

Brutality

by
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Translation by
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BRUTALITY PROJECT 1

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*"If you can convince the lowest white man
he's better than the best colored man,
he won't notice you're picking his pocket.
Hell, give him somebody to look down on,
and he'll empty his pockets for you."
Lyndon Johnson*

*"You feel the shame, humiliation, and anger
at being just another victim of prejudice,
and at the same time,
there's the nagging worry that maybe...
you're just no good."
Nina Simone*

*"...When all seems closed
and safe for the Self,
the Other bursts in."
Levinas.*

*"The Other is radically Other."
Derrida.*

Characters:

Robert Glenn, 45
Sophia Glenn, 41
Selena Reynolds, 28
Muna Sayeh, 25
Jose Espinoza, 32
Ethan McKeeman, 16
Katie Keller, 16

ACT I

1 / KITCHEN

(ROBERT, in a bathrobe, is preparing breakfast. Beside him, SOPHIE, in her school bus driver's uniform.)

ROBERT: I don't see him studying, sweetheart. He gets home from school, goes to the TV and while he's watching, he's on his phone and his tablet. One day I went over to see who he was talking to. It wasn't one person. He had five windows open! Girls, guys, all talking at the same time. It's crazy.

SOPHIE: Did you hear what he was saying? You know he doesn't like that.

ROBERT: No, of course not. He had earphones in and he was just laughing.

SOPHIE: Still, that can't be the reason.

ROBERT: That's not the reason? Wasting his time isn't the reason he's doing bad in school? Not studying isn't a sign that something's wrong with your grades? I don't know, sweetheart, but I'd say it is.

SOPHIE: Maybe he's like me. I didn't study much but I still did well in school.

ROBERT: Of course you studied!

SOPHIE: No, really, not at all.

ROBERT: And you got good grades?

SOPHIE: Not good grades, no, but I did fine.

ROBERT: Not me. I had to study, a lot. I worked super hard. Incredibly hard. I'd get tired, I'd sweat I studied so much. When I went to bed it was like I'd run seven miles straight. My bones, my muscles, my head, everything hurt. I studied like an animal, like my life depended on it. And in the end, I did horrible on my tests.

SOPHIE: It's not how hard, it's the way you study, sugar.

ROBERT: I guess so. They never showed me how to study.

SOPHIE: Don't be silly. You're very smart, of course you know how to study. You're just getting old, is all. *(Calling out)* Alex, breakfast is almost ready! *(To Robert)* What about you?

ROBERT: What about me?

SOPHIE: Are you going to work?

ROBERT: Why are you asking that? *(She points out the obvious. He notices.)* You see? When have I ever forgotten to get ready for work?

SOPHIE: I told you: you're getting old. Senile.

ROBERT: Keep it up.

SOPHIE: Yesterday I read how age-related diseases afflict white folks like you before women like me.

ROBERT: "White folks like me?" Aren't you white? What do you think you are? Creole?

SOPHIE: I mean we southern women have more color.

ROBERT: Give me a break, you're so pale your moles shine like psychedelic ladybugs.

SOPHIE: But I've got more color than you, accept it.

ROBERT: Because you suntan. What you've got are spots from your accident, plain and simple.

SOPHIE: *(Serious)* Seriously, are you going to work today?

ROBERT: Of course, Sophie, just like every day.

SOPHIE: Since you said they suspended you starting today...

(Robert takes off his bathrobe and quickly puts on pants and a shirt. Then he grabs his police sergeant's uniform jacket.)

ROBERT: Yeah, suspended with half pay, but if I don't go in I lose that half too.

SOPHIE: Don't exaggerate.

ROBERT: I'm not exaggerating. I'm under investigation. I'm not doing anything all day, but I have to go.

SOPHIE: Sitting behind a desk is better than driving a school bus full of teenage animals for two hours. Besides, your half pay is like my whole one, so don't complain.

ROBERT: I'm not complaining. I've always said your job is more dangerous than mine.

(They prepare to leave.)

SOPHIE: How do I look?

ROBERT: White.

SOPHIE: Idiot. *(Calling out)* Alex; your food's on the table. We're leaving now! *(To Robert)* If he keeps getting bad grades maybe he can be a cop.

ROBERT: You're killing me with laughter. Have a good day, hon.

SOPHIE: You too, honey.

(They kiss. Music)

(SOPHIE, in the driver's seat, waiting in the school bus. With her, two students: KATIE and MCKEEMAN.)

KATIE: Tell him, Sophie, tell him!

SOPHIE: But you already told him, didn't you?

KATIE: He doesn't believe me.

SOPHIE: Well, that's his problem.

KATIE: Come on, tell him. Tell him.

SOPHIE: It's no big deal, Katie. I'll tell him tomorrow. The other kids will be here soon.

KATIE: They're going to be a while. There's a meeting with the principal today.

SOPHIE: What about?

MCKEEMAN: They're probably having a talk with the students, stupid stuff.

SOPHIE: About the graffiti?

MCKEEMAN: Yeah, that shit. They're all freaking out over some stupid graffiti.

SOPHIE: Will they be long?

KATIE: They said five minutes extra. Come on, tell him, Sophie, tell him.

SOPHIE: But... what do you want me to tell him?

KATIE: About the Association you go to...

MCKEEMAN: Do you really go to that group?

KATIE: She goes to the "Struck by Lightning Association."

SOPHIE: "Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors Association," to be exact.

KATIE: Literally! The Struck by Lightning Association!

SOPHIE: *(Laughing)* I guess you could call it that. It's like Alcoholics Anonymous, but with lightning. We meet every two weeks.

MCKEEMAN: And you were really struck by lightning?

SOPHIE: I nearly died, but here I am.

(SOPHIE pushes up her sleeve and shows them a lightning tattoo. KATIE and MCKEEMAN are into it.)

MCKEEMAN/KATIE: Tell! Tell! Tell!

SOPHIE: Two years ago I was in my front yard watering the plants when all of a sudden this huge light swallowed me up. I passed out and like a half hour later I woke up, only thirty feet away from where I was before. My back hurt, not because of the lightning, because I hit a tree when I went flying. My shoes melted.

MCKEEMAN/KATIE: Wow!! Wild! Melted!

SOPHIE: I have white spots and I lost a bunch of teeth too. *(Shows them her teeth, though she's had them replaced with prosthetics)* They still hurt when the sun is really strong. And look... *(Shows them a burn on her neck)*

KATIE: That's where the lightning hit you?

SOPHIE: It was a necklace. Completely melted. I had to have surgery to get the incrustrated metal back out.

MCKEEMAN: But, don't people die from that? How'd you survive?

SOPHIE: Luck. The electricity travels through your body in microseconds but if it's real fast, it doesn't necessarily not kill you. Though it has its after-effects. *(The teens wait for an explanation.)* I have some depression and chronic pain that I take pills for.

MCKEEMAN: Oxy?

SOPHIE: *(Nods)* Prescription, of course. Honestly, I want to quit seeing doctors. They don't know anything. Nobody cares about post-electrocution syndrome. If it wasn't for the pills, I'd've stopped going already.

MCKEEMAN: So, do you have any extra Oxy?

KATIE: I wish I'd get struck by lightning!

SOPHIE: Don't be stupid, Katie, it hurts like hell.

KATIE: But I'd have the tattoo.

MCKEEMAN: And the Oxy.

SOPHIE: Well, you can buy Oxy on the street. And Katie, you can get a tattoo without having to risk getting fried to a crisp.

KATIE: But I want the experience.

SOPHIE: Then, don't worry, it can happen.

KATIE: Seriously?

SOPHIE: Of course. Orlando is the world capital of people struck by lightning. You live in the right place.

KATIE: Cool!

MCKEEMAN: You know what it goes for on the street?

SOPHIE: What?

MCKEEMAN: Oxy. You know what it goes for? Forty, fifty a pop.

SOPHIE: Really? So I've got a fortune in my bathroom.

MCKEEMAN: If you need to sell, let me know. I can place it for you.

SOPHIE: At that price? (*MCKEEMAN nods.*) I'll bring it tomorrow. Ok? (*We hear people coming.*) Here come the kids, we're off. By the way, guys, keep this secret. If the school finds out I could lose my job.

KATIE: Over the pills?

SOPHIE: All three of us would go to jail for that. I meant about being in treatment for lightning and not reporting it. They'd fire me.

MCKEEMAN/KATIE: Absolute secret!

(Music)

3 / SCHOOL

(KATIE and MCKEEMAN behind the school. To one side, a door and sign: "Orlando High. Service Entrance.")

MCKEEMAN: He's paying me 80 a pop and buying it all. No questions asked.

KATIE: So who is he?

MCKEEMAN: His name's Nick. He's living with us.

KATIE: With your mom? I mean, he's sleeping with your mom?

MCKEEMAN: He sleeps on the couch. Maybe they're having sex and don't want me to know. I don't know. Truth is, one time I got up for a midnight snack and I didn't see him on the couch.

KATIE: Would it bother you if they are?

MCKEEMAN: No way. Nick's a special guy.

KATIE: But, are you sure his story is true?

MCKEEMAN: We checked it all out before we let him move in. We're not idiots.

KATIE: The guy came from the future. Wooww!

MCKEEMAN: Exactly. He came from the future to tell us something really important. Check this, when he got here he didn't recognize the city, or our house, which belongs to his current family only they don't live there yet. They will in two hundred years!

KATIE: Two hundred years! So, he comes from...

MCKEEMAN: From 2216. And he says by then the United States won't exist.

KATIE: We're going to disappear!

MCKEEMAN: That in 2216 it's all foreigners. We'll speak Spanish and white people are persecuted by the Latino, black and foreign majority.

KATIE: Unbelievable!

MCKEEMAN: Nick came from the future to warn us and to do something about it.

KATIE: Is that why you painted that picture on the wall?

MCKEEMAN: It's not random graffiti. It's a really common symbol in 2216. Of the White Resistance; fighters who cross the border or scale the wall from Canada to repopulate and finally return to the United States of America.

KATIE: But maybe we should stop the graffiti, McKeeman. They're looking for us and if I get expelled I don't know what I'll do. Dad said he was going to draw and quarter me.

MCKEEMAN: Don't worry. He'll make you get a job. That's what Mom said too: if I do bad in school, I'll have to get a job.

KATIE: That's not so bad.

MCKEEMAN: Of course not. You make bank.

KATIE: You buy whatever you want.

MCKEEMAN Like, supplies to stock our hideout and prepare for the coming wars. *(KATIE loves the idea and kisses him. Beat)* This morning I sent an anonymous note to the principal about Sophie, the bus driver.

KATIE: About the lightning? *(MCKEEMAN nods.)* Are you nuts? Why'd you do that? They'll fire her!

MCKEEMAN: The bitch never brought me the Oxy. And I'd placed it with Nick.

KATIE: The guy from the future's the one dealing Oxy?

MCKEEMAN: Of course. We're gonna use that money to finance the first cell of the Anti-Appropriation Militias. We have to make money so we can change the future. So that 2216 belongs to us too.

KATIE: I thought you wanted the money to go to the Zombie Harpies concert.

MCKEEMAN: That too. Not everything's about liberating our race, right?

(MCKEEMAN quickly sketches the symbol of the White Resistance in 2216. Then they hear a noise from behind the door.)

MCKEEMAN: Here he comes!

KATIE: Fuck, remember don't kill him.

MCKEEMAN : Of course not.

KATIE: We're not damn murderers.

MCKEEMAN: What if he's got a gun?

KATIE: That guy? He doesn't even have papers! What kind of gun is he gonna have?

MCKEEMAN: You don't need papers, Katie.

KATIE: You don't?

MCKEEMAN: Look. *(Pulls out a Glock. KATIE is surprised.)* You order it online and boom. Anyone can do it.

(Just then the door opens and out comes JOSE ESPINOZA. He waves to the teens and walks off.)

MCKEEMAN: *(To KATIE, holding up a baseball bat)* Ready?

KATIE: *(Also with a bat. Kisses him.)* Ready, baby.

(KATIE and MCKEEMAN run after JOSE ESPINOZA. Music.)

4/ SELENA'S OFFICE

(JUAN ESPINOZA, beaten up, is sitting on a couch. SELENA paces back and forth.)

SELENA: It's not a test; it's a list of questions to legalize your status. She told me it's easy, Jose. Easy, she said. It won't even be in English!

JOSE E: I can speak English.

SELENA: Yes, of course, I know that.

JOSE E: And the girl? She's Arab?

SELENA: Lebanese.

JOSE E: Those Lebanese are really shrewd. Where I come from there's lots of them and they all do really well. How old is your friend?

SELENA: Her name is Muna and she's 25.

JOSE E: See? She's young. Young people know more.

SELENA: Jose, you're young too and you'll do fine. The problem is going to be the other thing...

JOSE E: What other thing?

SELENA: You know perfectly well what I mean.

JOSE E: But it just happened a few days ago. Maybe they haven't gotten the information yet.

SELENA: That's what we're hoping for. Though it would be an ethical breach if I don't tell them everything I know about you.

JOSE E: Then tell them, Dr. Selena.

SELENA: Just Selena.

JOSE E: Tell them everything, Mrs. Selena.

SELENA: Miss.

JOSE E: Since you're a lawyer.

SELENA: Call me Selena that's all.

JOSE E: Selena that's all. *(She looks at him in disapproval. JOSE laughs)* Selena, I just don't want you to get in trouble for helping me.

SELENA: If only you hadn't gotten so much attention!

JOSE E: I tried to make it perfect.

SELENA: But it wasn't perfect, Jose. It was never going to be. Disguising yourself as an African American to elude immigration officers. Really?

JOSE E: Dr. Selena, I couldn't think of anything else and besides I had to do it. I saw myself in the mirror and I looked real beat up. Those kids at the school got me good. I had bruises all over, I still do. Whenever I went out people kept really staring at me and I got scared. If regular people were looking at me that much, ICE was going to stop me for sure. They'd think I was some kind of criminal without papers, a troublemaker, a bad guy. So, decided to do it.

SELENA: And it didn't occur to you that you'd stick out even more?

JOSE E: No, of course not. I rubbed on shoe polish, I walked like them, talked like them. I even put baking soda on my teeth so they'd shine like theirs.

SELENA: Like ours, you mean. *(Noting that he doesn't understand)* I'm African-American, Jose!

JOSE E: No, I didn't know. You don't look black.

SELENA: Good God! What color do you think this is?

JOSE E: Like where I'm from.

SELENA: Exactly: black.

JOSE E: Maybe since you're a woman you don't look...

SELENA: Jose, you need to stop talking now. That's sexist, racist, misogynist. The whole menu!

JOSE E: I swear I'm none of those things. In my country I was always very respectful.

SELENA: But here you need to learn to watch what you say.

JOSE E: Is my English bad?

SELENA: No, but some of the things you say! And dressing up as an African American doesn't help any, Jose.

JOSE E: Really? I just didn't realize. All I wanted was to stop being Jose Espinoza and become Jack Black, for safety is all.

SELENA: *(SELENA, giving in, laughs)* And Black, no less. You're a disaster, Jose.

JOSE E: You have such a pretty laugh.

SELENA: The first person who saw you noticed you were painted black, that you weren't real. And then the second, and the security guard too, and by the time the police got there they were all laughing at you.

JOSE E: It's just they were asking everyone who looked Latino for papers and I...

SELENA: It's called Profiling and all of us who aren't white in this country get caught in it. You see the differences?

JOSE E: Maybe. But with a different skin color, for a few minutes anyway, I felt safe.

(SELENA sits beside him.)

SELENA: If my brothers heard you, or the pastor, they'd burst out laughing. As a black man you felt safe from the police! Are you serious?

JOSE E: I could've gone on like that forever and been happy.

SELENA: With them laughing at you!

JOSE E: Yes, but safe.

(SELENA laughs again. JOSE tries to kiss her. She pulls away, alarmed.)

SELENA: What was that?

JOSE E: I...

SELENA: You have a wife, Jose!

JOSE E: Excuse me, it was a moment...

SELENA: A moment?

JOSE E: There's nothing wrong with a moment.

SELENA: There's nothing wrong with a kiss? You told me you're getting your papers in order for her and your kids, to bring them all here!

JOSE E: Yes, but you just have such a pretty laugh, doctor.

SELENA: But I'm not flirting with you, Jose. You understand that? Right?

JOSE E: I've only been in this country one year and you're the only person who's been nice to me. Excuse me, doctor. I won't do it again.

SELENA: Of course you won't do it again. And I'm not a doctor, I'm a lawyer.

JOSE E: In El Salvador we call lawyers doctor.

SELENA: Well, you're not there anymore. You're here. And if you want to be legal in the United States, understand that you can't try to kiss, or touch women, just because they're nice. Good manners and happiness don't equal a sexual proposition, Jose. And don't change your race again, or use words that offend other people. Understand?

JOSE E: *(Ashamed. He holds his arm, which hurts.)* Yes, of course. I have a lot to learn.

SELENA: Does it still hurt?

JOSE E: It's nothing. It's going away.

SELENA: Your pain pills?

JOSE E: I'm taking them.

SELENA: Really? You're not selling them?

JOSE E: A few. Not many. *(SELENA gestures "this is the limit.")* I had a debt that couldn't wait. Getting papers is expensive, you yourself told me the price.

SELENA: Jose! Jose! My God! How many times are you going to break the law before you get accepted in this country? Do you really want to be in pain to get your papers?

JOSE E: The pain is nothing. It means nothing. But papers do, doctor. Besides, I've had pain all my life. And if they pay that much for those pills on the street, what do you want? I say, let it go on hurting. There are things that hurt worse and you don't get pills for them, let me tell you.

SELENA: I can lower the costs, that's the least important thing, but you take care of that pain, Jose. Ok? Do it for me at least. If I know you're selling your pills to pay for the process, I won't be able to keep doing my job. *(Beat)* And the kids who beat you up? Have you seen them again? Are they still at school?

JOSE E: Yeah, they're still there. One of them has a gun.

SELENA: A gun?

JOSE E: Of course. And I'm terrified of them, doctor. Terrified.

5 / BAR/NIGHTCLUB

(SELENA is waiting at a bar in a bar/nightclub. She looks around at everyone happily, glad to be there. Suddenly, her face lights up more. MUNA arrives.)

SELENA: You didn't have a hard time?

MUNA: A wrong turn, but then the rest was fine.

SELENA: *(Gesturing to the place)* What do you think?

MUNA: Nice. Nice. There's so many young people!

SELENA: We're young, Muna.

MUNA: Of course, but in Lebanon this couldn't happen.

SELENA: Young people drinking and dancing?

MUNA: A gay bar.

SELENA: Don't label it, Muna. Treat it like a regular place. People dance, talk, hook up, like in anywhere else in the world.

MUNA: Don't say that, Selena. That world you're talking about is tiny. In Beirut not only are there no gay bars, there are no bars. Period. And meeting places aren't even allowed for women, so you can imagine.

SELENA: I thought Lebanon was more open than the other countries over there, right?

MUNA: A little more than the other caves dominated by hairy guys and their prayers. But don't forget in our world a society that's open on the outside has a hairy guy on the inside.

SELENA: *(Orders a drink)* Here you don't have to worry about hairy guys. Or hairy girls, though there are some real hotties.

MUNA: *(Flirtatious)* Which one?

SELENA: Like her.

MUNA: *(Looking at her)* Gorgeous.

SELENA: Gorgeous. Like you, Muna. So forget Beirut, which by the way sounds like the name of a Sundance movie, and have one of these mojitos with me. This Cuban girl makes them world class.

MUNA: *(Takes the drink)* Beirut? I wouldn't remember it even with a Disney name. It's forgotten. In any case, now that I'm getting so forgetful, it's perfect timing.

SELENA: Forgetful? Really?

MUNA: Yeah. Like it was a disease.

SELENA: Don't say that, honey. I'm sure it's nothing. The change of scenery; one affects the other. That's all.

MUNA: Like yesterday I forgot where my phone was.

SELENA: Muna: We all forget where we leave our phone!

MUNA: I'm talking about my home phone, the one that's always been in the same place.

SELENA: Don't stress. You're 25. A girl forgets the little things. If you've got a Samsung, of course you're going to forget that prehistoric thing, which, by the way, looks like a faded flowerpot. *(Seductive)* Want to dance?

MUNA: Not yet.

SELENA: One day you're gonna have to try it, Muna. Remember you're a legal resident now.

MUNA: Yeah, of course, but I feel embarrassed today.

SELENA: Because you're at a gay bar?

MUNA: That and...

SELENA: Because you don't know how to dance.

MUNA: 1 نظرتم الليلة جميلة جدا، ولكن أنا لم تحرك جسدي في خمسة وعشرين عاما

SELENA: What? (*Muna laughs. Takes a drink.*) I'm going to learn to speak Arabic and then you'll see!

(They both laugh, seductive)

MUNA: I said people here dance like they're getting zapped by electricity.

SELENA: That's how we shake off the stress of the work week.

MUNA: I guess that's why they named this nightclub "Pulse."

SELENA: (*Moving closer*) Because it makes your heart beat faster.

MUNA: Do people kiss in all bars or just in these?

SELENA: In these and all of them.

MUNA: I like kisses.

(They kiss.)

MUNA: Yeah, I like long kisses and eyes closed.

(Music)

¹ "You're really beautiful tonight, but understand I haven't moved my body in twenty-five years."/
"nazartum allaylat jamilatan jiddaan, walikun 'ana lm tuharrik jusdi fi khmst weshryn eamaan"

6 / RESTAURANT

(ROBERT, in his police uniform, in a restaurant. Across from him, SOPHIE. In the distance, we see other cops having lunch there too.)

SOPHIE: Suspended.

ROBERT: Suspended? But, why?

SOPHIE: They gave me a two-week suspension. It turns permanent if I don't hand in my medical report.

ROBERT: Over the lightning? Is that it? How'd they find out?

SOPHIE: My own carelessness. I told a couple of kids and...

ROBERT: You're so stupid, Sophie! An idiot! Why in the world would you tell them that?

SOPHIE: Robert, people talk about themselves. Someone asks, there's a silence and you talk. You told me yours.

ROBERT: I was forced to by an Internal Affairs Commission, then I had to file a report that went public and after that the media ran the story over and over again... I didn't tell out of the goodness of my heart. It was a nationwide scandal. But you did it not because you had to, because there was a silence. You're a moron.

SOPHIE: Well, it's done. I felt the need to talk to someone about it and I did. What do you want me to say? The kids on the bus treat me like an idiot and I thought if they knew what had happened to me, what I've been through, what I really am, they'd respect me more.

ROBERT: *(Annoyed, pushes his food away)* I don't know what we'll do if you lose your job, Sophie.

SOPHIE: What's done is done.

ROBERT: At least my suspension should be over soon.

SOPHIE: How long do we have to wait till they reinstate you at full pay?

ROBERT: After today's testimony, it could be two or three weeks. That's what they said. Though they told me the victim's family could bring two more charges and then the whole thing will take longer and...Damn it!

SOPHIE: Two more charges! What do those thugs want? To crucify you?! The police have no one to defend them, that's for sure.

ROBERT: It's the media. And the protests, the organizations.

SOPHIE: If the guy wasn't black, there wouldn't have been such an uproar.

ROBERT: But he was.

SOPHIE: If a white cop shoots another white guy, four shots, the way you did, there wouldn't be all this press, or pressure, or suspensions, or police brutality. If you say accident, that's what it is.

ROBERT: That's not the problem, Sophie. The problem is, black or white, without my job and without yours, the numbers don't add up.

SOPHIE: What are we going to do?

ROBERT: First we have to talk to Alex. Tell him we have to tighten our belts. He's supposed to start college soon but we have to tell him the truth.

SOPHIE: The truth is going to kill him.

ROBERT: Doesn't it always? But the truth is the truth, the truth will set you free, and the truth is he doesn't have the grades to get a scholarship and we don't have the big bucks for him to go to college. Now even less. We don't even have enough for his food! So we tell him the truth: that he should wait and get a job first... *(Notices that SOPHIE suddenly isn't paying attention)* Are you listening to me? What's wrong with you?

SOPHIE: *(Talking softly)* Don't look.

ROBERT: What's going on?

SOPHIE: That guy there.

ROBERT: Which one?

SOPHIE: Sitting alone, with a hamburger...

ROBERT: The black guy. Yeah.

SOPHIE: Look between his legs.

ROBERT: You're looking between some guy's legs, Sophie?

SOPHIE: Stupid, look what he's got between his legs!

ROBERT: *(Looking)* He must have his zipper down and he's flashing his...!

SOPHIE: No, Robert. I think it's something else.

ROBERT: *(Realizing)* Fuck! That's the mouth of a rifle! It looks like the muzzle of an AR-15!

SOPHIE: Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god. All these cops eating here and we're the only ones who've noticed!

ROBERT: *(Pulls out his phone)* I'm going to call headquarters to put out an alert.

SOPHIE: Do you have your gun on you?

ROBERT: Yes, of course. I'm in uniform!

SOPHIE: I'm asking because I don't want you playing the hero. Got it? You're not leaving me an unemployed widow raising a teenage son who doesn't even want to talk to her. Besides, you're already under investigation for killing that other black asshole!

ROBERT: Then, what do you want me to do?

SOPHIE: Nothing. We get up and we leave. Let someone else deal with this mess, with investigations and suspensions. You can't take any more.

ROBERT: Fine. You go first then, like you're going to make a call. And when you're outside, run.

SOPHIE: What about you?

ROBERT: I'll go to the bathroom, casual, and raise the alarm from there.

SOPHIE: I'm scared.

ROBERT: Don't be. Nothing's going to happen.

(SOPHIE get up, nervous. Suddenly we hear something fall on the floor and a voice shouting.)

VOICE: I'm sick of all this police brutality against my brothers! And that's why I'm here today, to kill as many white cops as I can!

(Music)

7/A ZOMBIE HARPIES CONCERT

(Standing, listening to the band, MCKEEMAN and KATIE. Sometimes they're pushed by the huge wave of the mosh pit, which they love.)

MCKEEMAN: That's the bassist! Look at him! He's the best in the world!

KATIE: How do you know he's the best in the world?

MCKEEMAN: The experts say so, Katie. The Zombie Harpies bassist is the best in the world.

KATIE: There are experts who say who's the best bassist?

MCKEEMAN: He's the best bassist in the world and the drummer, take a good look, 'cause he's the best in the world too.

KATIE: The two best in the same band!

MCKEEMAN: And the guitarist is one of the best.

KATIE: What about the singer?

MCKEEMAN: The singer's shit.

KATIE: The experts prove that too?

MCKEEMAN: Totally.

KATIE: Whatever, the important thing is you like them, baby. Look! *(She lifts her shirt, shows him her back. She has a lightning bolt tattoo.)*

MCKEEMAN: Wooow! Did you get hit by lightning?

KATIE: Not yet. It all depends on you. *(Kisses him, very passionately.)*

MCKEEMAN: *(Shouts, thrilled)* Coming to the Harpies concert with you is my biggest dream come truuuuue!

(The wave of people comes and sweeps them along. They laugh and kiss.)

MCKEEMAN: Katie...Katie...Katie... you're the lightning bolt that splits me in two. What if we get married?

KATIE: What?

MCKEEMAN: What if we get married.

KATIE: Just like that.

MCKEEMAN: Well, we do everything together. And you want to get hit by lightning...

KATIE: That's not a reason to get married, McKeeman.

MCKEEMAN: Thing is...thing is... Nick. Mom's boyfriend? You know?

KATIE: The guy from the future. From 2216, right?

MCKEEMAN: Right. 2216. Nick said I'm in the history books of the future when they talk about the Race Battles. That's what he said.

KATIE: What Race Battles?

MCKEEMAN: These super famous social struggles happening soon. And he said the history books in 2216 say I'm one of the first instigators. That my fight is considered the precedent for the Historic Resistance, he said that, the Great Historic Resistance. You see? Of white people. Of us. And the most interesting part, the best part out of all the stuff he told me, is that those history books also say I married a woman named Katie. The book says that; Katie.

KATIE: Maybe it's some other Katie...

MCKEEMAN: It's you: a tall, blonde, white woman who I knew since I was young, my first love and all, and you help me keep my emotional balance, you were something like the co-creator for all my exploits in the first movement of the Great Historical Resistance against the oppression of the Unified Minorities.

KATIE: He told you that? Seriously?

MCKEEMAN: That you were my muse in the struggle. That in the future, in 2216, lots of girls are named after you, in your honor.

KATIE: In my honor! Wooow!

MCKEEMAN: And mine too. He said there's an airport for spaceships called "the McKeeman Launch Pad."

KATIE: But in 2216 there aren't any white people in the U.S.?

MCKEEMAN: The launch pad is in Canada, where the white people live after they're thrown out of the U.S. Remember? The white people sneak across the border, with the help of Wolves, or by climbing the wall the Latinos and blacks built to keep us out. And guess what. In 2216 there's a tunnel, the biggest one, named after you!

KATIE: The Katie Keller Tunnel!

MCKEEMAN: Katie McKeeman. That's what Nick said. That why we should get married, so we don't interfere with the course of history and the Great Historic Resistance.

KATIE: But...

MCKEEMAN: He knows all about us. He told me it was all History, that kids recite it, that there are poems about it.

KATIE: Poems? So what do the poems say?

MCKEEMAN: That once, in the middle of a Zombie Harpies concert, I got down on one knee and proposed to you... *(Just then he kneels)* And that, like Nick suggested, we ran away from home and started the battle against the white holocaust. And then, even the Zombie Harpies wrote us a song. A war song. The hymn of our generation!

KATIE: Seriously? And are you sure this Nick guy came from the future?

MCKEEMAN: Katie, don't be like them.

KATIE: Them?

MCKEEMAN: People who believe in nothing. We either believe or we disappear. So? Do we interfere with the Great Historic Resistance or do you marry me?

(She looks at him. She kisses him and yells Yesssss! Another wave of people comes. They laugh, happy. KATIE listens to the music and dances in a frenzy. Suddenly, KATIE stops and stares at the band.)

KATIE: Hey, what happened to the bassist?

MCKEEMAN: What's wrong with him?

KATIE: He fell down.

MCKEEMAN: Maybe he got electrocuted. Another one struck by lightning!

(KATIE feels a pain in her back. She touches it. It's bleeding. MCKEEMAN touches her and confirms she's hurt.)

KATIE: *(Terrified)* Baby, they're shooting.

(The band stops playing. We hear gunfire and shouting.)

(JOSE ESPINOZA and SELENA in the hallway of an office building. Both are very well dressed.)

SELENA: *(Annoyed)* Jose, what did we agree on?

JOSE E: A lot of things...I don't know, I don't know.

SELENA: Yes, you do. We agreed that the best thing was for everyone to forget your blackface episode. That after a few days everyone would forget about it, particularly the agent handling your immigration case. We agreed on that. We agreed on that.

JOSE E: Yes, we agreed on that. What's wrong?

SELENA: The interview is what's wrong, Jose! The interview you gave that TV station!

JOSE E: Oh, that. It was a local channel, doctor. No one saw it. Not even my friends heard about that interview. TV goes on and people forget.

SELENA: Well your immigration agent heard about it. You think TV disappears? Not even slightly. It remains, like you were published in the paper or written on the walls. You're online! Have you heard of this secret, invisible thing called, Internet? You're there! Your idiotic photo with your stupid black face is circling the globe! And not to raise concerns about issues of immigration or race, no, so people can laugh at you. And, like everyone else, your agent apparently likes to spend his free time watching cats, accidents, and undocumented immigrant morons who try to evade ICE by using blackface.

JOSE E: I couldn't say no. The reporter who called me was so concerned...

SELENA: With laughing at you!

JOSE E: She wanted to help.

SELENA: And was also very pretty.

JOSE E: And she was very pretty.

SELENA: You're an idiot. A sexist idiot. They show you a skirt and you confess. And the worst part, it's your own people who do whatever they feel like to all of you.

JOSE E: All of us... Us who?

SELENA: You. People without papers. Scared Hispanics. To you.

JOSE E: Selena, the TV didn't do anything. The pretty reporter didn't either. I wanted to tell my story. Not that I dressed up as a black man, that's secondary and I see why they'd laugh at me for that. I laugh at me. But what I...

SELENA: It's not secondary, Jose, it's racial! The tension, the violence, the inequalities, immigration! It's racial! Don't forget it. It's about the most important issue, the fundamental contradiction in this country: race, Jose. And you, whether you believe it or not, you're at the heart of it. Hasn't it sunk in? What country have you been living in this entire year? Because if it's the United States, you have to see it's not about immigration. It's race!

JOSE E: I mean that the story I told in the interview isn't about race, it's about being a victim. I was a victim, ma'am.

SELENA: Exactly, that's why I don't want you talking about how it's secondary! (*Fed up*) A white Hispanic man using blackface to feel safe from the police! Do you know how offensive that can be?

JOSE E: Remember, in any case, I'm still the victim here. It was the cop who started giving me funny looks, okay, maybe because of my disguise. And the first thing he said was that my camouflage wasn't working. But I didn't resist, I just acted like I didn't understand, that's all. "I don't speak English," I said. We were both fully aware that the black spray I'd put all over my body wasn't working. Maybe because I didn't put shoe polish on my ears. Maybe I overdid it with darkening my hair, or with the way I was walking or with my facial features. That day I'd put on lipstick because I figured black people have shiny lips. I don't know, maybe I'm not so good at disguises. The cop saw me and asked for my papers. I don't know if he was immigration or security, but I didn't have any, so I took off running and I fell. The cop caught up and stuck a knee in my chest. He was yelling and while he was yelling he pressed down harder. I was suffocating. I passed out. I nearly died under that guy!

SELENA: Jose, we know that, but...

JOSE E: No, you don't know, because to you it's race and to me it's almost getting killed.

SELENA: That's what I'm trying to tell you; it's the same thing, Jose.

JOSE E: (*Goes to the window*) I understand they call it police brutality.

SELENA: Yes, police brutality, of course. But the priority for you is to get legal, get your rights and then, take on the police brutality. Most likely your meeting with the agent today will get postponed again because, even though you're absolutely the victim, for that same reason, now they think you're hiding something.

JOSE E: I'm not hiding anything. I wasn't even hiding anything in El Salvador. (*Looking out the window*) Selena; is this a federal building?

SELENA: Yes, a federal building.

JOSE E: Are there lots of government offices working here?

SELENA: Mail, taxes, there's an ATF office and on this floor there's Homeland Security. You've been here before. Why are you asking?

JOSE E: The red flag with the X, that's from the south...Right?

SELENA: Are there anti-immigration protestors out there? Don't worry, it happens. They know this is where they give undocumented people their papers and...

JOSE E: No, there aren't protestors. But I see a guy, he's armed, wearing fatigues, raising that southern flag. And next to him there's two cops lying on the ground. I think he shot them.

SELENA: Seriously? (*Heads for the window*)

JOSE E: And now the guy pulled something out of an SUV and he ran off, yelling.

SELENA: (*Looking out the window*) What?

JOSE E: And that SUV. Is it his? What's he yelling?

SELENA: Jose, run, run!

JOSE E: Run? But, what about my immigration appointment?

SELENA: Run...run...!!! That SUV could be a car bomb!!!!

(*We hear an enormous explosion.*)

8 / BAR / NIGHTCLUB

(MUNA takes SELENA by the face, as though to kiss her, but she doesn't.)

MUNA: That has nothing to do with it, Selena.

SELENA: Maybe it does, maybe it does have something to do with it. And that's the thing. You don't see it, it's invisible to you, but it's there.

MUNA: Honey, Selena, I'm sure. I don't feel the same. It's normal. There doesn't have to be an explanation.

SELENA: Of course there has to be an explanation! Everything has one!

MUNA: Not love.

SELENA: Love most of all. *(Beat)* Just like that? Out of nowhere?

MUNA: I'm 25. It's normal. You fall in and out of love, all for no reason.

SELENA: No reason! A building falling on top of me isn't a reason?

MUNA: Of course not.

SELENA: Really?

MUNA: Really, Selena.

SELENA: Suddenly I stopped being the American girl of your dreams, a smiling American girl with high hopes and everything going for her. Instead I was a victim of terrorism, like you, like all the girls from your country. Now I'm not an other to you, just another one. Isn't that a reason?

MUNA: You're dreaming up nonsense, Selena. And not every girl from my country is...

SELENA: Maybe I should be in another terrorist attack.

MUNA: Don't say that.

SELENA: Maybe then you'll love me again.

MUNA: Please, stop.

SELENA: That would be a record. To be in two terrorist attacks!

MUNA: A record? Here maybe. In my country you can be in twelve a year.

SELENA: But where a building falls on you? Don't trivialize my odyssey.

MUNA: It's not trivial. But in Beirut a building can fall on you and the sky itself can fall on you. And not even in a year, in the same month. I have a cousin who was in two attacks in the same week. A bomb at the market on Tuesday; gunfire at the café on Friday. The next Tuesday a cat crossed her path and the poor girl fell and hit her head on a stair. She spent ten days hospitalized.

SELENA: Good thing we agreed not to trivialize.

(Pause. They look away from each other. Then, SELENA, trying to see what MUNA sees, questions her.)

SELENA: Is there another woman? Is that it? Did you fall in love with another woman?

MUNA: No, of course not.

SELENA: So?

MUNA: It's just I feel like I might break.

SELENA: Because of me?

MUNA: When I leave my house, suddenly, I get the feeling that any second I'm going to shatter.

SELENA: Because of my attack? Because of my terrorist bombing?

MUNA: I think it has to do with forgetting.

SELENA: About the phone? That once you forgot your phone?

MUNA: No, I mean I started to forget you.

SELENA: Don't be an idiot!

MUNA: Really. Your name, the way you look, what you say. Suddenly, I had to try really hard to remember you, and I thought: this can't be love, this is loneliness. Whatever, but it's not love.

SELENA: And the sex. Did you forget the sex too?

MUNA: With you, yes.

SELENA: Not with another woman?

MUNA: Not with myself. *(Kisses SELENA)* Come on, let's keep talking, keeping coming here. I like Pulse. Let's have fun, that's what I want; to have fun for a couple of years with no worries. No commitments, no plans. Falling in and out of love. Not too much desire or disdain. To live however, up against whoever, at top volume, no speed limit, knowing and unknowing in seconds. Don't you get it?

SELENA: Of course I do: you want to be free.

MUNA: Yes. Free. You should understand that better than anyone.

SELENA: Being free to be free.

MUNA: It's not so much to ask.

(But what MUNA has been watching is something else. She goes to SELENA, who thinks she's going to kiss her again.)

MUNA: *(Worried)* Honey: that guy. You see him?

SELENA: *(Disenchanted)* What about him?

MUNA: He's wearing a trench coat. *(SELENA's face says "So?")* In this heat?

SELENA: Muna, there's nothing strange about it. We're at a nightclub. People dress weird.

MUNA: But he's got his hands in his pockets and a big coat. Don't you think maybe he's hiding something?

SELENA: Leave him alone. We've seen that guy here lots of times. He's a regular. He even slept with a friend of mine! He likes them black. They all do, except you, of course. Definitely, black women cannot win; not with men or with women, no matter what race they are.

MUNA: *(On her own track)* In my country if someone looks like that it's because they're planning something.

SELENA: Forget the Middle East, Muna, and live your Sundance movie.

(Suddenly, we hear a 911 operator, loud.)

911: 911, what's your emergency?

VOICE: *(False)* What's coming is Jihad! They'll pay for the West's crimes! Long live ISIS!

911: Where are you calling from? What do you mean by...?

(We hear the line go dead)

VOICE: *(With hatred, personal)* Faggots, goddamn faggots. Lesbians, and faggots. Die, all of you. We're all going to die today!

(Music)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

1/ CLASSROOM IN PRIVATE SCHOOL

(Whiteboard, window, intercom, a drinking fountain and some cushions scattered on the floor. To one side, an area with different notices about activities. Onstage, MUNA and SOPHIE. MUNA has just arrived and is just setting her purse down on one of the tables. SOPHIE arrived earlier.)

SOPHIE: Nice to meet you. You're...?

MUNA: Muna Sayeh. From the bar. Seven months ago.

SOPHIE: I'm from the restaurant with the police.

MUNA: Yeah. I remember that was...

SOPHIE: Next week it'll be a year.

MUNA: I recognized you, of course.

SOPHIE: I get that a lot. "I know you from somewhere," like they'd seen me on signs in the grocery store.

MUNA: *(Laughing)* The same thing happens to me...

SOPHIE: Or else, "I saw you on TV the other day." And they say it with a smile like I was on some cooking show.

MUNA: But I recognized you from the TV show we were on together a couple of months ago, don't you remember?

SOPHIE: With you? *(Not remembering)* I've just been on so many...CNN?

MUNA: Yeah, with...

SOPHIE: The good looking host. White, gray hair, who knows how to talk fast.

MUNA: That's the one.

SOPHIE: Gorgeous. *(She stops at the school notice board)* But he didn't pay much attention to me. He was looking at the young girl, the one from the concert shooting. *(Reads)* "Encounter with the Victims of Terrorism." What a way to phrase it. I think these teachers watch too much TV. Also, it seems poorly written...

MUNA: How?

SOPHIE: Like it was talking about a sect that specializes in being victims of terrorism.

MUNA: Like it was a personality trait.

SOPHIE: *(Mimicking a teacher)* "Come right in, boys and girls, to the terrorist sideshow." *(Looking at a photo of a school bus)* I worked at a school once...

MUNA: Are you a teacher?

SOPHIE: No, a bus driver. I picked kids up and drove them and all.

MUNA: I love those yellow school buses. They hold a certain poetry, don't you think?

SOPHIE: But there's a lot of terrorism in those kids. If I told you what they told me, what they did while I was driving them to school or home again, it gives you goose bumps. And the way they talked! Insults, insults and that's about it.

MUNA: *(Laughs)* So they're the ones in the sideshow. Not us.

SOPHIE: But this is a private school. I've heard the terrorism here is gentler. *(Reading another notice)* Listen to this: *(Reads)* "The Administration would like to remind all students that offensive graffiti in the hallways or classrooms will not be tolerated. Be aware that any students involved in these acts of vandalism will face serious repercussions." Repercussions, how scary.

MUNA: But if rich kids go here, who are they offending with their graffiti?

SOPHIE: There must be minorities. And girls too, of course. And a few wimpy kids who don't play sports and all.

MUNA: There's always someone weaker, huh?

SOPHIE: Didn't you have any in your school, there, where you came from?

MUNA: Yeah, sure. And we tortured them. We bullied the ugliest girls, and the kids with more money bullied us, and the boys bullied the girls, and the boys bullied each other over any little thing.

(Enter JOSE ESPINOZA. We hardly recognize him. He dresses and looks very different. He looks like different man.)

JOSE E: Hi, sorry. I'm late but...

SOPHIE: Are we starting?

JOSE E: Sorry?

MUNA: Aren't you the...?

JOSE E: I'm here for the conference.

SOPHIE: Are you a victim, a reporter or just curious?

JOSE E: A victim. A victim.

SOPHIE: Where were you?

JOSE E: In the attack on the federal building.

SOPHIE: How awful! Have I seen you somewhere? Were you at the show on CNN?

MUNA: Hi, I'm Mona Sayeh.

SOPHIE: Sophie Glenn.

JOSE E: I'm Joe Spine.

MUNA: Spine?

JOSE E: When do you think we'll get started?

SOPHIE: *(Going to another school poster)* I've been on a lot of TV shows with Federal Building survivors. They never get tired of inviting them, even if that was domestic terrorism and the issue is Islamic Radicals.

JOSE E: I guess they call it "balance."

MUNA: *(SOPHIE doesn't hear her.)* A car bombing by militias. Domestic terrorism. Of course. Now I remember! Jose Espinoza!

JOSE E: Joe...

MUNA: You were a client of a friend of mine, the lawyer...

JOSE E: Selena Reynolds?

(SOPHIE goes over to them.)

MUNA: That's her, the one who was in two attacks.

JOSE E: Yeah, some luck.

SOPHIE: Two attacks? That's nothing. First, I got hit by lightning, no less, lightning, while I was working in my yard. *(Shows her tattoo)* Then, I was on the front line in the attack on white police officers in the restaurant. And to top things off, a week ago another lightning bolt came down on me, not directly but really close, while I was waiting for a cab. And it wasn't even raining! So watch out for me.

MUNA: Or any of us!

(The three laugh.)

JOSE E: We should save these conversations for when we talk to the kids, to make them laugh at least once in a while.

MUNA: They said this class was the most interested and they've been waiting for weeks.

JOSE E: I'm guessing that's because of the TV coverage.

SOPHIE: We're sort of celebrities, shooting stars...

(They laugh again.)

MUNA: I would've preferred not to be so famous, at least not for what happened to me.

SOPHIE: Personally I like remembering it. I suppose it's like therapy. The attention has made these last months more bearable. And the money, which you always need for the bills. People don't realize this terrorism thing comes with a lot of financial difficulties...

JOSE E: What was yours again...?

SOPHIE: In the restaurant with the cops, almost a year ago. Next week we're doing a special memorial show. On CNN again.

MUNA: (*Putting things together*) Aren't you married to a police officer?

SOPHIE: We got divorced a month after the attack.

MUNA: I didn't know. I'm sorry.

SOPHIE: That's how it is. These events touch everything. Like the world had ended and suddenly it's remade. Divorce, splitting up, to see if something changes. The past, maybe. But nothing changes, you're more alone, that's true, but nothing changes. The terror stays the same, married, single, widowed, or divorced. Well, maybe not widowed.

MUNA: Widowed isn't, I'm sure.

SOPHIE: But we're still friends. We have a son, Alex, and now everything's more normal. (*MUNA tries to hug her, but SOPHIE stops her.*) It's fine. Only young people like you think divorce is a big deal. It isn't. It's like you moved. Have you ever moved?

MUNA: I'm from Lebanon.

SOPHIE: Well, then like that.

MUNA: Something like that happened to me, but the other way around. After the bombing at the federal building, my girlfriend and I started drifting apart. She was a victim in that attack.

SOPHIE: (*Trying to hold back*) Your girlfriend?

MUNA: Yeah, we were a couple. But after the building fell on her, I don't know why, but I wanted to be free.

SOPHIE: Why?

MUNA: I don't know. To live? Then, we were both in the massacre at the gay nightclub and, for some reason, we got back together.

JOSE E: Maybe the fear of terror.

MUNA: I've heard that. It's possible. Terror kept us together. But when I think that's what's bringing us together, I want to run and leave everything

behind, including her. But when I come to these meetings all I think about is getting home, shutting the door, turning off the TV and holding her until I fall asleep by her side. Safe and asleep. The sleep of freedom.

JOSE E: How many people died at the nightclub?

MUNA: Thirteen.

JOSE E: How many at the restaurant?

SOPHIE: Four dead cops.

JOSE E: Two hundred in the building.

SOPHIE: Unbelievable!

MUNA: It's so barbaric!

JOSE E: Absolute brutality, pure brutality.

SOPHIE: Did you see the truck that plowed into that crowd? Horrific. I'm ashamed to say it but the truth is every time I see the breaking news box flash onto the TV screen with an attack somewhere, unconsciously I go for my calendar to see what I've got coming up. Because it's practically a given they'll call me for a show.

MUNA: That's awful!

SOPHIE: Yeah, but apparently there's no one like me for talking tragedy.

MUNA: It's hard for me to come to these encounters. I'd rather not relive them. But they keep insisting. They say I can help, that since I'm from Lebanon I have a special point of view. A Muslim, they say, is what we need. And it sounds like they're talking about a quota they need for the show. But I'm not a believer, I don't even pray, and the last time I went to a mosque was as a tourist. I saw it from far off and I didn't even like it. It scared me. In any case they didn't let me in.

JOSE E: They didn't? Because you're a woman?

MUNA: A woman and gay, you'll say next.

SOPHIE: Then say no.

MUNA: I feel bad doing that; I figure they'll take it as a slight. Call it ethnic guilt. I come from a Muslim country and I can't help feeling condemned and I say

yes to everything. At first the shows were really beautiful: people were sympathetic, they supported you, they kept saying how they didn't blame me and all. But in the end they just want to argue and insult people.

SOPHIE: You defend your ideas; speak up, interrupt anyone who contradicts what you think, be fiery and if you need to, insult them. Even if you don't feel it, act like you do. Practice in the mirror. Go on the offensive. You're the victim and you have the right to do whatever you want on camera. The whole world will understand you and they'll take your side.

JOSE E: So how do you do it?

SOPHIE: One day I told myself: from now on I'm going to be belligerent and fight everyone on everything.

JOSE E: You decided that after the attack?

SOPHIE: Long before, when I was a girl practically. I was a normal teenager, a bit chubby, too tall for my age, with a squarish head that made me look weird. The truth is I wasn't like the other pretty girls at school. And also, I was quiet, withdrawn really. Back then, everyone bullied me. They teased me, hid my stuff. One time at school they took my desk apart and held it together with wires so when I sat down it'd fall apart. And that's what happened and everyone laughed.

MUNA: And then?

SOPHIE: Then, one day when I got home from school, I decided to be a different person.

MUNA: Just like that?

SOPHIE: Just like that.

MUNA: I'm envious!

JOSE E: A different person how?

SOPHIE: I decided to be bad. (*MUNA looks at her in surprise. JOSE looks to MUNA for an explanation.*) Not bad bad, but I started doing bad stuff to other people, to kids who were smaller than me. That's when I realized that nearly all of them were weaker or smaller or stranger, weirder than me.

MUNA: What would you do to them?

SOPHIE: I'd leave dead animals in their lockers or superglue their locks or pull their hair till hanks of it came out in my hand. I had a book where I collected the hanks of my classmates' hair; boys, girls, everyone. I didn't let them talk, I'd interrupt, I'd yell, I raised my voice even to ask for permission or say sorry.
And that's when they stopped bullying me.
To me, that was the best time of my life. I even lost weight and my head quit being square!

JOSE E: I don't want to hurt anyone...

SOPHIE: That's what white men in this country have come to. To surrender. Or more like, to submission.

MUNA: (*Pointing to JOSE*) But he's not white...

SOPHIE: What?

JOSE E: Please...

MUNA: He's Latino.

SOPHIE: Latino? But... Really?

JOSE E: That doesn't matter.

SOPHIE: (*Harassing him*) Why do you dress like that, Joe?

JOSE E: Like what?

SOPHIE: I don't know, like a white white guy.

JOSE E: (*Looking at his skin*) I am white white.

SOPHIE: You know what I mean. Is your name Joe Spine?

JOSE E: It's the name I use now to...

SOPHIE: So what's your real name?

JOSE E: In this country you have the right to take the name you want.

SOPHIE: What's your name? Jose? Joe for Jose?

JOSE E: That's what I like about the United States: you can be reborn as many times as you want.

SOPHIE: Spine? *(Laughs. Her mockery is harassment.)* Spine like what? Like a porcupine? *(MUNA and JOSE look at her in shock.)* Excuse me, I don't mean to insult you, but I think it's funny. *(To MUNA)* Don't you think it's funny wanting to be a different race?

MUNA: *(Terrified)* No. I don't know. It's just I don't understand.

JOSE E: I'm Spine for Espinoza.

SOPHIE: And you're from...?

JOSE E: El Salvador.

SOPHIE: Of course you are!

JOSE E: What do you mean "of course you are?"

SOPHIE: That if you take a good look at you, setting aside your clothes, your haircut and your face, of course you come from El Salvador.

JOSE E: Not from Guatemala? Or Costa Rica?

SOPHIE: I don't know anyone from Costa Rica.

JOSE E: But you do from El Salvador.

SOPHIE: Yes, a lot. We had a janitor at the school from there.

JOSE E: Yeah, Jose Espinoza...

SOPHIE: No, his name was... *(Looks at him carefully. She's surprised.)* Jose? Is that you? *(JOSE nods. SOPHIE's attitude changes immediately. Suddenly, she's more herself, more friendly.)* I'm sorry, I didn't recognize you! You've changed so much! *(To MUNA)* We used to work together at the school! He was... !

JOSE E: The janitor.

SOPHIE: I didn't recognize you with...

JOSE E: Without my coveralls.

SOPHIE: Why'd you change how you look? You're not running from something?

(MUNA, nervous, edges away a little.)

SOPHIE: Jose, I know what I said isn't... I mean, I want you to know that I'm not racist. (*JOSE doesn't answer.*) Also, you have to understand it's not normal to all of a sudden see someone you know and they look like a different person. Can you imagine if I dressed up as a Hispanic woman, with a fruity hat, or an Arab woman covered head to toe? It could be offensive. (*To MUNA*) Right?

(*MUNA nervous, feels forced to nod.*)

JOSE E: I have to do it. I have to look like someone else. Joe Spine is better than Jake Black and, definitely, ten million times better than Jose Espinoza.

SOPHIE: You committed a crime and now you're in disguise? Is that it?

JOSE E: A crime? Because I come from El Salvador?

SOPHIE: It's not impossible, is it?

JOSE E: Because I look like a gang member, a raper of white women, because I take jobs from good people like you.

SOPHIE: I mean if you're running from someone.

JOSE E: Of course I am. Where do you think we are?

SOPHIE: You sure you're not hiding something, Jose? A week ago I met a Mexican bigamist, a quadrigamist, because he'd gotten married four times. And all to blonde women.

MUNA: (*Trying to defend him, but weak and nervous*) I don't think Jose thinks that way...

SOPHIE: (*To MUNA*) Men are men, sugar. Though I guess you don't know much about that, huh?

(*MUNA, hurt, turns and walks away.*)

JOSE E: Tell me something: is it a requirement?

SOPHIE: What?

JOSE E: Insulting people. Is it so necessary?

SOPHIE: Me? I never insult anyone. I'm completely open and I accept all differences.

JOSE E: A little respect wouldn't hurt. A little, not much, a pinch, a whiff, of respect. It doesn't cost you anything, not even an effort. Fake it if you have to. But respect. Don't you think?

SOPHIE: I... *(Sorry, she surprises MUNA)* Miss, Sayeh? Muna? What a pretty name. Muna, I'm sorry. Really. Sometimes I'm a bit impulsive and I don't think before I speak. If you're gay or Muslim, whatever. I don't care, you know. There's no reason I should care.

(MUNA, suddenly leans against one of the tables, weak.)

MUNA: I...

SOPHIE: And it's true: just because you're from there, from the Muslims or Arabs, doesn't make you a terrorist. I know that, I never doubted that.

JOSE E: *(Keeping SOPHIE from saying something worse)* But you never said anything like that!

SOPHIE: *(To JOSE)* But I might've thought it. *(To MUNA)* Just in case, I'm sorry. Also, we have something in common: you said you're not religious. I don't think I am either, though I believe in God. What about you?

MUNA: *(Trying to hold herself up)* No, I don't believe in God.

SOPHIE: What do you believe in then?

MUNA: In life...

SOPHIE: Simple. I like it. Me too. We should start a new religion; people who believe in life. Period. *(Goes over to her)* You see? We're not so different.

(But MUNA is about to faint. SOPHIE manages to catch her before she falls.)

SOPHIE: *(To JOSE)* Quick, bring me that cushion!

(SOPHIE eases her down into a seat.)

JOSE E: *(Getting the cushion)* What's wrong with her?

SOPHIE: I think her blood sugar dropped or something. *(Places the cushion to support her head in the chair.)* Should we call 911?

MUNA: No, it's nothing. I'm fine now. It doesn't last.

SOPHIE: Have you eaten today?

MUNA: Yes, of course. It's not that.

SOPHIE: You couldn't be pregnant?

(MUNA laughs.)

MUNA: If I am, then I'll start believing in God. In all of them at once.

(JOSE comes with some water.)

SOPHIE: *(Friendly)* Well, but the night is dark and you never know where the fish will jump.

JOSE E: What fish?

(The two women laugh. MUNA drinks.)

SOPHIE: *(To MUNA)* Better?

JOSE E: The best thing for you is to go home.

MUNA: I'm fine now. It only lasts a moment. It's happened before, it's nothing to worry about.

JOSE E: What is it?

MUNA: It happens when I get really nervous.

SOPHIE: Why are you nervous? Because of what I said? Look, just between us and don't tell anyone I said this, but I'm saying it anyway: you shouldn't pay any attention to me. Okay?

MUNA: It's not you. It's fights, arguments...

JOSE E: Arguments? If someone raises their voice, if you think there could be a fight?

MUNA: That's it. But it goes away fast. My girlfriend says it's because I'm gay and Lebanese.

SOPHIE: *(Trying to be funny)* Well no wonder! *(Sees her joke doesn't go over well.)* It's a joke!

JOSE E: *(To MUNA)* Is it always dizziness?

MUNA: Or aches in my muscles and bones. Sometimes I need help changing my clothes.

SOPHIE: Now that sounds sexy. No one helps me put on clothes, much less take them off.

MUNA: *(Laughs)* In my case, it hurts so much someone has to help me.

SOPHIE: They didn't prescribe Oxy, by any chance? When the lightning got me, those little pills helped.

JOSE E: So what else happens, besides the pain?

MUNA: Sometimes I feel like I don't exist and I have to ask myself: Am I here or not here? I disappear and reappear.

SOPHIE: That's excessive. I'm sure it's post traumatic stress from the attack.

MUNA: Did you have it?

SOPHIE: After the shooting in the restaurant, of course I did. But after a while it went away.

MUNA: How?

SOPHIE: First, the anti-anxiety meds. Then, Gatorade. Huge bottles of Gatorade three times a day. Though lately I've stopped all that because, to be honest, the only thing that works for me is alcohol.

JOSE E: *(To MUNA)* Just out of curiosity; do you forget things all the time?

MUNA: *(Surprised)* Yes! All the everyday stuff.

JOSE E: And do you feel like you could shatter any second?

MUNA: That's it! I walk down the street and I think the breeze will break me. If I stumble on a rock I'll break my foot, if someone shakes my hand they'll break my fingers.

JOSE E: It's classic.

MUNA: You know what it is?

SOPHIE: Really?

JOSE E: What you have is known as the Glass Delusion.

(The two women look at him skeptically.)

SOPHIE: How do you know?

MUNA: Glass?

JOSE E: People who believe they're made of glass and liable to shatter.

MUNA: A delusion? Like I'm crazy?

JOSE E: It's not crazy, no one's crazy. Maybe the people who want to hurt people are the crazies. But a sick person is sick, not crazy.

SOPHIE: How do you know about the glass thing?

JOSE E: Like everything I know: reading.

SOPHIE: Reading, just like that.

JOSE E: The thing is in El Salvador I was a Geography professor.

MUNA: *(Almost laughing)* And what's Geography got to do with glass?

SOPHIE: A professor? And you came here to be a plain old workman?

JOSE E: That's why I got a job in the school. To remember what it's like to be surrounded by students and devote myself to them. Even if it's as a janitor and not in front of a classroom.

SOPHIE: So how does a Geography professor know about medical stuff?

JOSE E: Like the Glass Delusion?

SOPHIE: Yeah, that Delusion thing.

JOSE E: The Glass Delusion is well documented. Today it's known as a syndrome, there's medicine and treatment, but at one time it was considered a type of madness. Cervantes has a character with that syndrome.

SOPHIE: Who?

JOSE E: Cervantes. You know, Don Quixote?

SOPHIE: Don Corleone? Don Corleone pizzas?

JOSE E: That's the one. He's got loads of pizzas for gangsters.

SOPHIE: I haven't tried them.

JOSE E: He has a story about the Glass Graduate, who believes his body is made of glass and that at any time it will shatter.

MUNA: That's me. That's how I am.

JOSE E: Me too. Me too.

MUNA: You believe you're made of glass too?

JOSE E: No, but I believe if I'm not someone else, I'll be erased. Black, white, Asian. Anything but what I am. So I won't disappear.

MUNA: I guess that's an illness too.

JOSE E: Miss Muna, the thing is your glass delusion and my desire to become someone else, are a way of handling humiliation.

(Someone knocks on the door. The three look at the door, expectantly, with some terror. Then the school intercom comes on.)

VOICE: Your attention please: the Sensibility Class encounter will begin in a few minutes. All interested students, please head to the auditorium. With us today are Muna Sayeh, Sophie Glenn and Joe Spone. I mean, Jose Spine. Sorry. Welcome to our school!

SOPHIE *(Taking charge of everything)* Okay guys. Unless they say otherwise, it'll probably go like this: They'll ask: who wants to speak first? I'll go. Ok? For fifteen minutes or so. My story, the lightning strikes, the attack, etc. Then, I won't say anything more until the question and answer session. Oh! And don't be upset if I interrupt you at some point. It's just hard for me to keep quiet. All right?

MUNA: Yeah, sure. My part will be quick.

JOSE E: They'll hardly see me. *(To MUNA)* How do you feel?

MUNA: Much better.

SOPHIE: Good. *(Trying to joke)* And don't forget you can't shatter in front of the students.

MUNA: Of course. After all, that's why we're here.

SOPHIE: *(Laughs)* That's right. And you should be happy.

MUNA: Why?

SOPHIE: They said your name first.

MUNA: What?

SOPHIE: When they announced us, they said your name first.

MUNA: It doesn't matter to me.

SOPHIE: Really? Do you mind if I ask them to change the order?

MUNA: Not at all!

SOPHIE: Fine. Let's go then.

(SOPHIE initiates a group hug. The others go along. The hug is intense. SOPHIE opens the door and JOSE goes out first. When MUNA is heading out past SOPHIE, SOPHIE stops her. MUNA is a bit frightened. SOPHIE looks at her as if searching for the words she needs to say but can't find them.)

SOPHIE: *(After a pause and with a sincerity we haven't seen in the rest of the play)* You know what? All that about the delusion. I... I think I'm like you.

MUNA: You mean...?

SOPHIE: That I have the Glass Delusion too. I just get the feeling that I'm about to shatter any second.

MUNA: You?

SOPHIE: Yes, me. That's it. *(Certain)* I have the Glass Delusion. But with lightning. Glass shattered by a lightning bolt.

(MUNA laughs and hugs her. Suddenly, she gives her a peck on the lips.)

MUNA: You're the best of the bad.

(They laugh more, like they'd done some mischief and go out holding hands. Music.)

2 / DR. BIRDEN'S OFFICE

(Waiting room. Chairs, paintings and a door that leads to a room labeled "Interviews." Onstage, ROBERT, in his uniform. With him, SELENA and MCKEEMAN. All three wear a sticker on their chest with their last names followed by a smiley face.)

ROBERT: The stadium?

SELENA: No, not that one.

ROBERT: I was at the highway one, the religious commune one and the shooting at the beach. Oh! And the airport one too.

SELENA: That one! The airport one! I remember it! The time the experts didn't let us talk. I think I said one thing and you didn't say anything. Right?

ROBERT: Nothing, they hardly put me on.

SELENA: *(To MCKEEMAN)* What about you?

MCKEEMAN: *(Sullen)* I haven't been to anything.

SELENA: Didn't they invite you? Because you're so young and...

MCKEEMAN: I don't care.

SELENA: Yours was at....?

MCKEEMAN: You need to stop talking to me, "sista."

SELENA: I just wanted to...

MCKEEMAN: Yeah I know. Leave me alone if you don't want trouble.

ROBERT: Hey! Some respect, kid.

MCKEEMAN: Then both of you leave me alone. And my name's not kid. That's all.

ROBERT: She was just asking to make conversation, but believe me neither of us has any interest in you, or your story.

MCKEEMAN: Good.

ROBERT: You're young, but that's no big accomplishment, kid.

MCKEEMAN: Whatever. But I'm here because it's mandatory, so I'm not in quite the same mood as the two of you. And don't call me kid!

SELENA: Mandatory? You're here by court order?

(A gesture from the boy confirms SELENA's suspicion.)

ROBERT: No wonder he's got a bug up his butt.

SELENA: I don't agree with those orders. *(Reading the name on his chest)* McKeeman? McKeeman. Right. I'm Selena. *(She's going to shake his hand but sees it's pointless.)* So, I was saying, McKeeman, those orders don't accomplish anything. Actually, they do the opposite: the kids get more violent.

MCKEEMAN: *(Violent)* I'm not violent!

ROBERT: *(Threatening)* Calm down or I'll calm you down!

MCKEEMAN: With your fists.

ROBERT: I get the impression you could use it.

SELENA: Ignore him, officer. He's a teenager. All of us were like that.

ROBERT: I never had the luxury.

SELENA: We all did.

ROBERT: Not me. My father wouldn't let me raise my voice. *(Shows his shoulder)* Look...

SELENA: What is that?

ROBERT: When I was more or less the same age as this delinquent *(Pointing to MCKEEMAN)*, I raised my voice to my mother. And my dad, without giving it a second thought, threw a chair at me. The chair broke and a huge nail stuck me like a knife.

SELENA: And what did they do to your father?

ROBERT: They didn't need to do anything to him because he was teaching me a lesson, that's what his partners said. And they were right. I never raised my voice at home again.

SELENA: His partners? You father was a police officer too?

ROBERT: Third generation in blue. And to give the story a happy ending, I'll tell you my father had a scar almost just like this on his back.

MCKEEMAN: *(Suddenly, loud)* All this bullshit talk makes me want to puke! When is this shit...? *(ROBERT shoots him a menacing look. MCKEEMAN lowers his voice.)* What a long and interesting conversation in this reception area. Now, my question is: when is the interview going to start? If I may be so bold and if it's no bother, could one of the adults present please be so kind as to inform me.

(SELENA laughs. ROBERT leans back from him, satisfied.)

SELENA: Dr. Birden called to say he'd be a little late. Traffic, he said.

ROBERT: Now that's strange. These sessions always start on time.

SELENA: Do you come to a lot of them?

ROBERT: Most of them voluntarily, others because they pay and some, sure, by court order. They're good. At least you relax; you remember but you forget too. I like them, just not so close together or I get bored. But they told me this one's new. What's it called?

SELENA: Consultation on Radicalization.

ROBERT: Right. That word, Radicalization. What's it got to do with us?

MCKEEMAN: Right! What the fuck does that shit have to do with me? *(Lowers his voice)* What possible relation can there be between this encounter and yours truly?

SELENA: The idea is to talk to Dr. Birden, who's an expert on Radicalization, to give him all the information we can on what happened to us. Or what we witnessed. No one's accusing us of being radicals, of course. He just wants to know what we think. He's looking for patterns so he can identify the context that people who become radicalized are living in.

ROBERT: You'll have to excuse me, because you sound like an intelligent and cultured person, but that seems silly. Where do radicals come from? From

religion, from poverty, from race and all that. From a lack of family values, of patriotism and a mother and father who know how to teach...

MCKEEMAN: With a chair to the head, for instance.

ROBERT: Right. Because a chair to the head at the right time stops you, instead of turning radical and going off and killing people, you want to be a cop and help others. You see? A well-timed chair to the head. You want one McKeeman?

MCKEEMAN: No, thanks.

ROBERT: *(Again, to SELENA)* This country's gone to hell, it's lost. That's the context: a lack of country. What they should do is look for the radicals and ask them. But, us? We're not radicals. Though the kid, are you or aren't you?

MCKEEMAN: Don't call me kid!

ROBERT: Are you a radical or not, kid?

MCKEEMAN: *(Restrains himself)* I'm nothing.

ROBERT: That's what I was saying, you act like nothing, you look like nothing and you talk like nothing. Nothing, no doubt about it; you're a radical/Nothing.

(MCKEEMAN's going to answer back but ROBERT's look intimidates him.)

MCKEEMAN: Whatever you say, captain.

ROBERT: Sargent's more like it.

MCKEEMAN: *(Sarcastic)* With the uniform who could tell.

ROBERT: A cop isn't a uniform. The cop is inside you.

MCKEEMAN: You've got a cop inside you? You like him inside you?

(ROBERT is annoyed but SELENA stops him.)

SELENA: Did the two of you read the material they gave us when we got here? It talks precisely about language as radicalization, as violence. As context. You understand?

ROBERT: Of course, it's just kids like this one are the ones who turn you so radical that suddenly all you want to do is break their face, in context, of course.

MCKEEMAN: Yeah, particularly in this context of killing cops, right?

ROBERT: Is that it? You want to kill me, kid?

MCKEEMAN: Don't call me kid!

ROBERT: You hate me? Is it just me you want to kill or someone else too? The young lady here? Her too?

MCKEEMAN: No, not her.

ROBERT: And you have a list, right?

MCKEEMAN: Of course. We all have a list of the people we want to kill.

ROBERT: So who's on it?

MCKEEMAN: Just pigs like you and filthy Muslims. It'll be a mass but sweeping execution: against all of them.

SELENA: The ones at the concert, they were jihadists, right?

MCKEEMAN: Goddamn Arabs.

SELENA: Arabs? Sunnis, Shiites?

MCKEEMAN: What?

SELENA: Did they speak Arabic, Urdu or Farsi?

MCKEEMAN: Huh?

SELENA: Were they from outside or were they homegrown in the United States of America?

MCKEEMAN: They were all shit!

ROBERT: I agree with you there. Pure shit.

SELENA: Tell me, McKeeman, what do you remember about the men who shot you?

MCKEEMAN: That they were shit.

SELENA: Aside from that, I'm sure they were. They attacked a concert by the... What were they called?

MCKEEMAN: Zombie Harpies!

SELENA: Right. What were they like?

MCKEEMAN: The bassist was the best in the world and the drummer too...

SELENA: I mean the men who shot you.

MCKEEMAN: Shitty terroris-

SELENA: Of course. Shitty. But...what do you remember about them?

MCKEEMAN: Nothing. Nothing...

SELENA: Tell us...

MCKEEMAN: I, I don't know.

SELENA: It was in the middle of the concert, wasn't it? I heard during the break.

MCKEEMAN: It was at the beginning. In the middle of a song.

ROBERT: What animals!

MCKEEMAN: (*Agitated*) Yeah, animals! Exactly! Shitty brutal animals!

SELENA: The music was playing and then...

MCKEEMAN: In the middle of the music, and everyone happy, planning their future, those animals whipped out machine guns and started spraying bullets. At everyone, they didn't care about race, nationality, age, nothing. Just shooting!

SELENA: Why do you think they did it?

MCKEEMAN: Because they hate us! Foreigners hate us!

SELENA: But the terrorists were from here.

MCKEEMAN: No, they weren't from here!

SELENA: They were born in this country. Went to school here. Watched the same TV shows you did, that we all did.

MCKEEMAN: But they hate me! They've always hated me!

SELENA: You?

MCKEEMAN: And I hate them too! It's mutual!

SELENA: But, why do you say they hated you, in particular?

ROBERT: Did they know you?

MCKEEMAN: They hated me!

SELENA: You?

MCKEEMAN: *(Angry, in climax)* Yes, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me!

ROBERT: Why you?

MCKEEMAN: Because they killed Katie!

(SELENA and ROBERT are shocked.)

SELENA: Katie?

(MCKEEMAN paces back and forth. He checks that no one else is listening.)

MCKEEMAN: I was on one knee, asking Katie to marry me, like the man from the future said I should. So she'd be my partner and we could start the resistance against the domination by... others. I don't remember who... Blacks? Foreigners? Something like that. I don't remember now. The man from the future told me he'd come to let me know how important I was and that my name would be famous and there'd be streets and airports named after me in his time, in 2216. And Katie, Katie too, she'd be known as a fighter who freed her people. She'd be my muse, my inspiration, my only love. And when I was proposing to her to start the future once and for all, then, she got shot. She said a few words and she died in my arms.

SELENA: What about you? What did you do?

MCKEEMAN: That's all I saw. I had a Glock in my jacket, this same one, but I didn't do anything. I didn't defend her. I didn't avenge myself.

SELENA: You were wearing that same jacket?

MCKEEMAN: No, this same Glock.

(MCKEEMAN, like nothing, pulls out the Glock. He holds it by the butt without touching the trigger, like someone dangling a bouquet of flowers upside down. ROBERT is alarmed by the gun and SELENA moves away, but not far. She covers her mouth.)

ROBERT: What are you doing with that?

MCKEEMAN: Nick, the guy who said he came from the future warned me this was going to happen...

ROBERT: Give it to me. You should give it to me...

MCKEEMAN: And now that I think about it, he probably wasn't from the future or anything...

ROBERT: *(Moving closer)* We're really sorry, but the best thing you can do is give me that...

MCKEEMAN: He just wanted to get rid of me...

ROBERT: *(Closer. MCKEEMAN keeps the gun toward the floor.)* I got you...I got you, but that could start trouble...

MCKEEMAN: And stay in my house for free and also screw my mom, for free too.

(MCKEEMAN hands ROBERT the gun very calmly and turns away from them, hiding his face. ROBERT puts the gun away.)

ROBERT: *(To SELENA)* I better hold on to this. I'll take it to headquarters tomorrow.

SELENA: Don't get him in any more trouble.

ROBERT: If the gun's clean, of course not.

(SELENA sees MCKEEMAN has shrunk, hiding his face. Maybe he's crying. She goes to hug him but then MCKEEMAN reacts violently. He pushes her and moves away. SELENA loses her balance a bit, but recovers quickly. ROBERT grabs a chair, like he's going to hit MCKEEMAN, but SELENA stops him.)

SELENA: *(To ROBERT)* Don't pay attention to him.

ROBERT: I'm not paying attention to him, of course not. *(He sets the chair aside and sits in it, justifying his earlier action with humor. MCKEEMAN throws himself to the ground and hides in his jacket.)*

SELENA: At his age, you fill the space of what you don't understand with violence.

ROBERT: It's no wonder. I guess all three of us have that empty space, don't we?

SELENA: I know I do.

ROBERT: Me too. Do you work here with Dr. Birden?

SELENA: No, I'm an immigration lawyer. But since I was a victim of an attack, here I am.

ROBERT: A victim of which attack?

SELENA: Of two attacks, actually!

MCKEEMAN: *(Coming out of hiding)* Two! That fucking sucks! *(Looks to ROBERT)*
Oh good heavens! Oh, how cruel!

ROBERT: What luck! If you don't mind, what attacks were you in?

MCKEEMAN: *(Excited)* At the concert? Were you at the Zombie Harpies concert? Did you see when they shot us?

SELENA: No, I wasn't at the concert. But I was in the massacre at the gay bar and then in the federal building.

MCKEEMAN: GAY! *(MCKEEMAN laughs idiotically. ROBERT looks at him and then mechanically he stops laughing.)* Fluid...uh...gender...uh...I don't know.

ROBERT: And you escaped both of them. *(Reading her name tag)* Mrs. Reynolds. Wow.

SELENA: Miss Reynolds.

ROBERT: You being a lawyer and all.

SELENA: *(Fed up)* Yeah, yeah, yeah. Call me Selena.

ROBERT: The impressive thing is being able to say you, whether you're a miss or a missus or a cop, managed to escape two terrorist attacks.

SELENA: But same as McKeeman and same as you, the truth is there's no escape.

ROBERT: No, of course not. I mean you got out of both still breathing.

SELENA: Breathing underwater. That's why I volunteer for every study on the subject. I want to help but I want to know. Like him (*Pointing to MCKEEMAN*) filling my empty spaces.

MCKEEMAN: Know what? That there are evil people killing us?

SELENA: I want to know what's beneath all this.

ROBERT: Well, good for you, Selena. But for me, empty or full, this ends today.

SELENA: What do you mean?

ROBERT: I'm withdrawing. I don't want to answer any more questions. Today's session with Dr. Birden on radicalization, is my last.

SELENA: Think it over, Robert. You still have a lot to contribute. A police officer has a unique perspective. Also, you survived a racist attack.

ROBERT: You said it: truly racist. The bastard wanted to kill white cops! No gray areas. Just white ones. Though one of the victims was a black officer...

SELENA: African-American.

ROBERT: I guess the killer didn't see very well.

SELENA: You see? You have a lot to say...

ROBERT: But there's no going back, Miss. I'm withdrawing. (*SELENA is going to keep trying but he interrupts her*) My answers are always the same; I don't have anything new to say. My son Alex has recorded my TV interviews and when he puts them on, I feel so ashamed. I feel stupid. Like I was saying what happened without understanding it, without the words you need to say so you don't sound like an idiot.

SELENA: How old is your son?

ROBERT: (*Looking at MCKEEMAN*) He's a teenager now. Fifteen.

SELENA: Keep trying a little longer. Pick a date: a year or six months more. Then, make your decision.

ROBERT: (*In a serious tone*) I don't know. Because there's the reporters too.

SELENA: What's going on with them?

ROBERT: You don't know?

SELENA: What?

ROBERT: My history. My past. You don't know? It was big news...

SELENA: What happened?

ROBERT: I figured you had recognized me.

SELENA: Is there something else, besides the shooting in the restaurant with the police?

ROBERT: Yes, of course. Though everything, like you say, is context.

SELENA: What things about your past?

ROBERT: The usual. What happens in the life of a cop.

SELENA: Like for example?

ROBERT: Like for example before the attack at the restaurant I was suspended over baseless accusations.

SELENA: What accusations?

ROBERT: It was an accident, of course...

SELENA: Of course it was. But, what did they accuse you of?

MCKEEMAN: Police brutality.

ROBERT: Stay out of it!

SELENA: Brutality? Here? In this city? (*Stares at him and remembers.*) Of course, I saw it on the news! Of course! There was an uproar in our community. My brothers went to the protests... You!

ROBERT: Don't believe everything you heard at the time. I swear it was an accident. Believe me.

SELENA: You shot an African-American who was driving on 95. Robert, why?

ROBERT: It was an accident, a mistake.

SELENA: But, how did it happen?

ROBERT: I've talked too much about this...

SELENA: Please, it's a golden opportunity. To understand you.

ROBERT: That won't be possible, miss.

SELENA: There are no cameras here. It's just us. You can be honest.

ROBERT: Like I said, it was an accident. An accident.

(Pause. He stands and moves away a little.)

SELENA: Yes?

ROBERT: That afternoon we were looking for a black robbery suspect...

SELENA: African-American

ROBERT: African-American. A robbery at a store. We had a description and even a photo on the computer from the security camera. When I was driving down 95 I saw a car and a driver who looked a lot like, almost just like the suspect.

SELENA: Almost just like?

ROBERT: The same features...as...You know...

MCKEEMAN: A black dude.

SELENA: As an African-American?

ROBERT: Right. The braids, his features, his heavy build, the big nose.

(MCKEEMAN laughs.)

SELENA: The big nose?

ROBERT: Yes, like the suspect.

SELENA: I have a big nose!

(MCKEEMAN laughs.)

ROBERT: I don't mean you.

SELENA: I'm black! It's my race!

ROBERT: Yes, but...

SELENA: Isn't it the same?

ROBERT: It's not the same.

MCKEEMAN: It's not the same!

(MCKEEMAN laughs. ROBERT takes a chair, no violence to the gesture, and looks at MCKEEMAN)

ROBERT: Behave or I'll sit you in the corner.

(MCKEEMAN stops laughing.)

SELENA: Robert, then?

ROBERT: Then I pulled him over. I asked the suspect for his ID and when he went to get his papers from the glove compartment, I saw he had a gun there. I thought he'd use it against me and not knowing how, I shot him.

SELENA: You thought he was going to pull out the gun?

ROBERT: I thought he came from a robbery!

SELENA: But it wasn't him!

ROBERT: No, it wasn't him.

SELENA: And he had a gun?

ROBERT: Yes, a legally owned gun.

SELENA: What was he doing with a gun?

ROBERT: He didn't have to be doing anything. He had one, that's all.

SELENA: For protection?

ROBERT: That's what his family said. But I thought he was going to shoot me.

SELENA: Just like with McKeeman.

ROBERT: No, not like with him.

SELENA: He had a gun.

ROBERT: But it was obvious that...

SELENA: And he had it in his hand, not the glove compartment of his car.

ROBERT: But...

SELENA: And with him you didn't think he was going to shoot you, but with the other guy you did?

ROBERT: Selena, they're two different situations. You saw when this kid took out the gun but he didn't really try anything...

SELENA: "Really" I don't know. Why?

ROBERT: Because he...

SELENA: Because he's white?

ROBERT: That's not important...

SELENA: He's white and he looks like your fifteen-year-old son Alex?

ROBERT: *(Looks at her like he's been stabbed in the back.)* No. No. It's not...It's not that. What I'm trying to say is the other case was an accident. *(He continues looking at SELENA, who stares him down. ROBERT gives in.)* Don't judge me, Miss, everyone's done that already...

SELENA: I'm not judging you. I'm not. *(She realizes that she is judging him.)* I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. *(Beat)* So what did they do about it?

ROBERT: Well, nothing. His family buried him and there was...

SELENA: I mean to you.

ROBERT: After the accident they suspended me.

SELENA: But you're in uniform.

ROBERT: After the restaurant attack they reinstated me.

SELENA: And you're armed?

ROBERT: Well, now I am.

(ROBERT thinks SELENA is going to explode, but instead she approaches him supportively.)

SELENA: You see? You see how important your perspective is?

ROBERT: *(Confused)* What? On what? On this?

SELENA: Of course, on this.

ROBERT: I don't think it's relevant.

SELENA: Yes, of course it is.

ROBERT: What the hell does what I did have to do with radicalization? Isn't this about Arabs?

SELENA: It's relevant: your son, your gun, your opinions.

ROBERT: I don't see the relation.

SELENA: It's known as a Frame of Reference and it has to do with what's invisible.

MCKEEMAN: *(Repeating what SELENA says, considering)* It has to do with what's invisible...

ROBERT: Are you mocking me?

SELENA: Prejudice comes from the way we define ourselves. It's invisible because it's made up of things we can't see. Emotions, comparisons, competition, but also language, insults, offensiveness.

MCKEEMAN: Yeah, but the guys who killed Katie weren't invisible.

(MCKEEMAN turns around and moves away from them, as though deciding to leave the conversation.)

SELENA: *(To MCKEEMAN)* Of course not. But there are other things that are. *(To ROBERT)* Listen, Robert, I'm not going to bother you any more. I'm sure we'll have a chance to talk about this in the consultation. But since they're private interviews, I'm curious...

ROBERT: Of course you are.

SELENA: Can I ask you a question?

ROBERT: Can I avoid it?

SELENA: I swear it'll be the last one.

ROBERT: Fine. Shoot.

SELENA: What?

ROBERT: Ask your question.

SELENA: The black man who was driving his car on 95...

ROBERT: African-American.

SELENA: Exactly him...

ROBERT: Yes?

SELENA: Couldn't you see him as a person just like you?

ROBERT: What?

SELENA: Like a while ago with McKeeman. It was obvious for a second you saw him like he was your son. And that had an effect, so a situation that might have ended in violence was resolved like a family matter.

ROBERT: You think so?

SELENA: *(She nods)* So, the African-American man: Didn't you see him as man like you?

(MCKEEMAN turns to hear ROBERT's answer. The police officer, nervous, moves away from SELENA a little.)

ROBERT: I'll be honest. No. I didn't see him as someone like me. Not because he wasn't, maybe he was. I'm sure he was. When I found out he was a teacher, that he'd never had any trouble with the law, that he kept a gun in his glove compartment because he worked in one of the most dangerous parts of the city, parts where no one wants to go, where not even us cops patrol, that's when I realized, yes: that man wasn't so different from me. But at the time of the accident, when I saw he was nervous, when I saw his gun, his features, the way he was looking back at me, like suspicious, like accusing me, then I couldn't.

(Pause. They look at him.)

And I can't.

I can't.

I can't see him as one of my own.

Can't see him or love him as one of my own.
I can't understand them, you know?
Not even you, a good person, who I've been getting to know all this time, I can't.
With him, I can. Looking at him, I thought of my Alex. And I felt upset, I wanted to help him, keep him from ruining his life.
But with the other I can't.
I try, but I can't!
(Loud) And the worst part, the reason I haven't been able to sleep since that night, is that I don't know why I can't, Selena!
I don't know! But I swear I can't!
(Louder. Grabs the chair, like he's going to hit himself in the same place he was hurt before.)
And I'm sick of it, that I can't!
That I can't and I don't know why terrifies me!
That's it! That's my terrorism!
(Pause. He looks at MCKEEMAN and puts the chair aside, like setting something very fragile on the floor. Before going on, he gently caresses the chair, as though saying goodbye to it.)
Though now, a few minutes ago, while I was listening to your story *(Points to MCKEEMAN)* I had a thought.
I had a thought and I remembered something.
And this is it:
That I can't because, ever since I can remember, they taught me not to. Not to be able, you understand?
That. They taught me that.
That we're different. That they hate us.
That you have to be afraid of them.
That they carry violence in the color of their skin; violence and failure, that's what they taught me.
Ever since I was a boy that's what I heard my father say at home, to his friends, to my friends, to my mother, to his family, all of them saying the same things over and over that now I say and think too.
You know what? I think that's why I can't. I can't.
(Beat. There is a very awkward silence. SELENA is going to speak but ROBERT cuts her off.)
Or I should say, I couldn't.
(SELENA and MCKEEMAN look at him, incredulous.)
Because you see now that I know why I can't, then, I think I can. Of course I can!
While I was listening to McKeeman tell his catastrophe I thought he was Alex; his tone of voice, his words, his laugh, like my son's laugh when he's talking to five people at the same time on the internet. And suddenly, it hit me:
Isn't everyone's kid like that?
And now, right this instant, I'm saying to myself:

If that's true, maybe what I have to do is think that their kids are my kids too. Simple as that.

And that's the phrase. I think if I think of it that way, I can.

I can. Don't you think?

SELENA: Robert. In a lot of our families, there's a moment we call "time for the talk." For other people, it's when parents talk to their kids about sex for the first time. "Having the talk," they call it. At twelve or thirteen. But in our homes, besides the sex talk, there's "the other talk." Mom was the one who told me, almost like an order: *(Lightly mimicking her mother)*

Selena, don't forget you're black. You're black. It's not an easy thing to forget, but you might when you're out with your friends, for a second, it might happen. You might forget. Maybe because, for a second, you might think life is freedom. But that feeling will be over fast the first time you have a run-in with the police. Have no doubt: it'll happen to you. I'm not saying you're doing anything wrong; just that, somewhere down the line, you're going to cross paths with the police. And when that happens, don't for any reason forget this moment and the next four things I'm going to tell you:

One: When you speak to that officer, always be respectful and call him "sir."

Two: Make sure the officer can see your hands at all times.

Three: Don't make any sudden movements and anytime you're going to do something, tell him what you're going to do and ask permission first.

And four: It doesn't matter if the officer yells or he's rude, or insults you. No matter what, you ALWAYS behave like you're speaking to your father.

(SELENA goes over to ROBERT finally.)

Then, Robert, I remember I asked: Mom, but why?

And then like it was the simplest thing in the world, she said: *(Lightly mimicking her mother)*

Because that man has the power to kill you.

And we have no power to seek justice.

And both of those things are well-known and understood on both sides.

(Beat)

That's when Dad spoke up and said the key phrase of the evening. He said: Sweetheart, in the end, it's all about Power.

(ROBERT looks at her, ashamed.)

ROBERT: Selena, I don't...I don't have power.

SELENA: I'm telling you this because those were the words I remembered when the bomb went off in the federal building; when I started asking myself how the two things might be connected; and when the second attack happened at the gay nightclub where I'd spent so many of my happy moments. While they were shooting fear at us, I remembered my parents' words about what

an encounter between an African American and a police officer means, or rather, between a helpless person and Power. And listening to you, Robert, I got it. Yes, there is a connection.

ROBERT: And what is it?

SELENA: That indiscriminate brutality arises from indiscriminate contempt.

(Suddenly, there's a knock at the door. We hear a voice.)

VOICE: Sargent Robert Glenn; they're ready for you.

ROBERT: I guess I'm going first. *(Leaving, he shakes SELENA's hand.)* Just in case I don't see you again, let me say it was a pleasure. A pleasure.

SELENA: For me too.

(They shake hands, cordial. ROBERT goes to say goodbye to MCKEEMAN but does it with a youthful gesture from the door.)

ROBERT: Take care, kid. *(Regretful)* Sorry. Ethan. Ethan McKeeman: take care. *(Points to where he put the Glock away)* I'm taking this. *(MCKEEMAN nods, like he doesn't care.)* If you want it back, come find me at the station on Hughey Avenue. Ethan? *(MCKEEMAN nods again.)* And stop spending so much time on the internet!!

(ROBERT said that in the same way he did in Scene One. He chuckles and leaves. MCKEEMAN laughs a bit too, guessing where that came from, and moves away from SELENA a little. She sits down and checks her phone. She makes a call.)

SELENA: Muna, honey? I'm going to be a bit later. Yeah, in Radicalization. But it's going slow; the first one just went in. I guess I'll be next. *(MCKEEMAN gestures like she's completely mistaken.)* Or maybe not. Wait to have dinner with me, ok? And don't watch Games of Thrones without me!!! *(She laughs. Blows kisses and says, in Arabic) أنا و أحبك، أنا*

MCKEEMAN: *(Like he'd seen a bomb)* That's Arabic! That's Arabic!

SELENA: Yeah, my girlfriend is Lebanese. You don't know how hard it's been for me to learn. It's a really hard language!

MCKEEMAN: And what did you say to her?!

² I love you, my darling. /"ana 'uhibuk, w habi"

SELENA: In Arabic? (*MCKEEMAN nods*) I left her a message. I said, "I love you, my darling." I always want to say that to her, I don't know why. Insecurity maybe. Or just in case something happens and then I'm sorry I didn't say it.

(Then, it happens. MCKEEMAN explodes. It is a horrible pain, a mix of sobbing and gasping. SELENA goes over to him and hugs him.)

MCKEEMAN: Katie...I love you, my darling. Katie...

(SELENA hugs him tighter, like he was a little boy.)

SELENA: She knew. She knew you loved her.

MCKEEMAN: (*Hugging SELENA*) Don't touch me, you're black! Don't touch me! Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

(MCKEEMAN repeats the last dialogue but hugging SELENA like she was his mother. He's interrupted by the VOICE from the door.)

VOICE: Ethan McKeeman, your turn.

(Then, MCKEEMAN feels terrified.)

MCKEEMAN: No, not me. Don't let them see me...

SELENA: Ethan, Ethan, calm down...

MCKEEMAN: I don't know anything. I don't know anything.

SELENA: It's ok. Let it go.

MCKEEMAN: I don't want to go.

SELENA: Do you want me to go first?

MCKEEMAN: No, don't leave me alone.

SELENA: I'm not going to leave you alone.

MCKEEMAN: Tell them we'll come tomorrow.

SELENA: Ok, I'll tell them. Today we're not answering questions.

MCKEEMAN: And we're staying like this.

SELENA: All right,

MCKEEMAN: For a while

SELENA: However long you want

MCKEEMAN: Thanks

(They knock on the door again.)

VOICE: McKeeman?

SELENA: *(Loud)* Leave us alone!

(Music. The lights begin to dim. MCKEEMAN and SELENA alone. Blackout.)

THE END

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