

Pañuelos

By

David Allard

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JOHN SULLIVAN writes...* For me, the key to this play comes from a line of dialogue. Daniel, tries to convince his mother, Veronica, that she needs to confront what's really happening to them and to society as Argentina transforms into a fully-edged, locked down police state. She refuses and ultimately claims there are things we don't / can't / just shouldn't talk about – things that proper citizens don't mention. When she pledges to “go to church and lead a quiet life,” Daniel tells her in no uncertain terms, “what is hidden in the dark, mother, is still reality.” Pañuelos unpacks various levels of unspoken hidden realities: Daniel's sexuality which brands him as a terrorist enemy of the state, the cold brutality of police and the military – beatings and torture in dark prisons and summary executions – and equally important, the erosion of free will and self respect in a population that goes along to get along, or in this case: to just stay alive. While this piece resonates to some extent with Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* – via Daniel's very brief encounter with the seemingly sympathetic possible informer Balduino in prison - the arc of transformation belongs entirely to Veronica. She becomes more self-aware, courageous, resistant to coercive rules and propaganda, and eventually joins the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in their overt protests against the state's evil policy of repression and “disappearing” its alleged enemies. The pañuelos – white scarves worn by Las Madres and their supporters – are a deeply affecting emblem of resistance embodied in the power of remembrance. A symbol of refusal to bend the knee to universal amnesia, coerced silence and compulsory ignorance enforced by the threat of isolation and brutal violence. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

Five stars

Pañuelos
A Play in Two Acts

By David Allard

Veronica discovers what truly matters in life during Argentina's Dirty War.

Argentina's "Dirty War," also called Process of National Reorganization, or El Proceso, was an infamous campaign waged from 1976 to 1983 by the country's military dictatorship against suspected left-wing political opponents. It is estimated that 30,000 citizens were killed and most of the disappeared were never found,

their bodies believed to have been disposed of in the Atlantic Ocean.

This is the fictional story of Vero Romero and her son Daniel, residents of Abasto, a suburb of Buenos Aires, Argentina. It is May of 1977.

Characters:

**News Reporter (Voiceover) Daniel Romero Veronica Romero Carla Medina
Raquel De Caimi Soldier / Government Worker Balduino Colas**

Act One, Scene One

*The Buenos Aires living room of **Veronica Romero**, a middle-aged, conservative widow and her son **Daniel Romero**, he is in his early to mid twenties. They are sitting and listening to the radio and Veronica reads the bible. A voice begins to speak over the radio, as the two listen.*

News Reporter
(from radio in the living room)

Buenas Tardes. The time is 7 pm and this is Argentina National Radio. Thank you for tuning into our radio news program. I am Juan Ramirez and this is the latest from our capital city, Buenos Aires:

El Presidente Videla, our commander in Chief, announced today that our national recovery is well underway and that all operations are running smoothly throughout the country. He delivered this important message during a speech to the nation given outside of the Casa Rosado. It has now been just over one year since President Videla took the helm of Argentina. The country's economic situation continues to improve a great deal as he cleans up the financial distress of Former President Isabel Perón. Videla continues to strengthen Argentinian relations throughout the western world and to keep us safe from leftist terrorist organizations that have long plagued our motherland. 'Argentina becomes safer and safer each day', said President Videla, 'as we clean up our streets and rid our

country of dangerous subversive ideas that were previously a constant threat to our national security.’ Videla spoke for about twenty minutes today- addressing crime, poverty and international relations. (The Argentinian Anthem starts to play for the first few lines.) “Libertad, Libertad, Libertad.” (Daniel gets up and turns off the radio.)

Daniel

Ay Mama. I cannot listen to any more of this. Our anthem makes me furious these days- listening to these lies in the lyrics of our own song. Liberty? Really? It’s an injustice to play that song. I don’t feel free anymore and none of my friends do either. Not under this regime. Not with everything that is going on in this country right now. To me, it feels more dangerous than ever. I’m sure you won’t agree with me, but we were surely better off under Isabel Perón. She was not perfect, but this is unbelievable. Why do we have to swing from one end of the pendulum to the next with the way that we rule this country? Do you know what is going on out there? Do you have any idea what the truth is? I assure you it’s not the spin that these reporters tell us every day about how great everything is in Argentina in 1977. These lies they report on the news are unreal. Improvements? More like a new world order, and if you don’t get in line, you had better watch your back out there. Videla stands for everything I am against. He’s a repressive dictator. Do you know that innocent people are going missing every day and no one wants to talk about it. Everyone would rather pretend it’s not happening. But I’ve heard things, so many things, that no one dares to speak about in the light of day. In fact, one of the cooks at work- here two weeks ago, living his life and working beside me in the restaurant, gone and never seen again! I heard they came to his apartment in the middle of the day and they took him away. No one has seen him since then. They blindfolded him with a handkerchief, a simple pañuelo, and took him out of his home. How is this making us safer? Kidnapping innocent citizens from their homes. It makes no sense to me at all. Why would our own government do this to our own people? You certainly will not hear about this on the news. No, just a reporter telling us how great everything is because we are saving face in other countries. Meanwhile, people are afraid to walk the streets and to be themselves. Sometimes, mama, the truth is right in front of us and we do not

want to accept it as reality, because it is just easier to live in a fantasy and pretend it is not happening.

Veronica

Ay mi hijo, no me digas eso. How dare you talk about our President this way! Your father, may God have mercy on his soul, would be so happy that the

government has retaken control of its people. He proudly served our country for many years. Now, stop with these lies of people going away. It is dangerous to speak in such a way. The government just made sure those dangerous leftist terrorists are gone. We are safer now than we ever have been. And what would the government want with a cook in a restaurant? You are inventing ideas in your head. I'm sure this man just found a new job. Do not repeat such things. Those are subversive ideas, there is no place for leftist talk in my home. Enough with all of this. ¡Basta ya! (She closes her bible) Now- be a good boy and start going to church again. *That* will be good for your soul, Daniel. Maybe it will help you to stop inventing all of these wild ideas in your head. They are simply not good to be thinking, and certainly should not be spoken about out loud.

Daniel

¡Todas mentiras! These are all lies you hear on the news. People are going

missing every day. And the whole country is afraid to speak about it. The whole country! Everyone goes about their day acting as if this is totally normal. In fact, someone brought up the cook that was missing the other day, to our boss and she was told to leave! To leave work for just asking a simple question.

Veronica

Well, some things just do not warrant discussion. I understand why she was asked to leave. That's not proper talk for a place of business.

Daniel

Proper talk? She was just asking a simple question. What is hidden in the dark, mother, is still reality: whether you choose to see it or not, that is your decision. There is more to all of these things than meets the eye. Do not believe what you hear in the news. Its not true! Open your mind just a little bit about this. Have you not heard anything about these missing people at all? Not even whispers?

Veronica

PEOPLE... these subversives... who are a threat to our country may have been removed, even exiled, or run away, mijo. Many people left our country because they were, indeed, subversives. There is no room for those communist terrorists in our gran pueblo. You know what the problem is with those subversives, they have no God in their lives! You may forget the country was falling apart under our last President. Now, maybe our economy can improve and you can get a better job, rather than that restaurant. You are getting much too old to be a waiter in an

ordinary restaurant. It is time to move on with your life and make a proper living. It's time to be a man.

Daniel

But I like the restaurant.

Veronica

Daniel, things have been so hard ever since your father died. We can barely afford to keep Carla working here. His pension only provides so much after twenty years of him being gone from this life. Now, I need you to assume more responsibility. And see the bright side of President Videla. He is a good man and will help this country and all of us to be more prosperous. I'm hopeful for our new President and you should be as well. You should be keeping him in your prayers every night, just like I do.

Daniel

Prayers... (he rolls his eyes) Listen, Mama, I like the restaurant. It may not pay very well, but my friends are all there. I love being a waiter. I love the atmosphere, the food, the people, and all the fun. You know I am a very social person. And we can barely gather in the streets anymore, not the way we used to anyway, so at least I have the restaurant. At least I can be with friends and talk to people and have nice conversations with the people who come in to eat. I am very happy there.

Veronica Happy?

Daniel

Yes, it's very fun.

Veronica

Life is not about fun. Life is about working hard and taking care of the ones you love! Life is not some big party as you might think it is. Soon, you must find a

wife and you will have a family of your own to take care of. And an aging mother,

as well. A restaurant is no place to take care of a family. Perhaps go into business like your father did after his military service. Or maybe even the military as a career? I think that would be a very good idea for you. You could use the structure in your life, I think. Church and the military, oh and a wife. You need all of those things in your life.

Daniel

The military! Are you kidding me? After all that is going on in this country right now. I would rather be dead than join that vicious group of killers! Did you not just hear me explain what they are doing to people out there? And, Mama, how many times do I have to tell you! I am not going to find a wife and have a family. That is just not in my future. That is nothing that I want for myself. That is not going to make me happy. It's not who I am or who I want to be in this life. Don't you think it is pretty obvious that I'm

Veronica

Nonsense! I do not want to hear anymore from your mouth. Since you tell me over and over that you do not want to be a priest, you, of course, will find a wife. I don't know why you hurt your mother with these stories you say. You will find a wife and a family. That is simply what one does at your age. I don't want to hear another word about this. You are becoming so argumentative, Daniel. I really don't know what is going on with you. You were never like this as a child. Never.

Daniel

Maybe it's something in this repressive air, mother. It's making me want to rebel! And I am not a child anymore. And this is..simply... what... one... does...? Who made up these rules?

Veronica

Rules? Well, the church.

Daniel

So someone decided that me having a family will make me happy- even though I am certain it will not- and I am supposed to follow that rule?

Veronica

I know you are a good boy. You were an altar boy, a great student, top of your class. The future is bright for you. You know all I ever wanted in life is your happiness. Now, soon it will be time to find a wife. And one cannot support a family on a waiter's salary. It is impossible. You need to find a better job and a wife. How about Raquel from the restaurant? She is very pretty. She is always going out with you, wherever it is that you go after work. Perhaps she likes you. You should ask her out on a proper date with you and get to know her, you know, as a girlfriend. I think she would make a nice wife for you. She comes from a very nice family, I've seen her at church many times with her parents and her abuelita.

Daniel

Pero, mama. It's not that simple. Raquel is my best friend. It's not...

Veronica

Exactly! Marriage is based on friendship, so you already have that great foundation. She is very pretty and smart and she seems to like you quite a bit.

Maybe I will even speak to her about it. She seems to like me very much. I am sure she would love to hear from her future mother-in-law!

Daniel

You don't understand. Sometimes I feel like you don't even listen to me. Sometimes I feel like you just hear what you want to hear and see what you want to see. Reality is not just black or white, it is every color, mother. You need to open up your mind.

Veronica

Ay, mi hijo. Sometimes I do not understand a word you are speaking, like it's a foreign language or something. I am going to mass. I will pray that Jesus blesses you with many children and many grandchildren for me to love! Oh, and that he brings you a great wife, perhaps that Raquel- I do like her. I will need to speak with her more, but she is definitely a possibility for you. You must keep her in mind. Bueno, me voy. Dame un besito. (They kiss) I love you very much. Now please behave yourself. I will be home right after mass. (She takes a bible from the table, and exits through the front door.)

Act One, Scene Two

*The living room. Later that same evening. Daniel sits on the couch and there is a knock at the door. It is his best friend, **Raquel de Caimi**. She is in her mid to late twenties. Daniel opens the door and gives her a huge hug.*

Daniel

Raquel, mi amiga. I thought you would never get here. I am so ready to dance tonight. We are going dancing at that underground place, no? Ay- I need some fun in my life tonight. I want to forget, for a few minutes, what is going on in this country. Ay, and mi mama also. She is driving me crazy, Raquel. It is worse than it ever has been. She is really putting the pressure on me today. Sometimes, I just feel like a firecracker that is waiting to explode and she is holding the match. It is almost too much for me to handle.

Raquel

Daniel, you worry too much. Everything is fine. And– tonight we dance (the two dance a small tango together)! I know how much you love to dance. And... this is going to be a great party. It's in the basement of that apartment building in Recoleta that we went to last month. Remember that beautiful man you had your eyes on was at this place the last time we went? He was so cute. Just my type, but unfortunately, I wasn't his! If he weren't interested in you, I would have been all over him! Such a beautiful smile. I really liked him. What was his name?

Daniel

Rodrigo! Yes. I haven't seen him since the last party. I used to see him in the square all the time, but I used to see a lot of people in the square all the time that I no longer see. I often wonder if they got the money to get out of here... or...well..

you know.. (He takes out a very feminine women's handkerchief from his pocket and puts it around his neck.)

Raquel

God only knows where half our friends have gone.

Daniel

I don't even want to think about it.

Raquel

Have you heard any other news on Eduardo from work?

Daniel

Nada. And I guess we aren't allowed to ask. Such bullshit.

Raquel Such bullshit.

Daniel

Raquel, mira, this is my mother's handkerchief. I love wearing it so much. She caught me wearing it a few weeks ago and almost had a nervous breakdown. She took it off of me, but I went back into her room to get it. Truth be told, I have been wearing this scarf for years. She just has never caught me wearing it, before now. I think I don't care much anymore if she does see me in it. I might even like when she catches me. It's about time she knows exactly who I am. Because, honestly, I love who I am and she should, too! Pero, she can be so uptight sometimes. But we

already knew that! I think it looks amazing on me. What do you think? Do you think Rodrigo will like it on me?

Raquel

What a beautiful scarf. I'm sure Rodrigo will adore it on you. Danielcito, about your mother, she is older and set in her ways. You know she loves you. She just has a hard time accepting new ideas and expressing herself. She is, well, she is of another generation. Her generation thinks that it is easier to ignore things that bother them. They don't talk about things like sexuality, or attraction, or even feelings. I mean, we are children of the sixties and seventies. We are open, we are more open minded than they are. Your mother was raised a certain way. Grow up, get married, go to church, raise a family. She is just trying to come to terms with... well with...

Daniel

With what? The fact that her son is...

Raquel Gay?

Daniel

Yes- GAY! I like men. Sometimes, I even like to dress with women's clothes (He touches the scarf).. Why does there have to be a word for what I am! I'm Daniel!

Raquel

Yes, yes you are!

Daniel

One thing I do know for sure. I'm not going to settle down and have a family like my mother wants me to. And I'm sure as hell not going to be a priest! I could never do that. I love her so much, but she does not understand me. Ay Raquel, sometimes I feel like you're the only one who does. (Daniel hugs Raquel and Veronica enters, stunned that Daniel is wearing the scarf)

Raquel

(Noticing Veronica's shocked face) Well, I will be outside. Buenas Tardes, Sra. Romero. (She kisses her and starts to walk toward the door)

Veronica

Raquel, no please stay inside, I would like to speak with you and with Daniel. We haven't talked in so long, mi amor. There are a few things that I would really like

to discuss with you. As you know, Daniel is getting a little older...

Daniel

Ay, Mama, will you please stop with this talk.

Raquel

Another time, Sra. Romero. Another time we will all sit down and have a long conversation. I promise. But, we are running very late for an event downtown. Daniel, I'll be outside. (She kisses her and quickly exits out the front door)

Veronica

What did I tell you about that handkerchief? What in the world is wrong with you? No son of mine is leaving my house dressed in something that is meant for a woman. Now give me back my scarf immediately, young man. This is such an embarrassment to me and to our entire family. What would your father say about this if he were still alive? What shame it would bring to our family.

Daniel

What is the problem? Why are you ashamed of me? Does this scarf embarrass you? Do you think I look like a faggot in a woman's scarf? Well, I have news for you mother. I like to wear women's clothes sometimes. I like many things you would not approve of! Many things that you might even be ashamed of. Would you like to talk about it once and for all? And stop dancing around this? Have a real, adult conversation and stop living in a fantasy world.

Veronica

What are you talking about? Take that handkerchief off. NOW! Why would a man want to wear such a feminine thing? You know what? I think you and I are going to go and talk to Father Antonio tomorrow. You need some serious religious counseling. I am sure he can help you. You need God in your life. I don't know who is feeding your mind with such ideas about clothes and parties and fun. But I did not raise you to be like, like... this. I raised you to be a good Christian and a good citizen of this country. Not, not a man wearing a woman's scarf who goes out dancing until all hours of the night.

Daniel

God made me just the way I am and, guess what- I love wearing women's scarves. So, mama, if God loves us all, just like Father Antonio always told me as a child, then God loves men who like to dress in women's clothes. VOILA! There you have it.

Veronic

It is not that simple.

Daniel

Honestly, you are so uptight. It's not a big deal, really. I wish you wouldn't make such a huge issue out of all of this. People are people and we all have the right to

express ourselves and be happy in this world. Losing papa so young has shown me that life is too short not to be happy and do the things I love. Like wearing a beautiful handkerchief and going out dancing. (He shrugs, she tries to grab the scarf off of him but he moves away)

Veronica

Please, Daniel. Please go with me tomorrow to our church. You never go with me anymore.

Daniel No way.

Veronica

I am your mother and I love you and I just want you to be happy. I am worried you are following the path of the devil. I prayed day and night that this would not happen. I love you so much and I just don't know what I did wrong for this to

happen. Maybe I should have remarried and given you a stronger male influence. Perhaps this is all my fault. I guess I should blame myself for all of this.

Daniel

Mama, if you wanted me to be happy, you would have told me the scarf looks nice on me and gone to bed.

Veronica

Looks nice! Why would I ever say that?

Daniel

Just because your version of happy and my version of happy look different, does not mean they both can't bring someone happiness. People are different. This is

1977. Not 1940. Just because this country is being led by a fascist, does not mean the world and its people are not changing. You need to open your mind. Evolve a little! Now, I am going out with Raquel. I am going to dance. I may dance with men, I may dance with women. I will do as I please. Now, good night. I love you

but I do not want to argue with you. I need you to relax with everything and try to accept me.

Veronica How can I relax?

Daniel

Mama, you have to calm down.

Veronica

I am just asking that you speak with the priest and go to mass with me tomorrow evening, like we used to when you were younger. This one small request for your mother. It would make me very, very happy. Ay, I do not know what to think about you.

Daniel

You don't know what to think about me? Why don't you worry about yourself, Mama!

Veronica

Please stop! You are not acting like yourself.

Daniel

No Mama, I finally AM acting like myself and it's about time you saw me.

Veronica

These decisions you are making will never lead to happiness. That much I know.

Daniel

I am happy, very happy. I love dancing and being with my friends and I love waiting tables. And yes, I love men. In fact, I have dated a few men. And I like it. I like it a lot. This is who I am, Mama. It is a part of me. I know myself. I am 25 years old. It's about time that you accepted it and that you accepted me. I am not going to have a wife. I am not going to have children. Your son is.... What you would call... different.. I always have been that way, for as long as I can remember. You should know this by now. You know what, before this stupid dictator, I used

to march in the street for my rights. My rights to love whomever I choose and be whomever I want to be. I used to march in parades with human rights organizations. And we were starting to see some change in this country. More people with open minds, more people free to express themselves and how they feel! Now I am forced to basements and houses because our country has no room

for anything other than conservative ideas. Ideas that repress people and want to keep them from being happy and free.

Veronica

Stop talking this nonsense, Daniel. I know what is going on here. I really do. You are simply confused. You don't know what you're talking about. Marching in the streets? What do you mean? I never knew about any of this. I think you are fantasizing again. Remember how you always used to fantasize when you were a child? Now, you and I will go see the priest tomorrow.

Daniel

I am not going to see any priests.

Veronica

You need some God in your life. Some orderly direction. The church is just the place to get that. Now, I need to get some rest. I don't know what has come over

you lately, but I need you to please listen to what I have told you and stop making up stories. (She exits to another room and Daniel storms out the front door to meet Raquel.)

Act One, Scene Three

The living room. Veronica sits reading the newspaper. Carla Medina, a middle aged maid, wearing a handkerchief and carrying a broom.

Carla

Buenos Dias, Sra. What a lovely Fall day today. I hope that you slept well last night. How is your morning? Do you need some more coffee or anything?

Veronica

No, No. I had enough coffee this morning, Carla, pero gracias. I am just reading about these subversives. You know, I am so pleased with our new President.

Cleaning up our country. I feel very hopeful reading the news these days. God is blessing our beautiful country with exactly what we need. I had faith these days would come, even in the darkest hours I knew we would restore this country. My dear husband would have been so proud to see control back in this country. This is just what was needed, I know it.

Carla

Yes. Yes. (long silence as she dusts a table) I suppose.

Veronica What do you mean?

Carla

Nothing, Sra. It's just that. Nothing. You are so right. God Bless our new President. I hope he gets rid of all of those subversives that have been pestering our good country. And continues to fix this broken economy as well.

Veronica

Carla, I have known you long enough and now you are holding back from me? Please, you have never been one to keep your opinion quiet. Why in the world

would you start now?

Carla

I really do not want to sound disrespectful in any way. I love my country. But, I have heard things. Things that scare me. Things that would scare you. You know my cousin is in the military, and I fully support moving in the right direction. But, sometimes I worry. (pause) (I've probably said too much.

Veronica

No. No. You worry about what?

Carla

Nothing Sra. I'm just thinking out loud. Nonsense I am sure. Listen, is Daniel still sleeping? I need to clean his room and do his bed and laundry. It's getting late and his breakfast will be cold in no time at all. Where is he?

Veronica

He must still be sleeping. He was out late last night, yet again. He is always out so late.

Carla

He loves to dance. Always has.

Veronica

Carla, can I speak to you about something, well, speak to you about something as a friend. You know, confidentially. Just between the two of us. It's a sensitive matter and requires discretion. It makes me quite uncomfortable to speak about to be completely honest with you, so I apologize in advance if I have trouble saying these words to you.

Carla

Of course, you can trust me. I would never repeat anything that you tell me. I know you are my boss, but you are also my friend and I am happy to listen.

Veronica

Daniel and I had a terrible fight last night.

Carla

Oh no. You two never used to argue.

Veronica

I know. We always got along so well when he was young. But, I am very worried about him and the direction that his life is taking. Very worried, Carla. I think maybe because his father died when he was young, maybe, he... maybe he is

confused. I think he has a lot more problems in life than I was willing to recognize. He was such a good boy growing up, so full of life, so happy, so obedient. I really think he is just confused about a lot of things right now. Life can, as you know, be confusing sometimes.

Carla

Ok, so you think that he is confused in life? Confused about what? Being gay?

Veronica

(Shocked) Do you know that? What makes you say that? Did he tell you that he is well, a homosexual? ... Ay Dios mio. I am not comfortable with this conversation.

Carla

I don't know what he is, exactly, by definition. But, I always assumed he was gay. Since I started working with you. What I do know is that he has loved women's clothing, fashion, for years and years now. Didn't you tell me he liked dolls as a child and playing dress up. That doesn't mean someone is gay, but it could. But-that's just who he is. You know that. You have always known that. I think that maybe you just did not want to admit it to yourself.

Veronica

I can't even believe we are having this conversation. I suppose you may be right about a few things. But...

Carla

Oh and then there were those marches he went on a few years back with homosexual liberation group- Nuestro Mundo. You must remember that? He had a few friends from that group over the house a few times- they were so lovely. They were marching for more rights for gays and lesbian people at the Plaza de Mayo. It got a lot of attention. That group was really prevalent a few years ago. They were always marching around the city. Please don't tell me you don't remember this? I think it was even in the newspaper.

Veronica

No! I do not remember those marches. Why would anyone march for their rights in the street? No wonder Videla had to come in and take over with some law and order. That is terrible. Maybe I'm old fashioned but I don't like that one bit. Marching in the street? For.. for that!

Carla

A lot of people have marched in that plaza for many things over the years. Actually, there is a group of mothers who have been marching in the plaza lately.

Veronica

Marching in the Plaza de Mayo. I don't know why anyone would march at the Plaza. Just be a good citizen and help others. Why do people always have to scream and shout? Causing trouble is simply not the way I was raised. Go to church and live a quiet life.

Carla

When faced with injustice, a lot of people feel the need to scream and shout and push against the establishment. I think that everyone has the right to march. To tell you the truth, I was so proud of Daniel and that whole organization.

Veronica PROUD?

Carla

Maybe I've said too much. I don't want to offend you.

Veronica

Marches? Marching in the street? These friends you are talking about. I don't remember that at all!

Carla

Vero, Please forgive my bluntness, but you are famous for looking the other way- whenever anything becomes difficult, you bury it inside and ignore it. I'm almost shocked you are talking to me about this at all. I figured you would bury it down and deny it, to be completely honest with you.

Veronica

Me? Bury it? Do I? I don't know. Daniel has been very abrupt and combative in the way he is talking to me. Listen, I do agree I would not bother you with this unless I were very worried about it. I think I need your help.

Carla My help?

Veronica

Yes, could you just mention to Daniel how much it would mean to me if he would go to mass with me tonight. Just. You know. Casually.

Carla,

He is a creative, sensitive soul. He has brought so much joy to this house over the years. He is passionate and funny and full of life. You should be proud of him. He's a bright young man. He will offer a lot to this world. But as for your wish, I guess I can ask him to go to mass. But, really, he hasn't been to mass with you in years.

Veronica Yes, and it shows.

Carla

Perhaps you are being too hard on him. Too hard on yourself.

Veronica

I'm not being hard enough on him. One thing that I know for sure is that his father would be so upset with all these ideas. I have to bring him to church today

and we will see about changing his mind about all of this. There is nothing that the power of God cannot fix. Soon he will have a new job and a wife; exactly as God wants it.

Carla

Exactly as God wants it or exactly as you want it? (Daniel enters) Buenos días Daniel. Did we have a late night?

Daniel

Yes, Carla. I had last night and today I'm off from the restaurant. So I decided to sleep late.

Carla

Well, I hope you had a nice night. Did you go out with Raquel?

Daniel

Yes. And my friend Rodrigo.

Carla

Wonderful. I made you breakfast. It is in the kitchen. I will get it ready for you.
(She exits, Daniel starts to follow her)

Veronica

Daniel, I know you are not working tonight. I insist you come to church with me and that we speak to Father Antonio after.

Daniel

Oh, yes, I thought long and hard about that Mama. And I wanted to tell you- NO.

Veronica

This is not a request. I will see you in this living room at 6:30 pm and we will be attending mass -together! (As he exits) Just like when you were a child. You know just how much this means to be. Be down here and ready to go by 6:15. (She opens the newspaper and starts to read it). These subversives and their anarchy. Soon, they will all be gone and we can live in peace, the way God intended.

Act One, Scene Four

The living room. It is almost six thirty pm. Veronica is waiting at the door, dressed in her church attire.

Veronica

(yelling) Daniel, we will be late. And I told Father Antonio that you will be joining me. Oh I'm so pleased that you are coming to church with me. You are answering all my prayers. Soon you will have all of these crazy ideas out of your head!

Daniel

(Enters) Mama, I told you I am not coming to church. I hate church!

Veronica

How could you say such a thing? Of course you don't hate church. You always loved being an altar boy and you loved attending mass with me when you were younger. Every Sunday you and me and your father. Such happy memories for our family. I will never forget your confirmation...

Daniel

I ALWAYS HATED CHURCH! You just never bothered to listen to me. Mama, you live in a fantasy world. As long as everything appears okay on the outside, you are comfortable. I hated being an altar boy and I hated going to mass. I told you this time and time again, but you don't listen to me- ever, about anything that I say to you that might make you uncomfortable.

Veronica

Don't yell at your mother. Your behavior lately is so obstinate. You were never like this when you were younger.

Daniel

(Yelling) Perhaps you will finally hear me if I yell. Perhaps you will finally listen to the truth!

Veronica

What truth are you speaking about?

Daniel

The truth about me. The truth about who I am. You know why I don't like going to church, Mother? Because they are all hypocrites. They preach acceptance and tolerance and love and forgiveness. All in the name of Jesus Christ. But, it's not how they act. They don't tolerate everyone. They only tolerate you if you fit into a certain box. If you act a certain way. If you follow these made up rules, according to their guidelines. The church is just as bad as our government. In fact, they're one in the same in this country! Open your eyes.

Veronica

These rules are not made up. They are centuries of tradition. They are our faith.

Daniel

Your faith! Not our faith! I have my own beliefs and maybe you or Father Antonio might not like them so much, but they make a hell of a lot more sense to me than yours. I think we were put here to be happy, to be free, and to be

comfortable with who we are. To fully express ourselves and to be exactly as nature intended us to be. I don't need any counseling! Counseling is for people who are depressed or unhappy and want to change their lives. Can't you see? I am happy. You know the happiest I ever was?

Veronica When?

Daniel

When I was spending all my time with Nuestro Mundo! The gay rights group I used to march and organize with around Buenos Aires. I made the best friends there and we were all working for a common goal. It made me HAPPY! I felt like I was helping people and contributing to society. I felt really good about myself, like I had a purpose.

Veronica

Oh, please don't tell me this. What is in the past for you is in the past, but I am sure we can fix you... whatever you are. I am sure there are therapies for this behavior and for your impure thoughts!

Daniel

Therapies are for sick people. I'm not sick. I had so many happy times with Nuestro Mundo. I could tell you so many stories, if you were only willing to hear them.

Veronica

I don't want to hear these stories, we are going to be late for mass and Father Antonio will be looking for us right after so that he can speak to you.

Daniel

Why would you want a fish to swim upstream? It's against their very nature. Would you want a camel to live in the ocean? A bird to walk all day? Everything in this world has its nature. My nature is loving men and wearing women's clothes sometimes. Mama, I know who I am and I know exactly what my nature is. I have always known it. No amount of therapy or conversations with Father Antonio is ever going to change who I am. I am completely certain of that. They may cover up the issue at hand, but that's all. It's not healthy.

Veronica But...

Daniel

This is who I am. I fit into no box and that's okay with me. It's me. I'm happy, Mother. In fact, the only thing that makes me unhappy at all- in this crazy world we are living in is the fact that you simply do not accept who I am as a person. The fact that you don't want me to be happy and free.

Veronica

(Stares blankly at him) I know this is all my fault. It is always the fault of the caretaker when things like this happen. I should have remarried. I should have given you a father figure to look up to. Now I surely have ruined you for good. For good! (She starts to cry)

Daniel

Again, you are not listening to a word that I am saying to you. Will you please understand that I am happy? I am content with my life and how I live it! In fact, the only problem I have is, well, you! No one else I know seems to have a problem with it! At least, no one that I choose to spend my time with.

Veronica

Of course I have a problem with it all. This is unnatural. It is just not right at all. This is not how God intended for you to live your life. It is an abomination. It is against our religion and our way of life. You must change, immediately. We have to fix you.

Daniel

What is unnatural is trying to fix something that does not need to be fixed. You know what, you have known me my whole life. You are the one person who is supposed to love me no matter what. I really don't think we should put stipulations on love. For once, listen to me, I am not going to church with you! I am not going to any counseling. And if you don't like it, you can go to hell!

Veronica

Daniel, please. You need to stop fighting with me. Stop fighting with sensibility. I am trying to save your soul. I am just trying to help you figure this all out so you can live a good life as a good Christian and a good husband and father.

Daniel

¡Por Dios! I have a good life. You are the one who can't see that. You are the one who is so concerned with all these stupid rules society has taught us. Not me! Go

to church, mother. Go pray to a God that I am quite sure could not give a shit if I wear your accessories! You are just as repressed as this government. No wonder you love it so much.

Veronica

Fine, if that's the way you want it. But, Father Antonio will be very upset about you not coming.

Daniel

I don't care!

Veronica

Yes, Yes. I'm starting to see it all now. You really don't care about what your poor mother thinks. You really don't think that after raising you on my own for all these years, on my own, that I know what's best for you.

Daniel

I need to live my life for me, not for you.

Veronica

Well, listen up and listen well- I will never approve of this sinful lifestyle you are choosing to live. I will never, ever accept this type of life for you! You either change your ways, or you are no longer a son of mine! And I would appreciate you not forcing me to make that decision. Think about this long and hard young man.

Daniel

(yells) FINE. Go to church. I no longer care what you think. I'm already controlled by our Government, I will not be controlled by my own mother. Now you listen to me, I am going out with my friends. And I am going to do whatever the hell I want. (He exits, and Veronica grabs her bible and coat from a nearby table. She puts her coat on.)

Veronica-

This is my fault. My fault. The Lord entrusted me with this child and now he is living this lifestyle. Ay, his father would be so disappointed with his choice of this lifestyle. He would never accept this and I must not either. Father Antonio will help me with this. He has to. (she exits)

ACT 1- SCENE 5

Living room. Later that night. Raquel knocks for a second and opens the door . She enters and Daniel is on the couch, visibly upset.

Raquel

Daniel, you sounded so upset on the telephone, what happened? What's the matter with you?

Daniel

It's my Mother. We had another fight.

Raquel

Oh no, again? What did you two say to each other this time?

Daniel

It's simple. I told her that I am who I am and I am not going to church with her to fix that.

Raquel

Was she prepared to hear this or did you ambush her?

Daniel

I guess it was kind of an ambush. And it got really bad. I've never fought with her like this before. But, I don't want to go to church with her and I don't want to fix who I am. But, Raquel, I exploded, like I never have before. I got so upset that she won't listen to me. I wanted our conversation to be so different. But I think I really went too far. I keep thinking about what you said that she is from another generation. I really think I hurt her and I do love her so much, in spite of this fight. I just don't want her to control me or my life... or try and change who I am. Who I always have been.

Raquel

Well, I'm sure you can apologize to her. She loves you, too. It was just a fight. People get over fights.

Daniel

That's not the problem. It is such a conundrum. I want mama to love me, but I want to be who I am. Do you have any idea how awful it is to suppress who you are to try and keep the peace? For years I have been avoiding this conversation with my mother. I sort of danced around it just hoping she would figure it out and

come to terms with who I am. But I see now that is never going to happen, so I exploded.

Raquel

No. No. No. I am absolutely sure she will come around. Remember when I fought with my parents because they didn't like Matias, that guy I was dating last year?

Daniel

Sort of, but, remind me again.

Raquel

They said he wasn't welcome in the house because they thought he was rude and below us, because he didn't have a good enough job, or something like that. I wanted to just die when they said that. I thought- how can I please both my parents and him. How can I get everyone to get along? It was the most isolating feeling in the world. I felt so alone trying to keep everyone happy. I tried to avoid it, but some conversations, as tough as they are, have to happen, so that we can move forward with our lives.

Daniel

So what did you do?

Raquel

I cried a lot. But, I stood my ground. I knew that eventually they would come around, because a parent's bond is unlike anything else. They did threaten to make me leave the house! But, my parents are good people just like your mother, and that gives me hope that you two will resolve this issue.

Daniel

I know, I guess you are right. What happened with Mattias, anyway?

Raquel

Total bum. I dumped him. Every once in a while, parents are right. But that's beside the point, which is that you need to make up with your mother.

Daniel

I agree with you. I do.

Raquel

You know what this is? This is what I call the in between time.

Daniel

In between time? What do you mean by that?

Raquel

In between time. This is the time when it is always the most uncomfortable for everyone. It's the time of transition. I always think about that when I'm going through a difficult time. It's in between time. In between being okay. But, eventually, it will be okay, it has to be. Emotions calm, people move along with their lives, and love always prevails. Love might be intangible but it's the most important thing we have on this earth. Your mother is upset because she's scared for you, she loves you so much. You're upset because you love your mother so much and you want her to accept you. There may be a lot of shouting, but, really, it's because you love each other so much. So, even if people disagree with one

another, if we love each other enough, the time in between will end, and everything will be okay. I want you to remember that. Promise me you will remember that for me?

Daniel

Ay, of course, what would I do without you Raquel? You are my rock. Thank you so much for listening to me. I am going to wait for Mama to come home and speak to her. Let her at least know that I love her. We will make it through this in between time. It might be rough, but we have to. We are family.

Raquel

Okay, good. I am sure she will be so happy to see you home when she arrives. Now, I am going to go out tonight. You aren't the only one in this city looking for love after all. Call me tomorrow and let me know how it goes with your mom.

Daniel

Don't do anything I wouldn't do— which is basically nothing, so I think you will be fine. (They walk to the door and he hugs her as she exits. Daniel sits down on the couch.) Ay, mama. We will get through this. I know that we will. (There is a loud knock at the door.) Raquel, What did you forget? (There is no response but the knocking gets louder and more intense. Daniel opens the door. A soldier. Dressed in civilian clothing, enters. He is in his thirties and has a gun.)

Soldier Daniel Romero?

Daniel

(Stepping back) What? No. No. I'm not Daniel. He is not here right now.

Soldier

Daniel Romero. We know who you are. (He pushes him to the ground. Handcuffs him. And puts a handkerchief around his eyes.) You are coming with me.

Daniel

No! No! I didn't do anything! I swear! I'm innocent. What is this about? I'm just a waiter in a restaurant.

Soldier

You are a subversive and a threat to this great country. The Argentine Government is placing you under arrest for terrorism to this country and left wing subversion tactics in the City of Buenos Aires.

Daniel

I did no such thing. I'm innocent, I swear! My father was...

Soldier

We know who you are and who he was. You are certainly not your father. Now, you can walk out this door with me or I can drag you. Which would you prefer?

Daniel

(Begins to cry) I don't understand this. What did I do to Argentina or to anyone?

Soldier

You are a terrorist and a threat to this nation.

(The soldier begins to drag him out of the house. Daniel takes his mother's handkerchief from his back pocket and throws it to the ground. Both exit)

End Of Act One XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Act Two, Scene One

*A dark cell. Daniel is thrown into the room by Soldier and then the soldier throws a blanket on the floor. Sitting in this empty room, on the floor, is **Balduino Colis**, a man in his mid thirties. He wears only a tee shirt and boxer shorts. There is a blanket on the floor that he sleeps on.*

Soldier

(Throws Daniel to the ground) Welcome to your new home. We have a lot of questions for you, you dirty subversive.

Daniel

You have the wrong person. I'm a waiter in a restaurant. I have nothing to do with any subversive threats to Argentina.

Soldier

Oh really? Why don't you tell me about your affiliation with Nuestro Mundo?

Daniel

I have no...

Soldier

(Pushes him) Don't lie, young man. I have ways of making you tell the truth.

Daniel

They're a gay and lesbian group. I used to march with them, but they aren't subversive. We just marched for tolerance and acceptance. And maybe to protest a few laws.

Soldier

GAY RIGHTS? You communists think that everyone is equal in this society. You promote all sorts of anarchy. Marching in the street and flaunting your disgraceful lifestyle where anyone could see it. Even children!

Daniel

I wasn't flaunting anything. I was just carrying a sign saying I don't believe in discrimination.

Soldier

Carrying a sign? Disrespecting your country and your faith.

Daniel No.

Soldier

ADMIT IT! You are a disgrace!

Daniel Sir, please.

Soldier

You don't believe in this country. Your subversive, leftist ideas devalue a good Christian nation.

Daniel But...

Soldier

Shut your mouth. And listen to me, if you want to live. We are looking for a few members of that group. There are a few leaders that we must find. Perhaps, if you cooperate with us, perhaps, we could figure out how to get you home, to your mother.

Daniel

But I haven't seen anyone from that group in well over a year. I've lost touch with them. I just work in my restaurant. I don't...

Soldier

(slaps him) LIES! Where are they hiding?

Daniel

I don't even know who you mean?

Soldier

Cesar Ramirez and Tiana Morales, the leaders of the group. When did you last speak to them? Where are they?

Daniel

It's been at least a year since...

Soldier WHERE ARE THEY?

Daniel

(starting to cry) I don't know.

Soldier

LIES. Now, we can do this the easy way. Or we can do it the hard way.

Daniel

Sir. I told you. I don't know...

Soldier

You are a lying, dirty subversive. You are a disgrace to society. You are a disgrace to the Christian faith. Either you tell me where those leaders are or this will not end well for you.

Balduino

Sir. Por favor, let me talk to him. I'm sure I can help him remember. Just let me talk to him, you know, in private.

Soldier

You subversives are all alike. Always trying to find a way out of telling the truth. Fine. You have ten minutes. And I will be back. Maybe if you can get him to speak, you could help yourself, Sr. Colas. I will be back. (he exits)

Balduino Romero?

Daniel

Si. Daniel Romero.

Balduino

Balduino Colas. Mucho Gusto.

Daniel

Mucho gusto. What in the hell is this place? When will they let me out? I really do not belong here.

Baldiuno

No one belongs here, Daniel.

Daniel

Well, I really don't. Now, what the hell is this place? Some kind of prison?

Balduino

This is ESMA. It was the naval training base in Buenos Aires. Now known as the subversive torture center. From what I hear, this is the worst of the worst. You know they have centers like this all over the country, but this is where they do their dirty work.

Daniel

How long have you been here?

Balduino

I've been here... maybe three or four weeks. Maybe more. I've lost count.

Daniel

Well, they have this all mixed up. I'm not a subversive. I just..

Balduino

Listen, if they said you're a subversive. You are a subversive. Your opinion, your values, your rights... Those don't exist here. This is prison, Daniel. And from what I've heard. It's not the type of prison many people make it out of.

Daniel Excuse me?

Balduino

Daniel. If you want to stay alive. You better come up with some names and places, quickly.

Daniel

But I know nothing. I marched in the Plaza a few times with Nuetro Mundo, that is all! (pauses) What did you do?

Balduino

Well, my story is a bit more complicated. I belonged to a labor union that was very loud in their opposition to President Videla. They're interested in learning about my union and its leaders.

Daniel

So... you are a subversive?

Balduino

What does that word even mean? I oppose Videla, so I am the enemy.

Daniel

I need to speak to someone. My father was in the military. They really have no reason for holding me.

Balduino

Survival, Daniel. Come up with some names or ideas and that may keep you alive. That's what I keep doing. You'd be surprised what three hours in the torture chambers down in the basement will make you say. They put a handkerchief over

my eyes for at least a week, until I couldn't tell whether it was day or night. They shock some people, and I heard they will even take body parts from others. So, you may think you don't want to talk now, but if they think you know something, you had better talk.

Daniel

This is all so wrong. And, I don't know anything. Literally not one thing. Why would they take me?

Balduino

Well, you better invent something quickly or they'll dispose of you. You have no idea the things I've heard in this place. NO IDEA!

Daniel Like what?

Balduino

I don't think you want to know.

Daniel

Come on. We are still in Argentina. We are still citizens. I'm sure they'll let us out. They're just trying to scare us.

Balduino

Oh yeah, tell that to the guy who was in here with me before you.

Daniel

Why? What happened?

Balduino

You really want to know?

Daniel YES

Balduino

Well, I guess he went to some communist rally years ago. He wouldn't give them any answers. Last night they drugged him and dragged him out of here. That was after three or four days of torture.

Daniel

Moved him to another prison?

Balduino

It's much worse than that. I've heard a vicious rumor.

Daniel Tell me.

Balduino

I don't know if it's true. But it's enough to make me give them names. That much I can tell you.

Daniel Tell me!

Balduino

From what I hear they moved him right onto an airplane. Him and about 100 other prisoners here. You see, they drug them.

Daniel Who?

Balduino

Anyone not of value to them.

Daniel

NO! There's no way.

Balduino

I'm telling you three weeks here is like a lifetime. I hear so much late at night. The soldiers, they talk to each other and I hear them.

Daniel What do they say?

Balduino

They drug them. They put their bodies into airplanes and they dump them over the ocean. Hundreds, maybe even thousands of people.

Daniel

Lies. These are awful rumors. This is Argentina. This is 1977!

Balduino

Maybe. But I hear the soldiers speak about it. They're young, they're brainwashed into thinking this is the right thing, carrying out orders that will haunt them for the rest of their lives. Men younger than us. Who will have to live with the horrors of what they have done to their own people. Years from now, imagine, knowing they

have killed so many innocent people. I'd almost rather the fate of the body being dumped into the ocean.

Daniel

I can't even believe this is real. I mean, I knew people were disappearing, but this is beyond my worst nightmare.

Balduino

Stay here long enough and you hear enough things, Daniel. My first week, I saw a pregnant woman here. They treated her fine until she had the baby. Then. Poof, gone! Drugged, drugged and gone.

Daniel

Stop it. That's not possible. Where is her baby?

Balduino

Well I'm sure it wasn't given back to her family. Who knows!

Daniel

These are just rumors. You're making this up.

Balduino

Maybe they are, maybe they're not. But why do you think no one on the outside wants to talk about where all the missing people have gone? Why do you think the second someone is gone, it's like they've vanished. It is much more pleasant to assume we are all terrorists and to not think about where we are or what is really going on. It's happened time and again in history. This is nothing new.

Daniel

I was trying to explain this to my mother. But I never thought it was this bad. Never. It's just so hard to wrap your head around. You know, I think my mother will be able to help me out of here. She knows a lot of people.

Balduino

I hate to say this Daniel, but the most your mother will ever be able to do is join those women at the Plaza de Mayo.

Daniel Who?

Balduino

I hear the soldiers complain about this new group of women all the time. They call themselves the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They all wear white handkerchiefs on their heads. They carry pictures of their lost loved ones around the plaza. The international news is starting to notice.

Daniel

I think I read something about the protests in one of the foreign papers.

Balduino

Probably. They march every wednesday in the Plaza de Mayo, carrying pictures of their lost loved ones. More and more every week, from what I hear.

Daniel

(pause) I can't believe this is happening to me. Someone has to help me. (He gets up and tries to unlock the door- unsuccessfully)

Balduino

Give them some names. It will save you, for now.

(Soldier re enters)

Soldier

Are you ready to talk, Romero?

Daniel

Sir, please. I don't know anything. Honestly, I am very sorry. But I have not talked to anyone from that group in a very long time.

Soldier

(Pushes Daniel to the ground) Where are the leaders of Nuestro Mundo?

Daniel

Sir. I really don't know.

Balduino

Sir, he really doesn't know. He is a good young...

Soldier

Shut your mouth. Well, if you know nothing. You're useless. Just another traitor to this country who refuses to help his government.

Balduino

Wait! I'm sure he can.

Soldier

Mouth Shut, Colas, or you're out of here just like your little friend last night. Now, Romero, put this over your eyes. (hands him a handkerchief to blindfold him)

Daniel

No, please, I... I...

Soldier

Do you have information for me?

Daniel

I will tell you everything I know about the group, but I don't know where anyone is.

Soldier

This is not helpful information.

Daniel No, but...

Soldier

I told them you were useless. Our intel suggested you didn't know one damn thing. But they insisted we take you.

Daniel

Sir, I am begging you. Just let me go home. I won't say a word. Please.

Soldier

You are a useless subversive. (He injects him with a drug and carries him out of the cell). Colas, I will deal with you tomorrow.

Balduino

Please, Sir. This man, He didn't do anything wrong!

Soldier

He is a traitor to this country.

Balduino YOU ARE!

Soldier

Shut your mouth or you will be on the plane with him.

Act Two, Scene Two

Living Room. The next day. Carla and Veronica enter. Veronica sits on the couch holding her handkerchief and crying.

Carla

Buenos Dias Sra. (looks at Veronica) What is wrong with you this morning?

Veronica

Danielcito and I had a huge fight and he did not come home last night. I left a message with Raquel. And I found this (holds handkerchief) on the ground. Here in the living room. I have no idea why it was here on the ground.

Carla Your panuelo?

Veronica

Yes. He... well he..

Carla

He wore that, no?

Veronica

(Nods her head, unable to say the words) I just don't understand. Where could he be? And why would this be here? None of this makes any sense to me.

Carla

Ay, Senora. I am sure he just had a late night. Perhaps he slept over at a friend's house. I'm sure there is no need to worry. What can I get you for breakfast this morning?

Veronica

I can't eat. Not until I know where Daniel is. I have a terrible feeling in my gut, Carla.

Carla

(There is a knock at the door. Carla answers.) Good Morning, Señorita Raquel.

Raquel
Good Morning, Carla.

Veronica Gracias a Dios, Raquel.

Raquel
I got your message and came right over. What happened?

Veronica
Daniel did not come home last night. When I returned from church he was not here and he never came home.

Raquel
Why are you holding that handkerchief?

Veronica
It was on the floor by the door when I arrived. I think he dropped it maybe.

Raquel Dropped it?

Veronica
He must have. Where did the two of you go last night? Do you know where he is? This is so unlike him.

Raquel
I have no idea where he is.

Veronica
But the two of you are always together.

Raquel
Not last night. I went out without him last night. He said that he wanted to stay home. Did you call the restaurant? Maybe they know where he went to ?

Veronica
No one at the restaurant has heard from him. You went out without him? Do you have any clue where he is? I don't know who he could be with if not you.

Raquel No. No clue.

Veronica

Please, if you can think of anything that might help me find him!

Carla

I'm sure he is fine.

Raquel

I came by last night, but we did not go out. He said he was going to stay in. He told me you two had...

Veronica

A terrible fight. Just awful. The worst we have ever had.

Raquel

Yes, and he said he wanted to talk to you. So he didn't go out with me at all. He said he wanted to stay in and see you. He had no intention of leaving the house. Oh My God, where could he have gone to? You don't think?

Veronica What?

Carla

Ah, Ah, Ah. Be careful what you say young lady.

Veronica

Be careful about what? I need to know where he is?

Raquel

You don't think? I have heard. I guess. What I am trying to say is. I have heard of people being taken away from their homes.

Veronica

Impossible! That is not happening. Well maybe to terrorists. There is no way. NO WAY. Not my little boy. Impossible. There is no way that happened to him. He must be out with another friend. Surely someone else.

Carla

I hate to say this, but maybe we should call the police?

Raquel

I have a terrible feeling about this.

Act Two, Scene Three

Government Building, a few days later. Veronica enters, she is wearing the scarf Daniel left behind. Soldier is behind a desk.

Veronica

Excuse me, Sir. I am looking for my son. I am hoping that you can help me, I think there has been some sort of misunderstanding. I am desperate to find him. He has been missing for days now.

Soldier

Your son? You lost him?

Veronica

Well, he has been gone since Thursday evening. Three days now. I have no idea where he is. It's like he just vanished. I am told maybe you can help me.

Soldier

Told?! By whom? Why would I be able to help you?

Veronica

Well, my friend Carla said...

Soldier

Go to the police station. How could I help you? This is a government building, Ma'm. Do I know your son for some reason?

Veronica

No, I don't think so. I just, I was told that maybe you..

Soldier

Whatever you think you know is wrong. I have no idea anything about your son. What kind of subversive questioning is this anyway? What is your name? Why are you here again?

Veronica

No, No. My Daniel is a good boy. I thought maybe there was a mistake, and perhaps you could help me.

Soldier

Mistake? Mistake with what? I think you are very confused, Sra. How could a

government worker help you with your missing son? Are you living in a fantasy world?

Veronica

I just thought that. ..Maybe... Sir, please. My Daniel is the only family I have left. And I am not the type to bother anyone, truly. I am a good citizen of this country. I just would like to know where my son is and I thought that maybe you could help me, sir. I'm so lost right now. Please.

Soldier

WHY WOULD YOU COME HERE FOR THIS? GO TO THE POLICE! This is not my problem. I am sorry if your son ran away or fled the country or whatever.

But this is not the problem of this government. Now, would you like to explain to me why you are here? Why are you disturbing a government official with such nonsense? What is your name again?

Veronica

(she begins to cry) Nevermind. I am obviously confused. Thank you for your time. Perhaps he is just with some friends anyway. I'm so sorry to bother you, sir.

Act Two, Scene Four

The living room. Veronica is reading a newspaper and Carla and Raquel enter the room.

Carla

Senora, did you speak with the police?

Veronica

(reading the newspaper) Yes, they said they would let me know if they hear anything. It's been seven days and they told me he probably fled the country. You and I both know that Daniel would not flee the country. That makes no sense. To leave without saying goodbye, seems very unlikely.

Carla

I agree. (looking at what she is reading) Senora, since when do you read the Buenos Aires Herald? That's a British paper, no?

Veronica

Since Raquel pointed out to me that they are reporting much more truth than I hear

on the radio. Have you read about this group of mothers? They're calling themselves the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

Carla

I see them on Wednesdays on my way home from work. They march every Wednesday with their white pañuelos on their heads. They say those handkerchiefs, pañuelos, symbolize diapers for their lost babies. It is their uniting symbol. They march every Wednesday afternoon with giant pictures of their lost loved ones. It's really quite a sight to see. I almost could not believe it when I saw it.

Veronica

I thought the government wasn't allowing any protests right now?

Carla

The Madres, they walk only in groups of two, which is allowed. It's really quite a good tactic. They walk in groups of two around the plaza, right outside the Casa Rosada. Every week, more and more of them.

Veronica

Well, you know I don't believe in protests. I believe in being an obedient citizen. And a good Catholic. Besides, these women were mothers of terrorists...

Carla

Are you really sure about that? And sometimes being a good citizen, being a good Catholic, means standing up for justice. Speaking out when something is not right. These women have all lost someone dear to them and no one is listening. I can't imagine how frustrated they are. I can't imagine how you feel. This is injustice at its worst.

Veronica

No. No. No. These women are all crazy. I am sure Daniel will come home soon. Those women have terrorist children, they are nothing like my son.

Carla Senora, but..

Veronica

NOT... ANOTHER... WORD... Carla. Daniel will be home soon. I know it. I just know it. Or he will send me a letter from wherever he had to go. Now, stop

with this protest talk! Those women. What are they thinking? Such disobedience!
(Raquel knocks on the door and runs inside)

Raquel
Senora Romero. I have some really bad news.

Veronica
Ay, no. I can not take anymore bad news right now.

Carla
What is it, Raquel?

Raquel
One of the waitresses at the restaurant, Cecilia, grew up with Daniel and I.

Veronica
Yes, her parents live the next street over.

Raquel
I'm so sorry to say this, but her father saw Daniel being taken out of this house with a handkerchief over his eyes. The night you were at church. He said the man had a gun and threw Daniel into his car.

Veronica
No. He is mistaken. (She begins to get up and leave)

Carla
Where are you going?

Veronica
To speak with Cecilia's father about what he saw.

Carla
Are you crazy! You can't do that.

Raquel Absolutely not!

Veronica
I need to know! Maybe I can describe this man to the police. (Carla puts her head down and exits to the kitchen)

Raquel

Sra. Ramos, please sit down. I need you to calm down. I know this is new information and I know that it is so scary. But I need you to come to your senses, right now. Until this happened to you? Did you want to speak about it? Did you acknowledge this?

Veronica

Well, that was before an innocent person was taken.

Raquel

Do you truly think that Daniel was the first innocent person taken? (She looks at the newspaper on the table.) The Herald is reporting that thousands of people are

missing, all over this country. They're the only paper who will write about this and God only knows how long they will be able to, with this government. Look at all the Mothers that have been showing up at the Plaza de Mayo. Do you think all of their children were dangerous terrorists? Do you?

Veronica

THOSE MOTHERS DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING! THEY ARE SUBVERSIVES.

Raquel

(Grabs Veronica) NO THEY ARE NOT. They're grieving mothers, just like you!

Carla

(re- enters) Senora it is time you wake up to the truth. I told myself a long time ago that I would not say anything about this to you, with your husband being a military leader, with my own cousin in the government. But, you have to open your eyes to what is going on in this country. Thousands of people are missing. And God only knows where they are! This is not right. And to think of poor Daniel being dragged out of this home.

Raquel

(Grabs the handkerchief off the table) He left this so that we would know. I know he did.

Carla

Senora, it's time to accept the truth.

Veronica

I just (she starts to cry), I can not accept that they would take my baby. I have to get him back.

Act Two, Scene Five

The living room. Veronica sits with Raquel. It is about a few weeks later.

Raquel

Three weeks. Three weeks without Daniel. It doesn't seem real. I mean, everywhere I go I think of him. When I pass by our old school, when I go to the restaurant, I just see his face. I see his face everywhere.

Veronica Me too.

Carla

(walks out of the kitchen) Senora, everything you need is in the kitchen.

heading home, unless you want me to stay? Or go with you?

I am

Veronica

I don't know how I would have made it through these last few weeks without you, Carla. Go. Go home and relax, please. Wednesday is always your half day. I will see you tomorrow. (Carla embraces her and exits) Thank you for everything.

Raquel

Adios, Carla.

Veronica

I don't need her around the house as much anymore. Well, with it being just me. And, I am going out tonight anyway.

Raquel

I came over today because I wanted to talk to you about something.

Veronica

Dime, mi amor. Go on.

Raquel

I was here, with Daniel, right before they came for him. Actually if I stayed ten more minutes, I don't know if I'd be here today.

Veronica

I didn't know that.

Raquel

Sra, he stayed home that night because he wanted to apologize to you for the fight. He felt so awful about it.

Veronica

So did I. Just terrible. I cried through the whole mass. I said many awful things to him.

Raquel I'm so sorry.

Veronica

You know, the way I was raised, there are just certain things in this world you do not discuss. Certain topics are off limits. I just didn't know how to handle what he had to say. I didn't know how to handle him. Funny, just a few weeks later and I could care less about any of it now. I would give him this handkerchief to wear, if only to see his face. And tell him I love him.

Raquel

You know, I never knew this, but losing someone in an instant, it changes everything. The little things don't seem to matter much anymore. Do they?

Veronica

It erases everything petty from your mind. Shows you what really matters in life. I see now there is one thing that matters: love, nothing more, nothing less.

Raquel Yes

Veronica

Did he tell you how cruel I was?

Raquel

I think you were just processing something that was hard for you to understand. He did say it was bad, but he didn't get into much detail about it.

Veronica

Do you think I'm a horrible person?

Raquel Not at all.

Veronica

I was raised to be perfect. To never show on the outside anything that might be wrong on the inside. To be the perfect student, wife, mother. Now I feel like I'm not any of those things anymore and I have no idea who I am and if I even believe any of the things I grew up believing. I think my son was right. About so much. And how sad it took him disappearing for me to realize it. I wish I could just talk to him and tell him how sorry I am.

Raquel

Well, Can I tell you something I told Daniel, right before he was taken.

Veronica Please.

Raquel

This is just in between time. I don't know what happened to Daniel, but one thing I do know is someday, somehow, the two of you will reunite. And this in between time, is doing what it does, healing. When the two of you are together again you will have a different sense of appreciation and love for each other. I really believe that.

Veronica This is so hard.

Raquel

I understand. He was my best friend and I loved him so much. To think of him being taken out of here with a handkerchief over his eyes.

Veronica

It's ironic. I was the one with the real blindfold, not Daniel. I couldn't see what was going on in this country for what it was. I couldn't see who my son is, or accept him for the beautiful person he is. Daniel saw himself and the world so clearly. Not me.

Raquel

You have to forgive yourself.

Veronica

I am scared day and night. Scared about where Daniel is. Scared about what he did. Scared if they will come for me. But, even though I'm scared, I really don't care the way I used to. The handkerchief over my eyes is gone. The world isn't as simple as catechism and government leaders make it. A wise man once told me that the world is not so black and white. And I can see it now. Sadly, it took losing him in the way that I have. (she begins to cry) He is just 25 years old, his whole life ahead of him. And now I have no idea where he is and this corrupt police department that won't even call me back is making me sick. No one cares, Raquel. No one.

Raquel

Have you spoken to Father Antonio about this?

Veronica

That's even worse. He wouldn't speak to me about it. Told me to never discuss it with him. Told me he was disappointed in me for bringing this up to him and that I needed confession.

Raquel Confession?

Veronica

Yes, well, maybe had he told me that three weeks ago I would have gone to confession. But I told him if he didn't want to talk to me about this, then he is no Christian. Not in my eyes! He is another one, living with a blind eye.

Raquel

You said that to him?

Veronica

I did. I think the old saying is true, when you have nothing left, you have nothing to lose. All of this, it's really made me question who I am and what I believe in. You know, I've been thinking a lot about a lot of things these past few weeks. About control. About justice. My eyes are finally wide open. This government is not about justice, it's simply about controlling us all so they can have their way and

they do not care who gets in the way. What kind of a society, government leaders, police, religious leaders won't talk to a mother who has lost her child?

Raquel

Would you have helped someone like you before this happened to you?

Veronica

I don't know, to be honest. Sadly, I think sometimes it takes a situation like this to change people. It's changed me.

Raquel How so?

Veronica

I could care less what Daniel does or who he is with or how he dresses. I just want him to be here with me. My baby. I hope I never get so caught up in what other people think, that I forget about what matters most. We get so caught up in the news and our neighbors and society, religion.

Raquel

I'm really starting to see that.

Veronica

But you know what I am thinking most about?

Raquel What?

Veronica

My pañuelo. (she holds it in her hand)

Raquel

The one Daniel wore? Why?

Veronica

Yes. I used to look at this, when Daniel was wearing it and I would feel such shame and embarrassment. Why on earth would a man wear this I would think. I would feel so afraid. I was afraid of people saying mean things to Daniel. But, I see now, I was mostly afraid of people judging me for having a son who wore this. But now I see the truth. I should be proud. I raised a son who is confident and strong and full of life. Someone who doesn't give a damn what people think about him and who just wanted to live his life by his own terms. It's beautiful. I wish I could tell him that now.

Raquel

I agree. But please, just remember. Right now- it's in between time. I will come by tomorrow to see how you are. (She gets up and hugs her, exits)

Veronica

(She stares at the scarf on the table) Life is not black and white. You know maybe, maybe the gray area is where the truth actually is in this life. (She goes to the kitchen, comes back out with a white scarf in her hand and a picture of a poster board with Daniel's picture and name on it. She looks at her white scarf and puts it on her head) I've worn a lot of pañuelos in my life, I wore one to hold my hair up

while I was giving birth to my son, one to clean this house, held one to dry my tears at my husband's funeral, and many to be fashionable. But this, this is the pañuelo of justice. The pañuelo of a mother's cry for a missing child. Today justice will live on through me and all of the mothers of the plaza de mayo. (She puts on the scarf and her coat and walks out the door with the sign of Daniel.)

The End XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *As a former High School and University Spanish Instructor, I was always amazed that so many of my students had not heard of Argentina's Dirty War. Every year, I would show my students the film "La Historia Oficial" about the war and they were always quite interested in the history around it. I decided to write this play to draw attention to this important part of history and also give a narrative to the LGBTQIA community, who were quite abused during this time.*

AUTHOR BIO: David Allard is a former teacher and former political aid, who now works in corporate communications. After a twenty year pause, David has returned to acting and writing. He has starred in an off Broadway and several off off Broadway shows in NYC. He has also been featured in several television shows in NYC. David loves to write historical fiction. He also loves to insert a queer narrative into period pieces. He is a graduate of University of Massachusetts, Amherst and the University of Rhode Island. David lives in Manhattan.