

LUIS BRITTO GARCÍA LITERARY PRIZE FOR DRAMA, Caracas, 2014

Two Kids in the Universe

by

Gustavo Ott ©2010

Translation by
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Department of Cultural Affairs

For Francesca

*"Poetry is the only concrete proof
of the existence of man."
Luis Cardoza y Aragón*

*"I too, dislike it: ...
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it,
one discovers that there is in it after all,
a place for the genuine."
Marianne Moore*

Characters:

PRINCIPAL RAMIREZ
ABRIL LOPEZ
NORWAY GONZALEZ

Set:

Office of the principal of an elementary school.
Desk, flag, two chairs and an executive desk chair for the principal.
To one side, a piano.

TWO KIDS IN THE UNIVERSE (Lírica) has its English premiere in a Teatro Dallas production on November 3rd, 2023, at the Latino Cultural Center, Dallas, Texas. It was directed by Mac Welch with the following cast:

AUDRYMEDRANOThe Principal
 CAITLIN GALLOWAY.....April
 VICTORIA CRUZ..Norway

Scenic Design..... Mac Welch
 Costume Design.....Gabriel Sacampini
 Lighting.....Joshua Manning
 Sound Design.....Claudia Jenkins
 Stage Manager.....Rodrigo Caraveo
 Director's Asist.....Jeremiah Lara
 Producer Coordinator/Props....Gabriel Sacampini

1/

TODAY, 1 P.M.

The school principal's office.

Shadows. We hear a powerful earthquake, with breaking glass and falling objects. Then the earthquake mixes with the sound of a piano playing Gnossienne No 5 by Satie. The tremor disappears and now we hear children playing during recess.

PRINCIPAL: Did you feel the earthquake this morning? It woke me up. It was an extremely loud quake, though they say it was small, 5.3 on the Richter scale. But on the scale of Dr. Ramirez here, it was plenty powerful. Don't you think? (*April nods*). And now that second earthquake just a few minutes ago. It was less intense, but I think it was a 4.8. The teachers talk about them like they were ex-boyfriends: the first one was so strong, he really moved. The second one was shorter, I barely felt that one. (*The principal is trying to get a laugh out of April, but she's not in the mood for jokes*) The first one had to be stronger than 5.3, because my office was a disaster. I've straightened it up a bit now, but when I got here this stack of files, that poster, and the flag were all on the floor. Even the piano had moved! But what I thought was weird was the time of the earthquake, exactly six a.m.; right when everybody usually sets their alarm. Like the earth had coordinated it with the clocks. Don't you think?

(The principal finishes putting some papers on a pile that looks like it is about to fall over)

APRIL: Principal, ma'am...

PRINCIPAL: You can call me Dr. Ramirez.

APRIL: Dr. Ramirez, the thing is I don't have much time today, so I'd like for us to go back to talking about the case.

PRINCIPAL: That's fine. But it's just that the more that I look over "the case," as you call it, the fewer reasons I find.

APRIL: I think you should take a better look.

PRINCIPAL: Are you giving me an order?

APRIL: I'm requesting, of course.

PRINCIPAL: I'm asking because ever since you got here your tone has been a bit aggressive. Are you not feeling well?

APRIL: I apologize then. It's the situation, it's making me very nervous. My son is only nine years old; you know?

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Lopez: this an elementary school. We have at least sixty nine-year-olds here.

APRIL: Yes, but mine is the one who is suffering.

PRINCIPAL: No one is suffering here, Mrs. Lopez.

APRIL: I guess you're talking about the rest of them, but not David.

PRINCIPAL: I'm talking about Davey too.

APRIL: Well, then I don't think you know what you're talking about.

PRINCIPAL: You see? There's that tone again...

APRIL: Principal, ma'am...

PRINCIPAL: Dr. Ramirez.

APRIL: Dr. Ramirez. First of all, I want you to know this is how I always sound. Maybe I didn't before, but not anymore. This has been my tone for three months now; three months with the same rhythm, the same accent, and the same fury.

PRINCIPAL: Let's set aside what happened three months ago, for now, just for a minute and let's talk about...

APRIL: I'm sorry: And how do you do that?

PRINCIPAL: Excuse me?

APRIL: How do I set aside what happened three months ago?

PRINCIPAL: I'm not saying you should forget it, just that, to be able to discuss this "case," *(She gestures as though she is taking something in her hand)*, you set it here, to one side. We see it, we know it's there, but we set it aside, so it doesn't come between us. Because the thing is, if we leave it in the middle, it won't let us see things clearly.

APRIL: Put it here or there. It's all the same. I still see everything perfectly and I've come to a sensible, rational, and simple conclusion: that boy needs to be expelled from this school.

PRINCIPAL: That boy's name is Lennon Gonzalez.

APRIL: Yes, that's him.

PRINCIPAL: He has a name.

APRIL: Saying his name doesn't do anything to solve the problem.

PRINCIPAL: Regardless, you need to call him by his name.

APRIL: With his name or without it, the one thing clear here is that that boy has to be taken out of this school. Period.

PRINCIPAL: Period?

APRIL: Is there some better punctuation mark?

PRINCIPAL: Well yes, I think there are about two hundred better punctuation marks than "period," Mrs. Lopez.

APRIL: The only reason I came to meet with you is to formally request, in light of all of the above, that that boy be expelled from school immediately.

PRINCIPAL: Immediately!

APRIL: Well, it could be in a couple of days or a week. As soon as possible.

PRINCIPAL: Why expel Lennon Gonzalez and not your son?

APRIL: Because my son hasn't done anything.

PRINCIPAL: Because he's innocent.

APRIL: Exactly

PRINCIPAL: April. Can I call you that?

APRIL: You can call me Mrs. April Lopez.

PRINCIPAL: Fine. Mrs. April Lopez: you came here today to ask me, not to keep your son in school, but for us to throw another boy out. Do you think it's as easy as that?

APRIL: In light of the case.

PRINCIPAL: And without that other boy having done anything wrong.

APRIL: My son is terrified of him.

PRINCIPAL: Well, that's not what it says in the teacher's report. Or the mentor's, or the supervisor's...

1APRIL: He *is* terrified. He said so. That he asked to move seats, that when he sees him, he freezes up, that that boy chases him...

That he says things about him...

That he's plotting with other kids...

That that boy rules a mafia...

A mafia that he uses to terrify him...

That he hides his school supplies and tears up his papers...

That they copy his work and pass him notes full of insults...

That they call him names...

That he starts rumors about him...

That he humiliates him...

That he took him to the bathroom...

PRINCIPAL: Be very careful with what you're about to say!

APRIL: ...and he and other classmates did horrible things to my David.

PRINCIPAL: Ma'am, get this straight: Lennon Gonzalez is a model student.

APRIL: Don't call that demon by his name!

PRINCIPAL: Lennon is a good boy, ma'am, and...

APRIL: Good? A good boy? Didn't you hear all the terrible things that monster is doing to my son? I'm sure you're waiting for proof, of course. You need the dead body. You want to wait for my son's dead body and then you'll act. Fine, when my son is covered in bruises and when he goes missing and we find him in the bushes, dead, beaten by his classmates, shot up by that gang of delinquents who go to this school, that's when you'll do something, of course you will. Thank you, thank you very much. Call me then, is that it?

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Lopez. You know that all of that is made up.

APRIL: What's made up? Are you saying my son is lying?

PRINCIPAL: Your son hasn't lied about anything. What I'm saying is that you made all that up.

APRIL: I did?

(PAUSE)

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Lop, April... How can I explain this to you? *(April takes out her cell phone and pretends to send messages, not paying attention to the principal while she, in her role as teacher, explains)* Our species of humans, you and I, we call them Cro-Magnons. And up until thirty thousand years ago they co-existed with another species, one that was stronger and to some extent better prepared than we were. That species we call Neanderthals. They were older too, they spread around the world before us and they dominated it. Neanderthal men and women ruling the world, no competition. But in a relatively short period of time, the Neanderthals disappeared. They, the stronger species, went extinct instead of ours. Do you know why? Well, among other things, because our species could talk. We developed language. We communicated with each other. And that's what we have to do to survive: *(In real teacher mode)* Com-mun-i-cate. *(April nods, as if she were paying attention, but keeps going between her phone and the principal)* Yesterday I talked to your son, Mrs. Lopez. *(Now April does pay full attention)* And I asked him: *(she takes out a red folder)* David, Is this true? And this? And this? And he said: no, no, no. He said no to all of it.

APRIL: *(Puts down her phone)* Of course he denied it! He's terrified of you!

PRINCIPAL: David isn't afraid of me.

APRIL: He's as terrified of you as he is of that animal!

PRINCIPAL: He's a boy and...

APRIL: He's not a boy! He's a goddamned animal! And that's not an insult, I mean in the religious sense of the word. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it?

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Lopez, I won't allow you to call him that.

APRIL: It's the truth!

PRINCIPAL: It is not the truth!

APRIL: I refer to the evidence!

PRINCIPAL: The thing is you made it all up.

APRIL: I made it all up? That's what you're telling me?

PRINCIPAL: And honestly, I think you should feel ashamed.

APRIL: I am ashamed. Very ashamed. Because everything that happened in the last three months I made it up; that my son can't sleep alone, that he wets his bed and that he wakes up in the middle of the night screaming and crying, I made that up too. It's all me; this entire situation is in my imagination.

PRINCIPAL: Well actually I do think this situation is in your imagination, but that doesn't mean that it's not true.

APRIL: How dare you!

PRINCIPAL: What I mean is the pain is real, it's there, and everything that pain makes us do has real meaning. Even if it's not real. Like dreams, we suffer, we laugh, we love, and it's all true, even if when we wake up none of it is real.

APRIL: Don't be an idiot, Dr. Ramirez.

PRINCIPAL: What did you say?

APRIL: Dr. Ramirez. That's what you told me to call you.

PRINCIPAL: No, the other part.

APRIL: Oh! I told you not to be an idiot.

PRINCIPAL: I won't let you...!

APRIL: *(Loud, furious)* Don't let me then!

PRINCIPAL: Can't you set your hatred aside for one second?

APRIL: *(Loud, furious)* No, I can't!

PRINCIPAL: Why?

APRIL: *(Loud, furious)* Because without my hatred I'm invisible! *(Pause)* And don't give me one of those pretty little speeches made up by someone with time to spare for dreaming, Dr. Ramirez, because we're the ones who live in this neighborhood that you call dangerous. The way to this school is more menacing than the neighborhood itself, much more!

The people who live around here live in daily terror; you can see it in their face, in their age, in the fear in their eyes. Take a look out there at those 12-year-old kids, even the ten-year-olds, and you'll see most of them look like they're eighteen already.

And if you look close, you'll see they're armed.

The thing is we're the Neanderthals and they're the Cro-Magnons, Professor, because we're the ones who are going to disappear, while they'll spread across the whole planet with their terror.

You think the way to this school is dangerous? Very dangerous? Well, let me tell you, my son and I live in an area that's WORSE. Worse than the dangerous way that everyone's afraid of! We live in the area, Dr. Ramirez, that SCARES the ten- and twelve-year-olds who carry weapons, it terrifies the Cro-Magnons, and petrifies the Neanderthals.

My area is the area that horrifies the ones who scare you.

That's what it's like where I live. Not in the middle of a dream, in the meadow, with white fences and grass, no, a *lawn*, all even and pretty green like a watercolor. We don't live next door to imagination; fantasy doesn't stop where we live.

That's why I'm telling you my son knows what it's like to be afraid, Dr. Ramirez. And you see he knows it so well, that the fact that he knows it is the reason I'm asking you, as politely as I know how, that the other boy, who I won't name, be expelled or transferred to another school.

PRINCIPAL: I can't do that.

APRIL: (*shouts*) What do you mean you can't do it?! Of course you can! Of course you can!

PRINCIPAL: That's not possible.

APRIL: Why?

PRINCIPAL: Because there's no reason.

APRIL: Isn't that reason enough!

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Lopez. I didn't ask you to come here today to discuss your request because it's denied. We aren't going to remove Lennon Gonzalez from the school. However, we want to do everything necessary to fix this problem and make sure both boys are calm and safe.

APRIL: I don't see how...

PRINCIPAL: I asked you to come today at this time because, before seeing you, I spoke, in this same office, with Mrs. Norway Gonzalez.

APRIL: Who?

PRINCIPAL: She's Lennon's mother.

APRIL: I know perfectly well who she is. She was here?

PRINCIPAL: She still is.

APRIL: Where?

PRINCIPAL: Waiting in the Assistant Principal's office. She doesn't know you're here, but maybe this would be a good time to...

APRIL: Here? That woman is here. Oh my God!

PRINCIPAL: Well, she's also a bit concerned and...

APRIL: She's concerned? *She* is?

PRINCIPAL: The problem affects both of you.

APRIL: And what's her problem?

PRINCIPAL: Well, to start with, she's also lived through a tragedy. Like you. She's devastated and...

APRIL: She and her son deserve every bad thing that happens to them and then some. (*Loud, so that Norway hears her*) GODDAMNED ANIMAL!

PRINCIPAL: Please... she's not goddamned.

APRIL: I'll decide who's goddamned here!

PRINCIPAL: She isn't doing very well either with everything that's happened to her.

APRIL: Everything that's happened to her?

PRINCIPAL: What's happening at school.

APRIL: At school? What about what happened to me?

PRINCIPAL: With that either, of course. Because her situation is desperate too.

APRIL: And that's my fault?

PRINCIPAL: No, of course not.

APRIL: You're saying it like it was.

PRINCIPAL: I'm not saying it like it was.

APRIL: But you're implying it.

PRINCIPAL: What I'm saying is...

APRIL: And you called her to meet with me.

PRINCIPAL: I think that you can...

APRIL: Without asking me ahead of time.

PRINCIPAL: That the three of us can come to an agreement on (*teacherly*) co-existence...

APRIL: Co-existence? An agreement on coexistence. Fine. Did you know that, if I can, I am completely within my rights to kill that woman? How's that sound as a first step toward starting co-existence?

PRINCIPAL: Please, Mrs. Lopez, don't say that. Remember that you're in a school and that your son...

APRIL: But you know that? That I could? Any judge would understand me.

PRINCIPAL: No one understands violence, no one.

APRIL: Someone does.

PRINCIPAL: Who?

APRIL: Her!

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez has done nothing bad to you and, as far as we know, has done nothing bad to anyone.

APRIL: She hasn't done anything bad?

PRINCIPAL: No, *she* hasn't.

APRIL: So for you then she's the good one. A citizen without sin, the kind that doesn't go to hell. Will she or won't she go to hell, Mrs. Gonzalez?

PRINCIPAL: No, I don't think so, at least as far as I know...

APRIL: Maybe hell changed its line of business, and I didn't know about it. Maybe now hell has taken up housing all the good and self-sacrificing people, the victims of evil, like my husband, my son, and me. We're the victims for hell. For Mrs. Gonzalez there's no abyss, no shadows. No sir. For her, there's a spot ready and waiting in the evil heavens, where for now, thanks to the changes sponsored by the principal of Harbor Hills Elementary School, they are devoted to protecting degenerates.

PRINCIPAL: Calm down, you should calm down...

APRIL: Let's be honest. I know you're on her side. Who knows what she said to get you to see things her way? It doesn't matter. I'm used to everyone siding with the criminals. And I also know very well how to do things for myself, to fight for myself and not depend on anyone. I understand what's happening; maybe she gave you money. Maybe she bribed you...

PRINCIPAL: I won't allow...

APRIL: Again, you won't allow me? And what are you going to do to not allow me? Huh? You going to call school security?

PRINCIPAL: Well, if it's necessary...

APRIL: You didn't have to call the police on her, did you?

PRINCIPAL: Well no.

APRIL: Just with me

PRINCIPAL: Not with you either, Mrs. Lopez.

APRIL: Why don't you call Security and have them arrest me and then take advantage and have them arrest my son too? Where do they put fatherless kids when they throw their mother in jail? Maybe we should ask Mrs. Gonzalez, because she does know about those things. And me, me who's never seen the inside of a police station, who's never had a problem with the law, who's family is decent to the bone, well I'll be the one they have to handcuff. (*Standing up*) I think I'll go. It's obvious you're on her side.

PRINCIPAL: I'm not on anybody's side.

APRIL: Then I'll be the one to take my son out of this school. I don't think it's fair and it will mean more work for me, but I guess I'll have to do it. Getting up earlier to take him to a different school, farther away, but where at least they treat decent people well and delinquents and criminals badly. Goodbye.

PRINCIPAL: There's no need for you to do that, take a seat.

APRIL: If that boy doesn't go, I'm pulling mine out. You can't stop me.

PRINCIPAL: Well, the truth is...

APRIL: You can?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, I can, but I'm not going to do that. Understand that this is a public school; we're supervised by the State. And if you don't have a valid reason for taking your

son out of the school, I'm required by law to write a report and the state could investigate you, assign you a social worker. I've seen cases...

APRIL: I'm the one who's going to get assigned a social worker! Me, and that woman and her ogre of a child nothing, protected by the law, by statistics, and most especially by you.

(Shouts loudly) Victims like us have zero rights! *(She falls into the chair. It seems like she will cry but she doesn't. We hear sad piano music)* Look; I'm not afraid. Normally, I'm not afraid. I'm not a coward. To live where I live you have to be whatever, but never a coward. I'm telling you this because I might be a victim, but don't think it's because I'm afraid. This is a battlefield. And even though people like me might be on the losing side, we go on fighting despite the fact that decent people have no way out.

A day goes by and for them, the ones on the winning side, it's just one more day. But for us, on the side of defeat, it's one less.

But, when I go to bed at night and I know I'm under the covers and my son, who's been sleeping in my bed for three months now, when he's dreaming, that's when I let out a sigh and I think we've escaped.

Because from my room, hiding behind my pillow, protected by my covers and with the night ready for sleep, I can see the faces of that gang of criminals, and there are so many of them and then while we're sleeping, they take over the night.

And they lie in wait for us, like always, for me and my David.

But that night, when we're in bed and far from the day, we're lucky and just that; lucky, because they haven't found us yet.

And from my bed I can see they're angry too, bitter, because that woman and her boy escaped them once again. But their dark day will soon come, they say. Sometime, just like that without a thought, Mrs. April Lopez and her boy David Lopez will slip up. And they'll go down. They'll be our victims, the way God intended.

Because, we all know, it can't be every night that we're safe and happy sleeping in our beds. And because it can't be every night you sleep and live and so you're a coward.

That's what I think every night, Dr. Ramirez. That for today, just for today, we've escaped. And that it's a day in our favor only because they haven't killed us yet.

(The music ends. The principal lowers her eyes. April also looks somewhere else. Then, the principal looks for another red folder on her desk. She hands it to her.)

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Lopez, I want you to see this.

APRIL: What is it?

PRINCIPAL: It's a transcript of the talk I had yesterday with the other boy, Lennon Gonzalez.

APRIL: And why should I care about that?

(She tosses the folder into the air)

PRINCIPAL: Look: I came to an agreement with Mrs. Gonzalez. By the way: do you know her?

APRIL: Of course, I know that piece of trash.

PRINCIPAL: You know her?

APRIL: Yes, I know that filthy, goddamned criminal.

PRINCIPAL: You know her?

APRIL: No, I don't know her!

PRINCIPAL: We think the best thing would be for her to meet with you.

APRIL: And what is it you want? For me to take a selfie with her? To invite her to tea?

PRINCIPAL: To begin the process of healing and acceptance, it's what the experts recommend.

APRIL: Honestly, I can't believe we nod along and do everything those goddamn delinquents want. I mean everybody hates those scumbags and still, we end up doing what they want. What those experts want is for us to lose our dignity with all this understanding. We're all held hostage; everyday people living bound and gagged.

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez isn't holding you hostage.

APRIL: Well it's her fault I'm in this situation!

PRINCIPAL: No, it's not her fault.

APRIL: I can't believe you!

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez didn't kill your husband.

APRIL: She...! She!

PRINCIPAL: And her son, Lennon Gonzalez, didn't kill your husband either.

APRIL: That monster!

PRINCIPAL: Your husband was killed by Mrs. Gonzalez's husband.

APRIL: Goddamn him, goddamn him!

PRINCIPAL: Those are the facts. She's not to blame. She didn't do anything. And the boy didn't either.

APRIL: Her, them, the whole family!

PRINCIPAL: It was a regrettable incident and we're all very sorry...

(Again, we hear the sad piano music)

APRIL: Three times he shot my husband. In the chest. Three. He was coming home from work, walking up the dangerous path and that's where he ran into that murderer. What did he ask him for? Money. He wanted money. To buy drugs, to spend it on guns, or maybe he just asked him for money because he felt like it. He probably got a little cash, not much, because we don't have anything. We're the poorest of the poor. And then, after he took his wallet and watch and even his shoes, then, for no reason at all, he shot him three times.

Can you imagine how much that hurt?

Do you know how much I loved my husband?

When his leg was bothering him or he'd cut his finger, I'd be desperate; I'd be terrified thinking about the pain he was in.

When they took out his appendix, I cried like never. And that was a routine operation.

And you know why I cried?

Because of his pain, that's all.

Because I would imagine it. See? I would discover his pain.

So now think, imagine! what it's like for me to remember those three gunshots and how much they must have hurt him and how they keep hurting me. Because he didn't die right away. He was alive for forty-five minutes; forty-five minutes of pain, lying there on the ground. And that man let him die.

He waited until he died!

Understand?

He waited!

(The music stops)

PRINCIPAL: Mrs.... April...

APRIL: April Lopez

PRINCIPAL: April Lopez...

APRIL: Should I keep using Lopez even though he's dead?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, if you want to...

APRIL: Of course I want to, you idiot!

PRINCIPAL: I understand your pain.

APRIL: Oh, you do? How? How do you understand it?

PRINCIPAL: What I mean is... Now we have the case of Mrs. Gonzalez, his wife...

(We hear the sound of an earthquake that is only noticed by the audience)

APRIL: Yes, a wife who supports him...

PRINCIPAL: And her son....

APRIL: Because she goes and visits him in jail...

PRINCIPAL: Who incidentally...

APRIL: Even though that man is the most hated and detested criminal in the country...

PRINCIPAL: And to everyone's surprise...

APRIL: And she waits for him and when they see each other, they hug and...

PRINCIPAL: Both attend this same school.

APRIL: They cry, but they have each other, they kiss...

PRINCIPAL: And truth be told; both boys are model students and get along well.

APRIL: And he can see his son. And even though the father is behind bars for murder, they sing and play and tell each other stories...

PRINCIPAL: And they're not afraid of each other...

APRIL: And he sees his son and he runs his hand over his hair...

PRINCIPAL: I've seen them playing together...

APRIL: And they're a broken family, but a living family.

PRINCIPAL: And when they're together, they laugh...

APRIL: But not us. My son doesn't have a father. He doesn't run his hand over his hair, they don't sing songs together, or play or tell each other stories. And I'm desperate.

PRINCIPAL: And they write things, they write together...

APRIL: My husband didn't do anything wrong.

PRINCIPAL: And they help each other...

APRIL: And now I can't stop thinking about him, inside that box, underground...

PRINCIPAL: And the teacher sits them next to each other...

APRIL: With his three holes in his chest in that pauper's coffin, because we couldn't even afford to buy him a nice one.

PRINCIPAL: Because she says when they're together...

APRIL: And the blood...

PRINCIPAL: They're the best in the class...

APRIL: And I can't avenge him...

PRINCIPAL: And also, we think they both have very high IQs

APRIL: And then, to top it off, the son of his murderer...

PRINCIPAL: And both have been accepted into the program...

APRIL: Goes to his school. In the same classroom!

PRINCIPAL: For Gifted Learners. Both of them were accepted...

APRIL: And I can't take this fury, this hatred, this outrage anymore...

PRINCIPAL: They'll spend more time together...

APRIL: That's all I have left...

PRINCIPAL: More time studying...

APRIL: Precisely with the son of that animal.

PRINCIPAL: More time imagining...

APRIL: And maybe, also, he'll end up killing him.

PRINCIPAL: More time being human.

(April mumbles insults. Just then, a knock at the door. We hear "Go on in.")

PRINCIPAL: Yes?

(The door opens. Enter Norway. The noise of the earthquake as loud as it can go)

NORWAY: It's me. I wanted to tell you I've been rethinking it and I don't want to...

PRINCIPAL: Just a minute... I'm... with...

APRIL: Her!

(The two women come face to face. April stands up, like she's going to leave without a word. Norway, for her part, looks at her like she's going to say something. Then, April pulls a kitchen knife out of her purse. She goes after her. The noise of the earthquake resounds throughout the whole theater)

Blackout.

2/

YESTERDAY, 11 A.M.

The noise of the earthquake mixes with the sound of a school bell and children playing during recess. We also hear a noble piano piece. To one side, the principal talks with Lennon Gonzalez, played by the actress who plays April.

PRINCIPAL: How often do you visit him?

LENNON: On Thursdays and Saturdays.

PRINCIPAL: Do you come to school on Thursdays?

LENNON: Yes, but I leave early.

PRINCIPAL: And still, in that subject, the one you're not going to on Thursdays, you're the best in the class.

LENNON: Because when Mom and Dad are talking, that's when I get my homework done.

PRINCIPAL: In the prison.

LENNON: Yes.

PRINCIPAL: And it doesn't bother you?

LENNON: It's a bit uncomfortable. There's a lot of sad people there. And arguing. They get loud. And the other kids want me to play and they interrupt my homework.

PRINCIPAL: Does your dad like when you visit?

LENNON: Yes. On Saturday we started singing, just like when he lived at home.

PRINCIPAL: Tell me about it.

LENNON: On Sundays, when dad lived at home instead of jail, he'd put on music super loud and he'd take a hairbrush and sing songs with me. And he'd say: sing loud with me. And I'd sing but mostly I'd just laugh because dad is really funny, and he makes his voice all weird and it cracks me up.

PRINCIPAL: So, in the end you'd sing with him?

LENNON: Yeah, but both of us cracking up

PRINCIPAL: Why?

LENNON: Well, Dad and I take the English words and make them all up in Spanish and everything we say is crazy and funny.

PRINCIPAL: What kind of music do you sing with your dad?

LENNON: The Beatles

PRINCIPAL: Your dad likes the Beatles.

LENNON: That's why my name is Lennon.

PRINCIPAL: Like the Beatle. Do you remember a song? The one you sing the most?

LENNON: "Here Comes the Sun"

PRINCIPAL: And in Spanish...?

LENNON: Aquí viene el Sol.

PRINCIPAL: Yes, you're doing really well in Spanish too. Ok. Sing it.

LENNON: (*embarrassed*) He'd say "Ir a comer salmón", that's "Here comes the sun." Like that. We make up the lyrics...

(*Lennon laughs*)

PRINCIPAL: That's great, Lennon, you're really funny!

LENNON: I'm not funny, miss. My dad is the funny one.

PRINCIPAL: (*Testing*) And do you want to be like him?

LENNON: Yes, but without going to jail.

PRINCIPAL: You'll never go to jail, Lennon.

LENNON: But if the box gets me, then I will.

PRINCIPAL: What box?

LENNON: And now that Dad's not home, the box can get out of the closet.

PRINCIPAL: What box?

LENNON: Without my dad, the box has powers.

PRINCIPAL: What powers? What box?

LENNON: A box that's in the closet.

PRINCIPAL: And what's in the box?

LENNON: It's a shoeshine box.

PRINCIPAL: And why are you afraid the box will get you?

LENNON: Well, when Mom's mad, and she thinks I'm not studying or I say things wrongs or I don't do my homework and I watch TV, she says I'm going to end up on the streets cleaning boots. And then she gets out the box and puts it by the door and says: *(like his mother)* "There's the shoeshine box for you, because that's what you'll have to do if you don't study like you should." And I cry. Because I'm terrified of going out to shine shoes. Then Dad comes over, when she's not looking, and he says: "Don't worry, I'll make sure you don't have to go out and shine shoes." And he takes the box and hides it in the closet again. That's why Dad is bad. So that the box doesn't come out and I don't end up on the streets shining shoes.

(The principal's mood changes and she looks like she is going to angrily deny what Lennon has said)

PRINCIPAL: But that's no excuse for... *(Controls herself, remembering he's a child)*
You understand what your father did wasn't right?

(Lennon nods. Then, hoping that the boy will realize his father's true nature, she asks him)

PRINCIPAL: How would you really describe your father?

LENNON: *(after a beat)* Delicious. Like milk chocolate!

(The scene dissolves. Music: "Here Comes the Sun" by the Beatles)

TODAY, 11 A.M.

(General lighting.

The school principal's office, much messier now than at the beginning of Scene 1. Throughout the scene, the principal is arranging her office and putting objects, folders, the poster, flag and piano in the places we saw them earlier.

For now, the principal is looking for a piece of paper. In front of her is Norway)

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez, thank you for coming. Please excuse the state of my office. It's just today, with the earthquake this morning, I think some papers fell, or they moved around. How strange. Right? Like the papers could decide where they're going to jump. But have a seat, I'll find it, it was over here... *(Norway sits down. The music begins)* This earthquake business has us all very nervous. *(Teacherly)* What's happening is the tectonic plates are sliding. And it's a good thing they're moving, because that means the heart of the Earth is still alive. And if it's alive, then so are we. That's what I like to think: that the earthquakes are the Earth's heartbeat. Whatever they are, what we have to do is understand these earthquakes and their aftershocks. We might have three or four aftershocks just this week. And there's no reason to be scared. It's better if the Earth moves like that, a bit at the time, and not all at once. Right? *(Very teacherly)* Because everything in life is a process. Don't you think so? *(She finally finds the paper)* Here it is! *(She hands it to Norway. She takes it, and it's clear she doesn't understand what it means)* It's a formal notification for you.

NORWAY: About?

PRINCIPAL: From the Board of Education and the Superintendent. You see the two logos, at the top?

NORWAY: Yes...*(Reads)* I....

PRINCIPAL: It means your son made the Dean's List.

NORWAY: The dean's list? Lennon?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, Lennon has been selected to participate in the Program for Gifted Children.

NORWAY: Lennon?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, your son, Lennon Gonzalez.

NORWAY: Are you sure?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, very sure, Mrs. Gonzalez. He was given the tests three months ago. They were overseen by specialists from the Department of Education. Didn't he tell you he had taken some special tests?

NORWAY: Yes, a long time ago...

PRINCIPAL: Three months ago...

NORWAY: Yes, he said something...

PRINCIPAL: Well, his scores came back, and they've been compared with results nationwide. Lennon was selected. He's in the 99th percentile for the whole country. In fact, it's the first time one of our students made the genius list. *(She laughs. Norway doesn't find it funny)* He was selected, you know?

NORWAY: So, do we have to pay for that?

PRINCIPAL: You don't understand Mrs.... Norway?

NORWAY: Norway. Norway Gonzalez.

PRINCIPAL: Pretty name.

NORWAY: Do we have to pay for that?

PRINCIPAL: No, Mrs. Gonzalez, you don't have to pay for anything.

NORWAY: That's good, because I don't have money.

PRINCIPAL: Of course, that's not the point. The program is...

NORWAY: Or time. I work all day and part of the night too.

PRINCIPAL: Of course, we know that but... Don't you help Lennon with his homework?

NORWAY: Me? Are you kidding?

PRINCIPAL: It's normal for parents...

NORWAY: He doesn't have a father.

PRINCIPAL: Yes, we know that for the last three months...

NORWAY: I mean: he has one, but he doesn't live with us.

PRINCIPAL: I was asking if you don't help him...

NORWAY: Mrs....What is your name?

PRINCIPAL: Mariana Ramirez. You can call me Dr. Ramirez.

NORWAY: Dr. Ramirez, listen. I can't help Lennon with his homework for two reasons. One, because when I get home, I'm exhausted from my two jobs, like I told you...

PRINCIPAL: Yes, of course, and...

NORWAY: And because I also don't understand the homework you all give him in this school.

PRINCIPAL: You aren't happy with his homework? You can ask us to...

NORWAY: I don't understand it. I don't know what it means.

PRINCIPAL: Oh! I see. But I don't mean if you do his homework for him, just if you spend time with him while he...

NORWAY: He likes to do his homework by himself. That's what he said. He holes up in his room, with that awful music he likes to blast with his dad. And that's how he does his homework. While he's doing it, I'm making him his dinner and watching TV. And when he's ready, he comes out of his room, and shows me his homework. And I guess that he's done it right and I sign it and that's that. Why wouldn't I sign it if I don't understand any of it anyways?

Then dinner, a little TV, and bedtime.

PRINCIPAL: That's all?

NORWAY: What else?

PRINCIPAL: With as well as he's doing in school, we thought that maybe he was spending extra time studying in...

NORWAY: I told you: he does it all on his own, in his room and listening to his dad's records.

PRINCIPAL: That's something...!

NORWAY: I thought it was normal.

PRINCIPAL: Yes, of course, it's normal...

NORWAY: Good. Because right now, after everything that's happened, the last thing I need is a problem with Lennon.

PRINCIPAL: No, he's fine. Really fine.

NORWAY: Or for you to put him in extra activities in school. You know? Because I don't have time to bring him.

PRINCIPAL: No, it won't be like that...

NORWAY: His grandmother comes to pick him up at the regular time and if it's not that time, then he has to stay until I get here at night. Like that time...

PRINCIPAL: Yes, like those times...

NORWAY: Once in a while.

PRINCIPAL: *(Looking at a chart)* Fifteen times this month.

NORWAY: I work, I told you that.

PRINCIPAL: It's all right. He stays with friends. Sometimes they invite him to eat...

NORWAY: And for three months now I'm working two jobs, practically three, really, if we count overtime, because I have to support a nine-year-old boy, his grandmother, who's sick all the time, and his dad. Jail is expensive. You know?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, I.....

NORWAY: I don't *have* to pay rent for his cell or for his food or the right to look out the window, but he still always needs money because without it, he says, they'll kill him.

PRINCIPAL: We understand your situation. And don't worry, Lennon doesn't have to do anything special. Mrs. Gonzalez, you should be very happy because if he keeps going like this, and I think he will because he obviously has a special talent, the County will take care of a lot of things. For starters, they'll give him a little money...

NORWAY: *(Happy)* Money? How much?

PRINCIPAL: Not much, but it will help...

NORWAY: So little and he's already working!

PRINCIPAL: It's not a job per se, the idea is that you would have some support so that your son would have everything he needs.

NORWAY: *(Again, hard)* Lennon has everything he needs.

PRINCIPAL: I mean, just in case...

NORWAY: I give him everything. He eats a very good breakfast, he has lunch here, so you must know what he gets. And I make his dinner myself too, a big one, so that, if he's going to mess up his life, like his father, it won't be because he didn't get enough to eat.

PRINCIPAL: He's doing really well...

NORWAY: Yes, I can see that every day.

(Norway gives her back the letter)

PRINCIPAL: That's the letter of acceptance to the gifted program, you can keep it. *(Norway puts it in her purse, not particularly carefully)* A lot of mothers have it framed... It's a real achievement and a recognition... Signed by the Head of the School Board and the Superintendent...

NORWAY: Ok. Thanks.

PRINCIPAL: Thank you. *(Ending the meeting)* Well thank you very much for coming. It was nice to meet you.

(Norway doesn't move. The principal waits for her to go but she stays right there. Pause)

NORWAY: I came today because I needed to talk to you, Dr. Ramirez, about something very important.

PRINCIPAL: Oh, yes? What is it?

(The principal places papers on one side of the desk, in a pile that looks like it is about to fall over. There is now an empty space between Norway and the Principal)

NORWAY: I want to take Lennon out of this school.

PRINCIPAL: What?

NORWAY: I want to take him out of here.

PRINCIPAL: But...why?

NORWAY: I have my reasons.

PRINCIPAL: You have to tell me...

NORWAY: I have to?

PRINCIPAL: Well, because if it's a problem with the school, we can...

NORWAY: I don't have to do anything I don't want to. If I don't want to explain it, I won't explain it. Period.

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez...

NORWAY: I want to take Lennon out of school. How do I do that?

PRINCIPAL: Well, when the school year ends...

NORWAY: I mean right now.

PRINCIPAL: You want to take him out right away?

NORWAY: Today or tomorrow. Today is better.

PRINCIPAL: But...

NORWAY: What do I have to do?

PRINCIPAL: No, you can't do that.

NORWAY: I can't?

PRINCIPAL: He's in the middle of the school year! He's thriving. He just got accepted into the gifted program! Did you not understand everything I've been telling you?

NORWAY: Yes, but don't tell me I can't.

PRINCIPAL: I mean...

NORWAY: Because, for example, for three months in my house what I say goes. And if I want, he won't come to school anymore and that's that...

PRINCIPAL: Of course, I meant that you shouldn't...

NORWAY: He's my son. I decide. Until he's eighteen and can work and support himself.

PRINCIPAL: Yes, but Lennon is only...

NORWAY: Nine years and three months old. Who brought him into this world, you or me?

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez...

NORWAY: I can't remember. It was so long ago. Was it you?

PRINCIPAL: There's no need for you to talk to me like that.

NORWAY: You haven't answered me.

PRINCIPAL: What?

NORWAY: Who brought him into the world? You or me?

PRINCIPAL: You, of course.

NORWAY: Oh! Well. Then I guess I'll be the one to make the decisions.

PRINCIPAL: I only want the best for him and...

NORWAY: And I don't? What do I want? The worst for him? Of course, I'm just his mother and we mothers want the worst for our kids. You, on the other hand, are the school principal and obviously you do want what is best for him.

PRINCIPAL: Norway...

NORWAY: Mrs. Gonzalez.

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez

NORWAY: Thank you.

PRINCIPAL: What I mean is....

NORWAY: So then, shall we make it today or tomorrow then?

PRINCIPAL: Mrs.....

NORWAY: I prefer today, as you know.

(Tense pause. The two look at each other)

PRINCIPAL: Fine. You're his mother and you know what's best for him.

NORWAY: That's right.

PRINCIPAL: But, give me a minute. Just a minute so that we can come up with a reason that...

NORWAY: A minute for a reason? Don't you think that's a lot of time?

(The principal stands up again)

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez: I want you know that it was just fifteen days ago that we found out about the situation. And on top of that, we found out by chance. Mrs. Barrios was overseeing Lennon's case, because of the situation with his father...

NORWAY: Who is in prison for Homicide.

PRINCIPAL: Yes.... that...Mr. Gonzalez...

NORWAY: Gonzalez is my maiden name. His is Marcano. We never got married.

PRINCIPAL: Mr. Gonzales, Marcano, wouldn't be home anymore... for a while...

NORWAY: He'll never come home again. He confessed and they gave him life.

PRINCIPAL: And then later, Mrs. Barrios was also assigned to see the other boy...

NORWAY: Premeditated and with malice. "A wicked man," the Judge called him. "An embarrassment to society."

PRINCIPAL: From the same classroom, whose father had passed away...

NORWAY: My husband killed him.

PRINCIPAL: For God's sake! Let me finish!

NORWAY: Fine. But say it like it is. You don't have to shy away from the words. The words are there, they hurt, but they exist. They're like things. For example, there's that desk, but inside it, is the word; Desk. You see? Like bullet. The word bullet can kill, just like the bullet itself. That's why we have to say the words. If we don't say them, the space for the words is taken over by brutality.

PRINCIPAL: We don't have to be cruel, Mrs. Gonzalez...

NORWAY: Then say the words. There they are, prisoners, not able to look out the window and paying you not to kill them. Can I ask you a question? *(The principal nods, thinking it will be the key question)* Am I Mrs. even though I never got married?

PRINCIPAL: I...uh...Of course you are. There are a lot of cases like yours at the school. In fact, most of the kids here only have their mother.

NORWAY: Did their father kill another man too?

PRINCIPAL: No, of course not! Divorce...you understand!

NORWAY: Of course I do. I just don't like it when you try to paint everything in pastels. With me everything is black and white. It is or it isn't.

PRINCIPAL: I understand, but that doesn't mean you have to be harsh with me. I was telling you that then Mrs. Barrios saw David Lopez, who lost his father, (*Before Norway can interrupt*) We already know he was murdered, we don't have to repeat it, because one thing is shying away from words and another is repeating them until they lose all meaning! In short, it was fifteen days ago when the psychologist wrote her report that we found out about the situation.

NORWAY: The situation?

PRINCIPAL: (*Defeated*) That we have two nine-year-old boys in the same classroom and that both lost their fathers...

NORWAY: Lost?

PRINCIPAL: One died...

NORWAY: He died?

PRINCIPAL: He was murdered...

NORWAY: And the other one?

PRINCIPAL: Is in prison...

NORWAY: In prison and sentenced.

PRINCIPAL: For that crime.

NORWAY: As simple as that.

PRINCIPAL: (*Sighs*) Now, those are the facts. Neither you nor I can change that. It happened. But understand here at the school we've barely had time to adjust to these circumstances.

NORWAY: Situation, circumstances. What do you have there? A dictionary? Look, the truth is you don't have any reason to adapt to anything.

PRINCIPAL: Of course we do, there are things you don't know about that...

NORWAY: Because I'm pulling my son out of this place today.

PRINCIPAL: I mean, there are a lot of variables in this story....

NORWAY: Professor Ramirez; you've had fifteen days to think about it.

PRINCIPAL: Yes, and we have...

NORWAY: I found out last night.

PRINCIPAL: Last night?

NORWAY: Last night. When we were working on his math homework. Though the "we" were working is an overstatement, because he knows more than I do about all that. But he needs someone to keep track of the table, you know: 8x1, 8x2, 8x3. I look at the answer and if he gets it right, I move on to the next one. And if he gets it wrong, I repeat the question. Suddenly, last night, while we were going back over the eights table, that's the hardest one for him, though who knows why when he's such a genius, well he stopped and said: "Mom, there's a boy in my class named David Lopez."

And I didn't understand him. And I said, "Okay. 8x7?" And he said, "He's my best friend." And I said, "Perfect, that's wonderful. Now, 8x7?" But instead of telling me the answer to 8x7, which I know he knows because even I know it. And because we've gone over it a million times. But nothing. Instead of the answer, he says, "I don't want to lose David Lopez as my friend." Then I said, "You're not going to lose him. Now then, 8x7?" And that's when he said it:

"It's just David is the son of the man that Daddy shot."

(Pause. We hear guitar music, sad but noble)

You see how words bite? How they explode? How there can be twelve words with forty-one letters, an apostrophe and two capital Ds, and that together those words with no commas, no periods, no new paragraph are like the three gunshots my husband fired three months ago at Mr. Lopez when he was nearly home. (BEAT) Can I call him "my husband" even if we never got married?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, of course, you can call him that....

NORWAY: "My husband" is two words. You see how important they are? I heard that people are common law married when they've been together for ten years. Is that true?

PRINCIPAL: *(Saddened)* Legally you're a married woman.

NORWAY: Of course I am. Because I've been with him for twelve years. Nine years with Lennon and three honeymoon years. Ever since he got off the boat and I went to stand beside him and took his hand, all the way to today, and I'm still going and taking him his food in prison. And I pay so they don't kill him and so he can look out the window. Did you know that from the window in his cell you can see a little, not much, but a little bit of the sea? He told me that. He can see a little, a sliver, of the sea.

PRINCIPAL: Off a boat?

NORWAY: He was a sailor. And I lived in the port; that's where I was born. Dad was always out of work because he didn't have an education, you know? So he'd go out to shine the shoes of sailors on foreign ships or of tourists on the cruise ships that would dock there. We were always hungry; like now, though I think Lennon eats better and more than what I used to eat back then. Maybe because I have two jobs, nearly three, while my dad only shined shoes and looked at the sea.

Mom told me that when I was born, Dad spent the whole afternoon looking out at the horizon. He saw a cargo ship called "Norway" and so he named me "Norway," like a cargo ship.

And that's exactly what I am now: the ruined hulk of a cargo ship.

You see: I've always been around ships. Maybe that's why I saw him getting off that ship, and just like that, I took him by the hand.

Though now I'm thinking that I should've taken the ship instead of the man, because they might seem the same, but apparently, they're not. Like now, you have no idea how I wish I could get on a cargo ship with my Lennon and be done with it, they could take us away from here, far away, to Norway maybe. Did you know Norway is a country?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, I know...

NORWAY: Maybe that's where my dad wanted to go, marry some blonde woman and have me, but blonde, living in a little house with a picket fence, green grass, shiny yellow school buses, the policeman who waves at you, the mailman who brings you good news.

(THE MUSIC STOPS)

PRINCIPAL: Mrs... Norway....

NORWAY: Or even better, maybe he wanted to send me there.

PRINCIPAL: You don't have to go anywhere.

NORWAY: Are you saying that 'cause I'm doing so well here?

PRINCIPAL: (*Pointing to the flag*) I'm saying it because this is your country.

NORWAY: No, that's the flag. I'm still searching for my country. Though this country has certainly found me. It's been after me for three months. Maybe if it catches me I'll figure it out.

PRINCIPAL: The country isn't after you.

NORWAY: Of course, it is. Because of what happened.

PRINCIPAL: You haven't done anything wrong.

NORWAY: I'm suspect.

PRINCIPAL: People can see what they want, but you're not suspect for anything.

NORWAY: I'm not talking about how people see me; I'm talking about how I see myself. *(The sad guitar music starts again)* I see myself as suspect. I walk down the street, I look at the people around me, and I can't stop thinking that maybe I better stop walking close to them 'cause, if I get close, they'll scream.

They'll think I'm going to snatch their purse, that I'll point a gun at them, that I'm following them to take them hostage or break into their houses and steal everything they have.

When I go to the playground, I feel like there, among all those pure angels from heaven, there's no longer a place for my fallen son. When I go to a store, I get the feeling they won't let me go inside. That everyone else notices who I am, and they know what happened to me.

And if I walk by an ATM, I can feel everyone turning to look at me, sure I'm there just waiting for them to get cash so I can snatch it from them or steal their secret PIN.

I see them and I tell myself: they think I am who I am, one of those women who could pull out a kitchen knife and plunge it in their chest without even knowing them.

Because I am evil personified. Or someone who lives with him. I'm hell's favorite tenant. But don't worry, I'm not going to take a ship to Norway. You know why? You know why I'm staying here and not running away in shame?

For him.

Because he says: who will take him food in prison when I'm off being a blonde in Norway? And especially: who will give some money to the confessed murderer, so they don't kill him, and they let him see a sliver of the sea from his cell window? Who?

PRINCIPAL: You still love him. Don't you?

NORWAY: What do you think? You think a woman stops loving her husband when he kills another person?

PRINCIPAL: No, of course not.

NORWAY: You've never been in love. Have you?

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez, with all that's happened, honestly who I am doesn't mean a lot. *(The principal takes out the red folder)*

PRINCIPAL: If you have time... Could you read this report?

NORWAY: I don't have time to read.

PRINCIPAL: It's short. Three or four pages.

NORWAY: So what is it? More reports on my son the genius?

PRINCIPAL: This is the transcript of my interview with David Lopez yesterday.

NORWAY: The other boy.

PRINCIPAL: The other boy. And I'd like you to read it....

NORWAY: And why would I care about what that boy said to you?

PRINCIPAL: Because it's related to everything.

NORWAY: *(Puts the papers in her purse)* Everything is related to everything.

PRINCIPAL: Lennon has had a very hard life, a terrible one, I should say. But he's responding well, he's studying more, and I don't know if it's God at work or who, but it so happens that his best friend at school, is David Lopez. They're the best friends we've ever seen. And there are no secrets between them. What I mean is Davey knows that Lennon's dad did what he did. *(Norway is going to interrupt her but the principal knows what she is about to say and beats her to it)*

Murdering his father.

(She says this seriously and at the same time as though it took place long ago. This tone surprises Norway)

Everything is related to everything.

(She looks at the piano) You see that piano?

(Norway nods. The principal goes to the piano and moves it, returning it to where it was in Scene 1)

My mother wanted to be a pianist, but she wasn't able to. So from the time I was seven she put me in classes. I didn't last long. The pressure got to me by the time I was eleven. The years went by and I became a teacher. Then later, I got my PhD. I applied for openings in the county and one day I became a principal.

(Norway is going to interrupt, but the principal asks for her to be patient)

Now, the point of the story is that when we found out I'd finally gotten the job as the Principal of Harbor Hills Elementary School, I went out with my husband and a couple of friends to celebrate at a restaurant that for me was a real luxury.

We had drinks, we laughed, we ate, the best night of my life. I didn't even feel that happy on my wedding night. To one side of our table there was a piano. And suddenly, maybe it was the wine, I felt the need to run my fingers over the keys. I mean to touch it, to feel it. And when I did, I was shaken.

I felt like there was someone else at the table, in my place, with my body, but that person wasn't me. Then, I sat down on the piano bench, I put my hands on the keys and, good lord, music came flowing out. *(We hear Satie's Gnossienne 5)*

It was one of Satie's studies, Gnossienne, number 5.

My husband couldn't believe it. My friends were amazed: no one knew I had taken piano lessons as a child.

Maybe it wasn't well played, but in my memory, something remained, something related to that art, to music, to the sublime, to the perfect, to the peace that uplifts us, to the beauty that impacts us. But all those things, still there inside me from the time I was eleven years old, were telling me, that even though all that music was truly once a part of my soul, it wasn't me anymore. That all of it that was so wonderful, and eternal belonged to someone else.

Then, I stopped playing and on the happiest night of my life, I burst into tears. And I cried until the next day. I think I really cried until yesterday, to be honest. Because yesterday, after meeting with David Lopez and Lennon Gonzalez, I felt like I had recovered a sliver of that beauty that I had set aside when I was eleven.

What I'm trying to say is there's something much bigger here than the situation at hand. You see? It's something truly special, we don't know what it is yet. The teachers at the school are all really surprised, because the two boys always walk side by side. And they laugh and they play. They've even invented their own language to communicate with each other. They swap words, and images, like it was a game. Did you know that's what they do during recess, when the other kids are talking about whatever silly things? They talk like they were writing poetry together. *(She takes out a blue folder)* And you should know that yesterday, yes, just yesterday, when Lennon was leaving with his grandmother, David, in front of all of us, gave him a hug goodbye. A hug! A lot of the teachers cried. We don't know if it's forgiveness. Could that be it? Are we seeing forgiveness? Is that what this is all about? And if what we experience in those childhood years has such a profound impact on us, inspires us, like my piano lessons, then I think these two boys, in such terrible circumstances, are experiencing something that could make them two extraordinary citizens, model, monumental citizens. If this country loses its way, if it sinks into tremors, if it grows accustomed to aftershocks, if it faces extinction, then the only way to rebuild it will be with the strength of symbols. And it will be people like Lennon and David who will step up to create us again, to be safer, more enduring, thanks to the power of metaphors.

NORWAY: Maybe these kids are just closing their eyes. Maybe they're just running away from conflict with all this sensitivity.

PRINCIPAL: Whatever it is, we think it's a miracle, Mrs. Gonzalez. A miracle.

NORWAY: I don't believe in miracles.

PRINCIPAL: But you believe in God, right?

NORWAY: You didn't really listen to my story, did you?

PRINCIPAL: I did.

NORWAY: And you're still asking me if I believe in God?

(We hear the school bell. We hear children going out for recess)

PRINCIPAL: Our time is up!

NORWAY: We're finished?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, but...

NORWAY: So am I taking him out today or tomorrow?

(The principal looks at her, sadly)

PRINCIPAL: Maybe neither of us listened to the other one today.

NORWAY: Speak for yourself.

PRINCIPAL: Mrs. Gonzalez. Just one thing...

NORWAY: Yes?

PRINCIPAL: Can I ask you a favor?

NORWAY: What is it? What do you want now?

PRINCIPAL: Could you come back in a couple of hours?

NORWAY: Do you think I have nothing to do?

PRINCIPAL: No, of course I know that you work...

NORWAY: I bust my hump. Say it like it is.

PRINCIPAL: You bust your hump.

NORWAY: Good.

PRINCIPAL: The thing is, in a few minutes, I have an important meeting. A meeting that, incidentally, is about this same matter. That's why I'd like to know if you can come back in a couple of hours and then we can make the definitive decision about your idea to take Lennon out of the school. Is that ok?

NORWAY: We can make the decisions?

PRINCIPAL: Yes, today we can resolve everything.

NORWAY: Not tomorrow?

PRINCIPAL: Today. Rain, lightning, or thunder.

NORWAY: Or earthquakes with a thousand more aftershocks.

(Then, it happens. An earthquake rattles the windows, knocks over the mountain of papers the principal had piled up and they are where they were in scene 1. Norway, nervous, goes over to the piano and hides)

NORWAY: Another earthquake! What do we do?

PRINCIPAL: Nothing. We don't do anything. Just wait.

*The principal has remained in her place, defiantly.
Shouts in the distance. A knock at the door. The earthquake mixes with the music. Blackout.*

3/

YESTERDAY, 1 P.M.

The noise of the earthquake mixes with the sound of a school bell and children playing during recess. We also hear a piano playing a noble piece.

Lights. To one side, the principal is talking to David Lopez, played by the actress who plays Norway.

PRINCIPAL: Do you miss him a lot?

DAVID: Yes. It's a good thing Mom is here. Though she cries more than I do.

PRINCIPAL: Well, that's normal. Anyway, you know that your dad, even though he's not here with us, he's always thinking about you.

DAVID: Yeah, that's what they said.

PRINCIPAL: What did they say? Who?

DAVID: That my dad is like an octopus tentacle. And that every time I see a dad, it's like another tentacle from the same octopus. And that all dads are octopuses.

PRINCIPAL: *(Laughs)* Of course, meaning you see your father in all the other dads, that he's still here with you though the other ones. What a nice way to put it. Who told you that? Your mom? Your grandma?

DAVID: He told me that.

PRINCIPAL: He? Who?

DAVID: Lennon.

PRINCIPAL: Lennon told you that about your dad?

DAVID: I talk to him and I tell him stuff.

PRINCIPAL: You tell things to Lennon?

DAVID: And to my dad.

PRINCIPAL: To your dad? You talk to him? (*David nods*) Yes? And what do you say?

DAVID: I tell him about the TV shows we always used to watch together and now he doesn't know what's happening... Or does he? Is there TV in heaven?

PRINCIPAL: I'm sure they do have TV there. A big one, the best TV of all.

DAVID: That's what Lennon thinks. He says TV in heaven is like the movie theater. And that they see better shows than us. And that they know how series are going to end when we're just starting to watch them. And I'm glad, 'cause I was worried Dad wouldn't know what's going on in his favorite shows. Anyway, just in case, I watch them all so I can tell him.

PRINCIPAL: When do you talk to him?

DAVID: Sometimes, in the afternoon after school, when I go in my room and close the door and leave the window open.

PRINCIPAL: And what else do you tell your dad?

DAVID: I tell him about Mom, that's she's crying over him a lot. I tell what's going on in school.

PRINCIPAL: Do you like coming to school?

DAVID: I like it best of all.

PRINCIPAL: So then: what else do you tell him?

DAVID: That I have a really good friend...

PRINCIPAL: Lennon.

DAVID: Lennon. And he's really funny. And sometimes we make up games like the ones I used to play with him...

PRINCIPAL: Games like...

DAVID: Word games

PRINCIPAL: Poems.

DAVID: Yeah, right. We make poems.

PRINCIPAL: They're very pretty.

DAVID: Yeah. I say things first and then Lennon puts something else and that's how the poems come out.

PRINCIPAL: So who are the poems for?

DAVID: I can't tell you.

PRINCIPAL: *(Finishing the meeting)* Well, that's all I had...

DAVID: Like yesterday, Dad was with me in my room. And he told me there'd be three earthquakes.

PRINCIPAL: Yesterday...? Three earthquakes? Really?

DAVID: And he said I should believe in earthquakes.

PRINCIPAL: He said you should believe? Well the most important thing is to stay calm and...

DAVID: He said humankind exists because of belief.

PRINCIPAL: That humankind...

DAVID: And we shouldn't glorify madness.

PRINCIPAL: Humankind exists because of belief...

DAVID: And not to look at anything that happens in the absence of man.

(The principal looks at David, intensely)

PRINCIPAL: He said that to you yesterday? Your father?

DAVID: And he didn't have blood or anything.

PRINCIPAL: No? What did he look like?

DAVID: Good, normal. He was wearing his favorite shirt.

PRINCIPAL: Did you see him for a long time?

DAVID: Yes, till Mom came and he disappeared out the window. *(Gestures like he had flown away)* Whoosh!

PRINCIPAL: And you're sure it was him?

DAVID: Of course. He's my dad.

PRINCIPAL: Yes, but I mean if it wasn't like a dream.

DAVID: No, because I took a picture of him.

PRINCIPAL: A...? Picture?

DAVID: Yes, then I printed it and put it in my wallet. It's right here. You want to see it?

PRINCIPAL: Yes...yes...

(He takes out a portrait printed on paper. He shows it to her)

PRINCIPAL: Oh my God!

DAVID: You see? I told you, Principal Ramirez. He's my dad.

(The scene disappears. Music)

TODAY, 3 P.M.

(Lights. Principal's office. The scene opens with the situation at the close of scene 1: April and Norway face off. The Principal paces back and forth, holding April's knife)

PRINCIPAL: With all the things I've had to take away from students. I never had to confiscate a knife in this school! *(Showing the knife to April)* I had better hold on to this. Right?

APRIL: It's your fault, for letting that woman in here!

NORWAY: My name is Norway Gonzalez, if you're interested!

APRIL: No, I'm not interested!

NORWAY: Maybe because you don't have a weapon in your hand anymore!

APRIL: I should leave! *(Notices that Norway is between her and the door)*

NORWAY: (*Also leaving*) Maybe we should drop all of this now!

PRINCIPAL: You think so? Well I think that we should take this chance to talk.

APRIL: To talk? What a ridiculous idea. To talk. Like those Neanderthal creatures would talk with those Cro-Magnon creatures.

PRINCIPAL: No, the Neanderthals didn't talk to... You didn't understand what I told you?

APRIL: Yes, that talking saved the species.

PRINCIPAL: Exactly

APRIL: So many times on the verge of disappearing and maybe that would've been for the best.

NORWAY: We wouldn't have to be here.

APRIL: And go through this.

NORWAY: Especially, after she attacked me with a knife.

APRIL: I didn't actually attack her!

NORWAY: She pulled it out and came at me!

APRIL: And if I had wanted to kill you, you'd be dead now!

NORWAY: You could still do it!

APRIL: Well, it won't be because I didn't want to!

NORWAY: Maybe because you didn't have a knife? (*To the principal*) Go on, give it back to her!

APRIL: It was an unconscious act. Besides, I have the most incontestable excuse.

NORWAY: Incontestable excuses? You could go to jail for your incontestable excuses, which, by the way, when they get contested, are known as "attempted murder." I'm still deciding how to report you to the police.

PRINCIPAL: You're not going to report her.

NORWAY: How can you be so sure?

PRINCIPAL: *(Shows her the knife, hides it)* Because you have no proof. And I, as the only eyewitness, will deny everything.

NORWAY: Of course, you're on her side.

PRINCIPAL: I'm on the side of helping.

APRIL: I don't need help.

NORWAY: I can survive on my own.

APRIL: So, don't worry so much about helping.

NORWAY: When, by the way, no one asked you.

APRIL: All that help is terrifying, Principal Ramirez.

NORWAY: That much assistance is suffocating.

APRIL: Because there are people who help to go on the offensive.

NORWAY: Helping to control, to have power.

PRINCIPAL: So you, Mrs. Gonzales, aren't trying to go on the offensive?

NORWAY: I'm not trying to do anything. The one with the knife was her.

APRIL: It's a kitchen knife. I use it to cut potatoes. Maybe that's what gave me the idea.

PRINCIPAL: I say that, Mrs. Gonzalez, because of the way you express yourself, how you say things...

NORWAY: What about it? Don't you understand me? I don't know how to talk?

PRINCIPAL: I'm referring to how your way of saying things is unusually blunt.

NORWAY: Oh! What you're saying is that women like me, whose husbands are in jail, who don't have their own home, or car, who don't have enough money for food, and who are going through life with absolutely nothing, that we should also not be blunt or even better, we shouldn't have language. Because obviously since I live around here, and I am who I am, I can't afford to pay for the words I say. Maybe you're implying I stole my voice. That's it: I'm a language thief and you caught me. Is that what you're referring to? Maybe I should talk like they do on TV so you can calm down and justify my universe?

PRINCIPAL: It's not about class, Mrs. Gonzalez. Here, really, the three of us are all about the same. Three poor women, to be speak plainly.

APRIL: Poverty, Principal Ramirez, has shades.

NORWAY: Every day is a shade.

PRINCIPAL: We're the same: I work too much, have no free time, a low salary, no savings, public transportation, debt, stay-cations, not many groceries. Right?

NORWAY: I don't have any debts.

APRIL: And I go back home for my vacations.

NORWAY: It's very easy to own your words, Dr. Ramirez, when you have your position and your salary.

PRINCIPAL: But it's just there aren't that many differences among us, Mrs. Lopez and Mrs. Gonzalez. Because being a teacher means living simply. *(She sees that Norway and April don't believe her. We hear a soft piece played on guitar and piano)* Sometimes, when I walk through upper-class neighborhoods, I think that, even though I don't belong in that landscape, I could blend in perfectly with their luxuries and their lives, maybe because one day they'll notice who I am: a teacher with talents. That when they look at my face, my hands or my eyes, suddenly they'll understand, and they'll say: "She likes to read. She knows how to speak. She played piano when she was a child. She assists those who don't even dare to ask for help. She's one of those people who cries when she sees other people sad."

In short, that I'm confronting barbarism.

And then I think that one of them will come over to me and they'll say: "I was looking for you, Principal Ramirez with your PhD. I know who you are. I want you to have my house, with my beautiful balcony, to enjoy my pool, for your family to play in my yard. Here, take the keys."

And in disbelief, I'd ask him: "Why me? Why let me use everything you have?"

And he'd say:

"Because you are an extraordinary person."

But when I finish walking through the neighborhood with its pretty houses, nothing like that happens. And it never will. The principal with her PhD ends up back here, at the school, living simply with just the basics.

Because a teacher is that and just that: living simply.

(BEAT) Until something happens like what's happened here. And then I realize: David and Lennon are like that rich man in my bourgeois dreams, the same one who, like an idiot, I want to recognize me.

Because these boys, who don't know who I am, have given me everything and I have nothing left.

Between the two of them, they are my house, my beautiful balcony, the pool I enjoy. They are my family playing in my yard. Those boys and I, we don't need class recognition, we need it from the people we love, in this very strange, and very unusual, situation that gives meaning to everything that is normal.

(The music stops)

NORWAY: Nothing is normal in this situation, Principal Ramirez with your PhD.

PRINCIPAL: You're wrong. *(Looks among the papers)* There's a Foundation that provides support to families of the victims... *(Finds the paper, hands it to Norway)* It's called "Victims Assistance Fund," there's the number and information, that's for you. But there's another Foundation *(With another paper)* "Project Life," committed to assisting the families of prisoners. *(She hands the paper to April. The two women look at each other and, patiently, exchange papers. The principal realizes her mistake)* Sorry.

Our case is more common than you think. Families of the victim and the perpetrator interact in the same spaces: supermarkets, malls, workplaces and especially in schools. The problem, of course, is when they recognize each other. That's when our spaces are taken over by the people we hate. Little by little resentment pushes us out of our places. We hate and they hate us; outrage seizes the territory from us.

APRIL: Tell me something. Why do you care?

PRINCIPAL: It's my job and....

APRIL: But why are you taking it so personally?

PRINCIPAL: It's not personal, it's a case that has affected all of us...

APRIL: Of course, you're taking it personally, with that whole story about the man who gives you a house. It's personal and it's naïve, Principal Ramirez. The truth is you could let this go. If she wants to take her son out and I want mine to have no contact with him, what does any of that have to do with you?

(To Norway)

I'm sure your son is a wonderful boy. But in my tragedy, there are very few things I want and can have. For example, I want my husband to be alive again. That can't happen. I'd like for someone to tell me how I'm going to pay the debts I have now. Well, no one can. Even the passwords to read our emails: I wish he had written them down for me someplace. But my husband is gone all of a sudden and he didn't even have time to leave me his passwords.

So, what I want I can't have. But out of all those things I can't even wish for, there's something that might be possible: for my son to have no contact with the family of the man that murdered his father.

For my son not to share spaces with the criminal's people.

Is it so awful to want that?

Does it make me a monster because I want to distance him from any contact with his father's murder?

PRINCIPAL: The boys don't see it that way, Mrs. Lopez.

APRIL: Of course, they don't. That's why we have to see for them.

NORWAY: The thing is if they understood they wouldn't be such good friends...

(We hear the noise of an earthquake that only the audience notices and that accompanies April/Norway's dialogues)

APRIL: They wouldn't be so happy...

NORWAY: Or talk so much on the phone...

APRIL: The truth is if they understood, they'd only want to kill each other.

NORWAY: And maybe that's what they'll do.

APRIL: When they're older.

NORWAY: Not even a lot older; a couple of years will do it.

APRIL: Teenage violence.

NORWAY: They'll be competing.

APRIL: And they'll hate each other.

NORWAY: Like only men know how.

APRIL: One loathing the other.

NORWAY: Detesting each other.

APRIL: And they shoot each other.

NORWAY: And when they start to look for culprits...

APRIL: Because they didn't succeed...

NORWAY: In doing it...

APRIL: Because you can be sure that they won't be successful.

NORWAY: Of course not!

APRIL: That's why we are where we are.

NORWAY: And we are who we are.

APRIL: Don't make them believe in happy endings.

NORWAY: Don't convince them there's beauty in this.

APRIL: I've seen thousands of movies that tell stories like ours.

NORWAY: And in all of them, one of them always dies.

APRIL: One or both of them.

NORWAY: And that day we'll cry.

APRIL: And you won't be here then.

NORWAY: And there won't be earthquakes.

APRIL: Or their aftershocks.

NORWAY: The school won't be here either.

APRIL: The neighborhood won't be here either-

NORWAY: Just me.

APRIL: And me.

NORWAY: With my tears.

APRIL: The same tears I've cried right up to today.

NORWAY: And they're the same, Dr. Ramirez.

APRIL: The water from tears doesn't evaporate or get recycled

NORWAY: That salty water comes back.

APRIL: They're the same drops.

NORWAY: Not one more not one less.

(The earthquake stops)

APRIL: Tell me something: do you have kids? *(Dr. Ramirez lowers her gaze)* Is that it? You don't have kids?

NORWAY: That's why you don't understand.

PRINCIPAL: That's what this is about, precisely. That with all the characteristics of this case and my own, I am able to understand it. The whole school understands it or at least we intuit what it means. None of us can put a name to it, but we know that what's happening here is important. It has the words of importance. It's valuable. It has to be. Don't you see that?

NORWAY: Well it shouldn't affect you all that way.

APRIL: It should affect me.

NORWAY: And me. But not you.

APRIL: Do you want to take over our pain? Is that it? You don't have a pain like ours and you envy it? Is pain what makes you think you're still alive? Well you can have it! It's all yours. I don't want this pain.

NORWAY: Maybe pain makes you feel like you're playing the piano.

APRIL: Who plays the piano?

PRINCIPAL: I play the piano.

APRIL: That piano?

PRINCIPAL: That one, any one...

APRIL: Well then concentrate on that and leave us alone. *(April stands. She takes her purse)* Don't be an idiot.

NORWAY: *(Also stands up)* Idiot. You're an idiot, Dr. Ramirez.

(The principal stands up, brandishing the knife)

PRINCIPAL: (FURIOUS) Just one moment! *(The two women see the knife. They freeze. The principal slowly loses some control)* I'm older than both of you and what you think of me I've thought myself a thousand times before and better than you. You know what I see in front of me? Two women in real pain, who've gone through a true tragedy, it's true, but I also see two brats, two disrespectful, immature women who think they know it all just because they've suffered. Coming and going without knowing anything about the hell they're living in.

(Angry) You suffer it, but you don't know it.

You can move me with your story, but the one with the big desk is me, with the flag behind her is me. And with the degree hanging there, is me!

(Knife still in hand, she is in an intimidating stance. The recess bell rings. We hear commotion. Children everywhere, laughing)

APRIL: Well, maybe we should call it a day. I have to go.

NORWAY: So do I...

PRINCIPAL: Just a moment. I want you to see something.

NORWAY: Dr. Ramirez, I...

APRIL: I'm going to be late for...

PRINCIPAL: *(Giving an order, knife in hand)* Both of you together. *(April and Norway do what she says. The principal goes over to the window, facing the audience)* This is the last recess. And the yard, the hallways, and the patio are filled with students. Though of course, that's just the official word for them, because they're just kids. From five to eleven years old, with the music of laughter and games, all of them drinking their juice, talking, having fun, they're happy.

(She points to one side) Lennon and David always meet up near this office, I'm sure we'll be able to see them from here...

(April and Norway go to the window too)

APRIL: You don't have to push it, I already know they're friends...

NORWAY: All Lennon does is talk about him...

APRIL: David idolizes him: Lennon did this, Lennon did that...

NORWAY: One Saturday he told me he was going to dress just like David...

APRIL: He said the same thing to me! "I'm going to dress like him, because today is Saturday and we can't see each other."

NORWAY: And when he shows me what David wears, it turns out it's exactly how he dresses.

APRIL: (LAUGHS) Exactly!

(The principal notices that they both laughed at the same time. Now the three of them are facing the audience)

PRINCIPAL: Look, there they are. Look how they talk, in secret...

NORWAY: I bet Lennon talks the most...

APRIL: What are you talking about? David is like a radio talk show host!

PRINCIPAL: Now, what I want you to see is this. During their conversation...Can you tell me what they're talking about?

NORWAY: No, how could we...

PRINCIPAL: What are they looking at?

APRIL: They're... looking at... That door?

NORWAY: With the big hinges...

APRIL: With the fountain behind it...

PRINCIPAL: In polished marble...

APRIL: Ok, but, what about it?

PRINCIPAL: Look closely. Is there anyone else in that picture?

NORWAY: Is...Is that a girl?

APRIL: Yes. It's a girl.

PRINCIPAL: Right. A girl. Her name is Francesca and she's in their class.

NORWAY: They're talking and looking at her...

APRIL: They're talking about her.

PRINCIPAL: Exactly!

NORWAY: What's that mean?

PRINCIPAL: They're both in love with the same girl.

NORWAY: In love! Don't be ridiculous!

APRIL: They're nine years old!

PRINCIPAL: It happens all the time. Children fall in love in a very pure way, it's a powerful feeling. It's really more of an attraction that falls between friendship, admiration, and beauty. At that age of honesty and simplicity, it's one of the most sublime human emotions.

NORWAY: Well I don't think Lennon is in love with that girl. Please!

APRIL: Or my Davey either. He's very little. I'm sure they're talking about something that happened in class....

(The principal goes to her desk and once again, from the red folder, pulls out several small papers)

NORWAY: What's that?

PRINCIPAL: *(The principal reads aloud)* "Francesca: Yesterday you didn't come to class. Please, don't do it again. When you're not here I can't stand it." Lennon.

NORWAY: What?

PRINCIPAL: "Francesca; please, when we're taking a test, look at me a couple of times at least, because your eyes are the ones that teach me to see the answers." David

APRIL: David?

PRINCIPAL: (LAUGHS) David signs with his last name. David Lopez. Just in case so she won't mix him up with some other David...

APRIL: Incredible! He's never written anything like that for me!

(Watching the kids out the window)

PRINCIPAL: We took these notes from them in class when they tried to pass them to the girl. The ones we miss, the girl takes them, reads them, and saves them in a notebook. Francesca has a special notebook for everything that David and Lennon write to her. They're best friends, in love with the same girl, and look at them. They're both happy with the situation. Probably right now they're thinking about the next poems they'll send her.

NORWAY: You don't have to go overboard.

APRIL: Those aren't "poems." They're more like notes.

PRINCIPAL: *(Surprised)* You don't know anything about the poems?

NORWAY: What poems?

APRIL: What are you talking about?

NORWAY: Kids make things up....

APRIL: But it's not important...

PRINCIPAL: You don't understand.

(Then, we hear the piano and guitar playing a noble and beautiful piece and the principal reads the poems, with great passion, as though she were reading the birth certificate of the universe)

PRINCIPAL: "I think of you
like a door thinks of its hinges
Like the polished marble of the fountain
when it thinks of the beggar
who died leaning against it
Like the stone sunken in the sea
thinks if it hasn't drowned
it's because its story
begins with a mountain
Like the messenger with one leg
who can't stop thinking
of the part of his body that disappeared
And he asks it:
What is death like?
and his leg answers:
It's one second before the void;
death is like when you say
they've given me everything
and I have nothing left."
David López y Lennon González.

(Abril and Norway are affected)

APRIL: And they wrote that?

PRINCIPAL: To the girl. To Francesca.

(Checking the window again)

APRIL: And the girl isn't even looking at them!

NORWAY: I don't know who this Francesca thinks she is!

PRINCIPAL: *(Laughs)* That's how it is! But what keeps these two together during recess is the wonderful idea, that they both love the same person. And their only communication with her is through poetry. Do you know how hard it is to find a friendship like that? Or even more: poetry like that? Not just at their age, but in a lifetime. *(Beat. April and Norway look at each other)* Both of them are on the dean's list, they're both the best students we've

had in decades, both have a moving friendship, and we think that the secret is in the transcendental weight of their friendship.

Separately, they'd probably both crumble.

Do you know how many students fail in school only because they see their grades as something they have to fight against? That they see sensitivity as though it were darkness; they see solidarity as a deviation; imagination as a shadow; friendship as a test, and school as the enemy, while they see barbarism as an amusing accomplice in life? Lennon and David see school as poetry. Their friendship is a lyricism that lets them play together, feel protected and overcome cruelty. That. Poetry. To help them beat the savages.

(The bell rings for the end of recess. The sounds of the children gradually disappear until there is a silence filled only by the music. This is an intimate moment. Norway and April are now reading the poems in fascination. The principal does the same. The three spend a moment reading in awe of Lennon and David's poems)

PRINCIPAL: *(Reading from Lennon and David's notes)* "Humankind exists because of belief." "I don't recognize what exists in the absence of man." *(The music stops. Norway is moved. She hides her tears. April too. The principal takes the red folder again and goes over to April)* Mrs. Lopez, I want you to see this photo. David told me that in the afternoon, closed up in his room with his window open, he talks to his father, that he sees him and they tell each other things. I figured he was talking about a game in his imagination, which by the way is normal in these cases, until he told me no, that he was there, that it was his real father. And as proof, he took a picture of him.

APRIL: A picture? *(April clearly doesn't like what she sees)* What is this? What does it mean? Could he be going crazy? Is that what this is? My son is going crazy? Is that possible? All this talk about poetry and friendship and the girl and beauty it's nothing more than a way to tell me that my nine-year-old is going crazy? Is that it?

PRINCIPAL: No, not at all. Your son isn't...

APRIL: Because this photo confirms it: David is losing his sanity. That's it. His father's murder is annihilating his mind.

This is all I needed. What should I do now? Put him in an insane asylum? Are there asylums for kids?

PRINCIPAL: I think you're taking that photo the wrong way....

APRIL: Wrong? He likes to shut himself up in his room in the afternoons and I'm thinking the time alone will do him good. That he needs time alone. And I hear him talking in his room. And I tell myself it's dreams or games, that kids play like that, they talk and say things, they make up stories. But I didn't know it was a conversation he thinks he's having with his father. And it's not with him! He puts on his father's clothes and talk to the mirror! *(Looking at the photo more closely)* What is this? *(Loud)* There he is, that other stupid boy!

NORWAY: What are you talking about?

(Showing the photo)

APRIL: There he is, in my house, without me knowing! That's why he leaves the window open, so his little friend can come in and out without me seeing him. That brat is definitively a bad influence on him!

NORWAY: You don't have to insult Lennon.

APRIL: Oh no? *(Hands her the paper)* Take a good look, you idiot! When he says he wants to be alone in his room, he's really going to spend time with his friend. And your son has the gall to put on my husband's clothes and pretend to be him!

(We hear earthquake noises that only the audience notices and that accompany the confrontation between April and Norway)

PRINCIPAL: He doesn't pretend to be him, you don't understand...

APRIL: Or maybe your son is the sick one?

NORWAY: He's fine...

APRIL: Of course something's wrong with him! After all, those deviations are inherited. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

NORWAY: What deviation?

PRINCIPAL: Please...wait...

APRIL: His father's a murderer. And a drug addict. And a confessed criminal that the whole country despises.

PRINCIPAL: We shouldn't glorify madness...

APRIL: That's inherited. Isn't it?

NORWAY: Well Lennon's not the one who sees ghosts...

APRIL: My son doesn't see ghosts! Your son is driving my David crazy!

NORWAY: Well put him in an insane asylum for kids then.

APRIL: And yours in juvenile detention, that works

NORWAY: Yours will end up on the streets shining shoes.

APRIL: Yours selling drugs on the stairs.

NORWAY: Maybe they'll have to shoot yours full of medicine, so he sleeps his whole life.

APRIL: Or they'll pull your kid's teeth, so he doesn't bite innocent victims.

NORWAY: Your son isn't innocent!

APRIL: Your son is a misfit!

NORWAY: Yours is a lunatic!

APRIL: Yours is a murderer!

PRINCIPAL: No, no...

APRIL: And that unhealthy friendship ends today! I won't have them spending all this time together and then something worse happens!

NORWAY: Like my Lennon learning how to be an animal from you

APRIL: Like that animal of yours starting to touch my David.

NORWAY: Disgusting! How dare you!

APRIL: Nothing's worse, nothing's worse than that!

NORWAY: Only someone sick would think like that. Maybe the one they should send to the asylum is you.

APRIL: I'm the sick one? The nutjobs around here are you and your son! We're finished here. I want to make one thing very clear to you, Mrs. Whoever-you-are. To you and your son, who I see you have no control over. I'm warning you he better not set foot in my house again. Because if he does...

NORWAY: If he does what?

APRIL: Well, you know.

NORWAY: No. I don't. Say the words.

APRIL: It won't be words I say to him.

NORWAY: Oh no? Are you going mute then?

APRIL: Mute because without a word, I'm going to grab him...

NORWAY: Grab who? Who?

APRIL: That boy of yours whose name I will never say ever in my life!

NORWAY: Lennon! His name is Lennon Gonzalez!

APRIL: Whatever his name is. I warned you.

NORWAY: No. You didn't say anything.

APRIL: Well, I'll be clearer then: if I find that boy in my house, just remember accidents can happen.

NORWAY: Accidents?

APRIL: It's my house. He's my son. And it's my right.

PRINCIPAL: I'm asking you to stop...

NORWAY: Are you threatening me?

APRIL: Yes. I'm threatening you.

NORWAY: How dare you?

APRIL: I dare because I'm the victim here!

NORWAY: You're not my victim!

APRIL: *I am* your victim! It's you and your son and your husband who made me a victim. Your family visits to the prison make me a victim. Your affection for that murderer make me a victim. Even the love the son feels for his father makes me a victim!

NORWAY: Your his victim, not mine.

APRIL: And a victim has every right...

NORWAY: To what? To hurt a child?

APRIL: To ask...

NORWAY: To ask what?

APRIL: I don't want to say it... I don't want to say it...

NORWAY: What? Say it. Spit it out. The last word you've been wanting to say ever since you saw me come through that door.

APRIL: Well I can ask...

NORWAY: Yes?

APRIL: That!

NORWAY: Say the word, you goddamned-

PRINCIPAL: Don't call each other that!

NORWAY: I decide who's goddamned around here! Say it, goddamn you!

APRIL: You know it!

PRINCIPAL: No, don't say it!

NORWAY: Say it!

PRINCIPAL: Don't say the word!

APRIL: Ask for that!

PRINCIPAL: You don't need to say it!

NORWAY: Revenge?

PRINCIPAL: No!

APRIL: *(Loud)* Yes, revenge!

NORWAY: That's all you want? Revenge? That's it?

APRIL: God talked about vengeance! An eye for an eye!

NORWAY: And that would be enough for you?

APRIL: That's the only justice for me.

NORWAY: Revenging yourself on me or my son? Or my husband should die?

APRIL: He should die from three gunshots to the chest because a bastard needs money to buy drugs. It's a simple as that to make amends.

NORWAY: You may get your revenge soon.

PRINCIPAL: No, no!

NORWAY: In prison life is very short.

APRIL: Dead dogs don't bite!

NORWAY: That's all there is to say. This meeting is over. Goodbye. I'm taking my son. A pleasure. It's been a hell to meet you both.

APRIL: No more contact with my David! Is that clear?

NORWAY: Don't worry. They'll never see each other again.

PRINCIPAL: No, no, they have to be together, two kids in the universe...

NORWAY: Goodbye. And for me, die, if you can.

APRIL: Don't come saying later that I wasn't clear: if I see him with David again, I swear I'm going to grab him...

NORWAY: And what? What are you going to do to my son?

APRIL: *(She throws the printed photo in Norway's face)* I'll rip out his soul, if I feel like it!

(Norway has lost all control now and she faces off with her)

NORWAY: Oh yeah?

APRIL: Yeah!

NORWAY: Just you think it!

PRINCIPAL: No, for God's sake...! Stop!

APRIL: That's what's missing with all these words. A little revenge!

(Then, Norway moves away. She goes to the desk and takes the knife. April looks at her in terror. She pulls out her phone and is about to throw it at her. Norway takes a few steps toward her; they are going to fight. But just then, the principal sits down at the piano and plays Gnossienne no. 5 by Erick Satie.

The piano music, suddenly, is mixed with the sound of children at recess. The music takes the whole stage.

Norway and April are surprised, listening to the music and watching the principal play. They can't believe it and at the same time they don't know what's happening. But the music gradually works its way into their souls. We can see it. Their movements are slower, as though in time to the music.

The music, as it progresses, disarms them.

Norway lowers the knife, little by little. She leaves it on the desk, like it was a feather. April does the same thing with her phone, she sets it aside, as though it were a sinking stone. April and Norway move a little apart, but very slowly, nearly imperceptibly, and without taking their eyes off the principal and the piano. In her face, the principal reflects a beautiful pain.

The lights slowly dim. The principal plays the music like a woman in love. April remains standing. Norway sits, facing the audience, and they read, choked up, with a voice we haven't heard from them until now)

APRIL: Like a stone sunken in the sea thinks if it hasn't drowned.

NORWAY: It's because its story begins with a mountain.

(April and Norway, now as Lennon and David, in the middle of composing the poem, happy, with real affection between them)

LENNON: Like the messenger with one leg...

DAVID: Who can't stop thinking...

LENNON: Of the part of his body that disappeared...

DAVID: And he asks it:

LENNON: What is death like?

DAVID: And the leg answers him:

LENNON: It's one second before the void

DAVID: Dead is like when you say...

LENNON: They've given me everything.

DAVID: And I have nothing left.

LENNON: David Lopez

DAVID: And Lennon Gonzalez

They give each other a high five. We then see, on the entire stage, the painting “Two Kids in the Universe” by the artist George Mendoza. The principal plays the Satie piece to the end.

The End