

A Desperate Woman: A Play in Two Acts

PETRONA DE LA CRUZ CRUZ

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Characters:

JUAN (Father)

MARÍA (Mother)

CARMEN (Oldest daughter)

JUANITA (Neighbor)

ANTONIO (Stepfather)

JOSÉ (Neighbor)

LUPITA (Youngest daughter)

MARIO (Employer)

TERESA (Middle daughter)

JUDGE

COMANDANTE

Act 1

Scene 1

A Zinacanteca-style house with a straw roof and a small door. María appears, hugging her sick daughter looking imploringly up at the sky.

MARÍA: (*In anguish*) Lord, help me. I'm dying of hunger and exhaustion. I don't know if I can find a good path for my daughters. Their father has never cared about them. He doesn't even remember to bring them food. He lives in the cantina with his friends. He won't even give us permission to go work so that we can earn our own food. Forgive me Lord, and give me the patience to put up with him.

(*Carmen runs through the door, alarmed.*)

CARMEN: Mama, mama. Here comes dad, drunk and yelling, and there is no fire in the hearth. He is going to scold us. He is going to hit you again for not having food ready. He is so drunk that he doesn't understand anything. Ay, mama, I am afraid.

MARÍA: No, daughter, don't be afraid; he will only hit me. Hide yourself and I will talk to him. Go on, go out back. (*The daughter leaves and María sits on the bed, resigned, covering up her sick daughter. Juan enters, yelling in a drunken voice.*)

JUAN: What! Weren't you at home? I want to eat! Why isn't there a fire? Who were you with, you disgrace of a wife? Tell me or I'll kill you! (*He grabs a log from the fireplace and throws it at her while she dodges it, huddling on the bed. He lunges towards her and yanks her by the hair until she falls to the floor.*) Hurry up and get me something to eat or I'll beat you to death.

MARÍA: (*Crying*) Don't you understand, man? How can I make a fire if we don't have kindling or food. You are so drunk that you don't see anything. You haven't worked for a long time, even to feed your daughters. Look how sick they are, and you just keep getting drunk and throwing away money that we don't have.

JUAN: (*Furious*) All I need is for you to chide me. (*He goes back to hitting her.*) Take this for your big mouth and learn to respect your husband. (*María cries and hugs her sick daughter, trying to protect herself from the blows.*)

ROSA: (*Having heard the yelling, she appears at the door.*) Don Juan, what are you doing; my God! Don't you realize that your wife and daughter are very sick? Instead of bringing them to be treated you are tormenting them. What a heartless man! Don't you care about your family?

JUAN: What do you care you old gossip. I am her husband and I can do whatever I want to her. (*He lunges towards María again, trying to hit her; Rosa gets between them and gives him a hard push, making him fall.*)

He is so intoxicated that he can't control his fall and knocks his head against a stone in the cold fireplace. The women watch, frightened.)

ROSA: Oh, holy God! How could I push him! He has hurt his head! Oh my Lord, I only wanted to defend you and the girl because I know you are sick! Now he's hurt. We have to take him to be treated.

MARÍA: But he's so drunk! We better let him sleep for a while or he will be so furious that he won't let them treat him.

ROSA: (*Worried*) I'm going to call someone to help me take him to the doctor. He looks badly hurt, and his head is bleeding hard.

MARÍA: But . . . how are we going to pay a doctor if we don't even have money for food? (*She hugs her daughter more tightly.*) And what about my sick daughter? She gets worse every day and I don't know if she will die! And since we have no money to bring her to the doctor we can only wait for the grace of God.

ROSA: (*She goes out the door and runs into her husband.*) Ay, José! Thank goodness you are here. Juan is hurt badly. He hit his head and is bleeding a lot.

JOSÉ: What happened? Did he really fall or did they beat him up on the street for being so drunk. What are you doing here? You should be at home!

ROSA: Ay, José: he was hitting these poor women! I was trying to defend them and gave him a shove, and he was so drunk that he hit his head against the stones.

JOSÉ: (*Very angry*) Why do you meddle in things that are none of your business? What! Don't you have enough work to do at home? Now you got me mixed up in this problem. Let's see if I can find someone to treat him. Go on, go home: I'm going to get a doctor. As if we have lots of money.

MARÍA: Don't get mad at her José; no one else tried to defend me.

JOSÉ: (*Bending down to look at Juan's head*) Now we are stuck in a real mess. This man is hurt bad. You go home, Rosa. Let's see if we can get someone to treat him. (*They both leave in a hurry, but then return when they hear Juan's groans and María's cries.*)

JUAN: Aaaaay, God, I feel like I am dying! (*María runs over to attend to him.*)

MARÍA: No, Juan, please don't die! The neighbors will think that I killed you, they won't believe that you fell!

JUAN: (*Suffering*) Aaay, woman. This must be my punishment for having treated you so badly. I am dying; please forgive me for everything that I have done to you. Take care of my daughters. Now they will be happy. I was only a nuisance . . . Just give me a little water. I'm thirsty.

MARÍA: (*She quickly gives him water.*) Here's your water. Come on, drink! (*With great difficulty, Juan drinks from the water jug, and begins to suffer death spasms while his wife, his youngest daughter, and his neighbors look on in anguish.*)

JUAN: Aaay, goodbye woman! God forgive me for what I made you suffer. (*He dies, and upon seeing that he is dead, María lets out a scream and begins to cry.*)

ROSA: Ay, María! Your husband is dead! Now what are we going to do? It is my fault that he is dead. (*She cries.*)

JOSÉ: Ay, Lord, what are we going to do now; I don't know why you had to come meddle in things that are none of your business. All because you wouldn't sit at home. They are going to call you a criminal.

MARÍA: (*Between sobs*) No, Don José. It was not Rosa's fault. Juan was very drunk, we don't have to blame anyone. She just wanted to defend us.

(*Carmen, the eldest daughter enters, alarmed; when she sees the scene she screams.*)

CARMEN: What happened, mama? What happened to my father? Oh my God, he is dead!

MARÍA: Ay, my daughter: your poor father fell down drunk and hit his head! May God forgive his sins!

CARMEN: He made us suffer so much! Let him rest in peace and may God forgive him! We don't even have enough to buy a mat to bury him. My poor father left us in misery!

JOSÉ: (*Looking at Rosa, resigned*) Although there is little we can offer you, you can count on us to help with cost of the burial. How did this unlucky thing happen! But poor Juan was already in bad shape. May God forgive him and may he rest in peace. We'll have to wash the blood, Doña María, and tell the officials that he died from the fall. Come on, Rosa. We are going to take the corpse and wash it. (*They leave, in tears, carrying the corpse.*)

Scene 2

The same house, after the burial. A worried Rosa enters with María who carries her weak child as she sobs.

ROSA: Don't cry any more, everything will be okay. Now you have to think of your daughter so that she can get better. Don't worry, we will bring her to the clinic in a little while; you'll see that things will be okay.

MARÍA: May God hear you. I don't even want to think that I will have to bury her too, like her father. What are we going to do? We don't know how to work at anything, and we don't know anything about the city; I don't know what we are going to do. Ay, God help us to survive in this world! Rosita, would you please lend us the money to eat today?

ROSA: Fine, María, but I won't be able to keep lending you money. The best thing would be to send Carmen to work, so that she can help you a bit while your youngest daughter gets better. Otherwise you'll die of hunger.

MARÍA: You're right, Rosi; but how can I send them off to work when they don't even know how to work as servants. They won't be able to go anywhere.

ROSA: Even if they don't earn much while they are learning, at least it will be something, Mari. The truth is that I can't keep lending you money. You already owe me a lot and as it is you won't be able to pay me back everything I've given you. You couldn't even pay me when your husband was alive, let alone now.

MARÍA: Ay Rosi, I promise that sooner or later I will pay back all the favors that you have done for us, but you know how it was with my dead husband: he was so jealous that he wouldn't even let us breathe. At least lend me five thousand pesos so that I can feed my little girl.

ROSA: Look, I can give you two thousand, but this is the last time, because I don't have anything left for myself. Forgive me but you'll have to see if you can find help somewhere else because my husband doesn't give me enough to keep lending to you. I have to go, before he gets angry. May God protect you.

MARÍA: *(Crying)* Thank you so much, Rosi. May God reward you; you are so good. We will get through this.

ROSA: Like I said: you have to send your daughter to learn to work. I already talked to some friends who need someone to help take care of their boy. They will probably come to see you. Okay, I am leaving now. Here comes your daughter. *(She leaves quickly.)*

MARÍA: Be well, Rosa. (*Carmen enters.*)

CARMEN: What's wrong, mama? Why are you crying again? Couldn't they lend you money for food?

MARÍA: (*Between sobs*) No, daughter! Rosi says that she can't give us any more. I only got enough for a little corn for the girl. I don't know what we're going to do.

CARMEN: I have something to tell you. The neighbors know a man who says that he will give me a good salary to go the city and clean for him and take care of his children. Since we have nothing to eat now, it would be best for me to go to work. It's for the best.

MARÍA: Ay, daughter! I don't want you to go! I don't know what to say, because we don't know anything about the city! But what other choice do we have? We can't die of hunger. Tell the man that I want to speak with him.

CARMEN: (*Leaning out the door*) He is coming, mama. Doña Rosa must have spoken to him. Come in, Señor. I already told my mother and she wants to speak with you. (*She lets Mario enter and he greets them.*)

MARÍA: Good afternoon, Señor: Is it true that you want my daughter to work for you?

MARIO: Yes, Señora: I need someone to work in my house; your neighbors are my friends and they told me that your daughter might want to work for me. That's why I have come looking for her.

MARÍA: (*Resigned*) That is fine, Señor. But the truth is that she has never worked before, and we don't know how much you mean to pay her.

MARIO: Well, would twenty thousand pesos per month be acceptable while she learns how to do the work? We will pay her more later on if she works well.

MARÍA: I see no problem with that. That's a good salary while she's learning to work, but forgive me, Señor; would you give me half of her salary in advance? It pains me to tell you but my husband just died and we have nothing to eat. (*She begins to cry.*)

MARIO: Don't worry, Señora. Here you are. Once I see how your daughter works I will increase her pay; that way we can help both of you.

MARÍA: May God reward you, Señor. Thank you so much, because we really need it. I suggest that you show her city ways little by little, so that

she learns to take care of herself and to work. And when do you want her to begin?

MARIO: Right now, if she can, Señora. My wife has to go to work and doesn't have anyone to take care of the children. Here is my address, and you already know my relatives, in case you want to come see her. Don't worry, we will take care of her.

MARÍA: Please, Señor, take good care of her there. Let me just get her clothes together.

CARMEN: (*Holding up a small bag*) I have them all ready, mama. The Señor says that his wife will give me a few clothes.

MARÍA: (*Holding back her tears*) God will reward you, Señor. It's just that we are so poor. See you soon, dear. Take care of yourself.

MARIO: Well, Señora. We will be on our way. Don't worry about your daughter, we will take care of her. You can come see her when you want. (*Carmen takes leave of her mother, and follows Mario out the door.*)

MARÍA: (*While watching Carmen from the door she hugs her youngest daughter.*) Ay, my little daughter, if we were not poor your sister would not have to go to their house. I don't know why it makes me so afraid. But . . . what else can we do? (*They exit to one side.*)

Scene 3

María and her youngest daughter appear, next to the fireplace. There is a knock at the door and the voice of Rosa is heard.

ROSA: (*Alarmed*) Are you there, María? (*She quickly knocks again.*)

MARÍA: (*Startled, she hurries to open the door.*) Yes Rosa, come in.

ROSA: (*Entering*) Ay, Doña María; I don't know how to tell you. Something terrible has just happened. Don Mario came with some bad news.

MARÍA: Aaay, what now, Doña Rosa? What did they do to my daughter? What has happened to her? Please don't tell me that they have kidnapped her!

ROSA: Ay, Doña María! It would be better if Don Mario told you. (*Mario enters.*)

MARIO: It is even worse than that, Señora. We are truly sorry. Your daughter went out to buy some things, and since she has never been to the city . . . she didn't look before she crossed the street, and unfortunately . . . a car hit her.

MARÍA: But what happened to her? Is she hurt badly? Oh my God, tell me what happened to my daughter! (*She begins to cry.*)

MARIO: Ay, Señora; I don't know how to tell you . . . They couldn't save her . . . she was hurt badly and sadly . . . she died.

MARÍA: (*Crying inconsolably*) Noooo! Aaay, my God; my Carmen, dead! How could you send her out on her own without knowing the city? I trusted you to take care of her! And what are we going to do now without my beloved daughter? Ay, my God; why are you punishing me like this? (*The younger daughter also cries, hugging her mother.*)

MARIO: (*Remorseful and ashamed*) I understand, Señora. I know that you are suffering a lot for your daughter. What could we do? We had already showed her how to cross streets, but she wasn't careful. She ran out in front of a car. The poor driver wasn't to blame.

MARÍA: And what did they do to the driver? Did they nab him or let him get away?

MARIO: No, Señora. He even stopped to help her, but it was her fault that she was hit. There were witnesses. It was a terrible accident. It wasn't the driver's fault, but he plans to pay for the burial in any case. You just need to go see your daughter for the last time.

MARÍA: So . . . they are not going to bury her here?

MARIO: No, Señora. They can't bury her here because the driver is poor and doesn't have the money to pay for the transportation. Since everyone saw that he wasn't to blame, we can't make him pay. It's very expensive. That's why I ask you to resign yourself to the situation.

MARÍA: (*Hysterical*) How can you ask me to be resigned when she was my only hope! Now I have no one. (*She cries bitterly.*) Ay, my God! And my younger daughter is finally better and loved Carmen so much! If it wasn't for her I would not be able to bear such pain.

MARIO: Yes, Señora; I understand that you are suffering for the loss of your daughter. But . . . what can we do? Really, it was not our fault. Her misfortune came because she didn't know about the city. She should have waited for the light to change.

MARÍA: Oh, my God. My husband wouldn't even let them raise their eyes from the floor. That's why I worried about them so much. But what can we do . . . now she is dead. (*She goes back to crying bitterly.*)

MARIO: (*Dismayed*) I understand, Señora . . . but it's already late. We have to go, because the funeral begins in half an hour; that is if you want to see your daughter's face for the last time . . . We should go.

MARÍA: Okay, Señor. Let's go. Dear God! Why are you punishing me so much?

Act 2

Scene 1

María rushes in, followed by Teresa. They carry piles of clothes, which they throw on the bed.

MARÍA: Daughter, tomorrow you will have to get up early because Señora Juanita asked if we wanted to pick frijoles and I said yes. What do you say? Should we go or not?

TERESA: That's fine with me, mama; I would rather work nearby than die in the city like my sister, even if the pay is less. We could even bring my little sister.

MARÍA: Ay, daughter, thank God we are together, even if we barely earn our meals. Truly I can't stand any more of this poverty.

TERESA: But Don Antonio keeps asking you to marry him. And it seems like you want to get married.

MARÍA: Ay, daughter, I don't know what to think. He seems like a good man. At least he works. And I don't want you to go hungry so often. What would we do if I got sick and couldn't work? People here don't respect widows. At least we would have somebody respectable in the house.

TERESA: Ay, mama. The truth is that I am afraid of him. It is true that he works, but I don't know if he will treat us like daughters or what. What happens if he later regrets having to support us because we are not his daughters.

MARÍA: No, daughter. Don't think like that. He has told me that he wants to be like a father to you. You see how he takes care of the little one. He brings her lots of presents, and has brought you several dresses.

TERESA: It is true, but for some reason I don't like him. I don't like the way he looks at us.

MARÍA: Ay, daughter; don't start me thinking. It's for your good that I want to get married. You've seen how hard it is for a single woman. Someday

you will marry too, and I won't have anyone to look after me. I don't want to be a burden.

TERESA: Don't say that, mother. If I ever get married, the first thing I am going to do is ask my husband to let you live with us.

MARÍA: No, my daughter; that's no good. Married people should live on their own. You know how many problems there are when mothers-in-law live with their sons-in-law.

TERESA: I just don't want this Don Antonio to treat you badly like my father did. Won't he say that he is doing you a favor by marrying a widow with two kids?

MARÍA: No, my daughter. I think that Don Antonio has good intentions. The people from his town say that he's a hard worker. And he has a nice house. I don't think that he will mistreat me. This way I will feel more secure and you'll be able to study. It'll be the best thing for you.

TERESA: Okay, mama. Think it over. Let's hope that you don't have regrets later.

(They both leave, worried.)

Scene 2

Another, bigger Zinacanteca-style house. There are full grain bags and a table that is larger than the one at the other house. María enters, followed by Teresa, who carries a basket full of provisions, which they put on the table.

TERESA: *(Pleading)* I want to go to church now that my stepfather is gone. When he's here he doesn't let us go anywhere.

MARÍA: Ay, no daughter. You better wait for Antonio to come then I'll ask him to take us. He might scold me if he doesn't find you here. As you know, this is a very tender point with him. When he gets mad he doesn't understand anything. Wait for Antonio, daughter! Later, when he comes back we will go together.

TERESA: *(Annoyed, she paces back and forth, speaking angrily:)* But why do I have to suffer because of your marriage? It's not my fault that you married this man. What does it have to do with me? It's one thing if you want to put up with his jealousy, but why should he order me around? Here we are suffering just like we did with my father and I can't even go to mass.

MARÍA: Please understand, daughter; as you know we now have food to eat and clothes to wear. I know that he is too jealous, but I think he'll get better with time.

TERESA: It seems to me that he gets worse every day. Before he was just protective of you, but now he gets mad every time I talk with anyone. My friends don't invite me to go anywhere because they know he won't give me permission to go out, and they even have to put up with his scolding if they invite me.

MARÍA: It's probably because he wants you to be careful. You know how girls are these days. You shouldn't trust them.

TERESA: Ay, mama; you know how it is. All he wants us to do is sit in the house, answering to his beck and call. He is always coming up with ways to keep us busy running back and forth fetching things for him. We are like his slaves. Sometimes I think it would be better if you left him and we went back to our house to live alone, instead of martyring ourselves.

MARÍA: No, daughter! You are forgetting that I am married to him and can't leave him. Anyway, you have already forgotten how hungry we were. Now we don't suffer so much. It's just a question of time. You'll see that things will come together. *(Animated)* Anyway daughter, calm down, come on. I'll let you go to mass, but come home as soon as it's over so that your stepfather doesn't discover that you have gone. Please understand, daughter!

TERESA: *(Reanimated and almost happy)* Good, mama; I'll be back soon. But in any case it's time for the two of you to understand something: he's not my father and he doesn't have the right to meddle in my life. *(She begins to change for church.)*

MARÍA: Yes, daughter, yes. I will convince him. Go on, hurry up.

(Having changed, Teresa prepares to depart when her stepfather appears. When he sees that Teresa is going out in her church clothes he becomes angry.)

ANTONIO: Where do you think you are going? Haven't I told you that you can't go out without my permission, and definitely not alone. In this house you follow my rules. Do you understand? You need to learn! *(He raises his hand to hit her and Teresa dodges to one side, sobbing, and leaves the scene.)*

MARÍA: *(Imploring Antonio)* No, Antonio! Let her go to mass! She's young and she needs distractions.

ANTONIO: (*Furious*) You better shut up or I will hit you! Didn't I tell your daughter that she can't go out unless I go with her?

MARÍA: Okay, don't get mad. I will tell her that she can't go out. I will tell her to water the plants. (*She goes to find Teresa in the kitchen. Antonio, furious, exits to one side. Teresa immediately enters from the other side, crying from rage, followed by María. They remain in the kitchen.*)

MARÍA: (*Tenderly*) Ay, daughter, Antonio is very angry because he doesn't want you to go out by yourself. But I understand that you want to go out . . . I told him that you were going to water the plants; pretend that you are going out to water and then as soon as he is calm you can go out for a while. I just ask that you don't go out for too long. You know how he is when he gets mad.

TERESA: You are so good, mother! It's too bad that you had to marry this wretch of a man who is making your life impossible just like my father did. Listen mother, there's a really nice young man waiting for me at church who wants to speak with me . . . I am just going to ask him to wait a little while so that we can have a serious talk with the old man and ask his permission to marry. I won't be long mama, I'll be back soon.

MARÍA: Oh Lord, my daughter. Although you are so young to marry . . . I understand. I can't ask you to keep putting up with the mistreatment of your stepfather. I just pray to heaven that you can be happy, and that you are not destined to as much unhappiness as me . . . (*She cries.*)

TERESA: Don't cry, mother. You'll see that everything will be better when I am married. Maybe this man is so angry because he doesn't like supporting us since we are not his real daughters. And if he keeps mistreating you, then leave him and come to live with us. But I am already late. I won't be long (*She exits to one side.*)

MARÍA: May God protect you daughter. Don't be late. (*She goes off the other side. The scene remains empty and silent. Suddenly we hear Antonio's yells.*)

ANTONIO: (*Yelling behind the scene*) Teresa! Teresa! Come here! (*Antonio appears to one side, still yelling.*) Damn! She has escaped! When will this girl learn? She's going to get such a beating. Tereesa! (*When she doesn't respond he gets furious and kicks a pail. He leaves to one side. María appears on the other side followed, in turn, by Antonio.*) María! Where is your ungrateful daughter; she doesn't answer when I call.

MARÍA: She is outside watering the plants like you asked.

ANTONIO: Don't lie or I will beat you to a pulp. I was just looking for her and she's not there; that's why I am asking you.

MARÍA: (*Annoyed*) Okay! I will tell you the truth. She went to mass. What's wrong with going to mass? Anyway she's young and is neither your wife nor your daughter so you have no right to be so protective of her. I am her mother and she asked for my permission. I have the right to give it to her, because it's my fault that I married a man who is so jealous of her. Let her live her life, man!

ANTONIO: This is my house and I make the rules here! This is all I need. I kill myself working to support you and your daughters and you dare to disobey me? And don't raise your voice to me! (*He hits María, who protects herself from the blow.*) Your hussy of a daughter will get the whipping she deserves for her disobedience. (*At this moment Teresa enters; when she sees they are fighting, she intervenes.*)

TERESA: Enough, stop hitting my mother already! I went out without permission because you are shameless and have no right to order me around. I am not your daughter and I can go out any time I want. And you better think twice about hitting me because I have a boyfriend who is ready to defend me. And I am finally telling you: I am leaving this house today because I am getting married very soon.

ANTONIO: (*Trying to hit her while she dodges him*) Shut up, you demon girl. You hussy. Tell me who this punk is so I can wring his neck. You are not going anywhere. Do you hear me? I am going to lock you up and leave you there until you learn to respect me.

TERESA: Who do you think you are to be locking me up? No, Señor. The days of slavery are over.

ANTONIO: I am your father, you demon child. (*Making a move to hit her*) If you keep raising your voice to me I will break your face. Get down on your knees and beg my forgiveness.

TERESA: You're nothing to me. I don't have to obey you. I wouldn't obey you even if you were my father! You're the one who should be asking forgiveness for the bad life you've given my mother.

ANTONIO: (*Chasing her*) I told you to shut up and I'm warning you. You'll never leave this house, much less to marry some bum. It's time that you understood that you belong to me just as much as your mother does, because I'm in love with you and I'm not going to allow some bum to take my place. You're mine for better or for worse!

MARÍA: My God! What are you saying, Antonio? Are my ears deceiving me?

ANTONIO: *(He goes to the door and locks it with a bolt.)* Yes, that's right. I'm in love with your daughter! Now you know; you both belong to me. That's why I did not want her to marry anyone. From now on you will stay here under lock and key. *(María, furious, grabs a log from the fire and throws it at Antonio, who ducks.)*

MARÍA: I will kill you first you disgraceful man, even if I have to go to jail for the rest of my life.

ANTONIO: *(Crazed)* How are you going to kill me, you whore? You want to go off with someone else? Is that it? Well I won't let you. *(He pulls out his machete from its case and begins to slash at María. Teresa looks on in horror, paralyzed by terror.)* Take this you unlucky woman, now I will finally have your daughter to myself. Finally, finally, finally, finally. *(María, dead, falls to the floor by Antonio's feet, who gazes at her with a crazed look. He then looks lecherously at Teresa, who is mute with terror.)*

TERESA: *(Crying, terrified, yelling)* But . . . but . . . why did you kill my mother? Murderer! Help! Antonio is a murderer! He just killed my mother! Help, please! *(She tries to open the door.)*

ANTONIO: *(Grabbing her by the arms, crazed)* You're not going anywhere! You're staying right here because you're mine! You belong to me whether you like it or not! We're going inside!

TERESA: *(Struggling to get free)* Let me go, you murderer! Help! *(She manages to pull free and lunges for a shotgun that is hanging from the wall. When he sees that she is pointing it at him with resolve, Antonio freezes, surprised.)*

ANTONIO: *(Yelling, afraid)* Put it down, Teresa. Can't you see that it's loaded?

TERESA: You asked for it! You crazy old murderer! I don't care if they send me to jail. At least I can avenge the death of my mother!

ANTONIO: *(He lunges towards her, afraid.)* Give me that shotgun!

(Teresa, still taking aim, shoots. Antonio manages to gaze at her in disbelief before falling down, dead. Teresa remains standing, paralyzed. At this moment an insistent rap is heard at the door. Teresa reacts and slowly opens the door. Lupita, the younger daughter enters, leaving the door open behind her. When she sees the scene she screams.)

LUPITA: What's going on? We heard shots! Aaaaay! My mother is dead! What did you do, Teresa! You killed my mother and father? Now who will we live with?

TERESA: (*Crying and hugging Lupita*) No, little sister! I didn't kill mama! This disgraceful man killed her with his machete, and I killed him for it. I didn't kill my mother! (*They cry inconsolably. José enters.*)

JOSÉ: (*Running, alarmed*) What happened here, Teresita? What were those shots? (*He looks at the cadaver in shock.*) What happened? Who killed your mother?

TERESA: (*Sobbing*) My stepfather did it, Don José. He was the one who killed my mother. (*José discovers the cadaver of Antonio.*)

JOSÉ: (*Shocked*) He's dead too! What happened? Did they kill each other?

TERESA: (*Cries uncontrollably*) No, Don José! After he killed my mother he wanted to rape me. He was very jealous because I told him that I was going to marry. I never imagined that he was in love with me. He tried to drag me into the bedroom but I managed to grab the shotgun and shoot him.

JOSÉ: Oh, my Lord. What a tragedy! Antonio must have gone crazy. Poor Doña María, to die like this after having suffered so much. May God receive her in all his glory! But now . . . we must notify the officials.

TERESA: (*Sobbing*) Yes; okay. I just need to ask you one favor: please take care of my little sister because I am sure that they will put me in jail to pay for my crime. (*She walks into the bedroom with the shotgun. They hear metallic sounds.*)

JOSÉ: (*Consoling Lupita, who is crying*) It's okay; don't worry about your sister. She will stay with us while you give your statement. You can say that it was in self-defense. Don't move anything. I have to go quickly to the station so that they can come see what happened. (*Teresa comes out of the bedroom, and she and Lupita cry together over the body of their dead mother, while José goes offstage and later returns with the judge and the comandante.*)

JUDGE: (*Annoyed*) Good afternoon, young woman. Don José informs us that a double crime has been committed in this house. Would you mind explaining what happened here?

TERESA: (*Trying to hold back her tears*) Yes, sir. Ay, Lord, if I could have only known what was going to happen . . . ! My mother defied my stepfather by giving me permission to secretly go to mass, which infuriated

him so much that he began to scold and beat her, like he had done many other times . . .

JUDGE: Did they argue and fight a lot?

TERESA: Almost every day, Señor; he made life hard for her. He tried to keep us shut in the house, particularly me. He got very angry when my mother gave me permission to go out.

JUDGE: And he killed her just for that?

TERESA: The thing is that when I came home I found them fighting because of me; I got angry and told him that he didn't have any right to meddle in my life, and that I was going to get married. That made him furious. He became crazed, and began to shout that I belonged to him just as much as my mother did, and that he had been in love with me ever since he married my mother.

JUDGE: And . . . had your stepfather ever said anything that would lead you to believe that he was in love with you?

TERESA: No, Señor . . . The only thing is that he always watched over me and wanted to know where I was all the time. He looked at me in a strange way but I thought that it was because he was always angry at me.

JUDGE: Okay, go back to the moment when he told your mother that he was in love with you. What happened?

TERESA: So . . . he wanted to keep us locked up, and to bring me to the bedroom . . . and my mother got angry and tried to hit him with a log to make him let us out, but she couldn't hit him and he grabbed his machete and hacked at her until she was dead. He seemed crazy; he laughed like he was insane! I began to cry for help but no one heard me.

JUDGE: And . . . how were you able to kill him?

TERESA: When I tried to get away he grabbed me by the arms; here are the bruises! He wanted to force me into the bedroom. I don't know where I got the strength but I pushed him. I jumped over to where the loaded shotgun was hanging . . . and I killed him when he came at me. My little sister arrived, followed by Don José . . . This is all I have to confess, Señor.

JUDGE: (*Very serious*) Okay; from what I have heard I believe that you acted in self-defense. But in any case you will have to come with me to the station. Comandante, come over here to examine the corpses and to record the evidence.

COMANDANTE: (*Serious*) As you say, Señor Judge. (*He looks them over while Teresa and Lupita continue to cry.*)

JUDGE: (*Serious*) Do you have other sisters, young woman?

TERESA: (*Very sad*) No, Señor . . . It was just my mother, my sister, and I.

JUDGE: Your stepfather had no children?

TERESA: Not as far as I know. He claimed that he never had children.

JUDGE: Okay, we'll be on our way. You will have to accompany us to the station.

TERESA: (*Crying*) Am I going to jail, Señor? Oh my God! How many years will I be given?

JUDGE: I don't know. It depends on what comes to light. You will be detained while we do an inquiry. Then we will see.

TERESA: Please don't be mean, Señor. At least let me ask our neighbors to take care of my little sister; she has no one to stay with. We don't have any more close family.

JOSÉ: (*Sincerely*) Don't worry about Lupita, Teresa. We will take care of her as if she was part of our family. You poor people, my God! But what can we do? It must be God's will that things have turned out this way. Maybe it's your destiny to suffer so.

LUPITA: (*Crying*) No, please. Don't take Teresa away! It wasn't her fault! It was Antonio's fault for hitting her and my mother so much!

TERESA: (*Crying uncontrollably*) I'm going now, Lupita. Don José and Doña Rosa are going to take good care of you. Right, Don José? Please behave yourself. (*Rosa enters, very worried.*)

ROSA: Is what I have heard true, Teresita? Is it true that Antonio killed your mother? (*She begins to cry when she sees the corpse.*) Oh my God, how that poor woman suffered! She couldn't even have a peaceful old age!

TERESA: (*Almost unable to speak for her suffering*) . . . Maybe . . . maybe it is our fate to suffer, Doña Rosa. I was going to be married soon! Now you see . . . now I have to go to jail because of that cursed Antonio!

ROSA: (*Hugging her while she looks at the sky*) Oh my God! Give us strength! These women have suffered so much! (*She cries.*)

JUDGE: (*Sympathetic but energetic*) Well, young woman. We have to take your statement and begin the inquiry. Are you willing to follow your husband's lead and take this girl into your care, Señora?

ROSA: (*Wiping away her tears*) Yes, Señor. The only problem is that we have no money for the funerals.

JUDGE: The precinct will have to take care of that since there is no family. We will send a truck to get the corpses.

TERESA: (*Crying and resigned*) Okay, Señor; I will just get my things. Ah, Doña Rosa; I need to ask you for a favor. My boyfriend is going to come this afternoon . . . to ask for my hand in marriage. Tell him that I did all this to protect my honor, and because I love him very much! (*She goes into the bedroom, and for a moment there is silence. Suddenly we hear a pair of shots from the shotgun. The Judge runs into the room, and returns mortified, with the shotgun in his hand.*)

JUDGE: What is this! She has killed herself! Damn! Why didn't I think to ask her for the shotgun? (*Everyone runs to the room and then returns lamenting, particularly Lupita. We hear an automobile pull up and soon the comandante enters.*)

COMANDANTE: The truck is here to pick up the bodies, Judge. Now we just need to bring them to the station to record the evidence and give them a good Christian burial. Such an atrocity. What a sad afternoon it has been.

JUDGE: (*Pensive and sad*) You said it, comandante. What sad luck these women have had. (*Speaking to Rosa and José*) Let's hope that Lupita grows up well now that you've taken her in. We will make sure that she is given this house as her patrimony.

JOSÉ: (*Wiping away her tears*) Why would we want this cursed house! Better to sell it and keep the money for when Lupita needs it.

JUDGE: As you prefer. Take Lupita now. Believe me that like you, all of this has hurt my soul. But now we have to go. (*Two police take away the corpses. The pained judge shakes the hands of Rosa and Juan.*) Until later, Señores. Tomorrow morning we will need you to testify to what you have witnessed. May God protect us all! (*They mournfully take their leave, following the corpse of Teresa.*)

END