

Adela and Juana

By Verónica Musalem Moreno

In a new translation by Caridad Svich

This translation was developed at the Lark Theatre Company Play Development Center, New York City, as part of the US-Mexico Playwright Exchange Program

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Figures:

ADELA: 18 years old. A country girl. Impulsive and sensual.

JUANA: 50 years old. Owner of a bar called "Las mariposas." A seer. She has a hard countenance. She is spent.

BENITO: 20 years old. A young fieldhand.

PABLO: 45 years old. Former head of a transnational oil company. Handsome, elegant and quick-tempered.

NANCY: 35 years old. Pablo's wife. Beautiful, poised, and a little lost.

CLAUDIA: Pablo's secretary. Young, slightly vulgar woman. She wears too much makeup.

Setting:

A forgotten little town somewhere in Mexico. A hot dry place.*

Places:

A bar in the middle of nowhere
A river stream bordered by tall thick grass
A 1940s-era hotel (abandoned)
A cabin in the fields (also abandoned)

Time:

The present.

**The play is inspired by the landscape, people and history of Oaxaca. And of conquests past and continuous.*

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*The bar in half-light. In the background, a neon light flickers.
Adela is seated. Juana is drinking. She has been drinking for a while.
Adela goes to the jukebox and chooses a selection. Music comes up. It is a song by the Mexican
country-pop group Los Bukis. Adela dances suggestively. Juana watches her and laughs. Juana
goes to Adela, takes the lead, and dances with her. Juana caresses Adela violently, then tired of
her, pushes her away. Juana sits and resumes drinking.*

JUANA

Everything is dried up, everything is over.
This town has been left without a past.
Little by little, everyone's disappeared.
First one, then another, then... they were all gone.
How did it happen? Who knows...?
It just happened. That's all we know.
Little by little our lands were taken away from us.
They came here from up north.
They came here and took it all. Just like that.

ADELA

Shut up, Juana...shut up now.

JUANA

Men of steel. That's what they called them.
The men of steel came here to our crap bars to get their fill.
They came here asking all sorts of questions.
No one knew what they were saying.
But some people would answer them anyway.
Others wouldn't say a thing.
In the end, they had no choice but to watch
While everything was taken away from us:
Our men, our women, our lands, our homes...
The men of steel stuck their greedy snouts into every orifice in this town,
And no one said a word.

ADELA:

It's always been like this, Juana, always...

JUANA

They took our men, and left us fucked.
From one day to the next, our stories were stripped from our mouths.
Everything turned pale, colorless, bleached out.
The birds stopped singing, the dogs stopped... (*laughs*) barking,
Everything stopped...
No sign of anyone anymore.

ADELA

Shh! Quiet! I hear someone.

BENITO enters impetuously. He is visibly upset, as if he is fleeing from something. He is quiet. He looks at the women. He makes sure no one is following him. He surveys the area carefully.

ADELA

Benito?!

They all look at each other. Benito exits.

ADELA

That's enough. I don't want to dance anymore. *(turns off jukebox)*

JUANA

Quiet!

I told Benito "Go, find out what's going on, you little bastard.

Find out everything that's going on and don't come here

Until you have something for us."

(laughs) And you see? He's nothing if not an obedient bitch...

ADELA

(excited) They're soldiers.

JUANA

(Furious.) Soldiers? How do you know they're soldiers?

No one here knows who they are, or why they're here.

All we know is they came here with their damned suitcases

And pockets full of money to take over this goddamn town.

ADELA

I know as much as you: nothing

JUANA

You better watch out, Adela. Those men are up to no good.

ADELA

They're our enemies?

JUANA

Yes.

ADELA

Then why did they come here?

JUANA

Who knows? The only thing we know is that they're our enemies.
They're not from here.

Benito enters.

ADELA

Finally!

BENITO

(frightened) It's really spooky out there.

They all walked into town.

They said they come in peace, that they only want to buy the hotel

But I don't know. They go everywhere, asking questions, making deals.

They're not leaving a single stone unturned.

The streets are empty.

JUANA

You stopped by Don Carlos' place?

BENITO

He doesn't know anything either.

JUANA

Adela, you should go to sleep now.

ADELA

But...

JUANA

That's an order, dammit!

Adela exits.

JUANA

If they find out everything, about our plans and all, your life will be on the line.

BENITO

I know.

JUANA

They've come here looking for someone to blame.

We knew this would happen sooner or later. I told Don Carlos he was risking

all our lives when he set fire to those government-owned stores. Now they come here to take it
all, but most of all, to take our lands away from us.

BENITO

No one can...

JUANA

No, no one can suspect us...

BENITO

I'm scared, Juana.

JUANA

We have to protect ourselves, that's all. We can't say anything. Anyway, what would we say? This is a bar, for Christ's sake! All people do is come here to eat, drink, sing lousy songs, tell stupid stories and get damn drunk. This is a shit place. That's all it is. Drink! We have nothing to be afraid of.

2.

Adela is bathing in the stream. A sound is heard midst the tall, thick grass.

ADELA

(laughing) There's someone there, isn't there? I can't see you, but I know you're there... Come on. Show yourself, asshole! *(Restless)* I'm going to scream and all my brothers will come to find out what's going on. I have a lot of brothers. *(Screams)* You shouldn't spy on women. Do your job. Buy that hotel and put it in order. Or have you come here for something else? You think you have the right to spy on me, don't you? Just because you have money you can do whatever you want. *(Pause)* There are animals out there... if I rise up and catch you looking at me, you're going to start running. Y'hear? *(Pause)* They say you came into town and stuck your noses into everything. So, why hide now? Coward! A person can't even bathe in peace....

PABLO'S VOICE

What's your name?

ADELA

I knew it. I knew there was someone there. You think we're shit, huh? *(Laughs)* Show yourself! Why do you hide?

PABLO'S VOICE

What's your name, girl?

ADELA

(unsure) Marina... my name's Marina.

PABLO'S VOICE

Marina.. You know who I am?

ADELA

I know you're with them... with the men who bought the hotel.

PABLO'S VOICE

(laughing) You're trembling...

ADELA

Cause it's cold, asshole! Besides, I'm not getting out of here until you fucking leave.

PABLO'S VOICE

All right, don't get upset, I was only passing by. Getting to know the area. *(Pause)*
You're beautiful. ...Come on. Get out of there. You're going to freeze to death.

ADELA

And you... Why won't you show your face?

Why are you so afraid? Your conscience must be troubling you.

What's your name, eh? Are you still there? Hey. Can you hear me? *(Pause)*

We haven't been able to sleep for days now.

Juana says our men have been taken away.

Juana says there are a lot of bad things in the air. You're one of those bad things.

You came here to spy on us; you came here from afar; all powerful, yeah; wanting to screw us hard, wanting to fuck us women harder. The men of steel, that's what Juana calls you. And I'm not talking Superman, asshole.

You come here from real far but I know you all the same. I know your kind.

PABLO'S VOICE

And what is my kind like?

ADELA

Like you. You won't even say your name.

PABLO'S VOICE

I can say it. I will. Pablo. My name is Pablo. *(Pause)* It's a pleasure to meet you, Marina...

ADELA

I'm not afraid of you, Pablo.

I'm not afraid of anything.

But if Juana finds out you were here... she'll beat me. She will.

JUANA'S VOICE

Adela! Adela! Dammit, child, where are you?

Footsteps in the tall grass. Adela rises slowly, defiantly. She slips on her dress. She's not in a hurry. Her gestures are mechanical, as if she were thinking of something else.

ADELA

(mocking) Pablo... Pablo...you'll come back tomorrow.

3.

Near the stream. Adela rests. Claudia spies on her.

CLAUDIA

Miss! Hey. Girl!

ADELA

Again? What the hell is-? Oh, not another one...

CLAUDIA

Hello. ...Come here. Don't be afraid.

ADELA

Do I look afraid to you?

CLAUDIA

No. ...What's your name, girl?

ADELA

Adela.

CLAUDIA

Ah. (*Nervous*) Nice to meet you... I'm Claudia.

ADELA

You're with them, aren't you? With the men who bought the hotel?

CLAUDIA

How'd you know?

ADELA

You were spying on me, weren't you? Why are you looking at me like that?

CLAUDIA

Like what?

ADELA

With that look...

CLAUDIA

It's nothing, Adela. I'm only looking at you...because you're different.

ADELA

Different, eh? You call it how you see it, don't you? (*Pause*) Tell me,

Why did those men really come here?

CLAUDIA

I don't know. I only do what I'm told. The boss says we're here to "bring progress."
It's quite a venture. The adventure of my life. I've nothing to lose.
It was easy to say yes to this job.
Everything happened so quickly. From one day to the next my life changed. Just like that.
I've no regrets. You have to adapt to everything in life. That's how you get ahead.
One day you're here, the next day you're... who knows where?
You don't understand because you're... But a woman like me...?
What else could I do? You know what, Adela? I like this place. It's strange.

ADELA

Why are you telling me all this?

CLAUDIA

I don't know. ...Tell me, how old are you, Adela?

ADELA

Eighteen.

CLAUDIA

You don't look it. You're so small. *(Pause)* Would you like to walk with me a bit?

ADELA

No. I don't want to get mixed up in anything. I don't like you, the lot of you.
Juana says that I like to live a simple life...I like to dance and talk to people.
That's all. *(Pause)* I was born here. I live with Juana because I've no choice.
I've Juana, my brother Benito, and the bar. Juana's bar. Juana is like a mother to me.
Well, she's like a mother to me except when she beats me.
I like serving people, the people who come to the bar. *(Pause)*
I want to leave this place. I want to go far...up and out of here...
that one, that man that came with all the others, I like him. I want him.
See, there's nothing to do here.
Benito, well, he wants to leave too. He says he wants to go across the border, up north,
but he never does. He's a coward. He's always following orders like a good son. *(Pause)*
I like men. There aren't that many round here. Only the old ones are left! *(Pause)*
Time devours us here. Before these men came 'round, we used to go into town.
Now, we see Don Carlos every once in a while.
I watch TV all afternoon; Benito and Juana talk.
I love *telenovelas*. You know any *telenovelas*?
I love stories. I get so wrapped up in them... and then Juana screams at me
"Adela, hurry, dammit!" And I leave everything and run to her, because when Juana
calls, you gotta run. You gotta be there and quick.
She puts me to work. She makes me work like a slave.
She screams all the time and when she's spent from screaming, she gets angry and...

Don't tell anyone, but I'm going to leave this place.
That man that came by and looked at me, he wants me.
He's always coming 'round and looking at me.
He's buying everything, you know: the hotel, the lands, the whole town.
That's what Juana says. Let him, I say.
I want him to look at me. You see? I like it when he looks at me.
What do you think about that?

CLAUDIA

...Well, I don't know what to say.

4.

In the hotel.

PABLO

At last! A new home. *(Pause)* I'll take care of everything. You just tell me what you need and you'll have it. The world itself will be at our feet. *(Pause)* Come here, love.
Look. See all that out there...the grass, the earth, the sky... Well, everything as far as your eyes can see is ours, dear...It's a dream, Nancy, it's my dream. ...Don't look at me like that. *(Pause)*
I'm happy.

Nancy looks out. The landscape overwhelms her.

NANCY

And I'm happy, too, Pablo.

PABLO

Nancy?

NANCY

Yes, Pablo? I'm here...

PABLO

My princess, my little doll...don't say a word. Just sit here with me in silence. *(He kisses her)* I like... this place. We had to leave. We had no choice. I've no regrets. It was my destiny to come here to this place, to this little corner of the earth. This is where I belong. I feel it in my bones. *(Laughing)* This is the land of my dreams. One day I heard someone say "Money is a headache to he who doesn't have it." Well, we have it...we have plenty. And all my headaches are gone.

NANCY

And here I am at your side...seeing what you see.

PABLO

You see this view? Feel this air? The people? We're going to change it all.
What's money good for if not to dream (and make those dreams come true)?

... Are you with me? I don't want to lose you, dear. Because all of this is for you.

NANCY
For how long?

PABLO
As long as we can.

NANCY
As long as we can.

PABLO
But you mustn't say anything. You should just stay here with me in silence. Like a good pet. My dear Nancy. *(Pause)* Isn't it a dream?

NANCY
Yes, Pablo, it's a dream.

PABLO
Listen, I don't want you to talk to anyone. Nobody need know anything.
Why am I here? No one has to know. Where are we from? We don't have a past.
We have no memories.
All we have are fantasies, dreams of the future, dreams of the now.
I'm Pablo. That's all. I don't know who I was before or where I was from. *(Laughing)* I'm a dream made only to dream. *(Pause)* Nancy, we can't trust anyone here...we can't...especially because we're on the run...

NANCY
I don't like the people here.

PABLO
We don't like the people here. How bout some whisky?

He heads to a table and pours whisky into two glasses. Everything about his actions is deliberate and careful. He lights a cigarette, and smokes.

PABLO
I didn't have a choice. You know that. It was either me or the company, and I'm not the kind of person who will submit himself...to entrapment. Good ol' company! All that money in the pot! I had to do it. And it was so easy: a call here, a call there, a transfer of funds, and...all that money is ours now. I knew you'd understand, dear. After all, there wasn't any time to waste. We had to leave everything and run. There'd been enough scandals. The press, the government...They wanted someone to blame and all eyes were on me. We had no choice but to come here.

NANCY
Don't worry. I'm here, Pablo, by your side....

PABLO

And that's all that matters, love.

Claudia enters. She has several notebooks in hand. She wears outlandish clothes with lots of fake jewelry and way too much makeup. She has flowers in her hair..

CLAUDIA

Sir! Everything's ready. Just like you wanted. The kitchens are stocked up, the coffers are full and everything's been cleaned. Everything's ready! *(laughing)* I've walked this town backwards and forwards. It's as if everybody had been waiting for us, even though most of them don't like the fact that we're here. Others, well, they're curious. As you can imagine... Oh. Sir! Sir!

PABLO

Claudia, please, there's no need to shout. Just slow down...speak calmly. What's the hurry? I'm not *in* at the moment, understand? So if anyone wants to see me, they'll have to wait...Today I'm off.

CLAUDIA

Don't worry. I'll do whatever you say. That's what I'm here for.

PABLO

Claudia, please lower your voice.

CLAUDIA

But sir, the whole town is scared! They don't like us being here. They're worried. See? They're going round muttering things. I hear some people are getting together and scheming. I don't know about what, but I'll find out. I'll just have to gain their confidence. *(laughing)* Don't worry, everyone here can be bought, as long the price is high enough. I'll know more soon.

NANCY

What are those flowers called?

CLAUDIA

What flowers? Oh, these *[in her hair]*. I don't know. I found them on the way.

PABLO

Claudia, that'll be all now...Thanks so much for all your hard work and dedication...

CLAUDIA

But I have so much to tell you! I thought I'd get bored here in this wretched place but I don't have time for anything...nothing at all.

NANCY

I like those flowers.

CLAUDIA

The people here think we're from the government. I told them we were.

PABLO

Enough! I don't want to hear anything else. I don't want any more reports from the field. You hear me? I know you're efficient, but... leave me in peace now. Please. Today I only want to relax.

CLAUDIA

But...

PABLO

I only want to walk a bit, stroll down to the river... I feel a bit dizzy. I need some fresh air.
(Pause) Nancy? Til later, my pet.

Pablo exits.

CLAUDIA

Oh, ma'am, I never tire of him. He says such things... He asked me to let him know every little thing and now he doesn't want to hear any of it. All I'm doing is following orders. Like I've always done. By the way, I had to spend a little more than I -

NANCY

I need to take a bath. I don't feel well. This awful place...! *(Pause)* You hear me?

Claudia walks over to Nancy and takes off her shoes. She then takes off her blouse. Nancy lets everything be done to her; it is as if she is in some other world. Claudia takes the flowers out of her hair and puts them in Nancy's hair.

CLAUDIA

Yes, ma'am. Don't you worry about a thing. I'm going to draw a nice warm bath for you and I'll tell you everything. The people here don't trust anybody. They're quiet, yeah, but they're hiding things. They're so scared, though, they can't keep their stories straight. *(Laughing)* They think that we're from the government. Of course I told them we were. It's better for us if they're scared. Relax now; you'll see how we'll amuse ourselves... Pablo doesn't know what he's doing - how could he bring a little flower like you to this desert of a place? But don't worry, he's got me, that he has. You just tell me what to do; your word is my command.

5

The bar in half-light. Juana is drunk. She is alone.

JUANA

(in trance) They came here;
Little by little, they took everything
Right out from under us.

Like they've always done, like they always do.
They took our lands, our beliefs...
They took it all.
And we didn't even notice,
Although everyone else did.
The signs were there.
We were tossed about from one place to the next,
And we saw so many things,
Horrible, dreadful things.
Fear entered us.
And peace would no longer be with us
(Pause)
There's an echo....Y'hear?
The screams never stop.

Adela enters. Light shift.

ADELA
I went out to take a look; everything seems fine. Everything's quiet.

JUANA
Where's Benito?

ADELA
I don't know...

JUANA
There's talk of this man... Who knows what he wants? Whatever it is, that bastard won't lie to us. We'll see to it. He says he's come here to buy the hotel, but he's after something else.
(Pause) He mustn't know anything about what we're plotting ...He's lying to all of us...they found Don Lucio's men shot to death, massacred... (laughing) They resisted, you see? They didn't want to sell their lands. ...Be careful, Adela! Get to work now. Night's upon us.

ADELA
Why are you telling me all this? I don't give a shit.

JUANA
I'm telling you... to give a shit.

ADELA
What are you talking about?

JUANA
Don't act like you don't know!

ADELA

Juana, stop. Leave me alone.

JUANA

I'm not doing anything. I haven't even started. Listen to me, Adela, and listen to me good. Think about me, think about Benito. *(Pause)* Now put on some music and pour me a drink!

Night falls. The neon lights flicker. Adela selects a tune on the jukebox. Juana sits and watches Adela as she fixes up the place. Juana drinks. Footsteps are heard from outside, as if someone were running. Noise and laughter. The women are still, as if they haven't heard a thing. Adela peers out the window.

6.

In the fields, night is falling. Benito is standing. Nancy is seated, near him.

BENITO

Here I am again in this little corner of the earth.

(Drawing close to Nancy) here in the fields and all I have to do is look.

The light of the moon is upon us. Everything else is darkness.

Fires burn. Smoke envelopes the fields.

You're scared, aren't you? *(Pause)*

I'm Benito. Just Benito. No last name or anything.

Juana says they brought me here from the mountains when I was very little.

(He looks at Nancy) It smells nice here.

You turn, and strange shapes appear. Don't be afraid. It's just the mountains.

Nothing is what it seems. *(laughing)* Adela frightens easily.

She doesn't like coming up here to the mountains with me at night. Do you know her? Adela is my sister. I like her. She's pretty and she never stops smiling. *(lowers his voice)* I work in the fields from sunup to sundown. I work with Juana when time allows.

The town's turned upside down since those men arrived. You're with them, right?

The men who bought the hotel and Don Lucio's lands...

everybody's selling everything now; everybody wants to make some easy money.

That's what they say anyway. But what it really is is that they're scared.

(Pause) I'm scared.

(nervous) Ever since these men arrived, there have been so many deaths.

Don't be afraid. It's not your fault.

(Laughing) Our ancestors are upset, though.

I brought some offerings to their graves, but they won't calm down. You hear the wind? *(Nancy walks away)*

Nobody talks to anybody anymore, nobody trusts anybody anymore.

I don't like that man – the one that's with you all the time. He's just upsetting everyone.

I look at him with suspicion and hatred, and Adela looks at him just the opposite.

She hasn't talked to me in days.

The signs are there. The gatherings at Don Carlos' place have stopped.

Adela told me she found a serpent in her bed...

*Thunder and lightning. Storm winds.
Light shift. In the bar.*

PABLO

Good evening...Can we come in?

JUANA

Evening. *(Pause)* Well? You're already in.

PABLO

We'd like to have a drink.

JUANA

Come in, come in, then! You must be Pablo.

PABLO

Yes... pleased to meet you.

JUANA

Adela! Take care of these people!

ADELA

Yes?

PABLO

Two pints.

NANCY

This is fun! *(under her breath)* Those women... *(laughs)*

PABLO

Not a word... *(Pause)* You're so beautiful.

NANCY

I'm drunk. Shh. Don't let anyone find out.

PABLO

You like this place?

NANCY

Yes.

PABLO

Why?

NANCY

Cause it's fun...I've never been in a place like this...

PABLO

Me neither. But...you like it?

ADELA

Here you are. That'll be twenty *pesos*.

NANCY

Hey girl, hold your horses, we're just getting started....

JUANA

Adela!

ADELA

I'll be right there... (*she walks away*)

PABLO

Cheers!

NANCY

Cheers!

PABLO

Hold on. (*Pause*) I need to ask this woman something. Ma'am?

JUANA

Juana to you. What can I do for you?

PABLO

I wanted to ask you something, Juana.

JUANA

Is that right? Well, people say that you're happy, that you're getting accustomed to this place.

PABLO

Yes, I am. (*Silence*) In fact, I'm very interested in investing in this place, in buying some of the lands.

JUANA

(*laughing*) This damned place isn't worth shit. Can't you see where you are, sir?

NANCY

That's exactly what I say...

JUANA

Everyone here will sell you their lands; they'll sell you their souls if you have enough money. Go on. Take a look out there. It's barren.

PABLO

I've heard that you're not exactly happy with my presence in this town.

JUANA

My happiness is none of your business, Pablo. What old Juana thinks or feels means nothing to nobody. *(Laughing)* I'm just an old barfly.

PABLO

Then I'd advise you to keep being one...that way there's nothing but peace between us
And our neighbors.

JUANA

I just go about my business, sir. I don't get mixed up in anything. You see? You have nothing to worry about. It's the people who are afraid. It's the other people in this town you should be thinking about. Not me. I'm here. That's all. I just do my job. You see?

Juana rises, drink in hand, sashaying her body. Pause.

JUANA

Think of this as your home.

Pablo and Juana gaze at each other in silence. From the jukebox, a banda song blares.

7

A lone bed in an abandoned cabin. Gauze, fabrics and animal furs are strewn about on the floor, along with some liquor bottles and maps. There is a lamp to one side with a rose-colored light.

ADELA

How old are you?

PABLO

45.

ADELA

And handsome too...

PABLO

You're so enchanting... so beautiful...has anyone told you?

ADELA

Yes.

PABLO

You like people to tell you?

ADELA

Very much.

PABLO

It excites you?

ADELA

What do you want?

PABLO

To possess you.

ADELA

Possess me.

PABLO

I'm afraid. You're so small, so...

ADELA

I'm not afraid. I want you.

PABLO

Come here... it will hurt. It always hurts the first time.

ADELA

I don't care. I want you.

PABLO

I can't believe...how much you want me....

ADELA

No words.

PABLO

Adela...

ADELA

Take me. Now.

Silence. Light shift. Time has passed (nearly a month).

ADELA

My master, my man. (*Laughing*) Here you are again. Oh Pablo, I didn't know you were so shy. You were so afraid when you entered me; it was as if you were asking for my permission. ... You came yesterday and the day before that, and you'll come again tomorrow and always. And I will wait for you right here, naked. And I'll kiss you again just like you like. And we'll make love until we're sweaty and spent and our cries are heard all over town, from the smallest room in the hotel to Juana's bar to the mountains where Benito likes to wander about. And my screams of pleasure will fly from my mouth like the wind.

PABLO

Quiet! (*Pause*) I have to go back now...But I can't...Oh, Adela, you're so beautiful. I'm burning. You see? Everything inside me is on fire. I can't control it.

ADELA

You touch my leg and I tremble. Look at my body. Look how it quivers for you... You like...?

PABLO

Adela!

ADELA

Pablo! I'm here. I'm here to make your dreams come true. All you have to do is ask and I will give you everything. I'm here to serve you, to please you...whatever you ask... That's how you want me, right?

PABLO

Yes. (*Pause*) I want you so much.

ADELA

Take me.

PABLO

You're the only one who will really give herself to me. Everyone else...keeps themselves from me; they hold me back.

ADELA

So many words...(*laughing*) Juana's always saying things, and Benito...he's just afraid.

PABLO

What's he afraid of?

ADELA

Of you...Juana says that-