Lydia

BY OCTAVIO SOLIS

From left, Lydia (Stephanie Beatriz), Ceci (Onahoua Rodriguez) and Misha (Carlo Albán) in the Denver Center Theatre Company's world premiere production at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.
Memories on the Border
An interview with the playwright
BY ELAINE ROMERO

ELAINE ROMERO: You developed Lydia pretty quickly from commission to premiere. What was your process like?

OCTAVIO SOLIS: I put this work through my own rigorous process. I wrote at least two drafts very, very quickly. I started the day after Christmas and I submitted it in early February. Kent Thompson [artistic director of Denver Center Theatre Company] went for it right away. That's when we lined up Juliette Carrillo and our team, and he lined up the Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School & Camp up in Steamboat Springs. We developed it there for a week.

You set the play in the early '70s. What role did memory play in the writing?
The play feels almost autobiographical. Not quite. A lot of the big things in it have no parallel to my own life. It is taking me back to my formative years in El Paso, growing up there in the '70s, when I was 12, 13, and starting to see the world through a very different lens. I started writing a lot of poetry in those days. The parents are obviously not my parents, but they're based on qualities that I saw in my parents and parents all over El Paso. There's a poem called "Ode to a Chanate," and its parallel is my very first poem, "Ode to a Prairie Dog." Memory does play a great part. In fact, I seem to be dipping more into memory as I write.

What was El Paso like in the '70s?
It was a very stormy time. The Vietnam War was very present. We knew about these assassinations. We knew about the rioting, the death counts, because we were watching the news every night. We'd see older kids that we kind of looked up to go to the war because they were drafted. We were amazed at how many of them went voluntarily. It made a huge impact on families—made them feel more American. They thought, "This is how we'll earn our right to be here." The war is definitely present in the fringes of this work—as is the border. The border was an issue then, too, but not quite the hot, nationally politicized issue it is now. It has always been an issue in El Paso. It's a chimera that takes many forms. It becomes a focal point for addressing crime, human rights, the drug trade and corruption.

We also had a maid who took care of us when we were kids. Consuelo was an older lady who watched us for almost 10 years. She was like a grandmother. She'd live with us and cook for us and take care of us and bathe us. At some point she stopped coming. I think it was because she passed away. My parents wouldn't tell us. We started getting these young, young girls. I was 14, 15 years of age. I didn't know quite how to deal with that. The relationship between the family and Lydia is really sort of a fantasy of what I wish I could have done—talked to pretty, young girls, who seemed so strange and so scared and somehow so exotic to me—and yet more real. They were like the real deal and we were imitations.

The real deal as in being Mexican?
Yeah. But also they came from dirt poverty—as I'm sure Consuelo did. They came here to do this kind of work, and it was really kind of spooky.

ABOUT THE PLAYwright
Octavio Solis is a playwright and director living in San Francisco. His works Lydia, June in a Box, Lethe, Marfa Lights, Gibraltar, The Ballad of Pancho and Lucy, The 7 Visions of Encarnacion, Bethlehem, Dreamlandia, El Otro, Man of the Flesh, Prospect, El Paso Blue, Santos & Santos and La Pasada Mágica have been mounted at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, the Dallas Theater Center, the Magic Theatre, Intersection for the Arts, South Coast Repertory, the San Diego Repertory Theatre, the San Jose Repertory Theatre, ShadowLight (San Francisco), the Venture Theatre (Philadelphia), Latino Chicago Theatre Company, the New York Summer Play Festival, Teatro Vista (Chicago), El Teatro Campesino, the Undermain Theatre (Dallas), Thick Description, Campo Santo, the Imua Theatre Company (New York) and Cornerstone Theater Company. His collaborative works include Burning Dreams, written with Julie Hebert and Gina Leishman; Shiner, written with Erik Ehrn; and Great Highway, written with Wendy Weiner. Solis has received an NEA 1995–97 Playwriting Fellowship, the Roger L. Stevens award from the Kennedy Center, the Will Glickman Playwright Award, a production grant from the Kennedy Center fund for New American Plays, the 1998 TCG/NEA Theatre Artists in Residence Grant, the 1998 McKnight Fellowship grant from the Playwrights Center in Minneapolis and the 2003 National Latino Playwrighting Award. He is the recipient of the 2000–01 National Theatre Artists Residency Grant from TCG and the Pew Charitable Trust for Gibraltar at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Solis is a Thornton Wilder Fellow for the MacDowell Colony, a New Dramatists alum and a member of the Dramatists Guild.

ABOUT THE PLAY
Lydia was commissioned by the Denver Center Theatre Company (Kent Thompson, artistic director) and was developed by the Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School & Camp's New Works Festival (Andrew Lelyvise, artistic director). The world premiere was produced by the Denver Center
What’s your take on your title character—Lydia? She’s no witchy woman or angel. She’s just a person who wants to come and live the American dream. She admires this family for all its American-ness, for all the qualities that make it, in her eyes, a prosperous family. She loves the way they dress. She loves the big house. She loves that they have a big mall. She’s entranced by all that. She has her own personal dreams. She’s a person who wants to work and live free without fear. But all the other characters in the play project on her what they fear, what they need, what they hope for. When they do that, she seems to sort of fulfill what those things are.

When did you know your brain-damaged character, Ceci, would have a voice? The play came to me many years ago through a series of flash images. One of the big images—I didn’t want to explain it, but I wanted to understand it—was the final moment of the play. There was no way it could be anywhere else except at the end of the play. I said, “Okay, wherever I drop the little ball bearing on the pinball thing, I know it’s going to go right down to that scene. So I’ve got to figure out how.” After years of having these moments foment in my head, I finally said, “Okay, I’ve got to write it all down.” I knew that Ceci had been through some accident that caused her to be locked in, and yet I wanted to give voice to her. She doesn’t have language. She can hardly gesture that she’s hungry or has to go to the bathroom. But when we get inside her soul, she’s incredibly eloquent.

You have upcoming productions of *Lydia* at Yale Repertory Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum and Marin Theatre Company. Will you continue to revise? I think that the Yale Rep production will be the one that finally cements the script for me. Honestly, kept to my own devices, I’ll keep revising from production to production. At some point, you have to give up.

I hear *Lydia* is part of a trilogy. Is that true? Alvaro has a supporting part in this play. I want to explore him further. I’m writing another play, called *Yolanda*, in which he is the main character. I feel a third play coming, but I have to finish my work on *Yolanda* first. And *Lydia* is still sort of haunting me.

What does that mean, that *Lydia* haunts you? I don’t know. I think it’s telling me to deal with the stuff that’s in that play on a personal level. This play is saying, “You wrote this for a personal reason—it’s for you. I’m telling you something.” I think it’s changing me in some way. We’re constantly changing our work, all the time, and we don’t take into account that sometimes the work changes us.

Do you have other plays that haunt you? *Bethlehem*. It’s a dark, dark play. It’s a play about the devil, really. For all my liberal thinking, at heart I am a moral person. I said, “How dark can I really trust myself to go with this work?” And I did it with that play. I went all the way to the bottom and came back out.

You’re adapting *Don Quixote* for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Has it been difficult to make it your own? A little bit. I haven’t cracked the book open since I started writing it. On some level, I feel I am being utterly true to Cervantes—to the spirit of the work. It feels like I’m writing a play based on it rather than trying to literally theatricalize the novel. I never lose sight of Cervantes. I feel that I have a responsibility to make people go, “Oh, man, I can’t wait to read the novel.”

You relocated to San Francisco a number of years ago. Did moving away from El Paso transform you as an artist? I found myself in my writing going back to El Paso constantly. But the El Paso I started writing about was an El Paso of the imagination. Everyone has a different idea of what New York is. Spike Lee’s New York is very different than Woody Allen’s New York. I created a myth of El Paso through my plays. They all somehow come up to the edge of the border. I lived on the edge of the border—less than half a mile. We used to ride our bikes to the river. We could see people trying to decide the right time to cross. It was a very real thing to me. Every time I think I’m done, and I think I’ve made the transition to writing plays that are set in California, I still somehow end up going back to El Paso. Faulkner created that little county where everything took place. This is what El Paso is to me. It’s my Yoknapatawpha County.

Elaine Romero’s plays include *Barrio Hollywood, Something Rare and Wonderful* and *Walk into the Sea*. She is working on commissions for InterAct Theatre and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and is playwright-in-residence at Arizona Theatre Company.
Lydia

CHARACTERS
CECI: the sister, 17
MISHA: the younger brother, 16
RENE: the older brother, 19
ROSA: the mother
CLAUDIO: the father
ALVARO: the cousin, 22
LYDIA: the maid

PLACE
El Paso, Texas.

TIME
The early 1970s, in winter.

ACT ONE

The living room of the Flores home. A sofa with a coffee table, its surface scratched and stained. An old La-Z-Boy facing the TV. A stereo console with a set of headphones attached. A door to the front porch. A darkened hallway to the bedrooms. An entry to the kitchen. In the foreground by the TV, a small mattress with pillows and stuffed animals.

As rise, Claudio stamps on the La-Z-Boy watching TV. Ironing his white shirts and pants is his wife, Rosa. On the mattress lies Ceci in a sweatshirt. a long thin scar rising from her eyebrow, disappearing into her hairline. She lies very still, her eyes on the flickering light of the TV. After a moment, a thought comes to her, and she starts.

CECI: She touched me and I flew. Touched my fault line. And I flew. With her hand, laid holy water on my scar. And I flew on wings of glass. My body como una bird racing with the moon on a breath of air. Flying out of range of pain, purpose, this thing we call vida, soaring into the blueness of memory, closing my eyes for the third time.

(She closes her eyes. Opens them.)

I wake to this. Life inside my life. No wings, no glass, no moon. Only later, which means bingo, which means chance, which means play.

So I play the cards into view.

(She looks down at her arms and legs curling under her as a light falls on her mattress.)

A card with me printed, La Vida Cecilia, rag doll thumbing the stitching in her head, forming the words in her vegetable tongue, what happened to me, porque no puedo remember, I must remember.

(The light bears down on Claudio.)

There. A card called El Short-Order Cook. Broken man drowning in old rumbleras and TV. I hear sores antigua calling his name, Claudio, my poor papa, Claudio, in your personal winter, drowning out the will of Mami saying, "Come with me across the Rio, give me up that lie you thought was you and live mine, live American with me." So the dish ran away with the greasy spoon and a girl jumped over the moon, but you don't spikka the English, only the word, "No," which in Spanish means, "No." "No" at work, in bed, in your dreams, in your cantos perdidos.

(The light shifts to Rosa, ironing clothes and muttering silent prayers to herself.)

Aquí. The Mami Rosa card, dressmaker of flying girls, sewing up my unfinished seams; a beautiful woman losing beauty by the day, see it gathered at her feet like old panty hose, say Amor! You were Rosie Flores, clerk for the county, making your life here, Anglo words like lazy moths tumbling out of your mouth. You were toda proud, but now. You've Rosa Reborn holy-rolling me to sleep with the prayers of your new church. Your prayers for us to be family, which hasn't really been family since they stopped putting cork in soda bottle caps.

(RENE comes in from down the hall. He goes to the front door and retrieves the day's mail. He goes over it carefully.)

AYE. My wild card, El Carnal Mayor, Rene, my elder volcano, bustin' noses just by looking at 'em, both hands fulla middle fingers for the whole world, checking every day for hate mail, but always nada. Cars go by and honk, "Puto-Puto-Rene-Puto!" but cowards, my brother is invincible.

(RENE throws the mail on the coffee table, stares at Ceci.)

The army recruiter don't want you, hah, not like those other flag-draped Chicanos on our block, even those that come back alive look like they gave up the ghost, that's kinda what you want, that damned ghost taken out of you. 'Cause you're all messed up with some hard-core macho shit nobody gets.

(RENE finally looks at Ceci, be slowly comes to her.)

Andale, plant a kiss on my head like that saint in church with the chipped nose—
(He kisses her, then leaves out the front door.)

Dry-kiss and move away. Simin, carnal, before the disgust starts to show.

(Misha enters with his books. Flips down on the couch.)

Misha? ¿Eres tío? Card with the inscription Little Sht. Caramba Misha bringing to my nariz fragrances of the street, the school, his body, yes, the mask of you coming of age, coming into yourself, coming all over yourself. I hear your little secrets like crystals of salt in the pockets of your eyes, sad-boy Misha, sad for me, for us, the things that darken the day, King and Kennedy, the killings of students, the killings of Nam—

(Beat.)

Mi familia. All sad and wounded 'cause of somethin'.' Somethin' that broke. I gotta read my scar for the story, it's in there, I know it! ¡Agua! I see her. The girl that touched me... her face in a mirror looking back...showing me her own scc-geggh mum her own—scc-crrmmngmmh...

MISHA: Mom, what's wrong with Ceci?

ROSA: A lo mejor she went poo-poo.

MISHA: She doesn't smell like it.

ROSA: Maybe she wants her therapy. Could you do it, Misha? I'm pressing your father's shirts for work.

Misha sits by Ceci and runs her through a repertoire of delicate physical exercises, shifting her position from time to time.

MISHA: Orale, carnal. Let's get the blood pumping.

ROSA: Con cariño, okay?

MISHA: Always gentle, Ama. Hey, Dad.

ROSA: He can't hear you.

MISHA: Dad!

ROSA: ¿Qué te dije? What are you doing home so early? Don't you have practice?

MISHA (As he rubs Ceci's arms and hands): I dropped out of the squad. Football ain't my game. You hear that, Dad? I'm a wuss and I don't understand what all those little circles and arrows mean. I can't hear the quarterback in the huddle. He grunts, "uhh twenty-unuh on huuh—uhuh!" But I go on, "huuh," and Coach yells at me. At the scrimmage today, a touchdown got called back on account of I was offside. I told them it wasn't my fault. I told them we need enunciation in the huddle. In the showers they all towel-whipped my bare ass.

ROSA: Watch your language.

MISHA: So you know what, Dad, I quit. I turned in my equipment and walked. I'm sorry, Mom. I just feel I'm needed here.


MISHA: You named me Miguel.

ROSA: But after I saw that Baryshnikov on TV, I started calling you Misha.

MISHA: I don't even like ballet.

ROSA: The point is a brown boy named Misha in El Paso is special. I got my hopes pinned all over you like dollars.

MISHA: Is there anything to eat?

ROSA: There's albondigas on the stove.

ROSA: Meatballs? From last night?

ROSA: They're a little dried-out, but still good. You want some?


ROSA: I saw you this much.

ROSA: Sangría. Rosa laughs. She goes into the kitchen.

CECI: Huuu onhuh-uuuh.

MISHA: You sound like my quarterback.

CECI: Shhhhhmm.

MISHA: The truth is, when I'm on the field, I don't pay attention. I watch the yellowing grass and the zip-zip-zip of the sprinklers and the clouds making ponsytails in the sky.


MISHA: Mom. There's something different about her.

ROSA (From off): What?

MISHA: I dunno. Something. Are you still giving her her meds?

ROSA (Returning with a bowl of meatballs): Of course!

MISHA: 'Cause I know you don't sometimes, Mom. I know how you "forget" sometimes.

ROSA: I don't forget, never!

MISHA: Where are they? Where're the pills? How much do you give her today? How much, Mom?

ROSA: Oye, it's not drugs she needs but faith! Faith! Miya, the doctors said it was over, remember, she's a vegetable para siempre. What are these pills supposed to do then?

ROSA: Give me the pills. Or I'm telling him.


CLAUDIO: ¿Qué pasó, Miguel? ¿Cómo te va en el fútbol?

MISHA: Good.

ROSA: I'm almost done here. Just a few more shirts.

CLAUDIO: ¿Cómo?

ROSA: Nomás estas camisas, viejo.

CLAUDIO: Miguel, una cerveza. Misha nods gravely as Claudio goes down the hall to the bathroom.

ROSA: Praise God.

MISHA: I wish you'd keep your religion to yourself. It's not doing Ceci any good.

ROSA: Oyeme, Misha. When your sister got hurt, I prayed to the Virgen Santa, the Patrono de todos los Mexicanos. La Virgen de Guadalupe herself. And she failed me. That's when I knew. Us Católicos, we worship the wrong things. Idols can't make miracles. Only God. So I go to a church with no other gods but God.

MISHA: Has that done her any good? Has it?

ROSA: Today. While your father was sleeping. You know what I did? I took her to Our Church of the Nazarene.

MISHA: What? You took her to those holy rollers? Are you kidding me?

ROSA: Misha, she loved it. All the peoples adored her. And Pastor Lujan himself baptized her.

MISHA: What?

ROSA: He put her in this big glass tub and laid his hand on her, miya. Right here where her precious brains came out, and he prayed to God for her soul. He dipped her backward in the water and her face came alive! Eyes bright as nickels and her mouth wide open, taking in the light of heaven! Pastor Lujan said very clearly: "Cecilia, prepare your! Your redemption is knocking on your head." And he took her pills and poured them all into the same tub.

MISHA: Oh no...

ROSA: He said we don't need them anymore! He said it's evil in our hearts that makes her sick.

MISHA: No more saving her soul. I mean it. Leave her soul alone.

ROSA: Don't you lecture me on how I care for miya! Who stays home with her day and night, changing her when she needs to go, making her special food, rubbing her joints y todo? Who?

MISHA: I help.

ROSA: Por favor, Misha. You're in school all day. I know.

ROSA: Well, I know more. Nothing happens without me in this house. I see to our needs. That's how come we're getting a maid.

MISHA: A maid? Like to clean the house?

ROSA: To clean the house, to cook the food, to watch your sister. I asked your Tin Mirna, and she said her maid knows this chantula from Jalisco who just came over and she needs work and she's cheap.

MISHA: What about you?

ROSA: They called from the country office and told me my old position is available if I want it. Well, I want it. I'm tired of staying in this house all day. Plus we need the money.

MISHA: Is she legal?

ROSA: I don't ask about such things. I just ask her to come tomorrow.

MISHA: Tomorrow? Dammit, why didn't you tell me?

ROSA: I did. Watch your tongue. Last week. I mentioned it at dinner. But you never listen. You and your brother only hear what you want to hear. Claudio returns from the bathroom.

CLAUDIO: ¿Y mi cerveza?

MISHA: Mom dice que we're gonna have a maid, una criada.
CLAUDIO: Asi lo quiere.

MISHA: ¿Y tú, qué quieres?

CLAUDIO: Mi pinche cerveza.

He sits, puts his headphones on again. Misha watches him.

ROSA: You heard him.

MISHA: What am I, his mesero?

ROSA: Looks at him. Misha goes off to the kitchen and reenters with a can of beer.

MISHA: Ask yourself, Mom. Do we really want this? Do we really want a stranger coming into our house?

ROSA: What’s wrong with our house? What don’t you want her to see? What are you ashamed of, Misha? Your sister?

MISHA: Not her.

ROSA: I promise you. When she comes here, she will find a close, caring Mexican familia trying to make it in this blessed country.

CLAUDIO (Impatiently waiting for his beer): Miguel...

ROSA: Get over your vergüenza and give your father his beer.

MISHA: Mom...

ROSA: Do it, Miguel. Claudio suddenly gets up, takes the beer, then slaps Misha across the face.

CLAUDIO: Tres veces te lo pedí, cabrón. Tres veces. Claudio sits, rips off the pull-tab, then tosses it on the floor near Ceci. He watches TV as Misha’s eyes well with tears.

ROSA: ¿Qué te dijo? Pick up that thing before your sister cuts herself with it.

Misha picks up the pull-tab, his cheek reddening with the beat of the blast, and goes to his room.

CECI: I hear your face clapping against the way things are, and I know it hurts, ’cause I feel my face smashing against the mad will of God. I remember that, Misha, like I remember we can’t let the swelling block us off, we gotta believe that it passes, bro, it passes. Sure as day passes into night.

Suddenly, night. Ceci lying on her mattress.

Headlights raced across the window drapes as Rene comes in the front door. He stands, waiting in the dark until his breath is even. He watches Ceci with a mix of fear and contempt. Misha enters.

RENE: Any mail?

MISHA: No. (Notices Rene’s bloody knuckles) Váro.

RENE: It’s nothing.

MISHA: Nothing. You’re bleeding.

RENE: What’s a little mole. You should see them.

MISHA: Are you drunk, too?

RENE: It helps, don’t you think? So you and me and some Buds?

MISHA: We’re out. And it’s too late to hit the Circle K.

RENE: I don’t need no shit Circle fucking K, goddammit. I need me some pisco. Watcha.

He reaches under the La-Z Boy cushions. A fifth of Southern Comfort.

MISHA: Whoa.

RENE: Papa’s got brand new bag.

MISHA: How’d you know it was there?

RENE: Ese, he sits in that chair all pinche day like he’s incubating a fucking bicho. ¡Andale, tragaré! They slap some down.

RENE: Nothing like a little pisco to smooth out the rough edges of a bad night.

MISHA: Was it a bad night?

RENE: Hell no, it was a good night. We kicked some ass.

MISHA: What did you do?

RENE: We kicked some ass.

MISHA: How about a little more detail, ese?

RENE: We kicked some fucking ass.

MISHA: Rene.

RENE: You’re too young. You don’t get the vibe. This is me, Joey and Sergio taking on the pinche world.

MISHA: Joey and Sergio? Those pussies?

RENE: ¡No mames, güey! These are my camaradas! Besides, we need Joey’s van for the ceremony.

MISHA: What ceremony?

RENE: Pos, first we chug back some brew for a couple hours, listen to some Sabbath, take a little mope for courage. Then we think of cheerleaders and whack off a little till we’re nice and hard and then we hit the road.

MISHA: And kick some ass.

RENE: Fuckin’ A.

MISHA: I heard it was some ebolas last night.

RENE: Tough littlefuckers in training for prison, gang tats y toda la madre. We kicked their ass. Dame. (Drinks) Some red-and-white lights flash by the window.

RENE: ¡Trucha! Get down! Down!

MISHA: Shit, Rene! Is that the cops?

RENE: Just be quiet and keep your head down. (Peeks through the drapes till the lights pass)

MISHA: What the fuck happened? Better tell me or I’m gonna wake up Mom and tell her the cops are after you.

RENE: Calmantes montes, norte. I’ll tell you, but only as a cautionary tale for you not to put your ass where it’s likely to be kicked, me entiendes?

Misha nods.

RENE: We took on some G’s.

MISHA: Shit. Oh shit.

RENE: Fresh outa Fort Bliss. We went up the mountain on Scenic Drive and pulled over by these cars. And there they were, a gringo salado and a couple negros. We just approached them like some tourists up to see the sights, you know? They offered us some beers and were really nice to us. But these fags, Meesh, you gotta watch out for them.

MISHA: How come.

RENE: Just ’cause I say so. Anyway, the gringo puts his hand on my knee so I gotta cut him with a right hook that snaps his head back. Joey and Serge lay into the others, and man, it’s on. We lay into these five-turkey motherboardfuckers with basic-training bricks. Serge is swinging this bat on their heads and Joey’s got nunchucks and blood is shootin’ volanic all over the place.

MISHA: You hit ’em with bats? What if you put ’em in the hospital with like brain damage or something?

RENE: Hey, don’t talk brain damage. Not in front of her. Pay your penance, fuck. Rene offers the bottle and Misha drinks.

MISHA: I don’t get it, man. Why are you doing this shit? When are you gonna go to college or get a real job?

RENE: I gotta job.

MISHA: Car detailing at Earl Scheib? You’re smarter than that.

RENE: What’s the pinche point, bro? I’m gonna get drafted anyway.

MISHA: Is that what you’re looking for in the mail? Your draft notice? Ese, your birthdate’s not due in the lottery till next year.

RENE: No mames, güey.

MISHA: If you’re so anxious about it, if you wanna kill someone, go enlist like Alvaro.

RENE: I ain’t that stupid.

MISHA: Neither is he. He came back with a bronze star. Gung-ho guys like him always seem to make out okay.

RENE: Varo’s too hot-shot for us now. Back three months and he still hasn’t come to our chante.

MISHA: Mom says he’s been focusing on getting some steady work.


MISHA: I know this much. War keeps going like it is, I’m gonna have to go to Canada.

RENE: Canada? Why truck all the way up there? Mexico’s right there, you dope!

MISHA: Well, on TV, that’s where they all say they’re going! Canada!

RENE: ’Cause they’re white, stupid! Canada! You’re a trip. What are you doing up?

MISHA: I couldn’t sleep. I had this dream. Hey, you know Mom’s hiring some chick to take care of Ceci?

RENE: Old news, bro.

MISHA: She’s coming tomorrow to cook and do the wash. Tell you one thing, she ain’t touching my clothes.

RENE: You got some stains in your chones you don’t want her to see?

MISHA: Shut up.

RENE: Haha! Is that what you had? A wet dream?

MISHA: Cut it out. It was scary as shit. We were kids, you, me, Alvaro and Ceci, all alone in this house.

RENE: What happened?

MISHA: We were playing like we used to. We
put chairs all over the living room, down the hall, covered them up with sheets and we crawled under pretending we were ants in our tunnels. We scurried from chamber to chamber, touching heads lightly, making those little “tee-tee” sounds in ant language. Ceci’s eyes full of joy. She had those pearl earrings she got for her quinceañera. We saw her go off with this shiny key in her mouth. I think it was a key. It looked like a key. Her shadow against the sheet one second, and the next, gone. We went through the tunnels looking for her, but we couldn’t find her. I wanted to call out, “Ceci,” but you said use ant language. I couldn’t think of the words for, “Please come back,” and I went all through the tunnel, looking for her. I woke up absolutely freaked. I came out here and saw the invisible lines of the tunnels all over the floor.

RENÉ: I’m sacking’ out before the old man comes home. You shouldn’t be dreaming shit like that, Misha. Rene returns the bottle to the La-Z-Boy cushion seam, then goes.

CECI: Ggghn.

Misha moves to Ceci and looks into her eyes. He gently pries her mouth open. He looks inside. He lets her go, then walks off to bed.

CECI: You won’t find nothin’ down there but spit and the words to “Cielito lindo.” I feel it coming around again like a Mexican yoyo, little ball up on its string and plop right into the bowl of my heart. (Claudio enters from the shadows in white shirt and trousers with his paper hat.)

It’s the night of my race with the moon. He comes in his fry-cook whites to my room, wearing that white paper hat like a general. I’m at the threshold of my señorita-hood, pretending to sleep, feeling his raw breath in my ear singing for the last time...

CLAUDIO (Singing softly as he opens his hands, revealing a pair of pearl earrings):

De la sierra morena
Cielito lindo viene bajando
Un par de ojos negros
Cielito lindo de contrabando
Ese lunar que tiene
Cielito lindo junto a la boca
No se la des a nadie
Cielito lindo que a mí me toca
Ay ay ay ay
Canta y no llorres
Porque cantando se alegran
Cielito lindo las corazones.

(Claudio gets up and slowly walks off into the darkness.)

CECI: A tear from each eye turned to pearl and laid on my pillow to make the moon jealous. Oh what is this yearning inside? What does it mean?

The next day. Rosa comes in dressed for work, fusing about, straightening up the house with a minimum of noise. Ceci plays with a GI Joe.

ROSA: ¡Ay Disisto Disisto! Where is this girl? ¡Ya son las ocho y media! ¡Ay, qué nervio!

CECI: Ggghhh.

ROSA: Okay, okay, I’m coming! Ya ya. I know, I know. This house smells like a cantina! What were these barbacoas up to last night, Ceci?

CECI: Ggghnn.

Rosa goes to the kitchen and quickly returns with a bowl of oatmeal. She sits, stirring the oatmeal around with a spoon.

ROSA: T’as bien, miña. I know everything in this house. I know they were drinking. I know Rene was fighting again. But what can I do? He does what he does. ¿Tienes apetito por some oatmeal? Vén. (She holds Ceci as she raises a spoonful of oatmeal) Oh, espera. We forgot grace. (She holds Ceci’s hands and closes her eyes) Dear Lord Jesus Holy Father, we submit this meal today for your blessing that we may not want and pray for your mercy, for You made us in order to love us and as we take this meal, please forgive our sins and heal us first in our corazonas so that the body may follow. In your most precious and holy name, Amen. (She guides the spoon into Ceci’s mouth) Not too hot? Good. (She continues to talk as she feeds her) My pretty girl. Even the accident couldn’t keep this body from growing. It’s my body, Ceci, the body I used to have. The hip-huggers and halter tops I would have bought you! ¡Lástima de tu quinceañera! I made with my own Singer the whitest most beautiful dress with lace running all the way down the sleeve to the wrist. Like a Disney chibana you would look! Regal and sexy, but definitely chaste. You would save that costura for after your wedding. Pero ahora, pobre miña. It’s just a dead flower on you now.

Ceci jerks, thrusts the bowl of oatmeal all over herself and her mother.

CECI: GGGGhhmmmm!

ROSA: ¡AY! ¡Cecilia Rosario! ¡Qué bas hecho! Look at my dress! ¡Invertida! Ceci flails madly about. Lydia appears at the door, bag in hand.

LYDIA: ¿Señora?

ROSA: Oh, sí, sí, sí. ¿Eres la muchachita de Jalisco?

LYDIA: Yes.

ROSA: ¿Hablas inglés?

LYDIA: Si, Señora o sea...Yes, I would prefer. I am learning.

ROSA: Entonces, come in. Come in, please. She enters. Ceci is still angrily flailing her arms.

CECI: Ggghhn!

LYDIA: Perdón, pero me perdi. I...I...got lost...

CECI: GGGGhn!

ROSA: It’s okay, okay, I understand.

LYDIA: Let me. I help. You go wash. Lydia puts down her bag and goes to Ceci. She cleans her with her napkin.

ROSA: No, no, please, she’s very hard to—

LYDIA: It’s okay, I can do, she’s strong, your—como se dice—your daughter?


LYDIA: You go change, I take care here. Hola-bola, chica. What is her name?

ROSA: Ceci.

LYDIA: Hola, Ceci. Hola. I am Lydia. How are you fine? I am fine too. Que bonita te ves con la arena en la cara. Oatmeal is very good for the skin. Here. She rubs more into Ceci’s face. Ceci freezes at the feel of the warm oatmeal. Rosa is taken aback as well.

LYDIA: Soon you be Miss Texas, que no? Soon you be Miss Universo. Misha enters as Ceci coos softly throughout the next passage.

MISHA: What’s going on?

CECI: Ooooh...oooh...

ROSA: This is our maid—

LYDIA: Lydia.

ROSA: Lydia from Jalisco.

MISHA: What’s she doing to her?

ROSA: She spilled the oatmeal on me and—

LYDIA: Making her skin soft. If she won’t eat, then she can be beautiful. ¡Verdad, Ceci?

CECI: Ooooh.

ROSA: I have to go change. I’m going to be late. I’m late already. Rosa goes.

LYDIA: Así, así. Feels good, no? Feels like chocolate.

CECI: Ggghhn.

MISHA: Are you sure this works?

LYDIA: It worked on me, que no? (She looks up at Misha for the first time) What is your name?

MISHA: Miguel. But they call me Misha.

LYDIA: Misha?

MISHA: My mother’s name that since I was little.

LYDIA: It’s Russian.

MISHA: I know.

LYDIA: Is there Russian in your blood?

MISHA: No. Listen, I think you really should get her cleaned up before my old man sees her like this. He’s not into beauty tips ‘n shit—

LYDIA: Speak slower. Or speak Spanish.

MISHA: I’m not that fluent in Spanish.

LYDIA: Then speak slower, Misha.

MISHA: My Father. Will be pissed. When he sees this. Pissed as in pissed off.

LYDIA: Ceci, are you calm now? You want to clean up and eat?


MISHA: That means yes.

LYDIA: No, it means let me wear it for another minute. Are we sharing a room?

MISHA: What?

LYDIA: Me and Ceci, are we sharing a room?
LYDIA: A ver. You will like this. Mi abuela made it for me. The last time I wear, I was another girl. I sat before the espejo brushing my hair, wondering: who is that looking back? Him? Now let me see your room, palomita. She takes up her bag and goes down the hall. Ceci feels the fabric of this new blouse.

CECI: Now I remember. I'm horny! I'm just horny! I want to be wanted. I want to be touched. Not just touched, groped! I want to be fondled and strapped and tickled and... I want to be fucked. I want someone to plunge their hands into my body and grab that half of fire burning my insides and hold it super tight till the picante bursts through my eyes! Ohhh! It feels so good but so BAD! How could you miss this, God? How could you take so much of my brain and still miss the part that craves the hokey-pokey? Oh, who is this girl? What is she doing to me?

(Lydia returns in a plain dress and slippers. She has been cleaning the house. Broom and dust mop. She starts straightening up in the living room.) Hours pass like seconds. She's fast as a bird's wing. Lydia the blur. She brings me soup but I don't remember slurping nothing but blur. (Claudio enters, gruff and disoriented after a long daynight sleep. He stands in the middle of the room, staring at Lydia, who stops and stares back.)

LYDIA: I am your maid. (No reply) ¿Cuántas veces has visto Ibi?

CLAUDIO: ¿Hay café?

LYDIA: In the kitchen. What happen to her? (No reply) It's okay. She'll tell me. He glares at her and goes to the kitchen.

LYDIA: Your father, he reminds me of someone. One of my novios. Always mad at something. He returns with a cup, turns on the stereo, puts his headphones, and sits to watch TV.

CLAUDIO: I don't comprehend your coffee machine. If it is not good, I make again some more.

CECI: GGGhnn.

LYDIA: If it's too strong, tell me. I like it strong, but for some peoples, coffee is not good that way.

CECI: GGGhngh.

LYDIA: He can't hear? Why not? I'm right here, he's right there.

CECI: GGGnghh.

LYDIA: I see.

Lydia dusts the TV, blocking Claudio's view. Then she dusts the stereo console. She finds the sleeve of the record album.

LYDIA: ¡Ay, mira! ¡Pedro Infante! My mother's favorite! She raises the volume to full. Claudio flips off the headphones and jumps to his feet, his eyes glaring with rage.

LYDIA: How come she is like this.


LYDIA: How long ago?
CLAUDIO: Hace dos años.
LYDIA: ¡Hace dos años! ¿Was it your fault?
CLAUDIO: ¿Qué qué?
LYDIA: You walk around like it’s your fault. Did you crash the car with her inside?
CLAUDIO: No.
LYDIA: You blame yourself.
CLAUDIO: ¿Qué quieres de mí?
LYDIA: Only this one thing: you like the coffee or not? He takes the cup of coffee and in one gulp downs it.
CLAUDIO: No. No me gusta. He throws the cup violently into the kitchen, shattering it, then goes back to his bedroom.
LYDIA: Pues...I’ll have to do better.
CECI: ¡...I see a new card, El Pontiac Caliente! The Pontiac in heat! Cici in the Pontiac mad-crazy for some loco. Si, that ball of fire inside! Daddy’s little girl in hip-hugger jeans, Red Keds, Carole King hair racing toward her miracle boy! Lydia cleans up the mess as Rene comes in, sleepy.
RENE: What the hell was that?
LYDIA: I broke a cup.
RENE: Are you the maid?
LYDIA: Lydia. You are the other son.
RENE: Yeah. ¿Cómo the fuck esta?
LYDIA: I...what?
RENE: Is she giving you any trouble?
RENE: Slap her upside the head if she gets out of line. Kiddin’! Is there café, por favor?
LYDIA: Sí, pero it’s not good.
RENE: What do you mean it’s not good? Get me a cup.
Lydia goes.
CECI: Ggghhhnn.
RENE: I said I was kidding, Jesus Christ. (He stops. Looking at Ceci) Look. Every breath, every beat of my heart, every drop of my blood, is yours. You own me. So quit giving me that look or die.
Lydia returns with a cup of coffee.
LYDIA: Here for you.
RENE: Okay, if you’re talking English on account of us transborder Mexicans, spare me the condescension. Talk Spanish in this house if you want.
LYDIA: Bueno, si quiere que hable en mi idioma materno, así lo prefiero también, pero primeramente, me gustaría explicarle un poco de mis deseos en este país—
RENE: Look, if you want to speak English here, I’m not going to stop you. Spanish sounds kinda uppy coming from you, anyway.
LYDIA: Uppit—uppit...?
RENE: It means gimme the damn coffee. He takes it and sips as she watches him.
LYDIA: You don’t like?
RENE: Not bad.
LYDIA: You don’t go to school?
RENE: I’m done with that shit. You know, the more I look at you, the better this coffee tastes.
LYDIA: I’m glad.
LYDIA: Contempt...
RENE: You hate us. You hate us for coming here, for deserting the homeland for a chunk of that goddamn American dream, whatever the fuck that is. We’re you watered down and a little more well off. So, do you like what you see?
LYDIA: I always like what I see.
RENE: So you think you’re going to hold out long?
LYDIA: In this job or this country?
RENE: Both.
LYDIA: I hope yes.
RENE: I hope so, too. You’re easy on the eyes and hard somewhere else.
LYDIA: Your mama said you were trouble.
RENE: Better keep your door locked at night.
LYDIA: But I don’t think you’re trouble.
RENE: Righteous.
LYDIA: Is your coffee good now?
RENE: Best I ever tasted. He finishes it up, then throws the empty cup into the kitchen. He goes back to his room.
LYDIA: Mano...what happen to the men in this house?
CECI: Gghngng, ggghn. Ggn...teeeeceee. Lydia goes to her. She touches her scar.
LYDIA: De acuerdo. I have seen this before. Men who don’t get love, they get ugly. ‘Cause they hurt. (She touches Ceci’s scar with tenderness) Love is a big hurt. Even for muchos like fathers and brothers.
Ceci touches her chest. Lydia is caught in a pang she hadn’t acknowledged before.
LYDIA: Have we met before, mamita?
Lydia goes. Light change around Ceci.
CECI: Maybe. Maybe we fell in each other’s wounds one night. Into each other’s mirror. Crossed paths in our vueltos, said wassuap with you, and then took a nap in the afterlife. Spooning in the afterlife, you and me. Or maybe we just wish we were sisters.
Everyone is sitting watching TV, eating off tray tables. Claudia has his headphones on. The TV plays a melange of everything that was on during the early 1970s: news, variety shows, cop shows, talk shows, etc. Ceci lies on her mattress.
RENE: This pollo ain’t bad.
ROSA: It’s good.
MISHA: Real good.
RENE: Come to think of it, we’re all eating a little better lately.
ROSA: Qué, you don’t like my cooking, sinceridad?
MISHA: Mom, she makes chicken mole from scratch. She uses spices and stuff we don’t even know how to pronounce. She’s got recipes the Aztecs used on the damn pyramids.
ROSA: Enonces I won’t cook for you no more. Ingenuus.
RENE: Hey, a-hole, speaking of Aztecs, where’s my Abrazos album?
MISHA: Oh. I was gonna ask you. I borrowed it for inspiration. I’m writing some poems for English based on the songs in Santana’s album.
RENE: ¿No mames, güey? You took my album to school?
MISHA: What’s wrong with that?
RENE: Baboo. I had something special in the sleeve of that album.
MISHA: What?
RENE: Something very very important.
ROSA: ¿De qué estás hablando, mijo?
RENE: Just some special papers, Mom. I appreciate you interest in poetry and art, bro, but you get that effin’ album back. And stay out of my effin’ room, while you’re at it.
MISHA: It’s my effin’ room, too.
RENE: Then stay out of my TOP half of it.
MISHA: Okay, then anything that falls out of the top half of your room is MINE.
RENE: And anything I step on in the bottom half is BROKE.
ROSA: ¡Y! Ay, praise God, sometimes I wish I had my own headphones too.
RENE: Oye. Mira. The jefe hasn’t touched his supper.
MISHA: Maybe it’s too spicy.
ROSA: Oye, viejo. ¿No tienes hambre? Claudia looks at her. He takes off the headphones.
CLAUDIO: No. Tengo que ir temprano esta noche.
He stands and goes.
ROSA: That’s four nights in a row he’s going to work early.
MISHA: I think the maid makes him nervous.
ROSA: So what do you think of her?
RENE: Besides her cooking and her perky little breasts?
ROSA: Which reminds me. I don’t like the way you’re looking at her. Porta bien, Misha? What do you think of her?
MISHA: She does all right with Ceci. She likes her, too.
ROSA: She does, doesn’t she?
CECI: Ggghhhhn. Gghhnh.
ROSA: Lydia!
Lydia enters from down the hall. She notices that Claudia has not eaten her food.
LYDIA: Señora.
ROSA: Ceci needs her diaper changed.
LYDIA: Si, señora.
Lydia goes to Ceci and slowly brings her to her feet.
ROSA: So what are these poesmas you’re writing, mijo?
MISHA: Ah, they’re nothing special. Just some verses.
RENE: What about, bro? Oppression and la raza unida and our Indian roots?
MISHA: No, not like that. My first one’s called Ode to a Chante.
ROSA: A grackle? You wrote a poem about those natty black birds who mess on my car every morning?
Lydia wails Ceci off.
MISHA: They’re beautiful. They got these oil-slick wings and yellow eyes and their song is so complex. There is a tight knock on the door.
ROSA: ¡Chule! More like a squeaky garage door, mija! Don’t write no poems about them chonque.
Rosa opens the door. Alvardo comes in, dressed in a large overcoat.
ALVARO: Tía!
ROSA: Oh my god! Alvardo!
ALVARO: I know, huh? I hope I’m not bothering you at this hour.
ROSA: No, no, we just finished eating. Come on, you, say hello to your cousin!
MISHA: Hey, Varo. What’s up?
ALVARO: You’re growing tall, kid.
MISHA: About effin’ time, dude.
ALVARO: I know. It’s just, sabes, I’ve been a little busy.
MISHA: Little busy being a damn hero! I saw your picture in the paper!
ALVARO: Ay, that was nothin’. Hey Rene.
ROSA: Varo, we’re so proud of you! (Kisses him) ¡Qué lindo te veo! Take off your coat, make yourself at home! ¡Andale!
ALVARO: Thank you, Tía. Alvardo takes off his coat, revealing his Border Patrol uniform underneath.
MISHA: ¡Vato! You joined the Border Patrol?
ROSA: ¡Ay, Dios mío, qué barbaridad!¡
ALVARO: I thought you should be the first to know, being family and all. I signed up about a month ago and they fast-tracked me right into service. What do you think?
ROSA: I don’t know what to say, sabrino.
MISHA: Are you nuts? You can’t join la migra!
ALVARO: Relax, cuz, I had to do it. Money, sabes. It was this or temp work at Manpower.
MISHA: It still doesn’t make sense, Varo. You’re better than this, ese.
ALVARO: You guys don’t know what I been through. I learned some deep lessons in-country about—Lydia enters.
LYDIA: Cielas...
ROSA: Lydia! ¡Vén, vén! Lydia’s taking care of Ceci.
ALVARO: Oh, mucho gusto.
ROSA: Oh, she has her papers and everything. We made sure of that.
ALVARO: Placea.
LYDIA: You’re the cousin. She told me about you.
ROSA: What? Oh, Ceci can’t talk, silly! Alvardo, want to sit down and eat? Here, have this.
LYDIA: That’s Don Claudio’s.
ROSA: No te apures. He’ll have a cheeseburger at work. ¡Andale, provecho!
ALVARO: It sure looks good, Tía.
ROSA: Just don’t mess your uniform. It’s so starched and clean, praise God! (To Lydia) Go bring her...
Lydia digs into Claudio’s plate with relish as Lydia goes.
RENE: Lessons like what?
ALVARO: Lessons about what matters. Lessons about the sacrifices our mothers and fathers made for us. We fight for that every day, primo. Every day we protect the blessings of this life.
MISHA: And that’s why you took the job?
ALVARO: We got our own DMZ right here.
MISHA: You mean the border?
ALVARO: As soon as I get back, what happens? Some mojado steals my mother’s car. I look at the neighborhood kids and they’re all marijuaneros now. Everywhere I turn, there’s some out-of-work alien taking up space. It doesn’t matter what all I’ve done over there, I still have to wait in line for a job with these illegals.
MISHA: Dude, our dad was an illegal alien.
ALVARO: But he got his papers. He became a naturalized citizen using the proper channels, didn’t he, Tía?
ROSA: Oh yes. Yes. Claro que sí.
MISHA: So you don’t have any second thoughts about doing this to raza?
ALVARO: Who would you rather, the gringos? We take care of our own mierda, excuse the language, señora.
RENE: Is that really why you came, Varo? To show us your new uniform?
ALVARO: There was a time, cuz, when I thought I knew who I was, and what I wanted, but I just needed to grow up.
RENE: Grow up?
ALVARO: I mean wake up to the real-real. Remember when we used to play like ants in this very room? That was a child’s dream, Rene. We think the dream carries us all the way, but I got different expectations now.
RENE: What do you expect?
ALVARO: To come back and start my life right. This war was the best thing that happened to me. It pulled me out of the dream.
RENE: It was more than a dream to some people.
ALVARO: Then some people better wake up.
CLAUDIO (Calling from off): ¡Rosa! ¡Los zapatos!
ROSA: ¡Ay! ¡Este, señor! He always needs me to find his shoes for him! Espera...
Rosa goes.
ALVARO: How you doing, little cuz?
MISHA: Not sure. It’s hard to see that uniform in this house. But at the same time, you’re family.
ALVARO: That’s right.
RENE: Not one letter. Not one damn letter.
ALVARO: This is what I really missed over there. My aunt’s cooking. God, her chile is the best.
Misha senses something between them.
MISHA: I’m gonna help clean...uh...I’m gonna...(Takes the plates from the trays, goes into the kitchen)
ALVARO: Po, you’re lookin’ good. I heard you been in some fights.
RENE: What the hell do you think you’re doing here?
ALVARO: What do you think? I came to see Ceci.
RENE: Bullshit.
ALVARO: Is that bed for her? Is that where she’s sleeping now?
RENE: You got some nerve. In that uniform too.
ALVARO: Never in my dreams did I see myself in this. But it suits me, Rene. It really does. I’m gonna be good at this.
RENE: I bet you will.
ALVARO: How is she?
RENE: Now you ask. Now it occurs to you.
ALVARO: Look, man, what do you want from me? I’m here.
RENE: I wanna know where we stand.
ALVARO: We stand by the family. Rene. We stand by Ceci.
RENE: Why didn’t you come sooner?
ALVARO: I couldn’t.
RENE: But why? I’m talking to you!
ALVARO: ‘Cause when I come near you, everything gets so confused. Things happen way too fast for me. You move at this crazy speed ‘cause you’re a blaze, ese, you don’t give a shit. But I can’t be selfish now. Look what happened.
RENE: She loved you, ese. She believed in you.
ALVARO: That’s the problem. Everyone fucking believes in me.
RENE: Is that why you ran? Is that why you didn’t even stay long enough to see how she was?
ALVARO: You eat shit. Don’t forget where I been for the last two years. What I went through trumps anything you throw in my face. I’ve moved on. So don’t lay your guilt at my feet.
RENE: She was crazy for you—
ALVARO: Yeah—
RENE: She waited years for some word from you. A card. Anything.
ALVARO: How do you know? How the fuck do you know? If she can’t talk, how do you know she missed me?
RENE: ‘Cause I stayed, fucker! I stayed and took the heat for you!
ALVARO: Poor cuz. Still picking glass off your face...
Alvaro touches his lip. Misha enters. Rene moves away.

MISHA: What's going on.

ALVARO: Nada, Mesh. Rene enters with a photo album.

ROSA: Oye, sobrina. Mira. She made a scrapbook of you. She glued all your pictures on it, polaroids of you and her. See, your ribbons from track and wrestling.

ALVARO: Wow, I never realized.

ROSA: And the newspaper articles. When you were Homecoming King. And Student Council y todo. And look, all your notes to her. And the songs she copied from the Hit Parade.

ALVARO: All of this for me.

ROSA: She had a big crush on you, sobrina. She would been so proud of your service.

MISHA: Mom, she ain't dead.

Claudio enters dressed in his whites. He sizes Alvaro up with a scowl.

ALVARO: Buenos, Tio.

CLAUDIO: Sobrino, ¿Y tu Abuela Doña Yolita?

ALVARO: Bien, gracias. Tio, I'm in the Migración.

CLAUDIA: Good. Keep them all out. He grabs his coat and walks out past them.

ROSA: Well. That was easy.

ALVARO: Pues, I better get going too.

ROSA: But you haven't seen Cecilia!

ALVARO: Another day, Tia. I go on duty in fifteen minutes. I'm on the levee just up the road. Look, if you guys decide to hate me for this, I'll understand.

ROSAS: (Kissing him on the cheek): I'm going to pray for you. I'm going to ask Jesus to make these mojados lay their souls before your badge and give up without a struggle so no one gets hurt.

ALVARO: Gracias, Tia Rosa.

CECI: Gggghnnnaaaggg.

Misha is the first to see Lydia ushering Ceci into the room in her quinceañera dress and shoes. Her hair is pinned up. Everyone is stunned.

MISHA: Oh my God.

ALVARO: Ceci.

RENE: What do you think you're doing?

LYDIA: She wanted to wear this. She said Alvaro would have the first dance. In her quinceañera. First her dad, then you. Because you know her better than anyone.

ALVARO: Jesus.

ROSA: Lydia, por favor——

LYDIA: A bailar, caballero. Alvaro goes to Ceci. He takes her hands. Then carefully lifts her up and dances gently around the room with her. Everyone watches them except Rene, who looks away. A distant Mexican waltz plays in Ceci's mind.

CECI: Lydia, in your world the things that never happen always happen. With him. All my urges saved for him. Catching moonlight on the folds of my gown. A big corsage aflame on my heart. My pearl earrings on, dancing super slow with Varo in the middle of the salón to “Sabor a mi,” body to body, cheek to cheek, his breath in my ear saying over and over——

ALVARO: Ceci... Ceci... Ceci— She grasps Alvaro around the neck as if to hold him forever.

RENE: Ceci, let him go.

MISHA: Leave them alone.

LYDIA: Let her dance.

RENE: Ceci! I mean it! A small yet spot gathers around Ceci as she peers herself.

CECI: Gggghnnn.

ROSA: Ay Dios mio! ¡Qué desastre! ¡Mira nena! She's doing number one!

ALVARO: Ceci... please... my uniform...

RENE: GODDAMMIT STUPID BITCH!

ROSA: RENE! NO!!

Rene tears Ceci away from Alvaro. She collapses in a heap, crying.

MISHA: See what you done? Look at her! Are you happy? Is this what you wanted? You asshole! Lydia rushes to the kitchen.

ALVARO: I have to go.

ROSA: Perdón, sobrina! We're so sorry about this! I wish you didn't——

ALVARO: No, I'm sorry! Thank you for the good food. I have to go.

Alvaro rushes out. Misha consoles Ceci as she cries. Lydia returns with a mop.

MISHA: It's okay, sis. It's over now. (To Rene) You didn't have to be so rough with her.

RENE: I didn't put her in that dress.

MISHA: Still, you didn't have to push her away like that, fuckhead! What's your problem?

RENE: My problem is this maid doesn't realize what that dressing dress means in this house!

LYDIA: But she does.

RENE: Who asked you to talk?

LYDIA: She knows everyone's pain. All the time. Even yours.

RENE: Did she really ask you to put her in this dress?

LYDIA: How else would I know where to look?

ROSA: She told you?

RENE: Did she also tell you how she got her head stretched up like a baseball? Did she say who did that to her?

LYDIA: Not everything she says comes out her mouth.

RENE: What's that supposed to mean? What are these riddles? Who the fuck are you?

ROSA: ¡No hablas asi, Rene!

RENE: No! Explain to me! How do you know what she wants? As far as we can tell, the best she can do is nod when she needs to take a shit!

LYDIA: She loves you, Rene. She thinks you should be what you are, and not be sorry for it.

RENE: What??

The sound of a car pulling up. Misha looks out the window.

MISHA: Dad.

ROSA: (Eyeballing on Claudio’s wallet): ¡Dios mio! He’s coming back. Take her to bathroom! Get the dress off de velada!

LYDIA: Why?

RENE: You screwed yourself this time, maid.

MISHA: He’s coming!

ROSA: ¡Andale! Ay, la carrera! His wallet! Claudio enters. He takes his wallet. He goes to Ceci and touches the frill of her dress.

CLAUDIO: ¿Quién hizo esto?

ROSA: Mira, Claudio, it's not a big——

CLAUDIO: ¿Quèn li peuso esta chingadera a mi?

CECI: Gggghnn.

CLAUDIO: ¿QUE QUIEN LO HIZO?

Misha steps forward.

MISHA: Me. I did it.

Claudio looks down, shakes his head.

MISHA: I just thought it was time, Dad. She looks so...divine. ¿No se parece divina, Apa? Claudio charges with flying fists at Misha, who collapses under the thrust.

CLAUDIO: Cabrón! Te voy a matar, maldito!

ROSA: y ay viejo! NO! NO!

Cladio pommels Misha. Lydia screams as Rosa tries to intervene. Rene turns his back to them.

CLAUDIO: ¡Dejalo! ¡No le pegarás! Claudio blindly socks Rosa as he throws Misha down the hall and follows him out, taking off his belt. The door slams. Everyone hears the lashes and Misha’s cries.

ROSA: Ya no le pegues, viejo, please Diosito santo, make him stop, please not Misha, ayyy...ayyy... Lydia glares at Rene, who watches helplessly, then runs out of the house. The lashes continue at the lights change.

CECI: New card. La Miera. The Shit. This thing lashing me, this burning need to hurt, carnal mayor, you tore me away from him, my bronze star, how come? And what’s this thing that blackens my corazón with so much hate when it’s Varo my body craves? Rosa and Lydia enter. A shiner on Rosa. She is putting on her coat and getting her keys.

LYDIA: Are you sure you should be going, señora?

RENE: I have to go look for him. Rene is very sensitive. He acts tough, but inside he’s scared.

LYDIA: Of what?

ROSA: His father. Himself. Everyone. He won’t even drive a car since Ceci’s accident. Lord, take care of my boy!

LYDIA: Where are you going to look?

ROSA: I’ll drive around till I see him. He can’t be far. Misha’s sleeping now. He just needs some rest.

LYDIA: We shall take him to the hospital.
ROSA: No, no, they ask too many questions. He’ll be okay in the morning.
LYDIA: La duda, señorita. Se me parece muy malo. And your eye too.
ROSA: Please, Lydia. It’s happened before. He’ll be all right. Stay here with Ceci. Rosa goes. Lydia sits by on the sofa. She places her hand on her chest.
CECI: In your world, Lydia, people die and come back but not all the way. Not all the way. Misha comes into the living room, swelled and blue from the pounding. A cut above his eye.
CECI: Eeeeee. Eeeecyee.
MISHA: Shh. It’s okay, girl. I’m all right. See? Just a little puffy.
LYDIA: You should be lying down. Go lie down.
MISHA: Where’s Mom? Is she okay?
LYDIA: She’s looking for Rene. Sit. I’ll get some more ice.
Misha sits while Lydia goes to the kitchen.
MISHA: You know what, Ceci? He’s getting old. He can’t keep pace anymore. Still, when he’s mad, he can land some real-life hurt.
Lydia returns with some ice in a dishtowel.
LYDIA: He was an animal. Only an animal does this.
MISHA: Didn’t you earn your whippings growing up?
LYDIA: No way.
MISHA: In this town, it’s a rite of passage.
LYDIA: Why did you do that? Why did you take blame for the vestido?
MISHA: I wasn’t gonna let him work you over.
LYDIA: He would not.
MISHA: You don’t know my dad.
LYDIA: You don’t know me.
MISHA: Besides, you made her beautiful. I didn’t believe she could be like that and still look so beautiful.
LYDIA: She is.
MISHA: You can’t leave now. Ceci needs you.
Ow.
LYDIA: Sorry.
MISHA: If you do that for kicks in your hometown?
LYDIA: Town? More like a campo santo. Barren fields and empty houses. A lot of people gone to El Norte. We go to school. In the afternoons, we help our mamás with the chores. I’m an orphan so mostly I took care of my abuela.
MISHA: Did you have a ... a novio?
LYDIA: Once. But he was too possessive. Then my grandmother died. I needed something to do.
MISHA: What do you want to do?
LYDIA: Learn English. Work in a hospital. I could be a good nurse.
MISHA: Yeah, but you need skills for that. Owwww! My back’s on fire.
LYDIA: Take off your shirt. (He gives her a look) Ay, por favor! Let me see your back! He takes off his shirt. His back is covered with raised welts, some of them bleeding.
LYDIA: Oh, señorita. Wait here. She runs down the hall to her room.
CECI: Ggghgngn.
MISHA: Hey, I saw you topless, it’s only fair.
CECI: Ggnm. Lighhh.
MISHA: You loved him, didn’t you?
CECI: What sucks is that I still do. His thorns are all around my heart.
LYDIA: Returns with a small vial and a lit candle.
CECI: A vee.
MISHA: What’s that?
LYDIA: I have skills. I learned them from my grandmother.
MISHA: Ahh. What is that stuff?
LYDIA: It’s some liniment made from the agave. We use it to heal open wounds.
CECI: Well, it’s not working.
LYDIA: Of course not. You need to seal this.
She dips her wax on his back.
MISHA: OOOWW! OOOWW! What are you doing to me?! That burns!
LYDIA: You’ll start to feel better now.
MISHA: What is this, some kinda witchcraft?
LYDIA: Mi abuela was a curandera. I learned the science of herbs growing up with her in her botica.
CECI: Well, your science burns like shit.
LYDIA: Get your mind off it. Tell me this poem of the grackle.
MISHA: What?
LYDIA: You said you had a poem. How does it go?
MISHA: Well...
LYDIA: You don’t know it from memory?
MISHA: I do.
LYDIA: ¿Entonces? Don’t be shy. What’s it called?
MISHA: Ode to a Chimney. Ode means—
MISHA (Reicting):
O bird
You black bird
You look like you flew through / the darkest night and it stuck on you,
Except you closed your eyes and they stayed yellow
As the wasps that dance around the lawn.
I see you sitting on the wire
Making that song, that grackle, crackle, wheeeze, and chirp
That makes me wonder if you’re trying to learn
The language of manual transmissions
Or maybe you’re trying to say something in our broken tongue.
O bird dressed in mourning but always so lively,
Like death is just another occasion to find a she-grackle,
You remind me of things I should be doing,
Flights I should be taking, nights I should be soaking my wings in.
Except with eyes opened ‘cause mine are already black.
Well?
LYDIA: The transmission part. I didn’t get that.
MISHA: It’s a draft. I’m still working on it. Hey. I don’t feel it anymore.
LYDIA: Put your shirt on. Your poem is good. But to know words, you have to know people. Not grackles.
Rosa enters and sees Misha without his shirt on.
ROSA: ¿Qué es esto?
MISHA: I was...I’m tired. I have to go to bed.
He goes.
LYDIA: Señora—
ROSA: I found him. Rene enters, morose, withdrawn. He looks like a child.
LYDIA: Rene?
ROSA: Don’t talk to him. Go to bed, miijito. She kisses him and he starts to go, eyes to the floor. He stops, falls before Ceci.
RENE: Sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorrrryy in sorry ceci in sosorry sorry. He gets up and goes down the hall to his room.
ROSA: You too. Go to sleep. I’m tired. I have to work tomorrow. (Regarding her eye) How will I explain this?
LYDIA: She wanted to wear the dress. She told me so.
ROSA: I understand. But leave the miracles to God.
Lydia goes. Rosa casts a glance toward Ceci.
ROSA: You know where I found him, don’t you?
ROSA goes.
CECI: Where hearts and Pontiacs break. It’s all love, ama. All a desperate abrazo. All of us holding tight to each other so we don’t fall so hard. So we can open our eyes again and see the new sun dripping in through the blinds.

The following dawn. Claudio comes in, his whites stained with grease and ketchup. He finds Ceci sleeping, still wearing the dress.
CLAUDIO: Mi pajarita. Como te quiero. ‘Cause of you I given up.
Lydia enters with her bag, dressed to leave.
LYDIA: Ya me voy.
CLAUDIO: ¿A dónde?
LYDIA: ¿Qué te importa? You beat him very badly. Your own son.
CLAUDIO: ¿Pero mira como la viestió!
LYDIA: It was me, stupid. I dressed her in it. You going to beat me, too?
CLAUDIO: Espera.
She stops. Claudio struggles to frame his words.

CLAUDIO: Era mi pajarrita...

LYDIA: In English. You want me to listen, tell me in English.

CLAUDIO: Cecilia...my bird. Why do you put the dress?

LYDIA: It's her dress. She wanted to look nice for...for you.

CLAUDIO: It's good you go back. This country robs your soul.

LYDIA: Hombre, you have a life here.

CLAUDIO: I had a life alli! But the way you want things and the way things go: different. Rosa wants her babies que sean American. So here I am, not one, not the other, but a, como se dice, a stone. A stone for them to make their own grande pinche dreams.

CECI: Gyguffulh.

LYDIA: Except Cecilia.

CLAUDIO: You want to know que paso, for reals?

CECI: All the things that need saying. Finally, to know how I got my tiara of scars.

LYDIA: No.

CLAUDIO: Three days till la quinceañera. Three days. Dinner set, salon reserve, the comadres all prepare. But en medio de la noche, everyones is sleeping and me at work, Ceci y Rene go out the window in her room, and nobody hears nada. Why?

CECI: Cause this is the night—the night of secrets—of dark streets and Pontiacs and fire in my body.

CLAUDIO: Why put the car in neutral and push it down the street and then start it up?

CECI: 'Cause a fierce voice in our hearts is hissing vamamos!

CLAUDIO: Con las alas del diablo they tear down to the border en el west side! Why!

CECI: There is no why! Fuck all the why's! Only me and Rene and the roar of the car!

CLAUDIO: Three nights till the quinceñera and they go, they go somewhere too fast, the pendejos—

CECI: To Alvaro! Alvaro my love! I'm coming!

CLAUDIO: They go too fast on the dirt road by the border fence, and the tires are bald en ese Pontiac, you can't drive too fast in that car! And then something happen—

CECI: This ugliness. This hot ugly bile inside rolling up my throat!

CLAUDIO: Rene's good, he drives good. But something make him miss this big curve, you have to slow down to turn, but Rene, he don't slow and he don't turn and—!

CECI: NO!

CLAUDIO: The car hits a pole y ya.

CECI: El Pontiac wrapped around a pole like a lover and me flying in a sky full of confetti glass!

CLAUDIO: Mi Cecilia, who was born on a full moon and danced the twist for me at six and always understood me no matter what demon possess me, Cecilia Rosario Flores, her name on the cake of her fifteenth year, flies through the windshield of the car into the cold hard ground fifty feet in front.

CECI: I see little bits of brain and blood on the road, and you trying to scoop up all the memories, my first words, my first dreams, you try to scoop them up in your hands, Apa.

LYDIA: And Rene.

CLAUDIO: Nada. I ask him why. I ask him where the chingado they were going. A million why's I ask him. He sits in the dirt and cries. He never answer me, never.

LYDIA: You still blame him, don't you?

CLAUDIO: Blame is not the word. I wish you peace of mind wherever you go.

He puts on his headphones and stays at the blank TV.

LYDIA: Peace of mind. What is that.

About to leave, Lydia catches Ceci's gaze. A kind of plea in her look.

CECI: I had a dream the night before you came. That you stand at the door and stop breathing. And a part of you falls away...

(Lydia sets her bag down, she peels off her underwear. She approaches Claudio who stares straight at the TV.)

That you come like a ghost into our house and stand over my daddy, who's a ghost himself, and you take his crown and hear the voices in his heart crying for love...

(She takes off his headphones. She places them over her head and listens for a moment.)

And then you blind him...

(She turns off the TV. He remains still with his eyes fixed ahead.)
And land on his lap and take his breath away. (She straddles him in his chair and kisses him. He enfolds her in his arms.)

Each breathless bezo, reaches into his heart and lays grog over the crumbling walls of his pride, you touch him who can’t remember touch any more than I can. It was a dream more real than this maid on my father making sex like the last act of God, I see your eyes, Lydia, dreaming the same thing, burning their grief into, their want, their reckless need for darkness—(She turns and meets Lydia’s gaze.)

I see—You! With the inscription ‘La Muerte, La Muerte, La Muerte… (They continue to make love as Ceci goes into convulsions.)

Gnghghghghghghghgngng.

Out of the shadows, Rene watches them making love as music from the headphones plays.

ACT TWO

The living room in Ceci’s dream. Bed sheets stretched everywhere over chairs and tables, creating a network of glowing tunnels amid the darkness. Ceci, wearing the quincañera dress, crawls on all fours like a toddler through the tunnels.

CECI: Teeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteeteetelete
CLAUDIO: ¡Ya no me!
LYDIA: ENGLISH.
CLAUDIO (Chingao): Why you torture me like this?
LYDIA: I'm not.
CLAUDIO: Will you see me tomorrow?
LYDIA: No.
CLAUDIO: So that one time? Was for what?
LYDIA: I don't know.
CLAUDIO: What does it mean? What does that mean for me?
LYDIA: You cried. When you fucking me, you cried.
CLAUDIO: ¡Y qué?
LYDIA: I never cry.
CECI: I hear them, the longings in their voices, not for each other, but for other things out of their conception. Things that require light and mindless hurt. Their gases remain locked as lights and human motion are restored in the living room.
MISHA: What are you redeeming this time, Mom?
ROSA: This set of knives, mira. These are special “chef’s” knives, very high quality, five of them, imagine. I always wanted a set.
ROSA: Pues, when I go to France, así lo digo. Here I say “chef.” How are you feeling?
MISHA: Mom, it's been a week. I'm fine. Lydia passes through with the wash.
ROSA: He didn’t meant to hit you like that, you know. He was expecting me to stop him. I just didn’t know how. It was my fault.
MISHA: It was nobody’s fault, okay? Claudio walks through on his way to the bedroom. Silence.
ROSA (Going through her purse): Anyways. After work I stopped at Mr. Dickey’s jewelry store and…
Rosa gives Misha a small case.
MISHA: Mom...
He opens the case.
ROSA: It’s a Cross. A gold Cross pen.
MISHA (Taking the gold pen out): Mom, are you sure about this? These pens are expensive.
ROSA: I’m working, Misha. We’re quasi-middle class as of today, which means we live a little más better. Besides, it was a clearance, half off. I always wait for the half-off sales.
MISHA: Thanks, Mom. Feel this, Rene. Feel how heavy it is.
RENE: That’s heavy.
MISHA: Words. Full of words, carnal.
ROSA: Just no bad words, okay? I hate when you write bad words.
MISHA: If I use them, Mom, I promise you won’t know what they mean.
ROSA: Misha, you’re going to be somebody. Even if you won’t have God, God’s grace is on you.

She goes, wiping her eyes.
MISHA: What's with her? She's all goofy lately.
RENE: Leave her alone. She's doing her best.
MISHA: Her best to what?
RENE: Dude, you’re so damned naive. You got no idea how fucked-up we are.
MISHA: I’m not as naive as you think I am.
RENE (Grabbing Misha’s pate): Oh yeah? What's this, fuckhead?
MISHA: Don’t touch that. Put it down.
RENE: “Black eyes drenched in the waters of the Rio”
MISHA: Give it!
RENE: “Black hair like a mantilla draped on me.”
MISHA: I told you —
RENE: “Your brown hands rolling over the open plain of my back.”
MISHA: Ashole.
RENE: I gotta say, Misha, I never seen you like this. It seems our little housekeeper from Mexico-way has sparked your plumed serpent to life, carnal. (Rising his back) Too bad it’s wasted.
MISHA: What do you know? …Has she told you anything?
RENE: ¡No mames, buzy! You don’t know thing one about this.
MISHA: It’s been two years, carnal. When are you gonna get over it? When are you gonna stop making everyone pay for that crash?
RENE: Keep your maid away from me. If you want her, fine, let her be your damned—
MISHA: Don’t you say it. Don’t say that word to my face.
RENE: Whore.
Lydia comes in with a pair of scissors. They all stand looking at each other.
CECI: These cartoons, amazin’ how they go through so much hell, but nobody ever gets hurt. Just little bronze estrellas over their heads and these magic bandages that vanish in the next frame. That’s why they don’t have private parts. They’ll be safe as long as they don’t screw each other blind.
Rene fathers under Lydia’s stare and walks off to his room. Misha gathers the stamp books and puts them all in a bag. Lydia starts cutting the plastic covers off the lampshades. Rosa enters.
ROSA: What are you doing?
LYDIA: Señora, I saw the pictures in that catalog. Lampshades like yours.
ROSA: Yes.
LYDIA: Except they don’t have the pilástico on them. It’s just how they were…sino se dice...
MISHA: Packaged.
ROSA: But it keeps the dust off them.
MISHA: Mom, she’s right. You’re supposed to take them off when you put them up.
ROSA: But we’ve had them like this forever.
LYDIA: Well, it’s all wrong. That’s why the light is so bad in this house.
ROSA: Then why didn’t you say something? Why didn’t none of you say something?
MISHA: We didn’t want to embarrass you.
LYDIA: See! Don’t they look más better?
ROSA: Pues…
LYDIA: Now you can see things.
ROSA: Next time, ask me, Lydia.
LYDIA: I thought I—
ROSA: You didn’t. Ask me before you start redoing my house.
LYDIA: Mi culpa, señora. I didn’t mean to be so presumptuous.
Rosa glowers at her for a moment.


MISHA: Look, Mom, Ceci likes it, too. See how she’s responding.

Rosa looks at her uneasily, then laughs, embracing Lydia.

Rosa: ¡Ay, como soy tonta! You’re right. It does look brighter. (Laughs) I can be so dumb sometimes! Such a ramshackle!

LYDIA: Señora Rosa, don’t talk like that. You’re good people. You seem nicer than my own mother to me. I’m sorry.

Rosa: Thank you, miña. (To ص ber face) You know what? Let me take you shopping.

Andalus, vámonos shopping! Lydia: ¿Que qué?

Rosa: Come with me! I hate going to the stores alone! Además, I’m going to need help with the bags.

LYDIA: Oh señora, there’s work to do...

Rosa: Chale, the work can wait. Besides, you made Ceci happy. Ven camina, miña. Help me pick out some things for the house. Pronto, get your chaqueta and let’s go!

LYDIA: Señora, you are too nice!

Rosa: Misha, stay with your sister. We’ll be back. And next time, you let me know about things like this, mi ojos.

MISHA: Okay.

Rosa: Vamos, miña.

Rosa takes her keys and goes out the door. Lydia starts to go, but stops. She sees Misha take out his Cross pen and starts to write in his pad.

LYDIA: Read me unos de tus poemas, Misha.

MISHA: Uh...sure.

LYDIA: Tonight.

She goes.

CECI: Ghngng. Ghngng.

MISHA: You hear that, carnada? She wants my poems.

CECI: Gh. Ghngngn. (Points to the pen in his pocket)

MISHA: Oh! You wanna poem. Okay. “Ode to Ceci.” He tries to write a poem in her palm, but he can’t.

MISHA: Sorry, sis. All my poems come out for her. One for the way she laughs. One for the way she irons my pants. Ayy. Ten for the hurt that presses on me when she’s near.

CECI: Where does it hurt?

MISHA: Mainly here. Pumping through my veins one single word. Lydia... Lydia... Lydia... I can’t think, I can’t sleep. I curl up in bed and cry.

CECI: I hear you.

MISHA: Sis, have you ever felt this? I don’t mean puppy crushes or shit like that. I mean blind, dumb love.

CECI: Blinder, dumbier.

MISHA: Is it legal to want her this much? ‘Cause I want her.

CECI: Worker Ant, don’t do it.

MISHA: What if she doesn’t like me? What if she just doesn’t feel the same way I do?

CECI: Then hope to God she tells you, Meesh.

MISHA: Shit. You’re lucky you don’t have to deal with this anymore. Way too much hurt for the risk.

CECI: Lucky? I’m the opposite of lucky. If wanting to love and be loved back is lucky. I’m the opposite of luck, the opposite of possibility and love and Cecilia Rosario Flores.

MISHA: I take it by your look you’re saying I should go for it.

CECI: Ghngngnh.

Claudio enters again from his bedroom, a troubled look on his face.

CLAUdio: ¿Dónde está Lydia? MISHA: Out with Mom.

CLAUDIO: ¿Cuándo regresan?

MISHA: No idea.

Claudio reaches within the folds of his La-Z Boy for his bottle. He takes a twig. He spits it out.

CLAUDIO: ¿Qué la chingada madre! ¿Cabrones!

MISHA: ¿Qué anda, Dad? What’s wrong?

CLAUDIO: ¿Quién pisó Wesson en mi botella?

MISHA: What?

CLAUDIO: Who put cooking oil en mi botella! MISHA: It wasn’t me! I swear!

CLAUDIO: Hijo de la chingada—!

MISHA: I swear! I had nothing to do with that, Dad!

Claudio raises his fist to strike him. Misha covers. Claudio sees his son’s terror. Misha looks up at his father and sees the same fear in his eyes. Claudio turns away.

CLAUDIO: Get up. I know who did this.

MISHA: Who?

CLAUDIO: ¿Quién más? Rene. I don’t lay my hand on him not since before miña, and see how he hates me.

Misha disappears into the kitchen.

CLAUDIO: Nobody listens to me. I’m nothing en esta casa. I work like a Negro and still I’m nothing.

Misha returns with a beer and offers it to Claudio.

CLAUDIO: I’ll wash that greasy taste down. Claudio takes it and sips.

CLAUDIO: Is there anything else I can do?

CLAUDIO: No.

MISHA: Want me to take that for you?

Claudio gives him the liquor bottle. He notices the pen in Misha’s breast pocket.

CLAUDIO: ¿Y eso, de dónde viene?

MISHA: Mom bought it. Half price.

Claudio nods. He sits in his chair. Misha clicks on the TV and brings his father his headphones.

CLAUDIO: You’re a decent boy. Tu mamá, she raise you well.

Claudio puts on the headphones and skates at the TV. Misha takes the bottle and starts to go back to his room. He stops.

MISHA: Dad?... Jefe?

No response.

MISHA: For what it’s worth, it wasn’t just Mom who raised me. It was you, too, asshole. You’re half to blame. You’re the idiot who knocked her up, right? Your last name is mine, too, right? Everything about you I resent is half of you too, motherfucker. The blood that came out my nose is yours, your spirt in my face has my DNA all over it, and the shit I seem to give you time after time after pince time is the same shit you’ve been giving me since the day I was born. So take some credit. Dad. I’m your son. I’m your decent well-raised second son. You bred me with fists and belts and shoes and whatever else you could throw at me. You raised me to jump at the sound of your voice and the stamp of your foot. You taught me to cower and shake and cover my ears in bed at night so I wouldn’t hear you screaming while you slapped her. You taught me shame. I should grow up to be a spiteful little fucker just like you, hating the world for the crap I bring on myself, piling some real hurt on the people who care for me most. Except you know what, I won’t. No sir. I won’t be you. I don’t know what the hell I’m gonna be and God knows may turn out worse than I think, but I won’t be you. Some day, not today, against my better sense, I’ll gonna forgive you. You’ll see.

He turns and goes.

A pause. Claudio stands and goes to his stereo.

CLAUDIO: Next time put the needle on the record.

Claudio sits and watches TV. The glow from the TV intensifies, casting long shadows across the room.

CECI: How come, Daddy? How come you don’t upload on him now? Is it ‘cause he’s right? Is it ‘cause, like Rene, you crave to be punished? Or is it ‘cause of Lydia? Does it take a stranger to make you quit your pendejadas? I see you, the man inside the man who coulda been. All afternoon, still as a lawn Mexican, you wait for the changes inside. You fall into a sleep that permits no dreaming, no dreaming on this side for you Apa...

Claudio sleeps. A knock. Alvaro in his street clothes steps inside, a bag draped over his arm.


ALVARO: Oye. About last week. I haven’t been the same since...well, since. (He comes toward her... touches her dress) That day I came over. You were wearing this.

CECI: I wanted to see what fifteen looked like.

ALVARO: But it wasn’t finished yet. None of us were.

Some scratchy AM radio tune plays from somewhere down the hall. Alvaro hears it, then turns in its direction. The lights change. Ceci stirs.
CECI: Calling. VARO!

ALVARO: Hey, Ceci! I heard the radio and— whoa! Look it up!

CECI: What do you think? You like it?

ALVARO: Turn around. Prima, you look fine! Is it finished?

CECI: Almost, just some hemming to do. Why are you looking at me like that?

ALVARO: I had no idea my cuz was such a fox. You’re turning into a real beauty.

CECI: Hey, you better come to my quincencieras.

ALVARO: I’m there. I just can’t get too messed up ’cause you know I’m shipping out the next morning.

CECI: I wish you didn’t have to go. Can’t you get some exemption or something?

ALVARO: Actually, Ceci, I wanna go.

CECI: But why? Don’t you watch the body counts on the news?

ALVARO: Sure I do. That’s why I need to be there. My mom and dad, when they came over, they had nothing. Being American means a lot to them. C’mon, you know this. We got a flag on our porch.

CECI: But you’re the brain of the family! You should be in college!

ALVARO: Mira, Ceci, the truth is, since graduation, I’ve felt like some discipline’s gone AWOL in my life, and what better way to get it back than to do my duty for Tió Sam?

CECI: God, you are something. Varo, will you, like, be my first dance? At my quinceañera?

ALVARO: That’s reserved for your father.

CECI: But after him, the next dance. Will you ask me, I mean, never mind, what am I thinking, huh?

ALVARO: Cecilia Rosario, may I have the honor of throwing some chancas with you? She smiles and offers her hand. They dance to some slow Temptations song on the radio.

CECI: I hope they play this song.

ALVARO: I’ll see that they do. Anyways, is Rene home?

CECI: No, he’s running some errands for Mom. What’s up?

ALVARO: I gotta talk to that dude. There’s something I gotta tell him.

CECI: Tell me. I’ll tell him.

ALVARO: No, this is personal guy stuff, Ceci—

CECI: Is it drugs?

ALVARO (Breaking away): What? No!

CECI: Are you guys toking up or something?

ALVARO: God, you been watching too much Mad Squad, esa. Just tell him I came by. Tell him I had to put my car in the shop.

CECI: Your car?

ALVARO: Tell him tonight’s my only night. That’s all. I gotta split. You’re gonna kill ‘em in this.

He turns to leave.

CECI: Alvaro. Wait.

She kisses him hard on the mouth. He is startled.

Then he kisses her back.

ALVARO: Oh my god, Ceci—

CECI: Tell me you haven’t wanted it. I know you like me. The first time at the Bronco drive-in with you in the backseat with my brothers. I let my hand slip into yours under the blanket and you held it tight on your lap, which was so warm. All through the movie I thought I would explode. That’s when I knew! Te quiero, Alvaro. Te quiero mucho. Oh my God, I can’t believe what I’m saying!

ALVARO: Me neither—

CECI: I’ve come of age. I don’t need no party to prove it. I know what I feel.

ALVARO: Ceci, you’re my cousin.

CECI: Do you want me? That’s all you have to say. Do you?

ALVARO: Te-tee-tee. In ant language, that means you’re the queen.

CECI: (Leaping into his arms): I knew it! I knew it! Take me with you.

ALVARO: Take you…?

CECI: You and Rene taking Dad’s car and partying tonight, aren’t you?

ALVARO: Oh shit. Rene.

CECI: Can I come? I won’t be any trouble. It’ll be fun, like the three of us at the drive-in.

ALVARO: No, Ceci, and you can’t tell anybody this. This is guy’s night out, that’s all.

CECI: Please let me come. If you want me, you’ll let me come.

He kisses her long and deep. The lights change back. The radio fades. When Alvaro pulls away, Ceci is restored to her brain-damaged state.

CECI: Uhhhhh uhh.

ALVARO: You shouldn’t come. You shouldn’t have stayed home. It wasn’t you. It was never you.

CECI: Oh no. No. All my love wasted, all my wishing ruined, no chance of that cherry going boom.

Alvaro goes to pick up his bag. He sees that Claudio has been awake for some time. Claudio takes off his headphones.

CLAUDIO: Solrino.

ALVARO: Buenas noches. Disculpe si lo desperté, Tió.

CLAUDIO: ¿Cómo se te parece? ¿Todavía bonita, que no?

ALVARO: Sí, señor. Still very pretty.

CLAUDIO: She is our penance. How we repay our pecados.

ALVARO: God forgives our sins, Don Claudio. He doesn’t take them out on others.

CLUDIO: Mine. He does.

ALVARO: I stopped by to see Rene. I brought him something from my tour. A jacket I bought in a market.

CLAUDIO: ¿O si?

ALVARO: My buddies and me got ‘em for good luck. It wasn’t good enough for some, I guess.

When I got back, Tió, I didn’t know what to do with myself. I didn’t know how to be with people. I think I got used to having someone tell me what to do. The Migra’s good for that. Still, with this war going on, I feel like I oughta make peace where I can.

CLAUDIO: Rene.

Alvaro nods, then looks away.

CLAUDIO: What happen that night?

ALVARO: Si? I don’t understand…

CLUDIO: All this time, I wonder where they go. To see you, que no?

ALVARO: No, señor.

CLUDIO: They come to your house, verdad? Rene y Cecilia. Y tú.

ALVARO: You know what happened, Tió.

CLUDIO: I know what happen to miia. What happen to you? They are going to see you, no? You are there tambien, verdad? What do you know about this accident? You can tell me, Varo. I won’t hate you. I just want to know. ¡Contéstame!

ALVARO: What does it matter now? How’s it going to change anything? She’s not going to get better. You and me, Tió, comiser iguales. Blaming ourselves for nothin’.

ROSA: Alvaro! Praise the Lord! What a surprise! ¡Mira, Rene, tu primo!

RENE: Hey.

ALVARO: I just came over, you know…

ROSA: We were shopping all day, sorry, viejo, Lydia had never seen the mall, you know the new mall they put by the freeway? So I took her and you should have seen the look on her face!

LYDIA: It’s the most beautiful place I have ever seen!

ROSA: We bought some things, viejo.

LYDIA: I got some makeup and some perfume, see? And then I got some high-tone shampoo for my hair and conditioner, and some soap so I smell like Ali McGraw. And then at the Popular, I got these new shoes. See? ¿Les gustan mis zapatos?

CLAUDIO: How did you pay for this?

ROSA: I advanced her for the month.

CLAUDIO: A month’s pay to smell like a gringa.

LYDIA: Like a rich gringa.

ROSA: On the way home, we saw Rene walking on the street. So we picked him up, praise Jesus.

RENE: I wanted to walk.

ROSA: But look who you would miss if you did! Lydia goes to Ceci and puts some perfume on her wrist.

ALVARO: For you, cuz.

He unties the bag and presents a satin jacket with colored embroidery to his cousin.

ROSA: Ah! ¿Qué bonita! Goodness, look at the back! Ay, Rene…

Rosa displays the back of the jacket which has an embroidered map of Indochina, with a colored dragon running around it. Sewn in gold lettering it says, “When I die, I am going to Heaven, because I’ve already done my time in Hell.” Rene puts it on.
ALVARO: Straight out a Nam, see. I meant to bring it last time, but I was having your name sewn on the inside seam.

RENE (Floored): What can I say? It’s great.

ALVARO: Over there, Rene, family is everything. That’s all that kept me going. I went over there for you, man. I know I made some choices in my job that don’t sit well in this house, and I’m sorry. But we can’t let that burn up the good times we had. I need you to accept what I am, ‘cause you’re my cousin and I love you.

RENE: What did you say?

ALVARO: You’re my cousin.

RENE: No, you said something else. What did you say? Say it.

ALVARO: Rene, I’m doing the best I can—

RENE: SAY IT! You fucking hypocrite!

ROSA: RENE!

Rene scrambles for the door. Claudia grabs his arm and his sides. They look at each other for the first time. Rene jerks his arm away and runs out.

CECI: Ggggggggg.

ROSA: Lo siento. Rene just can’t get used to this INS business.

ALVARO: I understand, Tía Rosa. He’ll come around.

LYDIA: Ceci says it is best that you go.

ALVARO: Your criada has a wild imagination, Tía. Ceci.

Alvaro goes.

ROSA: Did you see that, viejo? Did you see how Rene was?

CLAUDIO: I saw.

ROSA: And you’re not even going to ask him why?

CLAUDIO: Already a million times I ask him.

ROSA: ¿Por Dios santo! Nobody makes sense here! Rene! Rene!

Rosa goes out after Rene.

Misha goes to his room. Lydia and Claudia regard each other in silence.

LYDIA: You are going to stand there? He’s your son, viejo.

CLAUDIO: Don’t call me that. Only Rosa calls me that.

Claudio stalks to the stereo and gets his headphones.

LYDIA: He needs you.

CLAUDIO: (Putting the headphones on and sitting in front of the TV): Leave me alone.

LYDIA: Look at you. Locked inside your pride, while your family suffers. Lydia rips the cord out of the stereo.

LYDIA: Talk to him, Claudia!

CLAUDIO: How? How to take back all that time of not talking to him?

LYDIA: By talking to him. You men are so stubborn!

CLAUDIO: He look at me like I am a stranger.

LYDIA: You’re not.

CLAUDIO: All week, sofocado. I can’t breathe. I’m dying.

LYDIA: You’re not dying. The opposite.

CLAUDIO: You call this living?

LYDIA: She does. Your life is here, bombre.

CLAUDIO: And us?...

LYDIA: A dream. Not even that.

Claudio grabs his coat in agitation and starts out.

CLAUDIO: Are you going for Rene?

LYDIA: I’m going to work.

He goes. She starts picking up the shopping bags.

CECI: Gggggg.

LYDIA: ¡Ves, chica! Tanto desamor aquí. Oye, you know why we were out so late? Your mamá couldn’t say it in front of your cousin. We went to see someone in her building who is going to get me papers. She wants me to be legal.

CECI: Ghghyn?

LYDIA: She wants my name in the passport to be Flores. Lydia smiles. The lights change, brightening over Ceci. Lydia goes.

CECI: Flores is a name that goes all the way back to Spain, all the way back to the origin of flowers, which is what the name means. And the Flores that live in this town, all of them came from the first Flores that ever made love to an India. He gave her flowers for a name and she wore them for the next one and the next one wore them for the next one after that. All the way down to me. The pink icing on my cake says Flores. My wrist band says Flores. The red and white blooms in my head are Flores.

The lights are out in the living room where Ceci lies. Misha enters sheepishly.

MISHA: Ceci?

CECI: Gghnh, gghn.

LYDIA: I went in your room. It’s all different now. She took your Bobby Sherman poster down. And all those Barbies you used to have. They’re gone.

CECI: Gghnh.

He sits by her.

MISHA: Sis, remember those summers when we were little and Dad used to take us to the community pool on his days off? Remember those days?

LYDIA: appears, in her bathrobe with a towel on her head, bolting a manuscript.

LYDIA: Him in his baggy trunks standing in the shallow end ‘cause he can’t swim. When you, me, Varo and Rene played water tag all day long. That was our real life. That was family. Anyways, there was this one afternoon, when Rene was going up on the diving board and taking these big dives, and even at 12, he was already so graceful. And Dad’s just standing in the water watching him like he’s this god, and he says to me: “I swam the Rio for this boy, I swam and ran straight to the hospital where your mother was giving birth and made sure his name was Claudia Rene Flores.” I go, “You can’t swim, Dad.” And he just goes, “I know.” I’d forget it completely until tonight when I saw the two of them look at each other for the first time since you-know-what.

LYDIA: The shower is free if you need.

MISHA: I know. I heard Ceci and... I should let you get dressed.

LYDIA: Did señora find your brother?

MISHA: Not yet.

LYDIA: You left this on my bed.

MISHA: You asked for my poems.

LYDIA (Looking over them): Gracias. Your sister and you, very close, no? You tell each other secrets.

MISHA: I do, anyway.

LYDIA: I bet she has some of her own. Read me this one: “Sombra.” She pass the notebook of poems back to him.

MISHA: She is the shadow on my wall
When I am alone and needing
Unspeaking things, alone
With only my hands to catch me
She is la sombra I cast
In my sleep, lip to labio
Against the pillow
And her shadow legs as long
As mine, as dark, as
Smooth, draped over mine
And give me shadow
Solace, shadow peace
In headphone whispers.

LYDIA: Are you in love, young boy?
He grips her hand tightly. With eyes closed, he brings her hand to his lips and kisses it.

MISHA: I don’t know what to do with girls. I never have.

LYDIA: You’ll learn.

MISHA: Lydia, who are you? Why did you come here?

LYDIA: ’Cause I need work.

MISHA: But you’re here for something else. I know.

LYDIA: You want my secrets now?

MISHA: I want to know everything about you. You’re so far from your home and—

LYDIA: My home, Misha, sincerely, is nowhere. What I had back in Mexico. It’s all gone. I am hardly even here.

MISHA: What do you mean?

LYDIA: She shows him a small circular mark on her chest.

LYDIA: I died, Misha. Like Ceci, I died, but I came back.

MISHA: Jesus. What is that?

LYDIA: My eyes were closed for a long time. When I opened them, I was an orphan.

MISHA: What happened?

LYDIA: It doesn’t matter. This says I’m here now. This says I can’t never go back.

MISHA: Are you a mojada?

LYDIA: Uh-huh, but that’s ‘cause I just took a shower.
MISHA: Your English is getting better all the time.
LYDIA: Gracias, guapo. I practice with your sister all day.
MISHA: You’re good with her. She needs you.
LYDIA: It’s you she needs. En serio. She counts on your poetry. Una noche, when you are alone, look into her gitar and hold her hand tight, don’t let go, no matter what.
MISHA: I don’t understand.
LYDIA: I’m saying give her love and she will give you the poems of her life. Para siempre. Can I keep her?
MISHA: They’re all for you.
He slowly moves in to kiss her. She lets him.
LYDIA: Misha...
He kisses her again. He slides his hand into her bathtub. She likes it, but has to resist.
LYDIA: See how quickly you learn.
MISHA: I’m just across the hall.
LYDIA: That’s how it has to stay, sweet boy. She likes him tightly on the cheek. He goes. Lydia reads his poems, tears coming to her eyes.
CÉCILIA: Ay, Lydia. All the want of before, dilating my corazón, it’s dilating yours. You speak the idioma of ants and miscarried love. The cards of La Vida Cecilia falling into place. Some desnuda is coming into view and I’m gonna need you, loca. I’ll need you when I fall.
LYDIA: ¿Qué ves, pajarras?

Darkness has descended on the living room. Roma sits on the sofa in her negligee.
ROSA: Dear Jesus. I know Rene won’t amount to much, that’s what I believe, that’s my sin, to dismiss my oldest so easily. He’ll be a loyal son if he lives to be 20. But he won’t make a difference in the world. I know, it, he knows it and You know it, too. But that doesn’t mean I don’t love him. Bring him home tonight dear Father and—Rene can be heard roaming outside, crashing against garbage cans.
RENE (Off): ¡Chinga la verga! ¡Pinche puto cabrón! Who do you think you are? I got every right to be here.
ALVARO: Remeze inside. Rene drunkenly staggers in, his hands caffed behind him.
RENE: Let go of me! I said LET ME GO!
ALVARO: Shut up, Rene! You’re gonna wake the whole block!
RENE: You can’t treat me like this! I ain’t your wetback! You don’t get rid of me that easy, you shit!
ALVARO: I know what you’re trying to do. It’s not gonna work.
RENE: You don’t get it, do you? You drivin’ to the levee, right by the same fuckin’ pole! That’s why you joined la Migra!
ALVARO: What do you want from me?
RENE: I want you to talk to me! Jesus Christ, just talk to me!
ALVARO: There’s nothin’ to talk about! I’m through, that’s all!
RENE: Then why did you give me your jacket?
If you hate my guts so much, why?
ALVARO: Listen up, you fuck! I gave this to you ‘cause you were part of my war! The whole time I was there, so were you! What we had, ese, nobody’s ever gonna touch that, nobody’s ever gonna come that close! That was it, ese. That was my shot.
RENE: Then why won’t you see me, goddamn it?
ALVARO: ‘Cause when I think of us, I see her! I hear those words!
RENE: What are you sayin’, asshole? I live with her! I hear them every day!
ROSA: Rene. ¿Qué es esta locura?
ALVARO: He was up on the levee, Tía. He’s drunk. He taunted us while we were doing our job.
RENE: You were buying me off! This jacket’s to buy me off!
ALVARO: He’s talking like a crazy man.
ROSA: Mija, please don’t be like this...
RENE: Get the fuck away! I’m done with you.
Misha enters in his T-shirt and shorts.
MISHA: Mom, back away.
ROSA: ¿Pero, mija, mira qué locura!
RENE: ¿Carmalito?
MISHA: Do as I say. Back away.
Rosa retreats in soles as Rene grows more glowering and furious. Ceci becomes agitated.
RENE: That’s right! Back away from the Fag Basher!
MISHA: What the hell are you doing, man?
RENE: Don’t look at me like that, Meesh! I’ll fuckin’ bust your head open! Like I busted Ceci!
MISHA: What can I do, Rene? Te quiero ayudar. Tell me what to do.
CÉCILIA: GGNNGAYAAAA!
RENE: Hypocrates and liars! I fuckin’ hate you all!
ALVARO: Misha, he just needs to sleep it off.
(To Rene) You gotta get a grip.
RENE: FUCK YOU! TAKE THESE OFF AN’ LEMME KICK YOUR ASS, YOU FUCKING COWARD!
Lydia appears.
LYDIA: ¿Qué pasa aquí?
RENE: Oxote. You want an illegal? You wanna do your fuckin’ job, Migra?
MISHA: Go back to your room.
LYDIA: Let me take Ceci out.
ROSA: Take her to your room, Andale.
RENE: Don’t put your dirty hands on her.
Mojada.
MISHA: Rene...
RENE: I’m telling you, cuz, this one’s trouble. This one thinks she knows our shit. She’s gone real deep with us, verdad, criada?
MISHA: Back away from her. I mean it.
RENE: It’s sad, ese. You giving your heart to a wetback. She’s using you!
MISHA: I don’t care. I’m not letting you say whatever you want about her.
ROSA: ¡Misha, cuidado, miito!
RENE: You think she’s toda India Mexicana. But I’ve seen Dad banging this whore!
ROSA: Lydia…
Misha gat-checks him and he falls.
ROSA: Misha!
MISHA: I TOLD YOU TO WATCH YOUR MOUTH!
RENE: I saw them!
MISHA: Liar!
He grabs Rene by the collar and threatens to bit him.
ALVARO: STOP IT!
RENE: ¡Andale, Miguel! ¡Dale gat! Hit me, motherfucker! I want you to hit me!
MISHA: No way...
RENE (Collapsing in tears): ALVARO! ANY A YOU? I’M BEGINN’ YOU! JESUS, SOMEBODY FUCKIN’ HIT ME!
ALVARO: Jesus, Rene, quit this now please… Ceci continues in terror. Lydia runs to beds her tightly. Misha looks at Alvaro.
MISHA: Are you going to tell us what is going on here? Will somebody tell us?
CÉCILIA: Ghhrnn.
LYDIA: She will.
ALVARO: What?
MISHA: What are you talking about?
CÉCILIA: Ghghghn.
LYDIA: She knows. She was there.
CÉCILIA: Ghghn.
LYDIA: She is there now.
ROSA: She is?
CÉCILIA: Ghghghnss.
LYDIA: She says Rene and me.
CÉCILIA: Ghffeggh-ghffhn.
LYDIA: Driving in the middle of the night.
CÉCILIA: Ghghhag.
LYDIA: To Alvaro’s house.
CÉCILIA: Tte-tttee.
LYDIA: Delirious as ants.
CÉCILIA: Ghllingn.
LYDIA: Rene is driving.
CÉCILIA: Hghhiah.
LYDIA: But I’m hiding in the backseat. Crouched in the floor of the backseat.
CÉCILIA: ‘Cause I wanna surprise them! I wanna see the look on Alvaro’s face when he sees me again! Party!
LYDIA: She says
CÉCILIA: I hear the radio playing and I feel the wind rushing in through his open window and I’m tingling with excitement! I’m gonna trip ‘em out!
LYDIA: She says...
CECI: I hear the car stop and Alvaro getting in and I’m about to jump out, but he’s like on Rene, kissing him, and my heart stops and LYDIA: She says
CECI: I can’t think, I can’t move, but the car does. It rolls along at roadrunner speed to nowhere, and I can hear them talking, Rene’s like, “Where you wanna go,” and Alvaro’s like, “Where we always go, cuz, the border.”
LYDIA: She says
CECI: I’m toda dizzy. But soon, I feel the car stopping. The engine stops and it’s quiet as death
LYDIA: Quiet as death
CECI: I feel the beautiful dream of Varo and me slipping away as I hear this moaning and kissing and crying
LYDIA: She says
CECI: This moaning and kissing and crying
LYDIA: She says
CECI: And then I see Alvaro throw his head back and cry out
LYDIA: ¡Ay Rene!
CECI: I see carnal rise up and kiss him and I can’t believe it
LYDIA: She says
CECI: Alvaro was mine all these years. I dreamed of kissing him like that and now
LYDIA: She says
CECI: Right there, right there, this ugliness inside takes over: “YOU FAGS. YOU HOMOS. YOU DIRTY FILTHY HOMOS!”
LYDIA: She says
CECI: They scream, they’re so shocked but the ugly keeps yelling, “You jatos, damn maricones!” Rene starts the car and says over and over:
RENE: “Don’t tell Dad, Ceci, please don’t tell Dad.”
CECI: And Varo’s face turned away saying
ALVARO: “We weren’t doing nothing, I swear.”
CECI: And the car is racing and I’m screaming in the backseat, “YOU DISGUST ME, YOU MAKE ME SICK, YOU LYING SHITS!”
LYDIA: She says
CECI: I’m beating on Rene, I am so mad at Rene. And he’s yelling, “No,” and Alvaro is yelling, “Stop, Ceci!” But my fists keep hitting his head and the car is swerving like crazy, and Rene reaches back and tells me right to my face
LYDIA: “I’m sorry!”
CECI: But he’s not looking and the curve is right there and the pole wants the Pontiac. And there in the rearview mirror I see you, so pale and sad, the face of death willing the car into the pole
LYDIA: Just as I see yours in my mirror
CECI: And I am pure bird soaring with the moon, stretching out like chicle toward the red card with the inscription: Now Look What You Done, Stupid
LYDIA: She says
CECI: It was me! ME! This mierda was me!

You didn’t do nothing wrong! It was all my shit my fucking shit making it wrong. The words in my heart fall out the crack in my head. The words I never meant this. Not in a million. I love you, Rene. I love you both. I’m ssghngnng...ngngn.

LYDIA: Es o lo que dice. Silence. Alvaro takes the cuffs off Rene.

ROSA: Is it true? Alvaro?

ALVARO: No, Tía.

RENE: Rene? Is it true, Rene?

RENE:Yeah. All true.

ROSA: Get out. Get out of this house.

MISHA: Mom, you can’t just—

RENE: Alvidiana. carnal. I’m done here. He exchanges a look with Alvaro and takes off the jacket. He throws it at him and goes.

LYDIA: She wants to rest now. I’m tired too. Lydia gets up and starts to her room.

MISHA: Were you...did you and my dad...?

LYDIA: What importance is that now, Misha? Lydia goes. Misha looks at Rosa.

ROSA: I always say nothing happens in this house without me knowing. But really, all I knew was nothing.

MISHA: Mom, you can’t let him go like that.

ROSA: Go to bed, mio. Misha goes. Alvaro makes to go but Rosa stops him.

ROSA: Sobrino. Rosa goes to him and whispers something to him. Ceci covers on her mattress.

CECI: This noche nobody sleeps. This noche the words slam against the walls like angry little birds again and again. Faggot. Whore. Mojado. Migra. Mijo. Love. All these words on razor wings looking for something to cut. Slashin at the walls of the world we used to call family. Alvaro nods gravely to Rosa. He goes. Rosa sits with Ceci.

ROSA: What does the word madre mean in this country? Does it mean idiot? Does it mean pretending? Does it mean living like nothing’s changed? Everything’s changed. I’m old. I’m a stranger to my own children. My husband won’t touch me. You were going to be my partner, but look at you.

CECI: Gghngh. There is an awful lull. Then we hear screaming and yelling off.

LYDIA: (From off): AAAYYYYY! AAAAAAYYYYYYYYYY! Alvaro enters dragging Lydia out behind him.

ALVARO: That’s the way it is. Now come on! Lyd: AYYYYYYY! AYYYYYYYYYYY? Help me! Misha comes out.

ROSA: Whoa! What the fuck are you doing? MISHA: Misha! He’s taking me away!

ALVARO: She’s got no proof of residence, cuz.

MISHA: What?! Where are you taking her?


LYDIA: Señora! Tell him I’m American! He won’t listen to me! I’m American!

ROSA: Es una mojada. I don’t hire mojadas.

ALVARO: Vámonos.

MISHA: Mom, you can’t do this. I won’t let you.

ROSA: You dare defend her in my presence? Esta degradación se abusa de mi marido, my husband!

LYDIA: Señora, please, don’t be this way! I love this family! Misha!

MISHA: Let her go, Varo. C’mon, for family, cuz.

ALVARO: Misha, can esto, familias no vale, madre.

LYDIA: ¡Misha, por favor! I don’t want to go back! If I go back, I’ll die! I know I will. I’ll die!

ROSA: Alvaro Fernandez. TAKE THIS PUTA OUT OF MY HOUSE NOW!

ALVARO: C’mon.

LYDIA: Wait! My poems! Let me get my poems! Misha!

ROSA: Espera. Rosa violently strips off Lydia’s top.

LYDIA: NOO!

ROSA: This is niña’s blusa.

CECI: CECI! Ceci!

Alvaro pushes Lydia, ravaged and half naked, out the door.

MISHA: I love her.

ROSA: Mira nena. Her little pendejo. Writing mierda to her with my pen.

Misha runs out. Rosa sits on the sofa in exhaustion. The lights collapse in around Ceci.

CECI: I flew tonight to a village in Jalisco, through a window, this girl sitting at a dresser brushing her hair. She looks in the mirror, sees me and smiles like she’s always known me, this tragic girl brushing her hair at the break of day.

Later in the morning. Claudia enters. He finds Cici and Rosa sleeping together, on the mattresses.


ROSA: (Waking): Hmmm.

CLAUDIO: ¿Qué estás haciendo? ¿Porqué duermes aquí?

ROSA: I got lonely.

CLAUDIO: I brought you some menudo.

ROSA: Grazias.

CLAUDIO: ¿Estás todo bien? (She nods) ¿Y Rene? ¿Dónde está miérda?

ROSA: I’m out.

CLAUDIO: I will talk to him. Pos, you better have some before it gets cold.

Rosa opens the container of menudo. Claudia takes a beer from his bag, pops off the pull-tab and holds it in his band.

CECI: Ghgh.

CLAUDIO: Quisibol, niña. Are you ever going to change out of that thing? Uh?

CECI: Da...hh...da...ghghnttee.

CLAUDIO: Querida. The only English I want to know is yours.

He kisses her forehead, inadvertently dropping the pull-tab on her mattress.

ROSA: I love when they put extra tripas. Menudo is always good for the morning after.

CLAUDIO: Are you hungover?
From left, Ceci (Onahoue Rodríguez), Rene (René Millán) and Alvaro (Christian Barillas).

ROSA: Hombre, this headache like a devil with a claw hammer. I think I'm staying home today.
CLAUDIO: Then lie down for a while. ¿Y Lydia?
ROSA: Se fió.
CLAUDIO: ¿Cómo que se fió? Where is she?
ROSA: Con la Migra.
CLAUDIO: ¿Qué chingadas dices, mujer? You turn her over to la Migra?
ROSA: If you want her, vete. If you miss that fucking country so much, go. Let me remind you who also needs papers.
They glare at each other for a moment.
CLAUDIO: Rene and Cecilia in the car: you know why, don't you?
ROSA: There is no why. There is never any why.
Misha enters dressed for school. He goes straight to Ceci and begins her physical therapy.
CLAUDIO: Miguel...Miguel...
No response. He turns to Rosa.
CLAUDIO: Come to bed. Bring the menudo with you.
Claudio goes. Ceci finds the pull-tab from Claudio's beer. She claps it tightly in her fist. Rosa can stomach no more soup. She goes to Misha and Ceci. She looks at Ceci.
ROSA: ¿Y tú que ves? What other cochinadas are locked in those pretty eyes of yours?
She takes one of Ceci's stuffed animals and walks solemnly down the hall.
CECI: Ggggghgh.

MISHA: It's okay, sis. I know you didn't mean it. It's love that makes us do the worst things sometimes.
CECI: Mmmm...Meeseh shhhhhhh!
MISHA: Sis, did you just—?
CECI: Mmmeeeshshhhhh. Aah.
He goes to her. She kisses his hand.
MISHA: Oh my God. Ceci. You're talking.
She guides his hand under her dress.
MISHA: Wait...what are you...no...let go. Please, Ceci. Let go! I'm sorry. No. He breaks away. She curls up and cries softly. He goes to his room. Ceci looks at the pull-tab as Misha reappears, crawling on all fours at the end of the hall along invisible trails.
MISHA: In ant language, teetee means sister. In ant, teetateee means touch. I wish I knew the word for Ceci.
CECI: Tee-teeeh.
MISHA: I hear you. He crawls to her.
MISHA: In my dream, you had a key in your mouth.
CECI (Gripping his hand tightly): My magic key out of ant prison.
MISHA: I love you, Ceci.
CECI: Aayyhhhh.
He griss his teeth as she moves his hand into her.
She begins to smile. He cries.
CECI: The last card. Inscibed, Ay Te Watcho. Which is "Godspeed" in Chicano. So wave bye to me, little brother, and reach inside and spell the word love in a girl that's never felt it, with your fingers push back the veil, ay, asi, carnal, asi, find the poems in me, 'cause I hid them all for you, asi, asi, poems of your hunger, your shame, your secret loves, ay, got them right here, Misha, your verse—
CECI/MISHA: —dancing in me, drowning in my blood—
Misha continues their poem as Ceci sets the pull-tab gingerly on her tongue.
MISHA: —reaching all the way up to your heart, I'll find the Ceci you'll never be, give you wings with my pen, make you fly, I'll be your poet forever, con safe, retaabo, asi asi Ceci dame la vida Cecilia asi.
CECI: Hbbhhhh.
Misha cries. He closes his eyes. Ceci, in a spasm of ecstasy, swallows the pull-tab. The lights slowly fade.

END OF PLAY