

Jamal Garcia

Written by

Nora Contreras-Almeida

Based on, original idea by Nora Contreras-Almeida

©Copyright Nora Contreras-Almeida, 2012 and 2013.

All rights reserved.

Jamal Garcia

A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

April 25, 2013

By John Spriggs Ph.D.
Committee Chairperson

[Signature] Ph.D.
Committee Member

[Signature] MFA
Committee Member

FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTHSIDE OKLAHOMA CITY. AFTERNOON.

Mariachi music swims out of an authentic Mexican restaurant door as a family of patrons enter.

A street vendor selling a plethora of soccer jerseys, baby blankets, and religious paintings calls out to the business owner across the street.

A mobile taco stand plays banda music as the owner serves out tacos to three Mexican cowboys who are dressed in their Saturday best lime-green alligator pointy boots and whistle at the girls across the street.

A blue metallic 1976 Chevy Impala creeps forward on the street as six homeboys listen to unrecognizable music with heavy bass.

PAN TO:

Two pairs of feet walk alongside a sidewalk as the Impala rolls away. The first pair belong to a two-year-old boy named MATTHEW. Matthew smiles up at the person that holds his hand. Matthew's small, olive hand clutches a juvenile black hand. JAMAL GARCIA smiles down at his little brother as they enter the Hernandez Grocery Store.

INT. HERNANDEZ STORE. AFTERNOON.

Jamal enters the store with Matthew. Matthew immediately lets go of Jamal's hand as he makes his way to the cereal aisle. PEDRO, a slim Mexican-American teen with a crooked smile, restocks the cereal. BETO, a Mexican in his early twenties with a sharp gaze, sweeps by the produce aisle.

PEDRO

Your little bro bring you to the store again, Jamal? Let me guess, chocolate milk? Or should I say, baby crack?

JAMAL

(Shrugs)

Hey, I just bring him; Lorena lets him drink it.

Pedro hands Jamal a can of Mexican instant chocolate mix as Matthew plays with the cereal display. Beto moves closer to the cereal aisle as he pretends to sweep. Beto's eyes linger on Jamal.

PEDRO
Hey, the cake your mom made for
Eliza's wedding was bomb, man!

JAMAL
Yeah, Lorena is getting pretty good
at making cakes.

Pedro squats down next to Matthew.

PEDRO
What up, little man! Hook me up
with some cake and I'll supply the
chocolate milk!

Matthew smiles up at Pedro. Pedro gives him a pat on the
head.

JAMAL
See you around.

PEDRO
See you.

Jamal and Matthew walk towards the register to pay.

CEREAL AISLE

Beto leans over to the cereal aisle.

BETO
(In Spanish)
You know the black kid pretty good?

Pedro wipes off the sweat from his eyes with his bandana.

PEDRO
(In Spanish)
Sure, we go to school together. His
mom is Mexican.

Beto snorts.

BETO
(In Spanish)
Well, he sure doesn't look (beat)
Mexican.

Pedro holds two boxes of cereal side by side as he glances
over at Beto and then over at the produce section.

PEDRO

(In Spanish)

Well, the floor by the produce section sure doesn't "look" like it was swept, man. I think you missed a few spots.

Beto glares at Pedro as Pedro continues to stock the cereal aisle.

EXT. LOWER CLASS MEXICAN-AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD. AFTERNOON.

Jamal and Matthew make their way to their home. The neighborhood is made up of 1920s homes with faded paint, ancient sidings, and grass driveways. Neighbors sit on their porches gossiping while children play with toys purchased at the morning's garage sales. Matthew smiles and waves at the neighbors while Jamal nods politely and holds onto the can of chocolate mix.

GARAGE ACROSS THE STREET

Across the street, attempts at music come from the Rucos Banda (Old Guy's) Garage. It is a group of five men, in ages ranging from 35 to 55. OLD VATO RODRIGUEZ wears a black zoot suit pants and button down shirt as he strums an old bass guitar, intent on the instrument. EL JESSE, the one with the freestyle moustache, swats at a fly as he attempts to play the keyboard. EL RANCHERO (the country one) shines his boots with glass cleaner and a rag. EL WILLIS, plays the drums with his eyes closed. EL GUAPO (the handsome one) looks at himself in a pocket mirror as he combs through his glossy, black locks.

OUTSIDE JAMAL'S HOUSE

Jamal looks down at Matthew, who is enthralled by the sounds of the music. Matthew points toward the Rucos Garage.

JAMAL

Yeah, little man. They're the band that's playing tonight at the 15th.

Rodriguez looks up from his bass guitar and notices that Matthew and Jamal observe them. With a stoic look, Rodriguez gives them a quiet nod.

Jamal returns the nod but quickly takes Matthew by the arm and tugs him gently toward the house.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(To Matthew)

You know Lorena and your dad don't want you hanging out with some sixty-year-old losers.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. AFTERNOON.

LIVING ROOM

Jamal and Matthew enter the home. Matthew runs towards the couch, where Matthew's father, TONY, is sprawled out in a wife-beater and tattered jeans, playing a video game in the miniature living room.

KITCHEN

LORENA, Jamal and Matthew's mother, is wearing a slip, flip-flops, a full face of make-up, and a head full of rollers as she hurriedly works on the icing of an enormous party cake in the adjacent kitchen. She has dark circles under her eyes, regardless of the concealer.

Jamal walks over to the kitchen and places the receipt and the change in a cookie jar next to the stove.

LORENA

(To Jamal)

How much was left?

She continues icing the cake as Jamal begins to place all the cake ornaments in a tupperware container.

JAMAL

Eighteen eighty-seven.

LORENA

(Sighs)

We'll be eating hotdogs all week.
The cake money is for rent.

Jamal glances towards the living room.

JAMAL

(Whispers)

Tony?

LORENA

(Sighs)

It's hard to get a job when you don't have much experience. All the good jobs are taken.

Jamal takes a moment, struggling to speak.

JAMAL

You could qualify for food stamps
and that way you wouldn't have to
work so much-

LORENA

We already talked about this and I
said no last time.

LIVING ROOM

Jamal looks over at Tony who has Matthew on his lap playing
video games. Matthew hands Tony the chocolate can.

TONY

Bossy! Just like your momma!

Tony hands Matthew the video game controls as he sits him on
the couch.

Tony enters the kitchen.

KITCHEN

TONY (CONT'D)

Cake's coming along, babe!

Tony walks over to the fridge and grabs the milk.

TONY (CONT'D)

So do you dance at these things
after you help your mom set up the
cakes, Jamal?

JAMAL AND LORENA

(In unison)

No!

Jamal and Lorena look at each other as Tony mixes the
chocolate mix in with milk.

JAMAL

(To Lorena)

Why the negative?

LORENA

Because (beat) I know you don't
like to dance.

TONY

It's cool. At your age I would go
just to check out the girls, too!

Lorena slams the icing bag on the kitchen table. Tony stops
stirring and Jamal stands with a cake ornament, frozen.

LORENA

Don't you ever tell him that! Jamal
is a sixteen-year-old *child*!

Tony bites his lower lip.

TONY

Come on, Lorena. He's already a man-

LORENA

NO!

O.S. Matthew begins to cry from the living room.

TONY

Matthew wants-

Lorena takes the chocolate milk from Tony and hands it to
Jamal.

LORENA

Go give the milk to your brother.

Jamal glances at Tony momentarily before he steps forward to
take the cup and walk over to the living room.

KITCHEN

LORENA (CONT'D)

I've told you not to but in when it
comes to Jamal.

TONY

I was just making a comment.

LORENA

Well, don't make them!

TONY

What's the big deal? You're the one
that's been dragging him to these
parties for like the last month.

LORENA

To help me work!

Tony shrugs.

LORENA (CONT'D)

He's young. I don't want him to mess up his life like I did—especially with some of the girls that go to those parties.

TONY

Which girls?

LORENA

A lot of them are wetbacks.

TONY

Lorena, your parents and mine were "wetbacks".

LORENA

You know where we live, Tony. Jamal could get into big trouble just by hanging out with them and you know that police watch him more closely because he's bla—

Jamal enters the kitchen. Lorena stops, startled.

JAMAL

He drank the chocolate milk; he's asleep.

LORENA

(Stammers)

Ok, I just need to put my dress and shoes on.

Lorena quickly escapes to the bedroom to change. Tony and Jamal stand in silence for a moment as Jamal takes the sections of the enormous cake and places them in plastic containers.

Tony steps toward Jamal, hesitates, turns and exits into the living room.

Jamal retrieves a shiny, tin pan from the counter space and catches a glimpse of himself. He studies himself momentarily but drops the pan as Lorena reappears behind him. Tony enters.

TONY

Ok, I put him in the playpen. Which containers am I putting in the car?

JAMAL

The ones on the end of the counter.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE JAMAL'S HOME. AFTERNOON.

Lorena, Tony, and Jamal make their way out to their old 1993 Sentra with the plastic containers and paper bag of cake decorations.

TONY

(To Lorena)

What time will you be home?

LORENA

I'm hoping they cut the cake by midnight. We'll be back as soon as we pick up our cake stands.

Jamal opens the door to the passenger side and sits, with the bag of decorations in his lap, waiting for Lorena as she kisses Tony quickly goodbye.

INT. CAR INTERIOR. LATE AFTERNOON.

Lorena enters the car and straps on her seat belt as she pulls away from the driveway. Lorena glances over at Jamal but drives in silence.

JAMAL

Being sixteen doesn't mean I'm stupid-or deaf.

LORENA

I don't understand code. If you have something to say, then say it.

JAMAL

Lorena, I know I'm black.

Lorena inhales deeply.

LORENA

You're part Mexican, too.

JAMAL

Yeah, but that part didn't come stamped on me.

They come to a red light and Lorena slams on the breaks and turns to face Jamal.

LORENA

What do you want me to do? Pretend like some people don't treat you a certain way? I can't change what people think; I can only try to protect you—from them and from yourself.

JAMAL

From myself?

The light turns green and Lorena faces forward as she drives.

LORENA

I don't want you to fuck up like me. Getting pregnant at sixteen is a mistake I'm still paying for. It ruined my life.

Jamal stares out the passenger window as Lorena pulls into a busy parking lot.

JAMAL

(As he continues to sit in the car)

I don't want to help with the cakes anymore, it's embarrassing.

LORENA

(As she opens the door to exit the car)

You'll be more embarrassed living in the street. Now cut out the bullshit. We need to work.

JAMAL

(He continues sitting in the car)

I don't want people to see me with-nevermind.

Jamal sighs and begins to slowly open the passenger door.

Lorena returns the driver side door.

LORENA

Me? I embarrass you?

JAMAL

(Startled)

I-I didn't say that.

Lorena's face muscles become rigid.

LORENA

We need to get inside.

Lorena walks briskly in front of Jamal and he drops a tupperware container with the cake stands as she continues inside.

Jamal sighs and stops to pick it up, but when he extends his hand to retrieve it, another hand collides with his and grasps it firmly.

JASMINE, a slender fifteen-year-old girl with pleading eyes continues to suffocate his hand as he stares at her.

JASMINE

(In Spanish, pleads
frantically)

Help me, please!

The motor of a vehicle alerts them.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

I need to hide, please!

Jamal looks towards the sound of the thriving engine and at the driver, SAMMY, who is Tony's brother and a community menace.

Jamal ponders if he should get involved or ignore the pleading wisp of a girl.

JAMAL

(In English, under his
breath)

Lorena wouldn't like this-

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I don't speak English-please!

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)
Ok.

Jamal hands the girl the tupperware and tugs her in front of him as he dashes her forward into the building.

SAMMY (O.S.)

Setting up another cake, blaxican?

Jamal sees the girl rush in and counts to ten before he turns to face Sammy.

Sammy's polished Chrysler 300 sits on top of the sidewalk as Sammy throws out multiple wrappers from his driver side window.

JAMAL

Lorena wants to teach me work ethic. Some mom's don't get to it though, right?

Sammy's stare ices over Jamal.

SAMMY

Well, blaxican has a fucking big mouth. She should teach you to know your place.

Jamal shrugs.

JAMAL

This is my place; I'm here to set-up the cake, right?

Jamal turns to the building and heads inside, ignoring Sammy's comments.

INT. RECEPTION HALL. NIGHT.

Jamal enters the reception hall. It is decorated with white and yellow balloons, yellow tulip centerpieces, and strings of white streamers.

The Rucos Banda members connect their instruments to the music mixer.

The QUINCENERA and HER COURT are taking pictures in the balloon arch by the main table.

Guests begin to arrive and fill the tables.

MRS. SALAS, the mother of the Quincenera, instructs the PHOTOGRAPHER on how to take the pictures as he rolls his eyes.

Lorena stands next to Mrs. Salas as the photographs continue.

Jamal sprints to the cake table and sees the tupperware.

Jamal agitatedly looks for the girl and peeks underneath the table cloth.

LORENA

Jamal?

Jamal springs back from underneath the table.

Lorena eyes him quizzically.

LORENA (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

JAMAL
I thought I dropped something. We
need to set up right away, right?

Lorena grabs Jamal by the chin and analyzes his eyes.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Come on, there's people here!

LORENA
You better not be on something, J.
I'll beat the shit out of you!

JAMAL
I can't stand Sammy, so no worries
there.

Jamal goes about setting up the cake stands and Lorena
observes him.

Lorena and Jamal begin to set up the cake as the Quincenera's
Court looks on.

LORENA
Shit! I left the staircase
decorations in the car. Finish
setting up, I'll be right back.

Lorena rushes out through the front door. As she does so, a
family of five enter the doorway. It is a mature couple with
three children, the oldest a gregarious male of about twenty-
four, a cherub looking girl of about nine, and the girl Jamal
helped-JASMINE.

Jamal stares transfixed at Jasmine. Their eyes hold each
other with no words but are filled with recognition and
subtext. Jamal notices that her hands tremble.

Jamal takes a half step forward, but then steps back,
embarrassed, and attempts to hide behind the cake.

ROMEO, a young black male of seventeen approaches Jamal.
Romeo wears a silky suit and a pair of shades.

ROMEO
You got invited to the party, too?

JAMAL
Not exactly.

Romeo removes his shades and eyes him.

ROMEO
You're making all our kind look
like pansies, fixing that cake.

Jamal pauses as he analyzes Romeo.

JAMAL
Our kind?

ROMEO
You're not really black; but you
look it. At least try to act like a
man if you have the skin.

JAMAL
So why are you hanging with
Mexicans?

Romeo shrugs.

ROMEO
I like Latinas and they like me.

Lorena walks in with the bag of decorations and approaches
the table.

Jamal immediately turns back to the cake and focuses on
centering it on the cake stand.

LORENA
J, help me put the decorations on
the cake.

ROMEO
(To Jamal)
Is this your boss?

Lorena glances from Romeo to Jamal.

LORENA
I'm Jamal's mom, Lorena.

Romeo's eyes widen.

ROMEO
I'm Romeo.

LORENA
Are you Jamal's friend?

Romeo smirks.

ROMEO
Not exactly.

Lorena studies Jamal.

Jamal turns his attention back to Jasmine as he pretends to center the smaller cakes.

Lorena looks over at Jamal and at the direction of Jasmine.

LORENA
(To Jamal)
Jamal, I think I'm good here. You
can go ahead and go home.

Jamal breaks his hold on Jasmine and his expression questions Lorena.

ROMEO
See you around Jamal. Nice to meet
you Lorena.

LORENA
Ms. Garcia.

ROMEO
Sure thing.

Romeo walks away and makes his way towards a group of young latin@s and the Quincenera.

JAMAL
(To Lorena)
Who's going to help you-

LORENA
(Intent)
I'll manage.

Jamal puts the decorations down and begins to leave as Lorena admonishes him with her eyes.

Jamal walks out through the door and when he comes a few feet from the girl he stops momentarily and their eyes meet, but she immediately glances away. Jamal's hands transform into fists at his side as he exits the Reception Hall.

EXT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Jamal approaches his home and halts as he notices an old camero parked outside the grass driveway. All the lights in the home are off.

A rusty '74 Ford truck drives down the street. Rodriguez glances at Jamal as he stands out by his mailbox, studying the house.

The truck rolls to a stop.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
(In Spanish)
Garcia, you ok?

Jamal's eyes linger on his house. Jamal turns towards Rodriguez and nods.

Rodriguez nods and drives on to his home and exits the vehicle.

Jamal approaches his home cautiously.

INT. JAMAL'S HOME. NIGHT.

Jamal enters the dark home quietly. He looks around the living room and sees Matthew asleep in the play pen. He proceeds towards the kitchen and hears voices coming from the bedroom.

TONY (O.S.)
Yeah, honey!

Jamal marches toward the bedroom door and throws it open. Tony falls off the bed; the WOMAN with him screams.

TONY (CONT'D)
What the fuck?

Jamal looks around the bedroom, gives Tony a look of repulsion, and then says to Tony in a strong, steady voice:

JAMAL
Get out of my mother's house.

Tony pulls up his pants as the woman wraps herself in a sheet and attempts to throw her clothes in an oversized hot pink purse.

Jamal turns around and makes his way to the kitchen.

TONY
No! Wait, Jamal! You aren't going
to tell Lorena-

Jamal spins around and faces Tony, who is now standing
outside the bedroom door.

JAMAL
You did her wrong; you're going to
tell her.

TONY
Look, kid-

JAMAL
I'm not involved. But-I did think
you were better than this.

The woman, TRIXIE, walks out of the bedroom past them.

TONY
Trixie-

TRIXIE
Don't call me back!

Trixie stomps out the door and lets the flimsy screen door
slam on her way out. Matthew awakens and begins to cry. Both
Jamal and Tony go over to the play pen where Matthew was
napping, but Jamal pushes Tony away from the play pen.

TONY
What the fuck, J?

JAMAL
You lost this privilege. I said
out.

Jamal attempts to reach into the playpen to pick up Matthew,
but Tony hurls Jamal into a wall.

TONY
(As he throws Jamal)
I want my son! Get out of my way,
you nigger!

Jamal's body is on the floor. Jamal pivots his head up and
casts his eyes on Tony. Jamal's eyes water over.

Matthew wails.

TONY (CONT'D)
(In confusion/lamentation)
J-

Rodriguez enters the home with a baseball bat and slams Tony's back with it. Tony falls over and Rodriguez rushes over to Jamal.

Rodriguez throws Jamal a set of keys.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Run to my truck with your brother
and lock yourself in there. If this
son-of-a-bitch comes at you, drive
off.

Jamal and Rodriguez lock eyes; Jamal nods.

EXT. JAMAL'S STREET. NIGHT.

Jamal sprints across the street with Matthew in his arms. Jamal opens the door to the old truck and waits for Rodriguez.

Jamal POV: Rodriguez drags the unconscious body of Tony out the door and into the front yard. Rodriguez reaches into Tony's back pocket and retrieves a set of keys.

Jamal notices that Rodriguez touches the left side of his face and winces.

INT. RODRIGUEZ'S TRUCK. NIGHT.

Rodriguez knocks on the door and Jamal unlocks it. Rodriguez enters the vehicle.

JAMAL

(In English)

What happened?

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Well, I thought that I could talk
with him, but he didn't want to
talk.

Jamal notices the bruise on the left side of Rodriguez's face.

JAMAL

(In English)

You ok?

RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 Yeah.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Tony?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 Tasered out.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Is that legal?

RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 Beating kids isn't.

They sit in silence for a moment. Matthew resumes crying.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 He doesn't have keys to the house
 anymore, he can't get in. I'll
 drive you to your mom.

Rodriguez starts the engine and drives in silence as they reach the Reception Hall.

EXT. RECEPTION HALL. NIGHT.

Rodriguez parks, turns off the engine and turns to face Jamal.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 The guys and I will follow you and
 your mom after the dance to make
 sure you get home ok.

Rodriguez opens his door and reaches behind the seat for a box.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 El Ranchero broke a string; I had
 to go to the garage and get another
 one.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 I'm glad you did.

Rodriguez nods and closes his door as Jamal and Matthew exit the vehicle. Rodriguez continues to enter the Reception Hall through the back entrance, with access to the band stage.

INT. RECEPTION ROOM. NIGHT.

Jamal and Matthew enter the Reception Hall through the front door as the Quincenera waltz concludes. Everyone stands and claps.

Lorena sits at a table with some acquaintances. Lorena stands immediately when she sees Jamal and Matthew and approaches them.

LORENA
(Concerned)
What happened?

Jamal swallows, looks down at Matthew, then back to Lorena.

JAMAL
Tony isn't at the house anymore.

LORENA
What? Why? Is he ok?

JAMAL
I told him to leave-

LORENA
Why-

JAMAL
He was there with a lady-in your
bedroom.

Lorena becomes motionless.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Lorena-

The voice of El Guapo is heard over the microphone.

EL GUAPO
(In Spanish)
And now ladies and gentlemen, the
quincenera will cut her cake!

Jamal glances to the main table, where all the Quincenera's family and Court are gathering.

Lorena remains motionless.

JAMAL

Lorena!

Lorena does not respond. Jamal reaches for Lorena's arm and leads her to a table to sit.

Pedro approaches the table and glances from Jamal to Lorena.

PEDRO

Hey, man-is she ok?

Jamal hands Matthew over to Pedro.

JAMAL

Could you hold him while I go help with the cake?

PEDRO

Sure, the little man and me are going to get our cake on! Right?

Jamal kneels in front of Lorena.

JAMAL

(Whispers)

You going to be ok?

Lorena stares out blankly as her eyes glaze over.

Jamal sighs and stands. He makes his way over to the cake.

MRS. SALAS

(In Spanish)

I need your mother. Why is she not over here?

JAMAL

(In English)

She's not feeling well; I'm going to help.

MRS. SALAS

(In Spanish)

She gets paid for making the cake, setting it up, and serving it-

JAMAL

(In Spanish)

She doesn't work alone; she has me.

Jamal walks over to the cake table and hands the spatula to the Quincenera. Mrs. Salas urges the photographer to take pictures while Jamal begins slicing cake as he glances over at Lorena.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

This song goes out to the
Quincenera as a special request
from her cousin Ines! Hit it!

The cumbia music starts and couples start heading out to the dance floor.

Jamal looks on as the Jasmine and her brother dance together. Her brother, PACO, contorts his body in an exaggerated manner on the dance floor while Jasmine, laughs heartily and dances conservatively next to him as she smiles with pride at her older brother.

Jamal stops slicing, transfixed by her.

Jasmine becomes more comfortable as she allows Paco to twirl her as the music continues. She lets go of his hand and dances around him as he stomps his feet from side to side.

Sammy enters along with two young men, BERTO and PETE. They are dressed in knock off Hugo Boss black slacks and button down shirts, as well as black 'calf Leds'.

The atmosphere is filled with imitation Gucci Envy cologne.

Matthew sees Sammy and runs to him. Sammy extends out his hand and is handed a sucker from Berto. Sammy hands the candy to Matthew.

SAMMY

(To Matthew)

Blood calls, right nephew?

Sammy glances at Pedro briefly before he grounds his eyes into Jamal.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

So, Blaxican, I found my brother
Tony bloody and unconscious outside
your whore mother's house. You want
to tell me how that happened?

The Quincenera and her Court's conversation and festivities go mute as they gape at Sammy.

Jamal brings the spatula close to himself and holds it underneath the table as he eyes Sammy calmly.

CU: Jamal's hand trembles underneath the table.

JAMAL

Why don't you ask him?

Sammy snarls.

SAMMY

Look you little shit, don't think that your ass is covered because you're a kid! I know what you did to Tony! What I want to know is who helped you!

JAMAL

What, you think I can't handle your loser brother on my own?

SAMMY

Tony can do whatever the hell he wants because he is the man of the house! You should be thankful that my brother took up your mother and you, you little bastard!

PEDRO

Hey, that's uncalled for-

SAMMY

You stay the fuck out of this or I'll make the call for your paid trip back home.

Jamal eyes Pedro, perplexed. Pedro becomes motionless and looks at the ground.

JAMAL

It was all me, Sammy. Go and leave my family alone.

SAMMY

I don't give a fuck for you or that whore, but this is my nephew and he's coming with me.

Jamal looks in Lorena's direction but Lorena is no longer there.

STAGE

CU: Rodriguez keeps his gaze on Sammy.

BACK TO SCENE

Sammy holds Matthew by the hand and he turns and begins to walk away.

Pedro looks panicked as he glances from Matthew to Jamal.

Jamal plunges the spatula into the icing and heaps out a big scoop. Jamal lunges at Sammy.

JAMAL

Sammy!

Sammy turns to face Jamal and Jamal flings the buttercream heavy spatula towards Sammy and flings Sammy in the face with it. Jamal jams the spatula into Sammy's eyes and mouth. The icing splatters on Sammy's face and clumps down his neck and shirt.

Berto and Pete pull out their bandanas and attempt to clean Sammy up, but they just smear his shirt further.

STAGE

The music stops, except by Willis, the drummer, who plays with his eyes closed. Those on the dance floor scoot away from Jamal and Sammy.

Rodriguez removes the strap from the bass guitar and walks off stage.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

Well, friends, let's keep dancing.
Let's keep the peace boys!

EL JESSE

(In Spanish, to El Guapo)

Here's your chance for an aca-aca-acapella.

EL RANCHERO

(In Spanish, to El Jesse)

Where the hell are you going
without me?

El Guapo sighs.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

Keep the music going, Willis.

They walk off stage in the footsteps of Rodriguez.

BACK TO SCENE

Coughing, Sammy immediately releases Matthew's hand as he pulls out his bandana from his back pocket to wipe his shirt.

SAMMY

You fucking little bastard! Do you know how much this shirt cost?

Jamal picks up Matthew in his arms and kisses his forehead.

JAMAL

I'm thinking it's more valuable to you than your nephew?

SAMMY

(To BERTO and PETE)

Take this asshole outside!

Jamal hands Matthew over to Pedro just as Berto and Pete grab Jamal by the arms.

Jamal grounds himself firmly as they attempt to drag Jamal outside.

Berto and Pete begin to drag Jamal towards the exit.

Rodriguez stands in the way of Berto and Pete.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

I got your brother; leave the kid alone.

Sammy laughs.

SAMMY

(In English)

You got to be kidding me, old man!
I'm afraid to even try to punch you-
your social security might not
cover the damage!

Sammy scoots Rodriguez aside roughly as Sammy makes his way in Jamal's direction.

Rodriguez kicks Sammy behind the knees and Sammy, surprised, topples over.

Berto and Pete release Jamal and pull out guns.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

(To BERTO and PETE)

Not here, pendejos (dumbasses)!
There's security here!

Berto and Pete put up their guns and help Sammy up.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
 (In English, to El Vato
 Rodriguez)
 You don't know who you just messed
 with, old man!

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 You don't scare me, kid. I don't
 think you were invited, so it's
 time for you to go now.

Rodriguez, El Jesse, El Ranchero, and El Guapo all stand facing Sammy. The SECURITY GUARD re-enters the reception area and Sammy, Berto, and Pete begin to retreat.

SECURITY GUARD
 What's going on here?

SAMMY
 We were on our way out officer,
 just stopped by for some cake.

SECURITY GUARD
 Looks like you had your fill of
 cake.

Berto and Pete laugh and then convert to coughing.

SAMMY
 (To the Security Guard)
 I'm just going to say bye to my
 nephew.

Sammy leans into Jamal and hugs him as he says softly:

SAMMY (CONT'D)
 I'm going to kill you, Garcia. It
 will be my pleasure.

The Security Guard walks Sammy and his boys towards the exit.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish, to Jamal)
 You ok?

Jamal nods as he takes Matthew by the hand.

Lorena enters hurriedly from the side exit.

LORENA
 (In English, to Jamal)
 What happened?

JAMAL
(Irritated)
Where were you?

LORENA
I was having a smoke outside. I
just saw Sammy leave. Is Tony
looking for me?

Jamal glances at her with judgement.

JAMAL
No, Sammy was here to take Matthew
away from the Blaxican and the
whore he lives with-

Lorena gasps.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
-his words.

LORENA
(Painstakingly)
You think-

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
(In Spanish, to both)
Maybe this is something you should
discuss at home?

Lorena glares at Rodriguez.

LORENA
(In Spanish)
I don't need advice from an old
loser-

JAMAL
(In English)
Don't. He helped Matthew and me
while you were out enjoying a
smoke. We finished our business
here, it's time to go home.

Jamal makes his way to the table with Matthew alongside him
as he begins to collect the cake decorations.

Jamal glances in the direction of Jasmine, and she stares
intently. Jamal glances away.

The band members walk back to the stage.

Lorena follows and she assists Jamal with collecting the
items.

MRS. SALAS

(In Spanish)

This is the last time you have any business from me or anyone in my family, Lorena! How can you have this boy fighting at a function like this? I want you to pack your things and go!

ONSTAGE

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

Ok, ladies and gentlemen, this is the last song of the night! Last chance to break-in your shoes! Hit it!

The band plays a norteno (Mexican country) song.

BACK TO SCENE

LORENA

(In Spanish, to Mrs. Salas)

We're on our way out. I-were you going to pay us?

MRS. SALAS

(In Spanish)

And you still have the audacity to ask for pay after you ruined my daughter's party? You cheap trash.

Jamal reaches out to Lorena and gently leads her away from Mrs. Salas.

Mrs. Salas huffs away and Jamal and Lorena head out the door with bags of decorations in hand.

EXT. RECEPTION ROOM. MIDNIGHT.

Lorena puts a sleepy Matthew in the back car seat and the bags in the trunk.

Jamal places the remaining bags in the trunk.

They drive off into the night.

Rodriguez's truck follows closely behind them.

EXT. STREET. MIDNIGHT.

The Garcia family arrives home.

Jamal looks across the street at Rodriguez, El Jesse, El Ranchero, El Willis, and El Guapo as they unload their instruments in the garage.

Rodriguez nods towards Jamal's home, signaling Jamal to get inside.

Jamal nods and heads inside.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. MIDNIGHT.

Jamal enters with Matthew in his arms as Lorena follows Jamal with the bag of decorations.

Jamal places Matthew carefully in the playpen and covers him with a blanket.

Lorena stands at the entrance of the house and releases the bag of decorations limply as she studies the house. She struggles to breathe evenly and inches slowly towards the bedroom.

BEDROOM

The sheets are slung across the bedroom floor and Tony's shirt is flung over the ceiling fan.

The radio is on, softly playing unrecognizable music.

A photo of Lorena and Tony is face down on the night stand.

A condom wrapper lies next to Lorena's foot on the floor.

Lorena takes a step back and slams the door shut as she begins to sob.

Jamal retreats to his room, wordlessly.

LIVING ROOM

Lorena walks, defeated to the living room couch and lands enfeebled on it as she crouches into a fetal position and continues to sob.

Jamal reenters the living room and approaches Lorena with a pillow and two blankets. Jamal covers her carefully with one blanket and he then places the other blanket and pillow on the floor next to the couch.

Jamal lies on the floor next to the couch and extends his hand to her. CU on Jamal's hand.

CU: Lorena takes his hand in hers and holds it tightly as she continues to sob into daybreak.

INTERIOR. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

CAFETERIA.

Students gossip and jest as they stand in the lunch line.

A group of young Mexican-American girls sit together at a table as they chat and text. Romeo sits with them and skims over at the table where Jamal sits.

Jamal sits with a group of black youth and is inattentive and detached to the heated sports conversation.

Jamal feels an arm at his shoulder and he whirls around as he throws the hand off his shoulder defensively.

All the youth at the table stand.

Pedro retracts a few steps back and lifts up his palms to shoulder length level.

PEDRO

Hey, man. Just wanted to talk to you.

Jamal sighs.

JAMAL

(To the group)
It's alright.

Jamal nods toward any empty cafeteria table and Pedro follows.

They sit down and Jamal alertly looks around at the table of the Mexican-American males as he sits with his back to the wall.

PEDRO

What's going on?

JAMAL

(As he looks in the direction of his peer table and then over to the entrance)
I think I'm getting jumped today.

PEDRO

You think Sammy-

JAMAL

I'm sure of it. He doesn't like anyone making him look like a fool. Who knows who his messenger is-you shouldn't be talking to me.

PEDRO

Do your friends know what happened the other day?

JAMAL

(He averts eye contact with Pedro)

It's not their world. They might hear about it later, but Sammy won't want to start trouble with anyone from the Eastside. He's a coward, he'll leave them alone. He just wants me. (Jamal sighs). Sorry about this next thing, man.

PEDRO

What-

Jamal grabs Pedro by his collar and jerks him to stand.

JAMAL

What, you don't think I can take you, you little shit?

Pedro does not move.

The Mexican-American males and the black youth at both tables stand.

MR. MORALES, the English Teacher who wears sweater vests like a uniform and COACH HALL, the athletic donut-lover, approach Jamal and Pedro quickly.

The teachers each take one of the boys by the arm and drag them towards the exit.

COACH HALL

What are you thinking, Garcia?

JAMAL

I'm sorry, sir, I wasn't. I got a little hot-headed.

COACH HALL

(Sighs)

You have to go to Principal's Office now; no surprise there. (To Pedro) You too, Gonzalez.

Mr. Morales and Pedro lead them into the office.

COACH HALL (CONT'D)

Now you boys have a seat there and you keep your fists to yourself.

MR. MORALES

Greg, I'll go back to the cafeteria while you and Ms. Torres handle this.

COACH HALL

(To Mr. Morales)

Left your romance novel in the cafeteria, Guillermo?

MR. MORALES

(To Coach Hall)

It's Shakespeare, Hall.

COACH HALL

Sure, sure.

Coach Hall attempts to head over into the Principal's Office, but is detained by BETTY, the Principal's Administrative Assistant.

BETTY

She's in a meeting.

Coach Hall sighs.

COACH HALL

(Points)

These two were fighting.

Betty looks over at them.

BETTY

They seem pretty calm now.

COACH HALL

Well, I'll leave them here with you until Torres is out. Will she be long?

BETTY

She shouldn't be more than fifteen minutes.

COACH HALL

Well, they're all yours.

Coach Hall rearranges his baseball cap as he walks out of the door.

PEDRO

(Whispers to Jamal)
What the hell, man?

Jamal does not look at Pedro.

JAMAL

(Whispers to Pedro)
Sammy knows we've been friends since we were kids; now he'll believe we aren't. He won't mess with you.

PEDRO

(Whispers to Jamal)
Well, that's a fucked up way of showing your friendship. What if we're suspended?

Jamal continues to avert his eyes from Pedro.

The door opens and three people enter.

JAMAL

(Whispers to Pedro)
There isn't any blood on either of us, no bruises. We'll probably just get detention. Just apologize profusely when we meet with the Principal.

Jamal attempts to ignore Pedro and turns towards the door. Jamal is startled to see Jasmine and he stares quietly at her. A smile smears across Jamal's lips.

PEDRO

(Audibly)
What?

Jamal elbows Pedro.

Betty assists Jasmine, her MOTHER, and a TRANSLATOR, but Betty catches this.

BETTY

Boys, do I need to call back Coach Hall?

Pedro lowers his head and places his head in his right palm, averting his eyes, as he continues to sit.

JAMAL

No, ma'am.

Jasmine turns towards Jamal and smiles at him. Jamal returns the smile.

The PRINCIPAL steps out of her office and Betty points towards the boys.

PRINCIPAL TORRES

Gentlemen, in my office.

Pedro and Jamal walk past Jasmine. Pedro passes with a look of defeat and Jamal walks by with a triumphant smile on his way into the office.

INTERIOR. LEE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM. AFTERNOON.

The bell rings and the students exit their classrooms.

HALL

Jamal walks over to his locker and Romeo approaches Jamal.

ROMEO

Well if it isn't the Mexican neighborhood hero!

JAMAL

(Gazes at Romeo uninterested, as he puts his books in his locker)
Do I look (beat) Mexican?

ROMEO

Well-no.

Jamal slams his locker shut and turns to face him.

JAMAL

What?

ROMEO
I just wanted to talk.

JAMAL
To the Mexican that looks black or
the black guy that happens to be
Mexican?

ROMEO
Multiple personality disorder?

JAMAL
Fuck off.

Jamal walks away.

Romeo calls out to him.

ROMEO
Makes no sense.

Jamal takes a step back towards him.

JAMAL
I didn't say that it made sense;
I'm saying that's how things are.

Jamal rounds the corner to the hallway.

Jamal is upset and walks directly into Jasmine. Jasmine drops
all her books and notebooks.

Jasmine instantly begins to retrieve all her belongings from
the floor and Jamal just stands there momentarily as he takes
her image in.

Jamal reacts after a few seconds and scoops down to help her.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(In English)
I'm sorry-
(In broken Spanish)
I'm so sorry, let me help you.

Jasmine stares at him momentarily, wordlessly.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
I don't know what to say to you
about the other day-

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish,
hesitates)
You could start with your name.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
I'm-yes-I'm Jasmine.

Jasmine extends her hand to Jamal.

Jamal gawks at her for a second and then wipes his hand on his jacket and quickly extends it in return.

JAMAL
Jamal. Jamal Garcia.

The bell rings.

They both stand quickly and Jasmine rushes off.

Jamal follows after her.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(In broken Spanish)
Wait! Where are you going?

Jasmine halts.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
I-I don't know. I'm having trouble
finding my way around-

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
For a second I thought you were
running away from me.

Jasmine breaks into a gentle smile.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
I should. People say you're a bad
boy.

Jamal puts forth a half smile and shrugs.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
Don't girls like the bad guys?

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I don't know what the other girls like, but I like boys that are nice.

Jamal hangs his head for a bit and then extends his hand out to Jasmine.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

Can I see your schedule?

Jasmine hands it to him.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In broken Spanish)

Ok, don't worry; it's close. You want to follow me?

Jasmine nods and beams at him.

Jamal walks her to the entrance of her class.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In broken Spanish)

This is it.

They look at each other awkwardly for a few moments.

Students begin walking towards the class and eye them curiously.

Jasmine looks down at her shoes as she makes imaginary spirals on her book with her index finger.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I saw how you stood up for your little brother and your mom. You're stupidly brave, but I think you're one of the nice ones.

Jasmine peeks up at Jamal quickly and immediately walks into the room.

The bell rings and Jamal rushes off to his own class with an inexplicable smile plastered on his face.

INTERIOR. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. EARLY EVENING.

DETENTION

JAMAL
So do you know Jasmine?

PEDRO
(Irritated)
Man, we're in detention because you went crazy protector and you want to talk about girls?

JAMAL
Not girls, *the girl*- Jasmine. Plus, no one else is here but Mr. Morales and he's too busy reading his E-book.

PEDRO
So you just want to talk to me when there aren't others around? I feel used, man.

Jamal becomes serious.

JAMAL
You're like family, Pedro.

Pedro looks at Jamal and shrugs as he smiles.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Now, if you were a good friend and since you know I'm going to get my face rearranged, you'd want to give me some happy conversation.

Pedro grows somber.

PEDRO
You aren't scared?

JAMAL
(Shrugs)
Sure, but there is nothing I can do about me. Sammy wouldn't do anything to hurt Tony, so my family is ok, and now you are too.

PEDRO
But wouldn't Tony be upset with him if he messed you up?

JAMAL
Tony called me a nigger and threw me against a wall, so I don't think so.

PEDRO
You know that-

JAMAL
I don't want to talk about that.
Jasmine, Pedro.

Pedro sighs.

PEDRO
Her and her family just got here
from Mexico. He lives by Ines.
That's all I know.

JAMAL
She smiled at me.

PEDRO
Maybe she was laughing that you
were being escorted into the
Principal's Office.

Pedro laughs and Jamal remains solemn.

PEDRO (CONT'D)
What is it about this girl?

JAMAL
(Shrugs)
I meet her at the dance and she was
running away-I think from Sammy. I
just want to make sure she's ok.

PEDRO
Great, now you want to get with
Sammy's girl! Now for sure he won't
kill you!

JAMAL
She's not his girl!

PEDRO
If he wants her then she is. Look
around you, J. You know how things
run here.

Mr. Morales interrupts them.

MR. MORALES
Ok, boys, time to go.

Mr. Morales exits the room and both boys follow.

EXTERIOR. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. EARLY EVENING.

Pedro begins walking home and Jamal stands outside the school.

PEDRO
You aren't going home?

JAMAL
I think I'm going to stay here for a little while.

PEDRO
(Perplexed)
For what?

JAMAL
The sooner you get out of here the sooner I can get home.

PEDRO
Crazy pendejo (dumbass).

JAMAL
I can understand Spanish.

PEDRO
(Smiles as he turns to leave)
I know.

Jamal waits a few minutes and then walks towards his home cautiously.

EXT. LOWER CLASS MEXICAN-AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD. AFTERNOON.

Jamal makes his way home slowly as sounds of cumbia music escape the Rucos Banda Garage.

Jamal walks towards his house, but stops when he reaches the mailbox.

Jamal steers towards the Rucos Banda Garage and stands outside the garage door as the band rehearses.

INSIDE RUCOS BANDA GARAGE

EL RANCHERO
(In Spanish)
Wait, wait, wait! I need a drink so I can tune up!

El Willis continues to drum away with his eyes closed.

EL RANCHERO (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 Damn-it, Willis! I said hold on!

Willis opens his eyes as he continues playing, eyes El Ranchero, closes his eyes, and continues playing.

EL WILLIS
 (In Spanish with his eyes closed)
 So catch up.

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 You know that isn't my kind of music; I like corridos (fast Mexican country music)! I have to be pretty drunk to play this sissy shit.

El Jesse, the one with the freestyle moustache, grins as he brushes his moustache.

EL JESSE
 (In Spanish)
 You know-you know-ahem, you like the music, your style is ju-ju-just a little off.

EL GUAPO
 (In Spanish)
 You are good at what you do but only some of us look good while we do it! Right, Rodriguez?

Rodriguez takes a drag from his cigarette as he tunes the bass guitar.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 I do it for the music.

EL GUAPO
 (In Spanish)
 Well, I like the music, but that's not all I do it for! The ladies are my inspiration.

El Jesse smiles.

EL JESSE
 (In Spanish)
 I-I just want to be-be-belong somewhere....

They all become silent; even EL Willis stops playing.

Jamal steps back to retreat and runs into a tin trash can behind him.

They all scurry towards the trash can and find Jamal there, trying to replace the trash can to its original position.

EL WILLIS
(In Spanglish)
Orale, it's beat-him-with-the-
frosting-kid!

Rodriguez extends his hand towards Jamal and Jamal takes it to support himself to stand.

JAMAL
(In English)
Not really the name I want to be
known by.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
(In Spanish)
Did anyone bother you at school?

JAMAL
(In English)
No, he didn't.

EL GUAPO
(In Spanish, to Jamal)
Don't you speak Spanish, kid?

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
Not too much.

EL JESSE
(In Spanish)
Wh--Wh-Why?

Rodriguez puts his hand on Jamal's shoulder.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
(In Spanish)
We understand English.

EL JESSE
(In Spanish, to Jamal)
We even do some Su-Su-Sunny and the
Sunliners and some Freddy Fe-Fe-
Fender.

JAMAL

(In English)

I'm not sure who they are.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Jamal, let me introduce you to the guys: El Guapo (El Guapo combs through his glossy black locks as he smiles at Jamal), El Jesse (El Jesse approaches Jamal and shakes his hand sincerely, but lightly), El Ranchero (El Ranchero shakes Jamal's hand firmly, as if trying to out-do El Jesse's handshake), and El Willis (Willis nods his head at him and says "frosting" under his breath as he chuckles).

(To Jamal)

You want to hang out while we practice?

JAMAL

(In English)

Sure, if it's cool with you guys.

ALL THE BAND IN UNISON

(In Spanish)

Sure, sure.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish, to Jamal)

Any requests?

Jamal shrugs.

Rodriguez speaks quietly to Willis and Willis hands Rodriguez his drumsticks.

Rodriguez hands the drumsticks to Jamal.

JAMAL

(In English)

What?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

You should play; just follow us.

Willis nods towards Jamal and sits down by the door as Willis pulls out a cigarette.

Jamal walks uncertainly towards the drum set and sits down.

JAMAL
 (In English, to Rodriguez)
 So whose beat am I supposed to
 follow?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 The bass player and the drummer
 have to parallel each other, so
 follow me.

The band begins playing a slow song and Jamal waits a few seconds to catch the beat. He begins to strike the drum set softly.

Jamal looks towards Rodriguez for approval and Rodriguez nods.

Jamal catches the beat and begins to play with confidence, although a little off-beat.

The band members glance at each other, surprised, as Willis smokes with his eyes closed.

The song ends and the band members clap.

EL GUAPO
 (In Spanish)
 Not bad for a first timer!

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 He plays the same as Willis after a
 few shots! I think we found his
 replacement.

EL WILLIS
 (In Spanish, to El
 Ranchero)
 He still needs to learn the feeling
 of being music.

Jamal looks around for a clock.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 I gotta go.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 Garcia!

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Yeah?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 We need help before and after the
 dance this Friday night to load and
 unload instruments and we could pay
 you a few bucks. You interested?

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Yeah! I'll stop by later this week.
 See you around.

Jamal begins towards the door but turns back towards them.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 Hey, please don't tell my mom I was
 here, ok?

Rodriguez nods and Jamal walks away.

EL JESSE
 (In Spanish)
 Like-like she won't find out in
 this no-no-nosy neighborhood.

El Guapo turns towards Rodriguez.

EL GUAPO
 (In Spanish to Rodriguez)
 You know we really don't need his
 help.

Rodriguez nods.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 I know.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. AFTERNOON.

Jamal enters the house and Lorena sits on the couch as she
 rocks Matthew in her arms.

LORENA
 Where were you? School got out over
 two hours ago.

Jamal hangs his backpack on a hook and begins picking up Matthew's toys and places them in the playpen.

JAMAL

I was with some friends.

LORENA

Were you with that girl? I'm not pendeja (stupid), I saw how you were looking at her at the dance!

Jamal stops and faces her.

JAMAL

What? No!

Jamal becomes solemn.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(Softly)

I just helped her find her class, that's all.

Lorena stands and places Matthew in the playpen and grabs Jamal by the arm and drags him into the kitchen.

KITCHEN

LORENA

Damn it, J! Why did you talk to her? I already told you I don't want you to talk to wetbacks!

JAMAL

She doesn't speak English; she needed help.

LORENA

Bullshit! You worry about your family!

Jamal's eyes confront her.

JAMAL

What about you? Do you care about your family? And I mean Matt and me.

O.S. The front door opens and closes.

Jamal looks at Lorena quizzically.

Tony enters the kitchen and looks down hesitantly when he sees Jamal.

TONY
Hey (beat) J.

JAMAL
(To Lorena)
You gotta be fucking kidding me!

Jamal strides past Tony to the front door.

LORENA
J, where are you going?

Lorena rushes out to the front porch after Jamal.

FRONT LAWN

LORENA (CONT'D)
J!

JAMAL
Do you even care?

LORENA
You're my son, Jamal, but I need
someone to take care of me! To love
me!

JAMAL
What he did-that's love to you?

LORENA
People make mistakes, but they can
change.

Jamal faces the street but glances over his shoulder.

JAMAL
I don't want (he sighs audibly)-be
careful. I'll be back later.

Jamal walks down the street as Lorena gazes after him and
Rodriguez watches them both from the garage.

EXT. STREET. EVENING.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Jamal walks aimlessly down a street as he ponders,
absentmindedly

B) Sammy drives down the opposite side of the road in his
Chrysler 300

C) Sammy sees Jamal and spins the car around after him and honks his horn loudly

D) Jamal quickens his stride to a sprint as Sammy continues to blast his horn at him

E) Jamal glances over his shoulder and realizes that Sammy holds a hand gun in his hand

F) Jamal jumps into a deep ditch that has sharp rocks

G) Sammy shoots into empty space, but as traffic approaches, his car accelerates

END OF SERIES OF SHOTS

Several moments later, Pedro rushes out towards Jamal as he sees Sammy's car take off.

PEDRO

Shit! You ok, man?

Jamal is covered in grass stains and bruises as Pedro helps him up from the ditch.

JAMAL

Yeah.

Jamal attempts to stand but can't.

PEDRO

You need to go file a police report, man! That fucker could've killed you!

At this moment Jamal realizes that Pedro is not alone; Jasmine is standing behind him with shock in her eyes and a replete grocery bag in her arms.

Jamal stands as quickly as he can but growls as he feels the impact on his leg.

JAMAL

No.

PEDRO

But-

JAMAL

No!

They become silent.

PEDRO
Where were you going?

JAMAL
Nowhere.

PEDRO
Let me walk Jasmine home, and I'll
help you get back home.

JAMAL
No, walk her home and make sure she
gets there ok.

Jasmine drops the grocery bag and bear hugs Jamal, nearly
toppling him over.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Ow!

Jasmine continues to hold onto Jamal.

JASMINE
(Whispers to Jamal in
Spanish)
I thought he had shot you.

Jamal leans into Jasmine's embrace.

Pedro shrugs and smiles.

A small VW beetle passes them on the road.

PEDRO
(In Spanish)
Uncle!

Jasmine releases Jamal from the embrace, but continues to
hold his hand.

The beetle creeps lazily back towards them. It is Willis.

EL WILLIS
(In Spanish)
What? Eh, J!

Willis looks from Pedro to Jasmine to Jamal and notices
Jamal's grass-stained, ripped clothing and bruises.

EL WILLIS (CONT'D)
(In Spanish)
I don't want to get involved.

Willis begins to drive off again.

PEDRO
 (In Spanish)
 Uncle, wait!

The beetle creeps back.

EL WILLIS
 (In Spanish)
 Eh, J! Eh, Pedro!

Pedro and Jamal glance at each other.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Can you give us a ride home?

Willis leans over and opens the passenger door.

Jamal leans in towards Pedro.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (Whispers to Pedro)
 Why do they call him Willis?

PEDRO
 (Whispers to Jamal)
 No one ever knows what he's taking
 about.

They enter the car. Pedro enters last, allowing Jasmine and Jamal to sit together.

INSIDE CAR

INTERCUT WILLIS and PEDRO/JAMAL and JASMINE

JAMAL AND JASMINE

Jasmine continues to hold Jamal's hand as she looks out the window. She turns to face Jamal and catches him observing her.

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 Did Sammy-did he hurt you?

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 No. You helped me, remember?

Jamal releases his breath and coughs.

Jasmine squeezes his hand as he covers his mouth with his other hand. Jamal smiles at her weakly.

WILLIS AND PEDRO (CONT'D)

WILLIS
(In Spanish, to Pedro)
Who is cooking at your house
tonight-your mom or dad?

PEDRO
(In Spanish)
Dad's working late today, so mom.

Willis squints his entire face.

END OF INTERCUT

EXT. MEXICAN-AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD. EVENING.

They arrive in front of Pedro's home and both Pedro and Jasmine exit.

Jamal draws toward the door as Jasmine exits.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
Jasmine?

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
I live three doors down from Pedro.

Jasmine and Jamal gaze at each other until Willis clears his throat.

PEDRO
(In Spanish)
You want to come in for dinner,
uncle?

WILLIS
(In Spanish)
Another day, maybe.

PEDRO
(In Spanish)
Ok. Jasmine, I'll walk you home.

Willis is about to shift gears but Jamal detains him.

JAMAL
(In English)
Wait-can we wait until she is
inside her house?

Willis turns slightly to face him.

WILLIS

(In Spanish)

You know, my brother-in-law married
my sister for her looks. I bet he
regrets it now when he gets home
from work and he's hungry.

Jamal rubs his forehead slightly, uncomprehending.

As soon as Willis sees Jasmine walk onto the front porch he
shifts gears and leaves.

EXT. JAMAL'S NEIGHBORHOOD. EVENING.

They drive in silence but a block from the Jamal's house
Willis stops.

Willis pulls out a pair of battered drumsticks from the glove
compartment and hands them to Jamal.

EL WILLIS

(In English)

Come practice tomorrow. Girls like
musicians.

EL WILLIS (CONT'D)

(In English as he waves to
Jamal who is still in the
car)

Bye.

Jamal exits the vehicle and looks down at the drumsticks as
Willis drives off.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. EVENING.

Jamal enters the house slowly clutching his side.

Tony sits with Matthew and stands alarmed as he sees Jamal.

TONY

J, what-

JAMAL

Is Lorena here?

TONY

No, she just went in for a double
shift at the nursing home. They
needed more evening housekeepers.

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)
 Something about an upcoming
 inspection.

Jamal makes his way to his room but Tony blocks him.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Did Sammy do this? I told him-

Jamal cuts him off.

JAMAL
 I don't know why Lorena took you
 back, but you're here and so is
 this 'nigger', so I'll stay out of
 your business if you stay out of
 mine.

Tony observes Jamal as he slams his door shut.

Tony returns to Matthew and holds him.

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. MORNING.

Jamal limps into the school building and makes his way to his
 locker.

HALLWAY

STAN and ERIC stand close by; their lockers parallel with
 Jamal's.

STAN
 (With concern)
 Hey man, what happened to you?

ERIC
 (Smirking, to Stan)
 Didn't you hear he's been out
 fighting drug dealers? All of a
 sudden he's super-Mex.

Jamal restrains himself and inspects Eric as he continues to
 speak.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Everyone's been talking about it.
 And you didn't tell us you
 moonlighted as the cake boss-well,
 the employee of the cake boss.

Jamal glares at Eric, yet remains motionless.

Stan glances back and forth from Eric to Jamal.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 (Defensive)
 What? Solo Espanol? (Only Spanish)?

STAN
 (To Eric)
 That's over the line, Eric.

Two Mexican-American boys across from Jamal's locker turn to stare.

LITTLE RICKY, a short, yet stocky Mexican student who always wears a blue beanie approaches the conversation followed by his slight, six-foot-three silent cousin, MIGUELITO.

LITTLE RICKY
 (To Eric)
 What? You got a problem with people speaking Spanish, cabron (asshole)?

STAN
 (To Little Ricky)
 Hey, he didn't mean it like that, he's just being stupid.

JAMAL
 (To Ricky)
 Ricky-

LITTLE RICKY
 (To Jamal)
 I wasn't talking to you, cafecito (Little coffee) cappuccino.

Eric bursts into laughter.

Ricky hurls Eric into a locker and Eric grabs Little Ricky by the collar of his shirt.

Jamal and Stan aimlessly attempt to pull Little Ricky and Eric apart.

Miguelito, the silent cousin of Little Ricky approaches them.

MIGUELITO
 Ricky, Coach Hall's coming.

Ricky and Eric release each other. Eric smirks at Little Ricky as he and Stan walk away.

Coach Hall walks past them, oblivious.

LITTLE RICKY

(To Jamal)

Now we're going to have problems with those guys and it's all your fault! I don't get it-it's like you're not proud to be who you are.

JAMAL

Why'd you step in?

Little Ricky seems confused.

LITTLE RICKY

If people bring up shit about Mexicans I'm not just going to stand there like a menso (idiot), like you were. What kind of Mexican are you?

JAMAL

The half kind.

LITTLE RICKY

This is why people shouldn't mix, asshole.

Little Ricky and Miguelito walk away.

Romeo approaches Jamal.

Romeo inspects Jamal studiously.

ROMEO

What happened to you?

Jamal begins to slowly walk away.

Romeo follows him.

Jamal stops.

JAMAL

What do you want?

Romeo hands Jamal a folded piece of paper.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

What is this?

ROMEO

A letter.

JAMAL
You wrote me a letter?

ROMEO
No, Jasmine.

Jamal yanks the piece of paper out of Romeo's hand.

JAMAL
How did you get this?

Romeo shrugs.

ROMEO
I saw her stuff it into your
locker.

JAMAL
So how does that mean you can read
my stuff?

ROMEO
I'm trying to help. And I didn't
read it.

Jamal looks at the piece of paper. Jamal squints and then
leans his head against the locker door.

ROMEO (CONT'D)
Aren't you going to read it?

JAMAL
I don't-I can't read in Spanish.

ROMEO
(Astounded)
You should learn to speak, read,
and write Spanish. This is the
United States, how do you expect to
get a job-or a girlfriend?

JAMAL
Not all girls speak Spanish.

ROMEO
But it is the fornication language!

JAMAL
You mean a Romance Language.

ROMEO
(Shrugs)
Sure, sure; it starts there.

Jamal folds the paper and puts it in his pocket.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

So why would she write you a letter?

JAMAL

Why do you care?

ROMEO

I already told you; I want to help you.

JAMAL

(Eyes Romeo wearily)
Why?

ROMEO

(Shrugs)

I figured you're not such a pussy after all. You do everything society says you shouldn't-I can respect that. And-I need a favor.

The bell for class rings.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

Find out who can read that for you; make sure it isn't a little gossip from school.

Romeo walks off into the hallway as Jamal ponders over the letter before he stuffs it in his pocket.

Jamal realizes he is late for class. Jamal hobbles over to his first class as quickly as the pain will allow.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY.

Jamal enters the class and sees that Jasmine is now part of the class.

Jamal halts momentarily and notices the concern on Jasmine's face.

Jamal grins and Jasmine returns the smile.

MR. MORALES

Mr. Garcia, you may smile all you like as you sit at your desk.

Giggles erupt from the class and Jamal walks slowly to his seat.

MR. MORALES (CONT'D)
You ok, Garcia?

JAMAL
Fell during Phys Ed, sir, but I'm
ok.

MR. MORALES
(Incredulous)
Oh. Well class, let's continue
where we left off. If you'll please
turn to page one thirty-seven.
Marco, please read out-loud for us.

MARCO
(O.S.)
*"Then plainly know my heart's dear
love is set
On the fair daughter of rich
Capulet:
As mine on hers, so hers is set on
mine..."*

Jamal sits across from Jasmine and they smile at each other
throughout the class.

Tammy, a beautiful black female student with a weave of long,
silky locks, sits in the back of the class, festering as she
observes the smiles between Jamal and Jasmine.

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. LATE MORNING.

CAFETERIA

Jasmine enters the cafeteria and picks up her lunch tray as
she goes down the lunch line.

CASH REGISTER ATTENDANT
What is your student identification
number?

Jasmine furrows her eyebrows, conflicted.

JASMINE
No English.

The ATTENDANT sighs audibly and rolls her eyes.

Two Mexican-American girls, JACKI and KRIS, stand in line
behind Jasmine. They have bright-blond highlights and wear
bright neon hues in their make-up. They ignore Jasmine's
situation as they check their social media on their phones.

Jasmine turns to face them.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

I'm sorry, can you please help me?
I don't understand what the lady is
asking me.

JACKI

(Rolls her eyes, whispers
to Kris)

These little Mexican country girls
make the rest of us look sooo
ignorant.

KRIS

(To Jasmine)

Sorry, no espanol.

CASH REGISTER ATTENDANT

(Impatiently drums her
fingers on the keyboard)

Identification-your number.

From behind Jacki and Kris, EMMA, called LA CHOLA, a full-
figured girl with loose khakis and an Aztlan shirt calls out
to Jasmine.

LA CHOLA

(In Spanish, to Jacki and
Kris)

Pinches (fucking) pop-princesses!

(In Spanish, to Jasmine)

The lady needs your identification
card, the card they gave you where
it has your picture and a number so
she can bill your lunch.

Jasmine pulls out her student identification from her pocket
and hands it to the Attendant.

The Attendant punches in her number and hands Jasmine the
card back brusquely.

Jasmine turns towards La Chola.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

Thank you.

LA CHOLA

(In Spanish)

Sure.

Jasmine looks around the cafeteria and sits at an empty table. La Chola approaches her.

LA CHOLA (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

Hey, kid. Do you know anyone here?

Jasmine nods.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

Yes, my neighbor Ines, but I think she's running late.

LA CHOLA

(In Spanish)

Cool.

La Chola begins to walk away but returns towards Jasmine.

EMMA, LA CHOLA

(In Spanish)

And don't let those pop-princesses get to you; they don't like anyone. They think they're all that because their daddy owns a meat store, but it's not like fancy or anything. If he had enough money they would be in private school, so that goes to show you that they don't-they're all talk.

La Chola walks away and sits with a group of young men and women who are dressed in urban clothing.

INES approaches the table.

INES

(In Spanish)

What did La Chola want?

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

She helped translate for me and she was telling me about the girls sitting over there.

(Jasmine nods her head in that direction)

They aren't very nice.

INES

(In Spanish)

Neither is La Chola; she's always getting into trouble.

Jasmine smiles and shrugs.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 I don't think she's that bad.

Ines sighs.

INES
 (In Spanish)
 You think everyone is good. By the way, there's been talk about you and Jamal...

Jasmine freezes as the fork makes contact with her mouth.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 He was nice to me-

INES
 (In Spanish)
 You don't want your family to find out; you know how they are.

Jasmine looks down at her tray as Ines continues to eat.

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. AFTERNOON.

HALLWAY

Jamal exits his last class and attempts to race to Pedro's locker.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Hey, meet me outside the west door; I need to talk to you.

Pedro nods.

EXT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL WEST EXIT. AFTERNOON.

The west side of the building is solitary as Jamal exits the door.

Pedro exits a few moments later.

PEDRO
 (In English)
 Man, you are seriously pissing the wrong people off.

JAMAL
(In English)
You mean Eric and Little Ricky?

PEDRO
(In English)
I thought Eric was your friend?

JAMAL
(In English, shrugs)
Guess not.

PEDRO
(In English)
He's probably upset about the Tammy
thing, but if he wasn't such a jerk
the girls would give him a chance.

JAMAL
(In English)
That's history. (Beat) So... what
did you and Jasmine talk about the
other day?

Pedro smiles.

PEDRO
(In English)
Her friend Ines.

Jamal smiles relieved.

PEDRO (CONT'D)
(In English)
I also asked how her and her family
were doing and she said ok. And...

Jamal examines him intently.

PEDRO (CONT'D)
(In English)
She asked me about you.

Jamal beams as he holds on tightly to the straps of his
backpack.

JAMAL
(In English)
She did?

PEDRO

(In English)

Yeah, but I told her you and I weren't friends and that we had an argument and that was why we were in the office the day she started school. She was really confused that I helped you the other day and I explained that I wanted her to think that I was a nice guy so she could talk to Ines for me.

Jamal sighs.

PEDRO (CONT'D)

(In English)

You wanted me to keep pretending or tell her the truth?

JAMAL

(Lost in reverie)

No, no. What you said was fine.

Pedro looks at his watch.

PEDRO

(In English)

I have an afternoon shift at the store, but I'll talk to you later, ok?

Jamal nods.

PEDRO (CONT'D)

(In English)

I could ask my uncle Willis to give you a ride home?

JAMAL

(In English)

Nah, it's fine. I need to walk out the pain.

PEDRO

It could be worse next time-

JAMAL

I'll be ok.

Pedro nods and leaves.

Jamal waits a few seconds and then reenters the building.

Jamal heads back to his locker and finds Tammy standing there.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(In English)
Hi.

Tammy looks him over.

TAMMY
(In English)
So was it really Phys Ed?

Jamal dials in the code to his locker.

JAMAL
(In English)
Don't worry about it.

Tammy sighs.

Jamal begins to place books in his locker and retrieve others.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(In English)
So what's up?

TAMMY
(In English)
That's what I'd like to know. So
you're into white girls now?

Jamal halts.

JAMAL
(In English)
What?

TAMMY
(In English)
You think I didn't see you eyeing
the Jasmine girl?

JAMAL
(In English)
She's not white-

TAMMY
(In English)
Well she sure as hell isn't black.

JAMAL

(In English)

Listen, I'm sorry if you're upset,
but we were a long time ago, Tammy.

TAMMY

(In English)

Before you never even hung out with
Mexicans, you said they didn't
accept you-

JAMAL

(In English)

I am part Mexican-

TAMMY

(In English)

Well, how convenient for you to
switch back and forth, asshole!

Tammy stomps away briskly.

Jamal leans against his locker and sighs.

Romeo turns the corner, from where he has observed the entire
discussion.

ROMEO

(In English)

Whoa, she's upset.

JAMAL

(In English)

You and I have never gotten along
and I'm getting fucking tired of
you lingering around like my
shadow.

Romeo raises his palms forward.

ROMEO

(In English)

I told you; you look troubled and I
wanted to help. It's like penance
for past mistakes.

JAMAL

(In English)

I don't want your help.

Jamal begins to walk out the east door.

ROMEO

Eric and Philip are out that door
waiting for you; you should take
the north door.

Jamal stops.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

Don't try to be a man; you're hurt
and need to get home. You don't
need to prove anything to me.

Romeo walks to him and hands him a piece of paper.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

(In English)

Now, this one is from me. It's my
contact info in case you need
anything.

Jamal takes it reluctantly as Romeo places his shades on and
walks out the north door exit.

EXT. LOWER CLASS MEXICAN-AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD. AFTERNOON.

Jamal walks as quickly as his limp will allow down the street
towards the Rucos Banda Garage with the drumsticks in his
left hand and the letter in his right hand.

Jamal knocks on the siding of the open garage door.

El Jesse sits in a corner trimming his moustache as El
Ranchero reprimands him.

EL RANCHERO

(In Spanish)

No, no, no! I told you to trim it
on the side! Now you look like a
cheap hoodlum! You need a moustache
that tells the ladies, "I'm all man
-hold me! But I'm Mexican too, so
don't just hold me, embrace me!

Jamal knocks again.

El Ranchero and El Jesse turn towards Jamal.

EL JESSE

(In Spanish)

You came to pr-pr-practice?

Jamal looks around.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Yeah, but is Rodriguez here?

They both look at Jamal with concern and lean in towards him.

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 You look beat up, kid...

JAMAL
 (In English)
 It's nothing; I'm fine.

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 He and El Guapo went to the music
 store. Willis is always late.

They stand next to Jamal and look down at the letter.

EL JESSE
 (In Spanish)
 Who-Who is it from?

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 What did you need from Rodriguez,
 because we can help. Anything he
 can do we can do.

Jamal looks from El Jesse to El Rancho.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 A girl wrote me a letter in Spanish
 and I want to know what it says.

El Rancho takes the letter from his hands.

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 Let me see, it says...

El Jesse and Jamal look at him expectantly.

EL RANCHERO (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 Her handwriting is too small.

El Rancho hands the letter to El Jesse.

EL JESSE

(In Spanish)

Let me try. It says, "I..I wa-wait
that you are-no, I ho-hope that you
are-yes, I ho-hope that you are..."

El Guapo and Rodriguez walk in with a microphone and some
cords.

El Jesse looks up at Rodriguez and El Guapo.

EL JESSE (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

Guapo, you read it, you're more dra-
dra-dramatic.

El Guapo takes a water bottle, has a sip, gargles, swallows,
and then takes the letter and faces them as he recites the
words emphatically.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

*"I hope you are feeling better
after what happened to you the
other day. I'm sorry you were hurt.
I know for a fact now that you are
one of the nice ones."*

EL JESSE

(In English, as he pats
Jamal on the back)

She say you nice!

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

Look at you, Jamal!

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Who was it?

Everyone stops and stares at Jamal.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

Tony?

JAMAL

(In English)

No, he hasn't confronted me since
that time that you were there.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 So?

Jamal takes a deep breath.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 We're even now.

LORENA
 (O.S. In English)
 Jamal!

Jamal thrusts the letter into Rodriguez's hand and drops the drumsticks.

Lorena enters the garage and glares at the Band Members.

Lorena grabs Jamal by the arm and begins to drag him out of the garage.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Stop! You're embarrassing me in front of my friends!

LORENA
 (In English)
 Friends? These old losers! Don't you know that they do drugs? And-

Lorena notices Jamal's limp and bruises and stops suddenly.

Lorena stands in front of Jamal and holds both of his arms.

LORENA (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 Did you get in a fight?

PAN TO:

EXT. SAMMY'S CHRYSLER PARKED OUTSIDE JAMAL'S HOUSE.
 AFTERNOON.

Sammy leans against his car as he observes the confrontation between Lorena and Jamal. Berto sits in the passenger side as he plays with his Ipad.

SAMMY
 (In English)
 It's not good to get into fights, nephew. It worries your mom.

Jamal glares at Sammy as Sammy grins broadly.

JAMAL
(In English, to Lorena)
Nothing happened. No one was
involved.

Jamal pulls away from Lorena.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(In English)
I work for the band now.

LORENA
(In English)
Work!

Sammy smirks.

SAMMY
(In English)
For those losers?

Jamal takes a step in Sammy's direction, but Lorena grabs his arms to keep him in place.

JAMAL
(In English, to Lorena, as
he eyes Sammy)
They're going to pay me to load and
unload instruments at the events
they play.

LORENA
(In English)
You don't have my permission to
work for them!

JAMAL
(In English)
Then you don't have my permission
to be with Tony! He pushed me and
called me a nigger and you take him
back into your house and bed,
Lorena! Who is the real loser here?

Sammy stands solemnly as he continues to observe.

Lorena attempts to strike Jamal across the face but he blocks her hand and holds her arm.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(As he looks first at Lorena and
then at Sammy)
Your choices hurt me more.

Jamal gently moves Lorena's arm back towards her.

The band members have gathered outside the garage and observe.

Jamal begins to walk down the street. He speaks loudly over his shoulder.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Don't follow me.

The band looks on as Jamal walks off and then they look at Lorena.

Lorena is befuddled. She looks over at the band and angrily scrapes a tear from her face.

Lorena attempts to retreat into her house, but is stopped by Sammy, who grasps her arm.

SAMMY
Don't forget our agreement, Lorena.

Lorena loosens her arm from Sammy's grip and enters her house.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
(In English, to Berto)
Looks like it's time to go. Too
much drama here.

BERTO
(Without looking up)
It's like a fucking novela!

Sammy points directly to Rodriguez, points an imaginary gun to his head and 'shoots'. Sammy laughs as he enters his car and speeds away.

OUTSIDE GARAGE

EL JESSE
(In Spanish)
Wh-Wh-What should we do, Rodriguez?

RODRIGUEZ
(In Spanish)
We should practice.

Rodriguez walks into the garage and the rest slowly follow.

EXT. SOUTHSIDE OKLAHOMA CITY. EVENING.

Jasmine and Ines exit the neighborhood market. They each hold a grocery bag as they giggle and walk home.

A white Chrysler 300 with dark tinted windows begins to follow close to the sidewalk as they walk.

The passenger window slithers down and cigarette smoke whirls out as it does so.

INES
(Whispers to Jasmine, In
Spanish)
Walk quicker.

SAMMY
(In Spanish)
Hey, you need a ride, muchachitas
(little girls)?

Ines looks straightforward as she continues walking briskly with Jasmine close behind Ines.

The girls ignore him. Their steps quicken and as they do so, Sammy revs the engine and increases the speed as he maneuvers the car towards the sidewalk.

A police car drives by on the opposite lane slows as it approaches Sammy's car.

Sammy picks up the speed and drives away.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
I'm scared, what if the police ask
us something.

The police car slows and looks from Sammy's car to the girls.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
(In Spanish)
Ines...

INES
(In Spanish)
Just keep walking like everything
is ok.

The police car continues down the street.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 Is he gone?

INES
 (In Spanish)
 Who? The drug dealer or the police?

Jasmine gulps and her pupils dance frantically.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 Who should I be more scared of?

Ines squeezes her hand.

INES
 (In Spanish)
 Come on, let's go home.

EXT. EASTSIDE OKLAHOMA CITY. EVENING.

Jamal walks down the street and his stride begins to slow.

Jamal retrieves the piece of paper that Romeo had handed to him earlier.

The neighborhood looks very similar to the Southside; however, the atmosphere begins to shift. R & B drones out of vehicles and the shouts from a nearby basketball court drown out any mariachi music that might have escaped with Jamal.

Jamal passes some businesses and notices the elders sitting outside and talking to each other across the street.

Jamal passes several individuals and none look at him twice.

EXT. ROMEO'S HOUSE. EVENING.

Jamal arrives to a small brick neighborhood, with average middle-class homes. The television can be heard from within.

Jamal knocks loudly.

DENZEL
 (O.S.)
 I got it.

DENZEL, Romeo's older brother opens the door.

DENZEL (CONT'D)

Yeah?

JAMAL

I'm looking for Romeo.

DENZEL

(His eyes widen)
Who you looking for?

JAMAL

Romeo?

DENZEL

You got the wrong house, man.

Denzel begins to close the door and Jamal holds his hand on the edge of the door.

JAMAL

Marlon?

DENZEL

Oh, ya he's trying out a new name for the girls. Something about a Latino singer. (Yells back into the house) Yo, Marlon man, your boy-

Denzel pauses and questions Jamal.

DENZEL (CONT'D)

I'm Denzel, Romeo's brother. Who are you?

JAMAL

Jamal.

DENZEL

(Steps closer to Jamal as he inspects him)
You the mixed kid? You don't look mixed.

JAMAL

And you don't look like Denzel, man.

DENZEL

(Raises his eyebrows and breaks into a smile)
Don't let my mama hear you; she loves Denzel. Come on in man.

Jamal enters the home after Denzel and Romeo approaches them.

Romeo enters the room with a quizzical look on his face.

JAMAL
 (To Romeo)
 How did you know about Eric?

ROMEO/MARLON
 Hey to you too, Jamal.

Denzel looks back and forth from Romeo to Jamal.

JAMAL
 (To Romeo)
 So how did you know and why did you tell me?

DENZEL
 (To both boys)
 You guys aren't being very friendly towards each other.

JAMAL
 (To Denzel)
 We're not friends.

Denzel looks at Romeo.

Romeo shrugs, unpreoccupied.

ROMEO/MARLON
 (To Denzel)
 He's right; we're not.

The phone rings.

Denzel exits to answer the phone.

JAMAL
 Ok, no bull shiting now- what do you want from me?

ROMEO/MARLON
 Don't come up in here and use that language in my mother's house.
 (He pauses)
 My mother has company over; why don't you call me later?

Jamal listens for the first time and notices that it sounds like a group of people are congregated in the home, speaking animatedly while musical instruments are being tuned up.

LANESHA, Romeo's mother, enters the room in a pair of scrubs and light make-up.

LANESHA

(To Romeo)

Oh, I didn't know you had company,
Marlon.

ROMEO/MARLON

(Sighs)

Mom, it's Romeo-pronounced in
Spanish.

LANESHA

(Extends her hand to
Jamal)

I'm Ms. Jones, Romeo's mother.

Jamal takes her hand.

JAMAL

I'm Jamal.

LANESHA

Jamal...?

JAMAL

Garcia. Jamal Garcia.

LANESHA

Well, nice to meet you.

ROMEO/MARLON

Mama he's on his way out-

JAMAL

(To Lanesha)

Yes, ma'am.

LANESHA

(To Jamal)

My band and I are having practice.
Would you like to stay and listen.
We always appreciate feedback.

ROMEO/MARLON

(Shrugs and whispers to
Jamal)

Stay at least for a little while.
You don't want to hurt her
feelings.

JAMAL

(To Lanesha)

Yes, thank you, ma'am.

LANESHA

Great! I'll set-up some more chairs in the living room and I'll come get you in a few minutes when we're done with sound checks.

Lanesha exits into the living room and closes the door.

JAMAL

(To Romeo)

What does your mom do?

ROMEO/MARLON

She's a RN at the hospital on north 63rd.

JAMAL

Like a real nurse?

ROMEO/MARLON

(Furrows his eyebrows)

Yes, a real nurse with a college degree. What the hell man?

JAMAL

(To Marlon)

Sorry...I didn't mean it like it sounded. You must be (beat) very proud of her.

ROMEO/MARLON

(Ponders for a minute)

Yeah-yeah I am proud of her. She works hard.

They stand in silence for a few seconds.

JAMAL

So what favor do you want from me?

ROMEO/MARLON

I don't like to owe people anything, so I need to give you a favor first.

JAMAL

You already did; you warned me about Eric.

ROMEO/MARLON

No, that was just a heads up, so you could learn to trust me.

JAMAL

So what kind of favor do you want to make me?

ROMEO/MARLON

I've been observing you and I've learned you're a strong, good little guy, but you're having some love problems so I will fix that for you if you do me a favor.

JAMAL

How can you help me with that?

Romeo gives him a cocky smile. Romeo picks up the phone and dials.

ROMEO/MARLON

(On the phone)

Ines, hey, beautiful! How are you? Good, good! Listen, my man Jamal here would love to help Jasmine with her homework

(Jamal's eyes budge)

so she should meet him during study hall in the school library--and you know he is with the band, he'd like to see her there on Friday as well

(Jamal stands in front of Romeo and makes threatening gestures as Romeo ignores him)

Romeo hands Jamal the phone.

ROMEO/MARLON (CONT'D)

She wants to talk to you.

JAMAL

Ines?

ROMEO/MARLON

Jasmine.

Jamal gulps and inhales deeply.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish, on the phone)

Hi-yes-homework, yes-okay I'll see you.

Jamal sighs and hangs up the phone.

ROMEO/MARLON
So you have study time with her?

JAMAL
How do you do that?

ROMEO/MARLON
It's called swag.

JAMAL
I mean, you're so sure of yourself.

ROMEO/MARLON
Yeah, like I said—swag. But don't be confused, I have been a jerk with swag. I'm working on only having swag now.

JAMAL
Ok, so I owe you. What do you want—

Romeo pauses for a few seconds.

ROMEO/MARLON
I want to make a song with the Mexican band.

JAMAL
The band? You mean my neighbors?

Romeo nods.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
Why?

ROMEO
I'm idiosyncratic.

Jamal's eyes widen.

ROMEO (CONT'D)
It means peculiar or individual. (He breaks into a smile). You learn a great deal when you are a second year senior.

JAMAL
Why are you a second year senior? You seem smart.

ROMEO/MARLON
My focus on being a bad-ass didn't help me with my schoolwork.

Denzel re-enters.

DENZEL
You guys ok?

Jamal nods.

JAMAL
(To Denzel)
It seems we've made an agreement.

Romeo beams.

Lanehsa reenters.

LANESHA
(To the boys)
Ready to hear some music?

They boys nod.

INT. ROMEO'S LIVING ROOM. EVENING.

They enter the room which is filled with women in scrubs,
speaking animatedly.

LANESHA
Ok, everyone. You know my boys and
this is their friend, Jamal.
They're going to give us some
feedback on the song and then we
all need to head back to the
hospital.

Lanesha sings as everyone looks on.

INTERCUT OF SERIES OF SHOTS OF LANESHA PERFORMING POP BALLAD
AND SHOTS OF A YOUNG LORENA AND JAMAL

- A) Lorena holds baby Jamal
- B) Jamal and Lorena play trucks on the porch
- C) Lorena and Jamal on Jamal's Pre-K graduation
- D) Lorena and Jamal eating his birthday cake

END OF SERIES OF SHOTS

As Lanesha concludes, they all applaud.

JAMAL

That was great—really great, Ms. Jones.

LANESHA

Why, thank you, Jamal.

ROMEO/MARLON

(To Lanesha)

Pitch was a little off towards the end.

LANESHA

(To Romeo/Marlon)

I will take that into account.

DENZEL

Considering you've been working long shifts at work and studying for your final, you sounded great mom!

LANESHA

Ok, I gotta go back to work.

(To Jamal)

It was great to meet you, Jamal.

JAMAL

Thank you, ma'am. You sing really good. Like really, really good!

Lanesha smiles and then kisses her boys goodbye as she grabs her purse and work tote and heads out the door with the other nurses.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Your mom's still in school?

DENZEL

Yeah, she's working on her Masters—it's what's next after you graduate college.

JAMAL

How does she do it all?

Romeo shrugs.

ROMEO/MARLON

It's a mom thing, I guess.

Jamal simply nods, lost in his reverie.

JAMAL

Thanks, Marlon.

Jamal walks out of the door.

DENZEL

I thought you didn't let nobody
call you Marlon?

ROMEO

The kid isn't a nobody.

EXT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. EARLY EVENING.

Rodriguez taps lightly on the spring door.

Lorena stands to the opposite side of the door, but does not
open it.

LORENA

(In Spanish)

What do you want?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Your son asked me to give you this.

Rodriguez extends out his arm. He holds a neatly folded wad
of dollar bills.

Lorena opens the door and looks over Rodriguez's shoulder out
into the street and into the band's garage.

LORENA

(In Spanish)

Is he over there?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

No, I haven't seen him since-

Rodriguez stops abruptly.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

-since earlier.

Lorena eyes him suspiciously.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

I haven't been involved in drugs
since 1977; he'll be earning this
money.

He places the wad of cash in her hand and walks back towards
his home across the street.

Lorena looks as he strides away quickly and she glances back
at the money and then at Matthew, who is in the playpen.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Jamal enters the house quietly and sees Lorena asleep on the
couch, with the T.V. buzzing in the background.

Jamal sighs and walks over to the television to turn it off.

Jamal quietly approaches Lorena.

JAMAL

(In English)

I'm home.

Lorena opens her eyes.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In English)

I don't want us to fight, ok?
Goodnight, mom.

Jamal leans in to kiss Lorena on her forehead and then exits
to his room.

Lorena sits alone in the dark.

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. MORNING.

HALLWAY

Jamal waits for Jasmine as she exits.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

You need help with homework?

Jasmine nods.

Jamal beams.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In broken Spanish)
 You want to meet me in the library
 after class today?

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 Yes.

INT. LEE HIGHSCHOOL. AFTERNOON.

LIBRARY

Jamal and Jasmine enter the Library. Jamal takes Jasmine's books from her and walks over to an empty table.

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 Is this ok?

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 I like that you ask me what I
 think.

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 I don't understand-

Jasmine places her hand on his and smiles.

JASMINE
 (In English)
 You nice.

Jamal grins.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 You're smart.

Jasmine knits her eyebrows together.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (Points to Jasmine and
 then to his head)
 (In English)
 You are smart.

Jasmine smiles.

Jamal ponders for a minute.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(In broken Spanish)
Intelligent, you're intelligent.

JASMINE
(The color drains from her
face)
Oh.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
What? What did I say?

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
You said I'm intelligent, but I
read your non-verbal signs wrong.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
What did you think I said?

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
(Blushes)
I thought you meant, that, that you
think about me.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
(Looks at her intently)
I do think about you; I think about
you a lot.

Jasmine smiles.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(In broken Spanish)
I wish I knew more Spanish so I
could tell you-

Jasmine takes a step closer in his direction.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
You don't have to; I can figure it
out. You said I'm smart, remember?

Jamal smiles and places down her books as they sit to study.

EXT. SOUTHSIDE OKLAHOMA CITY. AFTERNOON.

Jamal and Jasmine walk towards Jasmine's home as a white Chrysler 300 passes them.

INSIDE CAR

Sammy sits lazily on the passenger side as he holds a bottle of liquor while his friend, Berto, drives him.

BERTO
(In English)
Did you see your nephew?

SAMMY
(In English)
(As he drowns the bottle)
That little shit isn't my nephew.

Sammy sits up.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
(In English)
He was with the new import from old Mexico. Wonder what his mama thinks about that?

They laugh as they continue to drive.

EXT. JASMINE'S HOME. AFTERNOON.

PORCH

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
Are you going to the dance tomorrow?

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
Are you?

Jamal nods.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
I'll be working with the band.

Jasmine's mother, ROSA, exits and takes Jasmine by the arm and drags her inside the house.

DONA ROSA
 (To Jasmine)
 Get inside and go to your room!

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 I'm sorry, it's my fault she's
 late, I was helping her with
 homework-

DONA ROSA
 (In Spanish)
 You're a troublemaker! I saw you at
 the dance and look at you now! All
 covered in bruises. My daughter
 doesn't have permission to talk to
 you! We didn't make the sacrifice
 to be here so she would end up with
 a troublemaker! She's supposed to
 be here for a better life!

The neighbors look out their windows and some exit onto their porches.

Pedro observes from across the street as we walks towards Jamal.

DONA ROSA (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 And you better leave now before my
 husband and son get here from work!

Jamal gulps and looks towards the open window where he can see Jasmine, who is held by her chubby ten-year-old sister, ISABEL.

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 Listen, my mom doesn't think
 Jasmine is good for me either, but
 I think she's a great girl. If you
 would just get to know me-

DONA ROSA
 (In Spanish)
 I don't care what your whore mother
 say about my daughter! I don't want
 to see you or her near my family. I
 said get out and you better not
 come back!

Jamal strides quickly out of the neighborhood with Pedro at his heels.

PEDRO
 (In Spanish)
 Jamal!

Jamal spins to face him.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Fuck off!

Jamal turns the corner of the street and a stricken Pedro sees as he disappears.

INT. LOS RUCOS BANDA GARAGE. AFTERNOON.

Rodriguez is in the garage taking the drum set apart as Jamal enters.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 I'm here. What do you need me to do?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 What happened?

JAMAL
 (Defensive)
 It's none of your damn business, old man.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 Maybe not. You don't have to be here if you don't want to be.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 I'm here, ok.

Rodriguez pulls out a cigarette and sits in the corner to smoke.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 You can start taking apart the drum set so we can pack it into the truck.

Jamal begins brusquely taking apart the drum set as Rodriguez continues smoking.

Jamal, frustrated, has difficulty unscrewing the lid to the bass drum.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

You need help-

JAMAL

(In English)

NO! I don't need your help! You're a nobody! Why the hell would I need your help! Because you are the only person whose ever stood up for me? You had to be the old fucking-drunk who never did anything with his life. If people pity you and hate you for being a nobody what does that make me? The charity of a loser?

Jamal throws the drumsticks against the wall and wipes the tears from his face.

Rodriguez hands him a bandana.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In English)

Don't look at me!

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Because you're crying?

JAMAL

(In English)

Don't you get it? All I have is my pride I come here to breakdown in front of you-

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

You think real men don't break down?

JAMAL

(In English)

(Sarcastically)

I've never met a real man.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

I haven't met too many in my lifetime.

(MORE)

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)
 Plenty of bums, so-called
 delinquents who use fear and
 violence to threaten people—but do
 you think those are real men?

JAMAL
 (In English)
 They're better off than me, that's
 for sure.

EL VATO RODRIQUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 When I think of a good example of a
 good friend, a good son, a good man—
 I think of Jamal Garcia.

Rodriguez sits down to continue his smoke.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 I know what you did to protect
 Pedro, he told Willis. I also know
 what you do for your mom and your
 family. You're a good kid in
 difficult situations. Don't let
 them break you.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 I'm imitation black and a fake
 Mexican—I'm destined to be broken
 to pieces by everyone.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 The guys in the band, Pedro, and
 Jasmine don't want to break you to
 pieces. And neither does your mom.
 Why do you belittle yourself?

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Living up to society's
 expectations. I'm a nobody.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 There's where the problem is, kid.
 You have to live up to your own
 expectations.

They remain silent for a few seconds as Rodriguez looks away
 and finishes his cigarette.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 You still want to stay and help?

Jamal wipes his face.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Yeah, I have to. You already gave
 the money to Lorena, right?

Rodriguez nods.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 Plus, I want to stay. I can't
 believe you didn't bust my face for
 what I just said to you.

He looks pleadingly at Rodriguez.

Rodriguez nods.

Rodriguez goes back to winding the cables to the music mixer.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 Hey, I think-I do need some help.

Rodriguez nods and approaches him with a screwdriver.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 You hold it like this and turn them
 this way.

Rodriguez hands the screwdriver to Jamal.

Jamal removes the side lid.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Why are we even taking it off?
 Can't we transport it altogether?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 Sure, but that way we ensure that
 Willis shows up early to put it
 back together before the gig.

Jamal analyzes the bass drum intently.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 This is a big bass drum; it could
 fit a whole person.

RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 (With his back to Jamal as
 he loads the bass guitar
 into the truck)
 It would have to be a small person;
 a regular person wouldn't fit.

INT. JASMINE'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Jasmine sits doodling in her notebook. She sighs,
 exasperated, and throws the notebook at the door.

There is a light knock at the door.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish, without
 opening the door)
 Go away, Isabel! I don't want to
 talk.

The light knocking continues.

Jasmine stands slowly and opens the door.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 Isa-

Jamal stands there with a wilted tulip in his hand.

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 Hi.

Jasmine quickly pulls him into her room and closes the door.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 How did you get in?

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 Your little sister asked me if I
 was your boyfriend and I said yes
 and she let me inside. The bag of
 candy I brought over helped too.
 (Beat).

(MORE)

JAMAL (CONT'D)

I saw your parents leave to the store and your brother is outside talking to Ines's sister. I don't want to get you in trouble but I had to see you.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I'm so sorry about all those mean things my mom said to you-

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

I feel bad that she doesn't like me- but, do you like me?

Jasmine looks at him tenderly.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

You know I do. But-

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

What?

JASMINE

(In Spanish, whispers)

Don't you care that I don't have papers?

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

You don't care that I'm biracial?

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

How can you ask that?

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

So, what do you think about that- and me.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I think you are insecure about what other people feel you should do and feel, but I understand why. I'm not the 'right' kind of Mexican.

(MORE)

JASMINE (CONT'D)

In Mexico my family and I didn't make enough to be considered lower-middle class and here I don't have papers. It's like I'm a defective copy of who I should be.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

Yeah-I get that. I'm not enough for any group. I'm not even enough in my own eyes.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

You are in mine.

Jasmine caresses Jamal's face.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

Your background is an important part of you, but it is not all that you are. Above all that, you are a kind, generous, and strong person. I don't know if it means anything, because I am a nobody, but I love you.

JAMAL

(In English)

Really?

Jasmine smiles.

JASMINE

(In English)

Really.

Jamal places his hands on Jasmine's shoulders and leans towards her as a loud knock is heard on the door.

ISABEL

(In Spanish, from outside the door)

Paco's coming.

Jamal releases Jasmine and dives through the window.

Jasmine looks out the window as he runs down the street. She looks down at the floor and picks up the wilted tulip and smiles.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. MIDNIGHT.

Lorena enters Jamal's room, visibly exhausted, wearing her work smock.

Lorena sees Jamal asleep and pats his head tenderly.

Lorena exits his room and enters the kitchen.

The land line rings and Lorena remains motionless as it is picked up on the first ring.

Lorena enters her bedroom and sees Tony and Matthew asleep.

Lorena creeps down the hallway outside the door of Jamal's room.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish, on the phone)

...I just wanted to let you know I got home ok, and Jasmine-I love you.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In broken Spanish, to Jasmine)
I gotta go. Bye.

LORENA

(In English)

So you got home ok?

Lorena tears-up and she shakes controllably, attempting to control her anger.

LORENA (CONT'D)

I fucking, fucking hate wetbacks! I hate their pastel dreams of life here, I hate their ignorance, I hate all of them. Break it off!

Lorena stands to exit.

Jamal stands as well.

JAMAL

Why are you like that? You should be ashamed of yourself-you have papers and look at the shitty life we have because of you!

LORENA

What?

JAMAL

Romeo's mom is a single mom and she went to college, she's working on her Master's, and she makes time to sing! You don't have that because of your stupid choices, so don't go hating people because they want to do better for themselves!

O.S. Matthew begins to cry.

LORENA

You don't know anything about my choices!

JAMAL

I know what I see.

LORENA

You-you-

JAMAL

Is that why you hate me? Because I remind you of your wrong choices-like my dad?

LORENA

Shut-up!

JAMAL

You never talk about him!

LORENA

I don't need to! He was a good person-that's all you need to know!

Tony enters.

TONY

Lorena-

Lorena ignores Tony.

Lorena walks out of the room.

Jamal and Tony follow her into the living room.

LIVING ROOM

Jamal grabs Lorena from her arm and whirls her to face him.

JAMAL

I deserve some answers so stop running!

LORENA

Fine! I got pregnant when I was fifteen. Issac, your father was my age and I loved him but then a someone didn't like that we weren't the same 'kind' and killed him.

Jamal releases her arm and takes a step back.

Lorena averts her eyes as she speaks to Jamal.

LORENA (CONT'D)

(To Jamal)

The person that shot him died in prison a few years ago.

Jamal flops down on the living room couch.

Lorena kneels beside him.

LORENA (CONT'D)

I didn't want you to feel bad or wrong from where you come from Jamal, because in this shitty life that I've made the only thing I don't regret is having you for my son and that's why I want better for you than what I had and I won't allow you to throw away your life by being with a wetback. It will only bring you problems with the police and heartbreak because she might not be here much longer with the laws being what they are.

Jamal meets Lorena's eyes.

JAMAL

What if I love her?

LORENA

Then it's going to hurt like hell, but I rather see you hurting than see you dead.

Lorena stands to leave to her room.

LORENA (CONT'D)

If you don't break it off I'll call immigration on her myself.

JAMAL

You can't do that!

LORENA
Don't test me.

Lorena enters her room and slams the door behind her.

Tony puts his arm on Jamal's shoulder put Jamal shrugs it off and goes to his room.

JAMAL'S ROOM

Jamal sits on his bed and weeps.

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

LIBRARY

Pedro sits at an empty table clutching a graphing calculator attempting to reconcile the correct answer to his math homework.

Romeo enters the Library and sits across from Pedro silently awaiting for him to complete his struggle with the calculator.

Pedro looks up, startled at Romeo's presence.

ROMEO
Hey.

PEDRO
Hey.

Romeo leans forward, self-assured, as he continues.

PEDRO (CONT'D)
Can I help you with something?

ROMEO
I just want to talk with you if
your date with that calculator is
over.

Pedro raises his eyebrows in surprise and places the calculator next to his book as he leans back in his chair, following in Romeo's confident demeanor.

Romeo breaks into a smile.

ROMEO (CONT'D)
You trying to recreate my swag, Mr.
Gonzalez?

Pedro does not falter.

PEDRO
Don't need to; I have enough of my
own, Marlon.

ROMEO
I prefer Romeo.

PEDRO
I know you called Ines.

ROMEO
To help our boy Jamal and Jasmine.

PEDRO
Ines is my girl but I don't know if
Jamal is my 'boy'.

Romeo becomes serious.

ROMEO
I heard what happened after
Jasmine's mom ran him off.

PEDRO
For someone who doesn't live on my
side of town, you sure know a lot
of what goes on.

ROMEO
I keep up with tweets.

Pedro nods.

PEDRO
So, what do you want?

ROMEO
Don't give up on J.

PEDRO
Since when do you care so much
about being nice to Jamal?

ROMEO
(Pauses momentarily)
Don't turn away from him, he needs
a good friend like you.

PEDRO
What about you? Aren't you his
friend?

ROMEO

I'm not anyone's friend, but I do
respect the kid.

Romeo stands and turns to walk away as he places a pair of
shades on.

Romeo turns back to Pedro.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

And I know Ines is your girl. That
sucks for me but it is a good thing
for her. See you, Pedro.

INT. DANCE HALL. EVENING.

The reception hall is replete with persons of all ages. The
young men stand unassumingly, leaning against the wall as the
young girls sit and eye them expectantly.

Jamal enters behind the band with the bass guitar and a
handful of cables.

Willis pulls out a cigarette and walks off stage in the
direction of the kitchen.

EL RANCHERO

(In Spanish)

Where does he think he is going?

EL JESSE

(In Spanish)

Well-well where he always goes when
we get here early- to the kit-kit-
kitchen!

Rodriguez sighs.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

(To Rodriguez)

You're going to let him keep doing
this?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

He's responsible for setting up the
drums; he'll do it.

Willis walks out of the kitchen and sits with Pedro's family
as he eats.

JAMAL

(In English)

I can put it together, it will be good practice for me.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

You don't have to do this.

JAMAL

(In English)

It's cool.

Jamal sits down on-stage to put the bass drum back together.

As Jamal commences to work he observes as Jasmine enters. Dona Rosa glares at him coolly and leads Jasmine to a table by Ines's family.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

What a witch.

Jamal continues with his eyes fixed on Jasmine as he works.

JAMAL

(In English, to El Guapo)

I'm sorry, what?

EL RANCHERO

(In Spanish, to Jamal)

We can start off with that song from Los Tigeres Del Norte where the guy tells the parents that he's going to love the girl no matter what, and they can just go to-

EL JESSE

(In Spanish)

No, no-no! He wants to get-get along with the in-laws!

JAMAL

(In English)

Dona Rosa thinks I'm a troublemaker- and I don't know how she feels about me being black, or not a real Mexican or whatever.

EL JESSE

(In Spanish)

So-wha-wa-what? You-you are you!

Jamal shrugs.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 As long as Jasmine likes me.

The band members cheer and pat Jamal on the back.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 I need you guys to help me. I want
 to ask Jasmine to dance with me,
 but I don't think her parents would
 like that and I know for sure
 Lorena won't like it.

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 Her parents will be upset if we
 interfere.

All the band members look at him.

EL JESSE
 (In Spanish, to El
 Rancho)
 Sc-sc-scared of Dona Rosa,
 Tiburcio?

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 Oh, hell no! I'm a romantic and I
 will put my neck out on the line
 for little Jamal here, of course I
 will!

JAMAL GARCIA
 (In English)
 Thanks guys. I really appreciate
 it.

El Willis walks back on-stage.

EL WILLIS
 We're musicians. Lovers, we love
 all the girls.

Pedro and Romeo walk over to the side of the stage.

LOWER STAGE

JAMAL
 (In English, to the Band)
 Give me a minute guys.

Jamal walks over to the bottom portion of the stage.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In English, to Pedro)
 I was a dick the other day. Sorry,
 man.

PEDRO
 (In English)
 Hey, you had just gotten yelled at.
 No hard feelings, pendejo
 (asshole).

JAMAL
 (In English)
 I understand that.

Pedro grins.

PEDRO
 (In English)
 I know.

Romeo looks uninterested.

ROMEO
 (In English)
 If both of you "pendejos"
 (assholes) are finished with all
 your bromance, can we get on to the
 issue at hand?

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Yeah, the favor. Why don't you guys
 come up?

Romeo and Pedro walk up the stairs and meet with the band.

MAIN STAGE

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 Hey guys, this is Romeo, a guy from
 school and all you know Pedro,
 Willis' nephew.

El Willis looks perplexed for a few moments then smiles.

El Jesse approaches both Pedro and Romeo and shakes their
 hands lightly and El Rancho follows behind him greeting
 them with a hearty and violent grip.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 So, Romeo likes the music you guys
 make and he wants to collaborate.

El Guapo raises his eyebrows.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ
 (In English)
 How?

ROMEO
 (In English)
 I understand; you can talk to me in
 Spanish.

RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 How?

ROMEO
 (In English)
 I want to do a remix to one of your
 songs—in English.

The band members all look at each other.

EL RANCHERO
 (In Spanish)
 No one has wanted to collaborate
 with us before...

RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 Sure, if it's ok with all the guys.

All the band members nod in unison.

RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish, to Romeo)
 You can hang out here and come by
 when we practice.

Romeo beams.

ROMEO
 (In Spanish)
 Thanks, man.

A middle-aged man in a cowboy hat approaches the stage and
 points to his watch.

Rodriguez nods.

JAMAL
(In Spanish)
Wait!

Jamal quickly approaches El Guapo, who stands at the microphone. Jamal whispers in El Guapo's ear. El Guapo nods.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(To Pedro)
Hey, could you have Ines bring
Jasmine around to the back stage?

PEDRO
(In English)
Sure.

Pedro exits the stage.

EL GUAPO
(In Spanish, to the
guests)
This goes out to the nice girl that
likes the nice boy.

Jamal surveys the crowd and stares at Jasmine.

Jasmine gasps as she hears El Guapo announce the song. She looks up at the stage and gazes at Jamal.

Dona Rosa pinches Jasmine's arm.

The band begins to play a norteno ballad song.

Pedro approaches the table where Ines, Jasmine, and their families sit. Pedro leans into Ines, whispers in her ear and quickly walks away.

Romeo sits next to Willis and drums on his knees as Willis plays with his eyes closed.

Ines and Jasmine continue to sit.

Jamal watches anxiously as he pretends to switch buttons on the music mixer.

Jamal gestures to Pedro, who shrugs.

A few seconds later, Ines taps Jasmine's shoulder and says something to her. Jasmine nods and stands to follow Ines. The girls begin to walk in the opposite direction of the stage.

The band members look at each other and then at Jamal.

The girls enter the women's restroom.

Jamal continues at the music mixer and waits for the girls to exit, but they don't.

Jamal exits the stage and goes towards the lower backstage. Pedro meets Jamal at the lower backstage.

JAMAL
(In English)
Didn't you tell her?

Pedro shrugs.

PEDRO
(In English)
I'm sorry, man. Maybe she doesn't
want to risk it.

Jamal sighs in defeat.

The dance hall back door opens and Ines and Jasmine wave them over.

Ines and Pedro walk over to the back of the stage and sit.

Jamal walks out into the parking lot.

PARKING LOT OUTSIDE STAGE DOOR

Jamal approaches Jasmine.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
I thought you weren't coming.

Jasmine smiles.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
We went out the bathroom window and
outside to the back door there.

She points to the back door.

They gaze at each other wordlessly for a second.

Jamal extends his hand out to Jasmine.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
You want to dance with me?

Jasmine rushes to embrace Jamal and leans her head on his shoulder. Jamal holds her lightly as they dance to the song. The song ends a few seconds later.

Jasmine and Jamal stand upright and face each other.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I should probably get back before
my mom starts looking for me.

Jamal takes a step towards Jasmine. He cups her face with his hands and gazes into her eyes. He caresses her face and leans in and kisses her lightly. Jasmine responds to the kiss and places her hands gently on the nape of his neck.

Jamal completes the kiss and holds her hand.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

I'm sorry the dance was so short.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

It's okay, the kiss made up for it.

Jamal breaks into a smile.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

I don't want to let you go.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I wish-

Romeo leans out of the door.

ROMEO

(In English)

Hey, lovebirds, time to go. Dona Rosa seems to be getting anxious since Jasmine is still in the 'restroom'.

Jasmine sighs.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

Ok, I'll see you Monday at school?

Jamal nods as he sees her leave. Ines rushes out after her.

Jamal returns to the stage.

El Ranchero pats him on the back brusquely.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Don't be so obvious, I don't want
 Jasmine's mom to connect the dots.

El Ranchero scratches his moustache, perplexed.

Jamal gazes at Jasmine as she returns to her seat.

EL GUAPO
 (In Spanish)
 Here goes a fast song so you all
 can pick up the step!

People begin dancing as Jamal and Jasmine hold each other's gaze.

EXT. DAY. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET.

Ines knocks on Jasmine's door and Jasmine opens it a few minutes later.

INES
 (In Spanish)
 Come on! We're going to be late for
 school!

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 It's ok, go ahead and I'll catch
 up. I think I'm going to change
 again.

Ines rolls her eyes.

INES
 (In Spanish)
 Jamal won't care!

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 I know he won't; but I want him to
 see me at my best.

INES
 (In Spanish)
 You are so Juliet!

Ines hugs her and waves as she walks away hurriedly.

INTERIOR JASMINE'S ROOM

The room is very simple. It has a bed and a small table with a make-shift piece of a mirror.

Jasmine quickly changes her sweater and rummages through a small box under her bed until she locates a small lip gloss tube and applies it liberally.

She nods at her image in the mirror and rushes to compile her books and exits her home quickly.

INTERCUT

JASMINE WALKING/CAR TIRES ROLLING

CU: JASMINE'S FEET RUSHING

INTERCUT TO:

CU: CAR TIRES ROLL QUICKLY

INTERCUT TO:

CU: JASMINE BEGINS RUNNING

INTERCUT TO:

CU: TIRES ROLL UNCONTROLLABLY

END OF INTERCUT

EXT. SAMMY'S CAR. DAY.

The car cuts off the road in front of Jasmine. She drops her books and attempts to run in the opposite direction, but Sammy opens the door of the vehicle and grabs her forcibly by her slender arm.

INTERIOR OF SAMMY'S CAR

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

No! Let me go! People will wonder why I didn't make it to school-

Sammy slaps her in the face repeatedly, bruising her face and making her lip bleed.

SAMMY

(In Spanish)

Shut up!

(MORE)

SAMMY (CONT'D)

You want the police to hear you, you stupid bitch? The first thing they will do is send you somewhere in the middle of Mexico? Do you want that? The fucking Zeta cartel will get you. I can protect you, but you have to be quiet.

Jasmine bites Sammy's arm and he knocks her head into the dash.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

You fucking bitch! Understand pendeja-you don't count! Your kind don't count. This is Sammyland and I'm the fucking king. It's me or the police, baby. So shut the fuck up!

Sammy begins driving off into a dead end street and parks in an empty garage as he holds Jasmine with the base of a gun to her neck.

He climbs on her and she begins to cry loudly.

EXTERIOR OF SAMMY'S CAR

There is a struggle as the camera pans out. Jasmine cries loudly.

DISSOLVE TO BLACK

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. LATE MORNING.

It's early morning and the hallways are empty due to the morning Pep Rally.

Jamal walks as quickly as he can through the hallways and stops at Ines's locker.

JAMAL

(In English)

Hi, Ines.

Ines turns towards him and smiles.

INES

(In English)

Hey, Jamal. What's going on?

Jamal looks around the hallway, preoccupied.

JAMAL
(In English)
Is Jasmine ok? Is she sick?

Ines shakes her head.

INES
(In English)
No, she was running late this morning, but she was on her way. Maybe she's already at the gym for the Pep Rally.

JAMAL
(Sighs)
I didn't see her there. Sorry, would you mind calling her house to check.

Ines nods.

Jamal nods and rushes over to Stan.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(To Stan)
Hey, Stan. Can I borrow your cell really quick so Ines can make a call?

Stan looks at Jamal and Ines, concerned.

STAN
Everything ok?

JAMAL
We just need to check on something real quick.

Stan hands the phone to Ines, who has approached them. She dials and waits.

INES
There's no answer.

Jamal rushes to the door.

STAN
Wait, Jamal! Where are you going?

Pedro rushes in through the door Jamal is about to exit and pushes him back inside.

PEDRO

No! Go back inside! Little Ricky and Eric are fighting outside and they're going to want to drag you into it!

Pedro attempts to hold back Jamal.

STAN

Listen to him, man! Wait to go meet your girl later!

Romeo emerges from the restroom and realizes the commotion.

JAMAL

I'm not a coward!

PEDRO

It's called not being stupid, Jamal!

Jamal breaks through the hold that Pedro and Stan have on him and rushes through the doors.

EXT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL SIDEWALK. EARLY MORNING.

Jamal exits through the doors with Romeo, Stan, Pedro, and Ines at his heels.

Eric and Little Ricky furiously throw fists at each other.

Eric punches Little Ricky and knocks him to the ground. Jamal begins to rush toward the street, but sighs and turns to offer his hand to Little Ricky so that he can get up.

ERIC

That's it, you asshole! Take his side because you're getting Mexican pussy now!

Jamal leaps towards Eric and wrestles him to the ground.

Cousin Miguelito, Stan, and Romeo help Little Ricky stand up.

Jamal pulls Eric up from his collar and drags him over to Little Ricky.

JAMAL

Listen, I don't care anymore what anyone thinks about where I should or shouldn't fit in. I'm black and Mexican-both! It doesn't matter to me and it shouldn't matter to you.

(MORE)

JAMAL (CONT'D)

You fuckers keep this up and I'll
beat the shit out of both of you!

ERIC

I'm not scared-

Stan thrusts a strong punch into Eric's rib cage.

STAN

Know when to keep your mouth shut!

ROMEO

You got anything smart you want to
spit out, Ricky?

LITTLE RICKY

My jefa (mom) taught me when to
keep my mouth shut.

COUSIN MIGUELITO

My mom tells me not to say stupid
shit, so I never say anything.

Miguelito analyzes the group.

MIGUELITO

Are you guys, like, Jamal's posse
or what?

Stan, Pedro, Romeo, and Jamal look at each other.

ROMEO

Who says posse? Boy, learn how to
use a thesaurus!

Miguelito shrugs.

ANDRES rushes out of the building.

ANDRES

Run, pendejos (idiots)! Couch Hall
is coming!

Jamal looks around at everyone.

STAN

(To Jamal)

Go, man!

Romeo grabs Ines and Pedro and rushes around to the side
door.

Miguelito and Little Ricky follow as quickly as they can
behind them.

Stan pushes Eric in the direction of the side door.

Coach Hall emerges from the building, looks around, and shrugs.

EXT. STREET. MORNING.

Jamal sprints through the street as quickly as he can. He arrives at Jasmine's home and pounds furiously on the front door.

EXT. JASMINE'S HOME. MORNING.

FRONT DOOR

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
Jasmine! Jasmine! Are you there?

JASMINE'S ROOM

Jasmine sits in tattered clothing and a bruised face and arms. She sits alone in her bedroom with the lights out. When she hears Jamal she cries harder but does not move.

FRONT DOOR

Willis puts a hand on Jamal's shoulder.

EL WILLIS
(In Spanish)
Come on, kid. You're going to piss off the neighbors and then they're going to call the police. Not good for you or for her family. Come on.

Jamal drops his stance, defeated.

EL WILLIS (CONT'D)
(In Spanish)
Come on.

SERIES OF SHOTS

(A) Jamal places a call and waits a few seconds before he hangs up, visibly disappointed

(B) Jamal walks by Jasmine's house and sits on Pedro's porch at daylight

(c) Jamal enters his classroom. CU at Jasmine's empty chair

(d) Jamal questions Ines about Jasmine, and she sadly shakes her head

(e) Jamal sits outside Pedro's porch at nightfall with no sign of Jasmine

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

Jamal rushes into class and sits in his chair. He looks expectantly towards the door.

Jasmine enters and halts momentarily as she sees Jamal. She lowers her head and makes the way to her seat. Her face is bruised and her lip is busted.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish,
concerned)
Jasmine, I tried to call-

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
Don't talk to me.

Hurt registers on Jamal's features.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish,
whispers)
Did your parents beat you? Was it
because of me?

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
I said I don't want you talking to
me; leave me alone.

She whirls to face the front of the class.

Professor Lopez enter the class.

PROFESSOR LOPEZ
(Animatedly)
Ok, time for a pop-quiz!

Jamal studies Jasmine in puzzlement as she continues to ignore him.

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY. DAY.

The bell rings and the student stampede begins.

Jasmine rushes out of the classroom with Jamal at her heels.

He reaches out to her and holds her wrist gently, yet firmly.

JAMAL

(In English)

You have to talk to me, please. We
can't fix this if we don't talk
about it.

Jasmine glares at him and inches towards his face.

JASMINE

(In English)

I no speak ENGLISH!

Jamal releases her wrist and slaps his forehead with his
right palm.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

Sorry I didn't realize-

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

That's why you shouldn't be with a
wetback!

She rushes off into the girl's restroom and slams the door
shut.

Jamal looks at the door and waits for several minutes.

Jasmine does not emerge. Unsure, Jamal sighs and walks away.

INT. GIRL'S RESTROOM. DAY.

La Chola is leaning toward the mirror as she applies a second
coat of heavy eyeliner.

She sees Jasmine run into a stall through the mirror.

La Chola shrugs.

LA CHOLA

(Out loud, to herself)

Country girl really has to go!

She stops applying the eyeliner when she hears Jasmine whimpering.

LA CHOLA (CONT'D)
 (Out loud, to herself)
 That doesn't sound like bathroom
 issues.

La Chola approaches the bathroom stall and knocks on the door.

LA CHOLA (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 Hey, you dying in there?

Jasmine continues crying but does not respond.

LA CHOLA (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 It's ok to come out; no one is out
 here.

Jasmine hesitantly opens the door.

LA CHOLA (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 Oh, shit!
 (In Spanish)
 Who beat you?

Jasmine cries inconsolably and La Chola helps her to the sink to wash her face.

LA CHOLA (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 Jamal, didn't do this, did he?

Jasmine shakes her head.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 No, he's good. (Beat) I'm so
 scared!

Jasmine leans into La Chola and La Chola pats her shoulder awkwardly.

LA CHOLA
 (In Spanish)
 Listen, I'm not good with the
 feelings thing, but I can help. If
 you don't feel safe me and some
 people can walk you home. (Beat)
 Was it Sammy?

Jasmine covers her face and looks down as she cries loudly.

LA CHOLA (CONT'D)
 (In English, to herself)
 I figured. Fucking bastard! Sorry.
 (In Spanish)
 Did you tell anyone?

Jasmine's eyes bulge as she looks up at La Chola in desperation.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 No, no! Please, please don't tell anyone! He said he'd call immigration on my family and-I would die if Jamal knew! I'm not good for him anymore! Maybe I never was. Really, I'm just a delinquent and I don't count.

LA CHOLA
 (In English)
 Bullshit!
 (In Spanish)
 You count! You count to your family, friends, and especially to Jamal.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 I don't want to talk about him anymore.

La Chola nods sadly.

EXT. RUCOS BANDA GARAGE. EVENING.

Jamal arrives and nods absentmindedly at the guys as he begins collecting cords and wrapping them up quietly.

The band members study him cautiously.

El Willis gets their attention and puts his hand over his heart and shakes his head sadly.

They nod in realization.

RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish, to Jamal)
 This gig is out of town tonight.
 We'll be getting home around 2:00 a.m. Did you tell your mom?

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Yeah, she seemed ok with it.

The band members look at each other with concern and continue to load up the instruments.

INT. DUSK. RUCOS BANDA GARAGE.

RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish, to Jamal)
 Wake up, kid. Time to go home.

Jamal awakens in confusion.

JAMAL
 (In English)
 Are we unloading now?

RODRIGUEZ
 (In Spanish)
 No, it's late. I just put the truck
 in the garage.

Jamal nods and begins his short walk home.

EXT. DUSK. JAMAL'S HOUSE.

Jamal walks towards his house and halts as he sees Sammy's car parked outside his home. Berto and Pete sit in the car. Berto slides the windows down as Jamal attempts to make his way to the front porch.

BERTO
 Well what are you doing out so
 late, Garcia?

JAMAL
 What are you guys doing here?

BERTO
 Hey, man! Just visiting family!

PETE
 (To Berto)
 You don't have to explain Sammy's
 business to him. Roll up the
 windows-we're not here, remember?

Berto shrugs and rolls up the windows.

Jamal reaches the porch as Sammy and Lorena exit.

SAMMY

Well, if it isn't my favorite nephew!

Sammy attempts to pat Jamal on the shoulder and Jamal steps away as he pulls Lorena away from Sammy.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Whoa! No family love, nephew?

LORENA

Jamal-

JAMAL

What are they doing here?

LORENA

He came by to see Tony.

Jamal looks over at the empty driveway.

JAMAL

Tony isn't here.

Lorena glances inside the house nervously.

SAMMY

No, bad timing on my part, nephew. But I saw little Matt and brought him some cool toys.

Lorena fidgets her fingers as Jamal studies her and then Sammy.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Look, nephew. I know we had a little spat, but that happens in families. I want to be here for your mom and you guys in case you need anything.

JAMAL

At two-thirty in the morning?

LORENA

Jamal-

SAMMY

It's ok, Lorena. I broke his trust, I deserve this. But I'm glad he's alert. You shouldn't trust anyone in this world, J.

Sammy raises his palms in sign of peace.

Sammy leans towards Lorena to hug her goodbye and he whispers in her ear.

Lorena nods and Sammy smiles at Jamal as he sprints to his car.

Lorena makes her way into the house and Jamal promptly follows.

LIVING ROOM

JAMAL

What the hell was that all about?

LORENA

What?

JAMAL

I don't understand. You hate the guy and now all of a sudden we're one happy family?

LORENA

You and Sammy are technically family.

JAMAL

Bullshit!

LORENA

J, just-please; I'm exhausted. I don't want to fight. Sammy is going to be here once in a while to visit Tony, that's all. He has a right to see his brother and nephew.

JAMAL

Damn it, Lorena! Do you hate me that much?

Lorena's eyes swim in unshed tears.

LORENA

Besides Matt you are the person I care about the most in this world, J. Please know that I'm telling you this for your own good. I'm so tired of fighting you. Just do as you're told.

Tony enters.

TONY

The club closed early today so the cool bouncers got to go home. You're still awake!

Tony senses the tension.

TONY (CONT'D)

Is everything ok?

Lorena nods feebly.

JAMAL

No! I don't want to see your brother in my mother's house! If you want to see him find somewhere to meet him.

TONY

(Nods in acceptance)

I had already told him not to come by. He-

Jamal alerts him by shaking his head.

Lorena looks to Tony and then to Jamal, but misses the non-verbal signal.

LORENA

(To Tony)

What?

TONY

Just-Jamal and Tony don't get along. I'll see him outside the house, ok? It doesn't bother me and I think it is for the best.

JAMAL

I'm going to bed.

Jamal exits.

Tony looks quizzically at Lorena, but she exits to the bedroom and Tony is left alone, confused.

INT. LEE HIGH SCHOOL. LUNCH.

Pedro, Ines, Romeo, Stan, and Jamal sit together at a lunch table.

INES

(In English)

Something is up. She hasn't talked to me in two days. La Chola and her clique have been walking her to and from her house-

Ines halts as she focuses her eyes on the lunch line.

La Chola and a group of girls are in line with Jasmine. La Chola talks animatedly and all the girls laugh, but Jasmine remains solemn and sad.

Jamal stands.

ROMEO

What are you going to do?

Jamal starts towards the lunch line and approaches Jasmine, who has her back to him.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

Jasmine?

Without turning around, Jasmine responds.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I already told you to leave me alone.

La Chola and the girls become silent.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

Did your parents hit you because of me?

Tears drip from Jasmine's eyes, like a leaky faucet.

Jasmine exits the lunchroom and all the girls follow. Jamal begins to follow, but La Chola stops him.

LA CHOLA

Jamal, this isn't about you right now.

JAMAL

I want to make sure she is ok-

LA CHOLA

We're making sure she's safe. Right now she needs you away so she doesn't get hurt again.

JAMAL

So it was her parents?

La Chola shakes her head sadly.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Who did this to her?

LA CHOLA

It's not my business to tell. What I will tell you is that she thinks you're a good guy, but even good guys can't understand what all a woman goes through.

La Chola walks away and leaves a distraught Jamal.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. EARLY EVENING.

Lorena irons in front of the television as Jamal enters.

JAMAL

(Angrily, to Lorena)
Did you beat Jasmine?

Lorena stands defensively.

LORENA

Don't raise your voice to me or threaten me, Jamal!

JAMAL

You're not answering my question!
Did you?

LORENA

I told you to leave that wetback alone! If she got beat up she must have done something to deserve it.

Jamal exits to his room.

Lorena hears Matthew cry in the playpen and she kneels next to it and picks him up. She attempts to soothe his sobbing.

A few seconds later Jamal returns with a battered gym bag filled with clothing items.

Lorena averts her gaze from him, still upset.

He makes his way into Lorena's bedroom.

LORENA'S BEDROOM

JAMAL

I'm leaving this house! I'm tired
of this life, this house, you and
all your bullshit!

LIVING ROOM

LORENA

J, what the hell are you-

LORENA'S ROOM

Jamal attempts to remove loose floorboards underneath
Lorena's bed where she keeps important documents.

JAMAL

I need my birth certificate and I
know where you keep the paperwork.

LIVING ROOM

LORENA

NO!

Lorena quickly plops Matthew into the playpen and sprints
across the living room into her room.

LORENA'S ROOM

Lorena rushes into the bedroom, but Jamal has removed the
floorboards and discovered tightly bundled packets of a
white, powdery substance.

Jamal's breathing has accelerated and Lorena freezes by the
open door frame and begins to shake violently.

Jamal quickly replaces the floorboard and reaches out to
Lorena.

Jamal leads Lorena to sit on the bed and kneels to see her
eye-level.

Lorena begins to cry.

JAMAL

Lorena-mom. Don't worry; I'll take
care of this.

(MORE)

JAMAL (CONT'D)

I'll tell Tony to leave this house-
you don't even have to talk to him.

Lorena raises her eyes to his in hesitation.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

I would of never thought that Tony
would be involved in something like
this! I know he's lazy and a
cheater, dumb even, but to be
involved in drugs and to involve
you-

Lorena bursts into tears.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Mom, it's ok. I already told you
I'll take care of it.

O.S. Keys enter the front door knob and Jamal rises with
purpose.

LORENA

Don't say anything to Tony-

JAMAL

What? He needs to leave and take
his-

LORENA

It's not his-it's mine.

Jamal sinks to the floor, his mouth open, yet speechless.

Lorena hastily wipes the tears from her face and inhales
deeply.

Tony enters the room.

TONY

Hey.

LORENA

Hey.

Lorena sits on the bed while Jamal sits on the floor in front
of her, his eyes focused on the floor board.

TONY

Everything ok?

LORENA

Jamal and I were just talking.

Tony nods.

TONY

Ok, I'm going to go check on Matt.
I'll be in the living room.

Lorena nods.

Tony exits and Lorena closes the door behind him.

JAMAL

Is it Sammy's?

Lorena does not respond.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Why are you helping him?

Lorena attempts to form words, but she fails. She stands and begins pacing the room frantically.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Tony doesn't know, does he?

Lorena continues pacing and shakes her head.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

WHY-

Lorena rushes to Jamal's side and slips her hand over his mouth. She removes her hand and signals him to be quiet.

LORENA

(Audible whisper)

I-I never wanted you to know.

JAMAL

Mom, what? Mom you can tell me.

Lorena cries as she cups Jamal's face with her hands.

LORENA

My papers are fake.

Jamal's eyes widen.

JAMAL

You-

LORENA

I'm living here illegally.

Jamal gazes at her, speechless.

LORENA (CONT'D)

I dream big dreams—the biggest is that you're proud of me—but I know you aren't. It's because of what I am that I can't give you great things and instead of those dreams you live this life, where at any moment we could be separated forever and you and Matt would have to grow up alone. *I'm* the fucking wetback that could ruin your life!

JAMAL

How? You've lived here so long—

LORENA

I was sixteen with a baby and no help after my parents died in that wreck. I couldn't even pay the funeral costs. My uncle in Mexico came and took the bodies back home, but he said I was a whore and wouldn't help me. I had to take care of you so I dropped out of high school. And money for an attorney—what money, I have no money!

JAMAL

So is that why you're helping Sammy? For money?

Lorena brusquely whips her tears and kneels face to face with him, holding his face.

LORENA

No, mijo (my son). You and Matt need me. I'm doing it so that I won't be deported—

Jamal stands abruptly.

JAMAL

He threatened you?

LORENA

People like me have no rights, no voice. What else can I do? I don't know—tell me, what should I do?

Jamal takes a deep breath and steadies Lorena by holding her shoulders.

JAMAL

How did he get it in here, in the daytime?

Lorena sniffles.

LORENA

In the toys for Matt.

Jamal embraces Lorena.

JAMAL

They aren't taking you away-mom, I promise.

He looks at her directly.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

Mom, I'm going to fix this.

LORENA

Jamal, you can't. Just pretend you don't know anything and keep out of trouble so the police don't come around. I'm tired now.

Jamal nods as Lorena lays down on the bed.

Jamal walks to the door.

LORENA (CONT'D)

J?

Jamal stands with his hand on the doorknob facing the wall.

JAMAL

Yes, mom?

LORENA

I didn't hurt the girl. I could never do something like that to someone, especially someone like me. But I hate her because she is like me and she's in your life. You have enough dealing with one wetback.

Jamal's eyes glisten over.

JAMAL

Goodnight mom.

Jamal exits.

EXT. RUCOS BANDA GARAGE. EVENING.

The band practices as Jamal enters.

EL RANCHERO

(In Spanish)

Well look who it is! We're not
loading up until tomorrow evening,
you're a day early!

EL WILLIS

(In English)

You look out of it, man. Women
troubles?

JAMAL

(In English)

Yeah, trouble with Jasmine and
Lorena.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

It's understandable, no one likes
their mother-in-law.

Jamal looks up at them.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

Do you guys have papers?

There is an immediate audible silence.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Why do you ask?

JAMAL

(In English)

I don't know, I-I've never thought
about it much.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Why are you thinking of it now?

JAMAL

(In English)

People with papers can make those
without them do whatever they
want. It isn't fair!

Rodriguez sits in front of Jamal.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)
How can we help?

JAMAL

(In English)
I don't know. Everything is fucked up. It's really up to me. I'll see you guys tomorrow.

EL JESSE

(In Spanish)
No, wa-wa-wait!

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)
Leave him, Jesse.

EL JESSE

(In Spanish)
Something is re-re-really wrong with him!

The band sees as Rodriguez walks out of the garage over to Jamal's house and knocks on the door.

The door opens about an inch and Rodriguez carries on a lengthy conversation.

EXT. STREET. EVENING.

Jamal walks decidedly down the street.

Sammy's Chrysler 300 approaches and slides to a stop next to him. The passenger side window rolls down and Sammy appears, visibly drunk.

SAMMY

Hey, nephew! How is my favorite little mixed guy doing?

Jamal continues to walk down the street.

JAMAL

I'm going to the police station to turn you in.

The car halts to a stop and Sammy and Berto exit. Berto grabs Jamal in a chokehold as Sammy punches him in the stomach.

SAMMY

You really are a pendejo (dumbass)! I'm clean of any wrongdoing.

(MORE)

SAMMY (CONT'D)

It's in your mother's house, she's already a criminal because she's here illegally!

JAMAL

What about your brother? You don't care he could be involved?

Sammy shrugs.

SAMMY

My brother is a citizen. Plus he isn't involved and that will clear him in a lie detector test.

JAMAL

You abuse people that don't have papers! You asshole!

Sammy punches Jamal in the stomach again. Jamal doubles over in pain. Sammy leans over close to Jamal and whispers.

SAMMY

It's not abuse if they like it, like your little girlfriend.

Jamal looks up in shock and throws himself on Sammy as he wildly swings a punch towards Sammy's jaw.

After Jamal makes impact, Berto steps in and holds down Jamal. Sammy spits out blood and stands in front of Jamal and plants a strong blow to Jamal's face.

Berto holds down Jamal as Sammy pounds on his ribs.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Remember, nephew. You go to the police and both your mother and little girlfriend are gone for good. They're nobodys and the law is on the side of people with papers. Don't forget.

They drive off and leave Jamal bloody and barely conscious on the side of the road.

INT. PEDRO'S HOUSE. MIDNIGHT.

Jamal awakes and tries to sit up but can't. He moans in pain.

PEDRO

Hey, man! Take it easy!

Pedro dials a number and makes muffled call. A few minutes later, Ines and her sister JESSICA arrive.

JESSICA

You really should take him to a doctor. I haven't graduated from nursing school yet.

INES

Come on, just look at him again!

Jessica sits next to Jamal.

JESSICA

Ok, Jamal. Let me see those bruises.

Jessica continues her inspection.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Did they hit you in the head or did you fall on the ground and hit your head?

JAMAL

No and no.

Jessica holds up her hand.

JESSICA

How many fingers am I holding up?

JAMAL

Three.

JESSICA

Who is Pedro?

JAMAL

A pendejo (dumbass).

Jessica nods pensively.

JESSICA

He seems ok to me.

JAMAL

What time is it?

PEDRO

Close to midnight. I called your house and told Tony you were spending the night here.

(MORE)

PEDRO (CONT'D)

He said your mom was working a double shift again and that it was ok with him. He said thanks for calling.

Jamal turns towards Ines.

JAMAL

(To Ines)

Please, I have to see Jasmine.

INES

I haven't talked to her. I'm sorry.

Jamal turns towards Pedro.

JAMAL

Pedro, help me up.

Pedro nods and approaches him.

JESSICA

What are you doing?

PEDRO

Helping my friend.

JESSICA

He shouldn't-

PEDRO

Jamal doesn't really care about what he shouldn't do. I don't agree, but I'm his friend.

Pedro lifts Jamal up and helps him stand.

Ines helps Jamal on the right side.

Jessica sighs.

JESSICA

He'll be ok. Mainly just bruises. Ines, I'm going back home and you should do the same.

INES

(To Pedro while Jamal is leaning on both of them.)

I love that you are such a loyal friend, Pedro.

Pedro smiles and then looks at Jamal who visibly rolls his eyes at him.

PEDRO
Let's get him to Jasmine's window.

EXT. JASMINE'S HOME (BEDROOM WINDOW). MIDNIGHT.

JAMAL
Ok, guys. Please knock on the window and then leave.

PEDRO
But-

JAMAL
Please.

Pedro props Jamal next to the window and knocks softly on window until a light turns on and then he and Ines walk away.

Jasmine peeks through the window and sees Jamal. Alarmed, she slides the curtain open and then unlocks the window.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
Jamal, what happened to you?

She leans out her hand to touch his face but stops before her fingertips reach him.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
(In Spanish)
You need to go.

She begins to pull down the glass window to lock it.

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
I know Sammy hurt you.

Jasmine freezes.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
Who-who said that to you?

JAMAL
(In broken Spanish)
He did.

JASMINE
(In Spanish)
And you believed him?

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 I don't want to.

Jasmine begins to cry softly and covers her face.

Jamal reaches out to her and caresses her cheek.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In broken Spanish)
 I'm so sorry. I'm sorry he hurt
 you. I'm sorry I wasn't there to
 stop him.

JASMINE
 (In Spanish)
 Go away! I'm not good for you
 anymore!

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 Don't you understand I care about
 you? With or without papers. Broken
 or not. You are you, and I love
 you. Please don't push me away.

Jasmine continues to weep.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In broken Spanish)
 You know, I've always questioned
 who I am and where I fit in-but
 always thinking about what those on
 the outside saw, or thought they
 saw. It wasn't until I met you that
 I started looking at me for *me*. You
 saw beyond all my bullshit and
 confusion and all you saw was me-
 the complete me-not the puzzle
 pieces that make me up. I just want
 you to know that is how I see you.
 Beyond all the bullshit of those
 around us, I see you and I love
 you.

Jasmine looks up at him with tears washing her face.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In broken Spanish)
 I'll go now. I don't want to get
 you in trouble. But I'll be back
 tomorrow after the dance to see
 you.

Jamal walks away slowly and Jasmine locks her windows and weeps.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. NOON.

Jamal arrives accompanied by Pedro and walks in slowly.

PEDRO
Ok, see you later.

JAMAL
Ok.

Jamal enters the extremely clean living room. There are no toys anywhere in the living room.

TONY
Jamal, what happened to you?

JAMAL
Where is Lorena?

TONY
She had a double shift yesterday
and she is asleep.

Jamal looks around and takes a deep breath.

JAMAL
Smells like bleach.

TONY
Jamal, please let me help you. Did
Sammy do this?

JAMAL
Why do you ask if you already know?
I'm going to bed, I have to work
tonight.

EXT. EVENING. RUCOS BANDA GARGE.

Jamal walks slowly to the garage and everyone is loading instruments. They stop as Jamal approaches.

EL GUAPO
(In Spanish)
Kid, this is too much! You have to
tell us what is going on and why
you're beat up again!

The band members, with the exception of Rodriguez who is not there, surround him.

JAMAL

(In English)

Sammy did it and he hurt Jasmine and is blackmailing my mom. I was going to tell the police and he beat me.

They all look down and shake their heads.

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish)

He's an evil guy.

Jamal looks around.

JAMAL

Where is Rodriguez?

EL RANCHERO

Seems he had a late night. He's just now getting ready.

Rodriguez enters. He inspects Jamal and sighs.

RODRIGUEZ

Again?

Jamal nods.

Rodriguez forms fists with his hands, takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

RODRIGUEZ (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

We have to get to the event.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

Wait! We have to help him first!

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

All in due time. In the meantime I have someone watching out for your mom and brother. I had it setup yesterday.

JAMAL

(In English)

I don't know what to do to help my mom and Jasmine. All I can think of is telling the police, but that is just another way to hurt them because of their situation.

Jamal sighs.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In English)

Neither my Jasmine or my mom have papers.

The band members react surprised.

EL RANCHERO

(In Spanish)

I knew the little girl didn't, but I figured your mom did. Especially because people say she doesn't like-

Jamal looks at him sadly.

JAMAL

(In English)

Yeah, I thought the same thing.

Rodriguez sighs.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Ok, let's go setup and then we'll come up with something.

They all begin loading quietly.

INT. DANCE HALL. EVENING.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish, to Jamal)

Can you please bring in the drum set? Willis will set it up in a few minutes.

Jamal nods and walks towards the parking lot.

PARKING LOT

Jamal looks in the bed of the truck and realizes it is empty. He looks around the parking lot, but it is solitary.

BACK TO RECEPTION HALL

JAMAL

(In English, to Rodriguez)

The drum set wasn't in the truck.

The band turns to inspect Willis. Willis turns to face them as he is about place a chicken mole loaded tortilla chip in his mouth. Rodriguez nods him over.

Willis places the chip back on his plate and covers it up neatly with a paper towel. Willis walks up to the stage, plate in hand.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish, to Willis)

The drums weren't loaded.

Willis's eyes widen.

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish)

The kid didn't remind me. He's a bad assistant; you should fire him.

Jamal's eyebrows furrow.

JAMAL

(In English, to Willis)

Hey-

Willis smiles and faces him.

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish, to Jamal)

I'm just kidding. I was just making sure you can still understand Spanish.

EL WILLIS (CONT'D)

(In Spanish, to Rodriguez)

Sorry, I forgot. I would say I can go back and get them, but I can't.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish)

Why the hell not?

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish)

I just had three beers and two shots.

EL RANCHERO

(In Spanish)

We JUST got here? When?

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish)

In the kitchen; I was thirsty and-

They all await his response.

El Willis turns towards Rodriguez, pleadingly.

EL WILLIS (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

Tomorrow is the anniversary-

Rodriguez places a hand at Willis' shoulder.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Ten years since you served, we know. But you are home now, with friends. Don't worry, Jamal can go pick it up.

JAMAL

(In English)

Me?

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Sure, you have a driver's license, right?

JAMAL

(In Spanish, to Rodriguez)

Yeah.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Ok, (hands him a set of keys) pick up the bass drum in the garage and then you can go by Jasmine's house.

Jamal smiles and takes off quickly.

EL GUAPO

(In Spanish, to Rodriguez)

You are such a romantic, my friend!

Rodriguez shrugs.

EL VATO RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

The kid deserves some happiness.

El Willis runs after Jamal to the Exit Door.

EXIT DOOR

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish)

You might want to hurry because the
bass drum doesn't have the cover
on.

JAMAL

(In English)

Come on, man! Now I have to rush
everything!

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish)

(Puts his hand on Jamal's
shoulder)

You will learn that nothing is a
hassle when it involves music when
you decide to become a true
musician.

JAMAL

(In English)

So, what am I now?

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish)

You are already a musician. You
just have to believe it.

JAMAL

(In English)

What if (beat) I never believe that
I am?

EL WILLIS

(In Spanish)

You won't appreciate the music,
just sound. It's symbolic. If you
don't become who you are meant to
be then life will just be sound to
you, not music. If you live without
love, life is sound, not music.

JAMAL
(In English)
I'm sound?

EL WILLIS
(In Spanish)
Be music.

Jamal smiles.

(Jamal)
(In English)
(To El Willis)
Some people think that you're
crazy.

Willis nods.

EL WILLIS (CONT'D)
(In Spanish)
My secret is that I don't care what
people think. None of us do. People
think we're losers, but we have
music.

El Willis winks and walks away.

INT. RUCOS BANDA GARAGE. EVENING.

Jamal opens the garage and quickly loads the drum set and the
cover.

JAMAL
(To himself)
Willis can put it together once I
get there. He has music.

JASMINE'S STREET

Jamal drives slowly down the street and notices that Jasmine
is being dragged at gunpoint by Sammy from her home into his
car.

Jamal speeds up and attempts to catch up to Sammy's vehicle,
but does not reach the vehicle in time.

Jamal drowns the gas pedal and speeds after them.

Jamal remains intent on Sammy's vehicle and continues to race
towards Sammy's car.

There is a visible struggle occurring in the vehicle and it
continues to swerve extensively.

They reach the outskirts of the neighborhood and Sammy's vehicle spins out to the side of the road. The vehicle spins off into a tree, striking it on the driver side of the vehicle.

Jamal stomps on the brakes and plunges out of truck. He races to the passenger side of Sammy's car and yanks open the door.

Jasmine's torso leans on the dashboard, her arms grasp onto the dashboard as her torn dress covers her shaking figure. Her slip lays at her ankles and the straps to her dress are snapped as if by force.

Jamal observes her pain silently and then looks away for a second.

Jamal glances over to Sammy, who lies in a puddle on the dash. His face is a concoction of blood and white, chalky powder. The vehicle has a light dusting of the powder on the front seats and steering wheel.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In broken Spanish)
 (To Jasmine)
 Jasmine, honey?

Jasmine whimpers.

Jamal observes her with a crushed soul.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
 (In broken Spanish)
 I'm going to help you; come on and lean on me.

JASMINE
 (Sobbing, In Spanish)
 Please don't look at me! Leave, please.

Police sirens sound off in the distance.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
 (In Spanish)
 You have to go. You'll go to jail for helping someone like me-

JAMAL
 (In broken Spanish)
 I don't care about that. I'll damn myself to hell if I don't help you; I love you. (He leans into the vehicle and lightly places her arms around his neck). Ok, ready?

He attempts to retrieve her from the car and she cries out in pain.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

It hurts; I can't get out.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

You're strong; you can.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I'm not strong like you; I can't take this! They can just send me back to Mexico. I want to be treated like a human being, Jamal, I don't want people hurting me anymore.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

I won't let anyone hurt you; I promise.

Jasmine tilts her head slightly towards him. He nods and she closes her eyes as she gives him a miniscule nod.

Jamal lifts her into his arms and holds her securely, but delicately as she whimpers.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In broken Spanish)

(As they walk)

Jasmine, whatever I do is to protect you, ok?

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

What?

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

Please trust me, please?

Jamal reaches the truck and opens the truck tail gate.

He quickly but gently places Jasmine on the truck bed and runs to the glove compartment to take out some tools he turns on the truck and turns on the radio. Music streams into the rear of the truck.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In broken Spanish)

Jasmine, Jasmine. I need you to stop shaking, ok? Take a deep breath and let it out slow. Listen to the music, ok?

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

What?

He leans in to hug her.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

(Whispers to Jasmine lightly as he embraces her)

I'm going to put you in the bass drum; the police are coming.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

No!

Jamal continues to embrace her.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

You are my happiness, my music. You saved me and now this is going to save you.

With the help of Jamal, Jasmine curls into the bass drum. Jamal takes off his button down shirt, which is covered in powder and blood and places it underneath her head. He quickly places the drum cover on the drum and begins to screw it in place.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

(From inside the drum)

I shouldn't have to hide.

JAMAL

(In broken Spanish)

(Sighs)

No, you shouldn't. But remember; I know you're in there. As long as I'm here you're going to be ok.

He lightly caresses the drum cover.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In broken Spanish)

I'm leaving one screw off so you
can get air, but don't move,
please.

His hand lies loosely on the drum cover and he feels warmth beneath his hand as Jasmine matches her hand to his through the drum cover.

JASMINE

(In Spanish)

I love you, Jamal Garcia.

The sirens approach them and Jamal jumps off the truck bed and quickly closes the tailgate. He goes towards the driver's side of the vehicle as two police vehicles approach.

Jamal notices that the trunk of Sammy's car is replete of packages containing a white, powdery substance.

Neighbors from the nearby neighborhood drive slowly past the accident and point at Sammy's vehicle.

An ambulance arrives at the accident scene and the EMT's rush towards the vehicle.

EMT 1

A young man, early twenties is in
the vehicle. He seems to be
unconscious.

EMT 2 approaches Jamal.

EMT 2

Young man, did you see the
accident?

JAMAL

Yes, sir. I was on the road when it
happened.

EMT 2

You know the young man?

JAMAL

Yes, sir. He's the brother of my
mom's boyfriend.

EMT 1 approaches them.

EMT 1

This is a possible crime scene.

EMT 2

This young man witnessed the accident and knows the person involved.

EMT 1

Ok, the police are going to want to speak to you.

Two other EMT's load the unconscious body of Sammy into the ambulance and quickly speed away.

The police arrive and meet with the EMT's as another set of police officers begin inspecting the vehicle.

POLICE OFFICER 1

(To Police Officer 2)

Call in Narcotics. They put themselves on a platter for us when they use what they sell. Idiots.

(To Jamal)

We'll need you to come down to the station for a statement, son. You want to make a call to your parents? You're a minor, right?

Jamal nods.

JAMAL

Yes, sir. But first I need to call my boss and have someone pick up his truck.

La Chola is in the crowd and waves him over.

LA CHOLA

Jamal! You can come inside and use my phone!

The police officer nods.

INT. LA CHOLA'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Jamal calls Rodriguez's cell first.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Hello?

JAMAL

(In English)

This is Jamal. There was an accident with Sammy-

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Are you ok?

JAMAL

(In English)

Yes, but you have to come pick up your truck and your drum. It's got something of mine that's very valuable, so it might seem a little heavier than you remember.

There is a long pause.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Where are you?

JAMAL

(In English)

On 15th, between Mockingbird and Huckleberry.

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

I'm on my way.

Jamal puts down the phone. Sighs, and picks it up again to place a second call.

TONY

Hello?

JAMAL

I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Tony. But your brother was in an accident.

TONY

Is he dead?

JAMAL

I don't think so.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

I saw it happen and they want me to make a statement. Is Lorena there so she can come with me?

TONY

I'll get the neighbor to watch Matt and I'm on my way to the station.

Ok. JAMAL

J? TONY

Yeah? JAMAL

I'll be there for you. TONY

Ok. JAMAL

Jamal sees from La Chola's window as a vehicle approaches and Rodriguez exits and then enters his truck and drives away.

Jamal sighs.

INT. POLICE STATION. LATE EVENING.

Jamal sits on a bench as Tony enters hurriedly.

Jamal waves him over and Tony approaches him quickly.

Tony sits next to him.

You ok? TONY

Jamal nods and stands.

Ok, let's get this over with. JAMAL

JAMAL (CONT'D)
(To officer)
Sir, I'm ready for my statement.

OFFICER 1
Where is your parent?

Tony steps forward.

I'm his parent. TONY

The officer does a double take.

He's my stepdad. JAMAL

OFFICER 1
Oh, well that makes more sense.

TONY
I'd be very proud to be his real
dad. Jamal is a great man.

OFFICER 1
Sure. Let's get your statement,
son.

Jamal stares at Tony for a few seconds as he sits to give his
statement.

OFFICER 2
State your full name, son.

Tony stands next to Jamal and places his hand on Jamal's
shoulder.

Jamal takes a deep breath.

JAMAL
Jamal. Jamal Eduardo Garcia.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. LATE EVENING.

Jamal enters the house quickly.

TONY
I'm going to get Matt from the
neighbor's.

Jamal nods.

Jamal races to his mother's room and removes the floorboards.
There is nothing there.

Tony stands at the doorway.

TONY (CONT'D)
It's gone. We put most of it in
Sammy's car. The rest is in his
apartment.

Jamal gazes at Tony in disbelief.

JAMAL
We?

TONY
Yeah, Rodriguez and me. He's pretty
strong for such a scrawny old guy.

Tony rubs the back of his head.

TONY (CONT'D)
Trust me, I know firsthand.

JAMAL
How did you? How did he?

TONY
I've been a pretty complacent,
passive asshole, Jamal. I've made
bad choices and this was an
opportunity I had to make the right
one. I owed it to your mom and you.

Tony gulps.

TONY (CONT'D)
I've known you since you were a
little kid and I'm very proud of
the man you've become. You put me
to shame, that's for sure, but I'm
glad that Matt has a man like you
to look up to.

JAMAL
But you're his dad.

TONY
I will be every other weekend.
Lorena put me out.

JAMAL
What?

TONY
I'm not bad, Jamal, but I'm not
good either. You all deserve
better.

Tony stands to leave.

TONY (CONT'D)
Lorena wants me out by the time she
gets home from work. I'll get my
things ready and I'll leave her
some money so she can meet with an
attorney about her paperwork. And,
J, I'm sorry I called you that name
and threw you against the wall. You
hurt me when you said to get away
from my son and I wanted to hurt
you back and I knew you always had
an issue about who you are.

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)

It was a low blow. Please know that I'm sorry and if there is anything that you need in the future, know that you can count on me. (Beat) Ok, enough mushiness. Put the floorboard back and explain to Lorena when she gets home, ok?

Jamal nods as he clutches the floorboard and watches Tony exit.

EXT. RODRIGUEZ'S HOME. EVENING.

Jamal knocks on Rodriguez's door.

Rodriguez opens the door and Jamal hugs him. Rodriguez is surprised at first and then returns the hug.

JAMAL

(In English)

Thank you, you crazy old man!

Rodriguez pulls away and waves Jamal in as he hands Jamal a letter that was on his kitchen table.

Rodriguez looks solemn.

Jamal looks at Rodriguez.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In English)

This is not good, is it?

Rodriguez sits in the chair opposite Jamal as Jamal looks curiously at the letter.

JAMAL (CONT'D)

(In English)

You know I can't read Spanish!

RODRIGUEZ

(In Spanish)

Jasmine and her family left.

Jamal's eyes glaze over.

JAMAL

(In English)

Is she ok?

RODRIGUEZ
(In Spanish)
They want to start over somewhere
else, where they will feel safer.

JAMAL
(In English)
There is no safe place for her.

Rodriguez nods.

RODRIGUEZ
(In Spanish)
She wants you to know how thankful
she is to you and that she will
write you.

Jamal stands with tears in his eyes.

JAMAL
(In English)
I have to go now.

Rodriguez watches Jamal walk back over to his house.

INT. JAMAL'S HOUSE. LATE EVENING.

Jamal enters his room directly and begins to weep.

Lorena rushes in after him.

LORENA
Jamal, what's wrong?

JAMAL
She left. She's gone.

Lorena hugs him as he continues to weep.

JAMAL (CONT'D)
I don't want you to see me cry!

Lorena caresses his face.

LORENA
I'm your mommy. Who else are you
going to cry to?

JAMAL
I'm upset with me for not being
able to help you, to help her!

Lorena gazes into his eyes.

LORENA

But you did! You helped both of us!
You helped her escape and you
helped me be a better person,
Jamal. I'm so proud of you!

JAMAL

Even if what I did was illegal?

LORENA

Because it was illegal and the
right thing to do. You have guts.
I'm proud of you, mijo (my son).

Jamal lays in fetal position and continues to sob as Lorena holds him in her arms.

EXT. HERNANDEZ STORE. DAY.

Lorena, Jamal, and Matt exit the store as they wave goodbye to Ines and Pedro.

EXT. JAMAL'S NEIGHBORHOOD. DAY.

They pass Little Ricky and Miguelito, who wave as they drive their little brother's tiny bicycle around their yard.

They pass the Rucos Banda Garage and see them practice with Romeo who blows kisses to Jessica as he tunes up. Stan sits next to Willis as he imparts some philosophy to Stan. Lorena, Matthew, and Jamal walk hand in hand to the garage to see Jamal practice.

Jamal sits at the drums as Romeo hands him a letter.

ROMEO

I got it out of your mailbox when I
got here.

JAMAL

Federal offense.

ROMEO

Not if it's the right thing to do,
man.

Jamal looks down at the letter on the return address.

"Miss Jasmine Gomez to Mr. Jamal Eduardo Garcia"

FADE TO BLACK.

