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Cast of Characters

JUSTIN, American soldier in his early 20s. Caucasian.

ARMANDO / AHMED, Armando is a Puerto Rican American soldier in his late 20s, Ahmed is an Arab citizen of the same age.

KIESHA, Kiesha is an American soldier, 18 years old. She is African American. Kiesha sometimes echoes/reads as ALLISON, Justin's younger sister.

Setting

In the desert. In the sand.

There is a gas station with one pump.

There is nothing else.

Things appear out of, and disappear into, the sand. It gives and it takes. There is a sense that the sand is alive to the degree that it should feel like a character in the play.

Acknowledgments

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SAND

by Trista Baldwin

(Sand. Yellowy white. Empty. Endless.

Desert.

We wait for something more than desert.

Perhaps, if we look hard enough, we see the remnants of a British military uniform, the color and texture of sand. We see what seems to be a chest rising and falling in the sand, some indication of life. Or perhaps we don't. The sand is both dead still and vibrating with life. Depending on where your eyes fix. Depending on wind, on sunlight.

We wait.

At last, a sound.

It is the sound of someone breathing.

A light discovers JUSTIN, a U.S. Army Private, alone with his rifle.

He squeezes the rifle close, his body trembling.)

JUSTIN. *(Muttering, nearly inaudible:)* Did I do this? I did this. Could I do this? I did this.

(The sand has shifted to reveal a small, rustic gas station. One pump.)

Pussy, pussy, pussy, pussy pussy pussy...

Crawl back up inside 'n just—

Go back in time and just—

Start. Over.

Start over.

ARMANDO. Peterson!

(ARMANDO walks on, armed with an M-16 and a heavy ruck. He gets to the gas station and stops to set up gear.)

JUSTIN. Sabados?

(JUSTIN *starts laughing.*)

ARMANDO. This is it.

(JUSTIN *laughs harder.*)

ARMANDO. No joke, man.

JUSTIN. No joke?

ARMANDO. Water.

JUSTIN. No joke!

ARMANDO. Gotta stay hydrated.

JUSTIN. Yes, Sargeant!

(JUSTIN *drinks from the water bottle ARMANDO has given him.*)

ARMANDO. Serious.

JUSTIN. ...This is it?

ARMANDO. This is the assignment.

JUSTIN. Piece of cake!

ARMANDO. No cake.

JUSTIN. All we gotta do is stand here?

ARMANDO. Guard—

JUSTIN. This'll make Mom happy—

ARMANDO. C'mon.

JUSTIN. (*Pulling out a cell phone:*) Hey Mom, I just arrived here at The War, and guess what, ain't nothin' left to do!

ARMANDO. Always something—(to do)

JUSTIN. Bombed 'em all to shit!

ARMANDO. Man, wouldya—

JUSTIN. Ain't no one left to kill!

ARMANDO. —put that thing down.

JUSTIN. Man, this is cool! I knew I wouldn't have to kill nobody. Hey Sabados, say cheese.

(JUSTIN points his cell phone at ARMANDO, who poses, with some sass, for a picture.)

ARMANDO. (Pendejo)

JUSTIN. Sabados of Puerto—

ARMANDO. Rico, fuck you.

JUSTIN. Fuck you.

ARMANDO. Fuck you, and fuck you.

JUSTIN. You remember that shit?

ARMANDO. What shit.

JUSTIN. The beginning, man.

ARMANDO. This is the beginning.

JUSTIN. The start of it—

ARMANDO. Starts now.

JUSTIN. The fuckin' start of it, first flash 'cross the sky

ARMANDO. Set it up.

(ARMANDO and JUSTIN work together to set up for the night.)

JUSTIN. First fuckin', fuckin' BOOM!

(A bomb explodes in the distance: BOOM.)

ARMANDO. Wasn't that loud.

JUSTIN. BOOM. BOOM.

(More bombs heard in the distance: BOOM, BOOM.)

ARMANDO. Bright.

JUSTIN. *BOOM.*

(A boom, more distant now.)

ARMANDO. Unit's just watchin'.

JUSTIN. Watchin' and waitin'— *BOOM BOOM BOOM.*

(Bombs further in the distance.)

ARMANDO. Bomb after bomb after bomb.

JUSTIN. *BOOM.*

(A faint sound, then flash of light. JUSTIN watches the flash while ARMANDO remembers.)

ARMANDO. Flash after flash after flash.

JUSTIN. Then: nothin'.

ARMANDO. Then flash again.

JUSTIN. Got like watchin' a movie.

ARMANDO. Then nothin'.

JUSTIN. Like fake.

ARMANDO. Then flash again.

JUSTIN. Tryin' to tell myself it's real.

ARMANDO. Beautiful.

JUSTIN. ...That was some shit, huh?

ARMANDO. May have popped your cherry but I seen that shit before.

JUSTIN. Fuckin' Sabados. Too much.

ARMANDO. Can't have too much of a good thing.

JUSTIN. You were a dick, you know that?

ARMANDO. You were a limp dick book readin' pussy ass slacker that didn't belong in my unit.

JUSTIN. Why you gotta be like that, dawg?

ARMANDO. Don't try to talk ghetto. Go cut down a tree or some-thin', logger boy—

JUSTIN. Ain't no trees—

ARMANDO. —kill an owl.

JUSTIN. At least Springfield's in the States, man.

ARMANDO. States ain't shit.

JUSTIN. States you can vote.

ARMANDO. So what. You vote?

JUSTIN. Springfield... *(Shakes his head.)*

ARMANDO. Oregon, right?

JUSTIN. Or-ee-gone, thank God I'm gone. Not much goin' for Springfield. 'Cept it's close to the ocean.

ARMANDO. My babies love the ocean.

JUSTIN. And KFC. Wendy's. Mickey Dee's—

ARMANDO. My girls...

JUSTIN. Arby's 5-for-5...Thurston High, Wal-Mart of course. Den-ny's, Izzy's, Applebees...

ARMANDO. *(Presenting JUSTIN a picture:)* That's what it's all for.

JUSTIN. Beautiful.

ARMANDO. Nothin' smells like they do.

JUSTIN. Maria. Two?

ARMANDO. Already... Elisa, she just started writing her name.

JUSTIN. Three?

ARMANDO. Three years old, I can't believe...

JUSTIN. But number one—all of us know number one: oil. I do miss my car. Yes I do. Miss my bed. Real pillow. Underwear with no sand makin' my balls bleed... I miss rain...never thought I could miss rain...

ARMANDO. *(To the photograph:)* Maria Bonita.

JUSTIN. I miss *women*.

ARMANDO. You don't know love until you have a girl like this...

JUSTIN. *Women*. Never again to take for granted—

JUSTIN / ARMANDO. The smell.

ARMANDO. Nothing smells like that, your blood.

JUSTIN. Skin. Hair—

ARMANDO. Your own blood.

(A shift.

A woman appears, a young American soldier, dark skin and bright eyes. Beautiful. Only JUSTIN sees her.)

KIESHA. *(As ALLISON:)* My own Juice...

JUSTIN. Allison.

(She smiles, dancing to music we cannot hear.)

ARMANDO. What's that?

JUSTIN. Huh?

ARMANDO. You just said somethin'.

JUSTIN. Ah. Naw.

(JUSTIN shuts his eyes tight. The woman disappears. JUSTIN opens them. She is gone.)

(Days later.

JUSTIN *stands watch over the gas pump.*

Hours pass in seconds; a blip—until JUSTIN sees something in the sand. It is a bullet.

He holds it up to examine.

ARMANDO *comes over to take over JUSTIN's shift at the gas pump.*

JUSTIN *shows him the bullet.*)

JUSTIN. One of theirs?

ARMANDO. Ain't one of ours.

JUSTIN. Looks old.

ARMANDO. Hmm. British? Maybe.

JUSTIN. Finders keepers.

ARMANDO. Whatcha gonna do with some old bullet, man?

(JUSTIN slips the bullet into his pocket.

Shift of guard: JUSTIN off, ARMANDO on.)

(Days later.

ARMANDO *stands watch over the gas pump. Hours pass in seconds. JUSTIN, off duty, reads. Change of guard.)*

(Days later.

JUSTIN *stands watch over the gas pump.*

Hours pass in seconds—until JUSTIN sees something in the sand. A photograph. As he examines it, the shadow of a 1920s British soldier appears behind him, mirroring his position at the gas pump.

JUSTIN *catches the shadow out of the corner of his eye. Blinks. Squints.*

The shadow fades with the sun.)

(Later.

JUSTIN, *writing a letter.)*

JUSTIN. May—what is it—seven. Seventh.

Dear Mom. Mother mine. Hi. Hello. Greetings from Mars. Dear Mom. Bored. Alive. Dead stupid. Desert is...weird.

(He stops writing and watches the sand.)

The sand is. Something so...big. Like an ocean, but nothing like that, except it, like it moves you know, it changes shape... Alli'd freak if she could see me now.

Nah, you wouldn't like it here too well. It's like 120 degrees right now I shit you not. You have no idea what that even *is*. I have no idea what this even is, shit messes with your mind.

And all the Nothing. Nothing to look at nothing to do nothing to feel. (I don't know.) Maybe Alli'd like that part. (I don't know.)

(JUSTIN pulls the bullet out of his pocket.)

Trying to figure out why you let me, Mom. Why you let me come to this. Nah, that's bullshit. I'm not trying to figure nothin'. *(Fingering the bullet:)* Except this.

(Shadow of a British soldier in the same position as JUSTIN.)

This place, Mom?, turns out it's make believe. British made it up. I read that (yeah, I read). British made it up but like the people? They didn't believe it, just lines in the sand to them. Just lines in the sand this place ain't even real. Not that it matters to me, I'm not even here. Blink and I'm gone.

(JUSTIN goes back to his letter, scribbles for a minute. Looks. Signs.)

"Peace in the Middle East." (Justin).

(Days later.

ARMANDO *pulls a football out of his ruck.)*

ARMANDO. Hup!

(ARMANDO throws the football. JUSTIN catches it and throws back.)

JUSTIN. Ho!

ARMANDO. Look alive, man!

(ARMANDO throws the ball back to JUSTIN.)

JUSTIN. Look alive!

(JUSTIN goes to throw – the football disintegrates, becomes sand.

A shift.

JUSTIN hands and knees in the sand, looking for something. We will wonder if he's looking for the football that has turned to sand, but he is looking for the bullet.)

JUSTIN. I can't find it.

ARMANDO. Feel for it.

JUSTIN. I can't.

ARMANDO. See what you cannot see: faith. That is everything.

(ARMANDO leaves him.

Shift.

ARMANDO prays in Spanish.

In another space, JUSTIN finds the bullet. Examines it.

ARMANDO's prayer becomes a Muslim prayer, in Arabic.

JUSTIN enters his space, rifle ready.

ARMANDO *looks at him. He slowly becomes AHMED, his prayer a Muslim prayer, in Arabic.*)

JUSTIN. Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

(AHMED *stops.*)

JUSTIN. Sir, do you understand English?

AHMED. Oh, I understand English.

JUSTIN. I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

AHMED. Why are you going to have to?

JUSTIN. I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

AHMED. You're going to ask me?

JUSTIN. Sir, I am asking you to leave.

AHMED. Right now, you are asking this?

JUSTIN. I am asking you to leave.

AHMED. Why this question—sorry?

JUSTIN. Sir, there is no loitering here, the sign—

AHMED. The sign?

JUSTIN. There is no loitering here.

AHMED. Loi?

JUSTIN. There's no hanging—there's no sitting around, no standing, this is a business.

AHMED. Ah, business, yes, I understand. I have business also.

JUSTIN. You can't sit here.

AHMED. Oh, I see.

JUSTIN. Please take your belongings with you or your belongings will be treated as—

AHMED. This is a petrol station, is this correct?

JUSTIN. That is correct, sir.

AHMED. The business is gas.

JUSTIN. Is this your bag?

AHMED. I have it, thank you.

JUSTIN. I'm going to look inside your bag.

AHMED. You're going to look inside my bag?

JUSTIN. Sir, I kindly ask that you cooperate, for you own safety.

AHMED. I am sorry, is the business safety?

JUSTIN. Excuse me?

AHMED. I am sorry, I thought I am at gas station.

JUSTIN. You are.

AHMED. Ah... My cousin, he worked this gas station. I come here to—(sell)

JUSTIN. What is this?

(JUSTIN pulls something out of Ahmed's bag.)

AHMED. Balah.

JUSTIN. Excuse me?

AHMED. Like date? Date. Like fruit. Are you hungry?

(JUSTIN places the item back in the bag, keeping an eye on AHMED.)

AHMED. You are just curious, then?

(JUSTIN gestures stiffly for AHMED to pass, to be on his way.)

AHMED. I am curious, too.

JUSTIN. Thank you for your cooperation.

AHMED. You are welcome for your cooperation.

JUSTIN. Here.

AHMED. Skit—?

JUSTIN. Skittles. Candy. “Taste the Rainbow.” It’s, ah, candy.

AHMED. Candy.

JUSTIN. The best.

AHMED. The best, thank you.

JUSTIN. You’re welcome. Remember, no loitering.

AHMED. Loy-tir-ring. Yes, thank you.

(AHMED walks away. Before he is gone, he straightens, becoming ARMANDO again, turning around.)

ARMANDO. You make a great Hall Monitor, Peterson, your Mama should be proud. Bet when you get to that fancy prancy college of yours, you get promoted to Dorm Leader.

JUSTIN. Suck mine.

ARMANDO. You suck it.

JUSTIN. Wish I could.

ARMANDO. You know, you might stand a chance for some action as a Dorm Leader. When you write-up drunk co-eds for pukin’ on the grass, “I won’t tell” if you— *(Makes an obscene gesture.)*

JUSTIN. What’s into you?

ARMANDO. Nothin’s into me.

JUSTIN. Got up on the wrong side ‘a the Sand.

ARMANDO. Sand got up in the wrong side of me.

(They share a laugh.)

ARMANDO gets quiet.

Pulls something out of his pocket.)

ARMANDO. Maria. She lost her first tooth.

JUSTIN. Your wife sent that? Gross.

ARMANDO. You're gross.

JUSTIN. Gotta pack of baseball cards from my mom. Like I'm 13 at summer camp.

(ARMANDO looks at the baby tooth.)

JUSTIN. ...You should be able to go home to your girls. I mean what the fuck are we doing here. I could be standing guard at a Gas N Go and see more action.

ARMANDO. You wanted to See the world.

JUSTIN. Yeah.

ARMANDO. Here you go.

JUSTIN. You know, the first time I was on an airplane was on my way to boot camp. Down South. Sweat like a bitch. Didn't see shit. Girls at the bars were skanks.

ARMANDO. Always are.

JUSTIN. Second time on a plane was Kuwait.

ARMANDO. Maybe next time you end up in Columbia.

JUSTIN. Yeah? Is it nice there?

(ARMANDO laughs.)

JUSTIN. Down past Mexico, right?

ARMANDO. Yeah, it's called South America.

JUSTIN. I told you man I ain't been anywhere. Family vacation was like takin' the tent to a park, fuckin' grillin' a hot dog. You gotta edumacate me.

ARMANDO. Columbia was my first tour. First assignment.

JUSTIN. Oh. Yeah? What was the— I mean, how long were you—

ARMANDO. Popped my cherry.

(ARMANDO gets quiet. JUSTIN doesn't press.)

JUSTIN. After that was Somalia, right?

ARMANDO. Somethin' like that.

JUSTIN. You lifers, man.

ARMANDO. Just you wait.

JUSTIN. Ain't for me.

ARMANDO. You don't know what is *for* you, how you gonna know what ain't. Shit. I seen guys like you before. It's alright. Every tool is useful. Every tool serves a purpose.

JUSTIN. What's your purpose, anyway, how'd you end up on this 'luxury detail.'

ARMANDO. We'll see how luxury this is. We'll see. Problem with a detail like this? It's like the street. Looks like nothings going on. Looks like a nobody little Hajib, turns out to be a somebody—can't tell. Can go soft on a detail like this. Soft is dangerous soft is compromised.

(Small silence. JUSTIN pokes light.)

JUSTIN. Lot a coke in Columbia. Good?

(ARMANDO glares at him. Turns away.)

ARMANDO. Only one thing good there. Women. Fine fuckin' women.

(Dust envelopes them.

It is the dust from passing trucks.

Through the yellow air, KIESHA appears. ARMANDO and JUSTIN stare.

JUSTIN, energized, goes for his football, throws it, catches it.

ARMANDO approaches her, on edge; sexually charged. KIESHA responds.)

ARMANDO. Private Williams.

KIESHA. Yes, Sargeant.

ARMANDO. What is the status of medical supply delivery Charlie 89 X as in X-Ray?

KIESHA. Delivery is complete, Sargeant.

ARMANDO. At ease, Private. Nice work.

KIESHA. Thank you Sargeant.

ARMANDO. I understand there is a problem with your truck?

KIESHA. Yes, Sargeant.

ARMANDO. Your truck is needing repairs before you can complete your next mission.

KIESHA. Yes, Sargeant, that's what I understand.

ARMANDO. Welcome to the sand pit. Hope you're not stuck here long.

(KIESHA looks down.)

ARMANDO. Armando Sabados.

KIESHA. Kiesha. Williams.

ARMANDO. Your first week out?

KIESHA. It shows, huh?

ARMANDO. You're doin' great.

KIESHA. Thank you Sargeant... Armando, Sargeant. Ah—

ARMANDO. Armando Sargeant? ...So, what, we're friends now?

KIESHA. Sure.

(ARMANDO presses himself into her, yelling in her face.)

ARMANDO. THERE ARE NO FRIENDS HERE, WILLIAMS. THERE ARE ONLY SOLDIERS.

(He circles.)

You look confused.

KIESHA. I—ahh—

ARMANDO. “I” “Ahh”—you gotta toughen up there Williams. I don’t want to see you fed to the sharks, or in this case scorpions, on my watch, do you understand?

KIESHA. I understand.

ARMANDO. And by scorpions, I mean both *inside* and outside of U.S. Army issue tents, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

KIESHA. I understand, Sargeant Sabados!

ARMANDO. ...Good.

(ARMANDO leaves her.)

JUSTIN throws a football her way.

She catches it. They throw the football back and forth between them as he speaks.)

JUSTIN. Day I joined up? Signed my name on the dotted line? Just another rainy day. November, sky was saggin’ to the ground, everything gray as concrete. I was fixin’ the car, again. Piece of shit Chevy always breakin’ down. Dad’s car, only thing he left us and I gotta fix it and I’m all pissed off under the hood, when my chest starts hurting. Like somethin’ pushin’ up against my ribs, gonna push right out. Feel my sister—

(Stops. Starts again.)

She never got out of Springfield. And I—it was time for me to get out, way out— I had nothing to get out with, you know? Couldn’t even afford my classes at the community college, working full time at Jiffy Lube, (yeah) the guys giving me shit for studying on breaks, nah, couldn’t do that shit anymore. Couldn’t see that fuckin’ Chevy again, couldn’t see Mom sittin’ big with her box of Entenmanns in front of the fuckin’ TV, had to find my way out. Of. That. Found it in the parkin’ lot of Gateway Mall: U.S. Army recruiting. Pay my way to college, see the world? Hell yeah. Got my papers and a pretzel. Set. To. Go.

(ARMANDO enters running.)

A military exercise. JUSTIN joins.)

ARMANDO. Ain't no use in goin' home

JUSTIN. Jody's got your girl and gone

ARMANDO. Ain't no use in feeling blue

JUSTIN. Jody's got your sister too

(KIESHA joins them.)

ARMANDO. Ain't no use in lookin' back

JUSTIN / KIESHA. Jody's got your Cadillac

ARMANDO. When I die bury me deep

JUSTIN / KIESHA. With two crossed rifles laid beneath my feet

ARMANDO. And by my side a .45m I wear

JUSTIN / KIESHA. And don't forget to pack my PT gear

ARMANDO. Because early one mornin' around zero-five

ARMANDO / JUSTIN / KIESHA. The grounds gonna shake there'll be thunder in the sky.

(Sound of a helicopter. Dust.)

ARMANDO breaks off on his own.

JUSTIN helps KIESHA unload boxes of medical supplies.)

KIESHA. Numbers. I want numbers here.

JUSTIN. Numbers don't tell you everything.

KIESHA. You afraid to tell me?

JUSTIN. No, I'm just sayin', countin' it up like that is bogus.

KIESHA. Bogus? You old.

JUSTIN. Old school.

KIESHA. Old geezer.

JUSTIN. Please.

KIESHA. I'm gonna say fifteen. Round that.

JUSTIN. Fifteen? You think I'm a playa?

KIESHA. Fifteen's not too many for some of you's.

JUSTIN. Try three.

KIESHA. Three?

JUSTIN. That's what I said.

KIESHA. Naw, I don't believe you.

JUSTIN. Why you ax tha question if you ain't gonna hear the answer?

KIESHA. I hear it, but—

JUSTIN. But what—you don't think that's a "respectable" number?

KIESHA. Oh, it's respectable, a little too respectable.

JUSTIN. You don't got respect for me?

KIESHA. Well...

JUSTIN. Welllll, I'm a very respectable guy.

KIESHA. Well, well.

JUSTIN. Well, well, well.

KIESHA. Mr. Respectable.

JUSTIN. Thasright.

KIESHA. No whoring in Thailand?

JUSTIN. Nah.

KIESHA. Philippines?

JUSTIN. Not too much.

KIESHA. Somebody told me they can make change with their—

JUSTIN. Somebody told me that, too.

KIESHA. I sure can't do that.

JUSTIN. I'm sure glad.

KIESHA. Tho it'd be cool, I guess—

JUSTIN. But it would be a bad sign.

KIESHA. If a girl can make change with her hootch?

JUSTIN. Then you might wanna ask her where she's been.

KIESHA. What she's been through.

JUSTIN. God.

KIESHA. Lotsa things screwed up in the world.

JUSTIN. ...So you're from Jersey?

KIESHA. Jersey City. Ever been?

JUSTIN. Naw. Close to New York, right?

KIESHA. 'Cross the river.

JUSTIN. Damn.

KIESHA. It ain't all that.

JUSTIN. I never been to New York City. Statue of Liberty. Empire State. The—

(Remembers the Trade Center.)

...You see them go down?

KIESHA. Not up close, but. Yeah.

JUSTIN. Fucking bastards.

KIESHA. Burnin' in hell.

JUSTIN. I could be in college right now.

KIESHA. Gettin' smart?

JUSTIN. Gettin' drunk.

KIESHA. I could be takin' a shower.

JUSTIN. I could be puttin' on a clean t-shirt, fresh out of the dryer.

KIESHA. Gettin' my hair did.

JUSTIN. Watchin' Survivor.

KIESHA. Goin' to church.

JUSTIN. You go to church?

KIESHA. You don't?

JUSTIN. Nah.

KIESHA. That's weird.

JUSTIN. Sunday mornings, I like to pick my mom up from Wal-Mart.

KIESHA. Never been to a Wal-Mart.

JUSTIN. Everybody's been to Wal-Mart.

KIESHA. I ain't everybody.

JUSTIN. No you ain't. Okay: Wal-Mart is like a town. A city. A whole big goddam city. Filled with fat motherfuckers.

KIESHA. Aw, shit.

JUSTIN. Fat like my mom.

KIESHA. Your mama's not fat.

JUSTIN. Oh yeah, she's fat.

KIESHA. That's not nice, even if she is.

JUSTIN. She's fat and she's tired from keepin' the stock boys in line. You see, she was recently promoted to "Night Manager."

KIESHA. Good for your mom.

JUSTIN. She works hard when she's not sitting on the fucking couch. Yes she does...

KIESHA. So you go to Wal-Mart instead of Church.

JUSTIN. Good a place to go.

KIESHA. You cynical.

JUSTIN. Well, see, God hasn't been to Springfield in a while, so.

KIESHA. Springfield. Like the Simpsons!

JUSTIN. Like Kip Kinkel.

KIESHA. Who?

JUSTIN. The school kid who shot—

KIESHA. Colombine?

JUSTIN. 'Cept it was before.

KIESHA. I never—(heard)

JUSTIN. Three guns, three dead, twenty-two wounded.

KIESHA. Dang.

JUSTIN. Good old Thurston High—

KIESHA. Were you—(there)?

JUSTIN. Me and my sis, we went to Springfield High. Little ways away.

KIESHA. Thankfully.

JUSTIN. Yeah. I didn't know the kid, Kip. But somehow, the whole thing, it didn't surprise me.

KIESHA. I know what you mean.

JUSTIN. Yeah?

KIESHA. Shooting everything up is easy.

JUSTIN. ...Funny how no one thinks about that stuff anymore. Got the war now, I guess.

KIESHA. I guess.

JUSTIN. Springfield... Pretty at least. It's got these mountains, Serious Mountains, the Willamette river, and the ocean.

KIESHA. Oh, God—

JUSTIN / KIESHA. Water...

(ARMANDO enters their space, drinking from his canteen. They watch him drink.)

He wipes his chin. Offers water to KIESHA. She takes it.)

ARMANDO. Hear about Harlan?

KIESHA. The guy from 57th?

ARMANDO. He's pulling through it.

KIESHA. Did he really go blind?

JUSTIN. He didn't go blind.

ARMANDO. His left eye.

JUSTIN. He was injured, it got his eye, they took him to the hospital.

KIESHA. Really? He lost his eye, really?

JUSTIN. They fixed him in the hospital.

ARMANDO. He's still got the right one. A lot to be thankful for.

JUSTIN. He's got both of 'em.

ARMANDO. Nah, man.

KIESHA. Glad that wasn't me.

ARMANDO. He has a lot to be thankful for.

KIESHA. I guess he's lucky.

ARMANDO. Lucky is what you are when you're careful.

(JUSTIN *rolls his eyes.*)

ARMANDO. They're shipping him out. He'll be back with his woman in a week or two. Back with his girl.

KIESHA. That's good.

ARMANDO. He'll miss it, though.

KIESHA. Why?

JUSTIN. I wouldn't miss it.

ARMANDO. You always miss it. You always look back, where your friends are still fighting, still riskin' it. You get a ache to be there. Part of it. Watchin' their back. Once this gets in you, it don't get out.

(*The sand stirs.*)

JUSTIN. Check out that lizard.

KIESHA. Oh, gross.

JUSTIN. That thing is huge.

KIESHA. That thing is too big to be a reptile, it's like cat-sized.

JUSTIN. It's cool.

KIESHA. It's cool over there. Way over there.

JUSTIN. I bet I could catch it.

KIESHA. I bet you can't.

JUSTIN. Bet you a candy bar?

KIESHA. Then I will be eating your candy.

(JUSTIN *runs after the lizard.*)

(KIESHA *and* ARMANDO *are left alone.*)

KIESHA. Stupid.

(ARMANDO *and* KIESHA *make eye contact.*)

They look away.

Long pause.)

ARMANDO. I'm married.

KIESHA. I don't do that.

ARMANDO. Good.

(After a moment more alone with no words said, JUSTIN hollers.)

JUSTIN. I got him, I got him!

(He loses the lizard.)

KIESHA. Nice.

JUSTIN. I had him for a second.

ARMANDO. Gotta keep him.

(JUSTIN starts at ARMANDO.)

JUSTIN. What, man?

(ARMANDO points to Justin's rifle, abandoned in the sand.)

ARMANDO. What the hell's that?

JUSTIN. What?

ARMANDO. Pick it up.

JUSTIN. Pick what up.

ARMANDO. Your weapon, pendejo. What the fuck you thinkin'.

JUSTIN. I got my weapon right here.

(JUSTIN adjusts his balls.)

ARMANDO. Man, stand the fuck up. Straight.

JUSTIN. I am straight.

ARMANDO. What you are is a little cabron from Springfield. You ain't seen shit you ain't done shit.

JUSTIN. Stop fuckin' around.

ARMANDO. You need to understand what this is.

JUSTIN. I understand—

ARMANDO. No. You do not understand.

JUSTIN. It's not like nothin's ever happened to me / Sar, you can cut the act.

ARMANDO. It is exactly like nothin's happened to you man, nothin' has, I'm happy for you, really happy you got to hang at the mall or whatever you bolillos do, I'm happy for you that you did not have some ojete with an oozie all up in your pimple ass face or some knife at your throat 'cause you went to the wrong fucking side of the street.

JUSTIN. Christ, man.

ARMANDO. Christ is what got me out of that and into this.

JUSTIN. Got you out of what, exactly?

ARMANDO. No struggle, that's what's wrong with you. No pain no discipline no faith.

(ARMANDO *walks away.*)

JUSTIN. (*Punching his palm:*) Pow.

KIESHA. Justin.

JUSTIN. Pow pow.

KIESHA. Justin, what's goin' on.

JUSTIN. Going on? Gee, I don't know. It appears I have shit duty. Guardin' a fucking gas station in the middle of fucking nowhere in a country that doesn't fucking exist! It's all bullshit! (*Yelling in Armando's direction:*) Fucking BORING BULLSHIT is what's going on.

KIESHA. Bullshit!

JUSTIN. Bullshit! (*Scream:*) Ahhh!

KIESHA. Ahhhh!

JUSTIN. Ahhh!

KIESHA. Aaaaaahhhhhh!

JUSTIN. Burn it, gotta burn it!

(They start to run together, a military exercise.)

JUSTIN. Mom makes fourteen grand a year

KIESHA / JUSTIN. Works night n day till she got gray hair

JUSTIN. Mom says Son don't you be like me

KIESHA / JUSTIN. Gotta get yourself a college degree

JUSTIN. Mom I ask what about the money

KIESHA / JUSTIN. Son don't be silly there's the U.S. Army

JUSTIN. Signed me up at the recruiting station

KIESHA / JUSTIN. United States Army gonna pay tuition

JUSTIN. Momma momma tell me what's that terrible noise

KIESHA / JUSTIN. Hounds of war come to take my boys

JUSTIN. Momma momma please don't you start to cry

KIESHA / JUSTIN. 'Stead of sending me to college, they're sending me to die.

(They collapse in the sand.)

(Night. A thin moon. JUSTIN and KIESHA sit together, alone.)

JUSTIN. So what's a girl like you doing in a place like this.

KIESHA. You'll have to ask my recruiting officer, cuz I wouldn't have thought this up on my own. That's for damn sure.

None of my friends can believe it. I'm like the smiley quiet one in class.

But this one day, I was just feelin' real agitated. It's after school, I'm walking down the street, and there's this tattoo parlor, right? And I stop. I go in. And I look at these pictures, all these dragons and roses and I'm like, what would that do? So I walk out. And right there, is a recruiting office.

It's not like I could see some other picture of my future. I'd try. To get a picture in my mind. Like, when I'd be in bed, supposed to sleep, I'd go, *okay Kiesha think. You're gonna be graduatin' soon, whatcha gonna do whatcha wanna do.* I'd lay there squeezin' my brain, and no juice. The only pictures I'd get were these images of fallin'. Into the water, like...not screaming or slipping, not like a scary accident. Just fallin'. Still. Into such darkness...

I'm not talkin' any sense.

JUSTIN. Yes you are.

KIESHA. I guess I needed *something* to come along. I didn't think it was learnin' to kill people, but—

JUSTIN. But, hey!

KIESHA. It all happened so fast, you know. I never thought I'd be in, like, a war. It don't feel real.

JUSTIN. It isn't real.

KIESHA. But it is.

JUSTIN. Naw, it's all made up. The borders, all make believe. The British made it up. It's true! I got evidence.

(JUSTIN pulls the bullet out of his pocket.)

KIESHA. What is that?

JUSTIN. A bullet. From 1920. British. I looked it up. Here.

(She takes it, tentative.)

JUSTIN. It feels weird, huh?

(JUSTIN retrieves an old photograph of a young British soldier.)

The borders of this place? They were made up by guys like this.

KIESHA. Where did you get that?

JUSTIN. Right here.

KIESHA. He looks so young.

JUSTIN. Young as you, probably.

KIESHA. So this dude was here. Where we are now?

JUSTIN. He was probably here in 1920. That's when the shit hit the fan. All the borders start to unravel, 'cause they aren't real borders, they were made up by the English after WWI, when the Ottoman Empire fell apart.

KIESHA. Actin' all smart and shit...

JUSTIN. I can be smart. And shit.

KIESHA. I guess you can...

JUSTIN. Stop it.

KIESHA. Stop what?

JUSTIN. Anyway. So. I'm talking about. What am I talking about?

KIESHA. This British dude. Who looks like you, actually.

JUSTIN. No he don't.

KIESHA. Yes he do.

JUSTIN. No, no, look. Listen. Borders, I was talking about borders.

KIESHA. Borders. Boundaries.

JUSTIN. Yes. Boundaries. Between. People. Made up. By people outside the people. The British come in and draw these lines around people from different groups, tribes that were always at war with each other, they draw this line in the sand and say Here. This Is Your Country. Make it work.

KIESHA. This dude does too look like you.

JUSTIN. You're not even listening to me are you.

KIESHA. I am listening to you, it's just like, what am I supposed to do with that? Think this country ain't real? Think it ain't real what we're doin' here?

JUSTIN. What is it we're doin' here?

KIESHA. *(Laughs.)* What we're told.

JUSTIN. Seriously.

KIESHA. But you know something? Shh, it's a secret. *(She looks around, then whispers:)* I like it.

JUSTIN. You like it?

KIESHA. I feel strong here. I feel strong as a soldier. I never thought I could feel strong like this, in my body, in my mind.

JUSTIN. Does give you focus.

KIESHA. Focus, yeah.

JUSTIN. And a job.

KIESHA. If they fix my truck.

JUSTIN. What, you don't wanna be stuck here with me any more?

KIESHA. I don't know how you dudes can take this post.

JUSTIN. It's career development. Manage me a Texaco when I get out.

(She laughs. Then thinks.)

KIESHA. *Hopefully* a job, when I get out.

JUSTIN. Nurse Williams!

KIESHA. I hope.

JUSTIN. It'll happen.

KIESHA. If I make it out alive.

JUSTIN. What are you talkin', of course you will—

KIESHA. All I ask, if it's gonna come, Lord, bring it fast. None of this injury shit. None of that. If you gonna take my legs? Take my eyes? Best take it all. 'Cause I ain't doin' no half way kind of life. All or nothin'.

(ARMANDO enters their space, with a radio.

JUSTIN slips the photo and bullet into his pocket.)

ARMANDO. WHOO!

KIESHA. What happened?

ARMANDO. Took those Hadji's down man! 57th!

JUSTIN. Wow.

ARMANDO. For Harlan, bro. For fuckin' HARLAN.

KIESHA. They got the dudes who messed up Harlan?

ARMANDO. Hooo-ah!

KIESHA. Who-ho!

ARMANDO. Fuckers were kids, too.

JUSTIN. We're celebrating kids getting hurt?

KIESHA. They ain't kids if they're blowing / people up.

ARMANDO. Took 'em down man, to the fucking ground man!

KIESHA. *(To JUSTIN:)* What if it was Sabados instead of Harlan. What if it was me?

JUSTIN. Well—

ARMANDO. U-S-A. U-S-A. U-S-A.

JUSTIN. *(Laughing:)* This from a fuckin' Puerto Rican.

ARMANDO. Fuck you man I'm proud of my country.

JUSTIN. The USA ain't your country, that's all I'm sayin'.

ARMANDO. Hey: Fuck. You.

JUSTIN. I'm not puttin' it down, man, I'd be Puerto Rican over being American any day.

ARMANDO. Man, you have no idea what you're fuckin' talkin about.

KIESHA. We just got the evil dudes that got our good guys. I think we can feel good.

ARMANDO. U-S-A. U-S-A. //U.S.A

KIESHA. U.S.A.

JUSTIN. This is the thing I don't get.

ARMANDO. What don't you "get."

JUSTIN. I don't get what makes you fight for a country you're not even, like, a citizen of. I'm not tryin' to piss you off—

ARMANDO. You're not trying to piss me off, huh.

KIESHA. Boys, boys. / We should be celebrating.

ARMANDO. My dad fought in Korea. Silver Star for it. My Uncle in Panama.

JUSTIN. Panama? What were we / doing in Panama?

ARMANDO. They were proud to serve. They had honor. They understood duty.

JUSTIN. "Duty."

KIESHA. Sounds like you have a strong family.

ARMANDO. Strength from faith.

JUSTIN. Right! Faith.

Faith has nothing—(to do with it)

ARMANDO. Faith is nothing? Faith is everything. What're you doing here if you don't have faith in your country? If you don't have faith in God? How the hell can you carry that gun?

(ARMANDO walks away. Wind.)

JUSTIN *looks to KIESHA. She appears to sink into the sand. KIESHA is disappearing, being swallowed by it.*

JUSTIN *desperately tries to keep her. He digs, pushes and pulls, trying to keep her from disappearing.*

He pulls her out. The wind dies down.

KIESHA *sits calmly in the sand. JUSTIN watches her.)*

KIESHA. What?

JUSTIN. Nothin. Just— You remind me of my sister.

KIESHA. Oh yeah?

JUSTIN. My little sis. Called me Juice.

KIESHA. Juice, I like that.

JUSTIN. She beat me up all the time.

KIESHA. No she didn't.

JUSTIN. Yes she did.

KIESHA. Why you let your little sister beat you up.

JUSTIN. Can't hit a girl.

KIESHA. Please.

JUSTIN. I know, I know...

KIESHA. She doesn't beat you up any more, does she.

JUSTIN. No. No she does not do that.

KIESHA. ...What'd she die from? She get sick?

JUSTIN. I guess you could say that. A kind of—sick.

KIESHA. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want. But I'm not afraid of it, whatever it is.

JUSTIN. You say that now.

KIESHA. I say that for real. You can say whatever. I'm not gonna freak and get quiet on you or get talkin' all about myself real fast like oh-shit-oh-shit I can't listen to what he say.

JUSTIN. ...My sister killed herself.

KIESHA. When did she pass?

JUSTIN. Three years ago, about.

KIESHA. So it's been a little while.

JUSTIN. Yeah. No. I mean, I can't tell how long it's been. I *know*, but then again, every day—every time I think about it it's like it's right now, the same as when I first got the call, like I'm movin' along in life then somethin' trips me and I look down and see this hole in my chest, and I'm like, shit, that's right, there's a hole in my chest.

KIESHA. Like a wound.

JUSTIN. Nothin' to do but watch it bleed... You ever lose anyone?

KIESHA. No, nobody of mine. Nothing like losing my sister.

JUSTIN. Alli was cool.

KIESHA. 'Course she was, she was your sister.

JUSTIN. I couldn't even feel when she... I was in a bar, when she... I was in a *bar*. Shootin' the shit with my pals, right, I'm all party-party and I can't even feel it when—when she goes. When she does it. I always thought that. If something happened to her— I thought I could— I thought I would know...

KIESHA. You think that because you couldn't feel it when she passed, that you weren't really connected?

JUSTIN. I don't know.

KIESHA. You can't feel guilty.

JUSTIN. I don't know.

KIESHA. I do.

JUSTIN. Why? How can you know something like that? How can any of us know what another person takes from something—from

our action, or our, our, inaction—how can we say we’re not to blame in something, I mean maybe you need something right now and I can’t even see it, maybe I’m completely blind to it, maybe you’re crying for help while I take up all this space with, with *my* problems, when your problems are, are real/now/happening, I’m talking about the past, crying over what—what’s already done! It’s done! But there’s right now, there could be things right now that I can’t even see, and who can say that it’s okay for me not to see them? I mean isn’t it our job out here, our responsibility to this country, to see, to listen, to—(know)...

KIESHA. I know I didn’t know your sister. But I can tell that you loved your sister for real, and there’s no way she couldn’t have felt that. There’s no way you weren’t a good brother to her.

JUSTIN. (*Scoffs*) Good brother—

KIESHA. You were.

(*A voice, singing. A Muslim call to prayer, beautiful.*)

KIESHA *leaves.*)

(*ARMANDO enters, chewing on a “Hooah” energy bar.*)

JUSTIN. Man, where’d you get the Hooah?

ARMANDO. MRE.

JUSTIN. Told me you were out.

ARMANDO. I lied.

JUSTIN. I get half a that Hooah.

ARMANDO. Why.

JUSTIN. ‘Cause you got everything. Wife, kids. Church. What do I got?

(*ARMANDO tears off half of the protein bar for JUSTIN.*)

ARMANDO. I don't know. What do you got?

JUSTIN. I dunno. Don't know what the hell I'm talking about.

(They chew in silence.)

JUSTIN. You been married for what—

ARMANDO. Six years.

JUSTIN. And you still like her, like, you're hot for her?

ARMANDO. I'm crazy about her. To me she's like a supermodel, even though she ain't. Especially when she was pregnant.

JUSTIN. Really?

ARMANDO. Most beautiful thing in the world, the woman you love with your baby like that... Miss her so bad it hurts. She and my baby girls. Everything to me.

JUSTIN. I can't imagine it.

ARMANDO. You find the right girl, you can imagine it.

JUSTIN. Well. There is this one girl.

ARMANDO. You got a girl back home you ain't told me about?

JUSTIN. I think I'm fallin', man.

ARMANDO. Serious?

JUSTIN. We're keeping it loose. Keepin' it open.

ARMANDO. Close to the exit, huh? One foot in, one foot out. Man, that's just fear of commitment. You get over it.

JUSTIN. I wanna be able to change my life, change who I am in a second, snap like that.

ARMANDO. What you are is a soldier and that ain't ever gonna change, bro.

JUSTIN. That's just what I'm doing. Not who I am. It doesn't define me. In a few months, I'll be readin' Thoreau n shit.

ARMANDO. Nah, man.

JUSTIN. Lettin' my hair grow.

ARMANDO. In a few months, you'll be right here.

JUSTIN. If I'm still here in a few months? I'll be fucking dead.

ARMANDO. Not sayin' that.

JUSTIN. I'm leavin' this place. No Army can make me stay. I got a future.

ARMANDO. We all got futures.

JUSTIN. I got a different future.

ARMANDO. Only God knows your future, bro.

JUSTIN. You ain't gonna convert me so stop pushin'—(the God shit)

ARMANDO. You ask me, I'm gonna tell you.

JUSTIN. I'm not asking you.

ARMANDO. You ask about marriage. What do you think? Marriage is faith.

JUSTIN. Faith has nothing—(to do with it)

ARMANDO. Faith is *nothing*?

JUSTIN. *Has* nothing—

ARMANDO. Faith is everything. How you keep a woman—

JUSTIN. Trust—

ARMANDO. Not just trust but faith. Faith in that love that brought you together. Sounds like sap to you, cuz you're young. And you cannot see. It's all about what you cannot see, bro. Gotta give it to God. Let God see for you. You are a cup, you are a plate, you are a tool of God's. You do not have the power to question His use of you. And if you have the arrogance to believe you have this power, that you, as a cup, can fill yourself? As a plate, can wash yourself? You

put a burden on yourself that's too heavy. You can't carry this burden. No one can carry this burden.

What are you doing here if you don't have faith? In your country? In God? How the hell can you carry that gun?

(ARMANDO *is gone.*)

KIESHA *enters, stands at the edge of the scene. Talks to JUSTIN from far away. Almost a monotone.*)

KIESHA. Cisco got his foot blown off yesterday, you hear that?

JUSTIN. Yeah. That sucks.

KIESHA. Crazy.

JUSTIN. Yeah.

KIESHA. What would you do if your foot got blown off?

JUSTIN. Go home, I guess.

KIESHA. For real.

JUSTIN. Can't think about stuff like that.

KIESHA. Yeah... I guess.

JUSTIN. Don't think about it.

KIESHA. Just be glad I got both my feet.

JUSTIN. And all your fingers.

KIESHA. Two arms, two legs.

JUSTIN. Everything you need to keep dancin'.

(KIESHA *starts dancing, alone. JUSTIN watches.*)

AHMED *enters, with a boom box. The boom box plays a Backstreet Boys song.*

KIESHA *is dancing to the music. JUSTIN watches as she fades away.*

AHMED *walks towards JUSTIN, sporting a baseball cap with an American flag on it.*

AHMED. Hello! Hello, American! *(He points to boom box:)* This is American, too! Hello! Why do you not say hello?

JUSTIN. Afternoon.

AHMED. You look tired, yes?

JUSTIN. No sir.

AHMED. I am tired! Long day, so many long days. When I am tired I like to have the music.

(JUSTIN suppresses a laugh.)

You are laughing, I am being serious.

JUSTIN. *(Referring to boom box:)* You can't set that there.

AHMED. I cannot?

JUSTIN. No. Over—

AHMED. What about here? Can I put it here?

JUSTIN. That should be okay.

AHMED. Okay. I love the American song on the American radio!

JUSTIN. That's the Backstreet Boys.

AHMED. Back street?

JUSTIN. Boy band. Nevermind.

AHMED. No, explain to me.

JUSTIN. It's a band. That's all men. Young guys, teenagers, all dressed in some different trendy kinda way. And they do synchronized dance moves.

AHMED. They dance!

JUSTIN. Yeah. They dance.

AHMED. This is good, I like this! This is your music!

JUSTIN. No. This is not my music. I mean I'm glad you like it, but—

AHMED. You do not like this American music?

JUSTIN. No, this isn't the only music we've got, it's just one kinda music, it's not the best kind, but—

AHMED. What is the best music.

JUSTIN. Well, Jimmy Hendrix, for a start.

AHMED. Jimmy...?

JUSTIN. He played guitar. Back in the 60s. That was the best, the 60s, you should listen to that stuff.

AHMED. Did this Jimmy dance?

JUSTIN. (*Laughing:*) No, this Jimmy did not dance.

AHMED. I will show you something, yes?

JUSTIN. I'm sorry, I gotta—

AHMED. Yes, you are guarding this petrol-gas station we are at this gas station and you have all the gun and, yes I understand.

JUSTIN. You can stay here, it's okay.

AHMED. I play a song.

JUSTIN. You can play a song.

AHMED. I can play?

JUSTIN. Sure, I'd love to hear a song. Nothin' goin' on, so.

AHMED. Very good. Very good song! This is from here where you are standing. My country.

(AHMED *puts on a song. It is beautiful classic Middle Eastern music.*)

AHMED. Tell me do you like this?

JUSTIN. Yeah, it's cool.

AHMED. Cool.

JUSTIN. It's hip!

AHMED. Hip! Cool!

JUSTIN. (*Laughing:*) Is this your favorite kind of music?

AHMED. This is my music, yes.

JUSTIN. It's good.

AHMED. This music, you can dance to this music.

(AHMED starts dancing, a traditional dance. Unequivocally masculine. His hands in the air and hips turning.)

AHMED. This is how the dance is to the music.

(JUSTIN suppresses a laugh.)

AHMED. I am not the best dancer.

JUSTIN. You do pretty good.

AHMED. I only dance for a good time.

JUSTIN. That's the best reason.

AHMED. Do you sometimes have a good time?

JUSTIN. Back home, you bet.

AHMED. Back home, yes. Do you miss your country?

JUSTIN. I miss home, yes I do.

AHMED. Your family.

JUSTIN. Yeah.

AHMED. It is hard to not have your family.

JUSTIN. It's hard to not have a lot of things, but you know. I like it here, too, though. Here in your country.

AHMED. You like my country?

JUSTIN. Yeah. I do.

AHMED. What is it that you like of my country?

JUSTIN. Well, I like your music.

AHMED. Music, yes I am glad.

JUSTIN. And, I like how it's—how everything has history, the ancient culture, the history.

AHMED. The history! Yes. (*Clapping his hands, in dance:*) To history!

JUSTIN. To history!

AHMED. You, too, have history. So tell me. What is it about my history that you like?

JUSTIN. I don't really have history.

AHMED. Every person has history.

JUSTIN. I mean America. It's—

AHMED. New.

JUSTIN. Yeah, new.

AHMED. But not "poof" from thin air, no?

JUSTIN. Well, no.

AHMED. But new idea, maybe. Where you stand now, is not new.

JUSTIN. Exactly, that's what I—

AHMED. Many things have begun right here where you are standing. Writing. Mathematics.

JUSTIN. Yeah, yeah.

AHMED. God.

JUSTIN. Huh.

AHMED. Your God started here. Your Jesus. That is what I hear.

JUSTIN. I hadn't heard that.

AHMED. You want to learn how to dance?

JUSTIN. Oh, no, I can't do that.

AHMED. You cannot?

JUSTIN. No, I sure can't do that.

AHMED. You will not?

JUSTIN. I'm—

AHMED. The gun, of course, yes, but you see this dance, this dance you can do with a gun. Come.

(AHMED dances with seriousness. JUSTIN, after looking around, slowly warms to it. Starts to move.)

AHMED. Yes! That is it, like this.

(JUSTIN is dancing, with his gun.

JUSTIN starts to learn from AHMED's movements. The two dance.

Day becomes night...

As Puerto Rican music begins to play. ARMANDO is dancing, flask in hand.

KIESHA enters. Begins to dance to Armando's music.)

KIESHA. I like this.

ARMANDO. Never heard it before?

KIESHA. Don't think so. Ooo, you're drinkin'.

ARMANDO. Damn right I'm drinkin'. A man's gotta rest. Gotta get loose.

KIESHA. Shit, you're funny.

ARMANDO. I'm never funny.

KIESHA. Maybe that's why you're funny.

ARMANDO. So you're laughing at me?

KIESHA. Do you see me laughin'?

ARMANDO. I'm a soldier not a club kid.

KIESHA. You never party?

ARMANDO. 'Course I party.

KIESHA. I never partied before the Army.

ARMANDO. Now you're an Army girl, you're a party girl.

KIESHA. Gotta do somethin'.

ARMANDO. Yes you do.

KIESHA. Get some release.

ARMANDO. Gotta have that.

KIESHA. Or I go crazy.

ARMANDO. Wouldn't want you to go crazy.

KIESHA. You go crazy?

ARMANDO. Never.

KIESHA. Please.

ARMANDO. I never go crazy.

KIESHA. You lyin'.

ARMANDO. I gotta strong head.

KIESHA. What, you can like, break cement walls with it?

ARMANDO. Mind. I got a strong mind.

KIESHA. You got strong breath is what you got. What is that, whiskey?

ARMANDO. Tequila.

(ARMANDO leans into her, a kiss.

KIESHA responds with some force. They twist into each other, desperate.

JUSTIN appears out of the dark, shaking and breathing heavily.

The music grows louder.

We see through JUSTIN's eyes:

The air seems to blur as KIESHA and ARMANDO press into the gas pump,

And KIESHA drinks from the gas nozzle.

JUSTIN trains his rifle on ARMANDO and KIESHA.

An explosion.

Parts of a vehicle fly.

KIESHA falls into the sand.

ARMANDO is thrown.

JUSTIN hits the ground.

Sand fills the sky.

The three soldiers are blown into separate spaces. Shock.

KIESHA sits alone, shell shocked in the sand, shivering.

Silence. Then:)

KIESHA. Pow.

(ARMANDO emerges with a package. He looks at it.

ARMANDO starts laughing.)

KIESHA. Pow.

ARMANDO. Mail call, man.

KIESHA. Pow pow.

ARMANDO. Bitch sent me chocolate! *(Laughing hysterically:)* Don't the bitch know that the shit melts? It's fuckin' 120 degrees, man! Shit's pudding, check it out!

KIESHA. Pow.

ARMANDO. My wife.

KIESHA. Pow.

ARMANDO. Taste.

KIESHA. Pow Pow.

ARMANDO. TASTE. IT.

(ARMANDO grabs JUSTIN's head.

ARMANDO forces the melted chocolate into JUSTIN's mouth.)

ARMANDO. My wife, this is my wife, she made this herself, you like this? Huh? Yeah? You like it? She makes this shit from scratch.

(ARMANDO stops abruptly and turns his back on JUSTIN.)

ARMANDO. God take me.

(JUSTIN's face is smeared brown. He tastes the chocolate.)

JUSTIN. It's good. What time is it?

ARMANDO. ...I can't remember.

JUSTIN. How long is it

ARMANDO. Remember it...

JUSTIN. How long is it we been out.

ARMANDO. Can't see.

JUSTIN. We been out here...

ARMANDO. Can't feel Him.

JUSTIN. What happened.

ARMANDO. I don't...

JUSTIN. What happened back there.

ARMANDO. Feel you, Lord.

(ARMANDO whispers a prayer in Spanish.

KIESHA gets up.)

JUSTIN. Wait.

KIESHA. (*Speaking out, as if to JUSTIN:*) I gotta go.

JUSTIN. Go?

(*Shift.*)

KIESHA, *alone, sees a sandstorm approaching.*)

KIESHA / JUSTIN. Sand...

(*ARMANDO becomes AHMED, by the gas pump.*)

AHMED. You might call it Sand. I would call it many things you could not understand because you do not have those words anywhere in your head. They do not exist for you.

Like you do not exist for me. I am looking at you now, but in a moment, you will be gone. Like rain that brings no water. I say words to you now, but they go into emptiness. What is this place that we are in? Where rain is not rain and words are not words? Do you know of this place? What do you call this?

JUSTIN. I don't want to do this.

AHMED. Then why are you doing it?

JUSTIN. I'm not trying to take—this—from you, I don't want this place, we don't—we're not trying to take it from you

AHMED. But you are taking this from me. Piece by piece by piece by piece by piece. I did not know this world could be seen in so many pieces until I meet you. And see you break it down for me. You break it and I see all the pieces that used to be one whole and I see how you look at these pieces, how you look at these small pieces I have left, and I hear a grumble in your stomach and see your tongue hang from your lips. Why are you so hungry?

JUSTIN. I'm not—

AHMED. Then why do you look at me like a starved dog.

JUSTIN. Me? I'm not, I—I'm just one person. I'm not my country—

AHMED. But you are.

JUSTIN. I'm sorry, I—

AHMED. Why are you sorry? You are who you are. You are your country, I am my country, we are the dirt that we grow in, there is no sorry there.

JUSTIN. ...You can't take the gas.

AHMED. But I can.

JUSTIN. It's stealing—

AHMED. Can I steal my own house? Can I steal my own car? This gas comes from right under my own feet. This gas comes from my brother and my uncle and my cousin. This gas is my own gas. I cannot be stolen by me.

JUSTIN. I'm armed... I'm sorry— *(I have to warn you)*

AHMED. Again with the sorry. I am sorry for you with all of this sorry.

JUSTIN. I can't let you walk away with that.

AHMED. If you are not your country, as you tell me, then you can let me walk with what is mine.

(JUSTIN trains his gun on AHMED; finger on the trigger.)

AHMED slowly walks away. JUSTIN cannot shoot. He tries to pump himself up to pull the trigger.)

JUSTIN. Load another magazine
In my trusty M16
Cuz all I ever wanna see
Is BODIES, BLEEDING BODIES.

What makes the grass grow?

(Stabbing the air with their bayonets:)

BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD!

(KIESHA appears. Joins him.)

JUSTIN. What makes the grass grow?

JUSTIN / KIESHA. (*Stabbing the air with their bayonets:*) BLOOD
BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD!

JUSTIN. What makes the grass grow?

JUSTIN / KIESHA. (*Stabbing the air with their bayonets:*) BLOOD
BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD!

(A shift— sharp. A hard turn.

KIESHA approaches JUSTIN.)

KIESHA. Cisco got his foot blown off yesterday, you hear that?

JUSTIN. Yeah. That sucks.

KIESHA. Crazy.

JUSTIN. Yeah.

KIESHA. What would you do if your foot got blown off?

JUSTIN. Go home, I guess.

KIESHA. For real.

JUSTIN. Can't think about stuff like that.

KIESHA. Yeah... I guess.

JUSTIN. Don't think about it.

KIESHA. Just be glad I got both my feet.

JUSTIN. And all your fingers.

KIESHA. Two arms, two legs.

JUSTIN. Everything you need to keep dancin'.

KIESHA. Shake my ass!

JUSTIN. S'right!

KIESHA. Shake it, 'fore I lose it!

JUSTIN. You aren't gonna lose it.

KIESHA. Who's to say?

JUSTIN. I am. That ass is gonna stay right where it is, with the legs to carry it.

KIESHA. You gonna protect it, huh?

JUSTIN. Damn right. From all dangers, foreign and domestic. Protect it with my life if I have to.

KIESHA. Well guess what? I'm gonna protect your ass, too.

JUSTIN. Yeah?

KIESHA. Yeah. You gotta nice ass.

JUSTIN. Private Williams...

KIESHA. Fuck "Private."

JUSTIN. Uh-oh, you're talkin' like the rest of these animals.

KIESHA. Damn straight. Why not? We're all animals out here. Fuck, man. Why not do everything? Why hold back from shit!

JUSTIN. Shit like what?

KIESHA. Anything, like...anything...

JUSTIN. Kiesha.

KIESHA. Justin.

JUSTIN. What are you doin'.

KIESHA. Just lookin' at you.

JUSTIN. Don't do that.

KIESHA. Why, does it hurt?

JUSTIN. ...What happens when we get back?

KIESHA. What happens when we don't?

JUSTIN. We will.

KIESHA. Sure. Just like everyone thinks.

JUSTIN. We will get back.

KIESHA. Why you stoppin' yourself?

JUSTIN. Stoppin' myself from what?

KIESHA. Doin' what everybody else does.

JUSTIN. Everybody else?

KIESHA. Truck's fixed.

JUSTIN. Yeah. Yeah, I heard.

KIESHA. I'm leaving.

JUSTIN. You'll be back though, right?

KIESHA. I don't know, why?

JUSTIN. You know why.

KIESHA. Yeah? How can I know what I'm not told?

JUSTIN. You gotta be told everything?

KIESHA. You too all up in yourself.

JUSTIN. Am I?

KIESHA. You need to come on out of there.

(Knocks on JUSTIN's head.)

Hey! Hey you in there!

JUSTIN. C'mon.

(KIESHA keeps knocking, laughing.)

JUSTIN laughs but is overwhelmed.)

JUSTIN. Stop. Stop it.

(JUSTIN swipes at her, hitting her arm.)

KIESHA. Ow... Shit.

JUSTIN. Sorry—shit, are you okay?

KIESHA. Fuck you, Peterson.

JUSTIN. Wait—wait a minute would you?!

KIESHA. What for?

JUSTIN. You want me to say it?

I really like you, okay. I could see us living like real people, you a nurse, me a teacher, buying a house / with like a porch, you know, two dogs and a cat—or, or a kid—

KIESHA. What?

JUSTIN. Whatever you want. I mean... I could love you, Kiesha. I could *love* you.

KIESHA. (*Quiet:*) ...Don't say that.

(*Beat. KIESHA grows angry.*)

How can you say that shit out here? Where the hell do you think you are? Where you are, people fuck people. Like 3 of them from 57th fucked me just the other night

JUSTIN. What? Wait—you were raped?

KIESHA. No.

No. No. No.

I mean, what—you don't think I could take it? You have no idea how much I can take. None of you, have any idea, what I can fuckin' take— I am strong. I am strong.

JUSTIN. Kiesha—

KIESHA. Don't.

JUSTIN. I—

KIESHA. Don't be sad. Shit, don't be sad.

JUSTIN. I—

KIESHA. It's just...war. Justin.

JUSTIN. (*To himself:*) I don't understand. How could I not see?

KIESHA. I gotta go. Justin.

JUSTIN. This is it?

KIESHA. Justin—

(The sound of wind. A sand storm is threatening.

KIESHA becomes ALLISON.)

ALLISON. Juice?

(JUSTIN looks at her.)

ALLISON. You hear me, Juice? Remember that I love you, okay? No matter what happens, okay?

JUSTIN. Why, what's gonna happen, Alli.

(ALLISON is gone.)

JUSTIN. Alli!—Kiesha—Kiesha, wait!

(KIESHA gets behind the wheel of a truck. JUSTIN sees her leaving, in a convoy.)

JUSTIN. Wait!

(Echo of an explosion.

KIESHA's eyes go wide.

She breathes in.

Lights out.

JUSTIN's voice in the dark.)

JUSTIN. Kiesha?

(KIESHA moans in pain.

JUSTIN waves a flashlight in the dark. His light passes over ARMANDO, asleep.)

JUSTIN. Where is she?

(KIESHA *moans.*)

JUSTIN. KIESHA!

ARMANDO. (*Waking:*) What the hell

JUSTIN. Where is she?

ARMANDO. What the hell are you talking about.

JUSTIN. She go to you?

ARMANDO. Get that fucking light out of my face, man.

JUSTIN. Greedy motherfucker.

ARMANDO. Justin what the fuck are you doing.

(*Dawn breaks.*)

JUSTIN. Fucking hypocrite! Faith, huh? How you keep a marriage, yeah I like how you keep a marriage, Sabados.

ARMANDO. This aint' right.

JUSTIN. It sure as hell ain't.

ARMANDO. Can't bring this out now.

JUSTIN. What, this uncomfortable for you "Family Man"? SHE'S EIGHTEEN FUCKING YEARS OLD.

ARMANDO. Don't—

JUSTIN. I hope that sweet wife of yours is gettin' banged by some Freshman Army fuck—

(ARMANDO *pins* JUSTIN, *he struggles.*)

JUSTIN. What'd you do with her. Kiesha!

ARMANDO. Come on.

JUSTIN. Why can't I see her

ARMANDO. She's not here

JUSTIN. I just heard her voice!

ARMANDO. She's not here, Peterson.

JUSTIN. You telling me I'm hearing things? KIESHA!

ARMANDO. You've been up for three days

JUSTIN. I'm not HEARING not SEEING shit, I'm not CRAZY / for shit's sake.

ARMANDO. That girl // was in the convoy

JUSTIN. "That girl"?

ARMANDO. She was in the convoy.

JUSTIN. That girl has a name. Williams. Kiesha. // Kiesha. Williams.

ARMANDO. Williams was in that convoy. The convoy that—

JUSTIN. NO. NO. I just—saw her—I just—heard her voice—until you— What are you doing here, man, what the FUCK ARE YOU DOING? (Why can't I hear her?) WHAT DID YOU DO?

(JUSTIN attacks ARMANDO who tackles him to the ground. ARMANDO holds JUSTIN to the ground.)

ARMANDO. There was a sandstorm.

JUSTIN. Why can't I hear her.

ARMANDO. In the sandstorm, there was an explosion, her truck—

JUSTIN. Why can't I see / her.

ARMANDO. Her truck was hit.

JUSTIN. Why can't...

ARMANDO. You don't hear her because she's not here. You don't see her because she's not here.

JUSTIN. She—?

ARMANDO. She's gone.

(KIESHA is visible, slumped behind the wheel.)

JUSTIN. No.

ARMANDO. Listen, now.

JUSTIN. No, no.

ARMANDO. She's gone.

JUSTIN. She...?

ARMANDO. She's dead.

JUSTIN. She

ARMANDO. She's dead.

(JUSTIN is still on the ground, under ARMANDO's grip/consolation.)

KIESHA slowly stands. No pain.

She turns to JUSTIN. He watches as she becomes a shade of AL-LISON and disappears.

KIESHA is gone.

JUSTIN, in ARMANDO's grip/consolation, turns on ARMANDO as if he were AHMED.)

JUSTIN. You. This is you. Let you in. Number one mistake. Saw you as human. Number one mistake to make. Risked my life, seeing you as a human being. Risked her.

(ARMANDO becomes AHMED.)

JUSTIN. Risked her life.

AHMED. Her life? What of my brother? You cry for your friend / but what of my brother?

JUSTIN. My friend? I LOVED HER. Kiesha. I loved her. What do you know about love what do you know about that look at your country

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NOT OVER!**

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