

Sangre Mía

A Full Length Play

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CHARACTERS

CARREON	A Veteran of the Iraq War, Early 40s.
HERNANDEZ	An old platoon mate, Male, Late 20s.
CYNTHIA	Carreon's Wife, Late 30s. Latinx Ensemble.
MENDEZ / LUCIANO	A mechanic seeking advice. A shadow of Carreon's father.
THOMPSON	An old platoon mate, Male, Early 30s. White Ensemble.

ENSEMBLE

AGUILAR	Female, Seeking Asylum, Mother.
ESPINOZA	Female, Lost, A Child.
MANAGER	Male, Seeking Authority, The Boss.
POLICE OFFICER	Male, Seeking Connection, A Patrolman.

SETTING

El Paso, Texas
The Borderlands

TIME

Now

NOTES

"—"	Indicate a character being cut off by the next line.
"..."	Indicates a stillness, whether in thought or staging.
"/"	Indicates that the next line should start while this line continues.

ACT ONE

In the darkness, stands LUCIANO. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small glow-in-the-dark star. He places it on stage and, as he does so, a small portion of the stage is lit.

Music begins to play softly, "El Rey," sung by José Alfredo Jimenez. LUCIANO sings along as he places stars all across the stage. Like the first rays of the sunrise, LUCIANO reveals the desert of El Paso.

LUCIANO

Yo sé bien que estoy afuera
Pero el día que yo me muera
Sé que tendrás que llorar
Llorar y llorar
Llorar y llorar

The stage is covered in sand. At its furthest edges are desert plants. Yucca. Saguaro. Barrel Cactus. Elephant Tree. The dense plant life becomes flowers as we near a small clearing at the stage's center. A worn couch sits in the clearing. Sleeping on the couch is CARREON.

In the shadows, upstage of the couch, and beyond the clearing, is an overturned military, desert humvee. It is lying on its side.

LUCIANO

Llorar y llorar
Llorar y...

CARREON begins to stir in his sleep as a deep rumbling builds in the distance. Suddenly, he stands as the sound shifts to that of an engine

*starting. The humvee lights turn on. We hear
fighter jets fly over the audience, quick and sharp.*

CARREON

Welcome to Afghanistan. The name is Sergeant Carreon. You will call me Sergeant or Sir. I'm not here to fucking pamper you. I am not here to fucking spoon feed you. I am not your fucking mother and no, she will not be coming to pick your crying ass up. My job is to turn this group of shit stains into a justice serving, ass kicking machine.

I am here to train you for the harsh world you are about to enter. I am here to push you farther than you have ever been pushed before. I am here to show you what real pain is and maybe, just maybe, you'll be ready to get the job done. You're new to this, I know you've never left the cushioned corners of your crib so let me offer you a word of advice. Get ready to burn. It is hot here. It will always be hot here. You will always feel like you are burning alive. Don't waste time praying to whatever god you adhere to to change that. Instead pray that I take mercy on you sorry excuse for a soldier. New recruits, sound off!

*(The sound of a rifle cocking can be heard following each of their names
except for HERNANDEZ.)*

Thompson.

(Click-click.)

Cooper.

(Click-click.)

Alvarez.

(Click-click.)

Hernandez.

(There is a brief moment of silence.)

Hernandez, are you listening?

HERNANDEZ

(HERNANDEZ appears standing in the desert.)

Sir, yes sir!

CARREON

Are you ready to do what it takes to fight for your country?

HERNANDEZ

Sir, yes sir!

CARREON

Are you ready to protect and serve?

HERNANDEZ

Sir, yes sir!

CARREON

To fight the good fight?

HERNANDEZ

Is this the good fight sir?

CARREON

Excuse me?

HERNANDEZ

Is this the good fight sir!

CARREON

Did you hear that? Hernandez just earned all of you another five miles. Get running!

(CARREON starts to chant a cadence. He begins to march in place. The sound of men humming the words can be heard.)

President Bush said Hey M.P.

Won't you do a favor for me.

I've got to send you off to a foreign land.

Gotta send you over to Afghanistan.

Oh, whoa-Left, your lo-right.

Left. Left. Left-right-left.

(The humvee lights start to flicker.)

Left. Left. Left-right-left.

Left. Left. Left-right-left.

HERNANDEZ

The ants go marching two by two, / hurrah, hurrah!

CARREON

Hernandez, back in step!

HERNANDEZ

The ants go marching two by two, / hurrah, hurrah!

CARREON

Hernandez!

HERNANDEZ

They all go marching down, to the ground, to get out, of the rain.

CARREON

Hernandez, what the hell do you think you're doing?

HERNANDEZ

I can save us.

CARREON

You don't know what you're saying.

HERNANDEZ

We're out of water, Sarg.

LUCIANO

(An echo.)

Adrián!

CARREON looks out into the desert, towards the voice of his father.

HERNANDEZ

I've been looking for it this whole time.

CARREON

Quiet!

LUCIANO

Adrián!

HERNANDEZ

My chance to prove myself, Sarg.

CARREON

Wait, wait Hernandez—

HERNANDEZ

The moon was so bright that night.

LUCIANO

Llorar y llorar.

HERNANDEZ

Back in step!

LUCIANO

Llorar y llorar.

HERNANDEZ

President Bush said Hey M.P.

Won't you do a favor for me.

I've got to send you off to a foreign land.

Gotta send you over to Afghanistan.

(As HERNANDEZ continues the cadance, he walks out into the desert, his voice echoes and fades away as he returns to the darkness.)

Left. Left. Left-right-left.

Left. Left. Left-right-left.

CARREON

Hernandez! Hernandez, wait! Wait!

The sound of a phone ringing begins to overtake HERNANDEZ's cadence. It rings softly once, a little louder, then loudest. HERNANDEZ's echoes have faded. A voicemail.

CYNTHIA appears upstage in a column of light. Smiling, but nervous. She wrings her hands.

CYNTHIA

Adrián! I got your message. A new job! That's wonderful. I just wanted to call, because... I just wanted to make sure you were awake! Wouldn't want to be late on your first day, would you?

CARREON turns to CYNTHIA, his focus on her entirely. She turns to face him, and steps out into the clearing.

CYNTHIA

Adrián, are you still asleep? Come on! Get dressed!

CARREON

Why are you so quick to get rid of me?

CYNTHIA

Please, you've been wrapped around my finger since middle school. No way I could ever get rid of you.

CARREON

Ay, so you've thought about it!

CYNTHIA

Stop it, cabrón! Get dressed!

CYNTHIA grabs a white button up shirt from the couch and throws it to CARREON. He laughs as he puts it on. CYNTHIA grabs a black tie from the couch and walks up to CARREON. She helps him put it on.

CYNTHIA

Wanna hear a joke?

CARREON

You're no good at jokes.

CYNTHIA

I am too!

(Beat.)

Okay, I stole this one from a book—

CARREON

I knew it!

CYNTHIA

(Playfully slapping him.)

Shut up! Do you wanna hear it or not?

CARREON

Fine, fine. Shoot.

CYNTHIA

Okay, okay. Here it goes.

(Clearing her throat.)

So, late one afternoon, the Air Force folks out at Area 51 were very surprised to see a, uh, Cessna landing at their "secret" base. They immediately haul the pilot into an interrogation room and he says he took off from Vegas, got lost, and spotted the Base just as he was about to run out of fuel. The Air Force holds him overnight while they run a full background check and, by the next day, they were finally convinced that the pilot was just lost. So, they gas up his plane, gave him a terrifying "you-were-never-here" briefing, and told him Vegas was that-a-way. Now, the day after, the same Cessna showed up again. So the MP's surrounded the plane, except this time there were two people in it. The same pilot jumped out and said, "Do anything you want to me, but my wife is in the plane and you have to tell her where I was last night!"

(CARREON cracks up and CYNTHIA laughs triumphantly.)

See! I knew you'd like it!

(CARREON pulls her in close. They kiss. She looks up at him, and, after a moment:)

I'm gonna miss you, Adrián.

CARREON

I'll be back before you know it. I promise.

CYNTHIA

(Placing a hand on his cheek.)

You have no idea how proud I am of you. My little soldier.

CARREON

Hey, only my mah can call me her little soldier.

CYNTHIA

Oh yeah? Then what can I call you, huh big guy?

CARREON

How about husband?

CARREON drops down onto one knee and presents CYNTHIA with a ring from his back pocket. She looks at him, then the ring, then back at him.

CYNTHIA

Adrián...

CARREON

Well?

CYNTHIA

Adrián...

CYNTHIA nods frantically. CARREON places the ring on her finger. She holds it up to the light as she crosses the stage, back into the column of light.

CARREON

I love you, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

I miss you, Adrián. I hope you're doing well. Mom says hello.

(Looks at a non-existent watch.)

I should go. Good luck today, Adrián. I'm thinking of you.

CYNTHIA's light fades. The voicemail beeps. CARREON realizes that he is kneeling in the sand. He stands and looks at the spot where CYNTHIA once stood.

The voicemail beeps once more. Another light appears on THOMPSON.

THOMPSON

Hey Sarg, it's Thompson.

(CARREON looks to face THOMPSON.)

Listen, they got me stationed over in Fort Bliss. Reaching out on account of you being from around here. Hoping...maybe we could grab a drink? On me. I owe you one, after all.

(THOMPSON faces CARREON.)

Call me back.

The voicemail beeps as the light over THOMPSON fades. As THOMPSON exits, a single shadow stands alone in the desert, just behind where THOMPSON once stood. It is HERNANDEZ.

CARREON faces the audience and begins to straighten his shirt and tie. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

CARREON

My name is Adrián Carreon.

I live in El Paso, Texas.

I'm standing in my home.

And... And—

HERNANDEZ

(From the darkness.)

And who are you with?

CARREON

No one.

HERNANDEZ

Good. Better.

(His shadow turns to face, CARREON.)

So, tell me about this job. Is it out in the field?

CARREON

No. No, I didn't, uhh, qualify. They're putting me in an office. I'm going to be interviewing immigrants. No, asylum seekers. I have to look at their papers and determine credible fear.

HERNANDEZ

Credible fear?

CARREON

It's a whole thing. Did you hear they're tearing down the smokestack?

HERNANDEZ

What?

CARREON

The smokestack, at Asarco? They're tearing it down. I used to look at that thing from my bedroom window, just towered over the hillside. You must know what I'm talking about.

HERNANDEZ

Sure, Sarg.

A desk slides out into the clearing. On it is a desktop computer and a stack of papers and files. MANAGER enters with two chairs. He places them on either side of the desk.

CARREON

Never thought I'd see it go. You know, my mom used to tell everyone my dad worked there. He didn't, but that's what she'd say. It was just easier, you know?

HERNANDEZ

(Retreating into the desert.)

What did he do?

CARREON

My dad? He—

MANAGER

No, not your dad, you? What did you do out there?

CARREON

What do you mean sir?

MANAGER

Out on the battlefield? Army? Marines?

CARREON

Army. I was a driver.

MANAGER

A driver?

CARREON

Yes, sir.

MANAGER

Uhuh. This is your office. It's small, I know, but it's yours. My office is right down the hall. The kitchenette is around the corner. If you need supplies, talk to Gloria. Good?

CARREON

Yeah, yeah. Good.

MANAGER

Got any questions?

CARREON

No, sir. Just excited to start work here. Do some good.

MANAGER

Yeah, right. Look, you got the job. You don't gotta impress me.

CARREON

Yes sir.

MANAGER

You doing alright?

CARREON

Just nervous.

MANAGER

You? Nervous? Come on, you're joking right? Big guy like you? After everything you've done.

CARREON

What?

MANAGER

(Looking around the office, then to CARREON.)

Just between us. Just you and me.

(Gets in real close to CARREON.)

What was it like?

CARREON

Excuse me?

MANAGER

Out on the battlefield. What was it like?

CARREON

I'd rather not—

MANAGER

God, what I'd give to go out there. Bone spurs though, got them from my dad.

(He laughs. CARREON does not.)

If it wasn't for that though, I'd be out there, fighting for our country.

(Raises his fist for a fist bump. CARREON does nothing.)

So, you were a driver?

CARREON

That's right. Humvee.

MANAGER

You had to have seen some shit.

CARREON

Yeah, I did.

MANAGER

(Annoyed.)

Not very talkative, are you?

CARREON

I actually had some questions about—

MANAGER

Look, look. Maybe just give me a number. You know, like how many of ‘em you uh, you know...

CARREON

Look, sir, if you don’t mind—

MANAGER

Alright, I get it. Another time then. Take a second to settle in and we’ll start sending them your way.

CARREON

Yes, sir. But...

MANAGER

What is it?

CARREON

What do I do?

MANAGER

(Beat.)

You talk to them.

CARREON

And?

MANAGER

And what? Get to know them. Figure them out. They aren’t scary, they’re just Mexicans. Jesus Christ, you’re one of them Carreon. Ask yourself, is their reason for requesting asylum credible? Is their fear credible? That’s it. It’s all in the booklet.

(Gesturing to the small, messy pile of papers on the desk.)

CARREON

Oh.

MANAGER

Having second thoughts, Carreon?

CARREON

No sir.

MANAGER

Good. And quit the sir bullshit, will you.

(MANAGER crosses to the desk and grabs a booklet from the stack of papers. He reads from it.)

Look, this has everything you need to know, alright? Talk to them. Figure out what they want. That's it. If they qualify, you assign them the correct visa. A green card.

(He flips to the next page.)

There are Non-Immigrant Visas, temporary. An H-1B for employment in the States. A B-1 or B-2 if they're here for business or pleasure. An EB-3 if they're a skilled worker. F-1s and M-1s for students. R-1s for religious workers.

(A heavy, exacerbaded sigh.)

You get the idea. It's a lot all at once, but you'll get the hang of it. Couple weeks, tops.

(He closes the booklet and hands it to CARREON.)

Just stick to the script. Got it?

(CARREON nods.)

Good luck.

MANAGER exits. CARREON begins to look through the papers on his desk. HERNANDEZ returns from the desert and sits down on the couch.

HERNANDEZ

Remind you of anything?

CARREON

This is different.

HERNANDEZ

How?

CARREON

It's home.

HERNANDEZ

For who? You? But not them?

CARREON

Hernandez—

HERNANDEZ

Back in Afghanistan, you did something similar right? Talked to locals. But over there it wasn't your home, it was theirs—

CARREON

You aren't helping, Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ

Neither were you.

(They stare each other down until—)

You can't order me away, Sarg.

CARREON

What is this, Hernandez? What are you doing?

HERNANDEZ

What good is a ghost if it doesn't haunt you?

CARREON

Is that what you are then? A ghost?

HERNANDEZ

Semantics.

(Beat.)

Are you ready?

CARREON

No, I'm not—

HERNANDEZ

Tough shit, you're starting now.

AGUILAR enters. This first moment is tense. Both of them are nervous. HERNANDEZ steps back into the shadows, just behind the desk, fingers crossed.

AGUILAR

Hola—

(Catching herself.)

Hello.

CARREON

(A nervous smile.)

Hola. Siéntense por favor.

AGUILAR

(Relaxing slightly.)

Gracias.

(She takes a seat. After a moment, and after a deep breath.)

¿Qué hago?

CARREON

Háblame. No más.

AGUILAR

Sí, sí.

(The sound of a radio tuning.)

Where do I start?

CARREON

Tell me about where you're from.

AGUILAR

Climentoro.

CARREON

Guatemala?

AGUILAR

Mhm. In the western highlands.

CARREON

How long have you, umm, did you grow up there?

AGUILAR

All my life. My family has a plot of land, just enough room for a few crops of maize, some potatoes. Enough to keep my family fed. Well, it used to.

(CARREON digs through his desk, fumbling around for a notepad. writes something down, she notices this and pauses.)

CARREON

Continue. Don't mind me. Sorry.

AGUILAR

It's the frost. It's more intense than it's ever been. It wiped out most of our crops. Our neighbors to the south say they've been getting less rain. Or, when it does rain, it floods, taking everything with it.

CARREON is silent, not sure what to say, after a moment he flips to a page in the booklet.

CARREON

Umm. Kids? How many children do you have?

AGUILAR

Two. Daughters.

CARREON

(He writes this down.)

And their father?

AGUILAR

(She shakes her head briefly. Beat.)

I've known others who came up here.

CARREON

Other migrants?

AGUILAR

Uh huh. Climentoro, it's not what it used to be. All the men, the young ones, they left.

CARREON

And came here?

AGUILAR

Some, sure. My friend, Rudolfo, he's in Albuquerque now. He writes me letters. He told me I could find a home here.

CARREON

(Visibly uncomfortable.)

Uhh, sure. It's possible.

AGUILAR

I can't live in Climentoro anymore. Before, I planted the maize in April, but last year May and June were dry. Nothing grew. How can you plan your harvest if you don't know when to plant your crops? If you get it wrong...People left because they got it wrong.

(Beat.)

I got it wrong.

CARREON

I hate to press this, but their father? Is he in the picture at all?

AGUILAR

No. I already said—

CARREON

I understand. I just, the form, I need a clear sense of your family and—

AGUILER

My husband...he...

CARREON

I'm sorry. Can I get you some water?

AGUILAR

(A little shaky.)

Yes, please.

CARREON

(A piece of the desert is lit revealing a small table with a pitcher of water and a few glasses. He pours her a glass and hands it to her.)

This probably doesn't help, but it's my first day. So, I'm a little nervous too. Take your time. I...I just want to help.

AGUILAR

(She drinks, then continues.)

My husband, he and Rudolfo came up here together. After the storms, a lot of people left. Entire families. Those who could, I mean. My daughters were too young...

It's better that we didn't go then though, because...when you come up here, you're alone. No one helps you. And there are people who prey on you. Cartels sure, but the Mexican police too. The Mexican people. We aren't welcome in Mexico.

My husband, he didn't make it. Rudolfo says he got sick, died peacefully, but there is no such thing, not when you're making that journey. I appreciate the lie though. Am I lying to my daughters if I tell them someone else's lie?

CARREON

I'm sorry.

AGUILAR

(She nods.)

I have my daughters, and we made it here.

(Looking into her now empty glass of water.)

Please. Can you help me?

Lights shift as HERNANDEZ enters from the desert.

HERNANDEZ

Ghost towns.

CARREON

I know.

HERNANDEZ

Are you going to help her?

CARREON

I don't know if I can.

HERNANDEZ

How many people did we displace, Carreon?

CARREON

This isn't—

HERNANDEZ

How many ghost towns did we leave behind?

The engine of the overturned humvee rumbles to life. The dim light of the headlights reveal LUCIANO, standing in the desert.

CARREON

Stick to the script, Carreon.

HERNANDEZ

Where was it that we crashed? It had a name, didn't it?

CARREON

(Returning to AGUILAR.)

For asylum, you have to prove a credible fear, do you understand?

HERNANDEZ

It was on a map once until we wiped it off.

CARREON

(To AGUILAR.)

It's just that, usually, what we screen for is violence. Oppression. Antagonism. And this, what you're saying...the land—

AGUILAR

I was married by Lake Atescatempa. My husband and I, we took off our shoes and we stood in the water during the ceremony.

LUCIANO

Adrián! Did I ever tell you how your mother and I got married?

AGUILAR

At the time, we thought it might become a tradition. That our kids would also get married standing in the same waters.

LUCIANO

It was the day after Easter and Father Tomás was drunk.

AGUILAR

Sir, Climentoro was my home. For generations we've tended those hills, I never thought I would leave. I wouldn't be here if I didn't need help

LUCIANO

You were there too, do you remember? I've always wondered that. If you could remember the wedding. You were little. We had you before we were married. You were our little hiccup.

(Beat.)

It was a backyard wedding. Just our parents and your mom's siblings. It was by the canal. And it was filled with confetti and eggshells from all the Easter festivities and you were so focused on all the colors that you fell in. Your mom jumped in immediately, didn't hesitate. She pulled you out of the water and you were both covered in mud and confetti and... I didn't budge. My suit was a rental. I, uhh, didn't want to get it dirty.

AGUILAR

Señor, please.

CARREON

I don't think I can help you.

LUCIANO

Adrián. Some people aren't born with all the pieces they need.

CARREON

What you're asking me to do, to write down the climate? Storms? It's not how this works.

AGUILAR

Then tell me how this works—

CARREON

(Short with her.)

You don't have a case here! Look, I could write down that you feel unsafe in Mexico, but what does that do? Nothing.

HERNANDEZ

Sarg—

CARREON

They'll just send you right back to Guatemala. Back to all those empty houses in Climentoro.

HERNANDEZ

Carreon, enough!

The humvee engine revs.

CARREON

I can't just wave my hand and let you in. There's a system in place. There are rules that have to be followed.

LUCIANO

I look at you and I wonder.

CARREON

I can't help you. Or your girls.

LUCIANO

Was Adrián born with all his pieces. Or is he like me.

LUCIANO fades away.

AGUILAR

Señor. There's nothing to go back to. Vecinos fantasmas. Nada más.

CARREON

(Thinking. After a moment.)

Do you have Rudolfo's number?

(She nods.)

Good. Call him. See if he has any ideas.

AGUILAR

Okay. Okay.

She stands. She wants to say something, but she can't find the words. Instead, she nods. She turns to exit.

AGUILAR exits. The stage seems to grow colder without her in it. CARREON watches her leave before he collapses onto the couch, his face in his hands.

HERNANDEZ

What the fuck was that, Sarg?

CARREON

I knew this wouldn't be easy.

(After a moment.)

It had a name.

HERNANDEZ

What?

CARREON

Those ruins. Where we crashed. It had a name.

HERNANDEZ

What was it?

CARREON

(Shaking his head, ashamed to say:)

I don't remember.

The engine revs to life once more, the headlights flickering back on, a fire reignited. HERNANDEZ

notices this first. He looks out into the desert, concerned, and then back to CARREON.

HERNANDEZ

(Something in him shifts. He's been crying.)

You got any tattoos, Sarg? I bet you have a tattoo of your mom.

CARREON

Now's not the time—

HERNANDEZ

(Sniffing.)

Please.

CARREON

(Beat.)

I don't.

HERNANDEZ

Not even one of those cliché mom hearts? Or her name somewhere?

CARREON

Shut up, Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ

(Wiping his nose, trying to laugh.)

Shit dude, that's cold.

CARREON

I don't need a tattoo to love my mom.

HERNANDEZ

It's the thought though, you know.

CARREON

The thought? That's a dumb ass way to think about it.

HERNANDEZ

What's that supposed to mean?

CARREON

Thinking a tattoo is some sort of honor to her or something.

HERNANDEZ

Yeah, okay, whatever. No need to bite my head off.

(Silence.)

Do you really think—

CARREON

They're coming.

HERNANDEZ

Why were we even out here, Sarg. It's a strip of desert. Miles of nothing. What was the point?

CARREON

It's part of the job. We need to be a presence, Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ

Was it worth it? Being a presence—

CARREON

You know, we have a name for soldiers like you.

HERNANDEZ

What is it?

CARREON

Oxygen thieves.

HERNANDEZ

Oh, shut up.

(CARREON laughs, pained.)

Oh shit, so the Sarg can laugh! Who would've guessed it.

(The sound of children passing through, laughter.)

Did you hear that?

CARREON

It's the desert, Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ

I could've sworn I heard—

CARREON

You're hearing things.

(Beat. They both listen to the desert.)

Those first few years, they had me at Bagram Air Base. Me and my squad, we'd go into town, just patrolling. Being a presence. Kids would run up to us and pick our pockets. Little things, like gum or pens. I started carrying candy around, just for them. Give them those small victories.

(We hear children laughing once more.)

If you closed your eyes and just focused on those kids laughing, you could trick yourself into thinking you were back home. Some of the guys, they'd get mad at the kids. They'd cuss them out, but I'd tell them a lesson learned is a step forward.

HERNANDEZ

(He smiles at CARREON, then looks up at the sky, squinting.)

My mah used to say that all the time.

CARREON

She sounds like a smart woman.

HERNANDEZ

She was.

CARREON

(Beat.)

I'm sorry man.

HERNANDEZ

It's okay. I've got this tattoo on my shoulder of her favorite flower.

(He rolls up his sleeve but you can barely make out a faded flower tattoo.)

It's a Stargazer Lily. Shits a little faded. I was gonna get it touched up when I'm back in the states, but now I don't know if—

CARREON

It's nice.

HERNANDEZ

(Beat.)

Thanks.

CARREON

(Sincere, to HERNANDEZ.)

Hernandez. I didn't mean anything earlier when I said—

HERNANDEZ

Forget about it.

CARREON

It's hard, losing a parent. I've been there. When my mom passed—

Suddenly, from behind the humvee, THOMPSON lets out a terrible, pained scream. CARREON and HERNANDEZ look to the humvee, then each other.

HERNANDEZ

You know, I'll never get that tattoo touched up. And I think what pisses me off the most is that one day you're going to forget about that tattoo and just like that, there'll be nothing of her left.

CARREON

I won't forget—

HERNANDEZ

You already have. You got the flower wrong.

(Wiping away a tear.)

Your wife wants a word with you.

CARREON

What?

HERNANDEZ

It's rude, really. Here we are, making some progress, bonding, and you let her barge in.

(He pulls a red vest from the couch and puts it on.)

Too many God damned memories in your head.

Lights shift. CARREON is left standing in the middle of the stage. The lights are bright, almost fluorescent. There is a beeping sound, like an intercom, as someone speaks.

HERNANDEZ

(As a Target employee:)

Customer service needed in the healthcare department. Customer service needed in the healthcare department.

CYNTHIA enters from the desert. She is carrying a small red shopping basket, "Target," on its side in white block letters. She crosses to CARREON.

CYNTHIA

Did you find them?

CARREON

(Confused.)

What?

CYNTHIA

The razors? Did you find them?

CARREON

(In his hand is a package of cheap disposable razors.)

Umm, yeah, I guess I did.

CYNTHIA

(She takes the package and looks them over.)

Are you sure? These look kinda cheap. Only two blades?

CARREON

Yeah, they're fine.

CYNTHIA

(Unsure.)

Alright, if you say so.

(Beat.)

So, I was looking at the strollers. My sister was right, they are really expensive. And I don't think we need anything fancy. Detachable water slicks, jumbo sized cup holders. One had light up wheels? Can you believe that? Thing would drive me mad. I think we should just take my sister's stroller. It's a little banged up, and I don't like the colors, but it'll save us some money.

CARREON

Strollers?

CYNTHIA

Yeah, strollers. Are you listening to me?

CARREON

Yeah, of course. The ugly turquoise one, right?

CYNTHIA

Yeah...that one.

(Beat.)

Are you feeling okay?

CARREON

Yeah, yeah. I'm fine. So, the stroller is for...

CYNTHIA

Us. Us Adrián. Because we said we were going to try.

CARREON

Sorry, of course. Yes! Yes.

CYNTHIA

Adrián, what's going on.

CARREON

Sorry. I still feel like I'm playing catch up.

CYNTHIA

Adrián. I... this is only going to get harder for us. You know that, right? I'm... I want to have kids with you. With *you* Adrián.

CARREON

I know. I know—

CYNTHIA

But every year that goes by... I get it. You were being deployed. You weren't going to be around. I waited. But you're back now. To stay.

CARREON

To stay.

CYNTHIA

(Beat.)

I want this. Do you?

CARREON

I do. I'm just...getting settled is all.

CYNTHIA

I don't...you know I care about you, but...how much longer?

CARREON

Give me some time. Please.

CYNTHIA

(A heavy sigh.)

Alright. I'm trying to understand, Adrián. I really am. I don't know what you're carrying with you, but...It's just us now. You can trust me. Okay?

(She turns away to hide herself wiping a tear.)

I'll be...I think we need...I'll be back.

(She exits.)

HERNANDEZ

(On the intercom:)

Smooth, Sarg.

CARREON

Enough.

HERNANDEZ

What's holding you back.

CARREON

We have a job to do.

HERNANDEZ

Not anymore. You're free now. You should call her.

CARREON

No.

HERNANDEZ

Why not?

CARREON

Not until you're gone.

(Beat.)

I need to talk to somebody.

HERNANDEZ

Another trip?

CARREON

No. There's something I've been putting off.

HERNANDEZ

What is it?

CARREON

I haven't gone to see my old man. Not since I've been back. Make yourself scarce.

HERNANDEZ

That's not how it works.

CARREON

Now.

HERNANDEZ

Okay Sarg. Okay.

HERNANDEZ fades into the desert.

CARREON pulls a gallon of water from the desert. He carries the gallon of water to the edge of the stage. Slowly, not without effort, he gets on his knees. He takes a towel from his back pocket and begins to wipe away at the sand at the edge of the stage revealing a flat headstone, sunken into the ground. It reads simply, "Luciano Carreon."

Once CARREON has brushed away the majority of the sand, he opens the gallon of water and gently pours out enough water to clean off the headstone. With the towel he wipes the water and sand away.

From the desert stands, LUCIANO, wearing a simple, brown leather jacket. He sits on the back of the couch, his back to the audience. He is leaning back, looking up at the stars. CARREON speaks out to the audience.

CARREON

I have good news. Where's mom?

LUCIANO

She's sleeping.

CARREON

Oh.

LUCIANO

What's your good news?

CARREON

It can wait. I want mom to—

LUCIANO

Let's step outside.

CARREON

It's cold out.

LUCIANO

I want to smoke.

CARREON

Since when do you smoke?

LUCIANO

Are you policing me?

CARREON

I didn't mean anything by it.

LUCIANO

That's right. Besides, I'm not smoking pinche cigarrillos. I got some cigars—

CARREON

Since when can we afford—

LUCIANO

Adrián.

CARREON

Sorry.

There is a stillness to the air as LUCIANO takes out a cigar and lights it. Breathing a heavy cloud of smoke. He begins badly coughing. He puts out the cigar. Silence.

LUCIANO

What's your news.

CARREON

I was hoping to tell you both, at the same time, you know?

LUCIANO

I won't ask you again.

CARREON

(Beat)

I just wanted to make you proud.

LUCIANO

What did you do, Adrián?

CARREON

I joined the army. Soldiers came to the school, recruiting officers. Me and some of the other guys signed up.

LUCIANO

You joined the army, mijo?

(CARREON nods.)

And that's supposed to make me proud?

CARREON

(Beat.)

It's a job. Good pay. I could help you and mom—

LUCIANO

We don't need your help.

CARREON

Dad.

LUCIANO

Adrián. A military man.

(Beat.)

Do you know about the Hydra constellation?

CARREON

Yes.

LUCIANO

Point to it.

CARREON

I, uhh—

LUCIANO

There's its head, right there, see? That little cluster. And if you follow that down to that orange star right there, that's its heart. Following?

CARREON

(To the headstone.)

Yeah. I see it.

LUCIANO

The Hydra is the largest constellation, mijo. It takes seven hours to slither its way up the night sky. Climbing up all night just to dive back down behind the mountain ridge, right over there.

(He sighs, then runs his right hand along the top of the couch. He pats

it.)

Come here.

CARREON

We should go back inside.

LUCIANO.

(More stern.)

Come here. Sit.

CARREON stands and crosses to the couch, sitting down behind his father. LUCIANO turns and faces the audience and places his hands on CARREON's shoulders. He leans down.

LUCIANO

The Hydra has one flaw. Do you know what that is?

CARREON

What is it?

LUCIANO

It's boring. It's a string of minor stars criss-crossing between more magnificent constellations. All of the heavens before it and the Hydra worms its way through the night. Slithering between all this beauty and amounting to nothing more than a fun fact.

(Beat.)

Do you know who that reminds me of?

(He squeezes down on CARREON's shoulders. CARREON winces.)

You.

CARREON

Dad.

LUCIANO

You played right into their little game, mijo. You think that you made some grand decision for yourself—

CARREON

What are you on about—

LUCIANO

You really thought that this was some fork in the road. A branching path into a better life? You're just like that Hyrda, mijo. You slither across the sky along a straight path right into the machine. Their machine!

CARREON

I...

LUCIANO

What's that, Adrián? You say something.

CARREON

I'm trying—

LUCIANO

Speak up.

CARREON

I just wanted to help.

LUCIANO

Help who, Adrián? Us? Or them.

(Beat.)

Go wake your mother.

CARREON

What?

LUCIANO

She'll want to know you're leaving us.

CARREON

It's not like that.

LUCIANO

What were you thinking, Adrián?

CARREON

I want to...I want to make something of myself.

LUCIANO

And did you, Adrián?

(LUCIANO stands and turns toward the desert. He takes a deep breath.)

Did you make something of yourself?

*LUCIANO walks out into the desert, leaving
CARREON in silence. After a moment,
HERNANDEZ enters. He first gathers the gallon of
water and wet towel. Then he sits beside
CARREON.*

HERNANDEZ

It wasn't easy telling my pops either. He had all these ideas about me taking over the family business. Landscaping. Ha. But I didn't want that. I wanted to see the world, you know? That whole thing, and—

CARREON

How long were you listening?

HERNANDEZ

Sarg. I'm always listening. I don't just go away.

CARREON

I need to get back to the office.

HERNANDEZ

Sarg—

CARREON

The office. Now.

HERNANDEZ

Sir yes sir.

CARREON and HERNANDEZ exit into the desert as a voicemail chimes. CYNTHIA enters.

CYNTHIA

Hey Adrián. It's me. You might know this already, but I've been volunteering as a translator for an immigration lawyer. Just here and there, when I have the time, but...your office keeps coming up. A woman came in today. She named you. Specifically. She told me how you treated her. I couldn't believe it. I thought you might've been using this job to do some good, but...what's going on, Adrián?

The lights shift as CARREON and HERNANDEZ return to the office. HERNANDEZ kicks at the sand.

CARREON

Hernandez, memories with my father. They're...they're complicated.

HERNANDEZ

I get it.

CARREON

No, I don't think you do. You don't know what he was like.

HERNANDEZ

Then tell me what he was like.

CARREON

Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ

I was there for you, you know?

CARREON

I know.

HERNANDEZ

Whatever.

(Beat.)

Eyes up.

MENDEZ enters. He's carrying a zippered binder with him

MENDEZ

I normally see the gringo, but the guys a prick, maybe you can help me out?

CARREON

I can try to.

(Extending his hand.)

Carreon.

MENDEZ

Mendez, but call me Lalo.

CARREON

Tell me about yourself.

MENDEZ

No, no, I'm a citizen, I'm here to help my grandmother.

CARREON

Oh, I—

MENDEZ

Don't worry, I have a spiel. Now, I'll admit, I can count the number of times I've met her on one hand. She tends to farm out in Durango, goats, horses, cows, the whole deal, all on her own. I'm sure you know the type.

(He gestures like he wants or expects a response, but he moves on quickly.)

She's never left that town. In fact, my mother was probably the first to go, then the cousins, the tios, tias, even some of the other viejitos, but not her. It can't be easy, to see everyone leave like that. To grow old alone. But hey, nothing to be done about that.

CARREON

What *is* to be done then.

MENDEZ

I want to move her here. Take care of her. Get her medical treatment, everything.

CARREON

I'm sorry but—

MENDEZ

(Quickly unzipping the binder and taking out several forms, filled out and covered in small note tabs.)

I know, I know. I can't tell you how many I-130s I've filled out.

(He licks his thumb so he can flip through the instruction booklet.)

Also, "Petition for Alien Relative," what kind of backwards title is that? Someone should really change that, I'm not out here trying to bring ET home.

(Getting to the right page.)

Now, according to this, I can't petition for a "grandchild, niece, nephew, aunt, uncle, cousin, parent-in-law, or *grandparent*." Now what kind of sense does that make?

CARREON

You came prepared—

MENDEZ

Now, everyone here says, "Lalo, my guy, get her a B-2 Visa, Lalo that solves everything." But it doesn't. She's old and I can't expect her to keep making the trek up here whenever her

tourist visa runs out. I want her here permanently. Once her health goes, that's it, and when that happens I want her to be here where I can get her help, not over with the tumbleweeds or hay bales or cow patties.

CARREON

Cow patties?

MENDEZ

I don't know, do I look like I've worked on a farm? Auto mechanic, twenty years now. Look, I need to make sure she can get whatever care she needs. The money is whatever, if you need the money you find it, you just do, but I'm not having someone turn her away because she doesn't have papers.

CARREON

Right.

MENDEZ

So. Can you help me?

CARREON, notices the small tattooed cross on MENDEZ's knuckle. MENDEZ pulls his hands away, but it's too late.

CARREON

What is that?

MENDEZ

It's nothing man.

CARREON

Are you gang affiliated?

MENDEZ

No, I'm not.

CARREON

Were you at some point?

MENDEZ

Who wasn't?

CARREON

I wasn't.

MENDEZ

Lucky you.

CARREON

I was smart.

MENDEZ

Smarts don't have anything to do with it. It's about where you come from.

(MENDEZ looks over CARREON.)

Where are you from?

CARREON

Here, El Paso.

(MENDEZ waits.)

My family is from Mexico.

(MENDEZ waits.)

Michoacán.

MENDEZ

No way. Mi suegra is from Michoacán.

CARREON

Small world.

(They stare at each other. Sizing each other up.)

Gang affiliation, past or present, is going to make this a hell of a lot harder for you.

MENDEZ

You think I don't know that? You and the gringo, both of you get fixated on this one thing, like a little bit of ink decides who you are.

CARREON

Is this why you're coming to me and not him? You thought you could hide your tats from me and get an easier pass?

MENDEZ

(He unbuttons his shirt and pulls down a sleeve revealing an arm covered in tattoos. He points to a "915" on his shoulder.)

This is what they gave me when I first got initiated and, yeah, I got this one when I beat up a rival gang member, put the fucker in the hospital, but this one, I got this guy when my friend Miguel died at the hands of a BP officer. Shot dead because he couldn't hear what the officer was saying. Four fucking bullets to the back. This one, to honor the sacrifices my mom made to get me here. And this one. To remember my son.

(Beat.)

I'm not hiding anything. I did what I had to do, and I'm not proud of a lot of it, but I can tell you one thing. If it wasn't for that fence, I wouldn't have a single one of these. If it wasn't for this desk, you wouldn't be able to tell us apart. I don't know what fucking side you're on—

CARREON

This isn't about sides—

MENDEZ

Bullshit this isn't about sides. Sitting here, acting all fucking high and mighty with your papers and rules and looking down on me because what, I fought for something?

CARREON

And I didn't? You don't know me—

MENDEZ

You're writing me off over some old ink, but I haven't forgotten who I am.

CARREON

I don't see what any of this has to do with—

MENDEZ

It's in you. All of this! Borders, lines, laws. It's in your blood. On your skin just as much as mine, tattoos or not. This struggle Carreon, we all share it. Don't forget that, because they never will. The people who made all these rules, the ones who built this fence, the ones who gave you that desk. They took our home, Carreon. Aztlán. It's our birthright.

(CARREON looks confused.)

Aztlán, Carreon! Read a book! Take the time to learn where you fucking came from. It's the least you can do.

CARREON

(Silence. CARREON goes to pour himself a glass of water.)

Can I get you a glass of water?

MENDEZ

(Considers it. Sighs.)

Sure.

CARREON

Look, Mr. Mendez—

MENDEZ

Lalo, man—

CARREON

I want to help you, I do, but I don't see what I can do here. If my manager has been handling your case then I think he might be better suited to—

MENDEZ

(Beat.)

I've made mistakes. A lot of them, I'll never forgive myself for. I didn't get the chance to make things right with my mah before she left us. All of this, all of these forms, I'm trying to make things right with her. Five months I've been trying to find some way to make this work. My abuela, she's out there, alone.

(Beat.)

Make sure you write that down because that's important.

(He sits there waiting for CARREON to take note. CARREON does. He continues.)

Things are changing around here. El Paso, it's different, every day it changes. Ten years from now, who knows what it'll look like. Good or bad? I don't know. But we need to keep up. You hear they're tearing down the old Asarco smokestack?

CARREON

Yeah, I heard about—

MENDEZ

My father used to work there, at the copper refinery. Old man breathed in smoke everyday for twenty five years and he still had enough breath in him to beat my ass. He would've kept working there if they hadn't shut it down. He hated not working. You could see the

light fade from him everyday. He left a piece of himself in that smokestack. A piece of my history is there and it's about to get torn down. We're losing the fight for our history.

CARREON

Is that history worth saving? So what if your old man worked there? You and everybody else. What is it if not a tombstone?

MENDEZ

It used to be our lifeblood, Carreon. Our beating heart.

CARREON

Let the past die, Mendez.

MENDEZ

(He takes a moment.)

Look. I don't care what you write down on that piece of paper. But, what I want you to do, is call your mah and you thank her for doing everything she could to get you on this side of the fence.

CARREON

She's not with us anymore.

MENDEZ

(MENDEZ crosses himself.)

Then I want you to sit back and remember.

CARREON

Remember what?

MENDEZ

Who you are.

(He stands to leave.)

CARREON

Wait.

CARREON goes through the files on his desk and pulls out a sheet of paper. He writes something on it and hands it to MENDEZ.

MENDEZ

What's this?

CARREON

Immigration lawyer, I hear she's good. I can't promise anything, but the way guys around here talk about her... Well, it sounds like she's good at raising hell.

MENDEZ

Sounds like my kinda lady.

CARREON

Good luck, Mendez. I mean it.

MENDEZ

Gracias.

MENDEZ nods and exits, disappearing into the desert. HERNANDEZ reenters, passing MENDEZ.

HERNANDEZ

Who are you, Sarg?

CARREON

Don't Hernandez—

HERNANDEZ

What's left of you?

The humvee roars to life as CARREON begins to breathe heavily and rubs at his side, as if he were reaching for something along his ribs. He thinks he is wearing a kevlar vest. It's too tight and he can't breathe. HERNANDEZ walks over to CARREON and, from behind him, reaches over and, with the sound of velcro, pulls loose the kevlar vest.

HERNANDEZ

Not your size?

CARREON

They ran out. Can you believe that?

HERNANDEZ

It's bullshit. How much do they spend on this fucking war and they can't even get me a kevlar vest that fits.

(He pulls a canteen from the desert floor.)

Water?

CARREON

No. No, save it.

HERNANDEZ

You need to drink, Sarg. Your leg.

CARREON

It's fine... Thanks.

HERNANDEZ

Have you seen any movement?

CARREON

No. None.

HERNANDEZ

I can take over if you want to get some rest.

CARREON

No. Can't sleep.

HERNANDEZ

Me either.

(Pause.)

So, where'd you grow up?

CARREON

Not now, Hernandez.

(Silence. They sit for a moment as CARREON catches his breathe.)

HERNANDEZ

I grew up in Taos, New Mexico.

(No response.)

I thought it was hot there, but Jesus Christ the heat here.

(No response.)

Okay. I'm going to see if I can get the radio working.

HERNANDEZ stands and climbs into the overturned humvee. It's silent for a long while until, suddenly, static.

CARREON

Hernandez? Hernandez?

HERNANDEZ

Hold on!

The static continues, and then, flashes of sound. We can barely make out the sound of several news stations, mostly in Pashto. In the middle of it all there is a short snippet of music from José Alfredo Jimenez's "El Rey." This catches CARREON's attention.

CARREON

Wait, go back.

HERNANDEZ

Oh, now he wants to talk.

CARREON

Go back, Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ

Alright, alright.

HERNANDEZ flips back to the channel. We catch a verse from “El Rey.” LUCIANO appears singing this song in a shaft of light while shaving his face. His back is to the audience.

LUCIANO

Con dinero y sin dinero
hago siempre lo que quiero
y mi palabra es la ley
no tengo trono ni reina
ni nadie que me comprenda
pero sigo siendo el rey

The song continues softly as they talk, but the light on LUCIANO fades as he exits.

HERNANDEZ

I recognize this song. Where the hell are we picking this up from?

(Pause.)

What is he singing?

CARREON

You don't speak Spanish, Hernandez?

HERNANDEZ

(Almost embarrassed.)

Never really picked it up, you know?

CARREON

(Almost sympathetic.)

He's singing about how, even without money or a throne, he's still a king. That even though there's no one that understands him, and that he's still driven people out of his life, all he can do is keep pushing himself along and hope that someone will cry for him when he dies.

(The song begins to trail off as it ends. It is slowly replaced by static.

HERNANDEZ spends a moment trying to find the channel again but

there is no use. He gives up.)

My dad used to sing that song while he got ready for work.

HERNANDEZ

(Straightening up, almost as if at attention.)

Yeah?

CARREON

Yeah.

(A moment.)

I'm from El Paso, Texas.

HERNANDEZ

Do you miss it?

CARREON

Of course I do.

HERNANDEZ

How long have you been deployed?

CARREON

On and off since this war started.

HERNANDEZ

So, what is that—

CARREON

Almost six years now.

HERNANDEZ

You got anyone waiting for you back home? Your dad?

CARREON

My dad's gone, my mom too. But I have a wife.

HERNANDEZ

That's good. What's her name?

CARREON

Cynthia.

HERNANDEZ

That's beautiful.

CARREON

She is. She's my star.

HERNANDEZ

Tell me about her, she a looker?

CARREON

Like you wouldn't believe.

CARREON looks out into the desert as a light illuminates CYNTHIA. She stands in the desert wearing a wedding dress. Her hand is full of wedding cake. She is laughing.

CYNTHIA

Adrián! Baboso, don't try to run away!

CARREON

(To HERNANDEZ.)

We didn't get married until after my first tour.

CYNTHIA

Adrián, I'm not kidding, get your nalgas over here or I'm divorcing you, I swear to God!

(She laughs.)

CARREON

We went all out. Big tent wedding. My C.O. at the time pulled some strings and got us the Coronado Country Club. My mom made all the centerpieces. And Cynthia...

CYNTHIA

Adrián!

CARREON

She was beautiful. Watching the sun set behind her as we said our vows. It was perfect.

HERNANDEZ

And your dad? Was he there?

In the desert, LUCIANO appears. He stands with his back to the audience. He holds in the air a small gold ball. In his other hand is a golf club.

CARREON

Yeah. He was there.

LUCIANO places the small ball on the desert floor and readies his club, settling into the perfect stance.

LUCIANO

You know mijo, your abuelo used to mow the lawn here. Did you know that?

CYNTHIA

Adrián, get over here!

LUCIANO

Even in the summers they had him out here mowing these lawns.

CYNTHIA

Adrián!

LUCIANO

They damn near killed him.

LUCIANO hits the small golden ball. The lights over CYNTHIA and LUCIANO begin to fade away.

CYNTHIA

Adrián, come back!

LUCIANO

But sure mijo, it was a beautiful wedding.

CYNTHIA and LUCIANO exit.

CARREON

(As he speaks, it's harder for him to breathe.)

I, uhh, I left a few months later. My second deployment. We knew it was coming, so we were ready for it. But it got harder every time I had to leave.

(He is reaching for something along his side, the velcro lining to his kevlar vest.)

When I got back home from my fourth deployment she looked...older. She was still my shining star, but something about her was duller. I think we could both feel it.

(Shallow breaths.)

I shouldn't have left then, but I did...I, I did, and—

(CARREON begins to breathe heavily, as if he is not getting enough air.)

HERNANDEZ

Hey, Carreon, we did this. We did the vest thing, remember? Carreon? You okay man? Hey! Talk to me!

CARREON

(Through heaving breaths.)

Help.

HERNANDEZ

Fuck. Fuck this is new.

(Looking around the desert.)

Fuck where is she? Cynthia! Cynthia come back! Give me a memory Cynthia, conjure up another fucking memory! Take us back to Target, back to the wedding, anything!

(The desert is still.)

Fuck. Fuck-fuck-fuck. Okay, come on, we can do this. I've got you buddy. We're going to do this the old fashioned way.

(The cadence returns. HERNANDEZ helps CARREON to his feet.)

When you get there this is—

(Snapping his fingers at CARREON.)

Carreon, come on, stay with me now.

CARREON & HERNANDEZ

When you get there this is what you'll do.

You've gotta kill Al Qaeda for me and you.

We've gotta get them back for what was done.

On September 11th, 2001.

(CARREON is starting to get his breathing under control.)

Oh, whoa-Left, your lo-right.

Left. Left. Left-right-left.
Left. Left. Left-right-left.

HERNANDEZ

There we go, Sarg! There we go! Talk to me, what will help, hmm?

CARREON

Driving. My car.

HERNANDEZ

Alright buddy, you got it.

HERNANDEZ helps CARREON to his feet and sits him down on the couch. We hear the click of keys and the start of an engine. Lights shift. CARREON begins to drive. Every now and then a light shines on CARREON and HERNANDEZ in a rhythm. Streetlights. Slow at first, but they begin to speed up as the scene progresses.

HERNANDEZ

How we feeling buddy? Talk to me.

CARREON

I miss it.

HERNANDEZ

You miss what?

CARREON

You know what.

HERNANDEZ

Say it.

(Silence.)

Say it.

CARREON

The driving.

HERNANDEZ
The metal.

CARREON
The engine.

HERNANDEZ
The smell of diesel.

CARREON
And the cloud of dust I leave behind.

HERNANDEZ
The kind of dust that sticks to everything it touches.

CARREON
The kind you can't get away from. The kind you can never fully wash off.

HERNANDEZ
What did the boys used to call it?

CARREON
Moon dust.

HERNANDEZ
The moon was so big that night. I'd never seen anything like it.

CARREON
I hope it made it easier.

HERNANDEZ
It did.

CARREON
I should've gone with you.

HERNANDEZ
You don't mean that.

CARREON

I do.

HERNANDEZ

What about Cynthia?

CARREON

There were plenty of stars out that night.

HERNANDEZ

But none like her.

(As if looking out the window.)

This a highway?

CARREON

Yup, 375.

HERNANDEZ

It's nice out here. Dark.

CARREON

Cuts through the desert.

HERNANDEZ

Sand on all sides. You can't get away from it, can you?

CARREON

(The car speeds up.)

No. I guess not.

HERNANDEZ

Just you and me. Just like before.

(He hums, "Left, Left, Left-right-left.")

CARREON

Our boots are in the sand
We are marching hand in hand
We are here for you

Please don't shout and please don't boo

HERNANDEZ

I don't know that one.

CARREON

There was a time before you, you know.

(Looks to HERNANDEZ.)

I was deployed four times before you ever saw that desert. Youngbloods like you, every soldier you meet with even the smallest bit of dirt under their nails, you all get that look in your eyes.

(Eyes back on the road.)

How long is this guy's list? How many times has he had to pull the trigger?

HERNANDEZ

Sarg, I—

CARREON

You know what I can't figure out?

HERNANDEZ

What—

CARREON

Out of all of them. Every person I've ever had to kill. Why you?

(Silence.)

Why are you the one that's haunting me?

HERNANDEZ

I don't know, Sarg. I don't make the rules. I'm stuck in this desert just like you.

CARREON

(Eyes back on the road. The engine growls.)

Our boots are in the sand

We are marching hand in hand

We are here for you

Please don't shout and please don't boo

HERNANDEZ

Slow down, Carreon.

CARREON

We dodge bullets everyday
And we still have the courage to stay

HERNANDEZ

Enough of this! What are you trying to prove?

CARREON

All the sand is in our face
But we still stand in our place
We all work very hard
While marching with pride yard by yard

HERNANDEZ

Carreon, slow down!

CARREON

Marching without any qualm
While singing this soldier's song.

*Sirens blare out from the shadows of the desert.
We don't see a cop car, but we see the lights. We
hear CARREON's car slow down as he mimes
coming to a halt.*

HERNANDEZ

I fucking told you.

CARREON

Shit.

HERNANDEZ

Keep cool.

CARREON

Keep cool.

The POLICE OFFICER walks out of the shadows, the flashing lights of the cop car behind him. He walks up to CARREON's window.

POLICE OFFICER

Licence and registration.

CARREON

Of course.

CARREON turns to HERNANDEZ who reaches under his seat and pulls a few papers from the sand. He passes them to CARREON.

POLICE OFFICER

(Looking them over.)

This your car?

CARREON

Yes sir.

POLICE OFFICER

You've got purple heart plates.

CARREON

Yes sir.

POLICE OFFICER

What division?

CARREON

1st Armored Division.

POLICE OFFICER

Old Ironsides?

CARREON

(Taken aback.)

Yeah?

POLICE OFFICER

I was 1st Battalion, 107th Cavalry Regiment.

CARREON

Small world.

HERNANDEZ

No kidding.

POLICE OFFICER

I'll let you off with a warning.

CARREON

Thank you, I don't normally—

POLICE OFFICER

Truth be told, sometimes I do the same thing. Driving out here, this late at night. It helps.

CARREON

Yeah. It does.

POLICE OFFICER

Get home safe, ya hear? Goodnight.

CARREON

Night officer.

HERNANDEZ

Dodged a bullet there.

CARREON

Shut up.

(He thinks for a moment as the car starts up again.)

I need to make a phone call.

HERNANDEZ

It's late.

CARREON

I know.

CARREON pulls a phone from his pocket. We hear a phone ringing until:

THOMPSON (V.O.)

(After a moment of ringing.)

Hello? Who is this?

CARREON

Thompson? It's me, Carreon. I hope I didn't wake you, I know it's late—

THOMPSON (V.O.)

No, no. You didn't wake me. I'm usually up late.

CARREON

Yeah, me too.

(There is a long moment of silence. Finally.)

Hey, listen, I was wondering if I could take you up on that beer?

THOMPSON (V.O.)

(Trying to hide his surprise.)

Oh! Uhh, yeah, of course!

(Trying to downplay it.)

That'd be great.

CARREON

I know a place, I'll text you the address. How does after work tomorrow sound?

THOMPSON (V.O.)

Sounds great.

CARREON

Great, I'll see you then.

The phone hangs up.

The engine clicks back on as they begin to drive away. CARREON leans forward and flicks on an invisible radio. It is "El Rey" by José Alfredo Jiménez.

Light's fade.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO

Lights up on the same desert clearing.

CARREON is lying down in the sand. He is looking up at the sky.

CYNTHIA enters. She is wearing pajamas, maybe some Dallas Cowboys sweatpants or a sweater. She looks worried. She stands watching him for a second before she joins him. She lies down in the sand next to him. She hesitates but eventually holds him gently.

CYNTHIA

Whatcha lookin at?

CARREON

Just the stars.

CYNTHIA

You can barely see them.

CARREON

I can see them well enough.

CYNTHIA

(Beat.)

Tell me about them?

CARREON

(He takes a moment to look at her and then he gently kisses her forehead. Returning to the stars.)

Well, you can kinda see it, but that's Orion's Belt. And there's the big dipper, see it right there, the handle and the—

CYNTHIA

Yeah, I see it.

CARREON

Those are the easy ones. I think that's Gemini, right there by the mountains.

(CYNTHIA pulls in closer to CARREON. He looks at her and smiles.)

CYNTHIA

It's nice out.

CARREON

Yeah, it is.

CYNTHIA

(After a long while.)

How was work?

CARREON

(He looks at her. Confused.)

Are you...really here right now?

CYNTHIA

(Gently.)

No. I'm not.

CARREON

Right.

(Looking back up at the stars.)

Work, it's...different.

CYNTHIA

That's good though, right?

CARREON

It's not what I pictured.

(Beat.)

I don't think I'm helping anyone.

CYNTHIA

Of course you are.

CARREON

People come in needing real help and all I can do is sign a paper and pass it along.

CYNTHIA

But that's something. It's more than a lot of people will see.

CARREON

Is it enough?

CYNTHIA

Did I ever tell you about my Tío Chuy?

(CARREON turns back to her.)

My mother was born here, on this side. My grandmother barely made it to a clinic, almost had my mom right on the bridge. She said she would've been okay with that as long as she had made it across, but she didn't know which side would send medics first and where they would take her. So she ran as fast as she could and had my mother at the first clinic that opened its doors to her. When she had my uncle, she wasn't so lucky. She had twisted her ankle working at a maquiladora earlier that week. She prayed to god that my uncle would wait, that she could heal in time. But she didn't, and he was born in Juárez.

It was fine for a long time. He went to live with a relative in Oaxaca, where there was work. He wrote to his sister in the States and his mother in Juárez. I have a postcard from him somewhere, he'd send them to me on my birthday. Anyway. He didn't give any thought to coming to the States, he was happy in Mexico. He married a teacher and had two kids.

He didn't pay attention to the way the cartels were becoming more active. I mean, a lot of people didn't, not just him, the whole country. Shoot outs broke out often. Journalists would disappear and their bodies would be found hanging from a bridge. My mother told him he could come here, stay with us, but he said no. Said that it would die down eventually. That the government would take care of it. A few weeks later the cartel shot up his wife's school, she died.

By the time he tried to come here, to live with us, he had no money left. So, he asked around for help and eventually he found a coyote who promised him safe passage for him and his kids. For a lot of people, that's their only option. Blind trust in a stranger. In the end, my uncle and his kids never made it. The heat was too much for them, and Border Patrol had shot holes through the barrels of water left for people trying to cross.

I never met my uncle, or those cousins.

CARREON

I'm so sorry.

CYNTHIA

I just want you to know that you can make a difference. Every piece of paper you sign keeps someone from crossing. That desert, it just swallows you whole. Everything you are, everything you were. It doesn't matter.

CARREON

They're starting to turn away asylum seekers.

CYNTHIA

What? Isn't that illegal?

CARREON

Yup. But they're doing it anyway. They tell people, "we've taken in too many of you already." It's disgusting. They came all the way here and then to be lied to? Turned away? What's left for them after that?

CYNTHIA

The desert.

CARREON

The desert.

HERNANDEZ appears in the desert, watching over the two.

CYNTHIA & HERNANDEZ

The heat will burn you alive and the sand will take whatever's left of you.

CYNTHIA

(She looks to CARREON who is tense now.)

Baby, I'm sorry, talk to me.

(She wipes sweat from his face.)

You know you can talk to me.

CARREON

(He sits up.)

I know.

CYNTHIA

Then why don't you?

(CARREON is looking at HERNANDEZ, not at her.)

HERNANDEZ

(Coming back from the shadows of the desert. He snaps his fingers and CYNTHIA freezes.)

What is this?

CARREON

I thought it might help.

HERNANDEZ

This?

(Gesturing to CYNTHIA.)

She's a fantasy. Not real, Carreon.

CARREON

She's real to me.

HERNANDEZ

There's a real Cynthia out there, Carreon. But this isn't her.

CARREON

Enough.

CARREON snaps his fingers and CYNTHIA unfreezes.

HERNANDEZ

Stop this, Sarg.

CARREON

I said quiet!

CYNTHIA

What?

CARREON

No, not you, baby.

HERNANDEZ

Do you think this is what she'd want?

CYNTHIA

Stay with me, Adrián.

HERNANDEZ

Do you think the real Cynthia would look at this and take you back?

CARREON

Go away!

CYNTHIA

(Stunned.)

Okay. I'll leave you alone.

CARREON

No!

(Softer.)

No. I'm sorry. Stay. I want you to stay.

(He looks at HERNANDEZ.)

HERNANDEZ

Fine. Have your fantasy.

(He retreat into the desert, but watches.)

CYNTHIA

(She points to a star.)

What's that one?

CARREON

I think that's a planet.

CYNTHIA

It's so bright.

CARREON

Probably Venus.

(Beat. He pulls her in tighter.)

Thank you.

CYNTHIA

For what?

CARREON

For staying.

CYNTHIA

Stop that, of course—

HERNANDEZ

(Yelling from the desert.)

This is just sad, you know that right? Like, you see that?

CARREON

You didn't have to stay. But you did. Not everyone stayed waiting for their husbands to come back. Not everyone stayed when they did come back.

CYNTHIA

I know.

CARREON

Thank you.

(Beat.)

And about a kid...

CYNTHIA

Adrián, I love you. We can...we can take our time. Okay?

CARREON

Okay.

CYNTHIA

(Her voice is distorted as she speaks.)

I'll always be here for you.

(The words didn't feel right. She tries again.)

I'll always be here for you.

(She puts her hand on her mouth.)

HERNANDEZ

See. That's the thing with fantasies, Carreon—

CARREON

Cynthia—

HERNANDEZ

They have a habit of falling apart.

CARREON

(To HERNANDEZ.)

And you? When are you going to fall apart?

HERNANDEZ

I'm not a fantasy.

(Looking at CYNTHIA.)

What did she really say?

CARREON

Don't do this.

HERNANDEZ

What did she really say, Sarg?

CARREON sighs. He gestures towards CYNTHIA, prompting her to speak. Her voice is clear.

CYNTHIA

I love you, Adrián. But I can't be here. With you. Not like this. I'll always be here for you. But when you're ready.

CARREON

It was last 4th of July.

Banda music fills the air as CYNTHIA breaks away from CARREON.

CYNTHIA

We were at a cookout. It was my tia's place, out in Ruidoso.

CARREON

(Watching CYNTHIA.)

A weekend trip to get away from the desert.

CYNTHIA spins towards CARREON, a smile breaking out across her face. She wraps her arms around him as they begin to dance.

CYNTHIA

Ay, Adrián, will you look at this place.

CARREON

It's gorgeous.

CYNTHIA

She wasn't kidding when she said she got some work done. I thought it'd just be her nose, but no, even the whole backyard.

CARREON

(To HERNANDEZ.)

We were dancing in this little gazebo tucked in the corner of a garden, between two large hydrangea shrubs.

CYNTHIA

And lemon trees? My tia is not out here picking lemons, I promise you. It's so gaudy.

CARREON

I thought it was kinda nice.

CYNTHIA

Oh, yeah? You gonna make me a gazebo too? Plant some lemon trees in our little backyard?

CARREON

Yeah, maybe.

CYNTHIA

(Beat.)

You're here to stay now, right?

CARREON

Right.

CYNTHIA

So some projects might be nice, you know?

CARREON

Yeah. Yeah, might be—

As CARREON dances, he suddenly buckles as a sharp pain rockets out from his bad knee. He stumbles, and nearly falls over if it weren't for CYNTHIA catching his weight.

CYNTHIA

Adrián! Are you okay—

CARREON

Yes, I'm fine—

CYNTHIA

Do you need to sit down—

CARREON

No!

(Straightening back up.)

No. I'm fine. Let's dance.

(Beat.)

Please.

It takes her a moment, but she wraps her arms back around him. They dance. A little slower this time.

CYNTHIA

I'm happy you're back, Adrián.

(CARREON doesn't say anything.)

I've spent so many nights praying next to an empty bed, it's almost strange having you back. You know?

(Still no answer.)

But I'm excited for what's next. I really am, Adrián.

CARREON

Cynthia...

CYNTHIA

Yes?

CARREON

What if, there is no next?

CYNTHIA stops dancing.

CYNTHIA

Excuse me?

CARREON

I've just been thinking...

CYNTHIA

Thinking what, Adrián?

CARREON

I've just been thinking that you deserve someone whole.

(Beat.)

Someone who's got all their pieces—

CYNTHIA

No. No, Adrián you are not doing this right now. Not here.

CARREON

Cynthia, let me explain—

CYNTHIA

How long? How long have you waited to say this?

(Beat.)

Months?

(Beat. Pained.)

Years?

CARREON

I don't know.

(To HERNANDEZ.)

I didn't. But then the fireworks.

HERNANDEZ slowly raises his hand to the sky and snaps. Fireworks explode in the sky. CARREON sags to shrink at the sound of them.

CYNTHIA

Adrián? Adrián, baby it's the fireworks. Remember, just fireworks.

CARREON

(To HERNANDEZ, scared.)

And you were there. I saw you. And I yelled— On your feet soldiers!

HERNANDEZ

Sir yes sir!

CYNTHIA

Adrián, baby—

HERNANDEZ

The ants go marching two by two—

CARREON

Hurrah, Hurrah!

CYNTHIA

Look at me, Adrián. Come on, look at me.

CARREON

(Looking to CYNTHIA.)

Cynthia, I'm—

HERNANDEZ

Eyes on the horizon, Sarg.

CARREON

Cynthia—

HERNANDEZ

Don't take your eyes off me.

CARREON

(Pushing past CYNTHIA, knocking her over.)

Hernandez, wait! / Wait!

CYNTHIA

Ow!

The music cuts out as HERNANDEZ retreats into the shadows of the desert. CARREON is breathing heavily. He turns to see CYNTHIA, on the ground. He rushes to help her, but she waves him away.

CYNTHIA

No! No. I...

(She stands.)

I'm fine.

(She takes a step, and almost topples over.)

Fuck, I think I twisted my ankle.

CARREON

Cynthia, I'm—

CYNTHIA

Stop. Don't. I'm going to get ice.

(She shakes her head, fights back tears.)

Just...stay here.

CARREON

Yeah. Okay.

CYNTHIA exits, back into the desert.

CARREON

(He watches her leave. He turns to HERNANDEZ.)

Why were you there that night?

HERNANDEZ

I don't know.

CARREON

Was that...the first time?

HERNANDEZ

Sarg, I don't—

CARREON

You have to know something. Something about all of this.

HERNANDEZ

Believe me, I've tried to make sense of it. Sometimes, even I think this is a dream.

(He laughs.)

When I wake up, the first thing I feel is my feet sinking in the sand. And everytime I think I'm back there, in that desert. But then I see you. Sitting on this couch or heating up food or driving to work. I see you and I realize that I'm stuck in this...snow globe. This slice of desert that I've never been to and why? You. You keep me here, Sarg. You tell me why?

MANAGER appears on stage, he sits at CARREON's desk and gathers a set of papers. He reviews them.

CARREON

I don't know.

HERNANDEZ

Why, Sarg?

CARREON

I don't know.

Lights shift. The office.

MANAGER

You don't know?

CARREON

(Turning to the MANAGER. He sits on the other side of the desk.)

Excuse me, sir?

MANAGER

Carreon, I need to talk to you about these numbers. You've been working hard.

CARREON

Yes, sir—

MANAGER

You're taking nearly twice as many asylum cases as anyone else in the office.

CARREON

Twice as many?

MANAGER

Did you not realize that?

CARREON

No. I thought I was going slow.

MANAGER

That's what I wanted to talk to you about.

CARREON

I promise you I'm still following procedure.

MANAGER

(Purses his lips. Pulls out a document from his stack.)

You started off so strong. For instance, the Aguilar case. The woman from Climentoro. She's a dime a dozen. We get all these people talking about droughts and storms and you handled it.

CARREON

I wasn't able to help her?

MANAGER

Help her? Carreon, I don't go looking for a new place to live when it hails, do I? I just pop those dents and keep going.

CARREON

I thought there might be something we could've done—

MANAGER

Are you a climate scientist, Carreon?

CARREON

No, but—

MANAGER

In the military, did they train you in knowing things about the climate?

CARREON

Well, no, but—

MANAGER

Then leave it at that. It's not your place. Oh! Speaking of which. I understand that you're the one that helped Mendez find a lawyer?

CARREON

I did.

MANAGER

And were you aware that he already received counsel? From me?

CARREON

Yes.

MANAGER

And you don't see how that might be a red flag for me?

(He sighs.)

Carreon. I don't know how things were over there in Fallujah or wherever the fuck you were, but I run a tight ship here. Out of the 43 asylum cases you've personally reviewed, you've approved credible fear for 36 of them. That's nearly an 84-fucking-percent approval rate.

(He waits.)

Do you understand what I'm getting at?

CARREON

(Tense.)

No sir, I do not.

MANAGER

Carreon, no one has an approval rate that high. No one. Michael is at 14%. Gloria, she sits pretty at 11%. Hell, Peter, fucking Peter is at 4%. Nothing gets past Peter. What the fuck are you seeing that they aren't?

CARREON

I'm just trying to help—

MANAGER

Do you know why I hired you, Carreon?

CARREON

I like to think it's because—

MANAGER

I hired you because you're a machine. But I can't keep a machine that's putting out 84-fucking-percent. That machine is broken. I don't want a broken machine.

(Getting frustrated.)

Fuck!

(Deep breath. Beat.)

How many times did you try to become a Border Patrol Agent?

CARREON

I don't know what you're talking about.

MANAGER

All you guys, all you vets who come back here, you're predictable. You try for the police, private sector, or Border Patrol. Your resume was forwarded to me internally, so that tells me you tried BP. It doesn't tell me how many times you tried.

CARREON

(After a moment.)

Three times.

MANAGER

What did you in? The exams? Psyche analysis?

CARREON

The physical.

MANAGER

Seriously?

CARREON

Shrapnel in my knee. Made it to their training camp twice. Finally told not to try again after my leg gave out the second time.

MANAGER

(Taking this in.)

That's why I hired you. You're a soldier, Carreon. So what if they didn't want you? BP doesn't want a machine that runs slow, I get it. But I don't mind slow.

(Beat.)

I need you to be my first line of defence.

CARREON

Excuse me?

MANAGER

There's a war raging here, right here in El Paso. Don't you see it? A war for the very heart of the United States and I need you in my corner.

CARREON

I'm sorry, who are we fighting?

MANGER

(Gesturing to the stack of papers.)

Them, Carreon. This wave. This flood! They want to take over. Take this land from us. These, these illegals. They want to take what's ours. What's yours.

CARREON

I thought you said I was one of them.

MANAGER

Sure. But that's the beauty of it. You're my guy on the inside. My wolf in sheep's clothing. My—

The MANAGER's phone rings. He looks at it and makes an annoyed face. He gestures to CARREON that this will just take a moment. He answers it.

MANAGER

(Sharp.)

What? Are you serious? And you can't? Fine. No, I said fine. Bye.

(He hangs up, then gives CARREON a smile. He begins to gather his papers.)

It was the wife. Apparently, my daughter is throwing up at school and I've got to go and pick her up.

(He stands.)

Listen. I think you can do real, good work here. But I need you to cut these numbers in half, and that's just for starters. Do you understand?

CARREON

I just don't see how that—

MANAGER

Half, Carreon. You forget you haven't been here that long. You've still got a month left on your probationary period. If I don't see a drop in your acceptance rate...well. We're gonna have to have a chat about your place in all this.

(He pats CARREON on the shoulders.)

MANAGER exits as HERNANDEZ enters.

HERNANDEZ

(He flips off MANAGER.)

This fucking guy.

CARREON

Is he wrong though?

HERNANDEZ

Don't listen to him, Sarg.

CARREON

A wolf...

HERNANDEZ

Hey, what's getting into you?

CARREON

It's like I never left, huh? Did I bring the war with me?

HERNANDEZ

Carreon.

CARREON

I helped them take that desert, and now they want me to take this one.

HERNANDEZ

You're starting to sound a lot like, Mendez.

CARREON

Well, Mendez had it right. That gringo's an asshole.

CARREON and HERNANDEZ laugh. There's something natural in it. A moment between them like this hasn't happened in years. It almost feels nice. ESPINOZA enters.

ESPINOZA

What are you doing?

CARREON

(Spins to see her, he's surprised.)

What?

ESPINOZA

Who were you talking to?

CARREON

No one.

(She is silent.)

I was just reading out loud.

ESPINOZA

Who are you?

CARREON

Carreon.

(She is silent.)

You can call me Carreon.

ESPINOZA

Is that your name?

CARREON

It's my last name.

ESPINOZA

What's your first name?

(She is scratching her arms. A little nervous. Feet pointed inwards.)

CARREON

(He takes a moment before asking this.)

What's your name?

ESPINOZA

Maria.

CARREON

Hola, Maria.

ESPINOZA

Hola.

CARREON

So, what are you doing here? Where are your parents?

ESPINOZA

I don't know.

CARREON

You don't know? Are you lost?

ESPINOZA

Do you have any colors?

CARREON

Umm, no.

ESPINOZA

No crayons or markers?

CARREON

(He shakes his head and checks his pockets. He takes out a handful of highlighters.)

I have a couple highlighters?

ESPINOZA

That'll do.

(CARREON hands her the highlighters and a sheet of paper. She begins to draw.)

Can you tell me a story?

CARREON

A story? Why?

ESPINOZA

Because I'm bored.

CARREON

I don't really do stories.

ESPINOZA

Why not?

CARREON

I'm just not good at it.

ESPINOZA

Well, did your dad ever tell you stories?

CARREON

He didn't really—

ESPINOZA

Come on. Try.

CARREON

(He hesitates. Unsure. After a moment.)

My dad, he used to talk to me about stars.

ESPINOZA

Stars? That's kinda cool.

LUCIANO appears in the desert. He enters and sits on the couch.

CARREON

He'd tell me things about how long they lived or how fast light traveled from them. He used to bring me clippings from science magazines about our solar system or how planets were made or the way stars exploded when they died.

LUCIANO

Stars are one of God's greatest creations, Adrián. So much power, right up there, hanging up in the sky. Any one of those pinpricks is larger than you could ever imagine. Their light and heat would swallow us whole in an instant.

CARREON

One time, he brought home little glow-in-the-dark stars that he hid all around the house so, at night, you could see them shine all around you.

LUCIANO

But they're beautiful too. They've lit the way for our people for centuries. Just imagine it, Adrián. The night sky, the desert, pitch black save for these stars lighting your way.

CARREON

My mom hated it. She'd rip 'em off the walls if she ever found one, but my dad would always replace them.

ESPINOZA

She'd rip them off?

CARREON

Yeah...

ESPINOZA

Why'd she do that?

CARREON

My parents didn't get along very well. They used to fight all the time. Sometimes, two people don't quite fit together. And sometimes it takes you a few years to realize that.

(Beat.)

My dad, he'd do this thing. He'd sit me on the couch while the sun set and we'd wait for the little glow-in-the-dark stars to light up. He'd laugh so hard the couch would shake. You know that feeling? The kind of laugh that leaves you aching. That was him, every night.

ESPINOZA

That sounds nice.

CARREON

It was.

ESPINOZA

Are you married?

CARREON

What?

ESPINOZA

Old people get married. Are you married?

CARREON

Sort of.

ESPINOZA

Hmm. That makes sense.

CARREON

How so?

ESPINOZA

I could just tell you were missing something.

(She stands and hands CARREON the drawing.)

CARREON

(Feeling awkward, he takes the drawing.)

What did you draw?

ESPINOZA

The sun.

CARREON

The sun? Wow. And what is all this? Down at the bottom.

ESPINOZA

Those are all the people burning.

(ESPINOZA suddenly stands up.)

Thank you for the story sir. I'm gonna keep these if that's okay with you!

Before he can say anything she grabs a handful of blank papers and all the highlighters and leaves. ESPINOZA exits, back into the desert. HERNANDEZ returns from the desert.

HERNANDEZ

What the fuck was that?

CARREON

I was going to ask you the same thing.

CARREON's phone buzzes. He pulls it out and checks it.

CARREON

Fuck, I'm late. We— I need to go.

CARREON and HERNANDEZ exit into the desert. Lights shift as the song "El Rey" returns. LUCIANO is alone on stage, sitting on the couch, humming, looking up at the stars. He holds a bundle of cloth in his arms. A child.

LUCIANO

Your abuelo, my dad, he crossed the desert during a new moon. If it weren't for stars like Polaris, or Sirius, or Vega, I may never have been born. I think about that whenever I look up at them. That these were the same stars that helped guide him home. You're my little star now, Adrián. My little guiding light. The two of us, we're going to make something of ourselves, I can feel it.

The song fades. It plays softly in the background along with a mix of bar chatter and billiards. THOMPSON sits alone at a small table. A pitcher of beer, already started, sitting beside him. CARREON enters and spots THOMPSON. HERNANDEZ sits at a nearby table.

CARREON

Hey, sorry I'm late, work—

THOMPSON

No worries, sorry I already got started!

(He pours beer from the pitcher into another glass.)

How long have you been back home?

CARREON

Two years now. Just about. You?

THOMPSON

Couple months. So not too long.

CARREON

Where were you—

THOMPSON

Basra. Camp Bravo.

CARREON

Oh, I heard they're clearing that place out.

THOMPSON

Yeah. Hence...

(Gestures to himself.)

CARREON

Right.

(He drinks.)

It's good to see you.

THOMPSON

Yeah, it's good to see you too.

(He drinks. Silence.)

I never got a chance to thank you, you know, for—

CARREON

Don't mention it.

THOMPSON

No, seriously, thank—

CARREON

Thompson.

THOMPSON

Right.

(He smiles. Takes a drink. He laughs.)

CARREON

What?

THOMPSON

I missed it. You barking orders at me.

CARREON

(He smiles.)

Careful, Thompson. I might order you to buy us another round.

THOMPSON

(They both laugh.)

I wouldn't mind, it's the least I can—

(CARREON gives him a look.)

Right. Not mentioning it.

(He takes a drink.)

So, what are you up to nowadays?

CARREON

Nothing. Working in an office.

THOMPSON

Seriously?

CARREON

Hey, it pays the bills, right?

(He tries to give a small laugh.)

THOMPSON

Yeah, what more can you ask for? How's the, uh—

CARREON

Leg? Fine. Acts up when there's a storm though. Always thought that was an, uhh—

THOMPSON

Old wive's tale?

CARREON

Yeah! But it's true. It's fine though.

THOMPSON

(He takes a drink.)

Can I ask you a question?

CARREON

Sure.

THOMPSON

How long did it take you? To get settled, that is.

(The crack of billiard balls.)

CARREON

I don't know that I am.

THOMPSON

It's my arms. That's where I still feel it. My hands shake and I can still feel the kick of my rifle. Do you—

CARREON

I don't know if I want to be talking about this, Thompson.

THOMPSON

Right, of course.

CARREON

They've got counselors here you can talk to.

THOMPSON

Have you talked to them?

(No response.)

They're a bunch of kids, fresh out of school. I'm not wasting my time trying to talk to them about what happened.

(Still no response.)

I'm sorry.

CARREON

Don't be. It's hard. I...

(Takes a drink.)

You have anyone? A wife?

THOMPSON

Nah.

CARREON

Me either.

(He takes a drink.)

Well, I had someone. And I wasn't very good to her when I came back. I was short with her. Rude. Dismissive. When she tried to talk to me about it I, well, I wasn't really in the listening mood then. They didn't prepare me for that. Or for how still everything feels. How slow everything moves. Sometimes, I get it in my head that the ground is shaking. That the sand is right about to go out from under me and the desert is just going to swallow me. But then it doesn't. It's just me standing in my front yard just...waiting. For something, anything.

THOMPSON

For him.

CARREON

You see him too?

THOMPSON

No, but I hear him sometimes. That breathy laugh of his. Sometimes I hear it when a car passes by, or when I'm on a run. When I'm frying eggs. Everywhere. Sometimes, I go out to the shooting range and just stand in my lane with those big ear muffs on. Things can drown out gunfire, but not him.

CARREON

No. No they can't.

THOMPSON

(He takes a drink.)

You see him?

CARREON

No—

THOMPSON

I thought you said—

CARREON

I misspoke. I just...hear him sometimes.

THOMPSON

Even now I...

CARREON

We shouldn't talk about him—

THOMPSON

I just need to know how to make him—

CARREON

Enough.

(CARREON downs the rest of his beer and stands, shakily.)

I should go.

THOMPSON

Yeah. Okay. Sure.

CARREON

It's been...

THOMPSON

Yeah.

CARREON

(He turns to leave, but stops. To THOMPSON.)

Why Fort Bliss, Thompson? Why come to El Paso?

THOMPSON

It wasn't for you if that's what you're thinking.

CARREON

It wasn't.

THOMPSON

(Beat.)

Buddy of mine got a job out here a few years back. Says its helped him with, you know, the shaking. Says everyone is looking out for each other. I thought it might help.

CARREON

What's the job?

THOMPSON

Customs and Border Protection. They're beefing up the southern border. You hear about this?

CARREON

Yeah. Yeah, I heard something about it.

THOMPSON

Mhm. That's not what I heard.

CARREON

Excuse me?

THOMPSON

Some boys back at Bliss were telling me about you, but I didn't believe them.

(CARREON takes a drink.)

They were talking about how you tried out for BP, but they kept throwing you out. Said you were too soft.

CARREON

That's not what—

THOMPSON

See, the boys were saying that the great Sargeant Carreon ain't what he used to be.

CARREON

It was on account of my knee, the, uhh, shrapnel.

THOMPSON

Right. Broken parts and all that. How's it feel, Sarg?

CARREON

That job, you don't want it.

THOMPSON

Oh, really?

CARREON

When I got back, I was just like you. Stayed up all night, spent hours at the firing range, hell, I've started fights in every bar in and around Bliss and the entire time I thought the right job would make all that go away. But it doesn't, Thompson. I hear him. I see him. And keeping busy doesn't make him go away. I'm doing some real good now where I'm at. Making a real difference. And that helps. But out there, in that desert, what they want you to be doing. You want no part of that Thompson. I promise you.

THOMPSON

Here's the thing, Sarg. I do. I really do. They're looking for guys like us. Well, like me. Guys with a little dirt under their nails who ain't afraid when things get a little grey. Right, Sarg?

CARREON punches THOMPSON, knocking him to the ground. People gasp from the desert. HERNANDEZ leaps to CARREON, holding him back. THOMPSON is clutching his face. He looks up to CARREON and spits.

THOMPSON

Fucking spic.

CARREON is seething, he's about to take another step towards THOMPSON when MENDEZ enters.

MENDEZ

Carreon!

(CARREON turns to him.)

Leave him.

(Motioning his head towards the desert.)

Let's go.

CARREON takes one last look at THOMPSON then turns to leave. Lights shift as the bar sounds fade and THOMPSON retreats into the desert.

Music returns as MENDEZ and CARREON grab a table at a taqueria, just down the road. It's ranchero music, and MENDEZ nods his head along to the music. There are two glasses of water placed in front of them. He orders tacos from a waitress we can't see. He gives her a wide smile.

MENDEZ

Can we get an order of tacos de barbacoa, carnitas, lengua, y—

(To CARREON.)

You eat fish?

(CARREON nods. To the waitress:)

Y pescado. Gracias.

(Back to CARREON.)

The fish tacos are really great here. Best in the neighborhood.

CARREON

Thank you for stopping me.

MENDEZ

Don't worry about it. It's not the first bar fight I've stopped.

(He looks around the restaurant.)

Does that...happen often?

CARREON

No. Well, not in a long time.

MENDEZ

That's what I thought. You didn't strike me as the type.

CARREON

Thanks.

MENDEZ

Guy looked like he deserved it.

CARREON

He did.

MENDEZ

Well. In that case.

(He raises his water glass, after a moment, CARREON does as well.)

Fuck that guy.

(They clink glasses.)

CARREON

Yeah. Fuck that guy.

MENDEZ

I wanted to apologize for the other day.

CARREON

No, there's no need.

MENDEZ

No, no. I made a lot of assumptions. That place, the people in those offices, it all gets to me. Most of the time it feels like I'm talking to a wall, but you were willing to do something. So, I'm sorry.

CARREON

It's okay. Did you want to talk about—

MENDEZ

Nah, not right now. Let's just eat. And drink some water, you look like you could use it.

CARREON

Yeah, I do.

They drink silently for a moment.

CARREON

You got me thinking a lot about my dad.

(Beat.)

Him and that old copper refinery.

(Each syllable slow.)

Asarco.

MENDEZ

Is that a good thing or a bad thing.

CARREON

(Shrugs.)

You said your dad worked at Asarco?

MENDEZ

Yup. Machine operator or something like that. Did your dad work there?

CARREON

Nah.

After Asarco closed down, he used to take me out to the refinery. Just to explore. You know, break windows, climb machines, piss our names into the dirt. Guy stuff. I must've been 9 or 10.

One night, I see him pull out a small flashlight and shine it out into the dirt. Just sort of let the light spill out over it. I remember tugging at his shirt. Asking him what he was doing and that we should go back and mom would be worried. But, he told me to wait. To watch. So I did. And after a moment I saw what he was looking for. Little pinpricks of light in the sand. *Estrellas*, he said.

Since it was closed, my dad would go find what people left behind. Copper was as good as gold then and easier to get a hold of. So, when we were there, he'd pick up little bits of copper and keep them in his pocket. It's why we went. It wasn't about me and him, it was about those little stars.

That night, I found a piece about the size of a golf ball, maybe a little bigger. I thought I had caught a star, a little piece of the sky. Something God left me. I ran up to my dad with the biggest fucking smile on my face, just so exited to show him what I found and then he took it from me, right out of my hands. Put it in his pocket without another word. I wanted it to be mine. I thought it was meant for me. So I cried. And he hit me.

He told me to earn it. We never went back to Asarco. And a few years after that, he left.

MENDEZ

That's fucked up.

CARREON

(Starting to laugh.)

Yeah. Yeah it is.

(Laughs and drinks.)

My dad was...something else.

MENDEZ

Parents can be fucked up, its okay to say it.

CARREON

He was doing his best.

MENDEZ

No no no, no excuses come on. Come on, just say it.

CARREON

My dad...was an asshole.

(He laughs.)

MENDEZ

See, was that so hard?

CARREON

I just... I just hope I can be a better dad, you know.

MENDEZ

You already are.

(Beat.)

Just by worrying about it you're already doing better than him.

CARREON

Yeah, yeah.

(Beat.)

My dad, he's always had me convinced I was missing something, because he was.

MENDEZ

Are you expecting?

CARREON

No, but we... We were trying.

MENDEZ

Well... way I see it. If it's eating at you like this, maybe it's because you're meant to be one. You know?

CARREON

I'm not even sure there's still a chance. My wife, no, my ex, my, uhh...

MENDEZ

Your other half.

CARREON

I pushed her away. Said some things I regret.

MENDEZ

Does she know you regret them?

CARREON

We haven't really talked since then.

MENDEZ

That seems like a good place to start then. Then, baby steps. You know?

(Lifting the glass of water for a toast.)

To you and your future family. God willing.

CARREON

Yeah, God willing.

(They toast. They drink. MENDEZ finishes his water.)

How's it going with your abuela? I heard you got in touch with that lawyer I recommended.

MENDEZ

(He holds CARREON gaze for a moment.)

She passed away.

CARREON

Oh, Lalo, I'm sorry.

MENDEZ

Thanks.

CARREON

Seriously, my condolences.

MENDEZ

I appreciate it.

(He takes a long drink.)

CARREON

Is there going to be a funeral? I want to help, if there's anything at all you need—

MENDEZ

You're a good guy. But, no. I think I'm just going to do something small. Just me and her down in Durango. I think I'm gonna get her cremated, and that lawyer is helping me with all the paperwork so I can get her ashes up here, bury her with my mom. I think they would've liked that.

CARREON

Yeah, I think so too.

MENDEZ

(He gives a small smile that quickly fades.)

Alright, I better head out. Early flight tomorrow.

CARREON

But the tacos.

MENDEZ

(He smiles.)

They were for you. When was the last time you ate?

(CARREON looks like he could cry.)

I've got the bill. Just relax, take your time. Enjoy the food. The folks here, they're good.

CARREON

Thank you, Lalo. Seriously.

MENDEZ

Don't worry about it. And hey, it might not be my place, but... I know family can be a complicated thing. It's something you've gotta work at. Tend to. I, uh, didn't do much of that and now, you know, I don't have many people around. Heh. Geez. I'm just trying to say that if you've got someone, tend to them. You know?

CARREON

Yeah. Yeah, you're right.

MENDEZ

(He stretches his hand out to CARREON.)

Mr. Carreon.

CARREON

(He takes MENDEZ's hand and stands up.)

Adrián. Call me Adrián. I hope I'll see you around.

MENDEZ

Maybe. We'll see.

(He turns away and starts to exit, raising his hand in the air as a wave goodbye.)

Good luck to you and your wife.

MENDEZ exits and HERNANDEZ enters with the trays of tacos. He sits with CARREON and the two eat.

HERNANDEZ

You never told me that story.

CARREON

Which one?

HERNANDEZ

Your dad and the copper.

CARREON

It's not a fun story.

HERNANDEZ

No, I guess not.

CARREON

I left part of me behind at that factory. I left part of me behind in Afghanistan. What's left of me?

CARREON's phone buzzes on the table. He looks at it and freezes. HERNANDEZ looks at it and is surprised.

HERNANDEZ

Are you going to answer it?

CARREON

I—

The phone stops buzzing. After a moment, a beep. CYNTHIA appears in the desert, illuminated in a column of dim light.

CYNTHIA

This, is probably dumb, but...I just got off of the phone with my mom who says my cousin Leti called her to say that her nephew Mateo saw you get into a bar fight. I just wanted to check in on you. Make sure you're okay. Give me a call back when you can, okay? I'm thinking about you.

CARREON grabs the phone quickly and calls her back. CYNTHIA, still in the desert, answers and brings her phone to her ear.

CARREON

Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

Adrián.

CARREON

It was me.

CYNTHIA

Are you okay?

CARREON

Yeah, yeah. I am.

(Trying to make a joke.)

You should see the other guy.

(It doesn't land.)

I'm sorry, that was a bad joke. I did hit him, but I wouldn't call it a bar fight.

CYNTHIA

That's good.

CARREON

Listen. What are you doing right now?

CYNTHIA

Oh. Umm, nothing. I was just...I'm free.

CARREON

Will you meet me at my office? I want... I need to talk to you about a few things.

CYNTHIA

Sure, Adrián. Yeah, I can be there soon.

CARREON

Great. I'll see you soon then.

CARREON hangs up and the light on CYNTHIA fades. He stands and begins to walk out into the desert when he turns to HERNANDEZ.

HERNANDEZ

Are you really doing this?

CARREON

Yeah. I think I am. Bring the tacos.

CARREON exits followed shortly after by HERNANDEZ who brings the full tray of tacos. The sound of the taqueria fades away.

Lights shift to the office. CARREON's desk is still covered in papers. CARREON enters and begins to try and tidy the place up. He clears the couch, his desk. HERNANDEZ places the tray down on the desk.

What's your plan?

HERNANDEZ

I tell her.

CARREON

Tell her what?

HERNANDEZ

Everything.

CARREON

CYNTHIA enters from the desert. She has a light jacket on, a purse over her shoulder. She is still wearing her wedding ring.

What is everything?

CYNTHIA

Hi. Welcome.

CARREON

So this is where you work?

CYNTHIA

Yeah. It isn't much, but it's mine.

CARREON

CYNTHIA

What do you do?

CARREON

I help people.

(Beat.)

Well. I try to. But sometimes...

CYNTHIA

It's hard, isn't it?

CARREON

It is.

CYNTHIA

I don't know if you got my message, the one about—

CARREON

Volunteering?

CYNTHIA

(She nods quickly.)

Things are changing, aren't they?

CARREON

They don't tell me anything, but yeah. Things are changing.

(Beat.)

Thank you for coming.

CYNTHIA

Of course. I wanted to make sure you were okay. When my mom called—

CARREON

I saw someone tonight. Someone that I haven't seen in a long time. I thought it might help.

CYNTHIA

And I take it it didn't help?

CARREON

No. But it made me realize something. I care about us. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about you. I want to make things right. I want to tell you what happened.

Lights shift as CARREON takes us on one last trip to Afghanistan. CYNTHIA fades into the desert.

CARREON

We were driving through Afghanistan, me and a squad of new recruits. The war was winding down and we were just trying to maintain our holdings.

HERNANDEZ

Why are we out here protecting a hole in the sand?

CARREON

Because those are our orders.

HERNANDEZ

Jesus Carreon, there's got to be a better reason.

CARREON

Just do your job, Hernandez.

(Beat.)

Now, one of the things you try to get recruits ready for is the heat. It's always hot in Afghanistan. Always. That's the first thing you have to realize. You're baking with everyone else in your company and that's part of the job. You just come to accept it. I tell them that you find ways to ignore the heat. That they had to find their escape.

Hernandez liked to talk. I drove. Alvarez bit his nails. Thompson sang along to rap. Cooper would look at a photo of her kids.

HERNANDEZ

Cooper. How could I forget about Cooper.

CARREON

We all try to forget our dead.

HERNANDEZ

No, she was different.

CARREON

No one is different. Not in the desert.

(Beat.)

So, we were out on patrol, early in the morning, before sun up, and the route brought us to a small town I used to be stationed at in the early years. By the end of the war, it was mostly ruins, a ghost town. I was in my head, thinking about those kids, I wasn't focused. Maybe if I had been I would've seen, or maybe at least saw the signs, but...I didn't. An IED went off right next to us.

(There is a deafening pop. An explosion from deep inside sand. It's followed by a high pitched ringing. Shock.)

An improvised explosive device. The force of it lifted us, this whole humvee carrying five grown ass soldiers, right up into the air. Alvarez was dead before we even hit the ground. The shock wave got him.

(There is a crashing noise, the humvee hitting the ground.)

When the truck landed on its side, all I could hear was Hernandez's voice. He was crying, yelling at Cooper. She had cracked her head open.

HERNANDEZ

(Coming from offstage, almost echoing. Far away and desperate.)

Cooper, talk to me!

CARREON

I tried to move, but I could feel metal digging into my right leg, lodged into my bone. If Alvarez hadn't been sitting in the passenger seat—

HERNANDEZ

Cooper, stay with me!

CARREON

I had to pull myself out of the blown windshield. Dragging myself through sand and broken glass.

HERNANDEZ

Carreon, help me!

CARREON

I can't!

HERNANDEZ

Cooper, God dammit, come on!

For the first time, lights come up on the overturned humvee. HERNANDEZ, dressed in military fatigues, is sitting on the ground, his back against the desk. CARREON lowers himself down to sit next to him. He winces.

CARREON

By the time I got out, I found Hernandez lying against the humvee's roof.

(Beat.)

We sat there in the sand until they came for us.

HERNANDEZ

But we weren't sure who would come for us first.

CARREON

Friends, or whoever planted the IED.

(To HERNANDEZ.)

Sometimes, I can still hear the ringing.

HERNANDEZ

God, these stars.

CARREON

They're beautiful.

HERNANDEZ

Not once did I think to look at them. My eyes were always planted on the sand.

CARREON

On the horizon.

HERNANDEZ

But they were always right up there.

(Beat.)

Carreon, tell me something.

CARREON

What?

HERNANDEZ

How do you do it? How do you deal with the heat?

CARREON

(There is a moment where he thinks about it.)

You don't. You burn and you hope there's something left to send back home.

HERNANDEZ

Was there anything left?

CARREON doesn't respond.

Screaming erupts from behind the humvee. It is sudden and painful. CARREON tries to stand, but he can't. HERNANDEZ runs behind the humvee. We lose sight of him for a moment.

HERNANDEZ

Oh God!

CARREON

Hernandez? Hernandez, talk to me!

HERNANDEZ drags THOMPSON out from behind the humvee, his side is covered in caked blood. He's crying out in pain.

HERNANDEZ

It's Thompson, I thought he was dead.

THOMPSON

I'm not dead you fucking son of a— Ahhh!

CARREON

Stop draggin him, leave him there!

HERNANDEZ

I'm sorry—

THOMPSON

Sarg! Sarg, what the fuck happened?

CARREON

IED Thompson, knocked us over.

THOMPSON

Cooper? Alvarez?

CARREON

Both dead.

THOMPSON

(Starting to cry.)

Fuck. Fuck-fuck-fuck—

CARREON

Focus Thompson, what's hurt?

THOMPSON

My side, there's something—

HERNANDEZ

There's a piece of metal, I can see it in his side, should I pull it out—

THOMPSON

Keep your fucking hands off me!

HERNANDEZ

Sarg, he's still bleeding.

CARREON

Thompson, we're going to need to put pressure on that wound okay, and it's gong to fucking hurt—

THOMPSON

Water, someone fucking give me some water!

HERNANDEZ grabs a canteen from the desert, opens it, and gives it to THOMPSON who immediately pours it into his mouth and all over himself.

CARREON

God dammit, Thompson!

THOMPSON

God it hurts. It hurts so fucking much.

CARREON

That was all of our water!

HERNANDEZ

What are we going to do, Sarg?

THOMPSON

Fuck it hurts!

CARREON

Enough! Both of you I can't think with all of your fucking crying! How do you expect me to save you if I can't fucking think!

The desert is still. CARREON's breathing is rough and it fills the space. Finally, he looks at HERNANDEZ.

HERNANDEZ

Sarg—

CARREON

Hernandez, let me think!

HERNANDEZ

I know what to do.

(CARREON turns to him.)

I have to go get help.

CARREON

You're crazy.

HERNANDEZ

Sarg, we're out of water.

CARREON

I know that—

HERNANDEZ

The radio isn't working—

CARREON

Hernandez, you can't just walk out there, you'll—

HERNANDEZ

It's the only chance we got. Neither of you can walk. I can do this.

(Beat.)

The sun will be up soon, Sarg. And in that heat...

(Beat.)

I can do this.

CARREON

It's too risky, Hernandez, it's too long of a walk back.

HERNANDEZ

Sarg, Thompson is bleeding out, if he doesn't get help soon—

CARREON

Hernandez, I can't let you do this.

HERNANDEZ

You can! Order me to go.

CARREON

No, Hernandez—

HERNANDEZ

Then order me to stay.

CARREON is silent. He looks from HERNANDEZ to the desert. Finally, he nods.

CARREON

(Looking from his father to HERNANDEZ.)

Okay. Okay.

HERNANDEZ stands and walks out into the desert. CARREON watches him leave. All lights focus on CARREON as Afghanistan fades.

HERNANDEZ

President Bush said hey MP.

CARREON

President Bush Said hey MP.

HERNANDEZ

Won't you do a favor for me.

CARREON

Won't you do a favor for me.

HERNANDEZ

I've gotta send you off to a foreign land.

CARREON

I've gotta send you off to a foreign land.

HERNANDEZ

Gotta send you over to Afghanistan.

CARREON

Gotta send you over to...

HERNANDEZ

How long was it before you and Thompson got saved.

CARREON

An hour.

HERNANDEZ

And did you tell them about me?

CARREON

I told them the direction you went in. They looked for you, but... They never found you. I'm sorry.

HERNANDEZ

(Standing in a beam of light deep in the desert.)

You can't change what happened.

CARREON

No, I can't.

CYNTHIA

(Lights returning to her.)

But you can face it.

CARREON

I let him go.

CYNTHIA

Shh, shh, it's okay.

CARREON

I was supposed to keep them safe. Make them strong and I couldn't...

(Beat.)

I couldn't even tell him how proud I was.

HERNANDEZ

Sarg?

CARREON

(Turning to HERNANDEZ, breaking away from CYNTHIA.)

Hernandez, I am so fucking proud of you.

(Beat.)

I don't want to be my father. I want you to know how proud I am of you. I was so scared, but there you were. Calm. Ready. Determined. You were more of a soldier than I'd been. And you were just a kid.

HERNANDEZ

Carreon...

CARREON

If this is you, the real you. I just want you to know it was an honor serving with you. And I'll never forget you.

HERNANDEZ

No. No, I don't think you will.

CYNTHIA is silent. She crosses to CARREON and takes his hand, turning him to face her. She takes her hand and touches his cheek. She gives a small shallow smile.

CYNTHIA

I knew you were carrying something with you. I could feel him the moment you came home.

CARREON

He was my friend, but I think I only just realized that.

CYNTHIA

How can I help?

CARREON

Cynthia, I wanted to bring you here, because earlier, earlier there was a little girl. Sitting right here. She reminded me of you. Us.

CYNTHIA

Adrián—

CARREON

I know. But I want to be better. I came back missing something, and you had to deal with that. I thought if I got a job that paid well enough, I could make up for that. But this job.

(Beat.)

People keep telling me that I'm broken, but I'm starting to think I'm the only one working around here. These people need help and—

CYNTHIA

Adrián.

(Beat.)

Quit.

CARREON

Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

If you can't do good here then...find the place where you can.

CARREON

I can't—

CYNTHIA

You can— We can. But, that means we start making decisions together, Adrián. No more secrets.

CARREON

Of course.

CYNTHIA

No, not of course. It was of course before and you still broke my heart. This is going to be new. A new beginning.

CARREON

Baby steps.

CYNTHIA

Yes. Baby steps.

(Beat. She kisses CARREON.)

Pack your things. I'll bring my car out to the front. Okay?

CARREON

Okay.

CYNTHIA

(She is about to exit when:)

I'm proud of you, Adrián.

(She turns back to exit when:)

CARREON

Cynthia, I...I was wondering if maybe we could go to ASARCO. The demolition is today, in a couple hours.

CYNTHIA

Sure, but...are you going to be okay?

CARREON

Yeah, I think so. I just think I should be there.

CYNTHIA

Okay, Adrián.

CYNTHIA exits. CARREON takes a moment to survey the room, then he begins to gather things from his desk into a small crate. As he does this, HERNANDEZ comes out of the desert and sits on the couch.

HERNANDEZ

A new beginning.

CARREON

A fresh start.

(Beat.)

Maybe I'll start volunteering.

HERNANDEZ

Yeah. That could be good.

CARREON has finished packing. He stands by the edge of the desert, carrying his box of things. He looks to HERNANDEZ.

CARREON

Are you coming?

Neither of them move.

The lights fade as we hear music playing softly, as if hanging in the air. A wisp.

It is "El Rey," sung by José Alfredo Jiménez.

END OF PLAY.