

2015-01-01

# El Paso Odyessy

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El Paso Odyssey

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2015

An El Paso Odyssey

by

TAFARI A. NUGENT, BA Creative Writing

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Department of Creative Writing

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

MAY 2015

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## Introduction

I've always associated authority with oppression. Yet through reading a variety of texts, I've come to understand that one need not fear, fight against or eradicate authority. One must fear only the abuse, and misuse of authority; power doesn't corrupt so much as the belief that one's power gives one the right to dictate correctness, which corrupts.

Realism is defined as the quality or fact of representing a person, thing, or situation accurately or in a way that is true to life. (Merriam Dictionary) *El Paso Odyssey* is an experiment using ideas based upon these principles of Realism written with the idea that the novel for the author is a tool to report only what happens in a given situation, without comment or judgment. This thesis is a thought experiment in removing narrator and narrative altogether; the narrator the guiding consciousness within a text, usually frames the context of the setting within a story. I am attempting to create a framework within narration, which essentially relies on either no specific point of view or multiple viewpoints depending how one reads the stories.

I've removed the narrator from *El Paso Odyssey* to allow characters to tell their own stories indirectly, without the artifice of narration. This thesis takes Flaubert's notion that "the author, in his work, must be like God in the Universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere" (The Letters of Gustav Flaubert, 1830-1857) to the next step, based upon the idea that overt narration is an unnecessary layer of story telling a tool potentially yet not exclusively used to restrict and instruct readers how they should act, react to, feel, or experience a narrative. To remove removing the overt narrator is to trust the readers to make more connections on their own and to consider character and story more carefully without the context of an intrusive narrative point of view.

## The Absence Of Narration

Several issues arise with the removal of the overt narrator the most important being a lack of authorial-directed context; the narrator gives the reader a sense of context, and continuity within any given text. Because I've removed the narrator the only context of the story is one in which the reader must infer from the dialogue. Traditionally, the narrator clarifies context, revealing the narrative circumstances and setting for an event. By showing the reader only through direct dialogue and monologue, I've created a strictly implicit context directly linked to only what each character says, how each character views of the world, both physically and mentally and how the reader must read a particular situation. The voices of the characters alone guide the reader on who, what, when, where, why and how every situation within the text and context unfolds.

Allowing the reader direct access to all characters without the extra filter of narration and thought compels readers to read each persona's point of view carefully to follow the trajectory of the plot. Without narration the reader has only the tone and the language each character speaks to understand not just what's happening but also why, each character's underlying motivation.

Removing overt narration from *El Paso Odyssey* I hope to create a framework in which the reader experiences little to no dilation of time within the text between what characters say and the implied action which connects to that dialogue. These vignettes rely on the reader's interpretation of causality; events occur as the reader gleans the implied missing information. What ensues is a pattern of cause and effect, implicit action followed by an implicit reaction, which helps to create a pattern of reading, thus helping the creation of a plot without overt—and potentially oppressive narration.

Instead of having a narrator focused on creating a contextual narrative, backstory, exposition and so on, the action is revealed only through the statements of the characters acting out an implicit action. This process is purposeful, navigated by a limited amount of language, a kind of extreme minimalism, orated by a multitude of personas to further reflect an implied reality.

Without an overt narrator within the text the reader must consider each character judging (or not judging) each on his or her own merits, or as a collective in a number of combinations, all attempting to suggest different readings of the text. By removing the narrator, I have not allowed secondary reflections about a character's actions to interfere with the reading of each narrativeless story. The reader must infer each action and reaction as implied events occurring within the text, thus creating a potentially new level of audience participation without a mediating buffer between the narrator and the reader.

For me, attempting to create a framework that pushes the characters into the position of telling a story as the character views it is a deliberate choice, deeply rooted in a socio-political belief that each individual must be empowered to have the ability to be heard. A text like *El Paso Odyssey* not only attempts to give an accurate reflection of everyday American life within a particular timeframe but, also attempts to give characters the ability to speak for themselves. The audience must judge and interpret the authenticity and accuracy of the language throughout the text and if the veracity of the dialogue rings true, the narrative story has succeeded on some level.

My inability to gauge the veracity of the language used within the thesis is in part due to my not being a part of each of the groups depicted within the text, so I had to research ways of authenticating the language. One can only imitate in depicting multiple

cultures, and multiple perspectives within these cultures with the potential of stereotyping characters but my process of investigating each culture within *El Paso Odyssey* I believe, has revealed a tapestry of characteristics and characters within the thesis, based upon particular cultural views that I've garnered from close observation, listening and surveying numerous opinions from a widely multicultural El Paso.

Originally my desire to remove the narrator from my fiction came from my own experience with oppressive authority, and its potential connection to intrusive narrator or didactic narrator. For me the narrator can wield too much power especially in several canonical narratives I've read, the narrator directing all the actions, the implications of those actions and focusing the attention of the reader on one aspect of a story or another and leading the reader down a certain path, potentially having too much influence upon the reader's interpretation of the text. Conrad's narrator in *Heart of Darkness* is a prime example of the intrusive narrator that I am avoiding.

From what I've read, Ernest Hemingway's, "Hill's Like White Elephants" comes closest to what I'm attempting to do in *El Paso Odyssey*, from the perspective of limiting narration, and allowing characters to speak for themselves. Yet, "Hill's Like White Elephants" features a third person objective narrator, which also acts as a kind of witness influencing the reader's the ability to judge each character through the simple act of description and action.

### Polyptych Literature

*El Paso Odyssey*'s sectioned into six sections, featuring fifty-three vignettes constructed with a polyptych framework in mind. While the definition of a polyptych's a painting with several panels connecting to a main section, I used the idea to frame a

setting that puts the voices of the characters on center stage, connecting to ideas centered in the city of El Paso. By this what is implied is that each story, or section can operate on its own merit, giving a taste, or a slice of life in the city of El Paso. In order for the reader to receive a view, which is more complete of El Paso the entire work gives a more varied description.

### Timeframe

*El Paso Odyssey* begins in the winter of 2012, and ends in the winter of 2014. The text loops backwards in time in each section, but still progress forwards in the overall timeline. The overlapping timelines create a growing wave when plotted on a line chart, the arcs progressing in a forward motion in time. While almost all of the timelines form a forward moving motions there are two sections where this forward motion either stagnates or reverses. Within the fifth section titled South, two vignettes “Poison” and “Hang-ups” feature the same date, this is to give the reader a clear indication that these two stories are overtly linked, in a different way then all other vignettes. The characters are linked in action, but not in dialogue.

Within the sixth section titled West, the final vignette “Dilemma” happens before the penultimate vignette, “Traction”. “Traction” occurs in January, which in El Paso is relatively warm, the temperature staying in the range of the high sixties to the low seventies. “Dilemma” occurs in December, during the coldest weather in El Paso, as such there is an underlying dark happening in the story that isn’t quite clear.

## Mapping

El Paso is a mix: of Chicano pride, military patriotism, Texas passion, African-American Milestones, its streets are paved with history. Each of the sections within *El Paso Odyssey* focuses on shifting socio-eco-political issues, stories focus shifts from traditions based in El Paso, to cultures from outside of El Paso journeying here and learning to adapt to a culture steeped in border history.

*El Paso Odyssey's* vignettes begin in the northeast of El Paso. In the Northeast section vignettes focus on issues tied to family values. A grandmother stands on line waiting to buy treats with her grand daughter in “Waiting”, a mother searches for a hair salon with her daughter in “Beautician”. The focus in this section is to set a familial tone throughout the work; this section is meant to connect the reader to the deep family ties, which is a large part of what makes El Paso, El Paso.

The second series of vignettes are located in the eastern section of El Paso. Features in this series focus on characters attempting to create some type of change in their lives, or the trappings that keep some characters within the same space, either unable or unwilling to change their circumstances.

The third series of vignettes are located in central El Paso. The Central series attempts to explore issues concerning people keeping traditions alive in the face of an ever-changing landscape. “Remains” examines what are some of the implications of modernization for a city entrenched in history? What is gained and lost is difficult to measure, but it must be measured, or people become lost in this shuffling of events.

The shortest series in *El Paso Odyssey* is “The Bridge”. The series focuses on the Paso del Norte entrance that leads into downtown El Paso. I believed this point of

entrance would be the best location to include in the text. The series focuses on some of the reasons people cross back and forth between El Paso and Juárez. There are indications in this section of the ties that bind these two cities together, balanced against some of the divisions, which move to divide the populist, “The Bridge III” explores this idea, Julie, a character spoken of, is protesting against protestors who believe foreigners need to stay out of the U.S.A., this is juxtaposed against “The Bridge V”, where protestors are setting up to protest the Dream Act.

The penultimate series, The South focuses on issues connecting to modernization, and the influx of money into a small cities economy. This section focuses on the positive and negative aftermath of progress, although similar to the tone of the Central series; the southern series differs in its focus on monetary control, vignettes like “Standoff” that depict different social classes in one family.

The final series, The West focuses on expectations, the culmination there of, as well as the frustration of failure. This series considers what characters do when goals are achieved, and juxtaposes this against character’s that will have goals blocked, or have a seemingly insurmountable obstacle placed in the character’s path.

#### Literature’s Guidance

Several books were used to create *El Paso Odyssey’s* framework. The inspiration behind the vignettes length, and ambiguous endings comes from Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” several other texts contributed to the make up of the book. Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* contributed to the overall format of the book, and ideas of focalization on one location. James Joyce’ s, *Dubliners* convinced me a central

character isn't necessary to drive a series of stories in one locale. And finally William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, which introduced me to ideas on how to better explore the voices of each character.

#### Hills Like White Elephants

The idea of eliminating narration was a direct result of reading "Hills Like White Elephant". The use of third person objective narration in "Hills Like White Elephants", which compels the reader to closely interpret the dialogue of each character in order to understand the dynamics of the relationships between the characters acts as a blueprint in *El Paso Odyssey*.

"If I do it you won't ever worry?"

"I won't worry about that because it's perfectly simple."

"Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't care about me."

"Well, I care about you." (Hills Like White Elephants)

Hemingway's use of a third person objective narrator is pushed forward with the total elimination of the narrator in *El Paso Odyssey*. By totally eliminating the narrator careful consideration was taken by the author to not lose the reader in conversations where there are more than two persons. Markers such as a character's name and the type of relationships that characters share are utilized to help guide the reader through transitions of character's speech.

Can I get a enchilada and two orders of huevos rancheros?

Will there be anything to drink with that?

Lisa, what you want to drink?

Um, ice tea, unsweetened.

Can I get an ice tea, unsweetened, and two large cokes?

What size ice tea? (El Paso Odyssey)

“Hills Like White Elephants”’ ambiguous ending is another feature all *El Paso Odyssey* shares. Ending on a question is one of the devices used to propel plots forward in *El Paso Odyssey* the type of questions differs in each vignette.

“Do you feel better?” he asked.

“I feel fine,” she said. “There’s nothing wrong with me I feel fine.” (Hills Like White Elephants)

In some of the vignettes questions of remaining or leaving El Paso push the plot forward. In other stories questions of marriages taking place, marriages staying together, or should a marriage break apart are posed to the reader.

I thought your home was with me?

I thought it could be, too. At least with other Germans here it was easier, but now. I understand your family’s here, but you’ve got to leave the nest sooner or later. If you don’t like it, we can move somewhere else. The company has locations across Europe. We could go to Italy or France. What do you think?

(El Paso Odyssey)

The elimination of the narrator, true beginnings, and true endings from *El Paso Odyssey* is meant to open up the interpretation of the dialogue by manipulating the ambiguity of text. The ambiguities of the vignettes are meant to open up conversations about the accuracy of the dialogue, as well as the choices of the characters within. *El Paso Odyssey* is an experiment to see how much information is too little for the reader to

construct a plot, as well as the question is dialogue enough to keep an audiences attention, without overt setting?

### Winesburg, Ohio

Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*'s use of focalization on a single location was a guiding principle within *El Paso Odyssey*. The major difference with these two texts is the use of a main character. *Winesburg, Ohio* focuses on a main character and a singular protagonist, George Willard.

Among all the people of Winesburg but one had come close to him. With George Willard, son of Tom Willard, the proprietor of the New Willard House, he had formed something like a friendship. George Willard was the reporter on the Winesburg Eagle and sometimes in the evenings he walked out along the highway to Wing Biddlebaums' house. (Winesburg, Ohio)

*El Paso Odyssey* doesn't have a main character; as well each character is a protagonist within the vignettes. Since there is no main character in *El Paso Odyssey* it allows the reader to form neutral opinions on each character, as well depending on the reader's background opinions of how a story should end will shift.

Using a larger array of characters gave me the ability to explore multiple issues, as opposed to utilizing a singular main character, which forces the development of sub characters such as Anderson's Wing Biddlebaum, (a character used in the introduction of George Willard) in order to drive a plot's development forward, in that a main character needs periphery characters in order to show the artificial growth that such text offers in my opinion.

Another subtle idea borrowed from *Winesburg, Ohio* is the technique of minimal development of plots within the series of vignettes in order to focus on the language and relationship of the characters. In *Winesburg, Ohio* Anderson establishes the idea of

grotesque characters in the first story. Anderson begins to reveal certain truths about of each character and then leaves it to the reader to decide which characters are grotesque. In *El Paso Odyssey* each vignette asks the reader to take the side of one character or another, or to remain impartial in judgment, seeing both sides as equally valid.

### Dubliners

James Joyce's, *Dubliners* showed that focalization on a single locale can be done in a text, without a main protagonist being the principle character driving the plot forward. As well, a text can serve as a tool for an author to perform a form of introspection on a specific locale. Joyce's *Dubliners* carries heavy religious biases focused on ones choice of religion. The opening story of *Dubliners* is "The Sisters", which sets a religious tone for the entire text, for the reader.

It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word gnomon in the Euclid and the word simony in the Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. (*Dubliners*)

*El Paso Odyssey* makes a shift from this idea in that the vignettes in general do not carry a religious overtone; only one vignette focus is on the freedom to practice religion, or the choice to not practice religion, the vignette "Mischief".

I'm not missing another practice. I already missed two for the season, and I don't want to get cut from the team. And so what if he asks? Just because he asks doesn't mean you have to tell him. Just act like you didn't see me.

But I don't like lying to Dad. He always knows when I'm lying anyway. Just come home. You don't know. Maybe he'll let you miss Jumu'ah. Are you kidding me? He didn't even want to think of his daughter on the basketball team. It doesn't matter if it's all girls. (*El Paso Odyssey*)

*Dubliners*' range of characters age, social class, and ethics was another blueprint I used constructing the characters in *El Paso Odyssey*. The type of language used by characters may repeat in sections of *El Paso Odyssey*, yet the circumstance in the settings always shifts. In certain sections of *El Paso Odyssey* there is an obvious change in the tone of the dialogue to indicate for the reader differing attitudes, as well as social backgrounds between characters. As in *Dubliners* family structure, and challenges to family allegiances' are utilized as the backdrop for sections of vignettes, in *El Paso Odyssey*. The stories used for their connection to family background as blueprints from *Dubliners* were "The Boarding House" in it's idea of a parent changing, or altering a child's behavior, and "Counterparts" in its' exploration of combative family dynamics.

### The Sound and the Fury

William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* served as a blueprint for using characters that have mental challenges, or an alternative way of thinking. *The Sound and the Fury*'s focus on Benjamin Compson as an erratic character, is closer in comparison to what is attempted in *El Paso Odyssey*'s vignette titled "Remains" with the character Elijah.

"Caddy got the box and set it on the floor and opened it. It was full of stars. When I was still, they were still. When I moved, they glinted and sparkled. I hushed." (The Sound and Fury)

Nah, man, I'm all right. I ran outta my meds, again, but I'm all right. I just need to wait for the nurse to get back. When Mrs. Shaw gets back everything's going to be all right. Hey, you, you seen Mrs. Shaw today? Hey, bro, how long you say you been off your medication?

What? I ain't off my meds. I just saw Mrs. Shaw. She just gave me my medicine like five minutes ago, with some pizza, and ice cream. You didn't get any ice cream? It was good. (El Paso Odyssey)

While Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" does feature an erratic narrator, it's closer to Joyce's interpretation in *Ulysses*, Faulkner's interpretation in *The Sound and the Fury* is closer to what I'm attempting in *El Paso Odyssey*.

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes. When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it. That is why I watch it always. (The Yellow Wallpaper)

Joyce's, *Ulysses* use of stream of consciousness differs from Faulkner's in *The Sound and the Fury*. In *Ulysses* Joyce takes out punctuation to highlight stream of consciousness, Faulkner utilizes italics in *The Sound and the Fury* and keeps all punctuation.

I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. (Ulysses)

In *El Paso Odyssey* the punctuation has not been removed, and the text has not been set in quotations.

*El Paso Odyssey* features a vignette titled "Hang Ups", which features stream of conscious. The reader follows a young woman before a car strikes her down; the use of

stream of consciousness keeps the reader close to the character before she loses consciousness.

You're probably fucking right now. Fucking asshole, I hate you. I can't wait to see your face when I ring your bell. It's probably one of those gueras you meet at U.T.E.P. You're probably reading her some of your fucking poetry, or some other shit. Let's see that smug look on your face when I tell you I'm pregnant. (El Paso Odyssey)

El Paso Odyssey also features an erratic character, Elijah who's homeless and has stopped taking his medication.

Nah, man, I'm all right. I ran outta my meds, again, but I'm all right. I just need to wait for the nurse to get back. When Mrs. Shaw gets back everything's going to be all right. Hey, you, you seen Mrs. Shaw today? Hey, bro, how long you say you been off your medication? What? I ain't off my meds. I just saw Mrs. Shaw. She just gave me my medicine like five minutes ago, with some pizza, and ice cream. You didn't get any ice cream? It was good. (El Paso Odyssey)

### Culmination

My experiment in Realism allowed for a level of introspection into my own life that revealed potholes in the road that need to be fixed. The thesis showed me that I've made certain assumptions in literature that aren't true, for example the authoritarian attitude of literature that I hold is in part due to a limited library, which needs to be changed. This thesis has allowed me the time to examine the fourteen years that I've spent in El Paso it was a pleasure revisiting memories of the time spent thus far. Finding a place in the desert to write down one's thoughts is a paradise for a nomad.

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El Paso Odyssey  
by Tafari Nugent

I.  
Northeast

On The Mountainside,  
Helicopters fly slowly.  
The winds have picked up.

1.

## Traditions

North Eastern Trans- Mountain

December 21, 2012

Why are we going all the way to the North East for a burger?

I'm telling you, Rosco's has the best burgers in El Paso.

They better be good. I'm starving, and you're taking me half way around the world for a burger. I'm kidding, I'm glad you're showing me around El Paso. Practice and the library keep me stuck on campus.

You can't say you lived in El Paso, unless you try a burger from Rosco's. It's sacrilege. When's your next race anyway?

I don't run cross-country. I'm just doing strength training until December. That's when I start racing.

You only run indoor track?

No, I run outdoor too. I hate running outside, in the country. I don't mind running outside on the track, it's different. Running in the woods always makes me feel like I'm in a horror movie.

Wow, so you're trying to get to the Olympics, and stuff. That's cool. I can't wait for midterms to be over. Biology is killing me.

Olympics? I don't know about that. I'll be glad to just reach nationals. This view from the mountain is awesome. You can see the Mexican flag from here.

Yeah, it's one of the biggest flags in the world.

We almost there yet?

We have to get off the mountain. It's like five minutes away, relax.

I hope there isn't a line I don't want to wait. I just want to get in, and get out.

Well, we should just miss the lunch rush. Hopefully we'll get there before the dinner rush.

It's only 3:45.

They run out of burgers sometimes, so you got to get there in the sweet spot.

Run out of burgers, so we might be going there for nothing?

2.

Flood Gates  
Chaparral, Tumbleweed Road  
July 2, 2013

Don't touch that with your bare hands, Katy. There's mold on that board. Lucy, keep your hands out of your face.

Where's the canopy, Esther?

Over near the garage. Watch your step, the floor's not stable at the end of the kitchen.

I just don't see why your grandmother stays out here. Why doesn't she move into El Paso? The services are terrible in Chaparral. This is the third time this year your mother's place has flooded. What's she going to do? I mean it's not like your granddad's around any more. Why's she stay out here?

She feels closer to Pa in the old house. I mean the ladies lived a lot longer than me. Who am I to tell her how to live, or die?

What? She's dying? Oh, no, Esther. I'm so sorry.

We're all dying, Lin. We just hope it comes when we're as old and grey as GG. I don't mean she's dying today, or tomorrow. But she's closer to her time than not.

That's so morbid. Lucy, stop picking stuff up and putting your hands in your face. Do you want to wait in the car? I swear, that girl's going to be the death of me.

Katy, Lucy, go wait in the car. Katy, ask GG to clean off your hands.

It's not morbid. The way she tells it she's going to outlive all of us. She's already making plans for Katy's college graduation.

But she's not even out of the third grade.

You're telling me, that woman. She's a regular spitfire. If I have half the life she led I'd be happy. Help me open this backdoor. The mat's soaked, and it's wedged underneath.

Okay push on three. One, two, three.

3.

### Waiting

Will Ruth Avenue  
January 6, 2013

I hope they don't run out before we get to the front.

They won't.

How do you know, Abuela? They might. Look at this line. It's down the block.

It's always like that. You know that. This isn't the first year you stood in line with me.

I haven't done it since I was a kid. I forgot how long the lines are. How come you don't bake Rosca de Reyes?

Takes too much time, and I've always gotten it from here. It's good. And I never get the baby Jesus, when I get it from here. I'm not cooking tamales unless I want to.

Oh, Abuela, but I love your tamales.

I know. Everyone does. That doesn't mean I like making them. I cook them because Mom showed me how.

How come you never taught Mom to make them?

I don't know. Your Mom never seemed interested in those things. Your mom's always been in her books, just like you. I didn't want to change that. I like having an educated daughter. It makes me proud. She could be whatever she wants, not just a housewife.

Abuela, you're not just a housewife. I don't see you like that. You're always helping people. You're my idol, Abuela. I wish I had your strength. If it weren't for the care packages you send, I don't know what I'd do sometimes. Whenever I'm short on cash I can sell one of your goodies. People are always asking when you're sending more.

Abuela, are you crying?

No, mi'ja. It's just cold. I wish it weren't so windy.

You want my gloves, Abuela?

No, mi'ja, I'll just put my hands in my pockets.

Here, take them. My jacket's super warm, I'm almost sweating. Take my scarf, too.

Aye, no, mi'ja, you keep it. I don't want you catching a cold out here.

Please, Abuela, you'll make me feel bad.

Aye, mi'ja, just the gloves. Keep the scarf, don't open your jacket. Finally, the line's moving, wait, people are starting to leave. Abuela, I think they're closing the doors.

No, couldn't be. Let's go check.

You sure? We can try somewhere else.

No, I know the baker. Let's go see what's happening.

4.

**Amped Up**  
Tropicana Avenue  
June 17, 2013

Dude, where's my amp?

Ah, sorry, it's still in the car. I'll go get it.

Bro, I don't mind you borrowing my shit, but put it back when you're done.

Sorry, man, I was fucked up last night. Luis got a couple of six packs for the session, and you know Oscar had whiskey.

So you drove home like that, and in Mom's car? You're fucking stupid sometimes, bro. You totaled your car, and you still haven't learned. I told you if you need a ride just ask.

Fuck that, I'm not waiting around for my baby brother to get a ride. It's cool man. I know how to avoid the road stops. I was just too fucked up the last time. I don't get like that anymore.

You just said you were drinking last night. That attitude keeps you playing in shit holes in the northeast. None of the good places are willing to let you play anymore. You think you're going to be able to play big stages if no one's willing to give you the time of day?

Oh, you're big shit now. You play Neon Desert and you're some Rock God, what the fuck. Fuck you, bro, maybe I like playing where I play. The crowd actually digs my music. They know where I come from. They feel my music. It's their music. Not some watered down pop shit.

Pop shit? Least labels are looking at us. People'll get to hear my music, not just a couple a snaggletooth groupies, too drunk to move. Metal's over, dude. Get out of the

Stone Age. And, yeah, we played Neon Desert, so what? It's bad to be popular now?

Come on, bro, you don't remember when you were first learning to play? You didn't care about fame, and fans, and all that bullshit. You just wanted to play, and people were willing to listen. You let them. It was just about your music. What's your music now, dollar signs? That's it.

Look, Greg's band needs a bass player for their show at Tricky. If you're down I can get you the gig. Who knows? It might be permanent. Alfred left to San Diego. They don't think he's coming back. his girl got a sweet job out there. So what, you wanna play some pop music, or are you going to stay in those, shit stains?

5.

### Solo

Sanders Avenue

July 3, 2013

Yo, you finished your verse yet.

Yeah man, I'm ready to run up the studio, and burn down the track.

Ah shit, let me hear that shit, go ahead spit your verse.

Aight here it goes,

My verbals move at the speed of light  
hitting thoughts,  
like a lightning strike  
Gimme the mic.  
I'm responsible for it  
droppin hot tracks,  
lyrical porn shit  
bring you more hits,  
than Barry Bonds without the dope,  
dopest M. C since I don't know,  
ever. Any weather  
rain, wind, sleet,  
for this music I creep  
champion sound on the streets.  
None compete,  
too small minded  
bring your crew,  
I'll divide them.  
Make em to my minions.  
You're standing left alone  
hiding behind your children  
maybe now you'll listen.  
El Paso's on the map.  
Eardrums we'll be killing,  
representing the North East  
this is Chilo Dixon.

Oh, shit, bro, that shit was hot. You hear the beat yet?

Nah, not yet, Reggie's bringing the beats to the studio.

Reggie? Reggie's in jail.

What? When'd that happen?

He was spinning at Marco's party, and it got raided.

What, for real? Ah, man, he was already on probation. Man, his P.O. is gonna send him back to prison. Damn, man, that's fucked up. He had all the beats, and it's his homie's studio. He ain't gonna let me go in there for free. He wasn't charging us because of Reggie. What the fuck am I gonna do now?

Damn, bro, that sucks. Maybe he'll work with you. I mean your shit is on fire. I'd put the money in for studio time for that shit.

6.

Need  
Dyer Street  
July 16, 2013

Jessica, open the door. Es tu tía.

Okay.

Jessica!

Jennifer, hey! Hi, Tía, como 'stas?

Hey, Jess, that a new shirt?

Yeah, you like it?

I like the flowers. So pretty.

Como te gustaría, Tía?

Si, es muy bonita. Donde esta tu madre?

In her room. I think she's crying again.

Por que? What happened?

Carlos and her were fighting again. I don't think he's coming back this time.

I'm glad. I didn't like Carlos for her.

You two go play in Jessica's room. Jessica, take your birthday gift in there and open it.

Jennifer, come on. Let's look at my gift. Do you know what it is?

Yup.

Tell me.

It's a surprise, come on.

Elena? It's me, open up. Elena, abra la puerta.

Esta abierto.

Hey, chica, que pasa? Why's it so dark in here? Turn on the light. Open a window.

Light hurts my eye.

Your eye? What're you talking about? My god, Letty, what the fuck happened?

Was it Mario? That son of bitch, fucking patan! I told you to get rid of him. He just got out, and he's beating you again? Leave his ass in jail this time.

No. It's my fault. He wanted to wake up for work at 6:30, and I got him at 6. I made breakfast, and I thought he wanted to eat, instead of buying food from the truck. I forgot. He was drinking last night. I forgot he always wants extra sleep when he drinks. It's my fault. I should have just let him sleep.

Are you fucking kidding me? How's that your fault? Olvida ese pendejo. He's a convict, he's got a shit job, and he treats you like shit. Why do you take his mess?

I love him, that's why. It's easy for you. You have Adrian. You two been dating since grade school. Ray's in jail. He's not coming out. I'm pregnant. What do you want me to do?

You're pregnant?

I was going to tell you when you brang the food card.

How far along?

Four and a half months.

What? And you didn't tell me. So then you're keeping it?

Well, it's too late now. And. And I love Mario. I wouldn't kill his baby.

You're gonna let him kill you, and that baby?

What should I do then?

7.

Chico's Tacos Forever

Tompkins Road

July 28, 2013

Can I get a enchilada and two orders of huevos rancheros?

Will there be anything to drink with that?

Lisa, what you want to drink?

Um, ice tea, unsweetened.

Can I get an ice tea, unsweetened, and two large cokes?

What size ice tea?

Just make it large.

To stay, or to go?

To go.

That'll be twelve eighty-nine. Out of twenty. Six eleven's your change. Thank you.

Please come again.

Thank you.

How long's it gonna be?

Not that long, chill out.

I'm fucking dying. Why'd you let me drink so much?

Let you? I told you stop after the second shot.

But they were so good. Did you see Jeanette at the bar? I thought she was pregnant again.

That bitch is stupid. She's always drinking. You registered for the fall classes?

I'm taking all my classes at Valle Verde this year.

What, why? You gonna leave me alone?

Why don't you take classes at Valle Verde?

Trans-mountain's closer to my house. I just have to cross over the mountain. It takes less than fifteen minutes.

But Valle Verde has more classes, and I think the campus is better. I'd pick you up if you went. You wouldn't have to take the bus, or anything.

I already picked my classes. Maybe in January. My stomach, is the food ready?

Let me check.

Hey, Sasha, what's up?

Oh, hey, Dennis, hey, Francine, I didn't see you guys. Having a night out with your lady, Denny?

Yeah, my sister's watching the kids. You seen Lucy lately? I'm trying to go out to Hueco Tanks this weekend.

No, but I think my brother still has some D.M.T. Left. You should hit him up.

Simon. How's school going, you graduate yet?

Not yet, next Spring. How's Crystal?

She's cool. Just had another son.

I got to go see her. Tell her I said hi.

For sure, stay safe, Shasha.

I hate when you guys call me that. I haven't heard that since Hector got locked up.

Shit, how is your brother?

He's okay. I haven't been to see him in a while. I've been busy trying to help Mom take care of my little brothers and sister.

That's cool, but don't forget about your big brother, I know he's crazy, but he's

your brother. You know he always used to look out for you. He always made sure you stayed outta trouble, and kept all them young niggas out your pants. Don't turn your back on him.

Never that. I still write him. I just haven't been able to get out there. It's way out on Montana, but I'll try and get out there more often.

Cool, yo, stay up, Shasha.

Later, Denny, bye Fran. Excuse me is my order ready?

8.

### Beautician

Broadus Avenue  
February 13, 2013

Your aunt told me to just keep driving down Dyer, I'd see a place, and if I didn't we could go to one of her girlfriends. You see any saloons honey?

No, I see a lot a shopping centers Mama. But no hair places.

Well, keep looking.

Mama, on the left, right there, next to the Chinese Restaurant. You see it?

Yeah, baby, I see it.

Looks closed.

The light's on. Let's go check it out. Make sure you lock your door.

Should I bring my jacket?

You know what? Hold on. I might as well go check. No use both of us getting out the car. Let me just make sure it's open.

I know, girl, but did you see her shoes? Yeah, the strap on the heel, girl, I need a pair of those. Wait hold on. Someone's coming in. Hello there, can I help you?

Hey, you open? I wasn't sure. Bars on the door make the place look closed.

Yeah, we're open. What you need?

Oh, it's not for me. It's for my daughter. Her sweet sixteen is coming up, and we just moved here so we needed to find a new hairdresser.

Okay, where is she?

In the car. Hold on.

Hello.

Hey, pretty lady. I hear someone's sweet sixteen is coming up.

Yes, ma'am.

So do you have any designs in mind for your big day?

Mmm.

Don't be shy, Sheila. Tell the lady what you were thinking.

You see the new Janelle Monae video?

You want to cut your hair off? But you have such nice hair. Why you want to cut so much of it off? You sure about this?

I figure I'm in a new place. I want to try a new look. Is it okay, Mama?

It's your head, your birthday. Just don't come crying to me when your hair's chopped off.

When you want to do this, little lady? I'm pretty open, as you can see. You want to make an appointment or just walk in, it's up to you.

9.

## Leaving

Nations Avenue

March 9, 2013

So I went by my cousin's. She said they're hiring at her job. I'm thinking of putting in an application, at least until you can find something. I changed some things on your resume. You see it?

What? No. I'll take a look in a minute. Wait, your cousin? What kind of job is it? So now you're going to take your clothes off?

No. It's not like that. They're hiring bartenders. I'm not stripping, or anything like that. It's just bartending. It's not like I'm taking my clothes off.

Are you fucking kidding me? Ich gehe, Ich Haue ab!

Where're you going? What do you mean you're leaving? What'm I supposed to do? You said you'd try. You haven't even looked for work yet. And you're ready to give up? You're going to just leave?

You think it's so easy. Just find work. You're out of school for two years now, and you still can't find a job. Why stay here if there's no work? Now you're working in a titty bar? Not taking off your clothes, please. I know what happens when you work in those places, the types of guys that who're there, they only want one thing.

So what? You think I'll give them what they want? You really think I'm that kind of person? It's just bartending. Why're you being like that?

I can't do this any more. I'm going back to Germany. I already have a job lined up with an Dentsche Airbus. Kommt doch mit mir mit. There's room in my old flat for the both of us. With your degree you'll be able to find work in no time. Gretchen, my cousin, works in your field, she's already offered to help.

Are you serious? Mi idioma aleman no es muy bueno. I couldn't find my way around, even if I tried. You want me to just pick up and leave everything?

Die Möchten uns nicht hier. Since the Lutwaffee left, I have no place here.

You have me. We can make it if we just stay together. I can ask for an extra shift at the bar. I'm sure they're going to hire me.

I don't want you working in a place like that. You worked too hard in school to just bartend at a strip club. You should want more for yourself.

I do it's not forever. It's just for now, until I find something better.

Ich gehe nach hause.

I thought your home was with me?

I thought it could be, too. At least with other Germans here it was easier, but now. I understand your family's here, but you've got to leave the nest sooner or later. If you don't like it, we can move somewhere else. The company has locations across Europe. We could go to Italy or France. What do you think?

10.

Fine Dining

Fort Boulevard

March 23, 2013

Abuela! Abuela, where're you at? Abuela!

Aquí, why're you yelling? I'm in the garden, and make sure you close the front door.

I did. Where's the bag for Mom?

It's on the couch. Take the red one. There's a box next to the bag bring it out here.

Which box?

Next to the bag. There's only one box there. Look for it, mi'ja. Don't be lazy.

I found it. What's in it?

Benga para ca. Don't open it. Just bring it.

Here it is. What is it?

Okay, now you can open it.

It's for me, for real?

What do you think?

What is it?

Aye, mi'ja. I can't wait for you to visit Limón. It's Tortuga, the shell.

A turtle shell? What's it for? Is it a bowl or something?

We used to eat arroz con Tortuga in that, when I was a little girl.

Abuela! That's gross, turtles are endangered. People shouldn't eat them.

You're right. They are in danger, if I have my pot, and some hot water.

Abuela!

Did you see the plantanos on the counter?

II.  
East  
The desert opens  
Its arms to the coyote  
Traveling at night.

11.

Mailboxes  
Montwood Drive  
April 1, 2013

Hola, Vero.

Buen dia, Sylvia. Any good news?

Just bills. How's Jorge doing? Is he getting better?

Aye, Sylvia, he keeps complaining, but he's not taking his medicine. La cabra vieja, he thinks he knows everything. I tell him, if he wants to get better, he has to take his pills.

You think he listens to me? No.

Just put it in his food. He won't know.

Sylvia, I can't do that. What if he finds out?

Vero, sometimes you make me laugh. So what if he finds out? He's supposed to take them anyway.

You're right. I'll try it. Oh, my god, did you hear about Norma? I think she's in the hospital.

Was it Felix?

You know it was. He came home drunk again, and she locked him out.

Cabron, what'd he do?

He smashed open the back window. And let himself in.

Pendejo. Is Norma all right?

Norma? Norma's fine, when she saw her door messed up she flipped out. She took the pan that was on the stove and started beating Felix with it. Her daughter stopped her from killing him. You know how Norma is about her house. Felix shouldn't've walked in the house, and not taken his shoes off.

Aye, Sylvia did you make that up?

12.

Falsetto  
Mazatlan Drive  
April 16, 2013

That's what you're wearing?

Yeah, I like this dress. What's wrong with it? I wore it New Year's last year I forgot I had it.

But you're getting married.

So? It's my wedding. I'll dress how I want to.

But shouldn't you wear white, or something?

Why? It's not like we're really going to be married. I mean his boyfriend's his best man, and we're getting married at city hall. If I was really getting married, like in a church, in front of priest, or something, then I could see me doing the whole white gown and veil thing.

But you're supposed to make it look real, right? If somebody asked me to marry them I'd wear a white dress, and everything, even if it was just for papers. It just seems like the thing to do. You know?

Please, I don't care. I do what I want.

What time you gotta be downtown?

They said the office opens at eight thirty, so we want to be there a little earlier to try and beat the rush.

The rush?

Yeah, lots of people get married at the courthouse. We tried two weeks ago, but it was so crowded. The ladies at the front desk told me just come early and we'd be done

before ten. This is the first day I could take off.

So's there a honeymoon?

Yup, a trip to Vera Cruz. He's bringing his boyfriend, and Vickie's coming, too.

What? You should've told me. I would've been in the wedding party.

Yeah, but, would you be scissoring with me in the hot tub?

Ew, bitch, you know I'm strictly dickly. But for a free trip I might be up for some heavy spooning.

You're so stupid. You gonna lend me those boots this weekend?

You still going to Ruidoso?

I think so, but I want to be ready just in case. I don't want to be getting ready at the last minute.

If you're going to Ruidoso I want to go.

For real? You never go on trips with me.

Yeah, but I'm broke, and I want to get my car fixed before the transmission totally gives out.

We'll see. Let me find out if I'm still going first. I probably will, but let me make sure.

13.

### Ignitions

Independence Drive  
September 27, 2013

Just put the blankets on the bed. Thanks, Fabian.

Where you gonna put Manny's bag?

Manny's things are going to stay in the living room for now.

Why's Manny staying with his Dad? I thought he was coming here. I even asked Mom if I could play my games late with him. She said I could stay up till ten.

It's easier to take him to school from his Grandma's house.

Fabian, take the dog outside to eat.

He already ate.

Then let him go use the bathroom.

But he already went. I was watching him from the back window.

Fabian.

I'm going. Why didn't you just say get out?

Hurry up.

Can I still play my games?

Go ahead. When I come tell you to go to sleep, I don't want any arguments. I want the game off.

Okay.

So, why did you leave Manny with Mario? And, tell me the truth, don't tell me that shit about the schools closer, Elena. I know it's not.

Mario blames me.

Blames you, for what? Not for the fire? Of course, what else is new? He blamed you for the puta at his job he was sleeping with. He blamed you when he crashed his car. You know Jerry told me he was drinking with them. He'd blame you if it rained.

I know, but he's good with Manny.

But, you weren't even home. How could he blame you?

He says I must've left a pot on the stove, or something. But I remember putting the pot into the sink after breakfast. He was the last one to leave the house. I know he was. I dropped Manny to school before I went to Juarez. I remember calling him from the bridge.

You don't have to explain anything to me. What did the insurance woman say?

Said it didn't look like an accident, that someone had to leave a pot on the stove, but I know I didn't.

You're sure?

14.

## Wrap

Tornillo  
October 6, 2013

Ok cut. That's a wrap, folks. Hey, Jim, how's it look?

Take a look, the slow mo came off really nice. We're going to have to overlap some of the footage though. The first cut's intro looks cleaner. You can see more of the desert in the background, in the fourth shot.

Yeah, that's a keeper. Let me see the last one. I think I cut too early.

No, no, it looks good. Wait till we see it on screen. You'll get the full effect.

Whoa, I really like how the slow motion came out. You can see the tears forming in his eyes, before he starts crying. And the tears, man, they're refracting the sunlight. I didn't expect that effect, but it looks so cool. We gotta keep that shot.

Hell yeah. Let's start packing the equipment away. It's already getting dark.

Hey, Christian, you got a minute?

Sure, Stacy, what's up?

I can't make next week's shoot.

What? Why? You know we're wrapping up shooting in a couple of weeks. We just need you for two more scenes. Then you're good. We just need your close ups with the other girls, and you're done.

I know. I read the scenes, but I can't make it next weekend. My brother's getting back from deployment. We want to greet him when he gets off the plane. I wanted to ask if you could take pictures for me. It'd be so awesome to have something to remember his homecoming. Can you do it? I couldn't pay you much, but I could pay you some.

It's going to be at the airport, yeah?

Yeah, at El Paso Airport, it'll be around two in the afternoon. So you can do it?

I think so? But, let me check my schedule, okay?

Great, Christian, thanks so much. It'll mean a lot to my dad.

Dude, I'm finished packing, did you need anything else? I'll start back towards El Paso when everyone leaves.

Okay, Stacey, I'll give you a call.

Nah, dude, you're good. Thanks for waiting.

Hey what did Stacey want?

Her brother's coming home from serving. She wants me to take pictures, when he gets off the plane.

Oh, nice, when's he getting here?

Shit, I don't care. I'm not going. She said she wasn't going to pay me that much.

You know how much this equipment cost. I'm not just taking it out for nothing.

15.

Tour

I-10 Clint

October 24, 2013

Where are we playing? North or south stage?

South stage I think. Let me check. Yeah, south stage.

Cool, we're in front of Taylor's pad. I'll call ahead and let him know. I think he's going on at eight. We play like five sets before him. So even if he's on the other stage we can catch his set.

Word. You still wanna do the afterparty?

I think so. If I can crash out a couple of hours I'll be okay. I'm just tired.

Dude, you should just let me drive the rest of the way. We already passed Clint.

Nah, I'm good. The coffee's what fucked me up. I should've ate something.

You want some of my sandwich?

Does it have mayo?

Oh, yeah, shit, I forgot. Sorry, bro. Just stop in Horizon. There's bound to be something you can grab there.

I just want to get to Tony's crib, and crash out till morning. I don't even want to unpack.

You're going to leave the equipment in the car?

What, are you crazy? I said, I don't want to unpack. I never said I'm not going to unpack. Hell no, I'm not leaving the stuff in the car. I don't care if Tony lives on the west side. We're unpacking tonight. Hey, you want to give him a call, and let him know we're almost there?

I'll just text him.

Tell him to let Tony know we're playing in front of his house.

Cool.

I think we should start the set with one of the newer songs. Third year we're playing the block party, let's try something different.

But El Paso knows our older songs, and they like them. I want to get the crowd into it right off.

Yeah, but, what about Ultraviolet? I think they'll really like that one. Then we can mix in some of the older stuff to get the crowd jumping.

Dude, this isn't Austin. It's El Paso.

So what?

16.

## Picking

Fabens

October 26, 2013

Hey, there, Erik. Looks like a good haul this year. They're already dropping.

Yeah, last year's monsoons helped. We finished the tanks in time, so we stored water up until the next spring.

Good thing, this summer's been brutal.

You're telling me. I don't know what we would've done if we didn't have those reserves.

Sorry to hear about Reese. I thought it'd finally work out with him.

I tell you, it was the craziest thing. Martha called me inside yelling. When I saw him on the TV my jaw dropped. Martha just turns to me and says, that's what you get for hiring convicts. What could I say? I turned down the Ramirez boy cause I didn't want problems with his Dad, but seems that would've worked out better in the long run. Seemed this feller had some tough breaks. I figured I'd give him a chance. Lord knows I've needed my share of second chances.

Haven't we all? It was just a shame, though. Guy loses his wife and Dad in the same year. He'd gone straight. I don't want to hear that convict shit. You saw how hard he worked. Man was here before daybreak, every day. And left long after everyone else was already halfway home. In high school, he was a punk, took me, and my brother's lunch everyday. But I saw the change in him when he got out a prison. Missing his mom's funeral really broke him down. He was different. I mean he actually shook my hand and apologized for his shit when we were younger. It's the only reason I asked you to hire him.

I know, I know. It's a shame.

So you going to need an extra hand this harvest? I wanna take a break from the road for a while. Need to make some repairs on the house and such.

Sure, still remember how to use the hooks?

If there's one thing in life I'll never forget it's how to hook a pecan branch. You still gather the fallen twice a day?

You know it. Wait till you see the new tractors. Man they're sweet. I'm trying to order one of those new tree shakers by the end of the second harvest. We'll see how it goes. When were you thinking of starting?

17.

Speakeasy  
Zaragoza Road  
May 10, 2013

Hey, you guys open?

Yeah, how can I help you?

I'm trying to find out how much a cover up is. Do you charge by the hour, or by the piece?

Depends on the artist.

Oh. So could I speak to one of the artists then?

Sure, did you have anybody in particular in mind?

Not really. My friend Sarah told me about this place. She got a hummingbird on her shoulder. Said Dominic worked on it. Can I speak to him?

Dom should be back in like twenty minutes, he just left for lunch. But you could look at his portfolio, if you like. You know what piece you wanted?

Not really. I was hoping whoever did the tattoo would help pick something out. I mean I know I want a blackbird, but I'm not sure how it should look.

Yeah. that shouldn't be a problem. Where's the tattoo you want to cover up?

It's this cross I got when I was seventeen. It's on my shoulder. My best friend at the time and I wanted matching tattoos.

Why a cross?

We went to Catholic School together.

Which school?

Loretto.

I went to Cathedral.

For real, I hated Catholic School. I always wanted to go to public school, those stupid uniforms. What year'd you graduate?

Ninety-nine.

Oh, that's way before I graduated two years ago.

My sister went to Loretto Academy around then. Annabelle, she was on the debate team, and part of Scribblers.

Oh, I know her, she was always writing poetry and stuff, right?

Yeah, that's her. Here's some of the portfolios. You can take a look at them until Dom gets back, or if you see another artist you might want to work with let me know.

Okay, thank you. Can I just wait over here?

18.

Ghost Story

East Glenn Drive

May 19, 2013

Hurry up, bitch. They're not gonna wait forever.

Shut up, ho. They better wait if they know what's good for them. Pass my purple top.

You're wearing that, with those jeans?

Yeah, I like it. What's wrong with it?

I like the one you're wearing.

This is dirty.

So they don't know that.

Fuck you, bitch. You wear something dirty, like your cunt, you fucking slut. No really, you don't like this top?

No, I'm kidding. I like it. Hurry up and take your shower. I'm starting to smell you.

Ew, where's my towel?

I don't know. This is your room.

Shit, my grandmother was in here cleaning again. Grandma! Grandma! Fucking lady. Abuela!

Why are you yelling! Just come in the living room! I'm not shouting to answer you if I don't want to! Venido aqui!

Abuela, where's my towel?

In the wash. It was filthy. Take a clean one from my room. Are you going out again?

Si, Abuelita, I'll be back before one.

But it's raining.

So?

Erika, what's taking you so long? They keep texting me. Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs Maldonado. I didn't know you guys were talking.

Why are you girls going out in the rain, just to see boys? You should just stay home tonight. There's only trouble in those streets.

Aye, Abuela, we'll be back early, I promise. Promise I'll even bring you back something from Chico's.

But why in the rain? Just wait for another day, or at least until it stops raining.

It's okay, Mrs Maldonado. I just got new tires, and I'm a good driver. I've never gotten a ticket, or anything.

Haven't you girls heard of La Llorona?

Who?

It's an old story about some crazy lady who killed her kids. It isn't even real. It's a ghost story.

No, it is. Listen to me, mi'ja, La Llorona's as real as me or you. It was before I had your mother. I can remember it like it was yesterday. Mi comadre and me were going to Juárez, on a Friday night. It was raining out, but we got a ride from her boyfriend. He had a friend I was meeting. He was cute. He had nothing on your grandfather, but don't tell him I told you that. I had my Cher outfit. I was something back then. You wouldn't've recognized your abuelita back then. We had just crossed the bridge downtown, and the rain started coming down so hard we could hardly see out the windows. I told the guy to slow down. He just started laughing. He kept saying, don't worry. I know how to drive in

the rain". He didn't know enough. He crashed into a street sign. I told my friend let's go and call my father. He'd come and get us. She was worried my father'd probably beat the guys up, she was right he would've. We sat on the road with the guys, waiting for his older brother to come. It turned out it wasn't even his car. All of a sudden I started hearing a low moaning it was like, \_ \_

Hold up, Abuela, you didn't move to El Paso till you had dad. And you were just seventeen. You never partied, Grandpa wouldn't have let that go down, you told me you used to sneak beers with the neighbor, cause Grandpa was so crazy.

Callate, you're messing up my story.

Mrs Maldonado, you were lying?

## 19.

### Citizenship

Como Drive

June 4, 2013

Where's my folder?

La mesa.

It's not there.

Under the newspaper.

Ah, bueno. Found it.

I can't find my glasses. Where're my glasses?

Next to your keys.

Okay. You ready? I don't want to be late.

I'm just putting on my coat. Your English's gotten so good. This time I know you can pass the test, no problem.

I get nervous when they start asking me questions. Why are you in the country.

Why do you want to be a citizen? I just want to ask him why not? Is this a bad country?

Why wouldn't I get my citizenship? Pendejos.

Don't get upset. El Maestro says you're ready. I know you're ready. You'll pass the test this time.

Aye, Pame, what would I do without you?

You better not find out. Come on, listo.

Put your seatbelt on.

It's on.

Besitos.

Okay, let's go now. You know if miss your appointment, we'll have to wait, and

you might not be able to take the test today. Ready?

20.

Left Out

Lomaland Drive

June 17, 2013

You look so grown. Your father'd be so proud.

Mom, I've been wearing suits since I started working. It's been two years since graduation. I dress in suits almost everyday.

You're just not seeing yourself the way I see you. I notice the little changes in you. I'm telling you there's something different, and you should be proud. It's like when you graduated from college and then married Ana, you accomplished something. Are you ready for your first day?

I guess. I went over the schedule with Tio last night. He said he'd be back by weeks end. It looked simple enough. It's a slow week so there aren't that many deliveries coming in. I should be fine. Joseph'll be there any way. It's not like I'll there be by myself.

Your dad would've been so proud to know you started working at the company, it's what he always wanted. Father and son working side by side. It was his dream.

Don't cry, Mom. I know how hard Dad worked.

I know it's not what you want. But it's good work. You'll see. The company always provided for the family. Now that Ana's expecting, I can help out around the house, to make it easier for her.

Ana's not going to stop working, Mom. She's proud of her work. She's not giving it up. She might have to ease up a bit, but I know she's not going to just stop working. Mom, we're not planning on staying here forever. We have a life in San Diego. Ana's going back at the end of the month. We were hoping you'd come with us. Nothing's

keeping you here in El Paso. Dad's gone now. The business can take care of itself. Tio Josue and Joseph can handle the job. I'm thinking of selling my part of the business to them. They've offered a good price, and they're going to keep sending you residual checks.

Oh, that's fine.

You're okay with it then, Mom? Okay. I'll talk to Ana about moving you to San Diego. I thought this was going to be an argument you really surprised me. We should start looking to put the house on the market as soon as possible. Spring's right around the corner. It's the best time for home sales.

Yes, that's fine. You know. I thought you were coming home to help me deal with your father's affairs. I didn't know you came here just to bury your father, and his dreams. I don't need you and Ana to take care of me. I can take care of myself just fine, been doing it from before you were born. As for me, your father's buried in El Paso, and I'll be buried right next to him. Until then, I'm not leaving my home.

But, Mom, why do you want to stay here?

III.

Central

Rose gardens near Gold  
And Silver, where brides picture  
the rest of their lives.

## 21.

### Ritual

Raynolds Street  
November 23, 2013

It's still dark out.

I can see that.

I'm cold.

I'm cold, too. The car's still warming up. Where's your hat?

Forgot it on my bed.

That's a good place for it. I hope it keeps your head warm from there. You want to run back in and get it?

Nah. I don't see why we have to keep going to these things. None of the kids at school have to do this. Even Martin gets to stay home. How come he doesn't have to go?

You're not Martin.

I wish I was. Then I could be sleeping.

Stop leaning on the drum. If you break it you're not going to like it.

I'm not.

I see you in the mirror. Sit on the other side.

But, it's cold over there. I warmed up this spot.

I'm not going to argue with you this morning. I'm in too good a mood. If you don't want to go to any more ceremonies you don't have to. After this one, you're lead drummer this year. Martin's not going. Your aunt suddenly decided he knows what's best for him, whatever that means. But, you are going. You're sixteen, and until the law says otherwise what I say goes. Look, it's Nunutzi tradition to have the oldest male son lead the drum circle, you're older than Martin anyway. You would've led the circle even if he

were here. So stop complaining.

I know that. Why are we taking Raynolds?

They decided to hold the ceremony under the Spaghetti Bowl, close to the murals.

Why?

Why not?

It's under the highway. Why don't they have it at the lodge?

This is a different kind of ceremony. I wish your grandfather was here. He explained all this stuff better than I do. Daniel, this is important to me. I'm hoping one day it'll be important to you, too.

I'm still hungry. Did you bring snacks?

22.

Tease

Trowbridge Drive  
November 7, 2013

So what are you gonna do?

I don't know yet.

That's fucked up, man. Are you even going to get your money back?

I don't know, probably not. I might have to move back in with my mom.

That shit sucks. If it was me, I'd be banging down their front door. And I mean their house, not the school. You should call the news, put that shit on TV. They can't just take your money and get off scot free. That's bullshit. Girl, if you need a loan I can float you some cash for a couple a weeks, you know, to hold on to your place and stuff.

Ah, B, thanks. But I can't ask you to do that. This nursing shit didn't pan out. I just got to find something else, and quick.

You know they're always hiring where I work. And you're pretty. I know they'd like you. But, I know you're going to say no. I'm just sayin. It's quick money, and it's not forever. Just till you find something else, you know?

You mean dancing? I don't know about that. Getting naked, on stage, in front of some old dudes? It's not my thing. I'm not knocking you for it. You're my girl. But I don't think I could do that.

It's not so bad. It's like wearing a bikini at the beach, a topless beach. And you don't even have to give private dances. You could just do stage shows. That's good money, too.

I don't know. How much do you make on a bad night?

You can't compare you and me. I do private dances, and stage shows.

I know that, but I'm just asking. So I can compare, I'll just take away like half, you know?

I make way more in private dances, though.

Okay, so how much in a bad night?

On a bad night, I guess around two, three hundred.

Dollars?

Yeah, dollars. What do you think cents?

I didn't know you made that much. I could pay my rent and get a new car making that much.

So what, you're thinking about doing it?

23.

### B-Side

Alameda Avenue  
November 2, 2013

Can you turn that down? Bro, could you turn that down a bit? Man, what's wrong with your cousin?

Hector, man, turn it down.

What the hell, man. You ask me to give you and your friend a ride. You tell me you don't have gas money. I'm already late for work. And now you want me to turn down my music? What? You don't like Tupac?

Not really. Don't you have another CD or something?

Yeah, look under the seat. There're some CDs in the case.

Dude, these are all rap CD's. What, do you think you're black, or something?

What?

I mean, almost every one, over a hundred CD's in here, and almost all of them are rap music. A couple aren't and those are all reggae. You don't even have Eminem, and I looked through it twice.

Hey, lay off, man. He's giving us a ride, right? Don't be a dick.

Nah, it's cool. Yeah, I listen to rap music. So what? And, that's ska not reggae. It's different. That doesn't mean I wanna be black. I just like rap music. What should I listen to, rock?

Nah, man! That's not what I'm saying. I didn't ask you if you think you're white. I mean Mexican music. Don't you listen to Ranchera, or Norteña?

I'm from Cali, bro. I grew up on N.W.A. and shit. I was even pissed when all that East Coast West Coast bullshit was going on. I think it kinda fucked up hip-hop for a

while there. I mean, it's supposed to be about the lyrics, the beats, you know? The music.

But how can you learn about your culture unless you listen to your music?

Man, I'd rather hear music talking about what's going on where I'm from. And, I don't just listen to black rappers. I got some Big Pun, and I love Cypress Hills. You crazy, dude I love my low rider shit.

What do you think, Ed?

Shit, I don't care. If it sounds good, and I can move to it, then it's music I like. Hey turn left here, the house is right off Piedras. You gonna wait for us Hector?

24.

Educated

Estrella Avenue  
October 17, 2013

I'm still sleepy.

I know, mi'jo, but I don't want you late for school again.

Why can't Papi drive me?

Your father's tired. He worked a double shift again.

Papi's always working. He needs a vacation. Why don't you drive, Ma?

I never learned how. I'm scared of driving.

If you knew how to drive you could get a job. Then Papi wouldn't have to work so much, why don't you work?

I do work. I take care of you and your father.

That's not work. You do that cause you love us.

You're right. I do love you, and your dad, but it's still work taking care of you two.

I guess. Did you go to school, Mom?

Yes, what kind of a question is that? Of course I went to school. I even graduated college. You know, your father didn't.

He didn't? Then how come he has to work at a job, and you can stay home. And take care of us. Couldn't Papi take care of us, and you can work?

Don't you like me taking care of you?

Yes, of course.

Do you want to eat Papi's cooking?

No, he even burns popcorn. Okay, you can take care of us. Is the bus almost here?

I don't know, mi'jo, I can't read the schedule. It's old, and worn out. The times

have probably changed. Just be patient.

I'm still hungry.

Eat one of the sandwiches I packed for your lunch.

Mom, what's a wetback?

What? Where did you hear that?

Jonathan called Suzanna, the new girl, a wetback. Miguel got mad and punched Jonathan, right in the nose. So then Jonathan and Miguel started fighting, and Mr. Alvarez had to break it up. Jonathan started making kissy faces at Miguel, said he loved Suzanna. But, when I asked Miguel later he said he punched him cause he called her a wetback. That's not a bad word though. Who cares if your back's wet? My back gets wet when I swim, and when I take a bath, even when it rains sometimes, and the water gets through my coat, so I why'd he get so mad at that?

Aye, mi'jo, people say stupid things sometimes, but don't let what people say make you do something to get you in trouble. Think first.

So what would you've done, Mom?

25.

Wardrobe  
Wayside Avenue  
June 24, 2013

Put on the green one. It matches your eyes.

But the blue one looks good with the shorts, and the pink is old, I've already worn that out like twice. What do you think about this black top?

I still think the green one brings out your eyes. You want to show off your best assets. Trust me. Wear the green one.

You're sure?

Yes, I'm sure. Why are you so nervous? Who is this guy? It's not like you don't date. What's the big deal?

This guy's different.

Uh oh, what do you mean different?

He's not like the guys I usually date. I didn't meet him at the club, or anything like that. I know him from work.

Oh, so he's a professional. So what? You're awesome, and I'm sure he already knows that. He's going out with you, right? And he asked you out. So he should be nervous, not you. You're the one being chased, girl let him chase let him woo you.

But I've never dated anybody from work. I keep my personal life and work separate, on purpose. It could be messy if you had a bad break up in the office. I don't want to ruin anyone's career, namely my own.

I know what you mean. Work and relationships can be tricky. But, if he took the chance, and you accepted, there must be something there. You're both adults. You both know the risks, I'm sure you won't jeopardize your jobs. Look, you could've said no

politely, but you said yes, so you really must want to see if something's there.

Fine. I am going to wear the green one. Are you going to lend me your green shoes?

Of course, let me make sure that they don't need to be polished. Hurry up and get ready. Isn't he going to be here at seven? It's already six thirty.

Thanks, Raul.

Shut up, and get ready, Juan. Don't think being fashionably late is cute. Don't mention it, hermanita.

26.

WIFI

Cardon Street  
April 27, 2013

Is Dad coming yet?

No, mi'jo. It's only 11:30.

What time's he going to get here?

In another twenty minutes, maybe.

Can I have some more soda?

You already had enough. You're not going to be able to sleep tonight.

Ah, Mom. But I'm thirsty.

Por favor, mi'jo, we're leaving in a little while. Play with your Gameboy.

It's dead already, and I don't have the plug. I'm tired, Ma.

I know, mi'jo, but I have to finish this paper for school. I'm almost done. Go get some soda, but just a little. I don't want you wetting the bed.

I'm a big boy now, Mom. I don't wet the bed anymore.

What about when you stayed at your Tia's house? She told me you wet the sofa.

No. It was Ricky. He was sleeping on the sofa, too. He woke up first and said I wet the bed. But my side was dry. When tia came out, Ricky said I wet the bed. But I didn't.

Okay, if you say so, just half a cup and no ice.

No ice?

No ice.

Ah, man. Please?

27.

Last Shoes

Noble Street  
April 26, 2013

Your grandmother called again.

So?

She said she fixed the hem of your dress.

I told you, I'm not going.

Aye, mi'ja.

Please, Mom. I don't want to hear it. I'm not going. I said no. That's it.

Why're you being so difficult? I don't see why you just can't go.

You know why I'm not going.

Your dad would want you to go.

Dad's not going to be there, is he? Is he? Exactly, and you want me to just act like everything's fine. And it's not. Nothing's fine.

I never said everything's fine. What do you want me to do? It's hard for me too you know. I'm trying to make the best of things. Your dad wanted you to have a quinceañera, and you're having one. Your cousins already have their dress. The halls paid for, and so's the caterer. Why are you being like that? Do you know how much this is costing us?

Everything's always about money with you guys, I don't care about Dad's blood money. That's why he's not here.

Cállate, Christina. Don't you ever let me here you talk like that about your father. Do you hear me?

Yes, Mom. I hear you.

Now call your grandmother back, and tell her we're on our way.

But, Mom.

Christina.

Fine, I'll call her.

And hurry it up.

I'm going. So, since Dad won't be there, who's going to give me my muñeca?

28.

Side-tracked  
La Luz Avenue  
April 24, 2013

Oh, shit. Look at Mr GQ. Where you going, fucker, court?

Nah, gúèy, I'm going downtown, over to the new ballpark. They're hiring. You should come.

For what?

For a job, fucker. You telling me you don't need money?

Shit. I don't need ballpark money. I'm cool, gúèy, I got money.

What, from selling Javier's weed? Fuck that. You could buy your own weed, if you had a job.

I don't need to buy weed. I get weed. My cousin hooks it up.

So why're you always giving him money? And you always complain that you're broke.

Shit, bro. Get outta my pockets. Don't worry about my shit. You better not let my cousin hear you talking about that shit, gúèy.

I'm just saying, gúèy. You could have your own money, be able to do what ever you want to do. Shit, I saved up enough to start at Community in the spring.

Now you're going to school? What the fuck's up with you? Who put the battery up your ass? Damn, bro, you're serious?

Hell yeah, I'm serious. Look, my mom's not getting any better, and I got to worry about my brothers. I can't be getting locked up all the time. That shit ain't cool.

Fuck, bro, that's cool, man. Well, shit, good luck, man. So what's up? You still want to smoke this blunt?

I do, but I'm gonna wait. I want to go to this interview with my head on straight. I can't be going in there all blazed out.

Shit, all right man, I see you when you get back?

29.

Detour

Montana Avenue  
March 30, 2013

How long's this train take?

It usually passes pretty quickly.

It's been like fifteen minutes already. Just back up and go around.

There're cars behind us. It won't be that long. Just chill out.

Do trains come through here all the time?

They usually come through at night, but as you can see trains can pass through unexpectedly.

They should build a bridge or something.

A couple blocks over on Yandell you can drive under the train.

So why didn't you cut up that way?

I usually take Montana. I didn't know the train was coming, and it was too late to back up. There was a truck right behind me. I didn't have room. Look the last car's going by. I told you it wouldn't be that long.

That's so weird. Why would they have a train run right through the city? What if there were an emergency, or something?

I'm sure the emergency services know not to go this way. And anyway trains don't come through that often. I wouldn't've driven this way if they did.

Are there any authentic Mexican restaurants around here? I want to try some real Mexican food.

You've had Mexican food in New York, though.

Yeah, but it's not the same. I want real Mexican food.

Do you want to go to Juárez? The food's better over there. We just take Mesa straight to the bridge.

How far's Mesa?

We're on Mesa now. Goes from the west side of El Paso all the way to the bridge to Juárez. We're like fifteen minutes away from Mexico. You could literally jump across the border. So you want to go to Juárez?

I don't know about that. Maybe next visit. Aren't you scared about all the cartel stuff? Is it safe?

Remains

Missouri Avenue  
March 19, 2013

Hey, Elijah, you still here?

Yeah. So, what of it?

You heard the cops. We need to make ourselves scarce, or else. Shit, man, why you ain't pack your stuff yet? Elijah, man, you all right? You don't look so good.

Nah, man, I'm all right. I ran outta my meds, again, but I'm all right. I just need to wait for the nurse to get back. When Mrs. Shaw gets back everything's going to be all right. Hey, you, you seen Mrs. Shaw today?

Hey, bro, how long you say you been off your medication?

What? I ain't off my meds. I just saw Mrs. Shaw. She just gave me my medicine like five minutes ago, with some pizza, and ice cream. You didn't get any ice cream? It was good.

Come on, man, get up. Let me help you pack this stuff up before the cops get here. You don't want no problems, man. Come on let's just go over to Beaumont. I'll go with you.

I don't need to go to the hospital. I'm just waiting for Reggie to get back. We're going to lunch today. Hey, man, you seen Mrs. Shaw? I miss her. Whatever happened to her?

Hey, you two! Where's the party?

Shit. Not now, Stacy.

What? I want to party, too, what ya'll still doin here? You left some stash to come back for, huh? Come on. Be nice, I can be nice if you're nice. Let me see what you got.

Hey, hey, Stacy. You want some of my pills? I don't want them. They make you feel real good.

For real? Why don't you want them? What's wrong with them?

Nothing, I just don't want them. They make me feel loopy.

What? You got your pills? So why haven't you ben taken them? Leave his pills alone, Stacy he needs them.

You ain't my father, and you ain't his. Why you always preaching at people, Martin?

I'm just looking out for my friend, more than what you're doing. Fucking crack whore, get out of here. You're either in someone's pocket or rolling down their pants'. There's nothing here for you. Come on, Elijah let's go. You want to deal with this shit?

IV.  
The Bridge  
Cross between nations  
Between nations, family  
Bridged and bond by blood.

31.

## The Bridge

June 29, 2013

I'm telling you. I didn't know that stuff was there.

She's lying, bro. She knew that shit was in the car. Make her take a piss test. That bitch is gonna come out dirty. I'm telling you she was down with it.

Sir, I suggest you sit there and be quiet.

Man, I wasn't even driving the car, and it's her car anyway. That bitch is lying if she says she didn't know anything. Fucking, bitch!

Why are saying that, Miguel? I didn't know that you had drugs in the car! Tell them the truth.

Ma'am, I'm speaking to you. Can you stop yelling over there?

But he's lying! We were just supposed to go to a party by his friend's house in Juárez. We left early because he got a call from his mom to come home early. And we left the party.

So you're telling me you didn't smell the marijuana in the car?

No, officer, I'm telling the truth. I don't even know how weed smells.

So you wouldn't mind taking a quick drug test then? I'll let you and your friend go, if you come out clean.

Okay, but what if people smoke around me? It could be secondhand smoke in my system. You know like with cigarettes.

So you're going to stick with that story? You didn't know anything?

But it's the truth.

Ok, ma'am, I'm going to ask you to turn around now.

What? Why?

You're under arrest for possession, transporting, and intent to distribute narcotics.

Yeah, put the cuffs on that lying bitch. Ah ha, bitch, you think cause you live on the West Side you ain't Mexican. You're Mexican, too you going down just like me. You wanna play gangsta, huh? Well, get ready for the gangster life, stupid bitch.

Ma'am, I'm giving you one more chance. Is that your story?

32.

The Bridge - II

October 2, 2013

I'm gonna open the trunk and start taking out the signs.

Did you check to make sure they're not damaged?

Yeah, they're good. I made sure there were a couple of inches to spare so they wouldn't get bent.

I hate seeing old, dirty, bent up signs at rallies. We're here for a purpose. The least people could do is take pride in it. God knows those Mexicans are going to be there with their signs and banners. They take the time to make them bold and bright. Everybody can see their message clear. Did you see Ana's sign? It was the same one she used in San Bernardino, Brown, and Laredo.

She's been using those signs since California.

Tell me about it. Look, here she comes.

Oh, god.

Hey, there, Liz, hi, Susan.

Hey, Ana, you're here early.

I know. I wanted to get an early start. Have they started crossing yet?

No, we've been here twenty minutes. We were just finishing up our coffee. Did you bring your signs?

Oh, no, after the last rally I decided to throw those things away. Jess and Greg said they'd bring extra, so I can just borrow some of theirs. Have you seen them yet?

No, I think they're still on their way. Why don't you give them a call?

Okay. I'm running back to my car. It's chilly out here.

Okay, Ana, stay warm. We don't want you catching a cold. We'll see you at the bridges entrance.

Okay, bye, Ana.

See you guys in a little bit.

You see? Now there's a good Mexican. She even helps us keep her kind out of the country.

Oh, Sue, you're terrible. Damn it, now my coffee's cold. Should we ask Ana to go get some more?

### 33.

#### The Bridge - III

September 29, 2013

Hello, Jane?

Hey, Sarah, what's up?

I'm glad you answered. Is Brad there yet?

No, he's not coming in till after lunch. We just got off the phone. Is something the matter?

I'm still stuck on the bridge. The line's not moving at all. There's something going on at the entrance of the bridge, there're a bunch of protestors, with picket signs.

Oh god, I saw something about that on the news this morning. I totally forgot you're staying by your Mom's house in Juárez for the week. I don't know how you do it.

I'm used to it. I used to make the trip everyday to get to school, and I was walking across then.

So how long you think the line's going to be?

Boy, I wish I could tell you. While we've been talking, we still haven't budged. I wonder what they're protesting.

You don't want to know.

Why? What is it?

A group calling themselves Border Convoy. They're protesting Obama and the Dream Act.

Are you kidding me?

Wait, that's not who're on the bridge protesting. It's a group protesting the protestors.

What?

It's a group called Border Network for Human Rights. I think they're from El Paso. They wanted to stop the other protestors, so they got there before the convoy and called the news to get exposure.

My sister's a part of that group. She's always advocating for some cause or another.

Julie? Really? Don't get me wrong I think your sister's one of the nicest people I know. I just can't see her holding signs, yelling at cops, and getting arrested for a cause. She just always seemed so quiet she doesn't seem the type.

Julie was always the Mother Theresa type. She had a hospital for the neighbors' pets. She never treated them. She just put Band-Aids on them and fed them snacks. But that's who she is she's my sister that's one of the reasons I love her so much. If I see her I'm going to stop. I'll call you when I cross, I'll let you know what I'm doing.

The Bridge - IV

October 8, 2013

Hey, Mike, can you make sure the camera's ready to go as soon as we get there?

Sure, no problem. Do you want to stop over at El Tragadero when we're in Juárez?

Juárez? I wasn't planning on going into Juarez. I'm just going to cover the story that's it. We're just getting shots of the protestors on the Mexican side. Why would you want to go into Juárez?

What do you mean? I'm in Juárez every other week. I love Juárez. I was born there. I mean, I moved to El Paso when I was three. So it's not like I was raised there. But I love visiting family, going to parties with my friends, just hanging out in Juárez, you know? It reminds me of my heritage.

El Paso's basically Juárez on this side of the border. I mean everybody speaks Spanish. There're plenty of restaurants from Juárez that have places up and down Mesa. Most of the radio stations play Spanish. There're more Spanish channels than English on the TV. I mean, come on. You know what I mean, right?

I guess, but it's not the same. I love El Paso just the same, but Juárez will always have a special place in my heart. Hey, the extra mic's in the back, right?

It should be, I didn't take any of them out yesterday. They should be behind my seat.

Yeah, they're there. I made sure to bring the longer cables in case the batteries die.

So we're going to be in and out, right?

You really don't want to stop over in Juárez for a quick bite? It won't take more

then twenty minutes it's on me. I'm telling you this place has the most awesome carne asada.

I don't know. I've never been. I don't want to get kidnapped, or worst.

You're kidding right, dude? It's safe. Come on, let's go. After we wrap we can make a quick run to Juarez. What do you say?

35.

The Bridge – V

October 9, 2013

Hurry up, Debra.

Stop rushing me, Hannah.

Oh, my god, you drive so slow.

What do you want it's not my fault there's traffic? You want me to drive through the cars? Or maybe you want me to fly?

Stop being so fucking sarcastic. I just don't want to hear my mom complain. I was supposed to be at the store since two I already sent her to voicemail twice.

So why'd you go to Juárez with me?

You said it wasn't going to take that long. "It'll just be a quick drive to my aunt's" you said.

That's what you get for quoting me. You weren't complaining when she dished out that second serving. This line's so slow today. I think there are protests going on up ahead. I thought there might be a delay, but this is ridiculous. I saw something about it on the news, but I didn't think they'd block the bridge.

Are you serious? I might as well get out and walk. We haven't moved in twenty minutes. Why does your aunt have to cook so good? My mom's going to kill me.

Just call her and tell her you're with me. She loves me. Just let her know we're on the bridge.

If she loves you so much, you call her. You don't know Korean moms. She doesn't mind me hanging out with you in El Paso, but she'd have a fit if she knew I was still going to Juárez.

Why? your mom's been to Juárez plenty of times. I thought she loved Mexican Food? Didn't she even have a shop over there, or something?

Yeah, but she had to close it. The taxes were too high.

You mean the city taxes?

No, the cartel taxes.

Oh.

Yeah, she hasn't been back since last summer. I don't think she'll ever go back there. And, it's sad. She said it reminded her of home. Well, more than El Paso does, but it's all the same to me.

Maybe she'll come back one day. The violence isn't as crazy as it used to be. I mean the craziest thing I've heard is about the students in Southern Mexico, but that's some corrupt mayor or something.

I'm getting out Deb, my mom's calling again. I'm just going to walk the rest of the way.

Just let me talk to her, I'm telling you she'll be okay with it. Are you serious?

You're getting out?

36.

The Bridge- VI

October 15, 2013

Is the traffic always like this?

Yup. It's always like this on Friday night.

I hope this parties' good. I mean I'm not carrying all this crap for nothing. You're sure people are going to be down?

I'm telling you. You're going to sell out before two. We'll be chillin way before the nights over. My cousin Ysela's going to be there, with some of her friends and they party hard. They'll probably buy your shit out as soon as we walk in.

Okay, if you say so. Fuck, this line is taking forever. I hate going to Juárez.

Why? The parties are fucking dope.

Please, it's the same shit as over here. Except more Mexican.

What's wrong with that?

Nothing's wrong with that? I'm just saying. Its not like I'm telling you that you should stop liking Juárez. I don't like going over there, that's all.

But why?

It's just a bunch of bull shit, fucking corrupt cops. My mom used to get bags from Juárez, and sell them in El Paso. One of our trips the cops stopped us before we got to the bridge. They took all my mom's stuff, all of it. One of the fucking cops started staring at me. My mom stood in front of me to get the cops attention. She just told me to get back in the car.

Shit, what happened?

What do you think? I just stayed in the car till my mom got back in. She just broke down when we got back to El Paso.

I don't think she's been back since. Not even when my grandma died.

Fucking cops, they're corrupt everywhere. Look, if you don't want to go we can just go to the SMG concert. It might take longer but it'll still be fun.

I don't know. We're already on the bridge. Do you think they'll stop us if we try to turn around?

Hell yeah they'll stop us. We can just turn around when we get off the bridge.

So we have to go into Juárez?

V.  
South  
Run from the border,  
There are no borders downtown  
It's all Mexico.

37.

Diversion

7<sup>th</sup> Avenue

July 27, 2013

Well, Jim, it seems like those politicians in Washington are never going to get their acts together.

I know, Bob, gridlock as usual.

Turn that shit off, what the hell, man. Turn some music on or something. What the fuck?

What's your problem, guèy? Why don't you calm the fuck down? I can listen to what I want. It's my mom's car. If you want get out, then get the fuck out.

Why don't both of you chill out? Luis, leave him alone. He's driving us right? Manny, put on some music. That shit's depressing.

I don't want to change my mom's settings. She'll have a heart attack if I do. I'm late with the car as it is.

Then turn that shit off, man. I can't take that government shit. They don't give a fuck about us.

Fine. Chill, guèy. Hey, man, how long do we have to wait for your friend?

He'll be here. It's already 6:40, and he said he'd be here by 6:30. Give him a minute. We just got here.

You think we missed him?

Nah, he'd text me.

I don't like waiting around this neighborhood. I'm getting hungry. And? I am missing dinner for this, Sarah.

I thought you were cool, guèy, I told you I'd give you an ounce, or something, for

taking me. What's up with your cousin, Sarah?

Come on, Manny. Just chill out. I'll buy you some Chico's later. I'm already letting you print your Psych. paper, and I'm hooking you up with Vero. Come on, just relax.

See, this is him texting me now.

See, Manny? We'll be outta here in a sec. Don't worry.

Whatever, just tell your friend to hurry up.

Shit, he's stuck on the other side of the bridge. Hey, man, do you mind driving over?

What? Hell no, across the bridge? I thought you were meeting him on this side. I'm not taking my mom's car across the bridge. I'm sorry, Sarah. I just can't. What if something happens? I'm not bringing that shit across the bridge, you're crazy man. No, hell no!

Hey, Sarah, talk to your cousin.

There's nothing to talk about I said no. I'm not going.

Manny, let's just hurry up. It'll be quick.

I said no, I'm not... Hey, man, let go of me, what do you think you're doing?

Luis, what the fuck? What are you doing? Let him go! Let him go!

Fuck that! Stop being a pussy, gûey! Drive the fucking car before I break your fucking neck. And leave your ass on the curb, by the garbage.

Let me go, man. Get the fuck off me. I can't I can't breathe. All right man!

Yeah. I know it's all right, now let's go.

Luis, what are you doing? We can't take my aunt's car.

Yo, shut the fuck up. Don't you start. I said let's go. Start the car. I said start the

car! Did you hear me?

38.

Poison

Paisano Drive  
August 14, 2013

Put your hands on the car!

But it wasn't my fault. She must a been suicidal or somethin. She just strolled in front of me. I'm tellin you, officer. She's gotta be drunk. I wasn't speedin or nothing. She just jumped in front of my car.

I'm not going to tell you again. Put your hands onto the vehicle! Sir, put your hands on the vehicle!

Hey, buddy, do you know who I am? You wanna lose your badge?

I don't care who you are, don't move!

All right, all right, you don't have to yell. I hear you, what's your problem, man?

Don't move! Don't you fucking move!

Hey, man, why are you putting me in cuffs. It's not my fault, man. She just jumped out in front of me. I didn't see her till it was too late.

I said don't you fucking move, sit on the ground!

What? Why? What the hell are you doing?

Get on the ground!

All right, you don't have to yell, chill out man.

You stay on the ground! Hold on, ma'am, hold on! Can you hear me, ma'am. Don't move. You've been in an accident. Just hold on. Oh, my god. This is Officer Gutierrez. I need an ambulance on the southeastern corner of Mesa

and Paisano. There's a woman down at the scene. She's been struck by a Vehicle. And isn't responding.

Officer Gutierrez, this is dispatch. Hold your position. Help's on the way.

Did you hear that, ma'am? Help is on the way, just hold on!

Is she all right? Hey, officer, is she okay?

You just remain on the ground. Back up will be here any moment.

Phone's ringing.

Get on the ground!

Are you gonna answer the phone?

I'm not going to tell you again!

But the lady's phone's ringing. Maybe you should answer it.

Get your face down on the ground. I'm going to stun you if you don't remain still!

I'm just sayin. Phones ringing.

Be quiet! Hello? Hello, this is Officer Gutierrez. May I ask who's speaking?

Officer? Who is this? Why are you answering my daughter's phone?

Ma'am, please calm down. You have to calm down. There's been an accident. Wait, hold on. Hey! I told you to stay down! Get down or I'll fire! Get down!

## 39.

### Hang-ups

Paisano Drive

August 14, 2013

Fuck, I shouldn't've drunk that last glass of wine. My stomach's killing me. Shit, it's the last one I'll be having for a while anyway. Pick up your phone, asshole. I know you see it's me calling. Fucking jerk, answer your phone. Fuck this. I'm just gonna walk over there. It's not that far. It's just a couple blocks. Fucking asshole, I know you're home. You think I'm so stupid? Watch when I get there. Some stupid bitch is probably there. You're probably fucking right now. Fucking asshole, I hate you. I can't wait to see your face when I ring your bell. It's probably one of those gueras you meet at U.T.E.P. You're probably reading her some of your fucking poetry, or some other shit. Let's see that smug look on your face when I tell you I'm pregnant. Let's hear what your stupid poetry has to say about that. I bet Ginsberg never got anybody pregnant. But what if that look doesn't change? What if that smile is the same? What if that smug expression just stays plastered to your face? I think I'd just die, or kill myself. Why don't you just answer your phone? Fuck, David, answer your phone! I'm so stupid, I knew I shouldn't've trusted you. My mother was right. I shouldn't've trusted you. It's just like the time I caught you with that bitch at The Plaza. She looked so happy. In her red dress, stupid slut. And you, lying to me, telling me she's your cousin, and you're just picking her up. So then why'd you look so nice? You had your best jeans on, and I could smell the cologne that I bought for you. You're such a liar. Wait till I see her, I'm going to pull her fucking hair out of her head. Why won't you just answer your phone? Come on, David. Answer your phone. Oh, my god, it's not stopping, it's not stop

Oh, god, oh, god, oh, shit, what did I do, what did I do? Where's my phone? Hey,

hey you, call 911. I think she's hurt. Call 911. Are they answering?

40.

Offbeat

Overland Avenue  
September 18, 2013

Which one is he?

He's the one with the green Nashville hat.

Dude. He's black.

Yeah. So?

I mean, I'm not racist or anything. But are you sure he's going to fit into the band?

We're trying to do something new here, not make political statements.

Dude, he's good. I'm not saying he's Hendrix, or as good as Page, or Gilmour, or some of those dudes. But, shit. He can play, and I've seen him work a crowd.

It's a group decision, so it doesn't matter what I say.

Why don't you just meet the dude, before you make up your mind about him?

Whatever, dude.

Hey, Charlie?

What's the word, Matty, Matt? Who's this?

Oh, this is the friend I told you about, Christian. He's the one looking for a drummer for his band.

Hey.

Wow. You in a band, man? What kind of music you play? I play in my Dad's band. It's for our church. I don't mind. At least I get to play, mostly bluesy stuff. But I'd love to be playing shit like Zeppelin, or Sabbath. What do you like?

Yeah, we're trying to put a band together. We don't know what kind of sound we wanna produce. But, you know, the good stuff, regular shit. I think my cousin might be

playing for us though. He's already in a band, but I think I could convince him to play for us.

What? Which cousin? Who're you talking about? You never mentioned you had a cousin who played.

I just thought about him. You haven't met him before. He lives in the Northeast.

Oh, for real? Okay, sorry about that, Charlie. Hey, can I give you a call later?

Yeah, sure, dude. No worries. I don't want to be late for work. I just headed over here cause you said you wanted to meet up. But, yeah, give me a call later.

All right bro, sorry about that. Nice meeting you, though.

41.

Tyrant

Texas Avenue  
November 12, 2013

You got the tent?

Yeah, it was in the garage. York got back early and took it out the car before he went to work.

He knows where you're taking it?

I told him I was going to a sleep over.

So that's a no?

Yeah, that's a no. Dude, if I told him where we're going he'd tell my Dad. I'm doing this, bro. They can't stop me. No one can. It's time we let those Wall Street dudes know what's up. You know my dad got fired at the bank, right?

Yeah, so?

It was those Wall Street dudes. They sent some memo out that my dad was too old, or something.

Dude, your dad's like a hundred.

Fuck you, dude!

Shit, fucker! You didn't have to hit me so hard. I was just kidding. But you gotta admit, your dad's getting up there. How old is he anyway?

Shit, I don't know.

What do you mean, I don't know?

I don't know. I never asked. He never volunteered the information. I don't know.

That's weird, dude. How the hell don't you know how old your own father is?

Shit, dude. There's lots of things people don't know they know. And things people think they know, but really don't. There's stuff we want to know but we'll never know. And shit that we'll wish we never found out. That's just how some shit is.

Dude, what the fuck you talking about? Did you smoke all the weed already?

What, nah, man, fuck you! I still got a G in my sock, but you ain't smokin.

What?

I'm just messing with you, man. You got the blunt?

Yeah, but let's roll it when we get to the plaza. I want to smoke Jenny out, too.

Jenny's going to be there?

Yup, you ready to go?

I just want to stop at the Circle K to buy a couple gallons a water. I don't want to keep leaving the park once we get there.

Yeah, me neither, shit, man. You're a regular Daniel Boone. You know your camping shit.

Daniel who?

Dude, you don't know who Daniel Boone is? The guy with the skunk on his head?

Man, you can't take a joke. Yeah, I know who he is, the hunter dude who fought at the Alamo. Anyway, the water's for if the cops use their pepper spray.

Pepper spray? You think we're going to get pepper sprayed?

Dude, I'm joking.

42.

## Hooked

Artisan Hotel, North Kansas

October 19, 2013

Arnold! Yo, Arn! Open the door! Man, it's Gilbert! Arnold, come on, man. I don't have time for this shit.

What the fuck? Hey, man, you trying to break down the door or something?

Where's Reggie?

He left already.

What? What do you mean he left already?

He's gone. He took some of his shit. And told me to keep the rest if I wanted.

You're shitting me. Did he tell you to give me anything?

Yeah, man, relax. He left a bag in the closet for you.

Which closet?

Next to the kitchen.

When're you getting out of here?

Shit, I'm not going anywhere they're gonna have to drag me out of here kickin and screaming.

You're crazy man I'd just leave. There's other spots you can find. This place is shit. Why're you fighting to stay here?

All my friends are here, man. This is downtown El Paso. It's the place to be. The park's right up the block, plenty of people to talk to. Even the cops don't bug me, they just let me be. Long as I don't bother folks. Long as I just do my thing, you know?

It'll be the cops dragging you out of here if you don't pack your shit up, man. It's Jen isn't it? Hey, man, you can't save her. She's hooked on that shit. It's got her, man.

Ain't nothing you or anybody else got to say to change her mind about that. She's gotta want to get off that shit. She has to want to live. And right now she wants that high, more than she wants anything else. You got to let her go.

Did you find what you were looking for?

What?

Did you find your shit?

Hey, man, you don't gotta be like that. I'm just saying.

Just get your shit. And go, man. I don't remember asking anybody's opinion.

Well, fuck you. I got my shit, all right. Lock your door, man. Sorry for bothering you, motherfucker, and I hope the cops come and kick your fucking ass. Stupid motherfucker, I'm just trying to help you out.

43.

Mining

Stanton Street  
December 5, 2013

No, fine! That's fine. I'll get my shit before the week's out. No, don't touch it.

Leave my shit where it is. Yeah. Whatever, just don't touch my shit.

Hey are you okay?

What? Yeah, I'm fine. The set's over. Did you need something?

No, well, yes, well, not really. I was wondering. If you'd sign one of my CD's, I mean your CDs, I mean the CD that I bought, of your music?

What? Look, I'm kind of busy. I need to get ready for another party, and my ride just cancelled on me, permanently.

I know, I kind of overheard you arguing with your boyfriend. I could give you a ride. Where're you spinning? I don't mind. My car's off Stanton and Texas. It'd just take me a minute to run and get it. I have room for all your equipment, and stuff.

Ah, my girlfriend. Nah, that's okay. I don't even know you. It's pretty far it's all the way in Albuquerque. I gotta hold on to as much cash as possible.

Oh, I didn't mean anything by that. I mean I thought it was some dumb dude, or something. It's cool, really. I'm off till Tuesday, and I love your music. I've been following your sets for the past two, three years.

I really don't want to put you out. I guess I could give you gas money at least. I've got like fifty bucks extra after tonight's set.

No, really, it's okay. You're one of my idols. I'd love to watch you spin, and I dig your vibes. You seem like cool people.

If you don't mind, sure, why not?

Awesome. I'll go get my car. Do you want me to carry some of your stuff now? I'm stronger than I look.

Nah, it'd be easier to load the stuff up one time, instead of going back and forth. I'll just wait in front.

Okay, I'll be right back.

Hey. Did you want a shot before we left? I've still got to close my tab at the bar. If you're giving me a ride, we don't have to leave right now. We could chill for a bit.

Really? You want to have a drink with me? Okay, but just one. I'm driving.

I got you, girl. You'll be all right. One shot won't hurt you.

Okay, let's go. I can't believe I'm actually hanging out with you. I didn't even think you'd want to sign my CD, and now we're having drinks like best friends.

What? Ah, yeah, so what do you drink?

44.

EP-Con

El Paso Convention Center  
September 11, 2013

Hang it more to the left.

Make up your mind. Why don't you move it, and I see if it looks right?

You almost got it, just another inch to the left.

How about now?

Yeah, that'll work. Let me secure this side. Okay, grab the cords and fasten your side.

These cords are too short. Where're the red ones?

Under the table.

Got it. All right, I'm finished. I think it looks good. What do you think?

Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. Let's put the flyers out in front of the comics.

We should build a Jenga design with the flyers. Every time someone grabs a flyer from the wrong spot the whole thing will come down sending flyers all over the place. It'll look like an accident, but when everybody rushes to help pick up the flyers they'll see the shop's logo, and address.

Dude, that's a great idea. When'd you come up with that one?

Oh, I've got plenty tricks to use at conventions to get noticed. Hey, where's Vince?

He's still getting autographs. Did you see the zombies he got pictures with? They're way better than last year. I want a picture with the new light saber.

Dude, what are you, some kind of fan boy? We're here to promote for Asylum. How're people gonna know about our comic shop if you guys are just out here paying for pictures and autographs for other characters? We've got to promote our work, our

characters. Don't you want to put our work on the map? We gotta let people know El Paso has good comic books coming out of here, too. Screw that Manga crap. I mean I love the style, but we gotta show our shit.

You don't have to preach to me. I'm with you, bro. Look, I'll go find Vince. Amy's on her way. She's bringing the extra t-shirts, and posters. Can you hold down the fort until I find him, or Amy gets here?

Sure, whatever.

Dude, don't be like that. Chill out, we just got here, and it's only the first day of the convention. Did you need anything from the vendors, like a soda, or nachos?

I really wanted to stop by Liquid Squid's booth. I like their new coloring books design, and I wanted to grab some plush bots from Michelle and Ray, but whatever.

It's cool, I can go, while I'm looking for Vince. Just relax man, look those kids are walking this way. Start showing them our stuff. Where're the fliers?

45.

**Break Bread**

Arizona Avenue  
September 24, 2013

It's right down here, just a little farther. It's right off Arizona.

How'd you find this place? You sure they're on the up and up?

Mrs. Maria told me. You know, the main nurse at the shelter.

Yeah, she's hot. Man, if I were twenty years younger.

You'd still be a drunk, and she'd still be too good for you.

Fuck you, Charlie, I was on heroin twenty years ago. I wasn't a drunk yet.

Hey, be respectful in this place, no cussing.

Ah, man, they got rules to eat. I don't know about this place.

It ain't a rule, but the lady's real nice. And she ain't just given you some shit to eat.

She's making you a gourmet meal. Five star, man, I mean real class.

And it's free?

I told you, man, for us, it's free. The lady, she doesn't charge us, but fat cats, she empties their pockets. She makes them pay for our meals, and when they eat, it's right next to us. They don't get no special treatment, or nothing.

The way you say it this lady's some kind of saint, or Mother Theresa.

Shit, she just might be. Here's the place.

Mustard Seed, huh? Hey, I thought you said no cussin'?

Shit, you're right. I almost forgot. All right. I'll stop now. I don't wanna embarrass the lady.

Hey, ain't that Milford?

Yeah it is. Hey, Milford, how you been?

Hey, Charlie, Angelo, long time.

What're you doing here, my man?

I been coming here for lunch for the past two weeks. I'm gonna start taken some of the classes they offer.

What? Ain't you too old to be going back to school?

It's that's type of thinking that'll keep you stuck.

Man, everybody's preaching today. I think I need some air. I'll be right back. Save my seat, Charlie.

You good, Angelo?

46.

Exchange

Leon Street

September 29, 2013

Are you sure you don't want me to go with you?

No, Mom. I'm in college now. I can go by myself. I'm not going to be there long, just an hour, or two. It's a church. What could happen?

Don't ask me that. You're just going to make start to think of things. Is your phone charged yet?

Almost.

So why're you going to a church so far? There're plenty of churches near here.

Not Korean ones. It's not that far. It's close by Eastwood.

Why does it have to be a Korean Church? What's the name of it again?

I think its Bethesda. My sociology professor wants us to go to a religious service from another culture, and write about it. My friend Seo said I could go to church with her. She's going to come to Mass next week.

So she's Korean?

Ah, yeah, Mom. She's Korean.

Don't, yeah Mom me. I'm just asking, she doesn't have to be Korean.

But, it's a Korean church, and her name's Seo.

Okay, okay. I got it. Well, just make sure you put gas in the car, the lines already past the quarter tank. If you get stuck I can't get you.

I know. How could you? I have the car.

You're lucky it's Sunday. Keep getting smart.

Sorry, Mom. Did you see my jacket? I thought I left it on the couch.

I think it's in the kitchen. Did you look in there?

VI.

West

Swanson hawks, sun blind

Solar mirrors shine below

Reflecting the sun.

47.

Sighting  
Scenic Drive  
March 14, 2013

Bro, d'you see that?

See what?

You didn't see that light in the sky?

Dude, you're trippin. You need to chill with all the D.M.T. Stick to bud you just want to relax and listen to good music.

Dude, I'm telling you, there was a light in the sky. It was purplish, with a gold ring around it. It was floating back and forth, and when I turned to ask you if you saw it, it was gone.

It ain't there now. And, I still think you're trippin.

So what? You don't believe in U.F.O.'S, or life on other planets, and shit?

Fuck no, are you kidding? What do you think? They're gonna beam you up, or teleport you away?

I didn't say that. But you're telling me that as big as space is, you don't think there's life out there?

I don't know. Maybe.

What about a higher power?

Sometimes, I guess. I mean I don't believe in all that Bible shit, but I do believe in God. I went to Catholic school for a couple years, but when my dad left, Mom couldn't afford it anymore, so I went to public school. That's not why I don't believe in the Bible it's all the bullshit contradictions in it. But God, that's different. I've seen shit that makes me believe in God.

Yeah, like what?

If I told you, you wouldn't believe me. Hey, man, stop hogging the blunt.

Oh, shit, I was listening to you and forgot I had it. Sorry, my bad.

Man, the blunt's half gone. You're rolling the next one.

But, you roll better. I always roll it loose. Where's your bowl?

Left it at home.

Shit, fine, pass me the lighter. I'll roll it when we get inside.

Did you really see a light in the sky?

48.

Dressing Room #2  
Executive Center Boulevard  
March 29, 2013

That bitch!

What? Who're you talking about?

Fucking, Roxy, she's dancing with one of my customers again. Fucking Puerto Rican bitch. She's such a fucking slut.

So what? Dance with one of hers. What's the big deal?

What's the big deal? What's the big deal? Please, Jennifer, let someone dance with one of your regulars. You'd drag that bitch out of here by the back of the neck.

You got that right, but that's me. Don't get all crazy, unless you gonna back that shit up, and you ain't gonna back that shit up.

Please, she ain't worth my time. What I look like? Fighting over some fucking trick? And anyway, I'm a be out a here by the end of the month.

Girl, where you think you going? You know you going to be here next week, next month, next year, and after. Just like the rest of us.

Fuck that. Me and Brad've been talking. He said he doesn't want me dancing anymore. He's coming back at the end of the month, and he's going to marry me.

Keep believing that shit. You gonna be in for a surprise. He's gonna come back, go to college, and get one of those young stupid bitches in school pregnant. Then they're gonna get married and start their fucked up life, the end.

Fuck you, Jennifer, you don't know shit. Just cause your old man knocked you up. And forced you to start working here, doesn't mean everybody's life's gonna end up like that.

You're so stupid. You're here just like the rest of us, shakin' your ass, letting dudes rub on your tits. Didn't you meet him in the Champagne Room? You think he's gonna marry some slut who sucked his dick. In the back room of some strip club? Bitch please!

Hey, bitches, what's the word? What's wrong with ya'll, oh, you mad, Vero? Shit, just dance with one of my customers. Why you always get so butt hurt? You act like it's your boyfriend or somethin.

Hey, Roxy, check this out. This bitch thinks her soldier boy is gonna come and rescue her. She thinks he's gonna swoop in, like Superman, and fly her the fuck out of here. And, yeah, she's mad you stole her customer. Matter of fact, she said she's gonna kick your ass.

She said what?

49.

Bus Stop

Western Paisano Drive

April 12, 2013

Hey.

What's up? Where's your sister?

She's sick again. Staying home.

Again? Man, she's always sick. Is your mom staying with her?

It's not that bad this time. You know we just missed the bus.

I don't care. The wait's not that long.

Did you finish the assignment for Mrs Alvarez? I only did the summary.

Nope. I didn't even start.

Shit, you're gonna fail if you don't do it. You already failed the last test.

I know. I'm thinking about just taking the G.E.D. You going to watch them knock down Asarco towers

For what?

What do you mean, for what? It's historic, man. It'll be cool watching the smoke stacks fall. It's like an event the news is going to be there and everything.

Yeah, and all the shit that's in those stack's is going to be there too. Nah, I'm going to be helping my mom seal the windows, and the doors, to try and keep some of that shit out of the house. Mom says, enough of the towers got in the house when Dad used to work there. Fuck those towers.

Hey, my dad and uncles worked there, too. So'd my Grandpa. He said he was lucky to get the job. He wasn't even eighteen when he started there. He got the job because his friend's dad worked with the railroad. But he always said that job made him a man, he

could support his family, send money home. I mean, I wouldn't work there, but I'm grateful he did. Those towers' coming down is the end of an era.

Some things need to end bus's coming. Where's your pass?

I lost it again.

Dumb ass, I guess you got money for the bus?

50.

Mischief

North Mesa Street

October 4, 2013

But, Indra, you know he's going to ask where you are. Why don't you just come home now?

I'm not missing another practice. I already missed two for the season, and I don't want to get cut from the team. And so what if he asks? Just because he asks doesn't mean you have to tell him. Just act like you didn't see me.

But I don't like lying to Dad. He always knows when I'm lying anyway. Just come home. You don't know. Maybe he'll let you miss Jumu'ah.

Are you kidding me? He didn't even want to think of his daughter on the basketball team. It doesn't matter if it's all girls. He nearly had a stroke when I told him I was joining the team. Why do you think I didn't mention Friday practices in the first place? Just don't say anything. This is him calling now. Hey, Dada. No, no I haven't seen Zariah. What? I don't know. She was supposed to meet me after seventh period. Yeah, Dada, no, I'm meeting some friends at the library to finish up on a project. I have to, Dada. I don't have a choice. My teacher told us we have to finish the project by Monday. I know I'm missing Jumu'ah. But we have service on Saturday, and I figured. No, I know. I wouldn't miss Saturday service, too. Okay, Dada, I'll try to find her. Yes. Yes, I'll be home right after the meeting's over. Okay, Dada, love you.

I can't believe you. You know he's going to find out anyway. You should just go home.

Come on, Zariah. Just don't say anything. You don't have to lie. Just don't

say anything.

If he asks me if I saw you, I'm not going to lie.

I'm not asking you to lie. I'm asking you to shut up. Just talk about your day or something. Just talk about service Uncle Musa should be there. Just start him up about the festival next month and tell him you need a new Thob. Just don't tell him I went to practice, okay, Zariah?

51.

### Reunion

North Resler Drive

September 17, 2013

Look at this chick. Miss? Excuse me, Miss? Ma'am, what do you think you're doing?

What? Nothing. Nothing. I was just looking for the expiration date on this box. The numbers are so small. I need my glasses. Can you tell me the date?

I saw you, Miss.

What? You saw me? What do you mean? Of course you saw me. I'm standing right here.

I saw you put it in your bag.

Put what in my bag?

Miss, I saw you put the pack of crackers in your bag.

I didn't put anything in my bag. You saw me looking at the label. I just asked for your help. The box is still in my hand. Here take it. I don't need this.

Miss, don't make me call the manager. I saw you drop the pack of Ritz crackers in your purse. Just put it back.

I told you I didn't take anything. Now I'm leaving. Get your hand off of me.

Mrs Gutiérrez, haven't seen you in awhile. I'm sorry I missed you at the door there was a problem at one of the registers. How've you been?

I'm just mortified. I'm trying to leave, and this young woman's been harassing me.

What? It's, Natalie, right?

Yes, sir, I mean, Mr. Martinez.

I'll handle this, help out at the information desk.

But, Mr Martinez, she has a... I saw her put.

I'll handle this. Go over to information.

I'm so sorry, Mrs Gutiérrez. Here's you're cart. You must've forgotten it again.

What? Oh, Joseph, I didn't see you. Where's my head today?

Is Frederick outside?

Yes. Yes, Freddy's in the car, with the baby. He's waiting right at the front. Come say hello.

Oh, no I can't. tell Freddy I'm sorry. That register I mentioned has been giving problems all day. I have to make sure it gets back online. The company's losing money if a register's down. My friend Duncan here is going to help you with your cart.

Oh, all right. Well, Freddy will be disappointed.

I know, but I think he'll understand. He's a manager himself. He knows how it is.

My, Joseph, you've grown into a fine young man, nothing like that little rascal. Who I'd had to keep after school. Now don't you work too hard, you hear? Don't kill yourself for a company. That's how my Lester died. I can't believe Freddy still works for them twenty-four years he worked at those towers.

Don't work yourself up, Mrs Gutiérrez. Duncan's going to make sure you get back to the car okay. And don't worry. Freddy's not like his dad. He already told me he found another job working with the city. You take care of yourself, Mrs Gutiérrez.

Who was that, Mr Martinez? Did she work here before?

I'm sorry about that, someone should have told you about Mrs Gutiérrez. She hasn't been the same since her husband died a couple years ago. I got caught up at the register and lost track of time. I didn't even see her come in. If you ever see her in here

just flag me down, okay?

Got it, Mr Martinez. That's so sad about her husband. I don't know what I'd do if something like that happened to me.

Yeah, ah, Natalie, can you get back to the information desk now? The lottery is backing up again.

52.

Stand Off  
Isla Del Rey Drive  
October 12, 2013

Grenade! Move it, soldier. Move it or lose your ass!

Daniel! Daniel!

Yeah, Mom, what's up?

Daniel, your cousin's here! Come downstairs!

Send him up, Ma!

No, you come down!

Mom, I'm in the middle of a battle. Just send him.

Daniel, you come down here right this minute! Don't make me come up there!

How's your mom, David we missed her at the barbeque.

She's okay, Tia. The car broke down again.

I swear, I don't know why she doesn't just get a new one. I offered her the money, you know. Her and her pride, she's just like your grandfather. And your sister, is she behaving?

Yeah, Tia, she's good, too. She got into community. She's going to Valle Verde in the fall.

Good for her. She can go to U.T.E.P. after, if she does well enough. But I'm sure she'll do just fine. Daniel!

I'm right here, Mom, dag. Hey, David, what's up?

Your cousin's here to take you out. Go get ready.

What? Where? I don't want to go out. I'm in the middle of a clan battle. My friend's'll kick me out of the clan, if I just up and quit.

You and those games. You're getting too old for those things. It's your first year of college and you haven't been out once. Your cousin's nice enough to take you out with him. So go get ready. And hurry up!

Mom.

Hurry up!

I'm going!

Watch it, mister.

Yes, ma'am.

Here's a hundred, David. Don't get him home too late.

Yes, Tia.

Daniel! I don't hear the shower! I swear, that boy.

If he doesn't want to go, Tia, it's cool. We can go another time or something. We can just hang out here if he wants.

No, he needs to get out more. And anyway your uncle's bringing company by, and we want the house to ourselves for the night. Daniel, are you in the shower yet? I swear.  
Daniel?

53.

Phone Call

Bellas Arters Drive  
November 6, 2013

Hello.

Hey, man, what's the word?

Ah, nothing much. Maintaining. What's good with you?

Just finishing up lunch for the kids. Thought I'd give you a call, see how you're doing.

I can't complain. School's going, and teachings always cool. I can't wait to finish, though. How's Isaiah and Brendon?

Those two, growing like weeds. School's finished this spring for you, right?

Yes, sir.

So what are you planning to do when you're done? You going back to New York?

I guess I plan on visiting, but I don't know about moving back to the city. Shit's as crazy as ever there. When's the last time you were in Brooklyn?

I was there for Labor Day. We stayed by my Mom's house. I didn't get to take Rochelle to Jouvert. But it was okay. The kids loved the parkway. Brooklyn's changed, though, boy. The parkway lock up. You can't even walk with the trucks anymore. They have gates sectioning off the streets, shit, there're cops on every corner. It might as well be a parade for the cops.

I heard since 9/11 they changed up a lot of shit. That's a big part of the reason I haven't gone back.

What's the other part?

Same shit.

You still beefing with the family?

It's not me. They just see the world differently. I just got tired of arguing with them.

Have you ever thought it's you?

What? What do you mean? You know my Dad and my Mom, she doesn't even live in New York anymore. There's no real rush to go back there.

That's what I mean, maybe you see things differently because you're supposed to. You were one of the first from the crew to leave Brooklyn, I mean permanently. You know most people leave for school, but they come back home. You always wanted to see something different. If you saw the world like the rest of your family, you'd probably still be in Brooklyn doing the same things, but you don't.

Yeah, I guess. But it'd be nice to feel like I had a place to go, instead of feeling like I'm always searching for a place.

There's nothing wrong searching for better. Just make sure you enjoy the search. Don't just get caught up in the move, you'll never get to enjoy the little things from each place, you'll just always focus on what's next. And what's better than today?

54.

Revelations

Redd Road

November 24, 2013

Dave, your book bag's open.

Oh, thanks, man. Forgot to close it. Did you see the game last night?

How could he drop that pass? It was right in his hands.

I know. I was like, dude? I was so pissed. I had ten bucks on that game.

Screw that, you shouldn't bet on sports. You know they're fixed. You're just wasting your money.

Get out of here. So they planned that catch on the thirty last night?

Man, have you seen them practice? They always make those crazy catches.

Yeah.

You going to the game Saturday?

Nope, I'm going to temple, for Mincha.

To what?

Temple, it's like church. You know I'm Jewish, right?

Nah, I didn't. But, you're Mexican.

So?

Nothing, I just figured you for Catholic, you know? So what do you guys do there?

Does the pastor preach and stuff?

He's called a rabbi, and the prayers're called daveing. But orthodox call it tefilah.

Sounds like a lot of stuff.

Eh, it's not so bad. I figure every religion has stuff. It's about traditions, you know?

It's going to be a good game. You're gonna miss it man. My cousin ran for three

touchdowns last week.

It's cool. There'll be other games. What did you get on Mrs Augustine's test?

I got a B.

Shit, I got a C, but she said I could make it up. You going to Sonics?

Nah, I want Whataburger. I'm meeting Nancy. And Michelle there to start going over the final project.

I'm supposed to meet up with Bobby and Irene at the mall tomorrow.

So come hang out with us now. If you need some cash I'll treat for lunch.

All right, cool. Woo, almost forgot my USB.

55.

### Traction

West Trans- Mountain

January 29, 2014

Shit! Can you hear me? Stay with me, man. You okay? Ah, hell, man, don't move.

I'll be right there. Just stay still.

Ah, shit. My leg, my fucking leg!

Hold on, man, I'll be right there. Stop moving. What the fuck, dude? Didn't you see how close you were to the edge?

Hell no, I didn't see the drop. If I saw the shit, I wouldn't've fell. Fuck, man, help me get this shit off my leg.

Your bike's fucked, man. What're you gonna tell Chuck?

Shit. Fuck that. What am I going to tell Mary? I wasn't supposed to be riding today. Fuck, my leg!

Ah man, your leg looks pretty banged up. Can you straighten it? Try to stay down for a minute.

Just help me up. It's already getting late. I told Mary I'd be home before her, and she's going to be pissed if she sees I haven't fed the dogs yet.

Dude, we're going to be late any way. Your bike's fucked. How're we going to get down the mountain before the sun goes down? I'd go ride to your car, but I can't ride down by myself. Let's just take our time and walk down.

Shit, man, I don't want to hear Mary complain. You can make it this isn't your first ride.

It's not, but this is a fucking mountain. I can't do this shit by myself. Let's just walk down this shit's too steep for me.

Fuck it, man. Let me get your bike and I'll ride to my car. I'll drive back to where we started and meet you.

Fuck that. It's already getting dark. What if you fall again? I won't know where you are. Why don't we just walk? Mary's not going to kill you.

I know that. I just don't want to hear her. You know how it is with a wife.

Nope, that's why I'm single. I can't tolerate people's shit, and most people can't tolerate my shit. Fuck, dude, I'm not walking up the mountain with a broken bike in the dark.

Just leave the bike. We can come back for it. I'll ride fast. It'll be fine. Just walk back, and I'll be there in less than half an hour.

You haven't even tried to walk yet, dude. How do you know you can even make the ride, let alone ride fast? You're crazy, dude.

You gonna let me hold the bike?

Fuck it. If you think you can make it, go ahead.

Shit, my leg. Fuck.

Dude, let's just walk.

I can make it.

You sure?

56.

Dilemma

Doniphan Drive  
December 27, 2013

Say there, you look like you could use a hand. Everything okay?

I think it's the radiator. I'm not sure.

Kind of late for a young lady to be out on her own like this, no?

I know. It's an emergency. I'm making a house call out on Country Club. A mares gone into labor.

Well, pop the hood. I'll take a look.

Really? Thanks. I get the worst reception out here. I've been trying to call ahead and let them know that I'm stuck on the road. But close by. The reception out here is horrible. They need to put up more street lights out here. I was scared to leave my car for help.

I can tell you this car ain't going nowhere no time soon. The radiator's busted, and you need a new pump you're leaking fluid, bad.

Oh, damn it, I need to get there. There've already been complications with the mare. I should've just stayed there from earlier.

I could give you a ride, if you need. I live on Country Club. It shouldn't be too far from my house.

I couldn't ask you to do that. You're probably on your way home. You've already been so helpful, but thank you.

No problem, darlin, I don't mind. It's the neighborly thing to do. Let me just clean off the front seat. I got my work gear there, and it's kinda filthy.

I don't want to put you out.

It's no problem. Believe me.

You really don't mind? Okay, thank you so much.

All right. It'll just take a sec for me to move that stuff. Wouldn't want to get that outfit of yours dirty.

I really appreciate this. You might know the family with the mare, and they're probably your neighbors'.

Like I said, don't mention it. My pleasure.

Tafari Nugent (Brooklyn, United States 1976) is currently pursuing an M.F.A. in Creative Writing, at the University of Texas at El Paso. Both, poetry and short fiction have been the crux of this writer's work. Focusing on the complex idea of narrative construction during the time in the program has led to attempts to develop writings, which give voice to particular subjects through the focalization of marginalized characters, during events constructed/connected to current times in the second decade of the twenty-first millennium.

This writer has also worked as an editor on the Rio Grande, a publication at The University of Texas at El Paso. Taking part in the editing of other writers has helped this writer to connect to what a wide variety of styles, taste, and audience expectation can be. As well, this writer has been published in the Chrysalis, a publication of the El Paso Community College, and The Rio Grande Review, a publication of The University of Texas.