

Sabor a Mi

By Nora Montañez
Patterson

Character:

Nora: A mother. A Peruvian immigrant. A questioner even when her questions get in the way. A dreamer. A daughter trying to make sense of her immigrant journey to the United States. Has been processing their traumas for a while now.

Nery: Nora's 7-year-old daughter. First generation immigrant. A welcomed questioner. A processor through visual arts. A lover of stories.

Nilda: Nora's Mami. A Peruvian born singer, who lost their way without music. Someone who welcomes questions when the time is right (and I mean right, right). Her speech is of someone who is afraid and any emotional burst will trigger a crying session. They are at the beginning of processing their life traumas.

Raul: Nora's Papi. A Peruvian born musician, who never lost their way with music. Someone who welcomes questions but at times deflects them with music or a joke. He's speech is of someone who is kind and gentle but doesn't share much of their feelings as not to affect or influence others. They are at the beginning of processing their life traumas.

Teacher, Students, Customs Officer, NY Landlord, NY Secretary, Flight Attendant, Statue of Liberty: All part of the Nora's memory journey. Each character has a distinct mannerism and a speech pattern that plays into their micro-aggressions around race, social economics and patriotism.

Time: Now. 1975. 1979. 1982. 1986. Back to present time.

Place: Lima, Peru. Queens, NY.

Notes:

*Below you will find some of the important aspects the make *Sabor A Mi* a dynamic and impactful production.

Collaboration: It is important that this be collaborative journey for all those involved in the development of the production. The dialogue, the staging, the lighting, the sound is layered together to create a piece that without the other the piece could falter.

Staging: This production can be presented in various ways. It can embrace minimalist staging, making the cajon the only thing that can transform into multiple objects (i.e. a rocking chair, a bar, an airplane seat, ect.) or have a set that is flexible and layered. Currently, the projections are used to inform a location The cajon can also take the form of a memory chest as if items like photographs get pulled out to reveal another memory. The major component is the cajon (which represent the heart, the head or another body part. What body part is leading this memory?)

Physicality/Sound: This production can use sound in various ways. It can use minimal sound and have the actor be the vesicle of sound (i.e. the sound of a car peeling away, the sound of a phone ringing, ect.) or a sound designer can create the soundtrack to the production.

Physicality of Characters: Fluctuating between characters should be fluid and also exhausting. Playing with shapes and levels is key. Discovering a specific mannerism for each character should be played with. If the actor is having fun with the characters then the audience will have fun with the characters.

ACT 1 Scene 1:

(Lights come up on Nora. She is seated on el cajon using it like a rocking chair. It's bedtime. She waits for her child...too long. She hums a song while she waits. The projections begin to draw out a seven year olds room (A small desk with a calendar or drawings, a shelf with a fish, posters of Frida Kahlo and Sonia Sotomayor etc.)

NORA

Mija'

(Nora waits.)

MIJA! Es tiempo para dormir.

(She rocks and hums some more.)

MIJ-(ohhh)

(Daughter finally enters. Nora mimes holding her hand and leads her to her bed.)

Ok, mi amor. Let me see those teeth. Que bueno!

(Nora tucks her in.)

OKAY!

*Los pollitos dicen
Pío pío pío
Cuando tienen hambre
Cuando/*

(Nora (As daughter) lays into bed about fall asleep then props up from bed.)

NORA (*As Daughter*)

Mami, tu didn't look at my pictures hoy.

NORA

(Re-tucking daughter)

Tus dibujos? Si! I saw them. Hmmhummm...
OK!

*Quando tienen frio
La gallina buscas el maiz
Y el trigo y les da co-*

(Daughter pops up from bed again.)

NORA (*As Daughter*)

Did you really see it?

NORA

Mhummmmm...

NORA (*As Daughter*)
Por eso es que I said, I am brown.

NORA
Que?!

NORA (*As Daughter*)
Michael, he said I'm not brown but...I am brown.

NORA
Michael es un niño en tu salon?

NORA (*As Daughter*)
Si, I drew him en my picture.

(Nora goes to her drawing on the table. The projection begins to draw a boy in a classroom with the words "You're not brown. You're white".)

NORA
Esto paso hoy?

NORA(*As Daughter*)
Si!

NORA
Que dijestes?

NORA (*As Daughter*)
I said, "My Papi es white pero I'm Brown." And he said, "Oh, I thought you were white?"

NORA
Si, miya bueno their both true, right?!

*Y les da comida.
Y les presta-*

NORA (*As Daughter*)
Si, pero porque people want to be white and not brown?

NORA
Tu te sientes hacie?

NORA (*As Daughter*)
No, pero there are people que dicen that brown people are illegal?

Los-

NORA
People? No, miya' gente can't be illegal.

NORA (*As Daughter*)
Pero Mami, porque tu says I'm not illegal.

NORA
When?

NORA (*As Daughter*)
Cuando tu protests?

(The projection draws out a Nora wearing a shirt that said, "I'm not illegal".)

NORA
Ohhhhh...ya, I could see why that's confuso.
Mija, si yo soy un inmigrante y I'm proud of it. Pero, some people think that being an immigrant is a bad thing and because they are scared they say that we are illegal. Like we don't belong here. Which is not true. Por eso es que I wear a shirt que dice "I'm not illegal" I'm protesting. Entiendes? Good!

Los pollitos dicen pio, pio, pio-

(Nora sits back on the rocking chair and rocks her daughter.)

NORA (*As Daughter*)
Pero, how did you get here?

(Nora tries to rock her again.)

NORA
On an airplane.

NORA (*As Daughter*)
With a ticket.

NORA
Si!
(Nora tries to rock her again.)

NORA (*As Daughter*)
Ok, pero why did you come here?

(Nora hums as she thinks and then stops rocking. The projection begins to draw Nora's cartoon heart beating. Nora pounds on the cajon.)

NORA
(To the audience) There it is?! The question.
Do you think she feels my heart beating?
I'm sure she can feel my heart beating fast. (A breath) Ok! You know, no parenting books preps you for this "The "if you decide to have a bi-racial child and raise her to be an anti-racist" book"

(She looks at her daughter)
I should do something. Do something! She's looking at you...(An idea)
"Let it go. Let it go-" Oh god, I hate that song. NO! I got this.

“Why did we come here?” I don’t know why we came here. I just know we’re here. That’s all that matters. Right?! (A deeper breath) “How did I get here”? Ok, Wellllllll!!!!

(The projection begins to draw a recording studio. Nora transitions into a pregnant woman.)

WOMAN
(*Tapping the mic*)
Uno-Dos-Tres. Listo!

(Woman starts to sing La Flor de la Canella by Chabuca Granda.)

WOMAN
*Déjame que te cuente limeño,
Déjame que te diga la gloria.
Del ensueño que evoca la memoria
Del viejo puente, del río y la alameda.
Déjame que te cuente limeño,
Ahora que aún perfuma el recuerdo,
Ahora que aún se mece en un sueño,
El viejo puente, el río y la alameda
Jazmines en el pelo yyyyyy...*

(She stops. She has a contraction. She looks up at the booth and flags the universal sign for "Its ok".)

*Jazmines en el pelo y rosas en la cara,
Airosa caminaba la flor de la canela,
Derramaba lisura y a su paso dejaba
Aromas de mistura que en el pecho llevabbbbbbaaaaaaa.*

(She stops again. She has another but longer contraction and it hurts more. She tries to straighten up, looks up at the booth to reassure them.)

WOMAN
Estoy bien. No. Sigue! Sigue!

WOMAN (Cont.)
*Del puente a la alameda, menudo pie la lleva,
por la vereda que se estremece,*

*al ritmo de sus caderas,
(Takes another deep breath)*

recogía la risa,

de la brisa del río,

al viento la lanzaba,

del puente a la alameeeeddddaaaaa...

WOMAN

(Holds her lower belly)

Aye, Dios mio!

(Flagging the booth person)

Padre santísimo, ya viene, el bebe.

(Snapping her fingers)

Aye', CaraJOOOOO!

(A rapid switch. The projections draw a classroom.)

NORA

...And. That's. How. My Mami. Went into labor with me.

Thank you.

(She gives a proud full bow.)

TEACHER

Ohhhhh...well that was an interesting story-

NORA

-Ya, then after that she was put in a taxi and I was almost born in it. But she got to the hospital in time because in Peru the drivers create their own lanes because "todo esta jodido"...that's what my Mami says.

TEACHER

Well I don't know what that means but that sounds different.

NORA

Ya so, I was born a girl because when she met the Pope and she asked for a girl.

TEACHER

The Pope! Imagine that. Can you tell us about Peru?

NORA
(Confused)

No?!

TEACHER
Oh...Okay children, do any of you have questions for Nora?
(Points to a student) Yes!

NERDY STUDENT
(Defiant)
She didn't do the assignment right.

TEACHER
We'll talk about that later...any other questions for Nora?
(Pointing to another student)
Yes!

TEACHERS PET STUDENT
(Angry)
The assignment was "I AM FROM"

NORA
I AM FROM. LIMA, PERU.

TEACHERS PET STUDENT
(Mocking)
Actually, it's called Lima! (Pronounced as Lime-ah) Like Lima
beans. Lima Beans! Lima Beans!

TEACHER
Ok, ok. Anyone else? (Pointing to another student) Yes.

GIRLY STUDENT
(Flippant)
If you were born there, why are you here?

NORA
(Pause)...Because...I-I don't know.

TEACHER
Good questions children. Now all this week we will continue to
hear from everyone's projects. I encourage you all to dig deeper
and ask you parents "Where Am I From." Little Nora here-

NORA
-I'm not little.

TEACHER

-did the assignment differently, however she did her best. I mean just a few years ago she couldn't even speak English and now...well...here she is...OK!

(Teacher turns away to write something on the board.)

NORA

Ya, I did my best.

(While teacher has her back turned, Nora sticks her tongue out and gives the middle finger to her classmates.)

NORA

Oh!!! My god! No! I can't tell her that.

Ok! I lied! That wasn't in any way how my mother went into labor with me. I made it all up. I mean, I know I was two years old when we moved to the states. Why? I don't know why we moved! I was three. I was in Peru and then one day I was in Los Estados Unidos.

(The projection draws a picture of a one-bedroom apartment. Nora transitions into her mother Nilda. She sweeps the floors.)

NORA

Mami, tell me a story cuando yo nacie?

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Bueno, tu nacistes en Peru en Noviembre. Y te tenia en mi barriga cuando-

(Beat)

NORA (*As Nilda*)

(Threatening her youngest child)

Carajo, muchacho de mierda, sal de la cocina que te vas a quemar!

NORA

(To audience)

Right?!...

(The projection draws a picture of a car hood. The cajon transforms into a car. Nora becomes her father, Raul.)

NORA

Papi, tell me a story cuando yo nacie.

NORA (*As Papi*)

Cuando tu nacistes...yo queria tener un niño. Luego me nacio una niña. Porque-

(Raul takes younger Nora's hands and dances with her as he sings.)

*"Es mi niña bonita...con carita de rosa...
Es mi niña bonita cada dia mas preciosa...
Es mi niña bonita echa de nardo y clavel...
Es mi niña bonita
es mi niña bonita...
Cuando la llego a querer".*

NORA

Music always found its way to explain things. For my musician parents it was easier. Well, almost always-

(The projections transform into the one bedroom apartment. The Cajon transforms into a vanity.)

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Aye, Norita tu nacistes un Noviembre 13.
Te nombre Nora por tu abuelita Nora-
(Nilda starts to cry).
Porque tu eras como mi maaaaaaa.

NORA

Yeah! She never got past that, "You're like my mother" which actually meant-

NORA (*as Nilda*)

"I birthed you to replace the loss of my dead mother, and named you after her so you won't ever forget that..."

NORA

And Papi-

NORA(*As Raul*)

Ayyyyyyyyee.... Tu! Tu eres la unica que sacaste el nombre de Montañez.

NORA

"You are the only one who took after the name Montañez?"

(The projection draws the name M-O-N-T-A-Ñ-E-Z)

NORA

WHAT THE HELL did that mean? Were we casiques?

Were we decedents of the Sapa Inca?

In mean, in the absent of facts, I let my creativity run a shit show. Like we were direct decedents of Atahualpa, the last Incan emperor making me una ñusta, an Incan princess. I mean I can't be that far off. I know Quechua blood runs through my vein. I feel it when I dig in the dirt and give offerings to La Pachamama. I have a chakana tattoo on my back and I mean, this profile screams Incan royalty! Right?!!!

NORA (*As Raul*)

Mija, tu abuela era blanca de España.

(Silence)

NORA

Sooo...I descend from the colonized and the...colonizers?

(Beat)

NORA

UGHHHH!!! Why do people even asking, "Where are you from?"

AMERICAN DUNK WOMAN

OHMYGOD. You are so exotic! Where are you from?

AMERICAN COLLEGE JOCK

Damn, baby! You look like a Mayan Princess. Where are you from?

AMERICAN PREPPY MAN

I love it when you say your name like that. It's like Nora-but different. Where are you from?

(Silence)

NORA

You feel me, right?! UGHHHHH!!!

(Nora sits on the cajon and plays. Projections draws out music notes all around.)

NORA

The music my parents sang or danced to was a way I found answers to my questions. So I began to listen to them.

(Nora (as Raul) sings as he practices his cajon.)

Esta Es Mi Tierra

*Esta es mi tierra, así es mi Perú
Esta es mi tierra, así es mi Perú
Raza que al mundo escribiera
La historia humilde el imperio del sol
Enarbolada, flamea tu bandera bicolor
En costa, montaña y sierra
Con paz trabajo y amor*

NORA (*as Raul*)

Genes, hija. Y tu los tienes también. Yo cantaba, sí. Pero yo era un músico, no cantante.

(Projection draws out a television screen.)

NORA

He's a "musician, not a singer" he then goes on to tell me que el canto in a Peruvian talent show on television and sang-

(Nora (as Raul) sits on the Cajón and sings

Sabor A Mi

*No pretendo ser tu dueño
No soy nada yo no tengo vanidad
De mi vida doy lo bueno
Soy tan pobre, que otra cosa puedo dar
Pasaran mas de mil años, muchos mas
Yo no se si tenga amor la eternidad
Pero allá, tal como aquí
El la boca llevaras
Sabor a mi.
Sabor a mi.*

NORA

So Papi goes on to tell me all about how he won the contest, which then led him to acompañar ha artistas famosos, con su cajón.

Mami y Papi met while recording a vinyl record called La Gran Peña.

(The projection draws a record player the vinyl record.)

NORA

Papi was the well respected cajonero y Mami became known as “La Princessa de la Proviencia”

NORA (*As Raul*)

Eso fue. En el año 1977.

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Aye’, tu Papa ya está viejo, eso fue en el 1975.

NORA

Ok, so it was 1975! Mami was 18 and Papi was 30-

NORA (Cont.)

(Beat) Ahhhh...Did anyone not do the math on that? Ok, so then it must have been 1977 so Mami would have been 20 and Papi 32. Wait! I’m supposed to tell this to their grandkid?

NORA (*As Raul*)

(Goes to the cajon)

Yo la acompañe a tu Mama en el Cajon. La cancion se...ehhh...ah, llamaba Juramento.

(The projections draw a recording studio.)

Raul:

No te acuerdas de aquel juramento
que un tiempo hicimos los dos
no te importa ya mi sufrimiento
y te alejas sin decirme adios

NORA (*As Raul*)

Y tu Mama cantaba-

(Nora transitions from Raul into Nilda singing the song.)

Nilda:

Si algún día
tu alma sufre
vente de nuevo a mi lado para consolarte
que siempre te querré y no te olvidaré
aunque me lleve la muerte
que siempre te querré y no te olvidaré
aunque me lleve la muerte.

Aunque me lleveeeeeeee lllllaaa muerte.

NORA (*Nilda*)

Aye Norita, no me hagas recordar.
Eso fue cuando lo concí a tu papa.

NORA

(Laughing)

Mi Mami y Papi had a rather complex
and yet playful relation. They always joked
about having met each other like it was
either a good thing or...bad thing. I wasn't
really sure. Pero la musica que cantaban
juntos began to tell a narrative of their
relationship.

(The projection draws a Nilda and Raul singing together.)

(Nora plays a trill on the cajon)

Nilda:

Mi Cariñito

Por lejos que estes cariñito
ahí ahí te seguiré
por lejos que andes amorcito
ahí ahí te encontrare x2

(Trill of the cajon)

Regresa

Pero regresa, para llenar el vacío
Que dejaste al irte, regresa, regresa
Aunque sea para despedirte
No dejes que muera sin decirte adios

(Trill of the cajon)

Nada Soy

Te fuiste sin motivo de mi lado
Lloró mi corazón sacrificado
El ser que a ti te quiso con pasión
Y que te dio su amor
No tiene la dulzura de tus besos
Tampoco la ternura de tu amor
Ahora nada soy, sin tu cariño
Nada, nada, nada soy

NORA

"How ever far you are...there I will be."
"Don't let me die without saying Goodbye."
"I don't have your tender kisses and your love so now I'm
nothing."

See...aren't they funny!

(Nora plays the of a Festejo on the cajon. The projection draws a newborn baby.)

NORA

My parents did have a complicated relationship but not so complicated because on November 13th 1979, a child of the sun was born. With a mane de una llama y allas como el condor and blessed with an Inca nose that a golden nose plate was begging to be hung from it...(pointing to herself). Meeeee!!!

NORA

Mami, es verdad that you met the pope when you were pregnant con migo y that you asked for a girl.

NORA (*Nilda*)

Que, que?!!! Muchacha que imagination tienes...no eso fue el Señor De Los Milagros. El Pope! Que creas? Que eres una Princesa Inca.

(The projection draws a crown on the baby.)

NORA

I'm not?

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Sal de aquí...una Princessa Inca?!

(The crown falls off of the baby's head.)

NORA

See...funny!

Humor was a shield que los protejia. I mean how do people heal from...(parent loss, childhood loss, economic and education loss). And I haven't gotten to what they lost when they landed on los Estados Unidos. These losses made their courtship very co-dependent of each other even though my father had already been married with two kids. Ohhhh....esperate es no es nada.

I mean, who doesn't from a complex family who loved each other so deeply that they disregarded ALLLLL faults. Right?!
....And then have another child in the mix.

A Boy!

(The projection draws a baby boy with lipstick and a rose in their hair.)

NORA

"Los pollitos dicen pio pio pio...
Cuando tienen hambre...
Cuando tienen...

Ok, ahora una flor para tu pello y lapis de...(grabs babies face)
Lapis de labio. Ahora ensellale ha Papi.

(Nora runs away and hides.)

NORA (*As Raul*)

Norita, que familia no tiene secretos.

NORA

Secretos dice tu Papa...ay...ya..yi. Si, que te diga sus secretos?!

NORA

Secretos!

It was 1983. It was no secret that mi Mami wanted to leave Peru after one by one her family was moving to los Estados Unidos. Peru was fighting presidential corruption; political armed wars with Maoist Rebels Sendero Luminosos, state of emergencies and capital divide between the rich and the poor. So it came to no surprise cuando Papi llego to the American Embassy con documentos en la mano including a letter stating that he had potential employment in the United States.

NORA (*as Nilda*)

Esperate, esperate que? No! Eso no fue haci. Tu Abuelo nos ayudo.

NORA

Ok! Mami says that abulito was the one who paid for the documents to be forged.

NORA (*as Raul*)

Noooo...yo tenia el trabajo y me firmaron un documento.

NORA

Ok! Papi said it was he got los documentos.

NORA (*as Raul*)

Norita!

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Mira, hija.

NORA

(To her parents) Ahhhh!!! Regardless who did what...they gave us six years on our Travel Visas. (Cajon transitions into airplane seat) Entonces, on July 28th, enbede de celebrar Fiestas Patrias en Peru, we left our home, a homeland that was oozing with financial and political corruption and patriarchal systems and hello to America. Where none of those things happen?!

((The projection draws a plane flying from Lima, PE to Miami, FL. The sound of overhead speaker creating static.))

NORA (*as Flight Attendant*)

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Sandra and I'm your chief flight attendant. This is a non-stop service from Lima, Peru to Miami, Florida. At this time, make sure your seat belt is correctly fastened. Thank you for flying, American Airlines

NORA

We left mid-winter. Dejamos nuestra familia, el olor ha chicha y chocolate caliente y paneton, the trill of el Cajon playing Peru Negro, and the abrazos de mis dos hermanos mayores. Watching the Andan montañas waving adios through their evaporated steam while mi Papi swallowed his fear and mi Madre silently sang through her tears.

NORA (As Nilda)

Contigo Peru

Te darte mi vida

Y cuando yo muriera

Me unire en la tierra contigo

Contigo Perú

Te dare mi vida

Y cuando yo muera me unire en la tierra

Contigo Perú

NORA (*as Nilda*)

Aye, mijita, llegamos ha Miami ha las una de la mañana.
Estabamos tan cansados.

NORA

Holding a sleeping 6 month old and a very tired
three years old my parents nervously shuffled towards the first
American man that laid eyes on us.

(The projections draw a customs officer)

NORA (*As Customs Officer*)

Señor, documentos, por favor?

(Raul hands over the documents)

NORA (*As Customs Officer*)

Porque esta aqui?

NORA (*Raul*)

Un tragajo...y Disney.

NORA (*As Customs Officer*)

How much money do you bring?

(Silence)

Dinero...dinero trae?

NORA (*As Raul*)

Ohhh...bueno...dos mil.

NORA (*As Customs Officer*)

(Pointing to Nilda. Scans her.)

Su esposa?

NORA (*As Customs Officer*) (*Cont.*)
Hello sweetheart, what's your name?

Your name?!!!
What?! No habla Ingles?

Quince dias!
Welcome to the United States!

(The projection draws an American flag.)

NORA (*As Customs Officer*)
Adios, Señorita! (Beat) Next?!

NORA
From six years to fifteen days. Perspiring through our new winter clothes y mi madre walking on a broken heel, my father trembling from fear that was our first steps on American soil. Eso es como America welcomed us. We never made it to Disney. Instead we took another flight and arrived ha una ciudad llamada-

(Nora sits on the cajon and clicks on the seatbelt then slide the windowpane open.)

-N-eee-www Y-y-y-orkkk. Neeewww.Y-oooork! Me recuerdo la palabra en Ingles felt new, like a newly printed dollar bill. Pero, I didn't feel new viviendo in a basement under old pipes that dripped from condensation. I didn't feel new durmiendo en una sofa cama for a family of four, speaking Español to American blond children, Mami silently crying while singing, Papi walking for hours searching for work. I didn't feel new but more like a disruption. Quisas I was saying the word wrong. New Yorrk.

(With a New York accent)
New York! Ohhhhh...there!

NORA (*as Raul*)
Viviamos en Queens con tu tia. Ayaya!

(The projection draws Queens on the map of New York.)

NORA (*As Raul*)
Un dia encontre periodicos en español. (Opens a newspaper)
Se busca, mecanicos en Manhattan. Entonces llame.

(A phone rings)

NORA (*As Secretary*)
This is Michelle speaking. Um...hum..um...hum. You want to apply for the mechanic job? Ok! Where are you coming from? Queens?! Ok. All you have to do is take the L and take the A Express, not the local to West 4th Street get off the train then take the 1 Train and get off at Houston St. Cross the

NORA (*As Secretary*)(*Cont.*)
street to the building 1998 and take the elevator to the 10th floor.
Ummm...hum...I'm sorry...do you speak English?

NORA
He started working the next day. He had no choice because mi tia, started charging us rent starting the first day we landed. Familia! Papi worked 16 hours a day 365 days al año pero en meses we had our newly USED banana colored caro, which was as long as a Brooklyn brownstone. The next stop was moving out of the basement.

NORA (*as Raul*)
Esscu me, you have apartamento?

NORA (*As Landlord*)
(Sucks his teeth)
Ya, somewhere in there. Whatever is left of it, anyhow?

NORA (*as Raul*)
Can I, please?

NORA (*As Landlord*)
Woah! Woah! Amigo, I have someone coming to check it out in a few hours. However, if you pass me a little dinero I can save you the apartamento if they pass it off.

(Landlord watches as Raul pulls out his wallet and counts. The landlord takes a wad.)

NORA (*As Landlord*)
Mi casa, es su casa!

NORA
Papi no sabia que el apartamento had traditional New York squatters (Nora stomps on a roaches). Lucky for me, I was busy studying on my English and on the necessities of being an all-American kid to even think about having to move into a mice and roach infested “garden level” apartment in Richmond Hill, Queens, NY.

(The projection draws a school. Nora plays hopscotch.)

NORA
Kindergarten became a nice break from the daily struggles of assimilation and hardships. Kindergarten was the place I attained all my useful knowledge like “I...can...go...anywhere...with Reading Rainbow...a rreading rainbowwww, that ET and Alf were aliens just like me and that I desperately wanted to be a catlike humanoid alien “Thunder. Thunder. Thunder. Thundercats, ooohhhh”.

I came home a new kid with my freestyle moves

(Nora dances) “Oooohhh baby I think I love ya...from head to toe”
and attained a new language

NORA

(Valley Girl accent)

Shaaaa...braaa, your totally bogus, St. Elmos Fire is like totally
awesome cuz’ they’re like real people dealing with real like issues.

NORA (As Nilda)

NORA! Español. No eres gringa.

NORA

Mami, was also learning English. “Come on down. You’re the next
contestant at Price Is Right”.

NORA (As Nilda)

Aye, Norita, yo me quedaba sola en el cuarto estudiando...con Bob
Barker.

NORA

I remember coming home from school and seeing Mami in our one
bedroom alone studying with Bob Barker. Everyday. *(Nora
watches her mother.)* Lying in bed, fading in the dark within the
blue haze. *(Nora watches her father.)* Papi was always working so
we barely saw him until one day he was gone and moved to New
Jersey, making the Hackensack River rip between us. The trials of
assimilation had beaten them so far down until they quit on each
other. But I? *(Nora regains her strength)* I had to step up! I had to
take care of my brother! I had to go to school! I had to learn a new
language! I had to remember to play! I had to kill mice, I had to
stomp on roaches, I had to fight, I had to survive
Porque...porque...because I’m...soy ummmm...

(Realizing)

Jesus, why did we come here?

(The sound of a ferry horn in the distance. The projection draws the East River.)

STATUE OF LIBERTY

(French Accent)

*Give me your tired, your poor,
your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*

(The projection draws the Statue of Liberty.)

STATUE OF LIBERTY

-Bon jour! Coucou, c’est moi.

(Americanized Accent) I’m just kidding. What’s up chica?

(No response.)

Did I catch you at a bad time? *(No response.)*

STATUE OF LIBERTY (Cont.)

Now, I know you are not someone who is lost for words? I know who you are.

(Flips through her massive book.)

You are the child born from the rich land of gold and silver, who was born on the riches capital on the Pacific Ocean surrounded by desert made worst by el Niño, the descendant of Viceroyalty-

NORA

(Cold)

-Can I help you?

STATUE OF LIBERTY

Ah you do speak. I thought you didn't understand English? I was like "wait a minute?"

Help me? No, I'm here to help you, silly.

To remind you where you came from and ease your pain. Think of me as your immigrant beacon. You know my father Frédéric birthed me as a token of admiration to the new continent, a gift to you. Voula!

NORA

What happened to your accent?

STATUE OF LIBERTY

What happened to your accent? (*Laughs*) You're funny. Listen muchacha (I said, that right? Right?!) Look, I know things look hard right now but things will get easier. I speak from experience. Immigrants like us built this land. Take a look your parents. They participated in the Aquatennial of New York after being in states for a year. Which was a beautiful reminder how much people love our country.

NORA

How is swaying to Kenny Roger's "Through the Years" at the Mets Stadium being American?

STATUE OF LIBERTY

Well...they got to celebrate their Peruvian culture all around New York City and share their dances with Americans. It's a celebration of cultures.

NORA

I think you mean, an education. Do you know anything about Peru?

STATUE OF LIBERTY

(Flipping through the book)

Well, I'm no expert but I do know the Machu Picchu is one of the many wonders of the world and-

NORA

-You mean the stolen land that was made infamous by a European man who just stumbled across it and had been inhabited by the Incas. Just like THIS continent was stolen. Look I appreciate you're help but I know where I come from. I come from arriving here and trying to pass as anyone else but me. From lemon juice in my eyes to lighten them, to concoctions to bleaching my skin to blond hair and blue contacts. I did everything to avoid the question, "Where are you from." I tried to erase myself.

STATUE OF LIBERTY

"Where are you from?!" Well, how else can people learn about you?

NORA

People ask me that question not because they want to know about me but because they want to know how they should treat me.

STATUE OF LIBERTY

I know it's...challenging to assimilate here. We don't make it easy but we are the lucky ones to make it to the Promise Land. Do you know that over twelve million people entered through Ellis Island? People sailed on boats and trains to arrive here. You are one of those people survived-you made it!

NORA

"Made it"

Did my father "make it" when my father would ride the L pretending to read the New York Times in a language he did not understand in order to avoid interrogation from ICE. Did my mother "make it" when she would plan her escape route at work if ICE would arrive. Did those people who enter Ellis Island "make it" after they were treated like cattle with your chalk and your bleach all the while filling them with the illusions of hope and not to mention those who were turned away?

Immigrants are being separated, caged and dying in trucks and deserts with their dreams wrapped around their tongues. However, those people look like me not you?

STATUE OF LIBERTY

(Apprehensive)

Dying? No! We would never...

*"Send these, the homeless, tempest-lost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

That what the poem says.

Right?! Right?!

NORA

Maybe your inspiration was once useful but your words are being used as a weapon. That flag that I once held in my hand to become

a citizen is being used as a weapon. Your American “beauty” has become a systemic weapon. You have stopped lighting the way for many of us.

(Silence)

STATUE OF LIBERTY

I’m-I’m sorry. I just-I fear my beacon is fading.

NORA

(Deliberate to the audience)

Ya! Well...that’s a start. Now what?

(Long silence. Nora walks away then stops.)

NORA

Oh, god! Why? Why do I have to assimilate to make others feel comfortable? No entiendo. Still...people risk their lives to come here pero for what cost. No! How am I supposed to tell my daughter this?

What if she is embarrassed of me? What if she decides to lean into her whiteness making me feel more rejected? I can’t! I can’t say it.

NORA (*As Papi*)

Mijita’!

NORA

(Looking at her Father) Papi?!

(Looking at her Mother) Hola, Mami!

NORA (*As Mami*)

Ayyyyyyaya! Mijita, si, es verdad. It’s never been easy. We lived in fear por años. Pero, we did it para ti y tu hermanito. It was worth it. Mis dolores no son tus dolores.

NORA

I know your pain is not my pain pero it’s still heavy, Mami.

Papi, why did you come here? I know you never wanted to come.

NORA (*As Raul*)

Si, es verdad. That’s because I had responsabilidad to your brothers’. Pero tu Mama, ella-

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Yo? Tu responsabilidad fue la tuya. La mia fue mis hijos.

NORA

Por favor!!! Don’t fight...it’s nobody’s fault. I would have been afraid too. I’m still afraid. Do I tell her we were undocumented when there is a fear about immigrants being taken away todo los dias by people who look like her Papi? That the cries of children isn’t enough.

I don’t know.

(Silence)

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Mija' there is no book on como ser mama.
You teach tu hija the best way you know how. We did the best we
could with what we had. Y mira, we have been en los Estado
Unidos for 40 años y we still don't know muchas palabras
en Ingles.

NORA

Mami, esta bien. You don't need to. Your granddaughter habla
Español.

NORA (*As Raul*)

Si, mijita es verdad. We are so proud of you.
Y mira, mija...(Looking out to the audience)
Look what you are doing?

NORA

Wait! You see them too?

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Si, mijita!

NORA (*As Raul*)

You are just sharing one of nuestra historias.

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Norita, tell las historias of the mountains you have climbed porque
tus palabras can become a survival guide in someone else's book.

NORA

Wow! Mami! That's beautiful.

NORA (*As Nilda*)

Si! I read it...en el Facebook.

(They laugh together.)

NORA

Mami. Papi. Gracias!

NORA (*As Raul*)

We would do it again...

NORA (*As Nilda*)

...para nuestra ñusta.

NORA

(Laughing)

Aha!!! I knew it.

(Nora leans into her Fathers embrace and then reaches out to hold her Mother's hand. The projection draws them together. They walk her back to el Cajon. Nora transitions to the start of the play, sitting on el Cajon and holding her daughter.)

NORA (*As Nery*)
Ma..mi!

NORA
-Si.

(The projection draws a child's bedroom.)

NORA (*As Nery*)
Que paso?

(Nora looks out into the audience. She takes them in.)

NORA
Ohhhh...nada mijita. I was remembering una memoria.

NORA (*As Nery*)
Que memoria?

(Nora lifts her daughter up into her arms. She slowly rocks her.)

NORA
Bueno es una memoria very funny and very complicated. Pero you were in it.

NORA (*As Nery*)
I was?!

NORA
Porsupuesto, mi historia es tu historia. Do you know you come from ancestors que soñaron que un dia they would move to the United States y despues they became citizens in their 60's. Sabias eso?

NORA (*As Nery*)
Woah that's old?!

NORA
Si! Your great great grandmother tenia manos fuertes and she loved to dig in the rich soil of la Pachamama en Cajamarca. Y su hija Nora, your great grandmother sowed dresses for her hija, tu abuela y Nora era una maestra.

NORA (*As Nery*)
A teacher...como tu?

NORA
Si!

NORA (cont.)

Y tu otra great great grandmother Ofelia tu biasabuela was a performer en el teatro.

NORA (*As Nery*)

Como tu, Mami.

NORA

Si! She was descendent of Viceroy of Nueva Granada. Ella era Española.

NORA (*As Nery*)

Ohhhh...I don't like what the Spanish did?

NORA

Yup! Yo tampoco! I told you it's complicated. Pero just because something es complicado, it's not worth living. No?!
(Looking at watch) Aye, dio! Ok, es muy tarde.

NORA (*As Nery*)

Mami, what about Papa Jose?

NORA

Oh bueno Papa Jose is my stepfather. mi padastro. El es de Puerto Rico. Y you know that Puerto Rico is parte of the United State, right?!

NORA (*As Nery*)

Of course, Mami!

NORA

Ok, que bueno. I know I'm doing something right!

Bueno, Papa Jose also raised me porque...bueno...to become a citizen you have to...ummm...sabes que miya that's another longer and complicated story. Para otra noche!

NORA (*As Nery*)

Ok, Mami!

(Nora holds Nery in her arms. Nora hums "Los Pollitos". They exit. The projections draw Nery and Nora in a South Minneapolis home. Jipi Jay de Pepe Vásquez plays while picture of young Nora are projected on screen.)

Blackout.

END OF PLAY