

The Conquest of Mexico
by
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The Conquest of Mexico

(A Parallelo-Gramatica in Seven Scenes)

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Times: The present. The year 1519.

Settings:

In the present: mayoral campaign office; in a car at a MacDonald's drive-thru; a hotel room; all in the same large American city.

In 1519: the tent of Hernando Cortes near Tabasco on the East Coast of Mexico; the private apartments of Montezuma in Tenotchtitlan, Mexico; sacrificial temple in Tenotchtitlan.

Characters:

Bernard - also Cortes

Paul - also Montezuma

Dona Marina - also Marina

Old Teacher - also Hunchback

Astrologer

Quetzalcoatl

Female companion of Quetzalcoatl

Soldiers, Priests, slaves and others as needed.

****Note: Structural, situational and thematic parallels between the different eras should be highlighted by transparency in the transitions between the doubled roles. In other words, the Audience should witness, when possible, characters changing into their counterparts. These moments are marked by the word **Change** in the script.*

**** Cortes, Montezuma and Dona Marina are historical figures. Any resemblance of any other character to actual persons living and dead is purely coincidental.*

**** The playwright acknowledges the work of Jerome Rothenberg in his ground-breaking anthologies of primitive poetry 'Technicians of the Sacred' and 'Shaking the Pumpkin', for their examples of Aztec poetry and insight into Aztec thought. The poem spoken by Montezuma (pg. 40) appears in 'Shaking the Pumpkin' as "A Poem to Xipe Totec"*

(English Version by Edward Kissam though the italics are the playwright's). Montezuma's speech (pg. 54), relies on the form of 'Aztec Definitions' as Rothenberg presents them in 'Technicians of the Sacred'. The playwright agrees with and acknowledges Rothenberg's credo, Primitive means complex.

Scene 1

(Mayoral campaign office.
PAUL gazing out window.
BERNARD enters, papers
in hand.)

BERNARD

The new numbers are out, my man.
Our lead's into the double digits
and widening. You're a beast. A
beast.

PAUL

You know, there's a beautiful web
on the fire escape out here but I
can't find the spider.

BERNARD

The press is waiting for a
statement, Paul.

(PAUL turns, faces BERNARD.)

PAUL

Let 'em wait. I'm going to drive
up and visit Allison today.

BERNARD

We're booked through eleven
tonight. A breakfast, two
lunches, a dinner and discussion.
Sorry, babe.

PAUL

Fuck it. I never should've agreed
to send her away to school.

BERNARD

Allison's schooling is a break-
even issue for us. For every do-
gooder vote we lose, we gain an
angry taxpayer. In a few years,
we'll re-enroll her in a city
school as a symbol of the system's
revival under your leadership.

PAUL

An eleven year old girl isn't a symbol. An eleven year old girl should've been at the kitchen table this morning all sleepy and warm from bed, not sixty miles away at some academy just because her mother went there. Sad, how I just caved, sad, how I'm always caving in to that woman.

BERNARD

Right. You don't cave. You roll your dynamic sleeves up and get things done. That's you.

PAUL

On message, Bernard, that's you. Always on message.

BERNARD

It's how elections are won. The next three weeks, we seal the deal.

PAUL

And how long do I have to stay married, again?

BERNARD

Depends if you want to be governor. You and Helen have got to make some arrangement you both can live with, and then, when you're governor, you can appoint her to the appeals court, get her out of your hair. I'll handle the press this morning. You know they're going to ask me why you're so far ahead.

PAUL

Because Wilson's years in office have cost him most of his hair.

BERNARD

You've got the best hair, no doubt about that.

PAUL

A man shouldn't win an election
because his opponent goes bald.

BERNARD

That he's a bit dim helps too.

PAUL

A man shouldn't win an election
because his opponent's a bald
dimwit.

BERNARD

These numbers say different. They
say Love. The people love you.

PAUL

Not me. I don't recognize me out
there, anymore.

BERNARD

It's you in a landslide. Now...

PAUL

I miss Allison and I miss me. I
wander the world like a stranger,
especially my own house.

BERNARD

I know. I know what it is. You
stopped taking your pills again.
Take your damn pills, hammer your
priorities home and stop looking
out windows.

PAUL

Ever write a suicide note,
Bernard?

BERNARD

No.

PAUL

Not one suicide note?!

BERNARD

No.

PAUL

You've got no imagination, man.
On message. I used to write
suicide notes full of teen-age
angst. I was never so alive,
missing life, life missing me. The
red maple outside my window made
me scream my head off. Stereo way
up, mom and dad drinking
downstairs, reaching for that
numbed state of being able to
tolerate each other. Then I
discovered the law. Ah, what a
discovery that was.

BERNARD

What law do you mean?

PAUL

Not a law, the law, a complex
system to master like a game. I
was never into it. I just liked
mastering the system. I never
wanted to be a political star, a
boy wonder. Look at this coin.

BERNARD

Yeah? A dime. So what?

PAUL

No, no, it only looks like a dime.
That's the point. It's a Mexican
five centavo piece worth almost
two tenths of a penny. I was
driving the east side last week,
down by the old batting cages.
Driving. Just me. I love to drive
more than ever now, blast my music
or just think. I stopped at
MacDonald's for some fajitas which
turned into an ordeal because the
drive-thru speaker was bad and the
woman, at least I thought she was
a woman, had a Spanish accent. But
it's not a woman. It's a gorgeous
teenager, piercing black eyes,
black hair, maybe seventeen and
part Indian. When the races mix

PAUL (cont'd)
startling, unexpected beauty
results.

BERNARD
No. Not a teenager. No.

PAUL
In the change she gave me was this
coin, exactly like a dime but
worth nothing. Don't know why I
noticed it, just did.

BERNARD
I don't like this kind of talk,
three weeks before an election
we're leading by double digits.

PAUL
And I'm wondering if she pulled
the switch on purpose to
supplement her stinking wages; a
pocketful of centavos turning into
an pocketful of dimes by the end
of the day. So I went back two
days later. Same thing. And
again. Look. That's three coins.
Now what to do about it? What to
do?

BERNARD
What to do? Please. You let her
have her little scam, and stay
away from her.

PAUL
Tell her I know? That if I found
out others will? That she's going
to get fired and maybe deported?
But how without being noticed?
I'm running for mayor after all, a
defender of the law. Then I got
an idea: To drive through again
and pay her with the five centavo
pieces as a signal I'm on to her.
Marina, it said on her black
plastic name plate. Marina.

BERNARD

You're a handsome man, Paul. The camera loves you, women love you, offering themselves up at every fund raiser, luncheon, barbecue and little political club. Flashing their eyes, flashing their business cards, flashing their whatever wherever. Do you have any idea how many napkins with phone numbers scrawled on them I've taken out of your coat pockets after you've worked a room? But we're five weeks away and there's only one thing that can blow it now; a scandal at the last minute!!

PAUL

Marina. Of the sea, I think.
Something to do with the sea.
Marina.

(Sound of the sea. End
of Scene. **Change**)

Scene 2

(1519. Sound of the sea
CORTES' tent, near
Tabasco, Mexico. CORTES
sits, writing at table.)

A VOICE FROM OUTSIDE
Dona Marina is here, Captain.
(DONA MARINA enters.
CORTES stands.)

CORTES
Welcome to my poor tent, Dona
Marina.

DONA MARINA
A tent by its nature is a
temporary thing.

CORTES
And one that has never looked so
poor as at this moment.

DONA MARINA
Your poverty is also a temporary
thing.

CORTES
Perhaps, if....

DONA MARINA
(Interrupting.)
And the fame and riches you seek
here are, by their natures, very
temporary. All is temporary,
compared to life everlasting.

CORTES
So we agree as to the ephemeral
worth of earthly things. I came to
your land for trade and to spread
the word of the god.

DONA MARINA
May you remain true to your word
and god's, or pay god's price.

CORTES

I was warned you could talk the sun out of rising.

DONA MARINA

The sun, like you, will do what it wants. Why did you send for me, Cortes?

CORTES

Just curious.

DONA MARINA

I notice that each of the other girls given to you by our chief has been assigned to one of your officers. What are your plans for me, Don Hernando?

CORTES

You speak very familiarly, Dona.

DONA MARINA

I might as well, if I'm to be your mistress.

CORTES

You are brazen, for one so young.

DONA MARINA

Our chief gave us to you to do with as you please so, if that's to happen to me, why shouldn't it happen to me with you? Though young, I am not unschooled in what pleases a man. And you will find I offer political advantages as well.

CORTES

So you came to offer yourself to me, even if I was old and fat.

DONA MARINA

I saw you on your horse yesterday, igniting sparks from the rocks of the road. But yes, even if you were old and fat, I was going to

DONA MARINA (cont'd)
offer myself to you, in the hope
that you'd die soon.

CORTES
Ha, ha, ha.

DONA MARINA
Like you, it's in my destiny to
rise to a high position and in my
character to bring it about.

CORTES
But now, you're given away as a
slave?

DONA MARINA
It's a long story, better suited
for a long night.

CORTES
Of course, I've heard quite a bit
about you already. And part of
what I've heard has already proved
true. Your beauty, your wit, your
impeccable Spanish.

DONA MARINA
I am fluent in Aztec as well and
can be very helpful to you in your
dealings with Montezuma.

CORTES
You speak Spanish elegantly, like
a Castillian princess.

DONA MARINA
Gracias, Don Hernando.

CORTES
Prized for their beauty, manners
and court cleverness, they are, in
truth, empty-headed hot house
flowers who would have nothing to
do with me when I was poor and
unknown.

(He touches her face.)

DONA MARINA

And what I have heard of you is
proving most true already.

CORTES

What's that?

DONA MARINA

That you're a rogue, Sir.

CORTES

I was thinking of Puertocarrera
for you. He's brave, a superior
horseman and very handsome.

DONA MARINA

I will be an excellent mistress to
you, Don Hernando, and my
knowledge of their language and
ways suits your purpose with the
Aztecs.

CORTES

How did you come to speak the
language of Mexico?

DONA MARINA

I was raised in the Aztec capital
before my mother gave me to the
people of Tabasco to ensure that
her son by her new husband would
inherit her wealth and position
instead of me.

CORTES

And your Spanish, Dona?

DONA MARINA

Taught me by the man who taught me
Christ, Padre Alvador.

CORTES

Alavador. Alvador is dead. He
was in Grijvilla's scouting party
that was wiped out ten years ago.

DONA MARINA

He's hardly dead. He was in town when you passed through yesterday.

CORTES

A white man?

DONA MARINA

Padre has lived in the jungle so long he's as dark as I am. The rest of his party was killed by the Aztecs but they kept him alive to act as interpreter with the Spanish. Four years ago, he escaped and lived on his own in the jungle until we found him.

CORTES

And Alvador converted you?

DONA MARINA

Padre taught me of a loving god who sacrificed his only son so man could live eternally. I never knew the word sacrifice could have a beautiful meaning. All sacrifice ever meant to me was human blood pouring down temple steps and beating hearts ripped from the chests of prisoners to placate the angry Aztec Gods.

CORTES

And why are the Aztec's gods so angry?

DONA MARINA

No one knows anymore, not even the Aztec priests. All the priests do is calculate by the positions of the stars how many prisoners must be sacrificed to ward off disaster from an angry heaven.

CORTES

It's barbaric but strangely childish.

DONA MARINA

The sacrifices continue even as we speak here, in the thousands.

CORTES

Yes. Yes. It's horrible.

DONA MARINA

The sacrifices must be stopped, Cortes.

CORTES

Yes, of course. But I have heard it said the Aztecs take me for a God.

DONA MARINA

Your ships arrived on the very day the return of Quetzalcoatl had been foretold.

CORTES

Quetzalcoatl.

DONA MARINA

Quetzalcoatl...Finish the 'L' deep in your throat.

CORTES

Quetzalcoatl.

DONA MARINA

Deeper down. Down here.
(She guides his hand.)

DONA MARINA

Quetzalcoatl.

CORTES

Quetzalcoatl.

DONA MARINA

Quetzalcoatl was a plumed serpent who took the form of a man with a beard and pale skin and preached against human sacrifice. To be thought of as Quetzalcoatl could be a very providential thing,

DONA MARINA (cont'd)

Cortes. Montezuma is intelligent but paralyzed by superstition. He probably doesn't know if he should treat you as a man and risk the violence of a god or treat you as a god and risk the violence of a man. So it would be best if he never knows what to make of you. Bide your time here on the coast for a while, act mysteriously and let his imagination do the rest.

CORTES

I can see the advantages in having you as my mistress, Dona.

DONA MARINA

Mistaken for a god, Cortes. For I know what a rogue you are and how you swore an oath to god and to the new wife you left behind in Cuba.

CORTES

You're walking a thin line between God and a man, Senorita.

DONA MARINA

I can keep my balance. Can you? Will power go to your head?

CORTES

Mistress, priestess, politician, which are you?

DONA MARINA

Does every woman who loves Christ have to be a nun? And does every beauty have to be an empty-headed flower good for one thing only?

(CORTES touches her hair
as she speaks.)

DONA MARINA

Though you are mistaken for a god
arriving, that doesn't mean your
arrival can't have a heavenly
purpose.

CORTES

Tell me about Quetzalcoatl.

DONA MARINA

Like Jesus, Quetzalcoatl taught
that all people must be loved.
(He guides her hand to
his throat.)

CORTES

Quetzalcoatl.
(A long kiss which CORTES
breaks.)

CORTES (cont'd)

(Calling out of tent.)
Private, take this girl to
Puertocarrerro, as my gift and
with my blessing, to use her as he
will.
(PRIVATE enters, grasps
DONA MARINA'S arm.)

DONA MARINA

As you wish, Cortes. I will serve
my new master with the same fervor
that I serve the one true god.

CORTES

Take her away.
(DONA MARINA is led out.
End of scene. **Change**)

Scene 3

(The Present. A few days
after Scene 2. PAUL at
MacDonald's drive-thru
speaker.)

MARINA OVER SPEAKER
Welcome to MacDonald's. May I
please take your order. (Beat.
Beat.) May I please take your
order.

PAUL
(Butchering the Spanish.) Dos
fajitas, por favor.

MARINA OVER SPEAKER
Algo mas, Pablito? Algo mas?

PAUL
Uhh...?

MARINA OVER SPEAKER
Is that all?

PAUL
Yes, si.

MARINA OVER SPEAKER
Two ten is your total.

PAUL
I...yes...si.

MARINA OVER SPEAKER
First window please, Paul.
(PAUL pulls up. MARINA
gets in car.)

MARINA
Vamanos.
(PAUL drives.)

PAUL
You saw me?

MARINA

On my TV screen. That's my job.
Was my job. It cost me five
hundred dollars. The brokers.
Fake I.D. broker. Job permit

MARINA (cont'd)

broker. Job broker. Rateros.
Thieves. Bastards. I am their
slave. I curse them with a
slave's curse.

PAUL

Slouch down.

MARINA

What's this slouch?

PAUL

Get low in the seat. If someone
sees us, I could lose everything.
(MARINA slouches.)

MARINA

If you lost everything, you would
soon have it again. My people who
have nothing to lose but their
lives, lose them all the time for
nothing. Very cheap lives, no?

PAUL

So that means stealing is okay.

MARINA

The coins are for you only.

PAUL

What do you mean for me?

MARINA

The first time you appeared on my
screen, I decided to give you one,
a lucky coin from my unlucky home.

PAUL

Why?

MARINA

Because of who you are and what
you are. And here you are.

PAUL

That's crazy.

MARINA

Many things are crazy but they
also happen.

PAUL

Can't argue with that.

MARINA

You came in secret, Mr. Mayor, so
I needed a secret way to bring you
back. And you came, three times
more.

PAUL

I'm not mayor yet.

MARINA

Your position is of no importance.

PAUL

Here. Look. I saved them all.
(PAUL shows coins.)

MARINA

Hello, little messengers.

PAUL

I was going to pay you with them
today as a signal to get you to
stop stealing.

MARINA

So you needed a secret way also.

PAUL

I'm running for mayor. (Beat)
How old are you?

MARINA

Nineteen.

PAUL

No way.

MARINA

Seventeen, and I need your help.

PAUL

Help? How?

MARINA

I need your power.

PAUL

I have no power yet.

MARINA

Not the power of being mayor.
Your strength as a man. What was
in your blood from the beginning.
I wouldn't care if you were a
beggar. I need a man of power,
and you are that man.

PAUL

Why?

MARINA

To do what I have to do.

PAUL

And what is that?

MARINA

To bring my friend back from the
terrible journey she's on. I need
a man of power to help me fight
her demons. A week ago, her
husband committed suicide by
putting a rifle in his mouth and
blowing the brains out of his
head. They called him Loco and he
was. A small, beautiful man with
yellow eyes and jet black hair who
could not stay still, who is very
still now. It seemed to us Loco
never slept. He used to go out
late at night. That's when he
would borrow the eyes of an animal

MARINA (cont'd)

and climb in people's windows to slip bills from their sleeping wallets like a boy stealing pesos from his father to buy sweets. Just enough so they wouldn't miss it, a dream you forget in the morning.

PAUL

You are beautiful...

MARINA

They called him Loco and he was. He was an artist who could capture someone's face in three blinks of their eyes. After he drew someone that person would touch his face to make sure it hadn't been stolen. Once the police sent Loco to jail and he captured the face of every thief and junkie in there. He was going to have an exhibition of those sad, hard faces and become famous but he left the window open one night and they got soaked by a storm. And other pictures got stolen. That was how it went a lot. Some days he would set up his easel on the street and he would draw faces for a dollar but Loco couldn't do what he asked his subjects to do. Stay still.

PAUL

You are fantastic.

MARINA

They called him Loco and he was. Some say he was bipolar and one day the bottom opened. Loco said he wanted to be a painter with brushes and everything. His friend the pencil was no longer enough. No one pays any attention to anything done with a pencil, said Loco. He began to paint

MARINA (cont'd)

pictures of the aerials, elevator shafts and satellite dishes of the tenement roofs with laundry hanging and chili peppers drying, and the clouds behind them. Everyone thought it was a change for the better. The trouble was the light wouldn't sit still for Loco. Unlike the face of a person who will live many years, each separate day ages quickly. Loco wanted perfect stillness but the light kept changing as light does and he kept painting over what the light first showed him to capture what the light was showing him now. His paintings wound up thick messes like scabs on the canvas. Nobody saw it coming. If we knew we would have gone up on the roof and pulled the painting off his easel and said there it's done, it's great, and sold it for a thousand dollars. But I don't think it would have done any good. My friend was the one who found him in their bedroom, all messed up like that. The police who couldn't find his brain put in their report that it had flown out the window to be eaten by crows or dogs but it wasn't true. My friend had picked the brain up and put it in her son's Leggo box. Up Loco's loco brain went to the top shelf of my friends' closet and it's still there. She had loved that crazy man and wasn't going to give his mind up, talking to her with the voices of mirrors, dolls and parrots. My friend, she acted normal, answered all the police's questions, even went down to the corner with me for a soda that night. I should have stuck needles in her feet. When someone

MARINA (cont'd)

acts normal after such a thing happens, it is the worst possible sign. The next day she woke up as someone else and has been waking up as a different person for two weeks now. They are not good people. They are the people from the bad news headlines who kill their own children and blame it on a stranger or say god told them to do it. I have to rescue her before it's too late and that involves a ceremony for which I must be very strong.

PAUL

You are electric. What a story.

MARINA

I am a poet who doesn't write her poems down but says them out of her mouth. I have won many poetry slams in clubs in my second language. I can also free-style your face off. I will be famous one day.

PAUL

I believe it.

MARINA

Now I must be strong for the magic. Take me to a hotel, fill me with your male strength and I will be able to do it. Magic is a way of thinking like a bird and a bird needs two wings not just one to fly. So what do you say, Pablito?

(Fade to black. End of scene. **Change**)

Scene 4

(1519. Tenotchtitlan,
Mexico. MONTEZUMA's
private apartments.
MONTEZUMA on throne.
ASTROLOGER and OLD
TEACHER stare at the
floor, waiting to be
recognized.)

MONTEZUMA

I have portentous news. My sister
Panpantzin, lying four days dead,
has opened her eyes and spoken.

ASTROLOGER

The gods are kind, Lord and King.

MONTEZUMA

But what do you make of it as an
omen, among all the other strange
goings-on in the capital?

ASTROLOGER

It portends well, Lord and King.

MONTEZUMA

Does it?

ASTROLOGER

Does it not?

MONTEZUMA

It depends.

ASTROLOGER

Depends on what, Lord and King?

MONTEZUMA

On what she saw! On what she saw
when she was dead.

ASTROLOGER

Yes, Lord and King. What did the
royal sister see?

MONTEZUMA

Tall men with beards and pale skin
riding into our country on giant
deer and bringing it to ruin.

ASTROLOGER

It may be a reference to Cortes,
Lord and King.

MONTEZUMA

Of course it is. I haven't slept
in days, reading the heavens to
know what to do for my people.

ASTROLOGER

And they adore you for it. The
stars yield more secrets to
Montezuma than to any other.

MONTEZUMA

Tell me what you see there?

ASTROLOGER

The stars remain ambiguous...

MONTEZUMA

Oh.

ASTROLOGER

And fraught with possibility.

MONTEZUMA

And dogs are walking backwards
down the streets.

ASTROLOGER

Lord and King?

MONTEZUMA

The lake is boiling, yellow clouds
hang like poisonous shadows over
the water and the air is so thick
with dust sighted men need blind
men to lead them home. I need
readings I can act on right now.

ASTROLOGER

Cortes says he is the servant of King Charles the 5th, so we have inserted the number five into all our calculations.

MONTEZUMA

If he truly has a king and is not a god himself.

ASTROLOGER

We are also reckoning that Cortes could be Quetzalcoatl returning.

MONTEZUMA

And?

ASTROLOGER

The number five turns us to the land of red daylight where Quetzalcoatl journeyed and where he prophesied his return to end the practice of human sacrifice.

MONTEZUMA

A time of great calamity for the people. I fear it is that time.

ASTROLOGER

Quetzalcoatl's star is shining brightly dawn and evening.

MONTEZUMA

His body changed to light/ his heart transformed into a star/ that burns forever in the sky. So are you saying Cortes is Quetzalcoatl and not a servant of this Charles?

ASTROLOGER

When dealing with Quetzalcoatl's return from across the ocean, the sky is reflected in the water's mirror and right becomes left and up down, making readings difficult.

MONTEZUMA

Enough. Our thought is as brittle as an old stick under the foot of this Cortes' approach. Here is my command: Stand by Panpantzin's bed and report all she says back to me, along with your reading of her words mean, no matter how bad.

ASTROLOGER

I'm dead.

MONTEZUMA

What was that?

ASTROLOGER

It's just that the reporting of bad news has become a most dangerous activity these days since every bearer of bad news has been strangled to death.

MONTEZUMA

If your news is bad, we'll all die. You'll just do it sooner. Now go.

(ASTROLOGER exits,
backing out.)

MONTEZUMA (cont'd)

Ten days without a word from Cortes who bides his time on the coast. Is it a man or a god I'm dealing with?

OLD TEACHER

May I speak freely, Lord and King?

MONTEZUMA

You never held back before, so why would you now?

OLD TEACHER

Perhaps it would please the Lord and King to have his old teacher strangled, if the news I bring is not to his liking?

MONTEZUMA

You always taught that strong magic is to be obtained through strangling the bearers of bad news, though I can't believe much magic could be squeezed from the death of an old geezer like you.

OLD TEACHER

Yes but the Lord and King is welcome to every last drop, if he's short on magic these days.

MONTEZUMA

I could have you strangled for such insolence and for that supercilious grin on your face. We are low on prisoners and I must scrounge around for hearts, even gnarly ones like yours, to secure our future.

OLD TEACHER

The future is a road that circles back again and again but man bumbles along it every time as if it were the first time.

MONTEZUMA

So nothing is ever new?

OLD TEACHER

Old age is new to me and I'd like more time to get used to it.

MONTEZUMA

Your life will always be safe with me, old friend.

OLD TEACHER

Is it true you have ordered the conquest of more southern peoples, to secure a fresh supply of hearts for the coming rites?

MONTEZUMA

Yes. Peace would be a dangerous state of affairs especially now. Our safety, as always, lies in war.

OLD TEACHER

It is a nightmare.

MONTEZUMA

Nightmare?

OLD TEACHER

We are powerful, our culture surpasses all others, yet it troubles me in my old age that our gods require such misery from our prisoners. Doesn't it trouble you?

MONTEZUMA

As head of the religion, I cannot be troubled by what tradition dictates. In those matters, my actions are circumscribed.

OLD TEACHER

You were such a sweet and gentle child. I remember you wouldn't kill an ant.

MONTEZUMA

Old friend, I'll tell you something no one else can ever know. In sleep, I dream it's me splayed on the altar stone for sacrifice.

OLD TEACHER

What do you make of your dream?

MONTEZUMA

I can hardly sleep in dread of having it again.

OLD TEACHER

But have you found no meaning in it?

MONTEZUMA

Within the shadow of prophesy we are living under, only this: Ruin of the empire I represent as Lord and King. Why does Cortes just sit there, doing nothing? I have sent him slaves and jewels and gold but still he sends no answer and I can't decide what to do to save our race: Kill him or worship him.

OLD TEACHER

Perhaps you should order the sacrifices stopped as Quetzalcoatl would have you do.

MONTEZUMA

And make the other Gods angrier? No. It is my obligation, as Lord and King, to forestall the disasters that would befall us if we deny the gods their portions?

OLD TEACHER

Earthquake, famine, drought, hurricanes, the sea turning red, giant fissures in the Earth, you name it.

MONTEZUMA

Howling caves, hail, locusts, silent lightning, birds dying out of the air, nightmares, the old living too long...

(OLD TEACHER and
MONTEZUMA laugh.)

MONTEZUMA (cont'd)

It is fun to name disasters when you're not experiencing them. The lake clogged with vegetation, infertility, lice...

OLD TEACHER

Skin sores, meteors, orgies, floods, children who stare...

MONTEZUMA

Senile judges, weird clouds,
sulphurous clouds, clouds in
ominous shapes, twins...

OLD TEACHER

Sexual impotence, a blight on the
corn, mosquitoes...All these and
more would occur without assiduous
attention to our sacred rites.

MONTEZUMA

Rampant stupidity, mad dogs, too
many girl children...

OLD TEACHER

The gods don't seem to like man
very much.

MONTEZUMA

No, the gods don't seem to like
man very much at all.

OLD TEACHER

(Suddenly serious.)

Except Quetzalcoatl who became a
man.

MONTEZUMA

I don't see your meaning.

OLD TEACHER

Now that I've arrived at the tree
of my old age, I can turn my face
toward death without fear and in
the sublime hope that the gods
love each and every one of us,
equally.

MONTEZUMA

That's fine for you. But fear not
hope is our natural state unless
we're very old like you or very
young like children whose hearts
rise with the sun. Believe me,
I'd give up all my days to wake
once more as that hopeful child
who wouldn't kill an ant.

OLD TEACHER

Perhaps there is a different way.

MONTEZUMA

What way is that?

OLD TEACHER

If I knew and if I told you, I
wouldn't be a very good teacher.

MONTEZUMA

So you would have me preside over
our race's ruin?

OLD TEACHER

Some wisdom, if it is given, can
never be earned.

MONTEZUMA

I haven't slept a wink in days.
My senses are deranged, my nerves
giving way. Help me.

OLD TEACHER

Here's what you do: Have a very
beautiful slave brought to the
palace. Adorn him as Quetzalcoatl
and treat him as a god for thirty
days, given anything he desires.
Let him choose among your
mistresses. Then when thirty days
are up, parade him to the temple
and rip his heart from his chest.

MONTEZUMA

To what purpose do I do all this,
old man?

OLD TEACHER

Perhaps the god will be mollified
if he sees you only wish to kill
him by proxy.

MONTEZUMA

It will be done.

OLD TEACHER

Now let me give you something so
you can sleep.

MONTEZUMA

No, I must remain vigilant. (With
a formal tone.) Here are my
commands: First; I want my sister
brought to the palace. Perhaps
she will die again under my watch
and wake with more clarifying
news. Second; I want all dreams
reported to me by the governors of
every province. Those whose
dreams are inauspicious will be
put to death. Perhaps this whole
thing will prove to be just a bad
dream. Third; Have statues of the
gods brought to this chamber. I
intend to practice the austerities
and spray the gods with blood
drawn by cactus thorns from the
lobes of my ears. And fourth, I
want our remaining prisoners
prepared for sacrifice. I will
wield the knife myself.

(End of scene. **Change.**)

Scene 5

(Present. Hotel room.
Leggo container on desk.
MARINA reading
newspaper. PAUL, tied
in bed and drugged,
wakes. MARINA walks to
bed.)

PAUL
Hello, Spider Lady.

MARINA
Hello, little fly.

PAUL
Caught me in your web, huh?

MARINA
How else could something so sad
and slow and bound to the earth as
a spider, dragging her fat belly
along the ground, hope to catch
the quick little fly? And it is a
big surprise for the fly, no? And
does the fly believe it? No, the
fly does not believe it.

PAUL
You drugged me.

MARINA
Because the fly was taking too
long to decide. You know how they
are,
buzzing, buzzing, buzzing against
the window because they can't
figure glass out.

PAUL
Buzz, buzz, buzz then swat.
(Beat) Does anyone know about
this yet?

MARINA

You're not on the TV and you're not in the paper. (She tosses newspaper on bed.) You're not anywhere.

PAUL

I can see I'm tied in the Regent Hotel, 4th floor I'd say, a few blocks from my headquarters. Why?

MARINA

You are also right next to the newspaper office.

PAUL

I know. How'd you get me up here?

MARINA

The back way. I know all about the back ways through the kitchens and laundries of hotels.

PAUL

So what is this about? Money?

MARINA

I spoke to Bernard and explained the situation to him and that I have pictures of us and then he told the media you were on a vacation before the final part of the campaign.

PAUL

And my daughter, does she know?

MARINA

That is none of my business.

PAUL

So you want money? I can get you plenty of money.

MARINA

Bernard was upset when I told him my age and that I could have the press here pronto. One more

MARINA (cont'd)
thing: I've got your sperm
scattered in me like seeds in a
field.

PAUL
What?

MARINA
We made love many times last
night.

PAUL
I don't remember that.

MARINA
I have your DNA blowing through me
like trash through the streets.

PAUL
You're a poet all right.

MARINA
Como no?

PAUL
I used to be a poet too. Believe
it or not.

MARINA
There's no 'used to' about
poetry, Mr. Mayor. It's in you
or it's not.

PAUL
Like trash in the streets.

MARINA
Exacto.

PAUL
What a gyp, not remembering making
love when it's going to destroy
me.

MARINA
You fucked me like a jaguar,
Pablo. Long and strong and slow.

PAUL

So what do you say you and me
disappear together, travel the
world? Forget the election,
forget everything but poetry.

MARINA

Sorry, Pablito. I don't think so.

PAUL

I don't care about being Mayor.
I hardly recognize myself
anymore.

MARINA

Because you are an invention made
up by other people. A person has
to invent her own story. Other
people tell me I'm a girl of
poverty but I know I'm a girl of
poetry.

PAUL

Right. Right. I'm trapped in a
story made up by other people.

MARINA

Like the poor little fly who
doesn't understand glass.

PAUL

Buzz, buzz, buzz then swat. I
still don't get what you want out
of this.

MARINA

The fly will understand soon
enough.

(PAUL looks out window.)

PAUL

Look how regular it is down there,
all these people on the way to
work, Castleman from our office,
sunlight off his bald head, crowds
from the train. And the gal in
the news kiosk, same as usual like
it's a regular day.

MARINA

It is a regular day.

PAUL

Manuel arranging oranges into his bins...

MARINA

A very regular day, Pablito.

PAUL

But I'm not in it. I'm missing.

MARINA

A regular day for everyone else. For you, this day will be very different.

PAUL

Different, how? (Beat. Beat.) See how orange Manuel's oranges are. Hard to tell if the sunlight's falling on them or coming from them. Must be the drugs.

MARINA

Drugs? No, Pablito. An orange is sunlight, sunlight transformed into a sweet ball of sun juice you can hold in your hand.

PAUL

Manuel has the best fruit in the city.

MARINA

Everything comes from the sun. You and me, the orange and the jaguar. When the jaguar eats you, you will just be changing from one form of sunlight into another form of sunlight. You will still be alive in the life of the jaguar.

PAUL

What drug was that anyway?

MARINA

Mushroom to change you, flowers to calm you, leaves to make your body do what I wanted it to do, all plants transformed by the sun, like Manuel's oranges, transformed by the sun, transforming you.

PAUL

There's not really a brain in there is there?

MARINA

Do you want me to open it?

PAUL

Sure, go ahead, open it. What do I care?

(MARINA opens Leggo container, reaches in, takes out orange.)

PAUL (cont'd)

So you made that whole Loco story up?

MARINA

I made up my Loco story to fit the story the world tells about you, just as the history of the world is made up by those in power to keep them in power. I had to make you want me and I will transform into someone powerful because of my Loco story. No more will I wander your land like a beggar who can't get in a door. You are just another river for me to cross. Here is the real story. This is not made up. I have crossed many rivers. To get here, a girl of twelve, I had to cross a river in the middle of the night. There was no moon. You don't want a moon. You want wind, rain that doesn't swell the river too much, coyotes and other sounds to cover your sound as you move like a shadow over the desert. You want

MARINA (cont'd)

bribed guards, honest criminal guides and a safe house close the border. All this costs money. You don't want to be in a truck with forty others in the heat of Texas. I worked for this money since I was a child selling American cigarettes in the streets of Mexico City. Marlboro. Marlboro. I sang for four years. Here is my first sentence in English:
Warning: Cigarette smoke contains carbon monoxide which may be harmful to your health. A story made up by other people but not anymore. My story is that I will be a famous poet one day and that story is coming true because of you.

(A knock. MARINA opens door. LOCO enters, wearing Jaguar mask, carrying a sack.)

MARINA

Pablo, this is Loco.

PAUL

Now you are freaking me out.

MARINA

The drugs are wearing off. You should be conscious for your transformation, for what good is a transformation if one is not conscious. If I was to be eaten by a jaguar, I would want to be conscious and I would want the jaguar to be conscious like a man is conscious. Long and strong and slow. This is Loco, Pablo, the Loco who has lost his mind.

PAUL

Jesus Christ.

MARINA

Loco is looking for his mind.

PAUL

What is all this?

MARINA

They call him Loco and he is.

PAUL

What's happening here?

MARINA

We are transforming you.

(LOCO unloads knives from
his sack onto the
table.)

PAUL

What are those? Knives?

MARINA

They call him Loco and he is, a
man so angry he has lost his mind
but
Loco doesn't need his mind anymore
because he is thinking with his
anger like a child thinks with his
playing or a runner thinks with
his running or a poet thinks with
her poem.

PAUL

What is he angry about?

MARINA

You, Pablo, you. You tried to
change the story the world is
telling about you.

PAUL

I need more to go on than that.

MARINA

You fucked me and that has made
him lose his mind. Normally he is
a tranquil person but now he must
run around like a disturbed madman

MARINA (cont'd)
with a demon him. He wants the
demon out so he can become
tranquillo again. He will be
transformed by his transformation
of you.

(LOCO draws a circle over
PAUL's heart.)

PAUL
Jesus Christ.

MARINA
Jesus was innocent of crimes. You
are not innocent.

PAUL
I was drugged, Mister. She
drugged me.

MARINA
You were going to fuck me whether
you were drugged or not.

PAUL
She took liberties with me while I
was out cold.

MARINA
He cannot let change the story
that must happen.
(LOCO raises his knife.)
When the hairs cross
When the fuse is ignited
When the mouth in the brain opens
When the lake is crossed
When the count is lost, the
numbers turn to dust
When stones are chipped away
When hearts are torn out
When songs are stabbed like
animals in their holes
When your body is numb and sleep
rides by laughing
When the word 'death' is struck
and makes no sound
When arms end not in hands but in
cups of tears

MARINA (cont'd)

When the wind in the towers sounds
like fire

When your sister sleeping under
the island refuses to wake

When a man says hello which means
goodbye

(Blackout. End of scene.

Change)

Scene 6

(1519. Aztec Temple. A
slave stretched on the
altar, MONTEZUMA with
raised knife.)

MONTEZUMA

Since you drink night,
why are you hiding now?
Put on your golden clothing,
dress yourself in rain.
You are my god, your water is a
gift of precious jewels.
As it falls down on the aqueducts,
as it feathers
Mountain herbs in green.
Sun has already left me,
has slithered away like a snake.
I will not die,
I am a tender tassel of corn.
My heart is like an emerald,
I must see the gold.
My heart will be refreshed,
man will grow ripe
And the lord of war will be born.
You are my god,
let there be an abundance of corn.
The tender tassel of corn
is shivering in the wind before
you
Has fixed its sight on you,
toward your mountains,
Worships you.
My heart will be refreshed,
man will grow ripe
And the lord of war will be born.

(MONTEZUMA cuts slave's
heart out. Lights down
on temple, up on
MONTEZUMA's apartments,
where HUNCHBACK is
decorating the young
slave Quetzalcoatl with
feathers. With them is
a girl Quetzalcoatl's
age. The young people

are giddy with their
pleasure in each other.)

HUNCHBACK

(As he places feathers.)
What laughs inside you but cries
outside you? (The young people
answer by kissing each other.)
Okay. Which are more beautiful,
emeralds or leaves? (Kiss.)
Okay. Try this: If seven plus
one is a tamale and eight plus one
is a tortilla, what's nine plus
one? (Kiss.) Ah foo. Nine plus
one is ten. Poor me, poor poor
me, I get no kisses but yak and
yak because of this mountain
bolted to my back. Well then how
about petting me for a cat? Meow.
Meow.

(The young people cover
HUNCHBACK with kisses.)

HUNCHBACK (cont'd)

Sweet children. Sweet, sweet
children.

(They are hugging when
MONTEZUMA enters.)

HUNCHBACK (cont'd)

Ah, look who's back from his heavy
business. Children, go give your
Lord and King a kiss hello.

(The young people run up
and kiss MONTEZUMA.)

HUNCHBACK (cont'd)

A kiss that means hello and
goodbye.

(MONTEZUMA slumps on his
throne. The young
people go back to the
feathers.)

HUNCHBACK (cont'd)

Tired My Lord? I say My Lord but
do I own you? Of course not. Who
could own The Great Lord? Hmmm.
When you say My Hunchback you own
me yet when I say My Lord you
still own me. It makes no sense

HUNCHBACK (cont'd)

so the words must be at fault.
My, my, my. He who owns nothing
should never say My, my this, my
that, my foot, my hat, just
because he's come to think of them
as his. If he owns nothing then
nothing's his own and even his
heart is only on loan. So is My
Great Lord beat from stopping
beats?

MONTEZUMA

Careful, Imp, what you say in this
company.

HUNCHBACK

Is your heart not in taking hearts
out?

MONTEZUMA

Careful.

HUNCHBACK

Foo to you and your knives too.
My heart is stored in the hill on
my back, a safe too solid for
anyone to crack. So the Great
Lord will have to crack the brain
out of my head like an egg yolk to
shut me up. But that won't do
either because I don't need my
brain to speak, never have. I'm
all backwards, a dog who by his
tail is wagged. My tongue wags
me, not the other way around. But
even if you cut my wagging tongue
out, it won't do any good because
I'll wager that my wagger will
continue to nag at you as it flips
and flops like a landed fish upon
the floor. And even when that
carp goes dead, my voice will carp
inside your head, saying what
needs to be said.

MONTEZUMA

Quetzalcoat1, sweetheart, could you two run to the orchard please and pick me the ripest orange you can find?

(The two run off.)

MONTEZUMA (cont'd)

Don't try me anymore, Monkey. Stop your rants while the boy is present or I'll shut you up once and for all. I'm ill, ill inside my head where I have ceased to exist as I've known myself and become a stranger not to be trusted. I don't know where Montezuma is inside this Lord and King anymore.

HUNCHBACK

Perhaps Cortes will open you like you have so many others, take a peek and tell you what's in your heart. I hear he's only three days march from here.

MONTEZUMA

Cortes doesn't worry me as much as the people whose fear has turned to drunkenness in the streets, so utterly convinced are they that the boy's sacrifice will pacify the approaching god. Our army could squash Cortes like a bug yet my hand is stilled by the prophesy of Quetzalcoat1 and my dread that violence against this god will bring us to ruin.

HUNCHBACK

You always liked my taunting before.

MONTEZUMA

I never saw a happy slave before.

HUNCHBACK

That's because you're always standing over them with your stone knife and that look in your eye.

MONTEZUMA

As it is commanded of me.

HUNCHBACK

As I am commanded to run my mouth for your amusement. Think I want to do that? I'd rather hump my hump into the humpy hills. Oh please free me so I don't have to watch this bloody fiasco being played out on the boy.

MONTEZUMA

It was a mistake letting Quetzalcoatl have the run of the palace. Having him so close at hand has made me love him.

HUNCHBACK

Love's a bell that rings false without loving actions.

MONTEZUMA

I love him like a son now.

HUNCHBACK

Even my monster of a Dad waited til I was five before he dumped me at your door so you'd adopt me for a curiosity and good luck charm. I guess that's love or dread of drowning your own kitten, a dread you don't seem to have. In any case, I lived. Too bad he won't.

MONTEZUMA

I want Quetzalcoatl happy until the end so shut up unless you want to lose your own life.

HUNCHBACK

Can't lose what you don't own. Oh
Lord and King, give me my life
back for just one minute and let
me have the dignity of losing
something mine for once.

MONTEZUMA

Come here and I'll sever you from
your life, Monkey.

(MONTEZUMA draws his
sword.)

HUNCHBACK

What fun, the Lord and King coming
to kill his dwarf. What an honor
that my puny life has become so
necessary to the great Lord and
King.

(Young people return.
MONTEZUMA sheaths his
sword.)

MONTEZUMA

And one more errand you two: Run
down to the garden by the stream
and pick me a handful of ripe
raspberries.

(Young people run off
again and MONTEZUMA
collapses exhausted on
his throne.)

HUNCHBACK

Here's one: What three things
does a man never want to see? His
own heart, his own brain and his
own true face.

MONTEZUMA

My face has aged thirty years in
thirty days.

HUNCHBACK

No, your face is gorgeous, Lord
and King. Full of gorges.

MONTEZUMA

You're the only one who dares tell
me how ugly I've become.

HUNCHBACK

The others try to read the music
of your wishes in your face and
dance their jigs to it. False
mirrors every one.

MONTEZUMA

No one else will tell me the truth
anymore. Thank you for that. All
this is too much to bear alone.

HUNCHBACK

Being so ugly myself, I'm the only
true mirror you've got left.

MONTEZUMA

Even you are not ugly enough to be
a true mirror to me.

HUNCHBACK

Try me. Try me.

MONTEZUMA

Not nearly ugly enough, Imp. Too
beautiful for me.

HUNCHBACK

Try me. Try me.

MONTEZUMA

One glimpse of my real face would
crack you into pieces.

HUNCHBACK

Try me. Try me for a mirror. For
I have followed the course of my
deformity like a dark river
twisting inside of me and sailed
out into a wide open sea, the love
of all humanity.

(MONTEZUMA grabs

HUNCHBACK for a mirror.)

MONTEZUMA

Reflect then the monster's
decaying face as a picture of his
rotting within and reflect, in the
fumes hanging over our city, the
monster's poisonous thoughts.
Reflect that he is the crumbling
of his empire and downfall of his
people. Reflect that he is but a
curtain through which nightmares
pass and become real and that
Cortes's arrival is but one
nightmare of his being acted out
in the world. Reflect how
strangely lit his palace is, the
walls swelling, blood rising to
their swollen surfaces, an
unsubstantial world. Reflect that
the monster doesn't know where he
ends and the world begins and soon
he won't exist as Montezuma but
only as a Lord and King
mechanically acting out fate,
powerless to stop it.

HUNCHBACK

Powerless, no. Let's run away.
The four of us, away, away, out
into the wide open sea, away,
away.

MONTEZUMA

I would but a Lord and King
cannot. (Beat) What have the
children been up to today?

HUNCHBACK

Kissing everywhere and I mean
everywhere, everywhere in the
palace and on their bodies. You'd
think they knew no shame. The
real shame is that it must soon be
over. And there's the skinny
dipping and bathing in oils and
the massages and music and dancing
and costumes they try on and
making up plays and playing with
the hundred pets of the palace,

HUNCHBACK (cont'd)
the parade of life's pleasures
going by. Or should I say
charade.

MONTEZUMA
Just don't talk of charades in
front of them.

HUNCHBACK
So what about the parade when
Quetzalcoatl is to be taken to the
temple to have his heart ripped
out, will he be told of that?

MONTEZUMA
I'll tell him in a couple of days.

HUNCHBACK
Why tell him at all?

MONTEZUMA
So he doesn't die like a beast
without knowing the meaning.

HUNCHBACK
Not much advantage for him over a
beast knowing that.

MONTEZUMA
Knowledge of death distinguishes
man from the animals.

HUNCHBACK
True, Lord and King. For I have
spent weeks explaining to my
turkey that he will soon become my
dinner but my turkey keeps on
looking at me as I speak as if
some delicious corn might be
hidden in my hand. Never does
even a glimmer of understanding
light my turkey's eye. The idea
goes right past his little brain
like a breeze goes over a pebble
in the road.

(Young people return with
raspberries.)

HUNCHBACK (cont'd)

What an interesting discussion we've been having, children, about the difference between man and beast. Montezuma just made the point that one important distinction between man and beast is our knowledge of the gods. And I have to agree, for while I have been explaining to my turkey that he is soon to be my dinner, I have also explained the gods to him so that he will be reconciled to his coming death by the fact it is in the divine order of things. But it hasn't helped one bit because my dumb turkey keeps looking at my hand for delicious corn. So I conclude, animals can't know death or be reconciled to it by knowledge of the gods. But you, Quetzalcoatl, can take solace when I tell you that the death your Lord and King has arranged for you in three days is in the godly order of things.

MONTEZUMA

I'll slay you for a liar.

(MONTEZUMA draws his sword. The young people, thinking it is a game, clap and laugh.

HUNCHBACK dodges the charging MONTEZUMA.

HUNCHBACK is quick and agile.)

HUNCHBACK

Liar?! Liar?! Then I won't say why he's so feted is that he's soon to be filleted.

MONTEZUMA

Liar.

HUNCHBACK

The gods are hungry and there's
their chef.

MONTEZUMA

Liar. Devil.

HUNCHBACK

It makes perfect sense. Just as I
am hungry for turkey, the gods are
hungry for Quetzalcoatl's heart.
Just as man eats animals, the gods
eat man. For we have observed
through the evidence of our senses
that everything kills and eats to
live. And so too must the gods.
There is just one thing we haven't
observed through the evidence of
our senses, the gods themselves.
Being gods, they're very good at
hiding.

MONTEZUMA

Blasphemer.

HUNCHBACK

Since war gives us prosperity and
peace calamity, he must extract a
piece of your anatomy.

MONTEZUMA

Catch the liar for me, children.

HUNCHBACK

Yes, it's just a game. A deadly
game. Dress me up in feathers
like him for the kill.

(HUNCHBACK sticks
feathers into his hump.)

HUNCHBACK

I'm Quetzalcoatl now. A game, a
game, a deadly game. See that
look in his eye. See how well I
play.

(HUNCHBACK smears
raspberries on his chest
and pretends to die. He

spits at MONTEZUMA's but
has miscalculated and
MONTEZUMA stabs him
through his hump.)

HUNCHBACK (cont'd)

That ugly hill doesn't contain my
heart, it is my heart. For I have
followed the course of my
deformity like a dark river
twisting inside me and sailed out
into a wide open sea, the love of
all humanity. Every single person
must be loved. I'm beautiful. So
dress me up in feathers.

(HUNCHBACK dies. The
young people, still
believing it is a game,
put feathers in
HUNCHBACK's hump.)

QUETZALCOATL

Get up, and see how we've turned
you into a bird. Get up and sing
us a funny song, birdy bird.

(Young people realize
HUNCHBACK is dead.)

MONTEZUMA

Please don't cry. It wasn't me.
I did it as your Lord and King who
can't let himself or the gods be
so disrespected even by a clown.
Montezuma himself wouldn't kill an
ant. Not an ant. Why do you see
no ants in the palace? Because
they're not allowed, they're kept
out. It was, it was, yes, yes, it
was a few days ago that I did see
an ant for the first time, lost
and crawling on my bedside table
and I watched him a long time, his
fine little legs, the segments of
his body, his antennae feeling
around for the way home. Forlorn
he was as I said and lost. Three
days he stayed up there. Three
days I watched an ant that wasn't

MONTEZUMA (cont'd)

allowed in the palace, three days and I grew fond of him, his fine little legs, the segments of his body. But now the ant was losing strength up there, going slower and slower, looking sadder and sadder up on my bedside table so I decided to feed him what ants like best. Honey. Honey. A big drop of honey, children, to build his strength back up. But you know a few hours later, I came back and saw my poor ant had drowned himself in the honey. It wasn't hunger that was making him lose his strength. He died from loneliness...

(End of scene.)

SCENE 7

(Blackout. CORTES and
DONA MARINA making
love.)

DONA MARINA
Admit it, Cortes: You send
Puertocarrera on so many missions
so you can have me like this.

CORTES
Puertocarrera fights bravely and
his men respect him.

DONA MARINA
Admit it.

CORTES
I am merely giving Puertocarrera
what he wants; his chance at
riches and fame

DONA MARINA
You are still a rogue and a liar.

CORTES
If that is the case why didn't I
take you when you offered yourself
to me?

DONA MARINA
You wanted me on your terms, not
mine. You tried to take power
over me and yourself by refusing
me.

CORTES
I will be obligated to no one.

DONA MARINA
What about your king and your god?

CORTES
That goes without saying.
Tomorrow, we enter the capital
where you will act as intermediary

CORTES (cont'd)
between Montezuma and me. I put
myself in your hands, Dona.

DONA MARINA
And I put myself in yours and
God's. May God take you to him as
you have taken me to you, as a
slave to his will.

(Crowd sounds. Lights up
on temple of
Tenotchtitlan, MONTEZUMA
on his throne, OLD
TEACHER nearby,
QUETZALCOATL tied down
for sacrifice.)

OLD TEACHER
How is the boy?

MONTEZUMA
Content. Rendered insensible to
sorrow by the drink of peyote and
chocolate I gave him to stop his
weeping.

OLD TEACHER
And you, Lord and King, are you
insensible to sorrow?

MONTEZUMA
I told the boy, there must always
be an end to singing and dancing.
I said, the gods are threatening
us with ruin and that his death
was required to appease them.

OLD TEACHER
And did he understand?

MONTEZUMA
No, he wept piteously and said:
Why? I want my life. I love my
life. Why do the great gods
require the life that I love?

OLD TEACHER
And what did you tell him?

MONTEZUMA

I had nothing to say. What is there left to say to the piteous weeping of an innocent boy who is about to die? I gave him the drink and it has resigned him to his fate. Now tell me, teacher: Why

MONTEZUMA (cont'd)

do the Gods require so much death from us?

OLD TEACHER

Require? Require is your word not mine.

MONTEZUMA

Don't tell me that when this sacrifice was your idea.

OLD TEACHER

An idea is nothing without the power to bring it about.

MONTEZUMA

Decrepit old man!

OLD TEACHER

Yes. I am that.

MONTEZUMA

Decrepit old man who has lived far more than his portion.

OLD TEACHER

Yes, I am old and decrepit and would be pleased to take the boy's place in this rite. Please, take me in the his stead.

MONTEZUMA

I would. Gladly. It's the people and the gods who won't.

OLD TEACHER

Is it that my old flesh would give
the gods a stomachache? I forget:
Do the gods have stomachs or not?

MONTEZUMA

What's that crack supposed to
mean?

OLD TEACHER

Perhaps we should get a ruling
from the priests on the divine
digestive system.

MONTEZUMA

Why are you trying me like this
when it was your idea to make the
boy into a temporary god only to
kill him?

OLD TEACHER

The boy is innocent like you once
were. The reason I told you to
adopt a slave was so that you
might come to love him and,
through that love, remember who
you are.

MONTEZUMA

I did not ask to be king but I am
who I am. I am who I am!

OLD TEACHER

You can still stop this,
Montezuma.

MONTEZUMA

Guards, this old man called me by
my name. Strangle him!

(MONTEZUMA watches as OLD
TEACHER is strangled to
death. MONTEZUMA raises
his fists and screams
his agony to the
heavens. The crowd
cheers this show of
passion. MONTEZUMA
slumps to his throne.)

MONTEZUMA (cont'd)

It is a dark place. A place of darkness. A place where shadows gather. A place where one is blind. It is a constricted place, a narrowed place, one of the hollowed out places. It is a place of rough, hollowed out places. No softness anywhere. Cold, hot. It is a place that closes in. It keeps narrowing. It is a place of fear and death. It is a place of dying. A place where the bones of the dead are stored. A holy place. An angry place. A place where the quiet echoes. Where the quiet is no longer quiet. It is a place of falling, a falling place. I fall. I keep falling. I am still. I keep falling.

(CORTES and DONA MARINA enter. Crowd roars. CORTES makes a speech but no words are heard just a harsh, buzzing sound, as the Aztecs would have heard his Spanish. During Cortes' speech DONA MARINA can be heard saying words like 'Jesus Christ', 'sacrifice', 'man must be loved'. Silence. Everyone waits for MONTEZUMA's response. MONTEZUMA falls to his knees, arms held out so he can be shackled. DONA MARINA approaches and he whispers something to her.)

DONA MARINA

Montezuma says, he will become your prisoner, if you spare the boy.

CORTES

Take him away. Gently. Gently.

(MONTEZUMA is led out.

Crowd noises. The crowd
is on the verge of
rioting and killing

CORTES.)

CORTES (cont'd)

They want the boy's life and will
have it.

DONA MARINA

Cortes! That is murder!

CORTES

They'll have the boy's life or
ours, Dona. Remember: God is on
our side.

DONA MARINA

May He forgive us.

CORTES

Here are my commands: Make
Montezuma comfortable and treat
him with the respect a fallen
leader deserves. Disarm his
soldiers and unload his treasury
into our carts, separating as you
do the jewels from the gold. Oh
yes and have a shrine to the Holy
Mother built right next to this
temple. Once they are disarmed
these savages can be taught the
one true god. But first the boy
must die for our holy cause.

(CORTES signals sacrifice
to begin then exits.

Change The crowd roars
as lights go up in the
hotel room, LOCO with
knife raised above PAUL.
QUETZALCOATL is
sacrificed. Great roars
from the crowd. Lights
down on temple. LOCO
lowers knife and raises
mask. LOCO is BERNARD.)

PAUL

Bernard? What is this?

BERNARD

I got to Marina first, Paul.

PAUL

Untie me.

BERNARD

I'm not a handsome man. The camera doesn't love me. I have no fucking charisma. But you could say, in my favor, that I, being a dull person, without many options, that I'm not easily distracted, that I keep my eye on the prize.

PAUL

Untie me, right now.

BERNARD

And I have no imagination, as you said. But I do have enough imagination to hire someone with the imagination to scare the fuck out of you and keep you in line.

MARINA

Sorry, Pablito.

BERNARD

She's beautiful, isn't she? What brilliance. What a godsend. Can you believe it? Working at MacDonald's. And I got to her before you did. Better me than someone on the other side.

MARINA

Now that I have crossed the river of you, Paul, I am no longer a girl of poverty.

BERNARD

Marina, here's the rest of what I owe you.

(BERNARD hands MARINA an envelope.)

And Paul, here are the pictures I took of you and the girl.

(BERNARD shows PAUL pictures.)

Did you really think I was going to let you ruin everything after we'd come so far? Now, tell me: Are you going to be a good little mayor or not?

MARINA

Whose story are you going to live now, Pablito, your own or a story made up by other people.

BERNARD

You can go now.

MARINA

To win is to lose, to lose is to win.

BERNARD

What's that supposed to mean?

MARINA

It means nothing to you or to him. A thing like that can only mean something to a poet who has sacrificed everything her land, her family, her language even, on the altar of her true self.

PAUL

Can I come with you, Marina?

MARINA

Si, como no? A man like you, sure, how not? Come on. Vamanos. Let's go.

BERNARD

And Allison, Paul, when these pictures come out in the paper, have you thought of that yet? Because I have.

PAUL

Bastard.

BERNARD

Just on message. Always on
message. Goodbye Marina.

MARINA

Pablito. Pablito. Little Paul.
Now I must exit your story
forever. Sad. I feel sad about
it though I shouldn't because
it's not your story anymore is
it? But a story invented by
other people. Adios, Pablito.
Goodbye, Little Paul.

(MARINA exits.)

BERNARD

Here is your schedule for
tomorrow, Paul. I could see the
stress of the campaign was getting
to you and that I needed to take
some of the weight off your
shoulders and just let you be you.
It should be much easier now,
because from now on, you are who I
say you are.

(Slow fade to black. End
of play.)