

Last Cup of Sorrow

A Play in Three Acts

By Jeremy B. Storey

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CHARACTERS

CHARLIE: A young man in his mid-twenties. Brother of Josh, son of Madeline. Charlie is a former athlete... he is charming, fun-loving, cocky and little reckless.

JOSH: A young man in his early-twenties. Younger brother of Charlie, son of Madeline. Josh is an athlete. He's a good-natured, perceptive, sensitive and understanding person.

MADELINE: A woman in her late-forties. The mother of Josh and Charlie. A matriarchal figure, full of compassion and love for her family.

NURSE PARKER: A woman in her late-twenties. She is a kind and confident caregiver, full of positivity. She is also not afraid of making emotional connections to her patients or speaking her mind.

DOCTOR FORSELL: A man in his mid-forties. Is the doctor tending to Madeline and Josh at the hospital. He is a no-nonsense, uber-professional doctor, whose bedside manner is indifferent at best.

JAVIER: A man in his early-forties. Prisoner. Cell mate of Charlie's. A hulk of a man, scarred by years of fighting and emotional torture. He is a man of few words, but when he does speak, his words carry weight.

CARLOS: A man in his early-thirties. Prison guard, married to Eldora, nephew of Uncle Aldo. He strains to be a moral and respectable person. But under the surface he crackles with anger, fear and regret.

RODRIGO: A man in his late-thirties. Prison guard, friend of Carlos. A fidgety, anxious fellow who is conniving and generally ill-tempered.

ELDORA: A woman in her late-twenties. Married to Carlos. She is classically pretty and statuesque. She has a strong will and is not afraid to express it. She is full of life, love and grace.

UNCLE ALDO: A man in his early-fifties. Uncle to Carlos. He is a man of stature with an air of immense self-assurance and menace about him. He is a terrifying man... and knows it.

TOM: A man in his late-forties. He has an ominous, yet deliberate demeanor. He speaks softly, yet his words carry a steely determination about them.

ACT ONE**Scene 1**

FADE IN LIGHTS:

Hospital room. JOSH sits beside a bed where his mother, MADELINE lays unconscious. Various monitors and side-tables flank either side of the bed. One of the side-tables has a picture - not in a frame - of the two brothers and their mother. JOSH'S forehead and left eye are covered in bandages - his cheeks are reddish with slight burns.

(CHARLIE, JOSH'S brother enters carrying two cups of coffee. He hands one to JOSH.)

CHARLIE: Hey... Hear anything?

JOSH: *(Shakes head.)* No. You?

CHARLIE: Voicemail again.

JOSH: *(Sips coffee, grimaces.)* Any idea where he is?

CHARLIE: Not a clue.

JOSH: He can't be off the grid.

CHARLIE: Remember who you're talking about.

JOSH: Mom would know.

CHARLIE: Doubt it.

JOSH: *(Pause.)* What if she... if he wasn't here if...

CHARLIE: *(Reassuring.)* We'll find him.

(CHARLIE restlessly walks the room.)

JOSH: The woman?

CHARLIE: Still in surgery... I think. Not sure.

JOSH: Get that from the doctor?

CHARLIE: No, the nurse. Doc's AWOL. When'd he last come by?

JOSH: *(Looks at his watch.)* An hour ago.

(JOSH sits up, starts tenderly arranging the pillows behind his mother's head.)

CHARLIE: An hour? What the fuck, man?

JOSH: It's an ER. Whaddya expect? *(Rubs eyes, squints and grimaces.)* Think we can turn the lights down?

(As JOSH moves to sit down again, he stumbles slightly. CHARLIE helps him sit down.)

CHARLIE: Feeling a little loopy there, pal?

JOSH: Just lost my balance for a sec.. I'm fine.

CHARLIE: *(Concerned.)* Tired?

JOSH: Aren't you?

CHARLIE: You're concussed.

JOSH: Since when did you take the Hippocratic oath?

CHARLIE: I've seen enough pucks and sticks to the head to know when a guy's noodle's been scrambled.

JOSH: *(Gestures to MADELINE.)* You reckon Ma's okay?

CHARLIE: *(Glances at Madeline, looks away.)* I don't know.

JOSH: Think she's in pain?

CHARLIE: It's not looking- *(Bites lip.)* Finish your java.

JOSH: It's my third cup. I'm awake already.

CHARLE: You need to sober-up.

JOSH: What difference does it make?

CHARLIE: *(Agitated.)* Will you just drink the damn coffee!

(JOSH nods. Reluctantly sips at his coffee. He straightens the pillow behind MADELINE'S neck.)

JOSH: It's a good sign the woman's in surgery, right?

CHARLIE: Good, in that she's not dead, yeah.

JOSH: *(Almost whispering.)* What if she doesn't make it?

CHARLIE: I'll deal.

JOSH: Really? You don't seem to do well in cramped spaces.

CHARLIE: One thing at a time.

JOSH: I know but, but if the authori-

CHARLIE: *(Livid.)* Will you give it a rest? Mom's all fucked up, and you're worried about me doing time? Get your goddamn priorities straight, kid.

JOSH: *(Retracts, hurt.)* Sorry.

(CHARLIE takes a deep, calming breath and walks over to JOSH. He puts his hand on the back of JOSH's neck, and gives it a gentle, loving squeeze.)

CHARLIE: *(Gentle.)* It's gonna be okay.

(Pause. JOSH stares at CHARLIE.)

JOSH: *(Quietly.)* Why were you driving?

CHARLIE: You were shitfaced.

JOSH: But I was the designated.

CHARLIE: Nope.

JOSH: I swear it.

CHARLIE: Swear all you like.

JOSH: *(Scratches head.)* Something's off.

CHARLIE: You're concussed, everything's off.

(NURSE PARKER enters.)

NURSE PARKER: Am I interrupting?

CHARLIE: No. (*Notices the NURSE, straightens up his clothes and runs his hands through his hair.*) Are you a doctor?

NURSE PARKER: I'm a nurse.

JOSH: Where's nurse Hinton?

NURSE PARKER: Her shift ended.

CHARLIE: What? No good-byes?

(*NURSE PARKER smiles sympathetically in response and then goes over to MADELINE and looks her over.*)

CHARLIE: What about Dr. Forsell? When does his shift end?

JOSH: Charlie-

NURSE PARKER: Doctor Forsell's on call for next 24-hours.

CHARLIE: Figures.

JOSH: Charlie-

CHARLIE: What?

JOSH: Cool it.

(*CHARLIE glares witheringly at JOSH. JOSH looks away, breaking eye contact.*)

NURSE PARKER: (*Gives CHARLIE a matronly tap on the shoulder.*) You're in good hands with Dr. Forsell, he's an excellent physician.

CHARLIE: (*Looks at her hand, puts his hand on it.*) I'll take your word for it, nurse...?

NURSE PARKER: Parker. Nurse Parker. (*Pulls her hand away.*)

CHARLIE: (*Eying her figure.*) Is that what it says on your birth certificate?

NURSE PARKER: (*Smiles shyly.*) No.

CHARLIE: So...?

NURSE PARKER: Paisely Pearl Parker.

CHARLIE: 'Paisely Pearl Parker'? That's unique, don't you think, Josh?

JOSH: (*Indifferent.*) Sure.

NURSE PARKER: Always sounded saccharine to me.

CHARLIE: No. It's classical... like one of those gals from the silver screen. You know... uh... Josh, help me out.

JOSH: (*Whimsical.*) Doris Day, Mary Miles Minter...

CHARLIE: Brigitte Bardot.

JOSH: (*Looking at MADELINE.*) Ma loves those movies.

CHARLIE: (*Also looks at MADELINE.*) Yeah.

NURSE PARKER: (*Moves closer to JOSH.*) How you feeling?

JOSH: Much better.

CHARLIE: I think he has a concussion.

NURSE PARKER: (*Looks at JOSH.*) Josh, are you experiencing any nausea? Sensitivity to light? Problems concentrating?

JOSH: No, I'm good. (*Looks at MADELINE, becomes oblivious.*)

CHARLIE: (*To NURSE PARKER.*) No, he's not.

NURSE PARKER: (*Looks concernedly at JOSH, and that at CHARLIE.*) I'll make a note for the doctor.

JOSH: A note? About what?

CHARLIE: Your concussion, dumb ass.

JOSH: Oh.

CHARLIE: (*Mocking.*) Oh...

JOSH: Can we please talk about our mother, now?

(Picks up MADELINE'S charts. Starts reading them.)

NURSE PARKER: *(Looks at her charts.)* Her vitals are stabilizing.

JOSH: *(Slightly animated.)* That's good, right?

NURSE PARKER: It's a start... but the next 24-hours are critical.

JOSH: Why?

NURSE PARKER: She- *(Pause.)* Doctor Forsell will explain.

CHARLIE: And wait another hour?

NURSE PARKER: It's not my place to-

JOSH: If you know anything... anything at all. Please.

NURSE PARKER: *(Hesitates, looks at the chart again.)* Your mother fractured her skull and there's swelling around her brain. The pressure from the swelling needs to subside for her to recover.

CHARLIE: If it doesn't... 'subside', then what?

(JOSH sits up, and looks imploringly at NURSE PARKER.)

NURSE PARKER: *(Looking at JOSH.)* At best, potential brain damage and at worse, complete organ failure.

(JOSH, holds his head in his hands. CHARLIE leans against his mother's bed and almost absent-mindedly touches her hand.)

(DOCTOR FORSELL enters.)

NURSE PARKER: *(Stiffens, when seeing the doctor.)* Doctor.

(NURSE PARKER and DOCTOR FORSELL quietly confer. NURSE PARKER, glances sadly over to JOSH.)

NURSE PARKER: I'll be back shortly. Gentlemen... *(Nods to them both.)*

(NURSE PARKER exits.)

CHARLIE: (*To DOCTOR FORSELL.*) Glad you could join us.

FORSELL: Josh... I have your MRI results.

JOSH: What about Ma? How's she doing?

FORSELL: I'll get to her in a moment. First, I wa-

JOSH: The woman we hit? She okay?

FORSELL: The female patient is still in surgery. (*Pause.*) Unfortunately her infant died at the scene.

JOSH: (*Stands up.*) What infant?

FORSELL: (*Confused.*) The... her baby. I'm sorry, I thought you knew.

CHARLIE: (*Quietly shaken.*) Evidence to the contrary, doc.

JOSH: (*To CHARLIE.*) Did you know?

CHARLIE: (*Shakes his head, looks away, still shaken.*)

JOSH: (*Sits down again. Softly to FORSELL.*) What are their names?

FORSELL: Whose names?

JOSH: The woman. The 'infant'. They had names, right?

CHARLIE: (*Quietly to JOSH.*) You don't have to do this.

JOSH: (*To FORSELL, urgently.*) Their names?

FORSELL: (*Looks at his clipboard.*) Susan Henson. The infant's name was Harry. (*Pause.*)

JOSH: (*Slumps down, distraught.*)

CHARLIE: (*To FORSELL.*) The MRI results?

FORSELL: Josh... the retina in your left eye has been detached. Most times we can re-attach it. But in your case, the nerves are compromised. So... (*Pause.*) I'm sorry.

JOSH: (*Pointing to the eye.*) Am I gonna go blind?

FORSELL: No, no... but your depth perception will be distorted.

CHARLIE: Can he still play hockey?

FORSELL: (*Shakes his head.*) Contact sports should be ruled out indefinitely.

CHARLIE: So... no hockey...? Ever?

FORSELL: He could lose vision if-

JOSH: Any updates on our mother?

(*Unsure how to proceed, DR. FORSELL looks at CHARLIE, who in turn, looks away, lost in thought. FORSELL turns his attention to MADELINE.*)

FORSELL: (*Starts reading MADELINE'S chart.*) She's stable, but the next-

CHARLIE: ...24-hours are critical. Nurse Parker explained. (*Points to the door.*) We need a moment, doc.

(*FORSELL nods, starts to move to the door. Stops.*)

FORSELL: Before I forget... The police are going to need a statement from you both.

CHARLIE: Why? I was the one driving.

FORSELL: You're both material witnesses.

JOSH: (*Looks at CHARLIE.*) It's the law, Charlie.

CHARLIE (*Rubs his temples and sighs resignedly.*) Fine.

FORSELL: (*Looks quizzically at CHARLIE.*) You were driving?

CHARLIE: That's right.

FORSELL: (*Straightens.*) Look... I've seen my share of car accidents. (*Pause.*) Your mother's injuries are consistent with blunt force trauma, usually caused by a head smashing a windshield or dashboard.

CHARLIE: She was in the front.

FORSELL: (*To JOSH.*) But you were in the back?

JOSH: (*Looks at CHARLIE, then nods.*) Right.

FORSELL: Josh's injuries are virtually identical to your Mother.

CHARLIE: (*Provoking tone.*) And?

FORSELL: If I knew nothing about the accident, and was simply going by x-rays and test results, I'd assume the person who suffered Josh's injuries was driving the car.

CHARLIE: Well, your 'assumption' is wrong.

FORSELL: Perhaps. But you should know... under oath, I'd state the same assumption.

(DOCTOR FORSELL, *nods to JOSH, and stars to exits the room.*)

JOSH: One more thing, Doctor.

FORSELL: (*Stops.*) Yes, son?

JOSH: I don't remember the accident. Will it stay that way?

FORSELL: (*Looking at CHARLIE.*) It's too early to say.
(*Pause.*) Josh, I'm going to ask Nurse Parker to take you to radiology for more tests.

JOSH: (*To Forsell.*) Okay.

(FORSELL *exits*. CHARLIE *slumps down on the chair next to MADELINE'S bed.*)

JOSH: Anything you want to tell me?

CHARLIE: About?

JOSH: The accident?

CHARLIE: (*Ominous.*) I've told you everything.

JOSH: (*Considers refuting CHARLIE. Thinks better of it, resignedly takes a seat. Sighs.*)

CHARLIE: We're gonna get you on the ice again.

JOSH: (*Annoyed.*) Forget it.

CHARLIE: Don't do that.

JOSH: Do what?

CHARLIE: Quit.

JOSH: I'm smelling the coffee - maybe you should too.

CHARLIE: (*Standing.*) Doctors do swing and miss, you know.

JOSH: So do you.

CHARLIE: (*Steps closer to JOSH.*) What does that mean?

(*NURSE PARKER enters the room, with a wheel chair.*)

NURSE PARKER: Everything okay?

CHARLIE: Fine and dandy, thanks.

NURSE PARKER: (*Smiles politely, looks at JOSH, gestures to the wheelchair.*) Your chariot awaits, sir!

(*JOSH gets up and NURSE PARKER helps him sit down in the wheelchair. As NURSE PARKER leans over to help JOSH into the chair, CHARLIE admires her caboose.*)

CHARLIE: Paisely Pearl Parker...

(*NURSE PARKER stops.*)

CHARLIE: Tell me... what time does your shift end?

NURSE PARKER: Are you asking out of concern or intent?

CHARLIE: That's depends on your answer.

NURSE: If the former, in 16-hours. If the latter, in perpetuity.

CHARLIE: *(Slowly smiles at NURSE PARKER.)* Can't blame a guy for trying.

NURSE PARKER: *(Turns to JOSH.)* Time to go.

(As JOSH, moves toward NURSE PARKER, he stumbles a little... CHARLIE goes to assist him. CHARLIE holds JOSH by the shoulders and looks him over. CHARLIE tenderly straightens JOSH'S collar and smoothes out his shirt. CHARLIE then gives JOSH a loving tap on the cheek with his hand. JOSH grudgingly smiles.)

JOSH: *(To CHARLIE, gestures to MADELINE.)* Hold her hand.

(JOSH and NURSE PARKER exit.)

CHARLIE stands alone in the middle of the room. He stares at MADELINE for a moment. He digs his hands into his pocket and pulls out his cell phone. He checks the phone. He holds it aloft, seemingly searching for reception. Gets nothing, appears frustrated and slams the phone shut.

He goes over to the side-table, picks up a remote control and points it at the TV (not seen on stage). He clicks the button a few times, apparently surfing through channels. Seems disinterested by everything he comes across. Frustrated, he turns the TV off and casts aside the remote control.

He picks up a magazine from the side-table and disinterestedly flicks through it. Again, not enough of a distraction to keep him pre-occupied.

Finally, CHARLIE stops fretting, and looks at MADELINE... really looks at her. His eyes well-up in sadness. He picks up MADELINE'S hand and holds it momentarily against his cheek.)

CHARLIE: It's funny, I was maybe three or four. *(Pulls in closer to MADELINE.)* It was Christmas... We were in a superstore... the main hallway was full of kitschy kiosks, peddling fragrances and mini-makeovers. *(Pause.)* With all the hubbub I lost track of you. So, I held up my hand, expecting as usual to find yours. But I found nothing. You were gone and so I panicked. It probably wasn't more than a

few minutes, but it felt like forever. I was terrified.
(Pause.) This. Here. Now. Feels like that.

MADELINE: *(Reaches up and takes CHARLIE'S hand.)* Macys.

CHARLIE: Mom?

MADELINE: *(Croaky voice, opens her eyes.)* It was Macys. And you weren't alone for more than 30-seconds. *(Her eyes wonder, taking in her surroundings.)* What's going on?

CHARLIE: We were in a car accident... you're in a hospital.

MADELINE: Where's Josh? Where's my baby?

CHARLIE: They took him to radiology.

MADELINE: Radiology?

CHARLIE: Routine stuff, Ma. Dotting Is crossing Ts.

MADELINE: So he's okay?

CHARLIE: He's just fine.

MADELINE: Are you looking after him?

CHARLIE: Of course, Ma. *(Pause.)* How ya feeling?

MADELINE: Thirsty.

(CHARLIE, goes to the side table and pours MADELINE a small glass of water. He helps MADELINE drink the water. He wipes her face tenderly with his sleeve... kisses her cheek. MADELINE smiles.)

MADELINE: Tell me about the accident.

CHARLIE: It was a head-on collision.

MADELINE: Good lord. Were people in the other car?

CHARLIE: Yeah.

MADELINE: Are they okay?

CHARLIE: *(Pause.)* We should tell someone you're awake.

MADELINE: Your father?

CHARLIE: (*Sarcastic.*) Surprisingly we haven't been able to reach him.

MADELINE: If he could be here, he would, dear.

CHARLIE: But he's not.

MADELINE: You're too hard on him.

CHARLIE: And you're too forgiving.

MADELINE: (*Terse.*) Listen, if I... go, you're all he has.

CHARLIE: You're not going anywhere, Ma. (*Pause.*) You need to relax. Take it easy. (*Starts adjusting her pillows.*)

MADELINE: I'm serious. Without us. He's lost.

CHARLIE: Lost?

MADELINE: (*Pause.*) Is it a sin to love someone? (*Pause.*) Even if they've done things. Unforgivable things?

CHARLIE: You always said love is blind.

MADELINE: (*Frightened.*) But is it without a conscience?

CHARLIE: (*Concerned. Looks at the door.*) You need help.

MADELINE (*Tightly grabs CHARLIE'S hand, shocking him.*) You need to know.

CHARLIE: (*Hesitates.*) Know what?

MADELINE: The truth. And God forgive me for telling you. But you must know. You have to know. (*Looks away, frightened.*)

CHARLIE: It's okay Ma... you can tell me.

(MADELINE gestures for CHARLIE to come closer. CHARLIE, leans in, and MADELINE whispers something in his ear. When she finishes, CHARLIE recoils into his chair, with a small look of shock on his face.)

CHARLIE: For how long?

MADELINE: Since I've known him.

CHARLIE: Who does he, you know, do it for?

MADELINE: Corporations, I think.

(CHARLIE takes a glass of water from the side-table and drinks. He remains speechless and stunned.)

CHARLIE: All those times he was gone... he was... working?

MADELINE: Yes. Doing his job. *(Pause. Suddenly scared.)* Do you think this is judgment?

CHARLIE: No, Ma. *(Shaking his head.)* No.

MADELINE: I married a monster. What does that make me?

CHARLIE: Forgiving.

MADELINE: *(Smiles warmly at CHARLIE.)* Come closer.

(CHARLIE buries his head in her breast. MADELINE, puts a hand on his head stares off peacefully and still into the distance. She closes her eyes.

Without looking, CHARLIE holds up his other hand towards MADELINE, for her to hold it. However, MADELINE remains motionless and does not take CHARLIE'S hand. CHARLIE looks up at MADELINE.)

CHARLIE: Ma? *(Stands up, shakes MADELINE'S shoulders.)* Ma? *(Louder.)* Are you okay? Say something. *(Looks to the door and shouts.)* Can I get a doctor in here? Please... somebody help me!

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

Scene 2

FADE IN LIGHTS:

Hospital room. CHARLIE, JOSH, NURSE PARKER and DOCTOR FORSELL stand huddled together at the foot of MADELINE'S bed. MADELINE is motionless.

JOSH: Why's she still breathing?

FORSELL: Technically, she's not. (*Gesturing to the machines.*) She's on life support.

JOSH: How can she be awake one minute, and the next... (*Shakes head. Voice trails off.*) It's not fair.

FORSELL: Cranial injuries can be highly unpredictable.

JOSH: (*To CHARLIE.*) Did she ask about me?

CHARLIE: (*To JOSH, reassuring.*) I told her you were fine.

JOSH: (*To FORSELL.*) How long can we keep her this way?

FORSELL: No more than forty-eight hours, otherwise the organs could be compromised.

CHARLIE: (*Acerbic.*) Couldn't harvest them then, could you?

FORSELL: She carries a donor card, she-

CHARLIE: Please just shut the fuck up.

JOSH: (*Gentle, but firm.*) Now's not the time..

CHARLIE: (*Pause. Resigned.*)

JOSH: (*To NURSE PARKER.*) So, forty-eight hours?

NURSE PARKER: (*Nods.*)

FORSELL: Or sooner.

JOSH: (*Looks at MADELINE.*) We need to give Dad a chance to say goodbye.

(*DOCTOR FORSELL'S phone rings.*)

FORSELL: (*Answers phone.*) Yes. Okay. When? (*Walks over to the corner of the room and confers silently on the phone.*)

CHARLIE: (*Quietly to JOSH.*) Dad's not coming. Not in the next forty-eight hours.

JOSH: Did he call? Did Mom say something?

(CHARLIE *shakes his head, starts to say something-*)

FORSELL: Thanks. We'll be there shortly.

(DOCTOR FORSELL *gets off the phone and moves back toward JOSH, CHARLIE and NURSE PARKER.*)

FORSELL: (*Hesitates.*) The female patient who was in surgery..

JOSH: Susan?

FORSELL: (*Nods.*) Yes. Ms. Henson. I'm afraid she didn't make it.

(JOSH *slouches down on one of the chairs. An uncomfortable silence descends like a curtain.*)

FORSELL: The police are here and would like to take a statement from the two of you.

(JOSH *gets up to go, but CHARLIE pushes him back.*)

CHARLIE: Stay with Ma. (*To FORSELL.*) Okay, let's do this.

(JOSH *slightly resists, then stops. CHARLIE exits the room with DOCTOR FORSELL.*)

NURSE PARKER, *noticing JOSH'S somber silence walks over to him.*)

NURSE PARKER: (*Hands a container of pills to JOSH.*) Take these twice a day. They should help with the headaches and delirium.

(JOSH *places the pills on the side-table. He takes MADELINE'S hand and holds it to his face.*)

NURSE PARKER: (*Moves closer, awkwardly to JOSH.*) If you need someone to talk to, we have a Chaplain and a grief counselor on staff.

JOSH: (*Politely.*) No thanks. (*Pause.*) Charlie thinks quacks are full of shit.

NURSE PARKER: What do you think?

JOSH: I dunno... I guess they're trying to help.

NURSE PARKER: (*Sits next to JOSH.*) I know what you must be feeling... maybe talking it over will help.

JOSH: You have no idea how I feel.

NURSE PARKER: I didn't mean to... (*Voice trails off.*)

JOSH: (*Softly.*) Don't sweat it.

NURSE PARKER: (*Stands up, makes some notes on a chart.*) I'm sorry about your eye.

JOSH: I'll live.

NURSE PARKER: (*Pause.*) I saw you play last year against Olympia.

JOSH: (*Looks at NURSE PARKER.*) Hockey fan?

NURSE PARKER: My boyfriend is, was. Ex-boyfriend. Said I should keep my eye on you... said you might turn pro.

JOSH: (*Flippant.*) Well, that ship sailed.

NURSE PARKER: You don't sound too bothered.

JOSH: (*Looking at the door.*) Truth is, I'm relieved.

NURSE PARKER: Oh?

JOSH: I like hockey... Just don't love it.

NURSE PARKER: Why play?

JOSH: It'd kill Charlie if I quit.

NURSE PARKER: (*Smiles understandingly.*) Your brother played in that game too... he got ejected for fighting.

JOSH: Yeah... Yeah... the guy sucker-punched me. That didn't sit well with Charlie.

NURSE PARKER: So he bashed him in the head with his stick?

JOSH: He can be over-protective. (*Looks back at MADELINE.*)

NURSE PARKER: He'd throw himself under the bus for you. (*Quietly.*) Would you let him?

JOSH: Not if I could help it.

NURSE PARKER: (*Pause.*) Do you remember anything about the accident?

JOSH: (*Staring at MADELINE.*) One minute we were leaving the bar to pick up Ma, and next thing I remember... I'm crunched against the side window, upside down and everything smells like gas. (*Pause.*) Then I saw Ma... and her head through the windshield. (*Shakes his head.*)

NURSE PARKER: (*Leans in closer to JOSH.*) If Charlie's charged, he could face ten-to-twenty.

JOSH: (*Surprised.*) Ten-to-twenty?

NURSE PARKER: (*Nods.*) I know Dr. Forsell can be a cold fish... but he's right about your injuries... they don't jibe with Charlie's story.

JOSH: (*Quickly looks up at NURSE PARKER.*) I don't remember anything... I really don't.

NURSE PARKER: (*Earnest.*) Sometimes... it's not what you remember... it's what you know.

JOSH: (*Studies her suspiciously.*) What's your angle?

NURSE PARKER: I once let someone fall under the bus. And the regret I feel will be with me 'til I die. (*Pause.*) Could you live that way?

(*CHARLIE enters. CHARLIE looks curiously at JOSH and NURSE PARKER, sensing he interrupted something.*)

CHARLIE: Josh... they're waiting for you downstairs.

(NURSE PARKER *pulls a card out of her pocket and writes something on the back. She walks over the CHARLIE and hands it to him.*)

CHARLIE: What's this? Sympathy digits?

NURSE PARKER: (*Smiles demurely.*) In case you need a friend.

(NURSE PARKER, *looks over at JOSH, and then exits.*)

CHARLIE: (*To JOSH.*) Did I miss something?

JOSH: (*Shrugs.*) She likes you.

CHARLIE: I think you got it the wrong way around.

JOSH: (*Pause.*) Remember Mr. Jones?

CHARLIE: (*Confused.*) The song?

JOSH: No, the cat from next door. The cat I threw out our window 'cos I wanted to see if the nine-lives thing was true. (*Pause.*) Apparently, one was the limit.

CHARLIE: Oh, that's right... man, did I get a whuppin'.

JOSH: But I killed him.

CHARLIE: Dude, you may have pushed the cat, but I was the one pushing your buttons.

(JOSH *stands up, steps closer to CHARLIE.*)

JOSH: I should've taken the heat.

CHARLIE: (*Annoyed.*) Really?

JOSH: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Pretend for a moment you did take the heat. Let's go back in time, and lay the blame on little Josh. The same kid who would cry for three or four hours, whenever his Mommy or Daddy raised their voices at him. Yeah, let's punish the kid who'd creep into his brother's room every night and sleep on his floor, using a wet gym sock as a pillow and a pair of dirty pants as a blanket 'cos he

didn't want to wake his brother and be bounced back to his own room.

JOSH: (*Looks away.*) It wasn't every night.

CHARLIE: Most mornings I'd trip on your ass as I got outta bed.

JOSH: I had nightmares.

CHARLIE: Why didn't you ever go to Mom and Dad?

JOSH: I didn't want to be a burden.

CHARLIE: You were afraid of him. (*Pause.*) So you leaned on me... for everything.

JOSH: No I didn't.

CHARLIE: Really? Who taught you to skate? Drive a car? Unhook a bra with one hand? Who, you ungrateful shit?

JOSH: (*Angry.*) I didn't ask you to be my father.

CHARLIE: Someone had to step up.

(*JOSH holds his hand up about to make a point, but stops, sighs, and simply sits down dejectedly on the seat next to his mother's bed.*)

JOSH: (*Softly.*) I want you to stop lying about the accident.

CHARLIE: (*Dismissive.*) Give it a rest.

JOSH: We're not talking about killing a cat and protecting me from a slap on the wrist. This is way more serious.

CHARLIE: (*Pause.*) Josh... you weren't built to do time.

JOSH: Don't ask me to throw you under the bus.

CHARLIE: I'm not... I... (*Frustrated.*) You have no choice.

JOSH: Yes I do. And I don't choose to live with a lie. That'd be worst than any prison.

CHARLIE: Josh... please don't...

JOSH: Wanna act like a father? Than know when to step aside.

CHARLIE: (*Sighs disconsolately.*) Okay.

JOSH: Okay, what?

CHARLIE: Okay, we'll do it your way. (*Pause.*) I'll tell 'em you were driving over the limit, passed out at the wheel, swerved into the opposite lane, and hit the other car head on, and killed everyone inside it. (*Pause.*) That's the truth... every last bit of it.

(*Now, confronted by the harsh truth, JOSH doubles over, as though punched in the stomach, holds his head in his hands. CHARLIE comes over and gently taps the top of his head.*)

CHARLIE: Now you know.

(*JOSH nods, centers himself and then gets up to leave.*)

JOSH: Help me find my coat.

(*CHARLIE stands eerily still. JOSH notices-*)

JOSH: What is it?

CHARLIE: (*Softly.*) I know where Dad is.

JOSH: (*Stops, turns to CHARLIE.*) You do?

CHARLIE: Ma told me just before... (*Pause.*) He's in Mexico.

JOSH: Where in Mexico?

CHARLIE: South.

JOSH: (*Suspicious.*) You shittin' me?

CHARLIE: No. We should try and find him.

JOSH: Why?

CHARLIE: I reckon he can help.

JOSH: Dad?

CHARLIE: Yeah, Dad.

JOSH: We talkin' about the same guy?

CHARLIE: In a manner of speaking... no.

JOSH: Why go find him? Why not wait 'till he gets back?

CHARLIE: 'Cos it might be too late by then.

JOSH: I dunno, Charlie... feels like a half-baked plan.

CHARLIE: Look, Dad just lost a wife... he's not gonna lose you without a fight.

JOSH: *(Hopeful, almost childlike.)* You really think so?

CHARLIE: He's our Father.

JOSH: *(Nods.)* Yeah... he is.

CHARLIE: We need to get going.

JOSH: *(Looks at MADELINE.)* Doesn't seem right leaving her like this all alone.

CHARLIE: That's not our Ma. Not to me.

(JOSH hesitates. He leans over the bed and kisses MADELINE on the cheek. JOSH grabs the picture of their family next to MADELINE and joins CHARLIE. CHARLIE hands JOSH his coat. CHARLIE and JOSH exit.)

MADELINE, lays silently on the bed. Next to her on the side-table, are JOSH'S pills. Sounds from the life support machines punctuate the gloomy, lonely silence.)

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

ACT TWO**Scene 1****FADE IN LIGHTS:**

A decrepit jail cell. There is a cot on either side of the cell, a small window with bars, a sink and a toilet. Next to the toilet is a small table, with two wooden stools. On the table, a candle burns.

(Kneeling on the floor, in the middle of the cell is CHARLIE. He is mostly naked, and has a black hood over his head. His body is weary and beaten.

CHARLIE is flanked on either side by guards. One of the guards is CARLOS and the other is RODRIGO. CARLOS wears his cap tight over his forehead, almost hiding his eyes in shadow.)

CARLOS hands RODRIGO a couple of pictures.)

CARLOS: ¡Asesino!

RODRIGO: *(Shocked by the pictures.)* ¡Asesino!

CHARLIE: Where's my brother?

(CARLOS pulls a passport out of his pocket and hands it to RODRIGO.)

CARLOS: *Pasaporte*

CHARLIE: What have you done with him?

(RODRIGO takes the passport from CARLOS.)

RODRIGO: *(Looking at the passport.)* American? *(Stares angrily at CHARLIE, pockets the passport.)*

CHARLIE: Please. Where's Josh?

CARLOS: *(Heavily accented.)* Dead. *(Pause.)* All of them... dead.

CHARLIE: (*Quietly.*) Where's his body?

RODRIGO: (*Swiftly pulls out gun, holds it to CHARLIE'S head.*) In the river... with the rats.

(CARLO, moves to CHARLIE, and removes his hood.)

CHARLIE, stares at this captors, bewildered and scared witless. As the GUARDS start to leave the cell RODRIGO continues to aim his gun at CHARLIE'S head and when behind him, shoves CHARLIE to the floor sadistically with the heel of his boot. As the GUARDS exit...

JAVIER -- enters the cell. JAVIER is large, brutish and very intimidating. He looks menacingly over at the GUARDS. The GUARDS sheepishly leave.

CHARLIE looks up at JAVIER, tries to say something but then passes out again.

JAVIER faces upstage, and stands over CHARLIE and looks him over. JAVIER goes to the table, picks up a cup, and scoops up some liquid from the toilet pot. JAVIER goes to CHARLIE, straddles him, and then drips the liquid on CHARLIE'S head.

CHARLIE stirs, awakens, rubs his fingers through his hair and then smells them. He looks up at JAVIER and like a skittish cat, skulks into the corner of the cell.)

JAVIER: (*Steps closer to CHARLIE.*)

(CHARLIE shrinks further into the corner, frightened.)

JAVIER: *Ingles?*

CHARLIE: Y-Yes. ;Si!

(CHARLIE absent-mindedly rubs the liquid on his head, again smelling it.)

JAVIER: No touch.

CHARLIE: W-What is it?

JAVIER: *Orina.*

CHARLIE: (*Disgusted.*) Piss?

JAVIER: (*Nods, touches his forehead.*) For clean.

(CHARLIE stops running his fingers through his hair and touches his forehead and grimaces when he feels the bump on his head.)

CHARLIE: Where the hell am I?

(JAVIER sits on a stool and observes CHARLIE.)

JAVIER: *No es infierno. Purgatorio.*

(CHARLIE slowly drags himself up and starts walking around the room, assessing his new surroundings.)

CHARLIE: Is there a phone?

JAVIER: (*Shakes his head.*) No.

CHARLIE: So how do I reach the outside?

JAVIER: You don't.

CHARLIE: What? So like I'm... I'm stuck here?

JAVIER: It would seem that way.

CHARLIE: They can't just hold me without a trial.

JAVIER: (*Sniggers.*) This is Mexico.

(CHARLIE slouches down dejectedly on his cot.)

CHARLIE: Got a name?

JAVIER: (*Stares at CHARLIE, but says nothing.*)

CHARLIE: (*Looks away, intimidated.*) Sorry I asked.

(The CELL door suddenly SWINGS open. The guards -- RODRIGO and CARLOS -- gesture for JAVIER to move. JAVIER removes his shirt. His body is riddled with small black crosses. CHARLIE, reacts to this.)

CARLOS: (To JAVIER.) *El Bestia... vámanos.*

(JAVIER'S mood darkens, he follows the CARLOS out of the cell. The cell door is SLAMMED shut, leaving CHARLIE alone in the cell with RODRIGO.

RODRIGO *simply stares threateningly at CHARLIE.*)

CHARLIE: What the fuck are you looking at?

RODRIGO: (*Snarling.*) Was he gentle? (*Pause.*) Or maybe you like it rough?

CHARLIE: Maybe you like to watch. That your thing, sweetheart? Like a little guy-on-guy action?

RODRIGO: (*Spits at CHARLIE.*) *Putá.*

(CHARLIE, *makes a threatening move toward RODRIGO. RODRIGO puts his hand on the butt of his pistol. CHARLIE steps back.*)

RODRIGO: (*Shakes his finger at CHARLIE.*) No easy way out for you... not like your brother.

(CHARLIE *shakes with rage. RODRIGO continues to antagonize, hoping CHARLIE will bite. CHARLIE wants to do it, he wants to end it, but can't. He backs down, and sits demurely on his cot.*

Satisfied, RODRIGO smirks, and grunts contemptuously. He backs out of the cell, with his hand still on the butt of his pistol. Exits.

CHARLIE *stands in the middle of the cell, trembling, in fear and anger. He starts to restlessly stalk around the cell. He goes over to JAVIER'S cot and sits on it for moment. He sees something sticking out from underneath the pillow. A book. He picks it up, and then notices something underneath it... a shiv. He slowly picks it up, and runs his thumb along the blade, carefully studying it. He gets up and stalks around the room for a moment... extreme pain and anguish increasing with every movement and breath he takes.*

CHARLIE eventually kneels down in the middle of the floor, closes his eyes and holds the shiv over his heart. He hesitates, opens his eyes and stares at the shiv as though willing it to thrust into him. But he does not. Instead, he sees sticking out of his top pocket a crumpled picture... a picture of his family, the one that had been beside his mother's bed in the hospital. He takes out the picture and stares at it... absorbing strength and comfort from the memories.

He takes a calming breath, looks disgustedly at the shiv and puts it back under the pillow.

CHARLIE goes back over to his cot and slowly sits down... holding picture close to his heart.

CHARLIE: (Calming breath.) Don't do that again.

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

Scene 2

FADE IN LIGHTS:

Prison cell. A month later. CHARLIE is alone in the cell standing in front of the mirror.

(CHARLIE, is running his fingers tenderly over his face, checking for bumps and bruises. Clearly he's been taking a fair share of beatings. He grimaces a few times. Behind him the CELL door opens. JAVIER slowly walks in. He does not acknowledge CHARLIE'S presence.)

CHARLIE: Hey. Where'd you go?

(JAVIER ignores CHARLIE, lifts up his mattress on his cot and from underneath pulls out his shiv and a small bottle of black ink. He continues to ignore CHARLIE. He sits by the small table beside the sink and lights the candle. He holds up his knife over the candle's flame.

CHARLIE watches with curiosity.)

CHARLIE: What you doing?

(JAVIER says nothing CHARLIE, and continues to go about his ritual.

CHARLIE moves back to his bed and keeps watching JAVIER.)

CHARLIE: (*Frustrated.*) Cat got your tongue?

JAVIER: (*Again, no response.*)

CHARLIE: (*Pretending to answer as JAVIER.*) "No, Ingles. This is Mexico... where we illegally imprison people and then beat the shit out of them every day."

JAVIER: (*Does not look at CHARLIE.*) If they fear you, they'll leave you be.

CHARLIE: (*Flat and relieved.*) Easier said than done.

JAVIER: It is easy... If a preso threaten you, kill him.

CHARLIE: Just like that?

JAVIER: Without hesitation.

CHARLIE: You're serious?

JAVIER: (*Stares gravely back at CHARLIE.*)

CHARLIE: (*Pause.*) I'm not a killer.

JAVIER: Why you here?

CHARLIE: (*Pause. Looks away.*) That's different.

JAVIER: You kill once, you kill again.

CHARLIE: (*Pause.*) I've been here a month and you've barely spoken to me. Now you wanna help... why?

JAVIER: (*Shrugs.*) The guards... they no like you.

CHARLIE: How do you know?

JAVIER: (*Pointing to the cell.*) They put you here.

CHARLIE: So?

JAVIER: They think maybe I eat you.

CHARLIE: And?

JAVIER: I am no hungry.

CHARLIE: (*Mordant.*) Well, that's a relief.

(JAVIER continues along his ritual. He uses the knife to cut a small cross into his forearm. After this, he dips the knife into the ink and dabs it into his fresh wound, coloring it black. CHARLIE watches is morbid curiosity.)

CHARLIE: (*Pointing to the crosses.*) Are you religious?

JAVIER: (*Smirks. Shakes his head.*)

CHARLIE: So, why the crosses?

JAVIER: (*Pauses, contemplating.*) To honor the dead.

(JAVIER takes the shiv and uses it to loosen something from his knuckles. CHARLIE observes.)

CHARLIE: What is that... in your hand?

JAVIER: Bone.

CHARLIE: Yours?

JAVIER: (*Shakes his head.*)

(JAVIER gets up from the table, moves to his cot, picks up his pillow, and from underneath pulls out a small book. He goes back to the table again and starts to read. With his index finger, he traces lines on the wall next to the table.)

While JAVIER is fetching his book, CHARLIE gingerly lifts himself up and walks over to the sink.)

CHARLIE: (*Intrigue building.*) Why do the guards call you 'El Bestia'?

JAVIER: (*Pause.*) It means 'The Beast'.

CHARLIE: Yeah, I know... but is that your name?

JAVIER: No.

CHARLIE: Then why, '*El Bestia*'?

JAVIER: (*Pause.*) Because of what I do.

CHARLIE: (*Pause.*) Where do the guards take you?

JAVIER: (*Pauses. Faces CHARLIE.*) '*Cámara de la muerte*'.

CHARLIE: Chamber of... death?

JAVIER: (*Nods somberly.*)

CHARLIE: What do you do in this... chamber?

JAVIER: Fight other prisoners.

CHARLIE: (*Stunned.*) What? Why? Punishment?

JAVIER: No. No punishment. Entertainment.

CHARLIE: Entertaining who? The guards?

JAVIER: *Los ricos*.

CHARLIE: The rich? Why?

JAVIER: Some come for fun. Some come, for (*Searching for the right word...*) uh, *apostar*.

CHARLIE: Gambling? On who will win?

JAVIER: No. On who will die.

CHARLIE: (*Aghast.*) It's to the death?

JAVIER: '*Cámara de la muerte*'

CHARLIE: Right... of course. (*Pause.*) So all those crosses represent someone you...?

JAVIER: *(Nods.)*

(JAVIER stands up and walks over to his cot.)

CHARLIE: Do you have a choice?

JAVIER: I do not fight because I'm told or afraid.

CHARLIE: Then why?

JAVIER: *(Closes his eyes, lays down.)* Because I am unforgiven, English. Unforgiven.

(JAVIER, lays on his cot and closes his eyes. CHARLIE continues to look at him... not with fear, but with sympathy.)

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

SCENE 3

FADE IN LIGHTS:

Prison cell. JAVIER, is alone in the cell, sitting at the table, reading a book.

(The cell door opens. CARLOS firmly escorts CHARLIE into the cell, holding one of CHARLIE'S hands behind his back. CARLOS pushes CHARLIE to the floor.

CHARLIE sits up on his knees and glares icily back at CARLOS.)

CARLOS: *(Scowling.)* You didn't have to.

CHARLIE: Yeah, I did.

(CARLOS shakes his head... oddly disappointed. Exits.)

CHARLIE, stumbles over to the sink. CHARLIE begins to furiously wash his hands. His breathing is heavy and uneven, his hands are shaking. CHARLIE looks up at the mirror, sees the looming figure of JAVIER behind him.)

CHARLIE: Guy came out of nowhere. He tried to fuck me.
(Pause.) I beat him and beat him, and then watched my hands squeeze the life out of his eyes.

(CHARLIE turns and faces, JAVIER.)

JAVIER: Now you know how to survive.

(CHARLIE takes his shirt off and lies down on his cot.
He stares at the ceiling in quiet contemplation.)

CHARLIE: It... it... was easy. Almost like it came natural.

JAVIER: We're all animals, English. It is our nature.

(The CELL DOOR opens, CARLOS walks in. RODRIGO stands at the doorway staring at CHARLIE. CHARLIE sits up. CARLOS gestures for JAVIER to come closer. He shows him a picture. JAVIER looks disappointedly at CHARLIE and then back at CARLOS. CARLOS nods, affirming something unspoken between them.)

RODRIGO smirks at CHARLIE and then runs a finger over his neck gesturing a slit throat. CARLOS and RODRIGO exit the CELL.

JAVIER takes one of the stools from the table and places it behind the head of CHARLIE'S bed. JAVIER removes the shiv from his waistband and holds it to CHARLIE'S throat.)

CHARLIE: (Scared.) What are you-?

JAVIER: Is it true you killed a little girl?

CHARLIE: (Somberly stares back at JAVIER. He is no longer scared or surprised... but repentant.) It was an accident. I didn't know she was in there.

JAVIER: Where?

CHARLIE: Her mother's room... she worked in a whorehouse.

JAVIER: (Agitated.) Why were you there?

CHARLIE: Me and my brother Josh, we needed to blow off some steam. I mean, I did, but Josh, he-

JAVIER: (*Hold around CHARLIE'S neck intensifies.*) How did the girl die?

CHARLIE: Josh was in the room with her mother... she was hiding her girl in the closet. She... (*Voice trails off.*)

JAVIER: (*Annoyed.*) What happened?

CHARLIE: This wacked-out guy showed up and started to get rough with the mother. Josh tried to help her... but the fucking psycho had a gun and... and shot them both.

JAVIER: (*Easing up.*) Where were you?

CHARLIE: In the other room. (*Pause.*) I heard the shots and ran over. But by the time I got there, Josh was dead. (*Pause.*) I just freaked out and jumped on the guy, somehow got his gun and just... started shooting. (*Pause.*) I didn't see the little girl until the closet door opened and she... and she fell out. (*Sighs.*)

JAVIER: (*Gentle.*) You killed her.

CHARLIE: (*Sobs.*) I killed all of them.

(*JAVIER waits for a moment, and then pulls the knife away from CHARLIE'S neck. Lifts up stool, brings it back to the table, where the candle is burning.*)

CHARLIE: (*Sits up, wipes tears from his eyes.*)

JAVIER: 'Venganza'. This I understand.

CHARLIE: You do? I don't. 'Cos if it was revenge - an eye-for-an-eye - than I shoulda shot myself.

JAVIER: Why?

CHARLIE: It was my job to protect him, not walk him up to his grave and push him in.

JAVIER: It wasn't your fault.

CHARLIE: (*Shakes head.*) It was all a lie. Mexico, Dad... everything. (*Pause.*) If I'd just... stepped aside, we wouldn't have been in this mess. And Josh wouldn't

be...*(Voice trails off. Pause.)* I only wanted to keep him safe, you know? That's what big brothers are supposed to do, right? Right?

JAVIER: *(Sits on his cot, stares at CHARLIE.)* You are like me, English. Un-forgiven.

(CHARLIE sits up in his bed, pulls his knees toward his chest and begins slowly rock back and forth.)

JAVIER *pulls a book from his bed, and stands by the table, reading and with his finger, he absent-mindedly traces lines on the wall.)*

CHARLIE: What is that? The drawing thing you do?

JAVIER: *Pintura mural.*

CHARLIE: Yeah, but of what?

JAVIER *(Holding up book.)* Things I read in here. *(Pause.)* Things I have not seen.

CHARLIE: Like?

JAVIER: *(Hesitates.)* Pyramid. Statues. Spaceships. And animal, such like *leones y elefantes.*

CHARLIE: *(Pause.)* Just how long have you been here?

JAVIER: *(Ignoring the question.)* Are they... beautiful?

CHARLIE: Some more than others.

JAVIER: *(Pauses.)* Could you... No matter.

CHARLIE: What?

JAVIER: *Dibuja?*

CHARLIE: A minute ago, you were ready to kill me... now you want me to draw for you?

JAVIER: *(Slightly awkward.)* I am sorry. You have no reason to be kind, English. Forget.

(Ill at ease, JAVIER sits heavily at the table and returns to his book. CHARLIE sympathetically observes JAVIER for a moment.)

CHARLIE gets up and sits opposite JAVIER. He moves his hand toward JAVIER'S knife. JAVIER hesitates, but let's CHARLIE take the knife. CHARLIE dips the knife in the ink pot, opens up a blank page on the book ready to draw.)

CHARLIE: What would you like to see?

JAVIER: *(Eyes widen, thinks about it.)* Spaceship.

CHARLIE: Okey dokey... Keep in mind, I'm no Picasso.

JAVIER: Picasso?

CHARLIE: *(Smiles.)* One thing at a time, big guy. *(Starts drawing.)* See it? *(Smiles again.)*

JAVIER: *(Smiles briefly.)* Yes, English. *Es hermoso.*

CHARLIE: It's an X-Wing Fighter.

JAVIER: This is real?

CHARLIE: Uh, no. It's from Star Wars.

JAVIER: There was a war in the stars?

CHARLIE: No... it's, um, an imaginary story that takes place in a galaxy far, far away.

JAVIER: Ah... *(Nods.)* Can you draw pyramid? A real one?

CHARLIE: Absolutely. *(Starts drawing.)* I know it kinda looks like a giant triangle, but it's really a lot more beau-

(The CELL door thunders open. RODRIGO and CARLOS come in. They look at CHARLIE, displeased he's still breathing. They gesture for JAVIER to come over.)

JAVIER moves toward the guards. JAVIER starts to take off his shirt, but the guards gesture for him to stop. They mumble something quietly to JAVIER. For a moment,

JAVIER *frowns and then his dispassionate countenance returns.*)

JAVIER: Come, English.

(CHARLIE *tentatively walks toward them.*)

RODRIGO: (*To CHARLIE.*) Take off your shirt.

CHARLIE: My shirt? (*Realization kicks in.*) They want me to fight?

JAVIER: (*Nods.*) '*Cámara de la muerte*'.

CHARLIE: (*Panicking.*) I can't do this. I don't want to.

RODRIGO: (*Sniggers at CHARLIE'S fearful reaction and giddily prods CARLOS in the ribs with his elbow.*)

CARLOS: (*Remains undeterred and motionless.*)

(JAVIER *looks over at the guards and then yanks CHARLIE closer and away from the guards.*)

JAVIER: Do you want the memory of your brother to die with you?

CHARLIE: (*Looks at JAVIER. Shakes his head.*)

JAVIER: Then do not die tonight.

CHARLIE: (*Nods again and takes a deep, calming breath.*)

CARLOS: (*Irritated.*) *Busta. Vamos.*

(CARLOS *and RODRIGO grab CHARLIE. For a moment, CHARLIE resists. CHARLIE lets the guards march him out of the cell.*

The CELL door slams shut, leaving JAVIER alone, staring at the picture CHARLIE drew.)

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

SCENE 4

FADE IN LIGHTS:

Prison cell. JAVIER is sitting at the table. The candle is lit. He is staring intently at the cell door.

(JAVIER goes to blow out the candle. The CELL DOOR opens, JAVIER stops.

CARLOS drags CHARLIE through the door and dumps him on the floor. CHARLIE is alive, but badly beaten.)

CARLOS: *(Genuinely surprised.)* He fights like a tiger.

JAVIER: Go.

(CARLOS studies JAVIER for a moment, considering what to do. CARLOS decides not to challenge JAVIER and exits the cell.

JAVIER kneels over CHARLIE, helps him up.)

CHARLIE: *(In pain.)* You're wrong, man. This place isn't purgatory. It's hell.

(JAVIER helps CHARLIE to his cot. CHARLIE lays down and closes his eyes.

JAVIER sits on his cot, studies CHARLIE.)

CHARLIE: I'm gonna die here, aren't I?

JAVIER: *(Pause.)* Rest now.

CHARLIE: Why? I mean, at best I die. At worse... I live a nightmare.

JAVIER: No, at worse, you become the nightmare.

(CHARLIE gingerly sits up. JAVIER gets up and sits at the table, picks up the book, looks at the pictures CHARLIE drew.

CHARLIE puts his hand under his pillow and pulls out the crumpled picture of his family, stares at it for a moment.)

CHARLIE: You have family?

JAVIER: *(Purposefully distracted, looks away.)*

CHARLIE: A mother? Father? Siblings?

JAVIER: (*Continues to ignore CHARLIE.*)

CHARLIE: (*Frustrated and despondent.*) You were once a person, right? (*Pause.*) Someone's child? A brother?

JAVIER: (*Notices CHARLIE'S anguish, looks at him.*) I was ten when my mother died.

CHARLIE: (*Gentle.*) Your father?

JAVIER: America.

CHARLIE: (*Confused.*) America?

JAVIER: She worked near the U.S. base.

CHARLIE: Worked?

JAVIER: She was a whore.

CHARLIE: Oh. (*Pause.*) Where'd you go when she died?

JAVIER: I found a new family, *El Desciples*.

CHARLIE: Who are they?

JAVIER. A gang. *El Cartel's* little brother.

CHARLIE: The Cartel? (*Dubious.*) As in the Mexican Mafia?

JAVIER: *Si*. We were their street army. And, I was a good soldier. When they told me to steal, I steal. When they told me to fight, I fight. (*Pause.*) For a while it was normal, like a family maybe. But one night, a girl -- a beautiful angel -- walked into our barrio... she was lost.

(CHARLIE *gets up and sits at the table opposite JAVIER.*)

JAVIER: They took turns with her. She did not scream or cry. She closed her eyes... went somewhere far away in her head... somewhere peaceful, I think. (*Looks away from CHARLIE.*) Like a good soldier, I did what I was told. I... I... (*Pause.*) As I got close to her face, she opened her eyes...

blue eyes. She held my head close and whispered... *'máteme, por favor máteme'*.

CHARLIE: (*Softly.*) What did you do?

JAVIER: They would... hurt her, again and again. She knew this. (*Pause.*) So, I do what she ask... I kill her.

CHARLIE: (*Expels a deep breath. Sighs.*) Maybe... maybe you did the honorable thing.

JAVIER: (*Shakes his head.*) She will have honor, only when I kill them all.

CHARLIE: Who?

JAVIER: The ones who hurt her. They all come through here. But they never leave.

CHARLIE: How many left?

JAVIER: One. The leader. His name was Blanco. I do not remember his face, but I remember his eyes.

CHARLIE: (*Stares at JAVIER.*) You're here 'cos of her?

JAVIER: (*Nods.*) I am here for her.

(*JAVIER lays down on his cot.*)

CHARLIE: What was her name?

JAVIER: Justine. Her name was Justine.

CHARLIE: Do you think she still-

(*The CELL door opens, RODRIGO enters.*)

RODRIGO: Stay seated, boys.

(*RODRIGO goes over to where JAVIER sits and whispers something in his ear.*)

JAVIER: (*Looks at RODRIGO, confused, angered.*) Tonight?

RODRIGO: *Si.* (*Smiles malevolently at CHARLIE.*)

(RODRIGO exits the cell.)

JAVIER gets up and walks to the cell door, putting his hands and head against... and for a moment we see the first flash of hopelessness in this rock of a man. CHARLIE notices it too.)

CHARLIE: What's wrong? What'd he say to you?

(JAVIER moves over to the table and sits opposite CHARLIE.)

JAVIER: When you see me, what do you see?

CHARLIE: You.

JAVIER: You no see monster?

CHARLIE: Just you. Large. Old. You. Why?

JAVIER: You see me, like I see you... as a man.

CHARLIE: Well, yeah. How else would I see you?

JAVIER: (*Frustrated.*) When I fight and kill, it is *penitencia*. No matter who die, both belong in hell. You understand, English?

CHARLIE: (*Flippant.*) Can't say I do, big guy.

(JAVIER drives his fist against the table, shocking CHARLIE, and to a lesser degree himself.)

JAVIER: I no think you belong in hell.

CHARLIE: (*Understanding.*) When?

JAVIER: Tonight.

CHARLIE: So soon? I'm in no shape to- (*Looking at JAVIER, scoffs.*) Like it matters.

(CHARLIE pulls back from the table, gets up and starts to prowl restlessly about the room.)

CHARLIE: So I vanish, and the only trace I was ever here will be a crooked cross on the body of a mad man.

JAVIER: Mad man?

CHARLIE: Consider yourself sane?

JAVIER: (*Anger rising.*) Why you say this?

(*CHARLIE goes to the table. Picks up a book, tears out the pictures he drew.*)

CHARLIE: You can see these pictures, but you'll never appreciate their beauty.

JAVIER: No. No. Stop.

(*JAVIER yanks the book from CHARLIE and holds it close to his chest.*)

CHARLIE: To appreciate beauty you have to feel something other than pain.

JAVIER: I feel, *Ingles*.

CHARLIE: True. You also feel anger and hate.

JAVIER: (*Stands.*) You wish me to kill you now?

(*JAVIER and CHARLIE step toward each other. Both look menacingly at one another.*)

CHARLIE: Yeah... I'd rather die here with self-respect, than as a freak-show in the ring.

JAVIER: (*Looks away.*) No.

(*CHARLIE shoves JAVIER in the chest. JAVIER does not move or respond. CHARLIE shoves again, and again, increasingly frustrated that he cannot bait JAVIER - or shake him.*)

CHARLIE: Come on you fucking pussy... do it. DO IT!

(*JAVIER languidly pushes CHARLIE to the floor.*)

JAVIER: (*Confused and angry.*) Why you say? I thought we were-

CHARLIE: What? Friends? You think outside these walls, we'd be buddies?

JAVIER: *Parar.*

CHARLIE: (*Mocking.*) 'Vengenza'... is your only friend. It comforts you. It drives you. It defines you.

JAVIER: And what do you have?

CHARLIE: My dignity... or at least what's left of it.

JAVIER: You think I have no dignity?

CHARLIE: You have no control.

JAVIER: (*Dismissive.*) You know nothing.

(CHARLIE *picks himself up, sits on his cot.*)

CHARLIE: (*Sighs.*) When does it end? You gonna quit after you get this Blanco? Retire to the big house in the sky?

JAVIER: I will stop.

CHARLIE: Could you stop yourself from killing him? Or does 'vengenza' always end in death?

JAVIER: It's the only way.

CHARLIE: No, it's not. Don't you see? They can call you 'El Bestia' but it's just a stupid name.

JAVIER: You no understand.

CHARLIE: The hell of it is... I do.

(CHARLIE *lays down on his cot.*)

JAVIER *gathers the pictures and puts them neatly, and tenderly back in the book.*)

CHARLIE: Promise me something, 'El Bestia'.

JAVIER: Yes, *Ingles?*

(JAVIER *moves closer to CHARLIE'S cot. Looms over him.*)

CHARLIE: Make it quick.

JAVIER: *(Nods.)* Of course.

(JAVIER sits down on the cot opposite CHARLIE. Neither man speaks. Or make eye contact. Long pause.)

CHARLIE: Last summer me and Josh went to the mountains to camp for a few days. All we did was hike, fish, and shoot the shit. *(Pause.)* One night, we got to talking about how we'd wanna go out... if we had a choice. Josh wanted to die an old man with his family by his side. Me on the other hand, I wanted to go out like Jimmy Dean... doing something reckless... or boneheaded, as Josh put it. Anyway... the point being, I wanted to die young... that way, I'd be immortal, you know? Everyone remembers the guy who died young... never the old geezer. *(Slowly rubs his eyes, sits up. His knees practically touch JAVIER'S.)* Well, I got half my wish.

JAVIER: *(Looks directly at CHARLIE and holds out his hand.)*
I am Javier.

CHARLIE: *(Takes JAVIER'S hand.)* I'm Charlie.

JAVIER: *(Smiles, pats CHARLIE on the knee.)* I will remember you, Charlie. I promise this.

(The cell door opens. CARLOS and RODRIGO enter the cell.)

CHARLIE looks up, about to say something to JAVIER. JAVIER gestures to CHARLIE to go first. CHARLIE slowly stands and heads toward the cell door with RODRIGO.)

CARLOS: *(To RODRIGO, gesturing to CHARLIE.)* Take him.

(RODRIGO and CHARLIE exit the cell.)

JAVIER is about to stand up, but CARLOS puts a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. CARLOS sits on the cot opposite JAVIER.)

CARLOS: Make it last twenty minutes.

JAVIER: Why so long?

CARLOS: Why do you care?

JAVIER: I do not. You do.

(CARLOS removes his hat. Rubs his hands wearily through his hair. Stands, walks to the sink and takes a comb from his back pocket. He looks in the mirror and runs the comb over his tresses.)

CARLOS does not notice JAVIER stand up and hover behind as he is speaking.)

CARLOS: Many important men expect to profit from tonight. And they're relying on me to protect their investment. Do you understand?

(CARLOS turns to see JAVIER standing barely a foot behind him. He is surprised. JAVIER grabs CARLOS by the throat and angles his head upward.)

JAVIER stares into CARLOS' scared eyes, carefully studying them.)

JAVIER: *(Through gritted teeth.)* Blanco.

CARLOS: *(Flustered.)* How do you know that name?

JAVIER: *(Pulls CARLOS to his face.)*

CARLOS: *(Registers recognition.)* You. Ja-

JAVIER: I waited many years for this, Blanco.

CARLOS: Why?

JAVIER: *(Incredulous.)* Remember Justine?

CARLOS: The whore?

JAVIER: *(Slaps CARLOS.)* She was no whore. *(Slaps CARLOS again.)* *No puta.*

CARLOS: Okay. Okay. Yes, I remember her.

JAVIER: You kill her.

CARLOS: What? No. Those bastards were out of control.

JAVIER: Those bastards are dead. All dead, except you.

CARLOS: Listen, my uncle is powerful. He can get you out.

JAVIER: (*Enraged.*) Out? No. Here I die... like you.

CARLOS: (*Grimacing.*) Please... I beg you.

JAVIER: Like she beg you?

CARLOS: (*Looks ashamed... Closes his eyes... almost relieved, his body slumps.*) Okay, *El Bestia*... okay.

JAVIER: (*Begins to squeeze, then stops. Hesitates.*) Important men, you say? *El Cartel*?

CARLOS: (*Opens eyes, perplexed.*) ¡*Si!*

JAVIER: You look after their money?

CARLOS: ¡*Si!*

JAVIER: And they bet their money on me?

CARLOS: (*Puzzled.*) Always.

JAVIER: (*Grins contentedly. Let's go of CARLOS' neck.*)

CARLOS: (*Rubs his neck, appears baffled.*)

(*CARLOS skulks away from JAVIER. He picks his hat off of the bed, places it back on his head and then moves toward the cell door. Composes himself.*)

(*JAVIER takes off his shirt and looks whimsically and contentedly around his cell. Goes to his bed, picks up a book, opens it and pulls out a picture that CHARLIE drew... smiles.*)

JAVIER: Vengeance does end in death... (*Looks at CARLOS.*) ...but not yours. (*Flips book back on the bed.*)

CARLOS: (*Croakily.*) *El Bestia*?

JAVIER: (*At the cell door, turns to CARLOS.*) My name is Javier.

(JAVIER and CARLOS exit the cell.)

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

SCENE 5

FADE IN LIGHTS:

Prison cell. A month later. The cell is silent and dark.

(A figure, shrouded in shadows sits at the table. The figure lights a candle. The light from the candle reveals the figure to be CHARLIE.

On the table, is a bottle of ink, a book and JAVIER'S shiv. CHARLIE pulls off his shirt. His chest and arms have three black crosses tattooed across them.

CHARLIE takes the knife and seemingly cuts something into his breast. He dips the knife in ink and draws another cross into his breast. All the while, CHARLIE remains emotionlessly stoic, his eyes, almost dead.

The CELL door opens and CARLOS enters carrying a plate of food. He walks over to CHARLIE and puts it on the table.)

CARLOS: A month has passed, and 'El Bestia' is already forgotten. You are 'El Bestia' now.

CHARLIE: He's not forgotten. Not by me.

CARLOS: I didn't mean, he was forgotten or... *(Voice trails off.)*

CHARLIE: Get out.

(CARLOS retracts, heads to the cell door. He pauses for a moment and stares remorsefully at CHARLIE.)

CHARLIE: *(Without looking up.)* What are you lookin' at?

CARLOS: *(Pause.)* I'm not a bad man.

CHARLIE: (*Now looks up.*) No, you're worse than that.

(CARLOS *straightens his suit and heads to the cell door.*)

CARLOS: Eat. You have a big fight tonight.

(CARLOS *exits the cell.*)

CHARLIE *pulls the food over and takes a couple of bites. CHARLIE stands, picks up the book and starts to read. CHARLIE faces one of the walls and begins to trace pictures against it with his forefinger. 'Pintura Mural'.)*

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

ACT 3

SCENE 1

FADE IN LIGHTS:

A small, modestly furnished apartment.

The apartment is comprised of a kitchen with a small table at the center. A living area with a medium-sized, ornate couch, an armchair and a coffee table. A front door, with a side table and a full length mirror on either side. At the center of the stage behind the couch is a doorway with a flamboyant beaded curtain over it. This doorway leads to the bedroom, which is offstage.

(*On stage, alone, is CARLOS.*)

CARLOS *is standing in front of the full-length mirror. He is wearing a guard uniform with a badge on the breast pocket. He is combing his tightly cropped, greased-back hair with a comb. A look of pride and contentment is evident in his countenance.*

ELDORA, CARLOS' *wife walks through the beaded curtain, wearing one of Carlos' old soccer shirts and a pair of underpants.*)

ELDORA *approaches* CARLOS, *puts her hands around his neck and helps him tie his tie. She kisses him on the back of the neck.*)

ELDORA: *Mi hermoso hombre.*

CARLOS: (*Smiles warmly.*) *Mi esposa hermosa.*

(CARLOS *passionately kisses* ELDORA. *He tightly embraces her and smiles.*)

ELDORA: When people see you-

CARLOS: When they see us...

ELDORA: When they see us, they'll see dignity and honor.

CARLOS: No. They'll see a queen, and perhaps they'll notice the *vagabundo* who dares to stand beside her!

ELDORA: (*Playing along.*) Yes, and they'll wonder, what is a queen doing with such a pauper?

CARLOS: Slumming, no doubt.

ELDORA: I always did like the bad boys.

CARLOS: Now you must make do with a boring good boy.

ELDORA: Only if he still fucks me like a bad boy.

CARLOS: (*Shakes his head, gently pushes her back.*) Eldora... an angel does not speak with the devil's tongue.

ELDORA: (*Retracts slightly.*) Oh Carlos... I'm playing.

(CARLOS *steps closer to* ELDORA, *holds her face with his hands and pulls her closer.*)

CARLOS: My love... whether we're in our home or in public, we must always express dignity and honor in our actions... and words.

ELDORA: Like the Americans?

CARLOS: Exactly.

(ELDORA *nods in agreement and kisses CARLOSs again.*

ELDORA *goes to the mirror and runs her hands through her hair.*)

ELDORA: Will I be considered pretty in America?

CARLOS: More than pretty... a goddess.

ELDORA: (*Looks in the mirror, fretting.*) Perhaps.

CARLOS: Certainly.

ELDORA: (*Faces CARLOS, embraces him.*) *Mi hermoso hombre.*

CARLOS: (*Kisses ELDORA'S forehead.*) *Mi esposa hermosa.*

(*While CARLOS goes to the kitchen, ELDORA looks through the doorframe and notices something outside.*)

ELDORA: That's strange.

CARLOS: Mr. Fuentes naked again?

ELDORA: No, Carlos. It's your uncle Aldo.

(*CARLOS, stops what he is doing and stands eerily still, staring at the door. His mood visibly darkens.*)

ELDORA: He has a new car... (*Whistles.*) ...BMW.

CARLOS: Put some clothes on.

(*A KNOCK on the door. ELDORA doesn't move.*)

CARLOS: *Vamos!*

(*ELDORA stands defiantly for a moment, before retreating to the bedroom, offstage.*

CARLOS *goes to the door, opens it.*

UNCLE ALDO *enters. He is, dressed in a white suit and wears a Fedora, as well as a large gold medallion.*

ALDO *embraces CARLOS in a bear hug. He then loudly kisses him on both cheeks.*)

ALDO: *Buenos dias, sobrino.*

CARLOS: *Buenos dias, tio.*

(ALDO takes off his hat and hands it dismissively to CARLOS. ALDO strides into the center of the living room and looks around.)

ALDO: Not bad... better than the shithole you grew up in.

CARLOS: We made do.

ALDO: A tasty mushroom can grow in shit, but it's still shit, no?

CARLOS: *(Uncomfortable.)* I never complained.

ALDO: You sound like your father.

CARLOS: *(Twitches irritably, but says nothing.)*

(ALDO moves toward the kitchen.)

ALDO: Where's that beautiful wife of yours?

(ELDORA enters... this time wearing a simple summer dress.)

ELDORA: *(Carefully articulating her words.)* Wonderful to see you again, Mr Blanco.

(ALDO walks back to the center of the room, takes both of ELDORA'S hands and kisses them. He then delivers a lingering, slightly sexual kiss to her forehead.)

ALDO pulls back, still holding both of ELDORA'S hands and eyes her lustily.)

ALDO: *(To CARLOS.)* They broke the mold when they made this one, little Carlos. How anything to come from my brother can be this lucky... *(Whistles lasciviously. Shakes head.)* Then again... *(Spanks her bum.)* ...you are a Blanco.

(ELDORA looks as though she is about to slap ALDO.)

CARLOS: Would you like some coffee, Uncle?

ALDO: *Si, gracias.*

(CARLOS *nods to ELDORA. ELDORA starts to the kitchen to make coffee. ALDO watches ELDORA, shakes his head and laughs unkindly. ELDORA stops and turns to face ALDO.*)

ELDORA: Is something amusing, Uncle?

ALDO: Yes. You.

ELDORA: Me?

ALDO: Watching you obey him is like watching an Empress take orders from a servant.

ELDORA: I'm not- (*Stops herself.*) I'm proud to make a home for my husband.

ALDO: Indeed. But you were cut from the cloth of privilege -- A life of silver spoons and servants, no?

ELDORA: (*Steps closer to ALDO.*) My life is rich in ways you cannot conceive.

ALDO: If you insist.

ELDORA: I do.

ALDO: (*Mocking bow.*) As you wish, your eminence. (*Points to the kitchen.*) Coffee? I take mine black. No spoons.

(ELDORA, *stands stubbornly still in front of ALDO.*)

CARLOS: Eldora... if you please.

(ELDORA, *looks at CARLOS. He nods reassuringly back to her. ELDORA goes to the kitchen.*)

ALDO *walks around to the couch and sits down. He ushers for CARLOS to sit next to him. CARLOS does as requested.*)

ALDO: She's stunning and spirited. That's good. She'll require both.

CARLOS: For what?

ALDO: We'll get to that soon. First, tell me... how do you feel about your new job? It's a big responsibility. Are you ready?

CARLOS: Yes, Uncle.

ALDO: (*Chuckles.*) This is ironic, yes?

CARLOS: Ironic?

ALDO: You're a guard, in a prison, where you should be an inmate.

CARLOS: (*Looks anxiously at ELDORA in the kitchen, lowers his voice.*) That was a long time ago.

ALDO: Like your father now?

CARLOS: Hopefully.

ALDO: So be it. (*Pause. Takes out a cigar from his breast pocket and sniffs it.*) Your father and I used to be choirboys. 'Little servants of the lord'... Mama called us. Did you know this?

CARLOS: (*Shakes head.*) No.

ALDO: After choir, your Father would go home and do chores, while I ran with a gang. He'd toil and earn shit. While I played games and made more money than I could count. (*Puts cigar in mouth.*) Your father, was a choirboy his whole life and worked like a dog 'til he died. (*Pause.*) If you ask me, he died of a broken heart.

CARLOS: (*Annoyed.*) Broken?

ALDO: Because he knew, no matter the example he set, you'd never follow. And you didn't, did you?

CARLOS: When I was younger, no. But now-

ALDO: Now you've turned your life around -- a wife, a home and a respectable job.

CARLOS: Yes, precisely.

ALDO: You're father would be proud.

CARLOS: I pray he would.

ALDO: But would he still feel pride if he knew you worked for me?

(CARLOS stands, looks down at ALDO.)

CARLOS: (*Vaguely puzzled.*) I don't work for you.

ALDO: (*Patronizing.*) How do you think you got this job?

CARLOS: Through the local magistrate.

ALDO: The magistrate doesn't crap without my permission.

CARLOS: You had no hand in this. It was legitimate.

ALDO: Legitimate? Who hires a thug? (*Looks over to ELDORA and then back at CARLOS.*) *Un violador.*

(ALDO stands, and takes CARLOS' badge off his breast pocket.)

ALDO: While your father was on his deathbed, he begged I protect you, until you were a man. I did as promised. But nothing is for nothing in this world. A debt must be repaid, little Carlos.

CARLOS: With all due respect Uncle, I owe you nothing.

(ALDO smiles, throws the badge in CARLOS' chest and then pushes him to the couch.)

ALDO: Sit down and listen.

(ELDORA sees the ruckus and moves to the living room. CARLOS gestures for her to get back. ELDORA retreats into the kitchen.)

ALDO: You were a wicked child. And that gang of yours? Remember what they did to that girl? She was fourteen.

CARLOS: I wasn't the one who-

ALDO: Who killed her? No... but it was a member of your gang... a little boy if I recall.

CARLOS: It was beyond my control.

ALDO: You're a Blanco... nothing's beyond your control.

CARLOS: (*Looks over at ELDORA, concerned she might have overheard. Quietly.*) What do you want me from me, Uncle?

(ALDO *sits down on the couch next to CARLOS.*)

ALDO: I want you to make sure my friends inside are treated well. Can you do that?

CARLOS: (*Nods sheepishly.*)

ALDO: (*Ruffles his hair, like a dog.*) There's a good boy.

CARLOS: (*Stands.*) I should be leaving.

ALDO: Don't want to be late. (*Sarcastic.*) That would make a bad impression.

(ALDO *stands, walks toward the door.*)

ALDO: (*To CARLOS.*) Two more things; first... there is a game we run in the prison. You will help manage it.

CARLOS: What kind of game?

ALDO: (*Squirrely.*) It is like cockfighting... only bigger.

CARLOS: This game... is it legal?

ALDO: (*Arrogantly smirks.*) Ask the judge.

CARLOS: (*Sighs. Grabs ALDO'S hat.*) And the other thing?

ALDO: Ah, yes. One of my clubs is in need of a new hostess.

CARLOS: (*Concerned.*) What sort of club?

ALDO: A club for gentlemen.

CARLOS: (*Indignant.*) No, she-

ALDO: Tsk, tsk... I need her as a hostess, nothing more... unless of course she enjoys entertaining gringos.

CARLOS: (*Incredulous.*) She's at nursing school.

ALDO: Perfect training, then. Her job is to keep things running smoothly and cleanly... especially the girls.

CARLOS: What if I say no?

ALDO: This as an opportunity. With the extra money, you'll be closer to your American dream... tell that to Eldora... I'm sure she'll understand.

CARLOS: And if I still say no?

ALDO: (*Takes his hat from CARLOS, puts it on his head and smiles ghoulishly.*) Enlighten me nephew... how much does your pretty wife know of the old Carlos?

CARLOS: (*Shakes his head.*) She knows nothing.

ALDO: Would you like to keep it that way?

CARLOS: (*Nods gloomily.*)

ALDO: There's a powerful man inside you, nephew... Do not fear him.

CARLOS: (*Cynical.*) And be like my uncle?

ALDO: Pride imprisoned your father, it needn't be that way for you.

(ALDO opens the door. Tips his hat at CARLOS.)

ALDO: *Ciao, sobrino.*

CARLOS: Goodbye, Uncle.

(CARLOS glumly shuts the door, and leans his head against it... pride slowly seeping away.)

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

SCENE 2FADE IN LIGHTS:

Apartment. CARLOS is alone at the kitchen table. He seems despondent and scruffy. An unopened bottle of whiskey is at the center of the table. A lone shot glass sits next to it.

(CARLOS stares indecisively at the bottle. For a second he reaches his hand out and delicately touches the bottle top and then withdraws his hand.)

The FRONT DOOR abruptly opens.

ELDORA stumbles in. She is wearing a revealing, gaudy cocktail dress. Blood is speckled all over it. ELDORA slams the door shut and kneels down on the floor, hyperventilating and sobbing. CARLOS rushes over to her.)

CARLOS: Are you hurt?

ELDORA: *(Stuttering, inconsolable.)* Carlos... he killed her. He killed that little angel. *(Looks at her dress.)* My God, the blood... there was so much blood.

(CARLOS tenderly kisses ELDORA'S head. Helps her up, embraces her.)

CARLOS: You're home now, my love. Home.

(CARLOS walks ELDORA over to the kitchen table, sits her down and puts a blanket over her shoulders. He then opens the bottle of whiskey and pours her a shot.)

CARLOS hands ELDORA the glass... her shaking hands grasp it, and then she gulps it down.

CARLOS sits on the seat opposite ELDORA. Takes both of her hands and holds them tightly in his.)

CARLOS: *Mi amore...* what happened?

ELDORA: Two gringos... brothers I think... were at the club. There was screaming -- awful shrieks. Then gunfire -- and more screaming. And then... nothing. Silence. Like the world had stopped.

CARLOS: Slow down...

ELDORA: *(Holds her glass out.)* Mas.

(CARLOS stares at the bottle. He rises and gets another shot glass. He pours ELDORA a shot, and then tilts an additional shot into the second glass.)

CARLOS puts the extra glass in front of him, but does NOT drink it. ELDORA momentarily stirs from her anguish when she sees what CARLOS has done.)

ELDORA: Carlos... don't. Please.

(CARLOS, continues to stare, trance-like at the glass.)

ELDORA, reaches her hand across the table and gently cups CARLOS' chin with her palm. She lifts his head until his eyes meet hers. CARLOS nods in unspoken agreement and pushes the glass slightly away.)

CARLOS: Go on.

ELDORA: *(Takes a deep, soothing breath.)* One of the gringos was with Pilar.

CARLOS: *(Surprised.)* Your cousin?

ELDORA: She begged me to come back. I offered her money, but she insisted she work for it.

CARLOS: *(Stern.)* Was she clean?

ELDORA: *(Hesitates.)* No.

CARLOS: Was she still with Jose?

ELDORA: *(Nods.)* He came looking for at the club. Found her with one of the brother's and... *(Swallows.)* ...shot him.

CARLOS: *(Crossed himself.)* My God!

ELDORA: The other brother went crazy... somehow got Jose's gun... shot Jose, Pilar and... *(Softly.)* ...and then Ariana.

CARLOS: Ariana? *(Agitated.)* Why was her daughter there?

ELDORA: Pilar had nowhere else to go-*(Shakes her head, sobs.)* I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

(CARLOS stands up... and angrily digs his fingers into the table. He stares again at the shot glass, grabs it, momentarily hesitates and then almost violently throws the shot down his throat. He grimaces.)

ELDORA looks sympathetically at CARLOS, grabs the other glass and drinks.)

CARLOS: Are you sure that's what happened?

ELDORA: *(Wavers.)* Absolutely.

CARLOS: Where is this gringo now?

ELDORA: Policía. Turned himself in.

CARLOS: *(Stares off into the distance.)*

ELDORA: What will you do?

(CARLOS looks to pour another drink, stops and pushes the bottle away.)

CARLOS: Let the police handle it.

ELDORA: So?

CARLOS: He'll be charged.

ELDORA: And then deported?

CARLOS: Probably.

ELDORA: *(Pauses before saying-)* That's not good enough.

CARLOS: *(Taken aback.)* What more can I do?

ELDORA: *(Slams glass down.)* You're a Blanco, aren't you?

CARLOS: *(Surprised, sits down.)* Tread carefully, Eldora.

ELDORA: *(Pause.)* Is this how you'd act if someone hurt me?

CARLOS: Of course not.

ELDORA: She was my cousin. I think an appropriate response is required, if not for her honor, than mine.

(CARLOS nods... stands, thinking. He seems conflicted. After a moment of deliberation he walks over to the phone in the living room and picks it up and dials.)

CARLOS: *(Into the phone.)* Captain Sanchez? This is Carlos Blanco. Do you have the gringo? *(Listening.)* Has he contacted anyone? The embassy? Family? *(Pause.)* Keep it that way. I want you to erase any records of his arrest. *(Pause.)* On who's authority? Carlos Blanco. Nephew of Judge Aldo Blanco. *(Pause.)* Bueno. I'll be there soon.

(CARLOS hangs phone up.)

ELDORA *moves over to* CARLOS.)

CARLOS: *(Assertive.)* I'm taking the gringo to my prison.

ELDORA: You can do that?

CARLOS: *(Sardonic.)* I'm a Blanco, remember.

ELDORA: People will come for him.

CARLOS: Perhaps. But they'll find nothing.

(CARLOS takes ELDORA'S glass and swallows down her whiskey. He goes to the front door and starts to put his coat on. ELDORA gazes at him peculiarly.)

CARLOS: Why you look at me this way?

ELDORA: *(Starts to approach CARLOS and then stops.)* I hear you speak. But I do not hear you Carlos... I hear your Uncle.

CARLOS: Does this frighten you?

ELDORA: No. *(Moves closer, kisses him.)*

CARLOS: *(Momentarily looks down at the floor. He looks up, with a steely expression.)* An appropriate response, yes?

(CARLOS exits through the door. ELDORA stands very still. The blanket falls from her shoulders.)

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

SCENE 3

FADE IN LIGHTS:

The apartment.

(ELDORA emerges from the bedroom. She is wearing an elegant dress. Her neck is adorned by a chic, glistening necklace. She stands before the door mirror and admires herself.

CARLOS ghosts in through the front door. He obliviously slips past ELDORA and goes to the kitchen.

CARLOS opens a whiskey bottle and takes a big, hearty swig straight from the bottle.

ELDORA bustles across to CARLOS.)

ELDORA: Once was a time when the first thing you wrapped your lips around was me.

(CARLOS grunts something and dispassionately kisses ELDORA on the cheek. He slumps down by the kitchen table. In the middle is an astray with a half-smoked cigar in it. CARLOS picks up the cigar and smells it.)

CARLOS: What is this?

ELDORA: Aldo was here. *(Takes the cigar from CARLOS, throws it into the garbage.)*

CARLOS: Why?

ELDORA: He came by to give me this dress.

CARLOS: For work?

ELDORA: No, Carlos... for my birthday.

CARLOS: *(Remorsefully nods.)* Siento, Eldora. Siento.

(CARLOS looks down at the table, says nothing.

ELDORA tentatively places a hand on his shoulder and begins to rub.)

ELDORA: All is not lost. There's still time to celebrate.

(ELDORA moves her hand slowly, suggestively over the top of CARLOS' chest, unfastening a couple of buttons along the way. Her hand moves into his shirt, over his breast. She then takes one of CARLOS' hands, and places it on her chest, close to her heart.)

CARLOS, freezes, removes his hand from her chest and then firmly removes her hand from his shirt, and begins to refasten his shirt buttons.

Hurt by this rejection, ELDORA steps back.)

ELDORA: My touch used to arouse you. Now it's like ice.

CARLOS: It's not you that is cold.

ELDORA: 'Love is an endless flame.' Remember? The Carlos I fell in love with told me that during our first encounter.

CARLOS: That man was naïve.

ELDORA: That man was my hero.

CARLOS: (Looking away.) Perhaps that man was a lie.

(ELDORA kneels next to CARLOS, takes his hand and kisses it.)

ELDORA: Not to me. (Impassioned.) When my parents died I was left with nothing. Overnight, I went from a nice home and fine clothes to a hideous apartment and dirty rags. (Pause.) I could've ended up like Pilar... may she rest in peace. (Places CARLOS' hand on her cheek.) But then you rescued me from misery. And that's the Carlos I know and love. Remember him. Remember us?

CARLOS: (Pauses, looks longingly at ELDORA.) Help me remember, *mi amore*... help me.

(ELDORA and CARLOS briefly kiss. They are interrupted by a LOUD KNOCK at the door.)

CARLOS bolts up from the table, opens a kitchen drawer and draws out a pistol. While CARLOS is finding the gun, ELDORA walks over to the door. She looks through the peep hole.)

ELDORA: It's Aldo.

(CARLOS puts the gun back into the drawer. CARLOS takes a deep, calming breath.)

ELDORA: Is everything okay, Carlos?

CARLOS: Let him in.

(ELDORA opens the door. UNCLE ALDO enters. He seems flush and irritated. He takes his jacket off and throws it over the couch.

ALDO is wearing a shoulder holster with a large sidearm.)

ALDO: (Grabs ELDORA'S wrist and pulls her to the kitchen.) Come.

CARLOS: (Rises from his chair.) Uncle! What are you doing?

ALDO: (Gestures for CARLOS to sit.) Sit, and be silent.

(CARLOS sits. ALDO physically pushes ELDORA down to a chair next to CARLOS.

ALDO proceeds to search through the kitchen, opening drawers, looking in jars, etc. He takes his search to the living room... looks under the couch, under pillows. He looks inside the desk drawers.

ELDORA looks to CARLOS for assurances but he can only shrug back in puzzlement.

ALDO'S search is fruitless. Fuming, he returns to the kitchen.)

ALDO: Okay, little Carlos... where is it?

CARLOS: Where's what?

ALDO: The money.

CARLOS: Money?

ALDO: (*Viciously slaps CARLOS.*) Don't play games with me.

(*ELDORA moves to protect CARLOS. CARLOS gestures for her to sit still.*)

CARLOS: (*Slight edge.*) What is it you think I'm guilty of?

(*CARLOS sits down between CARLOS and ELDORA.*)

ALDO: Do you know why they made me a judge? Because I can smell a lie. It's a gift I have. (*Pause.*) So, again ... where is the money?

(*CARLOS and ELDORA both shake their heads.*)

CARLOS: I've stolen no money, Uncle. I swear to it.

(*ALDO swiftly pulls out his gun and holds it against CARLOS' head and with his other hand he pulls CARLOS' face close to his. CARLOS' appears alarmed as does ELDORA. ALDO looks CARLOS in the eyes and then starts to sniff his face.*)

ALDO lets go of CARLOS, holsters his gun and drops back into this chair, seemingly confident of something, yet at the same time, still agitated.)

ALDO: Deception is not one your strengths.

(*CARLOS nods to ELDORA. She gets up, pours ALDO a drink.*)

ELDORA: What troubles you, Mr. Blanco?

ALDO: Today I lost a valuable asset.

ELDORA: And what was this 'asset'?

ALDO: (*To CARLOS.*) An unbreakable machine that was somehow broken.

ELDORA: How?

ALDO: (*Still at CARLOS.*) That's what I'd like to know.
(*Pause.*) How did it happen? Was he sick?

CARLOS: He seemed fine.

ALDO: Rodrigo said he appeared, 'content'. Was he on drugs?

CARLOS: The American bettered 'El Bestia'. I'm as surprised as you.

ALDO: That's the problem... surprises are bad for business.

(*ELDORA hands ALDO a drink of whiskey. He promptly swallows it.*)

ALDO: (*Puts cigar in his mouth.*) Carlos... why do you think our little enterprise is thriving?

CARLOS: As you say, we offer a taste of the forbidden.

ALDO: Yes, and people pay well for this taste... but not as much as those who wager on it.

CARLOS: Wagering is not without risks.

ALDO: Don't be a fool. These men only part with their money if they're sure it'll return to them with interest.

CARLOS: So our friends are unhappy?

ALDO: Yes, and they demand immediate restitution.

CARLOS: Pay them back? How?

ALDO: (*Flustered, looks at ELDORA.*) In one of life's little ironies; God blessed me with many gifts... but not a son.
(*Looks back at CARLOS, frowns.*)

CARLOS: Sorry I let you down, Uncle.

ALDO: Carlos, you have my determination, I grant you that, but like your Father you have no imagination or passion.

(*CARLOS stands abruptly, towers over ALDO.*)

CARLOS: (*Fiercely.*) Do not speak ill of my Father again.

ALDO: (*Smiling devilishly.*) Ah, that's better. I like this side of you.

(ELDORA *stares at CARLOS. CARLOS notices her looking at him and looks away shamefacedly. Sits back down.*)

CARLOS: (*To ALDO.*) We are nothing alike. Nothing.

ALDO: Yes, well that remains to be seen.

(ALDO *gets up walks over to the front door and takes his jacket off the hook. CARLOS and ELDORA follow.*)

CARLOS: What should I do?

ALDO: Kill the American. But do it in the ring -- at least then we can profit from his death.

CARLOS: I'll see to it.

ALDO: Good. (*To Eldora.*) The dress fits you well.

ELDORA: Thank you, Uncle.

ALDO: I will be away for the next week in America.

ELDORA: America?

ALDO: Yes, Miami. You know Miami, Eldora?

ELDORA: Yes, Uncle.

ALDO: (*To ELDORA.*) You'd like Miami. Everyone drives sports cars and live in houses with pools. Perhaps little Carlos can take you there someday. If not, well... maybe we can arrange something. (*To CARLOS.*) Let the American win a couple, drive up his value, then take care of him.

(ALDO *tips his hat to CARLOS and ELDORA then exits.*)

CARLOS *takes a deep breath and sits down on the couch.*)

ELDORA: What are you going to do, Carlos?

CARLOS: What I always do. Obey my Uncle.

ELDORA: But you want the American dead, no?

CARLOS: I wanted him to suffer - not kill him.

ELDORA: Afraid to get your hands dirty?

CARLOS: *(Looks away.)* My hands have never been clean.

ELDORA: What do you mean?

CARLOS: *(Pause.)* Do you like this life?

ELDORA: I endure for our dream of America. *(Pause.)* Imagine our own home? A pool! A BMW!

CARLOS: A life paid for in blood.

ELDORA: *(Dismissive.)* Everything here is paid for in blood.

CARLOS: *(Closes his eyes thinking.)* Have you the pain medicine you give to the girls?

ELDORA: I do. *(Realization.)* Very good. Very imaginative.

(ELDORA goes to the front door and opens the drawer of the side-table. She pulls out a ruby-red vial. ELDORA goes back to CARLOS, hands him the vial.)

CARLOS takes the vial and stares at it for a moment.)

ELDORA: A large dose will kill, but a small amount should be enough to disorient him.

CARLOS: *(Nodding.)* His opponent will do the rest.

(CARLOS gets up and goes to the front door. ELDORA follows. Recalling something CARLOS said... ELDORA puts a hand on his shoulder, turning him around.)

ELDORA: Why did you say, your hands have never been clean?

CARLOS: *(Faces ELDORA.)* I'll explain when I return.

ELDORA: Explain what?

CARLOS: About the old Carlos. Who he really was. *(Cooly kisses ELDORA'S cheek.)* Happy birthday, Eldora.

(CARLOS exits through the front door, leaving ELDORA alone, confused and concerned.)

FADE OUT LIGHTS:

SCENE 4

FADE IN LIGHTS:

The apartment. A small period of time has passed. CARLOS is asleep, alone on the couch. Empty whiskey bottles are on the floor beside the couch. The kitchen area is unlit.

(A LOUD KNOCKING at the door stirs CARLOS. He groggily sits up. Grabs one of the near-empty bottles, and takes a swig from it. Another LOUD knocking.)

CARLOS: It's open.

(RODRIGO enters. He seems jittery and nervous.)

RODRIGO: I've been calling all night... where've you been?

CARLOS: Sleeping. Turned my phone off.

RODRIGO: So you didn't hear?

CARLOS: Hear what?

RODRIGO: Antonio's dead.

CARLOS: How did he die?

RODRIGO: *(Paces nervously behind CARLOS.)* Car bomb.

CARLOS: Like Juan?

RODRIGO: Identical.

(RODRIGO grabs one of the bottles from the table, guzzles down a mouthful of whiskey. CARLOS grabs the bottle from RODRIGO and puts it down on the table.)

RODRIGO: It's the '*Cámara de la muerte*', I'm sure of it.

CARLOS: You're overreacting.

RODRIGO: But what if we're next?

CARLOS: (*Dismissive.*) Don't be ridiculous.

RODRIGO: (*Stops.*) Think about it: Antonio ran the books... Juan managed the clients... And we oversee the game.

CARLOS: Antonio and Juan were street soldiers and had many enemies.

RODRIGO: I don't believe in coincidence.

CARLOS: Don't you think my uncle would know something?

RODRIGO: Nothing's been normal since the American. And then there's Eldora-

CARLOS: Careful.

RODRIGO: Maybe... maybe Mr. Blanco wants everything to, you know, vanish.

CARLOS: (*Goes to RODRIGO. Puts a hand on his shoulder.*) Go home. I'll call my Uncle and find out what he knows.

RODRIGO: You haven't spoken with him since Eldora left-

CARLOS: It's business. Business always comes first.

(CARLOS ushers RODRIGO to the door.)

RODRIGO: So, you think we're okay?

CARLOS: Absolutely. (*Pause.*) Still... keep your eyes open.

(RODRIGO nods and then exits.)

CARLOS grabs his cell phone from the coffee table. He turns the phone on... stares at it for a moment, takes a deep breath and then dials.)

CARLOS: Hello? Who's this? (*Disconcerted.*) Hello, Eldora. (*Pause.*) Bueno. Muy bueno. (*Pause.*) He's taking you to

America? Miami. That's... that's good. (*Frantically searches for a bottle with some whiskey still in it.*) Work is well. (*Finds a bottle, takes a giant gulp.*) Everything is well. Is my Uncle there? (*Pause.*) He hasn't called? (*Placating.*) I wouldn't worry... men like Aldo keep strange hours. (*Pause.*) Tell him to call me when he returns. *Gracias*. Goodbye, Eldora.

(CARLOS closes the phone. Takes another long drink and rubs his tearing eyes. CARLOS continues to drink until there is nothing left in the bottle. CARLOS looks around for something else to drink. Finding nothing near the couch he totters toward the kitchen.

CARLOS turns on the kitchen light. He is SURPRISED to find A MAN sitting at the kitchen table.

At the table is TOM.

TOM is wearing a nondescript tan jacket and slacks, with a white button-up shirt underneath. TOM has a quiet, determined presence about him. Beside TOM on the table, is a large handgun.)

CARLOS: (*Startled.*) Who are you? What are you doing here?

TOM: Your friend was right to be paranoid... he is next.

CARLOS: Next? What are you talking about?

TOM: Don't believe me... call him.

CARLOS: (*Looks suspiciously at TOM, pulls out phone and dials... waits for a response.*) Rodrigo...? Where are you? (*Jolts phone away from his ear, agitated by a loud noise.*) Rodrigo? Rodrigo? (*Looks at Tom.*) Line's dead.

TOM: So is Rodrigo.

CARLOS: What do you mean?

TOM: When he answered his phone it sent a signal to a payload fixed under his car. (*Pause.*) Boom.

CARLOS: (*Frantic.*) Who sent you? Was it Aldo? Aldo Blanco?

(TOM reaches inside his jacket pocket, pulls out a large gold medallion - ALDO'S medallion -- and spins it across the table to CARLOS. CARLOS picks it up and eyes it suspiciously.)

TOM: For a man of power, he was surprisingly loose-tongued. He didn't exactly finish the puzzle, but he told me where to find the final pieces.

CARLOS: Is he...

TOM: Dearly departed? Yes.

CARLOS: (*Backs up to the counter.*) Who are you working for?

TOM: No one.

CARLOS: (*Hands behind back, hidden from TOM, starts to subtly open one of the draws.*) Then who the hell are you?

TOM: (*Picks up Bible from the kitchen table, rolls it over in his hands.*) Think of me as... the rider on the pale horse.

CARLOS: (*Stares back, says nothing. Puts hand in drawer. Fishes around. Finds nothing.*)

(TOM smiles briefly, pulls a gun from his coat and puts it on the table.)

TOM: I believe you're looking for this?

(*Flummoxed, CARLOS looks around, weighing up what to do next.*)

TOM: Try.

CARLOS: Try what?

TOM: Should I 'try' to run? Should I 'try' to reason? What should I 'try'?

CARLOS: And if I try?

TOM: I'll show no mercy to you or anyone you ever cared for.

CARLOS: (*Nods to the bottles.*)

TOM: Be my guest.

(CARLOS grabs a bottle. He then reaches into a drawer and pulls out two shot glasses... while CARLOS does this, TOM speaks-)

TOM: What's your role?

CARLOS: You heard me speak with Rodrigo.

TOM: *(Nods.)* You run the game. What else?

CARLOS: *(Stares off into the distance, says nothing.)*

TOM: You can answer my questions without encouragement... *(Deliberate.)* ...or I can encourage you. And I am very good at encouragement.

(CARLOS returns to the table. Puts down two glasses, both already with shots poured in... CARLOS grabs his shot, swallows it then sits down opposite TOM.)

CARLOS: *(Steadies himself.)* I manage the fighters.

TOM: There was an American. He was one of your fighters?

CARLOS: *(Sighs.)* Si.

TOM: Aldo had a beef with him. Why?

CARLOS: It wasn't personal, it was business.

TOM: So what happened?

CARLOS: *(Stares, entranced at ALDO'S medallion.)*

TOM: *(Agitated, snaps his fingers.)* Carlos.

CARLOS: *(Staring at the medallion.)* He's really gone?

TOM: Completely.

CARLOS: *(Looks up at TOM.)* The American's dead.

TOM: *(Tightens.)* How?

CARLOS: He was drugged, before a fight.

TOM: Unwittingly?

CARLOS: Yes.

TOM: Who did it?

CARLOS: Me.

TOM: Settling a score for your Uncle?

CARLOS: Making a profit would be more accurate.

TOM: How did he die?

CARLOS: During the fight?

TOM: (*Impatient.*) Yes, the fight.

CARLOS: It was quick. He had no equilibrium. The other fighter easily took him down and then...

TOM: Then?

CARLOS: Broke his neck.

TOM: (*Droops slightly in his chair.*) Where's the body?

CARLOS: We burn the bodies.

TOM: The ashes?

CARLOS: We throw them into the sewer.

TOM: (*Takes another deep breath*) Did he suffer?

CARLOS: The fight? Like I said, it was over quickly.

TOM: No, in the prison. Did he suffer?

CARLOS: No more than anyone else. Perhaps less. He was respected you see... feared.

TOM: Why?

CARLOS: He was a killer. *Un asesino.* (Pause.) Like his father.

TOM: (*Unflinchingly stares back at CARLOS.*)

CARLOS: It's in the eyes.

TOM: (*To himself.*) He was tough... but a killer?

CARLOS: What is it you Americans say... 'The apple never falls far from the tree'? (*Stares back at TOM.*) Yes, you and the American are very similar.

TOM: His name was Charlie.

CARLOS: So, this is vengeance.

TOM: I think of it as closure.

CARLOS: (*Stares at TOM, measuring.*) Vengeance alone doesn't drive you. There's something else... penance perhaps?

TOM: (*Coldly stares back at CARLOS.*)

CARLOS: Killing will never make wrong, right.

TOM: It's a start.

CARLOS: Yet not an end.

TOM: Thanks, but I don't take advice from the dead.

CARLOS: (*Sniggers.*) Oh... I died long ago. (*Takes a drink, leans back in his chair.*) You see... life ends the day you accept a deal from the devil. Every day after, you swallow cup after cup of sorrow - waiting for the end.

TOM: (Pause.) The soul dies, but the body remains. (*Takes the shot CARLOS poured fom him and drinks it.*)

CARLOS: (*Nods, in concurrence.*) For me the devil was my Uncle Aldo. Who did you make a deal with?

TOM: The highest bidder.

CARLOS: You're an assassin by trade?

TOM: That's one word for it.

CARLOS: And you have a family?

TOM: Had.

CARLOS: Did you... love them?

TOM: (*Picks up gun.*) Time's up, Mr. Blanco.

CARLOS: I was the last man to see your son alive, and yet you've asked me mostly nothing about him.

TOM: I know enough.

CARLOS: I think maybe, I know him more than you.

TOM: That wouldn't surprise me.

CARLOS: I'm relieved my father's dead. If he saw me now... I'd shame him. But at least once he knew me, and I him. He was a man of morals and principles. (*Drinks.*) And you... do you feel shame when you think of your son?

TOM: (*Places gun back down on the table.*) Charlie was a good boy. A good man... a better man than me. (*Pause.*) I tried... but this life... (*Shakes head.*) I had to disappear. Become a ghost.

CARLOS: But you're here now.

TOM: (*Pause.*) It's my last chance to be a father.

(*CARLOS picks up the bottle, pours them both another shot.*)

CARLOS: Here's to our wretched lives.

TOM: May this be your last cup of sorrow.

(*Both men drink their shots.*)

TOM moves his hand toward the gun on the table, as he does so, he slightly stumbles. TOM pauses, he almost looks surprised. He stares at CARLOS, silently, quizzically. TOM attempts to lift his gun, but it

falls heavily from his hand, back on to the table. TOM swoons.

TOM: What did you do? What did you give... *(voice fading)* me? CARLOS *reaches over, picks up both guns and tucks them under the waistband of his pants. TOM continues to sit silently, quietly gasping for air.*

CARLOS *reaches into this pocket, pulls out a RUBY-RED VIAL and places it on the table in front of TOM.)*

CARLOS: I tried to be like my father, but the truth is I'm without morals or principals. See, my friend, I'm a killer... A rapist... A thief... and a deceiver. *(Puts on ALDO'S medallion.)* A true Blanco. *(Sighs. Puts hand almost tenderly on TOM'S head.)* Now, you can go to your family. Be a father. Go... go...

(TOM doubles over, and dies face down on the table.)

CARLOS: *(Picks cell phone out of his pocket, dials, waits.)* Eldora? Pack your bags... I'm taking you to Miami. *(Closes phone.)* *Mi esposa hermosa.*

(CARLOS turns to leave, then stops. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out an old, crumpled picture. (CHARLIE'S picture of his family.) He goes back to TOM and places the picture in his hand.

CARLOS *moves purposefully to the door and exits.)*

CURTAINS.