

Borderline

A Desert Play

Andrew Siañez-De La O
ajsianez@gmail.com
32 Tower St, Apt. #1
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
(915) 383-1277
[www.andrewsianezdelao.com]

CHARACTERS

Unless otherwise noted, all characters should be cast Latinx.

ENZO	Male 12 years old
ROSITA	Female 14 years old
TONY	Male 18 years old
VERONICA	Female 18 years old
TÍO OFELIO/MAN	Male Late 30s, early 40s

SETTING

After Sunset.
The edge of an old cotton field.
Socorro, TX

NOTES

“—”	At the end of a line indicate a character being cut off by the next line.
“...”	At the end of a line indicates a stillness, whether in thought or staging.
“ / ”	Indicates that the next line should start while this line continues.
“ [] ”	Lines in brackets are physical rather than spoken.

Lights up on a bend in a thin, muddy stream running along the edge of an old cotton field in Socorro, Texas. Large patches of tall grass dominate the stage along with a few desert bushes, things like creosote, brittlebush, or red bird of paradise. There are plastic bags caught in the plants, a discarded shoe, crushed beer cans, the remnants of at least one car seat, a sunbleached copy of John Carpenter's "The Thing." A small radio sits half buried in the sand.

TÍO OFELIO stands upstage playing his guitar. He's a tired man. He's wearing a button up, loose at the shoulders, tight around his stomach, a clean pair of jeans and a pair of nice cowboy boots.

A storm.

TÍO OFELIO

(Thunder.)

My mamá used to tell me a story on nights like these, when the thunder would send me running into her arms. It was about a priestess in ancient Mexico. A little true, a little false, but completely her. I think I remember it.

(He plays music softly as thunder rumbles.)

Long ago, in a city hidden deep in Mexico, there was a girl. A young priestess loved by her people and known throughout the land for her beauty and her grace. She, and she alone, spoke to the Gods, the ancient ones that guided the winds and the rain. They warned the priestess of many things. Of droughts. Of famines. Of the coming conquistadores and the sickness that they would bring. Of their weapons of war. Of their hunger that knew no bounds.

But these things, they did not frighten her. No, because the priestess knew her people would endure. That they would fall and rise again as they had for so many centuries. She knew this to be true because with their warnings the Gods shared with her one great truth. Her purpose, above all else, was to relight the dying sun.

One day, the sky grew dark. The people of her ancient city filled the streets and looked up at a sky swallowed by dense, dark clouds, heavy with rain and thunder. An ancient and jealous God rose from the shadows of the clouds. Tlaloc, the God of rain and the ruler of the drowned. For centuries he had been stuck in an endless tug of war with the God of the sun, Huitzilopochtli, but finally, the war was over, and Tlaloc had won. He cried out triumphant through the cracks of lightning and rushing winds.

Her people looked to the sky, at a fading sun breathing out its last gasp of light and life, but the priestess was not afraid. She climbed their tallest temple and offered the sun her heart.

“Take this,” she cried out, “take this heart filled with the love I have for my people.” Huitzilopochtli, the God of the Sun, came down from the heavens and scooped her into his arms, and asked her, “Is this what you want?” She gave him a small, sad smile, and shook her head yes as she nestled into his chest. He took her into the sky and the sun burst anew, shining even brighter than before, sending Tlaloc back to his dark underworld of rain and thunder.

A new sun was born. A sun to watch over us in these troubled times. A sun burning with the love of a young girl who gave everything for her people, to keep the darkness away just a little bit longer.

(He plays music for a moment, then takes a long breath.)

A storm is brewing, and they are coming for me. I know it; I can feel it. I pray that my signal holds. I have so many stories to share with you.

In the distance, is the sound of laughter. Two kids shouting. The light on TÍO OFELIO fades.

ENZO and ROSITA enter, flashlights in hand. They're wearing well worn clothes. ENZO has a cheap backpack slung over his shoulder.

ROSITA

I win! The crowd goes wild!

(Making a mock audience sound, cupping her hands over her mouth:)

Rosa! Rosa! Rosa!

ENZO

(Out of breath.)

Ay, no fair! You cheated!

ROSITA

How did I cheat?

ENZO

(Very out of breath.)

I don't know—God gave you longer legs or something.

ROSITA

Cry me a river.

ENZO

You're so mean! Why do I come out here with you?

ROSITA

It's better than being back there with—

ENZO

Denise. Ugh. Fine.

ROSITA

Besides, even if you're a little slow, you're still my little brother.

(She grabs him and rubs his head with her knuckle.)

ENZO

(Pushing her away, but smiling.)

Awe, gee, thanks.

(Brushing himself off.)

What is with this weather?

(He looks up at the sky, squinting.)

Do you think it's going to rain?

ROSITA

I hope not.

(Looking up at the sky now too.)

Wow. You can barely even see the stars.

ENZO

It's kinda of creepy, isn't it.

(He begins to move to scare her.)

ROSITA

I hate thunderstorms. I don't like the way they make the air feel.

ENZO

(Sneaking up behind her as she looks up into the dark sky. Then pouncing:)

Boo!

ROSITA

Ay, qüey!

(She turns quickly and punches him in the arm, not too hard.)

ENZO

Ow!

ROSITA

You want another?

ENZO

Oh yeah, you wanna fight?

(He wipes his nose and lifts his fists like he saw once in a movie.)

Wanna throw down with Enzo, the world renowned lightweight boxing champion from El Paso?

ROSITA

More like heavyweight, you couldn't fight your way out of a paper bag, menso.

ENZO

(He lets his hands fall to his sides.)

When dad's back, he promised he'd take me to classes. You'll see.

ROSITA

Abuelo Lorenzo was a boxer.

ENZO

Really?

ROSITA

Yup. He boxed up in Chicago.

ENZO

What was he doing in Chicago?

ROSITA

Meat packing or something. Did it before he met abuela. Did dad not tell you that?

ENZO

Maybe he just never got around to it.

The sound of a guitar playing gently.

ROSITA

Órale, the radio! Did you leave it out?

(She picks up the radio and starts to wipe and shake the sand off.)

ENZO

No!

Enzo. ROSITA

I didn't! ENZO

I swear to God Enzo if it's broken— ROSITA

TÍO OFELIO is dimly illuminated.

TÍO OFELIO
—tonight I will make true on my promise.
(He plays music as the light fades.)

ROSITA
(Visibly relieved.)
Looks like you lucked out.

I didn't leave it out. ENZO

Whatever. I'll clean it up. ROSITA

ROSITA cleans the radio. She is gentle with it, showing the same care you might show a wounded animal.

ENZO searches the empty field and digs up a rusting metal box. In it are several notebooks, mailing envelopes, and a large glass jar with money in it. From his backpack, Enzo pulls out a small box of snappers¹, which he puts in his back pocket, a rolled up notebook, a magazine, and a handful of change which he puts into the glass jar.

ROSITA
Did you bring the recorder?

¹ Also known as “bang snaps.” Small noise makers, little bundles of paper, gravel, and a pinch of explosives that pop when you throw them on the ground.

ENZO

(He pulls out a small cassette tape recorder.)

Uh huh.

ROSITA

Batteries?

ENZO

Yes—

ROSITA

And it works?

ENZO

Yes.

ROSITA

Are you sure?

ENZO

(He clicks the play button on the recorder. We can hear his voice playing:)

“It works, tonta.”

(He clicks pause.)

ROSITA

I hate you.

ENZO

(Clicks play.)

“I hate you too.”

(He hits stop and rewinds the tape.)

There, it's all set and ready to go.

Static begins to come from the radio. They both listen. Static. Then, music.

TÍO OFELIO

(ENZO moves closer, recorder at the ready.)

I have their letters here, the last of the ones I...

(He sighs.)

I've traveled for so long, gathering them all. As many as I could. Tonight we'll read them, soon, I promise. I want to make sure you all have a chance to listen to your loved ones. I'm afraid this

may be...no, this is my last chance. They're close to finding me. Stay in touch, mi familia. Listen closely. Stay safe. It's going to be a long night.

(He plays his guitar as the light fades.)

ROSITA

I guess we're still early.

ENZO

The last ones? Do you think he has one from dad?

ROSITA

I'm sure he does.

(She looks at ENZO who still seems unsure. She reaches out and rubs his back, kind of awkwardly.)

I have a good feeling about tonight. Dad would make sure he got a letter to him. Now come on, let's count up what we've got.

(She opens the jar and begins to pull out its contents.)

Lights up on TONY and VERONICA who are sitting at the edge of the stage in two old car seats. They are in TONY's car. A beat up '72 Chevy Impala. A faded green color with a bad front axle. On the radio, we can faintly make out "¿Por Qué Me Haces Llorar?" by Juan Gabriel.

TONY is dressed in a cheap tuxedo, a little too big for him. He's thin, lean, looks like he could be decent at soccer if he had more muscle. His long black hair is slicked back and he's wearing a red and blue corsage on his wrist, the colors of Socorro High School.

VERONICA is wearing a pair of silver heels and a beautiful, blue dress. Her mother made it, but you'd never guess that. Her hair is held up with more aquanet than she'd like to admit and, around her neck, is a large homecoming mum². It's heart shaped and covered in blue, red, and silver ribbons in bows and curls. There are small bells and a small stuffed bulldog at its center.

² Look up Texas Homecoming Mums if you don't already know what they look like. It's truly wild.

Where are we going?
VERONICA

Don't worry, we're almost there.
TONY

Almost where, Tony?
VERONICA

Are you okay, Vero?
TONY

I'm just tired.
VERONICA
(She puts on a smile.)
I just thought we were going home.

TONY
(He leans over and kisses her cheek.)
It'll be quick, I promise. I had fun tonight.

You did?
VERONICA

Yeah. Did you not?
TONY

It got a little crazy, didn't it?
VERONICA

A little, but I mean, it wouldn't be homecoming if people weren't drunk.
TONY

VERONICA
(Suspicious.)
Were you the one who spiked the punch?

TONY
(He looks at her for a second, smirks, then looks back at the road.)
No.

Tony!
VERONICA

TONY

(Laughing.)

Seriously, no. It wasn't me. You think I'm gonna waste booze on a punch bowl? Come on. It was probably Lalo.

VERONICA

I guess.

(A smirk appears on her face.)

Yeah, it was probably Lalo.

(Laughing.)

Did you see what Maggie was wearing?

TONY

How could I not? Lime green? Showed up looking like a lime Jarritos. And Jeff? Like, come on man. Cargo shorts? Seriously?

VERONICA reaches a hand over and places it on his knee. TONY looks at her hand and smiles. Juan Gabriel fades away.

TONY

It isn't really fair though.

VERONICA

What isn't fair?

TONY

With you out there on the dance floor, they didn't stand a chance.

VERONICA

Oh, stop it.

TONY

It's true. Swinging those hips around. Doing Selena proud. Making the chaperones sweat.

VERONICA

(Laughing.)

Gross, Tony!

TONY

Hey, it's the truth! You saw Coach Sanchez.

VERONICA

He is the last person I want to be thinking about right now. Ew!

TONY

But nothing beat the way the other girls were looking at you.

(VERONICA is trying to hide her smile.)

Don't hide it, I know you saw them. You were gorgeous tonight.

(He looks at her and gives her the biggest smile.)

Seriously. Gorgeous.

VERONICA

(Smiling, she takes her hand and pushes his face away.)

Eyes on the road there, Ponyboy.

TONY

(Laughs.)

Yes, sir.

(We listen to the car drive for a moment, and then he brings it to a stop.)

We're here.

VERONICA

Where is here?

TONY

(Standing up, "exiting the car," he walks to the other side and let's VERONICA "out.")

Come on, you don't know where we are?

VERONICA

There's so much dust in the air I can barely see the end of the road. I know we're out in the fields, but where exactly—

(She looks up.)

Is that the water tower?

TONY

Ding ding ding. We have a winner.

VERONICA

You do not expect me to climb that thing.

TONY

Actually, I do.

VERONICA
You're kidding.

TONY
I'll even let you go first.

VERONICA
Why? So you can look up my dress?

TONY
I'm offended. The thought hadn't even crossed my mind.

VERONICA
Uhuh, I've got my eyes on you mister.

TONY
That's the way I like it.

VERONICA
Ay, the ganas on you tonight.

TONY
I'm in a good mood.

VERONICA
That's never a good sign.

TONY
Come on, it'll be worth it, I promise.
(He leans down to kiss her, but VERONICA looks down, making him kiss her forehead instead.)

Please. I'll even go up first.

VERONICA
(Taking a moment to think.)
Okay.
(She looks up at him and kisses his cheek.)

Alright, but before we do this, there's something I need to tell you.

Suddenly, a dim green light flashes across stage.

TONY
Did you see that?

See what?
VERONICA

That light.
TONY

I didn't see anything.
VERONICA

It was...weird.
TONY
(Taking a step towards it.)
(He takes another step towards it, further away from VERONICA.)

Is this a part of your thing? Your big surprise?
VERONICA

What? No. This is something else...
TONY
(Distracted.)

Tony, I don't want to go walking around in this dust storm.
VERONICA
(He begins to walk away from VERONICA, towards off stage. Distracted.)

Yeah, that's fine. Wait here.
TONY

Wait here?
VERONICA
(TONY keeps walking away.)
Tony, where are you going?
(TONY straight up exits the stage.)

Tony!
(Under her breath.)
Hijo de tu madre. Tony!
(She follows him, exiting.)

Lights up on ENZO and ROSITA who have been counting the contents of the jar.

ROSITA

Where's the magazine?

ENZO

(Grabbing it from the metal box and handing it to her.)

Here.

ROSITA

(Flipping through the pages of the magazine.)

Alright, what have we got. Hmm. Okay, there's a couple of places asking for sci-fi. A few for fantasy—

ENZO

That's good—

ROSITA

But none of them are offering prizes.

ENZO

None of them?

ROSITA

Not for sci-fi or fantasy at least. Oh! Wait, here's one. Twenty five bucks for a horror story!

ENZO

Ugh, horror?

ROSITA

But, twenty five bucks! We can write a horror story easy!

ENZO

I mean, I guess.

ROSITA

We'll fill this jar in no time with that kind of money.

ENZO

(Looking from ROSITA to the jar and then back to ROSITA.)

Alright, fine.

ROSITA

(She grabs a pencil from the metal box and opens the notebook, flipping to blank pages.)

Okay, where do we start. Do you know any scary stories?

Other than your face?
ENZO

Ha. Ha. Ha. Come on cabrón, think.
ROSITA

Well, there's the regular stuff like vampires, werewolves—
ENZO

Barf.
ROSITA

Okay, umm, what about la llorona?
ENZO

Been there, done that.
ROSITA

Come on! Mother loses her children and now her soul stalks the banks of rivers crying out for her babies.
ENZO

(In a faux spooky voice:)

Ay, díos mio! Mis hijos! Ayúdame!

(Normal again:)

What's scarier than that? It's a good story.

A good story that everyone knows.
ROSITA

Okay, well then, what else...bigfoot?
ENZO

Lame. It's just a big monkey.
ROSITA

The creature from the black lagoon?
ENZO

Do you even know what a lagoon is?
ROSITA

ENZO

Well, no, but—

ROSITA

You're just naming all those monster movies you watch on tv. We need something actually scary. Think horror, less spooky ghost, more freaky monsters—

ENZO

The chupacabra!

ROSITA

Okay, now we're onto something.

(She writes down 'Chupacabra.')

Blood sucking, goat eating, scaly monster. I like it.

ENZO

It's more than that though. It's a predator. It hunts.

ROSITA

And?

ENZO

So it's smart. It thinks. It's not a mindless monster, it's one that follows you home and waits for the right moment to go for your throat.

ROSITA

So that's what we write about? Being alone and this thing is hunting you?

ENZO

Yeah! So, here, some dude is coming home from work—

ROSITA

Nah, make it a woman.

ENZO

(Not missing a beat.)

Okay, some woman, she's coming home from work. It's late. Kids or no kids?

ROSITA

Hmm. Kids, something for her to fight for.

ENZO

She checks on her kids. They should already be in bed, because they're used to her late schedule.

ROSITA

She works at a hospital.

ENZO

And lives out in the boonies, out by, like, Butterfield.

ROSITA

Oh yeah, way out there, like in a trailer home.

ENZO

So the kids are in bed, but then she hears something. Scratching. Which is normal because like wild dogs and coyotes and shit everywhere. But then it gets louder.

(The sound of a twig snapping out in the audience.)

So she's a little worried. Like, maybe there's a mountain lion.

ROSITA

Mountain lion?

ENZO

Yeah, we get them all the time.

ROSITA

We do not.

ENZO

Yeah we do, we have the Franklin Mountains right there.

ROSITA

Just because we have a mountain doesn't mean we have mountain lions.

ENZO

Denise saw one.

ROSITA

Denise has a drinking problem. She probably saw a really blurry cat or a fat raccoon.

ENZO

Whatever. In the story SHE thinks it's a mountain lion. So she peeks out the window, right, and it's super dark, so she turns on the little porch light and, for just a second, she thinks she sees something dart away, like super fast and super big.

ROSITA

How big are chupacabras?

ENZO

I think they're like big dog sized, but we can make this one bigger.

ROSITA

How big?

ENZO

Like a healthy donkey sized chupacabra.

ROSITA

So, well fed.

ENZO

If I ate nothing but lonely Mexicans, I'd probably be donkey sized too.

ROSITA

You're not that far off—

ENZO

Anyway! Everything in her is telling her to stay inside and keep the doors locked, but a tiny part of her, is like, go out there Cindy, short for Cynthia. It's like, go out there, see what it is.

(Another twig snaps, closer to the stage, louder.)

So she unlocks the screen door and slowly opens it and that creaking sound seems so loud in the silence of the desert, but she has to know. So she starts to walk out into the dark and she sees these huge, deep scratches in the side of her car. These long cuts right along the side. And as she's looking at the scratches something jumps from behind the car, not at her, but like, out into the desert, but it was so big that it shook the car.

(A twig snaps. Louder.)

So now she's scared right? Like, duh. And she can hear it moving, but the porch light is too dim to see it. She starts backing away from the sound, but then it starts moving, not towards her, but towards the house and she doesn't know what it's doing, but then she hears a window break and it hits her.

ROSITA

The kids!

ENZO

The kids!

(A twig snaps. ROSITA notices it, but she continues writing as ENZO continues.)

So she runs into the house and goes straight to her children's bedroom and there it is. This hulking beast standing right above her kids. It's hunched over and the moonlight through the open window is reflecting off its dark green scales.

ROSITA

What does she do?

ENZO

She doesn't know. Everything in her is telling her to run, to scream, to jump at the beast, but right now, she can't do anything. She's frozen. She feels trapped in her own body, trapped by this fear and she just watches as the beast raises a huge green claw into the air, light glinting off its sharp claws and then—

(A twig breaks and they both hear it. They freeze. There's rustling in the brush.)

What was—

(ROSITA leaps up and grabs ENZO. They turn off their flashlights and slide down the embankment and into the muddy stream. Silence. It's dark, the stage is barely lit by dim, murky moonlight. Dry plantlife crunching.)

In the darkness, a man walks on stage. His shirt and pants are a dark, almost black, green. He might be wearing a cap or a cowboy hat, also dark green with sharp edges. He's quiet. His movements are deliberate and calculated, hunched and low to the ground, one hand at his waste, fingers on the handle of a gun or baton, the other hand close to his chin, holding a flashlight. His silhouette is jagged, contorted, almost square, like the rigid forms of Mayan hieroglyphs or the depictions of Aztec gods.

Complete silence as he searches through the brush. Even the crickets have disappeared. The man turns on his flashlight and, instead of a pale white or yellow light, it's green. He scans the stage.

He turns his head to the sky and breathes in the cold night, like a beast on the hunt. Long and slow, the air leaving his lungs like air through a tumbleweed.

The man spins around and focuses his light on ENZO's backpack. He runs to it, almost leaping,

and pulls it from the sand. He drops it, disappointed, and continues scanning the brush, his search jagged and slow.

ENZO reaches into his back pocket, fumbling to pull out the small box of snappers and handing one to ROSITA. She rolls it around in her hand, getting a good grip. She silently crosses herself and throws the popper into the air, high above and over the man. After a few moments it POPs. A loud sound like a cracking whip accompanied by a small flash of light.

The man spins around quickly and runs in the direction of the POP. He exits.

What the hell are they doing out here?
ROSITA

Jesus, I almost shit my chonies.
ENZO

Are you okay?
ROSITA
(She wipes the sides of ENZO's face in that clumsy way I child does when they are emulating what a parent would do.)

Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. You?
ENZO
(Pushing her hands away.)

I'm fine. I think he's gone.
ROSITA

We aren't even close to the fence. They shouldn't be out here.
ENZO

Neither should we.
ROSITA

Good point. Is our stuff okay?
ENZO

ROSITA

It looks like it. I can see the radio, and I don't think he found the money.

A twig snaps loudly and they both go silent. They look around. Another twig snaps. She takes ENZO's hand and they both run off stage in the opposite direction of the man.

The radio crackles:

TÍO OFELIO

(He begins to play the guitar.)

It's a scary time out here, out in the wilds. The forgotten lands. Aztlán. I think we should talk about family. About what that word means. For those of you out there tonight that don't know what I'm talking about, please, take a moment to reach down. Grab a handful of sand. Let the grains fall between your fingers. Can you count them all? The grains? As they fall?

Give them names. Names like Andrés, Magdalena, Jaime, Matías, Lourdes. Can you keep up? Keep naming them. Santiago, Sebastián, Mateo, Agustina, Diego, Adelita. It's hard, no? A few more. Antonio. Veronica. Enzo. Rosita. Y yo. Y tú. Say your name. Add it to the pile of grains gathering at your feet. That's Aztlán. A land of forgotten names, piled over forgotten bodies, lost families, buried promises. Welcome home.

(The lights fade as he plays his song. He hums the lyrics to a song that we can't remember.)

VERONICA

(Off stage:)

Tony, come back here!

TONY

(Off stage:)

Come on, I know I saw something.

VERONICA

(Off stage:)

It was nothing, let's go back!

TONY breaks through the brush.

TONY

You saw it too, I know you did—

VERONICA

(Off stage:)

The last thing we should be doing—

(Breaking through the brush:)

Is running *towards* the weird lights.

(Taking off the large mum and placing it on the ground.)

You think it's fun lugging this thing around.

(She looks around the clearing.)

Ay dios mio, where even are we?

TONY

(A little hurt.)

I thought you liked it?

VERONICA

(Babying him:)

Oh, honey, no, I love it—

TONY

I curled the ribbons myself—

VERONICA

It's just going to throw out my back.

TONY

Fair enough. Now...

(Looking around:)

Where did that light go?

VERONICA

(She sits down on the discarded car seat and pulls out a pair of sandals or flats from her purse to change into.)

It was probably just a car or something driving by, Tony. We're close to the border freeway.

TONY

I know the difference. This light was slow.

VERONICA

Slow driver.

TONY

And a weird green color.

VERONICA

A slow driver with dirty lights, I don't know.

TONY

And it stopped and kinda...hovered.

VERONICA

Wow, they used their brakes. How weird.

TONY

Hey, if you don't want to hunt this thing down with me, you can head back to the car.

VERONICA

And miss an opportunity to watch your dumb ass stumble through the desert, as if.

(They both laugh.)

You know, my tío once saw a UFO.

TONY

Seriously?

VERONICA

Oh, yeah. Says he was driving down the border freeway when this bright light shot right over him. He says it was really low to the ground, he thought it was a helicopter. Which like, on the border, isn't all that surprising.

TONY

Right, that's how they caught Jose's dad.

VERONICA

Seriously?

TONY

Oh yeah. Chased him down, spotlight and everything. But, UFO—

VERONICA

Right! So my tío, he's watching it and it's fast. Just zoom, right over the border, no hesitation. He pulls his car over and just watches it fly right over Juárez and then behind the mountain, in seconds. He's in awe, just standing there, waiting for it to come back around or something, but instead it just shoots right up into the air. This bright, little light just rockets out into space.

TONY

And he thinks it was alien?

VERONICA

Well, he thinks so, yeah.

TONY

You don't?

VERONICA

I mean, it could've been, sure, but I don't know. I don't think so. And you know my tío, always prone to telling wild stories.

TONY

Which tío? Chuy? Henry?

VERONICA

Ofelio.

TONY

Ofelio?

VERONICA

Yeah, haven't you met him?

TONY

I don't think so. Is he the one with the thick mustache?

VERONICA

No, that's Chuy.

TONY

The one with the truck?

VERONICA

That's Henry.

TONY

Huh. Weird.

VERONICA

Yeah, that is weird. I guess he doesn't really come out to our parties anymore. You know, I don't actually know when I last saw him.

TONY

Seeing a UFO changes you, you know.

VERONICA

Ha. Ha. Funny. No. I don't think it was a UFO, but you reminded me of him.

TONY

How?

VERONICA

You're gullible.

Suddenly, there is the deafening sound of a helicopter flying over head. It's fast and loud and is gone almost as quickly as it came. It's quiet now. The sound of the helicopter fwap-fwap-fwap can still be heard, but it is softer, then it fades.

VERONICA

(Now in TONY's arms, looking up at the sky.)

What did Jose's dad do?

TONY

Nothing. He was out with friends. They just picked him out and sent him away. Said he looked like someone they were looking for. Imagine that. A guy flying a helicopter thought he recognized someone from that high in the sky. Didn't know la migra hired eagles to do their hunting.

(He looks down at her.)

They both give a small laugh. Then they are quiet for a moment. They separate, turning away from each other. TONY adjusts his suit jacket and VERONICA plays with the hem of her dress.

TONY

So—

VERONICA

Tony—

TONY

Oh, sorry—

VERONICA

No, you—

TONY

No no, I—

VERONICA

I cut you off.

(There's an awkward silence. Finally:)

Sorry.

TONY

No, I'm sorry.

(Silence.)

So, do you want to go first or...?

VERONICA

No, you can go.

TONY

Okay.

(Beat.)

So...

(Awkward beat.)

Tito has heartworms.

VERONICA

(Stunned and kind of confused.)

What?

TONY

My dog, Tito.

VERONICA

Yeah...

TONY

Little guy has heartworms.

VERONICA

That...sucks.

TONY

Yeah. It's funny cuz— well, not *funny*, but like— well we've got to have him take his meds to kill the worms right?

VERONICA

Right—

TONY

But we also can't let him get too excited, because like his heart rate could cause problems or whatever.

VERONICA

Uhuh.

TONY

I kinda picture it popping, like, he's running around and just pop. It's scary.

(Beat.)

So like, anyway, when I get home, he always likes to jump around and like try to climb my legs and stuff, so now I have to like, kneel down and get on his level, just eye to eye with the guy and pet him all slow like. He wants to play and run around cuz he's still this little pup, but for now we gotta keep this heartworm thing under control, you know? Like, we've got to do this for his best interest?

VERONICA

Yeah.

TONY

I'm rambling.

VERONICA

I noticed.

TONY

But, there's a point.

VERONICA

Which is?

TONY

Listen, Véro...I just want you to know that I care about you. That, *I know*. I know about—

ENZO and ROSITA burst through the brush screaming and run into TONY from behind, the three of them all falling over into the dirt. Everyone screams.

TONY

What the hell are you two doing out here?

ROSITA

None of your business, long neck.

TONY

Hey, whoa, uncalled for.

ENZO

We should go.

VERONICA

Go where? You shouldn't be out here.

ROSITA

Well neither should you.

TONY

You're just kids.

ROSITA

And you're what, "adults?"

TONY

(Unconvincingly, maybe his voice cracks.)

Yeah. Yes!

ENZO

(Whispering to ROSITA as he looks around the field.)

Come on, let's go.

VERONICA

(Standing to block where the boy is starting to walk to.)

No no, seriously. You two shouldn't be out here. Do your parents know?

ROSITA

(Walking up to VERONICA, like she's ready to fight.)

Look, we're sorry we ruined your little romantic getaway in this dirt field—

VERONICA

Romantic? No, no, this definitely wasn't—

TONY

I mean, this isn't what I planned originally, I mean—

VERONICA

(To TONY:)

Did you want this to be romantic—

ROSITA

We're sorry we barged into your whatever this is, but we've got places to be. We just came back for the radio.

TONY

(Picking the radio up from the ground.)

Oh, you mean this radio?

(He throws it from hand to hand, almost dropping it.)

ENZO

Hey, careful with that!

ROSITA

That's ours!

VERONICA

If you want it—

TONY

(Faux smug voice.)

You're gonna have to pay for it.

VERONICA

(Sharp turn to TONY.)

Tony.

TONY

I was joking!

ROSITA

Wait, did you turn it off?

TONY

Was it on?

ENZO

Turn it back on, we're waiting for—

ROSITA

(Sharp:)

Shh. Just, turn it back on please.

TONY

(Looking to VERONICA and then the radio.)

Okay, alright.

(TÍO OFELIO appears back on stage. He is only half illuminated. He is playing his guitar.)

ENZO

(Quiet, and to ROSITA.)

Okay, he's still playing music. I don't think we missed it.

VERONICA

Missed what?

ROSITA

Nothing. Please, can you just give us the radio.

VERONICA

How about we all get out of here, okay? Our car is close by.

ROSITA

You're kidding, right?

VERONICA

No, come on.

ROSITA

Stranger danger.

VERONICA

(A big sigh.)

Look, I'm just trying to look after you two, okay. It's dangerous out here. You know that.

(Beat.)

I'm Veronica. And this lovable oaf is...

TONY

Tony. Good to meet you.

VERONICA

And your names are?

ENZO

(ROSITA remains silent, but ENZO steps up.)

My name is Enzo. We just...

(He looks to ROSITA then to TONY and VERONICA.)

It's just really important that we get that radio from you.

TONY

What do you want it for?

ENZO

It's a long story and we really don't have time to explain.

VERONICA

We've got plenty of time.

ROSITA

Not with him out there.

VERONICA

(Confused.)

Who?

ROSITA

That thing.

(Looking from VERONICA to TONY.)

Did you two not see it?

TONY

The light?

ENZO

(Beat. Uneasy.)

So you did see it.

TONY

(To VERONICA.)

I told you I saw something.

ROSITA

So now you know that we need to go.

TONY
What is it? The light?

ENZO
It's them. The green ones.

TONY
Aliens?

ROSITA
God you're so dumb—

ENZO
Rosa—

ROSITA
We don't have time for this.

(To TONY and VERONICA.)

We're going to have to put this little teaching moment on hold. Please, give me the radio. We need to go, now—

A giant ring of green light appears around the small group. The loud fwap-fwap-fwap of the helicopter returns with a boom. There's a voice coming from the helicopter, but it is garbled, electronic nonsense. The group is looking up at the sky, shielding their eyes from the light and the sand being kicked up.

ROSITA
(Yelling:)
They found us!

ENZO
(Yelling:)
We need to go! Now!

(He makes eye contact with ROSITA and then he runs off stage right, disappearing behind the brush.)

ROSITA watches as ENZO disappears. She thinks for a moment, ready to bolt after him, but at the last second she lunges for the radio and pulls it from

TONY's arms. She runs off, disappearing into the brush.

VERONICA

(Yelling over the helicopter:)

Tony! Go after the boy! I've got the girl!

TONY

What?!

VERONICA

The boy, Tony! Go get him!

They nod to each other and run off into the brush. The helicopter still hangs in the air and we hear the hushed tones of the electronic voice, ugly and jagged. The voice calls out, long and deep, it's almost familiar. A grito. Suddenly, trumpets blair in the skies and TÍO OFELIO begins to play his guitar building into a wild song, the notes almost reminiscent of "El Son de la Negra" by La Energia Norteña. The knocking of knuckle against guitar filling the space with a deep and rhythmic thump-thump-thump.

Beams of light criss cross the stage, turning on and off as the helicopter searches. In these flashes of light we see the kids running on and off stage. Each one barely missing the other, calling out each other's names.

The music peaks and then, silence. The trumpets and the guitar stops. Only a hollow fwap-fwap-fwap hanging in the air. A bright light scans the audience. Slow and hungry. Then, click. The light shuts off and the helicopter begins to leave.

ROSITA is the first to make it back on stage. She stands there in the dark holding the small radio.

TÍO OFELIO

(ROSITA looks down at the radio, quiet. Music.)

Everywhere you look, there is a darkness. The kind of dark that sucks away at the edges of your vision. Something hungry. Something that wants to pull you in closer. I can feel it. You can feel it. But no one wants to talk about it. No one wants to see the signs. The signs that they are getting closer. Never go out alone. Find someone. Hold them close. And stay alive. Stay alive for them.

(Static. TÍO OFELIO fades away.)

ROSITA

Enzo? Enzo? Ay, cabrón. Where did you run off to?

(The girl lowers the volume on the radio and runs off stage.)

TONY enters. He is brushing dust from his jacket and picking away broken twigs and espinas³ from his clothes. He looks around the clearing and then calls out, with his hands cupped around his mouth:

TONY

Verol!

ENZO

(Entering from off stage.)

Hey quiet! What are you doing?

TONY

Hey, there you are. I lost Veronica, have you seen her?

ENZO

No, but yelling is only going to get us caught so keep quiet.

TONY

Alright, I get it.

(Looking ENZO over.)

Are you okay?

ENZO

I'm fine.

TONY

(He walks to ENZO and kneels down in front of him, wiping dust from his arms.)

You've got scratches all over you.

³ The spiny seeds from burgrass.

ENZO

(Pulling away.)

I said I'm fine.

TONY

Hey kid, come on. I'm just trying to help.

(TONY walks up to him and pulls a twig from his hair. ENZO brushes him away.)

Can we at least agree to stick together? I don't need you running off on me again.

ENZO

Yeah. Yeah, sure. You said your name was Tony, right?

TONY

(He nods.)

And you're, Enzo?

(ENZO nods. The two seem to size each other up. ENZO holds out his hand and TONY shakes it.)

It's good to meet you, Enzo.

(TONY sits down on the ground next to the car seat. He pats it, motioning ENZO to join him.)

Come on, take a seat.

ENZO

Sit? Shouldn't we be out looking for them?

TONY

Do you know where they went?

ENZO

(Looking around.)

No, but—

TONY

I think it'd be smarter to just wait here.

ENZO

What?

TONY

They'll make their way back here eventually. All our stuff is here.

(He motions to the metal box, the mum, the trash.)

Besides, it's a big field. We could walk around for hours and miss each other without even realizing it. Especially with all this dust in the air.

ENZO

Alright. I guess we'll wait.

(He sits down on the car seat next to TONY.)

A coyote howls in the distance. The two look in the direction of the howl, then at each other. They laugh nervously.

TONY

(Softer.)

Are you sure you're okay. No bad cuts?

ENZO

I'm fine.

(Beat.)

Thank you.

TONY

(Beat.)

So, you and the girl—

ENZO

Rosa.

TONY

Rosa?

ENZO

She's my sister. Older sister. But not by much.

TONY

Cool, cool.

(Beat.)

So what were you and Rosa doing out here? Everything okay?

ENZO

Nothing. It's dumb.

TONY

What's dumb about playing in the desert? I used to do it all the time.

ENZO

Really?

TONY

Hell yeah. Me and some neighborhood kids pretty much grew up out here. Popping fireworks, breaking bottles, the whole shebang. So, you and your sister you...

ENZO

We come out here to write.

TONY

Write? Write what?

ENZO

We write for competitions, like short story stuff for magazines. Sci-fi, romance, fantasy, whatever pays.

TONY

(Eyebrows do a thing.)

Ooh. Romance?

ENZO

Don't be weird.

TONY

(He laughs.)

Seriously though, that's pretty cool. Which has been your favorite story to write?

ENZO

(He thinks for a moment, playing with the laces of his shoes.)

We wrote this really cool story about a dragon that lived in the Franklin Mountains. He was made of clay and instead of breathing fire he sucked the water out of things...you know, like turning things into dust...it's dumb.

(He stops himself from continuing.)

TONY

(Noticing.)

No no, that's rad.

ENZO

You think so?

TONY

Yeah dude, I love dragons!

ENZO

Me too! That's why fantasy stories are my favorite!

TONY

So this dragon, what did he do?

ENZO

Well, his name was Hernán and he fell in love with this girl from the pueblos. Every morning he would fly down to the river where the girl would get water for her village, and ask her to marry him.

TONY

(Quick.)

So does she marry him?

ENZO

No, of course not. He's a scary, old ass dragon. But he won't take no for an answer. He decides to suck the water out of her pot so she can't leave the river. Hernán thinks, I'll just keep taking her water until she agrees to marry me. So all day he does this. She refills the pot and he sucks the water right out. Over and over again. The sun is setting and Hernán tells the girl:

(In a gnarled voice:)

"If you don't marry me, I'll suck up the water from this entire river and leave this land parched and dry. No crop will take root, no animal will feed, no family will grow." So, the girl looks at her village and at the dragon and says, "okay." The dragon takes her with him to his cave and the girl spends years watching her family from the mountain top. And, every time she cries, the dragon whispers, "Do not cry, the river still runs because of your love," and he sucks the tears right up.

TONY

(Quietly.)

That's fucked up.

ENZO

Yeah, it totally is.

(He clears his throat.)

One morning, as the sun rises, the girl looks out over the horizon and sees a dark plume of smoke rising from her village. It's being raided. She runs to the dragon, begging him to save her village and, for the first time, he sees love in her eyes. But not for him. For her people. So, he flies down to the village and sucks the raiders dry, leaving nothing, but their metal armor and

bones. The girl thanks the dragon, and is ready to return to the mountain with him, but instead the dragon turns to the river and lowers his body into it.

The cold water rushes against his clay body and pieces of him begin melting off into the river. The girl runs to the dragon and tries to pull him out, but he begins to fall apart in her hands. He looks out at her village, at the destroyed buildings, and closes his eyes as he melts back into the earth. His final words, “rebuild your village and know that I am sorry.” So, using the clay from his body, the villagers rebuild their homes.

TONY

Wow, kid. You wrote that?

ENZO

Well, me and my sister did, yeah.

TONY

That’s amazing.

ENZO

Haha, thanks. We write these stories together. I couldn’t do it on my own. I kinda just ramble a story and she makes it better.

TONY

You ever consider writing a book? That dragon story would make a great kids book or something.

ENZO

Nah, I think it would take too long. Besides, the magazines pay okay and the stories are short enough that we can knock out a few a night. We don’t always win, but when we do it’s usually a good chunk of change.

TONY

Did you win anything for that one?

ENZO

(Trying to hide his smile.)

Yup! A whopping...

(Drum roll:)

Fifty bucks!

TONY

Fifty? Five-zero?

ENZO

Yeah, right! That was a good one. Competition was something like, “folklore from the south.” It was one of the more fun ones. I prefer fantasy. My sister’s really into sci-fi.

TONY

What do you do with the money? Split it? Buy candy?

ENZO

No, we’ve been saving it.

TONY

What for?

ENZO

(The boy is quiet, digging his heels into the dirt. After a moment:)

Just cuz.

TONY

Come on, you can tell me.

ENZO

(Standing now.)

We haven’t heard anything in a while.

(A coyote howls. Another responds. The two look at each other.)

TONY

Coyotes. Probably just hunting rabbits, or strays.

ENZO

(Gulps.)

Do you think they’re okay? My sister and your girlfriend, I mean.

TONY

I’m sure they’re fine.

(Thunder rumbles. He looks up at the sky. There is silence.)

So this dragon, Hernán, how’d you come up with him?

ENZO

(Beat. He kicks at the dirt.)

Well, it’s a story kind of about my mom.

TONY

Your mom?

ENZO

Yeah. We, umm, my mom...she didn't make it when we tried to cross into the US.

TONY

Oh, Enzo.

ENZO

She took these pills the coyotes gave us, supposed to help you stay awake for when we walked at night. But they just sucked the water out of her instead. She didn't make it.

TONY

Enzo, I'm so—

ENZO

So, like, I wrote this story for her I guess. Like, there's this girl who's willing to sacrifice everything for her family. It doesn't end the same way, cuz in the story the dragon, the desert, let's her go, but it helps me remember her. I don't know, it's dumb.

TONY

No, it's not.

(Beat.)

I'm sure she would've loved the story.

ENZO

Yeah, I think so too. When you're crossing, it's like, everything is out to get you. The heat, the animals...

(He looks up into the sky.)

And *them*. In their trucks and their helicopters and their night vision whatever.

(Beat. Silence.)

TONY

So, not aliens?

ENZO

No. Definitely not aliens.

TONY

Why are they out here?

ENZO

How should I know.

TONY

I mean, it's all residential out here, que no?

ENZO

Yeah. And it's all dead crops this time of year too. It was scary seeing one of them up close.

TONY

Wait, one was here?

(TONY straightens up and looks around.)

ENZO

Yeah, he was searching through the tumbleweeds. I think they might've seen our flashlights or something.

TONY

You've gotta be more careful than that, man.

ENZO

I know.

TONY

At least you're just kids. They can't do anything to you.

(Beat.)

Right?

ENZO

(He's quiet for a long time.)

It felt like...like he was hunting. Should we be worried? About the others?

TONY

Once we all get back together, we'll get out of here. Veró is looking for your sister. She'll find her.

(A coyote howls. Louder and closer this time.)

But there's no harm in looking around I guess. Come on, grab my hand.

ENZO

I'm not a baby.

(The coyote growls. ENZO grabs TONY's hand.)

Yeah, okay, let's go.

The two exit the stage slowly, quietly. ROSITA runs on stage, sliding to a halt and dropping to her

knees. She's panting. Tired. She puts the radio on the ground carefully.

ROSITA

(Between breaths.)

Dammit, Enzo. Where are you?

She goes to the metal box and pulls out the recorder. She presses play. We hear ENZO's voice from earlier:

ENZO

"It works tonta."

(Beat.)

"I hate you too."

(The tape ends. She smiles.)

She rewinds it and ties the small strap around her wrist. Next, she picks up the radio and raises the volume.:

TÍO OFELIO

It's hard being without them. Your family. I...I chose to leave. But others...they aren't always able to make that choice for themselves.

(He sniffles and plays a few messy chords. He gives a small laugh.)

I don't know what's gotten into me. I don't know if it's the storm or the dust. Or maybe the moon. That could be it. The moon.

(Beat.)

My mamá, she used to tell me my Abuelo was a werewolf. The man had hairy arms, and tufts of peppery chest hair peeking out from the top of his fancy button up shirts. A werewolf, she'd whisper to me, as she tucked me into bed, a werewolf with long yellowing fangs and cloudy brown eyes. At the time, my parents, they were getting a divorce. My father had already moved out of the house and my abuelo moved in to help my mamá.

(He plays a few chords.)

I wasn't sure why she called him a werewolf. They're supposed to be scary monsters that tore hearts out and ate them! But, here was this man from across the river who was plump and cheery and would cook us breakfast every morning. He didn't seem like a monster. He moved into the room next door to me. The first few weeks, there was nothing strange, some groaning yes, muttering in his sleep, sure, but the man was old.

(A few more chords. Deeper.)

But then he started drinking. He started yelling. He threw furniture around the room and cried himself to sleep. Turns out, he wasn't there to help my mamá. The man was trying to stay on the

wagon, but once he fell off, he changed. His face was always red, his forehead covered in beads of sweat, he never finished his sentences, the words disappeared into slurs.

(The music picks up pace.)

One night, my mamá confronted him. She burst into his room and yelled louder than I'd ever heard her yell before. Louder even than when she confronted my father about his new "rich man" cigars and the fea he was sleeping with. "Dámelo," she yelled at my abuelo, the wolfman, "give it to me or throw it out or dump it down the drain. I don't care what you do, but no more. Not in my house. Not around my kids." And he threw it, the bottle, threw it across the room against the wall we shared. It shattered, burst like a firework, glass falling to the floor and the smell of tequila filled our home. But on my end, on my side of the wall, the force of the hit knocked a frame loose. A picture of me and my siblings fell and hit me in the face, the glass cracking and cutting me down the length of my cheek. I cried out. My mother and the wolfman ran to my room and saw me there, sitting up in my bed, moonlight reflecting off my blood covered face.

(The music ends abruptly.)

My abuelo moved out the next day. Packed his bags and cooked us one last meal before the sun rose. I woke up to the smell of eggs con chorizo, my bandaged face still stinging, and he was gone.

(He takes a moment. Sniffles.)

I'm sorry. I know what all of you are waiting for and we will get to it, I promise. But we must wait for the right time. We have to make sure everyone is here. Almost.

VERONICA bursts on stage.

VERONICA

There you are! Órale, mijita, what were you thinking? Running around in the dark like that! Are you okay? Look at me? Are you okay?

ROSITA

Yes! I'm fine!

VERONICA

Alright. Jesus.

(She looks up at the sky.)

I think they're gone.

ROSITA

Have you seen Enzo?

VERONICA

Who?

ROSITA

My little brother, have you seen him?

VERONICA

No, but Tony went after him. I'm sure they're fine.

(Looking around.)

Were you talking to someone?

ROSITA

No.

VERONICA

I heard another voice.

ROSITA

Then you were hearing things.

VERONICA

(Suspicious. She picks up and flips through the notebook that was left in the sand.)

And what is all this?

(She looks at ROSITA who doesn't respond. She uncovers the metal box and opens the lid.)

What are you two hiding out here?

(She pulls the money jar from the box.)

What do we have here?

ROSITA

Hey, put that down!

VERONICA

Oh, yeah? Or what? You'll fight me?

(ROSITA lunges towards VERONICA, but she raises the jar in the air, high above the girls head.)

You want this back?

ROSITA

Yes!

VERONICA

You gonna start answering my questions?

ROSITA

(Groaning loudly.)

Yes! Now give it back.

VERONICA

(She tosses the jar to ROSITA who catches it.)

See, was that so hard?

(ROSITA tries to make a run for it, bolting in front of VERONICA who quickly grabs her by the back of her shirt. ROSITA falls down.)

ROSITA

Hey, ow!

VERONICA

Let me let you in on a little secret. I'm the oldest of five girls. I can do this all night. Try me.

ROSITA

I liked the other one better—

VERONICA

What did you say?

ROSITA

I liked the other one better! Long neck. He was nicer.

(She puts the jar of money back in the metal box.)

VERONICA

You're no ray of sunshine yourself, you know that?

ROSITA

Whatever. Come on, we need to find them.

VERONICA

No, no, no. We're not going anywhere. I'm tired of walking through this field. First I'm chasing Tony and then I'm chasing you. You...you girl. What's your name anyway?

ROSITA

Rosita.

VERONICA

Rosita. Rosa. Rose. That's a cute name.

ROSITA

Whatever.

(She looks around the clearing for a bit. Huffs. Paces. Huffs.)

You seriously think we should just wait here?

VERONICA

You want to walk around aimlessly for hours?

ROSITA

We have a flashlight—

VERONICA

Which probably attracted them in the first place.

ROSITA

We do this all the time and never have we—

VERONICA

What do you mean all the time?

ROSITA

We come out here, like every night.

VERONICA

Mijita, are you crazy?

ROSITA

Stop calling me that.

VERONICA

Calling you what?

ROSITA

(Disgusted:)

“Mijita.” It’s mijita this, mijita that. Stop.

VERONICA

Jesus, what crawled up your—

ROSITA

Remind me your name and I’ll tell you exactly what crawled up my—

VERONICA

Oh, I’m sorry. I was under the impression that I’m the only one out here trying to help you.

ROSITA

No! It's me and Enzo and that's it!

VERONICA

Oh? That's it? There's no one else out here. Well if that's the case...

(Looks around in the brush and finds a discarded flashlight. She picks it up.)

You wouldn't have a problem with me, I don't know, doing this—

(She begins to turn the flashlight on and off, holding it in the air.)

¡Oye! Anyone else around? Anyone want to help this little girl out?

ROSITA

Hey, stop that!

VERONICA

She's out here all alone and doesn't need anyone's help!

ROSITA

(She runs to VERONICA and takes the the flashlight out of her hands, she turns it off.)

What the hell do you think you're doing?

VERONICA

Do you hear that?

ROSITA

Hear what?

VERONICA

Listen.

(Beat. ROSITA listens.)

No helicopter. It's gone. Or at least doing rounds somewhere else.

ROSITA

So you thought it was okay to just put our lives in danger like that? Cuz you can't hear them?

VERONICA

We're fine, miji— Rosita. Believe me, I want to get out of here as soon as possible, but running around without any idea as to where the others are is not going to help.

(Beat. ROSITA is looking up into the sky.)

I know what they're capable of. I know what they do to people.

(ROSITA looks at her.)

I'm not going to let them take you. I'm going to look after you.

(Beat.)

Okay?

ROSITA

Okay. I still think that tantrum you just threw was stupid.

VERONICA

Bite me.

ROSITA

(Beat.)

So, were you two fighting or something?

VERONICA

What?

ROSITA

You and long neck.

VERONICA

Tony and I? No—no. We weren't fighting.

(Beat.)

It's just been a long night.

ROSITA

Trouble in paradise?

VERONICA

You call this paradise?

ROSITA

It could be worse.

VERONICA

No kidding.

ROSITA

(Beat.)

That's a nice dress.

VERONICA

Thanks.

(Playing with the hem.)

My mom made it for me.

ROSITA

Really?

VERONICA

Yup. We went to Michael's and she let me pick out the colors.

(They smile at each other and then quickly turn away.)

You know, your mom's probably worried about you.

ROSITA

I don't think so.

VERONICA

I'm sure she is.

ROSITA

She's dead.

VERONICA

Oh, Rosita, I'm so—

ROSITA

It's okay.

VERONICA

What happened?

(Beat.)

You don't have to tell me.

ROSITA

(Quick:)

She didn't make it. When we were crossing.

VERONICA

(Silence. VERONICA moves closer to the girl and puts a hand on her shoulder.)

And your dad?

ROSITA

He's...he's gone too. But not dead.

VERONICA

What do you mean?

ROSITA

They made him leave. They said he couldn't stay here.

VERONICA

Who did?

ROSITA

(Looking towards the sky.)

Them. They did.

(She moves away from VERONICA and sits at the edge of the stage.)

VERONICA

Oh. I see.

(Beat.)

So who is taking care of you?

ROSITA

Some lady. Denise. She's our temporary foster parent.

VERONICA

Temporary?

ROSITA

Until they find us a better match or something. They call us "wards of the state," But it's almost been two years? So...I don't know. They don't tell us anything. They just dropped us off at her place one day. She took us into this room with some bunk beds, gave us some clothes, and showed us where the food was.

VERONICA

Are there other kids there? With you?

ROSITA

(Playing with the sleeves of her sweater.)

Now? No. But there have been a couple.

VERONICA

A couple? But you've been there for two years?

ROSITA

Denise says they've started taking kids to other places. Newer places. But not me and Enzo. I think maybe they forgot about us.

VERONICA

Who were the others? The ones that have been with you.

ROSITA

I don't always get to know them. Sometimes they don't want to talk, or they don't know much Spanish or English.

(Beat.)

There was this boy, Luis, who was really nice. This is his sweater.

VERONICA

And what happened to Luis?

ROSITA

He went to the job corps cuz he was too old. He told me he was gonna learn how to weld and join the Navy. He told Enzo he should join too when he's old enough. That they'd make him strong and make him a citizen.

(Beat.)

I hope he's okay. Luis, I mean. I'm sure he is.

VERONICA

You know, Tony was a foster kid.

ROSITA

Long neck?

VERONICA

Yup. His mom had him here in the states, but she wasn't a citizen. She got deported when he was little and he got put with some relatives here, and then eventually foster care when they couldn't keep caring for him. He got moved around a couple times, and stayed with some good people. And some bad. But he turned out okay.

ROSITA

Did he ever get back to his mom?

VERONICA

No. But, he's eighteen now. When he graduates, he wants to sponsor her and get her back here in the states.

(Beat.)

I think he'd be a good person to talk to, about all this. It worked out well enough for him, you know?

ROSITA

(Not looking at her, still playing with her sleeves.)

Yeah, okay.

VERONICA

So, I don't want to pry, but...the jar of money.

(Beat.)

Are you and your brother, Enzo...are you planning on running away?

(Beat. ROSITA shifts uncomfortably.)

You know how dangerous that is, right? You're a smart girl.

ROSITA

We aren't going to run.

VERONICA

Then what is it for?

ROSITA

We're saving money for our dad. To bring him back.

VERONICA

Oh.

ROSITA

It's expensive to cross and we want to help.

(Beat.)

We come out here and write, submit the stories for cash prizes, and whatever money we make we bury out here.

(Beat.)

You're not going to steal it, right?

VERONICA

No. No, of course not.

(Putting her hand on her shoulder.)

You're really good kids. I can tell.

ROSITA

Thanks.

VERONICA

How about, after we all get back together and out of this dust storm, we go grab some fries or something? We can go to Whataburger. How does that sound?

ROSITA

(Hiding a smile.)

Pretty good.

VERONICA

(Hiding her own smile.)

Yeah, I agree.

ROSITA

I'm sorry about earlier. I know I can be a bit of a pain.

VERONICA

Just a little bit.

ROSITA

(Laughs a little.)

Yeah. It's just...it's just me and Enzo, you know? And he's smart, but also dumb. Does that make sense?

VERONICA

I know the type.

ROSITA

And with our dad gone, it's just me looking out for him.

VERONICA

You have to be the tough one.

ROSITA

Yeah, I guess.

VERONICA

You know you are tough though, right? I can tell.

ROSITA

It doesn't feel like it.

VERONICA

You can be tough *and* scared you know?

(Beat.)

I'm scared.

(Beat.)

I'm scared all the time. It's easy to forget there's a whole world outside this desert. Decisions being made thousands of miles away that are changing my life and yours and countless others

and...it's hard. It's scary. But you get by. You figure things out and you protect your loved ones. And, if you can, you protect a few more people. And then a few more. And a few more after that. After a while, we're all looking after each other and things will be better. But, until then, you watch out for Enzo. I watch out for Tony. And, at the end of the night, maybe we look out for each other.

(Beat.)

Okay?

ROSITA

Okay.

Lights fade on VERONICA and ROSITA as TONY and ENZO walk upstage, wandering around in the field. ENZO is playing with a large stick and TONY is leading the way.

ENZO

So, are you two, like, married?

TONY

(Shook.)

Married? Me and Veró? No no no. We're just dating. Like, boyfriend girlfriend.

ENZO

Uhuh.

(Whacks a bush with the stick.)

Are you gonna get married though?

TONY

(Stops walking and looks at ENZO.)

Alright bud, where's this coming from?

ENZO

I don't know. Isn't that just how things work. You date someone in high school and then get married and have kids?

TONY

(Scoffs.)

Ha, I mean sure, sometimes, but that's not us. Not me and Veró. We're different.

ENZO

How?

TONY
Just different. Not all gushy and stuff.

ENZO
Like, neither of you are gushy, or just you?

TONY
No, both of us. Not just me. I mean, we've never talked about getting married.

ENZO
You haven't?

TONY
No! Who talks about that stuff.

ENZO
I guess just serious couples.

TONY
We are serious couples. I mean, we are a serious couple. Singular. We are.

ENZO
But you aren't going to get married?

TONY
Kid, not everyone gets married.

ENZO
You should still *really* talk to her about it.

TONY
I know! I'm going to!
(*Beat.*)

ENZO
(*Snickers.*)
I knew it.

TONY
I hate you. How did you even—

ENZO
Teens come out here to do two things. Propose and Drink. And make babies. Three things.

TONY

You shouldn't know about all that. Cochino. And you and what's her face come out here to write. So four things!

ENZO

That's different. We're kids. Innocent and pure.

TONY

In the middle of the desert.

ENZO

It's a matter of circumstances. So, how were you going to do it? Propose?

TONY

No one said anything about proposing!

(Beat.)

I was just going to bring it up. All casual like. You know?

ENZO

You were going to half ass a proposal?

TONY

There wasn't going to be a proposal!

(An annoyed sigh.)

Look, come here.

(He lifts ENZO up to stand on a tire.)

You see the water tower?

ENZO

Kinda.

TONY

I know, it's kinda shitty weather tonight, but up at the top...

(He hands ENZO a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket.)

I wrote this huge message in red paint.

ENZO

(Unfolds the paper. Eyeing it.)

Huh.

TONY

What do you think?

Umm. ENZO

What, you don't like it? TONY

No, it's just that... ENZO
(Handing the piece of paper to TONY.)
I can't read.

You can't...read? TONY
(Beat.)

No. ENZO

I'm just like, surprised man. You're out here writing all these stories— TONY
(Stunned.)

Rosa does the writing. I just, sort of talk. ENZO

You never learned? TONY

My mom started to teach me, but, I mean I recognize some stuff, sure. ENZO
(Beat.)

It's whatever.

Hey man, it's okay. Plenty of people don't learn how to read or write until they're older. It'll be fine. TONY

(ENZO is looking down at the ground.)
Hey, you know who could help you? Veró. I'm sure she'd teach you.

Really? ENZO

TONY

Yeah, man. She wants to be a teacher.

(Beat. A little pained:)

She...she's gonna go to college for it.

(Beat.)

She'd be down to teach you before summer's out. I'm sure you're halfway to learning anyway. The toughest part is just knowing what all the words mean and you seem to have a pretty good grasp on that what with your dragons and shit.

ENZO

(Looking up at TONY now.)

Thanks. That'd be great.

(Renewed energy.)

So, what's your message say? On the tower?

TONY

Well, it's a quote from this book, *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton.

(In a faux tough guy voice.)

"Stay gold, Ponyboy, stay gold."

ENZO

Okay.

(Silence.)

So what's it mean?

TONY

It's like. Okay. Have you read *The Outsiders*?

(Looks at ENZO. Beat.)

Okay, that was a dumb question. Okay. Umm. So it's about these young boys in these gangs that are sort of duking it out and at one point one kid is dying and he tells this other kid, Ponyboy, to stay gold cuz earlier Ponyboy was reciting some poetry or whatever about how like nothing gold ever lasts. So, like, this Ponyboy kid can be better than this gang life and this dying kid knows it so he's trying to get him to leave this life and get out and be better. The whole book is like this reflection on how young kids can't remain innocent while living in a world where life's harsh realities are imposed on them.

ENZO

Whoa. Tony, that was kinda smart. I didn't know you had it in you.

TONY

Hey. Thanks.

(Beat.)

Well, Veró wrote my book report on it. I never actually finished reading it. BUT it's how we met! We were in middle school English and we got paired together. She's always been the smart one, for sure.

ENZO

So then why the water tower?

TONY

You know how I was saying I used to play out here with all the neighborhood kids? Well Veró was there too. She'd come out here and play rough, like really rough. Like to prove a point. If we played king of the hill, she had to be the one that made it on top. If we were playing bloody knuckles, she never gave in. You get the idea. This—

(Looking up at the tower.)

This one summer, without anyone telling her to, she climbed the water tower, right up to the top. I was scared out of my mind. Looking up at her and just thinking, this girl's gonna fall. But she didn't. She climbed back down with the widest, dorkiest grin I've ever seen. She was just...happy. Proud. That's when I knew I was going to marry her. And I was in middle school. Just this little chunky kid wrestling this girl in the dirt. So I was just thinking—

(Back to ENZO.)

Okay, picture this. We're up there on the tower and it's just all of Juárez and El Paso below us, and nothing but the sky above us and then...

(He thinks.)

And then...

(An embarrassed beat. He groans loudly.)

I don't know. God, it's always this part that trips me up. I keep thinking it's gonna dawn on me the more I talk about it. That the right words will come out. I don't know. I say something sweet?

(Beat.)

I rigged the whole tower with these string lights so I flip a switch and the whole thing lights up with "Stay gold, Ponyboy, stay gold," written right in the middle of it.

ENZO

That's how you were going to propose?

TONY

I'm not proposing! I just...I just want her to know that it's okay for her to leave. You know. She wants to go to college, but...we haven't really talked about it. I mean, she hasn't actually told me she got in...

ENZO

Oh.

TONY

I found the letter. It fell out of her backpack. She got it a few weeks ago and she hasn't said anything. I just want her to know that she doesn't need to stick around for me.

ENZO

That's really sweet, Tony.

TONY

She needs to get out there. I know that and she knows that.

ENZO

Just tell her. Everything you just said.

TONY

I've been trying to.

ENZO

No, you're overthinking it.

TONY

I want to do it right.

ENZO

Telling her is doing it right.

TONY

(Beat.)

You know, when you're right, you're right.

ENZO

When you write as many stories as me and my sister, you start to get real good at guessing the endings.

TONY

So then how does this one end?

ENZO

You and Veronica?

TONY

No, us. Tonight, all of us.

ENZO

Let's keep looking for them.

TONY

(The two come up on the old car seats representing TONY's car.)

Alright, here she is. Isn't she a beaute.

ENZO

What am I looking at, Tony?

TONY

It's my car, Enzo! My 1972 Chevy Impala. A little beat up sure, but she's my pride and joy. Before Veró of course.

ENZO

You mean after Veró?

TONY

What? Oh! Yeah, yeah, *after* Veró. My pride and joy *after* Veró.

ENZO

We aren't leaving, are we?

TONY

No, of course not. I just thought maybe she might've come here, but it doesn't look like it.

(Beat.)

But, since we're here, I want to give you something.

(Reaching "into" the car, he pulls out a worn paperback copy of The Outsiders, it's pages dog eared and spine heavily bent. He turns to ENZO, holding the book in both his hands.)

I figure, if you're gonna start learning how to read, then you might as well have something that you can practice with. So, here.

ENZO

Really?

(He looks at TONY, who nods, and then he takes the book.)

Thank you. Seriously. Thank you, Tony, I—

TONY

Don't mention it. We've gotta look out for each other. Out here, we all have to—

(Something catches his eye. In the distance is VERONICA flashing her light.)

What is that?

ENZO

(He follows TONY's gaze.)

That flashing light?

TONY

Yeah...

ENZO

Do you think it's them? Veró and—

TONY

It must be, come on, let's go—

Suddenly, the man walks on stage, still low to the ground, all jagged edges. TONY and ENZO turn and look at him. The man looks at them and slowly rises. He is tall, his face obscured by shadow.

TONY

(Standing in front of ENZO, shielding the boy. He whispers:)

Enzo, run.

ENZO

Tony—

The man digs his feet into the ground, he's ready to pounce.

TONY

(Louder now:)

Run!

TONY runs towards the man, ready to tackle him, but the man shoves him aside with one hand like nothing. TONY tumbles to the ground. ENZO stands on the other side of the stage, frozen, as the man begins to slowly walk towards him.

TONY picks himself back up and runs back to the man, jumping onto his back. The man grunts and howls.

TONY

(Trying to hold on:)

Enzo, man, you gotta go, now!

The man reaches behind him and grabs the top of TONY's head. TONY yells out in pain and falls to the ground. The man raises TONY by the collar and punches him. Once. Twice.

ENZO reaches into his back pocket, pulling out the box of snappers. He tosses a snapper at the man's feet. There is a pop and flash, illuminating the stage in a bright wash of light for just a second. The man howls, letting go of TONY and covering his eyes. The man turns to face ENZO now.

ENZO throws another popper at the man's feet. Pop and flash. The man howls again, but takes a step towards ENZO. He throws another, pop and flash, but the man moves closer again.

TONY

(Still on the desert floor, blood streaming down his face from a cut on his temple.)

Enzo! Throw them to me!

ENZO

What?--

TONY

Throw them!

ENZO tosses the box of snappers to TONY, the small box gliding over the head of the man. It lands in the brush and TONY quickly crawls over to get it. The man spins around to TONY, his movements heavy and slow. TONY raises the small box into the air and then quickly brings it down to the ground.

There is an almost deafening pop. A hollow boom that echoes through the desert. Then, the light. It is bright and blinding and envelopes the stage. The man seems to crumble under the light, collapsing into himself trying to cover his eyes and face. He

screams. As the light dissipates, the man runs off stage..

Are you okay?
TONY

Yes, I'm fine are you—
ENZO

Let's go. Now.
TONY

TONY grabs ENZO's hand and leads him off stage, he limps slightly. The lights refocus on ROSITA and VERONICA.

God, where are those two?
VERONICA

Do you think they're okay?
ROSITA

Yeah, Tony's tough. And I'm sure Enzo is too.
VERONICA

Yeah, he is.
ROSITA

Tony would know to come back here. All of our stuff is here.
VERONICA
(She gestures around at the metal box, the mum, and the trash.)

Enzo would know to come here too. For me and the radio.
ROSITA

So I guess we—
VERONICA

The radio crackles and we hear TÍO OFELIO.

TÍO OFELIO
The storm is getting closer, I can feel it in my bones. My joints are beginning to ache.

VERONICA

Who is that?

ROSITA

I don't know. Some old man Enzo and I have been listening to.

TÍO OFELIO

Or maybe I'm just getting old.

(He gives a weak laugh.)

VERONICA

I recognize that voice.

ROSITA

How?

VERONICA

I don't know, I just—

TÍO OFELIO

They're out in full force tonight. I can hear their helicopters, loud and flying low.

VERONICA

I swear I recognize... Why do you listen to him?

ROSITA

He—

TÍO OFELIO

I need to get something off my chest.

VERONICA

Rosita, this is important, why do you listen to him?

ROSITA

The letters. He reads their letters.

VERONICA

Letters? What are you talking about—

TÍO OFELIO

(Music.)

I've lived here all my life, in El Paso, on the border, between both worlds. I've driven along this scar for decades, for longer than I can remember. Some of my first memories were of riding my bike along the river, before the fence was so tall and the patrols so frequent. My papá gave me an old library card, from his studies in Juárez, to put in my wheel so he could hear me coming home. I never wanted to stop being this close to the scar. So I joined them, the Border Patrol.

VERONICA

I know who this is.

TÍO OFELIO

(Music.)

I thought I could make a difference, that, at least from the inside, I could be a green suit that cared. That smiled. But this government, this machine...it has made me do many things I regret. It made me...

(Beat.)

No. I gave in. I let them tell me what to do. I ignored who I was for too long.

(A heavy sigh.)

I thought I was fighting for a country that loved me back. That said, "Ofelio, you're something special." But no. Our parents. All those that came before us. I believed that they fought to get us here. That they sacrificed so much for us that I'd be letting them down if I didn't fight for this country. But I was wrong. Our parents, our ancestors. They didn't bring us here.

(The music stops.)

We've been here all along. Someone took our river, our pulse, and made it a wound.

VERONICA

Ay, Ofelio. What did you do?

ROSITA

You know him?

VERONICA

He's my Tío. He's family.

TÍO OFELIO

Tonight, I'm going to make things right.

TONY and ENZO run on stage. They are out of breath and scare both ROSITA and VERONICA.

VERONICA

(Quick, relieved:)

Tony! Oh, thank God you found him. I was getting worried.

(Seeing the blood.)

Ay, dios mío, what happened?

(She prods at the cut.)

TONY

We need to go. Now.

VERONICA

What?

TÍO OFELIO

I'm afraid they're going to find me soon, shut me down.

ENZO

He's on! Has he—

ROSITA

No, not yet.

ENZO

Do you have the recorder?

ROSITA

Yeah, right here.

TONY

(The distant fwap-fwap-fwap of a helicopter can be heard, it's approaching.)

Okay, okay, let's go. They're close.

VERONICA

They're close—

TONY

The light, Veró. They saw your light. We did too, we were headed to get you when we— We need to go, now.

The fwap-fwap-fwap of the helicopter is very close now. A spotlight turns on and scans the audience and outer edges of the stage.

TONY

Veró, we need to get to my car.

(VERONICA is focused on the sky.)

Veró, now, let's go!

VERONICA

(Whispers to herself:)

Tío...

(Breaking out of the trance. Looking to TONY.)

Yes...Yes!

(Turning to the kids.)

Rosa, Enzo, let's go!

ROSITA and ENZO lock eyes for a moment, looking at the radio and then the sky. They nod to each other and they both run towards TONY and VERONICA. They all begin to exit when:

ROSITA

Shit, wait.

(She shoves the radio into ENZO's arms and turns back around, running back on stage.)

ROSITA drops to her knees as she reaches the metal box and opens it, taking out the large glass jar of money. Suddenly, a large white circle of light appears above her. ROSITA stands frozen beneath this burning white light.

ENZO

(On the edge of the stage, he screams:)

Rosa—

TONY comes up behind ENZO and pulls him behind a bush. TONY peers over the bush at ROSITA who is still transfixed by the light. Suddenly, it turns off, and they are left in the dark and the silence of the desert.

VERONICA

(VERONICA, crouching behind the brush, moves on stage slowly and whispers:)

Rosita, come on, let's—

The next series of events is quick. From behind ROSITA, out of the brush, the man appears. The

dark green monster, the hunter, the agent. He makes quick, sharp movements as he grabs ROSITA from behind and picks her up. She cries out, but the man covers her mouth as he takes her into the dark, through the brush and off the stage.

ENZO breaks loose from TONY's arms and runs to the center of the stage. He looks out into the desert, panting, and calls out into the dark:

ENZO

Rosa! Rosa!

At ENZO's feet, is the jar of money, illuminated by the moonlight.

ENZO

(Turning to TONY and VERONICA who have come out of the brush.)

We have to go after them.

(No response from the teenagers, they are staring into the dark, and then at each other.)

What are you standing around for? We have to—

VERONICA

Enzo—

ENZO

No. Don't Enzo me.

(Turning to TONY.)

Come on, Tony. Let's go.

(TONY doesn't move.)

No. No no no. Tony, come on. Do you have huevos or what?

(Silence. Only the sounds of the desert.)

Screw you both. I'm going after her.

(He turns to run towards the man and ROSITA, but TONY grabs him and pulls him away, towards the other side of the stage.)

No! Let me go! Let me go!

(TONY takes ENZO and exits in the opposite direction. We can still hear ENZO calling out.)

Rosa! Rosa, I'm coming for you!

The three exit the stage. Lights shift, like clouds passing in front of the moon. The world settles.

Music begins to drift back in. Maybe a slow guitar cover of "El Triste," by José José. TÍO OFELIO appears on stage, dimly lit.

TÍO OFELIO

Music helps. It seems dumb to say, after everything that happened. After everything that will happen. But it's true. Music. This was my father's guitar. It was gathering dust in my mother's bedroom up until the day she passed away. It's a piece of a man I barely know. I don't know why she kept it for so long. I always imagined that the memory of him hurt her, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe she wasn't remembering the vato he became, but the lover that he was.

(He plays a soft beat on the body of the guitar, only for a moment.)

He used to play in a band. I think it was the way my parents might've met. My mother was a dancer and my father was a musician, it only makes sense. My mother dancing in a dimly lit cantina, her dress bursting with colors, while my father sat on a creaking bar stool and played a song from his heart. Maybe I'm wrong, but...I like that image. I think we all have stories like this. Little white lies that make our lives easier.

(Beat.)

But these lies add up, don't they. They let you turn into monsters. You tell yourself things will change. That things will get better. That you could never imagine a world full of injustice. But then you wake up one morning, and you put on your suit, and strap yourself into your car, and you drive yourself to work where you assign people numbers. Where you put them into cells and take their children away from them. And then you drive yourself back home, take off the suit, and look in the mirror until your face, the one you no longer recognize, fades away.

(Beat.)

But not anymore. Never again. Tonight, I begin to make things right.

Lights fade on TÍO OFELIO and rise on VERONICA, TONY, and ENZO.

ENZO

(Still very mad:)

We have to go back!

VERONICA

We can't, Enzo.

ENZO

You can't be serious!

TONY

I'm sorry, kid, but she's right.

ENZO

No, don't give me that. We can do something.

VERONICA

Like what, Enzo? What's your big plan?

TONY

Veró—

VERONICA

No, I want to hear it.

(To ENZO:)

Well?

ENZO

We...well...well we—

VERONICA

Well we what?

ENZO

We go after her!

VERONICA

Yeah? Where did they go?

ENZO

I— I don't know, but we can retrace—

VERONICA

Do you know how many there are?

ENZO

There's only one, we've seen him!

VERONICA

And the helicopter? How many people are in there, Enzo? Do you know?

TONY

Veró—

ENZO

I don't care how many of them there are! They have my sister!

VERONICA

We don't know where they went, how many there are, or—

TONY

Or what they want, Enzo. What are they doing out here? Just hunting kids?

ENZO

So then what are we doing?

(Looking at TONY's car.)

Were we just going to leave?

(To TONY:)

Was that your plan. "We save one of them at least."

(To VERONICA:)

Is that it?

VERONICA

Enzo, it's not like that.

ENZO

Tony, come on, we can take them. We fought one already!

TONY

And look how well that went!

VERONICA

You fought one?

TONY

We barely got away.

VERONICA

Tony, what were you thinking?

TONY

I didn't exactly volunteer, Veró—

VERONICA

You could've been killed—

TONY

What was I supposed to do? Run and leave Enzo—

VERONICA

Tony, that's not—

TONY

I had to protect him!

ENZO

(Beat. Silence.)

And you did. I'm still here. But now we need to save her.

(Beat.)

We beat that thing, Tony. IT ran away from US.

TONY

We had those things, Enzo. Those snappers, and unless you've got more stashed away somewhere, we don't have anymore.

VERONICA

Snappers?

TONY

Yeah, just little noisemakers, we used them to scare it off.

VERONICA

(Beat. To ENZO.)

Enzo...

ENZO

Don't—

VERONICA

Think this through, please. We're just a bunch of kids. Against...against them! Against something too big to even describe. And they aren't here to play fair.

TONY

I hate this, kid, you know I do, but we can't help her.

VERONICA

The best thing we can do, the only thing we can do, is to run and get help. We can go get my dad or one of my tíos—

TONY

Or some of the other guys from school—

VERONICA

We just can't do this on our own. We have to go.

ENZO

She'll be gone by then.

(Beat.)

She might be gone now.

(Defeated.)

Just go home.

TONY

Kid—

ENZO

I don't need you.

VERONICA

(Frustrated.)

Enzo, please try to understand.

ENZO

All this time it's only been me and Rosita, no one else. We look out for each other. She took care of me when they took dad away! Not you or you! She did! And now she's out there. Alone. Scared.

(Looking at his hands.)

And I...I don't know if I can save her.

(To TONY.)

I don't know if I can take that thing on, but I'm sure as hell going to try. We come out here to feel closer to her. To mom. To feel the sand, still so hot from the sun that you can feel it through your sneakers.

(Looking out at the desert.)

It's dumb, but we felt safe out here, like maybe she could watch over us. My mom prayed to the saints before we crossed. All of them. Saints for sick people, saints for luck, saints for athletes and animals and everything in between. Every. Single. One. And I don't remember their names, but if there's one for us out here, a saint for just a bunch of kids out in the desert, I hope that saint looks like my mom, because that's who I pray to now.

(Silent. Wiping at his face, hiding tears.)

I know you're scared, and I'm scared too, but I have to try. I don't care if he takes me too, at least I'll know that I did my best.

TONY moves towards ENZO, he comes down on one knee and hugs the kid then, softly:

TONY

Alright. How can I help?

VERONICA

Tony...

TONY

My mom crossed Veró, you know that. She was pregnant with me when she did. She left everything behind to get me here, but I still have her. I'm going to see her again. I'm going to bring her back to the States, but when I do, I need to be able to look her in the eye and tell her I did everything I could to help these kids. If I can't then...

VERONICA

Okay.

TONY

You can go, my keys are under the seat, head back and—

VERONICA

No. I'll help. You're right. I...I'm here to help you Enzo.

ENZO

Thank you.

VERONICA

Now, you said you scared it?

TONY

Yeah, with those snappers.

VERONICA

So, does it not like the noise.

TONY

No, I think it was something else, it covered it's eyes, like it was blinded.

ENZO

It was the light, Tony.

(Beat.)

The light scared him off.

TONY

So...what if...

ENZO

What if we blast the thing with as much light as we can.

(Beat, thinking.)

Like, a water tower full of light.

TONY

I think you're onto something here, kid.

ENZO

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

TONY

Is it going to be enough?

ENZO

It has to be.

TONY

(Looking up at the sky, towards the back of the stage.)

I rigged it to glow like a Christmas tree.

ENZO

So, is that a yes?

VERONICA

Someone feel like filling me in here?

TONY

Enzo, you small, round, genius boy.

ENZO

Well?

TONY

(Nervous beat.)

Let's put on a show, Enzo.

VERONICA

Wait, what?

TONY

Veró, honey, you know I love you, right?

VERONICA

Tony, what are you—

TONY

You know I love you, right? Come on Veró, work with me here—

VERONICA

Yes, yes, now what's going on?

TONY

I know about the acceptance letter.

VERONICA

(Almost apologetically.)

Tony.

TONY

No, I'm not mad. In fact, I'm so, so proud of you.

VERONICA

No, I should've told you I've just been trying to sort everything out—

TONY

I totally get it—

VERONICA

I've just been so busy lately with looking after my sisters that I haven't had a second to think—

TONY

Veró, it's fine—

VERONICA

And I wanted to tell you tonight, but then all of this happened, and—

TONY

Veró—

VERONICA

And I just wanted to weigh my options before—

TONY

(He moves towards her and grabs her hands, holding them up close to his chest.)

Veró! I need you to know something.

(Beat.)

I want you to go. No, I need you to go. You need to get out there and do everything you can, to accomplish everything I know you can accomplish.

VERONICA

Tony, I—

TONY

If the thought to stay for me has at all crossed your mind, don't. Get out of this town.

VERONICA

Tony, I love you, I really do, but now isn't the time to—

TONY

Oh, no. Now is exactly the time for this, because I'm about to do something very stupid.

VERONICA

What?

(TONY takes the radio from ENZO and runs off stage. She calls out after him:)

Tony! Tony where are you going?

Lights fade on ENZO and VERONICA as TONY exits. There is silence. Then, a twig snaps, then another, and a girl cries out.

The man walks on stage with ROSITA draped over his shoulder. He brings her center stage and lays her down on the ground. She stares up at the man who is hunched over her, watching her every move. He takes a small step back, giving her space. ROSITA watches him, measures him. She makes a move to run, but the man pulls out his flashlight and illuminates her with its green light. She freezes.

He snaps his fingers for her to sit. The man is very still and almost imperceptibly reaches for his walkie-talkie. He brings it to his mouth in one swift, sharp movement. His head twisting away at an unnatural angle. He clicks the walkie-talkie on and, instead of a voice, he speaks in static. Words garbled, long lost, a language chewed up and

abused and spit back out. He clicks the radio off and puts it back in his belt.

ROSITA

Please—

The man brings his finger to his mouth, shushing her. Then he brings his hand to his ear and cups around it, as if to say, “listen mijita.” A distant fwap-fwap-fwap is growing ever closer. But there is something else. Guitar music.

ROSITA begins to hum “La Llorona.” Slowly, clumsily, she’s trying to remember the words. The man looks at her, confused. The music grows a little louder and so does ROSITA. The man comes down onto one knee and listens to ROSITA.

ROSITA

Ay de mí, Llorona Llorna
llorona de azul celeste—

The man recoils at her singing, covering his ears. His flashlight turns off and, for a moment, the stage seems to grow warmer. The man grabs ROSITA by the shoulder of her sweater and pulls her close to him. He seems to growl. ROSITA uses this moment to quickly unzip her sweater and slip out of it, kicking sand out from beneath her as she begins to run.

The man stands and turns his flashlight back on, painting her green with its light. She freezes. Unable to move. The desert becomes cold again. The man takes a step towards her.

A radio crackles, TÍO OFELIO’s voice can be heard echoing in the desert.

TÍO OFELIO

There’s a song my mother used to sing.

(The man turns his head to the sky, confused.)

She would hum it when she walked me to school. When she baked. When she was sad. I would like to play that song for you as we get closer to the end.

Then, in the distance, TONY yells:

TONY

Unseen:

¡Oyé! Eyes up, cabrón!

Lights up on TONY who is standing at the back of the stage, elevated. He crosses himself before he begins to sing “La Llorona⁴” alongside TÍO OFELIO’s music.

TONY

Ay de mí, Llorona Llorona
llorona de azul celeste
Ay de mí, Llorona Llorona
llorona de azul celeste

VERONICA

(Running on stage with ENZO in tow.)

What is that idiot doing—

TONY

Y aunque la vida me cueste, Llorona
No dejaré de quererte
Y aunque la vida me cueste, Llorona
No dejaré de quererte

(The man seems to recoil as the music grows louder. ROSITA uses this opportunity to run to VERONICA and ENZO.)

TONY and ROSITA

Me subí al pino más alto, Llorona
A ver si te divisaba
Me subí al pino más alto, Llorona
A ver si te divisaba
Como el pino era tierno, Llorona
Al verme llorar, lloraba
Como el pino era tierno, Llorona
Al verme llorar, lloraba

⁴ An english translation of the song can be found at the end of the play.

String lights on the back wall begin to turn on, they flicker to life as the music picks up its pace. TONY is framed by a large ring of string lights and, at the center of it all, the painted words, "Stay gold, Ponyboy, stay gold."

La pena y la que no es pena, Llorona
Todo es pena para mí
La pena y la que no es pena, Llorona
Todo es pena para mí

The man is brightly illuminated by the tower's lights. He seems blinded as he stands up straight, covering his eyes with his arm.

Ayer lloraba por verte, Llorona
Hoy lloro porque te vi
Ayer lloraba por verte, Llorona
Hoy lloro porque te vi

VERONICA jumps into the car and turns on its headlights. Two beams of light flood the stage, bathing the man in harsh light.

EVERYONE

Ay de mí, Llorona, Llorona
Llorona de azul celeste
Ay de mí, Llorona, Llorona
Llorona de azul celeste
Y aunque la vida me cueste, Llorona
No dejaré de quererte
Y aunque la vida me cueste, Llorona

(The man is crumbling, his limbs twisting around his body, collapsing.)

No dejaré de quererte
No dejaré de quererte
No dejaré de quererte

The man collapses to his knees, his back towards the audience. His head hangs down, and his hat lies on the floor beside him. He is frozen. TÍO OFELIO's voice fills the theatre.

TÍO OFELIO

When I was with the border patrol, I scoured this land looking for you, mi familia. Hunted you. Bagged you and tagged you. Poured out gallons of water into the parched earth rather than give it to you. I tore families apart. Separated mothers from their children.

I couldn't look at myself in the mirror. Couldn't stand to see what I had become. They weren't my eyes, the ones that looked back. They were the eyes of everyone I sent away. Everyone I sent back to a country they were desperately trying to run from. To a country they could never call home. I am sorry. But I know that no amount of apologizing can make up for what I have done.

(The lights flicker and suddenly shut off, leaving them in darkness for just a moment. When the lights return, the man is gone, only his hat left behind sitting in the dirt.)

So. I went back for them. Looked for every person I ever sent back, their names and faces burnt into my memory. The ones I found, the ones who were still alive, I brought their letters back with me to share with you, the family that I betrayed. These are their words.

(The whole group, TONY, VERONICA, ENZO, and ROSITA, meet at center stage around the hat.)

From a father I sent back to Oaxaca:

(Beat.)

“Enzo and Rosita.”

(ENZO and ROSITA suddenly look at the radio in TONY's arms. ROSITA scrambles for the recorder around her wrist and places it near the radio. She records their father's message.)

“Mis hijos, I miss you with all my heart. It hurts me to know that I can't be there to protect you. I hear what's happening, what the world is turning into, and I can't help but feel that I have failed you. What kind of father am I if I cannot protect my children.”

(Beat.)

“But I know you are strong. You have your mother's fire. Your grandfather's bravery. I'm working as hard as I can to bring myself back to you, but until then, please, stay safe. I love you. I love you. I can't say it enough, I love you. I will see you again.”

There is silence for a moment. ROSITA lowers the recorder and shuts it off. TONY lowers the volume on the radio, letting TÍO OFELIO's voice continue as a whisper.⁵

ROSITA wipes her face and looks around at the others.

ROSITA

Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you—

⁵ While this whisper can be ad libbed, this might be an opportunity for a cast member to write their own letter to a loved one. A letter Tío Ofelio can read as the final moments play out. A shared secret that can make every production unique.

She begins to cry. ENZO wraps his arms around her as they gently fall to their knees.

The sun begins to rise, washing the four of them in a dim, warm light. VERONICA looks at the kids and then at TONY. She crosses to him and he wraps his arm around her waist. He kisses the top of her head.

VERONICA

You could've gotten yourself killed.

TONY

You should look into singing lessons.

(They both laugh gently.)

VERONICA

So, Ponyboy, what's next?

TONY

You go to college, I work hard to make some money, get my mom back here and maybe a little place. Maybe somewhere close to you.

VERONICA

Menso, I meant right now.

(She looks at him sweetly.)

But I like the sound of that too.

(She looks up at him and kisses him, really kisses him for the first time tonight.)

Alright, I'll go get the kids.

TONY

I could get used to the sound of that.

VERONICA

(She laughs.)

Quit while you're ahead, Tony.

She crosses to ENZO and ROSITA who are still kneeling on the ground. ROSITA rewinds the tape for a short moment and then presses play.

TÍO OFELIO

“—please, stay safe. I love you. I love you. I can’t say it enough, I love you. I will see you again.”

ROSITA turns off the recorder and holds it close to her chest.

VERONICA

Come on, you hungry?

ROSITA and ENZO

Yes.

(They smile at each other.)

VERONICA

Then let’s get out of here.

(She holds out her hand and ENZO takes it. The three of them walk back towards TONY and the two car seats in the sand.)

TONY

Hop in.

(TONY and VERONICA sit down in the front seats and ENZO and ROSITA sit behind them.)

So, Whataburger?

(He turns on the engine, the lights focus on the car, the desert seems to fade.)

ROSITA

Tony?

TONY

Yeah, Rosa?

ROSITA

Will you tell me about your mom?

TONY

(Taken aback.)

Umm.

ROSITA

You don’t have to—

TONY

My mom makes the best empanadas. Piña, manzana, crema, you name it. I used to help her with the dough, kneading it and rolling it out with this old rolling pin my grandma gave her.

(The lights begin to fade. A guitar plays in the distance.)

She would fill them and fold the dough over, and I'd press the edges down with a fork. That was my favorite part, sealing them. She'd throw them in the oven and we'd sit back and drink some chocolate de abuelita in the winter or agua de sandia in the summer.

(The lights continue to fade. Tightening around the car and its passengers.)

Just being there with her, next to that oven, smelling the empanadas cooking. That's what I miss the most. Making something with her.

VERONICA

What about your dad? Tell us something about him.

ENZO

Oh, I don't know—

ROSITA

Fireworks. When I think of dad I think of fireworks. He used to buy them from a guy he worked with. He'd get us little rockets or sparklers or the big ones that shoot off into the sky.

ENZO

One time I accidentally set some tumbleweeds on fire with a sparkler!

ROSITA

And he'd been telling you the whole time to stay away from them!

ENZO

He had a bucket of water ready to go, it was fine!

ROSITA

He had a bucket ready because he knew you were an idiot!

(They both laugh.)

Fireworks...

ENZO

And that burning smell. That's what I think of.

(Beat.)

I miss him.

ROSITA

I wish we could meet your mom, Tony.

TONY

And I wish I could meet your dad.

VERONICA

Well, how about we try to make that happen?

(She looks around at the others, then softly to TONY:)

Sound good, Ponyboy?

TONY

Sounds good / to me.

ENZO

(To himself:)

Ponyboy?

(Then realizing it:)

Ponyboy! Stop! I forgot something!

(ENZO "exits" the car and runs towards center stage.)

VERONICA & TONY & ROSITA

(Calling out to ENZO, ad libbed:)

Enzo! Where are you going? Enzo!

As ENZO runs out back into the field, the light on the car and the rest of the kids fades, leaving ENZO alone in a dim warm light. ENZO looks around at the brush. At the trash and torn clothes. At the muddy stream and discarded mum. At the empty metal box. At the creosote, brittlebush, and red bird of paradise.

Haphazardly left in the sand, is TONY's copy of S.E. Hinton's, "The Outsiders." ENZO picks it up, rubbing the cover against his belly to remove the sand. He opens its pages and holds it upside down, trying to shake more out. He holds it in his hands and smiles at the cover. He flips to the page that TONY left dogeared and reads:

ENZO

Stay gold, Ponyboy, stay gold.

(He smiles.)

From off stage a flashlight clicks on, illuminating ENZO in a sickly green light. He looks up into the light. He's frozen and begins to breathe heavily. A second flashlight clicks on. Then a third. All of them coming from different directions off stage.

ENZO is not alone.

A twig snaps. Then another. Then another.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY.

“La Llorona” Song Translation

Alas, Llorona Llorona
Llorona [dressed] in light blue
Alas, Llorona, Llorona
Llorona [dressed] in light blue

And even if it costs my life, Llorona
I won't stop loving you
And even if it costs my life, Llorona
I won't stop loving you
I climbed the highest pine tree, Llorona
To see if I could spot you
I climbed the highest pine tree, Llorona
To see if I could spot you
But the pine tree was tender, Llorona
When it saw me cry, it cried
But the pine tree was tender, Llorona
When it saw me cry, it cried

Sorrow and that which is not sorrow, Llorona
Everything is sorrow for me
Sorrow and that which is not sorrow, Llorona
Everything is sorrow for me

Yesterday I cried 'cause I wanted to see you, Llorona
Now I cry because I saw you
Yesterday I cried 'cause I wanted to see you, Llorona
Now I cry because I saw you

Alas, Llorona, Llorona
Llorona [dressed] in light blue
Alas, Llorona, Llorona
Llorona [dressed] in light blue

And even if it costs my life, Llorona
I won't stop loving you
And even if it costs my life, Llorona
I won't stop loving you
I won't stop loving you
I won't stop loving you