

WHATEVER I WAS

WGAW# 2068623

FADE IN:

EXT. LARGE EUROPEAN CITY - NIGHT

From high above we look down on street lights that reveal hundreds of fans in blocked-off streets slowly dancing to the SOUND of a beautiful melody. Everyone sings the lyrics that waft through the night air near a large concert hall.

EXT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT (CONTINUED)

In front of the hall, happy, relaxed, smoking city cops stand guard at the barricaded ends of several nearby streets.

Singing, swaying, hugging fans fill the street and face a large screen and giant speakers that project the performance inside.

Fans dance, smile, and sing under a large promotion banner: CELESTRA. It's a very orderly crowd. Everyone, even the cops, know all the words.

The video screen shows a young female lead singer, who also strums an acoustic guitar and stands between an electric guitarist and a bassist, all playing and singing harmony in front of a drummer and a singing keyboardist.

Her voice is smooth and strong. Harmony by other band members blends clearly, almost as one voice.

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT (CONTINUED)

The same scene and song, louder now, appears through the lens of a video camera perched on the edge of the balcony inside the hall.

From way behind it at the top of the balcony, the panorama unfolds in a vision of arms swaying like a wheat field in the wind, marking the gentle cadence of the performance in front of them.

Now, from the back of the stage we look from floor-level through the feet of the band out at the enraptured crowd.

We move from the drummer's feet that thumps a bass drum and high-hat cymbal, then to the guitarist's feet that stomp the beat.

Next we move to the bass player's feet, solid as a rock. Then we glide to the lead singer's high-heeled feet that move slowly forward and back.

We back up and stop at the keyboard player's feet that tap peddles with one foot and keep time with the other.

Now we look down on the keyboard as strong fingers skillfully work an arpeggio that goes higher and higher until the notes match the lead singer's top tone.

SINGER
(singing)
'Whatever I was... I'm not anymore'

INT. AMBULANCE (USA CITY) - DAY (CONTINUED)

Through the windshield we see morning commuter traffic pull over as the siren's EEE-EEE blares.

The vehicle's urgency rocks the driver as she maneuvers toward a hospital in the distance.

In the back of the ambulance, OLIVIA KING, 70, thin, gaunt, and dishevelled, lies on a gurney. She stares up blankly at nothing. An oxygen mask covers her nose and mouth.

But a familiar face is close to hers. It's CONRAD KING, 72, Olivia's husband, stone-faced, unshaven, dressed in sweats. He holds her hand and speaks loudly over the siren and engine noise.

CONRAD
Almost there, Olivia. Hang on.
You'll be okay. Like last time.

Conrad looks up and catches the eye of DAN MURDOCK, 28, uniformed ambulance Medical Tech. Dan looks away.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
Right?

DAN
Yes, sir. We're almost there.

Dan checks Olivia's I.V. and Olivia's oxygen flow.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT (CONTINUED)

The ambulance turns into the driveway and up to the covered emergency entrance. Its roof lights pulse and paint the hospital walls.

The siren goes off as med-techs exit the building toward the arriving ambulance.

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT (CONTINUED)

Again, from high in the balcony, we see the audience on their feet. They clap, whistle, stomp, yell, pump the air with their fists.

AUDIENCE
(chanting)
More, more, more, more!

On stage, the band bows, arms linked on the front edge of the stage. They smile, then wave.

AUDIENCE (CONT'D)
More, more, more, more!

The lead singer turns to the other band members and nods a "yes." They return to their positions and instruments.

The keyboardist lays down a sequence of chords. He repeats it. Over and over.

The audience cheers and claps. They know what's coming. It grows louder as the drummer adds a strong, powerful beat.

The bassist adds a thumping riff. Again the audience roars. The song takes shape. The crowd gets more and more energized.

Every four beats the guitarist violently strums a piercing chord. More pandemonium.

Then together the four band members' voices add a sustained moving harmony of 'AH' that blends with keyboard chords.

On signal from the keyboardist, the band suddenly stops for just a second as the lead singer launches into the tune's powerful lyrics:

SINGER
"You made me stron-ger.
You made me, me."

The band restores its accompaniment, both instrumental and vocal background, as the lead singer repeats the chorus's words.

The crowd joins in almost shouting the chorus. Over and over. Then suddenly the band and singer stop. The audience continues.

Band members smile, gawk at each other and, on signal from the keyboardist, resume with the first verse in sync with the crowd.

INT. HOSPITAL ER WAITING ROOM - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad sits on a plastic sofa and leans forward, elbows on his knees, hands on his forehead. His fingers massage his hair.

Next to him is MIRIAM KING STEELE, 34, casually dressed, a picture of comfort, arm over Conrad's shoulders.

MIRIAM

We've been here before, Dad. Mom will pull through.

CONRAD

Maybe. But this time it feels different... somehow.

MIRIAM

It always does. But she's a fighter.

CONRAD

She is. But I don't feel like a fighter. Not anymore.

MIRIAM

Don't say that. You're tough too. Let's just pray. Silently.

Both sit quietly, heads bowed, the only ones in the Emergency Room waiting area.

A doctor enters and spots Conrad and Miriam.

DOCTOR

Mister King?

Conrad straightens up, looks up at the doctor.

CONRAD

Yes, that's me.

Conrad and Miriam stand up.

MIRIAM

How's Mom? Will she be okay?

DOCTOR

She wants to see you, sir. And you're her daughter?

MIRIAM

Yes. How is she?

Without an answer, the doctor turns and heads through doors marked "STAFF ONLY." He waves Conrad and Miriam to follow.

DOCTOR
This way, both of you, please.

INT. HOSPITAL ER PATIENT ROOM - DAY (CONTINUED)

Olivia lies in a hospital bed, monitoring devices, all hooked up to her, are active... blinking, flashing.

The doctor enters followed by Conrad and Miriam. Conrad scoots around the doctor and takes Olivia's hand.

CONRAD
Olivia, sweetheart, how are you doing? Do you feel better?

Olivia turns her head, looks at Conrad. Her eyes smile, but are moist. She tries to speak through an oxygen mask, but no words come out.

Miriam comes around the bed and takes Olivia's other hand.

MIRIAM
That's okay, Mom. Just rest.

CONRAD
Yeah, just rest.
(turns to the doctor)
Doctor, what's going on...

The doctor gives Conrad a two-handed, soft "stay put" hand gesture and turns, leaves.

Olivia breathes slowly. Her face is the picture fear mixed with anger. She gently hugs Conrad's and Miriam's hands.

OLIVIA
(mumbles)
Not yet. Not yet.

MIRIAM
Rest, Mom. Don't try to speak.

Olivia releases Miriam's hand and struggles to remove the oxygen mask. Miriam helps her take it off.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)
I don't know if I should...

Olivia takes Miriam's hand. The other still holding Conrad's hand. Olivia is perplexed.

OLIVIA
Where's Kaden? I miss him. Conrad.
When will you ever ...

Olivia trails off, so sad, sobbing.

MIRIAM
Yeah, dad. Kaden's doing so well.
Mom's right. You should try to
reconnect. For mom.

CONRAD
There's no way.

Olivia tries to sit up, but instead pulls Conrad's hand into her face.

OLIVIA
Promise me, Conrad. You'll make up
with Kaden.

Olivia kisses Conrad's hand.

CONRAD
Well...

OLIVIA
It's time. Do it for me. Do it for
him. For you.
(beat)
Please.

Olivia releases her hold on Conrad. Her head flops back onto the pillow. Her eyes search Conrad's face. She stares through him.

CONRAD
For you, dear. Sure. I'll try.

MIRIAM
You gotta do better than that, dad.

Olivia nods in agreement.

OLIVIA
She's right. Spend some time with
him. Reconnect.

CONRAD
But...

MIRIAM
Go on a road trip. Like you used to
do before he...

CONRAD

Took off?

MIRIAM

No. Before he followed his own
dream. Not yours.

Olivia pulls Conrad's hand close to her face. She raises her head slightly, a final gesture.

OLIVIA

Promise me Conrad, you'll get with
Kaden. Maybe a road trip. Show him
the wells you dug in Mexico back in
the Peace Corps. That'd be nice.

Conrad tries to pull away. Olivia won't let him and holds him close.

CONRAD

But, well... I don't know...

OLIVIA

No buts. Just do it for me. Okay?

Olivia releases her grasp on Conrad's hand. Her head drops back on the pillow. Her face queries Conrad.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Because you love me?

CONRAD

(kisses Olivia)

Yes, dear. I love you. I will. I'll
get Kaden to go with me. For you,
my love.

(beat)

For you.

Olivia relaxes completely. She smiles and closes her eyes.

One long exhale fills the room. Then silence.

INT. EUROPEAN HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

It's dark, lights are out. One body breathes heavily on a large bed. No one else is present. An alarm clock reads 3:15.

A cell phone RINGS. Then again. The body stirs, rolls over, clicks on a light, and fishes for the phone on the night stand.

The body is the keyboardist, KADEN KING, 38, but looks younger with his short hair and dimples.

KADEN
Huh, hello?

He sits up. A short pause while he listens.

KADEN (CONT'D)
Miriam, is that you? Why...

Cut off, Kaden listens again. His face registers alarm. He freezes. He pulls the phone away from his ear slightly. He listens some more. Then stands.

KADEN (CONT'D)
Yes. I heard you. When?
(beat)
That was right in the middle of our concert tonight. My phone was off.
(beat)
No. I don't think so.
(beat)
Probably not. We have three more cities in that many weeks, six more concerts. All sold out.
(beat)
I know.
(beat)
I'm sorry. I wish I could but...
(beat)
She wanted what?

Kaden listens and paces.

KADEN (CONT'D)
Sure. I'm game if he is. Won't be fun.
(shakes his head)
We have a three-week break after this tour. I can be there then.
(beat)
I'll text flight plans. You sure dad is willing?
(beat-sarcastically)
Okay. Tell him I'm really looking forward to it.
(beat)
I'm sorry I can't make the funeral, but I'm glad you were there for Mom. And for Dad.
(beat)
Thanks for letting me know. Give my love to everyone. And my apology.
(MORE)

KADEN (CONT'D)

And prayers.

(beat)

Okay. Bye, Sis.

Kaden taps off his phone and sits on the bed.

He picks up his wallet, opens it and takes out a picture of his mom and dad, Conrad and Olivia. It's a picture of them years ago when they were young. Conrad holds a baby. And clearly the photo shows that they were happy and in love.

Kaden doesn't cry. He's just very, very sad. And alone.

EXT. EUROPEAN HOTEL - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

A single light shines from an upper window, a lone shadow is motionless on the curtain.

Streets are empty except for a small delivery truck that passes the hotel.

EXT. SUBURBAN MOTEL - DAY

The sun is barely up as a fifteen year-old crew-cab pickup slowly cruises down the row of exterior-exit rooms.

Conrad peers out the driver's window of the truck. He squints as he tries to read room numbers.

From the window of one of the rooms, Kaden examines the passing pickup. He quickly disappears from the window and bolts out the door toting a suitcase and a small bouquet of flowers. He yells at the truck, now past him.

KADEN

Dad! Dad! Stop! I'm here!

The pickup moseys along and U-turns at the end of the parking lot.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Through the windshield Conrad sees a man, hardly recognizable to him, but it's Kaden who stands by a suitcase and holds a bouquet of flowers.

Kaden waves as the pickup stops. Its brakes squeak. The passenger window lowers.

Kaden approaches tentatively.

KADEN
(smiling, looks in)
Dad? Nice to see you.

CONRAD
(glances at Kaden, motions
to the back seat)
Sure. Throw your stuff on the back
seat.

EXT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Kaden opens the back door and hefts in his suitcase.

He SLAMS the door and opens the front passenger door. He still holds the flowers.

CONRAD
Well, get in. Let's get going.

Kaden gets in and closes his door.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

As Kaden reaches for his seat-belt...

CONRAD
Fasten your seat...

CLICK. Conrad sees Kaden already buckled up.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
Oh. Okay. You remembered.
(beat)
You think flowers will do the
trick? I don't even...

KADEN
(interrupts)
They're for Mom. Can we stop by her
grave on the way out of town.

Conrad puts the truck in Drive.

CONRAD
You're a little late, son.

KADEN
I know. But please? It's something
I need to do.

CONRAD

If that's what you want.
Headstone's not there yet. But...
(drives off, mumbles)
Better late than never.

Kaden gives Conrad a sideways glance, shakes his head but says nothing.

EXT. SUBURBAN MOTEL - DAY

Conrad's pickup pulls out onto the highway.

EXT. CITY CEMETERY, OLIVIA'S GRAVE - DAY

Kaden kneels beside his mother's grave. It's covered in fresh sod. Stuck in the ground next to lots of wilted flowers is a temporary marker with her name and dates of her birth and death.

He places the bouquet next to the marker, gathers some of the wilted flowers from a vase, and puts his bouquet into the vase. He stands and bows his head.

A little ways off Conrad leans against his truck parked along the cemetery road. He stares at the sky and clouds, looks at his watch.

Kaden doesn't notice; he's lost in his thoughts, and maybe he prays.

EXT. CITY CEMETERY, CONRAD'S TRUCK - DAY

Kaden tosses an arm-load of wilted and dead flowers in a nearby trash can and approaches Conrad.

CONRAD

Say your good-byes, son?

Kaden gives Conrad a slight smile.

KADEN

No dad. Just, 'I miss you,' a 'God keep you,' and a big 'thank you.'
(beat)
That's it. Thanks. Let's go.

Kaden opens the truck door and gets in. So does Conrad.

The engine starts and rear wheels toss some dirt and stones as the pickup pulls away and exits the cemetery.

EXT. CITY HIGHWAY - DAY

The pickup merges onto a freeway and heads south. Traffic is fairly light at this time of day.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Conrad stares straight ahead. He drives almost at the speed limit. He's tense, somewhere else.

Kaden slouches, his fingers play something on his pants. He looks out the window at the passing desert scene. He glances at Conrad and starts to speak but hesitates when he sees Conrad's cold demeanor.

Conrad peeks at the speedometer, then the left side mirror, then the rear view mirror. His eyes dart to the right side, a quick glance at Kaden then forward again.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY (CONTINUED)

We look down on the pickup as it cruises south, being passed by just about every vehicle.

At a mid-desert exit the pickup turns off at a truck stop, a combined fast-food, gas station, convenience store.

A two-lane road heads past it through the desert toward a nondescript border town several miles away.

The truck pulls in at the gas pumps.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad turns off the ignition. As he gets out...

CONRAD

I'll fill it up then get some food
and goodies. You can stretch your
legs, use the john, whatever.

Kaden gets out.

KADEN

I can contribute. I'll get the
stuff inside. No problem.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad goes for his wallet, ...

CONRAD
Okay, but here...

KADEN
No need. Thanks. I'll handle it.

CONRAD
You sure? I want to...

KADEN
(interrupts)
Share the costs? Deal. You get gas.
I'll buy food.

Kaden walks toward the store as he pats his rear pocket where his wallet bulges.

Conrad heads to the gas pumps. He shakes his head, and rolls his eyes as he lifts the nozzle.

Opposite directions. Still.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Conrad waits at the gas pumps in the driver's seat. It's hot. He checks his watch, cranes his neck toward the storefront. He sees Kaden pacing from the store with two paper grocery sacks.

Kaden gets in and apologizes.

KADEN
Sorry. Not a lot to choose from.

Conrad shakes his head and looks away. He starts the engine.

KADEN (CONT'D)
Plastic-wrapped subs that expired
two days ago. Lettuce might have
been kelp.

Conrad smiles slightly to himself.

KADEN (CONT'D)
Wieners on a roller looked like
they'd been in the pool too long.

Conrad actually laughs out loud, just a bit.

KADEN (CONT'D)
You don't wanna know what the
bananas were singing.

Conrad composes himself.

CONRAD
So what'd ya get?

Kaden pulls a bag of rolls and a jar of peanut butter from the sack.

KADEN
Tah-dah! Safest food in the world.
And the rolls were made by the
mechanic's wife. This morning.
Supporting local small business.

CONRAD
How we gonna ...

Kaden extracts a plastic knife from the bag.

KADEN
Borrowed it from the hotdog
condiments table.

CONRAD
Smart.

Kaden pulls out more goodies, one at a time.

KADEN
And, of course, the absolute
necessities: Mountain Dew, M-and-
Ms, sour-cream-and-cheddar chips,
and, last but not least, napkins.

CONRAD
You remember the drill.

KADEN
How could I forget?

CONRAD
But you didn't get the...

Kaden pulls one more item from the bag.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
... Cheetos?

Kaden holds up a bag of Cheetos. He grins. So does Conrad.

An awkward moment. Almost a connection. But not quite.

Conrad puts the truck in gear..

KADEN

I'll make us sandwiches and set up a napkin with chips and stuff for you. Unless you want me to drive.

Conrad pulls away from the gas pumps and heads toward the highway.

CONRAD

No, I'll drive. We're behind schedule. And it's hotter than...

(beat)

And thanks for feeding the driver.

Kaden smiles. Ice broken. Slightly.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Conrad's truck slips onto the highway. It fishtails a bit and leaves behind a cloud of dust and heads south.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DAY

The pickup bakes in a line of vehicles creeping toward the small border crossing to Mexico in the late afternoon.

The truck's windows are down. Conrad and Kaden are quiet, droopy. They sip sodas.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

CONRAD

Sorry about no A-C. We'll overheat the engine just sitting here for so long.

KADEN

I understand. We used to go windows-down all the time back in the day.

Kaden stares at the line of vehicles in front of them. Without looking at Conrad, he steps out on a limb.

KADEN (CONT'D)

Why can't we be like we were then? What happened?

Conrad is passive, distant. Then, out of the blue:

CONRAD

See that line of cars? All of them
are going to somewhere, to someone.
You went away. You bailed on me,
son. Just like that.

(attempts a finger click)

You left. To where? To whom?

Kaden has a come-back, but hesitates.

KADEN

You know, Dad, you're right. I did
walk away.

(beat)

Thank you.

Conrad wrinkles his brow, what? He's confused. He looks at
Kaden. Kaden smiles back.

CONRAD

Well, whatever. This trip isn't
about you. And it isn't about me.
It's about Olivia.

KADEN

I agree. Mom wanted this.

(beat)

This trip is about her.

(beat)

And us. I guess.

Conrad says nothing. He inches the truck forward.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DAY

Conrad's truck is next in line. The car in front of him pulls
away and Conrad moves up to the Mexican border guard.

GUARD

Good afternoon. You have passports?
Where you from? Where you go?

Conrad hands the guard Kaden's and his passports.

CONRAD

Well, we're from Arizona, going to
a small city just past Ciudad
Obregon.

GUARD

Why you bring pickup? You bring
back big load?

Kaden leans over Conrad and talks in perfect Spanish to the guard.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY (CONTINUED)

[The following dialogue is in Spanish with English sub-titles.]

KADEN

Excuse me, sir. This is my father. When he was in the Peace Corps about fifty years ago, he came to Mexico to build wells to bring water to several desert towns.

GUARD

Oh, so you speak Spanish! So why are you coming back?

The guard examines the passports and matches their pictures to faces.

KADEN

Before my mother, his wife, died about a month ago, she made us promise to go on a road-trip together, to renew our bonds and learn about each other.

GUARD

So sorry to hear that. How long will you be in country?

KADEN

Maybe a week.

GUARD

Okay, but be careful wherever you are going. It may be dangerous for gringos there.

The guard hands the passports back.

KADEN

Yes, sir. We will. Thank you. May we pass now?

GUARD

Sure, go ahead. And may God go with you.

[End Spanish with sub-titles. English dialogue.]

Kaden turns to Conrad, smiles, and says ...

KADEN
Well, let's go.

CONRAD
I got most of that.

Conrad slowly pulls away ...

CONRAD (CONT'D)
I forgot most of my Spanish, but
how did you ...

KADEN
Our band gives concerts in Mexico,
South America, Spain, lots of
Spanish-speaking places. I thought
I should learn Spanish... to
translate some of our songs into
Spanish. So I did.

Conrad is still confused. A car behind HONKS. Conrad
accelerates a bit faster from the border crossing.

CONRAD
But what school did you attend? How
could you take classes?

KADEN
Books. CDs. And Marco, our drummer.
He's Hispanic. Born in LA. He was
my tutor. We have lots of travel
time. Time to read, study, learn,
write, compose, practice.

CONRAD
But you won't get credits. No
degree. No job.

Kaden shakes his head.

KADEN
Dad, I don't need credits. I don't
need a degree. I have a job. I
enjoy it. I'm happy.

CONRAD
But someday it'll all come crashing
down. And you'll have no backup
plan. No credentials. No job
history. Nothing.

KADEN

Perhaps. But oh, what a ride!

Conrad lets out a frustration burst of air.

CONRAD

Just as I thought. Still chasing that dream. Twenty years later. What a waste.

KADEN

It's not what you think. Look ...

CONRAD

Let's not talk about it. Okay? We still have a ways before we get to a hotel. I'd appreciate a little silence.

KADEN

Sure, Dad. But let me know if you'd like me to drive.

CONRAD

I'm fine.

Then silence takes over. And the hot, late afternoon desert passes by.

EXT. MEXICAN HIGHWAY - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad's pickup joins a host of vehicles traveling south on the northern Mexican two-lane highway.

A bus, a van, a loaded car, and some vacationing American vehicles pulling boats pass from the south.

A few families on foot, loaded with baggage, all saunter north on the opposite shoulder through blistering heat.

Skinny cattle graze along the road where a little grass grows.

Ahead a flock of buzzards rise from the carcass of a cow apparently hit by a vehicle. Conrad's truck passes slowly.

EXT. MEXICAN HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The truck's lights come on after the sun sets behind low hills in the west.

The lights of a city appear on the horizon. The truck points that direction and passes a few homes lit by dim porch lights.

EXT. SMALL MOTEL - NIGHT

Conrad's truck sits in front of the exterior entrance of a motel unit.

Kaden butt-closes the truck back door and totes his suitcase to the motel room open door.

Conrad grabs his duffle bag from the back seat, closes the door, and key-locks his truck.

Both men enter and the motel room door closes.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Conrad exits the tiny bathroom and finds Kaden fetal-curved sideways on an over-stuffed chair. Kaden hugs a pillow and snores softly.

Conrad sits on the single double bed, takes off his shoes, and lies down, not bothering to get undressed. He stares at Kaden, then at the ceiling, lost in thought.

Conrad clicks off the lamp on the night stand and rolls on his side, away from Kaden.

It's so still. The only movement is a shadow dancing across the wall from the lights of a passing car.

EXT. MEXICAN HIGHWAY - DAY

Conrad's pickup motors down the highway, still bordered by desert-like foliage.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Conrad drives.

KADEN

Want another roll?

CONRAD

No thanks. Two peanut-butter rolls and a Mountain Dew are plenty. Especially for breakfast.

Kaden tops the peanut-butter jar and closes the sack of remaining goodies. He sits up straight and stares out the window at the passing bland scenery.

He reopens the sack and takes out a handful of M&Ms. Nervously, Kaden glances at Conrad who drives cautiously. Kaden pops a few M&Ms in his mouth and begins to talk, a little mumbly.

KADEN

You know, Dad, ...maybe we need to talk.

(beat)

You know, about... stuff.

CONRAD

What stuff? About who sleeps in a chair and who gets the bed?

KADEN

No. That's the easy stuff.

(beat)

About us.

Conrad rolls his eyes and gives Kaden a brush-off glance.

CONRAD

What us? There is no us.

Kaden exhales a frustrated sigh.

KADEN

Come on Dad. You know what I mean. Mom's last wish wasn't for us to go on a vacation alone... together.

Now it's Conrad's turn to show frustration. And a little anger.

CONRAD

This is no vacation for me. Yeah, it's because of Olivia, I'm here. No more. No less. Got it.

KADEN

Oh yeah, I got it. But she said this was for us to reconnect.

CONRAD

Who told you that?

KADEN

Miriam told me. She said mom wanted us to do this, and she got you to agree... on her death bed. Right?

CONRAD

Right.

(beat)

But I don't have to like it.

More silence. Kaden's not sure what to say or do. The countryside passes slowly.

KADEN

And I don't either. But it is what it is... As mom used to say.

EXT. MEXICAN HIGHWAY - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad's pickup motors along, occasionally passed by a bus or truck with large piping for front bumpers.

It encounters a few other vehicles and pedestrians heading north along the shoulder.

The scenery is still bleak desert, with a few low mountains to the east.

Buzzards and dead animals clutter the highway every dozen miles or so.

Soon the sun is nearly at the western horizon and the pickup passes a few farms.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Kaden tips the Cheetos bag toward Conrad.

KADEN

Want more?

Conrad peeks down at it while still driving.

CONRAD

No, thanks. Still got peanut butter stuck to my palate.

(beat)

Besides, we'll be stopping for gas, another motel, and a restaurant in less than an hour.

Kaden grabs a few of the remaining cheese puffs, and folds up the empty Cheetos bag.

He takes the last gulps of his Mountain Dew and crumples up the can. Slips it into the paper sack.

KADEN

Yeah, I'm looking forward to a real meal. And I love Mexican food. You too as I remember.

CONRAD

Yup. Still do.

Then silence. Again. Kaden stretches. Starts to speak, but decides to let silence reign. Still not the right time. May never be.

Conrad stares straight ahead, lost in thought, maybe anger. About something. Who knows what. But he drives his truck carefully.

EXT. LARGE TOWN NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Music from a live band thumps from inside. Waiting patrons line the door outside. The street is busy.

Conrad and Kaden are at the front of the line and are invited in next. They disappear into the lively place.

INT. LARGE TOWN NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A friendly maitre de (Carlos) welcomes them with menus in hand.

CARLOS

Bien venidos. Or is it ...welcome?

[The following dialogue is in Spanish with English subtitles.]

KADEN

Whatever. We're visitors from the United States, and the hotel manager recommended your place. We're starving for a great meal. How's the food here?

CARLOS

Ay! An American who speaks Spanish! You are very welcome.

(MORE)

CARLOS (CONT'D)

And we have the best steaks in Mexico, and authentic Mexican food. Because, well, that's where you are.

Carlos laughs and invites them to a table near the band.

KADEN

Wonderful! We're starved.

CARLOS

This way please.

Conrad and Kaden follow Carlos through the crowd and several patrons who dance to the singing and rhythm of a good band.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

How's this, gentlemen?

KADEN

Perfect! Thank you.

Carlos hands them menus as Conrad and Kaden sit down at a small table.

Several dancers and members of the band check out the two new gringo arrivals.

CARLOS

Carmelita will take your orders. Again, welcome!

Carlos departs. Conrad and Kaden begin to leaf through the menu: in silence, cold and quiet between them, seemingly oblivious to the lively crowd and energized band.

At the end of the song, the crowd erupts in applause and hoots and hollers.

Conrad lays down his menu and puts his two pointing-fingers in his ears and wiggles them and exhales, clearly relieved that the noise has subsided.

The band announces (in Spanish):

MEXICAN BAND MEMBER

We'll take a short break and be back in fifteen minutes. Enjoy your food!

Recorded popular, more subdued music pours through overhead speakers, not nearly as loud as the band. Kaden is familiar with that tune:

RECORDED MUSIC
 (background, in Spanish)
 'Whatever I was... I'm not anymore'

[Conrad and Kaden resume their conversation, in English.]

CONRAD
 Now that's more like it.

Kaden smiles and looks up from his menu at Conrad.

KADEN
 You like that, Dad? The recorded
 music?

CONRAD
 Well it's much better than a loud
 live band.
 (beat)
 Why are you smiling?

KADEN
 Well, the tune that's playing, it's
 ...

Just then Carmelita appears at the table.

CARMELITITA
 Buenas noches, amigos. Carlos says
 to me you speak Spanish. Okay?

[Following dialogue is in Spanish with English sub-titles.]

KADEN
 Yes, miss. We speak Spanish. A
 little. Dad, what do you want?

CONRAD
 (in poor Spanish)
 Bring me your best steak, medium
 cooked, with a side of refried
 beans covered in cheese.

CARMELITITA
 Perfect. And you sir?

KADEN
 Chicken enchiladas. Four please.
 With beans, plenty of cheese, and
 red sauce.

CARMELITITA
 Nice. Anything to drink?

KADEN
Just a Coke. Dad?

CONRAD
You sill have those juices in cans,
uh, guava, apricot, pineapple?

CARMELITITA
Of course. Which one?

CONRAD
Guava please.

CARMELITITA
Great. I'll have your drinks right
away and get the chef cooking your
meal. Thank you.

Carmelita leaves, but turns back for a second glance at Kaden. She smiles and whispers something to a band member who sips a drink at the bar. She leaves.

The band member says something to another band member standing nearby. Both peer at Kaden suspiciously. The other nods.

[Return to speaking in English.]

Kaden catches the glances of the band members and gives them a cool thumbs-up, nod, and smile. They nod back.

Conrad catches the non-verbal exchange.

CONRAD
What's that all about?

KADEN
Just acknowledging how cool the
band is. Musicians like feedback.

CONRAD
All about egos.

KADEN
No. Well, maybe a little. But we
need to know if what we do is
liked. Of course, crowd reaction is
usually a good indicator. And
people here seem to really like
those guys.

CONRAD
I think they're too loud. That
piped-in music is much better.

KADEN

Really?

CONRAD

Sure. It's soothing. Especially after all that noise.

KADEN

Have you heard that group before?

CONRAD

The non-live stuff? No, but it's nice.

Kaden smiles and laughs to himself shyly.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

What?

Kaden just smiles bigger. He chuckles too.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Come on. What's up?

KADEN

Dad. You're listening to my band...

CONRAD

... Celestra?

KADEN

You know?

CONRAD

Olivia always talked about it. About you. But I never ...

KADEN

You never listened? Never cared?

CONRAD

I cared. About her. About how much she cared. About you. Your music. But I... well I... I just couldn't... I didn't... I don't know.

Conrad tapers off, not knowing what to say or how to say it. He stares at the band members who congregate at the bar and motion towards Kaden and Conrad.

Conrad looks away.

KADEN
It's okay dad.

Kaden reaches out and touches Conrad's arm. Conrad pulls back.

KADEN (CONT'D)
I understand. I really do.

CONRAD
No. You never did. You walked away from all that I gave you. You rejected my help. You hurt me, son.

KADEN
I'm sorry. That never was my intention.
(silence)
I just had another dream. A different path. That's all.
(beat)
And you're the one who cut me off. I tried for a while. To no avail.

CONRAD
Sure. Join a rock band. Do drugs. Free love ...

KADEN
You're wrong. I wasn't... I'm not... into any of that... Never was. Talk about prejudice!

Carmelita approaches. She speaks in English.

CARMELITITA
Excuse me, please. Your food is ready in little time.
(shyly she smiles)
Are you... band man... with...
(embarrassed)
Celestra?

A few members of the local band approach behind her.

KADEN
Well, yes.

CARMELITITA
That your music playing?

Two local band members move around and now flank Carmelita. Both grin.

KADEN

Celeste and I sing that duet. You like?

Conrad squirms. He's not used to strangers engaging in conversation. Kaden assures him.

KADEN (CONT'D)

It's okay dad. I get this a lot.
(to the band members, in
Spanish with subtitles)
You guys are very good.

Both band members smile. Guitarist ENRIQUE SOLANO reaches out to Kaden.

[Dialogue in Spanish continues with subtitles]

Kaden takes Enrique's hand.

KADEN (CONT'D)

Hello, I'm Kaden King. This is my father, Conrad.

Enrique and Kaden shake hands.

ENRIQUE

My pleasure. Enrique Solano.
Welcome to Mexico.
(extending hand to Conrad)
Sir, nice to meet you Mister King.

Conrad hesitantly greets Enrique with his outstretched hand.

CONRAD

Glad to meet you.

An awkward pause. Now what? Enrique whispers to a fellow band-member. They both grin. Enrique turns to Kaden.

ENRIQUE

I hesitate to ask this, but would you do us the honor of playing with us and singing your most popular song, "You made me, me"?

Kaden feigns shyness. Smiles. Then nods.

KADEN

Sure. Let's make it happen! Before our food arrives.

ENRIQUE
 All right! Wonderful!
 (to his fellow band
 members)
 Come on guys! Let's make some
 music!

Kaden gets up but talks to his dad [in English].

KADEN
 Excuse me dad. These guys want me
 to perform with them.

CONRAD
 But ...

KADEN
 It's okay. We'll have fun.

Kaden and the band meander to the small raised stage.

The keyboardist shows Kaden his instrument, and Kaden plays a few chords, adjusts the sound and volume, and tests the mike in front of him. The band's keyboardist picks up a tambourine.

Kaden gives Enrique a thumbs up.

At the center mike, Enrique announces proudly:

[Dialogue follows in Spanish, English subtitles].

ENRIQUE
 Hey everyone! Listen up! We have a
 guest with us today: Kaden King, a
 member of Celestra!

The crowd cheers. Kaden acknowledges the response with a small wave.

ENRIQUE (CONT'D)
 Kaden is on vacation with his
 father, Conrad ...
 (he points to Conrad)
 ... And has agreed to play one of
 his songs with us tonight.

Conrad smiles shyly. More clapping and cheers.

ENRIQUE (CONT'D)
 So remember tonight. And enjoy!

Kaden instantly begins playing the chord sequence that introduces the song. Over and over.

The crowd hoots and hollers!

The drummer begins the beat, almost exactly like the original song.

The band attempts to sing the harmony chord like the original, Kaden leading them with his voice. Their attempt is fairly good.

The bass player begins... followed shortly by the guitarist. Clearly they have covered this song before.

The patrons cheer and clap.

Kaden glances at Conrad and smiles. Conrad appears confused.

Kaden smiles and shrugs.

After a few sequences, Kaden raises his arm and signals the band with his fingers ...one, two, three, four. Then all stop.

With no lead female singer, Kaden sings [in Spanish]:

KADEN
"You made me, me..."

The band suddenly kicks in as Kaden continues the lyrics.

The crowd also joins in singing. Everyone knows the Spanish lyrics. Lots of dancing and partying.

Except Conrad. He's baffled, amused, surprised.

EXT. LARGE TOWN NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Lights from the restaurant stretch across a busy street.

A line of people wait to enter, some dancing to the music that thumps from inside.

Others sing along with the song.

INT. NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT (LATER)

CONRAD TABLE

Carmelita places food on the table as Kaden approaches with Enrique, and overhead recorded music begins again.

Kaden shakes hands with Enrique.

[Dialogue in English]

ENRIQUE

Thank you very much. That was fun.

KADEN

And very well done. You guys are good.

ENRIQUE

Thank you. Please join us again after your dinner.

KADEN

Probably not. We've had a long day. Many miles on the road. Maybe on our way back home.

ENRIQUE

Very good. Enjoy your meal.

Enrique rejoins the band on stage as Kaden sits.

He and Conrad exchange smiles.

CARMELITITA

Enjoy. And please come back. We loved your music.

KADEN

Thank you. We might just do that.

Carmelita departs, all aglow and tickled to serve a star, Kaden.

Kaden examines the plate of food before him. He looks up. Conrad's mouth is slightly ajar as he stares at Kaden.

KADEN (CONT'D)

What?

Conrad is silent.

KADEN (CONT'D)

Your food looks good too. Buen provecho!

Kaden digs into his enchiladas. Conrad is baffled. He reaches out and touches Kaden's arm.

CONRAD

Uh... What just happened?

Kaden, his mouth half full, blurts out:

KADEN
I just tasted the best enchiladas
I've ever tasted. Wow!

CONRAD
No. I mean up there. On the stage.

KADEN
(with a full mouth)
Oh. Well, I just helped the band
cover one of our most popular
tunes.

Kaden takes another bite.

CONRAD
Cover?

KADEN
(taking a bite)
Yeah. Playing someone else's music.
But it was, well, mine.

Conrad looks puzzled.

KADEN (CONT'D)
So I guess technically I just
covered my own piece. Weird.

Kaden laughs and takes another bite. He's obviously starved.

KADEN (CONT'D)
(another bite)
Dad. Eat your food. It'll get cold.
(beat)
Ha! Now I'm sounding like you.

Conrad slowly cuts his meat and takes a bite. Still a little confused.

CONRAD
This tastes good. Very good!

Kaden nods. Takes another bite. So does Conrad.

The overhead music ends and the band begins another lively song, a popular Mexican folk tune, with a curious rock arrangement.

Conrad grimaces but can't help himself: he chews in rhythm.

Kaden notices and smiles through another bite. He thumbs-up the band.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT ROAD - DAY

As the sun rises over the distant hilltops, Conrad's pickup rumbles slowly down a narrow dirt road in a southwest direction. It's alone. But a dust cloud follows.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Conrad slows even more. He's uncomfortable with the jostling and steering around deep ruts and potholes.

TIRE NOISE rolling on dirt and gravel is loud. Conversation is almost yelling.

CONRAD

I don't remember this road being that bad.

KADEN

That was quite a while ago. Was it a dirt road then?

The pickup hits a particularly deep hole.

CONRAD

Arrgh!

(beat)

Yeah, but it was plowed every so often. So people could get in and out.

KADEN

Mostly out, I assume.

(beat)

Why don't you pull over... up there.

(Kaden points ahead)

Let's shake out some of the cobwebs forming in our be-hinds.

CONRAD

Good idea. This is brutal.

(beat)

Sorry about windows-down, no A-C. We're going too slow to cool the condenser; truck'll overheat.

KADEN

Like us.

CONRAD
Who's idea was this anyway?

KADEN
Uh... mom's?

CONRAD
No. Actually...
(another major bump)
Ugh! ...It was Miriam's.

Conrad steers to an open space near a broken-down fence. He turns off the engine. Silence.

Then dust catches up with them and envelopes the truck and pours into the open windows.

Both Conrad and Kaden cough and choke. They exit the truck and continue their conversation.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT ROAD - DAY

In the bright sun outside the truck the two pace a little and meet up in a small bit of shade on the side of the truck.

KADEN
Miriam got us into this?

CONRAD
She suggested it to your mom.
Olivia came up with Mexico.
(beat)
They both made me promise.

Sweat and dust harden on both men's faces and clothes.

KADEN
When Miriam called me, she didn't mention that.

Another awkward silence. Conrad and Kaden stare at each other briefly. Darts fly.

CONRAD
Well, here we are anyway.

More dust settles on their faces. They look away.

Kaden gazes out into the desert.

KADEN
In the middle of nowhere.

Kaden coughs.

Conrad coughs too and pulls out a handkerchief. He blows his nose and smears sweaty, muddy dust all over.

Kaden wipes his nose and forehead with his sleeve. Another painted face.

KADEN (CONT'D)

How grim. Desolate. Great place for
a town.

CONRAD

And a well.
(beat)
At least it used to be.

KADEN

I don't see any town.
(beat)
Or any people.
(beat)
Or animals.
(beat)
Or any real reason to be here.

Again they stare at each other.

CONRAD

Maybe.
(beat)
You look like a zombie.

KADEN

You look like a zombie's father.

Both men fight a chuckle. They let out a little smile. The dry, dust-mud on their faces crack.

CONRAD

Wanna turn back?

KADEN

Heck no.
(beat)
I wanna see those damn wells you
dug so I can wash the desert off my
face.

They return to the truck, slam their doors, buckle up, and sit back.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad starts the engine.

CONRAD
Okay. Let's take a look.

KADEN
Then maybe mom can rest in peace.

Conrad puts the pickup in gear.

CONRAD
Me too.

The pickup lurches back onto the bumpy desert dirt road.
Kaden braces himself against the dashboard.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT ROAD - DAY

The dust-covered pickup resumes its trek down the terrible dirt road.

It slowly moves ahead past cacti and creosote bushes, broken fences, and boulders of various sizes. But no signs of life.

High-noon, shade-less heat ripples off the desert in all directions.

But the pickup slowly trudges on until, just over a small ridge, a tiny spot of green appears ahead. A few structures surround the oasis-like spot.

The pickup slows. The dust blankets it again. It stops at a small overlook with the scene ahead in view.

Conrad puts the pickup in park, the engine runs still.

Down the road a mile or so lies a semblance of what must have been a city, but now looks exactly like a ghost town with a tiny green heartbeat.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

KADEN
That's where you dug wells? Down there in that...

CONRAD
(interrupting)
I think so.
(beat)
(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

But it was much bigger. About a hundred homes. Small fields of corn, vegetables. And grain of some type.

KADEN

Now it's mostly deserted. Dried up. A hell-hole.

CONRAD

But what happened?

KADEN

I'd say fifty years of isolation out in the middle of nowhere.

(beat)

Come on. It's been fifty years! What did you expect? A resort hotel?

CONRAD

Hardly. It was a friendly, sleepy little town then.

KADEN

Now look at it.

CONRAD

Not much left. Hardly worth a road trip.

(beat)

We should-a stayed home. What a waste.

KADEN

Or we should-a not agreed to do this in the first place.

(beat)

What were we thinking?

CONRAD

What was Olivia thinking?

(beat)

And Miriam?

They sit quietly, both stone-faced.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Let's go back.

Conrad puts the pickup in drive. He begins to maneuver for a turn-around.

KADEN

I agree. But since we've come this far...

Conrad interrupts. He hits the brakes.

CONRAD

You mean you think we should still check it out? The place is dead.

KADEN

Not quite. I see a little green down there. Maybe some movement.

(beat)

Let's at least drive down there.

CONRAD

Even though the place is dead?

KADEN

Yes, I just have this feeling. I don't know why. Or what. Something tells me we need to investigate.

(beat)

But it still looks...

(with Miracle Max accent)

... mosh-ly dead.

The "Princess Bride" illusion doesn't escape Conrad.

CONRAD

... But still slightly alive.

A bit relaxed with each other, the dirt-faced men brace for more "rock and roll" travel.

KADEN

It'll take a miracle.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT ROAD - DAY

The pickup tires spurt rocks and dirt out the back as it crawls toward the town.

Gradually it descends the hill trailing clouds of dust on rocky, almost-a-road ruts.

The pickup approaches the semi-oasis where a few barely habitable huts stand amidst rundown relics of what may have been a half-decent settlement years ago.

It stops a hundred feet from where the center of town might have been and where a rusty pipe with a dripping hand-pump spigot pokes from the earth.

Encircling the pipe are a few nubs of weeds that struggle for life.

As road dust catches up with and passes the pickup, Conrad stares out his open window at the relic of his past. His face registers shock and sadness. And dust.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

The engine rumbles. Dust settles. Kaden opts to let the moment pass in reverence.

Conrad returns his gaze to the steering wheel.

CONRAD
(whispered)
Sorry.

KADEN
No need...

Conrad gently shushes Kaden with a raised hand.

CONRAD
I installed that pipe.

KADEN
But that was years ago...

Again, Conrad raises his hand. Kaden gets the hint.

It's quiet. A hot, light wind blows dust through the windows. Conrad and Kaden bake in the pickup. What to do now. Neither speaks. Kaden squirms a bit. He won't say a word but peeks at Conrad.

Conrad shakes his head slowly.

CONRAD
All that work.

Kaden again glances at Conrad but stays silent.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
For nothing.

Kaden can't help himself and blurts out.

KADEN

But you did so much...

When Conrad gives him the eye and a not-now head-shake, Kaden tapers off, his mouth agape.

Conrad leans forward, puts his elbows on the steering wheel, his hands on his forehead, looks down, and sinks into a private pity-party.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT TOWN - DAY (CONTINUED)

The pickup sits in the middle of the eerily lifeless town. It's engine rumbles quietly and then turns off.

Now it's even more ghostly. The only sound is the wind whooshing through creosote bushes and rundown structures.

Alone.

Or so it seems.

From the blanketed door of a rustic, tin-roofed hut about a hundred feet down the street, two women in threadbare dresses, barely visible in the blowing dust, peek out tentatively.

After a few glimpses, they betray themselves fully on the dirt street. Is it safe?

As one supports the other, they walk very slowly toward the parked pickup.

Step-by-step - one is very old and very weak - they leave the safety of their hiding place and gradually make it down the former main street toward the parked pickup.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad still sulks.

Kaden sips the last drops of his soda and tosses the can on the floor. The can rolls around. Kaden tromps it with his foot.

Conrad suddenly pounds the steering wheel with the palm of his hand. The thump startles Kaden.

Conrad turns the key in the ignition. The motor roars. Kaden, surprised, gawks at him.

Conrad grabs the gearshift level and puts the pickup in gear.

CONRAD

Let's go back.

As the truck begins to move, Conrad looks up. He slams on the brakes. Kaden lurches forward, braces himself on the dash, and stares wide-eyed through the windshield.

Directly in front of the pickup, standing stiff as statues, are the two ladies, huddled together. The younger one's hand is raised as if commanding the vehicle to halt.

Conrad and Kaden look at each other.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

What the...?

Kaden shrugs.

KADEN

Uh... Ghosts of Peace Corps past?

Conrad turns off the ignition. The engine sputters to a stop.

The younger lady's hand drops. She's GUADALUPE "LUPE" ALONZO, 69, but looks younger, petite but strong with stringy hair.

She stands by her mother, MARIA ALONZO, 96, very thin, wrinkled leather-like skin, and extremely weak.

LUPE

(loudly, over the wind)

Oye, gringos. Why are you here?

Conrad looks at Kaden. Both are puzzled.

CONRAD

She speaks English. Way out here.

Reaching for the door handle, Kaden takes charge.

KADEN

I'll go talk to them, figure out why they're here. See if they need help.

Before Conrad can respond, Kaden is out the door and striding up to the women.

Conrad watches through the pickup windshield. He can't hear the conversation, but there's a lot of gesturing, pointing here and there, and communication going on.

Lupe points at Conrad and smiles. Then she talks to Maria, who clearly struggles to understand and hear what Lupe explains.

While talking, Lupe points to Conrad again and then to Kaden, who smiles.

Finally, it appears that Maria gets it. She smiles and waves at Conrad, who waves back timidly.

Conrad observes more conversation through the windshield. He's getting anxious. Checks his watch.

Then, to his surprise, Kaden helps Lupe escort Maria back to where they came from. Lupe holds one arm; Kaden holds Maria up with her other.

Kaden looks back and gestures Conrad to start the truck and follow them.

Conrad cranks over the engine. Puts the truck in gear, and creeps forward after Kaden and the two ladies.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT TOWN - DAY (CONTINUED)

The strange three-person entourage hobbles down an off-road-like main street past boarded-up and falling-apart shacks.

They limp together and support each other against blowing, sporadic, dust-filled wind gusts. Kaden and Lupe hold Maria tightly to keep her from tripping or blowing over.

The dirt-covered pickup slow-dances along a short distance behind.

It's hot. Very hot. Sun bakes everything. And everyone.

Buzzards glide in circles overhead. Waiting.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad wipes sweat from his brow. He lifts a soda can from a drink holder and tips it to his lips. Only one last swig left. He tosses the empty onto the floor.

He continues forward a bit.

Ahead the threesome ducks through a dangling blanket into a shack. Kaden motions for Conrad to stop.

He stops, puts the truck in PARK, and turns off the ignition.

He sits and bakes alone in the truck for a minute.

Then Kaden leans out of the shack door and motions for Conrad to come in.

INT. ALONZO HOUSE - DAY

Light filters through tattered fabric hanging from nails over a single glassless window. Sun rays stream into the darkness and share dust that blows through the window and broken door that now holds Conrad.

He covers his eyes and attempts to adjust from the brightness outside to the dark interior.

KADEN
This way, dad.

Kaden takes Conrad's arm and escorts him to a chair at a small table in the middle of the room.

Conrad's eyes readjust and focus on a smiling Lupe across the table. He sees Lupe's hand holding Maria's hand to his right.

Conrad looks at Maria. She smiles at him and pats his arm.

MARIA
(whispered)
El Rey.

Conrad smiles back but then looks to his left where Kaden has taken a seat. Kaden smiles too.

CONRAD
(to kaden)
What's going on? Who's 'El Rey'?

LUPE
You are... Mister King.

CONRAD
You speak English!

Now Conrad is very perplexed.

KADEN
Yes she does. And very well I might add.

CONRAD
Okay. I need someone to explain what's going on. And what happened to the water. And this town...

LUPE

I'll give you the story.

(beat)

But first, do you remember anyone named Roberto?

(beat)

From here, long ago?

CONRAD

From here? No. Just my college buddy, Ned Robertson. He was here with the Peace Corps too. People had trouble saying 'Robertson,' so they just called him Roberto.

LUPE

Just like we called you 'El Rey,' Mister King.

CONRAD

We?

Maria pats his arm again. She smiles.

LUPE

Yes, Mister King. We. Mother, (Lupe squeezes her hand) Maria Alonzo, and I, Guadalupe Alonzo, were here when you were.

Conrad's chin drops.

LUPE (CONT'D)

Over fifty years ago.

Conrad leans back. He examines the faces of Maria and Lupe.

KADEN

That's not all.

(beat)

Tell him, Lupe.

CONRAD

There's more?... Other than what happened to the well?

LUPE

Do you remember Roberto flirting with a young girl back then?

CONRAD

Yeah. Sort of. We made fun of him. Teased him about robbing the cradle.

LUPE
I was that girl.

CONRAD
What?

LUPE
After all of you left, he started writing me. In Spanish. He even visited a few summers after you made the wells. He even fixed them once. After he graduated from college...

CONRAD
... He took off and got married. Got a job somewhere in California.

LUPE
He married me, Mister King.

KADEN
Small world, huh dad?

CONRAD
I always wondered. He was pretty quiet about it. Probably because we teased him so much.
(beat)
I knew he moved to California, but over the years I only heard about him from others.

LUPE
Well, the short story is, we had kids, they got married and moved away. Bob retired but kept smoking...

CONRAD
Yeah, he was a chimney then too.

LUPE
... And twenty years ago it caught up with him and he died of lung cancer.

CONRAD
Yeah, I learned from friends that he passed. So sorry about that...

LUPE
Thanks. But I'm okay now. Except for mom.

KADEN

Lupe moved here to care for Maria
after Bob died.

LUPE

And shortly afterwards most of the
wells began drying up and people
left.

(beat)

But mom wouldn't. So here we are.

CONRAD

But how do you survive? Anyone else
live here?

LUPE

The last ones left two years ago
when only one well was left, the
one you saw dripping when you
arrived. We kept planting and
growing what we could. And my sons
brought us canned and dried goods,
and seeds from the States a few
times a year... until recently. I
assume they have family and work
pressures. Not sure.

(beat)

Former neighbors would visit and
bring us things too. They
encouraged us to leave. But mom
wouldn't.

(beat)

Until now.

CONRAD

Now?

LUPE

We're almost out of food.

(beat)

And mom isn't doing well. She knows
she's not going to be with us long
and wants to see a priest.

(beat)

Before she sees Jesus.

Kaden gently puts his hands on Lupe's and Maria's clasped
hands and on Conrad's shoulder. They all lean in. Kaden
carefully looks at each and speaks.

KADEN

Maria says God sent us here. On a
special mission.

(MORE)

KADEN (CONT'D)
 (beat, to Lupe)
 For her.
 (whispered to Conrad)
 Not for us.

CONRAD
 Maria's dying?

LUPE
 She's ninety-eight. Maybe a
 hundred. Half-starving. Weak.
 Almost deaf and blind. Who knows
 what else.
 (beat)
 No doctors in probably over fifty
 years. Maybe more.

Conrad and Kaden are astounded.

LUPE (CONT'D)
 Yes, living that long isn't normal.

KADEN
 Especially out here.

LUPE
 But water from the wells - El Rey's
 wells - saved her life. And mine...
 Her final wish - my wish - is that
 you rescue us one more time. Take
 us away from here... to town so
 Maria can see a priest.

Conrad and Kaden look at each other. They nod simultaneously.

CONRAD
 Sure. We can do that. Right, son?

KADEN
 Of course.

CONRAD
 But is there enough water here to
 take with us? To drink. Or for the
 radiator, if we need some.

LUPE
 We have a gallon or so. Perhaps we
 can get more, but it flows slowly.

Conrad and Kaden look around. Is there anything these ladies
 want to take with them? It doesn't look like much of value is
 there, but Conrad offers.

CONRAD

Gather up whatever you want to take. We've got plenty of room inside the truck plus room in the back.

LUPE

Just us. A few pictures. Maybe clothes. I have a suitcase. Mom just a bag of stuff.

Kaden wants to help.

KADEN

If you have any bottles, cans. Buckets. Anything to hold water. I'll go back to the spigot to see what I can get out.

CONRAD

(to Lupe)

Tell Maria we'll take her to town to see a priest. That we're leaving soon. Tell her to gather whatever she wants to take.

LUPE

I will.

(whispered to Conrad)

I don't think we'll be coming back. But we really appreciate your help.

CONRAD

God moves in mysterious ways.

LUPE

He does. Mostly through other people. Like you.

CONRAD

Maybe. That road back is awful. But I'll take it easy.

Everyone disperses to take care of business. Kaden gets some bottles and a jug from Lupe and heads out the door and back toward the dripping spigot.

Maria puts a few possessions in a sack.

Lupe finds a suitcase and fills it with a few items.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT TOWN - DAY (CONTINUED)

Conrad exits Lupe's home and gets in his truck.

He turns the truck around and cleans out the back seat.

He carries what little food he has into the house.

Though still blistering hot, down the street, Kaden slowly fills an old jug with water.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT ROAD - DAY

Conrad's truck slowly motors up the bumpy dirt road, away from the ramshackle collection of boarded-up shacks, now a confirmed ghost town, no longer a desert oasis.

The heat of the sun cooks the solitary vehicle, its passengers sealed in with all windows rolled up.

Clouds of dust swirl behind the pickup and settle in a final farewell to disappointment and what could have been.

At the last view of the town from the road, the truck stops. Is it in trouble?

One by one everybody gets out. With one hand Conrad helps Lupe dismount from the driver's side passenger door.

Kaden gently lowers Maria from the other side.

All four stand silently in the sweltering heat. Arm-in-arm, they gaze at the town, a reverent farewell.

Maria smiles. Everyone else squints at the brightness.

[Following dialogue in Spanish, English subtitles]

LUPE

It's so hot, mama. We have to get going now.

MARIA

You're right.

(waves to city)

Goodbye, my city. Goodbye, my home.

(beat)

Okay, let's go now.

[Resume English dialogue]

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Moving along again. Everyone jostling about even though Conrad goes slower than before.

From the back seat, Lupe speaks up.

LUPE
Sorry about that.

CONRAD
No problem. I understand. That's been her home for almost a hundred years.

LUPE
Yes, and sadly, she'll never see it again.
(beat)
Nor will I.

Maria sits contentedly.

LUPE (CONT'D)
And thanks for turning on the air conditioning. It makes the bad road almost bearable.

Kaden smiles but remains quiet.

Lupe looks exhausted.

Conrad concentrates on his task: driving. He ignores interior distractions, but hears everything.

CONRAD
You're welcome.

Everyone flops back and forth in their seat belts as they absorb the rough road.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT ROAD - DAY

Conrad's pickup crawls along - around one bend after another, through a rocky washed out ravine, past an old broken fence, through the ever-present dust.

The day wears on. So does the truck.

Then it stops. Dust washes over it.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

The engine rumbles. Conrad flexes his hands, wrists, and fingers.

KADEN
You okay dad?

CONRAD
This is brutal. Especially with
arthritis.

KADEN
Why didn't you say so. Let me
drive.

CONRAD
Okay. But let's all stretch our
legs and have a some water.
(turns around)
Okay Lupe? Maria? Agua?

LUPE
I agree. Let's rest a bit.

Conrad turns off the engine. They all get out as before. This time Conrad helps Lupe out with two hands, but she slips and he catches her. They both smile.

LUPE (CONT'D)
Sorry about that. I'm clumsy.

CONRAD
Me too. It comes with age.

They all stretch and shake out the cobwebs.

Kaden retrieves the jug of water and serves everyone in leftover soda cans.

Conrad walks a few hundred feet up the road and stops. He wipes sweat from his face with his sleeve.

LUPE
Where's he going?

KADEN
Just up and back. He's got to move
or he'll stiffen up.

LUPE
I can relate to that.

Lupe walks toward Conrad. Kaden is left with Maria. Both lean carefully on the side of the hot truck, half in the shade.

[The following dialogue is in Spanish with subtext]

KADEN
It's very hot here.

MARIA
Yes, very hot.

KADEN
How long have you lived here?

MARIA
All my life.

KADEN
How old are you?

Maria chuckles.

MARIA
One never asks a woman her age.

KADEN
You're right. Sorry.

MARIA
Ninety-eight.
(beat)
I think.

Maria smiles and takes Kaden's hand.

KADEN
You're sweet. You remind me of my
grandma.

MARIA
I'm everyone's grandma.

[End Spanish dialogue]

Maria pats Kaden's hand.

Conrad and Lupe walk closer. Lupe stumbles. Conrad offers her his arm. She accepts.

They reach the truck. Lupe lets go of Conrad's arm.

CONRAD
We'd better get back on the road.

LUPE
So that's what it is, a road?

CONRAD
It used to be. Back in the day.

Kaden helps Maria back into the pickup.

KADEN
It's hard to rest in this heat. The
air-conditioning will be welcome.

Conrad helps Lupe into the pickup. Conrad and Kaden switch places and get in.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Everyone is in, belted, and tired, but rested a bit.

Kaden turns the key and engine turns over but doesn't start. One more try. Nothing.

Kaden pauses and sweats. Everyone else sits quietly.

KADEN
Come on.

He turns the key again. There's plenty of starter power. He pumps the gas pedal.

CONRAD
Careful. Don't flood the engine.

Kaden turns the key again.

KADEN
Please. Please. Please.

Finally, the engine starts with a growl. Then purrs.

CONRAD
Well, that was exciting.

KADEN
I'd call it scary. The last thing
we need ...to be stuck out ...

LUPE
(interrupting)
God is with us. He brought you to
us. He won't leave us out here.

Kaden puts the pickup in gear. They start to move again. And move, and move... rocking back and forth on the treacherous road.

The A-C kicks in too.

MARIA

Que bueno!

LUPE

I agree. Very nice.

A bit of cool comfort pours over the travelers. A sigh of "ah" from everyone kicks off the continued journey.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT ROAD

The pickup slowly rambles along the rough dirt road. The blazing sun beats down mercilessly.

The dust trail still follows and disperses in the breeze.

High overhead, buzzards circle the fellow travelers. They float on rising heat waves, ever present, they wait patiently for ...

The pickup trudges toward a city off in the distance: Down a gully, over boulders washed by late summer monsoons last year.

Along a smooth blanket of silt. Back up a gentle rise of washboard gravel.

Suddenly, around a bend a ways off, another vehicle moves perpendicular to the dirt road.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Kaden sees it first.

KADEN

Look!

(he points)

Another truck way over there.

Lupe leans over.

LUPE

Where? I don't see it.

KADEN

Right. There.

He gestures firmly. Points with both arms then re-grabs the steering wheel.

CONRAD

I see it. We're almost to the highway.

(beat)

Pavement at last.

LUPE

Thank heaven. I feel like I'm falling apart.

Next to her Maria is asleep! Her chin is on her chest. Her head bobs with each bump, but she doesn't wake up.

LUPE (CONT'D)

Do you believe it? Mom's asleep!

KADEN

The circle of life.

CONRAD

What?

KADEN

We begin life rocked to sleep. And that's how it ends.

(beat)

Lucky lady.

Through the windshield a few more vehicles crisscross on the distant road.

Everyone except Maria is alert, excited. The terrible road will end soon.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT ROAD - DAY

The bumpy dirt road's end is a few hundred yards away.

Conrad's pickup slowly approaches a tilting, bullet-riddled stop (ALTO) sign. And stops.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

The paved road is a god-send for everyone. Smiles all around. And quiet.

[Spanish with subtitles]

MARIA
 (whispered)
 Is this the church?

LUPE
 No, mama. Still a ways to go. Just
 rest.

MARIA
 Why are we stopped?

LUPE
 The bad road ended. Do you need a
 drink?

MARIA
 Yes, please. That would be nice.

Conrad, as front seat passenger, lifts the jug from the floor, pours a drink into an empty soda can, and hands it back to Lupe who helps Maria drink.

[English dialogue resumes]

CONRAD
 Anyone else?

LUPE
 Yes, please.

KADEN
 Me too, please.

Conrad gets to work. He pours one drink after another.

CONRAD
 Then I drive.

KADEN
 Sounds good.

EXT. MEXICAN HIGHWAY - DAY

It's late afternoon. Conrad's pickup shares the paved road with only a few vehicles as it approaches a good-sized town.

Ahead, two spirals of a cathedral rise above the town center. It's their destination.

The pickup stops at a four-lane road.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT TOWN - DAY (CONTINUED)

The pickup joins the main road and enters a busy section of the city.

It passes many homes and businesses and slows amidst increasing vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

The pickup meanders slowly along. The church spires are usually in view and get closer.

Finally the pickup pulls up in front of the cathedral, journey's end.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Conrad opens all the windows and turns off the ignition. He sighs.

CONRAD

Well, we made it ...in one piece.
Mostly.

Kaden turns around and sees Maria leaning over on Lupe's breast. Lupe's arms are wrapped around her mother.

Lupe looks up at Kaden.

LUPE

She's still breathing. But just barely.

Maria stirs.

MARIA

(in Spanish)
Ricardo. I miss you. I'm coming.

KADEN

I'll go in and get the priest.

Kaden opens the door, gets out, and rushes to the cathedral front doors.

LUPE

(in Spanish)
The Father will be here soon. See?
Rest now mama.

Lupe points as Kaden jogs toward the cathedral. Maria opens her eyes, looks toward Kaden, and smiles at Lupe.

MARIA
(In Spanish)
What a good daughter you are. God
bless you Lupe.

Conrad turns to the back seat.

CONRAD
Is there anything I can do?

LUPE
No, but thank you for bringing us
here. It means so much to mama. And
to me. You're a saint.

Conrad chuckles.

CONRAD
Not quite. But thanks. I'm glad we
could help.

A moment of quiet. Lupe slowly rocks Maria and then hums a
lullaby-like tune.

Conrad and Lupe gaze hopefully toward the cathedral.

EXT. MEXICAN TOWN CENTER - DAY

Conrad's pickup sits, engine-off, in front of an imposing
cathedral.

A few passers-by peer into the truck with license plates from
the United States, and they continue on.

A young boy taps on Conrad's door and holds up some gum.

YOUNG BOY
Chicle, mister?

Conrad wags his finger.

CONRAD
No, gracias.

The boy departs.

From around the side of the cathedral, Kaden appears. A
priest in all-black garb follows. He carries a small satchel.
When he reaches the pickup, Conrad gets out and greets him.

[Dialogue in Spanish, English subtitles]

KADEN

Dad, this is Father Santiago. And this is my father, Conrad King.

CONRAD

Thank you, Father Santiago. This is very important to these two ladies.

FATHER SANTIAGO

You are very welcome Mister King. I am happy to help.

Kaden opens the back door.

KADEN

And this is Lupe Alonzo and her mother, Maria.

FATHER SANTIAGO

Happy to meet you.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

Lupe makes sure Maria is awake, sitting up, eyes open.

LUPE

Thank you for coming out to help us. Mother, this is Father Santiago.

MARIA

Oh, how wonderful. We made it. We are here.

Lupe gets out and invites Father Santiago to get in the back.

LUPE

Please sit here to address mother.

[Spanish dialogue ends]

Lupe gets in the front passenger door and leans over toward the back seat. Truck doors remain open in the heat.

EXT. MEXICAN TOWN CENTER - DAY (CONTINUED)

With Lupe now in the front, Father Santiago begins the three elements of the Viaticum in Spanish.

Conrad and Kaden step away.

CONRAD

Best we give them a little privacy.

KADEN

Dad, I told Father Santiago that Maria is near death, that she barely even made it here.

CONRAD

I think you're right. It was good for you to clue him in on the situation.

KADEN

Clearly that's why Maria was so intent on seeing a priest now. She felt the need to receive the Last Rites.

CONRAD

Very dedicated. And out there in the boonies. No church. No priest. No people.

(beat)

Just Lupe. Bless her heart.

KADEN

And almost no water.

(beat)

Sad life.

They stand awkwardly a short distance from the truck, in the sun.

CONRAD

Let's go over there, in the shade of the cathedral, to wait.

KADEN

Good call, Dad.

They mosey over to a bench on the shady side of the building and sit.

Lupe sees them leave. Conrad looks back. They nod to each other in understanding.

Kaden and Conrad sit down ...on opposite ends of the bench. A cold silence lingers between them.

The two men sit together on a church bench, miles from one another.

Who'll speak first?

KADEN (CONT'D)
What'll we do if ...when ...Maria
...well ...you know?

Conrad looks at him straight-faced.

CONRAD
... Dies?

KADEN
Well ...yeah.

CONRAD
Here's a bigger question: What'll
we do if she doesn't die?

They both sit nervously. They stare ahead blankly.

They appear to ponder their situation, their predicament,
their future. Each in his own world.

KADEN
Not to mention ...When Maria dies
...if that happens while we're here
...what do we do about Lupe?

CONRAD
...And the body?

Kaden wrinkles his brow.

KADEN
Really, dad.

CONRAD
Well, we've got to consider all the
possibilities. I don't think
they've got any money.

KADEN
That's not a problem.
(beat)
I'll cover whatever expenses they
require.

Conrad smiles.

CONRAD
Right. I'm sure that you...

Kaden interrupts.

KADEN
Dad. I'm serious.

CONRAD

Where are you gonna get funds to cover...

Again, Kaden cuts him off.

KADEN

Dad. You're clueless about my situation, aren't you.

CONRAD

I know you're in a rock band that's pretty good, but we're talking about hundreds, probably thousands, of dollars.

(beat)

... Most likely pesos.

Kaden smiles and shakes his head.

KADEN

Like I said, Dad. You're clueless.

CONRAD

Well, I know Olivia regularly sent you money after you quit going to school.

KADEN

What?

CONRAD

You didn't think I knew. She didn't know that I knew either.

KADEN

That was quite a while ago.

(beat)

And I paid it all back.

CONRAD

Sure you did.

KADEN

Really.

(beat)

How do you think she bought that new grand piano?

CONRAD

Easy. She saved money from her piano lessons. She was very frugal.

KADEN

Twenty-five grand worth?

CONRAD

Ah, she got it on sale, used I think. Not that much.

KADEN

That's what she told you?

CONRAD

Yup. And she played it so well. I loved to listen to her.

(beat)

I still miss those beautiful melodies.

Conrad gets misty-eyed. Kaden lets the discussion lapse. No need to press the subject further.

Again they sit, staring out into the warm late afternoon that bakes the pickup and its inhabitants.

Then suddenly Conrad points to the pickup. He sees Father Santiago get out of the back. Lupe gets out of the front.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Looks like they're done. Let's go.

Conrad and Kaden rise from the bench. Their conversation, their connection, still not finished.

They head to the truck.

When they arrive, Lupe is all smiles.

LUPE

Thank you for bringing us here.
This is exactly what mother wanted
...and needed.

CONRAD

I'm glad we could help ...How is Maria?

[Following dialogue in Spanish, English subtitles]

FATHER SANTIAGO

Maria is very weak, but very content. She is a very kind, good-hearted soul.

Kaden reaches out his hand to Father Santiago. They shake hands.

KADEN

Thank you. Your service today has touched our hearts and has been recorded in heaven. I am sure.

LUPE

Yes. Thank you so much.

Lupe shakes hands with Father Santiago.

FATHER SANTIAGO

My pleasure. I am here to serve God and His children.

(beat)

Uh, may I ask, how long has it been since Maria has seen a doctor?

LUPE

Why do you ask?

FATHER SANTIAGO

Well, I have this feeling...

LUPE

I have been with her for almost twenty years, and she hasn't seen a doctor in all that time.

(beat)

Maria is a very strong woman.

FATHER SANTIAGO

Clearly. But, just in case, there's a good hospital up the street.

(he gestures)

Very good doctors. Kind nurses.

LUPE

Well...

FATHER SANTIAGO

Promise me you'll take her there. Very soon. Okay?

Lupe looks to Conrad.

CONRAD

Maria to hospital?

He nods approval.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Sure. No problem.

LUPE
Very well. Thank you.

FATHER SANTIAGO
Good. Then I return to prepare for
my evening mass.

He turns and waves goodbye to the three standing there.

[Return to speaking in English]

As he crosses the terrazzo, Lupe begins her apology.

LUPE
I'm so sorry Mister King. I didn't
mean...

CONRAD
That's Conrad, please. We're happy
to help. Let's get Maria to the
hospital so she can get checked
out.

Everyone mounts the truck and away they go.

INT. MEXICAN HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Conrad and Kaden sit with a bunch of sick indigent locals.
Lupe and Maria are not visible.

It's noisy and crowded. Lots of coughing and crying babies.

CONRAD
Can we go outside? I can't sit here
much longer.

KADEN
Good idea. I think I'm catching
whatever all these people have.

CONRAD
(rising)
We can keep watch for Lupe through
the window.

They both head toward the doors and position themselves
outside with a good view of the treatment room doors.

EXT. MEXICAN HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Conrad leans against a light pole and watches the hospital
chaos inside.

Kaden slowly paces up and down the sidewalk. He passes Conrad every twenty seconds or so. As he does, Conrad taunts.

CONRAD
You never could hold still.

Kaden stops.

KADEN
Nope. When I move I create songs.
Melodies. Harmonies. Lyrics.

CONRAD
So what's forming now?
(sings, poorly)
'We gotta get outta this place?'

Kaden smiles.

KADEN
Already been done, dad.
(beat)
No, I'm thinking about Lupe and her
mom. How to say goodbye to someone
who has meant so much for so long.

CONRAD
Been there. Done that.
(beat)
Another reason I needed to get out
of there.... But you wouldn't
understand.

KADEN
Again, you're wrong.

CONRAD
You keep telling me I'm wrong. How
so?

KADEN
You want a list?

CONRAD
Sure. Go for it.

KADEN
I will. First, you're wrong about
my financial status.

CONRAD
Okay, so you make a little more
than I estimated.

(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

And you probably have a bunch of credit cards you can charge with. Big deal.

KADEN

Wrong again. Dad, you've pegged me wrong ever since I dropped out of college.

CONRAD

No, that's where you made your biggest mistake. Where you were wrong. You coulda been running my company. Instead, your sister is. Your loss.

KADEN

So you're saying I'm a loser because I'm not following in your shoes.

CONRAD

Damn straight.

KADEN

And that the career path I've chosen won't amount to anything.

CONRAD

You got it.

KADEN

Again, you're wrong.

CONRAD

How so? Prove it.

KADEN

Okay, so let me ask you a personal question. During the last year you were working, before you retired, what did you make? Approximately.

CONRAD

Really? You want to delve into my income? My finances? Come on.

KADEN

Yes. I'm serious. You say I'm a loser. I say you're wrong.

(beat)

How much ...your last year of employment annual salary?

CONRAD

Okay. I made about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Conrad smiles in pride. He nods at Kaden.

KADEN

So here's the reality: During our European tour last month, including the ten concerts we did, record sales, and royalties from tunes I wrote, how much do you think I cleared? Just me, not the band?

CONRAD

Let me guess. Maybe you made several hundred, maybe a couple thousand dollars?

(beat)

Am I close?

KADEN

Not even. I made more than you made during your entire last year of employment. Just last month.

(Conrad, shocked)

And then some.

CONRAD

Sure you did. Come on!

KADEN

And I saved most of it.

CONRAD

Why? Because you wanted to buy a fancy car, a house, a boat ...

KADEN

I don't own any of those things, dad. Don't plan to, at least not right now. We travel too much.

Conrad is a bit perplexed.

CONRAD

So you make a bunch of money. You don't buy stuff. You save it. And you ...what? Live high off the hog?

KADEN

Hardly.

CONRAD

What? Wine, women, ...and song? And drugs?

KADEN

No way, Dad. You and mom raised me better than that. We're all Christians. We pray before and after our concerts. We're popular because we're rare among music groups. All our songs are clean, wholesome. Meaningful.

Conrad is shut up big time. Nothing to say.

KADEN (CONT'D)

Why do you think the band at that restaurant recognized me, and everyone knew our songs?

(beat, no response)

We've toured dozens of countries, including Mexico. We've translated our songs into five languages, including Spanish. We've sold millions of records worldwide. Even produced and sold sheet music of our tunes so other groups can cover them.

(beat)

Like I said... Dad, you're wrong. About a lot of things.

Conrad still leans on the light pole. He's hard to read. Is he mad? Embarrassed? Self-loathing? Indignant? Pride hurt? Or is he just analyzing the information he just heard?

Kaden can't tell. There's no response. So he continues to pace outside the hospital.

He checks inside as he walks. No one from the treatment room exits yet.

He tries to get eye contact with Conrad as he passes him. It's impossible; Conrad turns away. What's he thinking?

Nothing obvious. No verbal clues. So Kaden keeps going, back and forth. Round and round.

INT. MEXICAN HOSPITAL - NIGHT

The treatment room door opens and a nurse followed by Lupe exits.

Through the windows Conrad is first to spot them and he hurries toward the entrance, past several people going out.

The windows also reveal Kaden pivot at the end of his circuit and see Conrad re-enter the hospital. He runs to catch up.

Lupe looks around for Conrad and Kaden. She sees no familiar face and panics.

The nurse is confused too.

NURSE
(In Spanish)
I thought you had family here?

LUPE
(In Spanish)
I did but...

Conrad bursts through the door. He bumps into and navigates around a man with a child.

CONRAD
I'm sorry... Uh, lo siento, con permiso.

LUPE
(In Spanish)
There he is.

Conrad approaches quickly. Lupe reaches out to him.

CONRAD
How's Maria?

When their eyes meet, Conrad instantly knows the answer. It's all over Lupe's face. She doesn't speak.

They comfort-hug as Kaden enters. He sees them.

Lupe sees him and beckons him over.

She reaches for him and invites Kaden into the sorrowing group hug.

He joins Lupe and Conrad. It's awkward for the two men, but they clearly feel for Lupe's loss. It's familiar for both of them as well.

The nurse steps away. Others in the waiting room understand what just happened. They turn away in respect.

After what seems like too long, the group hug breaks up. Lupe, Conrad, and Kaden awkwardly search each other's eyes. Then silently stare at the floor. What now?

Kaden the composer steps back, takes charge. He sees Lupe and Conrad, both in tears, still close.

KADEN

Lupe, I'm so sorry about your mother. We'd like to help.

LUPE

No, no. You've already done so much...

KADEN

Where is your father buried?

LUPE

What?

KADEN

Is your father buried here?

LUPE

Yes. At the cemetery by the cathedral. But I...

KADEN

Dad, would you please get Lupe a room at a hotel near the cathedral. Check us in as well for a few days. Take her somewhere to eat. Maybe to shop for some new clothes.

CONRAD

Sure, but...

KADEN

I'll work with the hospital, a funeral home, Father Santiago, whatever legal stuff there is...

CONRAD

But what about...

KADEN

Text me the address of where you're staying. I'll catch a cab there later, after I've got things all arranged.

CONRAD

What if...

KADEN

Meet in front of the cathedral at eight tonight if we fail to touch base. Okay?

CONRAD

Well, okay.

LUPE

You are so kind. How can I thank you?

Kaden grabs a piece of paper and pencil on a desk nearby.

KADEN

Here. You can do this. Just write down your mother's full name and birthdate. Place of birth too. Your dad's info too please.

(beat)

And if you have your siblings' and your children's info - names, addresses, phone numbers - put them down too, and I'll notify them.

LUPE

Okay. Thank you.

Lupe takes a tiny address book from her purse and begins to write on the borrowed paper as she leans on a counter.

CONRAD

How are you going to do all that... in one day?

KADEN

Not to worry. I have connections. I also speak Spanish. So you take care of Lupe. I'll handle all the other details. Okay?

Again, Conrad is perplexed.

CONRAD

You'll handle all funeral arrangements?

KADEN

Yes. I've done it before. In Europe a few years ago.

Conrad is even more confused.

KADEN (CONT'D)

The brother of our drummer came along to help with setup. He fell off a ladder. Broke his neck. Died instantly. Our manager wasn't there to help us because he'd gone on to the next venue.

(beat)

So I took care of everything, including flying his body home.

(beat)

Not fun.

CONRAD

I can imagine.

KADEN

It was tough on everyone. We continued our concerts, but it was hard. We were pretty out of it.

Lupe is finished. She hands the sheet of paper to Kaden.

LUPE

Here's what you asked for. Please call me on your dad's phone if you need anything else?

KADEN

I will. Again. I'm sorry about all this.

LUPE

Thank you, but you two are my angels... my mother's angels. Our answers to prayers.

Lupe hugs Kaden... and then Conrad.

CONRAD

Do you want to leave now, Lupe?

LUPE

Yes. I've said my good-byes.

Conrad extends his hand to Kaden... for the first time.

CONRAD

Son, good luck. Let me know if you need help. Or anything. Okay?

KADEN

Sure. I'll see you later. Don't worry. I've got this.

Conrad puts his arm on Lupe's shoulder and escorts her out to his truck. Kaden puts his smart phone to his ear.

EXT. MEXICAN TOWN CENTER - NIGHT

CITY PARK

Conrad and Lupe slowly walk arm-in-arm on a warm evening. A few other couples are also out strolling, talking.

A guitar strums soft Mexican music from a nearby restaurant.

Conrad and Lupe are quiet.

They pass a few benches occupied by couples holding hands. Ahead is an empty bench.

LUPE
Let's sit for a while.

CONRAD
Okay. Why not.

They sit, but do not touch. They each stare out into the peaceful warm night.

Lupe breaks the ice.

LUPE
Your son is very nice.

CONRAD
Yeah, can be.

Lupe takes Conrad's hand.

LUPE
What's the matter between you two?
One minute you're like partners.
The next it's like you're enemies.
(beat)
I don't understand.

Conrad is stoic, as if he didn't hear Lupe.

LUPE (CONT'D)
Conrad. Please talk to me. What's
going on?

Without looking at Lupe, he answers.

CONRAD
We have our differences.

Then silence. Avoidance. Lupe drops Conrad's hand.

LUPE

Really? That's it?

(beat)

Look. I know your wife - his mother - died a month or so ago. And I'm sorry about that. But before she died, she got you two to promise to go on a road trip. To reconnect. Right?

(Conrad shrugs)

So I don't see any re-connection.

(beat)

All I see is two guys politely communicating but mostly just existing. In two different worlds.

Conrad sits and blankly looks at nothing. Statuesque.

Lupe stands, blocks Conrad's stare. Conrad ignores her, looks around her, and still sits. She takes his head in her hands and looks him in the eyes.

LUPE (CONT'D)

Do you think we have a chance?

CONRAD

What?

LUPE

Us. Is there an 'us' in the future? Seriously. I feel something. I think you do too. Or are we fooling each other because of our pain?

Conrad puts his hands on Lupe's hands on his face.

CONRAD

Yes, you're right. We've both been through a lot lately. We've lost people dear to us. That brought us together. Somehow.

Both bring their hands down. Lupe sits again, but she doesn't touch Conrad. She fixes her eyes straight ahead... on nothing as well.

LUPE

I don't believe in fate.

CONRAD

What?

LUPE

Fate. It's not real.

CONRAD

I don't know about that. Some things just happen. That's fate.

LUPE

No. Whatever happens, happens for a reason. And only God knows why. And maybe causes it. Or prevents it. Or just let's it occur... to what?

(beat)

Test us? Help us grow? Make us choose?

CONRAD

Maybe. All the above. I think he created the earth, threw us on it, and hoped for the best.

LUPE

But also gave us a road map.

CONRAD

That too many people fail to follow.

LUPE

Except you... and Kaden.

(beat)

I mean look at the sequence and number of events that brought you here.

Conrad shifts on the bench. He takes Lupe's hand.

CONRAD

You mean starting with Olivia's death?

LUPE

Well, maybe. But way before that.

(beat)

Look at all the choices we've made to bring us here to this bench.

CONRAD

Okay. Now I'm confused. Are we going back to Columbus choosing a route that ended up on this continent?

Lupe Laughs. Conrad lets go of Lupe's hand.

LUPE

No silly.

(beat)

Why are you and Kaden on this trip?

Conrad squirms.

CONRAD

That's a good question.

LUPE

You told me that your daughter
Miriam suggested it, Olivia
encouraged it, and you agreed to it
- as she was dying. And so did
Kaden, later. Right?

CONRAD

Yes, that's what I told you.

LUPE

And why did Olivia want you two to
do this?

Conrad turns away. He's cornered.

LUPE (CONT'D)

Conrad?

He mumbles.

CONRAD

(snidely)

To reconnect.

LUPE

And why was that necessary - and
important to Olivia?

Conrad remains disengaged, aloof.

LUPE (CONT'D)

Conrad? Have you and Kaden re-
connected? What happened? Why did
you need to re-connect?

Conrad hesitates. Then he looks Lupe in the eyes. He lets it
all out.

CONRAD

Okay. Here it is: I was by Kaden's
side all through high school -
debate team trips, class elections,
extra credit projects. You name it.

(MORE)

CONRAD (CONT'D)

I got him into the best university, paid all his expenses, even bought him a car. Then, in the middle of his second year, he drops out.

(snaps his fingers)

Just like that. To what? Be in a rock band. Play at high school dances, weddings, bars.

(beat)

What a waste. He was going to run my company. Ungrateful bum!

LUPE

So you what? Disowned him?

CONRAD

No. I just couldn't talk to him, be around him, even mention his name.

(beat)

He was an embarrassment to me and my company associates. They all knew how smart he was, where he was going, all that potential he had in my company. They felt sorry for me. For him.

(beat)

I felt betrayed.

LUPE

And Olivia? What did she think?

CONRAD

She was excited. In fact she taught him piano and got him interested in music. When we married, she put her own music career and education - her own dream - on hold, to raise our kids. She never returned to school. She planted the seed.

LUPE

So you hold her partly responsible for Kaden's decision to leave college?

CONRAD

(uncomfortably)

Well, sort of. Maybe she thought she could live her dream through him.

(beat)

But he did the deed.

Lupe is quiet. She lets Conrad ponder what he has revealed.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Funny thing though. Kaden seems happy. Successful. Still pretty smart.

(beat)

I don't understand.

Lupe lets that thought linger.

LUPE

Yes you do.

CONRAD

What?

LUPE

Understand.

Conrad reflects.

CONRAD

Maybe.

(beat)

On the second, maybe third, day of our trip we were at this nice restaurant. It had a band, a pretty good one according to Kaden. But loud and obnoxious to me. Anyway, during their break, they played canned music, softer, quieter than the blaring band. I liked it.

(beat)

Kaden smiled and said it was his group, Celestra. Then we were interrupted by a band member who recognized Kaden as a member of Celestra. He invited Kaden to play with them after their break - and Kaden readily accepted. So he got up there, took charge, and lead them in one of his songs, in Spanish no less. The crowd went crazy. Kaden had so much fun.

Conrad contemplates what he just said.

LUPE

And so?

CONRAD

I still feel hurt, betrayed.

LUPE

And your daughter, Miriam - right? -
she runs the company? Your son
Kaden is a successful musician?
You're comfortably retired.

(beat)

And you just met me.

Lupe takes Conrad's hand and smiles into his eyes.

LUPE (CONT'D)

So what's the problem?

CONRAD

I just feel so...

Conrad pauses. He looks for a word.

LUPE

(interrupts)

Lucky?

Conrad kisses Lupe's hand.

CONRAD

Yes. You're right. I am lucky. And
sad and embarrassed that I have
carried this baggage for so many
years.

(beat)

I guess I'm the ungrateful bum.

LUPE

No, just hurt. Now, after the
funeral, you need to apologize,
make up for missing so much. Okay?

CONRAD

Yes. I will. It'll be hard though.
I don't know if he'll forgive me. I
won't blame him if he doesn't. He's
probably even more upset about me
than I was about him. I basically
abandoned him - for almost twenty
years now. How awful.

LUPE

But you can fulfil Olivia's wish.
Just try. Re-connect. Forgive
yourself. Forgive him. Ask him to
forgive you. I'm pretty sure he
will handle it nicely. I also
suspect he's just as sorry about
this as you are.

CONRAD

You're probably right.

(beat)

Of course, then, there's the 'us'
you mentioned.

LUPE

Well, I suspect that will take care
of itself, as well.

Conrad and Lupe smile at each other and scoot closer, still holding hands.

From above, through the trees and surrounding buildings of the city plaza we see them tenderly embrace.

EXT. MEXICAN TOWN CENTER - DAY

CATHEDRAL CEMETERY

From a distance we see that a humble, but nice, casket is supported atop a newly dug grave. Father Santiago stands at the head of the casket.

His mouth moves but his words are lost in the warm breeze.

Along side stands Lupe. She holds firmly to Conrad's arm and carries a small bouquet of flowers. Conrad's hand rests on Lupe's hand to comfort her.

Kaden stands, head bowed, next to his dad. Two nuns on the opposite side make up the small grave-side assemblage.

Finally, Father Santiago blesses the grave site and makes the sign of the cross over Maria's casket. He faces Lupe, moves toward her, and takes her hand. He bows his head and blesses her too.

Father Santiago takes the hands of Conrad, then Kaden.

The nuns pass by and curtsy to each of the bereaved attendees.

Lupe, Conrad, and Kaden stand alone before the casket as the nuns and Father Santiago depart to the cathedral sanctuary.

A few laborers a few yards from the grave site lean on shovels, next to Maria's husband's grave.

They impatiently wait for the mourners to depart.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - DAY

The engine runs. The air-conditioning is on full blast.

Kaden, now relegated to the back bench seat, sees Conrad's face in the rearview mirror. Conrad looks back. Both are stoic.

Lupe sits in the front passenger seat. She stares out the window at the cathedral and nearby cemetery.

She sees workers lower Maria's casket into the grave.

KADEN

Sorry it was just us. I did get in touch with all your family. It was so sudden... and you know how busy they all are...

Lupe interrupts.

LUPE

(distracted, teary)

Don't worry. I haven't even seen some of my grandchildren, much less my children, it seems like forever. Our home down here wasn't much of a vacation hot spot.

(beat)

Well, it's hot, but there's nothing there.

Lupe changes her view to the windshield where the city streets are busy in front of the pickup.

Kaden reaches over the front seat with his cell phone in hand.

KADEN

Do you want to call anyone again? To update them... Or to find out if they've made any decision about...?

Lupe takes the phone, but just holds it in her hand. She looks at it and then at Kaden.

LUPE

Thank you. They have already expressed their condolences, sent flowers, told me how sorry they are to not have come...

(beat)

But... We've made other plans.

KADEN

We?

Lupe hands the phone back to Kaden.

LUPE

Yes... We.

Conrad looks at Kaden in the mirror again. Then he turns around and faces Kaden.

CONRAD

I've offered to help Lupe. To get her an apartment... wherever she wants in the United States so she can be near her children.

KADEN

So that's what you two have been talking about during your walks last week... before the funeral?

CONRAD

That.
(beat)
And other things.

Conrad looks at Lupe. She smiles and lightly touches his arm.

KADEN

(sing-song-like)
O-o-oh.

CONRAD

Not what you think... At least for now.

Conrad smiles back at Lupe. Then gives a non-of-your-business look to Kaden.

KADEN

Okay then. Now what?

CONRAD

We should head back.

KADEN

Home? With Lupe?

CONRAD

Of course.

LUPE

Please don't dump me alone back in the desert.

CONRAD

No way. We'll help you find a new home. One that's air-conditioned, with electricity... and running water.

LUPE

That would be a nice change.

Everyone cracks a small smile. But the occasion is still somber.

KADEN

Well, I'm looking forward to escaping this heat... And I've got to link up with my band in about a week.

CONRAD

Should be plenty of time, maybe a two- or three-day drive.

KADEN

Good. This trip has been...
(beat)
Interesting.

Lupe gives Conrad a slight scowl and a "did-you-talk-to-him?" non-verbal.

CONRAD

(mouths)
I will.

Conrad puts the pickup in gear and pulls out into the busy street.

EXT. MEXICAN HIGHWAY - DAY

It nears sunset as Conrad's pickup approaches a major city, the one where Kaden was recognized and covered his song with the band at a restaurant.

The pickup motors into a busy section of town, down a major street, and into the parking lot of a motel.

It stops and Kaden gets out and goes in to register.

A LITTLE LATER

He comes out with two sets of keys, waves them to the others, points around the corner, and gestures them to follow him in the truck.

He arrives at a few exterior rooms and directs Conrad to park in a nearby empty space.

The truck pulls in and the motor stops.

Lupe gets out as Kaden retrieves suitcases from the truck-bed.

KADEN

Here's a key to your room. We're next door.

(beat)

And here's your suitcase.

LUPE

Thank you.

Conrad steps out of the driver's side and gets his suitcase from the back as well.

CONRAD

Thanks Kaden. Let's freshen up and meet outside to go eat in an hour. Same place we ate before. Okay?

KADEN

Fine. They had good food.

(beat)

And good music too.

LUPE

Sounds okay.

Everyone hefts their bags to their rooms. The doors slam.

INT. NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Kaden plays keyboards for the same tune he played during the last visit. The band, patrons, and employees are all stoked - they dance, sing, whoop, clap - a great party atmosphere.

Conrad and Lupe sip their fruit drinks, nibble at last scraps of their dinner, and scope out the crowd.

[The following dialogue is in Spanish, English subtitles]

CARMELITITA

All finished? Can I take your plates?

LUPE
I am. Conrad?

CONRAD
Yes. I'm finished. Thank you.

CARMELITITA
Another juice?

CONRAD
Sure. Lupe?

LUPE
Why not? Please. Thanks.

CARMELITITA
Wonderful. I'll bring them right away. And I'll bring another for our talented guest - for when he completes the song.

CONRAD
Thank you.

[End dialogue in Spanish]

Carmelita clears most of the plates and departs.

Lupe enjoys the performance. She smiles and is astounded by Kaden's ability.

The band and crowd are loud. With a scowl on his face, Conrad scans the audience. He sees several patrons who record the band on their smart phones.

Just like the previous visit, the patrons are wild about the performance. As the song's last chorus rocks the room, everyone sings, dances, and celebrates.

When the song ends, great applause fills the restaurant. Kaden rises, bows, acknowledges the band, waves to standing applause, and struggles his way to his table amidst back-slapping and hand-shakes.

Before he arrives, the band already had struck up a local favorite, and dance and celebration continue, minus Kaden.

Kaden sits down, exhausted but pumped up. He autographs several napkins to a line of fans before Carlos shoos them all away.

He picks up the drink, swigs a long gulp, and puts it down as admirers filter away.

KADEN

Ahh! Thank you. I needed that.

Conrad scans the crowd again. Several people still have cameras pointed at Kaden. And at his dad. And at Lupe.

Conrad turns away and slumps down as if he could hide.

KADEN (CONT'D)

Dad, you can't hide from these guys. Sit up and smile. Like you're having fun.

Conrad scoots to a straight-up sitting position. Lupe smiles.

CONRAD

Yeah, but all these videos will go up on the internet, even the ones they shot of your whole concert here. That's - that's plagiarism. Stealing.

KADEN

I don't care.

CONRAD

You should. You'll lose sales.

Kaden smiles, sits up, sips his drink, and waves to a fan filming him.

KADEN

Our marketing guy does studies, good ones...

CONRAD

(interrupting)

You have a marketing guy?

KADEN

Sure. Most groups have them. He works with our manager.

(beat)

Look. Here's what happens. Fans all over the world shoot our concerts and put them online. They get tons of hits, thousands, some, millions. That encourages people all over to look us up, go to our website where - wait for it - they listen to snippets of all our tunes - ones that are of extremely high quality - choose some, and buy a few. It's free advertising. So we don't mind.

(MORE)

KADEN (CONT'D)

In fact, we're one of the few bands that encourages it. Smart, right?

CONRAD

Very clever. Too bad we didn't have the internet when I started out.

KADEN

You did fine without it, dad. And now Miriam uses it to build on the foundation you laid. She's pretty smart.

(beat)

And I'm glad she's there. And I'm here.

Conrad again buttons up.

Through the loud music of the band, Lupe encourages Conrad to speak up, to clear the air.

LUPE

Please Conrad. It's time. No more putting it off. Okay?

CONRAD

No. Not now. It's too noisy, too loud.

Kaden smiles.

KADEN

You think I don't know. Come on. I've seen you too. Ever since the hospital. The days before the funeral. This trip.

CONRAD

What?

KADEN

Come on Dad. I don't care. Mom wouldn't care.

Conrad fumes to himself.

LUPE

Don't push, Kaden.

(beat)

Even though that could be under consideration.

Conrad glances at Lupe. She returns a little telltale smile.

Kaden gets up.

KADEN

I'm going to talk to the band after this number. I need to thank them again and tell them how good they are.

Kaden heads to the platform the band plays from.

Lupe puts her hand on Conrad's hand.

LUPE

You haven't brought it up yet, right? - You said you would.

CONRAD

I know. I tried, a couple of times, in the hotel. But the words wouldn't come out.

(beat)

And he just continued putting on a show, an act, as if everything was fine. Just like on stage. He's good at it.

LUPE

But on stage it's not an act. It's the real Kaden. He's a performer, a musician... and a very good one.

(beat)

With you he has to act.

(beat)

When was the last time you talked to him, really talked with him... before this trip?

Conrad hesitates. He thinks hard, but as the music and crowd gets louder, their conversation is almost drowned out. They talk really loud too.

CONRAD

Probably when he called the day he dropped out of the university. I really chewed him out, lit into him.

(beat)

Now that I think of it, he actually hung up on me.

They both almost have to yell now.

LUPE
That wasn't real 'talking with
him.' Was it?

CONRAD
Well, he's the one who cut off our
relationship.

LUPE
Can you blame him?

All the loud music finally gets to Conrad. He changes the
subject.

CONRAD
This kind of music is what ticks me
off the most. It's mind-numbing!
(beat)
I'm getting out of here.

Conrad suddenly gets up. He throws two twenty-dollar bills on
the table from his wallet.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
I'll wait for you and Kaden out
front somewhere. Away from all this
garbage.

He turns and leaves.

LUPE
Conrad, come on. Wait for Kaden...

But Conrad was already past the dancers and almost at the
door. He didn't hear her and left.

EXT. NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Conrad leans against a lamppost across the street from the
restaurant. The night is warm. He wipes sweat from his
forehead. He checks his watch. Looks like he's bored,
impatient. He watches restaurant customers come and go.

Most people are happy, excited. Some are clearly drunk. Many
know each other and greet with big, friendly 'abrazos' (back-
slapping hugs). They're loud, boisterous.

Music filters onto the street from inside and some customers
can't resist the beat: they dance and sway as they wait -
some even dance as they leave.

A poorly-dressed, dirty, unshaven man toting his possessions in a garbage bag slowly limps toward Conrad from a half-block away. Conrad sees him approaching and high tails it the other way. No time for beggars.

He reaches the corner and crosses the street, walks down the block, turns, and ends up behind the big restaurant.

BEHIND NICE RESTAURANT

He walks nearby and exchanges nods with a guy dumping garbage into the restaurant's back dumpster.

The guy returns inside and Conrad stops. He smells rotting food from the dumpster and is repulsed.

He crosses the street to get away.

He leans against a telephone pole and tries not to barf. His stomach contracts. The odor really got to him.

He bends over as if to barf but only burps loudly.

A YOUNG MOTHER rocking a sleeping baby on a porch nearby uses limited English to gently taunt Conrad.

YOUNG MOTHER

Hey gringo? You drunk ...you sick?

CONRAD

(groggy)

What? Who?

YOUNG MOTHER

No make barf stink? No make more very bad smell.

Conrad looks around to find where the voice comes from. He spots the lady under a dim porch light.

CONRAD

I'm okay. Smell makes me sick.

YOUNG MOTHER

Yes. Make rent cheap too.

She chuckles. So does Conrad, a little. He recovers a bit.

YOUNG MOTHER (CONT'D)

Always cheap music close also. At night no need radio.

CONRAD

Too loud for me.

YOUNG MOTHER
 You too old for music like
 Celestra.

Conrad is taken aback.

CONRAD
 You know Celestra music?

YOUNG MOTHER
 On yes. Very popular in Mexico.
 Band here play Celestra songs.
 (beat)
 They play one tonight. Sound like
 original. My favorite.

Conrad still can't believe what he's hearing.

CONRAD
 My son is in Celestra. He is here.
 He played with the restaurant band.

The young mother is surprised, happy, shocked.

YOUNG MOTHER
 Who is he?

CONRAD
 He plays keyboards.

YOUNG MOTHER
 Kaden? He write most Celestra
 tunes. Very good. I love his songs.

CONRAD
 (still aghast)
 That's amazing! Behind a smelly
 restaurant in the middle of a
 desert, someone knows my son!

FRONT NICE RESTAURANT

Conrad signs a few autographs. Lupe admires him nearby.

He steps away to join her. People in line point and wave to
 him. He returns their greeting and he and Lupe head toward
 the parked pickup.

They scan for Conrad and are a bit bewildered.

LUPE
 I wonder where he went?

KADEN

He can't take so much loud music,
not to mention the noise of the
restaurant.

They arrive at the truck.

KADEN (CONT'D)

Dad has the keys.

(beat)

We'll have to wait here.

Kaden leans on the truck and nods every now and then to admirers.

Lupe continues to scan down the street and the front of the restaurant for Conrad. After a short while...

LUPE

There he is!

Lupe points past to restaurant front door as Conrad dodges waiting patrons to get by. Kaden waves to Conrad, but members of the waiting crowd wave back.

Conrad reaches the truck.

KADEN

Dad, where have you been? We missed
you.

CONRAD

(gets out keys)

Before we go back to the hotel...

Conrad unlocks and opens doors. He helps Lupe into the front. Kaden gets in back. Conrad commands.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Leave the windows up. But hold your
noses. I want you to meet someone.

Kaden and Lupe are confused.

LUPE

So where are we going?

All doors close and the truck backs out.

BEHIND NICE RESTAURANT

In front of the young mother's house the pickup slows to a stop, its engine softly rumbles. Only Kaden gets out.

INT. CONRAD PICKUP - NIGHT

Lupe and Conrad watch as Kaden kneels beside the young mother and quietly says something.

Then Kaden pats the baby's head. He hands something to the mother, stands, bends over, and kisses her on the forehead. She's flustered but obviously tickled.

Then Kaden returns to the pickup and opens the door. He gets in the back.

CONRAD

Thank you, son. I think you made her day.

KADEN

Great idea dad. You remembered.

CONRAD

The most important thing?

KADEN

Yup.

CONRAD

The fans.

(beat)

That's what you taught me.

EXT. NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Conrad's pickup pulls around to the front of the restaurant and drives by. From the rear window, Kaden waves to customers standing outside.

The truck drives off into the night.

All the fans - and new friends - wave goodbye. Lots of excitement. A memorable night.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Conrad sits on his bed. He goes through a few favorite wallet photos: Olivia, Miriam, Kaden.

He pauses at the picture of young Kaden. He stares at it long and hard. It's a photo of a ten-year old Kaden sitting at the piano. Smiling.

The hotel bathroom door opens and Kaden steps out. He massages and dries his hair with a towel.

When he pulls down the towel, he looks at Conrad and smiles. Conrad looks down at the photo. Then up at Kaden, and he too smiles.

KADEN

What?

The smiles were the same.

CONRAD

Way back when we began this road trip you said we needed to talk. About us.

KADEN

Yes, I said that. But you didn't want to.

An awkward pause. Who goes first?

CONRAD

Well, now I do.
(beat)
But it's hard for me.

KADEN

Me too.
(beat)
So how about I go first?

CONRAD

Okay.

Kaden sits down in a desk chair. He takes a big breath and faces Conrad.

KADEN

Well, here goes.
(beat)
I know how disappointed you were - you are - that I quit attending the university. I know that torqued you off badly.

CONRAD

No kidding.

KADEN

And I'm sorry.
(beat)
But I had to.

(MORE)

KADEN (CONT'D)

All during my classes - math, business, psychology - you name it, my mind created and doodled lyrics to songs, and melodies ran through my head constantly. I couldn't wait to get back to my room to tinker on my little electronic keyboard, the one mom bought for me, to write down those ideas that just poured out of my head. Those first two semesters were torture!

CONRAD

But you did so well in school.

KADEN

True. But whatever I was then, I'm not any more. Though classes weren't that hard for me, without music I felt empty. Then during the summer several of us musicians got together, formed a band, and, well, the rest is history.

(beat)

Most of which you never knew about or didn't care about much. Mom did though. She helped us a lot.

CONRAD

I knew that, but when you dropped out, that's when I couldn't believe it - or accept it.

KADEN

Technically, I didn't drop out. I just decided not to register for the following semester.

CONRAD

That's called 'quibbling.' You quit school. You dropped out.

KADEN

Okay. And I'm sorry about that.

(beat)

So here's the bottom line: Your plans for me didn't fit my plans for me.

That statement hung in the air. Conrad had no response. He tried to say something but nothing came out. He looked away as if he'd find words somewhere in the room. But nothing was there.

Kaden stopped talking. He could see that his dad was lost for a comeback. Then Kaden got up to retrieve a bottled water from the bathroom sink counter.

Then he stopped and without turning around spoke mildly.

KADEN (CONT'D)
And I was without a father for
twenty years.

That was a gut-punch to Conrad. His wall of resentment and hurt crashed down.

He got up and faced Kaden's slumping back.

KADEN (CONT'D)
(heartfelt)
I held that against you too. For
twenty years.
(beat)
I'm sorry.

Kaden turns around and faces Conrad squarely. Conrad puts his hands on Kaden's shoulders.

CONRAD
Lupe was right.

Kaden is a bit confused.

CONRAD (CONT'D)
I am lucky.
(beat)
Actually, I'm blessed.
(beat)
You are a wonderful, talented,
successful son.
(beat)
My daughter is skillfully managing
and growing the company I started.
(beat)
My dearly departed, my beloved
Olivia is most responsible for the
way both of you turned out.

Kaden feels his dad's love. Tears well in his eyes. He's choked up and has no words. But Conrad still holds him at a distance. No hug yet.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

And because of Olivia, Miriam, you,
and the whole idea of this road
trip, I've met a someone who might
provide me with companionship and
friendship to soften my heart and
bring me long-awaited peace.

(beat)

Please forgive me, Kaden.

Conrad pulls Kaden close. He hugs him fervently, honestly.
Kaden wraps his arms around his dad. He hugs back and
whispers to Conrad.

KADEN

I do. And forgive me too.

CONRAD

Of course.

They break their embrace and look in each other's moist eyes.

KADEN

Does this mean we've re-connected?

Both have big smiles.

CONRAD

I'd say so.

One more hug as Conrad looks heavenward.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

(whispered)

Thank you, Olivia. Thank you.

EXT. CITY CEMETERY - DAY

Conrad's pickup slowly pulls into the cemetery section where
Olivia is buried. Lupe rides in the front passenger seat.
Conrad drives. No Kaden.

The truck stops. The engine turns off. Then it's quiet,
peaceful.

Conrad gets out. Lupe stays in the truck.

Purposefully, but with reverence, Conrad walks toward
Olivia's grave. He tightly grips a small bouquet of flowers
in one hand.

When he reaches to plot it's different: no flowers, no dirt covering, no temporary marker - instead a polished granite headstone and freshly laid sod.

Conrad kneels at the base of the granite, leans the flowers against the cold stone, bows his head, and closes his eyes.

He's still, reflective.

He raises his head and reads the inscription on the headstone, top to bottom.

OLIVIA STANTON KING

DECEMBER 12, 1939 - JUNE 24, 2011

CHILDREN: KADEN & MIRIAM

HUSBAND: CONRAD LAURENCE KING

"WHATEVER I WAS, I'M NOT ANYMORE"

Conrad reads the last line out-loud as he touches the letters.

CONRAD

'Whatever I was, I'm not anymore.'

Conrad's face wrenches with sorrow. His eyes water. But he doesn't cry, not out-loud.

He rises from the grass and grasps the monument for help and to steady his effort.

One last, solemn look and then he slowly walks back to his pickup.

INT. CONRAD'S HOME - DAY

Conrad sits on the piano bench. He tries to plunk out keys to the melody of Kaden's song he heard in the Mexican restaurant overhead speaker, 'Whatever I was...'

His effort is pretty bad. Then he finally gets the phrase correctly. He repeats it over and over.

Then he tries to play the next phrase, 'I'm not anymore,' again with trouble.

A soft KNOCK on the front door and it opens.

LUPE

Hello, hello. Are you home, Conrad?

CONRAD

In here.

Lupe closes the door and follows the sound of the piano.

She sees Conrad struggling with the tune and sits down beside him.

LUPE

You best stick to digging wells.

CONRAD

Too old for that now. Besides,
Kaden has all the music skills.

(beat)

He got 'em from Olivia.

Lupe puts her arm around Conrad. He stops his attempt to play the piano.

LUPE

Things are good now. Right?

CONRAD

Yes.

(beat)

Except for one thing.

Conrad picks up an envelope that lies on the table next to the piano. He pulls out a letter and a concert ticket. They're from Kaden.

He stares at them and knows what he must do.

LUPE

Then do it.

Conrad smiles and gets up old-man style.

EXT. BUSY HIGHWAY - DAY

Conrad's pickup cruises along. It leaves town.

EXT. COLLAGE - PICKUP DRIVES A LONG DISTANCE

- The pickup drives through the desert.
- It drives on a freeway through mountains.
- Conrad maneuvers through another city during the night.
- The truck drives past ranches and orchards.

- The pickup enters a major city.

END COLLAGE

EXT. LARGE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The pickup approaches a busy parking lot. He pays and then is directed to a long row of parked vehicles. He coasts toward a person who points him into a slot.

Conrad parks, gets out, and begins a long trek to the entrance, past other cars that vie for parking spots.

He's in the entrance line filled with excited fans, many who sport Celestra T-shirts.

He gets to the front, shows the ticket-taker the ticket.

TICKET-TAKER

That's a back-stage pass, you lucky dog! How'd you score that, old man?

(beat)

Go that way.

The ticket-taker points around the side of the building and directs Conrad to go in that direction.

CONRAD

Oh. Okay. Thanks.

Conrad struggles through crowds and excited fans.

He reaches a side door marked 'VIPs,' another with a 'Special Guests' sign.

The next says, 'Stage.' He tries the door. It's locked.

He continues around to the back of the building.

Suddenly, he's almost alone.

SECURITY GUARD

Excuse me, sir. Can I help you.

Conrad is startled when a young uniformed 'rent-a-guard' approaches from the dark.

CONRAD

I sure hope so. I have this special pass and I can't find where I'm supposed to get in.

SECURITY GUARD

Lemme see it and I'll take care of you.

Conrad hands him the pass. The security guard examines it.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

Holy smokes, sir. Where'd you get this?

CONRAD

Well, my son sent it to me.

SECURITY GUARD

He must have good connections. This gives you access to everything: The concert, joining the band during intermission, refreshments, back stage, dinner after. Like it's a Golden Ticket.

CONRAD

Oh. I thought it was just a ticket to the concert.

SECURITY GUARD

Look. It's even signed by Kaden King. Now you've got his autograph too. Pretty cool.

The guard shows him the signature and hands the pass back to Conrad.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

That'll be valuable someday.

(beat)

Follow me. I'll get you in through this back door.

Conrad follows the security guard to an unmarked door. The guard enters a code, opens the door, and lets Conrad in, ticket in hand. Another guard greets Conrad and looks at his ticket.

GUARD 2

Good evening sir. Follow me.

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

On several large monitors mounted to walls and hung from the ceiling, Celestra pumps out the last few verses of a powerful tune that rocks the hall - live streaming video.

Through a small screen on a video camera mounted to the balcony the same scene appears.

Through the feet of the band we look out on the excited audience, as everyone on their feet cheers and applauds to the final chords of the tune.

The keyboardist's feet, Kaden's feet, leave the keyboard stand and literally dance to the center microphone. The lead singer steps aside.

Kaden acknowledges the crowd's approval and motions it to settle... which it finds hard to do.

Then, with emotion and careful choice of words, Kaden speaks into the mic.

KADEN

Before intermission...

(AH from the crowd)

Before intermission, we'll perform a song I wrote for the person who started me on my musical journey, the person who first helped me find middle-C.

(mild crowd laughter)

The person who continues to inspire me from her heavenly home.

(silence)

My mother.

Conrad looks on from the wings of the stage. His eyes water.

Kaden looks his way. He smiles. He nods to Conrad and then to the band.

In the background, the guitarist begins a pretty acoustic arpeggio as other band members sing a matching, sustained 'oh' chord.

KADEN (CONT'D)

And I dedicate this song to the person who taught me right from wrong, the person who instilled in me a strong work ethic, the person who, more than any other, showered me with forgiveness and love.

(beat)

My father.

Kaden looks at Conrad, gives him a thumbs-up and leaves the front mic.

As the band's background performance grows louder, Kaden returns to his instrument.

At the keyboard, Kaden adds a seriously difficult arpeggio of his own that builds to a sustained chord.

All band members look at him. He raises his hands and the entire band suddenly stops. The crowd murmur increases.

It's 'Wait for it' moment.

Then Kaden begins to sing acapella:

KADEN (CONT'D)
'Whatever I Was... I'm not any
more'

The band softly echoes those lyrics in a beautiful chord.

Then, together, the band begins the first verse. They sing and play accompaniment. The whole audience joins in. Everyone knows the lyrics (especially the chorus), the melody, and, most likely, the meaning of the song.

Conrad smiles as he looks on. He mouths words to the chorus.

Concert attendees are stoked. So is Kaden and the band.

So is Conrad.

FADE OUT.