

The Shaman, the Virgin, and the Crone
a Winter Solstice Fantasy

by

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SYNOPSIS

Is equitable distribution of wealth an impossible, unnatural ideal? Or are sharing and compassion the most human of impulses? Are these impulses compatible with capitalism? Is technology dehumanizing us? At a future crossroads, Zero, a shabby Shaman/Salvation Army Santa, pesters financier Ray for half his assets. When Ray bets nobody behaves that generously, Zero finds Viola, a bewildered senior who trusts Ray with her finances and is attracted to her assisted-living robot. Viola opens her heart and apartment to the homeless shaman and a teen-age, Latina, pregnant-virgin, social worker who, at their Winter Solstice ritual, births “el sol,” a source of magical, greed-healing powers.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Zero (Zurvan Ehecatl Ra Ogiuwu), any age, a shaman from a poor country; possibly Native (South or North) American or Siberian or African

Ray, 30’s to 50’s, a slick American businessman

Viola Green, 80’s, lively, loving, forgetful

Robbie, 80’s, trim and attractive, but a little stiff; devoted to Vi

Rickie (Enriqueta Tierrabuena), 15, earthy, energetic dancer; Latina accent.

Note: Rickie’s parents appear very briefly onscreen—can be videotape.

SETTING

December 21, the not-too-distant future, possibly circa 2027...or maybe next year.
Director/designers should feel free to elaborate on the futuristic elements.

Scene 1: Undetermined space or a street corner
All others: Suggested version of Viola’s futuristic living room

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ACT I

Scene 1:

SETTING: *Time out of time. A crossroads in a distant place. Or a street corner in the USA.*

AT RISE: *RAY, dressed in an expensive three-piece suit, works his i-phone (or its futuristic equivalent). ZERO, a strange, shabby, barefoot Salvation Army Santa, stands at his cauldron, beating a small drum with his hands. His battered backpack lies next to him.*

ZERO

(Singing to the tune of "Jingle Bells.")

Beat the drum, beat the drum,
beat it loud and clear.
If you do not share the wealth,
the end is surely near...ear!

Some have much, some have less,
some have none at all.
Now's the time to equalize,
so hear your conscience call.

(He stares at RAY, who has been oblivious, preoccupied with his i-phone. RAY now notices ZERO, tries to ignore him, but grows increasingly uncomfortable, until finally...)

RAY

What?

(ZERO stops playing, continues to stare.)

What?!

ZERO

I suffer.

RAY

I see.

Will you help?

ZERO

Yes, that's true.

RAY

(Unnerved.)

Well...I guess...yes...of course. Not to help would be selfish, wouldn't it?
(Takes out wallet, extracts a dollar bill, drops it in ZERO's cauldron, waits for "thank you." Then, sarcastically.)

Don't thank me. It's my...uh...moral obligation.

ZERO

You're welcome.

RAY

(Beat.)

I need more.

ZERO

More?

RAY

I still suffer.

ZERO

Well, *do* something about it.

RAY

What?

ZERO

Pick yourself up by your—

RAY

I have no boots.

ZERO

Is that *my* problem?

RAY

Yes.

ZERO

Why?

RAY

ZERO
 Because you have many.

RAY
 Which I worked very hard to get.

ZERO
 No harder than I.

RAY
 Then why don't you have—?

ZERO
 Poor soil. Drought. Flood. Famine. War. Unemployment. Crooked government.

RAY
 Get rid of it.

ZERO
 I tried.

RAY
 Look, I sympathize...

ZERO
 Show me.

RAY
 Oh, all right.
(Gives ZERO two more bills.)
 Now will you leave me alone?

ZERO
 You are the one free to leave.

RAY
 I'm meeting someone here.

ZERO
 I see.

RAY
 Look, I've been more than generous.

ZERO
 You have given from your excess.

RAY
What do you expect?

ZERO
More.

RAY
Why?

ZERO
The same sun shines on me that shines on you.

RAY
So what? What gives you the right to—

ZERO
To live?

RAY
To live off me?

ZERO
No one should have more than enough...while others have less than they need.

RAY
Says who?

ZERO
The moral philosophers.

RAY
Bunk!

ZERO
It is written.

RAY
Where?

ZERO
In the hearts of the just.
(Beat. RAY puts two more bills in ZERO's cauldron. ZERO does not look at them, but continues to stare at RAY.)

RAY
Just how much do you want?

ZERO
As much as I'm entitled to.

RAY
And what would that be?

ZERO
Give until you reach the level of marginal utility.

RAY
The what?

ZERO
The level at which, to give more would cause as much suffering to you as would be relieved in me.

RAY
Where did you get that wacko idea?

ZERO
John Stuart Mill.

RAY
Well, he's mad. And so are you.

ZERO
(With controlled anger.)
I have reason to be mad. I am hungry and cold and sick while you are warm and healthy and... *smug*.

RAY
Are you seriously suggesting that I empty my wallet into your...

ZERO
cauldron.

RAY
until the amounts in each are the same?

ZERO
And your bank accounts. And your stock portfolios.

RAY
What do you take me for—a *lunatic saint!*

ZERO
It's your...what did you call it?...your "moral obligation."

RAY
Why should I believe you would stop at half?

ZERO
I wouldn't need more.

RAY
But you'd *want* more.

ZERO
Only if I were as deluded as you.

RAY
It's human nature to be—

ZERO
Compassionate.

RAY
(Sarcastic.)
Right. So—if the shoe were on the other foot?

ZERO
My feet would be warm.

RAY
Enough! You're starting to piss me off.

ZERO
(Stands.)
“Smug” cannot last forever.

RAY
Neither can “naïve”—which is what you are. Apart from greedy.

ZERO
I'm not the one with the excess.

RAY
Don't you understand? My stocks multiply. And if I don't have enough of them multiplying, I can't have *this*—
(Whipping bank credit card out of wallet.)
and...I can't afford to give you *anything*.

ZERO
(Grabbing card.)
What do you buy with this?

RAY

(Tries to grab it back but it is pulled out of reach.)

Stuff.

ZERO

What kind of stuff.

RAY

Stuff that I deserve.

ZERO

(Circling RAY menacingly, waving card at him.)

Designer stuff? Frivolous odoriferous stuff? Super-sized, motorized stuff? Obscenely ridiculous conspicuous stuff...moronic, electronic stuff...extra-deluxe, big-bucks stuff...

(Puts card in pocket.)

RAY

What are you doing?

ZERO

Equalizing. You don't need all that stuff. None of you do. Get rid of it. Stop buying and selling it.

RAY

That won't work.

ZERO

Why not?

RAY

I got my money by selling stuff.

ZERO

Well?

RAY

If nobody buys the stuff I sell anymore, I won't have any money to share with you.

ZERO

Then sell something else. Or make something. Or grow something. Something essential. Food. Blankets. Medicine. Art.

RAY

But that wouldn't keep everybody here...employed.

ZERO

So? Work less. Enjoy your life.

RAY
If I work less, I'll have less.

ZERO
True.

RAY
Which means you'd have half of less.

ZERO
Which is a lot more than I have now.

RAY
Then what if somebody else comes along with nothing—do I have to give that person half of my remaining half?

ZERO
Of course.

RAY
And you?

ZERO
(Taking card from pocket, offering it to the hypothetical person.)
Would do the same.

RAY
Sure, sure. Come on—this is ridiculous. How would it end?

ZERO
In justice.

RAY
The line of paupers would go on forever.

ZERO
(Waving card.)
On the contrary. It's the only way to eliminate poverty.

RAY
(Reaches for card, but it's pulled back out of his reach. Frustrated.)
This is unreal.

ZERO
What?

RAY

This situation. This conversation. It can't be happening. I must be dreaming this. It's a... nightmare!

ZERO

Let's hope it ends in a wake-up call.

RAY

Is that a threat?

ZERO

That depends.

RAY

On what?

ZERO

On whether you're listening.

RAY

I don't like what I hear.

ZERO

Then *do* something about it.

RAY

What you propose I do will cost too much.

ZERO

Not as much as not doing it.

RAY

I don't like your attitude.

ZERO

Well...you could try walking in my shoes...if I had any.

RAY

Equal distribution of wealth? It's a preposterous idea. It can't be done. I mean people just don't behave that way—sharing everything they have. It's unnatural.

ZERO

Greed is unnatural.

RAY

I'll bet you can't find one person on earth who behaves that way.

And if I do? ZERO

What? RAY

What's the bet? ZERO

You won't. RAY

(Shaking card.)
Will you give this away ? ZERO

To you? RAY

To everyone in need. ZERO

Humph. What do I get when I win? RAY

Don't you already have it all? ZERO

Then why should I bet? RAY

I don't know. You're the one who suggested it. ZERO

It was a figure of speech: "I'll bet you can't find one person..." RAY

Oh. ZERO

But do go ahead and look. RAY

(Tosses card back at RAY, who catches it.)
I think I will. ZERO

(ZERO sits cross-legged, takes off Santa hat and beard and takes up drum.)

RAY

At least it's a way to get rid of you.

ZERO

Maybe...not. Maybe I'll turn up where you least expect me...to collect on our wager.

(ZERO starts to drum. The drumming gradually intensifies—and is enhanced by sound effects—as the lights fade up on him and down on RAY. ZERO throws back his head and closes his eyes as the drumming reaches a climax and light becomes blinding. Then: blackout.)

Scene 2

SETTING:

Living area of VIOLA's new age apartment: small dining table, two chairs, sofa, end table; counter separating living area from a not-visible kitchen. A stool at the counter. A computer screen provides a backdrop; next to it—or on a remote control on the table—a pad of buttons. On the floor in front of a suspended window frame: an orange tree in a washtub. Also suspended: a souvenir life-preserver with "Carefree Caribbean Cruise" printed on it. On the end table, a framed photo of a 70-something man in a captain's hat, saluting impishly. Inside the end table drawer (unseen): a mechanism for testing blood sugar level, knitting equipment, and a large pink piggy bank. Four door frames suggest: access to the outside, a closet, a bathroom, and a bedroom. Nothing on the other side of these frames needs to be visible. In fact, opening and closing the "doors" may be mimed. The set should not be naturalistic.

AT RISE:

VIOLA sits on one of the chairs, reading Doctor Dooley's Health Care Catalogue, which is open to the page picturing deluxe Natural Contours Massagers. ROBBIE enters.

VIOLA

You're not Frank.

ROBBIE

Of course not, Vi. I'm Robbie. Remember?

VIOLA

Where's Frank? He won't like me having another man around.

ROBBIE

Frank's dead. Ten years ago.

VIOLA

(Touching the photo.)

He'd still be jealous.

ROBBIE

Well, why not? You're a beautiful woman.

VIOLA

You're kind of cute yourself—in a quirky sort of way.

ROBBIE

Yes, I'm just what you told the matchmaker you wanted.

VIOLA

Well, I wouldn't go that far. You're no Liam Neeson.

ROBBIE

He wasn't available. Anyway, I'm perfect for you.

VIOLA

I can't believe I did that matchmaking business. At my age.

ROBBIE

Oh, everyone's doing it now.

VIOLA

Well, you're quite a catch. But I do wish you were a little more...affectionate.

ROBBIE

Did you take your pills?

VIOLA

I was just going to when you interrupted me.

ROBBIE

Sorry.

VIOLA

(Takes pills from pocket, struggles with bottle, then flexes her hand.)

Darn arthritis!

ROBBIE

Here—allow me.

(Opens bottle and hands it to her.)

Shall I get you some water?

VIOLA

(Flirtatiously.)

You spoil me.

ROBBIE

(Exiting.)

It's my reason for being.

(From "kitchen.")

Speaking of water...I'm afraid you left the cold water running in the bathroom.

VIOLA
How do you know it was me?

ROBBIE
(Returns with glass.)
Because I don't...oh never mind.

VIOLA
Well, did you turn it off?

ROBBIE
Yes.

VIOLA
Then all's well that ends well.
(Takes pills.)
I was in that play, you know.

ROBBIE
I don't think it was that one. I think it was *Twelfth Night*.

VIOLA
Was it? That was a long time ago. Before you—before Frank even. How do you know about it?

ROBBIE
You told me. I know everything you've told me.

VIOLA
Was I good?

ROBBIE
So you said.

VIOLA
What part did I play?

ROBBIE
Viola, of course.

VIOLA
What part am I playing now?

ROBBIE
What?

VIOLA

Gotcha!

(He seems taken aback.)

I can't remember exactly...what does Viola do?

ROBBIE

Disguises herself as a boy to win the boy she loves.

(Crosses to "closet.")

VIOLA

(Ponders this.)

Hmm. Well, I love disguises. Is she the one with the twin?

(No response.)

I have a twin. Did you know that?

(No response.)

An evil twin. Who never visits me.

(No response.)

Is he dead too?

ROBBIE

(Returning, with mop. Looks at her. Speaks tentatively.)

Hmm...I don't think so. He...he lives on the other coast.

VIOLA

(Shrugs.)

Oh well.

(Phone rings. ROBBIE presses button. Image of RAY flashes on screen.)

RAY *(on screen.)*

Hello, Vi!

VIOLA

(Looking at screen, pleased to get a call.)

Oh—hello.

RAY *(on screen.)*

It's Ray.

VIOLA

Ray! How sweet of you to call.

RAY *(on screen.)*

Just wanted to let you know I'm on my way.

VIOLA

Oh, good.

(Beat.)

Where are you going? VIOLA (*Cont.*)

There. RAY (*on screen.*)

Oh, that's nice. VIOLA

So, I'll see you in a little bit. RAY (*on screen.*)

Can you stay for lunch? VIOLA

Not this time. Too much to do. Bye now. RAY (*on screen.*)

Bye. VIOLA

(ROBBIE presses button. Screen goes dark.)

That was Ray. VIOLA

(ROBBIE begins mopping floor.)

What are you doing? ROBBIE

Cleaning. It's Tuesday. VIOLA

You are one of a million, you know. ROBBIE

Yes, that's true. VIOLA

You're smart, you're strong, you're organized...maybe a little naggy sometimes. ROBBIE

Now, Vi, didn't you ask me to remind you of those things? VIOLA

Did I? ROBBIE

Yes. Doctor Chi-Wa thought it was a good idea. VIOLA (*look at him, puzzled.*)

Your physician.

ROBBIE (*Cont.*)

(*Pointedly.*)

With whom you have an appointment tomorrow.

VIOLA

Oh! I better call about transport.

ROBBIE

It's an Internet appointment.

VIOLA

Oh.

(*Beat.*)

Why do you always change the subject to something...*medical* whenever I get personal. It's not an attractive trait.

ROBBIE

I guess I just can't help it.

VIOLA

Don't make excuses.

ROBBIE

Maybe I'm not programmed for intimacy.

VIOLA

Yes, Frank had that problem too. It's a male thing.

ROBBIE

I don't think—

VIOLA

(*Interrupting.*)

I mean here I am singing your praises, and you...throw cold water on me.

ROBBIE

It's time for your snack.

VIOLA

There you go again!

ROBBIE

What would you like?

VIOLA

A little snuggle would do nicely.

Vi. ROBBIE

VIOLA
(Disgusted.)
 Oh...just bring me a cookie.

ROBBIE
 I don't serve cookies to diabetics. Anyway, you know we don't have any.

VIOLA
 Yes we do. I put them on the list when you weren't looking. Ray brought them last week.
(He starts to object. She raises her hand triumphantly)
 They're SUGAR FREE! Nah, na, na, NA, na.
(He leans mop against table, crosses behind counter.)
 You need to lighten up a little, Robbie. Get a life.

ROBBIE
 I wish.

VIOLA
 You're a fellow of many talents.
(ROBBIE returns with plate of cookies, offers them to the mop. VIOLA laughs.)

ROBBIE
(Turning to her.)
 Whoops!

VIOLA
 See—you can be such a card.
(He offers her cookies. She takes one, takes a bite. He puts plate down.)
 You're not having any?

ROBBIE
 Not good for my boyish figure.

VIOLA
 They're SUGAR-FREE.

ROBBIE
 Still have carbs—and fats.

VIOLA
(Putting cookie down.)
 Sometimes I think you know too much for your own good.

ROBBIE

And other times?

VIOLA

You're just the most thoughtful thing in the world and I want to squeeze the stuffing out of you.

ROBBIE

Time to do your exercises!

(Presses a button. Loud New-Age music. On the screen: psychedelic images of aerobic dancers and/or graphics of stick people dancing. ROBBIE ushers VIOLA to an open space and they energetically execute a series of mild stretches and kicks. When they're finished, he presses button and screen goes blank. She falls back onto sofa, laughing.)

VIOLA

How'd I do?

ROBBIE

Better than me.

VIOLA

Well, if you'd just loosen up a little...

ROBBIE

(Going on one knee before her.)

Give me your hand.

VIOLA

(She does.)

Darling, take every part of me.

ROBBIE

(A warning.)

Vi.

(He takes her pulse.)

VIOLA

Or would you prefer I never tell my love?
 "But let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud,
 feed on my..." on my...something...cheek.

ROBBIE

Damask.

VIOLA

Ah. It's been a while since I had damask cheeks.

ROBBIE

Not true. You always have them after we exercise.

VIOLA

(Flirtatious.)

What a flatterer you are!

ROBBIE

Pulse is good. Dr. Chi-Wa will be pleased.

VIOLA

I think we should get married, Robbie. We live together. It's not decent. It's setting a bad example for the young people.

ROBBIE

What young people?

VIOLA

You don't want to marry me?

ROBBIE

It isn't that.

VIOLA

What is it then?

ROBBIE

I've explained it to you, Vi. About the—

VIOLA

About the money? I don't care. Money is not as important as love.

ROBBIE

About the...love.

VIOLA

You don't love me?

ROBBIE

I'm not the kind of...I'm not what you want, Vi. I can't make you happy. I don't have the...capacity to...

VIOLA

Oh, that. Don't worry about that. Frank wasn't much in that department either. I'm used to doing without. To be honest, I probably couldn't have handled Liam Neeson.

ROBBIE

But—

VIOLA

I mean, we wouldn't have to...go all the way.

ROBBIE

I...don't think I can even go part of the way.

VIOLA

You might feel more relaxed about it if we were married.

ROBBIE

I can't marry you, Vi. It wouldn't be fair.

VIOLA

(Insight strikes. All sympathy.)

O Robbie, why didn't you tell me—you're gay. It's all right. My twin brother Sebastian is gay.

ROBBIE

You don't have a twin brother.

VIOLA

I don't?

ROBBIE

And I'm not gay.

VIOLA

Well, then there's still hope.

ROBBIE

No. There isn't.

VIOLA

Why not? You're the man of my dreams. We've read all the same books—and you even remember what they say. You do the cooking and cleaning. You're sensitive and caring. You know more about me than I do. You said it yourself—you're perfect for me.

ROBBIE

But...not as a husband.

Why not?
 VIOLA
 Because I couldn't deliver—
 ROBBIE
 I told you I don't care about that! We could have a...whadda you call it?
 VIOLA
 Platonic relationship?
 ROBBIE
 That's it. What do you say? No pressure.
 VIOLA
 Really? No pressure?
 ROBBIE
(Not believing it.)
 None at all.
 VIOLA
(He looks skeptical. She crosses her heart.)
 I promise.
 VIOLA
(He seems to be weakening.)
 You always say my every wish is your command.
 ROBBIE
 I do say that, don't I?
 VIOLA
 More—you *live* it.
 ROBBIE
 Well...if you promise no pressure...then I guess...I suppose it wouldn't hurt.
 VIOLA
 I'm the happiest woman in the world!
 ROBBIE
 Good.
 VIOLA
 Maybe just one little squeeze...to celebrate?
(She starts moving in on him.)

ROBBIE

(Backing up.)

Vi...you promised.

VIOLA

(Advancing.)

Just one.

ROBBIE

Vi—it's time for you to go to the bathroom. Stop! What would Doctor Chi-Wa—

VIOLA

I don't care about Doctor Chihuahua. I want *you*!

ROBBIE

You'll be sorry! Vi...don't do this...Vi...

(She pursues him until he has nowhere to go. When she has him cornered, she throws her arms around him and squeezes with all her strength. We hear metallic noises—of a machine in distress, breaking down. Then ROBBIE collapses onto the sofa.)

VIOLA

Don't worry, Sweetheart. It'll be easier next time.

(Doorbell rings. VI goes to front door, "opens" it. RAY enters with bags of supplies, groceries, heads for counter.)

VIOLA *(Cont.)*

Ray!

(Throws arm around his neck, kisses his cheek.)

Well isn't this a nice surprise?

RAY

Isn't it Tuesday?

VIOLA

Is it?

RAY

I always come on Tuesdays, Vi.

VIOLA

Why don't you call me "Aunt Vi"?

RAY

I got you some "no-sugar-added" ice cream. Butter pecan.

VIOLA

You look more like your father every day.

RAY

I do?

VIOLA

We weren't *identical* twins, you know.

RAY

(Starts to unpack the bags.)

Toilet paper was on sale so I got you the jumbo rolls—double pl—

(Sees ROBBIE.)

Whoa! What happened to your Robbie?

VIOLA

He got a little...overexcited.

RAY

(Crossing to ROBBIE.)

I'll say.

VIOLA

I hope it's nothing serious.

RAY

Won't know till we get him checked out.

(Looks at his watch.)

Hmm...wasn't counting on this today.

VIOLA

Maybe we should just call an ambulance.

RAY

(Looks at her for a long moment.)

I think...I can take him in my car.

VIOLA

I don't know what I'd do without you, Ray.

RAY

I don't know either.

(Returns to bags and continues unpacking and putting things away.)

We have to talk, Vi.

VIOLA

Shouldn't we take care of Robbie first?

RAY

He won't get any worse in the next few minutes.

VIOLA

Well, just let me put this pillow under his head.

(She does this.)

There now, that's better.

(To RAY.)

What did you want to talk about?

RAY

(Stops unpacking, crosses to table.)

I've been going over your finances.

(Takes typed paper from his inside coat pocket, unfolds it, flattens it on table.)

VIOLA

(Uninterested.)

You know I leave all that to you.

RAY

But you need to know about this.

VIOLA

(Jokingly.)

Am I being evicted?

RAY

Not yet.

VIOLA

(Sobering up.)

What?

RAY

Come look at these figures.

VIOLA

(Crosses to table.)

Do I have to?

RAY

(Pointing.)

This is your savings account total.

VIOLA

(Nodding.)

The money from selling the house.

RAY

What's left of it.

(Pointing to another line.)

This is the annual interest rate. And this is what it comes to in dollars each month. Well, this month. The more we eat into the principle, the lower this figure will get.

VIOLA

Then let's not eat the principle.

RAY

Good idea.

(Pointing to another line.)

But this is what your monthly expenses come to—for rent, Robbie, utilities, computer, food, medical expenses.

VIOLA

And my spending money.

RAY

And your spending money.

(He takes out his wallet and gives her a twenty-dollar bill, then resumes pointing to the paper on the table.)

So each month you have to draw on the principle.

VIOLA

What about Social Security?

RAY

That stopped years ago. Remember?

VIOLA

What about the interest?

RAY

It isn't enough. I just explained that.

VIOLA

Well, I have all the house money still, don't I?

RAY

No. Like I said, some of it's gone.

Where? VIOLA

Your expenses up, interest rates down.
(He shrugs helplessly.) RAY

How much is left? VIOLA

I showed you the figure. RAY

I mean...in years. VIOLA

Three? RAY

(Stands.) VIOLA
Three years! I was counting on living longer than that. Robbie and I were just making plans...
(Crosses and sits next to ROBBIE.)

Weren't we, Sweetheart?
(To RAY.)

What will happen?

RAY
Maybe nothing...if you invest the house money.

VIOLA
Invest? You mean the stock market?

RAY
I know how you feel about it, Vi, but—

VIOLA
We were doing fine before the crash of ought-one.
(Gestures to souvenir life preserver.)
Even took that Carefree Caribbean Cruise. But we lost everything in the market except Frank's pension. And then

VIOLA & RAY *(Together.)*
his CEO ran off with that.

RAY

I know.

VIOLA

(Stands, crosses room nervously.)

Anyway, don't talk to me about stock market. Who can you trust? What would I invest in?

RAY

Something reliable.

VIOLA

(Angry. At window.)

Sure. Might as well just—

(Mimes throwing open window, winces from pain at doing this, tosses bill out.)

—throw the money out the window! Why don't I just take the whole damn nest egg to Las Vegas and throw it down the slots. At least then I'd get to see Wayne Newton.

RAY

He's dead. But the market isn't—it's on the upswing just now. Buy a few shares of R. J. Reynolds or Philip Morris and you'll—

VIOLA

Turn teenagers into addicts.

(Gesturing out window.)

Why not just bankroll the dealer that works that corner?!

RAY

(Stands.)

Think about it, Vi.

VIOLA

Can't we come up with a better plan?

RAY

Not now. Gotta take care of your Robbie.

(Wraps one of ROBBIE's arms around his neck and with the other hand, grabs ROBBIE's waist.)

Come on, Old Man—let's go.

(To VI as he exits.)

Anyway, I've got to get downstairs before somebody grabs up your twenty.

VIOLA

(At door, calling after them.)

I hope I don't sound ungrateful, Ray—I know you mean well. Take care of my Robbie.

(Throws kiss.)

I'll miss you, Sweetheart. You're my sunshine.

VIOLA (*Cont.*)

(Without closing door, dances to back of kitchen counter while singing "Ain't No Sunshine When [He's] Gone." Puts some supplies away, crosses to window, calls out.)

Did you find it?

(Sees the non-verbal response below, moans, "closes" window, registers the pain this move causes, rubs wrist, sits on edge of washtub with her head in her hands. ZERO enters slowly, tentatively, approaches her, stands over her. He wears the battered backpack containing a small drum and a quena. Suddenly she becomes aware of him, startles.)

Oh!

ZERO

I didn't mean to frighten you. I came to return this—
(Holds out a twenty-dollar bill.)

It dropped out your window.

VIOLA

It didn't drop out. I threw it.
(Takes bill.)

Thank you.

ZERO

I heard this happens in American cities, but I didn't believe it.

VIOLA

What happens?

ZERO

People throw money away.

VIOLA

In America, everything about money is crazy.

ZERO

That I do believe.

VIOLA

Let me give you a reward.
(Thinks about this.)
Do you have change for a twenty?

ZERO

Reward for what?

VIOLA

Maybe you'd like to stay for lunch.

(Crosses to kitchen.)

I just got supplies in. Robbie won't let me near the stove, but I can microwave a Pizza-For-Two. It's probably already defrosted from sitting out.

(She takes pizza from grocery bag, but has difficulty unwrapping it.)

ZERO

Let me help you.

(He removes wrapper and hands her the pizza.)

VIOLA

Thank you.

(Pops it into the microwave.)

This will be fun. I never have company and Robbie's so vain, he never eats anything,

(Confidential.)

though I have my suspicions about his "lunar activities." Are you hungry?

ZERO

Yes.

VIOLA

Good.

ZERO

But I prefer to earn my meal.

VIOLA

(Takes bill from her pocket and waves it at him.)

You already did.

ZERO

(Puts backpack on counter.)

Do you have work I could do?

VIOLA

Hmm...well, without Robbie, I could use some temporary help. But I can only pay you twenty dollars.

ZERO

Food will be enough.

VIOLA

Of course, Robbie gets bed and board, plus his salary. Ray takes care of that. Where do you live?

ZERO

On the corner.

VIOLA

Oh. You're not a drug dealer, are you?

ZERO

Only for ceremonial use.

VIOLA

Well, I suppose you could stay in Robbie's room till he gets back. It's the first door on the right. You can have a look while I get napkins.

(ZERO crosses to indicated door, "opens" it.)

ZERO

But this is a closet—

VIOLA

(Not hearing him. Calling over her shoulder.)

I know it's not the Hilton, but Robbie seems content with it.

(ZERO "closes" door.)

Well?

ZERO

(Gesturing to the living room floor.)

I think the floor would be better—I'm used to sleeping on the ground.

VIOLA

Oh dear, don't you get cold and uncomfortable?

ZERO

I am warm in the embrace of Mother Earth.

VIOLA

What a romantic! That settles it—you can stay here till Robbie comes back. By then, we can find you a job. What do you do?

ZERO

I'm a shaman.

VIOLA

There's no need to be. Plenty of people are poor. It's not your fault. Frank and I were doing fine before the crash of ought-one.

(Gestures to souvenir life preserver on the wall.)

Even took that Carefree Caribbean Cruise. But we lost everything in the market except Frank's pension. And then his CEO ran off with that. He's the one should have been ashamed.

ZERO

I'm a...*sha-man*. My people are what your people call...pagan.

VIOLA

(Crossing to table with pizza.)

Well, we all have a little of the pagan in us. Have some pizza.

(She sets pizza on table.)

ZERO

We worship the sun.

VIOLA

And you have a lovely tan to show for it.

(Sits.)

Sit, sit, sit.

(ZERO does. She hands him a napkin.)

What does a sha-man do?

ZERO

I serve as spiritual guide to the tribe, teaching them to celebrate the Dance of Life, to stay in harmony with the forces of nature. I channel the Spirit of the Forest and its wild animals so that human hunters can understand their oneness with their prey. I'm a counselor and a healer...especially of psycho-somatic diseases.

(More matter-of-factly.)

And of course, I officiate at sacrifices, head the fertility rites, and set the time and place for the gathering of the clans.

(Pointedly.)

But most importantly, I celebrate the turning of the wheel of the year.

VIOLA

The wheel of the year?

ZERO

(Pointing to quadrants of pizza.)

Winter, spring, summer, fall.

VIOLA

Shouldn't the onions be winter and the green peppers summer?

ZERO

(Looks at her with appreciation. Re-pointing.)

Winter, spring, summer, fall.

(Turns the plate.)

I officiate at the turning of the wheel of the year.

VIOLA

Wouldn't it turn without you?

ZERO

Of course. The gods turn it. We can only be...appreciative. Celebrate its turning—with rituals.

(Bites into a piece of pizza.)

VIOLA

And what are these rituals?

ZERO

Tomorrow is the Winter Solstice. And I see you have a Solstice tree.

VIOLA

I do?

ZERO

(Crossing to orange tree in washtub at window.)

I saw it first from the sidewalk.

(Caressing an orange on the tree.)

Beautiful—like the sun: round and bright and orange.

VIOLA

And full of vitamin C.

ZERO

If you like—we can have a Solstice ritual.

VIOLA

Here?

ZERO

Anywhere the sun shines.

VIOLA

Well, I love a celebration. Frank was Jewish, I was Christian. We celebrated everything.

ZERO

Did you celebrate Saturnalia? Inti Raymi? Shabe-Yalda, Chaomas, Dosmoche, Dong Zhi, Shogatsu? Makara Sankramana?

VIOLA

What are they?

ZERO

Festivals of the Romans, the Incas, the Iranians, the Kalash of Pakistan, the Tibetans, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Hindus. Everybody has a sun deity celebrated at Winter Solstice.

VIOLA

Well, isn't that a happy coincidence?

(RICKIE appears at still-open front door, knocks gently. Her speech is animated and she uses gestures whenever possible to make clear the meaning of the Spanish.)

RICKIE

Señora Green?

VIOLA

(Gets up, gesturing for ZERO to come back to table.)

Come finish your lunch.

(Crosses to door.)

Hello.

RICKIE

My name is Enriqueta Tierrabuena—from Social Services. *Usted me puede llamar* [You may call me] “Rickie.”

VIOLA

So young to be working.

RICKIE

I'm no working there for real. Well, I work there for *dos semanas* [two weeks]. Service requirement for graduating high school—to work *dos semanas* each semester doing good. I do good Xeroxing and sometime go on site with supervisor.

VIOLA

On site?

RICKIE

Si. Como aqui. [Yes. Like here.]

VIOLA

Well come in,

(Looking around.)

both of you.

RICKIE

(Coming into room.)

Supervisor is no here today. Holiday shopping. She say this visit is easy—ask *preguntas*, [questions] write *respuestas* [answers]—I can do it *sola* [alone]. Against *la poliza* [the rules], but hey, for two days *más* [more], I do what she tell me.

VIOLA

Let me hang up your coat.

RICKIE

(Resisting.)

This not take long.

VIOLA

We're just having lunch. Would you like a piece of...

(Checks pizza.)

summer?

RICKIE

Gracias, no. Lately I have *dolor de estómago* [upset stomach].

VIOLA

Let me introduce you. Rickie, this is—

(To ZERO, who stands.)

oh, here we are sharing room and board and I don't know your name.

ZERO

I am Zurvan Ehecatl Ra Ogiuwu. I'm a multi-national. You may call me Zero.

VIOLA

He's a sha-man.

(To ZERO.)

Rickie is a social worker.

RICKIE

(Correcting her gently.)

Yo soy estudiante. [I am a student.]

ZERO

Will you be a social worker when you finish school?

RICKIE

I will be dancer.

(She demonstrates.)

Is the most social of work.

ZERO

(Gesturing to sofa.)

Please—sit.

(He takes plate and napkins to kitchen, where he puts away rest of groceries and inventories stock for ritual possibilities. He removes quena from backpack and puts it on counter.)

RICKIE

(Sits, taking forms from Manila envelope.)

Gracias.

VIOLA

(*Sitting.*)

Why are you here, exactly?

RICKIE

We receive *un signo electrónico* [an electronic signal] when your Robbie break down.

(*Looking around.*)

Donde está su [Where is your] Robbie?

VIOLA

Ray took him to be checked out.

RICKIE

(*Writes this down.*)

Bien. [Good.] *Pero,* [But,] before we can send you another one, we have to make sure—

VIOLA

I don't want "another one." I want my Robbie back. We were making plans.

RICKIE

(*Beat, as she considers this, decides to let it ride.*)

Ah. In that case, I hope he get fixed. But, because you are part of *nuestro programa piloto*, [our pilot program] before we send him back, we ask *preguntas*.

(*VIOLA nods.*)

Please forgive if I step on your privates.

VIOLA

Excuse me?

RICKIE

Some *preguntas* are about private things. I no like to ask.

VIOLA

What are *preguntas*?

RICKIE

Questions.

VIOLA

Why don't you just say "questions"?

RICKIE

My English teacher, she say many words are introduced into English from *español*. *Por ejemplo...* [For example...] *cha-cha...y...salsa...y...merengue*. So—I introduce more. She also say "Inter-linguistics is *la solución* [the solution] to global hostility." Is another way I "do good," no?

VIOLA

Well, you just pregunta away.

RICKIE

You have any new source of income, *Señora* Green?

VIOLA

I won ten dollars on a rub-off Ray gave me.

RICKIE

I have to ask because if you go up to a higher *categoría* [category], you can no receive *los servicios de* [the services of] Robbie.

VIOLA

Robbie is paid by you?

RICKIE

Si. No me personally. *Pero los Servicios Sociales* [But Social Services] pay for your Robbie.

VIOLA

I thought I paid him. And you were sort of the matchmaking agency.

RICKIE

(Distracted, reading instruction.)

We are. So *su estado financiero* [your financial status]—no change.

VIOLA

Ray says it's getting worse.

RICKIE

(Writing.)

Get-ting...worse.... We need to see *los papers de su banco* [your bank statements]. Sign here *para la autorización.* [for authorization.]

(Hands VI a pen.)

VIOLA

(Signing.)

I hope this paperwork won't hold things up.

RICKIE

(Taking form VI signed.)

I fax this to office *ahora* [now].

(Crosses to computer screen.)

VIOLA

Thank you.

RICKIE

(Puts paper against screen, presses several buttons.)

I sorry your *estado financiero* is getting worse.

(Resuming questioning position.)

What about your marital status?

VIOLA

Might be getting better—when Robbie comes back.

(RICKIE looks at her, decides to go with the flow.)

RICKIE

Felicidades! [Congratulations!]

(Checks form for next question.)

You still live here *sola* [alone]—I mean only you and your Robbie?

VIOLA

Yes.

(ZERO drops something in kitchen.)

Well, Zero is living here temporarily—just till Robbie gets back.

RICKIE

Hmm...

VIOLA

What's the matter?

RICKIE

La poliza [The rules] for this apartment say no one can live with you except *su esposo o su niño*. [your spouse or your child].

VIOLA

But Robbie's been living here for years.

RICKIE

Excepción especial. [Special exception.]

VIOLA

Can't you make an *excepción* for Zero?

RICKIE

No same *categoría*.

(Starts to feel nauseated.)

Qué aroma? [What is that smell?]

ZERO

(From kitchen, where he tends pan on stove behind counter.)

Poppy seeds in special oil.

RICKIE

Perdón! [Pardon me!]

(Bolts to "closet" door, sees mistake, finds "bathroom" door. Gagging noises. ZERO crosses to VIOLA.)

VIOLA

(Starts to get up.)

Maybe I should fix her some ginger tea.

ZERO

(Gestures for her to stay put.)

Better to find out cause of problem first.

("Opens" the window, crosses back to counter.)

VIOLA

That won't be easy. Young girls can be so secretive.

RICKIE

(Returning, crossing to window.)

Sorry.

(Opens coat.)

Yo estoy embarazada. [I'm pregnant.]

(Takes coat off. It is clear she is close to delivery.)

VIOLA

(Initial delight.)

Oh, Rickie! That's....

(Sees Rickie does not share delight.)

Congratulations?

ZERO

You are not happy to become a mother?

RICKIE

I am high school sophomore.

VIOLA

What do your parents say?

RICKIE

They throw me out of *la casa*. [the house]

VIOLA

Oh, that's terrible. What about the boy's family?

RICKIE

Qué [What] boy?

VIOLA
The baby's father?

RICKIE
No hay padre. [There is no father.]

VIOLA
No padre?!

RICKIE
I think it was something I ate.

VIOLA
Does this sort of thing happen a lot these days? I haven't been keeping up with the paper.

RICKIE
Nunca, nunca, nunca! [Never, never, never!]

VIOLA
Hmm... Are you sure you're pregnant.

RICKIE
Tres veces [Three times] I take *el examen de embarazo en casa.* [the home pregnancy test] E.P.T.

VIOLA
And did you pass?

RICKIE
With straight A's.

VIOLA
What does the doctor say?

RICKIE
I have no *dinero para ver al médico.* [no money to see a doctor]

VIOLA
Poor child. Where are you living?

RICKIE
En la escuela. [At school.] I hide in locker room till Security Guard make his last round, then I sleep on mat in gym.

VIOLA
You can't go on like this. Zero, we must do something.

ZERO
When was your last bleeding?

RICKIE
So long ago I no remember.

ZERO
Try.

RICKIE
Eh...*marzo*? [March?]

ZERO
What did you eat or drink out of the ordinary that might have...?

RICKIE
(*Shrugs.*)
Hmm...I *bebí* [drank] some dandelion wine at spring break *fiesta*.

ZERO
Did you eat anything with it?

RICKIE
Tacos con chile. Mucho chile. Y tamales picantes. Y... [Tacos with chili. A lot of chili. And spicy tamales. And...]

ZERO
Did you dance that night?

RICKIE
Por supuesto. [Of course.] It was spring break. How else can I welcome *la primavera*? [spring]

ZERO
The fire smolders. All will be well.

VIOLA
Not living in a cold, empty building and no one to take care of her. Rickie, you'll just have to move in here—until the baby is born. Once your parents see their grandchild, they'll come around.

RICKIE
You have no room for—

VIOLA
You can have Robbie's room.

ZERO

Eh, maybe not...

VIOLA

Oh, that's right. Zero is in Robbie's room. Well, you can sleep with me. That way I'll know if you need anything in the night.

RICKIE

Pero, [But] it is against *la poliza* [the rules].

VIOLA

I'm sure the social worker will make an *excepción*. *Si?* [exception. Yes?]

RICKIE

(Beat.)

Muchas gracias.

VIOLA

Now that's settled, we can get on with preparations for our Solstice celebration. Let's see what the weather will be.

(Presses button. Image on screen: another ROBBIE, with dark hair, wearing a suit, in front of a weather map. Played by same ROBBIE, in a wig.)

ROBBIE *(on screen.)*

Winds from the north should move the clouds out, making tonight clear and cold. Sunrise tomorrow at 7:22. Looks like she'll be shining all day in a blue sky, Folks. Now for the five-day forecast—

(VI presses button. Image and sound off. VI looks at ZERO.)

ZERO

Perfect.

(He takes up the quena from the counter and begins to play. Lights fade. This music continues through scene change.)

Scene 3:

SETTING:

VIOLA's apartment, just before dawn the next morning. On computer screen, in the shape of a mandala: a colorful but dim collage of spheres—e.g., balls of all kinds, oranges, grapes, plums, soy nuts, peas, tomatoes, onions, garbanzo beans, planets, moons, protons, stones, rolling hills, wide eyes, young girls' breasts, pregnant women's stomachs, bubbles, marbles, pearls, milk duds, jawbreakers, donut holes, dandelions, whatever. The orange tree is decorated with paper birds of different colors. A large mirror has been set out to reflect the rising sun as it comes through the window. On the table: a wreath of evergreens with four candles. On the floor, the small drum. On the counter: a poppy seed cake and a glass pitcher of orange juice.

AT RISE:

The room is darkened, except for the dim glow of the computer image. ZERO, VIOLA, RICKIE are standing, each in a different corner of the room. ALL use "ritual voices" for this scene.

ZERO

The old year is dying.
The old fire is burned out.
All around us: darkness.
We must cast out the dark to make room for the light.
But first we must honor the dark and bless the gifts that darkness gives us.
For the dark, rich earth where seeds germinate...

ALL

We give thanks!

VIOLA

For the darkness that soothes us to sleep...

ALL

We give thanks!

RICKIE

For the darkness animals need for hibernation...

ALL

We give thanks!

ZERO

For the caves that that harbored our ancient ancestors...

ALL
We give thanks!

VIOLA
For the wombs that provide our first nourishment...

ALL
We give thanks!

RICKIE
For the cellars that keep us safe from tornadoes...

ALL
We give thanks

ZERO
For the darkness of suffering that strengthens our bonds with one another.

ALL
We give thanks!

ZERO
To prepare our hearts for the New Year, we must let go of the old, let go of our sorrows, forgive those who have hurt or disappointed us.

VIOLA
(Sighs.)
I forgive my memory for tiring out.

RICKIE
(Indicating her shape.)
I forgive my *cuerpo* [body] for going out of control.

VIOLA
I forgive Frank for dying before me.

RICKIE
I forgive my classmates for making fun of me. They *no comprenden*. [do not understand]

ZERO
I forgive the obscenely wealthy...who do not understand.

VIOLA
I forgive the CEO who stole Frank's pension.

RICKIE
I forgive *mi madre y padre*...[my mother and father] they *no comprenden*. [do not understand]

ZERO

In a spirit of hope,
we come together
(They cross to table.)
to light the new fire.

VIOLA

(Lights first candle.)
May the new sun bring us many blessings in the New Year.

ZERO

(Turning the wreath.)
We turn the wheel, disperse the gloom.

VIOLA

RICKIE

Call forth the sun from the rich earth's womb. Call forth *el sol* from the rich earth's womb.

(RICKIE lights second candle.)

ZERO

(Turning the wreath.)
We turn the wheel of death and birth.

VIOLA & RICKIE

We change the seasons of the earth.

(VIOLA lights third candle.)

ZERO

(Turning the wreath.)
We turn the wheel to beckon the light.

VIOLA

RICKIE

We summon the sun from the womb of night. We summon *el sol* from the womb of night.
(RICKIE lights fourth candle. VI and RICKIE sit.)

ZERO

In the beginning was the light of Mother Sun, which shone on all people, keeping the earth warm and providing good things to eat. All had enough. But some were not happy; they wanted more. They took from the others, leaving them without enough. This made Mother Sun unhappy and she hid herself in a cave to weep for humankind. The people missed the warmth and light of the sun. They shriveled in darkness and feared death—until finally they approached the cave where the Sun was hiding. They asked the birds to sing. They set mirrors in front of the cave so that the Sun might see her brilliant reflection and be drawn out. They asked their young girls to dance before the mouth of the cave, so that when all responded with laughter and clapping, the Sun would grow curious and come out to join in the dancing.

(ZERO begins drumming. RICKIE dances, gently at first, then with increasing exuberance. VIOLA claps the rhythm. As RICKIE dances, the sun slowly rises. We see its rays creeping through the window and being reflected in the mirrors. The final ecstatic moves of the dance match the intensity of the drumming. And then, RICKIE cries out and collapses. ZERO helps her to the sofa.)

Is it time? VIOLA

Yes. ZERO

What should we do? VIOLA

Usually the Chief Crone presides at birthings. ZERO

What does she do? VIOLA

She sings. To soothe the mother and welcome the newborn. ZERO

(RICKIE moans. ZERO kneels beside her, puts his hand on her stomach, throws back his head, closes his eyes.)

VIOLA
(Sings in a feeble but sweet voice. The sunlight brightens with her singing. The melody is the traditional Gaelic tune, "Morning Has Broken.")

DARKNESS HAS VANISHED,
MORNING IS DAWNING.
BLACK NIGHT IS BANISHED,
SUNLIGHT APPEARS.
WELCOME THE NEW DAY,
WELCOME THE SUNRISE,
LET THE MORN'S NEW RAYS
CAST OUT ALL FEARS.

GONE IS THE OLD YEAR,
COME IS THE NEW ONE.
GONE ARE THE OLD TEARS,
GONE WITH THE NIGHT.

VIOLA (*Cont.*)

KINDLE A NEW FLARE
DEEP IN YOUR HEART'S CORE,
CHERISH THE GLOW THERE,
MAKE IT GROW BRIGHT.

(On the last line, RICKIE cries out in a last birthing push, then falls back. ZERO reverently holds up a ball the size of a basketball. It is golden and luminous. The sunlight streaming in the window narrows on the luminous ball, just as the singing stops.)

(Blackout.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1:

SETTING:

Several hours later. VIOLA's apartment. The computer screen is blank. The mirrors and drum have been put away. The evergreen wheel-wreath has been moved to the counter, where half the cake remains. In the center of the table: a plate turned upside down, so that its base-rim can support the luminescent golden ball. Also on the table are two glasses, one empty and the other, VI's, half full of orange juice; also two plates with a few cake crumbs on them.

AT RISE:

VIOLA sits at the table, eyes closed, holding the ball in both hands, making maximum contact. As she holds it, it grows brighter. After a moment, she puts it back on its plate-stand where it dims slightly. She looks at her hands. She flexes each finger, makes fists and extends fingers, twirls hands from wrists, does finger exercises. She grows increasingly excited as she realizes nothing hurts. Standing, she snaps her fingers in jubilation, does the arm and hand movements of the hula, the Charleston, the Hokie-Pokie, walks like an Egyptian, etc. Finally, she pretends to be conducting a choir singing Handel's Messiah and sings along with them.

VIOLA

(Conducting and singing.)

AAAAH...LLE-LU-IA! ALLE-LU-IA! ALLE-LU-IA! A-LLE-E-LU-U-IA! AAAAH-LLE-LU-IA--

(ZERO enters from bedroom, closing door behind him.)

ZERO! ZERO, look! My arthritis is gone! Now I can open jars, button sweaters, lace shoes, peel oranges, fill the bird feeder.

ZERO

What will you do first?

VIOLA

Cut you another piece of poppy seed cake. Now it's my turn to serve.

ZERO

Thank you. But I've had sufficient.

VIOLA

What about Rickie?

ZERO

I just checked on her. Still asleep.

VIOLA

Well, *I'm* going to have another piece.

(Crosses to cake.)

Oh, if Robbie were here, he'd have a fit.

ZERO

Why?

VIOLA

He'd scold me for eating sugar and make me take my—

(An idea strikes.)

Ah!

(Crosses to end table, takes out blood-testing mechanism, hums "You Are My Sunshine" as she tests her sugar level.)

It's ninety-five. *Ninety-five*. Do you believe it? Roll on the dessert cart—I'm a sugar-short gal!

(Rubs Golden Ball.)

Such a wonderful baby, our little Sol.

(Gets an idea.)

I'm going to knit him a hat.

(Rummages around in drawer of end table. While she does this, ZERO cuts her another piece of cake.)

I wonder where I put my knitting bag...it's been so long... The babies born in the hospital all get those cute little hats. Ah, here it is.

(Settles on sofa. He hands her the cake.)

Oh, Zero—you spoil me almost as much as Robbie.

(Takes a bite of cake.)

What about the mother? I should make something for Rickie too. What do you think she would like?

ZERO

No offense to your hospitality, Vi, but I think she would like to go home.

VIOLA

Well of course. She'll want to show her parents the new grandbaby. I found their number in with her papers this morning and left a message to call us.

(Phone rings.)

That's probably them now.

(ZERO presses button, then stands to one side, making him invisible to those on "other end" of the call. Image appears on screen: RAY and ROBBIE.)

RAY (*On screen.*)

Hi there, Vi. It's Ray.

VIOLA

(*Standing.*)

And Robbie!

RAY (*On screen.*)

Right. Your Robbie's back in commission.

VIOLA

Oh, Sweetheart, I've missed you so. Did you miss me?

ROBBIE (*On screen.*)

Did you take your blood sugar count this morning, Vi?

VIOLA

So much has happened, Robbie—wait till you hear!

RAY (*On screen.*)

I have a few more errands to run. We'll be over shortly. Bye now.

VIOLA

Stop by when you get the chance.

(*Waves. ZERO presses button. Image disappears. VI lets out a sigh.*)

I am so pleased about Robbie.

(*Pets SOL.*)

Wait till he sees this adorable baby. He'll want us to have one of our own. Hmm...maybe at *Summer* Solstice.

ZERO

Vi...I'm not sure that—

VIOLA

Zero! Please forgive me. I should be thinking about your feelings in all this. Do you think you and Robbie could share a room? Just for a little while, until we find you a job.

ZERO

I don't want to inconvenience you.

VIOLA

How can you think such a thing?—after the beautiful gift you gave us last night.

RICKIE

(*Entering from bedroom.*)

Feliz [Happy]Solstice, everyone!

VIOLA

Rickie!

ZERO

Good morning, Mother. Did you sleep well?

RICKIE

Such a dream I had—that I gave birth to *el sol*. [the sun]

VIOLA

That was no dream.

(Indicating SOL.)

Here it is—your miracle baby.

RICKIE

This is mi bebé? [my baby]

(Picks up SOL.)

How warm and bright.

VIOLA

Don't you just love to hold him. And he never cries.

(She takes another bite of cake and starts knitting.

RICKIE puts SOL down, puts her hands on her abdomen, which is now flat. Marvels at this.)

RICKIE

No comprendo. [I don't understand.]

ZERO

Don't try.

(He picks up quena and begins to play. RICKIE picks up SOL and dances. After a few moments, the phone rings. Music and dancing stop. ZERO presses button. Image of RICKIE's parents appear on screen. During the following dialogue in Spanish, all three parties gesture broadly and emphatically, making the content clear. RICKIE's father repeatedly rubs his right temple.)

MADRE *(On screen.)*

Enriqueta--donde estás? [Enriqueta—where are you?]

PADRE *(On screen.)*

Quiénes son estas personas? [Who are these people?]

RICKIE

Mami, Papi, tengo bebé--mi pequeño sol! [Mama, Papa, I have a baby—my little Sol!]

(She holds SOL up to screen.)

MADRE *(On screen.)*

(To PADRE.)

Qué es esto? Está ella loca? [What is that? Is she crazy?]

VIOLA

(Jumps up and goes to screen, her knitting trailing her.)

It's true. She drank dandelion wine and ate chili and tamales and danced to bring in the spring and then we had a Solstice ritual and she turned the wheel again and danced to bring in the winter and gave birth to the sun. Aren't you proud?

MADRE *(On screen.)*

Enriqueta, llama a la enfermera. Tienes que mudarte del piso de locos e irte al departamento de maternidad. [Enriqueta, call the nurse. You need to be moved off that crazy floor and taken to the maternity ward.]

RICKIE

Mamá—ellos no son locos. Y yo no estoy embarazada. Es la verdad. Mira mi estómago. [Mama—they're not crazy. And I'm not pregnant anymore. It's true! Look at my stomach.]
(Shows her flat abdomen.)

PADRE *(On screen.)*

Ella tuvo un aborto! Ninguna hija mía se hará un aborto. Ahora, estás muerta para nosotros. Muerta! [She's had an abortion! No girl who has an abortion is a daughter of mine. Now you are dead to us. Dead!]

MADRE *(On screen.)*

(Crying.)

Enriqueta, por qué nos has hecho esto? [Enriqueta, why did you do this to us?]

PADRE *(On screen.)*

Cuélgale! [Cut her off!]

RICKIE

Esperen! Mami, Papi, no hice nada malo. [Wait! Mama, Papa, I didn't do anything bad.]

(MADRE reaches for button. Image disappears.)

VIOLA

(Beat.)

I have a feeling that didn't go well.

RICKIE

I am dead. *Muerta.*

VIOLA

(Comforting her.)

Rickie, dear.... You are the most alive person I have ever known. And you have given birth to the most wonderful little Sol.

ZERO

They do not understand.

VIOLA

But when they see the baby...surely then.

ZERO

Even then. Some people refuse to see.

RICKIE

What can I do?

ZERO

Your padre—he has pain, in his head?

RICKIE

Sí. Dolor de cabeza. [Yes. Headache.] Migraine.

ZERO

Take your Sol and hold it to his head.

VIOLA

Yes! That's it. *Then* they will understand.

ZERO

No, they will not understand. But they will feel.

RICKIE

(Picks up SOL.)

Mira! [Look!] My Sol is getting brighter.

(Presses buttons. Phone rings. Image of MADRE and PADRE reappear.)

PADRE *(On screen.)*

(Rubbing temple.)

Qué pasa? Estás llamando de la muerte? [What is this? You are calling from the dead?]

RICKIE

(Advancing towards screen.)

Sí, Papi. Tengo un regalo para ti. [Yes, Papa. I have a present for you.]

PADRE (*On screen.*)

(*Warding her off.*)

No quiero tus regalos. Tú no eres más un miembro de nuestra familia! [I don't want your presents. You are no longer a member of our family.]

RICKIE

(*Holding SOL to PADRE's right temple on screen.*)

Un besito de tu nieto. [A kiss from your new grandbaby.]

PADRE (*On screen.*)

Te dije que— [I told you I—]

(*Feels the relief.*)

Qué es estó? Qué hiciste? What is this? What have you done?]

RICKIE

Cómo te sientes? [How do you feel?]

PADRE (*On screen.*)

Sin dolor. [No pain.]

RICKIE

Te amo, Papi. [I love you, Papa.]

PADRE (*On screen.*)

Enriqueta...

RICKIE

Sí, Papi? [Yes, Papa?]

PADRE (*On screen.*)

Qué está pasando? [What is happening?]

RICKIE

La cosa más maravillosa. Siéntela. [The most wonderful thing. Feel it.]

(*He takes a deep breath.*)

Qué sientes? [What do you feel?]

PADRE (*On screen.*)

Ahora el dolor se ha ido. Me siento mejor...casi...feliz. [Now the pain is gone. I feel better...almost...happy.]

RICKIE

O, Papi!

PADRE (*On screen.*)

Y triste también...por la forma que te he tratado. Lo siento, Enriqueta. [And also sad...for how I treated you. I am sorry, Enriqueta.]

RICKIE

Te extraño, Papi. [I miss you, Papa.]

PADRE (*On screen.*)

Ven a casa, Niña. [Come home, Little One.]

RICKIE

Pero, estoy muerta. [But I am dead.]

PADRE (*On screen.*)

Te daremos vida nuevamente. Te prepararé tus tacos favoritos—con chile. Y tu mamá te hará tus tamales picantes. Vendrás? [We will give you life again. I will fix your favorite tacos—with chili. And Mama will make spicy tamales. Will you come?]

RICKIE

Sí, Papi.

(*Blows kiss. Presses button. Image fades.*)

Zero, how can I thank you?

ZERO

Your dancing was gift enough.

RICKIE

This morning...the Solstice sunrise...our ritual...it makes my heart swell. If only *todo el mundo* [the whole world] could have such an experience...

VIOLA

Why can't they?

ZERO

They do not understand.

VIOLA

But you could help them understand—make them *feel*.

ZERO

First they must want to, must be open...ready...

VIOLA

Couldn't you help them want to?

RICKIE

Sí. You need to advertise, Zero. Put a notice *en el periódico*. [in the newspaper] Buy a thirty-second spot on *la televisión*. Get a website, Facebook friends, a Twitter account, bumper stickers.

ZERO

What would they say?

RICKIE

Hmm... *Qué cosas más* [What else] you do besides rituals?

ZERO

(Dramatically.)

I climb up the world tree, the cosmic tree that connects heaven and earth, up the pole of the tent, up, up, through the smoke-hole into the sky where the horned creatures pull me in a chariot, taking me on a journey to find the gifts of the spirit—the gift of fire, the gift of prophecy, the gift of life, the gift of love. Then I come back, back through the smoke-hole, back down the chimney, bringing the sun, bringing the New Year, bringing gifts of the spirit for everyone. I also conduct out-of-body experiences for others. And escort the souls of elders on their journey to the next world.

(Pause.)

RICKIE

Hmm...*probablemente* [probably] we better stick with turning the wheel of the year.

VIOLA

Okay then. How about this for slogan? “Sha-man shares rituals” ?

ZERO

I don’t like advertising. Too commercial.

RICKIE

It’s *el modo americano*: [the American way] make people want things. Like liposuction or SUV’s.

ZERO

But turning the wheel of the seasons is sacred. We shouldn’t have to *make* people want it. It is a basic need—like water.

VIOLA

Maybe we’ve just lost our sense of taste.

RICKIE

Too much wine and soda. No appreciate *agua pura*. [pure water]

VIOLA

But people *do* feel the need to welcome the seasons.

RICKIE

Por supuesto. [Of course.] Why else we have spring break? And look at all the *regalos* [presents] and *fiestas*[parties] at Winter Solstice time.

ZERO

People need more than presents and parties.

RICKIE

Exactamente! [Exactly] That is what you can help them understand. No?

ZERO

No TV commercials.

RICKIE

Bueno. Un pequeño [Okay. A tiny] newspaper ad and a very tasteful website. How much *dinero* [money] you have?

ZERO

Five dollars.

VIOLA

I have twenty.

RICKIE

Not enough.

VIOLA

I have more in the bank—still have all my house money.

ZERO

I can't take your savings, Vi.

VIOLA

You can pay me back.

RICKIE

Or you could be partners in the Ritual Business.

VIOLA

What a marvelous idea!

RICKIE

We can work out details *mañana*. [tomorrow] *Ahora* [now] I have to take Sol *a mi casa*. [home]

(Picks up SOL.)

VIOLA

But I haven't finished his hat.

RICKIE

(Gathering up her things.)

No importa. [Doesn't matter.] I bring him back.

VIOLA

Yes! Bring him often—I've always wanted to be a grandmother!

(RICKIE exits.)

Zero...I feel so...

ZERO

Blessed?

VIOLA

So many blessings. I might just burst with happiness. Do you think that's possible?

ZERO

(Nods.)

And flood the world with light.

(Doorbell rings.)

VIOLA

Rickie forgot something?

ZERO

I'll get it.

(Opens door. RAY is there, holding a small evergreen tree in a pot.)

RAY

(Not happy.)

It's you!

ZERO

Yes, it is I—Zurvan Ehecatl Ra Ogiuwu.

RAY

What are you doing here?

VIOLA

Zero is my guest.

RAY

(To ZERO.)

If you've done her any harm, I'll—

VIOLA

Ray! Where are your manners?

RAY

Vi—what are you doing letting this shiftless, vagrant Commie into your apartment?

VIOLA

I'm just doing what any decent person would do. We can't let him sleep on the street.

RAY

You don't *know* him. He's...dangerous.

VIOLA

Oh. Do *you* know him?

RAY

I know him—and all his kind.

VIOLA

Zero, I didn't realize you knew my nephew.

ZERO

Only for a short time. We have a...wagering acquaintance.

RAY

If you think I'm going to—

VIOLA

(Interrupting.)

Where's Robbie?

RAY

Just getting charged up at the R-bar downstairs.

VIOLA

That scamp! He never takes a drink here. Must be the good cheer of the season. Come in, Ray. Have some poppy seed cake and Solstice juice.

RAY

(Eying ZERO suspiciously as he crosses farther into the room.)

No thanks, Vi. I just wanted to bring you this tree.

(Puts tree down.)

VIOLA

It's charming. How kind of you, Ray. Let's sit and visit.

(Takes him to sofa and they sit. ZERO takes empty plate and glass to kitchen.)

RAY

Have you given any more thought to what we talked about yesterday?

VIOLA
Yesterday?

RAY
When I brought you supplies.

VIOLA
The pizza was delicious—all four seasons.

RAY
About the money.

VIOLA
(Pulls bill from pocket.)
Look—I got it back!

RAY
How?

VIOLA
Zero brought it. He happened to be on the corner when I threw it out the window.

RAY
(Eying ZERO suspiciously.)
Wasn't that convenient?

VIOLA
So of course I invited him to lunch. And then Rickie came. And one thing led to another.

RAY
It did?

VIOLA
I wish you had been here.

RAY
I do too.

VIOLA
(Putting bill away.)
So. Was that what you wanted to talk about?

RAY
What I want to talk about is *investing* money.

VIOLA
Don't talk to me about the stock market. We were doing fine before the crash of ought-one.

VIOLA (*Cont.*)

(*Gestures to souvenir life preserver.*)

Even took that Carefree Caribbean Cruise. But we lost everything in the market except Frank's pension. And then his CEO—

(*Stops abruptly.*)

But I've forgiven him.

RAY

Who?

VIOLA

Frank's CEO. I've forgiven him.

RAY

Vi, I want to explain to you how investing works.

VIOLA

I know how it works.

RAY

You do?

VIOLA

Somebody needs money to start a business so other people give him money and then they're partners in the business. Right?

RAY

Sort of.

VIOLA

So I've decided to invest the house money.

RAY

That's great!

(*Takes out copy of Wall Street Journal from coat pocket.*)

I've got a lead on some solid stock that's definitely on the way up and—

VIOLA

I'm investing in Zero's Ritual Business.

RAY

(*Looks at ZERO who shrugs, then back at VI who smiles.*)

What's been going on here?

VIOLA

I told you, we've been having quite a time.

ZERO

(At counter.)

A time out of time. A magical “time out” from everyday life. We have visited a solemn place, a place deep inside our spirits where we long for meaning and connection—to the transcendent in ourselves, in the universe, in one another.

RAY

(Beat.)

Vi—how could you let this fruitcake in here?

ZERO

The door was open.

RAY

And will be again—

(Crosses to “door,” mimes opening it.)

just in time for you to leave.

VIOLA

Ray! I’m shocked. I know your father taught you better manners than that.

RAY

Vi, you can’t just let homeless weirdoes into your apartment. It’s dangerous. This moocher is a sham.

VIOLA

(Correcting him.)

A sha-man.

RAY

A con-artist! Who thinks he can waltz in here and take advantage of an old lady by asking for her money.

ZERO

I’m not the one doing that.

RAY

What?

VIOLA

He didn’t ask for money. I offered it.

RAY

Are you crazy?

ZERO

Be careful.

RAY

Of what?

ZERO

Of your tongue. You might hurt yourself. And Vi. I wouldn't like to see that.

RAY

Who cares what you would like, you lazy phony?

VIOLA

(Distressed.)

Ray, Ray, I do wish you would have some poppy-seed cake. We were all having such a warm and wonderful holiday. Oh, if only Sol were here, and you could hold him, you would feel so much better and everything would be peaceful.

RAY

Who is Sol?

VIOLA

Rickie's miracle baby—born right here at Winter Solstice.

RAY

Someone had a baby here in this apartment?

VIOLA

Enriqueta Tierrabuena. She's a dancing social worker.

RAY

This is sooooo out of line. I think I'm going to have to call Social Services.

VIOLA

I invited her to stay with us. Oh, you should have seen it, Ray, it was—

RAY

No! Stop there. I don't want to hear about it.

VIOLA

You have to be open, Ray. Cast out the dark to make room for the light. Cherish the glow—make it grow bright.

RAY

(Pulls himself together. Deep breath.)

Vi. Read my lips. If you do not immediately invest what's left of your house money in the stock market, in three years it will be gone and *you* will be the one living on the corner. Now I am coming back tomorrow with the papers you need to sign. I expect by then you will have...invited this imposter to leave.

(Exits.)

VIOLA

(Calling after him.)

Bring the money when you come tomorrow, Ray. Cash would be best.

(Looks at ZERO.)

ZERO

He doesn't understand.

VIOLA

What can we do?

ZERO

Wait. Hope.

(Lights down. Music for scene change.)

Scene 2

SETTING: *The next day. Plates, glasses, cake, and knitting have been put away. Pen and papers on table. The evergreen tree is decorated with white lights. In the hole of the hanging “Carefree Caribbean Cruise” souvenir life preserver sits SOL, wearing a neon-orange knitted cap.*

AT RISE: *VIOLA pushes the life preserver like a swing. ROBBIE is dusting the furniture with a feather duster.*

VIOLA

(To SOL.)

Wheeee! Isn't this fun? I'm just going to spoil the dickens out of you, Sweetie.

(Notices ROBBIE.)

Robbie, you don't have to do that anymore.

ROBBIE

I don't?

VIOLA

I can do it myself now—no more arthritis. Remember?

ROBBIE

Hmm...no, I don't remember. I may have to get...adjusted.

VIOLA

Well, I know it's a change for you, but it should be a happy one.

ROBBIE

Can't I still do the cleaning?

VIOLA

I suppose we could take turns—or do it together. That would be fair. Still, I feel I owe you for all the times you did it by yourself when I wasn't able.

ROBBIE

But that's what I'm here for.

VIOLA

Where's Zero?

ROBBIE

Left while you were in the tub. Said he was going hunting.

(Indicating papers on table.)

ROBBIE (*Cont.*)

Oh—Rickie said you need to fill out the rest of that form.

VIOLA

(Crosses to table.)

Might as well do that now.

(Picks up form and reads.)

“Any change in your financial status?” We did that. ...

(Moving pen down page.)

“Marital status”....

(Moving pen down page.)

Here we are. “Any change in your health status?” Well, I should say so! And it’s all good news.

(Sits and writes.)

“No...more...arthritis...No...more...diabetes...”

(Looks up.)

Isn’t it wonderful? You won’t have to nag me anymore about taking medicine or not eating cookies.

(Reading form.)

“Residency requirement?” What’s that?

ROBBIE

Let’s see.

(Looking over VI’s shoulder.)

Just means you can’t be homeless—you have to have a residence to house me in order to be eligible.

VIOLA

(Beat.)

Oh no.

ROBBIE

What is it?

VIOLA

You mean this form is for “Robbie Eligibility.”

ROBBIE

Yes.

VIOLA

But if I can do everything for myself now, maybe Social Services won’t pay you to look after me.

ROBBIE

I wouldn’t worry about it, Vi. There’s still the other business.

VIOLA
What other business?

ROBBIE
You know...your...condition.

VIOLA
What condition?

ROBBIE
The things you...can't do for yourself.

VIOLA
Like what?

ROBBIE
Like use the stove.

VIOLA
(Stands, flexes fingers.)
But I can turn the knobs now.

ROBBIE
That's not the reason.

VIOLA
What is?

ROBBIE
Don't you remember? You forgot to...um...the fire in the kitchen.

VIOLA
Oh.

ROBBIE
And sometimes you leave the water running.

VIOLA
Maybe that's to put out the fire.

ROBBIE
You just...sometimes you...forget. You forget to close the front door or put food back in the fridge or turn off the caller-screen...

VIOLA
It must be terrible for you, Robbie...to have to pick up after me all the time.

ROBBIE

It's my job. I don't mind at all.

VIOLA

(Waves form playfully.)

"Status of memory"? Lost in space.

(Sighs.)

ROBBIE

Look at the bright side: your Robbie Eligibility is not in jeopardy.

VIOLA

(Crossing to sofa, patting cushion next to her.)

Come and sit, Robbie.

ROBBIE

I've got work to do. Ray's coming.

VIOLA

He is?

ROBBIE

"I am coming back tomorrow!" I heard him even in the next room.

VIOLA

It's "tomorrow" all day. We've got time. Come on, let's you and I visit.

ROBBIE

I don't have to visit. I live here.

VIOLA

You know what I mean.

ROBBIE

You won't...try anything, will you?

VIOLA

Don't you think I've learned my lesson? Or do you imagine you're so irresistible I won't be able to help myself?

ROBBIE

(Sitting next to her.)

What did you want to talk about?

VIOLA

Have you held little Sol?

Oh yes, I've dusted him.

ROBBIE

And did you notice anything?

VIOLA

He's very warm.

ROBBIE

And gets brighter when you hold him?

VIOLA

No.

ROBBIE

Didn't get brighter?

VIOLA

No.

ROBBIE

Hmm... Did you notice anything about *you* while you were holding him?

VIOLA

Like what?

ROBBIE

Like how he makes you *feel*?

VIOLA

(*Beat.*)

No. I don't think so.

ROBBIE

You know, Robbie...I love you more than anyone, but sometimes—I hope you won't be offended, but I think it's important to be honest with those we love...

VIOLA

What is it?

ROBBIE

Sometimes you don't seem...it's a terrible thing to say...

VIOLA

Just *say* it.

ROBBIE

VIOLA

Sometimes you don't seem human.

(Rushing in.)

Even though you're kind and thoughtful and caring and—

ROBBIE

It's okay, Vi. I can understand why you'd think that.

VIOLA

Would you like to be...more human?

ROBBIE

Why?

VIOLA

So you could...feel things.

ROBBIE

It's not as efficient.

VIOLA

That's true.

ROBBIE

And I'm not sure you'd like it as much as you think you would.

VIOLA

Why not?

ROBBIE

Well, if I could feel...impatience, resentment, jealousy, hurt, anger, and all the rest, I might not be as kind and thoughtful and caring. We might be petty and argue and sulk.

VIOLA

And then we could laugh and kiss and make up and be happy. Like other couples.

ROBBIE

And that's what you want—that roller-coaster ride?

VIOLA

Yes!

ROBBIE

It's...it's just so...messy. It doesn't seem worth it.

VIOLA

But how would you know if you haven't experienced it?

ROBBIE
 Good point.

VIOLA
 If only I could describe it for you.

ROBBIE
 Try.

VIOLA
 Do you like the sunlight?

ROBBIE
 Of course. My sensors operate more efficiently. I don't have to get charged at the R-bar.

VIOLA
 Well imagine if there were no sunlight, if we lived always in the darkness. *That's* life without feeling.

ROBBIE
 Feeling is like sunlight?

VIOLA
(Nodding.)
 It washes over you, invades you, makes all your juices flow.

ROBBIE
 Sounds...out-of-control.

VIOLA
 Exactly!

ROBBIE
 Why would anyone *want* to be out of control?

VIOLA
 Because you don't know what will happen next, because it's...thrilling.

ROBBIE
 I don't do thrills, Vi. It's just not...part of my makeup.
(VI sighs.)
 I know I'm a disappointment to you. I'm sorry.
(He pats VI's hand.)
 You're not going to make me watch *The Wizard of Oz* again, are you?
(VI shakes her head with resignation.)
 And you're not going to...run off with Zero?

VIOLA

Where did you get that idea?

ROBBIE

Well, you're business partners now. And I've seen how he looks at you.

VIOLA

How?

ROBBIE

Like you're somebody special. And why shouldn't he? You are.

VIOLA

Robbie! I think you *are* jealous.

ROBBIE

I just wouldn't want to be out of a job. I mean *this* job.

VIOLA

Oh.

ROBBIE

After all, I'm perfect for you.

VIOLA

(Half-heartedly.)

That's true.

(ZERO comes in front door with two dead squirrels, which he holds up.)

ZERO

I am preparing a very special dinner tonight. Trapped these in the park.

(Puts squirrels on counter. Phone rings. ROBBIE presses button. Image of RICKIE appears.)

RICKIE *(On screen.)*

Hola, Robbie. Hola, Zero.

ROBBIE

Rickie. Why aren't you in school?

RICKIE *(On screen.)*

El principal make me take *maternidad* leave. So I come to work. Is Vi home?

ROBBIE

(Stepping aside so RICKIE can see VI.)

Of course.

VIOLA

(Still not herself.)

Hello, Rickie.

RICKIE *(On screen.)*

Vi—I have here your statements from *el banco* [the bank] and is very strange.

VIOLA

What do you mean?

RICKIE *(On screen.)*

Every month three thousand *dólares* [dollars] come out of your account.

VIOLA

Well of course, that's for Ray to pay my bills.

RICKIE *(On screen.)*

No, no. There is withdrawal for rent, for computer, for *médicos*, [doctors] insurance, groceries. And *otro* [other] withdrawal for three thousand *dólares*.

VIOLA

Every month?

RICKIE *(On screen.)*

Sí.

VIOLA

There must be some mistake.

RICKIE *(On screen.)*

Is what I think.

VIOLA

I'll have to ask Ray about it.

RICKIE *(On screen.)*

Buena idea. (Adiós! [Good idea. Goodbye!]

(Image disappears. ROBBIE presses computer button.)

VIOLA

I'm sure he'll set it all straight.

ZERO

Vi...who is Ray?

VIOLA

My twin brother Sebastian's boy. I thought I told you that. He takes such good care of me.

*(ROBBIE starts to say something, thinks better of it.
Doorbell rings. ROBBIE opens door, then exits to bedroom.
RAY enters with a bag of groceries, sees ZERO)*

RAY

What are you still doing here? I thought I told—

VIOLA

(Interrupting.)

Please don't, Ray. I wish you could get into the spirit of the season.

RAY

I'm going to have to be out of town for a while, Vi, so I brought next week's supplies early.

(Puts bag on counter, takes out bottle and holds it up.)

And a bottle of champagne so you can toast in the New Year while you watch the Times Square ball descend.

(Puts bottle on counter. Reacts to squirrels.)

VIOLA

Thank you, Ray. Did you bring the cash?

RAY

What cash?

VIOLA

The cash for Zero's business.

RAY

I told you, Vi, that's not a good idea. People need to invest in something that's going to make them money.

VIOLA

But I need to invest in something I believe in.

RAY

You're too gullible for you own good.

VIOLA

You may be right about that, Ray. But I still want to give Zero the money.

ZERO

Please, Vi—I don't want to cause any trouble for—

(VI raises a hand to stop ZERO, but looks at RAY.)

RAY

You can't give him the money.

VIOLA

Why not?

RAY

It's gone.

VIOLA

Gone where?

RAY

(Sighs.)

Yesterday I got an inside tip on stock that was supposed to take off. Ameri-Right. So I put what was left of the house money in that.

ZERO

And?

RAY

This morning it dropped out of sight.

VIOLA

What?! I don't remember signing anything.

RAY

You didn't need to. I have power of attorney. I can draw out whatever I want.

VIOLA

Then why do you always bring papers for me to sign?

RAY

I figured it made you feel good to think you still...had some control...

VIOLA

What about the rest of the money, Ray?

(RAY gives her a quizzical look.)

The three thousand a month?

RAY

(Taken aback.)

How do you know about that?

ZERO

Social Services has the bank statements.

RAY

(Collapses onto chair.)

Oh.

ZERO

Answer the question.

RAY

(To VI.)

I had...expenses.

VIOLA

Well...why didn't you...ask me for it?

RAY

(Looks away.)

I was going to...pay you back.

VIOLA

But you always seemed...I thought you were rich.

RAY

I was...once.

VIOLA

What happened?

RAY

Unforeseen circumstances. A twist of fate.

VIOLA

(Trying to get a handle.)

So...now there's...how much is left?

(No response.)

Ray?

RAY

(Sighs.)

Nothing.

(Beat.)

It was such a sure thing.

VIOLA

Nothing?

(RAY shakes his head.)

Not three years? VIOLA *(Cont.)*

Not three days. RAY

What about my Social Security? VIOLA

There is no more Social Security. RAY
(Beat.)
 I'm sorry, Vi.

(Bewildered.) VIOLA
 But what...what am I going to do?

I don't know. Maybe we can get Social Services to— RAY

Ray—how could you? My own nephew. VIOLA

Vi...I'm not your nephew. RAY

You're not? VIOLA

I'm your financial adviser. Frank hired me before he died. RAY

Frank? VIOLA

Your husband. When he was sick...he hired me to look out for you... RAY

And what a good job you've done. ZERO
(RAY shoots ZERO a look.)

Why didn't you tell me you weren't my nephew. VIOLA

RAY

I did, Vi, but you never remembered. You seemed to want to believe we were family, so I...let it ride.

ZERO

Very thoughtful of you.

RAY

Butt out, you gold-digging fraud!

ZERO

Me?

VIOLA

(To RAY.)

There's no need to abuse Zero. It's not his fault.

RAY

(Stands, with increasing agitation.)

Yes it *is* his fault. If he hadn't shown up with his hare-brained scheme.... Don't you see? I had to draw out the last of the money before you got your wacko boarder here to take you to the bank and draw it out yourself. I figured if I could get that big return on the investment, you'd never find out about the...earlier withdrawals.

(Shouting at ZERO.)

What are you doing here anyway? Who the hell are you, *really*, you creepy nut case?

VIOLA

Ray!

ZERO

Your brother.

RAY

What?!

ZERO

You've lost the wager, Ray. But we're still brothers.

RAY

Vi, you better throw this fake out before he makes you crazier.

VIOLA

Ray! Calm down.

RAY

(Facing off with ZERO as VI crosses to retrieve SOL)

You and I have nothing in common—get it? Nothing!

ZERO

The same sun shines on me that shines on you.

VIOLA

(Offering SOL to RAY.)

Here, Ray—let Sol warm you. It has a settling effect.

RAY

(Waves her away.)

I don't want to be settled. I want to rant and rave at my pathetic, stinking luck. I want to rage at the fickle gods who play their favorites, only it's not me anymore! I had plans, big plans. I wanted to get back in the game. I wanted to have it all again...to be powerful, buy anything... anybody...

(Breaks down.)

I wanted to be...on top of the world.

VIOLA

(Holds out SOL.)

Please, Ray—

(RAY knocks SOL out of VI's hands and storms out of the apartment, leaving the door open. The others look after him for a moment, stunned. Then VI sits down and ZERO retrieves SOL and gives it to her. She clutches SOL to her breast, forlorn.)

ZERO

Would you like a glass of water, Vi?

(She shakes her head.)

Would you like me to call Rickie? Ray may have been right about Social Services being—

(She shakes her head.)

You'll probably be in a...different category now. It might make you eligible for—

VIOLA

No. Thank you.

ZERO

Is there...is there anything I can do?

VIOLA

Look in the bottom of the end table. There's a pig.

ZERO

A pig?

VIOLA

I want you to sacrifice it. Didn't you say that shamans do that?

(ZERO retrieves piggy bank from end table, holds it out to VI.)

VIOLA *(Cont.)*

I want you to slaughter the pig and take the money for your ritual business.

ZERO

I can't do that, Vi. I can't take your last pennies.

(Puts pig down. Indicates quena.)

Shall I play for you?

(No response. ZERO plays for a few moments, then stops.)

VIOLA

Thank you. That was very nice.

(Beat.)

Zero...

ZERO

I'm listening.

VIOLA

You said...you said before that you...escorted souls on their last journey.

ZERO

Yes.

VIOLA

Would you...take me?

ZERO

Vi, I know your situation seems...desperate now. But you should talk to Rickie. I'm sure something can be...worked out...for you.

VIOLA

You may be right.

ZERO

Then let me call.

VIOLA

No. I don't want to work something out. It's time. I'm tired...and so very sad.

ZERO

But yesterday you were counting your blessings.

VIOLA

That was before...

(Beat.)

ZERO

You might feel different about it...after a while.

VIOLA

Zero.

ZERO

Yes?

VIOLA

I don't think Robbie is...

ZERO

What?

VIOLA

I don't think Robbie is human.

(ZERO gives her a comforting touch. Beat. VI puts SOL on table.)

What do I have to do...to get ready?

ZERO

Can you forgive Ray?

VIOLA

You ask me that? You seemed to be trying to make him even angrier.

ZERO

At himself.

VIOLA

He stole my three years. Maybe six.

ZERO

Yes.

VIOLA

Why should I forgive him?

ZERO

He's unhappy.

VIOLA

He didn't care how unhappy he would make me.

ZERO
 He cared. But not enough.

VIOLA
 How could he do it?

ZERO
 He's flesh and blood...

VIOLA
(Beat.)
 Yes, that's true. He's family.
(ZERO nods.)
 Still...shouldn't he at least have to be sorry before I have to forgive him?

ZERO
 I think he *is* sorry.

VIOLA
 I mean...take some responsibility...make amends.

ZERO
 Maybe he can only do that *if* you forgive him.

VIOLA
 And if I don't?

ZERO
 He'll be lost.

VIOLA
 But—

ZERO
 And so will you.

(Pause. She sighs, then nods assent that implies forgiveness.)

VIOLA
 What will it be like—the journey?

ZERO
 It's different for each person.

VIOLA
 What will happen?

ZERO

I'll play the drum. You just listen. Think only of the drum beat. After a while you won't have to think. You will feel relaxed, then drowsy. Your arms and legs will feel heavy. Your breathing will become slower and deeper, your pulse rate slower. Your body will feel no pain, yet you will be able to smell and taste and touch whatever you wish to. You will recall lost memories and feel a lightness, as if you were flying or floating. You will be in control of your breathing, your heartbeat. When you are ready, you can will them to be slower...and slower...and then, gently, quietly, to stop.

(Beat.)

After that, I do not know.

VIOLA

What do you think?

ZERO

I think...I believe...you will find peace.

VIOLA

And you'll be there—guiding me.

ZERO

Yes, I'll be there.

VIOLA

I'm ready then.

(ZERO begins a slow, steady drumming, closes his eyes, throws his head back. As VI passes through the stages identified, a light gradually brightens on her, until it is brilliant. Then...RAY appears in the doorway)

RAY

Vi...

(ZERO stops drumming. Brilliant light fades. RAY knocks gently on the frame.)

It's me...Ray.

(Still in doorway.)

I'm sorry I stormed out like that. I'm sorry for...I know I've made a mess of things. But I want to try to make it up to you.

(Beat.)

Vi?

(Comes far enough into the room to see her.)

ZERO

She's leaving.

RAY

(Going to VI.)

No! Vi? No! No! You can't! Aunt Vi? Please...I'm so sorry...please come back.
Can you ever forgive me? I need your forgiveness!

ZERO

That won't be enough.

(RAY looks at ZERO quizzically.)

You have to forgive yourself. You have to earn your own forgiveness.

RAY

Earn forgiveness?

ZERO

Become...worthy of it.

RAY

How?

ZERO

Become a different person from the one who committed the offense.

RAY

Different?

ZERO

Better.

RAY

How? I don't know if.. This isn't the way I...I mean...I only wanted... I don't know what
to...Can you help me?

ZERO

(Picking up SOL.)

Of course. Not to help would be selfish.

RAY

(Indicating SOL.)

Is there enough...to share?

ZERO

Take as much as you need.

RAY

As much as I want?

ZERO
As much as you need.

RAY
And if I take more?

ZERO
It will not warm you.

RAY
(*Beat.*)

I understand.
(He accepts SOL from ZERO. SOL grows brighter and brighter [and presumably warmer and hotter] as the sound of distant, eerie music grows louder and louder until RAY cannot bear the touch any longer. He drops SOL, which accidentally knocks the pig to the floor. It breaks open and a great number of large gold coins scatter noisily. Bright light and music fade.)

VIOLA
(Slowly coming back.)
Ray? Is it you? Where am I?

ZERO
You're home, Vi.

VIOLA
What was that noise?

ZERO
(Picks up a coin, reads inscription.)
"Engelhard. One troy ounce fine gold." Looks like a couple hundred of them.

VIOLA
What?

RAY
Vi—where did this money come from?

VIOLA
(Still hazy.)

I...I don't know.
(Taking in the breakage.)

Oh, dear!

RAY
How long have you had...the piggy bank?

VIOLA
A long time. It was so cute.

RAY
Where did you get it?

VIOLA
Frank gave it to me when...
(Reaching for the memory.)

RAY
When what?

VIOLA
When we sold the house and moved in here.

RAY
Ah!

VIOLA
They don't allow dogs or cats here. So Frank got us a pig. Said we should have a pet and pigs are good luck. Since Frank died, she wouldn't come out of there—in mourning, I guess.

RAY
(Picking up photo of Frank.)
Dear old devilish, once-burned Uncle Frank.

(RICKIE arrives at doorway out of breath, waving papers.)

RICKIE
(Coming into the room.)
Señora Green! Vi! I think I figured out about the *dinero*. [money] Your nephew Ray, he was—

(Sees the scattered gold.)
Oye, ¿qué pasa aquí? [Yikes, what's going on here?]

RAY
(Hands photo of Frank to RICKIE.)
Looks like Vi and Zero just found a third partner for their Ritual Business.
(Crosses to counter.)

RICKIE
(Looking at VI and ZERO.)
Is true?

VI & ZERO

Is true!

RICKIE

(Picking up SOL.)

Do you hear that, my beautiful Sol?

(Puts SOL in life-saver “swing.”)

Now you will be appreciated and celebrated by everyone!

VI

This is going to be a wonderful New Year!

RICKIE

Feliz Año Nuevo!

(RAY uncorks champagne—a loud pop.)

ALL

Happy New Year!

(Lights fade out except for spot on SOL.)

Music: “Darkness has vanished....”

End of play.