

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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Barrio Hollywood

by Elaine Romero

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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In addition the following special billing must also appear:

BARRIO HOLLYWOOD had its professional World Premiere at
New Theatre, Coral Gables, Florida
Rafael de Acha, Artistic Director/Eileen Suarez, Managing Director

And on a separate line, the following:

BARRIO HOLLYWOOD was originally developed at the San Diego Repertory
Theatre through the NEA/TCG Theatre Residency Program
for Playwrights, Sam Woodhouse, Artistic Director.

BARRIO HOLLYWOOD was developed at the Lark Play Development Center,
New York City, John Clinton Eisner, Producing Director

BARRIO HOLLYWOOD had its professional World Premiere at New Theatre, Coral Gables, Florida, Rafael de Acha, Artistic Director; Eileen Suarez, Managing Director, on October 14th, 2004. The creative team included movement director Ricky J. Martinez, set designer Michael McKeever, lighting designer Pedro A. Ramirez, sound designer Ozzie Quintana, production stage manager Joseph M. NeSmith. Eileen Suarez provided photography. The production was directed by Rafael de Acha with the following cast:

GRACIELA MORENO Beatriz Montañez
ALEX MORENO. Euriamis Losada
AMÁ Marta Velasco
MICHAEL John Baldwin

BARRIO HOLLYWOOD was first produced at Borderlands Theater, Tucson, Arizona, Barclay Goldsmith, Producing Director, on March 27th, 2003. The creative team included ballet folklórico coach Karl Rodriguez, boxing coach Vicente Medina, choreographer Eva Tessler, set designer John Longhofer, lighting designer John Dahlstrand, sound designer Jim Klingenfus, costume designer Carmen Gastelum, stage manager John Sweeney, and production stage manager Glenn Stockellburg. The production was directed by Kent Nicholson with the following cast:

GRACIELA MORENO Marissa Garcia
ALEX MORENO. Mario Figueroa Lopez
AMÁ Rosanne Couston
MICHAEL Dana Jepsen
SHADOW BOXER Eduardo Vega

BARRIO HOLLYWOOD was subsequently produced by the Miracle Theatre Group, Portland, Oregon, Olga Sanchez, Artistic Director Miracle MainStage, José Eduardo González, Founder and Executive Director, Dañel Malán, co-founder and Artistic Director Teatro Milagro, September 26th, 2003. The creative team included dance coach Sylvia Malán-González, fight coach, John Armour, set designer Mark Loring, lighting designer Peter West, sound designer Gerardo Calderón, costume designer Virginia Belt, and stage manager Emily Carr. The production was directed by Olga Sanchez with the following cast:

GRACIELA MORENO Ina Strauss
ALEX MORENO. Ricardo Delgado
AMÁ Nurys Herrera
MICHAEL Anders Liljeholm
SHADOW BOXER Tom Eveland

BARRIO HOLLYWOOD was given a staged reading at San Diego Repertory Theatre under the direction of William A. Virchis with dramaturgy by Nakissa Etemad. The cast included Alida Gunn, Sol Castillo, Catalina Maynard, and James Newcomb.

The Spanish-language translation of ***BARRIO HOLLYWOOD*** was developed for PlayFest – The Harriet Lake New Play Festival at Orlando Shakespeare Theater, Orlando, Florida, and presented in both languages under the direction of Ricky Martinez, Patrick Flick, Director of New Play Development, Jim Helsinger, Artistic Director.

CHARACTERS

ALEX MORENO, a twenty-four year-old Latino boxer.

GRACIELA MORENO, Alex's older sister. A twenty-nine year-old ballet folklórico dancer.

AMÁ, their forty-eight year-old mother. Sometimes a little girl who never grew up. Has a difficult time facing things.

MICHAEL, a white man in his early thirties. Beautiful, but he doesn't know it. He is a medical resident.

TIME

1999

PLACE

Kino Bay, Sonora, Mexico and Barrio Hollywood, Tucson, Arizona.

SET

A flexible space upon which the play takes place. Scenes should move fluidly. Realistic set pieces should be kept to a minimum.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Spanish words that are italicized should be pronounced in Spanish.

When Grace's lines are in ALL CAPS, she raises her voice. There is no build to these moments.

For Brad

ACT I

Scene 1

(Cinco de Mayo, May 5th. Lights come up on ALEX MORENO, twenty-four, on one side of the stage in a Mexican boxing ring, indicated by a Mexican flag, and GRACIELA MORENO, twenty-nine, at Kennedy Park prepping for her dance. She wears a white Veracruz-style ballet folklórico dress with red trim.

She lights the candle on her headdress. Alex warms up for his fight with his back to the audience. They start performing simultaneously. Graciela performs the ballet folklórico dance, "La Bruja." Graciela's dance and Alex's fighting are both slow and rhythmic. Their performances continue until Alex takes a blow to the left side of his head. He falls, but slowly gets up. He slugs some more until he gets knocked unconscious. Graciela looks over at him, seeing across the limitations of physical space.

Soft blue light as Graciela holds her unconscious brother in her arms. The candle on her headdress is still lit. A distinct echo of Alex's little boy laugh against pitch black.)

Scene 2

(Later that day. White lights up to an institutional bright. The hospital. The light accentuates a brick/partial lime green wall – la migra green. AMÁ, forty-eight and pretty, lays a silk handkerchief on the table. She whips a small votive candle in blue glass out of her purse. She lights it with a cigarette lighter. She fans herself with the smoke. She takes out a shaker of salt, shakes a handful of salt into her left hand and throws it over her right shoulder. She twirls three times. She claps her hands together. She puts them together in a prayerful position. She looks in both directions. Assured that the coast is clear, she pulls her rosary out of her bra and begins running the beads through her fingers. Whatever her movements are, she is clearly partaking in an idiosyncratic, eccentric ritual.)

AMÁ. I'll say a rosary every day. I'll go to Mass every morning at five o'clock. I'll go to confession twice a week. Make it three. I'll fast every Friday, and not only during Lent. For just this one thing, God.

I don't ask for much. You know, I never do. I'm happy with what you give me. *Muy contenta* with your plan. *Tu camino loco.* *(She laughs.)* We know.

(A disturbing vision undercuts her laughter. Alex appears behind the scrim. The boxing bell rings, not once, not twice, but three times. Each time corresponds to a blow Alex takes to his head. It is as if Amá is stuck in that moment. She grabs her head.)

But that picture in my mind, *en mi mente*. *Mi hijo*. Flat like that. You can change that picture. I know you can. Alex will be fine, and kiss me on the cheek. *(Points to her cheek)* Right here. Right, God?

(Beat) Fifteen years with my husband. And fifteen without him. Years where he just drifted off. We waved goodbye to him from the front porch, me and *mis hijos*, but he did not turn around to say goodbye.

My husband, Ernesto, the only husband I'll ever have.

Oh, I am faithful to him. Like I promised. Even though he is not faithful to me.

Yeah. We gotta a deal, You and me.

(Amá gives God a knowing grin. MICHAEL, an Anglo resident doctor in his early thirties, enters.)

MICHAEL. Mrs. Moreno?

AMÁ. Yes.

MICHAEL. We've been checking on your son.

AMÁ. Yes.

MICHAEL. The doctors are looking him over right now.

(Michael references Alex's chart. He seems inexperienced in his role as physician.)

Currently, his condition is – indeterminable.

AMÁ. I don't know what you mean.

MICHAEL. *(Not sure how to simplify)* Um...

AMÁ. *(Gesturing)* Find a little word. A tiny word.

MICHAEL. I –

AMÁ. I want to know what's happening with my son!

GRACIELA. *(O.S.) (Responding to nurse)* Guadalupe Moreno.
My mother.

(Graciela walks in stunned, white, scared. She wears her dance costume. Michael immediately takes notice.)

MICHAEL. *(To Graciela)* Hello, Miss.

AMÁ. My daughter.

GRACIELA. I – I – I –

MICHAEL. Just take a couple deep breaths.

GRACIELA. I – saw him.

AMÁ. *M'ija*, could you explain what the doctor means? I don't know what he means.

(Graciela grabs Michael's hand.)

GRACIELA. Hallway – bed. Door. They wouldn't let me in.

(Michael gently removes Graciela's hand. She sinks into a chair.)

AMÁ. *M'ija, m'ija, m'ija.*

GRACIELA. He – he – he –

AMÁ. Shhh.

GRACIELA. (*To Amá*) He – can't – talk.

(*Graciela breaks out crying. Michael hands Graciela a Kleenex®. She blows her nose.*)

MICHAEL. There's no evidence of that.

AMÁ. Of course he can talk. He's been talking since he was eighteen months old. You should know, you taught him yourself. (*Imitating her*) Cookie, taco, refrigerator. (*To Michael*) His third word – refrigerator – she taught him that.

GRACIELA. I screamed, "Alex. Alex!" But he doesn't hear. Me. (*Pointing at herself*) Me.

MICHAEL. You need to believe he can hear you. It's very important you believe he can get better. Do you?

GRACIELA. I –

MICHAEL. Do you believe?

GRACIELA. I –

AMÁ. (*Innocently*) I believe.

GRACIELA. He can't say his name.

MICHAEL. It's really early to jump to those kinds of conclusions.

GRACIELA. He didn't answer...today. He didn't say, "Yes, Gracie. I can hear you. I'm still here." (*To Michael; piercing*) Is he still there?

MICHAEL. (*Taken aback; beat*) I – we don't know. (*Quickly*) When the swelling goes down, we'll be in a much better position to answer your questions.

GRACIELA. What swelling?

MICHAEL. In the brain. (*Quickly*) Now, don't worry. Brain swelling happens all the time with athletes.

GRACIELA. (*Overlapping with Michael*) God.

AMÁ. Shh. We're at the hospital.

GRACIELA. (*Pointing*) Your son's dying in there.

MICHAEL. He's not...dying. He's stabilized.

GRACIELA. (*Numb*) You saved him?

MICHAEL. (*Proudly*) I was on the emergency room staff when they flew him in. I guess you can say that.

GRACIELA. (*Rocking; still numb*) I heard it on the radio. They play the radio between sets at the park. They were playing a new song called "*Cheech's chones*" for Cinco de Mayo and everybody was laughing.

AMÁ. (*Singing*) "He don't wear no *chones*. Naa."

MICHAEL. And *chones* are?

AMÁ. *Underwears*.

GRACIELA. And then they made this announcement, about Alex Moreno, the state featherweight champion – how he was illegally boxing in Mexico and he got caught. 'Cause God doesn't let you cheat! (*Calmer*) It was a newsflash. (*Upset*) About my brother. And everything they said, doctor, did not give me the impression – THAT HE WAS OKAY!

MICHAEL. "Okay" would be too strong a word.

GRACIELA. "Okay" would be a lie.

MICHAEL. It would be.

GRACIELA. He got fucked.

MICHAEL. (*Under his breath*) It appears he did.

GRACIELA. (*Finally, the truth*) Thank you.

AMÁ. (*Distracting herself*) Doctor, you don't wear no *chones* neither, do you?

MICHAEL. I – (*Blushing*)

GRACIELA. When will we know?

MICHAEL. About my underwear?

GRACIELA. About Alex.

MICHAEL. I'm not sure. There may be complications.

AMÁ. You have to let me visit. I always can cheer him up. He says, "Amá, you make me laugh sooo hard I cry."

(*Reality seems to be dawning on her.*)

I want to see my little boy.

MICHAEL. *(To Amá)* You can see him as soon as it's safe, Ma'am.

GRACIELA. After the swelling goes down?

MICHAEL. Then.

AMÁ. I'm not leaving here until I see my son. Go, get him Graciela. Wheel him in.

GRACIELA. We can't, Amá.

AMÁ. Why not?

MICHAEL. It's best not to move him.

AMÁ. Bring him in here. Or, I'm going there.

(She gets up.)

MICHAEL. Mrs. Moreno. Your son is in critical condition.

AMÁ. *(To Graciela)* Why can't you do what I say? Wheel him in. *(Demanding like a child)* Why not? Why not?

GRACIELA. They don't know what's wrong with him.

AMÁ. What?

GRACIELA. It could be really bad. That's what they said on the radio. Wheelchair. Crippled. FUCKED UP.

AMÁ. You don't need to yell.

(Graciela grabs Michael by the collar.)

GRACIELA. I want to know what's wrong with my brother and I want to know now.

MICHAEL. We have no information.

GRACIELA. Well, maybe if you got your ass in there and started taking some tests, YOU WOULD.

AMÁ. *M'ija*, don't lose control. *(To Michael)* You don't know what happens when she loses control.

GRACIELA. I GO CRAZY!

(Graciela tightens her grip on Michael's collar.)

MICHAEL. *(Constricted breathing)* Stop.

(Graciela releases his collar.)

AMÁ. She gets a little upset. *(Loud whisper; to Michael)* It's that alcoholism. From her father.

GRACIELA. I'm not an alcoholic!

AMÁ. She's not an alcoholic.

GRACIELA. I'm not an alcoholic. Geez!

(Amá pulls Graciela into herself. Resting Graciela's head on her shoulder, she pats Graciela's head.)

AMÁ. We're gonna get over this. We've been through worse. Like when your father left.

GRACIELA. *(Matter-of-factly)* My father left.

AMÁ. So sad. The kids cried for two years, *¿qué no?* *(Matter-of-factly)* I'd run out of candles on my altar. That's why he left. Oh, he didn't know that was the reason, but that was why.

GRACIELA. So sad.

AMÁ. You got to keep those candles burning or *Nuestra Señora* won't look down.

MICHAEL. I'm sure after we've had a chance to examine him, we'll realize that everything is fine.

GRACIELA. *(Still a bit dazed)* I like that song, do you?

AMÁ. You should hear her sing, *Doctor*. She played *María* in the "Sound of Music" at Catholic school. Well, she was the understudy. And the other *María* got laryngitis. *(Singing with a laryngitis voice)* *Y cantó así.* *(Normal)* And they sent Graciela up. And she sang like an angel. Better than that Anglo girl.

GRACIELA. *Amá.*

AMÁ. You did. And everybody said, "Why didn't they give Graciela that part in the first place?" And the nuns, and I don't ever forget this, because we gave *las mon-jitas mucho dinero*. They said, they just couldn't see a little Mexican girl playing *María*. Her name was *María*. *(Louder)* She was a Mexican girl. *Son pendejas*. And they never taught you nothing, except *que el inglés was mejor que el Español*.

GRACIELA. *(Beat)* We'll sing that song for him. We'll bring him back to the world with something he loves.

AMÁ. Something he loves.

GRACIELA. Boxing. He loves her like a lover, he told me.
He has no woman except her.

AMÁ. He has us. He doesn't need a woman.

GRACIELA. (*Quoting Alex*) "Boxing is in my blood. It's what keeps me alive, little sis."

(*Graciela chokes up.*)

MICHAEL. Everything's going to be fine. Candles or no candles.

(*Graciela looks up at him.*)

GRACIELA. I believe in you.

(*Graciela and Michael's eyes catch. She entrusts herself to him.*)

AMÁ. The candles are very important. The fire catches *La Virgencita's* attention. *Como una estrella.* The light guides her to see into your house – then your heart. That's why I always keep my candles burning. Don't I, *m'ija*?

GRACIELA. Oh she's a nut about it. The house glows like a church.

(*Graciela smiles at the doctor, but Amá seems to be realizing something important.*)

AMÁ. *M'ija*, you stole my candle today.

(*Graciela seems taken aback.*)

Para tu danza. You took *la protección!*

GRACIELA. That's crazy!

AMÁ. You did. (*Beat*) Doctor, I must see my son.

MICHAEL. You can see him through the glass.

GRACIELA. Amá, the Virgin wouldn't punish you like that.

AMÁ. It's an emergency. ¡*Híjole!*

GRACIELA. Amá, don't overreact.

AMÁ. I want to see him in his room. Right now!

MICHAEL. Three minutes.

AMÁ. Five.

MICHAEL. This is not a negotiation. I'm breaking the rules.

(Amá quickly applies her lipstick, upset.)

AMÁ. *Estoy lista.*

MICHAEL. Excuse me.

AMÁ. *(Harried)* I'm ready.

MICHAEL. *Cinco minutos. Nomás.*

(Graciela looks surprised at the Spanish.)

Head nurse taught me that. It's tough to get you guys to leave your family members alone.

GRACIELA. Well, we don't just give up on each other.

(Amá stands up, grabs the doctor by the hand.)

AMÁ. *(To Graciela)* This is your fault.

GRACIELA. They're just candles!

(As Amá drags Michael out the door, he looks back.)

MICHAEL. You just wait right there. Make yourself at home.

GRACIELA. Okay.

(As they leave.)

MICHAEL. The swelling makes it look much worse than it is.

(Graciela drops her head in her hands, wringing her hair. She looks up. Her song is more along the lines of a show tune than a traditional Mexican song.)

GRACIELA. *(Singing)* Everything is fine. Everything is fine. *(Launching into the tune loudly)* EVERYTHING IS FINE *(Softer)* if only I'd believe it. *(Belting it out)* EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING, *(Spoken)* is fine.

(Graciela turns her head in both directions to look for listeners. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Out of time. The stage is black. Amá lights a long match. It burns as a light comes up on her. She lays a blue star-studded cloth on the floor. Wrapped in the cloth are a round box of long wooden matches, a Virgin of Guadalupe religious candle, and a shaker of salt. She lights the candle, fanning herself with the smoke. She shakes a handful of the salt into her left hand and throws it over her right shoulder. She twirls three times. She claps her hands together. She puts them together in a prayerful position. When she looks up from the prayer, Alex and Graciela appear in separate light on both sides of her.)

Each person partakes in his/her own sacred movement, boxing and dancing, respectively. There is something very dance-like about Alex's boxing and something very boxing-like about Graciela's dancing.

A game ensues: the three begin to move into each other's spaces, taking on each other's movement whether it be praying, boxing, or dancing. The frenzy ends when all fall to the ground as in a children's game. Alex's little boy laugh echoes in voice-over, ending abruptly.)

GRACIELA. You vanished. Like breath. I want to feel you again inside my lungs, like the steam of the peppermint tea Amá used to give us when we were sick. Because I am sick. So tired. So much older than me. I look in the mirror and watch myself turn thirty. That's when you finally, after all those years, become a real woman.

Scene 4

(Two months after Cinco de Mayo. Lights up on the Moreno home. Amá and Michael sit at the kitchen table. Alex lies flat on a hospital bed with wheels. An intravenous feeding tube is hooked up to his arm.)

MICHAEL. They have full-time nurses who really know what they're doing.

AMÁ. But will they give him love?

MICHAEL. They read to the patients and everything.

AMÁ. What do they read?

MICHAEL. *(Stumped)* I'm not sure.

AMÁ. I don't want them reading him some *gabacho* story that he doesn't understand.

MICHAEL. I'm sure they'll read him what he likes.

AMÁ. If he can't talk, how will they know what he likes? *(Disgusted)* Nursing homes.

(Michael has no response. Graciela walks in, immediately checks on Alex, adjusting a pillow to make him more comfortable.)

Here's the girl.

MICHAEL. Hi.

GRACIELA. *(Shyly)* Hi.

(This is obviously more than a house call. There seems to be some attraction here.)

Are you sure it's okay – you coming over here to visit?

MICHAEL. Alex isn't my patient anymore. I waited two whole months to even ask you out.

GRACIELA. I'm glad you did.

MICHAEL. You're glad I waited?

GRACIELA. No, called. *(Beat)* I loved that place you took me on Tuesday night.

MICHAEL. Club Congress?

GRACIELA. The girl in the cage. Really wild! I'd never have

the guts to dance half-naked and crazy like that. And she was a homegirl.

MICHAEL. (*Embarrassed*) I didn't know they'd have people doing that there. (*Quickly*) I loved *your* dance performance. Thanks for inviting me.

GRACIELA. Well, when you called to follow up on Alex, I was really touched.

MICHAEL. I liked the way you had your hair up.

GRACIELA. Oh, that wasn't my hair.

MICHAEL. It wasn't? (*Disappointed*) Oh, I thought – (*it was*)

GRACIELA. I used to have hair like that. (*Wanting to please*) I could grow it out again.

MICHAEL. It was really pretty on you, even if it was fake.

GRACIELA. Thanks.

(Michael touches Graciela's hand, intertwines his pinkie with hers. They just stare at each other. They clearly want to kiss. Amá has to split up this mutual admiration party. She clears her throat.)

AMÁ. She changes the IV. She knows how to do it. Those mechanical things confuse me. I've broken everything Alex bought me.

GRACIELA. (*Explaining*) She broke the garbage disposal in three days. On avocado pits.

AMÁ. (*A loud whisper*) I was making *guacamole*.

MICHAEL. (*Suddenly serious; to Graciela*) So, he's been the same since he left the hospital?

GRACIELA. If you want to take a look – (*at him.*)

AMÁ. She's the one to ask. She watches him all day long. She won't even look up at the television.

GRACIELA. (*Embarrassed*) *Amá.*

MICHAEL. It's beautiful. You care.

GRACIELA. Well, I know my brother. Like when he boxed, he could beat the biggest guy in the world as long as there were people cheering for him.

AMÁ. (*To Alex*) Go, Alex!

GRACIELA. (*Back to his question*) His eyes.

MICHAEL. What about the eyes?

GRACIELA. They open and shut. Once in the morning.
When I lift the blinds and the sun gets in his face. And
again after dinner.

MICHAEL. That's great.

GRACIELA. Amá and I have been trying to figure out what
it all means.

AMÁ. I told her – it's a sign from God. When Alex wakes
up, he'll walk over and give me a kiss right here. Won't
you, *m'ijo*?

(*Amá waves at Alex.*)

¡Hola!

GRACIELA. And his toes. I saw him wiggle his toes a few
times. That counts, doesn't it?

MICHAEL. Wonderful.

GRACIELA. I knew these were good signs.

AMÁ. I started lighting *La Virgen's* candles again to make up
for that other time. On *Cinco de Mayo*.

GRACIELA. He gets better every day.

AMÁ. Give *La Virgen* time. *Con tiempo, ella siempre perdona.*
With time, she always forgives.

MICHAEL. I'll have to talk to the neurologist about these
signs, but I find any movement at all very, very en-
couraging.

GRACIELA. Encouraging. (*To Amá*) Did you hear that?

(*Amá points at the casserole dish in the middle of the
table.*)

AMÁ. Have some *enchiladas*. Graciela made them. It's her
specialty. Actually, it's the only thing she knows how
to make.

GRACIELA. (*With a smile*) That's not true.

AMÁ. She uses a little *mole*. You won't taste them like that
out of the freezer section.

MICHAEL. (*To Amá*) You first.

AMÁ. No. I'm just having a little salad.

(Amá reaches for a small bowl of salad, crosses herself, and begins eating.)

MICHAEL. You're not eating Graciela's enchiladas?

GRACIELA. Will you tell her that *woman* cannot live on lettuce alone?

AMÁ. I'm the only woman out of all of my sisters that doesn't have the *diabetes*. And you know why?

MICHAEL. You didn't inherit it.

AMÁ. No, you know really why?

MICHAEL. That's really why.

AMÁ. Because I watch my diet very carefully. What goes in and what goes out.

(Michael laughs.)

GRACIELA. *(Looking at Alex)* When Alex is thirsty, I give him ice cubes. That's the highlight of his day. Sheer oral pleasure.

(Graciela catches herself – she's embarrassed.)

AMÁ. She takes good care of him. I tell her she should go to school to become a nurse.

MICHAEL. Are you going to become a nurse?

GRACIELA. The dance school is my dream. Passing down the dance the way it was done by our ancestors. In little villages all over *México*. And never forgetting that it's all supposed to be fun. I'd forgotten that. But after Alex got hurt, I could hear him talking to me in my head. Like he was dead.

MICHAEL. You mean alive.

GRACIELA. I mean, dead.

AMÁ. The dead talk to us, you know.

GRACIELA. And he told me, "Gracie, you need to have more fun." *(Pained)* Because he loves me. And he wants me to be happy. He used to fill up this place with his laughing.

AMÁ. I think she should become a nurse. It's a good job.

MICHAEL. It's a solid job. You can work wherever you want.

GRACIELA. Like where?

MICHAEL. I don't know – New York, Miami, Michigan –

GRACIELA. Why the hell would I want to go to Michigan?

MICHAEL. I'm from Michigan.

GRACIELA. Oh, I see how this works. You know I just threw out that I'd consider nursing to make her happy and now she won't forget about it.

AMÁ. (*Hurt*) *M'ija*.

GRACIELA. Nurses, doctors, lawyers. *Amá*, we're from the most beat-up street in Barrio Hollywood. We don't have the money to become those kinds of things.

AMÁ. Alex has a little money saved. I'm sure he'd want you to follow your dream.

GRACIELA. (*Firmly*) My dream is to own a dance studio. (*Softens*) I like being a dance teacher. It makes me happy.

(*Graciela walks over to Alex's bed by the window and moves him.*)

MICHAEL. What are you doing with him?

GRACIELA. Giving him a different view.

AMÁ. He likes to watch the neighbors.

MICHAEL. Those *vatos* on their porch across the street smoking pot?

GRACIELA. It's part of his massage.

AMÁ. We give him a massage every night.

(*Graciela walks over to Alex, focuses on him, starts massaging his arms. Amá massages Alex's feet.*)

GRACIELA. It makes him feel more alive.

AMÁ. Because he is alive.

GRACIELA. (*Sarcastically*) That's why he hasn't said a god-damn word in two months.

AMÁ. She gets a little upset.

GRACIELA. (*Getting upset*) I do not get upset.

MICHAEL. Even for a few days, one of those homes might be nice.

AMÁ. Maybe he's right.

GRACIELA. We're not putting him in a home.

AMÁ. Listen to the *doctor*.

GRACIELA. He's a medical student.

MICHAEL. Resident.

AMÁ. It might be best.

GRACIELA. Alex is fine. He's got it made. He gets his massage every night at 6:30. Eats through that thing in his arm. He's just taking a time out. A breath.

(Graciela takes a deep breath in and out. Amá and Michael are transfixed by the breath as if Alex's fate is hanging on it. Graciela lines up a row of religious candles on both sides of Alex, lighting them one by one. There are two levels of window sills, so some of them are on both sides of Alex's head. Michael looks like he wants to ask a question. Amá stops him. It is a spiritual moment that should not be interrupted. Graciela puts her hands together, nods in prayer and returns to the dinner table.)

(To Michael) I'm sorry. I just want him to get well.

MICHAEL. *(Understanding)* I know.

GRACIELA. Maybe you could take a look at him –

AMÁ. After dinner.

GRACIELA. *(Continuing)* I know you're qualified. You saved him and everything.

MICHAEL. *(Not sure if he's been saved)* We did.

GRACIELA. It was the right thing to do.

AMÁ. Do you like the *enchiladas*?

MICHAEL. Yes. Delicious.

AMÁ. Why don't we feed some to Alex? He loves Graciela's *enchiladas*.

(Graciela and Michael look at each other uncomfortably. Alex is not conscious enough to eat. Amá starts to put a fork full of food up to Alex's lips.)

Eat up, *m'ijo*.

(A magical moment as a red light comes up on Alex. Alex opens his mouth, licks the enchilada, smacks his lips, shuts his mouth.)

GRACIELA. He moved!

(Graciela and Michael rush over. Graciela takes over the fork, starts trying to feed Alex the enchilada. Amá hangs onto Alex's feet, trying to wake him up. Alex lets out a huge burp. End of movement. They all try to wake Alex to no avail. He's out again. The red light fades.)

I believe. I believe.

AMÁ. Alex. Alex.

(They all stare at Alex, transfixed by what has just happened. Alex doesn't stir. Lights dim slightly on the tableau for a moment. Then, Michael begins to check Alex's vital signs. Michael slows down. There is no further movement from Alex. Amá seems the most distraught.)

GRACIELA. It's okay, Amá.

MICHAEL. *(Beat)* Do you think we all imagined it? *(Beat)* That really was an amazing amount of movement for –

GRACIELA. For what?

MICHAEL. *(Knows he's saying the wrong thing)* A comatose patient.

GRACIELA. *(Disappointed)* Oh.

AMÁ. Did you see him, *m'ija*? He wanted to eat dinner with us.

GRACIELA. He eats dinner with us every night, *¿verdad*?

AMÁ. The other night I went into his room and he was sleeping on his side. Like a baby. And I touched his forehead right there, and he smiled at me.

(Michael starts to interrupt. Graciela stops him.)

GRACIELA. It's Friday night, Amá. Poker night.

AMÁ. Why don't you two go out? Have another real date.

GRACIELA. No. You go out. Have your poker night.

AMÁ. Really?

GRACIELA. Yes, really. You deserve a break.

AMÁ. Are you sure?

GRACIELA. I'm certain. It's only one night, and we have a real doctor here to take care of Alex.

AMÁ. Well, you know I did very well last week.

GRACIELA. I'm sure you did. Now, go win.

AMÁ. (*Clearly cheered up*) Oh, thank you, *m'ija*. (*Amá looks at the dishes.*) Oh, the dishes.

GRACIELA. I'll get them.

(*Amá smiles and leaves.*)

She sees what she wants to see. Alex on his side. Smiles. Tears. It's all part of the movie in her head.

MICHAEL. Let her have her hope.

GRACIELA. It's senseless hope, isn't it?

MICHAEL. Hey, don't give up.

GRACIELA. Why not?

MICHAEL. Hope matters.

GRACIELA. She sometimes stops being an adult when it gets hard. She makes popcorn and goes into Alex's room and flips on the TV. Boxing. "It'll cheer him up, *m'ija*."

MICHAEL. I've seen things. People recover who were supposed to be dead. Real miracles. When I was in that trauma unit that night, I didn't think we were going to save him.

GRACIELA. But you did.

(*Michael touches Graciela's hand, comforting her.*)

You make me strong.

MICHAEL. You make me strong, too.

GRACIELA. Why do you need to be strong?

MICHAEL. (*Embarrassed*) I don't know. It sounded good?

GRACIELA. You're funny.

MICHAEL. (*Beat*) I can get an appointment to talk to the neurologist next week.

GRACIELA. I'd appreciate that.

MICHAEL. It's gonna be okay.

GRACIELA. Yeah.

(Michael strokes her face. Graciela receives it.)

MICHAEL. You're amazing – the way you love him.

GRACIELA. It's just – normal.

MICHAEL. Maybe to you it is, but not to the rest of the world.

(Graciela smiles at him. Michael strokes her face, moves in and French kisses her. She enjoys it for a second and then pulls away. It is more of an awkward than a romantic moment.)

It's me. I'm hopeless with my tongue.

GRACIELA. It wasn't that.

MICHAEL. I was trying not to use my teeth.

GRACIELA. It's not that either. *(Long beat)* It's just I've never dated anyone like you before.

MICHAEL. What do you mean?

GRACIELA. Well, you're a doctor. Which means you have a job.

MICHAEL. Yeah.

GRACIELA. And you're tall.

MICHAEL. Yeah.

GRACIELA. *(Blurting it out)* And I've never dated an Anglo before.

MICHAEL. *(Disappointed)* Oh.

GRACIELA. It's okay. I've just never done it. It's not like I'm a racist. I'm open-minded.

MICHAEL. Okay, I believe you.

GRACIELA. I feel stupid for even bringing it up.

MICHAEL. No, it's worth bringing up.

GRACIELA. *(Beat)* You're very cute.

MICHAEL. Thanks.

(Graciela crosses to Alex, tucks in his sheet.)

GRACIELA. I'll just put him to bed.

MICHAEL. Graciela.

(Graciela turns.)

GRACIELA. Yeah.

MICHAEL. I like that we're different.

GRACIELA. You do?

MICHAEL. I don't know the rules here. I don't even know how to be polite.

GRACIELA. *(Happy)* Good.

(Graciela wheels Alex off. Michael picks up the plates and puts the leftover food onto one plate. He does the job with great care. Graciela moves back into the room unnoticed. She watches him.)

(Startling him) You do dishes.

MICHAEL. And I cook.

GRACIELA. Mexican food?

MICHAEL. My mother's meat loaf, but I can learn.

GRACIELA. Family secret?

MICHAEL. Betty Crocker.

GRACIELA. Tell me another –

MICHAEL. What?

GRACIELA. Secret.

MICHAEL. About my family?

GRACIELA. About you.

MICHAEL. *(Beat)* When I went to that dance, and you were wearing your dance costume with all the colorful skirts, I thought you were the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

GRACIELA. Naa.

MICHAEL. You were. And when you danced, with your face really serious like that, I thought, I know how to make that woman smile.

GRACIELA. *(Challenging him)* Yeah.

(Michael moves and kisses her tenderly and less aggressively. Graciela smiles. Lights fade.)

Scene 5

(A week later. Lights come up Graciela's front porch. Music blasts from a boom box. Michael and Graciela dance together. Michael stops. He talks to her over the music. Graciela's backpack sits on the porch.)

MICHAEL. I don't know how to do it now that you said I dance funny.

GRACIELA. I didn't mean anything by it. You've just got different...rhythm.

(Michael stops dancing.)

MICHAEL. Now, that's a way to get me to cut loose and dance. Gee, I think I'll just move here and explore my different rhythm, like a catatonic on heavy meds.

(Graciela laughs.)

GRACIELA. It's beautiful...in its own way. Like an irregular heartbeat. I'm behind you, Michael. Behind your aspirations to become a dancer.

MICHAEL. A true teacher at heart.

GRACIELA. Yes.

MICHAEL. So, don't laugh at me anymore. Teachers aren't supposed to laugh.

GRACIELA. *(She gestures)* Okay, no more laughing. Dance teacher's honor.

(They start gazing at each other.)

You're growing on me – like a fungus.

(She laughs.)

(Suddenly serious) You're growing on me. *(Beat)* I'm not very good at all this, having boyfriends and stuff.

MICHAEL. Oh, and I'm some Mr. Smooth Guy. I'll tell you a little secret. All those years in college and medical school – you can call a romantic dry spell. I don't think I even went to coffee with anyone in eight years.

GRACIELA. Yikes.

MICHAEL. So you, my darling, are the expert here.

GRACIELA. Wow, I thought –

MICHAEL. Embarrassing, but true.

GRACIELA. I feel guilty – about Alex.

MICHAEL. Hey, I don't like the way we met either. But the fact we met, that's what matters. And if we didn't meet...

GRACIELA. Yes.

MICHAEL. We wouldn't know each other.

GRACIELA. Yes.

MICHAEL. And that would be tragic because some people you're just supposed to meet. You're supposed to touch their lives and let them touch yours.

GRACIELA. And I'm a person like that?

MICHAEL. You are that.

GRACIELA. That's very sweet.

MICHAEL. Oh, don't call me sweet. That makes me feel like a real loser.

GRACIELA. You are not a loser. You saved my brother.

MICHAEL. (*Ambivalent*) I did.

GRACIELA. So, you're not a loser. We have Alex because of you.

MICHAEL. Yeah.

GRACIELA. What is it?

MICHAEL. You have Alex.

GRACIELA. Because of you.

MICHAEL. Do you really have Alex?

GRACIELA. He's right inside, silly. Hey, I almost forgot. You absolutely must try on the belt. No self-respecting male *folklórico* dancer would dare dance without the proper accoutrements.

(Graciela reaches into her backpack to pull out the belt. She can't find it. She starts rummaging through the backpack.)

Where is the darn thing?

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