IL 60098
Phone: (815) 338-7170
Fax: (815) 339-8981

Characters

JUANA, a talented, attractive and temperamental nun who's renowned for her writing. She used

to be part of the viceroy's court. Age 28–40.

PADRE NÚÑEZ, the confessor of the convent and church authority. Age 40–60.

(Doubles as the

VICEROY.)

SOR FILOTHEA, the Mother Superior of the convent. Age 45–60. (Doubles as XOCHITL.)

SOR SARA, although they are the same age, she is envious of Juana's talents and past. Age 35–

40. (Doubles as the VICEREINE.)

NOVICE, a young nun named María. Age 18–22.

XOCHITL [Pronounced SO-cheel], Juana's maid in the court. Xóchitl, which means “flower” in

Náhuatl, is a full-blooded Mexican Aztec. Age 45–60.

VICEREINE (Laura), the vicereine of New Spain. She is an attractive, dynamic woman. Her

affection for Juana disturbs her husband. Age 30–40.

PEDRO, the viceroy's valet. He has been spurned by Juana. Age 35–45.

VICEROY, the temporary ruler of New Spain, appointed for a six-year term by the king of Spain.

Age 40–55.

SILVIO, an intelligent, educated thief. He is hired to seduce and humiliate Juana. Age 28–35.

THE SINS OF SOR JUANA

PROLOGUE

(XOCHITL drags a huge trunk on stage. She lights a candle, then turns to the audience and smiles.)

XOCHITL: This is a poem by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, (*Beat.*) Juanita. (*She clears*

her throat, and arranges herself into an important stance.)

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

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

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

(At the end of the poem, XOCHITL takes a bow. She gets into the trunk, winks at the audience, and closes the lid.)

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(SETTING: Late 1600s, New Spain [Mexico]. The setting is sparse: a small cot, a desk, a trunk, a free-standing closet and a doorway with a door. This setting serves as JUANA's room in the convent and her room in the palace. Spotlight on Sister JUANA as she rushes into her room. María, a NOVICE, is at her heels.)

JUANA: Hurry, María. Hurry!

NOVICE: But, Sor Juana, your visitors—

JUANA: Will have to wait. Where did I put that letter? Is the rider still there?

NOVICE: Yes, Sister.

JUANA: Here it is. (*She hands NOVICE the letter.*) This needs to be sent...outside the city. Give it to the rider; he can deliver it.

NOVICE: A letter to the new Bishop of Puebla? But if Father Núñez asks?

JUANA: El Padre cannot ask for what he does not see. Carry the letter for the bishop inside your sleeve.

NOVICE: Dios mío. (*Beat.*)

JUANA: After you deliver the letter, give the ladies my pardon. I will not be

returning to the salon today.
 NOVICE: Pray tell, what have you written?
 JUANA: Nothing...my opinion, María.
 NOVICE: Why?
 JUANA: I disagree with the new Bishop of Puebla.
 NOVICE: You disagree with the Bishop?
 JUANA: I think God wants women to learn.
 NOVICE: Why?
 JUANA: Because why else would we ask, "Why?" (*JUANA hands MARIA a small red book.*) María, this is for you.
 NOVICE: For me? I shouldn't.
 JUANA: Knowledge should be shared.
 NOVICE: We are only allowed to read the Bible.
 JUANA: Take it, María. You must never be afraid to learn.
 NOVICE: Thank you, Sor Juana.
 JUANA: Now take the letter for the new Bishop and send it with the rider.
 Now go, go.

(A strange wind fills the room. XOCHITL lights or places a candle on JUANA's desk. The spotlight fades as candles come to life all over the stage. NUNS file in, chanting in Latin.)

NUNS: BREVIS EST AMOR
 ENNOSTRA VITA
 CERTIS EST DOLOR
 SED IN TE MATER
 EN TE SANCTA SORROR
 CRESIT FELICITAS
 (*Repeat.*)

(PADRE NÚÑEZ, stands center stage. He begins to chant and lowers himself to his knees and extends his arms so he is shaped as a cross. The NUNS exit. PADRE prays fervently.)

PADRE: Dios mío, give me strength. (*Pause.*) Sor Juana, what have you done?

SCENE TWO

(JUANA is sitting in her room, writing. She picks up her pen, puts it down, and picks it up again. She is trying to write; she is testing and discovering her poem.)

JUANA: Green temptation of human life...Mad Hope—a savage golden frenzy (*She scribbles.*) Glass eyes of green, hope, light, fire / Twisted sight colors
 our world and heightens the desire. Hmm. It could be better. (*She scribbles another line.*)

(*SOUND: A loud knock from the trunk is heard. JUANA turns and looks at it. Another knock from the trunk is heard. Bewildered, JUANA stands and walks over to the trunk. Then we hear lots of knocks on the door. JUANA goes to the door.*)

JUANA: (Cont.) What now?

(*JUANA goes to the door and opens it. SARA is at the doorway. JUANA bows.*)

JUANA: (Cont.) Sor Sara.

SARA: (*As she enters.*) Sor Juana...

JUANA: I'm very busy right now. Could this wait till morning?

(*FILOTHEA enters.*)

FILOTHEA: May God be with you, Sor Juana.

JUANA: Madre Filothea!

FILOTHEA: Did we interrupt your prayers, my child?

JUANA: Prayers are never interrupted when answered. Please, how can I aid you today?

FILOTHEA: My child, we are concerned. When you are done with your duties and finished with your salon of visitors, you always leave our sight... to spend time alone in your room.

JUANA: Dear Madre, as you can see, I hardly get a daylight hour to myself.

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

JUANA: Oh! I do.

FILOTHEA: I know.

SARA: Sor Juana, you and I are quite similar...in age...why, we should spend more time together...cross-stitching. You and I...sewing and talking, talking and sewing. Sewing for the glory of the Lord.

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

SARA: Perhaps if you practiced...

JUANA: No! (*Beat.*) Thank you, Holy Sister.

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

SARA: Very eager.

FILOTHEA: (*Pause. Deeply sincere.*) As am I. With age, one begins to cherish a true connection of the mind and the heart.

JUANA: (*Touched.*) Madre Filothea. (*Pause.*) Why not attend one of my salons?

(*Beat.*) You too, Sor Sara, join us for our discussions of philosophy, or

FILOTHEA: mathematics...or our games of poetry.
 Oh, Juana, I'm afraid we would have nothing to contribute, sitting
 with all those illustrious men and women.
 JUANA: You can learn. Use your God-given gift. I have all the books.
 SARA: So many books.
 JUANA: Yes, and all of them have something to teach. Oh, where to start?
 Erasmus? Aristotle?
 FILOTHEA: Could I suggest, perhaps this one? (*Points to a book on the shelf.*)
 JUANA: Oh! Sophocles...a wonderful choice...

(*JUANA hands the book to FILOTHEA. FILOTHEA hands it to SARA.*)

FILOTHEA: And that one?
 JUANA: Ah, Copernicus.

(*JUANA hands the book to FILOTHEA who hands it to SARA.*)

JUANA: (*Cont.*) The moon, the stars, the earth—all in your hands. Although,
 (*Beat.*
She whispers.) Galileo, with the telescope, has gone further,
 proving Copernicus' hypotheses, placing the sun as the center of the
 universe...with the earth rotating...

(*Scandalized, SARA and FILOTHEA make the sign of the cross on themselves. JUANA quickly jumps in and does the same.*)

JUANA: (*Cont.*) And however mistaken, these theories bring us closer to
 God by
 contemplating the beauty of His labor.
 FILOTHEA: Amen. (*Looks at the books.*) Well, these are a start ...
 SARA: But Madre Filothea, this book on her table...?
 JUANA: The one that I am reading? It is poetry. Góngora. Please. (*She
 hands the
 book to SARA.*) Knowledge is the best weight to carry.
 FILOTHEA: So true.
 SARA: Sor Juana, I care to see that one. (*She takes a book.*)
 JUANA: Certainly.
 SARA: And, if Madre Filothea does not mind, this one.
 JUANA: (*Realizing what is happening.*) With all due respect...
 SARA: (*Taking the books.*) And those over there. And the one on the
 chair!
 JUANA: Why are you are taking all my books away?
 FILOTHEA: Sor Juana, please, do not make this more difficult than it is.
 JUANA: All my books!
 SARA: You still have the Holy Bible.
 JUANA: Dear Madre, I thought you understood!

FILOTHEA: Sor Juana, believe me, I am doing this for your sake.
JUANA: Father Núñez will be outraged by your misguided actions.
FILOTHEA: Sor Juana, forgive us, but we are acting on Father Núñez's behest.
JUANA: That's not possible. Many of these books are gifts from him.

(Pause.) I
must see el Padre...

(JUANA attempts to exit, but SARA and FILOTHEA block the doorway.)

FILOTHEA: I'm afraid el Padre is not available.
SARA: He's very occupied.
JUANA: He is my confessor!
FILOTHEA: I know, my dear.

(SARA and FILOTHEA hurriedly walk out with all her books.)

JUANA: *(Calls out after them.)* And if I cross-stitched?
FILOTHEA: *(Returns; pause.)* Afternoon cross-stitching with the convent
sisters would definitely meet with the Father's approval.
JUANA: Filothea, did you ever intend to read my books?
FILOTHEA: If I must deceive you to save you, so be it. It is my sin and cross to
bear.
SARA: *(Returns.)* Madre Filothea, we should remove the writing paper
from her desk.
JUANA: You wish to take my writing paper?

(SARA and FILOTHEA take her paper.)

SARA: The quill? The ink! She could still write.
JUANA: You are taking my pen and ink?

(SARA takes them.)

FILOTHEA: Father Núñez forbids you to write anymore.
JUANA: But Father Núñez promised me I would always be allowed to write.
FILOTHEA: What you have done is so serious, he now forbids you from writing.
JUANA: What have I done?
FILOTHEA: Father Núñez will speak to you in due time. God Bless you my
child. *(She*

exits.)

SARA: This is for your own good. You see that, don't you?
JUANA: I am not blind.
SARA: You will then see the charity of our actions.
JUANA: I am not blind.
SARA: God be with you, Sor Juana.
JUANA: Sister?

SARA: Yes?
JUANA: *(Pause.)* You have forgotten to take the candle.

(SARA exits. JUANA looks at her empty room with despair. The NOVICE runs in.)

NOVICE: Sor Sara! Sor Sara! The Goat! The Goat! The Goat is loose! Sor
Sara! Where is Sor Sara?
JUANA: Sor Sara just left
NOVICE: The Goat is loose, he's running through the kitchen!!! And Sor
Sara is
fearless in tying him down. *(Beat.)* Sor Juana, what happened to
your room?
JUANA: They've taken all my books.
NOVICE: Your books?
JUANA: And my paper and quill.
NOVICE: Your paper and quill!
JUANA: I am forbidden to write.
NOVICE: Why? What did you do?
JUANA: I do not know.
NOVICE: It must be something terrible if Father Núñez forbids you to write.
(Beat.) What are you going to do now?
JUANA: I do not know.
NOVICE: *(Beat.)* I should go help catch the goat.
JUANA: Yes, María. You should do what is asked of you.

(NOVICE exits. XOCHITL enters but JUANA does not see her; she is carrying a white piece of cloth and a long needle with a bright piece of thread.)

(Lights fade.)

SCENE THREE

(Lights up: Sor SARA and the NOVICE are cross-stitching.)

SARA: He is very upset. Madre Filothea says she's never seen el Padre like
that.
NOVICE: Dios mío.
SARA: And he asked...no, begged, that we help him...help him to save Sor
Juana's soul. It's not an easy thing you know...saving a
soul...especially one like Sor Juana's.
NOVICE: But Sor Juana is very interesting. A little strange, but interesting
SARA: I thought she was interesting too, years ago, when she first arrived.
We were placed in the same room. She stayed up half the night,
reading, writing, but I tried! ...truly tried...to befriend her. *(Beat.)*
She asked to be moved; to be by herself. *(Beat.)* It was for the best.

Sor Juana is not as respectable as she think she is.

NOVICE: She is a sister of the church.

SARA: What I mean to say is that she had low beginnings.

NOVICE: Low beginnings?

SARA: She is a natural child.

NOVICE: ¡Dios, mío! No father?

SARA: Shhh!

NOVICE: But then how would they allow her to enter the convent?

SARA: Thanks to the Vicereine's influence.

NOVICE: (*Excited.*) Ay! So it is true! Juana was a part of the Vicereine's court!

SARA: (*Cold.*) Yes. And now she is a part of a better court—the court of God.

NOVICE: Of course. Blessed are we all.

SARA: Be careful. You are about to miss a stitch.

NOVICE: Sor Sara? How did a poor, illegitimate girl end up knowing the Vicereine?

SARA: When she was twelve, she dressed like a boy, so she could try to study at the university.

NOVICE: What happened?

SARA: When they discovered she was a girl, they brought her to the Court. Word got out that she was as intelligent as forty men. So the Viceroy and Vicereine sat Juana in front of forty universitarians who fired questions at her. And she responded.

NOVICE: Just like the boy Jesus in the temple! (*Icy pause.*) Forgive me. (*Longer*

pause.) Sor Sara, why did she come here?

SARA: Why?

NOVICE: Why?

SARA: Dear María, you know that the past does not matter here.

NOVICE: Of course. Forgive my impertinence.

(*SARA and NOVICE sew in silence for awhile.*)

SARA: One story is that it had something to do with a man.

NOVICE: A man!!!

SARA: And another that it had something to do with a woman.

NOVICE: A woman?

SARA: And another that it was something much worse...

(*NOVICE crosses herself.*)

SARA: It was...pride.

NOVICE: Pride?

SARA: The sin of pride.

NOVICE: May the Virgin protect us all.

SARA: Yes, especially those among us who are not.

(JUANA enters, but NOVICE does not see her.)

NOVICE: So what happened? Why did she come here?

SARA: Dear María, why do we all come here? To serve God. There is no other

reason. Sor Juana is here to serve God. Good morning, Sor Juana.

NOVICE: *(Turns, surprised to see JUANA).* Sor Juana.

SARA: Did you not join this convent to serve God?

JUANA: *(Plainly.)* I am here to cross-stitch.

(JUANA sits and nods to NOVICE. NOVICE nods back.)

SARA: A holy pursuit. It teaches patience and humility. Hopefully you will learn. I pray for you.

JUANA: Thank you. I'm certain God sees your concern.

SARA: Certainly, for He sees all. And knows all.

JUANA: I pray He does.

SARA: You doubt?

JUANA: Doubt?

SARA: Question?

JUANA: No. *(Pause.)* I sew.

SARA: And what are you sewing?

(SARA and NOVICE walk over to take a look. NOVICE gasps.)

SARA: *(Cont.)* Sor Juana! What on earth are you doing???

JUANA: My cross-stitching.

(Enter PADRE and FILOTHEA. SARA sits down.)

PADRE: What a sight to behold. Miracles do happen. Good day, Sisters.

SARA & NOVICE: Good day, Reverend Father

JUANA: *(Stands.)* Padre, I am so happy to see you.

PADRE: I'm pleased to find you here as well.

JUANA: Padre, I believe there's been a terrible mistake, all my books and pens—

PADRE: Sor Juana, be SILENT and SEATED. Now!

(SARA and NOVICE begin sewing. JUANA sits.)

PADRE: *(Cont. To FILOTHEA.)* The holy sisters are working assiduously.

FILOTHEA: Yes.

SARA: As always. Even Sor Juana is skilled with a needle and thread.

PADRE: Really?
NOVICE: Oh, but my work is almost finished. Take a look.
FILOTHEA: Ah! St. Sebastian being martyred by the infidels. Arrows. Lovely!
PADRE: Sor Juana, what are you creating? (*JUANA hands PADRE her cloth; he takes it and reads what she has written.*) "What wild ambition drives us / To forget ourselves, our past?" What is this, Sor Juana! For you, Padre. The first verse I wrote under your tutelage.
JUANA: Remember?
PADRE: (*Pause; angry.*) Juana, how dare you do this? Filothea, you know that Sor Juana was forbidden to write.
FILOTHEA: Padre, I do not know how else to stop her from writing.
JUANA: This is not writing. It is cross-stitching.

(*Pause.*)

PADRE: Sisters! What do you think of this? (*Points at JUANA's work.*)
SARA: I am praying for Sor Juana's soul.
PADRE: María, what do you think of what Sor Juana has written?
NOVICE: She should use the double-stitch for letters.
PADRE: God save us.
JUANA: Padre, what has happened?
PADRE: Your writing has put us in grave danger. A collection of your poems has just been published.
JUANA: Really? You've seen it?
PADRE: Do you know the title?

(*JUANA shakes her head. Beat.*)

PADRE: (*Cont.*) Verses and Essays by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the 10th Muse of México, Phoenix of Poetry ...
JUANA: Dios mío.
PADRE: Why was I kept in the dark about this?
JUANA: Padre...
PADRE: Only two poems about our Lord, and the rest: romantic poems, carnal poems.
JUANA: But, Padre, I showed you the sonnets on friendship and the poems on love.
FILOTHEA: Is that true, Padre?
PADRE: I never imagined she would send them beyond these walls to be published.
JUANA: I do not see how poems by a simple woman as myself could possibly threaten the vast power and glory of our church.

PADRE: You are here to serve God.

JUANA: And if God has chosen for me to serve in this manner?

PADRE: You have chosen this! YOU chose this. Not God!

JUANA: Reverend Father, you told me that when I came to the convent I would be allowed to write and to study.

PADRE: I quote you: "Heart and Hand, trembling in the dark."

SARA: But how...

PADRE: I quote you: "The agony of loving, of feeling, of thinking is at the root of my desire."

FILOTHEA: God have mercy!

SARA: Padre!

PADRE: I quote you: "My heart, in my breast, shines with the delicacy of your touch."

NOVICE: (*Almost impressed.*) Sor Juana!

JUANA: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." "My Lover is to me a sachet of myrrh, resting between my breasts." I quote—

FILOTHEA, NOVICE & JUANA: "The Song of Solomon."

PADRE: Enough! I've been called before the Inquisition.

FILOTHEA: Padre! No!

JUANA: The Inquisition? Dios mío. For my poetry?

PADRE: (*Pulls out the letter JUANA wrote to the bishop. Beat.*) Your poetry concerns your disobedience. This letter to the new Bishop, however, is far more serious. It concerns your insolence.

JUANA: Forgive me, Padre. I should have told you. The New Bishop of Puebla. He contacted me with a series of questions.

PADRE: And he contacted the Inquisition with your series of letters.

JUANA: Dios mío.

PADRE: (*Reads from the letter.*) "Holy Sir, what can be so wrong about my being a poet? What strange madness. Writing verse is so innate in me, that I am doing violence to myself to keep this missive in prose." I quote you.

JUANA: Padre...

PADRE: For years I have defended your writing and your studies, to skeptical clerics. These are troubled times: the heavy rains, the ruined crops, the native rebellions. God's wrath is upon us. The Inquisition is relentless and your disobedience and insolence have put all of us, ALL OF US, in danger.

The New Bishop of Puebla—

JUANA: The New Bishop of Puebla believes women should not write.

PADRE: And then you write him a letter challenging his authority?

JUANA: I did not challenge his authority, Padre. I tried to reason with him.

Lope de

Vega, Calderón, Góngora are all published writers and men of the cloth.

PADRE: You are not a man.

JUANA: I know

PADRE: These poets are men of the cloth first. They serve God and they respect the authority of the Church. You wrote this poem in defiance of my orders.

JUANA: This is your favorite poem of mine.

PADRE: Juana, do you love God?

JUANA: Padre, you know my answer.

PADRE: Do I?

JUANA: Yes. (*Beat.*) I love the Lord.

PADRE: Again.

JUANA: (*Breathes.*) I love the Lord.

PADRE: Say it with your soul!

JUANA: I love the Lord!

PADRE: You must repent for your sin of pride and submit to the authority of God. As your confessor, I must save your soul. You will

pull out every single word you have stitched onto that cloth.

JUANA: Padre...?

PADRE: I will not accept your confession until you destroy this stitch.

(*FILOTHEA, SARA and NOVICE are shocked.*)

JUANA: (*Shocked and scared.*) Padre...

PADRE: I will not recognize you, nor bless you, nor guide you in the search for God until you learn humility. Destroy this stitch. (*Beat.*) If you do not, you must leave this convent.

JUANA: Please, no!

FILOTHEA: God have mercy!

PADRE: Remember what you did that drove you here.

JUANA: Padre, remember what saved me.

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

(*Pause. JUANA, moved by PADRE's plea, tacitly takes the cloth and truly attempts to destroy it.*

She looks at the cloth, and slowly shakes her head; she doesn't understand why she is unable to destroy it.)

JUANA: (*Softly.*) No.

PADRE: Take Sor Juana back to her room.

FILOTHEA: Father, your heart.

PADRE: What heart? God will grant me the time He sees fit. (*Pause.*) God help you, Sor Juana.

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

NOVICE: It's but a cloth with thread.
SARA: Shhh! María!
FILOTHEA: Come, Sor Juana.
JUANA: Madre Filothea, why has el Padre abandoned me?
FILOTHEA: Perhaps because you have abandoned God.
JUANA: I don't think I have.
FILOTHEA: Sor Juana, in this lifetime, it is more important to be humble than to be right. It is a lesson you have always failed to learn. God forgive you for your sin.
JUANA: Which one?
FILOTHEA: *(Becomes upset.)* It is your pride, Sor Juana. What will become of you, my child? *(To SARA and NOVICE.)* Go on with her. *(She exits.)*

(A dazed JUANA walks back to her room with SARA and the NOVICE.)

SARA: Your cell, Sor Juana. Good night. May the angels protect your sleep. I will pray for you. *(She exits.)*
NOVICE: I liked the poem...despite the stitching. *(She exits. The door closes.)*
JUANA: What a stupid woman I have become. I have disobeyed Father Núñez. I have brought the Inquisition down upon this house of God! What a fool I am. Cursed by Eve's affliction. Forgetting that ignorance is always the cleverest way. I thought coming here would give me the freedom to write and study. But I'm trapped. Trapped. *(Pause. She walks around the room.)*
God, why instill curiosity in women, and then punish us for having it? *(She grabs the cross-stitching but is unable to destroy it. She falls to her knees.)* If you can't make me understand, then help me to be good. They say I sin when I learn...and yet, how can I reasonably stop? If it is true that I should not learn, then teach me to hate knowledge...teach me to respect ignorance, to abhor the musicality of words and the beauty of ideas. Teach me to accept the path as it is, and to submit to the authority of the narrow mind...and teach me, above all, to really want what I am asking for...because, Lord, in all truth, I prefer this prayer go unanswered. Amen.

(SOUND: A noise comes from the chest in her room. JUANA leaps to her feet and runs to it.)

JUANA: Am I going mad?
XOCHITL: Let me out! Let me out! ¡Auxilio!

(JUANA unlocks the chest. XOCHITL, her old maid from her days at the court, emerges, pulling some cobwebs off.)

JUANA: Xóchitl!
XOCHITL: Finally, mi'jita. *(She coughs.)* Dusty in there.
JUANA: Xóchitl!
XOCHITL: Juanita!
JUANA: Ay, I am mad. Mad! Oh, I've missed you. *(She throws her arms around XOCHITL and starts to cry.)*
XOCHITL: Ya. Ya. Pobrecita.
JUANA: Ay, Dios mío. *(She starts to walk around the room.)* I know why you are here. Pray for me, Xóchitl, because I can no longer pray for myself.
XOCHITL: Pray for you? All right. In the name of the Father, Quetzalcoatl and the Holy Spirits. Amen. *(XOCHITL crosses herself incorrectly.)*
JUANA: Xóchitl. *(JUANA crosses herself correctly.)* It's in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.
XOCHITL: Fine. I know. I just don't want to seem partial to anybody up there.
VICEREINE: Juana! Juana Inés!

(XOCHITL opens the closet. The young VICEREINE enters from the closet in a splendid, alluring dress.)