

Title: Dad's Visit

Time: 2am, May, 1979

Setting: Tijuana. Teenager's bedroom. There is probably a chair near the foot of the bed.

Cast

Carlos – Early 40's.

Miguel – 14. Covered and asleep in the bed on side, facing audience.

Stage is complete black out. Footsteps are heard coming down a hallway. A door creaks slightly. If there is an actual physical door, Carlos enters it in the darkness; otherwise the actor just comes out to stand where a door would be. He turns on a fairly strong flashlight. Your team will decide if this is enough light or if you give the room as little light as needed for the audience to make out their faces.

(From here, there will only be a few stage directions; I trust the director to figure out what to do with Carlos through most of the monologue. In the interest of space, I won't indent and it's obviously all Carlos speaking.)

So there you are. Buenos noches, 14 years old. Happy Birthday.

It's been a year. Even in your sleep, I can see you're a bigger lump under the blanket than you were last year. Maybe you're even starting to get a little bit of a moustache like your father by now, eh?

(He pans the flashlight slowly up the bed and Miguel's body to his face and looks.)

Nope, not yet. Like your Papa. (chuckles gently). I didn't get moustache hairs till after my sixteenth birthday. I couldn't wait to get them then. Now, I'd appreciate if I didn't have to shave so much. Your grandfather was like that, too. My father, I mean, not your Abuelo Rodolfo, God rest his soul. Rodolfo...he had quite the beard. And not a gray hair in it, to the day he died. *(beat)* Or, at least...I assume so, based on the last time I saw him. Which was only a few years earlier. How old would you have been? that was...'73? So you were maybe eight. I'm sure you still remember him well. He was kind. Kinder to me than...well...let's not go there, mijo.

So, since your abeula tells me close to nada...do you even know that? Does she tell you that I get *un poquito de* news now and then when...she's feeling gracious? What do I know

since last year? I asked if you were doing sports and I know you play futbol now, eh? I like imagining that. I tried to ask what position you play but she said, “I don’t know about such things,” and I don’t want to push, even if you MUST have told her at some point if you’re a goalie or a fullback or what. If I push, she ends the conversation, so I have to be very careful. I don’t want to risk the deal. *Solo cuatro años*. Four years left. I can’t risk that.

(beat) I bet you’re a forward. Maybe even *un forward centrál*, eh? Scoring more of the goals? ¡Ojalá! (beat) But mostly, I just hope you’re having fun. I wasn’t good in sports, mijo, so I avoided them. It’s too bad. There wasn’t much to do in Sánchez Taboada and if you could kick *un balón de fútbol*, you were less likely to get in trouble. But I had no skills. Not for that, anyway. So good for you.

(beat, as he looks around with flashlight) So what else does your room tell me? Because most of what I know about you comes from this room. Farrah Fawcett? (laughs) Can’t blame you there. Not as *bonita* as *su madre*, but I get it.

I’m surprised Abuela let you hang that. Maybe she’s mellowing as she ages. (beat) But I doubt that. Maybe you’re standing up to her some, eh? Saying you’re enough of a man to decide what your room should look like. *un hombre independiente!* (beat) Then again...thinking that way is what did me in back in Sánchez Taboada. So *la independencia* isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. You’re lucky your abuelos were able to move to Playas de Tijuana. You don’t see what we did.

(laughs) Your mother. When we first got married – and without our families and not in a church – we had *nada*, especially once we started with the drugs, but she and abuela would get into such fights. On your mother’s good days, anyway, they’d fight – on the bad days, she didn’t say much at all after a while. I’d say, “Don’t fight with her, cariño; we might need her help sometime.” And we did. (chuckle) And she didn’t. It was tough. Especially on *los días malos*. When your mother had her bad days...

(beat) Do you even know about your mother’s bad days? Has she told you? Especially with the weather. *Dios mio*. You’ve never known anyone who was more sensitive to the weather than *su madre*. If she knew it was going to rain, she wouldn’t get out of bed and would barely talk. I’d say to her, “Dolores, it’s just water. Like the shower. And you don’t have to go outside. Just get out of bed.” But on those rainy days, she’d just lay there and gripe about our lives and be so down on me for getting in the way of what she could have done with her life. It was like a machete in *mi corazon* those days. Abuela said it was the heroin, but she was bad on rainy days way before that...it just made things worse. People would say to me all the time, “Carlos, how do you put up with Dolores? She can be so mean to you!” and all I could say is, “*Verdad*.” But you don’t see her at the times when she

isn't mean.” She gripped my heart tighter than the drugs ever did. Maybe that’s why I wasn’t able to kick that until after...till after. While it had her and she had me, I couldn’t get my head around being in a different place than her. Like if I lost her because she couldn’t get clean, I would just disappear.

I’ve never talked to you about that stuff before. Not that it matters when you’re asleep for all my visits anyway, but now I feel like I’m talking to a young man.

I’m clean two years, eight months, and some days, by the way. Most days, I don’t even think about the stuff, except for the fact that I’m at the meetings, which, *claro*, reminds me of where I came from and what I’ve done. I really don’t even think I need the meetings anymore. I go for two reasons. One, in case I’m wrong and they’re still helping me more than I know. And two: so that, on the rare occasion that your abuela will take my long distance call from Rosarita, I can tell her that I’m still going. But I never know what her response will be. The best I’ve ever gotten was, “*Bueno para ti!*” but one time she said, “Maybe if you could have gotten my daughter to those meetings she’d still be here.” Like I didn’t try, mijo! I did! I hope you know that. (beat) I hope you know any of this.

I can’t stay much longer. My biggest fear is that Abuela will ever wake during the night and catch me here. Or that she’d ever realize I had the key she gave Dolores in case she ever wanted to leave me and come back to her. That’s why I only ever come on your birthdays. I don’t dare risk more often because, if she catches me here, the deal is off. I can’t do anything to reach out to you till you’re eighteen. Do you know that? That she’s said that if I try, she’ll move you and I’ll never see you again. But if I wait till you’re eighteen, she’ll give you the option to see me. I hope you know that. I hope you know that I’m not staying away because I want to. Because it kills me every day not knowing you. And it tears me up that all you know of me is what you remember when you were small...and what Abuela must say about me.

(beat) I lied a minute ago. I came once when it wasn’t your birthday. But you weren’t here. Abuela let it slip that she was taking you on a trip – remember when you went to Ensenada with her? I came then, knowing you’d both be gone. Took the bus. Stayed just for a few hours. Sat on your bed. Looked at your clothes. Even looked through your history notes and read your essay about *Presidente Benito Juárez*. I know that sounds creepy but I just wanted to imagine the words in your head. I imagined you reading the essay to the class. Because I don’t know what your voice sounds like. I still hear it, but it’s the voice of a five year old. Not whatever the young man in this bed – my son – must sound like. But I felt just a bit closer to it when I could imagine you reading to your class, “*Benito Juarez fue un presidente muy importante!*”

(beat) Alright. *Tengo que ir.* For all I know, that woman may get up in the night to pee every hour these days.

Even if I can't say it to you for real, on some level, know that your father loves you, misses you, and is counting down the four years till he can say to your face, "I've always wanted to be in your life every single day."

(Carlos kisses Miguel on the forehead.)

Be good, mijo. And be good to Abuela. I don't like her, but she's a good woman. And I thank God she was there for you when we couldn't be. *Te amo.*

(Carlos exits. As he leaves, he turns off his flashlight and the stage is fully dark. The intention before continuing is to give about five seconds of darkness before the scene continues. It's possible the audience might applaud in this time, thinking the scene is over. If so, wait that out until the audience is quiet again and then count to five.)

Miguel has propped himself up in bed and turns on a flashlight. Hopefully, that's enough light to see what's happening but if some extra spotlight on him is needed, so be it, so long as the feeling is darkness with a flashlight. He reaches beside his pillow and pulls out a portable cassette recorder. He pushes a button and we hear the sound of a cassette rewinding (either the whirr or, even better, the voice going backward very fast) for about ten seconds. He presses "play" and we hear that he's recorded Carlos in his room as it plays back, ideally a tad muffled and scratchy, like an old cassette recorder would do:)

CARLOS (on recording): So there you are. Buenos noches, 14 years old. Happy Birthday.

Miguel pushes stop and the voiceover ends.

MIGUEL: *(gently)* Buenos noches, papa.

Miguel tucks the tape recorder away. He looks out at the audience and turns off the flashlight. If any additional light has been put upon him, it goes out simultaneously. As soon as the blackout hit, we hear either the whole song of Slip Sliding Away or perhaps it picks up at the first verse...director's choice)

[Verse 1]

Oh, I know a man
He came from my hometown
He wore his passion for his woman like a thorny crown
He said, "Delores, I live in fear
My love for you's so overpowering
I'm afraid that I will disappear"

[Chorus]

Slip sliding away
Slip sliding away
You know the nearer your destination
The more you're slip sliding away

[Verse 2]

And I know a woman
Became a wife
These are the very words she uses to describe her life
She said, "A good day ain't got no rain"
She said, "A bad day's when I lie in bed
And I think of things that might have been"

[Chorus]

[Verse 3]

And I know a father, who had a son.
He longed to tell him all the reasons for the things he'd done
He came a long way, just to explain
He kissed his boy as he lay sleeping
Then he turned around and he headed home again

Approx. 9 minutes before song