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Dramatic Publishing

THE HIGHEST HEAVEN

A Full-length Play

by

JOSE CRUZ GONZALEZ



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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“When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So, it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life.”

—César Chávez

*“La necesidad desconoce fronteras.”
“Necessity knows no borders.”*

—Mexican American Proverb

*“Butterflies
Flying Like the Breeze
Sucking Nectar Quietly
Colors Everywhere”*

—Kelsey Miguel González, Age 9

“If you haven’t forgiven yourself something, how can you forgive others?”

—Dolores Huerta

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The Highest Heaven premiered with Childsplay, Inc., in association with Borderlands Theater in January 1999 at the Tucson Center for the Performing Arts and February 1999 at the Tempe Performing Arts Center, Tempe, Arizona.

CAST

Huracán STEVEN PENA
Kika/Wife. ALEJANDRA GARCIA
El Negro ELLEN BENTON
Doña Elena. DEBRA K. STEVENS
Moises, Police Official, Addict, Undertaker-Barber, Husband . .
JON GENTRY

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director DAVID SAAR
Scenic Design. GRO JOHRE
Costume Design CONNIE FURR
Lighting Design AMARANTE LUCERO
Music Composition/Sound Design. . . . RICK ARECCO & ALLEN LEA
Dramaturg GRAHAM WHITEHEAD
Properties DARREN GOAD
Technical Director KENNETH P. LAGER JR.
Stage Manager MARIE KRUEGER-JONES

Originally developed at Childsplay, Inc. with support from the NEA/TCG Theatre Residency Program for Playwrights.

The Highest Heaven was workshopped in 1996 at the New Visions/New Voices Program, The Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C.

Special thanks: David Saar, Debra K. Stevens, Graham Whitehead, Rosemary Walsh, Childsplay, NEA/TCG, The Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices Program, John McCluggage, Mary Hall Surface, Susan Mason, Palabras, the San Jose Repertory, CSULA, Isaiah Sanders, Lucille Oliver, Alejandra Garcia Iñiguez, and my family.

The Highest Heaven received its second production with the Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum's P.L.A.Y., Los Angeles, Calif., February 7 – March 4, 2000.

CAST

Doña Elena, Kika, Wife CHRISTINE DEAVER
Moises, Police Official, Addict, Undertaker-Barber
. DAVID FURUMOTO
Huracán OMAR GOMEZ
El Negro RICKE V. HOWELL

PRODUCTION STAFF and CREW

Director. DIANE RODRIGUEZ
Set Design EDWARD E. HAYNES JR.
Costume Design INGRID FERRIN
Lighting Design JOSE LOPEZ
Musical Director/Sound Design DAVE OSSMANN
Casting AMY LIEBERMAN
Production Stage Manager BOBBY DELUCA
Stage Manager VANESSA J. NOON
Coordinating Producer DOLORES CHAVEZ
Artistic Supervisor COREY MADDEN
Master Electrician EFRAIN MORALES
Production Assistant ROBERT BOYD
Crew Head/Audio Engineer JAMES WITHERALL
Tour Coordinator. KIMIKO L. BRODER

THE HIGHEST HEAVEN

A Full-length Play
For 3 Men and 2 Women, some doubling

CHARACTERS

HURACAN a 12-year-old Latino boy.

EL NEGRO . . a Black man in his 50s. Worn like the earth,
he is troubled by his past.
Caretaker of the monarch butterflies.

KIKA. Huracán's mother. A memory.
(May also play the WIFE)

DONA ELENA a dark-skinned Mexican widow.
Old, possessive, petty and disturbed.

MOISES, THE POLICE OFFICIAL, THE ADDICT, THE
UNDERTAKER-BARBER and the HUSBAND may be
played by one actor. A fool. Related to Doña Elena.

BUTTERFLY EFFECT: Both productions incorporated a small fan which was rigged below the stage. A small hole was cut on the stage floor to allow the actor to remove the cut piece and release the butterfly confetti over the fan allowing the butterflies to float high into the air. The floating butterflies seen throughout the play were rigged on long poles and manipulated by actors.

MUSIC: The Negro spirituals used in the play are believed to be public domain. They are: O, Sit Down Servant, Somebody's Calling My Name, Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray, Roll, Jordan, Roll. Music is available at the back of the playbook.

Glossary

Andale: Go on!

'*Amá*: Mother.

Amigito: Little friend.

'*Apá*: Father.

Ay, que susto!: Oh, what fright!

Cabezon: Knucklehead, hardheaded.

Chocolate: Chocolate candy.

Cucaracha: Cockroach.

Conejo: Rabbit.

Día de los muertos: Day of the Dead: A holiday which blends the pre-Hispanic Aztec beliefs honoring the dead with the Catholic Church's All Saints' and All Souls' Days (November 1 and 2).

Deportados: Those who are deported.

El Diablo: The Devil.

Gringo: A North American citizen.

Guitarra: Guitar.

Idiota: Idiot.

Imposible: Impossible.

Indio: Indian.

La Llorona: The Weeping Woman. A legend having this ghostly woman wandering along canals and rivers crying for her missing children. Told to frighten children into behaving.

Mariposa: Butterfly.

Mijo: My son.

Monarca: Monarch butterfly.

Muchacho: Boy.

Nana: Grandmother.

No hay de que: You're welcome; don't mention it.

Oruga: Caterpillar.

Pobrecito: Poor little one.

Primo: Cousin.

Querido: My love.

Santuario de las Mariposas: Butterfly Sanctuary

Señor: Mister, Gentleman.

Señora: Madam, Lady.

Sí: Yes.

Tia: Aunt.

Toma: Here.

Tontos: Dummies.

Viejo Negro: Old Black Man.

THE HIGHEST HEAVEN

SCENE 1

SETTING: *The 1930s, when America was in the middle of the Depression. During that period thousands of Mexican nationals, as well as Americans of Mexican descent were repatriated to Mexico with or without their consent. The setting takes place in various locales and should only be suggestive. Title projections are optional.*
SOUND: A Negro spiritual is heard. Several monarch butterflies appear fluttering over the stage. Their wings glow, revealing deep vibrant colors.

AT RISE: *“The Great Depression. October 1931. The monarch butterfly begins his journey.—La gran Depresión. Octubre 1931. La mariposa monarca comienza su viaje venturoso.”* **SOUND:** *A train station. It is chaotic. Noisy. Dusty. Lights rise on a young Latino boy named HURACAN holding a suitcase. He is scared and alone. KIKA, Huracan’s mother appears.*

KIKA. Huracán!

HURACAN. What is it, 'Amá?

KIKA. Grab your things.

HURACAN. But why?

KIKA. They're taking us away.

HURACAN. Who is?

KIKA. Men with guns and badges!

HURACAN. Where are we going?

KIKA. They're taking us away on a train to Mexico!

HURACAN. But why?

KIKA. I don't know! Where's your father?

HURACAN. 'Apá was right behind us.

KIKA. I've got to find him. Stay here.

HURACAN. Can't I go with you?

KIKA. I'll be right back. Everything is going to be fine.

HURACAN. How do you know?

KIKA. I just do.

(SOUND: Another train whistle blast is heard. HURACAN sits on a suitcase.)

KIKA. Remember, when you're scared God's watching.

(KIKA exits. EL NEGRO, an old black man, appears.)

EL NEGRO *(to HURACAN)*. Boy?

HURACAN. Huh?

EL NEGRO. That suitcase belongs to me.

HURACAN. My 'amá told me to wait here.

EL NEGRO. You're sittin' on it.

HURACAN. That's what she said.

EL NEGRO. What are you lookin' at?

HURACAN. You must be *San Martin de Porres*.

EL NEGRO. Who?

HURACAN. The patron saint of the defenseless. Have you come to answer my prayer?

EL NEGRO. I ain't *San Martin*.

HURACAN. But he's black like you. Am I in heaven?

EL NEGRO. You ain't dead and I ain't no saint! This is *Misas*, Mexico, boy. Don't you know where you at?

HURACAN. No, my 'amá said to stay here.

EL NEGRO. They all gone, boy. You're on your own. *Andale*, I got a train to catch. (*HURACAN watches as EL NEGRO picks up his suitcase and waits for the train. Then...*) I can't do it. I can't get on. (*EL NEGRO exits as the train leaves.*)

HURACAN (*yelling*). 'Amá!

SCENE 2

*“Far from home a small caterpillar searches for food.—
Lejos de su casa una pequeña oruga busca comida.”
November. El día de los muertos—The Day of the Dead.
A cemetery. A remembrance for the dead. Like a Diego Rivera painting shawled women kneel whispering prayers before the graves of their dead. Candles burn, fresh cempasúchil (marigolds) flowers adorn, candy skulls and bread lie out on plates inviting the lost souls to partake. A wealthy woman, DONA ELENA, dressed in black, and her servant, MOISES, enter. DONA ELENA stands before her husband's tomb.*

DONA ELENA. Help me down, Moises.

MOISES. Sí, Doña Elena.

DONA ELENA. Bring me his basket.

MOISES. Here it is, Doña Elena.

DONA ELENA (*kneels at a grave*). *Porfirio*, my dear sweet dead husband, I bring you wine from your vine-

yard, bread from your bakery and meat from your *rancho*. (To *MOISES*.) What are you looking at, *Indio*?

MOISES. Nothing, *Doña Elena*.

DONA ELENA. Turn your back and cover your ears. This conversation doesn't concern you.

MOISES. *Sí, Doña Elena*. (He turns his back and covers his ears.)

DONA ELENA. I'm afraid I don't trust your unwanted son, *Porfirio*. You created him but he's nothing like you. None of those "cousins" are. There's the banker, the bread maker, the harlot, the nun, the police official, the addict and this *Indio* half-breed. Your infidelities have cost me dearly, *Querido*. I spit on you. (She spits and then crosses herself.) But I remember you, husband, as a faithful wife should on the Day of the Dead. I want all of those "cousins" to know how loyal I am. (Pause.) It gets me things.

(*HURACAN enters and crosses to DONA ELENA*.)

HURACAN. *Señora*, may I have a piece of sweetbread?

DONA ELENA. No, you may not. This food belongs to me and my dead husband.

HURACAN. But I'm hungry.

DONA ELENA. Begging won't do you any good. I gave at church. *Moises?!?*

HURACAN. Please, I haven't eaten all day.

DONA ELENA. I don't care! *Moises?!?* (She hits *MOISES* with her cane. He uncovers his ears.)

MOISES. *Ay! Doña Elena?*

DONA ELENA. What are you doing?

MOISES. Talking to the spirits, *Doña*.

DONA ELENA. Crazy *Indio*. Help me up. Go away, you wretched boy.

MOISES. You heard the *Señora*. Go!

HURACAN. But I'm dizzy from hunger.

DONA ELENA (*tempting him*). Then take the bread.

MOISES. *Doña?*

DONA ELENA. Be my guest.

HURACAN. Thank you, *Señora*. (*HURACAN reaches for the sweetbread and DONA ELENA hits him with her cane.*) Ouch!

DONA ELENA. Stupid boy. I said, "no" the first time. Now do you understand? My possessions are not to be touched. Not! Not! Not! (*HURACAN hides.*) Moises, you should be more attentive.

MOISES. *Sí, Doña Elena.*

DONA ELENA. I tire of this country's filth, its lack of culture and mostly of its poor. My dead husband and I started with nothing. We became quite successful and respected. Why must we carry the poor on our backs?

MOISES. I don't know...

(*DONA ELENA hits MOISES with her cane.*)

DONA ELENA. I wasn't speaking to you. If only you had lived, *Querido*. We would have been rid of *El Negro* by now. Taken what's ours. Everyone would fear us. But you died too soon. Once again, leaving me to clean up your mess. *El Negro* is like a cancer. How I hate him. But I'll find a way. Find his weakness. Then strike. (*To MOISES.*) Why hasn't *Don Porfirio's* tomb been cleaned? I'm ashamed at how dirty it looks. There's dust

everywhere. One can never be clean in this godforsaken country. Take me home!

(DONA ELENA and MOISES exit, HURACAN begins to eat as incense burns and prayers are whispered. MOISES reenters.)

MOISES. The dead must be respected, *muchacho*. Leave an offering.

HURACAN. Huh?

(MOISES places some coins on the tombstone.)

MOISES. If *Doña Elena* catches you we'll both be in trouble. Serious trouble. *(MOISES begins collecting food from other tombs and placing it on Don Porfirio's tomb.)* She's going to tell my cousin, the police official, and he'll come looking for you. You better leave now. You can't stay here. She does hateful things to people, especially children.

HURACAN. Have you seen my *'amá*? I lost her at the train station.

MOISES. No, I'm sorry, I haven't. But what do you expect? The whole station was a disaster. It's been like that all month. People everywhere. Screaming and crying. It makes no sense. And now everyone's gone.

HURACAN. Do you know where the train went?

MOISES. Maybe south. I'm not sure.

HURACAN. But I have to find my *'amá*.

MOISES. You can't go back there. Not even into town. *Doña Elena* has spies everywhere.

HURACAN. Please help me.

MOISES. There's nothing I can do. If *Doña Elena* knew I was talking to you...

HURACAN. I want my 'amá.

(SOUND: A coyote's howl is heard off in the distance.)

MOISES. Perhaps you can go into the forest.

HURACAN. Forest?

MOISES. That's where *El Negro* lives. Nobody ever goes there. Everyone's afraid of him, but not me. I'll go find him for you. But if *Doña Elena* finds out I helped you...

HURACAN. I won't say a word.

MOISES. Good. Here, take this blanket. It'll be cold tonight. It's all I can give you. And remember my cousin will be looking for you.

HURACAN. Who?

MOISES. The police official.

(MOISES exits. HURACAN wraps himself in the blanket. A moment later he pushes everything off the tomb in anger.)

HURACAN. Why is this happening to me?! Where are you, 'Amá?

(“The small caterpillar remembers his past.—La oruga pequeña recuerda su pasado.” El valle—The valley appears. A barn sits on the edge of a green field and the valley is filled with blue sky. KIKA, Huracán's mother, enters carrying a laundry basket.)

KIKA. *Huracán*, you've got chores!

HURACAN. But I'm hungry, 'Amá.

KIKA. There's plenty of time to eat later.

HURACAN. I hate chores, 'Amá. Why can't we have a maid like in the movies?

KIKA. *Andale!*

(She takes the bread away and hands HURACAN a coffee can. He begins to feed the imaginary chickens.)

HURACAN. It's so hopeless. Things only get messy again.

KIKA. If everyone went around thinking like that nothing would ever get done. Laundry would never get washed. Rooms would never get cleaned. Your socks and *chonies* would never get starched and ironed.

HURACAN. It would be my kind of heaven.

KIKA. Well, heaven wouldn't be very clean now, would it? God would be very unhappy. Angels flying with filthy wings? *Impossible.*

(SOUND: A train whistle is heard off in the distance.)

HURACAN. The train's on time!

KIKA. I hate how it rumbles past our home. There's dust everywhere. My heaven is going to be a place without railroads and trains or specks of dirt anywhere. Your father promised he'd be back now. We live in the United States where everything's on time except for him. *(A little worried.)* Where can he be?

HURACAN. Maybe he's buying something.

KIKA. He won't go into town. It isn't safe. People are being sent away. So, you stay near me.

HURACAN. Do you know what's today, 'Amá?

KIKA. It's Tuesday.

HURACAN. Yeah, but it's not just any Tuesday. There's something special about this Tuesday. Remember?

KIKA. No.

HURACAN. 'Amá.

KIKA. Of course I remember! You're growing so quickly. You'll never be eleven again. *(She kisses him on the cheek.)*

HURACAN. So?

KIKA. So?

HURACAN. So, is there anything I should open now, 'Amá?

KIKA. Ay, *Huracán*, can't you wait to celebrate tonight?

HURACAN. No!

KIKA. You're just like your father. *Imposible*. *(She gives HURACAN a small gift wrapped in burlap.)* Happy Birthday, *Huracán*!

(HURACAN immediately opens it. It is a glass jar with a monarch butterfly.)

HURACAN. It's a butterfly!

KIKA. It's not just any butterfly, *Huracán*. It's a *monarca*. A king butterfly.

HURACAN. What am I supposed to do with it?

KIKA. Make a wish and then let it go.

HURACAN. But I want to keep it.

KIKA. It isn't for you to keep.

HURACAN. But what kind of gift is that, if I can't keep it?

KIKA. You're suppose to make a wish. Then let it go, and your wish will come true.

HURACAN. Will my butterfly ever come back?

KIKA. No, but one of his children might. And when he returns, *Huracán*, there'll be thousands of monarchs with him dancing like leaves in the wind. They'll stop here to rest their weary wings and quench their thirsty mouths. When they do we'll dampen the earth with fresh water.

HURACAN. Why?

KIKA. So the flowers will be strong to feed these *mariposas* their sweet nectar. It's a glimpse at God's heart.

HURACAN. God's heart?

KIKA. It's a blessing, *mijo*.

HURACAN. How come you know so much about things?

KIKA. Not everything comes out of a book, *Huracán*. Who taught you to tell time by reading the sun?

HURACAN. You did.

KIKA. Who taught you to eat cactus without pricking yourself?

HURACAN. You.

KIKA. There are many ways to learn and they don't all come from a book. The earth has secrets. If you watch and listen closely she'll share them with you.

HURACAN (*closing his eyes*). Okay. Done. Time to go, *mariposa*. Fly!

(HURACAN opens the jar and releases the butterfly. The monarch butterfly flutters off into the blue sky. SOUND: A siren is heard. KIKA sees something off in the distance.)

HURACAN. What is it, 'Amá?

KIKA. Oh, no, they're coming this way!

HURACAN. Who is?

KIKA. Men with guns and badges!