

AN EDUCATED GUESS

by Juan José Alfonso

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CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION
Alba Guerrero	Dominican Woman, 40s
Nilda Jackson	African American Woman, 30s
Fr. Melchior Amiana	Filipino Man, 50s
Teresa Guerrero	Dominican Woman, 60s
Bogdan Markovic	Serbian Man, 40s
The Immigrant	Men and women various ages, nationalities

The Immigrant will perform the monologues while the rest of the stage is dark.

Depending on the scope of production, *The Immigrant* could be played by a few versatile actors, or by one actor for each monologue.

The play is to be performed without an intermission.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Lights up on two people: one woman, downstage right and one man downstage left.

The woman on the right is ALBA GUERRERO a bureaucrat at the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the hero of our story.

On the left, BOGDAN MARKOVIC, a nebbish math professor, who puts up his right hand, solemnly swearing. He's been in the country for almost a decade, but still speaks with a distinctive accent. Both of them face the audience.

MARKOVIC

I, Bodgan Markovic, hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce all allegiance and fidelity

ALBA

(Aloof, transactional) Form N-400, Application for Naturalization

MARKOVIC

to any foreign state or sovereignty, of which I have been a subject or citizen;

ALBA

Form I-485 Application to Register for Permanent Residence

Alba notices something is off and curiously looks over at Markovic.

MARKOVIC

that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America, against all enemies, foreign and domestic;

ALBA

(A little more intense) I-602 Application for Excludability Waiver

MARKOVIC

that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;

ALBA

Form N-336 Request for a Hearing on Naturalization Proceedings

MARKOVIC

that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law;

She begins to walk over to him, while still reciting the names of the government forms.

ALBA

I-566 Record of request A, G or NATO

MARKOVIC

that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by law;

ALBA

I-508 Waiver of Rights, Privileges and Immunities

Alba is standing close to Markovic. Staring at him, while he recites this last line.

MARKOVIC

and that I take this obligation freely, without any purpose of evasion;

ALBA

N-600K Application for Certificate of Citizenship

MARKOVIC

so help me God."

Markovic puts his hand down and finally looks at Alba. He turns to face her and they look at each other for a couple of beats.

Lights out.

SCENE 2

Over a dark stage.

AM RADIO

WNIX 1080, it's 8 o'clock. It's a gorgeous morning here in Manhattan, clear blue skies, light breeze from the west. Traffic is surprisingly light except for an accident on the BQE west leading up to the Grand Central.

As we fade out the radio report, lights up on Nilda Jackson stands behind a service window at a generic waiting room, similar to the DMV or the post office.

She is attending to her first appointment of the day and it's a bad start to her Tuesday. She speaks into a small microphone. We don't see or hear the person on the other side of the window. After she speaks each line, there is a pause where the person on the other side of the window would respond.

NILDA

Yes sir. Of course I remember you. It's your fourth time here.

NILDA

You were first processed at the embassy in San Salvador.
Uh huh. I'm looking at it right here, but you still don't have the I-129F.

NILDA

I know. I told you last time, there's nothing I can do if you don't have this form completed. You can come 100 times and it's not gonna change.

NILDA

Mr. Fernandez, please don't raise your voice, sir. I don't make the rules, I just enforce 'em.

NILDA

Sir, my job is not to determine whether this is "ridiculous", as you say. Maybe it's different where you came from, but we have laws to ensure the safety of our borders.

NILDA

I don't know that. I don't know you. Look we're gonna have to move on.
Please, step aside sir, complete all requirements on the form and we'll be happy to process the next phase.

NILDA

There is a long line behind you. They've waited just as long as you have.

Nilda picks up the phone and dials one number.

NILDA

Eighth floor, Window 6, security escort. Sir, you can't talk to me that way. I am not the bad guy here. Get your shit together and maybe we'll be able to help you out.

Alba Guerrero steps into the room. She is clearly worried.

ALBA

Nilda, let's go ahead and finish this one.

NILDA

(To the applicant on the other side of the window) Honestly. You think we're just here to jerk you around?

ALBA

Nilda. We gotta go.

NILDA

(To Alba) I will not be disrespected by this guy, or by anyone.

ALBA

Nilda!

NILDA

What?

ALBA

They're evacuating the building.

NILDA

I'm in the middle of something here.

ALBA

An airplane just hit one of the Twin Towers.

Lights out.

SCENE 3

Projected onto the back wall:

NEW YORK CITY
Four Years Later

Projection fades down.

Lights up inside a gray, nondescript office in a generic government building. This is the Manhattan office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Any sense of interior design was left behind in 1975. A large desk, covered with stacks of papers sits in the middle. Metal filing cabinets line the walls. A Dominican travel calendar, featuring a white sand beach, hangs on a messy bulletin board on the back wall.

Sitting behind the desk, we see ALBA GUERRERO. She's talking to NILDA JACKSON who works for her.

I'm tryin' be serious.

ALBA

What? You were flirting with that senator.

NILDA

Come on.

ALBA

He couldn't stop staring at you. I busted him twice.

NILDA

We're here to talk about your performance.

ALBA

Please.

NILDA

Did you fill out the self-evaluation form?

ALBA

We've worked together for 15 years. You know what I'm like. Just write that.

NILDA

First of all, it's been 12 years. And the reviews were due a week ago, so can we just get it over with? Tom's all up in my business about it.

ALBA

I went on a date last night.

NILDA

Nilda, I'm not playin'.

ALBA

With a white guy.

NILDA

(*Whoa*) Really?

ALBA

Yeah. And you know what? I liked him.

NILDA

I didn't think that was possible.

ALBA

I know. But here's the problem. Nessa hated him. She says he doesn't look like us. Says he doesn't match. Like he's a purse, or shoes or somethin'.

NILDA

ALBA

She's 6. Her opinion doesn't count.

NILDA

She's very strong-willed.

ALBA

Well, her future daddy needs to be more than a fashion accessory.

NILDA

She's acting like a teenager. I need to set her straight now.

ALBA

Alright. Like I was saying. Let's talk about—

NILDA

You're the one who should be getting a performance review.

ALBA

I *am* getting one. From *my* boss.

NILDA

This is a waste of time.

Alba begins to write on a sheet of paper on her desk.

ALBA

(While writing) Does not cooperate and rebels against authority.

NILDA

What are you doing?

ALBA

(While writing) Consistently questions her superior's orders.

NILDA

I don't care what you write. 'Cause Tom don't give a shit about me. He doesn't know I exist.

ALBA

Yeah, maybe. But *I* am your boss, not Tom.

NILDA

You're his pet. He showin' you off in meetings with district. All proud. "See? I care about diversity." Checks that box with a big red marker.

ALBA

Why you gotta be like that?

NILDA

Is it true?

ALBA

(*Beat*) Well... he did show up at the awards last week.

NILDA

Of course he did! He ain't gonna miss a chance to kiss ass in Washington. Fancy gala ceremony and all.

ALBA

It's not *that* fancy.

NILDA

Didn't you get a medal?

ALBA

Yeah.

NILDA

A big, shiny-ass medal for outstanding service. Like a little saucer, with a fat ribbin hangin' off your neck?

ALBA

I don't wear it around the house or anything.

NILDA

Tom got that award 10 years ago and now he's in line for district director. Maybe he sees a little of himself in you.

ALBA

I don't know about that. (*Pause*) But he did say some nice things about me to the Senator.

NILDA

The Senator?

ALBA

Yeah. The one.

NILDA

Mmm. That's a fine man, Senator Williamson.

ALBA

Senator Wilkinson.

NILDA

Whatever. He was hot.

ALBA

He's a grandfather.

NILDA

There you go again.

ALBA
What?

NILDA
Gettin' all stiff.

ALBA
What are you talking about?

NILDA
You know... how you get.

ALBA
No. I don't.

NILDA
All serious. Like a robot. (*Mocking*) "Let's conduct the next step on our performance evaluation process."

ALBA
Coño, Nilda. Can we be professional for one minute?

NILDA
It's the truth. Maybe you need a counselor or somethin'.

ALBA
This is *your* review. Stop analyzing me.

NILDA
I'm just worried.

ALBA
No you're not.

NILDA
For real. It's been a few months now.

ALBA
I'm fine.

NILDA
You know that's some bullshit. Just cause you win some Congressional award doesn't mean it's all good. Shit with your mom, with the job, with—

ALBA
My mom?

NILDA
I'm just sayin', it's been hard and you just keep puttin' on that face: Everything's fine!

ALBA

(Sighs. Looking down to a paper on her desk) Let's go to question number two.

NILDA

Honey, you got all your eggs in the job basket. The whole dozen in this broke-ass place. You know they're talking layoffs, right?

ALBA

If you shut the fuck up and let me talk for a minute, you'll see that you're on track for a raise, not a layoff.

NILDA

I'm just scared, you know? With Nessa and all.

ALBA

Are you even listening?

NILDA

I appreciate you lookin' out, but they've been saying that this is gonna be—

ALBA

They, have been saying that since I came back in '93.

NILDA

It's not the same. They gonna revamp this whole thing. And we're all gonna be on the street with nothin' but a government job on our resume.

ALBA

People don't get fired from government jobs.

NILDA

Easy for you to say. You're gonna be runnin' this whole place in five years.

ALBA

You just called me a robot a minute ago.

NILDA

You gonna get a dope-ass office, up on ten. Replace all of us with Ivy League graduates. Talking about Nathan Glazer and theories of Anglo-Assimilation and shit.

ALBA

What is wrong with you?

NILDA

And even if you get laid off, you can go work for your sugar daddy Senator Williamson.

ALBA

Wilkinson.

NILDA

Uh huh. The good Senator wanted some of that brown Dominican goodness you got goin' on.

ALBA

Cállate, carajo.

NILDA

You can make some nice mixed-race babies with the old man. Mmm-mmm.

ALBA

Jesus Christ. Okay. Question number two...

NILDA

Sweet babies.

ALBA

...what steps have you completed to achieve the goals set in your quarterly review?

NILDA

Caramel mocha babies.

ALBA

How many O, H and F visas have you processed since April?

Lights out.

SCENE 4

Over a dark stage we hear

AM RADIO

WNIX 1080, it's 11 a.m. We have breaking news from Harlem, where the massive manhunt has begun for the gunman who killed 10 people and injured 2 more at the *Boys and Girls Club* on 144th Street in Harlem earlier today. We have confirmation that at least half of those killed were children. The mayor will be holding a press conference in 30 minutes to give a rundown of the NYPD and FBI joint efforts to find the shooter.

SCENE 5

Downstage right, we see our first Immigrant, a Serbian woman, early 30s. The rest of the stage is dark, except for her. She addresses the audience directly.

FEMALE IMMIGRANT

You walk for five minutes. At the end of the hall, there's a huge room with no windows. Hundreds and hundreds of people getting in line. TV screens everywhere with a video full of smiling faces that plays over and over again, "Welcome to the United States of America!"

That's when I start to get that feeling, the nervous stomach. Right here. You start to wonder, if they don't like my answers, are they going to send me back on the same airplane I just came in? It's strange to feel like a criminal when you never committed a crime in your whole life.

The immigration officers, in their little windows, they have that arrogance. What do you want to do in my country? When are you going to leave MY country? And the worst are the ones that weren't even born here. The man from Taiwan. The woman from Jamaica. Looking down at me. Every single time I come back.

A few years ago, I went to the interview to get my green card with my ex-husband. He's also from Belgrade. He had been pre-approved already, but it didn't matter. I got that same feeling. Uncomfortable, you know? This woman's questions. Suspicious. The look in her eye, accusing us.

Bogdan, my husband. He was so furious. He held my hand so hard, and I could feel his anger.

People tell me that the "ugly" American used to be the guy who went around the world and showed his money and was loud and was ignorant. That's not him any more. The ugly American is the immigrant, who forgot where he came from.

Lights out.

SCENE 6

Lights up on Alba's office at INS. Alba is interviewing a Catholic priest from the Philippines.

ALBA

I'm very sorry but I can't approve this. That kind of visa is for people with extraordinary talent. I don't believe that your skills are more unique than an architect. Or a software engineer. Or a music composer.

FATHER AMIANA

I tend to my flock, Miss Guerrero. I look after—

ALBA

(Rudely interrupts) The word is extra, ordinary. What you're describing, any other priest can do.

FATHER AMIANA

The Filipino community in Jersey City needs someone who knows their culture. And someone who speaks Tagalog.

ALBA

Father... *(looks down at a document on the desk)* Melchior Amiana. You are now in the Archdiocese of Pasig, near Manila.

FATHER AMIANA

Yes.

ALBA

OK. Filipinos in this country are in California and in Hawaii. Not New Jersey. Besides, there's probably hundreds... thousands of you already in the country who can do exactly what you're describing.

FATHER AMIANA

There are thousands of basketball players, and not all of them can play in the NBA. There are specialized skills that—

ALBA

(Interrupting) Oh, so you're a pro baller now?

FATHER AMIANA

The archbishop selected me for a very specific reason.

ALBA

I'm sorry. I don't buy it. There's plenty of American citizens who can do this very generic job.

Father Amiana stares at Alba for a beat.

FATHER AMIANA

Tu eres católica, no?

ALBA

What does my religion have to do with you getting a work permit?

FATHER AMIANA

Tu no hablas español?

ALBA

Si, Padre. I do, but I don't appreciate you changing the subject and do... whatever you're trying to do.

FATHER AMIANA

You grew up going to church?

ALBA

Si, soy católica. ¿Y qué?

FATHER AMIANA

That's interesting.

ALBA

Again, that has nothing to do with this interview.

FATHER AMIANA

I'm curious about why you would turn your back on your upbringing.

ALBA

You don't know anything about me. And if you wanna have any chance of getting this work permit, you better—

FATHER AMIANA

I better what? It's clear you're not going to approve my application, so let me tell you something. You deny your upbringing because you are insecure. And you use this power complex you have to hide that insecurity.

ALBA

Really? You gonna go there?

FATHER AMIANA

You sit there and your opinion is law. And that's okay. But deep down, you're afraid and ashamed.

ALBA

Alright. Let's stop this dance right now. We're gonna reject your petition and you can appeal this in 6 months if you want.

FATHER AMIANA

There's nothing wrong with the way you're feeling.

ALBA

Father, I'm warning you.

FATHER AMIANA

Shame hurts. It's a common—

ALBA

OK, you need to go. Now.

FATHER AMIANA

Yo te puedo ayudar.

ALBA

You can help me?

FATHER AMIANA

I believe it.

ALBA

The church that molests kids and does everything to keep it hidden? What a joke.

FATHER AMIANA

(Reluctantly admitting it) I was called here by order of Cardinal Mahoney.

ALBA

Okay...

FATHER AMIANA

To clean up the archdiocese of New Jersey. Like I did in Manila.

ALBA

Oh! Now we get to the truth.

FATHER AMIANA

It's not something we want to publicize.

ALBA

So I give you a visa and you go make everything nice and clean for the cardinal.

FATHER AMIANA

It's not like that. I'm here on very specific orders.

ALBA

No me joda.

FATHER AMIANA

I can do some good, Ms. Guerrero.

ALBA

You're going to fix a massive institution all by yourself.

FATHER AMIANA

I'm going to try.

ALBA

Look, I think that's honorable. But they bring in *one* guy to do this? What's that gonna do?

FATHER AMIANA

I've done it before. You work on one person. And then you go to the next person. And when you look back after a few years, you've made progress.

ALBA

But you're at a seminary. *(Looks downs at the paperwork)* Saint Augustine. That's like priest university. What about all the others, out in the world?

FATHER AMIANA

I'll have daily responsibilities in the archdiocese. And unofficially, I'm the liaison for the Vatican task force.

ALBA

Unofficially. So you're a mole.

FATHER AMIANA

Moles live under the ground and dig tunnels.

ALBA

And this task force... what's it for?

FATHER AMIANA

As you said, our institution is not perfect. But people can change. And so can groups of people.

ALBA

Why are you here?

FATHER AMIANA

To protect children.

Alba stares at the priest. She takes a deep breath and starts to type on her computer. Without looking up, she starts to talk. Her printer comes to life.

ALBA

Two years. Renewable for one more. Go to adjudication on the second floor. Take a number, they'll get your picture and take your prints.

Hands him a stack of papers from the printer.

FATHER AMIANA

Thank you.

ALBA

Don't make me regret it.

FATHER AMIANA

Miss Guerrero, if you ever want to talk...

ALBA

Second floor. You'll have to come back for my signature before you leave. Talk to Nilda Jackson on your way out.

FATHER AMIANA

My door is open, if you need.

Father Amiana takes his coat and quietly walks out.

Lights fade out.

SCENE 7

Over a dark stage.

AM RADIO

WNIX 1080 with breaking news. We have new information about the identity of the suspected gunman who killed a confirmed 12 people at the Boys and Girls club in Harlem.

Lights come up in the office. Alba sits in her chair, listening to a small AM radio that rests on her shelf. She goes over and turns it up.

The FBI will hold a press conference at 12pm eastern. Exclusive WNIX sources tell us that the suspect is Bogdan Markovic, an immigrant from Eastern Europe and a resident of Brooklyn. We have unconfirmed reports that identify him as a university professor, living in Greenpoint.

Alba sits back down at her desk, looks at her computer and starts typing a few things. A realization hits her. A moment later, she urgently stands up and walks over to a filing cabinet. She opens a drawer, fingers through it and pulls out a file.

Senator Phillip North from South Carolina has been the first to issue a statement condemning current laws on background checks and immigration. Quote "this is a matter of national security. These people are terrorizing our country and we're just letting them in." Senator North calls for tighter controls, saying quote "This is just another example of incompetence at the federal level." As more information comes in, WNIX will keep you updated.

Alba puts the file on the desk, opens it and skims through it. She stares at it for a while and then sits down. Stares into space.

In national news, the Gulf Coast is bracing itself for a new hurricane after Dennis, which caused damage to the Florida Panhandle earlier this year. This hurricane has been downgraded to a category 3, to the relief of the local residents. The National Weather Service is still tracking it closely and has named the storm, *Katrina*.

Stage goes dark.

SCENE 8

At INS, Nilda walks with Fr. Amiana into Alba's office. Alba is not there at the moment, so they stand, waiting for her.

NILDA

I'm sorry about the delay. I know you've been here all day. Alba's gonna sign off on your papers and then you're all set. You'll get the card in the mail.

FATHER AMIANA

Thank you for your kindness.

NILDA

Oh no, father. It's our pleasure to help you. She'll be in, in just a minute to take care of you.

FATHER AMIANA

No problem. Ms. Guerrero was very... thorough, in her questioning.

NILDA

Yeah, she can get a little intense sometimes.

FATHER AMIANA

The Spanish inquisition was intense.

NILDA

Oh no, was she tough on you? I'm so sorry. We gotta be strict, you know, with everything going on in the world. Alba's probably the best agent on the east coast, so our boss puts her on the expedited interviews.

FATHER AMIANA

If I didn't know better, I would be quite insulted.

NILDA

No, please. She doesn't know any other way. She learned by interrogating Iraqi soliders in Kuwait. So she had to be real tough you know?

FATHER AMIANA

Baptism by fire.

NILDA

Yeah, somethin' like that. Young woman in a Muslim country, talking to enemy combatants.

FATHER AMIANA

I'm not an enemy.

NILDA

I know. And I'm sorry. Look, she gets to the truth, every time. We need more people like her.

FATHER AMIANA

She would make a good priest in confession.

NILDA

(Laughs) Nah... Nobody'd go to her. She'd have people admitting their darkest sins within a minute. Nasty stuff from 30 years ago.

FATHER AMIANA

Is she married?

NILDA

No! Can you imagine? Her husband left her when they were young. That's when she joined the army.

FATHER AMIANA

No kids, either?

NILDA

Aren't you the curious one?

FATHER AMIANA

It comes with the job.

NILDA

(Laughs) Nah, no kids. I think that's why her husband took off. You know, macho Dominican guy. Wanted her to give him some boys. And she just... couldn't.

Alba enters.

ALBA

Father. Please sit.

NILDA

We were just talking about you.

ALBA

Thanks Nilda. I got it from here.

NILDA

This gentleman is a man of the cloth. *(Smiles at Father Amiana)* We're good, God-fearing people here, Father.

ALBA

(To Nilda) Are you done?

NILDA

Don't be testy with a servant of the Lord.

FATHER AMIANA

(Sitting.) Please, it's okay.

ALBA

Don't you have some folders to file or something?

Nilda glares at Alba, shakes her head and exits. Alba types some things on the computer and makes Father Amiana wait for a moment.

FATHER AMIANA

Nilda told me you were in the first Iraqi war.

Alba just keeps typing on the computer. There's an uncomfortable silence.

ALBA

I'm sure she told you everything about my life, my mom's illness, my friend Min from the deli, my high school boyfriend, Reggie...

FATHER AMIANA

She's very sweet.

ALBA

Let me see your forms please.

FATHER AMIANA

I think they are all here.

Father passes over the forms, which Alba begins to scan.

ALBA

Did you get your medical exam?

FATHER AMIANA

Yes. There is an addendum because of a cancer screening last year. That's attached to the back.

Alba opens a folder and reviews it.

ALBA

This is fine.

FATHER AMIANA

I know something's weighing on your conscience.

ALBA

Look Father, I'm sorry I was rude with you earlier, but I'm real busy and you're not my priest. So let's just stick to business, a'ight?

FATHER AMIANA

Yes, of course. I'm sorry. It's that...

Father Amiana gazes at her.

ALBA

What?

FATHER AMIANA

You're not the only one who's perceptive and can read people.

ALBA

And?

FATHER AMIANA

And I just want to help. I know you don't believe I should stay in the country. But you're still approving my visa. And I feel I can reciprocate.

ALBA

I don't need help.

FATHER AMIANA

Do you have a support system? Do you have someone to go to?

ALBA

(Exasperated) Please, I've had a rough day, okay? That's it.

FATHER AMIANA

Does your family listen to you?

Alba types on her computer and ignores his question.

FATHER AMIANA

My offer still stands. I'm not that far across the river. Or I can come into the city.

ALBA

(Sighs) OK, fine. Look, I did something. Or... I think I did something. And I'm stressed out about it.

FATHER AMIANA

What is it you think you did?

ALBA

I... I may have made a huge mistake.

FATHER AMIANA

Okay.

ALBA

It's hard to explain. Something that I should have noticed. But I didn't. And I don't know. I think I'm in trouble.

FATHER AMIANA

Just a work thing?

Alba looks at this persistent man. He's not going to stop.

ALBA

Have you ever had someone in confession, who's done something just really bad? Like a rapist, or a murderer or something? And now you're obligated to forgive that person, but you don't really want to?

FATHER AMIANA

Forgiveness is between God and the sinner.

ALBA

Yeah, but *you're* the person who's saying the words and their sins are wiped away. Right? But these are bad people and you know it.

FATHER AMIANA

If they are truly contrite. In their heart—

ALBA

Come on. That's not how you really feel.

FATHER AMIANA

I don't understand.

ALBA

What I'm asking... how do you really know if something you've done is truly wrong? What's the moral test? It's not a priest judging you and telling you to go say fifty Hail Marys.

FATHER AMIANA

What is it you've done, Miss Guerrero?

ALBA

(Sits for a moment, then snaps out of it) Nothing. I'm sorry, this is stupid.

FATHER AMIANA

Alba?

She hands over the paperwork to Father Amiana.

ALBA

Here's the three signatures you need. And the dates.

FATHER AMIANA

Alba. The next time you have a quiet moment, take a deep breath.

ALBA

Sign here please.

FATHER AMIANA

Clear your mind and think about this thing you've done. Quickly. Don't use any logic. In that split second, before your mind takes over, you'll know. Right or wrong. It's just hard to see sometimes. *(Beat)* But you'll know.

Alba stares at him.

FATHER AMIANA

You can be forgiven. You know that, don't you?

ALBA

I'm not sure.

Lights out.

SCENE 9

The immigrant is a Black British man in his mid 30s.

MALE IMMIGRANT

Half a day later, my number gets called and this woman at "Window 6" tells me she couldn't help me. But I could call a 1-800 number, *(with a mocking American accent)* the Immigration hotline. She said you dial any time to get some "help" with the process.

Now take your worst nightmare story from the cable company. Multiply it by 10 and add a dash of humiliation. Don't get me wrong, the UK is a country filled with bureaucracy. But not like this, mate. Not at all. The INS customer service line... once you finally get some bloke on the phone with you, all he does is add to the confusion. First off, he doesn't understand my accent. You probably don't either. So I have to repeat everything three times. By the fourth time, I say fuck it and move on. Hope he gets the context of what I'm saying. And then, for every answer I get, I have a hundred more questions. *(laughs)* I work for a Swiss bank in international finance. I have a Masters degree from the London School of Economics and I still can't make sense of the bloody INS paperwork.

So I pay a lawyer 400 quid an hour and he magically makes it all go away. Mate, I picked the wrong fucking career. Until this immigration mess gets sorted out, my lawyer is buying his new summer house in the Hamptons. And some poor Central American is spending his summer on hold, on the fucking immigration phone line.

SCENE 10

Alba is at her desk, on the phone. There's a little liquor flask sitting on her desk. Probably rum. While she speaks, she puts it away on her top drawer.

ALBA

I can wait... yes m'am. Just so you know I've been on hold for 25 minutes...
(Pause) No. Like I told the first person, I'm an employee at INS in New York City. I'd like to speak with Director Johnson... Yes, I have a specific incident I'd like to talk about... I've never reported anything to the FBI.... I'm not calling as a government employee, I'm calling as a civilian... M'am, can I just talk to Director Johnson please? I know him personally.... I cannot tell you why. I'd like to report something personal and confidential...

Nilda comes into the office.

ALBA

Never mind, I need to go.

Alba hangs up.

NILDA

You alright?

ALBA

Yeah.

NILDA

Why you actin' like a first year? What's wrong witch'you?

ALBA

I don't—

NILDA

Why you gotta be such a bitch to the priest? Guy was nice. That's the type of person we *need* in Jersey.

ALBA

Nilda.

NILDA

You just layin' into him.

ALBA

I'm in trouble.

NILDA

Yeah, you are. You goin' to hell. Talking shit like that to a priest.

ALBA
No, for real. I made a big mistake.

NILDA
What're you talking about?

ALBA
A case subject.

NILDA
What.

ALBA
A guy. A man, I adjudicated back in the day. He got picked in the green card lottery and came in for the interview. And... I don't know, it's one of those gray area cases.

NILDA
So?

ALBA
He slipped by.

NILDA
He's a criminal or something?

ALBA
Yeah, something.

NILDA
You processed a case and he turned out to be a bad apple. Who cares? That shit happens all the time.

ALBA
Not like this. This is real bad.

NILDA
I let in all sorts of people that seemed alright. And then they go and become drug dealers, pimps, wife beaters...

ALBA
I don't wanna drag you into this.

NILDA
Who came over to your house when you had that fight with Felix?

ALBA
(Sighs) This case. It looked perfect on paper. Then I do the interview; but I know something's off. I just couldn't pin it.

NILDA
Baby, it's a numbers game. It's gonna happen eventually. Even to you.

ALBA
This is different.

NILDA
When was this?

ALBA
97.

NILDA
You trippin' about a case from 8 years ago?

ALBA
Nilda—

NILDA
You had thousands of cases since then. You sure this is the same guy?

ALBA
Yeah. I'm sure.

NILDA
Who cares? You don't know what someone's gonna do after you let 'em in. You're not a fortune teller.

ALBA
No.

NILDA
Only God knows for sure, and he sure as hell ain't gonna come down to the Federal Building.

ALBA
(Laughs) That's what we do, right? We play God. We sit here on the 8th floor and decide people's lives. On our throne, just judgin'. "You, come in. You, back to the factory in Indonesia."

NILDA
Well, kinda. But that's not what I meant—

ALBA
Difference is God doesn't make mistakes. He judges and he's right. For us, it's just an educated guess, nothing more. A guess, based on a bunch of paperwork and ten minute conversation.

NILDA
Aww, honey, stop it.

ALBA

I can't. I can't stop thinking about this.

The women sit in silence for a while, pondering.

NILDA

Have you told anybody about this?

ALBA

I tried to get a hold of Johnson.

NILDA

Fred Johnson? FBI?

ALBA

I can't just show up in Tom's office and blurt this out. I gotta protect myself.

NILDA

Al, what is this?

ALBA

Everybody's gonna ask how I could let a killer like this into this country. It's gonna be a mob.

NILDA

Killer? What are you talking about?

ALBA

Bogdan Markovic.

NILDA

Bog... what?

Alba remains quiet.

NILDA

Wait, is this the guy from the news this week?

Alba nods and looks away.

NILDA

The guy who shot up the Boys Club?

ALBA

Bogdan Markovic.

NILDA

Oh Jesus.

ALBA

He murdered twelve people. Kids. They're going to say he was dangerous and that I should've known and that I still let him in.

Nilda, for once, has nothing to say.

ALBA

When I found out this morning, I thought about the guys I used to serve with. Patriotic guys, you know? Good guys. But over there we all learned real quick that human life isn't worth a damn.

NILDA

Aw, you can't do this—

ALBA

And this morning it became so clear to me. In this office, we kill people's hope. And that's just as bad as killing a person.

NILDA

We're just applying the law.

ALBA

Bullshit. We derail someone's life and then we go to the break room to get a cup of coffee. Their *life*, Nilda. Where they get up in the morning, where they work, their families. And then we snap our fingers and completely change the direction of their whole existence. So yeah, if someone passes first review, I'd rather not slam the door in their face.

NILDA

Baby, don't—

ALBA

Markovic was a math graduate student with a lovely young wife. He survived the civil war in Yugoslavia and wanted to be far away from there. Passed all the background checks. Even Interpol.

NILDA

Clean.

ALBA

All clean. The guy had a tragic family story with his parents, but that's not against any law that I know. I didn't have a reason to keep him out.

NILDA

Jesus.

ALBA

Then two years later, we do the confirmation process and everything checks out, again. And now none of that matters. People are gonna say I let in a mass murderer...

NILDA

Nobody's gonna say nothin', Alba.

ALBA

I'm a gatekeeper, Nilda. I'm not a moral authority. That's not my job.

NILDA

I know, baby, I know.

ALBA

All it takes is some newspaper to write that these killings are my fault. Once that happens people treat it like a fact. And then some politician jumps on it. And then...

NILDA

Alba.

ALBA

You know what, maybe they're right. Maybe it is my fault. Just as much as it's his fault. Or his father's fault for beating his mom. Or his wife for leaving him.

NILDA

Baby, please. You barely remember this guy.

ALBA

See, that's the problem. I remember him perfectly. I thought about it for a whole year after we processed it. He told me everything about his life and was weird as hell and he measured every word. And his wife was just quiet, sittin' there. But you know, some people are just like that. A little strange.

Alba starts to crack emotionally.

ALBA

I even saw him at the citizenship ceremony.

NILDA

At the Javits Center?

ALBA

I'm pretty sure he recognized me.

NILDA

Honey, you can't tell anyone about this. This guy, Markovic, the cops are gonna get him sooner or later. But you go talking now and this office is gonna be a nice little scapegoat.

ALBA

What if I know something that can help the police?

NILDA

You said you had a standard profile and *one* interview, from almost a decade ago.

ALBA

Still...

NILDA

You keep your mouth shut on this. You are not gonna throw away your career. Or mine. Or the whole damn team here.

The phone rings. They let it ring a couple times and stare at each other. Alba composes herself and answers.

ALBA

Alba Guerrero.... Yes sir.... Yes, yes I do... 97. I was the point person on it. Sure. Let me grab the files... No, I'm okay, Tom. I'll be right up.

Alba hangs up. Looks up at her friend. Lights out.

SCENE 11

The immigrant is a Mexican man, mid 40s.

MALE IMMIGRANT

You can find me in the back of the restaurant. You see me when you go to the bathroom and the kitchen door is open. That's me.

Two hundred people come in for dinner every night. They don't know that I exist. I wash their dishes. I clean floors. Refill the ketchup and the sugar packets. At the end of the shift, I leave the restaurant and get to my house at midnight. I live with four other guys from Oaxaca just like me. In a one bedroom apartment.

At 5 in the morning I head over to the flower warehouse in Greenpoint. I pack the fresh roses from California into ice boxes. We load the truck and do all the runs to the flower shops in Long Island. And then in the afternoon I take care of an old Dominican lady. I cook for her, give her medicine and she helps me with English. And at night, back to the restaurant. Six days a week, and seven, if I have to.

Am I doing something wrong? Tell me. You're going to do this? Or you? Because if you will, you come over to the restaurant. It's Veracruz Mexican Cafe on Bedford Avenue and North 7th. Come on. I want to see you do this every day.

SCENE 12

Alba's apartment. Quaint, third floor walkup in Queens. Alba walks into her mother's room, where TERESA GUERRERO is lying in bed, under the covers. She was reading a book, that's still open on her chest, from the time she fell asleep. Her reading glasses are still on.

Mamá?

ALBA

Teresa doesn't budge. Alba sweetly takes the glasses off and puts them on the nightstand along with the book. She covers up her mom and tidies up some things on the small table. There is a small stack of envelopes. She opens some of them and begins to look them over. Her mom stirs.

I'm awake.

TERESA

Mamá, go back to sleep.

ALBA

I was just resting.

TERESA

Please. A dormir.

ALBA

Teresa gives her a smile.

You're the one who looks tired. Come here. Dale un abrazo a tu madre.

TERESA

Alba gives her mom a hug.

What time is Daniel coming tomorrow?

ALBA

In the afternoon. Today he gave me my medicine and left lunch in the fridge for tomorrow. He brought me leftovers from the restaurant. So nice.

TERESA

I have to talk to him.

ALBA

TERESA

Did you know he's starting to read to me?

ALBA

Yeah?

TERESA

People Magazine.

Teresa points at the nightstand and Alba picks up the magazine.

ALBA

Matthew McConaughey. Sexiest man alive. OK...

TERESA

It's educational. I'm teaching him some English.

ALBA

Mamá... We... we might have to think about how much we're using Daniel. Just for a little while.

Teresa sits up straight.

TERESA

You lost your job.

ALBA

No. I mean... maybe.

TERESA

You quit.

ALBA

No. I didn't.

TERESA

They don't deserve you.

Alba stares at her quasi-psychic mom with a puzzled look.

TERESA

I told you. From the start. You're too good for them.

ALBA

Well, I messed somethin' up.

TERESA

Those people don't know what they have with you.

ALBA

Mamá, ya... enough.

TERESA

This is when you start your political career. This is the moment, right now.

ALBA

God, no. It is the opposite of that moment.

TERESA

My daughter's gonna be a Senator.

ALBA

Mamá, I think I'm going to get fired.

TERESA

No. You just realized you have a better future.

ALBA

Can we not do this? (*Beat*)

TERESA

Moments like this, mija. This is when lives turn around.

ALBA

Whatever... And how do you know about this?

TERESA

(*Shaking her head*) No te lo digo.

ALBA

Seriously.

TERESA

Vas a creer que estoy loca.

ALBA

Ma, come on.

TERESA

Nuh-uh. You'll make fun of me.

Alba stares at her.

TERESA

I had a dream.

ALBA

A dream?

TERESA

Your father told me you left the office. You put all your stuff in a box and left with dignity, like a good Dominicana. Head high.

ALBA

That's pretty specific for a guy who's been dead for 10 years.

TERESA

Did it happen?

ALBA

No. I mean...

TERESA

Did you tell them all to fuck off?

ALBA

No.

TERESA

He looks out for you, your father. He speaks to me in these dreams.

ALBA

Virgen santa. And what do you say?

TERESA

I say he's the smartest man I ever knew.

ALBA

He was. (*Sad*) I messed up, Mamá. Feo.

TERESA

Everyone messes up.

ALBA

It's gonna take a while to get out of this one.

TERESA

Baby...

ALBA

We won't have insurance coverage for you. Or for me.

TERESA

I'm perfectly fine.

Alba starts to get a little teary eyed. Teresa does too.

TERESA

Are you crying?

ALBA
Yes. Why are you crying?

TERESA
Because you're crying.

*They look at each other for a second and start to laugh.
Alba hugs her mom again and gives her a kiss.*

TERESA
We don't need Daniel. I can find a job.

ALBA
Mamá—

TERESA
Carmen Mejia is an idiot and she makes 10 dollars an hour working at the center.

ALBA
You can't even walk to the end of the block. I'll talk to Daniel and see if we can work out a new schedule. Until I find something new.

TERESA
Yo no soy una anciana.

ALBA
I've already sent emails to all my contacts. I'm gonna have some interviews lined up pretty soon.

TERESA
There's no shame in asking for help, mija. You don't want the credit people to start calling us. Or the Eternal Service.

ALBA
The what?

TERESA
The Eternal. Like Eterno.

ALBA
Oh... Internal.

TERESA
Like God, eterno.

ALBA
No mami, Interno. Internal Revenue Service.

TERESA
Whatever.

ALBA

And you don't need to worry about that. Just tell Daniel to call me when he gets here in the afternoon.

TERESA

Well, your father and I are going to discuss this tonight. *(Tired and starting to fade)* I'll get back to you tomorrow with his advice.

ALBA

OK. You get some rest now. And tell him I say hello.

Alba covers Teresa as she quickly nods off. Alba kisses her on the forehead and sits on the edge of the bed, feeling the noose tighten. She stands by the nightstand and picks up the stack of envelopes; starts to leaf through them. It's a lot.

TERESA

(In her sleep) It was you.

ALBA

Mamá?

TERESA

(Still sleeping) He blames you.

ALBA

Mamá... who? Dad?

Alba looks at her mom, who breathes deeply and peacefully, eyes closed.

ALBA

Who?

Lights fade out.

SCENE 13

The immigrant is a Serbian man, in his late 40s. This is the same man from the first scene, Bogdan Markovic. He stands there while the AM Radio report plays.

AM RADIO

Evidence of planning and premeditation is starting to accumulate against the Harlem shooter, Bogdan Markovic, whose motives are still not clear. In Washington, meanwhile, a fierce debate has started on the subject of immigration scrutiny.

Proponents point to a new poll by the Pew Center, showing that 68% of people favor tougher vetting for new immigrants. WNIX 1080 news, weather and traffic.

Lights up on:

MARKOVIC

Did you know that there is something called, "the green card lottery?" Oh yes, a lottery. Just like the money one, but the winner gets to live in this country. It's absolutely real. Once a year, you apply, they put numbers in a hat and pull a few out. And there I was. Number A32928317, selected to come interview for the sacred residence permit.

I was living in Brooklyn, tutoring math students from LIU. I kept hearing stories about how difficult it was to stay here legally. People having to go back to their home countries once their visas ran out. For me, no. I took the lottery letter, my wife and I went into the office downtown. On Broadway, 26 Federal Plaza. We had a long interview with a lady. That part was... aggravating. Personal questions, things that were none of their business and that have nothing to do with my life here. Insulting.

But then, in a few months it came in the mail. The almighty green card with my smiling face on it. A few years later, I even got my citizenship with 400 other people at the convention center. The lucky ones.

As a maths person, I can tell you that probabilities are the expression of a potential outcome. The kind of thing you learn in statistics class. Chance. Nothing is truly certain. We can, however, say whether something is likely or unlikely to occur. For example, what was the chance that someone like me would just be accepted right into this country? Very low. The lottery, remember? What was the probability that my father would eventually kill my mother after thirty years of abuse? High. It was only a matter of time. Neither of these were certain, but they happened.

The timing of a death, anybody's death, is just a natural continuation of the uncertainty that you see in complex mathematical problems. And I love complexity. But I'm more fascinated with things that are closer to certainty. What is the probability that if I put a loaded gun to your temple and pull the trigger you'd die? (*Beat*) There is some degree of certitude in life. The sun will rise tomorrow. That's almost certain. We will all die, that is fact. The way we die, that, is left up to chance.

Lights out.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

Lights up on the main office at Saint Augustine Seminary. Projected on the back wall:

NEW JERSEY
2008

Three Years Later

Projection fades down.

A simple building, with spartan furnishings and a few religious items that give it a sense of piousness. Alba is straightening up and dusting with an aerosol can and a rag. The office looks very tidy. Not one thing out of place.

FATHER AMIANA

The grades are all in the log?

ALBA

Si, Padre. All done. It's in the system, too.

FATHER AMIANA

And the calendar?

ALBA

It's in there.

FATHER AMIANA

The Monsignor's travel schedule?

ALBA

What do you think?

FATHER AMIANA

Stupid question?

ALBA

You said it.

FATHER AMIANA

Right. If you're done, I've been meaning to talk to you about—

ALBA

I also called to confirm your doctors appointment. You're gonna get the results from your physical today or tomorrow. They asked for some insurance information, but I didn't have it and they were being all weird about it...

FATHER AMIANA

And?

ALBA

And I kinda yelled at the lady and she hung up on me...

FATHER AMIANA

You yelled at her?

ALBA

Kinda. She was being a bitch.

FATHER AMIANA

Alba!

ALBA

So you have to call them back.

FATHER AMIANA

I actually already talked to Dr. Lee.

ALBA

(Surprised) You did? Oh good. She didn't mention that. But OK, that's good because the painters are gonna be here between 2 and 6.

FATHER AMIANA

Oh... that quick?

ALBA

Yeah, it was either this afternoon or we had to wait another week.

FATHER AMIANA

No that's fine. It's better.

ALBA

Why do we need painters? I can paint. Save a few bucks.

FATHER AMIANA

Just have them get started on Brother Narciso's room, please.

ALBA

His room? Why?

He's... FATHER AMIANA

ALBA
Is he sick? He wasn't in class today.

He's leaving. FATHER AMIANA

Alba stops cleaning.

Leaving leaving? ALBA

Yes. FATHER AMIANA

I thought he loved it here. ALBA

He's going back to the Philippines. FATHER AMIANA

I talked to him yesterday. He was planning a road trip to Montreal with Ignacio. ALBA

Well, he's not. FATHER AMIANA

He's a third year. He's gonna quit now? That's ridiculous. ALBA

It is. FATHER AMIANA

Did you talk to him? ALBA

He cleared out his room, Alba. He's gone. FATHER AMIANA

I saw him in the kitchen this morning— ALBA

He's not the first one to leave. Or the last. FATHER AMIANA

Coño, but just like that? ALBA

FATHER AMIANA

It happens.

ALBA

Well, yeah. I know people leave. But you don't get to your senior year and then just take off.

FATHER AMIANA

You're being naive, Miss Guerrero.

ALBA

Naive...

Alba resumes cleaning.

ALBA

Narciso. Damn. You know, some of the other guys aren't really cut out for this. But Narciso, he's a natural.

FATHER AMIANA

It's a big loss for us.

ALBA

I guess... I'm just surprised.

FATHER AMIANA

I'm not. We just pray for him and move on.

Alba faces Father Amiana again and stops.

ALBA

That's it? This kid was actually good.

FATHER AMIANA

You were on the fast-track at INS. That didn't work out for you.

ALBA

Totally different.

FATHER AMIANA

Sometimes life just changes course on you.

ALBA

Father, three years at this seminary changed my mind on a lot of stuff. But the kind of guys that go into the priesthood, you know... not exactly the cream of the crop, right? No disrespect, but Narciso is one of the few who actually has good people skills. I mean, the other guys are nice, don't get me wrong, but do you really want to take spiritual advice from them?

FATHER AMIANA

I know, Alba.

ALBA

Damn, I'm sorry. I'm out of line.

FATHER AMIANA

No, no. You're right.

ALBA

Shouldn't you be recruiting better people? Doesn't the church have some sort of wanted ads or something?

Amiana smiles. Maybe a small laugh.

ALBA

Isn't there some Careers.com for priests? Or some recruiting company?

FATHER AMIANA

Of course. It's an easy sell: come to a disgraced institution for a life of poverty and no sex!

ALBA

Father!

FATHER AMIANA

No masturbation either. If you do, 50 lashes, every time.

ALBA

Come on, you know what I mean.

FATHER AMIANA

I don't know that the Church is going to survive the next 20, 30 years.

ALBA

Really?

FATHER AMIANA

Yes, really. But I know that I'm here now. And that things are getting better. Little by little.

Amiana smiles again.

ALBA

It's God's work, right?

FATHER AMIANA

It still is. Look, seminarians like Narciso are rare. And to have them dedicate the rest of their life to the Church, is even more rare.

ALBA

Maybe he's just getting cold feet. Talk him out of it.

FATHER AMIANA

Nah. Narciso suffocated. He left because he finally accepted what he knew all along. He's been thinking about leaving since his first year. I hear stories every week of people who get into marriages that they know are wrong for them. But by the time they realize it, there's too much momentum. It's hard to jump off a moving train. So if Narciso believes there's some other path for him, it's just better to let him go.

ALBA

It's just everything seemed so normal. I mean, even yesterday. Even this morning.

FATHER AMIANA

Humans behave in ways that don't make a lot of sense. That's why I have a job.

ALBA

It's just sad.

FATHER AMIANA

Were you sad when you ended your job? You just picked up and left.

ALBA

Yeah. Sort of.

FATHER AMIANA

You left in a hurry.

ALBA

It was different though. I found out about Markovic and everything changed. I had to get out to make it right.

FATHER AMIANA

And you never forgave yourself, Ms. Guerrero.

ALBA

Why do you always call me Ms. Guerrero any time you gonna lecture me?

FATHER AMIANA

Is it condescending?

ALBA

Very.

AMIANA

Good. Because you need to grow up.

ALBA

Seriously, no more sermons. We've talked about this a million times.

FATHER AMIANA

And you still don't get it. Until you forgive yourself, we can perform every Catholic sacrament in the book, but you will not be at peace. And if you're not at peace, you don't have the capacity to be healed.

ALBA

And you're implying that I still want to hurt myself.

FATHER AMIANA

Time doesn't magically fix this.

ALBA

I am not suicidal, Father. I am way past all that stuff.

FATHER AMIANA

I'm not a psychiatrist. But you need—

ALBA

You told me you could help. I came to you. You helped. It's very simple. Deal with it.

FATHER AMIANA

Alba, this is deeper than you think.

ALBA

Jesus...

FATHER AMIANA

I know a really smart counselor in Hoboken. He can help you in many ways that I can't. And he owes me a big favor so he could probably start pro bono—

ALBA

A counselor?

FATHER AMIANA

He's a friend. I told him—

ALBA

Why are you talking to other people about me? What the hell's wrong with you?

FATHER AMIANA

You need this.

ALBA

I told you things in confession.

FATHER AMIANA

I wouldn't break the seal of confession. But if it's going to prevent you from—

You cannot do that.

ALBA

I would, to save your life.

FATHER AMIANA

Save my life? You serious?

ALBA

It's simple forgiveness, Alba. But the healing process is NOT simple. You need help.

FATHER AMIANA

Unbelievable.

ALBA

You made a mistake with one of your cases. One. But now you need to move on. And then you need to move on from here. From all this.

FATHER AMIANA

It was more than just a case and you know it. Innocent people died. Kids.

ALBA

Father Amiana laughs.

Carajo, what's your problem?

ALBA

I hear this shit all day long. People blaming themselves for this and that. Cheating on their wife. Or stealing from their business. You're different. You're taking something for which you had no control and you put the entire blame on your shoulders. And now for three years you're here on some mission of atonement which, honestly, I can't stand any longer.

FATHER AMIANA

Are you firing me?

ALBA

No. But I should. For being a fucking idiot. You are so much more than this thing you're doing here. This job. Keeping logs, and cleaning and worrying about an old priest.

FATHER AMIANA

I've accepted my place.

ALBA

That's absurd.

FATHER AMIANA

ALBA

This is the first place in a long time where I feel I have a purpose. I happen to like helping people.

FATHER AMIANA

There's a million ways to do that. It's what you did for me 3 years ago when we met. I wouldn't be here, if it wasn't for you.

ALBA

All I did is push paper around and pretend that I had some power. You told me that yourself.

FATHER AMIANA

You don't believe that.

ALBA

I do believe it, and I'm sick of being told that I haven't forgiven myself, or that I'm meant for something better or some other bullshit. Here's some wisdom Father: sometimes life sends you a really strong message. Narciso heard it, and he was too much of a fucking coward to go through with it. I heard mine loud and clear and I'm sticking to it. If you don't want me around I'll leave right now. But if we're done with this conversation, I have shit to do.

FATHER AMIANA

My God, you're stubborn.

Alba glares at him. And then, before saying anything, she walks out.

Lights fade out.

SCENE 2

Lights up on the immigrant, a Jordanian woman in her mid 20s. She is wearing a hijab.

FEMALE IMMIGRANT

(In a slight Texas accent)

I've been here for a few years now, but I grew up in San Antonio, Texas. Short girl. Quiet. Not really shy, but a little scared to reach out. I reinvented myself as soon as I set foot in Manhattan.

Growing up, I was the weird kid in school who wore this on her head. Not easy. My last summer there, I was a senior.

This one day in August it started to rain, full blast. Like God turned on the shower and left the room. After three days of this, the river overflowed and I started to think, okay, we might really be in trouble here. This dark, muddy water was starting to pool on the street and on our lawn.

And God forgot to come back 'cause it kept going... for five more days. Inside the house, the water that's covering the rugs, all of a sudden it's up to our knees. And just like that, I look out the window and our street was a river. Cars washing away, people getting pulled by the current.

And in all this craziness, water rising by the minute, my grandmother and my mother, simply refused to leave. My mom... my intelligent, cultured, strong, progressive mom, didn't wanna budge. I don't know if it was some stubborn old country thing, where you have to stay in your home no matter what. Or if she's just brainwashed to obey her own mother.

My grandma's in the corner, in a trance, chanting a prayer in Arabic. I do remember it was the first time I got in a huge fight with my mom. Yellin', crying.

So the power is out. Everything smells awful. There's a bunch of books floating in the living room. You keep hearing the news helicopters flying overhead. And right at that moment, there's a loud knock at the front door. We all just stop. (*beat*)

Now the door was covered with all these heavy sandbags to try to stop the flooding. And they get pushed aside as the door opens. Bright light makes us all squint, and all we see is these two huge silhouettes. Cody and Travis. Two brothers who lived across the street. The biggest high school kids I've ever seen. Together, they musta weighed 600 pounds. And really quiet guys, maybe a little weird. All I knew is they were really into hunting. They'd practice shooting cans in their backyard and these shots would echo all through the neighborhood.

So they're standing there, unannounced, with this serious look on their face. Water up to their stomach. And they to wade across the living room, leaving a wake behind their huge bodies. Travis gets close to my grandma, who had stopped praying, or whatever she was doing. My mom and I look at each other, kinda nervous. This is all some crazy dream. And he just says this one word... "Ma'am." He bends over and picks up grandma up in his arms, like a baby. She's looking at him. What is happening? This giant kid doesn't say a word. He just starts walking, through the water, towards the door. My mom opens her mouth, but nothing comes out. And Cody, giant twin number 2, comes up to her and starts to carry *her* out.

I didn't know what to do. This is some kind of redneck miracle. So I followed them. All the way to their house, where they set us up with towels and blankets and food and emergency supplies. They gave us shelter for two days. Still weird as hell, but very respectful. And to my grandma, they were... sweet.

Our house was ruined, of course. My family moved to Houston and the next year I followed my brother Samir up to New York.

It wasn't enough to change cities for me. I had to throw everything out and start over far away. So I came to the city and my brother helped me get a job at the Federal Building, downtown. I'm in accounts receivable on the Immigration floor.

In the afternoons, Samir and I go to a conference room for prayers. There's tons of space open, after the layoffs last year. When I'm done and we're still on the floor; maybe Samir is still finishing his last Rakat; I always take a couple of seconds, in silence, and I think about everything we've been through since that day. Everything. But I never forget to thank Allah, for those giant teenage twins. For Cody and Travis Johnson, from Bexar County, Texas.

Lights out

SCENE 3

Lights up on the office at the seminary.

NILDA

Every single day. He'd close his office door. And we would hear him crying, hard. Sobbing.

ALBA

No.

NILDA

Yeah. Fearsome Tom, who ran the place like a drill sergeant. He'd come out of the office, eyes all red. Snot over all on his manicured mustache and beard.

ALBA

No!

NILDA

His little retro glasses were all fogged up.

ALBA

(Laughing) I can't...

NILDA

And then you thought it couldn't get worse, the district head came down to the floor and just lit him up. Right in front of everyone. He's standing there, taking it, and I swear to Jesus... he peed his pants. Our group director, like a little kid, urine running down his leg. So nasty.

ALBA

(*Still laughing*) Virgen María. I don't understand, this guy was bulletproof.

NILDA

He was, until they started making the whole thing about politics and they called him out on every single issue. I've never seen anyone fall so fast. Even the Muslim girl from accounting was talking shit about him.

ALBA

Carajo. Who gave him the ax?

NILDA

No one. They just tortured him. And the public hearing was the final straw. Dude had a nervous problem to begin with and in the end, they were just fuckin' with him. Like a rag doll.

ALBA

Wow.

NILDA

Look, I didn't like the guy, but that shit was sad.

ALBA

They broke him down over two years?

NILDA

Nah, they broke him down right after you left. And then they strung him along. Promised him a promotion, while choppin' off his legs.

ALBA

Damn. So who's left as director?

NILDA

Do you know about Newbury?

ALBA

He's there now?

NILDA

He came up from Washington and that's how I got to be assistant director.

ALBA

Wow. All grown up, mi pequeña Nilda. AD at 40 years old.

NILDA

Fuck you. I'm only 39.

ALBA

Excuse me. AD at 39. Pride of Bed Stuy.

NILDA
Believe it.

ALBA
I miss you guys.

The two friends look at each other for a bit.

NILDA
Don't you fucking make me cry, now!

ALBA
Come on...

NILDA
(Beat) You know, none of us ever talk about that last day.

ALBA
I don't blame you. I'm sure I came off all crazy.

NILDA
A little. But it's all like some weird dream. All fuzzy and blurry and shit.

ALBA
It feels like a hundred years ago.

NILDA
I just remember you had won an award from some Congressman. And we all went down to Washington for the ceremony. And things were hella busy. And then you were gone.

ALBA
Yeah...

NILDA
We could have fought it, Alba. You could still be there.

ALBA
No, mami. I was gonna be a scapegoat. Look at what happened to Tom. I'd rather go out on my own terms.

NILDA
Those are still the only terms that matter.

ALBA
You're saying I was selfish.

NILDA
Some of the team felt... abandoned. They loved you, Al.

ALBA

I guess. I was pretty hard on them.

NILDA

But you were their leader. They don't think of me the same way.

ALBA

I'm sure that's not true.

NILDA

Why d'you have to go and drop off like that?

ALBA

Did you feel that way?

NILDA

No—

ALBA

Is that why you haven't called me back in 4 years? I asked you for *one* favor.

NILDA

Aww. It's not like that.

ALBA

What then?

NILDA

People were upset. *Your* team was upset. That's it.

ALBA

Nobody came running to help me after all that shit went down. Not a lot of "checking in".

NILDA

I'm sorry. It's just, you know...

ALBA

I didn't owe any explanations.

NILDA

Of course you didn't.

ALBA

It took me a long time to not feel just... bitter.

NILDA

That man who shot all those kids, whatever his name was. That's not on you. You know that.

I'm learning. Slowly.

ALBA

Not on you.

NILDA

The head priest here beats me over the head with it every day.

ALBA

I told you he was a good guy. From the moment I met him.

NILDA

He is. He threw me a life-line.

ALBA

But what are you really doing here?

NILDA

I do a lot of things. Father goes over to the archdiocese in Newark almost every day. So I take care of the guys. The building. The schedule. Bunch of stuff. It's just easy.

ALBA

Easy?

NILDA

It's a new way of looking at life, you know? After my mom died and all the stuff that happened.

ALBA

But priests? You're not religious. Except for being all strict, like a nun.

NILDA

Bitch.

ALBA

I'm just sayin'. If you had a ruler, you'd smack my hand with it.

NILDA

(Smiling) You'd deserve it. Look, I don't know how I wound up here. But in a way, it kinda reminds me of the Army.

ALBA

Yeah, Jersey's just like Baghdad.

NILDA

Shut up, pendeja. More like Fort Benning, at the start. Bunch of young dudes, trying to figure themselves out. They think they know what they want. And they start to realize that life's hard. Unpredictable, you know?

ALBA

NILDA

And you're happy here? I don't wanna judge, but it looks like you're a janitor and a secretary.

ALBA

It's not that bad.

NILDA

Boo, I know you went through a tough time. And I know we weren't there for you. But I also know how you get all stuck in your own head.

ALBA

I was pretty low for a while.

NILDA

And now?

ALBA

Now I'm good. Most days.

NILDA

What happened to Alba Guerrero? The warrior! Gonna be the first female mayor of New York City!

ALBA

(Laughs) Yeah, that. There's still things I wanna do. But as Father Amiana says, "all in due time, my child."

NILDA

Does he really say that?

ALBA

No. *(In accent)* But I can do a hell of *Pilipino* accent.

NILDA

(Laughs and then in a near flawless accent) Y ahora yo puedo hablar español bastante bien.

ALBA

Tigueraza! Where did that perfect Spanish come from?

NILDA

Not perfect, at all. But you gotta do a little Spanish if you want to get up that company ladder. You know?

ALBA

I'm impressed.

NILDA

The job's not easy.

ALBA

Yeah, a lot of stuff comin' at you.

NILDA

You coulda taught me some of that shit before you left.

ALBA

You never let anyone teach you anything.

NILDA

(Laughs) Maybe I changed.

ALBA

Maybe you did. But now that you're a big shot, the job's really only about one thing.

NILDA

What's that?

ALBA

(Getting serious) You look at that person on the other side of the desk. And you move the papers aside. Turn off the phone. Turn off the computer monitor. That's real important.

NILDA

Okay.

ALBA

And you focus on their name. You imagine their lives. Their families. Their commute to work. Conversation over a meal. The real person. *(Beat)* And only then you start the interview.

NILDA

(Long pause staring at Alba) Is that some Dominican voodoo shit?

ALBA

See what I mean? Nobody can't teach you anything.

NILDA

(Laughs). I'm just messin'. I love that. For real.

ALBA

You can kiss my ass.

NILDA

Nah, you're right. It's about the individual.

ALBA

It's about that connection.

NILDA

True. But it's all so different now. Newbury just cares about the numbers.

ALBA

I'm sure.

NILDA

I mean, in a way it's better. It's real organized and there's more money to get shit done. It's just so impersonal.

ALBA

Well, the world's a different place, right? But that shit always goes in cycles. And I think you're gonna do great.

NILDA

Thank you Al. *(Pausing, a bit uncomfortable)* So listen, I did what you asked for.

ALBA

You did?

NILDA

You thought I was gonna forget?

ALBA

No... Well...

NILDA

That's not me any more. "All grown up," remember?

ALBA

Right.

NILDA

I talked to everyone I know at DOJ. They're not even returning my calls any more. And you know I can be pushy. I even had Newbury on it.

ALBA

Did you tell them the full story?

NILDA

Honey, I don't know how to say this... People didn't really want to stick out their neck for you. You left us.

Alba just looks at her.

ALBA

There's precedent for my request. I'm just asking for *one* meeting. It's not anything crazy.

NILDA

I pushed real hard, I swear.

ALBA

Is this why you haven't called me back?

NILDA

You've been through so much and (*beat*) I never knew what to say. One day turned into a week and then a year. And then...

ALBA

That's alright, mi amor. I know how it is on the job. It takes over. You're an adult, full time.

NILDA

You asked me for one favor. It's hard... you know? Maybe if there's someone who you know from back in the day, I can try to put in a good word. I can—

ALBA

Nah. Nah. Thank you for trying. I know it was a longshot.

NILDA

It can still happen. But you need to get someone real high up the food chain to authorize it.

ALBA

Yeah, let me hit up Mayor Bloomberg. I got his number on speed dial right here.

NILDA

I feel terrible.

ALBA

You're here, mami. You tried. That's more than anyone's done for me in a long time.

NILDA

I'm so happy I finally got to see you.

ALBA

We'll stay in touch, I'll make sure of that. If I leave it up to you, I'll see you at my funeral.

NILDA

Baby, don't say that. It's bad luck.

ALBA

I've taught you well.

Es verdad. NILDA

The two friends hug. They both know they'll probably never see each other again. As Nilda walks away...

Nilda? ALBA

As Nilda turns around.

How far up the food chain? ALBA

For your request? NILDA

For *full* authorization. ALBA

Congress. NILDA

Congress. Okay. ALBA

Lights out.

SCENE 4

AM RADIO

WNIX 1080, it's 5:10pm. The immigration reform debate in congress is getting more heated, and it looks like the bill is now deadlocked. A decision does not seem likely by end of session. Both senate republicans and democrats are engaging in insults and finger-pointing...

SCENE 5

Lights up on the seminary office. Alba's been talking to Amiana. There's a bottle of rum and two mismatched mugs. One has a logo with a religious cross on it.

FATHER AMIANA

I don't want you to be angry at me.

ALBA

You keep pushing all the wrong buttons.

FATHER AMIANA

I just wanna get through to you. I'm not gonna be around much longer.

ALBA

La Migra is finally coming to get you, huh? How long ago did your visa expire?

FATHER AMIANA

Funny.

ALBA

(Softens) Padre, I don't want to fight either—

FATHER AMIANA

The cancer is spreading. I got the results from my physical.

ALBA

Well, we knew that.

FATHER AMIANA

It's worse.

ALBA

OK. *(Beat)* OK. How bad?

FATHER AMIANA

Well, I'm not going to die tomorrow, if that's what you're asking.

ALBA

What do the doctors say?

FATHER AMIANA

It's slow. I'm going to be okay for a while.

ALBA

What? A year? A month?

FATHER AMIANA

I don't know. A couple of years.

ALBA

So... you gotta start chemo again? What's the treatment?

FATHER AMIANA

I'm not doing anything.

You're just lettin' it spread?
ALBA

Yes.
FATHER AMIANA

Virgen santa—
ALBA

I can't fight it. It's too advanced.
FATHER AMIANA

What do you mean?
ALBA

Too strong.
FATHER AMIANA

Alba takes a beat to digest this.

ALBA
So what happens to the seminary? What happens to the guys? And your work with the archdiocese? You've come so far.

FATHER AMIANA
They'll get someone else to replace me. Then life goes on.

ALBA
What about your mom? Her health, all that stuff. That was your whole bullshit excuse for coming to the U.S.

FATHER AMIANA
I'm not her only son.

ALBA
Wow. Really? I don't even know what to say.

FATHER AMIANA
There's nothing to say.

ALBA
I can't accept this.

FATHER AMIANA
I'm gonna be gone and you should start making plans too. You've done everything you can here. You need to go somewhere new. Go do some real good. Out there. Where you came from.

ALBA
You can't be serious.

FATHER AMIANA

I *really* don't want to have the same fight again, but—

ALBA

I'm sorry. I can't even think about that. You are dying.

FATHER AMIANA

And you're living like you died three years ago.

ALBA

That's not fair.

FATHER AMIANA

I'm coming to the end and I feel good. In my own way, I made the world a better place.

ALBA

But you never finished what you came here to do.

FATHER AMIANA

I did everything I could in a system that is very rigid.

ALBA

You don't believe that. You're finally getting the archdiocese to make some changes. After all these years.

FATHER AMIANA

I sleep very well at night. You are 43 years old and filled with remorse. I'm begging you. Don't waste the next forty years living angry.

Alba takes this in, but her anger is not subsiding.

FATHER AMIANA

You promise me you're going to go.

ALBA

You promise me you're gonna get some treatment.

FATHER AMIANA

Dammit Alba!

ALBA

I get that you're trying to shake me out of some funk you think I'm in. I'm grateful. I am. But then you drop this cancer bomb on me and tell me to leave the seminary? No fucking way, Padre. The guys depend on you. And so do I.

FATHER AMIANA

You are one of the smartest people I have ever met. And one of the dumbest.

ALBA

I'm going to stay right here and convince you to get treated. It's 2008. People beat cancer all the time.

FATHER AMIANA

You only learn the hard way, don't you?

ALBA

You hired me.

FATHER AMIANA

I felt sorry for you.

ALBA

I hate you.

FATHER AMIANA

Putang ina mo.

A small smile turns into a laugh, and a truce.

ALBA

Dirty old man.

FATHER AMIANA

You know, I didn't curse before you worked here.

ALBA

I didn't have a heart before you hired me.

FATHER AMIANA

That's bullshit.

ALBA

Maybe a small one.

FATHER AMIANA

A small one's all you need.

ALBA

Well I'm still pissed at you. I'm dragging you to the doctor.

FATHER AMIANA

I might be old but I can still kick your ass.

ALBA

Let's see what you got, viejito.

FATHER AMIANA

(Smiles) You had a visit this morning.

ALBA

That was Nilda from INS.

FATHER AMIANA

A colleague?

ALBA

Yeah. You met her that one time at the office. She's almost running the place now.

FATHER AMIANA

Good for her. But probably not a good time to be in the immigration business. Is she doing okay?

ALBA

Nilda's tough. And a lot changed since I was there. Everything's all computerized. Next gen databases. Predictive capabilities and all this other stuff I don't even get.

FATHER AMIANA

At some point, somebody's just gonna build a giant wall around the whole country and they won't need a government agency to deal with it.

ALBA

People'll still find a way to get in. They always do. All they need is for things to be bad enough where they're from.

FATHER AMIANA

But right now, it's about stopping terrorism. Right?

ALBA

Nah. People will always be scared of strangers. You know, our biggest screw up at INS wasn't that we let in the 9/11 hijackers.

FATHER AMIANA

What do you mean?

ALBA

Their lead guy, Mohammad Atta, got his visa approved six months AFTER he flew a plane into the World Trade Center.

FATHER AMIANA

I don't understand.

ALBA

He got his F-1 visa stamped AFTER committing the biggest single terrorist act on U.S. soil.

FATHER AMIANA

Holy Lord.

ALBA

That was a bad day at the office.

FATHER AMIANA

And your friend is in charge now?

ALBA

Of our department, yeah. Or whatever's left of it. The agency is not even called INS any more.

FATHER AMIANA

Really?

ALBA

Oh yeah, they wanna sound all gangsta now. ICE. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

FATHER AMIANA

So, some sophisticated computer program will tell them to deport me back to Manila?

ALBA

I'm the one who should deport your sorry ass, viejo de mierda.

FATHER AMIANA

You're so sweet.

ALBA

I'm sorry about earlier.

FATHER AMIANA

Don't.

ALBA

I don't do well with change.

FATHER AMIANA

(Sarcastic) Really?

ALBA

No sea pendejo.

FATHER AMIANA

The book of Proverbs says we should "remember the Lord in everything we do, and he will show us the right way."

ALBA

Proverbs?

FATHER AMIANA

Scripture. Maybe you crack it open and read a few verses.

ALBA

Maybe *you* should, before the cancer sends you packing.

Alba takes a breath. She smiles quietly at Father Amiana.

Stage right, on a darker part of the stage, a pin light shines onto a man sitting on a bench, wearing an orange prison jumpsuit. It's Bodgan Markovic, who we saw at the beginning of the play and when he addressed the audience at the end of Act 1. Markovic stares straight ahead.

ALBA

I'm so jealous of you. And the guys.

FATHER AMIANA

Of what?

ALBA

Of your certainty. Or almost certainty. Someone hits you with the news you're gonna die, and you're... you're okay with it. Because you're sure about God and heaven and everything.

FATHER AMIANA

You're jealous of our faith?

ALBA

Yeah, I guess.

FATHER AMIANA

You have it too, Alba. It just comes out a little different.

Alba smiles again.

ALBA

There's a little left in the tank. But it's getting pretty low.

FATHER AMIANA

Is this about your friend Nilda?

ALBA

Kind of. I can't find a way to get to him, Father. I've tried everything.

FATHER AMIANA

She couldn't help you?

ALBA

No. She called around, but it's hard. Nobody wants to touch this.

FATHER AMIANA

I'm so sorry.

Markovic stands. And even though he's hundreds of miles away, he watches the conversation between Father Amiana and Alba, as if he was there.

ALBA

I have one more person I wanna ask.

FATHER AMIANA

One more. Then another. And another.

ALBA

It's not like that. It's someone from my past that I wanna hit up again. A guy I used to know. Probably won't take my call.

FATHER AMIANA

At some point, you need to realize you're probably wasting your time.

ALBA

I have the time. I just need to find the right person to help me. Keep the faith, right?

Lights out, first on the office and a few seconds later on Markovic.

SCENE 6

AM RADIO

The immigration reform bill has been defeated in the senate. Senate majority leader Jed Wilkinson stated that despite the importance of the issue, the basic immigration law parameters remain unchanged from the last major reform, 22 years ago. It's 2:50 in the afternoon, 91 degrees in Times Square. WNIX. News, traffic and weather on the tens.

SCENE 7

Alba is in the seminary office by herself. She is on a call on her cell phone. We will only hear her side of the conversation.

ALBA

Thank you so much for calling me back... Yes, Guerrero.

ALBA

I know, I've been overbearing. I'm really sorry.

ALBA

Six letters, I think. I don't know how many calls and emails. (*Losing all dignity*) I'm... I have truly run out of options.

ALBA

Yes, through the Veteran's Administration. It doesn't matter. I just... I just need to get a message to the Senator.

ALBA

Well, I doubt he remembers me. I first met him when I was stationed in Kuwait. A couple of times in fact. And then when I was... yes the Congressional Service Medal. In DC. Right.

ALBA

All I need is for him to help facilitate a meeting for me. Just *one* phone call to the Department of Corrections. Will take him 5 minutes... Please.

ALBA

(*Exasperated*) Yes, of course. I can hold...

This feels like an eternity.

ALBA

(*Surprised*) Oh... Yes. Hello. Yes... yes, Senator Wilkinson. It's good to hear your voice.

Lights out.

SCENE 8

The immigrant is a Hasidic Jewish man, in his 50s.

MALE IMMIGRANT

What do you think of these hipsters? I can't stand them. All over Brooklyn. They don't have respect for anyone.

I was born in Poland, lived in Israel and came here when I was 18. Been here ever since. And look, we live in a pretty closed off community; you know, we don't really mingle a lot with others. We're picky. But you know who I do like? Puerto Ricans. That's right. And other Spanish people, too. They're family people like us. They treat their parents well. The men love their mothers. The women care for their mothers. And they care about each other.

I'm sure they think we're strange. I think they're strange. I don't like their music. And their fried food smells bad.

But they came here from a tiny country on an island. Like us. I mean, we're an island, inside an island. Even in Israel they treated us like freaks. It took living in Brooklyn to find other people that I connect with, besides my own. I'm the landlord, they're the tenants. They pay on time, I give them a good apartment and we live in peace. We tell each other jokes and they know not to bother me on Sabbath. Good family people.

I used to rent a third floor walkup to an old Dominican lady. Mrs. Guerrero. Every time she saw me, she gave me a hug. I'm not even supposed to shake a woman's hand. At first it was weird. We're strict about these things. But she treated me like a son. So after some time, when no one was looking, I hugged her back. Why not, right? I was sad when she passed.

I'm telling you, it's simple. Mutual respect. That's it. The hipsters, though? Ugh. Something else.

SCENE 9

Lights fade up on the seminary office. Alba is talking to her dead mother.

ALBA

I'm gonna do it.

TERESA

Of course you are.

ALBA

Why you looking at me like that?

TERESA

Nothing, *mija*. *Cálmate*.

ALBA

I'm leaving tomorrow early and I'll be home by Sunday. I'm just gonna drive there and turn right back. (*Beat*). What?!

TERESA

What you need to heal is here (*points at her heart*). And everything about you is always up here (*points at her head*).

ALBA

What's that supposed to mean?

TERESA

This trip. Your father told me it's not gonna solve anything. Just open up more questions.

ALBA

My dead mother is talking to my dead father. Oh my God.

TERESA

You're Latina. This is perfectly normal.

ALBA

I need to call the pharmacy. My dosage is wrong.

Alba fumbles through her purse looking for her mobile phone. Finds it.

TERESA

You need to think this through.

ALBA

Mami, I'm going.

Alba scrolls through her phone contacts. Presses the pharmacy's number.

TERESA

I'm not gonna try to stop you. But depression is serious, mi amor. I don't want—

ALBA

I am not going to kill myself.

Alba has the phone to her ear as she waits for someone to pick up.

TERESA

Something happened to you the day you walked out of that office. And it's still with you. Praying is not enough. Those little pills don't help. That flask of Ron Añejo in your desk drawer. That's not gonna help either.

ALBA

(To the phone). Hi this is Alba Guerrero, account number 593 2817. Please give me a call back, I have a problem with my prescription. I'd appreciate a call back today. *(Presses the hang up button)*

TERESA

I love you so much.

ALBA

(Deep breath) Mamá please. I need you to be okay with this.

TERESA

I just get scared when you get so focused on something. Remember Gonzalo, that guy who came to live with us because he didn't have a place to stay after he got to New York?

ALBA
What are you talking about?

TERESA
Gonzalo.

ALBA
We hosted a lot of guys.

TERESA
You know him! The tall one who was a negrito.

ALBA
Jesus, Mom. Even in death you're a racist.

TERESA
What did I say?

ALBA
Alright, what about him?

TERESA
Gonzalo loved you so much. He would take you to Coney Island every Saturday to play the arcade games, remember?

ALBA
Kind of.

TERESA
We had nothing but love for this man. (*Beat*) Until he stole from me. It was my grandma's jewelry box.

ALBA
Yeah, that guy.

TERESA
Old stuff. Not worth nothing. I suspected it was him, but I didn't want to offend him, you know? I was stupid. But you... you were 11. And you went after this poor guy like a police dog. You *knew* he did it and you wouldn't let it go.

ALBA
That was a long time ago.

TERESA
A week later, he finally admitted it, in tears. Everything changed. He had to leave. No other choice. Like this thing you're doing now. There's no stopping you.

ALBA
I need an answer.

TERESA

I already told you why he did it.

ALBA

I want to look him in the eye.

TERESA

Mija, and if you don't get the answer you want? You're still in a dangerous place.

ALBA

You sound like Father Amiana.

TERESA

(Laughs) I'll be here when you're back. All of us will. But those wounds don't heal too easy.

ALBA

I couldn't feel any more pain than I've already felt.

Lights out

SCENE 10

AM RADIO

Ground has been broken for the memorial for the victims of Boys and Girls club shooting. The tragedy from 2005, which caused extreme controversy on both the immigration and gun control front, was the at the heart of the mayor's campaign for gun reform. And it continues to generate debate to this day, both in New York City and across the country. WNIX 1080, news and traffic every hour on the tens.

ACT THREE

SCENE 1

Alba is at the visitation room in the Federal Correctional Facility in Dannemora, upstate New York. She is sitting on one side of a glass window partition, waiting a for a while. Bogdan Markovic arrives and sits down in front of her, on the other side of the glass. Alba, adjusts the volume of the speaker that allows her to hear what he is saying.

ALBA

(Nervous) Mr. Markovic, my name is Alba Guerrero and I'm— I'm here to talk to you about something that happened a long time ago.

Markovic looks at her suspiciously, says nothing.

ALBA

I just wanted to speak to you in person. And I need you to be honest with me.

Still... nothing.

ALBA

Mr. Markovic, please. They didn't give me a lot of time.

MARKOVIC

I thought Officer Johnson was putting me on. Some... joke.

ALBA

No. No joke.

MARKOVIC

What are you doing here?

ALBA

I want to talk about you.

MARKOVIC

You want to chat? See how I'm doing?

ALBA

Well, no.

MARKOVIC

Talk about the food in here? That sort of thing?

ALBA

I want to talk about your deception of the U.S. Department of Justice. And your subsequent murder of 12 children.

MARKOVIC

Miss... Guerrero. I spent two years in trial. I don't think I need to say anything else.

ALBA

Please. I just need a few answers and then I'll be on my way.

MARKOVIC

It's a lovely day outside. It's usually pretty cold this time of year. I mean, we're just a few miles from Canada if you take 87 north.

ALBA

I know you've been through a lot.

MARKOVIC

The flowers bloom until late in the season here. Pink asters. Not that I can see them from my cell.

ALBA

Mr. Markovic.

MARKOVIC

You came all the way here to talk to a guy on death row.

ALBA

This is New York. You'll die in your cell before they execute you.

MARKOVIC

Still. You drove all the way here to talk about something that nobody cares about.

ALBA

No, no. People definitely care about this—

MARKOVIC

Yes, the families. The blessed families. And the politicians. And the district attorney who got famous.

Alba stares at him.

MARKOVIC

And you, for some reason. But I don't know you.

ALBA

You do know me. You don't forget things.

MARKOVIC

Lady, I don't mind the company, but—

ALBA

(Interrupting) I know that you played me. And that you targeted me, specifically. And for some strange reason, you've never told anyone.

MARKOVIC

What are you talking about?

ALBA

I think I'm the reason you killed those children.

MARKOVIC

You think.

ALBA

I'm tired. I just want to know why.

More silence.

MARKOVIC

How did you even get in here?

ALBA

(Sighs, exasperated) A congressman helped me out.

MARKOVIC

A politician helped you?

ALBA

It took a few years. And a lot of pushing.

MARKOVIC

And now what? You want to understand? There's nothing to understand. We live in a very random universe.

ALBA

You are my biggest failure, Bogdan. I think about it every day. And every night, when I'm trying to fall asleep.

MARKOVIC

Should I feel bad about this?

ALBA

That day, you took the same subway route that I took from Queens to Harlem. Same transfer. Same exact stops. You were sending me a message.

MARKOVIC

Can you please get to your point?

ALBA

I need you to tell me why you cursed me with this—

MARKOVIC

Actually, I don't need to explain anything to you.

ALBA

Did you enjoy killing those kids?

MARKOVIC

Oh now you're boring me. I'd rather go back to my cell and stare at a wall.

ALBA

No you wouldn't. You love attention. You see yourself as some cold calculating machine. But you're an insecure little fuck, who's dying for attention. That's why you're playing this stupid charade. You say you don't know why I'm here? You're a genius. You remember every damn detail of every day of your life.

Alba and Markovic stare at each other for a beat.

ALBA

You got my attention. You won. I lost my family and all my friends. And everything I had. I called in every single favor I've ever had to get here. Talk to me.

MARKOVIC

You wasted your time.

ALBA

You weren't a violent man.

MARKOVIC

I can control myself quite nicely.

ALBA

Did you abuse your wife? She never gave you kids.

MARKOVIC

I never laid a hand on her.

ALBA

So why? Why did you go after those children? That Boys and Girls Club. In Harlem. The one I went to growing up. And where I tutored in college.

MARKOVIC

All these questions. I've talked to just about everybody in the government. But nobody from immigration. You're a few years late.

ALBA

I never said I worked in immigration.

Markovic smiles and piercingly looks at her.

MARKOVIC

You're not as stupid as I remember.

ALBA

You noticed me at the swear in ceremony, too. I saw that. How did you find out about me?

MARKOVIC

It's not hard, Alba. A few minutes on the internet and you can learn anything you need.

ALBA

Oh God.

MARKOVIC

It's all in an interview you gave to the Queens Courier. Page 11, left column, with a picture. A story about a local girl, off to serve in Gulf War who came back and is now a rising star in a big Manhattan government office. They're so proud! It's sweet.

ALBA

That day at the INS office.

MARKOVIC

Yes.

ALBA

June 24, 1997. It was in the afternoon. Full caseload. Back to back interviews all day. You came with your wife to interview for residency.

MARKOVIC

I won the green card lottery.

ALBA

But people had to vet you and approve you. And I was the case officer in charge.

MARKOVIC

Yes.

ALBA

You fooled me. And then the case officer after me. And then you played everybody else into thinking you were a model citizen.

MARKOVIC

(Realizing) You're here to find out if this is your fault.

ALBA

I'm just confirming what I knew.

MARKOVIC

Did you, now?

ALBA

You're fucking sick.

MARKOVIC

I'm not the one who is obsessed. *(laughs)*

ALBA

Do you have something against minorities? Against Latinos? Or Blacks?

MARKOVIC

Americans always think it has something to do with race.

ALBA

So just me? Just to get at me? Not the government. Not the system. Not a group of people.

Markovic just sits and smiles at her.

ALBA

What the hell did I ever do to you?

MARKOVIC

That's all you do. You ask questions and you feel powerful. You're doing it right now. Questions and more questions, until people break.

ALBA

I don't understand.

MARKOVIC

You asked me about my bank account. About my house loan. My salary. You asked me how much I owe on my car. My relationships. And then you questioned my marriage. You doubted my word.

ALBA

That's what we ask everybody. Those are standard questions.

MARKOVIC

It's not standard the way you insulted my wife.

ALBA

That is not—

MARKOVIC

You humiliated her. Made her feel like less of a person. She was different after that day.

ALBA

Your wife left you. She married another guy. Is that what put you over the edge?

MARKOVIC

You were not superior to her or to me. And even if now you're sitting on that side of the glass, your arrogance is gone.

ALBA

Oh Jesus. You shot up a playground because I was rude to your wife?

MARKOVIC

You really don't understand, do you.

ALBA

I guess I don't, professor.

MARKOVIC

The system. Your system of judgement did this, and you were a part of that system.

ALBA

I still don't—

MARKOVIC

You don't matter, Alba. You are insignificant. And the fact that you've devoted years of your life just to come sit here with me, just proves that I'm right.

Alba can't think of anything to say.

MARKOVIC

But you are so self-absorbed that you have to make it about yourself. So let's do it. Let's make this about you. Here is your answer, Miss Guerrero: I assure you that this is your fault. You let me in. Children died. Cause, effect.

ALBA

I didn't do anything wrong. You're the sick one here.

MARKOVIC

The more you try to forget something, the more you think about it. I'm not a biologist, but I do know that's how our brains are wired.

ALBA

Go rot in your little cell, you piece of shit.

MARKOVIC

Think about those kids, Alba. The teachers begging me not to kill them.

Alba bangs on the window in frustration.

Your fault.
MARKOVIC

Fuck you.
ALBA

MARKOVIC
I would do it again. You want to do something? Go kill yourself. *(Pause, as he realizes)* You've thought about it, haven't you?

Fuck you!
ALBA

Oh, you've tried it...
MARKOVIC

Vete al infierno, hijo'e puta!
ALBA

MARKOVIC
Come visit any time. I'll be here for the next 40 years. You don't have to ask your politician friends any more. I'll put you on the visitors list. But your life will probably end before mine.

Markovic gets up and walks away. Lights out.

SCENE 2

Over a dark stage.

AM RADIO
Both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates are starting to visit key battleground states, with the start of debates looming at the end of September. As Senator Barack Obama's popularity continues to grow, opposition is now openly questioning his birthplace, claiming that he was born in Kenya and demanding that he release his birth certificate. News on the tens, WNIX 1080.

SCENE 3

Downstage right, we see a Korean woman, early 30s.

FEMALE IMMIGRANT
My dad came here to study English. And by study, I mean from scratch. He didn't speak one word. I remember we had just got to New York. My mom was still back in Korea, because... she couldn't leave her job or something. We were staying with our cousins in the Lower East. They owned a laundromat and I was gonna hang out while my dad went to class.

I was 6 years old and to me, this—all of this— was an alien planet. Everything I knew in the world was Busan, a port city where I was born. A shipbuilding town.

My dad spoke to my mom a few times a week, but even as a kid, I could tell he wasn't himself. But he never broke character. Stoic, serious. Whatever the Korean word is for macho, that's what he was.

We were at the 1st Avenue Subway station one afternoon. It was packed, rush hour kind of thing. We're trying to push our way into a car. But this guy steps in front of me, right as the conductor's telling us the doors are closing. And then this big woman on my left who doesn't see the little kid, bumps me back and I fall on the floor, right on my ass, as the doors shut. My dad's on the other side of the glass window and I see this look of absolute terror on his face as the train starts to pull away and he realizes I'm not inside. He's frantic, yelling in Korean. People around him don't know what's going on. There's a hysterical guy, trying to pry the doors open. But the train kept moving right into the tunnel. And station got quiet. I just sat there.

It was the longest 5 minutes of my life. I remember feeling cold. And then another train arrived on the other side of the platform and my dad bursts out of a door. Yelling my name, running like crazy man. He hugged me like he was going to break me. And he was crying so hard, so violently, he couldn't stop shaking.

After a year, the English course finished and the student visa expired. My dad and I just stayed, but my mom never came over. I figured it all out a bunch of years later. Once I was old enough.

My dad runs his own laundromat now, in Jersey City. I come and help him on the weekends. After 10, the place gets really empty. There's a young few priests from a school nearby. And this one Latin lady that comes in around midnight. I watch her. Just by herself. She sits there and stares at the spin cycle dryer. Nothing to read. Just looking at the machines. She reminds me of my dad. And those five minutes in the subway station when I understood, all of a sudden. That sense of isolation. That absolute loneliness that my father has felt all along in this strange country.

Lights out.

SCENE 4

Lights fade up on Nilda, at the window at the INS building, where we found her at the beginning of the play. She will be talking to a young couple on the other side of the window.

We don't hear their responses and Nilda will give appropriate pauses after every line, so the audience can imagine what they've said.

NILDA

So how long have you guys known each other?

NILDA

And you started dating in college?

NILDA

Nice. Sweethearts. Don't see that too often any more. Did you bring all the stuff on the list from the website?

The person on the other side passes an envelope to Nilda. She opens it, takes a quick, careless look and puts it all back into the envelope, except for a picture.

NILDA

Great. Thank you.

NILDA

This is your daughter?

NILDA

Oooh. She's a little firecracker.

NILDA

Mine is eleven. Little girl. Nessa. Wants to be called Vanessa now. All sophisticated.

NILDA

Uh-huh. The affidavit and the personal letters of recommendation. Yeah. It's all fine.

NILDA

Nah. I don't need to see that.

NILDA

I understand. You're cool.

NILDA

Guys, I'm sorry, but I'm starving. I need to grab some lunch. Unless you have any other questions, I think we're good here.

NILDA

Nah. You'll get a notice to come take your picture and fingerprints next month. And then you'll get your residence card in the mail.

NILDA
About 8 weeks after that. Then that's it. Congratulations.

NILDA
Yeah. That's it.

NILDA
Don't worry, it's okay. I know.

NILDA
I just know.

Lights out.

SCENE 5

Lights up on a cemetery, with a single gravestone, no one around. After a few seconds, we see Father Amiana come in, and stand in front the grave. He stares at it for a bit, contemplating. After a while, Alba arrives.

ALBA
Hola Padre.

FATHER AMIANA
The cemetery, huh? Always so dramatic, Alba.

ALBA
I couldn't really go back to the Seminary.

FATHER AMIANA
It's been six days.

ALBA
I'm sorry.

FATHER AMIANA
You can't do that to us. Not after everything we talked about.

ALBA
I know.

FATHER AMIANA
Why are we here? Is this...

ALBA

It's Yadira Rodriguez. Nine years old. His first victim at the club. And right there is her mom, who was picking her up from daycare, after working a 10 hour shift. Two sections over, there's the Tejada family. A boy and a girl. And the dad who couldn't handle the grief.

FATHER AMIANA

That's awful. I'm so sorry.

ALBA

Yeah. How are you feeling?

FATHER AMIANA

Pretty good, for a guy with a broken liver.

ALBA

Pain?

FATHER AMIANA

No. But I'm uncomfortable all the time.

ALBA

Did you talk to the Monsignor?

FATHER AMIANA

I think everybody at the Archdiocese has had enough of me. I'm sure more than a few of them are happy that I'm going away.

ALBA

I'm not surprised.

FATHER AMIANA

(Laughs) Why are we really here, honey?

ALBA

This guy, Markovic, he shot her in the head, from about three feet away. And then, just because he was a cruel fucker, he shot her again.

FATHER AMIANA

Alba...

ALBA

He did this to get back at me. He blames me, Father. And he blames our country.

FATHER AMIANA

Oh Lord. *(beat)* And you?

ALBA

I think this man is evil. But he's not wrong. It is my fault.

FATHER AMIANA

Seriously—

ALBA

It's true. We were trained to act on our instincts, and I didn't.

FATHER AMIANA

Instincts are built on things you know. But you didn't really know that much about this man.

ALBA

You and the guys call it faith. I call it instinct. And I didn't follow it.

Father Amiana nods, and pauses to think about it.

FATHER AMIANA

Does anyone else know about this?

ALBA

I don't think so. He's never said anything about this before. And it's not in any of the court transcripts. Or discovery.

FATHER AMIANA

Are you sure?

ALBA

He saved it for me. He knew I would come to him.

FATHER AMIANA

How?

ALBA

The same way I should have known there was something wrong with him.

FATHER AMIANA

Well, it doesn't matter anymore. He's a very sick man. I don't care how intuitive or smart he is.

ALBA

But...

FATHER AMIANA

But it still matters to you.

ALBA

Yeah. It does.

FATHER AMIANA

He's sitting in jail and justice is served. Right?

ALBA

He won, Father. He got what he wanted.

FATHER AMIANA

Why don't we leave here and go somewhere else to talk about it? There's a diner off the BQE about a mile from here. The one off Meeker Avenue.

ALBA

I'd rather not.

FATHER AMIANA

Come on. I'm cold. You're cold.

ALBA

I'm here to say goodbye.

FATHER AMIANA

Goodbye?

ALBA

I'm going back to Santo Domingo.

FATHER AMIANA

Oh. Running away again.

ALBA

There's a youth development center in Los Rios, where my cousin works. I'm gonna teach English, help out around the office, maybe help with the social studies program.

FATHER AMIANA

Quisqueya, eh?

ALBA

My mom said her happiest days were seeing her little girl become young a adult. Maybe it's time I tried that out.

FATHER AMIANA

Mothers know.

ALBA

Even racist Dominican ladies.

FATHER AMIANA

When are you coming to pack your things at the seminary?

ALBA

There's nothing I need there, Padre.

FATHER AMIANA

And your apartment?

ALBA

I left the deed and the keys in my top drawer at the office. There's a notarized document that transfers ownership to St. Augustine Seminary. You just have to sign it and send it to my lawyer. His information is right there, on the sheet.

FATHER AMIANA

Alba—

ALBA

It's not really worth a lot, but it should pay some of those reforms you want to do next summer. Make the place a little nicer. Maybe help you get some new recruits in.

FATHER AMIANA

I don't know if I'll be alive next summer.

ALBA

That Asian liver is tougher than you think.

FATHER AMIANA

You're leaving this old priest to fend for himself?

ALBA

Who's being dramatic now?

FATHER AMIANA

I don't presume you'll ever come to visit?

ALBA

(Starting to get emotional) Nah.

FATHER AMIANA

Well maybe I'll just have to come down and visit you, Ms. Guerrero.

ALBA

You would?

FATHER AMIANA

Drink some rum. Argue about religion. Watch a few sunsets together.

ALBA

I'd really like that, Melchior.

FATHER AMIANA

Me too.

The pair stand there for a while, looking at each other. Alba bows her head and Father Amiana lays his hand on it. Overcome, Alba begins to weep.

FATHER AMIANA

God, the Father of mercies; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Lights fade out.

SCENE 6

The immigrant is a Brazilian man, late 20s.

MALE IMMIGRANT

It's fourteen dogs. I take the big ones. And my partner takes the mediums and littles. We walk on 66 Street all the way to the park. And then after an hour, we come back to Riverside. Dogs and dogs and dogs. And people smiling at us.

My friend Roberto help me to get this job. He started walking a tiny little Terrier in Brooklyn for a college professor and his wife. And now he has 8 customers and we make 15 dollars an hour, just to walk around the parks Manhattan. And when they do the coco, you have to pick it up. With a tiny blue bag. You pick up their coco! *(Laughs)*

But I don't care. Because I know I will make good here. Roberto is saving to buy a small house in Rockaway. He wants to be an electrical engineer. And I want to study too. And make good.

My father, he is going to the neighbor's house and telling everybody that his son Carlos is in New York City. He drinks the cafezinho, the little coffee, and he shows the pictures to everybody and tells them stories about me and he is so proud. "Carlos is going to be an engineer!" He is... como se fala... he is made out of love.

I talk to my sister on the telephone, every Sunday. She is the serious one. *(Beat)* Last week, she wanted to talk to me about coming back. She asked me about my dignity. Did I keep my dignity? Do I respect my family's name? Do I respect myself?

But I don't think about that. I know that she thinks it's important, but not to me. I'm going to keep my promise to my father. I am going to make him proud. I will make good here. You'll see. I will.

END OF PLAY