

Dolorosa

A Play in One Act

Synopsis

Each year for the Holy Week procession in Paete, Laguna, a family's prized heirloom, a one-of-a-kind wooden statue of the Mater Dolorosa, is put together and made whole by three sisters: Ate Maria, Dete Alicia, and Juliana. On this Maundy Thursday, they await the visit of their mother Pilar, who mysteriously abandoned them fifteen years ago. When she arrives, the sisters will confront the ghosts of their past and one shattering truth about their beloved Dolorosa statue.

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Cast of Characters

Pilar:	the mother, in her 60s
Juliana:	the bunso, in her 20s
Alicia:	the Dete, in her 30s
Maria:	the Ate, in her 40s
Two helpers and a crowd:	various ages, genders

Setting

Paete, Laguna, specifically the garaje of an old ancestral house.

Time

Present, Maundy Thursday, right before the town's Holy Week procesión.

SCENE 1

(Lights come up slowly on JULIANA, 20s, pretty, light and delicate to the point of otherworldliness. She is sitting on the floor, downstage left, caressing an object lovingly.)

JULIANA

I keep Her hands. Palms folded one on top of the other, fingers clasped close and tight. Like so.

(She holds them out to the audience.)

You can trace the grain of the wood on their surface, like wrinkles. It's as if after all these years, they have finally begun to show their age. The molave is one of the strongest Philippine woods, and it is all but rare now. It won't be long before pieces such as this will be all that is left of that mighty tree.

(She cradles the hands.)

My mother used to hold them like this, close to her chest like a baby, before every procesión. And sometimes she sang.

(The sound of a woman humming comes up.)

An indecipherable melody really, but it was sweet and lilting and seemed to speak of happier times. She would gaze at us, me and my sisters, when she sang, and when she did, her face would light up with this otherworldly joy.

(She smiles and the humming fades out.)

It was so infectious that it made us all smile, too, me and my sisters. That is why I chose these hands for me to keep.

(Lights start to dim on her.)

She would say to me that I hold the most precious part of the Mater Dolorosa, so I must care for it as I would my own child. This is because in whatever art that depicts the human form, the hands present the most difficult challenge for anyone to create. Only a master artist can be worthy of the task. And my great grandfather was one such man here in our hometown, the master carver of Paete.

(Lights down on her and up on ALICIA, 30s, body held close to the ground but spirit often buoyed by complaining. She is sitting on a chair, downstage center. A wooden torso, about her size, is positioned at her feet.)

ALICIA

(glaring at the wooden piece)

Look at it. Just look at it. Have you ever seen anything so hideous? Ugh. This is Her body. An ugly piece of wood, isn't it? And I'm the lucky one who gets to keep it all these years. Why does

this have to happen to me? Answer me that. I should have been more insistent years ago when we were deciding over which parts to keep. I should have put my foot down. But no, I had to hold my tongue and suffer in silence like always. So I end up with this.

(She glares at the piece again.)

I hate being the middle child. I feel I'm always being passed over, my opinions are almost always never considered, and I don't think anyone listens to me. I wish I were younger than Juliana, the baby of the family. Or older than Ate Maria, everybody respects her. That's it, respect! I don't get enough respect in the family. And so, Juliana gets to keep the hands — and such lovely hands indeed! — and Ate Maria gets to keep the head, the crown, and the vestments. While I, poor middle sister Alicia, I get to keep this...this lump of wood.

(She leans over and slaps it.
Then she sits quietly, regarding
the torso for a moment.)

It's not all that shapeless actually. You can see the beginning of a neck and the two mounds in front which represent the breasts. Nicely done. And it's got a lovely curve to its sides. Very womanly, if I may say so. It has a beauty all its own.

(She smiles proudly but suddenly
raises her hands in frustration.)

Ugh, but no one else in the procesión can see it! It disappears underneath the head and the hands and all that fabric.

(She slaps it again.)

I hate this body.

(Lights down on her and up on MARIA,
40s, sensible, almost imperturbable.
She is sitting on a couch, downstage
right, a wooden chest next to her.)

MARIA

Everyone will be here soon. But I think there is time to show you what I have.

(She opens the chest and takes out
a small wooden head.)

This is the Mater Dolorosa. As you can see, She has a lovely face.

(She then takes out a shining
crown and attached to it are
long golden strands of hair.)

And this is Her crown, Her hair attached. The crown is made with brilliant faux diamonds and the hair is made from real horse's hair.

(She attaches hair and crown
on to the head.)

There now, isn't She beautiful? Though one is in deep sorrow, one must always appear exquisite.

(She then takes out the virgin's vestments.)

And here we have Her robes, all meticulously hand-made and woven with gold and silver threads.

(She points to a pattern on the dress: a red heart pierced by seven silver daggers.)

And here is how the virgin got Her name. Seven daggers piercing Her heart, representing the seven sorrows Our Lady suffered.

(She counts off the following on her fingers —)

The prophecy of Simeon. The flight into Egypt. The Child Jesus lost in the Temple. Mary meets Jesus carrying the cross. Mary at the foot of the cross. Mary receives the body of Jesus. And finally, Mary witnesses the burial of Jesus. The seven sorrows.

(She lays out all the pieces on the couch with her.)

I feel very blessed.

(Sound of a car arriving is heard off-stage.)

They've started to arrive.

(She smiles sweetly at the audience.)

It's time to come together.

(Lights fade out.)

SCENE 2

(The large garage of the sisters' old ancestral house, located around the town's church.

On the stage, center up, the carroza waits, already festooned with lights and flowers. On a monobloc chair and worn-out couch, the Dolorosa's head, hands, and garment — they wait, as well. Flowers, ribbons, fabric, wire, cutting tools, and other knick-knacks are strewn on a small table and on the floor.

When the lights fade in, we see Juliana and Maria, arranging more flowers on the carroza.)

MARIA

Where is that woman? She knows we cannot start without her.

JULIANA

Don't fret, Ate. You do this every time.

MARIA

That's because Alicia is late every time.

JULIANA

Traffic to Paete is always horrible on Holy Week. Plus you know how Simon hates coming here.

MARIA

There's a lesson for you, Juliana. Never marry a man who's relentlessly prone to giving excuses. It shows a definite lack of fortitude. That's why I never married. Men are just too...unreliable.

JULIANA

It's not too late for you, Ate Maria.

(Alicia enters, carrying the wooden body.)

MARIA

Finally!

ALICIA

(kissing her sisters in greeting)

I'm so sorry, Ate Maria, Juliana. Traffic out of Manila is just horrendous. I think more and more people are coming to Paete every year, don't you think? Also Simon's ulcer has been acting up, so he decided not to come, you know how it is.

MARIA

(conspiratorially with Juliana)

We know.

(From this point on, the sisters busy themselves with arranging the carroza and assembling the Dolorosa statue.)

ALICIA

Is she here?

(Beat.)

JULIANA

She should be here soon.

MARIA

Her flight landed over two hours ago.

ALICIA

I still can't believe it. When you called and told me she was visiting, I was beside myself. I felt so paralyzed, I couldn't do anything that day. Why do you think she's decided to show her face all of a sudden?

JULIANA

Maybe she misses us.

ALICIA

After fifteen years?

JULIANA

People change. I miss her.

ALICIA

You barely even know her.

MARIA

You were seven when she left us.

JULIANA

I know her from all the gifts she sends. Such thoughtful gifts, too. It's like she knows exactly what we want when we want it. She loves us.

ALICIA

Those gifts she sends, they're not signs of love, Juliana. Guilt, more likely. Not love.

MARIA

Alicia!

JULIANA

Why would she feel guilty?

MARIA

Don't listen to your Dete Alicia, Juliana. Sometimes her mouth runs away with her brain.

JULIANA

I hate when you treat me like a baby. Come on, tell me.

(Maria and Alicia exchange looks.)

ALICIA

She was suspected of killing Papa.

(Beat.)

JULIANA

No. You're joking.

ALICIA

It's no joke, Juliana.

MARIA

We kept it from you all these years because...because you're the youngest.

ALICIA

And the baby of the family needs to be shielded from these horrible things.

JULIANA

Don't protect me from the truth, no matter how horrible it may be. I'm tougher than you think.

MARIA

(smiles)

We know you are.

JULIANA

But surely you don't believe Mama's capable of murder?

MARIA

Truth is, we don't know. No one's really sure, of course. Mama woke up one morning with Papa lying dead next to her. A heart attack, the doctor said. But that didn't keep the neighbors from talking.

ALICIA

They said she poisoned his coffee, little by little every day. Or that she killed a goat and prayed to a demon to squash his heart. Some even said she smothered him with a pillow that night. It pains me to think of Papa gasping for air — (pretends to being suffocated) — ack, ack, ack!

JULIANA

How awful!

MARIA

The talk was just too much for her to bear so she just packed her bags and left to live with Tita Anching in Honolulu.

JULIANA

That's crazy. Didn't she say anything?

MARIA

We never confronted her about it.

JULIANA

Why not?

MARIA

We were afraid she would tell the truth.

ALICIA

She did it, I tell you. She's perfectly capable of it, too.

JULIANA

Why? What do you mean?

ALICIA

Ate Maria, remember that time when we had those rabbits?

(Maria nods.)

When we were young — you probably weren't even born yet — Ate Maria and I had a pair of pet rabbits. A girl and a boy.

MARIA

We were going to breed them and start our own rabbit farm and sell the babies to our classmates.

(Juliana is clearly delighted.)

ALICIA

They were so adorable — like white cotton balls, they were. With pink eyes, pink ears, quivering pink noses. I forget their names now but Maria and I cared for them like they were our own babies, feeding them everyday with some shredded lettuce or chopped up pieces of carrot. Well, one day we saw them huddled really close together in the far corner of their cage. They were shivering and they had these ugly bites on their legs.

MARIA

Mama said that rats must've got to them during the night.

ALICIA

She said that there was no helping them then, that they were going to die in a couple of days. And just like that, she reached inside the cage and wrung their furry little necks.

JULIANA

No!

ALICIA

They didn't even make a sound.

JULIANA

You're making this up.

ALICIA

No, we're not.

MARIA

It's true, Juliana. I'm sorry, but it's true.

ALICIA

Imagine what that could do to a child. I sobbed uncontrollably in public for several weeks after that incident. My teachers separated me from all the other students because I was making them nervous. I lost all my close friends. Every time I see a carrot now my eyes tear up.

JULIANA

But a rabbit is not the same as Papa.

ALICIA

We know that, Juliana! The point is we saw a different side to Mama since then.

MARIA

A kind of coldness, a hardening of the spirit. It was disconcerting, to say the least.

ALICIA

That, yes, plus the fact that she was crazy.

JULIANA

Crazy?

ALICIA

She was always...seeing things.

JULIANA

What, like ghosts?

MARIA

Mama always said that she could travel outside her body. Astral projection is what it's called.

ALICIA

Luka-luka!

JULIANA

No.

MARIA

That's what she said. She could travel outside her body and see things that you wouldn't normally see.

JULIANA

I can't believe this.

ALICIA

We couldn't either. But she always had this uncanny way of knowing exactly what Ate Maria and I had been doing, especially when it involved boys.

JULIANA

That's just plain old mother's instinct.

MARIA

But that's not how she sees it, Juliana. She always called it a gift. She says it was how she found our Dolorosa. You see, our great-grandfather Mariano lost this Dolorosa right after he made Her.

ALICIA

After some exhibit in Europe or something. Back in the 1800s, in the Netherlands, I think it was.

MARIA

The Amsterdam Exposition of 1883, where great-Lolo Mariano won first prize, the first and only Filipino to ever do so. Anyway, the story was that She was stolen during the event. She was missing for over sixty years until Mama, a teenager back then, found Her while on one of her out-of-body travels.

ALICIA

Of course, we suspect that she came upon Her while she was out playing or something. But she insisted it was during one of her free-floats — that's how she called it, right? Free-float. Like an ice cream sundae.

MARIA

We all thought she was crazy. Even Papa. But he liked her that way. He always called her his Fanciful Angel.

ALICIA

More like his Angel of Death actually.

JULIANA

But having out-of-body experiences doesn't make you a killer. That doesn't prove anything.

ALICIA

It proves that she's crazy enough to do it.

JULIANA

Wild suppositions.

MARIA

Sometimes that's all some people need to believe.

ALICIA

You know how people are. They believe the stories they make up themselves. The more outrageous it is, the more they believe it.

JULIANA

That's just petty and dangerous. Besides, I'm not one of them.

(Silence. They are almost finished
putting together the Dolorosa.)

I remember Mama would brush our hair — a hundred strokes for each of us, remember? — to make sure they were smooth and shiny and healthy all the time. And then right before bed, she would sing to us that lovely tune, a sweet melody. That's how I like to remember her. That's why I cannot believe all these things you're saying about her now.

ALICIA

Believe what you want, Juliana. But that won't change the fact that she abandoned her three daughters to fend for themselves all these years.

(Alicia exits.)

MARIA

We understand, Juliana. But you see, Alicia and I grew up with her, and I'm sorry if our memories of Mama are not as pleasant as yours.

(Pause. Alicia returns, accompanied by a
couple of helpers who lift the Dolorosa
on to the carroza.)

JULIANA

By the way, if the Dolorosa was lost in Europe, how do you think She got back all the way here?

ALICIA

Who knows? Maybe it was all that trade happening back then, on those Spanish galleons, you know?

MARIA

There were actually rumors that She never left the Philippines at all.

JULIANA

Maybe it was a miracle. She found her way back home to Mama.

ALICIA

Whatever it was, I'm glad that She's back here with us. She is, after all, the greatest heirloom our family owns. There's nothing quite like Her. I have taken great comfort in Her all these years, as you both know.

JULIANA/MARIA

We know.

(The helpers exit. The sisters stand back from the carroza and gaze at the assembled Dolorosa in admiration for a while. Unbeknown to them, Pilar, 60s, an arresting presence, has entered and is watching them.)

MARIA

Simply exquisite.

ALICIA

A vision.

JULIANA

Just lovely.

PILAR

She's beautiful all right — like all three of you.

(The sisters turn around and stare at their mother in varying degrees of surprise. An awkward beat. Then —)

MARIA

(embraces Pilar, quickly but warmly) Mama.

ALICIA

(embraces Pilar, quickly and coldly) Mama.

PILAR

I missed you all so much. (Then to Juliana) And you—

(Juliana stares at Pilar a few moments more, then runs toward her and hugs her tightly.)

JULIANA

Welcome back, Mama.

(They stand holding each other longer.)

PILAR

(releasing)

Thank you, Juliana. You've grown to be as beautiful as your older sisters.

(Beat. An uneasy moment passes among them.)

Then—)

MARIA

How was your trip?

PILAR

Tiring, of course, even though I did manage to sleep on the plane for a few hours. It's something to do with age, of course. This old body can't take any more of these long Transpacific flights, unfortunately. Plus the drive here is much too long.

JULIANA

You look fine to me.

ALICIA

Hmph!

(Beat. Another awkward moment.)

MARIA

Would you like some cold kalamansi juice, Mama?

PILAR

That would be excellent, thank you.

ALICIA

(harshly)

I'll go get it. I need some air all of a sudden.

(Alicia exits, giving Pilar a cold, hard look.)

PILAR

(slyly, to the remaining two)

You don't think she's going to slip poison in my juice, do you?

(Maria and Juliana start to laugh.)

JULIANA

I don't think she's reached that point yet.

MARIA

But just to be safe, maybe we should hide all the cutters and scissors and wires lying around.

PILAR

Tell me, this Simon — he's her *third* husband, right? (Maria and Juliana nod.) At this rate, she'll surpass Elizabeth Taylor herself!

(Pilar moves and sits on the sofa.)

MARIA

(hoping to switch the topic)

How's Tita Anching?

PILAR

Your Tita Anching is fine, enjoying her life in Honolulu to the hilt like a carefree teenager.

Swimming every week, hiking up dormant volcanos. And she's recently taken up Bikram yoga.

JULIANA

Bikram yoga!

PILAR

Ugh! They do it in these overly heated rooms. Imagine all those smelly sweaty bodies. I don't know how — much less why — she does it, for the love of God.

MARIA

She's always been very active.

PILAR

Forget about your Tita Anching. Tell me about yourselves. How is everything with you girls?

(Maria and Juliana exchange looks,
both not sure which one of them should
speak up first.)

JULIANA

(tentatively)

You already know about Dete. Ate Maria here has been taking care of me and the house all these years.

PILAR

(to Maria)

And you've never been married?

MARIA

No, Mama.

PILAR

(pointedly)

I see.

MARIA

(obviously hurt)

Juliana is busy finishing her masters.

PILAR

Ah yes, what is it again that you're studying?

JULIANA

Philosophy.

PILAR

Wonderful. You all make a mother proud. A spinster, a philosopher, and a husband collector.

(Alicia enters with a tray carrying
four glasses of kalamansi juice.)

Ah! Speak of the devil...Thank you, Alicia.

(Pilar stands and goes to reach for a glass

but hesitates.)

Which is mine?

ALICIA

Your choice.

PILAR

You sure?

ALICIA

Why? You think I might poison you?

(Pilar turns to the others, raising her eyebrow, as if to say, "Didn't I tell you?" She then reaches for the glass farthest from her and downs her drink in one gulp as the others watch.)

PILAR

That was delicious, thank you.

ALICIA

(sharply)

Why are you here?

PILAR

Ah, Alicia. Ever the suspicious one.

ALICIA

(puts down the tray)

It pays to be suspicious. It prepares you for all manner of evil.

MARIA

Alicia! (Then to Pilar) Forgive her, Mama. She's been a little troubled since you left.

PILAR

I know. And by *troubled* you mean drowning herself in gin and stuffing herself with Vicodin every night.

ALICIA

(shocked)

How do you know all about that?

PILAR

You know how.

JULIANA

(elated)

Your free-floats!

(Pilar just gloats, relishing this moment.)

ALICIA

(defiantly)

Okay! All right! So yes, I've grown to love drinking. And yes, I've come to depend on Vicodin Night after night. Nothing else will calm my nerves. But do you know why I've developed these habits?

PILAR

I can make a pretty good guess but please tell me.

ALICIA

(vehemently)

It's all because of you.

PILAR

Dear me, and I thought it was all because of your husband. Excuse me, *husbands*.

ALICIA

No, it's you, Mama. You made me into this miserable, pill-popping alcoholic, who's on her third marriage, and most likely her third annulment. So thank you, Mama.

PILAR

Thank you's won't do. I want an award.

ALICIA

Joke all you want, Mama. But it's not just me. Oh, no. Ate Maria here, she has never married. You turned her into a miserable old maid.

MARIA

(tough)

It was my choice, Alicia. And I'm not miserable.

ALICIA

Listen to yourself, Ate Maria! We never had any choice after she left us all. (To Pilar.) After Papa's death, after you left, the whole town felt this house was cursed. No suitor wanted to knock on our door, everyone avoided us in the church, in the plaza, in the market. We became pariahs in our hometown. It's why I moved to Manila. I just couldn't stand it any longer. (Beat.) And Juliana—

JULIANA

What about me?

ALICIA

(dismissively blows air through her teeth)

Pshh! You're still young. You have your whole life ahead of you to mess up, just like your big sisters. (Then to Pilar.) You abandoned us, Mama. You left us all alone. Right after you killed Papa!

(Alicia breaks down.)

PILAR

(rolls eyes)

And I thought there was only one Lady of Sorrows in the room. First of all, I didn't kill your Papa. That's just silly tsismis.

ALICIA

(wailing)

But you killed BonBon and Fluffy!

PILAR

Your rabbits? They were dying! And I didn't want them spreading disease — they'd been bitten by rats. Second of all, you're all grown women. *Grow some balls.* And last of all, you were never alone. You had the servants and Nanang Idad taking care of you. And you had each other. Besides, I checked up on you every now and then. (Beat.) Yes, you know I could. You all know I have the gift. For instance, (To Maria) I was there when you suffered your first and only heartbreak and, as penitencia, you went to church and you crawled towards the altar on your hands and knees and flung yourself prostrate on the floor. You stayed that way the whole afternoon. (To Alicia) And you, I was there on your first wedding day, and your first annulment. Your second wedding day, and your second annulment. Your third wedding day...and let's just pray it ends there. (To Juliana) And you, I was there when you wrote to the Dolorosa about wanting to run away from here. You decided against it and burned the letter, but I saw you. (To all now) Oh yes, I saw all of you. Even from thousands of miles away, I was watching over each and every one of you through all these years.

ALICIA

Then tell us why you're here now.

PILAR

(smiles)

The suspense is unbearable, isn't it?

ALICIA

Tell us!

(Beat.)

PILAR

I've come home.

(Beat.)

MARIA

What?

PILAR

I've come home. For good. To be with you all again. In the flesh now, for a change.

ALICIA

You can't be serious.

PILAR

Oh, I am, my dear. I am serious.

ALICIA

One happy family? Is that what you're hoping we could all be? I can't believe this. You're actually mad, after all. You're a crazy motherfu—!

MARIA

(interrupting)

Why now?

PILAR

(shrugs)

Why not now? Can't a mother simply miss her daughters?

ALICIA

But we don't miss you!

JULIANA

I do.

ALICIA

Shut up, Juliana! (To Pilar.) You can't stay here and that's that.

PILAR

What makes you think I'm asking for permission? This is still *my* house. Passed on to me by my mother, passed on to her by her mother, and hopefully to be passed on to you girls. If you're nice to me, that is.

(Beat.)

MARIA

Mama, you must understand. It's quite a shock for us to have you here, let alone imagine that you're going to be living here with us again.

PILAR

You'll get used to it.

ALICIA

We don't need you! We have each other. (Gestures to the Dolorosa.) And we have Her.

(Pilar smiles.)

PILAR

The Dolorosa? Yes, I suppose it's nice to have Her as a surrogate mother. (Beat.) Even if she is a replica.

(The sisters all turn to her in sudden alarm.)

MARIA

What did you say?

PILAR

You heard me.

JULIANA

(looking at the Dolorosa, fascinated)

A replica?

PILAR

Yes, a copy. I had Her made from an old photograph.

MARIA

But you said you found the original, from one of your—

PILAR

My free-floats? Ha! Of course, I made it all up! It's a nice story to tell little girls about their mother, don't you think? Mama has super-powers, she can fly and walk through walls and see what normal people can't. Amusing, isn't it?

MARIA

But you said a moment ago that you've been checking up on us all these years. How did you know all that about us?

PILAR

Easy. I got your Nanang Idad a smartphone. She's been sending me news in Honolulu about all of you. We've been text mates all these years.

ALICIA

(hysterical)

Why are you doing this?! I can't have been praying all this time to a fake! She's the original Dolorosa!

PILAR

The original that your great grandfather made was never recovered. It's been lost for over a hundred years now.

ALICIA

You're lying!

(Beat.)

PILAR

Am I? It's so easy to verify, you know. The original had your great grandfather's initials carved on to each piece. Mariano Baldemor Madriñan. M-B-M. Found on the index finger of the left hand, under the chin, and on the stump of the right shoulder.

JULIANA

Mama's right. I've heard of this practice. Master carvers of that period were known to do this.

PILAR

The markings are often very tiny, but they should be there...if the piece is original.

ALICIA

Shut up! Just shut up! You are a witch! I have believed in Her, adored Her all my life. She's been my consolation, my refuge all these years. How dare you do this! Now I have no one, no one!

PILAR

Well, now you have me.

(Alicia looks at her, aghast, then she exits, sobbing.)

MARIA

(stone-faced)

Welcome back, Mama.

(Maria exits.)

(Pause. Juliana and Pilar regard each other carefully.)

PILAR

Quite a reunion we're having, don't you think?

JULIANA

It's unlike any other reunion I know, that's for sure.

PILAR

You think they'll ever forgive me?

JULIANA

What's there to forgive? You didn't kill Papa, right?

PILAR

(sits on sofa)

I see you've grown to be as blunt as your sisters.

JULIANA

I like the idea of cutting down to the chase.

PILAR

Very American, I can tell you that.

JULIANA

(sits next to her)

I'd rather you tell me about Papa.

(Beat.)

PILAR

Your Papa. What's there to tell? I woke up one morning to his cold dead body lying next to me. Heart attack in his sleep. Simple as that. (Beat.) Except...no, I take it back. It isn't that simple. Your Papa may have died in his sleep that night but he was dead long before that. And I with him.

JULIANA

What do you mean?

PILAR

Love dies, my little Juliana. Love dies and the person inside dies with it. She can continue living her days, of course, without anyone the wiser. She can go on putting on a brave, happy face for all the world to see, without anyone suspecting the empty hollow shell she has become inside. Your Papa sensed it eventually. He felt my coldness, my indifference, and so he died, as well. So you see, it seems I killed him, after all.

JULIANA

(holds Pilar's hands)

Oh, Mama.

PILAR

I kept blaming myself and blaming myself until one day I just packed my bags and left. I thought that by running away, I could run away from the guilt, the pain. I was foolish, of course. You can't run away from what you won't let go. It took me fifteen years, but I know that now.

(Pause. They sit in silence for a while.
Then—)

JULIANA

Something else is bothering me though. A while ago you said that you never actually had the gift of free floating, that you just made it all up, and that you'd been getting news about us all this time through Nanang Idad.

PILAR

Yes—?

JULIANA

Well, that's what I don't get. Nanang Idad couldn't have seen me write my letter, when I wanted to run away. I was all alone in my room when I wrote that and I burned it immediately when I changed my mind. There was no way Nanang Idad could have known. Unless—

(Pilar smiles slightly.)

So it *is* true! You *can* free float!

PILAR

Yes, it's true. It's been true since I was very young. That's how I know about Maria and her grand penitencia. That's how I know about Alicia's string of weddings and annulments. (Beat.) And that's how I know that the letter you wrote was actually a suicide note.

(Juliana's euphoria promptly dissipates
and she lays her head on Pilar's lap, tired
all of a sudden.)

JULIANA

I get very depressed sometimes. Papa's death, your leaving, Ate Maria and Dete Alicia and their troubles — this house is just too weighed down. I thought I could lighten it a little bit if I just...went away. (Starts to cry.) I'm sorry, Mama. I'm so sorry to be such a disappointment.

PILAR

My little Juliana. I'm sorry, too. I know now I shouldn't have left. When I saw you writing that letter, it was the most horrible moment of my life. There I was in your room, watching you plan your own death, and I couldn't do anything to stop it. I kept screaming at you but, of course, you couldn't hear me. You can't imagine how helpless I felt. No mother should suffer like that. And imagine the profound relief I felt when you finally changed your mind. So no, don't say that. You're not a disappointment. None of your sisters are, too. I'm just glad that we're all together again, that I'm here with you now.

JULIANA

Yes, I'm glad, too. I can feel things are about to change.

(Pilar begins humming the melody we heard
in the first scene, as she gently strokes
Juliana's hair.)

JULIANA

I missed hearing that. I hope you can sing it to me again.

PILAR

Of course, I will. As much as you want. For as long as I can.

(Something in her tone catches
Juliana's attention. She sits up.)

JULIANA

You're dying, aren't you?

PILAR

(smiles sadly)

I knew you were the most sensitive of the three. You have the gift, too.

JULIANA

Cancer?

PILAR

A very aggressive one.

JULIANA

That's why you've returned. You're planning to sell everything, aren't you? For your treatment?

PILAR

No. Before your Papa died, he made sure we had enough. More than enough. No, I would never do that. I just want to try and make amends, set things right with you and your sisters. (Looks to the Dolorosa.) Maybe I'll even pray for a miracle.

JULIANA

I'm here. I won't leave your side.

PILAR

And your sisters?

JULIANA

They'll come around. Eventually. And we can all pray for a miracle together.

(Pilar takes Juliana's face ever
so gently in her hands and kisses
her cheeks.)

PILAR

Thank you. (Beat.) Now I think we'd better go, my dear. The procesión is about to begin.

JULIANA

You go ahead. I'll just clean up here a bit.

(Pilar starts to leave. Juliana looks up at the Dolorosa)

Is She a copy?

(Pilar turns.)

Or is She the real one?

PILAR

What do you think?

JULIANA

(turns to Pilar)

I think real is what you believe.

PILAR

There's a lot of danger in that.

JULIANA

I know. But a lot of comfort, too.

(Pilar smiles then exits.

Juliana starts tidying up. After a while, she stops, turns, and stares again at the Dolorosa. Then, on a whim, she climbs up on the carroza and checks under the statue's clothes — the left hand, the chin, the shoulder.

And then she smiles.

She gets down from the carroza and exits.

The sound of women singing comes up, and a crowd enters, carrying lighted candles, rosaries, burning incense, prayer pamphlets, etc. The people surround the carriage and begin the procession, pushing the carroza off the stage as lights fade out. END OF PLAY.)