

PAPER RIVER

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

BY JUAN MAURICIO WILLIAMSON



CHARACTERS

RODRIGO 22 years old. An uneducated, yet incredibly eager and curious young man. In spite of his young age, his suffered existence has taught him the bitter notion of how the world works. He refuses to believe his miserable present is all that will wait for him throughout the rest of his life.

SAMUEL 67 years old. A retired teacher and columnist who, although very simple and humble, is a man with a high reputation of being cultured and wise. A terrible outcome of events caused an early retirement of his job.

SOFIA 21 years old. Samuel's granddaughter, and teacher at the local school. She is extremely passionate about her work, especially because of the stories she has heard of her grandfather. She has an exceptionally rare quality in this part of the world; she always tries to see the good in everyone.

TORIBIO 40 years old. Commander of the 2nd front of the Socialist guerilla. He is the man responsible to control the town of San Vicente del Caguán while the guerrilla establishes itself all around the demilitarized zone. Even though he is young, he has proven to be a fearless leader.

AURELIO 64 years old. He has devoted his entire professional life to teaching and is Samuel's closest friend. He knows Colombia's internal conflict like few other men, as he and Samuel have experienced the devastation of war both in their professional and personal lives.

MANUEL 24 years old. He is Rodrigo's best friend since childhood. More than a friend, Rodrigo considers Manuel to be the only family he has in this world.

ROSA 5 years old. An innocent and sweet young girl who is yet to be aware of the circumstances she lives. She is destined to have a better childhood than the ones her parents had.

FARMER A hard workingman, who lives of what he cultivates. One of the thousands of nameless and faceless victims in Colombia's internal war.

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CLARA Sofia's best friend. One of the few people in the world that Sofia trusts blindly and unquestionably.

GUERRILLA
FIGHTER 1 Fighter under the command of Toribio.

GUERRILLA
FIGHTER 2 Fighter under the command of Toribio.

GUERRILLA
FIGHTER 3 Fighter under the command of Toribio.

GOVERNMENT
NEGOTIATOR 1 Sent by the government to negotiate a peace treaty with the guerrilla.

GOVERNMENT
NEGOTIATOR 2 Sent by the government to negotiate a peace treaty with the guerrilla.

SCHOOL
CHILDREN Even though they were born in a country that is at war they still preserve their innocent and playful spirit. It's precisely those virtues that gives their parents hope every day in a country where hope is the most precious thing people can have.

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SETTING

Colombia. A beautiful, mountainous country famous for its tropical weather, the warmth of its people and vast plantations of coffee, bananas and flowers. Even though the country is beautiful and unique, it's people are engaged in war. San Vicente del Cagúan, a small town in the center of the war zone between the army and the F.A.R.C - E.P (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- Ejército del Pueblo) Socialist guerrilla. The government has just accepted, as a sign of good faith, the demand of the guerilla to demilitarize 16,000 square miles, in hopes to negotiate a peace treaty. The whole town is now in control of this group. People are skeptic about the new peace treaty; since this is not the first time the government has tried to negotiate with the guerillas. All previous efforts for peace have failed.

I entered Florence. It was dark.
I trembled listening
Almost asleep what the sweet river
Told me. I do not know
What the pictures or the books say
(Not all pictures or all books, But a few),
but I know what all rivers say.
They have the same language as I.
In the wilds the Orinoco speaks to me and
I understand. I understand stories I can't repeat.
There are secrets of mine
That the river has taken,
And what he's asked I've done
Step by step on the land.
I recognized then in the voice of the Arno
Old words seeking my mouth,
Like he who's never tasted honey and suddenly
Finds himself recognizing its delight.
That's how I heard the voices in the
Florence River, As if before existing he had told me
What I was listening: Dreams and steps that joined
Me to the voice of the river, Moving beings, Strokes of light
within history, Triplets lit as lamps.
Bread and blood sang with the nocturnal voice of the river.

Pablo Neruda

ACT ONE

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SCENE ONE *(The realities of war)*

(Lights up) (Toribio stands in front of a minefield with his arms crossed alongside with two other guerilla fighters. A farmer stands barefoot, with his hands tied, in the middle of the field. He has been stripped of his shirt and beaten excessively in the face, chest and back. He is surrounded entirely by white metal crosses, nailed to the ground, that mark landmines. Both guerrilla fighters have their rifles pointed directly at him)

TORIBIO

Bullet or mine, what's it gonna be?

FARMER

Please. I have a family.

TORIBIO

Shhhh *(clicks his tongue)* no begging. Choose.

FARMER

I need more time.

TORIBIO

Time's up my friend.

FIGHTER 1

You had time.

FIGHTER 2

He just decided to waste it. *(Mocking)*

FARMER

It's only been a week. I always pay on time and I- I never fall behind!

FIGHTER 2

Cálllese! (Shut up!)

FIGHTER1

Make a choice and shut up!

FARMER

The drought killed half my cattle. That's why I haven't ... just give me a few more days and *I swear-*

TORIBIO

Oh he swears! (*To the fighters*)

FIGHTER 2

Don't they all.

FIGHTER 1

Every time.

FARMER

I'll have the money soon. I swear I'll pay you!

TORIBIO

Didn't we have this conversation already? *muchachos!* (*Boys!*)

FIGHTER 1, 2

Si señor! (*Yes sir!*)

TORIBIO

Didn't we?

FIGHTER 1

Yes sir!

FIGHTER 2

I remember!

TORIBIO

You probably remember. Don't you? (To Farmer) (Pause)

FARMER

Yes - but you have to und-

TORIBIO

What did I say?

FARMER
Just let me explain, the drought-

TORIBIO
I asked you a question my friend.

FARMER
You have to understand-

FIGHTER 1
Answer him.

FARMER
Let me explain!

TORIBIO
I asked you a question and I expect an answer!

FARMER
If you just let me!-

FIGHTER 2
Answer the man!

FARMER
Toribio *please!* You have to under-

TORIBIO
What did I say!

(Toribio shoots at a mine close to the Farmer. The mine instantly explodes, sending a big chunk of grass, dirt, and dust into the air. Farmer looks at the cloud of dust and then at Toribio, who is pointing his gun at him) (Long Pause)

FARMER
You... you said...

TORIBIO
Yes?

FARMER

You said that if I - if I ever fell behind again I -
I... *(Begins to sob)*

TORIBIO

Go on.

FARMER

I would...

TORIBIO

Would what, huh?

FARMER

Pay- Pay in...

FIGHTER 1, 2

Pay in what!

FARMER

PAY IN BLOOD *(Prolonged Silence)*... You said I- I would
have to pay in blood. *(Begins to cry softly)*

TORIBIO

Pay in blood. I'm glad you remember.

FARMER

Toribio please. I have kids.

TORIBIO

Shut up! *Cállese la jeta, cobarde!* *(Shut your mouth you
coward!)* If you'd paid your dues on time we wouldn't be here
now, would we? This is your fault. *Your fault!* ... I told you once
and I'll tell you again. We are at war, my friend, and at war you
pay! Either you pay in cash or you pay in blood, but you *always*
have to pay! *(Pause)* *(Prepares to shoot)* You always have to
pay *(Farmer nods and wimps silently)*

FARMER

Please. Don't do this.

TORIBIO

Life consists of choices my friend. You made a choice when you decided not to pay, and now you must choose how to die... Do you think I want to do this? ... Do you? You made me do this! Now choose, Bullet or mine?

FARMER

I'll give you my land as payment.

TORIBIO

Last year I offered to buy it and you said no, remember?

FARMER

Take it.

TORIBIO

Too late.

FARMER

It's yours, take it!

TORIBIO

Oh I will take it! But you still have to pay!

FARMER

I don't have the money Toribio!

TORIBIO

Then you'll pay in blood!! We had a deal and you broke it! *(Long Pause)* Do you know where you are? *(Farmer closes his eyes and nods)* ...Take a good look *(Pause)* *(Eyes remain shut)* I said look! *(Farmer opens eyes)* as you are too much of a coward to choose your own fate, you force me to choose it for you *(Pause)* ... Walk. *(Farmer remains paralyzed)* I said walk! *(Points gun at his head)* Either you walk or I'll shoot you in the face, either way you're dead. *(Farmer walks towards a mine. He raises his leg directly above the mine, hesitates for a long moment, and pulls it back. Crosses a look with Toribio. (Pause) (He closes his eyes again) (Long Pause)*

Have it your way. *(Toribio shoots the man in the head. The man falls down and hits a landmine) (Blackout as explosion is heard)*

SCENE TWO *(Intrusion)*

(Rodrigo sneaks quietly into the kitchen of a house through a window over the sink. He moves cautiously, trying not to make a single sound. Although the house appears to be abandoned because of the accumulated dust, everything is in order and all the cabinets are filled with food and dishes. The place is like a trip to the past, occupied with old objects that show many years of use. There are several plant pots with roses, carnations and daisies. Next to the sink is a bowl full of coffee beans, which fills the room with its pleasant smell, and a rusty coffee grinder. He grabs a tangerine from a fruit basket placed on the kitchen table, peels it, and starts to eat it. He moans and squirms, expressing the relief of a man who hasn't eaten in days. He proceeds to grab as many fruits as he can carry with both of his arms and exit the same way he came in. As he climbs on the sink Samuel, the owner of the house, steps into the kitchen. Unaware of Samuel's presence, Rodrigo examines how to climb through the window without dropping the fruit. Samuel carries a pot with firecrackers inside it. He quietly places it on the kitchen table, takes out a box of matches from his pocket, fires the wick on the firecrackers, and takes two steps back.)

RODRIGO

Jueputa!!!! (Son of a bitch!!) (Simultaneously as the firecrackers explode, he jumps frightened into the air, landing on the floor. All the fruit in his arms fly across the room)

SAMUEL

(Laughing with tremendous joy) uhhh boy. I haven't heard someone scream that loud since my wife was alive haha!!! You should see your face right now (Makes a grin and a pose impersonating Rodrigo's reaction). I'm sorry mijo (son), are you all right? (Extends his hand to help him up).

RODRIGO

You scared the *shit* out of me!! Are you nuts?

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SAMUEL

Ahh papapa (*smacks him on the forehead*) there's no cursing in this house *mijo*. (*Examines Rodrigo's face with his hands*) Foul language is a tool of the ignorant and uneducated, and I will not tolerate it, do you understand? (*Speaks to himself like a thought*) *Ahy, ahy Dios Mio esta juventud de hoy en dia (Ahy Ahy lord this youth nowadays)*

RODRIGO
Who *are* you?

SAMUEL
I'm the guy you've been robbing of course (*Pause*)

RODRIGO
I'm really sorry *Señor* I th-

SAMUEL
So *you're* the one who's been stealing my food.

RODRIGO
Look I thought the house was empty. I didn't- If I knew you lived here I- I wouldn't have-

SAMUEL
Well, who do you think put all that fruit on the table, the Holy Ghost? (*Laughs sympathetically*)... It's *fine* son. I'm not mad. If you wanted food, just could've just *asked* for some, and I would've gladly given it to you. (*Sits on the edge of the table*) Please, sit down *mijo*. Finish your fruit. (*Confused, and still quite frantic, Rodrigo starts picking up the fruit across the room*)

RODRIGO
Please *señor (sir)*, don't call the police. I'll clean this up in no time and-

SAMUEL
It's okay *mijo*, *really*. Don't worry about it-

RODRIGO
I'll pay you back somehow.

Don't be silly. It's alright *(Rodrigo keeps cleaning)* Stop it *(Pause)* Stop! *(Rodrigo stops abruptly)* The mess is not going anywhere so you can relax. Come on, sit down. *(Rodrigo sits down still somewhat confused)* Now *(As Samuel passes him a plate with fruit)*. Go on, eat something. *(Rodrigo hesitates for a brief moment and then begins to devour the fruit.)*

RODRIGO

Thank you... Again, I'm so sorry-

SAMUEL

It's just food *mijo*. If you'd stolen my roses, on the other hand, this would be an entirely different conversation.

RODRIGO

Please let me pay you back.

SAMUEL

With what? A man who has to steal food isn't exactly in prime financial condition.

RODRIGO

In what?

(Still gulping down the food)

SAMUEL

It means you don't have the money to pay me back son.

RODRIGO

That's true. But I can get it. I can get a job in the coca plantations and-

SAMUEL

You'll do *no such thing!* You have no business getting involved with such people.

RODRIGO

There must be something I can do to pay you back? *(Pause)*

SAMUEL

I'll tell you what, if you read me today's paper, we'll call it even. *(Long Pause)*

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RODRIGO

Isn't there anything else you need that I can do?

SAMUEL

Easier than reading the newspaper for an old man?

RODRIGO

I can be very helpful. I can mow your lawn or clean the house.
I can do so much –

SAMUEL

Right now I just want you to read me the newspaper. *(Holds up roll of newspaper) (Pause) (Rodrigo struggles whether to grab or not the newspaper)*

RODRIGO

Look, all I'm saying is that I can be more useful. Reading a newspaper is not exactly –

SAMUEL

It's just words *mijo*. What are you so afraid of?

RODRIGO

I'm not afraid, who said I was afraid? It's just- It's just that I-

SAMUEL

It's just what? *(Pause) (Rodrigo continues to struggle until he makes up his mind)*

RODRIGO

Nothing, never mind. *(Rodrigo grabs the newspaper, reluctantly, unfolds it and looks at it meticulously. He moves his mouth, as trying to decipher the words, but nothing comes out).*

SAMUEL

Well?

RODRIGO

Well what? *(Slightly annoyed)*

SAMUEL

What are you waiting for?

Give me a second, will you? *(Long Pause)*

SAMUEL

I'm not getting any younger son.

RODRIGO

I can't read if you keep interrupting me.

SAMUEL

You're right, I'm sorry. Please continue. *(Rodrigo tries one last time, but only manages to mumble a couple of words)*

RODRIGO

P- P- peee

SAMUEL

Are you alright, son?

RODRIGO

I *can't* read, alright! There, I said it. *(Rodrigo tosses the newspaper on the table in frustration) (Long Pause)*

SAMUEL

You can't read?

RODRIGO

Didn't you hear me the first time? No, I can't read... I...I can't.

SAMUEL

Didn't they teach you how to read in school? *(Pause)*

RODRIGO

I didn't go to school.

SAMUEL

How old are you son?

RODRIGO

Does it matter?

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SAMUEL

I'm just making conversation. Don't get defensive. Now tell me, how old are you?

RODRIGO
Twenty-two.

SAMUEL
Why did you quit school?

RODRIGO
There were more important things to do.

SAMUEL
Like stealing food from old men? (*Playfully but establishing a point*)

RODRIGO
I *told* you I thought the house was –

SAMUEL
Empty. Yes, you did (*Pause*) So tell me eh...

RODRIGO
Rodrigo.

SAMUEL
Yes, thank you. Tell me, *Rodrigo*. How exactly is it you plan to survive in this town without knowing how to *read*?

RODRIGO
I've managed *so far*, haven't I?

SAMUEL
Yes, I can see that.
(*Pointing out the mess in the kitchen*)

RODRIGO
Don't *judge* me. You don't know who I am, you don't know me.

SAMUEL
I'm not *judging*, *mijo*, I'm simply stating the facts.

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RODRIGO

Yes you are. I may not know how to read, but I'm not stupid.

SAMUEL

I never said you were stupid.

RODRIGO

Well good... 'cause I'm not.

SAMUEL

I know you're not. You sound like a very smart young man...
Tell me, do you want to be something in particular when you
grow up? *(Pause)*

RODRIGO

Yes.

SAMUEL

What?

RODRIGO

I can't tell you.

SAMUEL

Why not?

RODRIGO

Because... it's embarrassing.

SAMUEL

There's nothing embarrassing about having dreams Rodrigo.

RODRIGO

It is when you don't know how to read. At least for this one it
is.

SAMUEL

You can always learn.

RODRIGO

Trust me, I've *tried*. I can't.

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SAMUEL

Maybe you just haven't found the right teacher.

RODRIGO

Ha! If you find him, let me know. *(Pause)*

SAMUEL

So...

RODRIGO

So what?

SAMUEL

So, what's your dream? *(Pause)*

RODRIGO

I wanna be a writer.

SAMUEL

That's great! A very noble profession. Congratulations.

RODRIGO

It doesn't matter, I'm never gonna be one.

SAMUEL

Never say never son.

RODRIGO

How am I supposed to *write*, when I don't even know how to read, ah? You tell me that!

SAMUEL

You have a point there *(pause)* *(He lets out a quirky smile)* Come back tomorrow, I know how you're gonna pay your debt to me. *(Pause)*

RODRIGO

How?

SAMUEL

Just be here tomorrow at al 7:00 A.M.

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RODRIGO

7:00 A.M?

SAMUEL

Oh, I'm sorry. Is there some other place you need to be?
(Patronizing)

RODRIGO

No sir. Seven it is. *(Embarrassed)*

SAMUEL

Good. *(Gets up and walks towards the door)* Don't be late ...
and Rodrigo.

RODRIGO

Yes?

SAMUEL

Tomorrow, when you come back, use the *door*, ok? *(Laughs)*

RODRIGO

Yes sir. *(Grins with a little excitement and embarrassment)*

SAMUEL

Now go get some sleep, *mijo*. You're gonna to need it. *Buenas Noches. (good night) Ahy, ahy, esta juventud. (To himself)*

RODRIGO

Buenas noches, (Samuel exits) (Rodrigo stays a moment guessing the task that Samuel is going to have for him in the morning. Gets up, picks up a fruit from the ground, puts it in his pocket, and exits through the same window he came in)

SCENE THREE *(Guerrilla takes San Vicente)*

(The principal's office of the local school. A rather small office with a bucket in the middle placed under a leak. There are several cabinet files and newspapers piled in the corner. (Principal Aurelio Vázquez, Sofia Ortíz, the schoolteacher, and Commander Alias Toribio from the guerrilla are having a heated argument. The guerilla has just taken over the school)

This is a school! Do you understand? A *school!* Aurelio, my children are terrified from watching men with guns *caminando como Pedro por su casa* (*Walking like they own the place*)

TORIBIO

Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo- (*The revolutionary armed forces of Colombia – army of the people-*) must seize control of this school during the peace negotiations. If you can't control your children than that's not –

SOFIA

You can't do this! This is the only school the town has.

TORIBIO

Principal Vázquez and I made arrangements so that classes can proceed normally.

SOFIA

Are you gonna let this happen? (*To Aurelio*)

AURELIO

Do you think we have a choice, Sofia? They're taking over whether we like it or not.

TORIBIO

We've agreed to leave a couple of classrooms cleared so that you can continue classes without any trouble.

SOFIA

Continue classes? ... You have men with *guns* walking in the halls of a school! Children are so terrified to even go to the bathroom that they're *literally* peeing in their pants. These may be children *comandante* (*commander*), but don't you think they know who you are? Your reputation precedes you and they know exactly what's going on. We have to call the parents Aurelio. We have to send the children home (*Sofia makes a move towards the telephone*)

TORIBIO

The children stay! *(Pause)* We are at a very delicate time. The press is already questioning the peace process and we can't afford another scandal.

SOFIA

Then take your men and leave.

TORIBIO

That's not an option.

SOFIA

Fine. Stay. But let the children go, you don't need them.

TORIBIO

You're missing the point here Mrs. Ortiz.

SOFIA

What point!

TORIBIO

I've been doing this for a long time miss Ortiz, and over the years I've learned something. People are weak when it comes to their children. You may take a farmer's cattle and, sure, he'll be furious. But he won't break. Not at first at least. You may burn his house to the ground and, yes, he'll be devastated, but he won't break. You may even threaten to take he's life, and trust me, his eyes will show fear, but HE WILL NOT BREAK. But take his children, and he will break like an egg. He will drop faster than rainwater to his knees and beg like the child he's so desperately trying to protect. People will always risk Mr. Ortiz. We love risk. Without risk life would be a parade of dry, tasteless meals. But we won't risk our children. It's basic human nature. Those children, they're my collateral. They're the ace under my sleeve. They will guarantee that every single farmer in this town does exactly what I want and when I want it. They're the reason we're here Mr. Ortiz, so when I say they stay. They fucking stay!!

SOFIA

You monster!! *(She jumps towards Toribio. Aurelio tries to pull her back. Toribio pulls out his gun. Sofia and Aurelio immediately fall back)*

Watch your temper, Ms. Ortiz. I'm a patient man but I will not be disrespected. If you think this was a negotiation, you were wrong. This is now property of *las F.A.R.C (To Aurelio)*. That's the deal and I *suggest* you get on board with it.

AURELIO

Put the gun away *comandante*.

TORIBIO

I'm the maximum authority in this town now and when I give an order you-will-follow-it, do you understand? I'm not gonna take any chances now. Not when we're so close. We need everybody in the town to be on board with this. They must be behind the process in order for the press to support it! They need to say that they follow our cause and that all they want is peace. After half a century of fighting and killing each other we are finally at the brink of peace and those children are the best chance we've got.

AURELIO

Will you *please* put that gun away!

TORIBIO

Patience, Aurelio, this is a teaching moment; you must know all about those. Sometimes a teacher has to take a different approach to get his students to understand. (*To Sofia*) imagine that I'm your father Mr. Ortiz and you're my daughter. You don't want to eat your vegetables. You think they taste bad and rather eat chocolate for dinner. I, as your father, know better than you and have the responsibility to raise you to be healthy and strong. So I must make you eat your vegetables. You will get mad at me; even hate me for a moment. But eventually you will thank me. Colombia is our child Mr. Ortiz, and we must make her eat her vegetables. (*Keeping eye contact with Sofia*) Otherwise, she will continue to be weak and people will continue to die at the point of my gun.

SOFIA

If you don't let those children go I swear to god I will go to the press. You can't stop me.

I have six bullets in my gun to prove you wrong. *(Loads his gun. Aurelio puts himself between Toribio and Sofia Toribio grabs Aurelio, throws him to the ground and presses his gun against his head. A small boy wandering down the corridors enters. He has toy gun and is pretending to be a cowboy. He notices Toribio and shoots at him playfully, like on a duel. Toribio recovers his humanity. He hides his gun and pulls back)* *(Pause)* *(Sofia grabs the child to protect him and carries him to a corner)*

AURELIO

We got the message *Comandante* so *please*, put the gun away. *(Pause)* I'll speak to the parents and we will try to proceed as we normally do.

SOFIA
Aurelio!

AURELIO

I beg you *mija* *(child)*, let me handle this! I promise everything will be alright.

TORIBIO

I know this is a sacrifice, but sacrifices must be made during war, so that peace can come after... I just want what's best for my country.

SOFIA

You sure have a great way of showing it, taking away their books and replacing them with guns! You people are nothing but a bunch of fanatic terrorists-- *(Toribio Kicks the bucket hardly, spilling the water and making a big noise)* *(Silence)*

TORIBIO

You may question my methods but never my ideals! We are at war and sacrifices have to be made in order to succeed. There are sixty-five children in this school, according to what you told me, *(Pointing to Aurelio)* and I am fighting for their future, as much as you are... But believe me, and listen carefully when I tell you that *if* I have to kill every single one of them for the benefit of our country, I will. *(Pause)* *(Toribio shoots the boy. The boy falls immediately)*

SOFIA

What did you do!! *Dios mio!! (My god!)* What did you do!!
(*Sofia embraces the dead boy*) (*Prolonged silence*)

TORIBIO

Have you ever killed a man? (*To Aurelio*) (*Aurelio is in shock. His eyes are fixed in the dead child*) Have you ever felt the flesh of a body ripping apart, inch-by-inch, as you pierce it with a knife? How the body twists and turns as the blade rips it slowly? Have you seen how the sparkle of a man's eyes fades away as he feels he's blood beginning to turn cold, he's legs numb and he realizes, just for a brief moment, that he's about to die? (*Long Pause*)... Well?

AURELIO

No.

TORIBIO

How about you? (*Looks fiercely at Sofia. She continues to hold the dead boy in her arms, but looks away terrified*) I didn't think so (*Pause*) (*Snaps his fingers*) That's how long it takes me to kill a man. (*Snaps again*) It was harder at first, but now it's become a part of my nature. I don't wanna kill them, but if you don't cooperate, *that's* exactly what I'll do. And, *when* I kill every single one of them, the blame will fall on you. Their blood will be on your hands. (*Points at dead boy*) His blood is on your hands. You, and only you, will have answer to their parents' cries and the people's fury. I'm a reasonable man, as I know you are to Mr. Vázquez, which is why I came as a gentleman to make this deal. I'm a patriot and I believe that this is the right path for my country. You accuse me of being an animal, and maybe I am. But if that child had lived, and our war still continued, then who would be the animal here? Huh? Who would be the terrorist? (*To Sofia*) (*Sofia looks away*) (*Prolonged silence*)

AURELIO

Will you please step outside for a moment? (*To Toribio*) I'd like to have a private conversation with Miss Ortíz.

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TORIBIO

The children stay. (*Toribio exits. Cold silence invades the room*)

SOFIA

We can't let them do this, Aurelio.

AURELIO

What are we supposed to do? You saw what he did.

SOFIA

You mean to tell me that these people. These *animals* are going to take over our town? *(Pause)*

AURELIO

Yes. That's exactly what I'm telling you, at least during the peace negotiations they are.

SOFIA

How long are they gonna last?

AURELIO

Who knows? They might as well go on forever, like this damn war. You know, you'd think that after 40 years of war people would get sick of killing each other, but they don't. This thing...this hate. It just keeps spreading like gangrene. Spreading and infecting each of us, until one day, our country will become nothing but a big putrefying corpse. *(Long Pause)*

SOFÍA

What are we gonna do?

AURELIO

What *can* we do?

SOFIA

We can't allow the children to be at the mercy of these people Aurelio *(Pause)* Look at him. *(Shows the dead child).* *(With a trembling voice)* *(Aurelio looks mortified)* You've seen the minefields, the child recruitments-

AURELIO

I know Sofia.

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SOFIA

The kidnappings-

AURELIO

I know.

SOFIA

The rapes, the executions-

AURELIO

I know Sofia! Christ I know! (Long Pause) (Holds both of Sofia's hands and looks at her. Sofia senses there is fear on his eyes)

SOFIA

I'm afraid, tito.

AURELIO

I'm afraid too, Sofi. But right now, *all* that we can do is *pray mija*. Cooperate, and then *pray* some more. Because if there is one thing certain in this damned situation, *one* thing. It is that at this point, you, me, those children, and the people of this town. We are at the mercy of these *savages*.

(Fade out)

SCENE FOUR *(Goals and dreams)*

(Samuel and Rodrigo are in his studio. Samuel is standing between two chalkboards. Rodrigo is in front of him seated on a desk.)

SAMUEL

Ok Rodrigo, remember what we've been practicing. On the Board to my left is?

RODRIGO

The Abecedary.

SAMUEL

Good. It contains-

PAPER RIVER

22

RODRIGO

All the letters in the Spanish language.

SAMUEL

Very Good. On the board to my right is the same abecedary,
divided into two groups: the? (*Pointing at the top group*)

RODRIGO

The vowels! I remember that one.

SAMUEL

Great! And this one? (*Pointing at the bottom group*)

RODRIGO

Ehhh... it starts with a C... the ... what was it?

SAMUEL

The conn-

RODRIGO

CONSONANTS!

SAMUEL

Yes! Great job. Now on to the vowels (*Pause*) ready?

RODRIGO

Yeah.

SAMUEL

Starting from left to right. First one.

RODRIGO

A

SAMUEL

Good. Next.

RODRIGO

Eeehhh... (*Trying to remember*)

SAMUEL

Good, next one. (*Rodrigo smiles surprised of his lucky shot*)

PAPER RIVER

23

RODRIGO

Ehhh...

SAMUEL

You already said that one.

RODRIGO
I- I don't...

SAMUEL
Good! *Sigue, vamos (Go on) (Rodrigo is clueless to why he is doing so well)*

RODRIGO
Ok I guess?

SAMUEL
You're on a roll Rodrigo!

RODRIGO
What the-?

SAMUEL
Last one, *vamos. (Come on)*

RODRIGO
what? ahhh...

SAMUEL
You already said that one (*Pause*)

RODRIGO
I don't know.

SAMUEL
Concentrate.

RODRIGO
I'm *trying*.

SAMUEL
Try harder (*Pause*) (*Rodrigo stares at the chalkboard*) *Vamos* Rodrigo. You know this.

PAPER RIVER

24

RODRIGO
Umm... damn it I don't remember. I can't.

SAMUEL

Yes you can.

RODRIGO
No I can't.

SAMUEL
Yes you can. Think.

RODRIGO
I AM THINKING.

SAMUEL
Think harder!

RODRIGO
I DON'T KNOW THIS

SAMUEL
YES YOU DO.

RODRIGO
NO I DON'T! FUCK!

SAMUEL
Epa! I told about cursing in my house *mijo*. Don't make me smack you again boy.

RODRIGO
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I apologize. It's just that- It's so frustrating! I have no idea what you're asking. I know we've studied this before but it *won't sink in*.

SAMUEL
You were doing just fine *mijo*.

RODRIGO
I got lucky! I have no idea what I just did. Not a clue (*Pause*) I know you mean well Samuel but I told you before. I can't. I just can't. (*Long Pause*)

PAPER RIVER

25

SAMUEL
Let's go outside for a moment.

RODRIGO

What? Why?

SAMUEL

You'll see. Come with me, and bring the radio

(Rodrigo grabs the radio from Samuel's desk) (Samuel walks out to the porch. It is a large porch in front of a green and spacious yard. There is a mango and a tangerine tree and flowers planted at their base) (Rodrigo follows)

Now, turn on the radio and tune in 94.7 FM *(Rodrigo turns on radio. Announcements and advertisements start to sound, giving way to a Cumbia)* Yes! Now that's more like it! *(Samuel puts his cane aside, walks down the stairs to his yard and starts dancing and singing gracefully to the rhythm of the Cumbia)*
(Pause)

RODRIGO

What are you doing?

SAMUEL

I'm dancing.

(Keeps humming and dancing)

RODRIGO

I can see that. Why?

SAMUEL

Don't you dance?

RODRIGO

Well yeah, sometimes but –

SAMUEL

You don't like Cumbia?

RODRIGO

No, I love Cumbia, don't get me wrong, but *vamos* Samuel, let's go back inside.

PAPER RIVER

26

SAMUEL

It's hot inside, I'm sweating like a pig.

RODRIGO

Come on Samuel, I wanna keep practicing.

SAMUEL

Relax *mijo*. You've been studying hard. Take a break.

RODRIGO

I don't want to take a break. I want to learn how to read. *(Pause)*
(Samuel turns radio off)

SAMUEL

(Continues to dance) You're thirsty for knowledge, I like that. But you see Rodrigo, sometimes in life, the best thing we can do is lay down the books, listen to some music, and enjoy the fresh air *(turns radio on)* Come here a moment.

RODRIGO

Thank you but I think I'll stay here if you don't-

SAMUEL

Just do it. *Vamos, ven acá hombre. (Come here)* *(Rodrigo walks down reluctantly)* *(Samuel grabs Rodrigo by the arm)* now follow my lead, and close your eyes.

RODRIGO

This is ridiculous.

SAMUEL

Do it!

RODRIGO

Alright!

(Closes eyes) *(Starts Dancing alongside Samuel)*

SAMUEL

Listen to my voice carefully Rodrigo. Words are not just traces of ink on a piece of paper. They're this. They're movement... music. Words are passion; they're joy and they're sorrow.

PAPER RIVER

27

They're everything that we are and everything that we're not....
Feel the wind hitting your face. Do you feel it?

RODRIGO

I guess.

SAMUEL

Guess harder (*Smacks him in the head*)

RODRIGO

Ok, Ok damn it...yeah I feel it.

SAMUEL

Good. Feel the sweat dripping down your cheeks... Feel the weight of your arms swinging from your body. Words are all of these. They travel through the wind, telling all of our tales and the tales of everything else. Day and night, they tell the story of our triumphs and our losses, our happiness and our pain. They are the sun and the rain, the past and the present. They're you and they're me. You know words Rodrigo. You know them because they're a part of your being. They're right here (*Touches Rodrigo's heart*) and here (*Touches Rodrigo's forehead*) you just have to discover them. You already know how to read and how to write Rodrigo. You just have to train your body in the art of using words... Now relax and do exactly as I say. (*Pause*) Breathe slowly but deeply...let the air fill your lungs, as *they* are the ones who release the words trapped in our bodies. Picture the board. Do you see it?

RODRIGO

I see it!

SAMUEL

Keep that picture. (*As Samuel talks, Rodrigo begins to dance more and more passionately*) Now keep dancing more and more intimately. Get acquainted with yourself... Get the blood flowing through you system. Release your body... Get in touch with your words (*Pause*) Are you ready?

RODRIGO

Yes! (*Opens his eyes*)

PAPER RIVER

28

SAMUEL

What is the first vowel!

RODRIGO

Umm!

SAMUEL

Come on Rodrigo! (*Taps him*) You *know* this...! Get in touch with your words! *Discover them! Feel them!*

RODRIGO

Ask me again!

SAMUEL

What is the first vowel!

RODRIGO

AAAAA

SAMUEL

NEXT!

RODRIGO

EEEEEE

SAMUEL

NEXT!

RODRIGO

IIIIII

SAMUEL

NEXT!

RODRIGO

OOOO

SAMUEL

NEXT!

RODRIGO

UUUU

PAPER RIVER

29

SAMUEL

VAMOS CARAJO!

(Samuel smiles with satisfaction)

RODRIGO

I GOT IT... *Dios mío*, I got it! ... What just happened? How did I do that?

SAMUEL

You discovered them Rodrigo. You discovered your words.
(*Rodrigo hugs Samuel with tremendous joy*) (*Sofia enters*)

SOFIA

What the hell is going on? (*Rodrigo and Samuel jump startled*)

SAMUEL

Sofi! *Mi amor* (*my love*)! You scared me. Were we being loud?

SOFIA

You think?

SAMUEL

Sorry honey. We were learning our vowels.

SOFIA

Who's that?

SAMUEL

Oh where are my manners!! Sofia *mi amor* this is Rodrigo García, the young man I was talking you about.

SOFIA

So this is Rodrigo? (*Surprised*)

SAMUEL

Yes. (*Sofia walks towards Rodrigo*)

RODRIGO

Mucho gusto Rodrigo Gar- (*Sofia slaps Rodrigo hardly in the face*)

SOFIA

That's for stealing from an old man *sinvergüenza!* (*Scoundrel!*)
(*Sofia exits*) (*Pause*)

PAPER RIVER

30

RODRIGO

Who's *that*?

SAMUEL

My wife, only two generations younger. *(Laughing)*

RODRIGO

Wow.

SAMUEL

Yeah. That's a good way to describe her. *(Samuel starts to exit but halfway gone turns around)* Are you surprised she just slapped you?

RODRIGO

Yeah.

SAMUEL

I'm not *(Laughs)* She's definitely like my wife. Come on *mijo*, I've got a mango in the kitchen we can eat. I think we've studied enough for one day. *(Samuel exits) (Rodrigo touches the cheek that Sofia slapped and smiles)*

RODRIGO

Sofia *(Lights fade)*

SCENE FIVE *(The River)*

(Rodrigo and his best friend, Manuel, are skipping rocks in a river at the outskirts of town. Each is holding a beer bottle in one hand. Several other empty bottles are set next to a big log in the shore. Both of them have taken off their shirts, shoes and socks due to the intense February heat, and have rolled up their pants right below their knees, sinking their feet in the cold water)

RODRIGO

Parcero (Dude), I'm telling you. I'm in love.

MANUEL

That hot, huh?

PAPER RIVER

31

RODRIGO

Gorgeous. *(Pause)*

MANUEL
Name?

RODRIGO
Sofia

MANUEL
Age?

RODRIGO
Can't be a day over 23.

MANUEL
Nice. Hair?

RODRIGO
Black.

MANUEL
Legs?

RODRIGO
Long.

MANUEL
Even better... Ass?

RODRIGO
Didn't look.

MANUEL
Who am I your mother? *Ass!*

RODRIGO
I saw her up front. Didn't have a chance to see it.

MANUEL
Ok that's valid... Tits?

PAPER RIVER

32

RODRIGO
Didn't look.

MANUEL
Pff come on. (*Splashes Rodrigo*)

RODRIGO
I was looking at her face.

MANUEL
Are you blind?

RODRIGO
I told you I was looking at her face (Splashes Manuel)

MANUEL
They're right there, how can you miss that? You know what your problem is? You're looking at women the wrong way.

RODRIGO
Is that so? (*Sarcastically*)

MANUEL
Yes... You see, the first thing you should look for in a woman is her tits, then her ass, then her legs and then, *if* you like what you see. You look at her face.

RODRIGO
You should've seen her face man. If you'd seen a face like that, trust me, you wouldn't have looked at her tits.

MANUEL
What!? Are you serious man?

RODRIGO
Dead serious.

MANUEL
It had to be one hell of a face if you decided to look at it before looking at her tits.

PAPER RIVER

33

RODRIGO
It was (*Pause*)

MANUEL

Not even a peek? *Vamos hombre (come on man)*, they're right there. It's not like you have to twist you're neck like a freaking snake or anything.

RODRIGO

Well yeah, I saw them, but it's not like I *saw* them, you know?

MANUEL

I knew it!! I was starting to worry. Did she catch you?

RODRIGO

What?

MANUEL

Did she catch you staring?

RODRIGO

I don't think so... I hope not.

MANUEL

Discretion is always important when looking at a woman's tits.

RODRIGO

You mean like when you "*discretely*" stare like a hawk? (*Mocks and imitates Manuel*) (*Manuel splashes Rodrigo*)

MANUEL

Hey I'm discrete... sometimes.

RODRIGO

Yeah let's leave it at sometimes (*imitates again*) (*Manuel laughs, winks at him, and raises his beer*) (*Pause*)

MANUEL

And?

RODRIGO

And what?

PAPER RIVER

34

MANUEL

What do you mean *and* what... *And?*

RODRIGO

They look nice.

MANUEL

Big? Small? Round? *Dale hombre*, talk to me.

RODRIGO

What the f -? I don't know man. What can I say, they were nice.

MANUEL

Is that the best you got? Come on, give me something.

RODRIGO

They looked... ehh... I don't know... *perky*, I guess.

MANUEL

That's what I'm talking about! Yeah! *Perky* is good... I like *perky* tits.

RODRIGO

You like all tits.

MANUEL

Damn right I do. They're tits, that's all you need to know.

RODRIGO

You crazy weirdo (*Laughs*) But I didn't really noticed them.

MANUEL

Aha (*sarcastically*)

RODRIGO

No seriously. I mean, they were *really hot*, don't get me wrong. But her face man, her *face!* *Mierda (shit)* it was just so...

MANUEL

Eyes?

RODRIGO

Hazel, like honey, *sabes?* (*You know?*)

PAPER RIVER

35

MANUEL

Uhh that's exotic.

RODRIGO

And her lips were so... ahh!! I can't even describe them!

MANUEL
Chunky?

RODRIGO
No.

MANUEL
Thick?

RODRIGO
No. What the hell? I don't know how to-

MANUEL
Juicy? Slim? Voluptuous? Scrumptious? Use your words
amigo.

RODRIGO
There is something seriously wrong with you. You know that?

MANUEL
Hey I'm a romantic alright! I happen to focus on detail. How's
her smile?

RODRIGO
Didn't see it.

MANUEL
What the fuck? What do you mean you didn't see her smile?

RODRIGO
She wasn't smiling.

MANUEL
She wasn't smiling? What is she, depressed?

RODRIGO
Angry.

PAPER RIVER

36

MANUEL
Ohh fuck that *Parce*, walk away... you don't want to mess with
an angry chick, trust me.

RODRIGO
She's not an angry chick. She was just angry at the time.

MANUEL

Yeah that's what they all say. Then, when you realize it, they're threatening to cut your dick off with a fucking axe!

RODRIGO

(Laughing) Man that was funny, I remember that one.

MANUEL

Funny my ass!

RODRIGO

You had it coming.

MANUEL

No I didn't!

RODRIGO

Parce, you slept with her sister!

MANUEL

How the fuck was I supposed to know!

RODRIGO

They live in the same house!

MANUEL

It was still uncalled for, you don't try to do that to a man... that's just wrong... Anyways, what was she angry about?

RODRIGO

I broke into her grandfather's house.

MANUEL

Fuck! *(Laughing)* Yeah that's bad.

PAPER RIVER

37

RODRIGO

Is not what it sounds like.

MANUEL

What do you mean?

RODRIGO

Remember the house we went last week?

MANUEL

You mean the one that smelled like coffee?

RODRIGO

Yeah.

MANUEL

What about it (*pause*)... oh shit that's-

RODRIGO

Yep.

MANUEL

You mean to tell me the house was-

RODRIGO

Not empty? Yes.

MANUEL

Jueputa! We've been going there for weeks! Did you get caught?

RODRIGO

Yeah.

Manuel

MIERDA... Who caught you, Sofía?

RODRIGO

No, her grandfather, Samuel.

MANUEL

Mierda parce. What happened, did he call the police?

PAPER RIVER

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RODRIGO

No.

MANUEL

Did he beat you?

RODRIGO

Not exactly, I have to go every day to his house from now on ...
he's teaching me how to read. (*Long Pause*)

MANUEL

Let me see if I got this right... You broke into the same house
we broke in last week.

RODRIGO

Yes.

MANUEL

The house we thought was-

RODRIGO

Abandoned. Yes.

MANUEL

You got caught by the owner... eh... eh...

RODRIGO

Samuel.

MANUEL

Samuel right... Instead of calling the police or just simply
beating the shit out of you, he decides he's gonna teach you how
to read?

RODRIGO

Right.

MANUEL

That makes no sense!

RODRIGO

I know right?! But when he caught me we talked for a while
and I told him I wanted to be a writer. I guess he felt like he

PAPER RIVER

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could teach me. Besides, it's not like we're just doing that, I'm
also helping around the house.

MANUEL

And where does the hot chick fit into this picture?

RODRIGO
Sofia?

MANUEL
No the Virgin Mary. Yeah Sofia!

RODRIGO
Yeah right. So, Samuel was teaching me the vowels the other day, and I was getting really frustrated 'cause I wasn't understanding. He took me outside to his yard and turned on the radio. You know, to make me relax a bit and make it more fun... I don't know what happened, suddenly one thing led to the other and we were shouting and singing and dancing. It was crazy.

MANUEL
Man! I wish all classes were like that.

RODRIGO
I know! It was great. But then Sofia entered the house.

MANUEL
Yes! Come on spit it out.

RODRIGO
As soon as I saw her everything just *stopped*. It was like if time and space had decided to focus their entire attention to that single moment... She asked her grandfather what the *hell was going on* of course. He told her who I was and what we were doing... Thinking about it now, he probably already told her about me, 'cause when she heard who I was her faced changed, you know? She started to walk towards me and all I could think was... who is this woman? This beautiful creature... this, this ... angel, who is she? Where did she come from? She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen and she was right there. I...I started to think of something to say to

PAPER RIVER

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impress her, you know? Like a complement, or something.

MANUEL
What did you say? (*Pause*)

RODRIGO
Nothing.

MANUEL
Nothing?

RODRIGO
Nothing.

MANUEL
So you choked.

RODRIGO
Yeah I- what? No!! No I didn't choke!

MANUEL
It sounds like you choked.

RODRIGO
I didn't choke! Shut Up. I was going to say the complement and introduce myself when she...

MANUEL
What?

RODRIGO
She-

MANUEL
I liked where this is going.

RODRIGO
She slapped me.

MANUEL
What?

PAPER RIVER

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RODRIGO
Yeah man, she slapped me. She slapped me like no woman has ever slapped me. I was shocked you know? I thought who the hell is this person that, out of the blue, just slaps a complete stranger?

MANUEL

See!! I told you she was an angry chick!

RODRIGO

She's not an angry ch!... shut up! let me finish the story.

MANUEL

Sorry man, *dale*.

RODRIGO

She slapped me and just walked away. It was so-

MANUEL

Insane?

RODRIGO

Hypnotizing.

MANUEL

Excuse me?

RODRIGO

It was incredible. I haven't stopped thinking about her ever since.

MANUEL

That was hypnotizing?

RODRIGO

Yeah.

MANUEL

Must've been one hell of a slap, 'cause it left you brain damaged *parcero*.

PAPER RIVER

42

RODRIGO

It was. *Me sacó la mierda... (She slapped the shit out of me)*
(Long Pause)

MANUEL

Hey... do you really want to be a writer? Or did you just make all of that up for the old man.

RODRIGO

Yeah.

MANUEL

Yeah what? The first or the second?

RODRIGO

The first... I really want to be a writer.

MANUEL

That's great man! Why didn't you tell me this *parce*? I'm your best friend. That's the type of shit you tell your best friend.

RODRIGO

Yeah I know. Next time I will. I promise.

MANUEL

Good... 'Cause, even though I always enjoy talking about tits.

RODRIGO

Oh, I know that.

MANUEL

I could've taught you how to read.

RODRIGO

Please (*Laughs hysterically*) skimming through porn magazines is not reading.

MANUEL

I don't skim through them! I look at them in detail. I tell you, those magazines have some really interesting shit.

RODRIGO

I've seen you read, you're not that much better than me.

PAPER RIVER

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MANUEL

I never said I was good at it. But I could teach you a thing or two nonetheless ehh? Eh? (*Splashes Rodrigo*)

RODRIGO

Mierda que frío (Shit that's cold)... (Manuel splashes Rodrigo)

again) Oh, you don't wanna do that.

MANUEL

You think you're better than me, huh? Come on. *(Splashes Rodrigo again).*

RODRIGO

Oh it's on! *(Manuel and Rodrigo start to splash and wrestle playfully in the water) (Lights fade)*

SCENE SIX *(Fútbol Fever)*

(Samuel's living room. Aurelio, Manuel, Rodrigo and Samuel are watching the Colombia's national soccer team. There are dozens of beer bottles at the table in front of the TV and two bowls filled with chips that constantly rotate between the men. All the men are wearing the national team's jersey and are living the game in a very passionate way) (TV narrator is heard in the background)

ALL

HAY!!!! *(Shouting at TV after a failed goal attempt)*

AURELIO

Agh carajo! *(Damn!)*

SAMUEL

Jueputa! *(Fuck!)*

MANUEL

How do you miss that!

RODRIGO

Hey what happened with the "no cursing in the house" rule?
(To Samuel)

PAPER RIVER

44

SAMUEL

It's fútbol, doesn't count.

AURELIO:

You can't watch fútbol without cursing, you just can't...
vamos Colombia con huevas carajo! (Play with some balls damn it!)

MANUEL
Damn right!

SAMUEL
Pass the ball! damn it!

RODRIGO
Works for me.

MANUEL
Thanks again for letting me watch the game in here Mr. Sánchez
(To Samuel)

SAMUEL
Please. Call me Samuel; any friend of Rodrigo is welcomed in
my house.

RODRIGO
*Vamos Dios, un golesito por favor! (Come on God, one goal
please!)*

AURELIO
There it goes.

ALL
*Vamos, Vamos, Vamos, Vamos.... Vamos...JUEPUTA! (All
men curse at the TV)*

AURELIO
Pass the Fucking ball!

MANUEL
Shit!

RODRIGO
Totonno was wide open!

PAPER RIVER

45

SAMUEL
Pass me the chips will you? All this suspense is making me
nervous. *(Manuel takes a handful of food before passing the
bowl) (Knock on door)*

RODRIGO

I'll get it (*gets up to open door*) (*Sofia walks in*) (*an awkward silence*) Hi.

SOFIA
Hi. (*Pause*)

SOFIA
So this is why you cancelled class Tito.

AURELIO
It was you grandfather's idea.

SOFIA
Unbelievable.

MANUEL
I know right? (*Manuel is stuffed with chips*) I'm Manuel by the way, but everybody calls me Manolo.

SOFIA
Sofia.

MANUEL
So you're Sofia! I've heard a lot about you. (*To Rodrigo*)

SOFIA
Oh yeah?

RODRIGO
No he hasn't.

SAMUEL
Cross it! Cross it!

MANUEL
Yes I have Rodrigo, don't you remember?

PAPER RIVER

46

RODRIGO
No...no... I don't think so.

AURELIO
Foul! That was a foul ref!

MANUEL

Rodrigo told me all about your perky- *(To Sofia)*

RODRIGO
Manolo!

MANUEL
Personality *(Teasing Rodrigo)*

SOFIA
Perky?

MANUEL
Perky. *(To Rodrigo)*

SOFIA
Is that good?

MANUEL
Oh yeah... it's very good. We like perky, don't we Rodrigo.

RODRIGO
Don't pay attention to him *(To Sofia)* he just doesn't know when
to *shut up*. *(To Manuel)*

AURELIO
That's right, enough chatting. There's a game going on here.

Sofia
How are we doing?

SAMUEL
0-0.

AURELIO
Vamos Congo! Crush those damn Argentinians!

PAPER RIVER

47

SAMUEL
My god this is torture!

SOFIA
Relax, it's just a game.

ALL

WHAT!!! *(With indignation)*

SOFIA

Nothing, never mind. *(Retracting after the outrage)*

MANUEL

We're close, I feel it!

RODRIGO

We just have to keep the ball. We're giving the ball away!

ALL

HAY, HAY, HAY, HAY ... *JUEPUTA!*

SAMUEL

Jesus Christ!

MANUEL

Carajo!

SOFIA

Damn that was close.

RODRIGO

All we need is one. Come on! One goal!

AURELIO

God this is too much *(The excitement of the people in the room rises as the narrator's voice increases in volume)*

SAMUEL

What minute are we on?

RODRIGO:

We're in overtime.

PAPER RIVER

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T.V NARRATOR

Bermudez despeja el balón, lo coge Bolaños, se la pasa a Viveros, Viveros la devuelve. Bolaños coge el balón y atraviesa el medio campo, se la pasa al Totonó, Totonó hace un pase profundo a Edwin Congo y Congo va, elude a un defensor argentino, va..... Se pone frente al arquero... le pega y.....

ALL
GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOL!!!!
(Everybody jumps and hugs in excitement. Whoever is holding a bowl tosses it into the air) (chips and beer are flying all around the room as they celebrate the goal.)

SAMUEL
Vamos Colombia!! (Kisses his shirt)

AURELIO
Que viva Colombia Hijueputa! (Long live Colombia!)

MANUEL
It was about freaking time!

AURELIO
Time ref!! End the game!

RODRIGO
Blow the damn whistle already!! *(The sound of a whistle is heard on the TV that signifies the end of the game)*

ALL
YES! *(Excitement increases) (Noise fades)*

SAMUEL
Man what a game! *(Pause)*

AURELIO
Vamos Samuel, let's go celebrate.

MANUEL
Do you mind if I join?

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SAMUEL
Come on! We're practically family!

AURELIO
Time to get drunk *(To Samuel, who laughs compliantly)*

SOFIA
You're already drunk.

SAMUEL

Hey our boys played on hell of a game, the least we can do is go out and get even drunker to thank them for it... (*All men Laugh*) I'll see you in a bit, *mi amor*.

SOFIA

Don't do anything stupid you crazy old man. Remember there's a curfew now. You know what can happen if the guerrilla catches you wondering after hours. That goes for you too Tito, alright? (*To Aurelio*)

AURELIO

Si Comandante Ortiz (Teasing her with a military salute)

SAMUEL

Don't worry *mija*. If there's one thing Tito and I know about this town is that, no matter if you're a *soldado, guerrillero, Narco, Paraco (soldier, guerrilla fighter, drug dealer, paramilitary)* or just a regular old guy, whenever Colombia scores, we all yell.

ALL MEN

GOOOOOOOOOOOOL!

SAMUEL

We'll be fine *mija*.

SOFIA

Ok go you crazy drunken fools, but please be careful.

SAMUEL

Always *mija*. (*Kisses Sofia*)

PAPER RIVER

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AURELIO

Chao Sofi! (*Samuel and Aurelio exit*) (*Sofia exits to the kitchen*)

MANUEL

You coming Rodrigo?

RODRIGO

Ehh... I think I better stay and help Sofia organize, you know?

MANUEL

Come on man! Don't be such a wimp, why would you? *(Pause)*
Oh.

RODRIGO

Aha.

MANUEL

Oh yeah.

RODRIGO

Exactly.

MANUEL

You get those perky tits! Make me proud buddy.

RODRIGO

Will you just go, you damn perv *(Manuel Exits)* *(Sofia enters from the kitchen with a broom, a dust pan and a big garbage bag)*

SOFIA

You're not going?

RODRIGO

Nah I'm ok.

SOFIA

You didn't have to stay.

RODRIGO

It's ok, I didn't want to go anyways.

SOFIA

Well...thanks

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RODRIGO

No problem *(Pause)* *(Sofia Gives the broom to Rodrigo. As she picks up the bottles and the bowls, Rodrigo sweeps the floor)*
(Awkward silence)

SOFIA

Listen... I wanted to talk to you.

RODRIGO

You did?

SOFIA

Yeah, you know... I wanted to, you know.

RODRIGO

Yeah?

SOFIA

I wanted to Apologize... for slapping you the other day... I'm sorry.

RODRIGO

Ok

SOFIA

Ok?

RODRIGO

No, I mean. It's okay I deserved it.

SOFIA

Yeah, you kinda did.

RODRIGO

Weren't you apologizing?

SOFIA

You're the one who said it (*Laughing*) (*Awkward silence*) So... how's the writing going.

RODRIGO

It's good... really good actually. I'm getting better every day. Your grandfather 's a great teacher.

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SOFIA

Yeah, he is.

RODRIGO

I walk down the streets now and I read post signs, just for the heck of it, you know? And I understand them! And, whenever I go to the river, I sit down on the edge and write. Sometimes I'm sitting down and, when I realize it, hours have passed and I've written dozens and dozens of pages. I love that feeling. (*Pause*)

SOFIA
You go to the river?

RODRIGO
Yeah, all the time. Sometimes I go with Manolo, but sometimes I like to go by myself. I... I have a somewhat special relationship with the river.

SOFIA
What do you mean?

RODRIGO
Nothing, never mind, you'll think I'm crazy.

SOFIA
Tell me.

RODRIGO
It's silly, never mind.

SOFIA
Try me. *(Pause)*

RODRIGO
I go to the river... because he speaks to me... I know it sounds crazy but the river speaks to me. I can't explain it. Ever since I can remember, the river has told me his stories. I thought the river talked to everybody, like a storyteller passing through the towns and connecting them with his memories. But then I realized that it was just me. I was the only one who understood what he said. He talks to me in sort of whispers that the wind carries. I can't really explain it. He talks through the sound of

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the water sliding through the rocks and the wind blowing the leaves into the current... Why me? I still think about that often. What's so special about me that I can understand him and no one else can? I'm still trying to figure that out. All I know is that it speaks to me, and that I have to tell the world what he says. Somebody has to tell the stories of the river. That's why I wanna learn how to write. *(Long Pause)* I told you it sounded crazy. *(Pause)*

SOFIA

It doesn't sound crazy at all. I know exactly how you feel (*Long Pause*).... My mom used to love to go to the river. She said that the river sang to her lullabies, and that she sang to me the songs so that I would sing them to my daughter one day. Ever since she died we stopped going, but I'd like to go again someday. (*Pause*)

RODRIGO

If you want... one of these days... When I go. You can... come. (*Pause*)

SOFIA

I'd like that (*Lights fade*)

SCENE EIGHT (*Skipping Rocks*)

(*Lights up*) (*Sofia and Rodrigo are at the river. Sofia has a bandana covering her eyes while Rodrigo guides her to a spot near the shore. It is a hot and sunny day*)

SOFIA

Can I open my eyes now?

RODRIGO

Not yet.

SOFIA

Hurry up, I'm curious.

RODRIGO

Wait a second (*Rodrigo places her in the place he wants*) And... now (*takes the bandana of*) (*Sofia opens her eyes*)

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SOFIA

Dios mío.

RODRIGO

Is it like you remember it? (*Sofia kneels down at the shore, pours her hands into the river and washes her face with the cold water*)

SOFIA

It's exactly how I remember it... the sound of the current... the feel of the breeze... the smell of the trees. Even the temperature of the water is the same.... Nothing has changed.

RODRIGO

Yeah, this place is pretty magical isn't it? (*Sofia starts sobbing. The sobbing then turn into silent crying*) What's the matter?

SOFIA

Nothing... It's nothing.

RODRIGO

Tell me.

SOFIA

I don't want to ruin the moment.

RODRIGO

Come on, tell me. (*Pause*)

SOFIA

We used to come every weekend to the river. My parents, my grandparents, Aurelio and his wife Esmeralda. My grandfather and Aurelio taught me how to skip rocks, so I always skipped rocks with them. It was our thing... I wasn't tall enough to go to the bottom of the river, so my dad always carried me on his back and swam into the deep... When I was tired I used to ask my mom to sing me lullabies... and she sang. She sang the lullabies that the river had sang to her before, until I fell asleep under the heat (*Pause*) one afternoon, it was a Sunday I remember, we were at the river. We must've stayed there for a while, because I was asleep... I woke up and there were loud bangs and screams everywhere. Screams louder than I'd ever heard (*Long Pause*) The army and the guerrilla were fighting over the control of the river and we... we got stuck in the

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Crossfire... My mother kept yelling... She kept yelling at my father to get out of the water... All I remember is that I wanted to see what was going on. I was curious. What is happening? I kept thinking. But when I went to see, my grandfather grabbed me... What's going on I said. I want to see... He took me into his arms and told me to close my eyes, so I did. He told me to cover my ears, so I did. He took me to a big rock and we hid there until the loud bangs and screams stopped... I remember he kept telling me to keep my eyes closed and fall asleep. He kept telling me that it was all a dream and that when I'd wake up, I was going to be safe... Esmeralda took me while Aurelio and

my grandfather went back to the river (*Pause*) I can still remember how my grandfather wept.... I'd never seen my grandfather cry, and I still haven't since.... I know he cries sometimes 'cause I can hear him through the walls, but he tries to make sure that I'm not around when he does... When they returned and my grandfather carried me in his arms again, I asked him, where is mommy and daddy *pajarito*? (*Birdie*) ... are they ok? Why aren't they with you *pajarito*? Why? Why? He just hugged me and told me to fall asleep... it was just a dream, he said. Mommy and daddy are alright... I pretended to fall asleep, but I saw the river as we walked by... A river that once was bright blue and brown had turned red, red as blood. The brightest red I'd ever seen. That same river that once carried dreams and hopes from the high mountains to the sea, was now carrying death. He carried all that death and all those fading heartbeats of the dozens of people who died that day, including my parents... The river turned red that day. (*Long Pause*)

RODRIGO

Sofia... I'm... I'm so sorry.

SOFIA

It's ok. It was a long time ago.

RODRIGO

No it's not. If I knew that I wouldn't have brought you here... God I'm such an idiot!

SOFIA

It was me who wanted to come, remember?

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RODRIGO

Why would you want to remember that?

SOFIA

Please don't be sorry.... I'm really glad you brought me here again.... I remember that horrible day, yes. But I also remember how my mother sang lullabies to me. How my father took me into his shoulders and swam on the deep waters with me on his back. I remember skipping rocks and feeling it was the greatest talent one could ever wish for... My dad, Aurelio Samuel! ...They all seemed like giants to me.... I thought, if they're next to me, then nothing can ever harm me. I felt so safe. I felt so loved.... And coming back here... I feel that love all over

again... Thank you for that. (*Gives Rodrigo a kiss on the cheek*)
(*Pause*) (*Rodrigo touches his cheek and smiles*).

RODRIGO
Do you remember them?

SOFIA
Remember what?

RODRIGO
The lullabies.

SOFIA
I remember one, my favorite one.

Drume negrita
Que yo va a comprar nueva cunita
Que tendrá capite' y también ca'cabe'
Si tu drume yo te traigo un mamey muy colorao
Si no drume yo te traigo un babalao
Que da pau pau

A la negrita se le salen
Los pies de la cunita
Y la negra Merce' ya no sabe que hace'
Drume negrita

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Que yo va a compra' nueva cunita
Que tendrá capite' y también ca'cabe'
Si tú drume yo te traigo un mamey muy colorao'
Si no drume yo te traigo un babalao'
Que da pau pau.

(*Long Pause*) (*Rodrigo gets up, picks up a rock and shows it to Sofia*)

RODRIGO:
What about this... you still remember this?

SOFIA
I... I don't know.

RODRIGO
Come on give it a try.

SOFIA
I haven't done it in years.

RODRIGO
You'll remember. It's like riding a bike.

SOFIA
Ehh... I don't know.

RODRIGO
Why not?

SOFIA
What if I suck? Then I'll definitely be sad, knowing I forgot the coolest talent I had. *(Laughs)*

RODRIGO
There's only one-way to find out. *(Hands her the rock) (Pause)*

SOFIA
Just so you know, if I suck at this, I'm gonna slap you again.

RODRIGO
I can live with that *(Laughing) (Sofia walks to the shore, does an imaginary throw practicing and then, after a real through, skips the rock)*

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SOFIA
YEAH!

RODRIGO
See, I told you... Just like riding a bike.

SOFIA
This is so cool! I can't believe I remember... This is amazing!
Let's throw some more.

RODRIGO
Sure *(Rodrigo and Sofia keep skipping rocks until the end of conversation)*

RODRIGO

Look, you're a natural (*Sofia throws another rock*)

SOFIA

You saw that?! That one skipped three times!

RODRIGO

I did!

SOFIA

That's absolutely beautiful.

RODRIGO

Yes it is (*Looking at Sofia*) (*Sofia notices and looks at Rodrigo. He realizes he got caught and turns away, blushing.*)

SOFIA

Thank you for bringing me here.

RODRIGO

Thank you for coming (*Long Pause*) (*Sofia and Rodrigo kiss*)

SOFIA

Come on let's get in. (*Sofia takes her shirt and shorts off*)

RODRIGO

Ehh... I don't know I think I'll pass.

SOFIA

Don't be such a wimp. (*Splashes Rodrigo*)

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RODRIGO

Mierda!! That's cold (His back twist with the contact of the cold water)... Oh you're gonna pay for that!! (Rodrigo and Sofia Splash and wrestle playfully in the water... at some point Rodrigo picks her up in his arms and they kiss again) (Lights fade)

SCENE EIGHT: (*Monsters*)

(Sofia is in a classroom at the school, erasing the board after the last class of the day) (Toribio enters) (Sofia doesn't notice his presence while he looks at her ass)

TORIBIO

Buenas tardes señorita Ortiz (Good afternoon Ms. Ortiz) (Sofia

Jumps startled). I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.

SOFIA
Comandante.

TORIBIO
I wanted to talk to you for a moment.

SOFIA
I'm busy.

TORIBIO
Oh this won't take long Sofia... may I call you Sofia?

SOFIA
That is my name.

TORIBIO
And a very beautiful one, I might add.

SOFIA
What do you want?

TORIBIO
I feel we started off on the wrong foot. I wanted to apologize for...for what happened the other day.

SOFIA
You killed a boy.

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TORIBIO
I know... I'm very sorry.

SOFIA
You took out your gun and pointed it directly at him, and you killed him!

TORIBIO
I know what I did was horrible. But you weren't listening to me. I was so frustrated because you weren't listening. Sometimes, when the blood heats up one does stupid things that one later regrets. I'm normally a very calm man.

SOFIA

I'd hate to be in your way on a bad day then.

TORIBIO

I would never harm you. You above all people. You must know that (*Long Pause*).

SOFIA

What about the children?

TORIBIO

What about them?

SOFIA

You say you'd never harm me. What about them?

TORIBIO

Have the other children been harmed so far?

SOFIA

No. Not so far. But you said-

TORIBIO

Has anyone under my command, during our time here, laid a single hand on them?

SOFIA

No.

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TORIBIO

You have nothing to fear, see? (*Pause*)

SOFIA

Promise me you won't hurt them.

TORIBIO

What kind of monster do you take me for?

SOFIA

You killed a boy!

TORIBIO

I know I killed a boy!! (*Long Pause*) It was horrible. Inhumane!

Soulless! There are no words to describe what I did. But it had to be done. You have no idea how hard it is to be in my position, Ms. Ortiz. I had to make you listen. I had to make you understand. *(Pause)*

SOFIA

Promise me. I need you to say it *(pause)* Promise me.

TORIBIO

You have my word.

SOFIA

Thank you. *(Pause)* *Understand* Toribio. You may be at war, but they aren't.

TORIBIO

I do.

SOFIA

Please remember it.

TORIBIO

I will... *(Pause)* You're a very passionate woman Sofia, I admire that.

SOFIA

Thank you.

TORIBIO

I'm a very powerful man. I have many men under my command. Most of them fear me and not a single one of them

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dares to question my judgment... But not you. You don't fear me.

SOFIA

You may be a powerful man but, behind all that power, you're still just a man.

TORIBIO

I find that rebellious nature of you to be... refreshing *(Pause)* you know, during wartime men, especially commanders of higher ranks, get to be quite lonely.

SOFIA

I imagine.

TORIBIO

You know what they say. Behind every great man there's a great woman that supports him.

SOFIA

I agree. (*Toribio approaches Sofia*)

TORIBIO

You're a very beautiful woman. (*He kisses Sofia*)

SOFIA

Stop.

TORIBIO

I want you.

SOFIA

Please stop.

TORIBIO

Kiss me.

SOFIA

I said stop! (*Sofia hits Toribio*) (*Silence*) (*Toribio recuperates*)

TORIBIO

Why would you do that?

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SOFIA:

Please leave.

TORIBIO

No.

SOFIA

Leave! (*Approaches Sofia Again*)

TORIBIO

Why won't you kiss me! (*Struggles with Sofia*)

SOFIA

Because you're a fucking monster! *(Hits Toribio, who falls to the ground) (Pause) (Toribio recovers himself, stands up and looks at sofia infuriated)*

TORIBIO

You think I'm a monster?... You think I'm a monster? *(Sofia runs towards the door. Toribio intercepts her and throws her to the floor)...* You want a monster!! I'll show a monster!

SOFIA

Help!!

TORIBIO

I'm a monster only because you made me one! *(Summits Sofia)*

SOFIA

Somebody help me! *(In pain) (Toribio Hits Sofia) Ahora si vas ver Perra. (Now you're gonna get it bitch) (Rodrigo enters)*

RODRIGO

Get off her!

(He pushes Toribio and frees Sofia. Toribio struggles to get up and takes out his knife. Rodrigo gets a hold on Toribio's gun that was sitting on the desk. He points it at Toribio and fires, but realizes that the gun is not loaded. (Long Pause) Toribio starts laughing. Takes out the bullets of his pocket, holds them in the air and drops them one by one.

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TORIBIO

You're gonna wish you hadn't done that boy. *(Toribio attacks Rodrigo) (Rodrigo and Toribio wrestle fiercely until Rodrigo hits Toribio and he falls to the ground. Rodrigo kicks Toribio hardy in the stomach. He picks up a bullet from the ground and proceeds to load the gun)*

SOFIA

Let's go!

RODRIGO

We can't leave him alive, he'll come after us. *(Fighters of the guerrilla running down the corridor are heard in the*

background)

SOFIA

We have to go now!

RODRIGO

Shit! *(Sofia and Rodrigo exit) (Fighter's enter)*

FIGHTER 1

Comandante! (Fighters aid Toribio)

TORIBIO

Find them! *(Toribio points to where they just exited)*

FIGHTER 2

Go!! *(Fighters Exit) (Long Pause) (Toribio Recuperates. He kicks a chair in the classroom and screams loudly in anger)*

TORIBIO

You're dead boy... You don't know it yet... but you're dead.

END OF ACT ONE

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ACT TWO

SCENE ONE *(Check mate)*

(Lights up) (Samuel sits in the garden listening to the radio, humming to the song that is playing) (Next to the radio there is an unfinished chess game) (The sound of a door opening harshly and slamming shut is heard)

RODRIGO, SOFIA

Samuel! ... Samuel!! *(In the background)*

(Samuel gets up the chair worried and turns off the radio)

SAMUEL
In the garden! (*Rodrigo and Sofia enter*)

RODRIGO
Samuel we have to go!

SAMUEL
What's the matter?

RODRIGO
We have to go, right now.

SAMUEL
What? Why?

SOFIA
No time to explain *pajarito*. We have to go *now*!

SAMUEL
What's going on?

RODRIGO
Would you please just do it!

SAMUEL
Do what?

SOFIA
Leave with us. We have to leave town right now.

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SAMUEL
Why?

RODRIGO
We don't have time for this!

SAMUEL
Will somebody explain to me what on earth is going on?

SOFIA
Rodrigo hit Alias Toribio.

SAMUEL

What? Are you insane?

RODRIGO
It's not how it-

SAMUEL
Do you know what that man is capable of?

SOFIA
He was protecting me.

SAMUEL
Protecting you? Protecting you from wh-- *(Pause) Dios mio no-
no puede ser (This cannot be)* What did he? -- Did he hurt you?
-- Are you alright?

SOFIA
I'm alright. Rodrigo stopped him on time.

SAMUEL
Oh thank God *(He embraces Sofia and kisses her on the
forehead)*

RODRIGO
We have to go Samuel.

SAMUEL
You're right. I have a friend in Neiva who'll let us stay with him
until we figure out what to do. *(Loud banging on the door is
heard in the background)*

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TORIBIO
Sofia!! I know you're in there! *(More banging)*

SOFIA
No. No, no, no, no *Dios mio* no!

RODRIGO
We can still make it.

SAMUEL
No time. Leave through the back door. Go to Aurelio's house
and hide. He just left so you'll probably see him down the road.

I'll stall them and buy you some time.

RODRIGO

Samuel no! They'll kill you!

SAMUEL

Go now!

SOFIA

Pajarito!

SAMUEL

Do as I say! Go! *(Sofia and Rodrigo exit) (Samuel turns on the radio and sits on a chair) (The fighters and Toribio break in) (Toribio and Fighters enter)*

TORIBIO

Where are they?

SAMUEL

Sorry, I can't hear you through the music!! *(Toribio turns off the radio abruptly)*

TORIBIO

Where are they?

SAMUEL

Excuse me?

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TORIBIO

Sofia and that bastard she was with. Where are they?

SAMUEL

Sofia must be at the school.

TORIBIO

We just came from the school.

SAMUEL

Then I'm afraid I can't help you. Mister...

TORIBIO

Comandante Toribio Arenas, segunda brigada móvil de las

Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- Ejército del pueblo-. (Comander Toribio Arenas, second mobile brigade of the revolutionary armed forces of Colombia- The people's army)

SAMUEL

Ah... *Mucho gusto Comandante. Samuel Sánchez. (Pause)*
(Toribio paces impatiently through the garden)

TORIBIO

You're telling me you haven't seen them?

SAMUEL

That's correct.

TORIBIO

You know what will happen to you if we find them and it turns out you were lying to me?

SAMUEL

I'm just an old man listening to some music for my soul and enjoying the sun before the rain comes, commander. *(Pause)*

TORIBIO

You two search the house. Tell the rest of the men to close down the block *(To fighters)* *(Fighters exit)* *(Toribio notices the chess board)*... Playing chess by yourself?

SAMUEL

With Aurelio, a friend of mine.

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TORIBIO

Aurelio Vásquez? The school principal?

SAMUEL

Do you know him?

TORIBIO

It can be said we're acquainted with each other, yes.

SAMUEL

Good! That means we have a friend in common. Do you play chess commander?

TORIBIO

Occasionally.

SAMUEL
Huh.

TORIBIO
Yes?

SAMUEL
Oh nothing. I just didn't picture as a chess player, that's all.

TORIBIO
Why is that?

SAMUEL
Chess is a game of patience and serenity. One must have a cold head and a steady hand to master the game of chess. Word on the street is that you're not a very patient man *Comandante*.

TORIBIO
Men in my position can't afford the luxury of patience.

SAMUEL
For men in your position patience shouldn't be a luxury, but more so a necessity, don't you agree?

TORIBIO
I agree.

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SAMUEL
A game? *(Pause)*

TORIBIO
Where are you hiding them, old man?

SAMUEL
Patience Commander, play a game with me. I'm sure Sofia and Rodrigo won't take long.

TORIBIO
So that's his name, the bastard. *(Pause)*

SAMUEL
Please, sit. (*Toribio sits down*).... Black or White.

TORIBIO
White. (*Toribio makes the first move*) (*Pause*)

SAMUEL
Is my Sofi in trouble?

TORIBIO
Yes.

SAMUEL
Is it serious?

TORIBIO
The whore hit me. (*Pause*)

SAMUEL
I'm sorry to hear that.

TORIBIO
Not as sorry as they'll be. (*Pause*)

SAMUEL
Are you going to kill her? (*Long Pause*)

TORIBIO
No.

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SAMUEL
What about Rodrigo?

TORIBIO
He won't be so lucky. (*Pause*)

SAMUEL
Is your decision final? (*Pause*)

TORIBIO
He's a lost cause Samuel, why bother help him?

SAMUEL

I don't believe in lost causes. Old habits of an old teacher. You of all men should understand that.

TORIBIO

Why is this boy so important to you?

SAMUEL

I'm teaching him how to read.

TORIBIO

You should've taught him how to shoot, it would've helped him more.

SAMUEL

Words will get him out of this town, not bullets. The sooner you and your men realize that, the sooner this war will end.

TORIBIO

He's common Samuel, nothing special about him. Ordinary at best. He's the perfect description of a pawn, you might say. *(Takes a pawn from the board and holds it up to illustrate his point)* There are thousands like him in this country. Each one as common and ordinary as the rest. Don't think that by saving him you'll help end this war, or that he'll become any better than the rest of them.

SAMUEL

And I suppose you're better than him?

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TORIBIO

You're damn right I am.

SAMUEL

You're a pawn in this war Toribio, Wouldn't you say? I say you're more of a pawn than he'll ever be... Check *(Pause)*

TORIBIO

I'm no pawn.

SAMUEL

Let me ask you something. If you get killed during combat, what happens to your position?

TORIBIO

My right hand takes over my duties.

SAMUEL

Is that already established as protocol?

TORIBIO

Yes.

SAMUEL

So you probably were the right hand of another commander before being commander yourself, right?

TORIBIO

Yes.

SAMUEL

And he probably died in battle, which gave you the opportunity to get promoted to the position you hold today. Correct?

TORIBIO

Yes.

SAMUEL

It sounds like a pawn to me. Check.

TORIBIO

I am not a pawn! *(Hits the table with his fist closed)* *(Long Pause)* I have Fort-five men under my command. People's

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lives depend on me. I click my fingers and people die! I have power... pawns don't have power.

SAMUEL

You move how and when you are ordered to move. Many of your fellow commanders have been deliberately sacrificed to get ahead in the war, and there is a high chance that you will too. Why can't you see that? ... Do you know how many years I've lived in this town?

TORIBIO

How many?

SAMUEL

Forty-five... And do you know how many *Commandantes de las F.A.R.C- Ejército del pueblo*- have I met while living in this town?

TORIBIO

How many?

SAMUEL

Twenty-four. Twenty-five, including you (*Pause*) you cannot sacrifice a king or a queen to win a war, but you can always sacrifice a pawn. If the king dies, the game ends. If the queen dies, the rest of the side she fights for will be crippled beyond repair. They're irreplaceable, unique you might say... That's not the case for pawns. Even though they're the ones who actually fight the war, there is little hope for them... There are countless numbers of them, which makes them replaceable. Even expendable, you might say. They're just another piece in this game we call Chess. (*Pause*) Are you indispensable *Comandante*? Are you unique? (*Samuel makes a final move on the game*) ... check mate (*Long Pause*) (*Toribio is speechless*) Good game *Comandante*. I enjoyed it very much. Better luck next time, and consider our little talk. I think it will do you much good. (*Samuel gets up and starts walking to the porch*)

FIGHTER 1

We found them! (*Samuel stops*) (*Sofia and Rodrigo enter at gunpoint and are thrown to the ground*)

PAPER RIVER

74

FIGHTER 2

Caught them right in front of Aurelio's house. (*Long Pause*)

TORIBIO

Check mate it is Samuel (*Toribio picks up a pawn and holds it in his hand*) ... Check mate it is (*Lights fade*)

SCENE TWO (*Broken Dreams*)

(*A grass field, surrounded by mountains. It's late in the afternoon, but the sun hasn't set yet. Shots are heard in the distance, where the guerrilla and the army are engaged in combat. A Single light illuminates Samuel, who is kneeling on the floor, with his hands tied on front. His face has been beaten*)

and the blood stains on his white shirt evidence it. He is without his glasses or his cane. Lights come in and it is revealed that Samuel is entirely surrounded by small white metal crosses, demarking landmines. Alias Toribio enters. Rodrigo and Sofia follow at gunpoint by two other men of the guerilla. Rodrigo and Sofia are horrified by the situation, contrary to the disturbing calm that Toribio and his fellow companions display. Rodrigo and Sofia are pushed to the ground, commanded to kneel)

TORIBIO

Do you know what this is Rodrigo? (*Pointing with his gun at the minefield*) (*Pause*)

RODRIGO

Yes.

TORIBIO

Do you realize what the cruces are?

RODRIGO

Yes. (*In a soft and sickening realization*)

TORIBIO

Speak up Rodrigo! We can't *hear* you!

RODRIGO

Yes! I...Yes, I do.

PAPER RIVER

75

TORIBIO

Good!! You're making my job easier... Don't you just hate it? When you're carrying out your business and there's someone who simply *does not get it?* ... Ugh! It drives me crazy! But not you, Rodrigo no, no, no, no. You're special! Unique one might say. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise. (*Laughs sarcastically*) Because I *know* you're such a smart young boy, I've created a small test, which, I personally believe, you'll pass with flying colors. (*Takes out a piece of paper from jacket*) In here are the written instructions so that our friend Samuel here can cross that minefield without any harm... Since I heard that you were making so much *progress*, I think it is only fair of me to give you a chance to prove it. Am I right, or not? Ehh? (*To his companions*) (*Him and his companions laugh. Companions*

nod in compliance) (Sofia stands up and moves towards Toribio).

SOFIA

Please I beg you... (Toribio and the other members raise their guns immediately).

TORIBIO

Don't move! Que no te muevas carajo!! Al piso puta!... (Don't, move!! On the floor bitch!) On your knees! Now! (Sofia falls back to her knees) If you move again, even one single inch! (Points gun directly at Rodrigo's head) I'll put a bullet into pretty boy's skull! Now... where was I? Ah! Yes... Rodrigo, please pay attention. It is your responsibility to direct our dear friend Samuel to safe territory, but here's the juicy part. Listen now, 'cause I really love this part. You know why? (Pause) because this is where I challenge you... You see how good of a teacher I am? (To Samuel) I'm challenging him to do better for himself! ... I'm teaching him more about life that you ever did! The juicy part... (pause) is that you have exactly one minute to do it. (To Rodrigo.) (Rodrigo looks at Toribio not believing what he heard) You heard what I said... You have one minute to guide him. One... If he fails to direct Samuel out of the field before the established time (To Sofia), then, I'm afraid, I will have to terminate your beloved writer's existence. (Pointing gun at Rodrigo's head).

RODRIGO

Dios mio ayúdanos (God, help us)

PAPER RIVER

76

TORIBIO

*God can't help you now *papi!* You're on your own! Your time starts... (Small pause) (Looks at his watch. Continues to point gun) ... now. (Rodrigo is in a state of shock; he looks at the paper but is unable to enunciate a single word)*

SOFIA

Read it Rodrigo!

RODRIGO

Ah... (Pause)

SOFIA

Read it!

RODRIGO

Two steps forward! Th.... Then ... Then turn...

TORIBIO

Tic-toc Tic-toc (*Applies more pressure with gun on head*) Come on Rodrigo you can do better than that!

SOFIA

Vamos Rodrigo! You can *do* this!

SAMUEL

Rodrigo listen to me!! *Listen* to me!! It's alright *mijo*... relax.

TORIBIO

Forty seconds! (*Samuel Starts walking forward slowly, step by step, as if waiting for a click to sound.*)

SAMUEL

Remember what I told you (*Moves Slowly*).

TORIBIO

Thirty-five seconds! (*Samuel continues moving*)

RODRIGO

Stop!! Samuel *for God's sake* stop!! I can do this!

PAPER RIVER

77

SAMUEL

Find your words Rodrigo! Find them! (*Rodrigo continues to look at the paper but is unable to speak*)

TORIBIO

Twenty seconds!

SAMUEL

Ehhh... Two steps forward! three steps to the left!... Ehhh. Damn it!

TORIBIO

TEN!

RODRIGO

I need more time!

TORIBIO
Not an option. Five!

SOFIA
Please give him more time!

TORIBIO
Three!

SAMUEL
It's alright *mijo*.

TORIBIO
Two!

RODRIGO
I'm so sorry Samuel.

TORIBIO
One! Time's up Rodrigo!

RODRIGO
I'm sorry Samuel!!! (*Rodrigo begins to cry*) (*Pause*)

TORIBIO
Oh Man! I was really rutting for you, *papi*. Better luck next time (*Rodrigo closes eyes*). (*As Toribio prepares to shoot,*

PAPER RIVER

78

Samuel begins to sing a Cumbia)

*Va subiendo la corriente
Con chinchorro y atarraya
La canoa de bareque
Para llegar a la playa.*

(Toribio lowers his gun in disbelief and looks at Samuel. Sofia joins the chant)

*El pescador...
habla con la luna
El pescador... habla con la playa
El pescador... no tiene fortuna*

Sólo su atarraya.

SAMUEL

Find your words Rodrigo. Find your words.

*La luna espera sonriente
Con su mágico esplendor
La llegada del valiente
Y del alegre pescador.*

(Rodrigo joins in the chant and sways to the rhythm of the song.) After he settles down he begins to read directions fluently and calmly, guiding Samuel to safe ground. Samuel and Sofia continue to sing and dance, as he follows Rodrigo's instructions. (Pause) (Toribio, Enraged, shoots a mine. The mine instantly explodes) (Prolonged silence) (Toribio points his gun at Samuel).

TORIBIO

Bullet or mine, what's it gonna be?

RODRIGO

You son a bitch!

TORIBIO

Shut up! *(Hits Rodrigo with his gun)*

SOFIA

You said that if Rodrigo read-

PAPER RIVER

79

TORIBIO

I lied!!!... What's it gonna be old man? Bullet or mine? *(Long Pause).*

SOFIA

Please don't... please!! *(To Toribio)*

TORIBIO

Shut up! Well old man? *(To Samuel) (Silence) (Samuel begins to move slowly forward. There is a great sense of pride and dignity in his walk).*

RODRIGO

Don't you move Samuel! Don't you fucking move *Carajo!*
(Begins to yell directions desperately)

SAMUEL

It's alright *mijo*, stop reading.

SOFIA

For the love of God *pajarito* STOP MOVINGG! (*To Samuel*)

SAMUEL

Remember what I told you.

RODRIGO

Stop damn it!!

SAMUEL

It's alright, *mijo*. (*Samuel walks forward until the sound of a click is heard. Samuel stops abruptly. If he raises his leg the mine will explode*)

RODRIGO

Jesus Christ!

SOFÍA

Oh God no, *Dios mio* no, NO, NO! (*Starts to cry uncontrollably*) (*Toribio lowers gun slowly, stunned by the outcome of events and looks at Samuel*) (*Prolonged Silence*) (*Only the Sofia's cries are heard*) (*Rodrigo clenches the paper hysterically and shouts instructions*)

PAPER RIVER

80

RODRIGO

Move left! Th... three steps forward then stop!

SAMUEL

Rodrigo.

RODRIGO

Move t...to- to the right and take f... five steps.

SAMUEL

Rodrigo!

RODRIGO

I can save you Samuel. Let me save you!

SAMUEL

RODRIGO! *(Rodrigo stops screaming. looks at Samuel)*
(Pause) The world may take everything from you *mijo*.
EVERYTHING! But it will *never* take away from what's in here
(points at his head) and what's in here *(Points at his heart)*. We
are skipping rocks in the river Rodrigo. We bounce
uncontrollably, hoping the river may take us to better waters, but
many times we fall thorough the water and drown at the bottom.
The choice you must make is whether to let yourself drown at
the bottom, or refuse to give up and let the river take you to
undiscovered places. Better places. Beautiful places! Places you
can't possibly imagine... Let the river take you places *mijo*.
Refuse to drown. Keep flowing until you reach the delta... If
you remember that, then everything will be alright ok? Tell
me you understand... TELL ME!

RODRIGO

I understand! *(Crying)*

SAMUEL

If you remember that then nothing can stop you! ... Always
remember it *mijo*. It's alright ok? Everything will be alright.
Goodbye Son. Take care of my Sofi. *(Raises his leg)*.

RODRIGO

Samuel No! *(Simultaneously as Samuel is raising his leg)*

PAPER RIVER

81

SOFIA

Oh god No! ... No! *(Shouts at the top of her lungs)*
(Simultaneously) *(Blackout as a loud bang is heard)* *(Only*
Sofia's cries are heard in the background)

SCENE THREE *(When it rains, it pours)*

(Lights up on center stage) *(The River appears, under a heavy*
tropical rain. Thunder and gunfire are heard in the background
of the rising brown current) *(The voice of a news reporter*
announces that the government has given an ultimatum to the
guerilla in the peace negotiations) *(Crossfade)*

(Toribio and members from the guerrilla are in a heated discussion with government representatives in the peace negotiations)

TORIBIO

We won't agree to this!

REPRESENTATIVE 1

You must!

FIGHTER 3

There's no way in hell we'll sign it!

REPRESENTATIVE 2

Haven't you had enough bloodshed?

TORIBIO

Not enough to sign this shit! *(Holding the treaty in the air)*
(Heated debate continues)

(Crossfade)

(Children in the school are bundled up in a corner on the playground. Guerilla fighters are pointing their guns at Aurelio, who has put himself between them and the children)

AURELIO

These are children for Christ sake!

PAPER RIVER

82

FIGHTER 1

Our orders are to take them!

AURELIO

To hell with those orders, this is madness!

FIGHTER 2

Step aside Aurelio!

AURELIO

For God's sake, think of what you're doing man! *(Standoff continues)* *(Crossfade)*

(The river) (Rodrigo is working on his aim, shooting at beer bottles under a heavy rain, while Manuel tries desperately to talk some sense into him)

MANUEL
Are you nuts?

RODRIGO
Yes I am!

MANUEL
You're seriously gonna shoot him?

RODRIGO
You damn right I am!

MANUEL
You're gonna get yourself killed! He's a commander of the Guerilla Rodrigo... do you even know how crazy you sound right know?

RODRIGO
Someone's gotta do it!
(Discussion continues) (Crossfade)

PAPER RIVER

83

(The Garden) (Sofia paces from side to side nervously. Clara, her best friend, sits on the porch, holding a pregnancy test)

CLARA
Relax will you?

SOFIA
Is it ready?

CLARA
Not yet.

SOFIA
Are you sure?

CLARA
Not yet!

SOFIA
Oh god.

CLARA
Will you sit down?
(Pacing continues) (Crossfade)

(The School standoff)

FIGHTER 1
They're old enough to fight!

AURELIO
Not old enough to die!

FIGHTER 2
Step aside!

AURELIO
You don't have to do this son!

FIGHTER 2
Please Aurelio! ... Step aside!
(Standoff continues)(Crossfade)

PAPER RIVER

84

(Peace negotiations)

REPRESENTATIVE 1
You've been at war for so long that even the thought of peace
frightens you!

TORIBIO
You're damn right it frightens us!

REPRESENTATIVE 2
What are you saying?

FIGHTER 3

What the hell are we supposed to do with peace? For as long as we've known we've lived the war, breathed the war, bled the war.

REPRESENTATIVE 3

Would you sacrifice peace, flawed as it may be? ... Would you turn down a chance for peace, just to have your way?

TORIBIO

Yes!

(Crossfade) (Discussion continues)

(The garden)

CLARA

Sit down! You're making me dizzy!

SOFIA

I can't do this right now... I just can't.

CLARA

It's perfectly normal to be scared Sofi, but it's alright.

SOFIA

What if I'm not ready?

CLARA

Of course you're ready.

SOFIA

What if I screw up and I turn out to be a lousy mother?

PAPER RIVER

85

CLARA

It's in our instinct as women to be mothers Sofia. You won't screw up *(Pause)*.

SOFIA

I guess you're right... Is it ready?

CLARA

Not yet!

SOFIA

Oh God!

(Crossfade) (Pacing continues)

(The River)

MANUEL

You won't even get close enough to him before he puts a bullet in your head!

RODRIGO
It's worth a shot!

MANUEL
No it's not!

RODRIGO
You don't understand Manuel!

MANUEL
Then explain it to me *Carajo!*
(Crossfade) (Rodrigo shoots at a bottle while Manuel covers his ears)

(The School)

AURELIO
Toribio gave me his word these children would not be harmed!

FIGHTER 1
He's the one who gave the order!

PAPER RIVER

86

FIGHTER 2
Step aside.

AURELIO
No!

FIGHTER 1
They're coming with us!

AURELIO
No they won't!

FIGHTER 1

Step aside!

AURELIO
Over my dead body!

FIGHTER 2
Have it your way (*Fighter shoots Aurelio*) (*fighters take the children as they scream and cry*) (*Crossfade*)

(*The garden*)

CLARA
Two lines.

SOFIA
What does that mean? (*Pause*)

CLARA
It's positive... It means you're-

SOFIA
Oh my god.

CLARA
Congratulations Sofi! you're gonna be a mommy!

SOFIA
Oh my god (*Sofia holds her stomach and begins to cry. Clara embraces Sofia as she cries*) Oh my god (*holds her stomach and smiles*)

PAPER RIVER

87

(*The river*)

RODRIGO
I have to do this! (*Shoots at bottles*)

MANUEL
You'll die if you do this!

RODRIGO
You won't talk me out of it Manolo! (*Silence*) (*Only the sound of the heavy rain hitting the water is heard*)... I thought the words of the river could show me a way out of this place. I thought Samuel was right about the power of books and ideas

and the stories in the river! ... But I was wrong... he was wrong!... the only way I'll get out of this town is by shooting my way out!

MANUEL

If you die now, then Samuel's death will accomplish nothing!
... If you get yourself killed now, He will have died for nothing!!

RODRIGO

I've made up my mind.

MANUEL

Then you're more of an idiot than I thought!

RODRIGO

Good bye Manolo!

MANUEL

Have it your way! *(Manuel exits) (Rodrigo continues to shoot the bottles)*

(Peace negotiations)

TORIBIO

We ... will ... not... sign!

REPRESENTATIVE 1

Then we have nothing else to talk about!

PAPER RIVER

88

FIGHTER 3

This is not the peace we want, why can't you understand that?

REPRESENTATIVE 2

Because its peace! *(Slams his fist on the table hardly) (Silence)*
(He rises from his chair slowly) The people are ready for peace... this country is ready for peace! ... But apparently we're not *(Long Pause)*... History will remember this... Our children will look at this moment and they'll see... They'll see that we had a chance for peace, and we chose war... They'll see that we failed... Let's go gentlemen. *(The representatives get up from the table and begin to leave)*

TORIBIO

Have it your way!

REPRESENTATIVE 1
History will remember this.

(Crossfade)

(The River appears again. The news reporter announces in the background that the peace negotiations have failed) (As the noise of the pouring rain and combat fire rise, so does the level of the water. It's color turns slowly from brown to red, until the river is nothing but a bright red corridor of water and blood) (Lights fade)

SCENE FOUR *(The garden)*

(Rodrigo sits in the garden, loading his gun. He carries a backpack that he prepared before attempting to shoot Toribio) (Sofia enters) (Rodrigo tries to hide the gun in the bag)

SOFIA

No need to hide it. Manuel told me what you're planning to do.
(Pause)

RODRIGO

Snitch.

SOFIA

What the hell is the matter with you?

PAPER RIVER

89

RODRIGO

Don't start... Just... Don't. *(Rodrigo stands up and walks towards the exit)*

SOFIA

Don't you dare walk away! Don't you dare! *(Rodrigo stops. Turns around slowly)*

RODRIGO

I have to do this Sofi.

SOFIA

Why?

RODRIGO
You know why.

SOFIA
You're gonna get yourself killed.

RODRIGO
You don't know that.

SOFIA
Did it ever occur to you to think about me? About us? Or were you too busy playing Rambo?

RODRIGO
Who the hell you think I'm doing this for?

SOFIA
Don't pretend you're doing this for us. You're doing this for yourself!

RODRIGO
Sofia! He has to pay for what he did!

SOFIA
And you're supposed to be the chosen one to make him pay?
(Pause)

RODRIGO
Someone has to.

PAPER RIVER

90

SOFIA
How many men have you killed Rodrigo? ... Huh? *(Silence)*
That's right... Toribio has killed hundreds of men. Maybe even thousands. He's killed more women and children than you, me or anyone can possibly imagine. He's a monster Rodrigo! And you want to become just like him?

RODRIGO
What do you expect me to do then? Nothing? He killed Samuel!

SOFIA
I know he killed Samuel, I watched him die!

RODRIGO

I watched him die to! *(Long pause)* I watched him get slaughtered like a pig.... I thought that you of all people would understand that I have to make this right!

SOFIA

No, I don't understand. Not this. Getting yourself killed won't make it right. It won't fix anything Rodrigo! It won't bring him back!

RODRIGO

I know it won't!

SOFIA

Do you Rodrigo? 'Cause you sure don't seem to be get it.

RODRIGO

It's not about that.

SOFIA

Then what's it about?

RODRIGO

I just have to do it alright?

SOFIA

Why?

RODRIGO

Because!

PAPER RIVER

91

SOFIA

TELL ME WHY YOU'RE DOING THIS?!

RODRIGO

BECAUSE I CAN'T WRITE ANYMORE! ALRIGHT?!
(Prolonged silence)

SOFIA

What? *(Pause)*

RODRIGO

I can't Sofi... Ever since he died, the river stopped speaking to me... I go now and all I hear is the water hitting the rocks... He used to tell me stories as he went by, like a friend telling me

about his day... but not anymore. He stopped talking to me. He stopped talking 'cause I... I killed him Sofi... I killed Samuel. *(Rodrigo falls on his knees and begins to cry) (Sofia embraces him) (Pause)*

SOFIA

Did I ever tell you why he took so much care of his roses? The day my parents died, my grandfather stopped teaching... He couldn't understand how such a simple thing like politics could create so much hate amongst people... My mother's name was Rosa. When she died, my grandfather shut the outer world and sunk himself into his garden... He never said anything, but I think he figured that, if he took just enough care of his roses, that would make him forget. It would make him forget that the real one in his life, his Rosita, was gone... She was gone and she wasn't coming back.... That was until you came Rodrigo. He was so excited about teaching again... I saw him go to his studio over and over to figure out different ways of teaching you. To get through to you easier, better... He talked to me about your progress during coffee and he told me how the river spoke to you... I could never understand that until now... why teaching you meant so much to him... Oh Rodrigo you should've seen how he spoke about you... his eyes just sparkled when he mentioned you *(Pause)* My grandfather was already dead when you came Rodrigo. You didn't kill him. You brought him back to life. *(Pause)*

PAPER RIVER

92

RODRIGO

I always thought that the river spoke to everybody only most of the people chose not to listen to him. A part of me still does... I wanted the world to hear the stories like I did, and your grandfather showed me how *(Pause)*... You say that Samuel was dead before I came along and I brought him back. I say I was dead. I was dead because I was hopeless... How can you call yourself alive when you have no hope? ... Then he came. He taught me how to write the stories that the river told me. He gave me hope. I need that hope back Sofi. I need it so bad... That's why I'm doing this.

SOFIA

You are not a murderer Rodrigo. The river hasn't stopped talking to you, you're just refusing to listen ... you've lost yourself so you stopped listening to him... If you kill Toribio, the river will stop speaking to you. You know as well as I that the river will not speak to a murderer. *(Pause)*

RODRIGO

I'll just have to take that risk. *(Rodrigo walks towards the exit)*

SOFIA

I'm pregnant. *(Rodrigo stops and turns around) (Silence)*

RODRIGO

What?

SOFIA

I'm pregnant.

RODRIGO

When did you-

SOFIA

Today... I was coming here to tell you when Manuel told me about this. *(Pause)*.

RODRIGO

Dios mio. (Rodrigo drops his bag and runs towards Sofia. He holds her in the air. He kisses and embraces her) (Pause) I love you so much. Everything's gonna be fine. We'll be fine. I love you Sofi.

PAPER RIVER

93

SOFIA

I love you to Rodrigo. God you can't imagine how much I love you! ... But you better figure out what you're gonna do. 'Cause even though I can't imagine having a child with anybody else but you, I won't bring a child into this world with its father six feet under it... *(Pause) Goodbye Rodrigo. (Sofia kisses Rodrigo and Exits) (Long Pause) (Rodrigo kicks his backpack in utter frustration and sits down to swallow the news received. He walks towards the garden table and turns on the radio. Announcements and advertisements lead to music. The same song that was playing when he learned his vowels is playing. Rodrigo smiles. He closes he's eyes and begins to sway. The sway slowly becomes a dance until he opens his eyes. He smiles*

again, takes out a note pad and a pencil from the bag, sits down on the table and begins to write) (Lights fade)

SCENE FIVE (*Paper River*)

(Lights up) (Several years have passed) (Manuel, Sofia and Rosa are in the river on a hot February day. Manuel is teaching Rosa how to skip rocks, while Sofia reads a book by a log on the shore)

MANUEL

You hold the rock in your fingers like this, you see?

ROSA

Yes.

MANUEL

Hold it.

ROSA

Así?

MANUEL

Exactly. Now throw it, but remember, you gotta throw it at the height of your waist, so it'll skip. Like this. (*Demonstrates*)

SOFIA

Rosa *mi amor*, come put some lotion on. I don't want you to get sunburned.

PAPER RIVER

94

ROSA

I already put some.

SOFIA

That was before you got in the water. You gotta put it again.

ROSA

In a minute mom.

SOFIA

If you wait you'll get burned and then you'll be sore all week.

ROSA

But mom!

SOFIA
Now.

ROSA
Agh... alright.

MANUEL
What time is it?

SOFIA
He'll be here soon.

MANUEL
He should be here by now.

SOFIA
Relax manolo, he'll be here.

MANUEL
Yeah I guess. I'm just so nervous, you know?

SOFIA
Yeah so am I.

ROSA
Mami sing me a lullaby?

PAPER RIVER

95

SOFIA
Claro que si preciosa. (of course precious) Which one do you
want to hear?

ROSA
The one your mom used to sing to you.

SOFIA
Come; sit (*Pointing at her lap*) (*Starts Singing*)

Drume negrita
Que yo va a comprar nueva cunita
Que tendrá capite' y también ca'cabe'
Si tu drume yo te traigo un mamey muy colorao

*Si no drume yo te traigo un babalao
Que da pau pau*

*A la negrita se le salen
Los pies de la cunita
Y la negra Merce' ya no sabe que hace'*

*Drume negrita
Que yo va a compra' nueva cunita
Que tendrá capite' y también ca'cabe'
Si tú drume yo te traigo un mamey muy colorao'
Si no drume yo te traigo un babalao'
Que da pau pau.*

(As lullaby progresses Rosa starts to fall asleep until she goes into a deep dream) (Rodrigo Enters. He is wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase)

MANUEL
How did it go?

SOFIA
Shhhh. Rosa is asleep.

MANUEL
Sorry *(To sofia)* ... Well? *(To Rodrigo)* *(Rodrigo drops his briefcase and opens his arms)* *(Pause)*... No.

RODRIGO
Yes.

PAPER RIVER

96

MANUEL
No!

SOFIA
Really?

RODRIGO
Yes!

MANUEL
Holy shit! *(Runs hastily and hugs Rodrigo)* you did it. You fucking did it!

RODRIGO

We did it Manolo.

MANUEL
I'm so proud of you man.

RODRIGO
Couldn't have done it without you. How's everything?

MANUEL
Usual.... skipping rocks, waiting for you.

RODRIGO
And how are my two beautiful girls. (*Kisses Sofia*)

SOFIA
She just fell asleep

MANUEL
I gotta go, my wife's waiting for me.

RODRIGO
Every time you say that I still can't believe you got married.
You of all people.

MANUEL
Neither can I.

RODRIGO
And with *her*.... *Parce*.

PAPER RIVER

97

MANUEL
After she tried to cut my dick off I figured we were done. But
I'm crazy about that woman, what can I say.

RODRIGO
Hey... you had it coming

MANUEL
Are we having this discussion again? I didn't know she was her
sister (*laughs*)

RODRIGO
Every time (*Laughs*) (*Pause*)

MANUEL

I've missed you man. See you later alright? (*Rodrigo and Manuel hug*)

RODRIGO

Take care (*Manuel exits*) (*Pause*) did you sing to her while I was gone?

SOFIA

Every night.

RODRIGO

Which one was it this time?

SOFIA

My mother's. It's her favorite.

RODRIGO

Mine too.

SOFIA

Let's go home, I want to hear all about it.

RODRIGO

I'll meet you there in a while, I just have to... you know.

PAPER RIVER

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SOFIA

I understand... we'll meet you there (*Rodrigo and Sofia kiss*) (*He kisses Rosa on the forehead and caresses her head*) (*Sofia and Rose exit*) (*Rodrigo takes off his suit and shirt and rolls up his pants. Walks to the shore, opens his briefcase and takes out a manuscript*) (*Long Pause*)

RODRIGO

I just came from the capital. (*Pause*) They said they're gonna publish my book.... El Río (*The river*), that's the title. (*Pause*) I named a character after you. A wise and patient old man, who leads the tribe and keeps it from falling apart, I felt it suited you (*Long Pause*) I don't know if you can hear me... I really hope so, 'cause there's so much I want to say.... (*Pause*) There's still

so much I wanted to learn.... so much for you to teach me and I... I'm so sorry. *(Pause)* I want to read it to you if you don't mind. *El Río*, a novel by Rodrigo García. *(As Rodrigo begins to read lights illuminate in the background the rest of the characters in the play as they speak) (Rodrigo is unaware of their presence)*

RODRIGO

Are we skipping rocks that bounce from place to place until we find ourselves drowning in the depths of the river? Or are we the river itself, who flows through the mountains and the planes, gathering memories until we reach the delta.

RODRIGO, MANUEL *(Simultaneously)*

I've skipped around.

RODRIGO, AURELIO

(Simultaneously) I've lost hope.

RODRIGO, FARMER: *(Simultaneously)*

I've done good.

RODRIGO, TORIBIO: *(Simultaneously)*

I've done harm.

RODRIGO, REPRESENTATIVES 1,2, :*(Simultaneously)*

But every single time.

PAPER RIVER

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RODRIGO, SOFIA: *(Simultaneously)*

The River's pushed trough

(The sound of a cumbia song is heard in the distance with the current of the River. As the music grows louder Samuel enters, humming his song and dancing to the rhythm of the Cumbia. Rodrigo is unaware of his presence)

RODRIGO

I don't know where the current may take me, but I know what I carry.

RODRIGO, AURELIO: *(Simultaneously)*

I carry memories.

RODRIGO, SOFIA (*Simultaneously*)
I carry weight.

RODRIGO, CHILDREN (*Simultaneously*)
I carry dreams.

RODRIGO, MANUEL (*Simultaneously*)
I have my faith.

RODRIGO
I may not know what all the pictures or the books say, but I know
what the river says.

RODRIGO, FARMER
I know because he speaks my language.

RODRIGO, CLARA: (*Simultaneously*)
He speaks my pain.

RODRIGO, MANUEL (*Simultaneously*)
He speaks my hopes.

RODRIGO, CHILDREN (*Simultaneously*)
He speaks my dreams.

RODRIGO, TORIBIO (*Simultaneously*)
He carries my weight.

PAPER RIVER

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RODRIGO, SOFIA
It doesn't matter what I say.

RODRIGO, FIGHTERS: 1,2,3: (*Simultaneously*)
It doesn't matter what I do.

RODRIGO
I know, deep inside of me, that the river, that silver and brown
snake that travels quietly through the vast plains to the sea, will
always come down from his bed the mountains and push me
through. (*Long Pause*) (*Rodrigo closes his manuscript*) I still
don't know if I'm the rock, who's supposed to bounce until I
drown, or the river to flow eternally in the planes. Maybe I'm a

little bit of both. I still don't know if you can hear me, but I can definitely hear you. I hear you in every word I write and every rock I skip. I know now why you did it and I want to thank you for it *(Pause)* I miss you Samuel... I... I miss you.

(The wind blows so hard that the first couple of pages of the manuscript are blown into the water) (Samuel walks towards Rodrigo and kisses him on the cheek) (Rodrigo touches his cheek and smiles) (The sound of the Cumbia begins to grow and, as it grows, Rodrigo and Samuel start to dance and to sing)

*El pescador... habla con la luna
El pescador... habla con la playa
El pescador... no tiene fortuna
Sólo su atarraya.*

*Regresan los pescadores
Con su carga pa' vender
Al puerto de sus amores
Donde tiene su querer.*

*El pescador... habla con la luna
El pescador... habla con la playa
El pescador... no tiene fortuna
Sólo su atarraya.*

PAPER RIVER

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*Y esta cumbia que se llama
"el alegre pescador"
La compuse una mañana
Una mañana de sol.*

*El pescador... habla con la luna
El pescador... habla con la playa
El pescador... no tiene fortuna
Sólo su atarraya..*

(As the sound of the Cumbia fades, Samuel exits) (Rodrigo stops dancing. takes a rock and holds it in his hand. As the remaining of the pages are blown to be carried by the river, Rodrigo starts to skip rocks) (Lights fade)

END OF PLAY

PAPER RIVER

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