

Waiting

(Pandemic Remix of
Waiting for Godínez)

A Tragicomedy in One Act

by

Daniel A. Olivas

E-mail: olivasdan@aol.com

Cast of Characters

Isabel (Chavalita): A woman.

Jesús (Chuy): A man.

Piso: A man.

Afortunada: A woman.

Child: About ten years old, nonbinary.

Scene

A park with city's skyscrapers in background.

Time

During the time of the pandemic.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Waiting received its world premiere on July 24, 2021, at the Atwater Village Theatre and was produced by Playwrights' Arena (Jon Lawrence Rivera, Artistic Director). The production was directed by Daphnie Sicre. The production designer was Matt Richter, the costume design was by Mylette Nora, the stage manager was Letitia Chang, the casting director was Raul Staggs, the associate producer was Natasha Kaiserman, and the graphic designer was Celina T. Duffy. The cast was:

JESÚS (CHUY): Raul Vega Martinez

ISABEL (CHAVALITA): Valentina Guerra

AFORTUNADA: Shanelle Darlene

PISO: Amir Levi

CHILD: Carolina J. Flores

SCENE 1

SETTING: A city park, moonless evening. We see a tree with a few leaves on its branches.

AT RISE: JESÚS (aka CHUY), sitting on park bench, is trying, unsuccessfully, to take off a huarache from one of his feet. He wears a mask (due to the pandemic), a white, short-sleeved guayabera, and a wristwatch. His clothes are dusty but otherwise neat. Exhausted, he gives up and, in disgust, drops his foot onto the ground. ISABEL (aka CHAVALITA) enters. She is dressed similarly to JESÚS, but wears no watch. She stops near JESÚS, leans in to take in entire scene.

JESÚS

¡Híjole!

ISABEL

Well said, Chuy. I have often said that, at times, the only proper response to life is "¡híjole!" So, I let out a loud "¡híjole!" when life does not go as it should. Sometimes, we have no choice but to yell "¡híjole!" my friend.

(shouting)

¡Híjole!

JESÚS

Why are you yelling?

ISABEL

(walks to bench, sits)

Ah! My friend returns. Cuéntame: Where were you last night? I thought I had lost you forever!

JESÚS

(exasperated)

I cannot get my pinches huaraches off! They fit yesterday, before I got deported. Now they are cutting through my feet!

ISABEL

Deported, again? Did they beat you?

JESÚS

No of course they did not beat me. They put me into a cage again.

ISABEL

A cage? But you are not a dog.

JESÚS

Are you so sure?

ISABEL

A dog would not wear huaraches.

JESÚS

There is a logic to your argument, Chavalita.

ISABEL

And they do not deport dogs, either. Es la verdad. Indeed, people just love dogs . . . people everywhere are adopting stray perritos all the time and taking these wretched animals to live in beautiful casas at the beach. Dogs living like royalty at the beach.

JESÚS

Sí.

ISABEL

Y más: Would a dog wear a mask?

JESÚS

¡No!

ISABEL

Would a dog wear pants?

JESÚS

¡No!

ISABEL

Would a dog wear a beautiful watch that, though it has stopped, is still correct twice a day?

JESÚS

(Holds it up to his ear to listen,
shakes his head because he hears
nothing, drops his hand, stands,
wanders stage.)

My beautiful watch is dead. It was a gift from you,
remember? A gift for me before the wedding. Before pinche
COVID. ¡Dios mío! My yesterdays slip away faster when I try
to remember. And the more I forget, the lonelier I feel.

ISABEL

(ignoring mention of wedding)

Ni modo. The point is, Chuy, you are not a dog! ¡Eres una
persona! As much as I am, my friend.

JESÚS

But if I were a dog, I would not be deported each night and
I would live in a beautiful casa at the beach.

ISABEL

Ah, es la verdad, but you would still be a dog living in a
beautiful casa at the beach. As the great Mexican poet
said: A dog is a dog is a dog.

JESÚS

What do poets know?

ISABEL

Poets understand the mysteries of life. Without poets, we
would be nothing but animals crawling in the dust.

JESÚS

So, the poets say that we are not dogs?

ISABEL

In so many words.

JESÚS

Do dogs wear hats?

ISABEL

No, dogs do not wear hats.

JESÚS

We do not wear hats.

ISABEL
We do not even own hats.

JESÚS
(triumphantly)
We are therefore dogs!

ISABEL
No . . .

JESÚS
(proudly)
¡Los dos somos perritos!
(howls joyfully)

ISABEL
¡No!

JESÚS
(remembers that his feet hurt)
Oh, these huaraches are slicing through my feet. They are worse than this pinche mask!
(limps back to the bench and sits)
Por favor, Chavalita, help me get them off, I beg you. Have mercy on your old friend. We have been friends since we were children. You must help me. ¡Por favor, ayúdame!

ISABEL
(ignoring plea)
Tell me about the cage.

JESÚS
¡Ay! They are slicing through my feet!

ISABEL
(persistent)
The cage!

JESÚS
(stands, starts to pace)
Every night, I fall asleep here on this pinche bench, you sleep over there, under that pinche tree, then they come to deport me, throw me into a cage . . . a cold, horrible, pinche cage fit for a dog . . . and then I escape because they never lock that pinche cage, and I make my way back here, and I always find you snoring over there!

ISABEL

How can this be true? I do not remember any of this. Who takes you? Are there many people? Do they have weapons? Do they snarl and abuse you? They must come here silently, like mimes, and slowly lift you from that bench so as not to wake you. Otherwise, I would protect you, Chuy!

JESÚS

¡Cada noche! Thrown into a cage like a dog, while you sleep under that pinche tree!

ISABEL

But your story makes no sense, Chuy. Once they deport you, why would they put you in a cage? If you are deported, they are free of you, and you are free of them, free to wander in México. No need for a cage.

JESÚS

So, there is no cage?

ISABEL

If your story is to make sense, which is what most stories should do, even stories involving you, my old friend, then there is no cage. Unless . . .

JESÚS

Unless what?

ISABEL

Unless they put you in a cage before they try to deport you!

JESÚS

Yes, that must be it!

ISABEL

Makes perfect sense. First the cage, then deportation.

JESÚS

But I trick them! I sneak out and make it back here to be with you so we can wait.

ISABEL

See, I solved the mystery!

JESÚS

Eres brillante, Chavalita.

ISABEL

You are not deported at all!

JESÚS

Es cierto.

ISABEL

Each night, they take you, put you in a cage, but do not deport you, and you always escape because the babosos do not lock the cage. Not so bad, eh? It could be worse . . . ten men could give you a beating and throw you in that ditch over there every night.

JESÚS

I suppose that is true.

ISABEL

So, as the famous Mexican playwright said, all's well that ends well.

JESÚS

Who said that?

ISABEL

Names do not matter. The words matter.

JESÚS

(limps back to bench, sits)

Por favor. Help me with these huaraches.

ISABEL

(stands, lifts JESÚS's left foot,
pulls)

¡Híjole! Your foot is so swollen, I cannot get this huarache off!

JESÚS

Pull harder!

ISABEL

(finally yanks off huarache)

Success!

JESÚS

Now the other one!

ISABEL

(Sniffs huarache, makes a face,
tosses it, reaches for the other
huarache, pull it off with effort.)

Success again!

(Sniffs huarache, makes a face,
throws it over to the first one.)

JESÚS

(wriggling toes, smiling)

Mucho mejor.

ISABEL

As the great Mexican philosopher said: A friend in need is
a friend indeed.

JESÚS

So many Mexicans saying so many things.

ISABEL

Chuy, tell me more about your night away from me.

JESÚS

¿Que quieres saber?

ISABEL

(sits beside JESÚS)

Tell me everything, por favor. From the beginning.

JESÚS

(stands, paces as he tells story)

Last night, you sat under that tree promising to keep watch
over me as I slept on this bench. You said, "Te prometo. A
promise from me is as good as gold." That is what you say
every night. Pues, I closed my eyes because I felt safe,
and sleep came to me. And then it happened: I felt strong
hands grab me! These agents in green uniforms lifted me
from the bench. I tried to call your name, but nothing came
from my mouth. And then I saw you! Asleep, snoring under
that pinche tree! They took me to a big, black van, threw
me in the back with all of these men, women, and children.
Los niños estaban llorando. The agents piled into the front
seat and laughed at us. The driver said: "You are going
home now." But I was already home, here in this park
contigo! They drove throughout the night until suddenly we
stopped, and an agent opened the back of the van. The other
agents pulled us out, one by one, and herded us to a row of

small cages. And one by one, they put us each into our own cage, so small, I could not stand, I had to crouch. Los niños kept crying. And one by one, the agents closed the cages with a loud clang and they laughed at us. Then slowly, they wandered off, laughing, joking, proud of themselves. After an hour or so, in those cold, dark cages, the others quieted down, and eventually the crying was replaced with soft, sad snoring. ¡Pero no dormí! I needed to come back here, to you, Chavalita. And then it happened. I leaned against the cage door, and it fell open! I could not believe my luck! Those babosos forgot to lock my cage! I crept out, on my hands and knees like a baby, and then stood, like a man. I looked at the pobrecitos in their cages, snoring softly, and my heart broke. But what could I do? I have no doubt the agents did not forget to lock all the cages. I crept away, silently into the night, to come back to this park, to be with you.

(sits again, exhausted)

And do you know what I thought about as I walked those many miles back to this park? I thought of you, Chavalita. That is what kept me walking, step by step, mile after mile.

ISABEL

Oh, Chuy, lo siento. If you say it happens every night, it happens every night.

JESÚS

Chavalita, I want it to stop. No more cages, no more escaping, no more swollen feet.

ISABEL

Your pain is never ending, eh? Just like Sisyphus.

JESÚS

(sidetracked from his pain)

¿Sisy-quién?

ISABEL

From Greek mythology, Chuy. Sisyphus. You know, that poor pendejo who was punished by the gods and forced to roll a huge boulder up a hill, and each time he gets to the top of the hill, the pinche boulder rolls down.

JESÚS

Ah! You are right. He is a pendejo. If I were him, I would stop pushing that boulder up the hill and go far away.

ISABEL

But we cannot go someplace else. Godínez told us to wait for him here by this tree.

JESÚS

¿Quién? Godínez? Ah, sí, sí. Godínez. I think I remember. Will he save me from that pinche cage?

ISABEL

I cannot remember, either. I remember his name, pero ... pero ... ¡Ay! The reason has slipped away from my mind.

JESÚS

(Stands, walks to tree, looks up into its branches.)

I wonder what kind of tree this is. I wonder if in the old days, this was a hanging tree. A tree that could bring sleep. With a bit of rope. Pues, it would be so easy . . . Maybe Godínez is up there watching us.

ISABEL

(Stands, walks to JESÚS, looks up into branches.)

No, they say Godínez is an older gentleman who was once lean but has grown quite corpulent with age. I do not think he could scramble up this tree.

(Walks back to the bench, sits.)

JESÚS

Why was he lean?

ISABEL

They say he was a famous bicyclist, raced once in the Tour de France.

JESÚS

They have the Eiffel Tower in France. But I have not seen it, except in photos, of course. Y más, there is that beautiful plaque at the bottom of the Eiffel Tower with hermosas palabras: "Give me your tired, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . ."

ISABEL

¡No, idiota! That plaque is not on the Eiffel Tower!

JESÚS

But I saw it on the internet. The internet does not lie.

ISABEL

¡No! That is not where you saw those words, Chuy.

JESÚS

I did not see them on the internet?

ISABEL

Quién sabe. You might have seen those words on the internet, but not on the Eiffel Tower. Or maybe you dreamed them. Perhaps they are on the dollar bill. Godínez would know.

JESÚS

But they are such pretty words.

ISABEL

Do not trust pretty words.

JESÚS

But words matter.

ISABEL

Words matter, until they do not.

JESÚS

Oh, tell me more about Godínez!

ISABEL

They say he is a total pelón. Not a hair on his head, even when he was younger.

JESÚS

(returns to bench, sits)

And now?

ISABEL

He owns a bicycle repair shop, of course. And he told us to wait here by this tree.

JESÚS

Perhaps Godínez will help me so that I will not be snatched up again and thrown into a cold cage like a dog.

ISABEL

Quizás. They say Godínez does good deeds by employing people at the bicycle shop who cannot find employment

elsewhere. Yet people also say that Godínez beats one of the two children who works for him. The other child he does not bother, for some reason. So I have been told. They are brother and sister, twins. Pero, I do not know where they came from -- who their parents are. They must be orphans. You remember them, do you not? We have seen them playing in the park on many occasions. One of them -- I am not certain which -- came to us that one day -- was it Tuesday? -- to say that we should wait for Godínez by this tree.

JESÚS

Perhaps Godínez will save me from the cold cage.

ISABEL

(perks up)

What is that? ¿Quién está ahí? Could that be Godínez?

PISO

(off)

You lazy creature! Pull faster! I have places to be! Time slips away and it shall never return!

ISABEL

¡Ay, Dios mío!

PISO

(off)

Faster!

(PISO and AFORTUNADA enter. AFORTUNADA pulls a large, two-wheeled, rickety wooden cart that is painted in faded colors. In the cart sits PISO in a wing-backed, beat-up upholstered chair, holding a glass of wine. They both wear pandemic masks. PISO's clothes are clean, AFORTUNADA's clothes are dusty, and her hair is unkempt)

It is time to rest. Stop here!

(AFORTUNADA stops suddenly and drops the cart's handles making PISO lose his balance.)

Imbecile!

(AFORTUNADA looks down, barely controlling anger. PISO stands.)

Open!

(AFORTUNADA shuffles to the little gate at the side of the cart and opens it, waits.)

Stepstool!

(AFORTUNADA jumps, reaches into the cart, and pulls out a stepstool, places in front of the cart's door. PISO gingerly steps out of the cart, holding wineglass aloft, and steps onto the ground triumphantly. PISO preens, examines his clothing, brushing off non-existent dust from his clothing. Examines the wineglass, tries to drink but realizes he cannot because of the mask, shakes his head, hands wineglass to AFORTUNADA who gingerly puts it into the cart.)

ISABEL

Is that him?

JESÚS

¿Quién?

ISABEL

You know . . .

JESÚS

I do not remember . . .

ISABEL

Godínez!

JESÚS

Sí, it must be Godínez. We are waiting for him, correct?

ISABEL

¡Sí!

(JESÚS and ISABEL run to PISO.)

ISABEL and JESÚS

Señor Godínez!

PISO

Who? What?

ISABEL

What my friend meant to say was: Welcome, Señor Godínez! We have been waiting for you as you requested.

PISO

I do not know this Señor . . . Cortés of whom you speak.

JESÚS

¡No! Not Cortés! Godínez! You do not know your own name?

PISO

My name is Piso . . .

JESÚS

Piso? That is a low name!

PISO

(puzzled, tries again)

At your service. I am Señor Piso Mojado.

ISABEL

(laughing)

Piso Mojado?

PISO

You laugh, but my name is seen in thousands of hotels and luxurious office buildings across the country.

JESÚS

Wherever there are dirty floors to mop!

PISO

Gentlepeople, as I said, I am Piso Mojado, not Cortés or Garcia or Godínez. You may call me Piso. At your service.

ISABEL

The joke is on us, eh, Chuy? Nothing matters, again.

JESÚS

Are you more famous than Godínez?

PISO

I do not know this Godínez of whom you speak. So, perhaps I am more famous than he. We call that logic.

ISABEL

And what are you famous for?

PISO

Gentlepeople, my fame comes from the work of others, which makes me a genius.

ISABEL

What is it that you do?

PISO

(pulls out business cards, hands
one each to ISABEL and JESÚS)

I am a literary agent.

ISABEL

(reading card)

"Señor Piso Mojado. Literary agent of the highest regard and standards."

JESÚS

(reading card)

"Manuscript submission guidelines: Please send your queries in the body of an email, no attachments please."

ISABEL

(reading card)

"Follow me on Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn." LinkedIn?

PISO

I cast a wide net. Even nerds write bestsellers.

ISABEL

He is a genius.

PISO

(snatches business cards)

Printing and paper costs are up, gentlepeople, so I must conserve where I can.

AFORTUNADA

(emits annoyed sigh)

PISO

(to AFORTUNADA)

Enough, you!

ISABEL

Who is that?

PISO

Afortunada is a poet, one of my clients, who had shown great promise at one time. But, alas . . .

ISABEL and JESÚS

Alas what?

PISO

Alas, even the most successful and talented poet can make nothing more than a mere pittance. A "bestselling" (gesturing air quotes) poetry collection might sell a thousand copies, if you are lucky. So, you see, gentlepeople, I must drop this client, and find a novelist to add to my list. I have no choice or else I will starve from the measly percentage I am paid from Afortunada's meager royalties.

ISABEL

But is her poetry not good?

PISO

Oh contraire! She is one of the great poets of our time! But who buys poetry? Who cares about poetry?

JESÚS

¡Quiero escuchar un poema!

ISABEL

Yes! That would be a pretty way to spend time as we wait for Godínez!

JESÚS

Who is Godínez?

ISABEL

We are waiting for Godínez!

JESÚS

Sí, sí. Estamos esperando a Godínez.

PISO

Yes, yes, we may have my poet recite a few pretty words. Why not? She will not be with me much longer, so I might as

well get some use out of her, even if it is just to entertain two strangers.

(pointing to stepstool)

Afortunada, prepare to orate!

(AFORTUNADA steps onto the stool,
faces audience, clears throat.)

Recite the poem, "Sisyphus Explains."

JESÚS

Sisyphus? Again?

PISO

She has not recited this for you before.

ISABEL

Ni modo. Ignore Chuy. Let us hear the poem.

PISO

Very well.

(AFORTUNADA clears throat, holds up right index finger, but no words come out. She realizes that orating during the pandemic is against Dr. Fauci's recommended protocols. Shakes her head, she will not orate. Steps off stool, defiant.)

ISABEL

Where is the poem?

PISO

Alas. We are bountiful with vaccines, but we have failed to reach herd immunity for reasons too disconcerting to mention here. So, we all must mask ... again. Pandemic best practices does not let her orate. Such a shame. This pandemic ruins everything, even poetry.

JESÚS

(to PISO)

Do you have a mango or even a limón? Tengo mucha hambre.

PISO

(stepping onto stool and into cart)

No time for mangos, gentlepeople, though I have many here in this lunch basket.

JESÚS

¡Nooooooooooooooooo!

PISO

Off to the city for a novelist! Afortunada, get back to your post and pull as if it matters to you!

(AFORTUNADA gets in front of cart)

Adieu, gentlepeople! We will never see each other again. Faster, Afortunada! Faster!

(PISO and AFORTUNADA exit stage. ISABEL and JESÚS follow them slowly, sadly, stop by bench as cart passes bench.)

PISO

Faster!

(off)

Faster, I say! Faster! Faster, Afortunada!

ISABEL

They are gone forever.

JESÚS

And so are the mangos. Estoy tan cansado.

(climbing onto bench, curls up to nap, facing audience, closes eyes)

Let me sleep.

ISABEL

Sleep my old friend. Rest so that we will be ready to meet Godínez. He should be here, perhaps while you sleep . . . but do not worry, I shall awaken you. But sleep for now. Sleeping is the best way to wait. Indeed, sleeping is the best way to live.

CHILD

(off)

Mr. Albert?

(entering stage right)

Mr. Albert?

ISABEL

Why do you call me Mr. Albert?

CHILD

Are you Mr. Albert?

ISABEL

I am Isabel. But you may call me Señora Soledad out of respect for my age and station. Who is it you are looking for? Are you the child who came Tuesday with the news that Señor Godínez wanted us to wait for him by this tree?

CHILD

No, Señora Soledad. That was not me. Maybe it was my twin.

ISABEL

Ah! You are one of the twins, yes? You both work at the bicycle repair shop for Señor Godínez, correct?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Which one are you?

CHILD

What do you mean, Señora Soledad?

ISABEL

Are you the boy or the girl?

CHILD

I do not know, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

You must know.

CHILD

No, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Ni modo. Does Señor Godínez beat you or your twin?

CHILD

He beats my twin, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Ah! So, perhaps you are the girl? Maybe Señor Godínez is a man of the old ways and would only beat a boy?

CHILD

I do not know, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

You are very thin. Are you hungry, child?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

(searching pockets, finds a mango)

Here, child, a delicious, ripe mango for you. Take it.

CHILD

(taking mango)

Gracias, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

And do you have a message for me from Señor Godínez?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

And what is that message?

CHILD

Señor Godínez says that he cannot come this evening, but he hopes to come tomorrow.

ISABEL

But we have waited all day for him, child. What of that? Does that not matter?

CHILD

I do not know, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Well, tomorrow it must be. We have no choice, do we? You may go now, child.

CHILD

But Señora Soledad . . .

ISABEL

What is it, child?

CHILD

What should I tell Señor Godínez?

ISABEL

Tell him you met me, we spoke, I fed you, and sent you off.
Can you do that, child?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

(CHILD hesitates, turns, starts to walk, turns to look at ISABEL one last time as if to say something, thinks better of it, then runs off. Suddenly, sky goes dark, it is now a dark night, moon rises into the middle of the night sky.)

ISABEL

(looks up toward the moon)
Ah, la luna! You have returned, my old friend. Just in time. I have so much to tell you. Where do I begin?

JESÚS

(stirring, eyes still closed)
Chavalita? ¿Dónde estás?

ISABEL

(looks toward JESÚS, walks to him)
Estoy aquí, Chuy.
(ISABEL sits, comforts JESÚS)

JESÚS

(eyes still closed, sighing)
Do not let them take me again, Chavalita. I do not want to be put in that cold cage ever again. Stay here, por favor.

ISABEL

I will protect you, Chuy. I will not sleep under the tree this time. I will stay here, near you, and alert all night.

JESÚS

Mil gracias.

ISABEL

Por nada.

JESÚS

Tengo hambre. Do you have a mango?

ISABEL

No, Chuy. I gave you the last one yesterday.

JESÚS

Oh, yes, you said that.

ISABEL

But maybe tomorrow I will have a mango.

JESÚS

Sí. Mañana.

ISABEL

In the meantime, I will stay alert. I will not betray you.

JESÚS

Gracias, Chavalita.

ISABEL

No one will take you tonight.

JESÚS

Gracias, Chavalita.

ISABEL

Te prometo. A promise from me is as good as gold. Sleep, my old friend. I will protect you.

(JESÚS falls asleep. ISABEL talks to herself.)

Pues, when the moon rises and our home here becomes quiet, I ask myself: Why do I have to protect Chuy? Why is it my responsibility to feed him? Why do I always have to worry that Chuy has all that he needs? ¿Por qué? Is Chuy a baby to be cared for by someone else? What about me? ¿Nadie se preocupa por mí? Pues, I will not complain. That is not in my nature. I will take action! From now on, I will care for myself first. No one will come before my needs! I make that promise to myself. And if there is anything left, I will give it to Chuy. You will? I will. Pues, you say that every night, and in the morning, you forget what you have promised yourself. I do not! Oh, but you do! I do? ¡Sí! Ay, it is because I forget. Sí, it is because you forget. Pero ... What? I can help you remember. Can you? Sí. Will you? Sí. Can I believe you? ¡Sí! A promise from me is as good as gold. Ay, gracias. Por nada. It is now time to rest.

(ISABEL's eyes start to flutter.
She slowly nods off. Tableau.)

(End of Scene 1.)

SCENE 2

SETTING: Next day (perhaps). Scene is identical to beginning of Scene 1 but all the leaves from the tree have fallen, scattered about. ISABEL is asleep. JESÚS's huaraches sit near the bench as they were the night before.

AT RISE: ISABEL wakes with a start, notices JESÚS's absence, scratches head, puzzled. Looks around, sees leaves on the ground by the tree. She gets up, walks to the tree, picks up one leaf, examines it, lets it fall back to ground. Strolls to bench, scratches head, sits down, remains silent for several moments taking in scene, still sleepy.

ISABEL

Híjole.

(Enter JESÚS walking slowly, barefoot, approaches ISABEL, stops, turns, walks over to tree, looks up into the barren branches, looks down at the leaves strewn about, slowly bends and picks up one leaf, examines it curiously, shrugs, drops leaf, turns, walks to bench, sits, sighs, sees his huaraches, slips them on one at a time.)

ISABEL

You again.

JESÚS

Sí, soy yo otra vez.

ISABEL

Where have you been? I thought I had lost you forever.

JESÚS

They took me last night, while you snored like a baby . . . they took me, threw me into that cold cage. But I escaped

before they could deport me. The babosos forgot to lock the pinche cage again, so I escaped, and walked miles with no huaraches on my feet, back to here.

ISABEL

I am always here for you.

JESÚS

That is the problem.

ISABEL

You are cruel.

JESÚS

You are here.

ISABEL

If you needed my help, why did you not cry out?

JESÚS

Why did you not listen?

ISABEL

There is nothing wrong with my ears.

JESÚS

That makes it worse.

(ISABEL stands, walks over to examine the tree, puzzled, shakes her head in confusion.)

ISABEL

This looks different from yesterday.

JESÚS

Es lo mismo.

ISABEL

No, it is different. Somehow. I cannot remember. But I know it is different. It is different from yesterday.

(walking back to bench, sits)

Why did you leave me last night?

JESÚS

Ya te dije lo que pasó. The agents came and took me, again. I walked all night. And now I am here. But these new

huaraches fit my swollen feet better than my old ones. That is one good thing.

ISABEL

No, those are your old huaraches.

JESÚS

My old huaraches were a lighter brown. I wonder who left them here? He clearly has larger feet than I.

ISABEL

Did you miss me?

JESÚS

When?

ISABEL

When you were in that cage last night.

JESÚS

I always miss you, even when I am with you.

ISABEL

I do not know if that makes me very happy.

JESÚS

No es mi trabajo hacerte feliz.

ISABEL

I just want happy days.

JESÚS

I just want happy nights.

ISABEL

What brings you back to me each night?

JESÚS

(ignores question, accusatory)

Tengo una pregunta para ti. What if I never came back ... here, to you?

ISABEL

Maybe your life would be better.

JESÚS

No sé.

ISABEL

And maybe my life would be better.
(pause, both in thought, then
jumping to her feet, excited)
Let us kill time!

JESÚS

Time will die without our help.

ISABEL

Let us play Piso and Afortunada! I will be Afortunada, you
will be Piso.

JESÚS

¿Quiénes son? Piso and Afortunada?

ISABEL

The two from yesterday! I will make up a poem titled,
"Sisyphus Explains."

JESÚS

(jumping to feet, upset)
No, no, no, not that one! Do one about a cat! ¡Amo los
poemas sobre gatos! Afortunada could not give us any poems
because of her pinche mask.

ISABEL

Ah, you do remember!

JESÚS

I remember nothing!

ISABEL

But you said . . .

JESÚS

(sits on bench, distraught)
I want to leave this place.

ISABEL

No, we must stay.

JESÚS

Stay? Why?

ISABEL
We must wait for Godínez.

JESÚS
¿Por qué?

ISABEL
(sits next JESÚS)
You know why.

JESÚS
I do?

ISABEL
Sí.

JESÚS
Because we have no choice?

ISABEL
Sí.

JESÚS
We must wait for Godínez?

ISABEL
Sí, we must wait for Godínez.

JESÚS
Sí, that is what I thought. Por supuesto. I knew that.

ISABEL
Sí.

JESÚS
(lies down, curled up, facing
audience, closes eyes)
I will sleep now.

ISABEL
Sí.

JESÚS
Estoy tan cansado.

ISABEL
Yes, sleep.

JESÚS

Gracias, Chavalita.

ISABEL

Por nada. So we will wait for Godínez. Maybe he will make things better, stop this cycle, stop the cages, keep you safe when I fail to. Sí, we will wait for Godínez because we have no choice. Why does it happen, over and over and over? Why do they take you, my friend, and put you in a cage in the hopes of deporting you? What harm have you done to them? You are as much of this country as you are of México. But you are not home in either place. Ni de aquí, ni de allá. But what can I do? Each day, I promise to stay vigilant throughout the night, but I fail you, I fall asleep, I enter dreams of yesterday when we were happy and young. And in my slumber, they take you, put you in a cold cage. But why? Are you an animal? No. Or maybe yes. No. I do not know anymore. Híjole. Maybe you should not return here. Perhaps tonight, after I fall asleep and they take you and throw you in that cage, you should make a different plan for your escape. Maybe there is a safe place, far from me, where you can live free from those monsters who want you out of this country. Why do you return? Why have you not learned? American dirt is a lie, not to be trusted. They use you when they need cheap work, then when they are done with you, they snatch you up in the middle of the night to rid themselves of your presence. ¡Ay Dios mío! Who gives them the right? Or maybe, a bit of rope and that tree branch can help you escape this prison forever. But what about me? I would be alone. Siempre. Maybe Godínez is the answer, not a bit of rope. We will wait for him. We have no choice.

JESÚS

(stirs and mumbling in sleep)

Mmmmmmmmm . . . Godínez . . . mmmmmmm . . .

ISABEL

What is that? ¿Quién está ahí? Could that be Godínez?

(JESÚS's eyes pop open, sits up.)

PISO

(off)

Oh, what is time to me now? Pull me if you must, to where I do not know.

ISABEL

Piso and Afortunada! They are back!

(ISABEL jumps up, runs to meet PISO and AFORTUNADA. JESÚS is confused, remains seated, unexcited.)

PISO

(off)

Oh, where do we go, I do not know!

(PISO and AFORTUNADA enter. AFORTUNADA pulls a beautiful, large, two-wheeled, wooden cart that is painted gold. PISO sits in a new wing-backed, upholstered chair. Both wear the same outfits as yesterday, but both are clean. PISO wears a white bandana on his eyes with blood stains where his eye sockets would be.)

PISO

It is time to rest. Please stop here, Afortunada.

(AFORTUNADA stops.)

Thank you, you are too kind.

(PISO stands, unsteady, hands out because he cannot see.)

Please open.

(AFORTUNADA grudgingly complies and opens the cart's gate, waits.)

Stepstool, please.

(AFORTUNADA reaches into the cart, and pulls out a stepstool, places in front of the cart's door, offers PISO an arm. PISO reaches out, finds AFORTUNADA's arm, gingerly steps out of the cart, and steps onto the ground carefully.)

JESÚS

(stands, joins ISABEL)

Who are they?

ISABEL

You know . . .

JESÚS
I do not remember . . .

ISABEL
Piso and Afortunada!

JESÚS
Who?

ISABEL
The literary agent and his poet! From yesterday!

JESÚS
We know them?

ISABEL
¡Sí!

JESÚS
And this is a good thing?

ISABEL
¡Sí!

JESÚS
(getting excited)
¡Sí!

ISABEL
¡Sí!

JESÚS
But what is wrong with Piso's eyes?

ISABEL
No sé.

PISO
Who? What?

ISABEL
Welcome back, Señor Piso Mojado!

PISO
Who is shouting at me? Please stop! Are you unable to see that I am blind! A blind man's hearing is amplified by his

blindness transforming a mere whisper into an intolerable cacophony of sound!

(gaining composure, bows)

My name is Piso . . .

JESÚS

Piso? That is a low name!

ISABEL

No, Chuy, this is the great literary agent, Piso! We encountered him and his poet yesterday at this same spot. You do not remember, Chuy?

JESÚS

I do not remember. And I was sad that his poet could not recite to us because of that pinche mask.

ISABEL

Then you do remember!

JESÚS

Do not tell me what is in my head!

(walks over to AFORTUNADA, looks
her up and down, curious)

¿Te conozco?

PISO

Gentlepeople, may I introduce you to Afortunada, one of the greatest novelists of our time . . . and my newest client.

ISABEL

No, this is Afortunada, your poet, not novelist.

JESÚS

Sí, la misma persona.

PISO

Do you mock a blind man? I know who my client is! She is the newest literary star, and she signed with me this morning. Afortunada is a brilliant novelist, a wordsmith of the highest caliber. I do not waste my time with poets who only bring misery and unpaid bills.

ISABEL

(pointing to PISO's face)

What happened to your eyes, if I may ask?

PISO

Gentlepeople, Afortunada blinded me with a pen.

ISABEL

What? Why have you not prosecuted her?

PISO

I am a literary agent. Afortunada is my client. And she will be a bestseller! I -- we -- will be wealthy beyond our imaginations! What is the loss of my eyes when I will live in comfort for the rest of my life?

JESÚS

Híjole.

ISABEL

She did it with a pen?

PISO

Yes.

JESÚS

¿Qué tipo de pluma era?

PISO

I do not know. Perhaps a fountain pen. I cannot remember!

JESÚS

¿Cómo podría no saber qué tipo de pluma era?

ISABEL

Yes, I would have remembered what kind of pen Chuy used to blind me.

JESÚS

I never would have blinded you!

ISABEL

I know, I know, Chuy.

JESÚS

I have wanted to kill you, por supuesto, but I would never think of blinding you.

PISO

Talking about it will not bring back my eyes. No. It does not matter. What does matter is that I have a brilliant

novelist as a client who, no doubt, will bring me -- us -- wealth and fame. What more could a literary agent desire?

AFORTUNADA

(adjusting mask, perhaps to remove, attempts to speak but she can only make muffled sounds)

PISO

(hearing muffled sounds, to AFORTUNADA)

Please be patient.

(to ISABEL AND JESÚS)

Would you like to hear my great author recite from her novel-in-progress . . . gratis?

ISABEL

Free is good.

JESÚS

Something about gatos!

PISO

A true coincidence! The great novelist's latest work does have a character whose nickname is "Kitten."

JESÚS

Close enough.

PISO

Yes, yes, we may have my novelist recite a few pretty words. Why not? Afortunada, prepare to orate!

(AFORTUNADA steps onto the stool.)

Recite an excerpt from your novel-in-progress, *Sanctity*.

ISABEL

A mysterious title. It must be brilliant!

PISO

I give you the great novelist, Joshua Franklin!

JESÚS and ISABEL

¿Quién?

PISO

Joshua Franklin! That is Afortunada's nom de plume. I learned long ago that selling books is a business with

certain rules. Rule number one: For a book to sell, it must be reviewed. And a book written by a person named Afortunada will not attract reviewers from the major publications -- the literary intelligentsia, if you will. However, a major novel by an author with a name like Joshua Franklin will be reviewed.

(to AFORTUNADA)

Joshua Franklin, recite an excerpt from *Sanctity*.

(AFORTUNADA clears throat, holds up an index finger, and tries to orate, but only muffled noises come through the mask. Frustrated, she triumphantly rips off her mask.)

AFORTUNADA

(reciting dramatically)

From the novel, *Sanctity*. By Joshua Franklin. Chapter 1: *Sanctity in Trouble*.

ISABEL and JESÚS

(clapping, excited)

AFORTUNADA

"Oh kitten, I'm delighted you called," the girl's aunt said on the telephone. "I am not well. At times I believe my life consists of nothing more than my body plotting against me with a plan of torture that gets more devious each day."

"How is that different from my life?" the girl, Hap, said. It was now her habit to call her aunt midway through her dinner break at the Red Lobster. She had many thoughts about her job -- which was far beneath her desires and abilities -- but Hap put on a brave face for her aunt, and these phone calls gave her a chance to have an obligatory conversation without saying too much and the honest opportunity to end the conversation because her manager needed her to get back to waiting tables.

"I am seeing double again," her aunt explained. "It's like my world has been split in two, like a teensy French chef has sliced my vision with a very sharp knife or something."

(puts on mask, steps off stool)

ISABEL and JESÚS

(clapping)

Wonderful! ;Otro!

ISABEL

But what did it mean?

PISO

Does it matter? Why should it mean anything? And were you not rivetted? Such simple language creating such complex characters, so real you could almost smell their perfume. But in the end, the real question is: Will *Sanctity* by Joshua Franklin sell? And I have little doubt it will because the critics will not ignore it.

ISABEL

You are the expert.

JESÚS

By the way, do you have a mango that you can spare for poor, hungry Chuy?

(PISO reaches for Afortunada's arm, grasps arm, turns, feels for stool with foot, steps onto stool and into cart.)

PISO

No time for mangos, gentlepeople, though I have many here in this lunch basket.

JESÚS

(distraught)

¡Nooooooooooooooooo!

PISO

Off to the city to meet with publishers!

(AFORTUNADA gets in front of cart, grabs handles, and starts to pull.)

JESÚS

¡Nooooooooooooooooo!

PISO

Adieu, gentlepeople! We will never see each other again, no doubt, but wish me well in my endeavors.

ISABEL

¡Nooooooooooooooooo!

PISO

Faster, please, Afortunada! Faster! Faster! Faster!

(PISO and AFORTUNADA exit.)

ISABEL

¡Noooooooooooooooooooo!

PISO

(off)

Faster, please, my great novelist!

ISABEL

(turning to JESÚS)

They are gone forever.

JESÚS

I am unhappy.

ISABEL

(laughs)

JESÚS

(incredulous)

Why do you laugh at my unhappiness?

ISABEL

As the great Mexican playwright said: Nothing is funnier than unhappiness.

JESÚS

But how will we pass the time as we wait?

ISABEL

A game to end our boredom! I will say a word. You must respond with another word. A word that naturally follows.

JESÚS

What kind of word?

ISABEL

We used to play a game where I would say the name of a state in México, and you would say the next one, in alphabetical order. But I cannot remember how to start it.

JESÚS

(thinks a moment)
Does it begin with an "A"?

ISABEL

Sí.

JESÚS

I cannot remember either.

ISABEL

That is my favorite game!

JESÚS

Yo también. But I cannot remember how it starts.

ISABEL

Why have we forgotten? We have played that game so often.

JESÚS

(yawning, walking toward bench)
No sé. All of this forgetting makes me so tired.
(climbs onto bench, curls up to
nap, facing audience, closes eyes)

ISABEL

Sleep my old friend.
(walking downstage, looks at tree,
pensive, talking to herself)
We must be ready to meet Godínez. And should he arrive
while you sleep, I promise that I will wake you. As the
great Mexican philosopher said: Sleeping is the best way to
pass the time while you wait for the important thing to
happen. We will meet Godínez here, together, by this tree,
and he will ... he will ... ay! I do not know what he will
do or say, but we must wait to meet him, then he will let
us know. I am sure of it. Sí, sí. I am sure of it.

CHILD

(off)
Mr. Albert?

(enters)
Mr. Albert?

(stopping in front of ISABEL)

ISABEL

Why do you still call me Mr. Albert?

CHILD

Are you Mr. Albert?

ISABEL

I told you yesterday, I am Isabel, my close friends call me Chavalita. But you may call me Señora Soledad out of respect for my age and station. Are you the child who came yesterday with the news that Señor Godínez wanted us to wait for him by this tree?

CHILD

No, Señora Soledad. That was not me. Maybe it was my twin.

ISABEL

You both work at the bicycle repair shop for Señor Godínez, correct?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Which one are you?

CHILD

What do you mean, Señora Soledad?

ISABEL

Are you the boy or girl? Yesterday, your twin did not know.

CHILD

I do not know either, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

You must know. Someone must know.

CHILD

No, Señora Soledad. I do not know.

ISABEL

Ni modo. You are the twin that Señor Godínez beats, correct?

CHILD

He does not beat my twin, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Ah! So, perhaps you are the boy? Maybe Señor Godínez is a man of the old ways and would only beat a boy?

CHILD

I do not know, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

(thinking, then gets an idea)

You are very thin, just like your twin. Are you hungry, child?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

(searching pockets, finds mango,
presents it to CHILD)

Here, child, a delicious, ripe mango for you. Take it.

CHILD

(taking mango)

Gracias, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Por nada. Child, were you born in México?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Do you know which state?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Which one?

CHILD

Oaxaca, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

That is a fine state.

(sadness, a memory of something)

I have been there many times.

CHILD

I do not know, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Trust me, child, it is a fine state. Do you know which state I was born in?

CHILD

No, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Of course you do not know. I was born in the great state of Chihuahua.

CHILD

(points to sleeping JESÚS)

And what state was he born in, Señora Soledad?

ISABEL

Jesús? He was born in Texas. El Paso to be exact.

CHILD

Is that in México, Señora Soledad?

ISABEL

No, it is part of this country, the United States. Texas was once part of México, long ago. Anyway, my friend over there never remembers that he was born in the United States, that he is a citizen of this country ... our country. He lost his birth certificate long ago, and never remembers that he needs to get another copy.

CHILD

Why do you not remind him, Señora Soledad?

ISABEL

I always forget. Do you blame me, child?

CHILD

No, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

I assume you have a message for me from Señor Godínez?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

And what is that message?

CHILD

Señor Godínez says that he cannot come this evening, but he hopes to come tomorrow.

ISABEL

This is the same message your twin gave me yesterday. We have been waiting for him for two, three, maybe four days, I do not remember. What of that? Does our waiting not matter to Señor Godínez?

CHILD

I do not know, Señora Soledad.

ISABEL

Well, tomorrow it must be. We have no choice, do we? You may go now, child.

CHILD

But Señora Soledad . . .

ISABEL

What is it, child?

CHILD

What should I tell Señor Godínez?

ISABEL

Tell him you met me, we spoke, I fed you just as I fed your twin yesterday, and sent you off. Can you do that, child?

CHILD

Sí, Señora Soledad.

(CHILD hesitates, turns, starts to walk, turns to look at ISABEL one last time, then runs off. Suddenly, sky goes dark, moon rises.)

ISABEL

(looking up toward the moon)

Ah, la luna! You have returned. It is good to see you again. Have you missed me? Yes, of course you have. How could you not. I know I will miss you when you stop

visiting. Ni modo. I have so much to tell you. Let me gather my thoughts ... I know there are things in here ...

(tapping head, frustrated)

... that you want to hear, that you need to know, but I do not remember where they are. They have slipped away. Por favor, give me but a moment to think ... I know I can make them return to my head, just as you have returned to me. I just need to think ... think ... think ...

JESÚS

(stirring, eyes still closed)

Chavalita? ¿Dónde estás?

ISABEL

(frustrated, sits on bench)

Estoy aquí.

JESÚS

(eyes still closed, sighing)

I had a dream, Chavalita. You fell asleep next to me and they came and took me again and put in me in that cold cage. All because you fell asleep and did not fight them.

ISABEL

It was only a dream, my friend. I will protect you, Chuy. I will keep you safe. No te estoy mintiendo. I will stay alert all night. Do not worry, my old friend. I will never betray you. You have my word.

JESÚS

Mil gracias.

ISABEL

Por nada.

JESÚS

Tengo hambre. Do you have a mango?

ISABEL

No, Chuy. I gave you the last one yesterday. I have had nothing in my pockets all day. I would never lie to you. But I hope that tomorrow I will have a mango. And if I do, I promise to give it to you and to no one else.

JESÚS

Sí. Mañana. Talk to me, Chavalita.

ISABEL
About what, my friend?

JESÚS
Did you ever marry?

ISABEL
I had a big wedding when I was young. You were there.

JESÚS
I was?

ISABEL
Sí. You do not remember?

JESÚS
Who did you marry?

ISABEL
(surprised with this memory)
I married your brother, Nacho. You do not remember?

JESÚS
Ah, sí, sí, Nacho. And did you have children?

ISABEL
Sí.

JESÚS
How many?

ISABEL
Two . . . a boy and a girl. Twins.

JESÚS
Ah, sí, sí, twins. And where are Nacho and the twins?

ISABEL
(confused, a chasm of pain)
I do not remember.

JESÚS
And tell me, Chavalita: Did I ever marry?

ISABEL
No, Chuy. You never married.

JESÚS

¿Por qué no?

ISABEL

You said the best person was already taken.

JESÚS

Ah, sí, sí. And who was already taken?

ISABEL

I do not know.

JESÚS

But I am not alone now.

ISABEL

(soothingly)

No, you are not alone, Chuy.

JESÚS

You are here.

ISABEL

Sí, I am here. I will protect you, Chuy. No one will take you tonight, I promise.

JESÚS

Gracias, Chavalita.

ISABEL

I will never betray you, my friend.

JESÚS

Gracias, Chavalita.

ISABEL

Te prometo. A promise from me is as good as gold.

(Both grow quiet. ISABEL's eyes start to flutter. She slowly nods off. Both are now asleep. Tableau.)

(Curtain, end of play.)