Acting Edition

Just Like Us

by Karen Zacarías

Based on the Book by
Helen Thorpe

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JUST LIKE US was first produced by The Denver Center (Kent Thompson, Producting Artistic Director) at The Stage Theatre on October 4, 2013. The performance was directed by Kent Thompson. The assistant director was José Antonio Mercado. The set designer was Kevin Regdon, and the costume designer was Kevin Copenhaver. The lighting designer was Don Darnutzer and the projection designer was Charlie I. Miller. The sound designer was Craig Breitenbach, and the composer was Deborah Wicks La Puma. The movement coach was Laurence Curry and the dramaturg was Douglas Langworthy. The voice and dialect coach was Kathryn G. Maes PhD and the Spanish coach was Gabriella Cavallero. The cast was as follows:

HELEN THORPE . . . . . Mary Bacon
MARISELA/RAÚL GÓMEZ GARCÍA . . . . . Yunuen Pardo
YADIRA/SPANISH TRANSLATOR . . . . . Adriana Gaviria
CLARA . . . . . Cynthia Bastidas
ELISSA/ZULEMA/SANDRA RIVAS . . . . . Ruth Livier
FABIÁN/TOM TANCREDO/ENSEMBLE . . . . . Richard Azurdia
JOSEFA/ALMA/DONNIE'S MOTHER . . . . . Alma Martinez
YOLANDA/CYNTHIA POUNDSTONE . . . . . Gabriella Cavallero
JULIO/RAMIRO/ENSEMBLE . . . . . Fidel Gomez
RECRUITER/MIKE McGARRY/ENSEMBLE . . . . . Steven Cole Hughes
MR. SMITH/JIM SPENCE/ENSEMBLE . . . . . Cajardo Rameer Lindsey
CARLOS/CÉZAR MESQUITA/ENSEMBLE . . . . . Felix Solis
IRENE CHÁVEZ/ANA/ENSEMBLE . . . . . Liza Fernandez
LUKE/BAILIFF/ENSEMBLE . . . . . Casey Predovic

CHARACTERS

PRINCIPALS

HELEN THORPE – Forties. The reporter. Irish American Quaker, very smart, confident, unfussy, woman with a penchant for interesting eyeglasses. Highly-educated career woman married to the Mayor of Denver. Mother of one small child. Much more comfortable as a thoughtful observer than as the center of attention. Prefers being a reporter than First Lady of Denver. Strongly convicted in her principles, she is self-aware about her role, and is consistently fair-minded.

MARISELA – Eighteen to twenty-two. Fully bilingual and bicultural Mexican. Does not have legal papers to be in the country. Emotional, sassy, intelligent, energetic, ambitious, yet sometimes insecure, a bundle of contradictions, attracted to bad boys yet is a great student. She craves excitement, wears a lot of makeup, tight jeans, and loves loud music (Ranchera especially).

YADIRA – Eighteen to twenty-two. Fully bilingual, bicultural Mexican. Does not have legal papers to be in the country. Still waters run deep. Beautiful, reserved, smart young woman who craves stability and security. Marisela's best friend, yet polar opposite in manner and look. Wears skinny jeans and bare-midriff shirts and yet, isn't a party girl at all.

CLARA – Eighteen to twenty-two. Bilingual, bicultural Mexican. In the U.S. legally. Innocent, religious, earnest girl. Good student. Hard worker. Discreet clothes, no makeup, wears a cross every day. The peacemaker and dreamer.

ELISSA – Eighteen to twenty-two. Bilingual and bicultural. In the U.S. legally. The go-getter, team captain of the group. Good student. Hard worker.

FABIÁN – Thirties to forties. Marisela's hard working, sometimes grouchy father. Only Spanish-speaking. A janitor at a supermarket who loves his family and worries about Marisela's wild ways. In the U.S. without legal status.

JOSEFA – Thirties to forties. Marisela's Mexican mother. Spanish-speaking. A devoted mother and hard working cleaning lady who looks after her four kids in the U.S.

YOLANDA – Twenties. Brassy bilingual hairdresser.

JULIO – Twenties, Latino.

SUPPORTING AND ENSEMBLE ROLES

TOM TANCREDO – A second generation Italian-American Congressman born in a working-class neighborhood in Denver who now represents a very affluent neighborhood in Colorado. The leading voice in Congress against illegal immigration. Charismatic, smart, loud, affable, and very single-minded in his fervor against illegal immigration. Can be doubled by **FABIÁN**.

RECRUITER – Named Tom Johnson. Can be doubled by **FABIÁN**.

CARLOS – Yadira's stepfather. Can be doubled by **FABIÁN**.

CÉZAR MESQUITA – Can be doubled by **FABIÁN**.

FEDERICO PEÑA – Can be doubled by **FABIÁN**.

COP – Can be doubled by **FABIÁN**.

RAÚL GOMÉZ GARCÍA – Is doubled by **MARISELA**.

ZULEMA – Yadira's younger sister. Can be doubled by **ELISSA**.

MRS. SMITH – Can be doubled by **JOSEFA**.

CAROL VIZZI – Can be doubled by **JOSEFA**.

LISA MARTÍNEZ – Can be doubled by **JOSEFA** or **YOLANDA**.

ANA – Can be doubled by **YOLANDA**.

CYNTHIA POUNDSTONE – Can be doubled by **YOLANDA**.

LUCY – Can be doubled by **YOLANDA**.

LOCAL BUSINESS LADY – Can be doubled by **YOLANDA**.

RAMIRO – Can be doubled by **JULIO**.

MIKE McGARRY – Can be doubled by **JULIO**.

Licensees can cast according to their cast size. Additional **ENSEMBLE** roles can be assigned from the Supporting and Ensemble characters.

ACT ONE

Scene: Marisela's Bedroom

(Lively Ranchera music.)*

(Projection: Pictures of Denver. Welcome to Denver sign. Images of the airport, the Convention Center, the Theater, the streets, the Rockies, affluent neighborhood, streets, and then the neighborhood where Marisela lives.)*

*(***HELEN** *walks on to the stage. She looks at the audience.)*

HELEN. Tonight is a very special night in the lives of four best friends I recently met.

And it is a special day for me, because I get to be a small part of it.

*(***MARISELA**, **YADIRA**, **CLARA**, *and* **ELISSA** *in fabulous prom dresses enter dancing along to the Ranchera song.)*

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(They stop dancing and start getting ready for prom.)

*(***FABIÁN** *and* **JOSEFA***, Marisela's parents, come in.)*

FABIÁN. ¡Marisela, voy a ir contigo!

MARISELA. ¡Mami, dile a Papi, que no puede venir conmigo!

JOSEFA. ¡Ay, pues no sé qué decir!

FABIÁN. ¡Yo soy tu padre!

MARISELA. ¡Mami, habla con él!

JOSEFA. ¡Fabián!

FABIÁN. ¡Josefa, es que no me gusta!

*(***FABIÁN** *storms off and exits.)*

*(***JOSEFA** *follows him and exits.)*

ELISSA, YADIRA & CLARA. Uy, Marisela.

MARISELA. My Papi says he's coming to prom!

ELISSA. Marisela, nobody goes to prom with a chaperone.

CLARA. He's just worried about the boys.

YADIRA. Clara, he's worried about Fernando.

ELISA. But Fernando is working in Arizona.

MARISELA. It's a secret, but Fernando is driving from Arizona to be here tonight with me at the prom.

ELISSA. Driving a thousand miles in one day?

MARISELA. I haven't seen him in six months.

CLARA. That's so romantic. Like Romeo and Juliet.

YADIRA. Except Romeo's horse is an old truck.

ELISSA. It's crazy. Fernando is too old for you. And your Papi is bound to find out!

HELEN. Elissa: The bossy one. If the four girls had been a sports team, Elissa would be their captain.

MARISELA. Clara, I have to see Fernando. You have to cover for me.

CLARA. Ay, Marisela…no sé…

HELEN. Clara: The sensitive one. Sweet. No makeup. No boyfriend. Parents believe her with good reason.

MARISELA. Besides, it's not cool for a father to go to prom.

YADIRA. Cool is not the best argument for your Papi.

HELEN. Yadira: The poised one: organized, serious, and very private.

MARISELA. Please, guys! You have to help me! Prom is the most important night of our lives!!!

HELEN. Marisela: the dramatic one: Emotional. Loud. A straight-A student who also likes to party.

CLARA. Oye Marisela, your dress still has a price tag – oh my God. That's like a month of work for you.

MARISELA. It's still Ross Dress for Less.

YADIRA. Not less enough for me.

MARISELA. I couldn't help myself. I'm an elegant woman. And this is prom.

ELISSA. And then we get to dress for up for graduation.

YADIRA. Graduation. I can't wait. I just can't stand being around my stepdad anymore.

MARISELA. Ugh. Maybe your Mom will leave him.

YADIRA. No, I think she's stuck.

MARISELA. Don't talk about sad things Yadira. It's making your hair limp.

ELISSA. I thought you got Yolanda to come and do our hair.

*(***MARISELA** *sprays* **YADIRA***'s hair. It's huge.)*

YADIRA. Oh God!

MARISELA. That's great!

ELISSA. Hand me the hairspray.

MARISELA. Do you want me to do your makeup, Clara?

CLARA. You can do my nails.

MARISELA. What? You don't like how I do my makeup?

CLARA. I'm already wearing too much makeup!

MARISELA. It's too simple.

ELISSA. Let Clara be Clara!

*(***YOLANDA***, big hair and colorful clothes, bursts in with makeup and hair stuff.)*

YOLANDA. Hola, nenas!

GIRLS. *(Annoyed.)* YOLANDA!

YOLANDA. ¡Aquí estoy! To make you beautiful for el prom.

CLARA. ¡Gracias a Dios!

YOLANDA. *(To* **MARISELA***.)* I just talked to your Papi. He's a mess.

MARISELA. Mi Papi is worried because he doesn't understand prom.

YOLANDA. He is worried because he understands boys. Who's up first?

ALL. Marisela.

YOLANDA. ¡Órale! You girls are going to look requete chulas!

GIRLS. Gracias.

YOLANDA. Prom! Graduation!

MARISELA. It's all happening so fast.

YOLANDA. *(To* **MARISELA**.*)* So what are you going to do after graduation? Are you going to get another job? Are you and Fernando going to get married?

MARISELA. No. I'm going to college!

YOLANDA. Going to college? Really? Where?

(Pause. A change in the mood.)

MARISELA. I don't know. Nowhere yet. I'm waiting to hear.

YOLANDA. You girls waiting too?

ALL GIRLS. *(Subdued.)* Yes.

YOLANDA. College! Válgame Dios. You girls must be so smart. And so rich! You are going to el college?!!!

MARISELA. Trying…trying…trying.

YOLANDA. Is that why there's a white lady sitting in the corner, taking notes?

*(***ALL** *turn to look at* **HELEN**. **HELEN** *looks up.)*

HELEN. Oh. Hello.

YADIRA. Oh. That's Helen.

CLARA. Helen Thorpe.

MARISELA. She's married to John Hickenlooper, the mayor of Denver!

ELISSA. Helen is the First Lady of Denver!!!

CLARA. I love how fancy that sounds.

HELEN. I feel a little miscast in that role. *(Goes to introduce herself.)* Hello, Yolanda, nice to meet you.

YOLANDA. If you're the mayor's wife then what are you doing here?

HELEN. I'm a reporter.

YOLANDA. Ay no! A reporter!

CLARA. A very respected journalist –

YADIRA. – and she's is writing an article in a magazine.

MARISELA. About us!!!!

YOLANDA. What did you girls do wrong?

GIRLS. NOTHING!

YOLANDA. Valgame! There has to be something! Reporters always want bad news.

HELEN. A fair reporter wants news: good and bad.

YOLANDA. And you, First Lady Helen, you are…fair?

HELEN. I hope so. I strive to be. That's why I am here. That's why I am listening.

MARISELA. You hear that, Yolanda, Helen is listening. To us.

ELISSA. She's on our side.

HELEN. I'm not on any side. I'm here to learn.

YOLANDA. Interesting. So Helen, hablas español?

HELEN. Un poco. Quiero aprender más.

(A cluck of appreciation by all the girls for her Spanish and her interest.)

MARISELA. Nice job, Helen.

HELEN. I hope I will learn more in the process of writing the article.

YOLANDA. Ah *(Beat.)* An article about you? Is that safe?

ELISSA. Of course it's…safe.

YOLANDA. For you, maybe, Elissa. But is it safe for all of you? I don't think so.

(They all look at **HELEN**.*)*

HELEN. I won't use your real names. I'll change the name of your high school. Protecting a source is part of a journalist's ethic.

MARISELA. See? Helen is going to protect us.

YOLANDA. I hope so. Because if the wrong people find you, you and your parents will lose everything.

(A car honks.)

MARISELA. The boys are here!

(The **GIRLS** *scramble to get ready.)*

¡Ay! Hairspray!

(The **GIRLS** *line up and* **YOLANDA** *covers the girls' hair with hairspray.)*

YOLANDA. Wait! We need a photo! Foto.

HELEN. We can use my camera!

(The **FOUR GIRLS** *pose.)*

One, two, three.

GIRLS. ¡Queso!

(A flash.)

(Another car honk. The **GIRLS** *shriek!)*

ELISSA. We gotta go!

YOLANDA. Have fun!

MARISELA. We will!

YOLANDA. But not too much fun!

YADIRA. OK ladies…prom officially begins.

ELISSA. Right…

CLARA. Now.

ALL. ¡Órale!

(As the **GIRLS** *exit.)*

HELEN. Elissa was born a U.S. citizen.

*(***ELISSA** *exits.)*

Clara is a legal resident.

*(***CLARA** *exits.)*

Marisela and Yadira do not have documents.

*(***MARISELA** *and* **YADIRA** *exit.)*

And under current law the two without papers have NO way of becoming citizens. The debate over immigration law is so superficial and so emotional, generally people don't seem to understand the content of the laws they are debating. I want to learn firsthand, what the laws mean and how they affect these young people.

*(***FABIÁN** *and* **JOSEFA** *re-enter the bedroom.)*

FABIÁN. ¡Marisela! Espérenme. No se vayan.

JOSEFA. ¡Diviértanse!

FABIÁN. Yo iba a ir con ella…para protegerla.

YOLANDA. Pues ya se fueron.

JOSEFA. Mi hija.

*(***FABIÁN** *and* **JOSEFA** *look at* **HELEN**.*)*

FABIÁN. Helen.

HELEN. They grow up so fast. *(***HELEN** *makes a sign of growing.)* Muy rápido.

FABIÁN. I want protect her. *(***FABIÁN** *exits.)*

HELEN. Don't worry, Josefa. Prom is a rite of passage… It's change.

JOSEFA. Crecer y cambiar es duro. ¡Díle!

YOLANDA. She says change is hard.

JOSEFA. Marisela tenía siete años cuando cruzamos el desierto. Pensé que nos íbamos a morir de calor, de sed, de miedo. ¡Díle!

YOLANDA. When they crossed the desert, Marisela was just seven years old. Josefa thought they were going to die of heat. Thirst. Fear.

HELEN. I have a little son. I can't imagine how scary it would be to walk my little boy across a desert.

JOSEFA. Yo no hablo inglés. No sé leer ni escribir. Y quiero que Marisela nunca trabaje como yo. Quiero que Marisela sea feliz. ¡Díle!

YOLANDA. Josefa can't read or write. She never wants Marisela to do the kind of work she does. She wants Marisela to be happy.

HELEN. I understand… Comprendo.

JOSEFA. Happy. Con permiso. *(Exits.)*

YOLANDA. Do you understand?

HELEN. Yolanda, I am here. I want to understand the world from these girls' perspective.

YOLANDA. So you want to see the world through the eyes of an illegal Latina girl?

HELEN. Yes. I do.

YOLANDA. You're crazy. But good luck with your "reporting," Mrs. John Hickenlooper. *(Exits.)*

HELEN. I prefer Helen Thorpe. *(To the audience.)* I was born in London to Irish parents, who emigrated again, a year later, to the United States. I'm an immigrant. Like the girls, the only country I know is this one. I had to explain words and customs to my parents: like prom and the word sophomore. But I didn't have to translate. I've never had to hide my identity. I've never been considered "illegal". I am drawn to the four girls because we have something in common and we have nothing in common. I wonder if their legal status is beginning to affect how they see one another. More than that, I wonder if their legal status will affect how I see them.

(A school bell rings.)

And I wonder, is high school for them anything like it was for me?