

# Breaking Away from Traditions

By

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**Abstract:**

This senior project in Theatre & Performance consisted of writing a piece that focused on healing from past traumas and focusing on personal growth within a familial setting. The piece included conducting informal interviews on intergenerational trauma and its effects on others. The project aims to allow Queer Latinx Youth to feel united and less alone as this project includes an experience many Queer Latinx Youth face pithing their own homes.

*Artistic Aims: Uniting Queer Latinx Youth*

In this paper, I will discuss my goals and motivations for my senior project. This project is a three act play about a family that copes with the loss of their father, and how that loss affects their mental health and continued relationships with one another. My immediate goal is to make Queer Latinx youth who struggle with mental health feel heard. This paper will explain how my project explores themes such as tradition, depression, generational & intergenerational trauma, and queerness.

Three plays that strongly influenced this work are, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Andrew Saito's *Men of Rab'inal*, and Noah Haidle's *Smokefall*. I fell in love with how each of these plays seem to play with this idea of breaking traditions (either intentionally or not). In *A Doll's House*, the central character, Nora, was trapped in an unhappy marriage because of traditional home values in the Victorian Era. Men were to take care of their families and become the bread makers while the women cared for the children and husbands and homes. At the end Nora leaves her husband and home to which is known as the door slam heard around the world. She decided that traditional values on family and marriage were not going to hold her back. In *Men of Rab'inal*, traditional Mayan culture was broken intentionally through colonialism and centuries of war. The

play follows the mytho-history of two Mayan prince warriors who are sent through time and find how much of their traditions have changed through violence and years of colonization. Lastly in *Smokefall*, the play follows a family who struggle to find meaning in their lives. The play made me think about how as individuals we have set routines in our lives that are so predictable it's hard to be original in this life. However, this family breaks their own tradition of suffering by being able to choose the kind of lives they want to live rather than confining themselves to the idea of fulfilling their life's "purpose".

My play is about a Latinx family in the 21st century, working through the loss of the father. The play explores grief and how each character responds to grief while trying to hold onto traditions set within the family like having dinner with each other and spending nights together. The characters also struggle against traditions within the Latinx community, religion and outdated views for example. The daughter has depression however in very old Latinx culture and years of machismo, mental illness is or was seen as being entirely made up, because Latinos have to be strong and hardworking in order to get ahead in life. The son is gay and struggles with machismo in his life and tries to break away from it in order to feel happy. Because of his struggles with his sexuality, his relationship with his father is strained since his father is all about being the man of the house and how to embrace the machismo attitude. Lastly the mother is the

character who tries to uphold their traditions because that is all she knows/is used to. She grew up with strict religious ideals such as the concept of sin and how horrible sins are, and the idea of going to hell due to the nature of the sin. For example murder is a horrible sin but as long as you accept god as your true lord and savior, you will be forgiven, but being gay is an unforgivable sin and you must change your ways and beg for forgiveness to get into heaven.

Why would I want to write a play like this? Personally I understand what it can feel like to be held back by familial traditions, both set within my own family but also in how families are portrayed in cartoons and the media. Growing up watching cartoons and movies, there was always a family that was “complete”, meaning the kids had siblings, friends, a pet, and both parents present in their life. When I was little I was taught that, that was normal. However neither of my parents were present growing up so I was always fighting this internal battle of “who am i?” or “what is my purpose?” So writing a play like this makes me confront all those dark thoughts and feelings I used to have and be able to look at them for what they are, very valid feelings for a child who felt abandoned, and be able to move forward and put those feelings in the light to learn from them. Part of working on this play is being able to heal from my own depression. However, chose to write this piece as my senior project because I want other queer latinx youth who may have similar experiences to have their feelings of depression,

abandonment, or breaking away from traditions validated and have them begin or further their journey towards growth.

My immediate goal is to make Queer Latinx youth who struggle with mental health feel heard. To do this I've interviewed friends, family, and strangers on their own personal struggles with their mental health in their respective communities. By communities I mean Queer, POC, youth, young adults, christians, college students, etc. By taking the information I received from my interviews and my own experiences, something I found that each interviewee had in common were topics such as machismo, and intergenerational trauma. Within those two topics a bunch of other themes came into play like homophobia, pressure of being a strong latino, and outdated assumptions on gender, like how men should be tough and shouldn't show emotion, while women spend their time in the house cooking and cleaning. By incorporating these themes into my piece I hope other Queer Latinx youth will see themselves in this play and feel as though they are being seen and portrayed.

I hope to overcome my inability to be specific. It is hard for me to understand what is considered specific or not specific enough so most of my pieces end up feeling too broad or cluttered. I will be working to overcome this through extensive character work. I want to get to know who my characters are, what they feel, what a good day looks like for them versus a bad

day. That is how I hope to become more specific by learning about each of my characters to be able to portray them better in my piece.

My long term goal is to write more pieces challenging oppression and mental health, as well as becoming an art therapist. Right now working on this project has been transformative for myself because I have to confront some parts of myself that I want to avoid like feelings of being abandoned by a parent or the frustrations of not knowing who my parents really are and even coming to terms with my sexuality. These lead to me having feelings of doubt within myself, fear, anger, and depression. This is the kind of work I want to do with other people because as exhausting and difficult it is to confront thoughts or past experiences we want to avoid, the payoff from being able to confront those feelings is so amazing. So if someone can read this piece and not only understand the characters but be able to reflect on themselves and begin this process of confrontation and healing then I will be more confident in my capabilities as a writer and future art therapist.

I've talked about my goals and motives for this project. I've also given a description of the play and inspiration for three central characters and why they think/act the way they do. My goal is to make Queer Latinx youth who struggle with mental health feel heard. I hope that this piece can help me achieve my goal as it would be a step in my future as a writer and art



therapist. I hope you the reader can understand my reasons for writing this piece as well as what motivated me to create this project. This piece is personal to me as well as those that I interviewed because this is a story that most Queer Latinx Youth know very well.

***Research Paper: A Discussion on Toxic Masculinity***

Can trauma be linked to traditions? Traditions can and have caused others trauma but can also be used as a way to heal from trauma. Because most traditions we are accustomed to when we are young, we become used to that routine and we may become bound by those set traditions, it may be difficult to break away from them. This paper will include research that links toxic masculinity to being a tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation, harming others and creating a need to heal from the damage caused by toxic masculinity. A lot of this healing will be on self reflection and accountability which are presented in the two texts I will be using, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and Noah Haidle's *Smokefall*. I will also be including my own direct research I made during my writing process. My research includes interviews from random strangers and significant events in their lives that they were able to cope with.

**Birth of Toxic Masculinity:**

One set traditional view that dates back centuries is the traditional housewife. For example, during the Victorian Era traditional views behind marriage were put into question with works such as *A Doll's House*. This play with the iconic scene known as "the door slam heard across the world", showed audiences the harm of traditional views on marriage. That is, men are

meant to handle all the finances and become the breadwinner of the family, while women are meant to stay at home as a housewife and care for the kids and their husbands. In an article from Bartleby.com, it was stated that “*A Doll’s House* was written by Ibsen not only to bring attention to the suppression of women, but to bring attention to the other problematic aspects of marriage in the late 1800’s”. We are able to see how this plays out in *A Doll’s House* by the way Nora tries to get her family out of debt; however is ridiculed by her husband because he sees her actions as a sign of disrespect rather than a faithful partner wanting to help the ones she cares for. This is where we can really see this sort of toxic value we know today as toxic masculinity play out. In *A Doll’s House*, Torvald was always concerned with how society viewed him as a man that he could not be the loving husband Nora wished him to be. For example in Act I:

“Nora. If anything so dreadful happened, I shouldn’t care if I was in debt or not.

Helmer. But what about the creditors?

Nora. They! Who cares for them? They’re only strangers.”

Here we are able to see right away how concerned Torvald is about the way he is perceived by others. Nora is only concerned with having one of the best Christmas seasons with her family, however Torvald has confined his family to the current era’s views on marriage. One way in which we see this is how Torvald speaks to Nora constantly calling her his “squirrel” or “lark”.

It's as if Ibsen wants us to view Nora as this caged animal who is just trying desperately to be free of the cage she is placed in. For the purposes of this paper this cage represents the way society views gender roles and marriage in the Victorian Era.

### **Modern Toxic Masculinity:**

In *Smokefall* we experience a different kind of tradition, the dead beat dad trope. This is something many people know too well but we get a different view on why fathers abandon their kids. In this play the father, Daniel, has debated leaving his family for a while now. He feels drained and as if he's given up on his own dreams at the price of a family he was not expecting.

“He avoids his family as much as possible. He's never felt at home here... He's so tired. He's been tired for years. He survives each day through the smallest of joys” (Footnote, Act I).

Here we see this idea of a father who seems like they were forced to stay with this family because of the fact he has children now. According to an article from the New York Times, “when fathers abandon their own children, it's not a momentary decision; it's a long, tragic process.” We see that with Daniel in Act I as Footnote describes Daniel as “being tired for years”. We can also see that Daniel does love his family as he celebrates his anniversary with Violet and that Beauty, his daughter, is “the best thing [he's] ever done in [his] life.” According

to the New York Times article, by David Brooks, fathers never actually want to leave their respective families, in fact when they have children unexpectedly there's this feeling of wanting to change the way they live their lives. "These guys have often had a lot of negativity in their lives. The child is a chance to turn things around and live a disciplined life. The child is a chance to have a respected role, to find love and purpose." The play doesn't speak of Daniel's past, however his relationship with his daughter in this play shows this idea of wanting to have a disciplined life. We see this while Daniel is telling the story of the day Beauty was born.

"Your mother was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen then I met you. And I felt what it was like to love something more than I love myself" (Daniel, Act I).

This relates to David Brooks' words because here we can see how selfless a father can be when he has his first child. However, when life becomes routine and about bills and responsibility, it turns into a burden for most parents, especially when the child is unexpected. He adores his daughter for her beauty and kindness, fatherhood is not the kind of life he was hoping to live after he found out Violet was pregnant with twins.

"When Violet told him she was pregnant again he walked into the next room, closed the door and didn't come out for three hours. When they found out they were having twins Daniel started to cry" (Footnote, Act I).

Whatever love Daniel may have for his children and family, this sort of routine life is something he did not know he didn't want, which is true for most parents who end up having unexpected children.

### **Personal Research: (The Interviews)**

For this project a lot of my research consisted of interviews with strangers. I asked many questions about experiences they may have faced that were especially mentally challenging, and painful experiences they faced and how they've been able to cope with what it was they have gone through over the years. I was surprised to find out many of the interviewees had an absent parent or experienced some form of negative experience surrounding cultural values and views on men and women. For example many male interviewees were queer and never really had a present father figure so they were left to be the "man of the house" which was a phrase most of them used. It was very interesting to see how there's this sort of universal tradition where men are expected to be the heads of households and strong and even responsible. I learned that many cultures combine this toxic masculinity in many of their cultural practices. For example, in Christianity, many people take the words of the bible literally, especially when it comes to the role men and women play in religion. "Agape masculinity is attentive to those callings. The proper utilization of strength is to fulfill the responsibilities given to us by our

identity,” Meador said” (Phil Mobley, Toxic Masculinity). In this article, by Phil Mobley, it is clear that the concept of how a man should behave is a colonized idea created by white men who sought out power. Soon this concept became something society has become accustomed to and soon created this pattern of pushing ideals onto our families that we don’t necessarily agree with, however it’s become a tradition and most people would rather follow a dated tradition rather than fixing it.

### **Traditional Views on Gender:**

Toxic masculinity serves to reward people who perform gender roles properly according to societal standards, while disapproving of people who do not perform their roles properly. For example, in *A Doll’s House*, Torvald is an embodiment of what a man should be. Stern, shows little emotion and even has a proper job to take proper care of his family. “Tough-skinned, refusing to show emotions, and being assertive are all ways in which society defines masculinity, and how a man should act. Torvald Helmer is a good example of how society labels the male gender who takes on the character role of a husband. Torvald is the vice president of the bank, so he makes quite a bit of money to support his wife Nora, and the rest of the family; he also is assertive, and doesn’t seem to show much emotion other than happiness, irritation, and sometimes anger. These seem to be the only emotions that society deems appropriate for a man

to show” (*Masculinity in A Doll’s House*, Unknown). This describes almost perfectly Torvald’s character in this play. We are shown a character who heavily cares about how others perceive his role as a working man and husband.

“So long as a willful woman can have her way– I am to make myself the laughing-stock of every one, and set people saying I am under petticoat government? Take my word for it, I should soon feel the consequences” (Torvald, Act II).

Here we are able to see how important Torvald’s masculinity is to him. He is afraid that if others found out that his wife convinced him not to fire Torvald, it would ruin his reputation as a man and a husband. He chooses his reputation over his willingness to listen to his wife, and in doing so maintains his performance at what society deems acceptable from a man. Toxic masculinity was created only to benefit a minority while others, like Nora, were doomed to be ridiculed for wanting to step out of line. However, breaking away from these patterns and traditions that existed for centuries is what allows us to grow and change, just like when Nora finally chooses herself at the end of Act III and leaves Torvald. Nora has done so much reflecting in the play and made the decision that this tradition is going to end with her and Torvald. She decided that she needed to leave in order to live the life she wants separate from how society may view her actions. She decided what was best for her own personal growth.



It is important for us as a society to learn from these patterns so that we can make change. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is an important play that addresses gender roles and masculinity and how harmful Victorian views on gender and marriage can be. In the coming years more texts will be created on how we adapt to this change in views on masculinity and how we change and heal from our past. For example, Noah Haidle's *Smokefall*, addresses this idea of making change. In *Smokefall*, we are shown a family who, from the very beginning, were doomed to relive the past.

“But how could I have been better based on the fundamentals with which I was born? Maybe I'm only a mechanism that plays out the theme of our lineage. And if that's true I had no agency in how my life could play out” (Johnny, Act III).

Here we get to see this idea of what it means to “be past saving”, according to many characters in the play, get played out. According to Johnny, many of us are doomed to repeat the tragedies of our ancestors, as if we do not have the option to change our futures by learning about our respective families' past. It's as if Johnny is telling us that from the moment we are born, the course of our lives are decided and we have no say in the matter. We are also able to see that narrative play out as Johnny followed the same path his father has.

“I couldn’t have loved you or your mother any better. It was built inside of me to fail” (Johnny, Act III).

Rather than holding ourselves accountable, most of society wants to blame the past for the way we live our lives. Moreover, with the idea of toxic masculinity in mind, most men, like Johnny, refuse to take accountability and would rather put the blame on the way they were raised. However, in order to get out of this cycle of suffering, we have to accept our past actions and learn to grow from them.

“But you proved it isn’t true. You kept Mom’s love alive, Johnny, this family’s. You didn’t have to look anywhere because there wasn’t anything missing. This is our piece of earth, our piece of the universe. You kept it safe, you made it grow” (Beauty, Act III).

At the end of the play we learn that, despite what he says about the past, Johnny has nurtured his family’s apple tree back to life. Here Beauty explains that we are able to heal and grow from our past and we are allowed to live in the present and live free of society’s expectations. In this beautiful final scene, Johnny is able to reflect on his actions and celebrate his birthday with his son.

**Reflection:**

Many of the people I interviewed had the same sort of reflection when looking back at their past experiences. They all mentioned a point at which they needed to think about how toxic masculinity harmed them. Something I noticed as well was how the families of the interviewees were the ones pushing these harmful ideals onto them. Small subtle nuances like commenting on weight or appearance, forcing boys to do masculine activities while forcing girls to do feminine activities. Toxic masculinity is a harmful tradition that tries to put people into respective categories before we are able to decide that on our own. Just like Johnny in *Smokefall* and Nora in *A Doll's House*, society assumed these characters would behave a certain way according to their own genders and these ideals followed them into adulthood. It wasn't until these characters had this reflective moment where they're able to look outside of themselves and begin the process of healing.

**Conclusion:**

Can trauma be linked to traditions? Traditions such as toxic masculinity can and have caused others trauma. In this paper we discussed two texts in which this concept is present: Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Noah Haidle's *Smokefall*. Both works have the same running theme of breaking away from traditions. We've also looked and severely articles that describe the

history of toxic masculinity and its effects on society. Not only that but we've also taken a look into how this research applies today by conducting interviews with multiple people and having realized they have all spoke about how toxic masculinity has affected them and their own growth as Queer Latinx Youth. Therefore it is fair to conclude that trauma is heavily linked to traditions.

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***Technical Essay: A Playwright's Process***

**Forming an Idea:**

I remember having the idea to write this piece since my first year at SUNY Purchase. Originally the piece centered around a family with a parent who abandoned their family. The piece isn't much different from my project today. However this play took many different turns before I was able to settle on a Latinx family who needed to heal from their respective pasts. A lot of inspiration came from Noah Haidle's *Smokefall* and Aleshea Harris' *What to Send up When it Goes Down*. Over the course of my four years at Purchase, I've met with many different professors who've all had an impact in the shape of my project. Although my project took a different shape than what was mentioned in my Artistic Aims, my goals have remained unchanged. I still hoped to bring Young Queer Latinx people together and have them exposed to an experience(s) most Queer Latix know all to well: toxic masculinity and how it's become some sort of tradition passed down from generation to generation.

**Origins of *Amor*:**

Freshman year I had the idea to write a play surrounded by depression and its effects on a Latinx family. I first got the inspiration I read in high school called *Smokefall*. A play set in a suburban neighborhood with a family who are doomed to repeat their family's past. I chose this

play for inspiration because it's something many people can relate to. This fear of ending up just like our families have in the past. I wanted to use that but instead of having the family run away from their past and suffer, I wanted to create a play that promoted growth and healing. I wanted to write a play that brings hope to its viewers while also creating a story in which the audience are engaged with.

I came into Purchase as a Psychology major because I was interested in helping people through Psychology. However I grew more interested in theatre and its history with therapy. It was when I finally switched over I learned about Theatre of the Oppressed and PsychoDrama. One sort of guides us through different types of prejudices people are faced with on a day to day basis and allows audience members to engage with the actors in order to find a new and better outcome, while the other allows people to visualize their pain in order to learn from that pain and grow. It was then that my play began to change shape as I learned more and met with many different professors.

### **Shifting Perspectives**

My piece changed drastically during my junior year when I was introduced to Aleshea Harris' *What to Send up When it Goes Down*. During that time was where I shifted career paths to looking at careers in theatre to thinking about becoming an art therapist. This was when I put

an emphasis on using art therapeutically. I met with two very significant professors in the process of writing this piece, Imani Douglas and David Bassuk. I learned about Black American Drama with Imani, as well as learning about how POC pain is emphasized in many contemporary pieces and how in most pieces about Black/Nonblack POC, the character(s) are made to suffer in the end. With David Bassuk I learned about space and how to manipulate that space to create an immersive theatre experience for the actors and the audience. These two professors brought me to *What to Send up When it Goes Down*, where the audience members were thoroughly engaged and there was space for the actors as well as the audience members to learn and grow together. It was from *What to Send up* and Imani that I learned about how to write a good play without having POC characters have to suffer some sort of horrible fate at the end. That's where the idea for *Doors* came into play. *Doors* is about POC characters in a purgatory-like space, experiencing raw emotions such as anger, sadness, anxiety, happiness, love, and heartbreak and being able to learn and grow from their pasts in order to move forward.

### **Overcoming Challenges:**

Coming into senior year was where a lot of the work was put into this piece. One of my biggest struggles was having to edit my piece for each character's story to tie into the next while having the whole piece make sense. I kept running into the problem of making the piece as



specific as possible. I was a bit defeated from junior seminar the past semester after finding out that I did not receive a standalone slot for my piece. Looking back now I'm pretty grateful it wasn't approved because this past year I just wanted to focus on the writing aspect of the piece.

Writing this piece was stressful because of the nature of the play. I tend to write most of my pieces from personal experiences. A lot of what happens in my piece is based on real events which can be hard because I'm confronting many events from my past and it becomes emotionally taxing. I began to realize I didn't have enough to write about from my own personal experiences alone so I decided to interview strangers about an event that was particularly painful for them and how they were able to overcome this sort of event. Many of the interviewees spoke about their families and talked about intergenerational and generational trauma. Both are very similar in which one is when trauma is passed down from generation to generation within respective families, while the other is more broad in that trauma is passed down from generation to generation. This allowed me to think about how I can use this information I received and make it into a piece that is specific. So, I decided to take a portion of my original piece *Doors*, and blow it up into a new piece called *Amor la Vida*. *Amor la Vida* takes place in a family home and centers a family going through the loss of a parent and confronting a common trauma passed down from family to family within the Latinx community: Toxic masculinity.

I shifted the focus from several characters dealing with emotional trauma to one family learning to cope with their past. At first it was going well but then I began losing focus again and my piece began to be too vague and cheesy. Originally the play had a therapist as a character. The therapist was a family therapist and became involved with this family after the passing of their father, David. However it became tedious to write because all the action happened within those therapy sessions instead of with the family. So I decided that only one character, the daughter Alex, would be the one secretly going to therapy sessions off stage. I did this so that we would be able to focus on the family.

### **Road to Completion**

In order to get more specific with my characters I followed the advice of Andrew Saito, and I began looking at places outside where I would most likely find each of my characters. Elena, the mother, would be found at the cemetery because the passing of her fiance David was hardest on her. While Leo, the son, would be at the park because he feels trapped and wants to be in a space where he can feel free to be himself. The park is also where he spends the most time with his crush Geo. Alex's place would be at her therapist's office at which she can speak her truth without having to fight with her mother, Elena. I also tried to keep separate journals for each character which inspired the second act which is basically Elsa, the grandmother, and Leo

writing letters to Alex after she leaves. I had finally gotten to a place where I felt proud of my work and got to know each of my characters well in order to write this piece. It was very challenging but it was worth it as I was able to reflect on my past at Purchase and my own family. I was able to grow with my work which is what I hope others are able to do when they read it. I feel as though my piece has reached my goals in wanting to unite people together and have them reflect on their own experiences and enjoy this piece. I am very excited to share my work and hope people understand that I gave my piece a somber and calm ending because I want to inspire hope for POC and Queer Latinx Youth specifically.

# Amor la Vida

A play in three acts  
By Richard Valentin

**Characters:**

Alex (Alejandra) - The rebellious daughter who has depression but avoids talking about her depression.

Leo - The son who has a hard time talking about his emotions and sexuality out of fear of rejection or something worse.

Geo - Leo's love interest. And a very optimistic person.

Elena- The mother who pretends everything is okay and does not want to believe anything is wrong with her family.

Elsa- Elena's mother, extremely stubborn but with good intent.

Tiempo- The narrator of the play.

**Setting:**

A living room. An old couch center stage, stairs leading up, upstage. Stage right a door leading offstage and offstage left a kitchen and Elena's room.

# Act I

*Tiempo enters and addresses the audience.*

Tiempo:

Bienvenidos! Muchas gracias a todos por venir! Hoy lo estamos celebrando. Hoy es el día en que empezamos a vernos claramente. Como? Bueno, escuchan. Les voy a contar una historia sobre mi familia. No es una historia feliz pero es una buena historia. Prometo. Mira, la historia empieza ahora.

*Lights up. The telephone is ringing.*

Tiempo:

Esta es las casa de mi familia. Aquí viene Elena.

Elena:

Hello? O hola mami. Si todo esta bien por aquí. Hablas en serio? Ay, no me digas...

*ALEX enters from the stairs and heads out the door.*

Elena:

Mama espera. Alex? Where are you going?

Alex:

Out.

*ALEX slams the door.*

Elena: (sighs)

Si todo esta bien mama... Te llamaré más tarde... Bye.

(Pause)

Elena: (sucks her teeth)

That girl I swear. (Yelling upstairs) Leo!

Leo: (from upstairs)

Yeah?

Elena:

Where did Alex go?

Leo:

What?

Elena:  
I said where did Alex go?

Leo:  
I can't hear you.

Elena:  
Can you come down?

*LEO enters from upstairs.*

Leo:  
What happened?

Elena:  
Where did your sister go?

Leo:  
She went out?

Elena:(sighs)  
That girl I swear. Y'know I work hard to be able to feed you guys and shit and I'm just tired. You guys are just so ungrateful. I'm gonna be in the kitchen.

*Elena exits.*

Tiempo:  
This happens a lot. It doesn't take much to set Elena off. Her kids hate it, but when she goes on like that, they just leave her be because it normally gets worse if they respond. Leo pretends like he's used to it by now but honestly he gets nervous each time. When Leo was little Elena used to be worse. I think it's because Leo and Alex were younger so it was easier to get away with manipulating them emotionally, but Leo thinks it's because of him. So now he avoids confrontation whenever he can.

*The phone rings.*

Leo:  
I got it!

(Pause)

Hola abuela! Si, soy bueno gracias. Um, no se pregunta mi mama. (Laughs)



Tiempo:

Ever since David passed away last year, Elena's mom calls the house... a lot. She means well but Elena gets annoyed honestly. Elena thinks it's because her mom is lonely but Elena is actually pretty lonely, she won't ever admit that though.

(Beat)

Right now Leo wishes he can see his grandma. "Te quiero mucho, avísame si necesitas algo mijo".

Leo:

Okay, Thank you ma\*, Te quiero. Bye.

Tiempo:

The kids have a habit of calling their abuela ma. As Leo hangs up he wishes he can tell his grandma how bad things are at home. He just wants to be whisked away from his home.

Elena: (from the kitchen)

What did she want?

Leo:

Oh nothing, she just wanted to know when she'll get to see us.

Elena:

Of course she did. I mean she can come over here whenever she wants but she doesn't so how baad does she really want to see us?

Tiempo:

Elena's mom wants Elena to get out of the house. That's why she keeps inviting her over. After David passed Elena started working from home. She works for a medical supply company. She's in charge of operations and logistics, a lot of numbers but she's good at it. When David passed her boss thought it was a good idea that she work from home. It's been a year since.

Leo:

I don't know I think it could be good for us. I haven't seen abuela in a while.

Elena:

I don't know Leo I don't wanna go over there.

Tiempo:

When Elena was around 18, she was pregnant with Alex. Elena was scared her mom would find out so at 18, Elena moved out from home. She hasn't lived with her mom

since, Leo and Alex moved around with their mom a lot, sometimes they'd stay with their grandma when Elena couldn't find a place for her kids to stay.

*Leo sits on the couch and goes through some magazines. Elena enters from the kitchen.*

Elena:

I'm gonna kick that girl's ass when she gets home. You don't know where she went?

Leo:

She didn't tell me anything.

Tiempo:

Every Monday at around 12pm Alex leaves the house without telling anyone where she's going. At least that's what Elena thinks. Leo knows that Alex started going to therapy almost two months ago after she tried hurting herself. Alex made Leo promise he wouldn't tell their mom anything.

Elena:

I swear I'm gonna kick her ass.

*Elena goes into the kitchen.*

Leo:

*Ma!*

Elena:(from the kitchen)

Yeah?

Leo:

Don't you have work today?

Elena:

I took the day off.

Tiempo:

It's been a year today since David passed. David is the father of Alex and Leo and Elena's fiancé.

Elena:

I'm gonna go out to the cemetery later, do you wanna come with me?

Leo:

No it's okay, I might go tomorrow if that's okay.

Elena:  
Are you sure?

Tiempo:  
Leo feels guilty about his father's passing. He hasn't gone to the cemetery ever. He missed his own dad's funeral because he "wasn't feeling well". Elena thinks it's because Leo and David were close. They were never close.

Leo:  
Yeah I'm sure.

*Elena enters from the kitchen.*

Elena:  
Okay. I'm gonna go out for a bit.

Leo:  
Where are you going?

Elena:  
To the store, I'm gonna get some things. Do you want anything?

Leo:  
Ice cream maybe?

Elena:  
Just text me what you want.

Leo:  
Okay.

Elena:  
Call me if you need anything, I'll be back.

Leo:  
Okay bye.

*Elena exits.*

Tiempo:  
Elena says she's going to the store but she really only goes out when there's something she can't get off her mind. She's still pissed at Alex so she wanted to go out for a bit to clear her head.

*Leo dials a number on his phone.*

Leo:

Hey! It's Leo, I'm gonna have the house to myself for a few if you wanna come over?  
(Laughs awkwardly).

*He hangs up.*

Leo:

Ugh why am I so weird. Do I call him again?

(Pause)

Fuck it.

*Leo calls the number again.*

Tiempo:

Leo has a crush on this guy at his school. By chance they were assigned to work on a group assignment together for their English class. So Leo got excited when they exchanged numbers. Ever since then Leo has been trying his best to flirt with his crush and tell him how he feels.

Leo:

Hey! Oh um, what are you up to? Oh yeah, word... so do you have any ideas for the project yet? Oh cool! Um, if you wanna talk more about it you can come over my house, I have the house to myself for a bit- oh really? No I'm down to meet at the park! Let me just grab my laptop.

(Beat)

Leo: (to himself)

Holy shit... okay, fuck okay.

Tiempo:

This is the first time Leo would be hanging out with his crush alone. His crush's name is Guillermo (Geo) Vargas.

Leo:

I'll be there in ten! Okay! Bye!

*Leo hangs up.*

Leo:

Fuck, what do I wear?

*Leo runs excitedly upstairs.*

*Alex enters on the phone.*

Alex:

Yeah... No, todos somos buenos. Thank you ma. Bye.

*She hangs up.*

Alex (yells)  
Leo!

Leo: (from upstairs)  
Yeah?

Alex:  
Where's mami?

Leo:  
She went out.

*Leo enters from upstairs.*

Leo:  
She's pissed y'know.

Alex:  
Who?

Leo:  
Alex I'm serious.

Alex:  
Oooo someone's dressed nice. Where are you going?

Leo: (sighs)  
I'm going to the park with Geo-

Alex:(teasing)  
Ohhhh/

Leo:  
/don't try ignoring the fact that mami is pissed off. You should've just told her where you were going or at least lied about it. Especially because of today, you know mami is gonna be extra sensitive today.

Alex:  
Alright fine...

Tiempo:  
Ever since David passed away Alex and Elena began to drift apart. They'd get in to fights about little things that they didn't care about. She took her father's death hard. In

her eyes her dad was her hero. It took her third attempt for her mother to finally take her to a psychiatrist. Alex was diagnosed with Severe Clinical Depression. Her mom didn't want her daughter to be on meds or go to therapy because they conflicted with Elena's religious beliefs. Ever since then Alex started taking meds and going to therapy in secret. Leo helped her find a center that provides free therapy to low income adults and she pays for her meds out of pocket.

Alex:  
Today's hard for me too Leo.

Leo:  
I know... I'm sorry, it's just. I'm tired of listening to the same shit every day Alex. You have to try to move on and just try with mami.

Alex:  
But you know how mami is.

Leo:  
I know... but she's our mom Alex. We already lost papi, mami is all we have.

Alex:  
I don't know...

(Pause)

*Leo senses how upset Alex is and tries to change the topic, avoiding a fight with his sister.*

Leo:  
I'm thinking of coming out to her.

Alex: (gasps)  
Leo! Oh my god, are you sure?

Leo:  
I think so. I mean I'm about to go to college. And after papi... I just don't want to wait anymore.

Alex:  
Okay, let me know if you want me to be there.

Leo:  
Thank you Alex.

*They hug.*

Alex:  
Okay go have fun on your date.

Leo:  
Stop... we're just working on a project.

Alex: (Teasing)  
Yeah okay...

Tiempo:  
Guillermo and Leo hang out more often after today and a few months later Guillermo asks out Leo and to this day they're still happily together.

Leo:  
See you later.  
(Beat)  
Apologize to mami.

Alex: (shooing Leo)  
Okay! Go you're gonna be late!

*Leo exits.*

*Alex sighs and sits on the couch while flipping through magazines.*

Tiempo:  
Today in therapy Alex covered her fear of being alone.

Alex:  
13 reasons why you need to let him go...

Tiempo:  
A year ago today Alex decided to stop believing in god. She began believing in the universe and became more spiritual. She's also a Libra!

Alex:  
Today's horoscope... practice patience, compassion, and forgiveness today... (laughs) okay...

Tiempo:  
She's selective about what she "receives" from the universe...

Alex:  
Oooo let's read mami's

Tiempo:  
Elena is a Pisces.

*Elena enters on the phone. With bags of groceries.*

Elena:  
Okay mama, si quieres venir entonces ven pues! (Noticing Alex) Okay mami, bye.

*Elena puts the bags down and hangs up the phone.*

Elena:  
Where were you?

Alex:  
I just went out for a walk.

Elena: (scoffs)  
For over two hours? Yeah right and your brother is gay.

Tiempo:  
Leo comes out to Elena by the end of the day today.

Alex:  
Ma you know he gets sensitive about that stuff.

Tiempo:  
Growing up Leo used to get bullied a lot in school because he wasn't as "masculine" as the other boys in school. One day he came home crying from school to which his dad responded: "what are you a faggot?". That was the last time anyone has seen Leo cry.

Elena:  
Alex I'm serious. I bust my ass off for you guys. I'm here working everyday doing something I Barely like to provide for the both of you, and you *dare* treat me with disrespect como si fuera uno de tus amigos. But I'm not, I'm your mother. You are my child and you will respect me.

Alex:  
Mami you don't even respect me or Leo!



Elena:

*Excuse me?* You don't get to talk back to me like that, I will smack the shit out of you pendejita.

Alex:

No mom, I can. Mom you love to talk about how you bust your ass for this house. Did you forget me and Leo work too? So that we can afford to live here? I also bust my ass for this house mami, pero no.

Elena:

Alex you better watch your fucking mouth.

Alex:

Or what mom. You're gonna tell me to go fuck myself like dad right before the accident?

Elena:

Get out of my house!

*The doorbell rings.*

*Elena closes her eyes and takes a breathe before answering the door.*

*She opens the door to Elsa.*

Elena:

Mami?

Elsa:

Dijiste que viniera cuando quisiera, así que aquí estoy. (Noticing the tension in the room) Que paso?

Alex:

Nothing ma. I'm going upstairs, hi ma.

*Elsa comes in confused as Alex greets Elsa and goes upstairs.*

Tiempo:

When Alex gets upstairs she starts packing her things. What Elena doesn't know is that Alex has been looking and saving up for her own place. Earlier that day she had received a call approving her application for an apartment a few towns over.

Elsa:  
Dime.

Elena:  
Nothing mami, we just got into a fight.

Elsa:(motioning to the couch)  
Cuentame.

Elena:  
I don't know what to do. I feel like I'm losing my kids. I missed them growing up mami. And now I've just got assholes I don't know walking around the house. I don't— I just, I'm done. I'm done.

Elsa:  
Mija... they're just at that age where they think the world hates them. Kids get angry around their age. You were worse....

Elena:  
I wasn't that bad.

Tiempo:  
When Elena was 18 she was pregnant with Alex. Elena was scared of her mom finding out so she ran away and stopped talking to her mom until after she had Leo.

Elena:  
I just don't want to have to deal with this today.

Elsa:  
I know mija. Pero tienes que empezar a ser más amable con ellos, son tus hijos

Elena:  
Me? Ma they don't even treat me with respect anymore.

Elsa:  
Y de quien es la culpa?

Elena:

Ay, mami y'know what I don't need this right now.

Elsa:  
Ah okay. Pues.

*Elena exits to her room.*

Elsa:  
*Alex!*

Alex: (from upstairs)  
*Ya!*

Elsa:  
ven aquí.

*Alex enters from the stairs.*

Elsa:  
Que te pasa?

Alex:  
Nada...

Elsa:  
It's not nothing! Mira, hija I know today is hard but you can't keep acting like this.

Alex:  
I'm not acting like anything ma! She has to get her head out of her ass, Leo and I aren't kids anymore.

Elsa:  
Pero ella es tu mama.

Alex:  
Okay? I'm her daughter.

Tiempo:  
The day before her dad died in the car accident, Alex remembers overhearing her parents fight. The last thing she would hear her mom say to her dad was "go fuck yourself".

Elsa:  
Mija, I get it. But you know your mom, today is just as hard for her too.

Alex:

I don't know ma, mom and dad fought all the time.

Elsa:

So? Couples fight all the time. Your abuelo, may his should rest in peace, would pick fights with me all the time. We still loved each other and made it work mija. Your papi and mama loved each other very much, perf that year was hard for the both of them hija. You remember no?

Alex:

Remember what?

Elsa:

When your papi lost his job.

Alex:

Papi never told me anything...

*Leo enters through the door.*

Elsa:

We'll talk about it later... (to Leo) Hola mijo!

Leo:

Hi ma. (Pause) Ma?

Elsa:

Estoy aqui porque ustedes nunca quieren visitar...

Leo:

Y mami?

Elena: (from the kitchen)

In here!

Elsa: (getting up from the couch)

Bueno dejarme ir a ayudar a tu mama...

*Elsa exits to the kitchen.*

Leo:

Alex, oh my god I have to tell you—

Alex:

Did you know papi lost his job?

Leo:

What?

Alex:

Ma just told me dad lost his job last year...

Leo: (Confused)

Why does that matter now?

Alex:

Because mami's keeping things from us Leo.

Leo:

Alex stop...

Alex:

Maybe if I knew I could've—

Leo: (standing)

Could've what Alex? Stop him from drinking... from getting into that accident last year?

Alex:

I don't know, maybe...

Leo:

Alex it's not your fault he became a drunk... You know that right? Why is this so important to you.

(Pause)

Alex:

It's not...

Tiempo:

It was important to Alex. The truth was that Leo and Alex were never close to their dad. To be honest he was pretty distant and an "asshole" according to Elsa. Alex always blamed herself for her relationship with her dad, always telling herself she needs to do more to gain her father's approval. When her dad died she felt as if she wasted her time; everything she did was for her dad.

Leo:

I get it Alex...

Alex:

You do?

Leo:

Sometimes I feel like I failed, as a son y'know. Like I wasn't the son he wanted.

Tiempo:

David always wanted a son. He never outwardly expressed it but deep down his kids always knew. Countless baby photos of Alex dressed masculine and hair kept short, even her nickname Alex. When Leo was born David was visibly excited. Leo wasn't what David imagined. David knew Leo was always different, and he never knew how to "deal" with his son, which is what he said in an argument with Elena. When Leo was little he used to get bullied a lot in school. When David picked him up from school one day he decided to have a talk with his son, a conversation "man to man". "Mira hijo, pronto serás el hombre de la casa. Es hora de que te hagas hombre!" David signed Leo up for little league baseball until high school where Leo joined the baseball team.

Leo:

You wanna know something funny? I've always *hated* baseball.

Alex:

Why stay on the team then?

(Beat)

Leo:

I don't know, I guess ever since dad died I felt like I had to keep playing for him. Because that's what he would've wanted. But honestly, I don't really know what he wanted. It's like no matter what we tried to do, there was this cloud that tried to keep us confined.

Alex:

Machismo.

Leo:

Exactly! I mean that's how dad grew up. I think he just got stuck there. You grow up living life one way and you get used to it, the ideals pushed onto you become routine and a part of you. I don't want that for me.

Alex:

What are we supposed to do about it? How do we change centuries worth of views and ideals?

Leo:

By choosing to not let those ideals confine us. I just got to hang out with the first boy I ever let myself like, and it felt great. I was so happy. We're still learning who we are, but we shouldn't let mami and papi's past define us y'know.

Alex: (Dismissing what Leo said)

Yeah... (pause) Leo I have to tell you something...

Elena: (entering)

Hi Leo, what do you guys want for dinner? I think I'm just gonna order tonight I don't feel like cooking.

Leo:

Hi mami.

Elena: (looking at her phone)

Ay, I think I'm just gonna order Chinese.

(Beat)

Elena: (looking at Alex)

Papi, can you go help ma with something in the kitchen?

Leo:

Oh, um... okay.

*Leo gets up and exits to the kitchen. As he leaves he looks at his sister and mouths "let me know what she says".*

Elena:

Listen, Alex I can't do this today.

Alex:

Okay...

Elena:

I'm tired. We go through the same shit everyday.

Alex:

Okay.

Elena:

I'm serious Alex! You're gonna have to grow up one day, get your head out of your ass and because you're not a kid anymore.

Alex:

Okay.

Elena: (Aggressively)

What?

Alex:  
Nothing.

Elena:  
Alex, I just don't understand what's wrong with you.

Alex:  
Nothing's wrong!

Elena:  
Then why do you act like you're not apart of this family? Why don't you talk to me, I'm your mom.

Alex:  
Okay but you make it so hard to want to talk to you.

Elena:  
Excuse me?

Alex:(getting up to go upstairs)  
Nothing...

Tiempo:  
When Alex was diagnosed with Major Depression and Anxiety, Elena, instead of supporting her daughter, decided to tell her that she needed to learn how to get over her feelings of depression. That mental illness is just something made up so people can make up excuses for themselves.

Elena:  
Alex stop!

Alex:  
Mom, I'm depressed. Sometimes it's just hard for me, and that's normal.

Elena:  
Alex, when I was your age I didn't have the time to think about how I was feeling. I had to work hard to live for myself and you guys. I didn't need to make excuses for myself just because I was having a hard time.

Alex:  
Okay mami, but I'm not you! I'm sorry that life wasn't easy for you but you have to understand that the world changed since you were my age. Just because you pretended like you were okay just to survive doesn't mean I have to. What I feel, what I'm going through is real mami.



Elena:  
I don't know what you want from me.

Alex:  
To be my fucking mom! Be an actual human being. See me for who I am.

Elena:  
I do see you!

Alex:  
No mami, you don't.

Elena:  
Mija, life was hard for me and I worked my ass off so things were easier for you and Leo. I don't want you to have a hard life.

Alex:  
It's already hard!

(Pause)

Alex:  
I didn't know what I was feeling for a long time ma. I felt lost for such a long time and when papi... I just didn't know who I was anymore. And it didn't help that I had to fit into this idea of what kind of person you want me to be. Mami, I'm sorry but I can't be this perfect daughter for you.

Elena:  
Alex...

Alex:  
Do you know how often I just wish I could disappear? I feel like I'm never enough.

Elena:  
Mija—

Alex:  
Mami, no! And papi... did he even care? Did we matter to him? I used to pray everyday that I become this person he wanted me to be but it was never enough. Mami, I tried so hard, I just wanted my family to be there, I needed my mom and dad...

Elena:  
Mija... listen. You're papi... he loved you—

Alex:

You know what. I don't care. He's gone mami. And I'm never gonna get to know what I Wass to him. I felt like a stranger in my own home... I don't need you to keep lying to me.

Elena:

When have I lied to you?

Alex:

Papi's drinking? How he didn't want me? How he wanted a son? Or why he even started drinking in the first place?

Elena:

What are you taking about?

Alex:

Why didn't you tell us that papi lost his job?

Elena:

Alex—

Alex:

Why keep that a secret? We're a family!

Elena:

Alex stop! We are your parents. We didn't want you guys to worry.

Alex:

Mami, how can you expect me to let you in when you keep things like that from me?

Elena:

You're my child, some things I'm just supposed to keep from you, to protect you.

Alex:

Protect me from what?

Elena:

Some things you just don't need to know.

Alex:

Like my papi being a drunk?

Elena:

Alex!

Alex:

I blame myself everyday for what happened to dad. I was so sure that I he didn't want me.

Elena:

Alex... mira, your dad... you know how hard it was for him to be open about his feelings. Your dad was also just an asshole mija, but he loved you very much and I know you meant the world to him.

Alex:

Then why did he just give up like that? Why didn't he come to us?

Elena:

He just lost who he was... he changed at some point. You know he had a tough childhood, the way his dad was.

Tiempo:

David's father was probably one of the worst creatures to walk this earth. When David was younger his father wished for nothing more than a perfect son. His father force fed toxic values and machismo down Davids throat and if David ever stepped out of line he would be beaten. Years of abuse wore David down until the day his dad died.

Elena:

When his dad died, your papi kind of just, broke... his papi broke him a long time ago. All that shit his papi put your papi through... he always pretended he was fine, he did it for us. But I always knew, and I did my best but after he lost his job, that was it. Whatever it was that was holding him together, he lost it. I loved your papi so much, and he loved you and Leo so much too, but sometimes that's not enough mija. I'm so sorry.

Alex:

I just hate the way he left me... how am I supposed to feel, knowing I never really knew him, and knowing he never really knew me? You guys sacrificed so much, I know that. You keep saying you guys did everything for me and Leo, but you guys never really tried to get to know us. You were so focused on surviving that you guys forgot to live. I don't wanna make the same mistakes.

Elena:

Alex!

Alex:

I'm gonna go upstairs...

Elena:

Alex!

*Alex exits upstairs.*

Elsa: (From offstage)  
Elena, La comida!

Elena:  
Ya.

*Elena takes a moment before getting up, then she exits towards the kitchen.*

*Alex enters from upstairs with a suitcase. She stops at the door and looks back at her home.*

*Alex exits through the door.  
Lights down.*

## Act II

*Lights up.*

*Standing across from each other  
are Elsa and Leo.*

*They're faced towards the  
audience.*

*Alex is sitting on the couch,  
watching.*

Leo:

Alex... it's been a few months. I just wanted to check in to see how you're doing. I miss you. Mami was pretty pissed that you left... she called the cops and everything but legally you're old enough to move out and technically you aren't a missing person... I might have been a little upset too, I just assumed you'd talk to me about what happened. I'm sorry it took so long to reach out. I just needed time. But I'll keep you updated on everything happening at home! Ma was so freaked out when you left. She wasn't upset really, she just wanted to know you were okay. And mami... she's been quiet lately. Oh I gave ma your address, I know I should've asked first but she just wants to know you're okay. Anyway I'll write to you soon. Love you, bye.

Elsa:

Mija! Oye, I went to your place the other day, don't worry Leo got me a fancy Uber that took me to the dollar tree after I stopped to see you. That's how I met Pedro, aye. Pero when I went to knock on your door you weren't there. Some woman answered and told me you moved out a month ago. She wouldn't tell me where... mija where are you? I just want to know if you're okay... aye, I'm sorry about your papi mija. I should've never said anything that day, your mami... please come home.

Leo:

Hey Alex, so I heard you moved out of your apartment... ma kept bothering me about it hoping I knew something. Y'know when she asked me about what was. Going on with you and I told her I didn't know, I thought about how we would tell each other everything. And now I'm completely in the dark. It's hard without you here. You're my sister and best friend. I'm always gonna love you.

(Beat)

Leo:

Oh and before I forget! The other day Geo and I went to our favorite spot in the park that's a couple of minutes from home. You know the one, it was where papi proposed to mami, and also the spot where I came out to you and you pretended to be shocked and I called you a bitch... (pause) anyway I'm there with Geo and he asks me out! Crazy shit. I haven't said anything to ma or mami yet... I'm waiting for the right moment, but I'm definitely coming out to them soon! Write to you soon! Love you.

Elsa:

Oye mija, I don't know if you know this but I moved in with your mami and Leo! Yeah, your mami hasn't been feeling to well so I just decided to stay to help out. It's weird over here mija I can see why you left... Ale, when are you coming back? I get so worried, you out there on your own... with no family. Mija you need family. Your family are the ones who will still be here when everything goes to shit. Nada supera a la familia. Mira, te voy a contar una historia. Te contare una parte ahora y el resto después. Back when I used to live in Guatemala, my papi used to tell me the story of the Quetzal. Mira, fue hace mucho tiempo. It was a time where we all lived in peace with the earth and it's creatures. A child of the chief of one of the forest tribes was born. The child was named Quetzal. My papi told me about how back then, people believed in spirit guides that we each had one. When that child was born a big and beautiful hummingbird landed on a tree in front of the chief's home. The chief called the wise men of the village to ask what this meant. The wise men told him that Quetzal would become a wonderful and beloved chief, but they could not say more until the child grew older. Mija, the day you were born I knew you were meant for greatness. I'm always going to worry about you mija, but I believe in the powers of this earth, and I believe in you mija. (Making a grand gesture) Te amo muchísimo.

Leo:

Hi Alex, I'm sorry I haven't wrote to you in a while, things have just gotten pretty busy. It's almost been a year since you left... I started college, I know crazy shit. I started late just because last year I wasn't all there and we just didn't have the money yet, but three jobs and two loans later here I am. Listen, um... I think I'm coming out to them today. I read somewhere that the "right moment" doesn't exist. There's no such thing as this perfect moment that signals you to take action. I used to think that the universe plans everything out for us, and we're just supposed to get these signs that tell us what we're supposed to do next. But the universe doesn't have the time to watch what each and every single one of us are doing and send us some sort of "sign" that we should do something amazing, y'know? We're responsible for us, it's up to us to take the path the universe laid out for us. It's not here to tell us what to do. So that kind of motivated me to do it. To come out. I want to be happy, I want to be me and share that part of myself with ma and mami. I want them to meet Geo. So I'll let you know how that goes... write to you soon.

Elsa:

Mija, no vas a creer lo que paso hoy! Bueno, I go to the store to buy some bread because we're all out and I when I go in, right by the isle with all the cheeses, I find \$300. No lo creo! And then when I come home Leo tells me and you mami that he's gay.

(Beat)

Elsa:

Al principio no lo entendi. Como, where did this come from? Did something happen? “No ma, no paso nada, yo siempre fui asi.” How do I respond to that? I didn’t know what to do or say but I just wanted to understand. Pero, it’s just hard for me because I didn’t even know what that was, but everything is so different now. Aye, que se yo. Your brother is mad with me, let him be mad, he just needs time. He wouldn’t talk to me today but I think it’s going to be okay.

Leo:

It’s probably been like 3 months since I spoke to ma. The house is quiet. Mami was mad at me when I came out. Like pissed. Okay to be fair I started it. When I told her all she could say was how it’s just a phase and I’ll get over it. I was like “no mom, this is me” and she goes on about how I’m still young and I don’t know much yet. And then, she decided to tell me she went through the same phase in high school! I was like in my head “what the fuck”. She really said that to me. Anyway that led to us fighting, and then I got into a fight with ma because she didn’t understand why I chose to be gay all of the sudden. Anyway I just stopped talking about it. I came out and that’s that. I told Geo about it and he told me they’d come around. That they’re just seeing me in a different light now and it takes time. Geo came out a while ago. He told me that family is important and stuff, but I don’t know. I started going to therapy because it’s just been kind of lonely now. I mean I have Geo but he’s not always around. Anyway I’m gonna cut this one short but I promise I’ll write more next time. Love you many.

(Beat)

Elsa:

Hi mija. I’m really trying with Leo, mija it’s just so new for me. Ay, I don’t know what to do... it hurts my heart that he doesn’t want to talk to me. (Sighs) Both of you don’t want to talk to me. Pues? What am I to do? Mija I just want to know you’re okay, I’m sorry mija, I didn’t know what was going on, I just...(wearily) come home...

(Beat)

Elsa: (cheering herself up)

Okay mija, let me continue the story of the Quetzal. The last thing I talked about was how the chief was told by the wise men that his son would be a beloved chief.

(Thinking) Ah, ahora recuerdo. The chief was so happy that his son would be beloved, however, the chief never noticed how his brother, Chiruma, looked at his son with jealousy. Chiruma wanted to become chief and did not want Quetzal to take his rightful place. As time passed the wise men’s fortune came true. He grew to be strong, brave, a good hunter and fisherman, and he was kind and generoso. He would become a fantastic leader. When he was still young, Quetzal called his father to a tribe meeting, but when he didn’t return his call, Quetzal went to look for his father. Pobresito Quetzal, when he found his father in his home, he had discovered he had passed away in his sleep. After the mourning period was over, the wise men had named Quetzal chief. The Wise men added that the hummingbird is a sign that Quetzal will never die, the gods



have chosen him to be immortal. That night the tribe celebrated, and no one noticed his angry uncle, Chiruma, plotting his revenge. Okay mija, I'll stop here for now. I love you mija, mucho mas.

Leo:

Hey Alex. It's been almost three years now since you left. I think mami is feeling a little better, maybe she'll write to you soon! I'm sorry I haven't wrote to you in a while, school's just been stressing me out and I've been working at an after school program at a school in the neighborhood. Anyway me and mami have been trying to get ma to start being more active and take care of herself. The other day she fell and I swear it was the first time I noticed she still wears heels. So she can't really wear them anymore because of her legs and she's pretty bummed about it but she said if it means she'll still be here for when you come back. She was joking but I was worried. Oh, I almost forgot, I talked with ma a few months ago. At the end of the day ma and mami are family. We've all been through so much but they're always gonna be there for us and love us unconditionally. I know it's hard, but we don't have to be alone anymore.

Elsa: (coughing)

Hola mija. I know it's been a while, pero I've been so tired to write lately. Lo siento... Ay I'm okay mija... I'll just continue the story. So a little while later, a neighboring tribe attacked. El pendejo, Chiruma, summoned his nephew, Quetzal, to lead the others into battle. Quetzal did not hesitate and led his tribe. He marched ahead of his warriors and the enemies' arrows flew toward him. Before they hit his body, the arrows they stopped and fell to the ground. The enemy saw this and fled in fear. This was the protection of the gods. (Coughs) Chiruma's hatred for Quetzal grew even more and he decided to come up with a new plan. Chirmua figured that it was Quetzal's necklace that protected him. So one night while Quetzal was fast asleep, Chiruma snuck into his room and carefully removed the blanket off of Quetzal revealing the necklace. Chiruma quickly stole the necklace and ran off into the night. (Coughs) Okay mija, I'll go for now. Love you mija.

*Elena comes from stage left.*

*Alex notices Elena.*

Elena: (wearily)

Alex... something's happened to ma... she's been sick for a while now mija. Listen I'm sorry I wasn't a better mom for you. It hurts that you left mija... You, Leo, and ma are my family mija. I'm trying to be better, I need to talk to you about your papi. Mija please come home, ma wants to see you... please mija... I don't know what's going to happen to her. Come home.

*Alex gets up and runs out the door.*

*Lights down.*

## Act III

*Lights up.*

*Tiempo is sitting on the couch going through old photo albums.*

*The doorbell is rung.*

*There is a baby heard crying upstairs.*

*Geo enters from the kitchen hurriedly to get the door, with an apron on and a spatula in one hand.*

Geo: (to himself)  
*Shit.*

*Geo wipes his hands on the apron, sets down the spatula and opens the door.*

*Alex is standing at the door.*

*(Pause)*

Geo:  
Oh, hi Alex!

Alex: (hugging Geo)  
Geo! Oh my god how are you?

Geo:  
I'm good! Come in, come in!  
*(Pause)*

Geo:  
How was vacation?

Alex:  
It was great! Y'know I didn't think I would like Chicago all that much but it was great! Met a all types of people over there and even though I was supposed to be on vacation I just had to make some connections over there— Speaking of which I found this really great band that you and Leo might like for the wedding!

Geo:

Great, I'll check them out... Oh shit, um do you mind I was making something in the kitchen but then the baby-

Alex:  
You're good. Oh, where's Leo?

Geo:  
He stepped out for a bit but he should be right back.

*Geo rushes upstairs as Alex wanders around her old home.*

Alex:  
(Sighs)

*Alex sits on the couch next to tiempo. Tiempo watches as Alex looks through some of the old pictures smiling.*

*The crying stops.*

*Leo enters through the door with some groceries.*

Leo:  
Alex?

Alex: (jumping up from the couch)  
Surprise!

Leo:  
What are you doing here, we weren't expecting you till like Saturday to watch the baby.

Alex:  
I know, but we were supposed to go visit mami today.

Leo:  
Oh *shit!* I knew I was forgetting something... I've just been all over, with the baby and the wedding.

Alex:  
I know, don't worry. Are you still going today.

Leo:  
Yeah, of course...

Alex:  
What's up?

Leo:  
I'm just so stressed y'know... With the wedding planning, the baby, and work...

Alex:  
What's happening at work?

Leo:  
Okay... don't say anything to Geo.

Alex:  
Okay... it sounds like you're about to tell me you're losing your job.

Leo:  
No... actually I'm getting promoted to Assistant Dean...

Alex:  
Oh, my god, Leo! That's amazing, you deserve it for all that you give to that school! Leo we need to /celebrate

Leo:  
/Shhh! (Looking up the stairs) I don't know if I'm gonna take it.

Alex:  
Hold up, why not?

Leo:  
I'm already barely home for the baby and Geo. And Geo is just starting back up with his art again, Alex I just want to be here for my family...

Alex: (Looking at Leo hard)  
Dimelo.

Leo:  
Huh?

Alex:  
There's more isn't there.

Leo:

No... (getting up) I'm serious Alex, there's nothing else. I just want to be with my family.

Alex:

Leo...

Leo:

No Alex, Ya.

(Beat)

Alex: (looking at the photos)

Remember that time I ran away and you and ma would send me all these letters.

(Pause)

Alex:

I remember everyday one of those letters came. At first I didn't read them, like not right away at least. But I just remember feeling so scared. I didn't want to end up like papi, and I felt like no matter what I did nothing would be enough, so I kept trying to run from you guys and here and my own truth.

Leo:

What changed?

Alex:

I didn't want to run anymore... all Papi ever did was run away from his own problems and look at what it did to this family. It's like we have this weird pattern or tradition to run away from the things that scare us the most. So I sat down one day and went through the letters you guys sent me, and I just remember crying for so long.

(Pause)

Alex:

Ma kept writing about the story of the Quetzal. Before then I didn't really know anything about where our family came from. But that story gave me so much hope.

Leo:

I remember that story too. About the chief's son Quetzal who was blessed by the gods and was protected by them. And his uncle who was so jealous of him.... Why do you think ma told us about that story?

Alex:

She wanted us to know that no matter what we were going to be protected, because we have this family... she always believed in us Leo. I felt horrible for what I put her through y'know.

Leo:

She never blamed you Alex... No one did.

Alex:

That doesn't make what I did right. I'm just trying my best for this family everyday Leo, and you need a little help right now.

Leo:

Alex...

Alex:

Do you remember how the story of the Quetzal ends?

Leo: (pauses to think)

No... I don't.

*A spotlight goes up on stage right where Elsa is seen on a hospital bed with Elena standing next to her.*

Alex:

You remember when Ma was sick?

Leo:

Yeah, I remember mami wrote to you and a few days later mami told me you came to visit. That was the same day ma passed...

Alex:

Ma never finished writing the ending of the story, so when I went to see her... I had to know how it ended...

*The lights fade on Alex and Leo. Alex gets up and goes to Elsa and Elena.*

Elsa:

Alex?

*Elena looks up at Alex, pale faced.*

Alex:

Hi ma... hi mami...

*Elena nods at Elsa and walks up to Alex.*



Elena: (angry)  
We'll talk later.

*Elena exits stage lefts.*

Elsa:  
Mija...

Alex:  
Ma... I'm so sorry...

Elsa:  
Ay miya no, you don't have anything to be sorry for.

Alex:  
Siento que te decepcioné.

Elsa:  
Ay no, ven aqui.

*Alex goes over to Elsa.*

Elsa:  
hiciste lo que tenías que hacer por ti mismo. It did hurt pero, tu eres muy fuerte hija. You're my granddaughter, forever and I will always love you no matter who you are or where you go.

Alex: (sobbing)  
I'm so sorry ma... I should've talked to you I just felt so trapped and scared—

Elsa:  
I know miya, I understand. I know you're scared of being just like your papi.

(Beat)

Elsa:  
Mirame, you are you, you are stronger than he was. Just because he had a hard life doesn't mean you need to. Mira we're always going to be here for you, family is forever miya. Don't ever forget that. Mi corazón está lleno de amor por todos ustedes y siempre haré todo lo posible para proteger a esta familia. Come back home. Please miya.

Alex: (nodding)  
I will ma... I will.

*For the first time in years, they embrace.*

Elsa:

Oh mira, I haven't finished the story of the Quetzal! I'll tell you now. Escuchar. So, Chiruma just stole the necklace with the humming bird feather. When Quetzal awoke, he didn't even notice the necklace was gone. Quetzal went into the forest to hunt. While hunting he heard a rustle of leaves behind him, and when he went to turn around to see what animal was lurking behind him, he discovered no animal. It was his uncle Chiruma with a bow and arrow. All Quetzal heard was the whistle of the arrow as it pierced his chest. Quetzal fell to the ground and pulled out the arrow and tried to stop the bleeding, but it was too late. He had already lost too much blood. Quetzal began to feel the life leaving his body. But right before Chiruma's eyes, a miracle happened. The young man transformed! His skin turned into feathers the color of blood and the plants around him. His arms turned into wings and on his head a crown of cerdas. He had a yellow bill and bright eyes and the bird rose gracefully into the sky. The gods have made their promise to Quetzal, and as for Chiruma, the necklace did not protect him. This beautiful bird lives in the forests of Guatemala, and to this day people call the Quetzal the holy bird. And when they see it they are reminded of their fearless leader. Bueno, ya.

Alex:

Ma, that story was so beautiful. Pero, why that story? Like what does it mean?

Elsa:

Ah... te conté esa historia porque eres tan especial. You are a Quetzal.

Alex: (confused)

What?

Elsa: (revealing her necklace)

Mira, this necklace has been in our family for years.

*As Elsa reveals the necklace, it is revealed that it is a necklace with a humming bird feather. Elsa takes off the necklace and gives it to Alex.*

Elsa:

It symbolizes strength and it will protect everything you care about mija. You are my Quetzal, you are brave and filled with so much love that you do not see yet. Pero hasta ese día te doy esto con la esperanza de que le muestres al mundo lo especial que eres.

Alex:

Ma, I can't take this...

Elsa:  
You can, and you will.

*Alex puts on the necklace.*

*Tiempo appears stage left as  
Alex goes back to Leo on the  
couch.*

*Elsa exits.*

Leo:  
How do you feel after she said all that to you? I mean like wow, I wouldn't know what to say.

Alex:  
Y'know, at first I was just speechless. But she just looked at me like "you don't need to say a word" and I just stayed with her for the rest of that night. Ever since I came back it's like I can still feel her. She's always going to be here for us. So, just know you are wrong Leo. We're different than dad. We get to choose the kind of people we want to be. Don't make the same mistakes papi made when we were little. Please, lean on us, I promise everything will be okay.

*Alex holds out her hand.*

Alex:  
Do you trust me?

Leo: (taking her hand)  
Of course... Thank you Alex.

*They embrace.*

*Geo comes downstairs with the  
baby.*

Geo:  
Did we miss anything?

Leo: (kissing Geo)  
Nope.

Geo:

Are we all ready to go?

Leo: (looking at Alex)  
Just about.

Alex:  
Aww let me say hi. To the baby before we all go! Hola Tiempo, I'm gonna spoil the shit out of you.

Leo:  
Alex, no cursing in front of the baby.

Alex:  
Anyway... come on we're gonna be late!

*Leo and Geo exit with the baby as Alex takes one more look at the house.*

Alex:  
I'm home.

*She exits.*

*Tiempo goes center stage and acknowledges the audience.*

Tiempo:  
Bueno, esa es la historia de mi familia. Un día envejeceré y contaré esta historia a mis propios hijos. Y como pase lo que pase en la vida siempre volveremos a los lugares que más amamos. Nuestros hogares. Muchísimas gracias.

*Lights down.*

*END OF PLAY*