

October 9, 2013

JUST LIKE US
THE PLAY
By Karen Zacarías
Based on the book by Helen Thorpe

CHARACTERS:

HELEN THORPE: 40s. The REPORTER: Irish American-Quaker, very smart, confident, unfussy, petite woman with a penchant for interesting eye glasses. Highly educated, career woman married to the Mayor of Denver. Mother of one small child. Much more comfortable as a thoughtful observer than as the center of attention. Prefers being a reporter than First Lady of Denver. Has strong conviction of principles, is self-aware about her role, and is consistently fair-minded.

MARISELA: 18-22. Fully bilingual and bicultural Mexican. Colorful! Does not have legal status to be in the country. Emotional, sassy, intelligent, energetic, ambitious, yet sometimes insecure, a bundle of contradictions, attracted to bad boys yet great student. She craves excitement. Wears a lot of make up, tight jeans, and loves loud music (Ranchera especially) and clothes and is an excellent student.

YADIRA: 18-22 . Fully bilingual- bicultural Mexican. Does not have legal papers to be in the country. Still waters run deep. Beautiful, lean, lighter skinned, reserved, smart young woman who craves stability and security. Marisela's best friend, yet polar opposite in manner and look. Wears skinny jeans and bare rift shirts and yet, isn't a party girl at all.

CLARA: 18-22. Bilingual- bi-cultural Mexican. In the US legally. Innocent, religious, earnest girl. Good student. Hard worker. Discreet clothes, no make-up, wears a cross every day. The peace maker and dreamer.

ELISSA: 18-22. Bilingual and bi-cultural . In the US legally. The go-getter, team captain of the group. Good student. Hard worker. **Also plays ZULEMA**, Yadira's younger sister.

FABIÁN: 40s. Must be fluent in English and Spanish. No accent in English. Marisela's hard working, sometimes grouchy father. Spanish and non-English speaking father. A janitor at a supermarket who loves his family and worries about Marisela's wild ways. In the US without legal status. **Also plays TOM TANCREDO**, a 2nd generation Italian-American Congressman born in a working class neighborhood in Denver who now represents a very affluent neighborhood in Colorado. The leading voice in Congress against illegal immigration. Charismatic, smart, loud, affable, and very single-minded in his fervor against illegal immigration.

JOSEFA: Late 30s, early 40s. Marisela's Mexican mother. Spanish-, non –English-speaking. A devoted mother and hard working cleaning lady who looks after her four kids in the US. **Also plays ALMA** (YADIRA's Mother), ensemble.

IRENE CHÁVEZ: 30s Latina. Bilingual and fully bicultural. Very Americanized with a go-get-them personality. A social worker who is very connected. **Also plays ANA, LISA MARTINEZ,** ensemble.

YOLANDA: 40s-50s Latina with no accent in English. Brassy. **Also plays, CYNTHIA POUNDSTONE, BUSINESS WOMAN,** ensemble.

WOMAN: Mid-30s Anglo. **Plays KELLY YOUNG, CAROL VIZZI,** ensemble.

YOUNG MAN 1: Early 20s Latino. **Plays RAMIRO, JULIO,** ensemble.

YOUNG MAN 2: Early 20s Anglo. **Plays LUKE,** ensemble.

MAN 1: 30s-early 40s Latino. **Plays CEZAR MESQUITA, CARLOS** (ALMA's husband), **FEDERICO PEÑA, ANNOUNCER ON SPEAKER,** ensemble.

MAN 2: 30-40s Anglo man. **Plays RECRUITER, MIKE McGARRY, COP,** ensemble.

MAN 3: 30s-40s African–American man. **Plays MR. SMITH, JIM SPENCE,** ensemble.

ACT ONE

SCENE: MARISELA'S BEDROOM

(LIVELY RANCHERA MUSIC)

(PROJECTION: PICTURES OF DENVER...Welcome to Denver sign. Images of the airport, the Convention Center, the Theater, the streets, the Rockies, affluent neighborhood, streets, and then the neighborhood where MARISELA lives.)

(HELEN walks on to the stage. She looks at the audience.)

HELEN THORPE

Hello. My name is Helen. A few years ago, I had the honor of meeting four young women, seniors in high school in Denver, Colorado: They had been friends since middle school; they know almost everything about one another.

(MARISELA, YADIRA, CLARA, AND ELISSA in fabulous prom dresses enter dancing along to the Ranchera song.)

(They stop dancing and start getting ready for prom.)

(FABIÁN and JOSEFA, MARISELA's parents, come in.)

FABIÁN

¡Marisela, voy a ir contigo!

MARISELA

¡Mami, dile a Papi, que no puede venir conmigo!

JOSEFA

¡Ay, pues no sé qué decir!

FABIÁN

¡Yo soy tu padre!

MARISELA

¡Mami, habla con él!

JOSEFA

¡Fabián!

FABIÁN

¡Josefa, es que no me gusta!

(FABIÁN storms off, JOSEFA follows.)

ELISSA, YADIRA, CLARA
Uy, Marisela.

MARISELA
¡My Papi says he's coming to prom!

ELISSA
Marisela, nobody goes to prom with a chaperone

CLARA
He's just worried about the boys.

YADIRA
Clara, he's worried about Fernando.

ELISA
But Fernando is working in Arizona

MARISELA
It's a secret, but Fernando is driving from Arizona to be here tonight with me at the prom.

YADIRA
¿Driving a thousand miles in one day?

MARISELA
I haven't seen him in six months.

CLARA
That's so romantic

ELISSA
It's crazy. Fernando is too old for you. And your Papi is bound to find out!

HELEN
Elissa: The bossy one. If the four girls had been a sports team, Elissa would be their captain.

MARISELA
Clara, I have to see Fernando. You have to cover for me.

CLARA
Ay, Marisela...no sé...

HELEN

Clara: The sensitive one. Sweet. No make-up. No boyfriend. Parents believe her with good reason.

MARISELA

Besides, it's not cool for a father to go to prom

YADIRA

Cool is not the best argument for your Papi.

HELEN

Yadira: The poised one: organized, serious, and very private.

MARISELA

¡Please, guys! You have to help me! ¡Prom is the most important night of our lives!!!

HELEN

Marisela: the dramatic one: Emotional. Colorful. Loud. A straight-A student who also likes to party.

(IRENE Chávez, a professional-looking woman, enters with flowers in boxes.)

IRENE

Hi, girls!

ALL

Ms. Chávez!

IRENE

Hi Helen. (To the girls) How are you?

MARISELA

Excited.

CLARA

Nervous.

ELISSA

Getting ready.

YADIRA

You know.

IRENE

It's a big night. I need to run back to the community center...but I wanted to give you these.

YADIRA

Flowers...for us?

IRENE (handing out the flowers)

Boutonnieres for you to give your dates.

CLARA

Did you know we were supposed to give the boys flowers?

ELISSA

¡Qué raro: Boutonnière!

IRENE

It's a prom tradition. I just wanted you to have all your bases covered.

YADIRA

You are always looking out for us, Ms. Chávez.

IRENE

Well, prom is a big deal.

MARISELA

My parents are so stressed about it.

(IRENE's phone rings.)

IRENE

That's funny I don't know anyone from Arizona!

MARISELA

That's for me. My parents confiscated my phone...

IRENE

Marisela! I don't think I...

YADIRA

May I? Hola Fernando! ¿Que qué? ¿Se estancó la troca?

MARISELA

The truck broke down?

YADIRA

He's getting a friend from Denver to pick him up.

MARISELA

Tell him he has to come! I'm getting my hair done and everything!

YADIRA

Good luck, Fernando, Marisela is waiting. (Hands the phone to Ms. Chávez)
Thanks Ms. Chávez.

IRENE

Your parents don't know he's coming!

MARISELA

I don't want them to worry.

CLARA

Its just like Romeo and Juliet.

ELISSA

Except that Romeo's horse is a broken down truck.

YADIRA

You know she could go with a guy from school.

ELISSA

But no, it's Marisela, so it's gotta be complicated.

MARISELA

I'm a complex human being, OK?

IRENE

OK, I best be leaving. Have fun but be safe. (Gives them all a hug. The last hug is for YADIRA) You have the keys to my house?

YADIRA

Yes.

IRENE

Make sure you take a picture to show your Mom. Adiós. (She exits.)

ALL

Adiós, Ms. Chávez.

CLARA

When I get old I want to be just like her.

ELISSA

It's so nice the Chávez's let you live with them the last couple of weeks.

YADIRA

I just couldn't stand being around my step-dad anymore.

MARISELA

Ugh. Maybe your Mom will leave him.

YADIRA

No sé. Anyway...when my Mom is sad that I left home, I tell her: Mami...Graduation is only three months away. I would be going anyway.

MARISELA

Let's hope, Yadira, your hair is looking limp.

ELISSA

I thought you got Yolanda to come and do our hair.

(MARISELA sprays YADIRA's hair. It's huge.)

YADIRA

Oh God!

MARISELA

That's great!

ELISSA

Hand me the hairspray.

MARISELA

Do you want me to do your make-up, Clara?

CLARA

You can do my nails.

MARISELA

What? You don't like how I do your makeup?

CLARA

I'm already wearing too much make up!

MARISELA
It's too simple.

ELISSA
Let Clara be Clara!

(YOLANDA, big hair and colorful clothes, bursts in with make-up and hair stuff.)

YOLANDA
Hola, nenas!

GIRLS (annoyed)
YOLANDA!

YOLANDA
¡Aquí estoy! To make you beautiful for el prom.

CLARA
¡Gracias a Dios!

YOLANDA (to MARISELA)
I just talked to your Papi. Está bien preocupado.

MARISELA
Mi Papi is worried because he doesn't understand prom.

YOLANDA
He is worried because he understands boys. Who's up first?

ALL
Marisela.

YOLANDA
¡Órale! You girls are going to look requete chulas!

GIRLS
Gracias.

YOLANDA
Prom! Graduation!

MARISELA
It's all happening so fast.

YOLANDA (to MARISELA)

So what are you going to do after graduation? Are you going to get another job? Are you and Fernando going to get married?

MARISELA

No. I'm going to college!

YOLANDA

Going to college? Really? Where?

(Pause. A change in the mood)

MARISELA

I don't know. Nowhere yet. I'm waiting to hear.

YOLANDA

You girls waiting too?

ALL GIRLS (subdued)

Yes.

YOLANDA

College! Vágame Dios. You girls must be so smart. And so rich! You are going to el college?!!!

MARISELA

Trying... trying ...trying.

YOLANDA

Is that why there's a white lady sitting in the corner, taking notes?

(ALL turn to look at HELEN. HELEN looks up)

HELEN

Oh. Hello.

YADIRA

Oh. That's Helen.

CLARA

Helen Thorpe.

MARISELA

She's married to John Hickenlooper, the mayor of Denver!

YOLANDA

The guy with the funny commercials who owns all those restaurants?

GIRLS

Yes!

ELISSA

Helen is the First Lady of Denver!!!

CLARA

I love how fancy that sounds.

HELEN

I feel a little miscast in that role.

YOLANDA

If she's the mayor's wife then what is she doing here?

ELISSA

Helen is a reporter.

CLARA

A very respected journalist—

YADIRA

—and she's is writing a book!

MARISELA

A book about us!!!!

YOLANDA

A book about you? Who's going to read that?

HELEN

I hope lots of people. I think I will learn a lot from these young women.

YOLANDA

Interesting. So Helen, hablas español?

HELEN

Un poco. Quiero aprender más.

(A cluck of appreciation by all the girls for her Spanish and her interest)

MARISELA

Nice job, Helen.

HELEN

I hope I will learn more in the process of writing the book.

YOLANDA

Ah (beat) A book about you? Is that safe?

ELISSA

Of course it's... safe.

YOLANDA

For you, maybe, Elissa. But is it safe for all of you? I don't think so.

(THEY all look at HELEN.)

HELEN

I won't use your real names. I'll change the name of your high school. Protecting a source is part of a journalist's ethic.

MARISELA

See? Helen is going to protect us.

YOLANDA

I hope so. Because if the wrong people find you, you will lose everything.

(A car honks)

MARISELA

The boys are here!

(The girls scramble to get ready.)

MARISELA

¡Ay! Hairspray!

(YOLANDA covers the girls' hair with hairspray, causing lots of coughing.)

YOLANDA

Wait! We need a photo! Foto.

HELEN

We can use my camera!

(THE FOUR GIRLS pose.)

1,2,3.

GIRLS
¡Queso! (A flash)

(Another car honk. The girls shriek!)

ELISSA
We gotta go!

YOLANDA
Have fun!

MARISELA
We will!

YOLANDA
But not too much fun!

YADIRA
OK ladies...Prom officially begins

ELISSA
Right...

CLARA
Now.

ALL
¡Órale !

(The GIRLS exit.)

HELEN
ELISSA was born a U.S. citizen (ELISSA exits) CLARA became a legal resident (CLARA exits) MARISELA and YADIRA do not have documents. (MARISELA AND YADIRA exit). And under current law the two without papers have NO way of becoming citizens; their legal status is beginning to affect how they see one another. Since they are about to leave the safety of high school, I want to know what will happen to them.