somebody’s children

a play
by
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“home is where you can say anything you like cause nobody listens to you anyway.”

-anonymous
characters

shannon landers: 17 years old/white
- father (works at a car wash)
- mother (works at a thrift shop)
- 2 sisters

Shannon’s parents have always seemed to struggle; neither graduated high school. They have worked a variety of minimum wage jobs their entire lives. Shannon has two sisters. One is younger and lives with the family. The oldest sister ran away from home and has little contact with the family.

Shannon is the “thinker” of the group. She is determined to succeed. She dreams of becoming the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Her perseverance is evident, but she also has a prideful side; almost too prideful. She sometimes seems ashamed of her family and prefers to paint a picture of her life in a realistic manner.

tariq nelson: 17 years old/african-american
- father (military veteran; unemployed/disabled)
- mother (aid at a convalescent home)
- only child

Tariq’s family was changed forever by the Persian Gulf War of the early 90’s where Tariq’s father served as a soldier. He’s been suffering from post traumatic stress disorder since he returned to the states. For the last ten years, the family has been at odds with the military over his father’s care. The family tries to survive on mom’s salary, but they never seem to have enough money; always, one step behind.

Tariq is angry at the world. The confusion and hurt running through his veins is apparent to everyone. He plays the victim; so much so, that one wonders if that martyrdom will prevent him from one day doing something positive with his life. He is the one kid in the group most vulnerable to the negative forces of the world. He has no idea what he wants to do with his life.
shelley “shell” taylor: -16 years old/white
-mother (unemployed/on welfare)
-2 brothers; 2 sisters

shell is the oldest of five children. her mother is on welfare. shell’s family used to live a comfortable middle-class life. unfortunately, one day shell’s father were in a car accident. shell’s father was badly injured and in a coma. he eventually dies, but his death took a toll on the family in every way imaginable; especially, financially. the family struggled because shell’s mother was a homemaker and never had any “real” job experience and skills.

shell is the mature one of the group. she acts older than any child should have to. it’s a struggle for her to balance school and family life. she rarely complains about her lot in life and she strives to help her mother and family dig out of their dilemma. shell is not only the mother figure to her siblings, but to her friends as well. she dreams of becoming a social worker.

alex & valerie cruz: -18 year old/chicano and 16 years old/chicana
-father (unknown: abandoned the family)
-mother (a maid)
-they are brother and sister

alex and valerie were born in mexico. their parents crossed into the united states with them when they were infants. after years of financial problems and personal differences, their father left the family; supposedly, traveling back to mexico. their mother has struggled to raise them. most of the time, they are alone in the motel; their mother coming home on the weekends from her maid job. they always live in fear of being deported.

valerie epitomizes the image of the “good” latina girl. she is obedient and does what her mother tells her. she is proper and has a gentle demeanor to her being. she is inquisitive and intelligent. she constantly refers to the past to fuel her desires for the future. she dreams of becoming a bilingual education teacher one day.

alex is the mischievous one. he is good-natured and always goes out of his way to cheer people up; hating seeing people sad. he is also somewhat naïve. he is so focused on his dream of becoming a baseball player that he sees no other alternative for the future…and, in actuality, he actually has enough skills to possibly make his dream a reality. he is the ultimate dreamer. unfortunately, he also suffers from a learning disability that has only recently been discovered.
# Points of Interest

**Time:** The play takes place in the present.

**Place:** The play is set in the city of Anaheim, California; not too far from the shadow of Disneyland.

**Setting:** The setting of the play is the El Dorado Motel: a shoddy and decrepit motel that is a remnant of the 60’s. Nothing in this place works and the owners do little to improve the conditions.

A neon vacancy/no vacancy sign can be seen. It is in constant disrepair.

The outside of the motel is littered with some trash, crates and a shopping cart full of bottles/cans and other assorted items.

Disneyland can be seen out in the distance.

**Production Notes:** The play is written in two acts. Act one (day); act two: (night). However, the play can run without intermission if that is desired.

The use of *extended beat* is used as a way to utilize time in the most effective way. It can, literally, be taken as a long beat, but the director has the discretion to be creative with this stage direction.

This play greatly utilizes “slam” poetry (aka- spoken word poetry). It is important that all efforts are made to effectively relate this form of poetry onto the stage.
order of performance

{act one: day}

1. yesterday (dad-daddy-papa-papí)
2. quinceañera
3. theo huxtable
4. (spoken word 1) butterfly
5. aquanet…y que?
6. that honey is looking at me
7. band-aid lady
8. (spoken word 2) my name is…

{act two: night}

1. today (i don’t want to hate)
2. (spoken word 3) if i ruled the world
3. brown boy
4. i saw somebody die and nobody seemed to care
5. 100 degrees in the dark and no ice in sight
6. wonder woman doesn’t have a thing on me
7. (spoken word 4) la luna y el sol
8. tomorrow (when you wish upon a star)
(act one)

yesterday (dad-daddy-papa-papi)

(the stage is dark except for a spotlight focused downstage. SHELL is standing in the spotlight with her eyes closed and is holding a piece of paper. she is listening to the silence.)

shell
you never forget the voice. (beat) “thee”…voice. it’s the voice you only hear in other people’s dreams. it’s the voice that carries with it the pain that poets have been trying to define since the beginning of time. it’s the voice that tells you nothing…will ever ever be the same.

(shell opens her eyes and begins to methodically fold the piece of paper.)

shell
it was the voice that told me my father was dead. (beat) drunk driver driving past his inhibitions as he sped down the santa ana freeway going north carrying with him the pride of that girl’s fake phone number neatly folded in his left pants pocket.

(shell puts the folded paper in her pocket.)

shell
(angrily) this sorry excuse for a man now walks the streets with a slight limp and no conscience while i listen to my little sister cry for the umpteenth time because her cheap plastic shoes keep giving her feet blisters.

(extended beat)

shell
(defeated) this mystery man stole my world and now i spend every waking moment trying to win it back.

(lights go up. we see shell’s friends: ALEX, SHANNON, TARIQ and VALERIE, scattered around the stage. they are all standing in front of the el dorado motel.)

shell
i miss my old house on terra cotta drive. the backyard where we played tag. the room that i didn’t have to share with my brothers. the swimming pool i lounged in for hours as i pretended to be a mermaid. i miss the happy family i used to have. the one you see in all those-

alex
-commercials selling fake smiles-
-and a solitary view of the world.

(a phone suddenly ring a few times. they all react: especially, shell.)

(extended beat)

shell
the second that phone rang my mother forgot how to smile.

shannon
no more pretty little picket fence like all the other pretty little picket fences in the neighborhood.

valerie
no more jones jr. high, books that aren’t high-lighted or torn to shreds and back-to-school specials at office depot.

shell
no more health insurance that didn’t pay what they promised they would pay.

Tariq
no more cable tv...real cable tv that costs twenty bucks a month extra. hbo. mtv. tnt. tbs and espn where-everyone’s life is a highlight film.

alex.

shell
no more pencil lines in vertical succession on the corner wall between the kitchen and the laundry room inspiring me to grow an extra inch in time for janet anderson’s thirteenth birthday party.

alex
no graffiti.

valerie
no taggers.

alex & valerie
no crossed-out names on a wall.

shell
driving away from the only home i’ve ever known and watching it get smaller and smaller through the back window of the chevy suburban we no longer own.
shannon & tariq
a place where the cops come when you call.

shannon & shell
daddy.

tariq
dad.

alex
papa.

valerie
papí

tariq
soldier boy killing babies on command as he dreams of another caramel colored baby. (beat) his baby…back in the states wondering why daddy only talks to the voices in his head…wondering why when pops got home things didn’t change and that sometimes one plus one doesn’t always equal two and that the same pair of eyes that once stared into my crib, now stare into the eyes (pointing to himself) of this baby-turned-teenager overnight. (beat) the woman who gave me birth can’t muster up the courage to tell me that the man living with us still hasn’t come back from the war. (beat) he ain’t never coming back.

shannon
father figure caught in between limbo and minimum wage with the phrase “living from paycheck to paycheck” tattooed in between the wrinkles of his brow. he forces himself to wake up every morning convinced that life is predestined and that the day is always over before it even begins. (beat) mother hops along for the ride never following her own path. never believing that she could play alongside the boys. never believing…that she could believe.

alex & valerie
anybody can make a baby…that doesn’t make you a father.

alex
ese hombre es cobarde! how could he do that? a mexicano is supposed to have pride. he’s supposed to be honorable. he was supposed to put food on the plates and a roof over our heads. he now only exists in this space as rumor and nothing more. (beat) i don’t understand why mama still sheds tears for him? why did he have to leave-

valerie
-us? i don’t understand. no se porque…all we ever did was love him.
valerie
it seemed like only yesterday that my father walked me to my first day of school. (beat)
yesterday, yesterday-

shell
-yesterday i was happy.

alex
yesterday i found out i had dyslexia.

valerie
yesterday i had to explain to my mother what dyslexia means.

shannon
yesterday my parents got laid off again.

tariq
yesterday i had never heard of war or weapons of mass destruction.

shell
yesterday my family used to go to church on sundays.

valerie
yesterday our familia lived in zacatecas, mexico.

shannon
yesterday there were no computers in schools; just typewriters.

tariq
yesterday i was an afro-american.

alex
yesterday i saw disneyland from across the street-

tariq
-and wondered what it would be like to-

shannon
-be normal for just one day and then i realized-

valerie
-that normal is a word you only find in the dictionary-

shell
- and when all is said and done i realized that-
alex
-yesterday, i stopped wanting to go to disneyland. (beat) yesterday was the day before today.

shannon
yesterday was the day i sent my application to harvard.

tariq
yesterday was the day i heard earth, wind and fire sing on the radio for the first time.

valerie
yesterday was the day that was supposed to be the first day of the rest of my life.

shell
yesterday was the day people forgot about-

-valerie
-me.

-tariq
-me.

-shannon
-me.

-alex
-me.

(extended beat)

shell
yesterday…was the day people forgot that we were somebody’s children.
quinceañera

(there is a quinceañera dress on a hanger and covered in clear plastic. valerie is touching it and is softly humming a song. she is wearing her uniform from burger king.)

valerie

(to audience) route 147 on the o.c.t.a. bus line. it’s the place where i do most of my best thinking. anaheim to santa ana, santa ana to anaheim…give or take a few minutes, depending on traffic, this journey is exactly twenty-eight minutes long.

(valerie crosses to a bus seat and sits down.)

valerie

i cherish those twenty-eight minutes…for those twenty-eight minutes

i don’t have to hear the yells, screams and poundings on the wall.
i don’t have to look at the grease spots on my burger king uniform.
i don’t have to see lost boys throwing gang signs up in the air.
i don’t have to bear witness to my life if i don’t want to.

(extended beat)

valerie

the 147 runs weekly from monday to friday. i don’t know why it doesn’t run on the weekends because people’s lives never stop running.

voice (o.s.)

next stop!

(something catches valerie’s eye and she looks into the distance. she sees it and smiles.)

valerie

i couldn’t believe what i was seeing…as my bus was stopped in front of the bowers museum, there was a quinceañera group getting it’s photo taken. i rubbed my eyes to prove to myself it was only a mirage because it was a friday afternoon and no quinceañera ever takes place on a friday afternoon…how strange i thought at the time, but there was no mistaking the image in front of me. the photographer was motioning with his hands; adjusting bodies so that he could take the perfect picture. the boys were dressed in black tuxedos with lavender ties and the girls wore these really cute pink dresses. the birthday girl wore a beautiful white quinceañera dress. everybody seemed to be so happy…like they had no choice in the matter. it made me wonder “what if?” (beat) i was curious to see how the picture would turn out…but, before the camera could click, the bus sped away to its next destination.

(valerie touches the bus window and looks behind her as the bus pulls away.)
(extended beat)

valerie

(sadly) i never had my quinceañera. there was no young man holding my hand at the front of the procession. there was no deejay playing a mix of tejano music and old school. there was no father beaming with pride. fate had found a way to steal from me a moment that every barrio princess should experience. (beat) my familia did the best they could to raise my spirits up. my older brother, alex, gave me a writing journal so that i could create the kind of world you only see in magazine ads selling perfection. my mama gave me a pearl necklace that belonged to her and that once belonged to my abuelita. (beat) one day, hopefully, it will belong to my daughter.

(valerie stands up and crosses downstage.)

valerie

on my fifteenth birthday, me, mama and alex went to the spanish mass at st. anthony claret catholic church. afterwards, we took some coupons and ate lunch at dennys and laughed over a plate of french toast and scrambled eggs as we spoke of the previous night’s episode of sabado gigante…we asked the manager to take a picture of us with a cheap disposable camera.

(extended beat)

valerie

before i went to sleep that night, i noticed the pain in my mama’s eyes as she sipped her café. it was the pain that told me how sorry she was and that this was not the life she had planned for her children. (beat) mama asked me to sit down with her and i did…and, we sat there in silence holding hands.

(extended beat)

valerie

my mama keeps all her pictures in an old wig box. they are the only things left that connect her to mexico and to the man she once called husband. when she’s not around, i look at them for hours at a time. i know every smudge, folded corner and smile. i’ve seem them a million times over and then some; especially, her quinceañera pictures. those black and white photos make me feel both sad and jealous.

(extended beat)

valerie

i’m the first girl in our familia to never experience a quinceañera. i guess that’s what i get for living in a motel…i don’t get the right to celebrate my life.

(extended beat)
valerie

(looking around) no one ever celebrates anything around here. no job promotions. no anniversaries. no birthdays. no quinceañeras…nothing. (beat; frustrated) you can’t celebrate in a motel and that’s because everyday people aren’t supposed to live in motels. motels are meant to be temporary, but the people who live in them shouldn’t be…but, we are.

(extended beat)

valerie

so many nights i went to sleep envisioning that white dress. my quinceañera dress…envisioning the night that i was supposed to become a woman.

(valerie crosses to the dress and begins touching the plastic bag.)

valerie

(to herself) i would’ve looked beautiful that day.

(valerie exits the stage.)
theo huxtable

(the theme song from the cosby show is playing. tariq, wearing a “loud” sweater walks around the stage comically and holding a small glass which contains jello brand chocolate pudding. he does a strange chicken-like dance and then takes a bite of pudding. he begins imitating bill cosby.)

tariq
i would like the world to buy some jello brand chocolate pudding!

(tariq finishes off the pudding as the music fades away into the distance; beat. he begins talking in his normal voice)

i, mr. bill cosby, would like the world to buy some jello brand chocolate pudding
as i help spike lee finance the sequel to malcolm x.
as i take my stand-up routine to convalescent homes across this great nation.
as i buy up majority stock in nickelodeon at night.
as i create a brand new cartoon about a diabetic mexican kid named fat alberto.

(extended beat)

tariq
sitcom reality-reality sitcom coming to a tv station near you
syndicated forever for the purposes
of purposes whose purpose
is to purposely

con us into thinking our lives…can be like theirs.

(extended beat)

tariq
who gives bill cosby the right to make me believe i could be theo huxtable?

only theo huxtable could crash his car into stevie wonder’s limo and be ecstatic about it.
only theo huxtable could be the captain of the wrestling team.
only theo huxtable could have a sister as fine as lisa bonet.
only theo huxtable could get away with being the perfect son.

(extended beat)

tariq
mama says, “you ever seen this show?” i say, “i’ve never seen it.” mama says, “you need to see this show. i loved watching it when i was your age. everybody loved the cosby
tariq (cont’d.)

show. ” i say, “whatever,” but i check it out to get moms off my back.

(tariq mimicks turning on a t.v. set and begins watching; beat.)

tariq

this episode was about theo freaking out because he got an earring. how lame is that!? they spent the entire show talking about a stupid earring and making it sound like it was some big drama. shoot, i wish my dramas were that simple. what a stupid show. screw it. i’m not going to watch it!

(extended beat)

tariq

but, the funny thing is i didn’t stop watching. i couldn’t stop watching…and, i’ve been watching ever since and each time i watch it, i’m ashamed of myself for watching it in the first place.

(extended beat)

tariq

every episode hits me like a slap in the face from some punk’s backhand…sometimes i feel like the incredible hulk right before he goes off on some fool. (beat) you telling me the wife can be a lawyer, the dad a doctor, have five kids and to top it off, they’re supposed to be normal or as close to normal that a family can be in thirty minutes? hell…even white families can’t do that! who took care of the kids? did you ever see a nanny? i know i didn’t…and, what about this mr. rodgers world they live in? it may be a beautiful day in their neighborhood, but in my neighborhood i worry about not stepping on some junkie’s dirty needle while theo worries about how much him and cockroach are going to have to pay to take their prom dates on a helicopter ride.

(extended beat)

tariq

where’s cousin rayray? you know the one…that person in every family who is always in and out of prison, but only refers to it as “going on vacation.” i don’t see claire huxtable making sandwiches with government-issued cheese that never melts, never tastes good and leaves your mouth with the aftertaste of a life once imagined. where is the family that has been ignored by the system and left for dead by the side of the road!?

(extended beat)

tariq

it’s bad enough i see this bull around me every day so why is it that when i turn on that tv set, all i ever see are pimps and ho’s on one side and black folk shuffling and jiving on the other side.
tariq (cont’d.)
i’m tired of seeing my face on every episode of cops.
i’m tired of people thinking i’m a charity case.
i’m tired of knowing my parents will always be stuck in the mud with nowhere to go.
i’m tired of living and dying in this cardboard box i call home.

(extended beat)

tariq
(angry) i know it’s about the positive and that mr. cosby is trying to show a black family doing good. don’t get me wrong. i get it, but this perfect world paints a picture of life that i could never paint myself…i was born with the canvas, but nobody ever bothered to give me the paintbrush. (beat) a sitcom family would never be able to survive in my world so why bother?

(extended beat)

when is bill cosby going to do a tv show about my life, huh?

(tariq throws the glass he’s been holding to the floor.)

(extended beat)

(tariq looks around the motel.)

(tariq)
(quietly defeated) i wanna be theo huxtable so much it hurts.
(spoken word 1) butterfly

shell
i wake up to the sound of my mother passed out on the sofa as i get ready for school.
i pick up the never ending pile of beer cans that block my view of the stars.
i feel the smog caress me in a way that makes my skin feel dirty.
i walk down the street wondering if there is a god.

(extended beat)

shell
i see a butterfly flapping its wings from halfway around the world. it’s on a journey to redemption

as it attempts to escape the concrete cocoon that surrounds its delicate form.
as it attempts to discover the garden of eden and nirvana at the same time.
as it attempts to rewrite history in order to forget its legacy of pain.
as it attempts to set off a chain reaction that will change the course of things to come.

(extended beat)

shell
how could things have changed so quickly? one second, everything seems to be the way things are supposed to seem. there was a certain order and a certain set of rules. the flight was on schedule with no delays in sight. a preceeded b preceeded c…there was the savings account, college account, vacation account; even a “rainy day” account…then, one day it began to rain. (beat) and, it hasn’t stopped raining since.

(extended beat)

shell
mom no longer wants to play the game. to her, the notion of hope is a four-letter word. that 1st of the month wealthfare check is the lifeblood that runs through her veins. her five tiny chicks cry in their nest waiting to be nurtured and fed…it feels like i lost both my parents on that late september night

when the tires screeched in falsetto.
when the steel hit the steel at light speed.
when the air bags filled up with ruined expectations.
when the jaws of life meant anything but.

(extended beat)

shell
i am butterfly. butterfly is i. (beat; looking out) motel girl witnesses motel butterfly trying to make connections.
shell (con’td.)

connecting us to each other
connecting us to mother earth
connecting us to the theory
that nobody stands alone
and that no man or woman
is an island unto themselves.

little butterfly holding in its wings
all the power the world has to offer
showing us that life

is as fragile as the snowflake on the tip of a young child’s tongue.
is as fragile as the crystal clown figurine in that upscale boutique.
is as fragile as the memory of a first kiss.
is as fragile as the petals on a winter rose.

(extended beat)

shell

(looking out) i see the butterfly floating over japan
selling uncle sam to geisha girls and corporate execs
in and out of neon fantasies
convincing them that technology
is a suitable substitute
for conversation
for hugs
for tears of joy
for the important things in life.

letters written with love and time well spent
replaced by the new confusing language
of text-message messiahs
proclaiming a brave new world
in the name of progress
hallucinations of growing closer
drifting apart the reality
fingers poking away on blackberries
seeking a genie in a bottle
helping hands
turn into fists
the world sticking its middle finger in our faces
reminding us that
we have no say in the matter.

(extended beat)
and...the one who suffers the most is that poor butterfly who now finds itself in a land where war is everyday life. Words get linked together to create ill-fitting sentences whether they want to or not. Headlines printed in blood red ink flowing from the lifeless bodies of boys not yet men, girls not yet women.

What does this mean asks the butterfly whose white wings have been soaked with the oil of profit weighing it down down down to the point that it makes dodging bullets nearly impossible.

Butterfly vanishes in the air.

(extended beat)

tired from its journey the butterfly flies over europe quickly as to not get caught in a no-fly zone...besides, europe is for tourists and this butterfly is looking to own, not rent. Butterfly puts an ad in craig's list looking for a home in a safe neighborhood with good schools and perfect weather...sorry, butterfly no room for you in this joint. you can't buy what isn't there.

(extended beat)

butterfly making a u-turn; defying all reason.

(extended beat)

butterfly had too much fun partying with the monarch butterflies of mexico; its cousins, twice removed, too much good food. too much good tequila...was convinced it could make it across the border in broad daylight. it should've known better...even butterflies are illegal nowadays. (beat) butterfly manages to fly away on a warm santa ana wind.
(extended beat)

shell
butterfly close enough i can practically feel its touch…butterfly disoriented. butterfly lost in the glow of disney fireworks. its silhouette now a rainbow colored shadow of youthful nonsense…somehow, butterfly survives the magical kingdom.

(shell mimics a butterfly landing on her finger. she asks it a question.)

shell
i ask the butterfly why it has come back…it has no idea how to answer this question. (beat) i ask the butterfly to fly away with me to a far off tropical island so we can watch the sunset together, but it wants to stay here with me. butterfly chained to the anchor that is its life. (beat) i tell butterfly to leave this place.

a place where stories get evicted for not being able to pay the rent.
a place where love can be rented by the hour.
a place where bad things happen to good people on a daily basis.
a place…where butterflies come to die.

(extended beat)

shell
(quietly) butterfly…
its silk wings touching moonbeams
writing songs
making babies
following comets
singing the blues
comforting lost souls
holding its children in its embrace
questioning authority
destroying its cage
yearning to fly.

(shell gently blows the butterfly away.)

shell
every butterfly deserves a chance to spread its wings.

(extended beat)

(shell points out into the distance.)

shell
i see a butterfly flapping its wings from halfway across the world.
aquanet...y que?

(in the darkness, the sounds of hairspray spraying can be heard. however, there’s a different quality to it. it’s the quality that says this spray is being sprayed with attitude. after a few minutes, lights up; shannon, shell and valerie are onstage; shannon is stage right, shell is stage left and valerie is center stage. they are all obnoxiously and meticulously spraying their hair with aquanet hairspray in front of a mirror. shannon and shell are using the red regular-strength can while valerie is using the white extra-strength can. this ritual lasts for what seems eternity.)

valerie

(joking) hey, chica...take it easy with that stuff. you’re going to waste the whole thing. it cost me $3.99 at walmart.

(shannon and shell stop; look at each other, then at valerie; beat. they giggle as they renews their hairspraying ritual.)

valerie

who needs to eat when all you really need is aquanet?

shannon & shell

very true.

valerie

it’s god’s gift for those mujeres who know what’s up and what’s happening.

shannon

definitely.

shell

without a doubt.

valerie

i can’t imagine living in a world without aquanet. the thought is almost criminal.

shannon & shell

death penalty criminal!

valerie

do you know my mama yelled at me for buying a can of the aquanet.

shell

no way.
valerie
i’m serious. *imitating her mother* porque necesitas pagar tan mucho para ese aquanet? no tienes dinero.

shannon
what does that mean?

valerie
she wanted me to buy the generic store brand.

shell
you can’t be serious.

shannon
doesn’t your mom understand?

valerie
she even tried to get me to use my brother’s tres flores, but that stuff is too greasy, plus, it’s for guys and the last time i checked, i wasn’t a guy. *(beat)* she just doesn’t get it, sabes? i’ve grown up with la aquanet hair products ever since i can remember. whenever i had some pennies i would save them so i could buy myself a can. it sounds stupid, but it’s not…not stupid at all. when i poof up my hair i’m ten feet tall.

shannon
hair that you can dive off of.

shell
every single strand holding still in perfect harmony.

shannon
the red can for those everyday moments and-

shell
-the white extra-strength can for-

valerie
-johnny rodriguez in my calculus class noticing fine i am.

shannon & shell
*(dreamy)* ooh…johnny rodriguez.

valerie
the spray from my can floats in the air

like the smog that clouds our visions of a better life.
like the halo of an angel in search of its wings.
like the words of an argument that you can never take back.
valerie (cont’d.)
like the dreams i dream after every good cry.

(extended beat)

valerie
…like the time i had to translate for my mother at the supermarket when they didn’t give her the right change. i still remember the look on the manager’s face as he tried to scold her, but she came right back in his face…and, she got the three dollars and twenty-six cents that they owed her. (beat) when i went to bed that night i cried because i knew they thought mami was trying to steal from them…and, because they thought they were better than us.

shell
…like the time my brother broke his leg. his school tried calling a million times over, but we didn’t have a phone and the number we gave them belonged to the disconnected payphone on the corner. we found out that bobby had broken his leg when the woman from child services knocked on our door. i’m surprised they didn’t take us away. (beat) i cried because my mother didn’t have to the strength to cry for us.

shannon
…like the time my eighth grade teacher, mrs. desilva, asked me and my mom to come in for a parent-teacher conference. i can still hear the tone of anger in my mother’s voice yelling at me because it was my fault for her being late for her shift…my teacher told her that i was one of the most intelligent students she had ever worked with and that we needed to work together so that i could go to college one day. mom thought it was a waste of time and she left the classroom to go to work without saying a word. (beat) i cried because i saw the tears in my teacher’s eyes.

(these recollections create an “air” of awkwardness and sadness. after a moment, valerie tries to change the subject.)

valerie
remember, when we went to lisa deleon’s house party freshmen year?

shell
i remember.

shannon
so do i.

valerie
i can’t believe we snuck out. that was so crazy.

shell
i can’t believe we didn’t get caught.
i can’t believe we looked so good.

that’s right!

it was the hair, muchachas…the hair.

(the girls react with a sense of pride for their “beautified” hair.)

the aquanet!

(beat; fondly) that was the first time we ever went out together as friends.

yeah.

it was the first week i moved in here.

yeah.

(hopeful) they’ll be more days like that…right?

yeah.

(extended beat)

(valerie pours some more hairspray.)

(annoyed) i don’t understand why my ama has to make a big deal about it. she acts like it’s the end of the world. it’s only a can of hairspray. (beat; sadly) it’s not like i have much that i can call my own.

one day.

(shell exits.)
shannon

you will.

*(shannon exits.)*

valerie

we will... right, chicas?

*(extended beat)*

valerie

we’ll look back at the melancholy moments of our lives and laugh them away as if they had never happened. no voy a llorar para nada. mis memorias siempre linda y precioso. aquanet memories til the end... que no?

*(valerie turns around and notices that shannon and shell have left. she turns back towards the mirror.)*

*(extended beat)*

*(valerie shakes the can and begins to apply more hairspray.)*
that honey is looking at me

(alex and tariq are standing upstage. they are throwing a football around.)

alex
j-lo’s all that and a bag of chips!

tariq
naw naw, dawg…get your mouth off the crack pipe…halle berry…definitely!

alex
selma hayek doing her snake dance in that movie from dusk til dawn was the moment i became a man!

tariq
she ain’t got nothing on beyoncé.

alex
penelope cruz…now, that mujer es perfecta.

tariq
man, that girl so skinny she hula-hoop through a cheerio.

alex
man, don’t hate.

tariq
you see, my naïve brown brother. a woman gots to have some meat on her bones…something to grab onto. that makes a woman sexy!

alex
then…that must make yo momma that sexiest women on earth!

tariq
what did i tell you about those momma jokes, fool!? (beat; throws the football.) anyway…yo momma so stupid she trip over a cordless phone.

alex
(sarcastically) wow…that was funny. (throws the football) yo momma so black and her teeth are so yellow that when she smiles she looks like a pittsburgh steelers football helmet.

(tariq throws the football down and rushes towards alex. he playfully gets alex in a headlock.)
alex
get off me, punk!

tariq
say my name!

alex
aren’t you missing oprah right about now!?

tariq
whatever…mister my favorite show is ugly betty!

alex
angelina jolie!!!

alex & tariq
finest white girl on the earth!
(tariq lets go of alex; beat.)

(lustfully) oh, hell yeah!!
(they playfully push each other around. tariq notices a girl out in the distance.)

(tpointing) yo, check her out…the one waiting at the bus stop.

alex
damn!

alex
you ever see her before?

alex
nope.

alex
look at that body.

tariq
that hair is driving me nuts, ese.

tariq
curves in all the right places.
alex

skin the color of café con crema.

tariq

(trying to be cool) did you see that? she turned around. she smiled.

alex

yeah…she smiled at me.

tariq

excuse me?

alex

shut up and let me focus on my future wife.

tariq

(chuckling) little boy, i don’t think so. she was eyeing the chocolate wonder.

alex

that aztec queen is allergic to chocolate. (beat) it’s a brown thing…you wouldn’t understand.

tariq

(annoyed) so…this is like a racial thing?

alex

yo no dije nada…hermano…brotha!

tariq

screw you…i’m going to get those digits.

alex

over my dead body.

tariq

who are you kidding?

alex

who are you kidding?

alex & tariq

that honey is looking at me!!!

(extended beat)
alex
she’s going to want me because i’m going to be so famous that it will cost more to buy my autograph than to make a hollywood action film!

tariq
she’s going to want me because i’m going to be so famous that they are going put my picture on the million dollar bill!

alex
*(mimicking a catch)* i’m going to be sitting in the front row seats above the third base dugout at angel stadium. someone will hit a rocket into foul territory and i will make a diving catch. the team will be so impressed that they sign me to a billion dollar lifetime contract on the spot!

tariq
i’m going to so rich that i am going to buy myself a golden mic so i can spit out the rage i have inside me. they’ll be like, damn, yo! he’s like a combination tupac, notorious b.i.g. and jay-z all trapped in one. they’ll make a tv movie-of-the-week about my violent thug death while i’m still alive!

alex & tariq
whatever!!!

tariq
*(pointing)* that smile tells me she wants a strong nubian prince to protect her.

alex
that smile tells me she needs a solid vato in her life.

alex
once you go black you never go back.

tariq
once you go brown you never frown…her mom would kill her if she brought a black dude home. don’t you get it? you can’t understand where she’s coming from. you’re not raza. you can never be one of us. no matter how hard you try.

tariq
she needs a man; not a boy. she doesn’t need that macho bull. that girlie girl will look into my eyes and see that color ain’t nothing, but a thing. open your eyes, homeboy. this is america; not viva mexico. trust me, i understand enough to get her to get with me.

alex
what makes you think you’re better than me!?
tariq
what makes you think you know how it feels to walk in my shoes!? (beat) and, now that
we’re on the subject of feet…you know what they say about guys with big feet!

alex
probably the same thing they say about guys flunking high school!

tariq
i thought you were my boy.

alex
i thought you had my back.

alex & tariq
you? her? her? you? don’t think so!!!

alex
all you do is complain about the world. black man this. black man that. give me a break. i
think someone forgot to tell you that the days of slavery are over, carnal. stop blaming
everyone, but yourself. turn off the violins because they’re starting to sound like
fingernails on the chalkboard of life.

tariq
what did you say, rain man? mr. special ed…not only do you see letters upside down, you
see the world upside down. you think you gonna be a ballplayer? you have a better shot
of walking on the moon. open your eyes and see reality. day dreaming ain’t gonna get
you a woman. it’s only gonna get you a fistful of nothing.

(alex and tariq walk up to each. they are practically nose-to-nose.)

alex
i’m going to play in the major leagues! i don’t care what anyone says.

tariq
i’m going to do what i need to do! like malcolm said…by any means necessary.

alex
wannabe snoop dog gangsta-

tariq
-hello, welcome to del taco-

alex
-febraury black history month whining-
-may i take your order, señor-

-tariq

-real world cops rerun reject-

-alex

-mexican mafia zoot-suit wearing-

-tariq

-basketball shucking street balling-

-alex

-soccer playing boring as hell-

-tariq

-three strikes and your out-

-alex

-reason for welfare having-

-tariq

-monique soul plane watching-

-alex

-erik estrada mexican soap opera watching-

-tariq

-cotton picking-

-alex

-strawberry picking-

-tariq

-piece of-

-alex & tariq

-why would she want you!?

-alex

-why would she want you!?

-tariq

(alex and tariq push each over away.)

-alex & tariq

-why would she want you!? you live in a freakin motel!!!
(alex and tariq turn away from each other; the words sting both of them equally.)

(quietly) sorry.

(quietly) me, too.

(extended beat)

this squashed?

it’s squashed.

(alex notices the girl once again.)

oh, hell, no.

(tariq notices the girl as well. alex and tariq drift to downstage center as they stare at the girl who is standing next to a boy.)

uhm…that could be her brother?

her adopted chinese brother?

it’s possible.

the last time i checked, brothers, real or adopted, don’t stick their tongues down their sister’s throat.

(extended beat)

she wasn’t all that anyway.

true that.

(alex and tariq give each other some “dap”/pound fist.)
band-aid lady

(shell is on stage. she is holding colored band-aids. she is counting them.)

shell
i would often see the figure of this woman and think she was so very sad. bags under her eyes bearing the weight of a million lost stories and peppered grey hair slipping into whiteness with every passing second. why she reserved even a second of her life for us will always be a mystery to me. (beat) just look at us…look at this place. it’s a motel for god’s sake. no one should ever have to raise a family here because

here we live in a space where people come when life has passed them by. here we live on the fringes of someplace else where people go to be forgotten. here we live at the expense of our own dignity and the amusement of others. here we live with the knowledge that life can only be lived a week at a time.

here is anywhere, but there.

(extended beat)

shell
(pointing) there…people have two-car garages, air conditioning, green lawns and families eating together at the dinner table…here. (beat) here a rusty hot plate and a garbage bag full of plastic forks and spoons serve as our kitchen. here people are packed like sardines in a twenty by twenty room reminding us that prison isn’t the only place where people live behind steel bars.

(shell looks for the owner, but doesn’t see him.)

shell
the owners don’t care because, to them, the word humanity, doesn’t belong in the dictionary. they only truly acknowledge us when they’re collecting past due rent and, all the while, they do so with a crooked smile and their fingers crossed behind their backs. (beat) and…it doesn’t matter which motel you live in this week. they’re all the same. empty rooms for empty lives searching to fill the void and stay warm at the same time.

(the sound of children playing and yelling can be heard. shell notices the children.)

shell
dirty children sporting tattered rags running all over the place like cockroaches escaping the light; most of them with heads full of lice so big and nasty that they look like spiders…the bad guys linger on the outskirts of this dump hoping to suck us into the black hole that is their hustle. (beat; to herself) it would be nice if someone would do something about it.

(shell counts her band-aids again.)
once upon a time, someone did do something. i never knew her real name, but it didn’t matter because we just knew her as the band-aid lady. she carried her stethoscope around in a tin-like shoebox that she kept in the trunk of her 1986 blue oldsmobile firenza. she was blind in one eye, but that didn’t stop her from seeing all the good in the world; including, seeing us for who we were and for the people she hoped we would become. (beat) she was the mother theresa of orange county; finding remedies for all of life’s ills. the band-aid lady brought things. she brought snacks, diapers, toilet paper, toothbrushes, used clothes and wic vouchers…but, she brought so much more.

(shell goes into the audience and starts passing out colored band-aids.)

she brought colors with her in the form of band-aids to convince us that little pieces of the rainbow were the perfect medicine for that scraped knee. she brought us the strength to tell the doctors at the free clinic that something really is wrong and…no…we are not imagining things! she brought the sunday newspaper to remind us that for every job, there was a person that needed to fill it. she brought us stories of people just like us who managed to blow past these walls.

(extended beat)

we were the band-aid lady’s kids.

the high school freshman with a pacemaker that never worked. the kid who worked in the sweatshop for fourteen hours with no break. the pregnant teenager whose mother kicked her out of the house for being a whore. the boy who became daddy because he thought playing russian roulette would be fun.

(extended beat)

i was the band-aid lady’s kid.

(extended beat)

one day, the band-aid lady never showed up…and, nobody knew why. had she moved away? had she died? had we broken her spirit? or…had we etched a dark place in her soul? i don’t know. i wish i could see her one last time. (beat) just to say, “thank you.”
(spoken word 2) my name is…

(tariq crosses to the grocery cart and pulls out a school sweater/uniform. he puts on the sweater. he then pulls out a small backpack and puts it on. once he does, the stage goes dark except for a spotlight on him.

tariq turns on a small transistor radio that is in the shopping cart. kanye west’s “wake up, mr. west” begins playing. tariq raises his hand like a student in school as he stares out into the distance. “wake up, mr. west” ends and morphs into kanye west’s “i heard em say.” tariq raps along with the first stanza.)

(tariq)

and i heard em say, nothing’s ever promised tomorrow today
from the chi, like tim it’s the hard-a-way
so this is in the name of love, like raba say,
before you ask me to go get a job today, can i at least get a raise on a minimum wage?
and i know the government administered aids,
so i guess we just pray like the minister say,
allah o akbar and throw em some hot cars,
and the things we see on the screen are not ours,
but these niggas from the hood so these dreams not far,
where i’m from, the dope boys is the rock stars,
but they can’t cop cars without seein cop cars,
i guess they want us all behind bars

i know it.

(tariq stops rapping. the song fades away as the chorus begins.)

(extended beat)

(tariq)

(quietly) i ain’t got nothing with my life. (puts down his hand; beat) i know it.

(extended beat)

(tariq)

my name is…
my name is…
my name is…

my name is…tariq!

noble name from the lips of allah
sent to bless me
with the soul of a million warriors
strong, brave and invincible
fighting for death
fighting for life
life blood running
through my veins
a proud history at my fingertips
generations of ancestors
dancing in the fire of my eyes
calling me
teaching me
surviving with me.

my name is...tariq.

definition: morning star

the guiding beacon
of the faithful fool
and the unwise wise man
sitting in the sky
the king of its castle
overseeing the great kingdom
queens on the nile
homeboys cruising on the street
one in the same
separated by time
and united by destiny.

my name is...tariq.

definition twice over: shining star.

(singing) shining star for you to see
what your life can truly be

(extended beat)

(tariq)

(singing) shining star for you to see
what your life can truly be

(extended beat)

(tariq)

(whisper) i wish i could believe that.
my name is…

it don’t matter.

cuz the matters
that matter
don’t matter
to them
them being those
not us
us being those
not them
because them is fighting words
words
written in hate
written in ignorance
written in a godless world
where good men go to suffer
where bad men go to frolic
where limbo offers the only true salvation.

dark skinned and lost in the urban jungle
searching for self
whatever that means
meaning behind symbols
symbolizing a sense
that for us, it’s better
better than being what i once was
better than being a negro
better than being a nigga
nigga both hated and embraced.

glass half-empty
glass half-full
full of the promise of a better day
forty acres and a mule
put on laway
never to be collected on

so…

when do i get to cash in that check?
when do i get to unlock those shackles?
tariq (cont’d.)
when do i get to have a vote that means a damn?
when do i get to look into the mirror mirror on the wall

…and, like what i see?

(extended beat)

life on temporary leave
warranty expired from day one
white envelopes black
in a daily ritual
of what have you done for me lately
colored lives reduced
to statistics on a welfare sheet
to numbers on a prison uniform
to bodies being buried in the name of war
collateral damage at its finest
african-american in a hyphenated world
a race racing to maintain
assimilation or annihilation
take your pick.

(extended beat)

the color of my skin
trapping me
within the confines of my mind
mindful not to mess up a good thing
people kept in check
parents playing roles
maids, maids, and maids name aunt jemima
yes, massa no, massa
a system that still knows how to lynch a fool
fathers being beat down by life
rodney-king style
little junior watching
the entire time from the front row.

white man in big white house
smiles at me from afar
thankful to the lord
he was given a four hundred year head start
hates the black man
tariq (cont’d.)
the black man talks too loud and is ruining this movie for everyone else.
the black man is lazy and should be grateful for what little he has.
the black man complains as the word victim is sewed on his sleeve.
the black man thinks not with his head, but with his di…

(extended beat)

tariq
(quietly) i don’t know what to do with my life…don’t know if there’s anything i can do.
(beat) i didn’t ask to be here…someone should have asked me for my opinion.

(extended beat)

tariq
(singing; defeated) shing star for you to see
what your life should truly…

(extended beat)

tariq
(whisper) my name is…tariq.

(lights fade to black.)
(act 2)

today (i don’t want to hate)

(lights are dark except for the light of a television set. the sound of cartoonish wrestling commentary eminates from tv set. note: if possible, an attempt should be made to project the wrestling show somewhere on a back wall.

Shannon can be seen in the light of the television. after a few moments, the lights go up as the television sounds fade away. Alex, Shell, Tariq and Valerie can now be seen.)

Shannon

I walk up to him while he’s half asleep watching wrestling. his eyes are open, but he’s only going through the motions.

Valerie

He looks sick.

Shannon

I tap him on the shoulder. his skin looks a little yellow and puffy. I tell him-

Shell

-You don’t look so good.

Alex

I’m fine.

Shannon

But, I know he’s not and I ask him if he’s been taking his diabetes medicine.

Tariq

Sometimes.

Shannon

Have you taken your shots today?

Tariq

In a minute.

Shannon

With those words, I search around the motel room for insulin needles I hope haven’t been all used up. I find two left, but as I look at dear old dad he acts like small child. he doesn’t want to, but I make him take his shot. ten minutes later I check his blood sugar and it’s-

Alex, Shell, Tariq & Valerie

-568!
shannon
what are you doing!? you need to see a doctor. you’re going to get sick and die! do you hear what i’m saying!?

shell & valerie
you’re supposed to be the parent.

tariq
that’s your job.

alex
you’re making a mountain out of a mole hill. it’s alright…you worry too much.

valerie
a minute is a lifetime.

shannon
just go to the clinic. the visit will cost you five dollars.

tariq
i don’t have five dollars.

(everybody pulls out a dollar bill.)

shannon
(annoyed) here…it’s some of my baby-sitting money.

tariq
(rolling up and throwing the dollar bill) one.

valerie
(rolling up and throwing the dollar bill) two.

shell
(rolling up and throwing the dollar bill) three.

alex
(rolling up and throwing the dollar bill) four.

(extended beat.)

shannon
(quietly) five.

(shannon gently drops the dollar bill and it floats to the floor.)
tariq
i’ll go in the morning. i promise. (beat) now…can you get me that twinkie on the table?

(extended beat)

(tariq)
it’s…can you get me that twinkie on the table?

(extended beat)

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(extended beat)

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(beat)
alex
-and your friend disappears into thin air.

alex & shell
what? where? when? who? why-

shannon
-are we stuck here today?

alex & valerie
today we had to rent a motel room because ama has bad credit.

shell
today we had to rent a motel room because we couldn’t get public assistance.

tariq
today we had to rent a motel room because my dad has a felony on his record.

shannon
today we had to rent a motel room because we have no other choice.

tariq
this is anaheim. the o.c…not skid row.

shell
today another motel room was shrouded in yellow caution tape.

tariq
today i argued with the government over my dad’s military benefits.

shannon
today they cut the music program at school.

alex
today la migra raided the restaurant down the street.

valerie
today disneyland bought out the last strawberry field in our neighborhood.

alex & valerie
growing like a cancer.
pushing poor people to other places so that they can be pushed to another neighborhood and then pushed to another neighborhood and then pushed to another neighborhood until the only place left for poor people to live is that back alley between the barrios of f-you and who gives a damn!

it always smells.

that smell never never drifts away.

i will never forget that smell.

we will never forget that smell.

the smell of-

-cigarette smoke and cat urine.

*extended beat*

what would’ve happened if my dad had turned right instead of left?

thinking about that question is just a waste of time.

forget about the past, think about the future, but the truth is you still got to deal with-

-today i took a long shower…without anybody bothering me.

today denise rodriguez smiled at me…from across the hall.

today i helped an elderly woman across the street…just because.

today i got my drivers’ permit…even though i don’t own a car.
today i saw a black man get elected president of the united states of america.

alex, shannon, shell & valerie

america!!!

(extended beat)

tariq

(sadly) but…what’s that got to do with me?

(extended beat)

valerie

today i struggled to make sense of it all…wondering why the gap between the haves and the have nots is growing wider than the grand canyon.

shell

today i imagined what life would be like without rules…wondering why instead of embracing diversity, we play poker with nothing, but race cards.

alex

today i made three errors and struck out with the bases loaded…wondering if the scouts a in the stands are looking at me, not like a human being, but as a piece of meat.

tariq

today i decided to walk around my hood…wondering when all these foreclosed homes would be filled with families and the treasured polaroid moments that come attached with them.

shannon

today i got accepted into harvard…wondering why i feel so sad when this moment should be the happiest moment of my life.

(shannon notices her friends who don’t seem to notice her back.)

(extended beat)

shannon

today i discovered that i don’t want to hate-

-the language i speak-

alex & valerie
shell & tariq

- or the family i was born into.

shannon
today.

(extended beat)

shannon
i don’t want to hate.
(**spoken word 3)** *if i ruled the world*

**shannon**

i don’t listen to the naysayers when they tell me “not to rock the boat.” i can think for myself. i will never look the other way and…like they say at the movies, i won’t be quiet, turn off my cell phone or remember not to say a word because silence is golden.

(*extended beat*)

i refuse to believe that pauses between words are meaningless.  
i refuse to believe that opinions should be kept to themselves.  
i refuse to believe that you don’t have to yell to be heard.  
i refuse to believe that sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

(*extended beat*)

**shannon**

a wise man once said, “there is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. there is always something to see, something to hear. in fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot.” (*beat*) sinners are not silent. saints are not silent…the world is not silent.

(*extended beat*)

**shannon**

*if i ruled the world*

eagles would be allowed to soar  
people would be forced to see the beauty in themselves  
teachers would be allowed to teach  
philosophers would be allowed to search for perfection.

perfection reflected in the eyes  
of visions frozen in time  
encouraging the fighter within us all  
to get back  
fight back  
and step forward.

taking life one day at a time  
time won’t give me time  
daylight savings time  
stealing time  
time being the most precious commodity  
that a human being owns  
owning every tear
shannon (cont’d.)

every laugh
every word said in anger

…every thought never spoken.

unspoken thoughts locked up
in the prison cell of our minds
where common sense takes a back seat
anxiety is king
hopelessness its queen
suppression of fantasy
killer of spirits
lover of lies
victor in every sense of the word.

(extended beat)

(shannon walks around the audience asking different audience members questions.)

shannon

have you ever wondered what the world would be like if you created it? let’s say god had
the flu and asked you to fill in. what would you do? would you create a land far far away
where elevator music softly plays in the background; all the men princes, all the women
princesses? would you create a world where disease didn’t exist; a world where you
couldn’t find the words, jealousy, fear or pain in the dictionary? would you create a world
that was so much like heaven that when you died and went to heaven you wouldn’t notice
the difference? (beat) and…how about you? would you create a new world or would you
just leave it as is?

leave it as is
this world of mine
sold to outsiders
as damaged goods
no money back guaranteed
my world stretching
not from one continent to the next
but
from one motel to the other
broken promises
fatherless families
and strip clubs
sandwiched in between.

(banging on the wall and the sounds of shannon’s parents arguing can be heard. shannon
tries to ignore it, but she can’t and it’s evident that she is affected by this disturbance.)
shannon

shannon this shannon that
straight-a-student with senior-itis
scared to face the future in front of her
in front of me
stay go go stay
questions coming in from every direction
family living vicariously
on my shoulders
shouldering the weight
of a thousand sob stories
in order to erase the one i inherited.

girl in the present
woman in training
same work less money
product of the alpha male
land of stereotypes
barefoot and pregnant
ozzie and harriet
back to the black and white 50’s
way of looking at the world.

(extended beat)

shannon

my parents...

always chasing their tails
tripping over their own flaws
looking glass turned inward
exposing their crow’s feet
exposing their receding hairlines
exposing their wasted youth
youthful life
peter pan mentality
ignorance definitely bliss

(extended beat)

shannon

my parents want me to stay home and work because i need to help them. they tell me that
i owe them…to them, love is a guilt trip, but that’s not the type of trip i want to be taking.
it’s like they don’t want me to be happy if they aren’t. why must people bring others
down in order to rationalize away their own failures? i guess my parents ditched class on
the day they studied history…or, maybe, they were in the boys’ restroom making out as
shannon (cont’d.)
their teacher warned the rest of the class that people who don’t study history are
destined…to repeat it. (beat) i don’t want to be like them: weak and unwilling to show
one once of effort.

i don’t want that to be my lot in life.
i don’t want that to be my signature.
i don’t want that to be my legacy.
i don’t want that to be my two cents worth.

(extended beat)

shannon
(sadly) if i ruled the world…things would be different.
brown boy

alex
i like to watch people...calm down, calm down, i know what you’re thinking. i’m not a stalker or a peeping tom or anything like that. i’m just a people watcher and wherever i go i watch people and

i try to imagine the first time they got into a water balloon fight.
i try to imagine his reason for forgetting his wedding anniversary.
i try to imagine why she can’t get along with her sister’s best friend.
i try to imagine what it would be like if i was living their lives.

(extended beat)

alex
i watch people and, in my imagination, i create scenarios for their lives. i create stories that aren’t really stories, but moments frozen in time...you see, people watching is a lost art which is a shame because people don’t seem to find other people interesting anymore. (beat) i don’t ever want to get to that point. i don’t ever want to be so disillusioned that even my illusions begin boring me. the best part of it all is that it doesn’t cost a cent; just time and that’s the one thing in my life that i have plenty of.

(extended beat)

alex
i’d like to go to europe or china or maybe a mountain top somewhere so i can check out the locals. i want to see if their part of the world wears different rose-colored glasses than ours, but for the time being

i have to settle for this place with the flashing neon lights.
i have to settle for this side of the imaginary line.
i have to settle for this roadside eyesore.
i have to settle for these four walls.

(extended beat)

alex
this place has so many different characters. they come and go like the tide. the tourists, the outsiders, the families and those unlucky souls caught between a rock and a hard place. you name it. we got it. (pointing) up there on the third floor; room 3b. miss thompkins. she doesn’t work so nobody knows how she pays the rent. the only thing we ever see her wear is this ugly yellow silk robe. she smokes cigarettes using one of those long wand things. people don’t care for her. she doesn’t care for people. she plays opera records in her room all day long. most of the residents of the el dorado assume she’s a bitter old maid...not me.
alex
i think that thompkins isn’t her real name and that she used to be a famous hollywood starlet and now she solely survives on the power of memories. yeah, i know it’s a cliché, but i don’t care. i mean the great thing is that there is always a chance; no matter how small it is…that the story you create for someone is true to a certain degree.

(extended beat)

alex
at what point did the drag queen in room 1f decide he wanted to be a drag queen? why is that japanese tourist taking a picture of said drag queen? why does the night manager walk with a limp? was he born with one leg shorter than the other or slightly disabled by being on the front lines of an epic battle? (beat) i bet you, mr. rodiguez in 2g was a brown beret from the sixties. i bet you the fbi wire-tapped his ass. i would bet my life on it because i can read the lines on his face; every wrinkle and each expression. i can tell that he’s proud, strong and has no regrets. he’s always reading books from the library about the chicano movement. if you ask me, he did more than read about it…sabes?

(alex’s friends call out for alex to join them. alex notices them.)

alex
(loudly; smiling) alright, alright in a minute. (beat) i see my friends and i know all their stories. their stories are my stories. each story is different, yet, they all share the same flavor of disappointment and frustration.

(alex notices someone in the distance; beat.)

alex
(to audience; pointing) see that guy over there? i call him brown boy. he stays in room 1j. he’s lived there for the past three weeks. he can’t be much older than me. when he’s not here, you can catch him in front of home depot trying to snag some work. he doesn’t really talk to anyone. if you pass him he’ll politely say, “hola”. that’s about it. i know he likes to keep his door open to let the breeze in when he watches mexican novellas. he ends every night outside the gate of the motel watching the freeway traffic that lies a few hundred yards away. there’s a small patch of dirt right by the gate. it can’t be more than one square foot. he planted some seeds there the first night he arrived at the el dorado. it’s starting to sprout; not sure what it is, but i’m sure it will be something pretty. (beat) i keep trying to figure him out, but i can’t. all i can do is guess. (beat) i know one thing for sure…he’s a dreamer.

(extended beat)
alex
he reminds me of my father. my apa was a dreamer…and, like him, i’m a dreamer, too.
it’s the only good thing he ever passed down to me. (beat; looking at the boy) i wonder
how much longer brown boy will stay here.

(extended beat)

alex
(quietly) brown boy staring at the stars
through used smog and bright lights
his universe made of barbed wire

no money and pockets full of lint
que la fregada what the hell
hoping for the american dream.

familia stranded on the other side of the fence
no love in this crazy place
clinging to la vida always

damn.

brown boy staring at the stars.

(lights fade to black, except for a golden orange light located center stage.)
i saw somebody die and nobody seemed to care

shell

what happened to us?

when did we begin looking the other way?
when did we forget that we’re not in this alone?
when did we wake up and realize that we don’t give a damn?
when did we decide we were no longer a civilized civilization?

(extended beat)

shell

when i’m walking over a freeway overpass i sometimes stop because, at that moment, stopping is the most logical thing to do. i edge up to see the traffic below. cars, trucks and motorcycles rushing by in a blur.

shannon
always in a rush to get home a few minutes early with the feeling that they’ve accomplished something special by doing so.

valerie
always in a rush to sit in front of their computer screen; my-spacing their way into creating fake villages in the name of posterity.

shannon
always in a rush to catch up on the latest celebrity gossip and tabloid news where pop culture divas get more respect than real-life good samaritans.

shell
always in a rush to forget things that once were worth remembering.

valerie

are you alright?

shell

(solemnly) i don’t know.

shannon

what’s wrong, shell.

shell

…

valerie

did something happen?
shell

yes and no.

shannon

you can talk to us.

(extended beat)

(shell walks away from the other girls; her back turned towards them.)

shell

if i fell would either of you pick me up?

of course i would!

valerie

you’re our best friend!

shannon & валerie

what kind of question is that!?

(extended beat)

shell

i saw somebody die and nobody seemed to care and nobody seemed to notice.

shannon

who was it?

shell

another faceless person in a world that doesn’t bother to distinguish.

valerie

tell us.

(shell turns back towards the rest of the group.)

shell

i was at lincoln park reading next week’s english assignment on sunday afternoon and

you know how crowded it gets there during the weekend.

valerie

the palatero man selling ice cream from his cart. kids at the playground with no worries.
shannon
a boyfriend and girlfriend tucked away underneath the shade of a tree sharing a kiss.

(extended beat)

shell
there was this old man who was walking around collecting cans. (beat) as he was placing a can in his supermarket cart, he clutched his chest and just fell to the ground like a giant redwood tree…and, it’s not like i’ve never seen a dead body before, but…uhm…but. (beat; confused) he looked healthy.

(extended beat)

shell
(quietly) a couple of people ran to him. this white guy started to do cpr. someone called the paramedics. they came and tried to bring him back. a small crowd…a very small crowd gathered around to see what was unfolding.

valerie
what about you? what did you do?

shell
i prayed.

i prayed for the children at the park who would not remember this event ever happening.

i prayed for the family i hope this man had waiting for him back home.

i prayed for the paramedics and the power they had to perform miracles.

i prayed for the stranger lying in front of me because i didn’t know what else to do.

shannon
i’m so sorry.

shell
people were walking right passed him like he was invisible. they didn’t even bother to stop for a second to give this man the respect he was due. it was like that man didn’t exist. (seething) there was this man dying just inches away from these people and they didn’t care! they were talking, laughing and playing while this man was leaving this life forever…

(extended beat)

shell
(solemnly) one last pump of the chest and it was over. (snapping his fingers) just like that! (beat) the paramedics declared him dead and the second they did everyone left; even the few who had watched the entire thing. at one point, it was just…us. i stared at the small button of a smiling child on his shirt. (beat) he was somebody’s grandfather.
valerie

at least, he had you.

shannon

that’s something…isn’t it?

shell

people don’t care about the fact that people don’t care anymore.

shannon

people don’t care about little kids playing violent video games…advertising blood and guts as cooler than love and honesty.

valerie

people don’t care about the wave of debt that is drowning us…human beings now being defined by their credit rating.

shell

people don’t care…about families living in motels. (beat) they don’t care about-us.

shannon

they don’t know about-us.

shell

why worry about dying when living a life ignored is the alternative?

(extended beat)

shell

as the old man was dying

i realized how cold mother earth could be to her own children.
i realized that people only think about death when it’s on a movie screen.
i realized that we are here today, gone tomorrow and left behind.
i realized that we become memories in the blink of an eye.

(extended beat)

shell

the old man was surrounded by people, but died alone. (beat; solemnly) he deserved better.
100 degrees in the dark with no ice in sight

(the sound of traffic can be heard playing softly. alex and tariq step into their respective spotlights. alex takes off his shirt and reveals that he is wearing a tank top t-shirt; exposing the tattoo on his right arm. tariq pulls out a bandana from his back pocket and wipes sweat off of his forehead. they look out towards the audience throughout the entire scene.)

alex

chihuahua...tell me about it.

(tariq)

makes me wish i was in class just for the air-conditioning.

(beat)

hey.

(tariq)

hey, back.

(join the club. (beat) hey.

(extended beat)

(tariq)

something on your mind?

(alex)

i saw your dad down the street.

(...)

(tariq)

hanging out at-

(alex)

-i know where he’s at. (beat) was he drinking?

(alex)

naw...he was just sitting on a crate; talking to himself. i think he was talking about his marine buddies or something like that.

(tariq)

at least, he wasn’t drunk.
(extended beat)

alex
can i ask you something?
tariq
you can ask.
alex
why doesn’t the government help your dad out? it’s the least they could do.
tariq
you’ll have to ask good old uncle sam that question. they have us running around in circles. they tell us that my dad isn’t that sick…they say it’s all in his mind.
alex
that’s not right.
tariq
(sadly) tell me about it.

(extended beat)

alex
coach snagged me a couple of free tickets to the angels game…you interested?
tariq
are they good seats.
alex
they’re free seats.
tariq
free is good…i’m in.

(extended beat)
tariq
can i ask you something?
alex
if i can ask you can ask.
tariq
do you ever wonder what…hmm, never mind.
alex
come on, fool…it’s cool. ask away.

tariq
do you ever wonder what would happen if you didn’t make the major leagues?

---

alex

---

tariq
i mean…do you have a backup plan?

alex

---

alex
(angrily) -dude, shut the hell…(stopping himself; beat) it’s going to happen! (beat; unconvincing) i’m going to play pro ball…case closed.

(extended beat)

alex
(fidgeting; changing the subject) when is this heat going to end?

you’re guess is as good as mine.

alex
i’m going to get some ice from the machine.

it’s broken.

alex
(frustrated) it’s always broken.

tariq
tell me about it.

alex
it must be a 100 degrees in the dark.
with no ice in sight.

alex
i can’t take this. i’m about ready to climb out of my skin.

tariq
let’s go pick up some ice at wong’s liquor.

alex
man, that vato charges two bucks for a bag. what a rip-off!

tariq
ice is ice.

alex
shoot, vato…by the time we get back here those cubes will already have melted.

tariq
they might not.

alex
plus, it’s late, man. i don’t want to risk running into any fools who are just looking to start sh-

tariq
-it’s cool, ese. chill out. you worry too much. man, you’re worse than your sister.

(extended beat)

(tariq)
(quietly embarrassed) it gives me a reason to bring my dad back home.

alex
(apologetic) oh, yeah. (beat) okay…let’s go.

(alex and tariq begin walking in place.)

(extended beat)

(tariq)
pops wasn’t always like that.

alex
i know.
i’m scared.

alex

why?

tariq

i’m starting to forget.

alex

forget what?

tariq

the good things about him and the kind of man he was before he left for the war.

alex

it’s not your fault. you were just a kid when he left.

tariq

doesn’t change the facts.

alex

keep the faith. things will work out one day.

tariq

i feel worse for my moms. it’s like she’s married, but she’s not married…that sound weird to you?

alex

nope…things stopped sounding weird to me a long time ago, my man.

tariq

she works too hard for us and has nothing to show for it.

alex

same with my ama.

alex & tariq

my mom changes diapers-

tariq

—for senior citizens whose pride has long since crumbled.

alex & tariq

my ama changes diapers-
alex
-for kids whose parents are too busy to notice they’re growing up.

tariq
my mom was the queen of her senior prom.

alex
mama was so beautiful when she was young.

my momma could’ve been a doctor.

alex
my mother picked the wrong man.

(extended beat)

alex & tariq
(defeated) damn…it’s hot.

(the blinking lights of a police patrol car begin flashing.)

(for the rest of this scene, alex and tariq rotate impersonating the police officer.)

alex & tariq
(nervously) damn!

(tariq/police officer) alright…put your hands up. keep them where i can see them.

alex
(putting up his hands) but, we didn’t do anything wrong.

(tariq/police officer) i didn’t ask you for your opinion…now, put your hands up on the wall.

(alex mimics putting his hands up against the wall. tariq mimics searching alex.)

(tariq) what are you two doing out this late?

(alex) going to the corner to buy some ice.
it’s a little late for a trip to the supermarket, gentlemen…now, show me some i.d.

we don’t have any on us.

names.

alex cruz and tariq nelson.

you two are friends?

(alex nods.)

(noticing the tattoo) that a new tattoo?

not really.

what gang do you claim?

i’m not in any gang.

you wouldn’t be lying now…would you?

…

answer me when i ask you a question!

i’m not lying, officer.

you illegal?

you can’t ask that-
(tariq mimics shoving a baton into alex’s back. alex reacts in pain.)

i can ask whatever the hell i want!

(extended beat)

at least, you speak the language.

(tariq mimics putting his hands on the wall. alex takes the authoritative stance.)

ty, man. you can’t be hitting on people.

excuse me…did you say something!?

(tariq begrudgingly shakes his head.)

when was the last time you did drugs?

don’t you mean “have you ever done drugs?”

shut up! (beat) you have a record?

no.

where are you two coming from?

the el dorado motel.

you both live there?

yes, sir.

figures.
(extended beat)

    tariq/police officer

there’s a curfew. i suggest you obey it or the next time i won’t be so lenient.

alex

(mocking) si, señor.

(tariq mimics grabbing alex by the shirt. alex reacts.)

(extended beat)

(tariq lets go of alex. a scared alex takes a step back.)

    tariq/police officer

(seething) you’re not worth the paperwork.

(extended beat)

    tariq/police officer

i knew you looked familiar…you go to lincoln high…you play second base on the baseball squad.

alex

(near tears; solemnly.) yeah.

(tariq/police officer)

you’re my son’s teammate. matthew simms. center field.

alex

he’s a freshman.

(extended beat)

(tariq/police officer)

(menacing) you need to start stepping into the pitch. (shaking his head) just another overrated glove; nothing more. (beat) now, go home and stay out of trouble, you two. have a nice evening.

alex & tariq

yes, officer.

(extended beat)

     tariq

once again.
it never fails.

you cool?

not a bit.

lwb...living while black-

-or brown.

trying to stay sane in an insane world.

do you ever get the feeling like there’s a target on our backs?

(sadly) every time i wake up in the morning, carnal.

(extended beat)

let’s go get that ice.

sure...
wonder woman doesn’t have a thing on me

(cheesy superhero music begins playing. shannon enters the stage. she is holding a wonder woman doll. she plays with the doll’s hair. after a while, the music fades away.)

shannon

wonder woman doesn’t have a thing on me.

she can keep aqua man and his talking ocean friends.
she can keep super man and his self-righteous smirk.
she can keep the green lantern and that tacky magic ring of his.
and, she can fight with cat woman over bat man anytime she wants.

i don’t care.

she can fly around the world in her invisible gas-guzzling environmentally evil jet.
she can watch daytime soaps at the hall of justice until the sun goes down.
she can use the lasso of truth to find herself a date for saturday night.
and, she can keep those silicone breasts of hers for that matter.

i don’t care…because superheroes don’t have to live in motels.

(extended beat)

shannon

i have my own superpowers.

(extended beat)

shannon

i have the power to make quarter act like a dollar.
i have the power to look at myself in the mirror without cringing.
i have the power to ace the s.a.t. exam on two hours of sleep.
i have the power to see a boy’s smile and believe that true love is not a lost cause.

(extended beat)

shannon

can wonder woman do that?

can she fight off the multitude of roaches i consider my roommates?
can she make the line at the unemployment office suddenly disappear into thin air?
can she lie to the guidance counselor about why she hasn’t been coming to school lately?
can she be anything and everything to a family searching for an ounce of peace?

(extended beat)
shannon
i’m the one they should be making comic books about; not some figment of a horny manchild’s imagination.
i’m the one who fights the injustices of the world from underneath the vacancy sign that is only partially lit and never welcoming.
i’m the one who threatens to call the police when i tell marcos from the first floor that he better not dare raise a hand to his girl, olivia.

(extended beat)

shannon
(tearing up) i’m the one who must juggle the duties of womanhood because someone somewhere along the line saw fit that me being a girl…no longer fit my job description.

(extended beat)

shannon
(losing faith) i…

(extended beat)

shannon
(tearing up) every night, like clockwork, i begin my nightly ritual. i pull out a book from my barely-useable backpack; a blue bic pen on page sixty-eight serving as a bookmark. i get down on both knees and i brace myself because the cold floor is hard and the cheap linoleum tiles are falling apart. i pull down the toilet seat. i wipe away remnants of the tear that’s rolled off my cheek. (beat; quietly) and, i begin my chemistry homework.

(shannon is on the verge of breaking down in tears which both angers and embarrasses her. she turns around in order to not be seen crying. she stomps her feet a couple of times as if that will help her avoid crying; beat. shannon turns around.)

shannon
(wiping away a tear) don’t believe her when she says she’s come to save you because that isn’t the truth. she isn’t going to rock your world or take you to places you’ve never been…she’s going to slip through your fingers the same way warm sand does when you play hooky at the beach. she’s going to claim to be many things and turn out to be none. she will be played on the big screen by julia roberts or catherine zeta-jones and her image will plastered on every happy meal box in every mcdonalds from here to australia. (beat) it still won’t change a single solitary thing.

(extended beat)
shannon

(quietly) like i said…wonder woman doesn’t have a thing on me.

(lights fade to black)
(spoken word 4/5) la luna y el sol

(salsa music begins playing. nickodemus & quantac’s “es mi tropical” begins playing. dance club lights go up. alex and valerie are dancing to music; enjoying every melody. at first, they dance separately then they dance together. the bond between this pair of brother and sister is evident. after a while, the song begins to fade away. alex and valerie glide to their respective spotlights opposite of each other; they send a melancholy glance towards each other’s direction; beat. alex turns his back away from the audience.)

valerie
la luna….the moon. it speaks to me. i speak to it.
we share secrets in the tone of whispers.
we share anecdotes in the form of chisme.
we share love songs in the style of classic ‘r’ and ‘b’.
we share a bond of sisterhood in the guise of whimsy.

la luna
protector of all that is good
calling for peace
sobbing in pain
speaking in spanglish
leading the way
helping us sleep
standing still
in an ocean of stars
one small step for man
one giant leap for mankind
history in the making
flashback to a simpler time
families acting like familias.

(extended beat)

valerie
my mother is la luna…luna yolanda cruz. in a previous life she was luna yolanda marquez. my father is diego enrique cruz.
they met in a mexican lemon grove as they were covered in dirt and sweat.
they shared a first kiss in the middle of the town’s plaza.
they fell in love on a breezy sunday morning.
they danced by the light of the moon.

(alex turns towards the audience.)
the sun…el sol.

without it: we’re dead and buried.
without it: there is no joy and pain.
without it: light turns into darkness.
without it: humanity wouldn’t bother to care.

the sun
the star amongst stars
playing bodyguard
controlling the chess game
evening the score
crying in fear
knowing the truth
its own mortality
as delicate as ours
flashes of faith
crosses to bear
legally illegal
mayan concept of absolute zero
la tierra santa
breaking backs
killing souls
la migra’s best friend.

(extended beat)

alex

what the hell was icarus thinking? his apa warned him, “you get to close to the sol and he’ll spit you out without even thinking about it.” vato thought he could fly to the sun on wax wings. he flew up as close as he could, but those wings couldn’t save him. his wax wings melted like a chocolate bar on a sidewalk on an august afternoon. poor icarus…ain’t no one seen him since. i suppose you could call him an idiot for flying without a license but, then again, who among us doesn’t want to believe they can live forever…huh?

valerie

nina cafécita
picture perfect
plays with dolls
muñeca linda
can’t wait to grow up
try on lipstick
be like her ama
make a dress
valerie (cont’d.)

listen to her elders
save a firefly
light a candle
catch a boy’s eye
break a man’s heart
find the beauty that god
bestowed on her.

(extended beat)

valerie

la luna no longer has a mate and as i speak to you i hear the broken record that is my
life. i can’t help, but wonder over and over and over again about why papa left.

i never saw them fight…not once.
i never saw him raise a hand to her in anger.
i never heard her say any bad thoughts towards him.
i never felt any loss of love between the two.

(extended beat)

valerie

i look at my mama and i can’t possible imagine a scenario that casts her as the villain.
everything that she has ever done has been for me and my brother; her needs always
taking back seat. what could she have said to inspire my father to leave? what kind of life
does my father live in the present tense? (beat) the reality is i don’t even know if he’s still
with us on this earth. i go about my daily business thinking that he is because then, one
day, a miracle may occur and i will be given the details that are owed to me.

alex

i am not my father’s son…don’t want to be. the second he left i became the man of the
house, but a house is not a home and a home is not a motel so…yeah…the thought of my
papa pisses me the hell off. (beat) i woke up one morning. we woke one morning…and,
he was gone like some nightmare come to life. it took about a month before what was left
of our familia realized that he was never coming back. he left our life the same way he
got into this country: underneath a cloud of shadows and silence. the man who i once
called papa no longer is papa. as far as i’m concerned, he’s no longer a man.

a real man fights all the monsters living under his little girl’s bed.
a real man fights for his son’s loyalty and unwavering dedication.
a real man fights to ensure his true love’s happiness; each and every day.
a real man fights for his family because without his family…he’s nothing.

baby boy
future at his doorstep
alex (cont’d.)

lessons passed down
father to son
so forth and so on
on the subject
of men
i’ll leave that to the experts
i have no clue
alone in this world
no help in sight
take it like a man
don’t back down from a fight
raise a fist before a fist is risen
watch out for life’s
*(throwing an uppercut)* wicked uppercut
don’t be a punk.

valerie

girl in search
of definition
of self-worth
of finding meaning
she can’t help
but be scared
the value of a brown girl
down to nothing
she watches tv
sees other brown girls
beautiful aztec queens
reduced to
a pair of breasts
a pair of hips
a pair of exotic eyes
created for the task
of seducing
spanish explorers
willing to pay
with a credit card.

texas el paso juarez mexico
mujeres y niñas
walking on a desert line
in the middle of the night
for only pennies on the dollar
making money
making product
alex (cont’d.)

making sure
capitalism survives
rape becomes acceptable
hundreds of brown smiles dead
thousands more missing
companies replace time cards
governments stay silent
more females will follow
more headlines on front pages
the ritual will continue.

alex

el rio grande
el desierto de arizona
journey to the center of the earth
people dying with their dreams
breath extinguished
nothing but bone
bone dry
dry riverbed
filled with the tissue
of the common man
names forever erased
in the name of history
history distorted
written by the winners
losers out of luck
never questioning
always searching
god answers no prayers
catholic guilt
silencing philosophy
silencing opinions
silencing action.

brown dreams
bought and sold
at auction
man’s will to succeed not included
battery life varies
energizer bunny no good
body breaks down
tossed off to the side
without as much as a “thank you.”
valerie
i want my mama to one day smile at my high school graduation.
i want my mama to fall in love all over again.
i want my mama to quit her job and let us take care of her.
i want my mama to experience the world for what it truly can be.

alex
when a bigot sees a brown face with no education, they call him a wetback. when a bigot sees a brown face with a ph.d., they call him…a wetback. (beat) let them say what they want to say because

i’m going to be able to hit a baseball a million miles into the heavens.
i’m going to speak when spoken to and stand up for myself.
i’m going to walk to the ends of the earth in search of an honest man.
i’m going to make up for the sins of the man who gave birth to me.

(extended beat)

valerie
i will walk down the aisle and marry my soulmate.

alex
i will walk my sister down the aisle so she can marry her soulmate.

valerie
i will teach students to write poems in two languages.

alex
i will teach hispanics about what it means to be chicano.

valerie
i will name my daughter…luna…as a tribute to my ama.

alex
i will name my son…sol…to protect his wings from melting.

(extended beat)

alex & valerie
the man in the moon
sunlight saying hello
circles in the sky
best friends forever
la luna siempre
el sol con fuerza
constantly reminding us…
(extended beat)

alex

that life.

valerie

la vida.

alex & valerie

is nothing more than shielding the sun with one hand while holding the moon in the other.
tomorrow (the el dorado motel)

(alex, shell, tariq and valerie are hanging out in the parking lot of the el dorado motel. they are talking trash, exchanging gossip and just enjoying the warm spring evening. music flows from a small transistor radio. after a few moments, shannon enters. she crosses to her friends and stops; her back towards the audience.)

alex
damn, girlfriend…don’t you think it’s a little hot for that coat?

shannon
yeah, uhm…well, yeah, i guess. (beat; nervously) i need to take care of some business. i’ll see you guys later.

(shannon begins to exit, but before she even finishes her first step her friends “egg her on” to stay and hang out with them.)

(shannon)
really, i can’t.

(once again, her friends coax her into staying.)

valerie
take off the coat, chica…relax.

shannon
i’m alright. i’m not hot.

(her friends start giving her the “3rd degree”.)

tariq
man, this girl is on the down low. she ain’t right. she ain’t telling us something.

(her friends stare her down.)

(extended beat)

(shannon)
(increasingly nervous) i got a job. (beat) it’s just, uh…the uniform. it’s kinda lame.

shell
it’s not that a big deal.

valerie
yeah…you got a job…that’s great.
where you working, esa?

---

come on…spit it out.

_shannon takes off her coat to reveal her uniform. the group of friends are shocked by what are they witnessing. they can’t seem to find any words. alex turns off the transistor radios. their mouths are agape._

_(extended beat)_

_shannon_ (embarrassed) i got a job at disneyland.

_(extended beat)_

say something.

... , tariq & Valerie

_(meekly) anything._

_(extended beat)_

how could you?

we had an agreement.

_(solemnly) how many times have we talked about this, shann? all those conversations about how we don’t fit in their program._

_complaining about why the cops protect them don’t blink an eyelash for us._
shell
all those nights we’ve tried to fall asleep, but couldn’t because of all the noise they make.

valerie
remember that one time when were walking to school…remember?

shannon
---

valerie
(emotional) remember when those tourist girls laughed at us because of what we were wearing and then we heard their parents tell them not to make fun of those poor unfortunate children who were less fortunate? (beat) remember, their father offered us a dollar so that he could help us get something to eat?

(extended beat)

shannon
i know. i know…but, i didn’t have any other choice. i thought you guys would be a little more understanding about the whole thing.

shell
then…why didn’t you tell us?

valerie
how long have you been working there?

shannon
about three weeks.

(the shocked turn their backs to shannon.)

(extended beat)

shannon
aw, come on…maybe, they’ll give me some passes. we can all go together. you know, one last hurrah.

(the last line reminds the friends that shannon will be leaving for college soon. the friends look away in different directions.)

shell
(sadly) yeah…one last hurrah.

valerie
i guess all we’ve been through doesn’t matter.
tariq
a person’s word is something to be their bond.

alex
(hurt) have fun with your new friends.

shannon
alex, you know that isn’t fair…college isn’t free and my scholarship doesn’t cover all my expenses. (near tears) my parents can’t help me…and, even if they couldn’t you all know they wouldn’t…if there was another job that would pay me better i-

(Shannon begins crying; beat. her friends, for a few moments, don’t budge; almost as if they feel Shannon deserves to be treated in this fashion. however, they “feel” the pain in Shannon’s tears and slowly, but lovingly begin crossing to her.)

tariq
don’t cry.

alex
i guess we forgot that it takes money to buy books.

shell
we wouldn’t want to hold you back.

shannon
you know that’s not true…that’s not what i meant.

still.

valerie
i guess this is goodbye.

alex
not yet…we still have a small sliver of time.

(t subdued) not all of us.

tariq

shell
what are you talking about, tariq?

(extended beat)
we’re moving to northern cali. moms has a cousin up there who’s gonna rent a back house to us real cheap. it’s close to the v.a. hospital and you don’t really need a car to get around. (beat) maybe, my dad is actually going to get some help this time.

were you going tell us?

---

(solemnly) anyone else have any more secrets they feel the need to announce?

what now?

(extended beat)

(the group of friends turn towards the direction of disneyland which is located in the direction of the audience.)

waiting in line for half a lifetime just to get on a two-minute ride. i don’t understand.

traffic clogging the streets all for the privilege of keeping the outsiders in and the insiders out.

people smiling and money being spent. don’t they see what’s across the street from them? (beat) happiest place on earth, my ass.

and, it just keeps growing…and, before you know it…

no more el dorado.

(extended beat)

we’ve lived here all together…what? three? five?

four.
four years.

and…never once, have we ever been invited there.

it’s like the enjoy dangling that carrot stick in front of us.

family fun for everyone.

no motel kids allowed.

(extended beat)

tomorrow i begin filling out, yet, another pile of financial aid forms.

valerie
tomorrow i volunteer at the boys and girls club; working with younger versions of me.

shell
tomorrow i make sure my brothers and sisters have their lunches packed.

tariq
tomorrow i wait for my mom at the bus stop and greet her with a hug.

alex
tomorrow i try to make sense of the letters on the page.

(extended beat)

shell & valerie

shannon.

shannon

yes?

shell & valerie

we’ll miss, you.

shannon

me, too.
yo, vato.
yeah?
it’s not gonna be same around here anymore without you.
homeboys through and through.
simon.

promise you will call us…will visit us…will keep in touch with us.
you know we will.

(extended beat)

i’m going to be a good doctor.
i’m going to be a good teacher.
i’m going to be good ballplayer.
i’m going to be a good social worker.
i’m going to try to be a good whatever i decide i want to be.

the word “try” is not acceptable.
tariq
i’m going to be good. *(beat; smiling)* starting tomorrow…tomorrow i’ll be a little less angry.

shell & valerie
tomorrow we’ll be running for student body president and vice-president.

shannon
tomorrow i’ll be opening up my first savings account.

alex
tomorrow i’ll be asking my coach to help me with my batting stance.

alex, shannon, shell, tariq & valerie
tomorrow.

shannon
tomorrow i will be a harvard graduate intent on saving, not only my family, but the world.

shell
*(squeezing valerie’s hand)* tomorrow i will the talking on the phone long distance and reminiscing with good friends and being a shoulder to lean on.

valerie
tomorrow i will see a classroom filled with bright young faces and i’ll be pushing them to go beyond what they think they’re capable of.

alex
tomorrow i will win the world series for the angels and, in the process, become a role model for raza boys on the verge of becoming raza men.

tariq
tomorrow i will be doing everything in my power to fight the man and kill the stereotype that follows me like plague.

shannon, shell & valerie
tomorrow…we will forget we ever lived at the el dorado motel.

alex & tariq
tomorrow…we will remember our time at the el dorado motel.

*(extended beat)*
(softly) tomorrow.

(the disneyland fireworks show begins. the friends see the lights of the fireworks. they hear the sound of the fireworks. the sounds and sights of the fireworks are overwhelming; filling the stage with intensity. this exhibition lasts for a while. the friends share glances with each other; truly appreciating the moment, but they are also realizing that life’s changes will soon be affecting them and, more importantly, separating them.)

(one by one, the friends drift away; time for them to sleep and wake up to another day. the first one to leave his shell...then valerie...then alex...then shannon. tariq is now alone. he watches the fireworks until the end. the stage is silent. light goes dark, except for a spotlight on tariq. there is an obvious sadness and loneliness to the expression on his face as he stares up at the night sky. lights fade to black.)

(end of play)