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CHARACTERS

ARIEL: *a confident, hip, high school senior who is secure enough about her popularity to try to help out a nerd in trouble. Her clothes, hair, etcetera, should reflect her level of cool.*

IVANIA: *a shy, sensitive girl who is lost in a dream world. She is the same age as ARIEL but appears younger. She wears a blouse with a peter pan collar, with either brand x jeans or a simple, dark polyester skirt.*

MR. MILLER: *a high school principal who is in his forties. He is stuffy, though he sees himself as able to “rap” with kids and be one of the gang.*

TIME

The present.

SETTING

MR. MILLER’s office, and then IVANIA’s dream bedroom. IVANIA sits sullen, slumped in a chair in the principal’s office. ARIEL, in the chair beside her, tries to cheer her up and reason with her.

ARIEL: So, listen, don’t be scared or nothing like that. I’ll try to do some damage control for you.

IVANIA does not respond.

Listen, I been meaning to tell you—if you want to go to the mall some time, together, that would be cool. We could go with Sandra and Elise, or whatever. I could just go with you. Pick out some new clothes. I’d be happy to do that.

IVANIA looks down—expressionless—at her clothes, then over at pretty, hip ARIEL.

I’m not saying you have to spend a fortune, and buy all Calvin Klein and DKNY or whatever. *Oíste? No es necesario a comprar muchas cosas, es posible a llevar mucho que ya tu tienes . . .* I just mean, like, if you want to fit in more. Don’t take it the wrong way.

IVANIA glances around the room.

¿Que piensas?

IVANIA: *Shrugs. Nada.*

ARIEL: *Nada. Great. Espero que tu insanidad no me dañe. Mira, quiero ayudarte, pero tienes que intentar ayudarte tu mismo. You gotta try to help yourself!*

IVANIA *again shrugs.*

He's not such a bad guy. *No es mal hombre. El cree que un dialogo, you know, a "dialogue" puede resolver todo. Pero, la cosa es para parecer escuchar su consejo—y no a mostrar miedo!* Don't look like you're scared!

IVANIA: *No tengo miedo.*

ARIEL: *Annoyed. ¿Y porque no?*

MR. MILLER *enters. He gives the girls a big, reassuring smile, and moves to shake hands with both of them. IVANIA lets him lift her limp hand, but applies no pressure to his.*

MR. MILLER: Hello, ladies. Thank you for waiting.

He moves behind his desk, sits.

And, Ariel, thank you for volunteering to help out here.

ARIEL: No problem, Mr. Miller. I'm glad to do it.

MR. MILLER: I think this is the third time we've had you in here interpreting for someone, is that right?

ARIEL: Fourth time.

MR. MILLER: Well. If this keeps up, you can go to work for the UN after college.

ARIEL smiles at his little joke. IVANIA remains expressionless.

You are planning to go to college, aren't you?

ARIEL: Yes, sir, I've applied to five schools where I maybe got a shot.

MR. MILLER: Well, that's terrific. You know, I've heard really wonderful things about you from Mrs. Caldicott.

Clasps hands on desk. He pronounces the first syllable of "Ivania" the same as "eye."

So. Does Ivania know . . .

IVANIA: *Sharply corrects him, with an "ee" sound: Eevania.*

MR. MILLER: *Taken aback, pronounces it correctly: Eevania. I'm sorry. To* ARIEL: Does Ivania know why she's been sent to my office?

ARIEL: *To* IVANIA. *Entiendes porque estamos aqui?*

IVANIA *shrugs.*

MR. MILLER: We understand that she's having trouble adjusting,

and that a new country can seem big and scary. We're not trying to gang up on her here. We want to try to help her, be her friend.

ARIEL: *El dice que es tu amigo, quiere ayudarte. Hazlo más facil!*

IVANIA *shrugs.*

MR. MILLER: Aha. Ariel, do you have any idea what's going on with her?

ARIEL: Oh, I don't know. I think she's just sad, she misses her country, maybe she misses her old friends.

MR. MILLER: Well, but she's been over here since the start of the year. And apparently she's making no effort to adjust or learn the language. Explain to her, please, that when we say "bilingual education" we do mean it. "Bilingual" means both languages, not just Spanish.

ARIEL: *Dice que "bilingual" significa ambos idiomas. Porque no puedes hablar inglés?*

IVANIA: *No me gusta.*

ARIEL: *Qué?*

IVANIA: *Es un idioma feo, un ruido, con sonidos como la ladrido de un perro. No tiene lógica. Ni ritmo. Es feo como este país es feo, y tosco . . . y cruel.*

MR. MILLER: What did she say?

ARIEL: *Uncertain how much to tell him.* Um, she says that English is very hard for her to learn. It's, uh, different from Spanish . . .

MR. MILLER: But did she just say we were being cruel to her?

ARIEL: Oh, no . . . she's saying that . . . she doesn't like English and the U.S. so much.

MR. MILLER: But she's here now. And frankly . . . I'll level with you Ariel. This is something I don't understand about a lot of our Hispanic students—and obviously you're an exception. If I go on a trip to visit a foreign country, I at least use Berlitz or Rosetta Stone first. I mean, I would make an effort to learn the language, to say, "How much does that cost?" Or "Where is a good hotel?" It's just polite. I wouldn't expect them to speak like me. And yet we have students here . . . and of course I don't mean you, your English is wonderful . . .

ARIEL: Well, I was born here. I'm an American.

MR. MILLER: Well, all right then, you see? But the ones who weren't born here, they're not just here on vacation. Most of them are planning to live out their lives here. And yet so many just won't make an effort. And I suppose, in their homes, in their neighborhoods, they don't have to. But what about when they get a job, out in the real world?

ARIEL: Plenty of jobs you don't need English for, Mr. Miller. I mean, you're making a really good point, don't get me wrong . . .

MR. MILLER: But earlier generations of immigrants, they learned the language. They had to.

ARIEL: Well, you know. First generation?

MR. MILLER: *Annoyed at being challenged.* First generation, second generation—they learned it. This is a nation of immigrants, yes. But in order to be united, we need to have one language in common, a lingua franca, a coin of the realm. The name for the United States in Latin is *E pluribus unum*, did you know that?

ARIEL: No, sir.

MR. MILLER: "In many one." And the common language makes us one. That's what I don't understand about a student like this. Her attitude. What does she think about when the teachers are trying to help her with her English?

ARIEL: *To IVANIA.* *Qué pasa cuando las clases son en inglés? Porque no lo aprendes?*

IVANIA: *Porque no vale la pena. Generalmente, no estoy allí en el aula.*

ARIEL: *Dónde estas?*

IVANIA: *Estoy en mi cuarto en mi casa. Mi casa de verdad, no ese pequeño apartamento feo donde vivimos ahora en esta ciudad sucia. En mi casa de verdad, en mi país, tengo una vista de los árboles alrededor del patio. Huelo las hojas y las flores, y siento el silencio y el viento. Escucho los discos de mi abuelita. Y . . . eso es todo.*

MR. MILLER: What did she say?

ARIEL: *Again, trying to be diplomatic.* She . . . gets distracted during class. She feels homesick, she misses her old house, the courtyard. Stuff like that.

MR. MILLER: Well, sure. I can understand that. But her parents decided to come here to build a better life, right? They wanted her to be an American. Doesn't she owe it to them to try?

ARIEL: *To IVANIA.* *Mira, si tus padres quieren vivir aquí, tu debes aceptar esta cultura, dice.*

IVANIA: No.

ARIEL: No?

IVANIA: *En mi propio país, por supuesto tuve mucho cariño y respeto de mis padres. Pero eso era antes de su traición a mí y a mi país. Allí tenían trabajos admirables, aquí son mugre. Ellos piensan que es un cambio bueno, yo no.*

ARIEL: Ay.

MR. MILLER: Well?

ARIEL: She's mad at her parents that they moved here. She doesn't respect them so much anymore.

MR. MILLER: I see. So, she refuses to learn English in order to get back at them. Well, we all go through a phase when we're angry at our parents, when they make choices we don't understand. *Smiling, affable.* Tell her that the great writer Mark Twain used to fight with his father when he was growing up.

ARIEL: *To IVANIA.* *Habla de Mark Twain. Creo que va hacer un chiste.*

MR. MILLER: And he said, when I turned twenty-one, I was amazed to find that my father had suddenly become so much smarter!

He chuckles. **ARIEL** smiles, and urges **IVANIA:**

ARIEL: *Si, lo hizo. Algo aburrido sobre el padre del escritor. Por lo menos, sonrie!*

IVANIA remains expressionless, staring at **MR. MILLER** without seeing him.

You know, I think she's a really messed-up person, with a lot on her mind.

To IVANIA:

Mira, estas en un aprieto! El es el principal del colegio!

IVANIA: *Shrugs.* Y, pues?

ARIEL: *Llamara a tus padres. Quieres eso?*

IVANIA: *No importa.*

ARIEL: Oh no?

IVANIA: *No. No creo en él. No creo en mis padres. No creo en tí. Todo*

esto es un sueño que no significa nada, mi vida real es en mi pueblo, en mi casa vendida, donde hay belleza y suavidad, donde las personas son gentiles y no son vulgares . . . todo esto no existe.

MR. MILLER: What is she telling you?

ARIEL: *Uncertain once more how to tell him.* She says, um . . . we don't really exist.

MR. MILLER: *Surprised.* What?

ARIEL: She feels . . . she sees all this as a dream. She wants to be back in her country.

MR. MILLER: I see. Perhaps the school counselor should have a talk with her. It's a shame that he really doesn't speak Spanish. We might need you to interpret for us again, and I don't want to keep pulling you out of class, so maybe we can arrange some kind of meeting after school. Do you play any team sport?

ARIEL: No, not right now. And I'm not doing any clubs.

Meanwhile, from the moment MR. MILLER mentions the school counselor and he and ARIEL begin to talk, a Spanish ballad, from the forties or fifties, begins to play. It should be a love song about loyalty, about not forgetting a loved one. IVANIA looks off to the side of the stage, previously in darkness, where a bed with a nicely patterned blanket is revealed. There is a potted plant on a table by the bed, and books in Spanish on the table and the bed. The other two do not see it.

MR. MILLER: So that might work out. I think I'd better have a meeting with her parents first. Again, it's so hard, when the parents don't speak English, to find out about a child's emotional state, what's going on in the home. I don't suppose you know the family?

ARIEL: No, I don't know them. You know, I see her around, we have homeroom together, and at lunch a couple of times I invited her to come sit with me and my friends. But she just keeps to herself.

As the conversation in English continues, the music grows louder, drowning the English out, and IVANIA rises and crosses to the bed. The others do not notice—MR. MILLER or ARIEL occasionally indicates IVANIA's seat, as if she's still in it.

MR. MILLER: Well, her parents really should get her some kind of

professional help, but of course that costs money. There are some community counseling services in Spanish, though. I'll have to have my secretary look into it.

We can barely hear him by this point as his conversation with ARIEL fades; IVANIA sits on the bed, and parts imaginary curtains as if looking out on a courtyard, and finally we see her smile and look happy. The song swells, and the lights grow brighter over this area and go down over the principal's office as the lights fade.

END OF PLAY