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## Del Norte: A collection of short stories y El corrido de Dani

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*DEL NORTE: A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES*  
*Y EL CORRIDO DE DANI*

A Thesis

by

JESUS ALFREDO REYNA

Submitted to the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

May 2014

Major Subject: Creative Writing



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*Y EL CORRIDO DE DANI*

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May 2014



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## ABSTRACT

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Del Norte is the title name given to this first series of vignettes and short stories. The narratives are divided into four parts including a one act play that attempt to bridge the gap between the idea of a homeland as well as the Mexican American identity through the eyes of a migrant family and its major narrator. Unlike derivative associations with the term Del Norte in other academic disciplines, my interpretation of being from “Del Norte” is manifested into stories about a homeland omnipresent in the familial relationships described in my stories. The narratives exist within this paradigm.

The themes discussed range from bilingualism in fiction, to colloquialisms, to displacement of the self, to violence in border communities. The work deals with the dichotomy of Mexican American culture and attempts to culminate the experience by those who transcend the boundaries of a region Del Norte.





## DEDICATION

I dedicate these stories to my late mother Rafael Reyna Rocha. Thank you for inspiring me to write my stories and giving them life. Te quiero mucho mi madrecita, siempre estarás conmigo.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Emmy Pérez for taking on the daunting task of being my committee chair. Her support and knowledge as a writer has been invaluable. The time that she has invested in examining and critiquing my work is something I will always be indebted to her for. I want to thank Dr. Marci McMahon for being a part of my committee as well. Her knowledge and insight about my cultural heritage influenced me as an undergraduate, and then later as graduate student in pursuing a certificate in Mexican American Studies. Last but not least I want to thank Dr. Francisco Guajardo for also being part of my committee. Although I knew him for the shortest time, he left a lasting impression with the way he conducted himself in the classroom. I appreciate the discourse and the knowledge you have shared with me.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
PART I: CUENTOS.....	21
The Storm (Lawton, Michigan 1980).....	21
Almost Gold (Sidney, Montana 1989).....	24
Padre, Hijo y Espirito Santo (Donna, Texas 1998).....	26
Dressed in Black (Donna, Texas 1988).....	28
Wonder Light Plastic Bread Wrap (Pullman, Michigan 1986).....	31
John Steinbeiser (Sidney, Montana 1989).....	34
1Las Borregueras / El azadón (Sidney, Montana 1989).....	36
Part II.....	40
Silver Avenue.....	40
Pescador De Hombres FISHERS OF MEN .....	45

Part III.....	58
El corrido de Dani.....	58
Part IV.....	90
Tacuache.....	90
REFERENCES.....	100
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	102

## INTRODUCTION

When I first conceptualized my thesis, I did so with the intention of understanding what it meant to be from “Del Norte”. Having been a musician for over fifteen years, and well versed in traditional forms of Mexican American music, my initial interest in this label followed a perception of cataloguing music and styles analogous to this region. Anyone familiar with *música nortea* could be able to distinguish a band by their sound. So I asked myself, why are we not able to distinguish it through prose as well? I was motivated to write stories that I perceived to be from Del Norte and unique to my hybridized sensibilities that were born out of the Rio Grande Valley.

I wish to make the moniker Del Norte prevalent in my writing, and influenced by the same type of hybridity in sociocultural terms. The idiosyncratic nature of music and literature is significant in terms of this relationship, and the manner in which I wish to present this collection of short stories. My interpretation of being from Del Norte is manifested in the narratives about a homeland omnipresent in the familial relationships described in my stories. The stories not only carry a physical awareness of what it means to be “home”, but also a spiritual one that is most represented in the final story of my collection titled “Tacuache”.

In my hometown of Donna, Texas we were known as those who come from the north (“¿Ustedes vienen Del Norte verdad?”). I grew up as a migrant kid born in Berrien Springs, Michigan. If you were to ask me where that is on a map, I couldn’t tell you. I have lived most of my life in the Rio Grande Valley. It was customary for my family to commute from Texas to Montana, Montana to Michigan, during every summer of the year until my eighteenth birthday.



We used to work the sugar beet fields in the town of Sidney, Montana from the months of May to July and then traveled to Michigan to work the blueberry and apple harvest that ended in October. We were never at one place for too long because before we knew it, it was time for us to leave again. The family relationship is omnipresent throughout my narratives and the characters at times resemble my own family in an autobiographical manner.

The migrant experience is undeniably significant in my work. The shared relationships with my family as we traveled and worked alongside each other served as a way for me to construct my stories and characters. The first time I encountered the word “migrant” was in John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993). This was the first story I ever read where I identified with the characters and my own childhood experience as a migrant farm worker. I remember my walks home from school and the apple orchard that surrounded the camp. I remember picking those “golden delicious” apples right off the tree and thinking that this is what it meant to “live off the fatta the lan” (56). I became a fan of Steinbeck’s work and subsequently read other works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Tortilla Flat*. I was very sympathetic to the strong family union illustrated by the Joad family and found something inherent in my own. I did not know then that this integral family dynamic would be at the core of my narratives and play a major role in its connection to a homeland.

Part I of my thesis depicts life as a migrant farm worker through the eyes of a narrator and his family. Some of the narratives are accompanied by pictures that juxtapose the visual imagery along with the written language. The stories represented in “Cuentos” are heavily influenced by two exceptional and critically acclaimed writers in Tomás Rivera and Norma Elia Cantú. In the introduction to the 1971 Quinto Sol publication of *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*, Herminio C. Ríos describes Rivera’s work as a historic continuation that not only transcends the

past but endures and reflects the multiplicity of the Mexican American experience (Rivera, 1971). In one of the opening pieces titled “The Children Were Victims”, Rivera describes the arduous heat endured by the children working in the fields and the villainous foreman who wouldn’t allow them to drink water:

He fired a shot at him just to frighten him; but when he squeezed the trigger he saw the little boy with a hole through his head. He didn’t even jump like the deer; he just fell into the water like a dirty rag and the water became saturated with blood... (11).

Rivera captures the abuse and injustices toward the migrant laborer of the late 1940’s and 50’s. The framework in which I wish to present my fiction follows in line with Rivera’s migrant experiences in a more contemporary period where civil rights laws have changed but the subtleties of opposition still exist. In my story “John Steinbeiser (Sidney, Montana 1989)”, students are depicted as cattle, each unnamed, with only the name of their farmer tagged to represent who they are. The stories in this thesis are meant to provide insight on the migrant farm worker of the 1980’s with a contemporary lens.

The photography that accompanies the vignettes in my work is largely influenced by Norma Elia Cantú’s book titled *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood En La Frontera* (1995). Although the images compliment the narrative in an aesthetic form the driving force that carries them forward is largely attributed to Cantú’s wonderful storytelling. In the introduction to her book, Cantú explains the origins of her characters and the amount of influence they have on her work: “As in most fiction, many of the characters and situations in these three works originate in real people and events, and become fictionalized. In *Canícula* the story is told through the photographs, and so what may appear to be autobiographical is not always so” (xi). While Cantú

plays with the idea of her stories being autobiographical, she also recognizes the ethnographic aspect about her fiction. Ultimately she jokingly labels her work as fictional autobioethnography (xi). I must think that classifying a writer according to just one genre may have seemed a little limiting according to her.

Much like Cantú, I take on labels and genres with a grain of salt. While my fiction recognizes both the autobiographical and ethnographic aspect of narration, in most cases I am simply the spectator and not the actual participant. My intention is not to put forward the most accurate account of my experiences in the narrative form, rather; I claim to use it as a foundation to build upon stories of my own. If any of my stories can be considered to be ethnographic or autobiographic by nature, it would be the following series of vignettes.

The prologue of my narratives titled *Cuentos*, are tales that describe a migrant family throughout different stages of their lives. The opening vignette titled “The Storm (Lawton, Michigan 1980)” is a metaphor for the split dichotomy of the self and the home in its most physical and literal form. The story follows an autobiographic event presented to me by my late mother. While I present some of my siblings as minor characters in this first half of stories; my mother on the other hand becomes an integral piece to the collective discourse as a major character herself. As one of the pillars in my family, I pay tribute to her in this first set of short stories.

Along with the initial characterizations in “The Storm (Lawton, Michigan 1980)”; the figurative language and the first visual components work hand in hand to demonstrate this duality of nature by nature. The pictures of the tree cutting into the mobile home are a physical manifestation of this dualism. I pay homage to Tomás Rivera when I say that “the earth turned

itself inside out”. The narrator is an adolescent baby when this metaphoric dualism and displacement occurs naturally by nature.

“Almost Gold (Sidney, Montana 1989)” carries forward with the concept of “home” as a thematic element in my narrative. In order to avoid confusion and still benefit the story in some way, I have accompanied each vignette with a date and location. In doing so, I have preserved the idea of being from “Del Norte” while helping my audience situate themselves in terms of setting. My intention was to capture a kind of innocence and humility with the young kids in an age where technological advancements were still at their infancy. I use baseball as a symbol to illustrate old ideals and values. In sociocultural terms; baseball was still untainted by the steroid era and kids still looked up to ball players back then. The story also brings to light hints of social class elements with the allusion to Alberto Rios’s *The Secret Lion* (1998), but nothing too heavy handed.

“Padre, Hijo y Espirito Santo (Donna, Texas 1998)” incorporates some of the traditional spiritual motifs associated with being raised in a Catholic family. I tried to make the story as honest as I could in terms of what church is like when you are a child, and the things you realize about religion when you are older. The title is symbolic in that it represents the three major characters in the story.

“Dressed in Black (Donna, Texas 1988)” is a story that touches on the sociocultural binary present in feminist theory and topics associated with gender. The education aspect was something I really wanted to touch upon in this piece. My sister was the first in our family to go to college. I had always wanted to write about the importance of this event for the longest time. The figurative language used in this story is supposed to mimic the disconnection from the traditional forms of living as she (Alma) knew it. What occurred next was a sense of

individualistic social change in her. I wanted the description of the album cover to personify the separation of cultures. I am very much influenced by 80's new wave music and pop culture. For individuals like my sister; this new wave gave resurgence to an individualist ideology and transformed the way the sociocultural patriarchy would be perceived in our family.

“Wonder Light Plastic Bread Wrap (Pullman, Michigan 1986)” begins with a descriptive narrative about a migrant family's home in Michigan. Although the omnipresent theme is still present with regard to the home; the story veers and the reader gets an insight into the sexuality of a young man. It is important for me to point out how mass media contributes to some of the character motivations in this vignette. Sandra Cisneros' use of telenovelas in *Woman Hollering Creek* (1992) suggests a romanticized myth about women and their role in society. Sonia Saldívar-Hull reinforces this idea when she suggests that, “The mass media, in this case fotonovelas, telenovelas, and revistas femeninas (women's magazines), all shape the women's consciousness and their limited knowledge of the world” (108 ). The child protagonist in my piece also learns by watching films, but more specifically; the sexy comedias along with the most prevalent actors and actresses of that genre. In some way or another he is forced to invent and learn about sex in his own initiation. At the end of the narrative, the child believes that he has become a man and even begins to act like it in front of his family.

“John Steinbeiser (Sidney, Montana 1989)” is a satirical look at migrant summer school in Montana. The story has plenty of autobiographical elements associated with it. I always thought it was funny that teachers wouldn't remember kids' names. They addressed you according to the farmer you worked for. In a subtle way I wanted to speak on behalf of the migrant that cultivates the fields and the American Indians that have been forgotten due to agrarian reform.

“Las Borregueras / El azadón (Sidney, Montana 1989)” is a two part vignette. The first part of the narrative shortly chronicles the Carranza women of Sidney, Montana. I met the Carranza’s when I was only ten years old. They were the only farmers I actually ever knew, and they were all women. Their story is an extraordinary one. In an article commemorating Margaret Carranza’s 100-year-old birthday, Dru Koester writes:

Juanita told how her mother’s early life was riddled with hardship; a flu epidemic and violent revolutionary war swept through the country and many lives were taken, including Carranza’s four older siblings (Koester, 2011).

Koester writes a separate anecdotal piece describing great grandmother Carranza before a firing squad after she refused to kneel to military forces:

She also almost lost her mother, Brigida, who refused, when ordered, to kneel before a firing squad which was prepared to kill her and several other women accused of showing disrespect to the government. Brigida proudly declared that she kneeled to no man, only to God. As the soldiers prepared to fire, Brigida’s 3-year-old son ran to her crying and wrapped his arms around his mother’s knees; an act that saved her life for, one of the soldiers, moved by what he saw, spoke out on her behalf and thus spared her from certain death (Koester, 2011).

Both my mother and women like the Carranza’s always demonstrated the ability to overcome adversity in toughest of situations.

“El azadón” is the second vignette in this narrative. This is one of my favorite pieces that I’ve written thus far. The garden “hoe” motif was something that I wanted to capture early on in my vignettes pieces. The narrative playfully deals with art of invention in its most general sense. The action occurring within the narrative very much resembles the daily work routine of being

out on the field. The two stories are combined together to form a cohesive pair and provide the backdrop for the additional stories left in the collection.

Part II of my thesis is a collection of slightly longer works. By now, most of the characters are older and the settings are entirely situated in the border region of the Rio Grande Valley. While flashbacks are still used as the main literary devices, my readers should understand that most of my characters are now adults for the exception of one character in the story titled “Tacuache”. I will give a quick overview of literary elements found in “Silver Avenue” as well as spend a significant amount of time discussing “Pescador De Hombres FISHERS OF MEN” in relationship to language and translation.

“Silver Avenue” is a story about innocence lost. The most important literary device present in the story is the flashback. The short story provides warlike figurative language that makes the playground in the story look like a war zone. The kids in the story begin to act like men while others pretend. Ernest Hemingway’s *First Forty-nine Stories* (Hemingway, 1995) was my initial inspiration for writing this piece. I was captivated by the Nick Adams’s coming of age story in stories like “Indian Camp”, “The End of Something”, and “Three Day Blow”. These particular stories resonate with the stylistic approach I took with my own story where the character of Nick Adams is looked at in different periods of his life. The flashback in “Silver Avenue” is designed to look at the narrator as an adolescent as well as a young adult.

My short story titled “Pescador De Hombres FISHERS OF MEN” is largely influenced by Lourdes Torres’s essay “In the Contact Zone: Code-switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers,” (Torres, 2007). Torres becomes my primary expert in the analysis of code switching, translation, and language as a political act. Torres explains:

In the United States, the presence of large and small Latino/a communities across the country, increasing numbers of Latino/a immigrants, and the US/Mexican border means that code switching in literature is not only metaphorical, but represents a reality where segments of the population are living between cultures and languages; literary language actualizes the discourse of the border and bilingual/bicultural communities (76).

Her essay examines numerous Latino/a writers and how they deal with bilingualism within their work, from italicizing Spanish, providing translation, to adding glossaries and indexes. While she stresses that publishers, editors, and printing presses are influential in the final production of a work, she lists a handful of writers who work within the confines and structure of language to find their own unique way in revealing their bicultural experiences through literature. In “Pescador De Hombres FISHERS OF MEN” I deal with the issue of translation in both a political and aesthetic sensibility which I will explain later in the essay.

The use of translation and code switching can be seen as a political act in the following regard. Torres cites a passage by Helena Maria Viramontes within her essay when asked about the use of Spanish in her work, the writer replied:

A few years ago a southwestern writer, Cormac McCarthy, wrote *All the Pretty Horses*. If I remember correctly, there were whole paragraphs in Spanish. Not one reviewer questioned it, not one reader said, ‘I wish there was a glossary.’ But if a Spanish-surnamed writer uses Spanish, it becomes an issue (84).

Viramontes statement marks the existence of unequal treatment of writers’ use of language based on race and ethnicity. Her remark clearly illustrates critical aspects surrounding race and language. Viramontes does not find the need to translate her work if other literary works are



being published without translation, or without devices that accommodate the mono-linguistic reader.

Translation is uniquely arbitrary according to both contemporary and early Chicano/a writers. Both Tomás Rivera in...*y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971) and Rolando R. Hinojosa-Smith in *Estampas del Valle y Otras Obras* (1973) chose to write their stories in Spanish only. Hinojosa-Smith for example is very particular in the way he selected to write when he says: “For the writer- this writer-a sense of place was not a matter of importance; it became essential. And so much so that my stories are not held together by the *peripeteia* or the plot as much as by *what* the people who populate the stories say and *how* they say it (Saldívar 21). Hinojosa-Smith describes language as unifier that forms a sense of place where he is “empapado” and drenched in the culture. The language inherited by the border region creates this sense of place.

Contemporary writers such as Helena María Viramontes and Oscar Casares sporadically use Spanish in their works. The degrees in which they use Spanish don’t necessarily warrant translations:

“You need to pay attention to Mr. Zamarripa,” his father said. “Don’t be playing around with the other boys. I want you to be serious. ¿Me entiendes?”

“Yes, sir.” (Casares, 2003).

Following Hinojosa-Smith’s analysis of sense of place, arbitrary differences may be contributed to a different sense of time. The writers were obviously living divergent social and culturally significant spells. Language in its contemporary sense is hybridized for most Chicano/a writers. Spanish is considered to be secondary language for most of them.

The issue of translation has been a lingering theme in my work and within the context of academic discourse in creative writing, especially since I use Spanish to a great extent. In most

cases there are no literal translations either. I am concerned with the perpetual nature of textual devices used to accommodate readers. Growing up in the Rio Grande Valley, I learned to read and write in both English and Spanish, although English is my native language. My ambivalent stance on using italics, footnotes, or any type of textual translation on bilingual pieces is as much a part of the local colloquialism of South Texas and its people, than just a generic attempt to accommodate the mono-linguistic reader. The individual does not speak in italics or footnotes so why should we write in that manner.

I have recently given greater weight to this idea of translation and code switching in my work. When I originally wrote “Pescador De Hombres FISHERS OF MEN”, it was with the intention of describing and writing in the colloquialism of the Rio Grande Valley. When I workshopped the story in my creative writing class it was received with mixed feelings. While some people enjoyed and related to the characters and the language in the piece, others wished I had included an index or glossary. The professor, who was bilingual, was also under the impression that it might be a little overwhelming for the average reader, let alone un-publishable. One student came to me and told me he knew where all those places mentioned in story were located, and I was thoroughly impressed since the story is a fictional piece. I was disconcerted with the idea of needing to translate my own work. I thought about providing a glossary or just switching back to English only in order to make things easier for everyone. I was moved that a person familiar with this area related to my piece in the original manner I had intended. I decided to keep the original version.

While teaching composition classes as an assistant lecturer in my final year of the MFA program, I consistently found students engaging in conversations about language and metacognitive aspects of learning to deal with bilingualism. I discovered that being bilingual

displaced a majority of these students. I found ambivalent attitudes and misconceptions everywhere. What troubled me the most was the perception that Spanish was considered to be the “other” language. The need by many students to make their native language seem foreign to themselves was bewildering. When writing essays, if they were to use Spanish, they needed to distinguish it with italics, footnotes, asterisks, and make it look foreign. It seemed like I had to compromise my own work in much the same manner to those who simply couldn’t understand the language and my sense of place. As a writing instructor, I found myself having to deal with issues pertaining to language more than any other time in my academic career. I felt unable to write how I truly wanted to write and to teach how I really wanted to teach. I am truly blessed that I had mentors that guided me on the right path and encouraged to confront these issues in discourse amongst all my peers and students. I allowed my students to write how they felt with the clear understanding that they realize who their intended audience was at all times.

I came up with a plan for dealing with the issue of translation in my own writing. It was the simplest way I could think of which would not only address concerns about code switching and translation, but would also speak on behalf of my own politics and frustration with translation. Here is an excerpt from “Pescador De Hombres FISHER OF MEN” illustrating my objective:

Line 1. “Watch where you’re going! Manejas bien gacho YOU DRIVE AWFUL!”

Line 2. “Mira Chavito, estos pinches culeros poniendo su pinche propaganda en el panteón y todas las coronas derramadas LOOK CHAVITO, THOSE FUCKING ASSHOLES AND THEIR PROPOGANDA IN THE CEMETERY AND ALL THE FLOWERS SPILLED.”

Line 3. “Well yeah, but you almost hit the poor guy,” said Chavito.

Originally nothing was translated within the text, but I was consciously trying to give indicators of the action taking place for my mono-linguistic readers. Line2 may have been especially difficult to conceive as the whole line is in Spanish, but the gist of the action is simply stating that a person was almost struck with the vehicle which is stated in Line3. The aesthetic nature of using all caps is related to a loss of value in language. The oratory form of language is not a construct of which you can distinguish with punctuation marks. I argue that in writing prose in such a manner, that one must translate or mark specific passages foreign and with textual markers like italics, asterisk, and quotations, a loss of value is occurring. That I use all caps can be perceived as shouting and a complaint against having to translate my work.

As a Spanish reader, I sympathize with Torres's take on the redundant nature that is produced when texts with translations are followed by each other, side by side. I believe I have found a way to produce this sensibility in an opposing manner. My translations seek to accommodate both English and Spanish readers. My Spanish reader can choose to skip the translation. If they choose not to skip the translation as I am figuring that they will not, then the same redundant effect will be such that the issue of translation will be turned on its head. Both my mono-linguistic and bilingual readers will subconsciously find it redundant to read the text in such a manner as I and many others have been doing so for far too long.

The mere fact that the translated text is in all capital letters should be a symbolic representation of an aesthetic value lost not only visually and while one reads the text, but within the actual story itself. My English reader must understand that while bilingual writers attempt to accommodate and appeal to their understanding of a text, an aesthetic quality is lost in the exchange. The loss of this value in language both literally, figuratively and metaphorically, occurs in a major scene in "Pescador De Hombres FISHERS OF MEN", when one of my major

characters pawns his guitar. The tone created by translations in all caps is meant to be suggestive and mimics this tension occurring within the story but within discourse associated with issues dealing with translation. My readers should begin to ask themselves why the translations occur as they do. If I can get a reader to do this; then I believe I have done my job.

I have considered the crudity of formatting my story in this manner, especially since translation is just one thematic element in my piece. I have considered that anyone who reads my story will only look at its composition. I am afraid that they will not notice other parts in the story that are relevant to an understanding about the characters, and the community represented within it. In a way to legitimize myself, my languages, my understanding of writing, as well as a way to validate my own work; I feel the need to explain why I chose to translate the way I do. Without giving too much in the way of analyzing the story, I welcome readers to think about what it means to live in this region. I welcome my reader to take their experience and put it into context within the story presented here. Earlier I talked about the displacement that occurred with my first year writing students with reference to language. I want to transition into a discussion about the types of social relationships in this region.

In John J. Gumperz academic essay titled *Linguistics and Social Interaction in Two Communities*, he references the study of sociolinguistics described as: “the study of verbal behavior in terms of the social characteristics of speakers, their cultural background, and the ecological properties of the environment in which they interact” (Gumperz 137). Gumperz looks at the interactions between people and specifically examines grammatical and social restraints. Grammatical restraints refer to the intelligibility of a sentence, while social restraints relate to their acceptability. He suggests that while the following expressions mean the same things, their

levels of intelligibility, and acceptability are vastly different. They also imply social statuses, and positions:

*It looks as if it isn't going to rain today. / It looks like it ain't gonna rain today. (138)*

*<sup>1</sup>Dine – Eat*

*House – Mansion*

*Talk – Lecture (139)*

Although similar referents of an expression can convey the same meaning, we rely on what he calls, “commonly agreed on conventions”, to understand what is being said. Hence we are able to comprehend the meaning of the first set of sentences but their places in the context of forms of speech are associated with social aspects of language (formal, informal, technical, etc...). The differences in dining and eating, as well as homes and mansions, are considerably different and imply certain social roles and statuses. Gumperz’s study does not draw on the cultural aspect of border bilingualism necessarily, but he embarks on an empirical aspect of language mannerisms attributed to this border sentimentality, in what he deems are patterns of interactions called “social relationships.” Gumperz references Basil Bernstein and states, “Between language and speech there is a social structure” (138).

The social relationships may be considered more complex in a society that frequents the use of two or more languages, but both the social and linguistic relationship act in the same manner. In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” from *Borderlands/La Frontera* (2007), Gloria Anzaldúa discusses this verisimilitude in language that I associate with Gumperz’s study in a variety of ways. She linguistically assesses the process in which Spanish words have evolved in part because of “archaism”, and “Anglicism’s”, that are most often dependent on geographic regions. Language becomes a social construct as she identifies with

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<sup>1</sup> Differences in word usage and implications and suggestions of each.

eight different languages that make up the heterogeneous nature of her own dialect. She states, “With Mexicans I’ll try to speak either Standard Mexican Spanish or the North Mexican dialect. From my parents and Chicanos living in the Valley, I picked up Chicano Texas Spanish, and I speak it with my mom, younger brother (who married a Mexican and who rarely mixes Spanish with English), aunts and older relatives” (78). She also mentions that with groups from New Mexico and Arizona she speaks “Chicano Spanish”, and with groups in California she avoids Spanish altogether. The figurative notion that correlates to the idea of communities acting as tiny islands and their heterogeneous nature is depicted in how she breaks down and categorizes the different languages associated with her dialect, and how she treats the language, depending on where she is.

The mix of languages and the evolutionary process of how certain words developed are testament to this amalgamation of culture and language associated with living in a border community. The following are just some of the examples listed in Anzaldúa’s book:

<sup>2</sup>*Simon – Yes*

*Churo – Sure (78)*

<sup>3</sup>*Lado/lao, mojado/mojao (79)*

<sup>4</sup>*Carpeta – Carpet*

*Bola – Ball*

Both Gumperz and Anzaldúa make the same argument and explain how language becomes a predisposition to social constructs contributing to variances and expression within a given society or group.

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<sup>2</sup> Mix of English and Spanish

<sup>3</sup> Leave out consonants when they appear between vowels

<sup>4</sup> Anglicism’s

The colloquialism and language in “Pescador De Hombres FISHERS OF MEN” acts as a “social relationship” and axiom of insularity associated with the people and culture of this community. The dialogue within the story is representative of the familiar language that exists in a bilingual region where both English and Spanish act as social relationships to the people of a border community, and are prevalent in everyday life. The social relationships also build upon Rolando Hinojosa-Smith’s theory of “sense of space” mentioned earlier in my thesis. The language and the social constructs that exist within my stories are representative of this demographic. The spaces where my stories exist are inundated with colonias, pawn shops, and the local politics. Familiar places like The Amigos Del Valle and the interstate highway that stretches along the Rio Grande are all idiosyncratic of this region. All of these things are signifiers of this space, this border region.

Part III of my thesis consists of a dramatic play. I read *Heroes and Saints & Other Plays* as an undergraduate student but never read her again after that. As a graduate student I became familiar with the playwriting genre and revisited Cherrí Moraga’s work again. I had a new found appreciation and respect for the activism alluded in her work. It inspired me to create my own play. Eventually I was able to perform a short ten minute version of my play during FESTIBA 2012. Surprisingly, I got very good reviews from my peers. I eventually decided to elaborate on some additional scenes. In an age where superhero blockbuster movies are being made, I looked at *El Corrido de Dani* as a way to bring the border corrido to life. The inclusion of performed musical notation is influenced by my upbringing as a musician. Cancioneros were always at my disposal and I wished to incorporate them into my prose. In an article titled “Functions of code-switching in bilingual theater: An analysis of three Chicano plays” (Jonsson, 2010), Carla Jonsson references Cherrie Moraga in defining theater as, a “theater of resistance” that lends



itself to both being a cultural, and political activity. In much the same way that Moraga's work has had a profound influence on the political activism in my play: The catalyst behind sociological aspects going in *El corrido de Dani* is attributed to the academic scholarship found in Américo Paredes's work. In a book titled *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican American Social Poetry*, author José E Límon states about Paredes: "his scholarship itself is poetically endowed by the epic heroic corrido, thereby becoming an example of what Lukács, after Schlegel, calls 'intellectual poems' ([1910] 1974:18) and what C. Wright Mills calls 'sociological poems' (Miller 1986)" (qtd. in Límon 45). In a way, the play is a response to sociological aspects surrounding border violence, and the way in which individuals live in fear: afraid to return to the homeland. I use the corrido medium as a way to give life to the tale as well as a way to tell a story by the characters who are supposed represent the people of this region. Much of the dramatic elements of the play are actual events that occurred. There are multiple layers surrounding the play. At times it can be very violent but it has a humanistic element to it as well.

The opening of the play starts with two boys tossing a baseball and talking about needing a super hero in Mexico. The juxtaposition of older and newer ideologies is personified in the heroic figures represented in Batman (new idol) and El Chapulín Colorado (old idol). The romanticized sensibilities attributed to the heroic figure in this border corrido are still synonymous with Paredes's work. The baseball motif is also a literary element consistent throughout my work that also implies a change in ideologies. The symbolic representation of baseball is tied to older values that seem to be outdated and no longer respected by contemporary society. Tainted by the performance enhancement era, baseball no longer represents the same axioms of "Americana" it once did. The two young boys go through a dialectical process of

make believe as they play with each other. In their imagination, they wield a bat into a sword, and a sword into a gun. If earlier stories like “Almost Gold (Sidney, Montana 1989)” represented an earlier romanticized notion of baseball, then *El Corrido de Dani* aims to destroy it.

The duality of language has a strong bearing on the identity of the self as described by Moraga when she says: “I write as I do because I am committed to communicating with both sides of myself” (qtd. in Jonsson 122). But it is Gloria Anzaldúa that clearly distinguishes the ability to invent language when no other alternative is left:

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what resource is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves – a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 77).

I decided to write *El Corrido de Dani* in English because of the influence bilingualism has in the border region. The play is written for the border individual that lives on the fringe of two sociocultural identities. My intended audience is aimed at the Mexican American-Chicano/a. In my initial draft, most of the dialogue was in Spanish. While we had a predominantly English speaking audience people were still able to grasp what was going on by the actions taking place. I know a number of people who commute on a daily basis to work on this side of the

border and then return home. That my play is almost exclusively in English is not so much of an issue as long as the dramatic aspect is believable.

The last of my short stories is titled “Tacuache”. The unnamed narrator in the initial vignette makes his presence known again in this short story. Both the mother and father figure are presented here once again. I decided to end with the piece because the story is essentially a narrative about returning to the homeland. The story begins with the narrator talking about the time he smuggled a gun into Mexico. I have made some allusions tied to sociological aspects of a return to the homeland when I reference Homer’s *The Odyssey* as well as the Grito De Dolores. Without giving away too much from the story the narrator talks about going back to Matehuala, SLP Mexico, and going back to the home he hasn’t seen in years. While there is a literal aspect about a return to the home land, there is also the spiritual one that is characterized by the narrator’s mother who no longer lives in the story. There is an ever present fear that is surrounded with the idea of going back home. The story unfolds in this dynamic and both the tacuache and the garden “hoe” are presented as symbols within the story. The “hoe” is a motif throughout my narratives that acts much like the baseball references. The “hoe” that was buried in “Las Borregueras / El azadón (Sidney, Montana 1989)” is resurrected as a means to protect a son (narrator) and father in the story.

The contextual framework in which I’ve presented *Del Norte: A Collection of Short Stories* y *El corrido de Dani* is related to a familial aspect omnipresent in the strong family connection illustrated in the stories. The narratives exist between delicate intricacies of sociocultural, sociopolitical spaces inherent in border culture. The fiction is characterized by my experiences as a migrant farm worker, a student, and a son.

PART I: CUENTOS

**The Storm (Lawton, Michigan, 1980)**



It was six a.m. when my parents woke up to get the kids ready for school. The dark morning sky was shaded by the cumulus clouds approaching the camp. Three families lived in a small camp on a hillside surrounded by cherry orchards in the middle of their peak season.

It's been more than thirty years and I have no recollection of any of it, except for the stories my mother left me with. I sit down at the table and ask myself, "And then what happened ama?"

I have recalled my mother tell me this story so many times. I can only imagine her figure. Her brown hair tied up in a clip. She has hints of gray and curls that fall from the side of her face. Turning the tortillas on the kitchen burner she then turns to me and balances the tortillas flat on her finger nails. She's always told me to do it that way so that I don't burn the tips of my fingers. She places them into the tortilla warmer.

"I was combing your sisters' hair when I heard Ramona call out, Fela, the trees are falling, get out, you and the children!"

I was just a baby when all of this happened. My parents, my sister, and I were on one side of the mobile home. My sister Lourdes and Rafael were in the middle bedroom, and my sister Yolanda and Alma were in the living room area on the opposite side of the trailer.

In the midst of the panic my sister Yolanda and Alma ran out to our neighbor Ramona as Robert Streeter pulled in along the trailer in his pickup truck. Mr. Streeter took Ramona and my two sisters with him along with some other people in the camp to his nearby home.

"Los arboles estaban de lado y la tierra roja, roja, con las cerezas derramadas en él."

My mother has told me how you could hear the earth parting as the storm neared. The tree trunks were being snapped off with every loud crack that resembled a crash of thunder. As

the storm funnel approached the camp; the tops of the cherry trees and the branches dipped to the ground as the redness of the fruit laid a tint of red all over the land.

The trailer sat between two trees. As the largest tree broke it fell on the smaller one crushing the trailer slowly through the middle. My eldest sister Lourdes managed to take my brother Rafael out of the middle bedroom before it was crushed and into the room with the rest of the family. When the storm was finally subsiding, my brothers who were staying in a smaller trailer outside of ours went into the longer trailer, scrambling for anyone still inside. My brother Güero made sure everyone was ok. He told everyone to stay low to the ground and away from any electrical devices. Yolanda and Alma were the only ones missing. A sigh of relief came when they found out they were at Robert Streeter's house.

I only remember the events as she explained to me. "Era buen hombre, y con la gente también," she would say. He saved many people that day. Robert lost everything. His crop and his ranch were ruined. All the trailers were destroyed. The work ended. Two years later he hung himself. In the year that I was born the earth turned itself inside out. The storm split my home in two and ironically shaped me in return.

### **Almost Gold (Sidney, Montana 1989)**



You have to find a way to entertain yourself when you are a kid. My older brother Ralph is trying to putt a golf ball between a rock and the lid of an igloo ice cooler. My nephew Junior looks at the camera as both me and my niece Zoyla wait for our turn. The object is to get the ball between the lid cooler and the rock. The problem is that the uneven surface makes it almost impossible to do it in one try.

I'd never seen a putter before then. I have always believed that golf was one of those rich sports like polo, tennis, and cricket. When I was a teenager I played croquet with some white people in Michigan. It was so formal, and even the equipment was so elegant. No one ever got dirty. Everyone was always dressed in nice white polo shirts, nice white pants, and really proper hats.

I once read a story about these runaway kids that thought they found heaven at a golf course. They even thought that the putting holes were cup holders for their drinks. When you

are poor, you make your own fun and games. I guess that's why I never really liked golf. It wasn't practical for us to play.

Instead, we would find thick branches and wielded them into baseball bats. See now baseball was a sport I latched on to an early age. My brother and I pretended to be ball players. Glen Davis, Chet Lemon, Mickey Tettleton, and the young Ken Griffey Jr. were really popular back then. We tossed rocks besides each other and hit them as hard as we could; pretending to be one ball player or another. We hit them towards the opposite side of the field and across the Montana sky near Old Fort Gilbert. On some occasions we even found arrowheads. We gave those to our sister Yolanda. She loved rocks and the petrified wood that was abundant everywhere it seemed.

There was an old oil rig that lit up the sky at night. I loved watching the flames rise and fall from the window of my house. Looking at this picture takes me back there: to our home in Sidney. You couldn't drink the water out of the faucet. Sometimes when my brother Rafael and I showered, we would get water inside of our mouths. It tasted horrible. The most annoying part about living in Montana was having to shower with a bucket of water and a tin can. We never had to do this in Texas. We had a shower head there.



### **Padre, Hijo y Espirito Santo (Donna, Texas 1998)**

My mother named me Jesus because she always wanted me to become a priest. “Que bonito se oirá, el padre Jesus”, she would say. I never had the calling to be a priest. I was raised in the Catholic Church and believed in God but it wasn’t until my formative years as a freshman in college that I told my mother I no longer wanted the picture of the Virgin Mary and the Jesus Christ plaster head in my room anymore. I must have been going through my existentialism phase reading Sartre or Nietzsche or something. I may as well have lashed out at her in spite. I had never seen her so angry before or after that incident.

She squinted her eyes and shook her head saying, “¿Estás loco o qué?”

“No ama, nomás no los quiero en mi cuarto ya,” I said.

“¡Mal agradecido que no te importa que llevas el nombre de Dios!”

A few days later I came home from school and found all my posters gone. All of them were gone, my Cure poster, my Depeche Mode, my Deftones, my Jimi Hendrix poster; all gone. She even threw away my “Are You Experienced” vinyl. She didn’t tell me she threw the record away until a few years later. She couldn’t stop laughing about it when she finally told me. She must have found it amusing that I still remembered about it all those years after. She probably felt bad for me because I didn’t stop looking for it until she finally told me.

“Ay ama, porque no nomas me dijiste,” I remember saying to her. I spent countless hours looking for that album attempting to figure out where I may have misplaced it. It was one of my favorite albums, but after a while, I started laughing with her. My mother passed away a couple of years ago and I miss her to this very day. I’d trade my whole record collection if it meant I could hear her laugh again.

My mother was very much the altruistic person in her own right, but to be visited by any member of the Catholic parish was magnified in our household. I had to sleep in another room every time Father Thomas visited. I had no say in it. I didn't know him very well. I only miss the way my room smelled every time he left though. It smelled like St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Donna, TX. It was the smell of incense burning in the thurible on special church day services. This smell triggered the memory of me and my brother Ralph traveseando in the church pews. We would pick up the pew kneelers and annoy our mother most of all. We knew better and we quit once we heard her whisper, "Van a ver cuándo lleguemos a la casa." My room smelled like this for two weeks at least.

Father Thomas was a bald tall white man that had a gentle voice and humility about him that resonated with my mother. He'd been providing church services for the migrant people in Michigan since 1979. That Father Thomas was staying at our home was a blessing according to my mother. A Godly home was a blessed home and Father Thomas was always willing and ready to provide a blessing for my mother who was always gracious in her own right.

### Dressed in Black (Donna, Texas 1988)



My sister Alma was the first one in our family to go to college. After reluctantly being allowed to attend St. Edwards University in Austin in fall of 1988, in the summer she came back a different young woman. During the months of May and June she spent the summers working in the sugar beet fields of Montana. She then worked the blueberry harvest in Michigan from July to September. If she was lucky, she would spend October and November during the cherry, peach, and apple harvest seasons picking alongside the rest of the family. She never considered herself so lucky.

My parents wanted her to attend a local school. My brother Carlos had a major influence in her being able to attend the University. He single handedly convinced my father to allow her to go to school in Austin. They were wary of her being so far from home. Eventually they came to an agreement. During the summers she was still obligated to work with the rest of the family during the sugar beet season. Not only was she happy about the compromise, but she was happy that she no longer had to work for the remainder of the season. She would miss the company of her sisters and they vowed to write each other consistently.

After her first year of school she came back home talking about The Cure, and Depeche Mode, and The Smiths, y quien sabe que mas. My sister was always a little tomboy but when she came back with super short hair dressed in black my mom was totally freaked. I'd never seen this person in my life. I wasn't sure if this was her or if my carnala was alright. Beneath the black turtle necks, and dark short hair, and red lipstick, and Dr. Marten boots, it was her alright.

"You've got to listen to this song called November Spawned a Monster," she said. "It's about the Elephant Man!"

"Listen to his lyrics," she says.

"Who's the Elephant Man?" I say. Sure enough curiosity got the better of me and I listened to Morrissey's *Bona Drag* album. Here is this British guy with a weird sounding voice singing songs about never marrying, and bombing sea side towns, and hair dressers on fire.

She then starts dancing to Yaz's *Upstairs at Eric's* album.

I look at the album cover and there are two guys sitting across from one another. Their bodies are cut in half. Their torsos and upper bodies are on the table. Their waist, feet, and legs are behind them sitting on chairs.

She swings her hips side to side putting her arms up oscillating them in waves. Her body and shoulders mimic this movement. She kicks left and then right with the electronic beat and cuts through the synthesizer melodies. I'd only seen my sister dance in her quinceañera. Every fourteen year old girl going on fifteen learns how to dance Chayanne's Tiempo De Vals. The dancing was much more formal, ballads, and uniform. This music and dancing was nothing like that. She wore black and I continued to rummage through her albums.

Excitedly and with a big smile she says, "That's how people dance in Austin!"

A year later my sister Yolanda joined her at St. Edwards. Two years after that, my sister Lucy joined them at the University also. They all looked forward to their summers again.

**Wonder Light Plastic Bread Wrap (Pullman, Michigan 1986)**



The home is small. There is a wood floor with no real room inside. It is raining today, as curious little hands scrape and scratch the interior of a wall in a bedroom. A bored little man uses his index finger and nail to scrape the figure of another little man. There are a number of images indented in the walls. Some are from a year or two ago. He stares at them and tries to remember what they were. He lies on the bed that his three sisters share, on his side, picking and poking at the wall. The images have a Paleolithic look to them. Most of them are alike; brown, human, and animal outlines. His three teenage sisters watch the rain fall from the window opposite the room in another bed that his older brother sleeps in also. You can call this a living room if you like. There's a black and white TV on top of a scratched-up emerald green dresser. The little man lies there still poking at the wall. He wears small jeans with purple and violet

stains on his butt. A little rope is wrapped around his skinny waist along with a stainless steel swivel hook on the front. He wears a white long sleeve shirt, also stained in violet. His sisters can be heard laughing in the background. They too wear stained jeans, long sleeve shirts, with ropes and hooks. The little man turns over on his back and stares at the ceiling. He turns over and looks over to a small open ventilation shaft that is stuffed with rags.

The aroma of chorizo infiltrates the tiny space on the other side of the room. You can call it the kitchen, dining room, and bedroom. With the back end of a spoon, the little man's mother smothers a flour tortilla with beans and adds chorizo. The tacos are neatly stacked together, facing each other under a paper towel. She places the last taco on top and wraps them in the white paper towel. The red grease drips and stains the paper towel. She places them inside a used bread bag and ties a small knot. The little man walks in and sits in the chair.

“Estos son para el lonche,” she says.

She walks towards the oven and grabs a mason jar. He watches her pour the grease from the pan into it. “Y esta mantequita lo podemos usar otra vez.”

In the background you hear the girls singing and chanting, “Que llueva, que llueva, la virgen de la cueva... Que llueva, que llueva, la virgen de la cueva.”

The rain continues to fall and doesn't look like it will let up any time soon.

“Ama, no quiero ir a trabajar, todavía me siento malo.”

She tells the girls to bring it down and they start laughing. The little man asks his mother if she has anymore bread wrapping. She reaches on top of the refrigerator next to the bed.

She takes the last two bread slices of the almost empty bag “Ten aquí esta; ¿Para que lo quieres?”

Without answer the little man quickly takes the plastic wrap, puts it in his pocket, and goes beneath the table. He pokes his head out to see if anyone is looking at him down there. He takes out the plastic wrap and spreads it on his lips.

A week ago he said he felt sick also and instead went to his brother's house and watched *Día de los albañiles 2* while everyone was out working. He had to climb in through the window in order to get in. There was a green suitcase filled with cosas mañosas. His mom would be very upset if she found out he was watching that.

He had asked his brother that wasn't much older than he was, "How do you kiss a girl?"

Shaking his head he said, "Estas bien menso, haven't you seen the movies?"

"Look, move your tongue in a circle like this, and just close your eyes."

He knew he couldn't kiss his cousin like that so he needed the bread wrapping. He would imagine that it was Angélica Chaín or Lina Santos. He'd seen *Tres Mexicanos ardientes* yesterday.

His mother opened the door beside the table.

"Ya paro de llover, órale suban las cubetas a la ven."

The little man's sisters were disappointed and complained, "We're going to get all wet mom!"

He came out from below the table with his bread wrapper in his pocket.

"Come on let's go!"

"Mira qué bonito hombrecito trabajador," his mother said.

The little man adjusted his rope and swivel hook and carried a large stack of buckets into the van and said, "Come on let's go, it's time to work!"



**John Steinbeiser (Sidney, Montana 1989)**



When we arrived at summer school they asked my brother who our farmer was. All of us had the same tag with the same name on it. A number of teachers holding clipboards tagged every student before entering the school premises. There were no white kids, only Mexican kids and three or four Indian kids in the middle of a cattle roundup. Back in Texas, my dad always took us to school. I spent most of the time sitting in the registrar's office waiting for him to leave me there. They would then take me to the classroom.

This was different. They had all the kids go into the gym and they gave us breakfast. They gave us cornflakes and toast and orange juice and milk. The toast had cinnamon. It was really pretty on the tray and seemed like food that rich people eat every day. I sat with my brother and my niece. The Indian kids sat by themselves. You could tell they were Indian because their eyes were different but normally because they spoke in their own language all the time. In the bus this other kid was making fun of them. They just smiled and said some things in Indian. I know one of the boy's names was Johnny. My brother said he knew him from the

year before. I always thought that they lived in different homes but when the bus pulled up to their house, it looked just like ours. Some people lived in trailers and others lived in small homes made of wood. Some kids were picked up further up or down the road from their homes so you couldn't see where they lived.

I thought that if you lived in a trailer then you had it pretty good. At least you had running water and showers. We had two rooms and a living room and kitchen. While our house was a little bit bigger we had the most people living in it. We had eight people living in the house including my parents.

“What's your name?” asked one of the teachers.

I looked up, “Jesse.”

She lifted my shirt slightly, “No, let me see your tag hun.”

## Las Borregueras / El azadón (Sidney, Montana 1989)

### I.

*“I’m a beet worker; I’ll always be a beet worker.” – Margaret Carranza*

They called us betabeleros. Betabel is the name given to the sugar beet. My parents first heard about work in Montana through our uncle Teodoro. Their initial experiences weren’t very pleasant or favorable. They worked for farmers who had rugged, heavily weeded lands that made the work arduous. It wasn’t until they met Las Borregueras through community engagements and church services that my family became acquainted with them.

The Carranza women lived on a farm in Richardson County. It is said to be the only all-female run sugar beet farm in the United States. While having dinner one occasion I’d asked my brother about how they first met?

“Ellos son los que nos presentaron a John,” said my brother Gilberto Jr.

With a big smile on his face he continued, “They knew that we played music and they loved to hear Spanish music: They would hold parties at their ranch and invite everyone. Mexicans, white people, everyone.”

He stands up from the table and starts putting his arms to the side and mimics the dancing, “And we loved dancing with those white girls.”

He looks at my father and tells him, “Y usted le gustaba también verdad, le gustaba chupar con Teodoro en el rancho de ellas.”

My father gets angry, “Yo a mi esas viejas no les estaba mirando las caras, Patsy era la única que se portaba bien.”

There was a bittersweet relationship between my family and Las Borregueras. My father has told me that he had once been turned away by them. There were rumors about their sexual orientation but my father didn't care for that. They blamed my father for spreading rumors. He was a proud man and to be turned away was the biggest sign of disrespect. He just would not tolerate that. He never really forgave them or made his peace with them.

As a child I remember running around on their farm. It is true these women ran the farm like men. It didn't seem abnormal to me and I was just a child. I had seen my mother do the work of a man as well. I loved climbing and jumping off the stacks of hay. I became trapped once and I thought my parents were going to leave me there. Luckily my brother Rafael found me and got me out with a rope. I was aware of their affection towards one another. I was also aware of how they demonstrated their affection with some of the other female ranch hands. I didn't think anything of it. They took me on their horses and took me to see the farm animals. The goats, the chickens, the pigs. I would help feed them and it was one of the most pleasant memories I have.

## II.

I learned to sharpen an azadón in Montana. My father taught me how to do this and when he noticed I was tired in the field, he had me sharpen everyone's azadón when they took a water break. We had a bus called “el huevo.” It was a 1959 Chevrolet two tone Viking Short Bus. It was a brown and white bus. There was a small platform on the rear of the bus used to carry propane tanks. We used it to carry all of our azadónes. My sisters hated going on it

because occasionally we had to stop at gas stations and fuel up. They were embarrassed to be seen in it by anyone. It was a handy vehicle. It was literally an RV and much nicer than some of the homes we were used to. It had a table, sink, restroom, and a pull out coach that became a bed. When it wasn't being used during the day; it served as my brother Gilbert's home.

I learned a lot of things working the sugar beets. I learned never to pray for rain because of the problem with the weeds and mosquitos. It was nice to get a day off during rain but we regretted it afterwards. The temperatures could get in the upper 90's but the humidity made it unbearable sometimes. The mosquitos and gnats were a nuisance as we made our way up and down the 40 to 60 acres of land daily. It was worse for my sisters on their "days." Only until I was older did they tell me that they would sweat and that it smelled down there. That attracted more mosquitos and bugs. The other problem is that there were no restrooms out in the fields. The restroom in the bus didn't work and my brother didn't want the girls to use it because it would create a smell. My sisters had to go wherever they could find a spot. Sometimes they would take a towel in case they couldn't find anywhere to go. One would spread the towel out so that no one could see while the other did number one or two.

In order to deal with the mosquito problem, my brother Ralph and I came up with an idea. Since the mosquito repellent wasn't working, we tried to figure out a way to work comfortably and deal with the problem. Our first idea was to put plastic bags on our heads. We cut small ventilation holes for our eyes, nose, and mouth. It worked for about five minutes. The problem is that it became too hot inside the bags that we were literally drenching from our faces. We used different repellents and none of them seemed to work. It also left a bad smell and if you were sweating sometimes you tasted the repellent in your lips. It wasn't until I came up with the solution. I noticed that when we walked the mosquitos and bugs followed us but when I

hunched down to where the sugar beets were they would disappear. I told my brother about this. We decided to take a whole sugar beet from its root and put it below our sombreros with the green vegetation sticking out. Everyone laughed at us initially but it worked. We were the only ones not getting bit or bothered by the bugs. My older brother Güero finally caught on and decided to try it also, and it worked for him too. It wasn't even an hour that passed when everyone was wearing a sugar beet on their heads. There were almost twenty of us out there doing this and it worked.

I will always be a beet worker. There is no way for me to forget that. I even have a small muscle on both my arms from hoeing in Montana. The last year we went up there, we all buried our hoes in the sugar beet field across our home, but I will always be a beet worker.

## PART II

### Silver Avenue

*I stood there looking outside my parents' house reminiscing still images with every passing vehicle. The television sounds going on in the background as I looked outside Silver Avenue and attempted piece together different moments of my childhood, my friends, and what became of it all.*

Louie's house was just up ahead the road. It was the corner house on the north end of the street. He was a sweet chubby kid that was always over at our house. His mom would always have to send his little sister over to retrieve him. They called him Bermuda's because he always wore Bermuda shorts. I haven't seen him in a very long time but every once in a while my father tells me that he gets a collect call from Michigan asking for my older brother. Not long ago I found out that he was locked up in somewhere in Michigan. He is a bald man now with tattoos all over his body. He's missing a few teeth but always manages to say hi to my folks when he is visiting. That's one thing about these former gangbangers on my street; they always had a respect for the elders.

Benny is also doing some time in the Hidalgo County Penitentiary. I picture both of them standing together across the street. They were actually really good friends except for one time when they got into a fight. I can't even remember what it was about. The smaller of the two, Benny, won that fight. They were both teenagers. The gang got a kick out of letting them

have a go at each other. Benny made Louie cry that day. I felt bad about it later when I didn't see him for almost a week. We all had a pre-conceived notion about the art of fighting but many of us at that point hadn't the slightest clue on how to throw a punch. Louie started off with a kick and a straight jab. It was a conventional move by our standards. Everyone I ever saw pretend to fight started off like that. The next thing I remember is Benny's head tucked down while both his arms are flailing away like windmill. He connected Louie's face several times until he started to cry.

Megan was one of the few girls in the neighborhood. Her house was behind Louie's and while technically, she didn't live on Silver, she hung out with us a lot. Actually, she hung out with Louie's little sister because that's the only way her father would let her get out of the house. She was the tomboy type. For being a young girl she loved to work out. She would invite me and Arnold over to watch her exercise. She had a dark complexion of black and Mexican decent. She had the most amazing body I had ever seen as a young boy. The kids at school would tease her about being black but I didn't know what the fuss was all about. There were rumors saying she liked me but I never asked her. She had beautiful full lips with curly hair down to her shoulders. I believe she has kids of her own now.

I can still remember both of us squatted down near the mailbox on the opposite side of the street. She was as beautiful as I remember, a happy young girl. I was shirtless, holding onto a football that looked like it had been in a few battles. I can remember this guy Johnny, this break dancer kid that wanted to start a dancing team. He was the older guy of our bunch who said he had sex with thirty girls. I kind of believed him too because he was always going to carnivals and listening to all these rock bands. He liked Iron Maiden and Guns N' Roses. He had these little mirrors with all these cool band albums on them. He said he won them at the



carnivals. I can remember him standing next to me; near the first down meter. We played street football and the gas meter served as the first down marker while the two farthest mailboxes opposite of each other served as the touchdowns.

We all stood there at one time in our lives, in front of Steve's house, which was enclosed with a barbwire fence. Steve was the Donna Redskin Mascot. He and Johnny were the oldest boys in our gang. It was really cool that we knew Steve because everyone knew that guy. I mean everyone. He introduced me to older girls when I was just in middle school. He took me to the high school prom when I was just a little green punk. He was a well-built dark complected young man. I sometimes thought that he was black also because his English was so good. He was just an outgoing guy that made friends really fast. I remember going to a little carnival near the Amigos Del Valle with him. We got on this kiddie ride. It was this heart shaped contraption that had a wheel that could be spun once inside. Steve was a strong guy. He spun this heart so fast and hard that when I got off I puked everywhere. His grandmother took care of him and she was very protective of her home; hence the barbwire fence. This was our playground.

*There is a fishing show on and I am partly uninterested. The ships are about to cast off. The shipmen are prepared, all smiles, gear loaded, and ready to depart. I step outside the door for the first time since I have returned home. I've been living in Austin for almost five years but my mother is sick. I've missed home.*

The mailboxes face each other like a soldier's firing line. On the southern flank of the street an abandoned house rests. For some reason or another several homes in the street were built on concrete blocks. I never knew why people built houses this way, maybe it was flooding. These colonias had poor drainage systems. We always loved playing in the water every time it

flooded. We would smoke cigarettes and look at dirty magazines. I remember the first time I saw a Hustler. I had never seen a woman's naked body like that before. Johnny had asked me if I ever kissed a girl before. I lied and said I had. He turned out to be a real creep actually. I remember Megan being there that day with some of the guys. Johnny had his hand underneath her shirt most of the time. Benny asked me if I wanted to put my hand underneath her shirt. He was saying how good they felt, and how black her nipples were. I could see him pinching her underneath her shirt. I looked at her and she looked like she didn't even mind the whole thing. She took a few drags from a cigarette and handed it back to Johnny. I'd never seen her smoke before and the whole thing was surprising to me. Benny started feeling her crotch when I decided to go out the trench and underneath the house. I saw his little brother Arnold looking from outside the window. He was too young to be among the rest of the criminals. His fate hadn't been dealt yet.

Running from a short distance behind him I shouted, "Go deep!"

He ran to the end of the last mailbox as the ball slipped through the communications cable and scored.

He scurried towards me catching his breath whispering, "You can see her taking a shower from the outside of her house. Later when she goes home, we can go watch."

In a shorter breath yet he said, "My brother says that when you kiss her just open your mouth and move your tongue in a circle like this."

I walked away half-heartedly saluting, "Sir, Yes Sir!"

I took the football and marched myself back home, gone back to the world.

*I go back inside the house and notice a few of the crew member's hack violently onto a sword fish's gills and face with a gaff hook. The sound is muted. The giant fish looks as dead alive caught under the swells of the ocean.*

### **“Pescador De Hombres FISHERS OF MEN”**

“Mira este vato lo van atropellar, casi está en medio de la calle LOOK AT THIS GUY, THEY’RE GOING TO RUN HIM OVER, HE’S ALMOST IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD,” said Chavito YOUNG BOY.

Passing old park cemetery at the incipency of the Colonia Seca DRY COMMUNITY, El Gato CAT quickly steered away and avoided hitting Miro Del Amora. It took a split second or two between the moment he recognized the man in the middle of the road and the quick jerk of the steering wheel right before he reverted his attention back to the cemetery. He wondered if anyone had been buried recently. It was years since he saw a group of mourners, even before he got out of the pen. He looked beyond the headstones, monuments, and grave markers looking to reconcile his disbelief of a now makeshift dwelling for the unrecognizable, and forgettable. Beyond the fence that surrounded the graveyard, and the secrets that lay hidden beneath the ground, were signs and patterns of another life. El Gatito YOUNG CAT remembered the time when he stopped kissing his uncle’s hand after finding out he tried to grope his older sister. He stared back momentarily at the artificial flowers on the graves.

In a sudden call for warning Chavito cried out, “Watch where you’re going! Manejas bien gacho YOU’RE A HORRIBLE DRIVER!”

“Mira Chavito, estos pinches culeros poniendo su pinche propaganda en el panteón y todas las coronas derramadas LOOK CHAVITO, THOSE FUCKING ASSHOLES AND THEIR PROPOGANDA IN THE CEMETERY AND ALL THE FLOWERS SPILLED.”

With a side of relief Chavito re positioned his lazy leg, “Well yeah, but you almost hit the poor guy.”

Agitated but subsiding from the momentary lapse, El Gato drove through the Colonia Seca and passed the numerous shacks that were bounded by fences, suffocating the space that lay between each and every one of them, makeshift houses piled on brick foundations surfaced in and out as he slowly drove by. A young woman sat on a chair with a baby in hand texting while another young boy in pampers parted the earth with his miniature hands, grabbed a hand full of dirt, and threw it up in the air. El Gato mildly grinned as screams from the mother broke out.

El Gato looked at Chavito, “Don Miro is always in the middle of the street. I swear that I didn’t even see him there.”

Chavito repositioned his cane but then decided to put it in the back seat: “He may as well be dead. He looks like a zombie just dragging his feet, barely standing.”

El Gato reached for his cigarettes on the driver’s side compartment and pushed the car lighter in. He took the remaining *Pall Mall* and lit it up as he turned over to Chavito and asked, “You ever hear him mumbling to himself because I went to Casianos the other day. Remember when you told me you were missing some quarters?”

Chavito smiled ever so slightly, “Yeah, I remember. La cagas YOU SUCK.”

El Gato laughed and pet Chavito on the head and looked at the rearview mirror: “We need to get you a new cane. That one looks like an old man’s cane.”

El Gato looked at Chavito as he gazed across the driver side window and passed an old elementary school. Chavito turned his head and watched the children playing on monkey bars and running laps around the inner edges of the fence surrounding the school.

In that moment El Gato noticed his brother's distraction, "No te aguites DON'T BE SORE, I bought a 24ozer and had some of your change left over, so I gave it to him carnal BROTHER. Poor guy looked like he was drying out the piss from his shorts, y me aguite tambien AND I FELT BAD ALSO."

Chavito got up from the seat and turned the review mirror trying to catch a glimpse of the school, and the fence, and children then he sat back down.

"Well Don Casiano says that Miro has never stolen anything from him in his life. He doesn't bother anyone." El Gato hesitated momentarily.

Sighing, Chavito added, "Well he's dead isn't he?"

Again feeling his brother's apprehension El Gato reluctantly conceded, "Don't be like that, carnal. Do you ever wonder how a person got to be that way?"

Chavito nodded and turned his head, looking out the window.

"Hey Chavito, it's like that old musician, remember. They called him 'Pajarito' LITTLE BIRD. El pinche Tigrillo me contaba, que antes se sacaba la daga en la guitarra THE FUCKING OCELOT USED TO TELL ME THAT ONCE, HE WOULD PULL THE DAGGER IN THE GUITAR. Pajarito used to play in a Tejano band or something, but his wife left him, and he started drinking a lot. El Tigrillo was telling me that he once drank a gallon of diesel and was never able to talk again."

"Well no wonder you can never understand what he's saying," said Chavito, as he rearranged his legs again.

El Gato drove by the last of the colonias COMMUNITIES and past the streets he often remembered where fights involving young boys and men involved a rite of passage. His older brother always warned him about his company. He thoroughly ignored his advice. El Gato always enjoyed playing his guitar instead of hanging out with his friends.

He drove on Silver Avenue. He passed the Amigos Del Valle FRIENDS OF THE VALLEY. The elderly folk's senior center was filled with signs and posters for the upcoming local elections. A number of people were grilling outside the building and parking lot. Each group had different colors representing their candidate. Silver Avenue was the same street he was picked up for on a drug possession charge. El Gato had been in and out of jail numerous times but this time would be the last time.

“How about that carnal BROTHER; Pajarito is probably long gone.”

“Are you sure you got to sell your guitar?” asked Chavito.

“You know I need to pay some stuff carnal, but don't worry about it, I'll get it back soon.”

The two brothers drove up Camino Real Road REAL ROAD crossing the tracks on Old 83.

“You know Chavito, these old tracks used to be the dividing line in this town. The Mexicans lived in the south, and the white people lived in the north.”

Chavito never recalled any white people living in the town except for some that attended St. Joseph's Catholic Church, but their last name was Ramirez. He wondered about it a minute, “There used to be white people?”

“Yeah carnal, now everyone lives in a colonia, just some are better off than others. Some are cleaner and have running water but in the eyes of the government, if you live 150 miles from the border, then you’re in a colonia, and that’s the only way any other people get help around here.”

“How do you know all this?” asked Chavito.

“I read it in the pen. You need to start paying attention and reading so that you know this kind of stuff.”

Chavito nodded as both of them drove along the way to the Colonia Nueva NEW COMMUNITY. El Gato came upon a traffic light. He remembered the kid that lived on the corner of Hooks Ave. Chris Perks was the son of a lawyer who had the only swimming pool in his class. In elementary school Chris was placed in the green group, and El Gatito was in the red group. El Gato remembered sitting with his group while Mrs. Paloma DOVE pulled on his ear after not being able to recite a passage from the English textbook. In her broken English she ridiculed his friend Eloy Garcia until he finally snapped and threw a book at her. This stuck with him all these years. He remembered how he used to sell *Sal y Limon* on the bus rides home and the times he would give Chris Perks free packs in exchange for some time in the pool. On the one and only occasion he walked three miles in his swimming shorts carrying his towel, he rang Chris Perks’ house. His younger sister answered the door as he overheard Chris tell her, to tell him, that he wasn’t there.

He remembered that excruciating feeling in his stomach the day his best friend Laura Alvarez told him she was dating Chris. Laura was his best friend throughout elementary and middle school. She followed El Gato everywhere. She liked hearing him play guitar and read all



his poetry. They would almost always sit next to each other in class. She liked El Gato but he always appreciated her friendship most of all. When he found out she was dating Chris, he never spoke to Laura Alvarez again.

“Hey Chavito, is that El Coyote’s truck parked at the funeral home?”

“Who died?” muttered Chavito.

Chavito continued, “And why is he always at our house? He can barely stand up. He’s so fat, and he’s always walking on his bad leg; always around everywhere.”

“He has to be nice to everyone; his brother is a candidate,” said El Gato.

El Gato looked at El Coyote’s red Dodge Ram covered in maroon and yellow stickers. On the bed of the truck he carried a big two sided sign with the same colors that read:  
LUCIO/CASTILLO/FRANCO for SCHOOL BOARD.

“Do you know what nepotism is Chavito?”

“What?”

“Never mind carnal, we’re almost there.”

El Gato and Chavito pulled into Amigo Pawn located north of Colonia Alegria HAPPY COMMUNITY. Rows of lawn mowers, bicycles, tires, and shiny silver rims adorned the outside parking lot. The patrons were in their abundance this afternoon as El Gato stepped out of the car. He opened the back driver’s door and reached for his guitar case and Chavito’s cane in the back seat. He walked around the car and opened the passenger door. He handed the cane to Chavito. The two brothers slowly walked over to the store and entered the shop. Testimonials around the

store suggested that the “trust worthy people at Alegria Pawn will give you the best price in town, bar none”. “Fa\$t Ca\$h Loan\$” signs, “We Buy Gold”, and “A Way to Finance Your Life” promotional advertisements adorned the walls. While in line, El Gato was trying to come up with a figure he would ask for his 1962 *Fender Jaguar*. He looked around at all the electronics, televisions, jewelry, and instruments feeling pathetic and resigned.

A dark skinned woman at the register sobbed as she took her ring off and handed it to one of the clerks. “Nos van a pagar la agua mijo. Por favor. Es oro THEYRE GOING TO TURN OFF THE WATER. PLEASE DEAR. IT’S GOLD.”

Sebo FATS was behind the counter, and his raunchy hair grease permeated throughout the store. His pants, two sizes too small gripped his stomach like a rim enveloping him at every breath as he continually attempted to arrange and rearrange his pants for a certain kind of comfort that did not exist. His unbuttoned shirt almost resembled a tulip, with his cleavage and hair sprouting from the seams. His gold Jesus anchor was lost in the trenches of his pubic jungle as he passed out stickers and flyers behind the counter.

“Adelante NEXT,” called out Sebo.

“¿Qué onda Sebo WHAT’S UP SEBO?” said El Gato.

“¿Qué onda Gato WHAT’S UP CAT? I heard you were locked up man. ¿Qué onda WHAT’S UP little foot? What do you got for me buey OX?”

El Gato placed the guitar case on the counter. “Nah man, I’m going back to school. I need some cash so I brought my guitar.”

Sebo opened the case and looked at the guitar jotting down a serial number on one of the flyers. He laughed and placed it back. “You bring me a lot of old shit vato. DUDE You wanna’ pawn it or sell it?”

“I want to pawn it man. I mean I don’t want to, but I need some money.”

Sebo laughed. “You should just sell it bro; you never got back that other guitar you brought remember?”

El Gato looked at Chavito then back at Sebo. “Yeah I know but still, I want to try to get it back.”

“He’s gonna get it back Sebo,” cried Chavito.

“Calmate tres pies CALM DOWN little foot. Well how much you need buey?” said Sebo.

“At least two thousand.”

El Gato realized that he shouldn’t have said the words “at least”, because that would have indicated to Sebo that he was willing to take less than what he asked for. If he felt resigned before, he now felt defeated in that very moment.

Sebo looked sideways and back slightly never releasing his fixture from the guitar. “I don’t know if I can give you that much man but let me call it in.”

Chavito started for the other instruments in the store.

“¿Carnal, para dónde vas WHERE ARE YOU GOING?” cried out El Gato.

Sebo had gone to the computer in the back office and was on his way back when he and Chavito got back around the same moment.

“I can give you five hundred buey.”

El Gato looked down at Chavito and back up again at Sebo. “No mames Sebo NO FUCKING WAY SEBO. That’s a vintage guitar, man. It’s worth more than five hundred bucks.”

Smiling, Sebo continued, “Está bien vieja la pinche guitar buey IT’S AN OLD FUCKING GUITAR BUEY. Look, the most I can do is six hundred.”

El Gato looked at the black casing and plush interior. He remembered his deceased brother playing on the same guitar and giving it to him before he passed away. He remembered his first lesson and learning the “circulo de *DO CYCLE IN THE KEY OF C MAJOR*.” The guitar had a circular imprint on the back of the body where the black paint had been partially scratched off by his belt that had rubbed on it for so long.

“GIVE ME THE MONEY,” said CAT.

FATS took the guitar to the back of the shop, printed the receipt, and handed it to him.

“Hey, have you voted,” said Fats.

“No, I haven’t voted, I haven’t had time,” said Cat.

Fats reached for his pocket and drew out a wad of twenties. “Well here, let me give you these stickers and you can put them on your car. If you vote for Lucio, I’ll give you twenty

bucks. Tell your friends that we're going to have a barbeque at the Amigos Del Valle. WE WILL GIVE THEM BEER if they vote for us. We can even pick them up."

Fats handed the money and the stickers to him. "And if you ever get stopped by the cops, and you get a ticket, let me know, and I can get it off. Lucio IS COOL AND HE ALREADY REMOVED THREE OF THEM. He hooked my wife up with a job at the school also. Who knows maybe he can help you out cat?"

Cat took the money and stickers. "OK I'll SEE YOU LATER FATS."

The brothers walked out of the store as the old woman cried in the background. "IT'S NOT GOLD MAM'!" said the young clerk.

"Are you going to vote for Lucio?" said YOUNG BOY.

"I'M GOING TO VOTE FOR MY EGGS," said Cat.

Young Boy laughed and got inside the car. Cat felt relieved to finally leave the shop.

Cat turned on the car and traveled south passing TRINITY COMMUNITY and down to Expressway 83. The good thing about living in the valley was that all the cities were near each other. Where there was a pawn shop, there was always a Walmart nearby.

"Where are we going?" said Young Boy.

"We're going to get you a new cane young boy."

The brothers arrived at Walmart and spent some time driving around the parking lot. Cat had just got out of THE PEN so he didn't have the accessible parking permit for young boy.

They finally found a spot near the store and walked in. A store attendant in the front entrance of the store was checking people's bags and push carts to make sure they weren't stealing anything.

Cat looked around the store, "I'm not sure where the walking canes are Young Boy. Let's try sporting goods."

Young Boy was born with polio and was used to the look of pity on people's faces every time he went out somewhere. He normally just stared down and avoided making eye contact with anyone. He preferred going through the tight aisles of a store instead of wider ones. Cat knew this so he made sure he his brother was following along with him.

"I think this is it Young Boy."

Young Boy looked around and had never seen so many different types of walking canes. His brown cane was given to him by his mother who found it in a garage sale.

Cat held up a handful of canes and demonstrated them to young boy, "LOOK THEY HAVE DIFFERENT COLORS. WHICH ONE DO YOU LIKE?"

"Pick whichever one you want, doesn't matter how much it is."

Young Boy grabbed a cane with a sexy pin up nurse on it: "This is way lighter than the one I have."

"I don't know if you can take that to school Young Boy?" said Cat.

Young Boy looked down and started to place the cane back.

"Hey, you know what? We can place tape on it WHEN YOU GO TO SCHOOL. JUST DON'T TELL MY MOM," said Cat.

Cat looked for the prettiest cashier on the way to the register. He noticed a BRUNETTE with long brown hair. She had cat eyes, a small nose, and big full lips. She was naturally pretty with big hips and a petite frame. She wore a very light red lipstick with her hair tied in a ponytail. She had black mascara that extended the length of her eyelashes and up towards her eyebrows. She impatiently chewed gum while a mother and her three kids waited to get their bag of groceries.

Cat quickly handed Young Boy some money, “Here’s seventy bucks Young Boy.”

“Why are you giving me the money?” he said.

“I want you to pay for it Young Boy. Girls like guys who have money.”

Young boy took the money and arrived at the register.

The woman looked at Young Boy and then the cane, “Just this?”

Young boy stared down momentarily while Cat passed by him and waited for him at the end of the register. He stared at her beautiful eyes and smiled and said, “Yes.”

The woman looked at the cane again, smiled, and approached him.

She whispered, “You like girls with big tits?”

Young Boy quickly handed her the money, “Here, how much is it?”

She rang up the cane and gave him the change, “Adiós cosita.”

Young Boy smiled, took the cane and money, and slowly walked towards Cat.

“Come on lets go,” said Cat.

Cat followed Young Boy to the exit where the store attendant was waiting.

The store attendant asked for the receipt as Cat smiled and looked at Young Boy, “¿Que te dijo?”

Young Boy smiled and handed the receipt over to the attendant and glanced over to Cat, “Espérate.”

The two brothers exited the building as Cat took Young Boy’s old cane and simulated using it as they both crutched back to the car.



PART III

El corrido de Dani

A One Act Play

By: Jesus A. Reyna

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**Characters:**

EL DANI	Cartel member
PERRO	A soldier
VICKI La POZOLERA	Transvestite, thirty nine year old
PRIEST	Catholic priest
FU_KOBAMA48	User, man with a mask and a suit
ARMANDO ZUNIGA	Former DEA Agent

**Setting:**

Nuevo Laredo Tamaulipas, MX

**Time:**

2004 - 2013

**The Heroes Scene 1**

*DANI and PERRO are two young 12 year old boys wearing jeans and a t-shirt. Each has a baseball mitt, and they throw a baseball back and forth to each other. A baseball bat lies next to a little brown box on the floor. They stand center stage.*

DANI

We need a Batman in here. My parents said we can't go visit my cousins at night anymore because of all the dead people on T.V.

PERRO

(Putting on his baseball mitt) I like El Chapulín Colorado.

DANI

He's old.

PERRO

No he's not

DANI

Aren't you scared? (Throws ball to PERRO)

PERRO

Scared of what? I have a knife.

DANI

(Excitedly) Let me see, let me see.

PERRO

Hold on, I have it in my pocket. (DANI runs towards him as PERRO takes off the mitt along with the ball. He pulls out a nail clipper)

DANI

Wow, where did you get it?

PERRO

From my dad, I stole it from him when he was asleep. He uses it to clip his toe nails. I found the knife inside. I don't think he knows that it's there because he left it in the restroom.

DANI

Why does it have that pico on the top? (Pointing at the nail clipper)

PERRO

Because that's the part that goes inside when you stick it in someone stupid.

DANI

Have you used it?

PERRO

No, but I took it to school last week. There were some kids that wanted to beat me up in the restroom. I took it out and they got scared. I told my dad that they wanted to beat me up after school so he's been picking me up every day.

DANI

But you live across the street from the school?

PERRO

So? You want them to beat me up or what?

DANI

You're lazy; you just don't want to walk. Your dad has money anyways.

PERRO

Shut up and get back. I don't want to get into trouble for sticking you with it. (Puts the nail clipper back into his pocket) Come on, let's throw the ball.

DANI

I have something better than your knife.

PERRO

Shut up, liar.

DANI

I do, and it's a lot sharper than your knife too. I've seen Carmen put it into her arm.

PERRO

Well where is it? Let me see it.

DANI

(Goes to the little box next to the baseball bat and takes out a metal syringe) I told you I wasn't lying.

PERRO

You know what that is?

DANI

Not really?

PERRO

That's a sword. I've heard Ms. Paloma talk about them in class. Like back in time when there were horses, and King Arthur, and all that stuff. (Pause) Except this one is small, maybe it's broken?

DANI

Carmen looks all funny. She makes funny faces with her mouth and her eyes turn white. My dad said to stay away from her.

PERRO

Don't be stupid. El Rey Arturo fought dragons and witches. (Pause) Give it to me let me see it.

DANI

Ok, ok, hold on. Be careful with it, and don't poke me neither.

PERRO

Come on let me see. (Takes it from his hand) Wow, this is so cool.

DANI

Carmen threw it outside her house, near the nopales. She makes me warm tortillas with mantequilla before she pokes her arm.

PERRO

We have to go check and see if she has anymore.

DANI

Let's play swords.

PERRO

Let me use this one and you can use my baseball bat.

DANI

Ok.

PERRO

(Starts flinging the metal syringe around in circles up in the air) Hey be careful not to hit me.

That bat is heavier and longer but mine has magic. (Starts making swishing noises with his mouth). I'm going to turn you into a frog.

DANI

Well I'm going to shoot you with my machine gun. (Flips baseball bat, grips it like a rifle, and points it at PERRO while making shooting noises)

PERRO

Hey that's not fair.

DANI

Why not?

PERRO

Because we're supposed to be using swords.

DANI

Swords are boring.

PERRO

Well then I'm going to get a gun from my dad.

DANI

Where?

PERRO

I can't tell you, he'll get mad at me.

DANI

My dad already told me about your dad.

PERRO

What did he tell you?

DANI

Everybody knows your dad sells guns (Pause) and drugs. That's why you're in that rich school with all the fresas. That's why you learned English before me too. I had to learn from my cousin in Laredo, but now we can't even cross the bridge.

PERRO

Your dad is a chismoso. You're lucky you're my friend.

DANI

Yeah, I like how the people treat me nice when I'm with you.

PERRO

Yeah. (Pause) You're right. Doña Elena always gives me free Mazapan and Barrilitos everytime I pass her store. (Thinking)

DANI

Come on let's throw the ball around. Get your glove and put the sword back in the box. (Picks up his mitt)

PERRO

Ok. Throw it hard.

End Scene

### **The Villains Scene 2**

**AT RISE:** *VICKI La POZOLERA stands in front of a vanity looking at herself stage right. She holds a pair of silicone breast implants near her naked chest. She wears some worn out dirty jeans. The vanity is littered with aerosol spray air fresheners and a cell phone. At back center stage, two blue plastic barrels and two dead bodies lay covered in a black tarp. A door faces audience stage left. Two little boys toss a baseball front stage left.*

VICKI

(Singing) Once I had a love, and it was gas. Soon turned out. Had a heart of glass. Seemed like the real thing, only to find. Mucho mistrust. Love's gone behind. (Pause) (Cell phone rings) (Places a silicone implant down and answers) ¿Bueno? (Pause) Y te dije, nomás tengo dos tambos aquí. Se tarda 24 horas. Bueno bye. (Hangs up) Pinches perros. (Little boys chatter can be overheard, grabs silicone implant again) Cosita, que rica te vas a ver con estas tetotas. (Puts on t-shirt, places implants on the vanity and heads towards the door and opens it) Ey, chamacos, vengan.

PERRO

(To DANI) Hey, that weird guy is calling us.

VICKI

Si ustedes dos. (Pause) Understand Spanish?



PERRO

We go or what?

DANI

No way, what if he steals us?

PERRO

(To VICKI) What do you want?

VICKI

Mira, tengo unas paletas.

PERRO

(To DANI excitedly) He has ice cream.

VICKI

Ándale, no les voy hacer nada.

PERRO

(To VICKI) Where's the ice cream? (He gets closer) Go get your stuff, hurry up. (DANI gets his baseball bat and little box)

VICKI

You don't speak Spanish or what? Hey, I have something better than ice cream. (Takes out a roll of money) Do you all want to make some money?

PERRO

Wow, where did you get all that money?

VICKI

I need some help inside. I'll pay you 20 dollars each if you help me, but you can't tell anyone.

DANI

100 dollars. (Pause) Each.

VICKI

Mira nomas que carajo.

PERRO

Yeah, we charge 100 dollars.

VICKI

Bueno, ok fine. Tengan. (Hands both of them one bill each)

PERRO

Woo, we're rich.

VICKI

If you tell anyone, something very bad is going to happen to all of us ok. Más vale que se quede quieto los dos.

DANI

Ok.

PERRO

Yeah, ok.

VICKI

¿Cómo se llaman?

DANI

I'm Dani and they call him Perro.

VICKI

¿Perro? Que feo nombre escuincla. (Pause) Pero tu Dani. Padece que eres el más vivo.

(Pause) Ok, ok, adelante. (They all enter door and in front of barrels towards vanity)

You guys are lucky porque; I'm going to give you a show today. Sit down.

PERRO

(Looking around) Where do we sit?

VICKI

Hay escuincla. Ahí, there on the floor. Just sit ok.

DANI

(Both kids sit) It smells bad in here.

VICKI

Hay sí, que horror. (Takes aerosol freshener and begins to spray entire room)

PERRO

I thought you said you had work for us?

VICKI

¿A si escuincla? You just want to work, is that right? I was going to show you something fun, pero if you just want to work, está bien.

DANI

No, no. What are you going to show us?

VICKI

(Excited) Ok but it's a surprise. I need to get ready. I'll be right back. (Gets silicone implants and exits stage right)

DANI

What are you doing? Let him show us. If we don't have to do work, let him talk.

PERRO

Where do you think he went?

DANI

I don't know? It still smells bad. Give me that spray.

PERRO

Here. (Hands him the aerosol spray)

VICKI

(Off stage) Ey, no anden traveseando.

PERRO

(Laughing) Ponlo pa-tras.

DANI

I wonder what's inside the blue barrels. (Walking towards the barrels)

PERRO

Hey what are you going to do with your money?

DANI

It stinks more over here.

PERRO

I'm going to buy a bike, and some boots, and a bed that's a car. My dad wants horses in my room. I like horses, but I want a car. Nobody uses horses anymore.

DANI

(Opens one of the barrels) It's just water.

VICKI

(Enter Vicki in full on drag and make up) Ey, deja eso.

DANI

Why, it's just water.

VICKI

Eso no es agua menso. Vaya. Y pensé que eras el más vivo. (Pause) That's not water boy, that's acido.

PERRO

Acid?

VICKI

Vengan para acá. Sit down. It's time for the show ok.

DANI

Ok.

PERRO

(Chuckling) Hey why do you look like a girl?

VICKI

Be quite escuincle. (Pause) Ok are you ready? (Turns around and in a deep voice) Presentando la reina de Nuevo Laredo dos mil cinco. Vicki Harri. (Sings and starts to dance) *Once I had a love and it was divine. Soon found out I was losing my mind. Seemed like the real thing but I was so blind. Mucho mistrust, love's gone behind. In between what I find is pleasing and I'm feeling fine. Love is so confusing. There's no peace of mind. If I fear I'm losing you. It's just no good, you teasing like you do.* (Pause) Ok, get up, now you two dance.

PERRO

I'm not going to dance.

DANI

We will dance for 20 dollars each.

VICKI

Ok, ok, come on dance. (Still singing and dancing) *Lost inside. Adorable illusion and I cannot hide. I'm the one you're using, please don't, push me aside. We could have made it cruising yeah. Ooooooh woah. Ooooooh woah.* Ok aplausos, aplausos. (They all begin applauding)

Muchas gracias, besos amores, besos. (Sends kisses to the audience)

PERRO

Hey that was fun.

VICKI

Bailas bien escuincle y tu Dani, necesitas moverte más. Very, very good. (Looks at herself in the vanity) Ay, mira nomas, I'm starting to sweat, que horror. (Takes out the roll of money from her bra) 20 for you escuincle and 20 for you Dani boy. (Pause) Ok, ahora el trabajo niños.

Escuincle. Levanta la lona negra. (Points to the tarp)

PERRO

But it stinks over there.

DANI

I'll go.

VICKI

Ándale, así me gustan los valientes.

DANI

(Uncovers the dead bodies and gets startled) They're... They're... Dead. (Pause) Perro, they're dead. It's two men, come over here, hurry up. I told you he was going to steal us and kill us like these two. Come over here. (PERRO runs towards him)

PERRO

Let us out of here. (Begins to yell at VICKI)

VICKI

Ey, quietos. Yo no los mate, they were already dead. Cobardes. Mira que hombrecitos me salieron. Ándenle, both of you are too young to be afraid anyways. You're going to help me put them into the barrels. (Goes to one of the bodies and begins pulling it) Grab the legs Dani. (Pause) ¿O tienes miedo?

DANI

No I'm not afraid. Come on Perro, grab the leg.

VICKI

Yo agarro el lado más pesado. Be careful with the acid, it will burn your skin. Wait, wait, esperen. (VICKI goes to the vanity and opens the drawer and pulls out a pair of neoprene gloves and hands them to the boys) Open the barrel escuincle.

PERRO

Don't call me escuincle no more.

VICKI

Ok, ok Perrito. Chiquit-tit-ito, papacito. (Puts first body in the barrel) Vaya que si estos cadáveres me rompen mis chichis, les voy a poner otro pozo en la cabeza. (Fixes her silicone implants)

DANI

What happened? Who killed them?

VICKI

Vaya que preguntón eres. (Frustrated, and fixing her outfit, hair, and breasts) Look, these men are not good people Dani boy. Neither are the men who killed them miijo. That's why you cannot tell anyone about this ok. Tu también escuincle. (Pause) I mean, Perrito. Ustedes piensan que yo fuera capaz de esto, ay no que horror. Virgen madre purísima. (Starts making the sign of the cross) I want to be a star, like Marilyn Monroe and Madonna, and Debbie Harry. Ay como me fascinan esas mujeres. (Pause) But, I have to live off something papitos, ándale. Vamos a echar el gordo. (Picks up the body and accidentally tears her implant)

DANI

What happened?

VICKI

(Loud cry) Ay qué horror. Pinche gordo me daño mis bobis.

PERRO

Don't cry Vicki.

VICKI

Hay, gracias escuincle. Este pinche gordo estúpido me lo va pagar. Agárrense. (They dump the heavy body into the barrel) I want you two to come next week. Necesito otra protésica. You are going to pick it up for me ok. I'm going to pay you.

DANI

Ok Vicki, we'll come back. Don't cry anymore ok. We won't tell anyone either ok.

VICKI



Hay que horror. (Pause) Bueno ya basta, no quiero que me miren así. Ya váyanse ok.

DANI

Ok, bye Vicki (Picks up his baseball bat and his box) lets go Perro. (They walk out the door)

End Scene

### **Los Valientes Scene 3**

**AT RISE:** *DANI and PERRO knock on VICKI La POZOLERA'S door stage left. Two bodies lay outside the door in the shadows which both DANI and PERRO are delivering. PERRO carries a flashlight while DANI knocks. Both are older now well dressed in cowboy hats and boots. They still have a teenager resemblance. VICKI La POZOLERA is inside with a young man caressing his face, on top of mounted bodies covered with tarps. VICKI La POZOLERA is dressed like a woman.*

VICKI

Te amo mi vida. Eres el más bello hombre que siempre he soñado. Tú eres el único que no me juzga. Quiero que estemos juntos para siempre. (Knock on the door) ¿Quién es?

DANI

Abre la puerta VICKI.

VICKI

(Worried) Hay mi vida, necesitas que esconderte. (Rushes to hide young man)

PERRO

Mira este pinche puto, cree que tenemos toda la pinche noche.

VICKI

Ay voy, ay voy. (Whispers to young man) Escóndete detrás del tambo. (Hides behind a large barrel)

PERRO

Con una chingada, apúrale. (Getting upset)

VICKI

(Opens the door) Hay, ya vinieron mis gringuitos.

DANI

What took you so long? Agárrate Perro. (Walks towards one of the bodies)

PERRO

(Hands flashlight to VICKI) Ándale pinche viejo, ayúdanos. (Shakes his head) Puta madre, still dressing up? Ya déjate de esas chingaderas.

VICKI

Hay, déjame en paz escuincle.

PERRO

(Grabs VICKI from the neck) ¿Qué dices puto?

DANI

Hey, leave her alone PERRO. Come and help me.

PERRO

(Releases VICKI) Cuidado puto, ya no estoy para tus chingaderas. (The boys carry the two men inside the house while VICKI helps with the flashlight) Where the fuck are we supposed to put them DANI? This bitch hasn't got rid of the last ones we brought. (He looks around and notices three mutilated women missing their breasts)

DANI

¿Qué pinche onda VICKI? (Upset, DANI sees the women) Who the fuck are these girls?

VICKI

(Upset) Leave them there. (Pleading) I'm sorry; I need them, por favor. Perdóname papi. I forgot DANI, please don't be upset. (Points to the vanity) Mira put them over here.

DANI

No we'll put them over here; I just need to move this larger barrel.

VICKI

(In panic) No, not over there please.

PERRO

(Goes behind the barrel) Look at what we got here? Este puto anda trayendo niños ahora.

(Grabs young man from the hair)

VICKI

(Crying) No, no. Por favor. Ay perdóname babe.

DANI

Another one VICKI? What did I tell you last time? Tengo órdenes de chingarte si volvía a suceder.

VICKI

DANI, es que lo amo, y el a mí.

DANI

He's just a child, where did you pick him up?

VICKI

(Angry) Que te importa pendejo. Let him go, he didn't do anything to you. Perdóname bebe.

DANI

You love him?

VICKI

Si.

DANI

And he loves you?

VICKI

(Pleading) Si DANI, por el amor de dios que sí.

DANI

(To PERRO) Chingalo. (PERRO pulls out a pistol from his jacket and shoots the young man)

PERRO

(PERRO grabs the boy and dumps him in a barrel) Carajo, esta pesado el carbón.

VICKI

(Screaming) No.

DANI

(DANI walks towards VICKI and grabs her hair. He pulls out the mutilated breasts from her bra and dumps them into the barrel with the young man) No me vuelvas engañar VICKI.

VICKI

Son unos cobardes los dos. (Crying) No puede ser. (She places her hands on her chest, and then her heart)

DANI

(To VICKI) I want you to put all those bodies in the barrels now. I'm done doing your dirty work.

VICKI

(Walks towards the barrel with the young man, and with indignation) It's my fault. Fue mi culpa dios mío. (Crying) Fue mi culpa señor.

PERRO

He's old, we don't need him.

VICKI

Mátenme. Ya no puedo vivir así. (Kneels down and grabs PERRO's hand and pistol) Haz lo cobarde. (Just as PERRO is going to pull the trigger, DANI hits PERRO beside the head with his pistol and falls)

DANI

(To VICKI) Vete y no vuelvas más. La próxima vez que te mire, será en tu pozo. (VICKI exits door stage left)

End Scene

#### **The Testimony Scene Four**

*A priest stands center stage as church bells ring. Priest is dressed in traditional Catholic gown. Two individuals stand in the shadows behind the Priest. FU\_CKOBAMA48 wears a suit with a Barack Obama mask painted like a joker and stands stage right. ARMANDO ZUNIGA sits on a chair stage left. He is an older chubby man with glasses and a mustache. FU\_CKOBAMA48 stands in front of a laptop. Light should be focused on each individual while they provide their testimony. The order will be the following: PRIEST, FU\_KOBAMA48, ARMANDO ZUNIGA*

PRIEST

Señoras y señores, en esta ceremonia conmemorar hemos hablado sobre el tema del miedo.

(Pause) Todos, de una manera o otra, hemos sentido miedo en nuestras vidas. Hermanos.

(Pause) ¿Quiénes de ustedes han perdido alguien en esta plaga de violencia que perturba nuestra comunidad? Levanten la mano por favor. ¿Quiénes de ustedes han tenido que darle el pésame a

un hermano, o hermana, padre, e hija? ¿Quiénes de ustedes les han dado el pésame hermanos?  
Aún sin embargo les pregunto ahora. (Pause) ¿Seguimos con este miedo? ¿Quieren seguir con  
ese miedo? (Pause) No. (Pause) ¿Qué es lo que nos puede pasar? Nada. Nos matan. ¿Están  
dispuestos a luchar? (Pause) Si.

G D7 G C D7 G

(Musical dialogue) Tú has venido a la orilla. No has buscado ni sabios ni ricos. Tan solo  
quieres

D7 G C G D7 G

Que yo te siga. Señor, me has mirado a los ojos. Sonriendo, has dicho mi nombre (Exit stage  
left)

FU\_KOBAMA48

Good day to you America and the world. There's been a lot of debate about a wall being built,  
or a fence being built between Mexico and the United States. But here's a good reason for it.  
The Zetas drug cartel. They decapitated a young woman in Mexico City or outside Mexico City  
for posting something on the internet about them. They found the body; this was this past  
Saturday, along with a hand written sign saying that she was killed in retaliation for the postings  
of a social network. These fucking assholes. They murdered this woman for no other reason  
than just to make a stupid bullshit statement. It's time the United States stops the crap with  
Mexico. Build the damn fence. Put out a goddamn minefield by it. I mean put out our military,  
bring our military home. Put our military along the border with the order to shoot to kill. It's  
only going to be a matter of time for assholes like the drug cartels to come over and start killing  
Americans. You know just go ahead, bring our military home, put down the fence, anybody

crossing the border, shoot to kill, end of story. If the cartel wants to try to come across, shoot em' all dead. The hell with it. If there is ever any doubt about closing the American Mexican border, this should be it. Animals like those in the Zeta drug cartel need to be kept out of America, they should be hunted down, we should help Mexico do whatever is needed to hunt these animals down and just make em' extinct. There's no place in the planet for sick animals like these people. You know, build the damn fence, put em' up in Mexico, put our military there. Have the order shoot to kill anybody who comes across, I don't care if the son of bitch is three feet tall or six feet tall, I don't care if its male or female. Shoot em', kill em'. That's it. You know, let these sick perverts, you know, Obama? What does the American government has to do before anyone will do anything like this? You gonna let these sick perverts come over here and kill some Americans, on American soil? Obama, get off your freakin' golf course, get off your freakin' butt and go do your damn job. Alright America, I speak and say what I want, if you don't like it, go to hell somewhere else cause I'm not going to change, I'm going to say what I want. You have a nice day.

#### ARMANDO ZUNIGA

My name is Armando Zuniga. I was born and raised here in South Texas. I ended up in the law enforcement field because my father used to be in law enforcement, my sister the same thing in law enforcement. I decided to go to school and get my degree and become a law enforcement officer. It was in Vietnam that I actually saw one of my friends died of an overdose of heroin. And right after a fire fight we found out that, you know, we found him with a needle still stuck in his arm, and basically what I did was that I picked up an AK-47 (Pause) from the enemy and double tapped him in the chest to, (Pause) to show that he died (Pause) in a blaze of glory as they say, instead of going home as a junkie. And I promised myself that if I survived that war, that I

would become a federal drug agent. I was accepted into the DEA in 1979. Having a lot of knowledge of my Vietnam experience I was assigned to the jungles of Peru. I ended up doing a lot of search and destroy mission down there, working hand in hand with the Colombians and the Peruvians and we had what was called, a big major operation. Operation Condor, but there was a contract put on my head so I ended up having to leave. And instead of sending me back to the states, they sent me to Salvador and Guatemala, to train anti-narco terrorist units, and do undercover work, and you know, run all different kinds of raids. Search and destroy missions and so forth. Reagan at one time said that we needed to stop communism in the back yard. Of course that was not the fact because there's really not the communist we were fighting, we were just running covert operations to help the CIA run their operations. We ended up training, instead of drug interdiction individuals, we were, (Pause) we were training the death squads which went out and slaughtered over close to two hundred and fifty thousand people in Latin America. (Pause)

I was a cop, a detective, and a DEA agent, which took me into Mexico working drug cases and smuggling cases from Mexico into the United States. And at that time period we had a task force that combined DEA, county, and the Edinburg police department. I used to do a lot of undercover work and basically what I was doing, I played different parts. I played being a Mexican, drug trafficker buying large quantities of cocaine. We were informants, we were introduced to different members of the drug cartels, and at that time period, you actually knew who they were. There weren't that many of them. You got to remember one thing, that in Mexico, when you work with a federal official, he actually has become your informant. He gets paid with federal funds. (Laughing) The majority of them worker up, you know they pretty well ran the whole thing. We were the law as they say. (Pause) Mexican authorities were known as,



as, they do the most outrageous thing you can think of. And basically what happened, it was my first taste of uh (Laughing) torturing people. (Pause) I remember when my senior agents for the DEA would bust somebody down in Mexico and they would actually hang them upside down and use mineral water. They shake it and run it down his nose to clear his sinuses, and of course he had the same effect of water boarding. It was just torture. I couldn't understand it, he said well "this is what we do in Mexico, and this is what we will continue to do" he says. We've done it for many years and you guys are not going to come in here and tell us how to do it.

The cartels have controlled this side of the border, in the U.S side because they have the money to do it. America is more addicted to drug money than they are to drugs. Because of greed, money. There is so much money. We have a generation (Pause) of individuals, that are willing to take somebody's life for (Pause) fifty dollars, a hundred dollars

### **El corrido de Dani Scene 5**

**AT RISE:** *In an abandoned space, a twenty year old old white-complected young man dressed in a black gold glimmering dress shirt, jacket, jeans, and cowboy boots sits tied to a chair. He is short and stocky. His dress shirt shows signs of wear along with blood stains on the fabric and on the front of his forehead. He struggles to unbind the ropes. A man wearing a green army jacket, jeans, and cowboy boots enter door stage right. He wears a silk stocking on his head and carries a sack over his shoulder. There is a laptop computer sitting on a table center stage left. Guitar begins playing a corrido. Musical dialogue is in the key of G, 2/4 time signature, waltz style.*

EL DANI

G

D7

(Musical dialogue.) Da la cara ya puto. ¿Sabes quién diablos soy yo? ¿Contesta, quien eres,

G

D7

cuanto, te andan pagando los gringos? Si hay una cosa bien saben. (Pause) No me

G

asusta esto. (Pause, hunches down)

PERRO

G

(PERRO enters door stage right, musical dialogue) En el año dos mil trece, un tal Dani lo

D7

G

D7

torcieron. Lo vendieron por muertes, que le debe a la gente. Por su puesto el quien tiene.

G

(Pause) El poder no está con este.

EL DANI

G

D7

(Picks up head) Perdóname por favor, no entiendo lo que sucede. Yo te propongo que esperes,

G

D7

G

que yo te puedo pagar. ¿Cuánto me cobras mi amigo? (Pause) Que lana no ha de faltar. (Pause, end musical dialogue)

PERRO

(Walks towards computer, sets up lap top camera and laughs) ¿Lana? ¿Lana? A mí no me hace falta el dinero puto.

EL DANI

¿Bueno, bueno, dime, porque la máscara?

PERRO

¿Ah, la máscara? Te voy contar una historia, de un tal Perro. (Pause) ¿Entiendes ingles DANI boy?

EL DANI

Yeah, I know English.

PERRO

Por supuesto que sí, pinche fresa. (Pause) Mira, it's like the dog; that not knowing any better, barks, and barks to protect its master. Te agita el nervio ese pinche perro. Until at last, you grasp its throat. (Grabs EL DANI's throat and begins to choke him) It produces a gasp for a last dying breath. Pushing its face down on the ground while you see its' eyes falling. Then you let go. (Releases him) De aquí en adelante, siempre te va tener miedo. No se te vuelve a poner encima más. Instead make way for you until you pass. (Patronizingly curtsyng with his hand out) Ándale señor, pase, pase. Por su puesto señor, a sus órdenes. (Pause) El problema amigo, es que el perro is innocent, y nomas un pobre animal.

EL DANI

¿Y quién eres? ¿Eres el tal perro o qué? ¿Me vienes a casar? ¿Me vas a frenar con el cuete? ¿Dónde está? Where is your gun? ¿Dónde está el fusil? (Turns head side to side looking for the rifle) (Pause) Cobarde, lo bueno que no puedo ver tu cara.

PERRO

Mira, tu no me puedes ver, pero si toda la gente nos está mirando atreves del internet. (Points to the camera on the computer, grabs his head to face camera.) Saluda DANI boy.

El DANI

Basta ya. ¿Espérame? ¿Dices que eres el PERRO?

PERRO

(In News style broadcast tone) Transmitiendo, en vivo, *Alarma!* MX online, en vivo, para que lo disfruten en su hogar.

EL DANI

¿Qué pedo?

PERRO

La Nena De Laredo was found murdered this morning. Sources say that her head was found decapitated and placed on top of her home personal computer. Sources say she was murdered for denouncing a drug cartel on a social networking site.

EL DANI

(Shuddering and laughing.) ¿Qué pedo? Esas fueron las órdenes.

PERRO

(Annoyed that has been interrupted, punches El DANI in the face, and continues to face the camera) Aquí tenemos uno de los agresores, y el principal, en el asesinato de La Nena De Laredo. (Stands beside El DANI and begins to interview him) Dime DANI. ¿Qué nos puedes decir sobre lo reportado?

EL DANI

(Laughing) Tu bien sabes cómo se trabajan las cosas aquí. (Angry) Denuncio. Carajo. She should have kept her mouth shut.

PERRO

(Facing the camera) En otras noticias. Un agresor, asesino a sangre fría a un cirujano dentista en la colonia centro de Nuevo Laredo. Especulando la existencia de corrupción, extorsión, y amenaza que existe en la frontera del país.

EL DANI

Por favor déjame ir.

PERRO

(Again faces the camera.) Al sujetar el agresor, Alarma! MX pudo descubrir fotos comprometedoras que encuentran el tal Dani, con la mujer de uno de los más prominentes jefes del cartel. (Holds out cell phone with compromising photos, holding it to the camera)

EL DANI

¿Dime que quieres?

PERRO

(As if interrupted) Espérame Dani, estamos transmitiendo. (Pause.) (Facing camera) Vamos a tomar una encuesta a través del sitio de internet. ¿Lo mato, o le damos misericordia? Ustedes van a decidir raza. (Faces DANI) Mira DANI, tú sabes cómo trabajan las cosas aquí. (Walks towards the audience) And you know how this is going to end DANI boy.

EL DANI

Who are you? Is it you PERRO?

PERRO

(Facing and pointing to the camera) It's funny how we are not allowed to have guns in this country and yet I have one in my hand (Picks up gun and looks at it). Don't you think it's funny DANI? Don't you think it's funny about all the dead people on T.V?

EL DANI

Dime quien me vendió? ¿Eres pariente de La Nena?

PERRO

(Goes to the computer) Mira Dani, la gente quiere que te chinge. (Turns to El DANI and laughs) Es más, te tengo una sorpresa. (Pause)

EL DANI

¿Qué cabron? ¿Dime?

PERRO

Cerrar los pinches ojos mendigo. (Points gun on El DANI's head. Perro reaches for the sack and pulls out VICKI's head from the hair. He puts the head in front of El DANI's face.) (Pause)

Abre los ojos.

EL DANI

(Startled) Eres un miserable.

PERRO

(Holds out the head and asks) Would you do me the honor of dancing with me? (Holds head to his ear and excitedly) She said yes DANI boy. (Goes to computer and plays a song, begins to dance center stage) Ándale, mira qué bonita baila DANI. ¿Nunca te enseñaste a bailar verdad? I was the one who knew how to dance.

(Banda music plays) (*Quiero cantarle a esos ojos tan negros tan negros. Que yo quiero. Quiero decirle a esos labios que si no me besan. Me muero*)

EL DANI

La mataste mendigo.

PERRO

Cálmate DANI, pareces puto como él.

EL DANI

Where did you find her? Dime.

PERRO

Uy uy uy papito. Que sentimientos para alguien de tu estatura.

EL DANI

She taught me everything I know.

PERRO

Y la encuesta ha terminado, ustedes han decidido raza. Muchas gracias por sintonizar Alarma! MX. Acompañemos la semana que entra donde estaremos en Reynosa Tamaulipas, desde la frontera, desde tu casa (Points at audience) transmitiendo en vivo donde nos encontraremos a otro delincuente, traficante y asesino. No se lo pierdan raza. (Turns to DANI) No contabas con mi astucia Dani. Aun estas equivocado. (Pause) ¿Quieres saber quién soy?

EL DANI

Yes, tell me.

PERRO

(With indignation) It's my fault. Fue mi culpa dios mío. (Pretend cry) Fue mi culpa señor.

EL DANI

Era una triste miseria.

PERRO

He was a pedophile.

EL DANI

No puede ser. ¿Eres tu PERRO?

PERRO

(Facing audience) I am a mother and father, hijo e hija, sobrino, sobrina, cousin, neighbor friend and enemy. There's no need to be afraid anymore DANI. (Punches El DANI slightly unconscious, Perro reaches for his pocket and takes out the saran wrap and covers El DANI's

entire mouth and head, puts El DANI's cell phone on his lap) Me vas a devolver la humanidad y la justicia a mí y a varios Dani. I am going to give you yours too.

C

G

(Facing the camera, musical dialogue) Yo ya me voy me despido, les encargo el asesino. (Goes

D7

G

to the computer and types) Aquí está la dirección, y en su conciencia decidan. Si lo condenan a

D7

G

muerte? O lo perdonan fingiendo. (Begins to exit stage right) Adios DANI. (Exit stage right and out the door)

BLACKOUT

EI DANI

(Loud mumbling.)



## PART IV

### Tacuache

#### I.

Let me tell you about the time I smuggled a gun into Mexico. I have never liked guns, but I remember the first time I pulled the trigger off a .22 pistol. I may have been seven or eight years old. You would have thought I was shooting a .45 caliber gun because the recoil scared the hell out of me. I couldn't stop shaking after I pulled off the first round. My older brother laughed at me as I tried to steady my hand, aiming for the bunker a top of the hill in the old migrant camp in Michigan. There was this fear of not knowing how to shoot a gun. You never wanted to be the effeminate type in my family; the one who hated doing manly things. I didn't want to be the one that couldn't shoot a gun. My older brother Rafael always kept reminding me about that day. It was the day that my hand started shaking from fear.

The truth is that no one ever taught me how to shoot a gun, so that fear has always been present. And it wasn't like we were hunters either. We worked the fields as migrants. Instead of guns we had garden hoes. I never got over it. We were like those people in the movies. We were like the artisans and farmers that couldn't fight because it went against their "good nature". Hollywood, and books, and literature have perpetuated a myth that helped these skilled workers win wars by using their craftiness. Take Homers' Trojan Horse as a prime example. On the contrary, there have been significant events in history that fit the "good nature" model. Take

padre Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla's Hidalguenses. Los que dieron el "costalazo." Those poor people weren't even allowed to grow grapes. But at least those farmers stood up for themselves.

My brother thought he knew about guns, but he really didn't. It's strange how you start learning about them as a kid. I don't even remember who introduced them to me at the camp? It must have been my other brother Gil, or Carlos? I've always been afraid of what would happen if it recoiled back and shot me in the face. I always slightly stand at an angle when I shoot. I guess there is always the slight possibility for a gun to mechanically fail. That's the chance you have to take. Lord knows I have heard my share of freak accidents of inexperienced or foolish people shooting themselves that way. My cuñados brother shot his foot on a bet that a BB gun wouldn't penetrate his tennis shoe. He lost. There was also my brother's neighbor who accidentally shot another kid in the face when he was only sixteen years old. All I have to do is knock off a couple of rounds when my noisy neighbors across the street start causing their insurrection to get a little peace and quiet. So in a sense it is a peacemaker.

There was a rifle hidden in a small storage room below our stairs in our home in the Valle. I'd always known it was there. No one ever took it out. It had wooden finish with a white diamond shape on the chamber. The only time I saw it fired was when Gil used it to shoot a tacuache that was stuck in the attic of our house. I remember climbing the small ladder and flashing the light toward the corner of the attic. I could see its eyes reflecting off the light, its hairless tail, and its teeth just grinning at me. I hate possums. My brother took that rifle and killed it that day. He had a hard time getting it out. That was the messy part. At that time I told myself that I would never kill an animal, even though I hate the damn things.

On one occasion my mother yelled out to my brother, "¡Rafael, Rafael, vente, órale, tráeme el azadón!" My brother rushed out to get a long garden hoe. The tacuache was scurrying

to find its way out of the small garden that was surrounded by a fence. It was a garden she took deep pride in both pragmatically, and aesthetically. Nopales, chile del monte, hierbabuena, sábila, and her favorite yellow and white roses. Rafael rushed and handed her the garden hoe as she hit the possum across its face; kept hitting, and hitting. After she had exhausted all her energy she quickly handed the hoe to my brother and told him to hit it harder. I stood behind the screen door of our house while I saw my brother's reluctant face beat the animal down. Its blood slightly sprinkled down his forearm. He split the hoe in a couple of places. My mother immediately handed him a shovel. You never know with tacuaches, they play dead sometimes. He struck the possum on its neck and heard the crack of its bones and lay there. I felt bad for my brother that day. I mean, what kind of 13 year old kid does something like that. It's not like he had time to even think about it. My mom laughed and got a kick out of how shocked we both were about the whole thing. She told us not to be scared. I only saw the blood on my brothers' forearm.

I ran outside as we both stared at the dead possum for a while. "Ándale, agárralo de la cola y tíralo atrás en el callejón," my mother said.

I looked at my brother and ran inside the house.

"Do it, do it, come on scaredy-cat," I said.

He took a dirty rag and picked him up from the tail and threw him out in the alley.

That rifle remained hidden for a long time after that until there was another incident. I was older and it must have been two years after my mother passed. A possum got stuck in a small tree stump on the edge of our fence. The poor bastard had the worst luck. It was during the day, and I couldn't understand how the hell it managed to get wedged along the fence. It must have been thirsty and drinking from the bird fountain in the garden when it scurried with

the barking of our dogs. My father handed me a garden hoe. I told him I was going to get the rifle. He yelled and told me not to shoot it. He was so upset. “¿Que estás haciendo?” he said. I quickly loaded it and went outside, aimed at its neck, and pulled the trigger. I took a dirty rag and grabbed its tail and threw it in the alley. My mother probably wouldn't have minded me shoot it, but she was gone, so was the garden, so was the dull gardening equipment that I didn't want to use anyway.

## II.

“Is my dad watching *Primer Impacto* again?” I asked.

My brother Rafael sat at the table scrolling through his cell phone, “Yeah,” he said.

I walked into the kitchen and sat down near the table with both of them.

“¿A'pa, en donde es eso?” I asked.

“Creo que Oaxaca,” he said.

Both my mother and father enjoyed watching shows like *Primer Impacto*, *Al Rojo Vivo*, and *Caso Cerrado* together. This was their news. My mother, then a 72 year old woman, once told me that she watched *Caso Cerrado* to learn about the sick things people do with the internet. After my mother died, it seemed my father kept watching these shows as a way to remember my mother. Now it was only my brothers and sisters that watched these shows with him.

In a report from Mexico, *Primer Impacto* was capturing images of a mob of people surrounding two men in a placita in Oaxaca. Their faces were halfway concealed by red handkerchiefs and rags across their faces. They held up machetes, long sticks, pitchforks, and hoes. Two fat old men in suits were being beaten in the public square as the mob cheered. The police took refuge behind plastic shields, gas masks, and grey smoke. Men jumping like grasshoppers kicking and swinging, banging their sticks and machetes on the plastic barriers that

surrounded an entire area. The men in arms scattered as the armed military made its way to the bloodied men. A few people offered assistance to the bodies that lay on the ground. I stood up and went to the refrigerator and got an apple. I took my pocket knife and cut the apple in half overhearing chants of “autonomía” in the background.

“They’re indigenous people,” said Rafael.

“Why are they fighting?” I asked.

His arms were now tucked underneath his chest, and he shrugged his shoulders:

“Something about agrarian reform, and corruption.”

He turned his attention away from the TV and back to his cell phone: “They’re called Triquis.”

The program cutaway to a group of women dressed in red, hair braids, indignant, weeping women.

“Sounds like a civil war,” he said.

I turned to my father and said, “A’pa, voy para Matehuala con usted.”

My father’s temper rose just like I knew how to make it.

“Estás loco, yo nomás voy y vengo. ¿No sabes cómo están las cosas allá, o qué?”

Rafael tilted his body back and crossed his hands behind his head, “He’s not going to let you go. He said he’s been watching *Primer Impacto* and that some guy got decapitated.”

“Well fuck that, I’m going anyways. Are we going to be scared forever?”

I turned to my stubborn father and stubbornly said, “A’pa, voy a ir.”

He got up and walked out of the room. I could hear him from across the hall, “¡Hace lo que quieras entonces!”

My brother stood up from the table and took my other apple slice: “You shouldn’t make him upset like that.”

I looked across the hall to see if he was still there, “I know but he’s just stubborn.”

“What time are ya’ll leaving?”

“I’m not going, I have to work,” he said.

“But I think he’s leaving at 1 in the morning.”

### III

I had received a call from all my sisters the night before telling me not to dress like I had money. I didn’t make fuss. I told them it would be ok. I hadn’t been to my parents’ home in Mexico since I was a young kid. My dad never wanted to take us because he hated acting like a tourist in his homeland, dragging his family along, taking pictures, delaying the whole trip essentially. He hardly ever even took anything with him. No luggage, no wife, nothing. I had somewhat received his blessing earlier that day. He told me we were leaving at 12 AM. While packing my small bag I thought about that show I was watching. Maybe it was those Indian farmers wanting to secede up in arms with their machetes and sticks? I felt contention. I felt the need to protect my father by whatever means possible.

We sat in the back of the bus. My bag was small enough to fit in the compartment above our seats. My father told me to go to sleep and that it would be a six hour ride. I wore a t-shirt and jeans, as well as a brand new Padres cap that my sister bought me when she went to San Diego. My father is a hunched older man these days. His green eyes are as consistent as they were in his youth, but they have seen much and experience plenty these most recent years. His

trips to the homeland were often a way of preserving the memory of his mother and brother who were buried there.

“Tengo que llevarles sus coronas, y es todo,” he would say.

With the passing of my mother, his wife; he only carried that burden along with him, no luggage; just the memory of that old house where they raised my older brothers and sisters.

An older couple sat across from us carrying two silver cans in a rainbow plaid maleta with no markings or labels on them. The old man wore a cowboy hat, white hair, and a white mustache. The woman had braided grey hair. Both had the disposition of being gente del rancho, morenos, and a humble inclination. She sat closely to her husband with the bag in hand, and the two silver cans held on tightly. The old woman whispered to him and he calmly nodded to her. I remembered the last and only time I ever went to Matehuala with my parents. I was 13 years old and we went as a family. I looked at the old woman and I saw my mother. At that moment I wished that I could touch her hand. I wished that as a child I could lay my head on her arm and feel her shelter in the dark coldness of the bus.

There was a man with a white muscle shirt and shaved head sitting behind the older couple. The man had tattoos in both his arms and some on his face. The individual next to him looked like a younger kid wearing an aqua *Aéropostale* t-shirt. The man and the boy seemed like they had been traveling for a while. They scrunched their potato bags between the seats. Both of them began to recline their seats as far back as they could. I noticed that the people behind them were annoyed by them reclined so far back. They didn't say anything. I watched my father fall asleep. I hated bus rides and I knew I would get very little sleep. I dozed off.

Two hours must have passed when the dome lights in the interior of the bus turned on. My head was leaning against the window and my baseball cap was resting on my lap. I looked

ahead and saw a number of trailers pulled over to the side. A man and a woman entered the bus. They flashed their lights on opposite sides inspecting the people and compartments. I put my cap on. Faced forward and waited.

The officer flashed his light on the man with the shaved head. His eyes partially reflected the light as he put his hands between his face and the light. His eyes were being blinded by the light as he grinned and tilted his head to the side.

“¿De donde vienen?” The officer asked.

“De Chicago,” said the man with the shaved head.

“¿Cargan armas, drogas?” the officer said.

“No,” said the man.

“¿Para donde viajan?” asked the officer.

“San Luis Potosi,” said the man.

The officer wore a black trench coat that concealed the semi-automatic rifle he carried on his side.

A few hours passed and I was intermittently awakened up by two additional checkpoints. They hadn't checked my compartment yet. Each time I had the cap on my lap and put it on as the officers entered. Each time they heckled the man with the shaved head. I looked at him. Every time I looked back he grinned at me right before the officers blinded him with the light.

The familiar arch near the bus station was an indication that we had arrived to our destination. The dawn was just breaking in as I reached for the compartment to get my bag. On our arrival the frigidness of the morning air took me by surprise. There was pleasantness to the air and I carefully pulled out my light jacket and put it on. I looked behind my father and



noticed a big man walking towards us. He wore a cowboy hat and a maroon Donna Redskins t-shirt.

The jubilant nature of the man was overly welcoming, “¡Aquí andas Gil!”

My father smiled and turned around, “¡Aquí andas Panterita!”

My father introduced me to him and told me that they live in our neighborhood in Donna. The man started to point out the local streets to me. I acknowledged and told him that I knew where he lived. I’d always wondered what the correlation was with people from Donna and people from Matehuala. It seemed that they all decided to move there at one point in their lives. It felt like home. It felt like I was talking to paisanos from my own hometown. The two men parted ways. I shook his hand and said goodbye.

We took a taxi home. I knew something about where we lived but not completely. No memory, narrow streets and bumps at each juncture. With every passing moment on the drive home I looked at my bag, and held on to it tight.

My father drove alongside the taxi driver and proceeded to ask questions, “¿Como está la violencia aquí? ¿No se ha escuchado nada por ahí?”

I felt somewhat offended for the driver that my father would ask such a question. I mean, one doesn’t go to New York or Paris and ask how dirty it is. As if for my safety as a tourist, my father felt compelled to ask about the violence in the city.

The taxi driver smiled and looked back at me in the rearview mirror, “Fíjese que no oiga, la verdad no esta tan pesado la cosa aquí.”

We had arrived to our juncture.

“¿Le ayudo con la mochila joven?” the driver asked.

I grabbed the bag quickly, “No, gracias.”

My father paid the taxi driver and told him that he would be needed for a few days. I admired the pleasantness of that morning as school kids passed by me riding bikes. I entered the house I hadn't seen in a decade. My father showed me the new bedroom that had been built along with the new showers. I gave myself a tour of the house. The archways of the front room lead to an old atrium outside where a garden sprung a grapevine with ripe grapes. On the opposite side I noticed the adobe kitchen my mother used to cook for us then. The only memory I had of this place. At this juncture I felt love. I felt peace. I felt a sense of place, and home. I went back inside and set my bag on the bed and opened it. I took out some garments and a tightly folded red handkerchief that concealed my pistol and thought it was such a funny thing.

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