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Óyeme, the beautiful

By

MIRIAM GONZALES

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(ÓYEME, THE BEAUTIFUL)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-232-2

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Óyeme, the beautiful was inspired by and produced in collaboration with the Óyeme Program at Imagination Stage (Bethesda, Md.) in April 2017.

CAST:

Roberto/Papi/Ruben Phil Da Costa
Laura/Mami..... Yesenia Iglesias
Valentina/Abuela/Female Teacher Nina Marti
Esteban/Male Teacher Christopher Rios

PRODUCTION:

Director and Choreographer Elena Velasco
Music and Sound Design Nick Hernandez
Costume and Scenic Design..... Deb Sivigny
Stage Manager Josie Felt

Óyeme, the beautiful

CHARACTERS

VALENTINA: 14-year-old refugee from El Salvador, Laura's best friend.

LAURA: 14-year-old refugee from Honduras, Valentina's best friend.

ESTEBAN: 15 years old, Valentina's brother.

ROBERTO: 13-year-old refugee from Guatemala.

RUBEN (played by ROBERTO): 17-year-old refugee from El Salvador; Laura's fellow traveler—her angel.

MALE and FEMALE TEACHERS: At the students' middle school. Also voice the administrator.

MAMI: Valentina's mother.

PAPI: Valentina's father.

ABUELA: Laura's grandmother.

STUDENTS: 13 to 15 years old, other middle school students; U.S. born Latinos, non-Latinos or Americanized immigrants (have lived in U.S. for many years). They play various roles.

SETTING: A middle school somewhere in the United States.

CASTING NOTE: This play can be done with four actors (2m., 2w.). Actors double in ensemble pieces and background characters in dream sequences. Possible doubling:

Abuela/Valentina/Female Teacher

Mami/Laura

Papi/Roberto/Ruben

Esteban/Male Teacher

I know our home now, I know it's different.
I know it feels like a bunch of pieces,
But, when I see home I see holding hands
Everybody *así* across two lands.
Not a big house, small house, rich, or poor.
It's *gente unidos* searchin' for more!
Óyeme!

—Student, Óyeme Program

Óyeme, the beautiful

SCENE 1

(The school hallway. We hear a cacophony of school sounds mixed with Latin music—a vibrant, youthful, strong beat. VALENTINA, LAURA, ESTEBAN and ROBERTO enter with a choreographed dance that captures their teen energy and spirit. They call out to one another [ad lib].)

Moments later, we hear a locker door slam violently. The music stops. VALENTINA, LAURA, ESTEBAN and ROBERTO freeze.

Again, a locker door slams violently.

A beat. VALENTINA, LAURA, ESTEBAN and ROBERTO stare up and out into the eyes of the unseen GANG MEMBER STUDENT.)

VALENTINA *(to herself)*. *El marero.*

GANG MEMBER STUDENT *(V.O.)*. *Esteban. Apurate.*
(Pause.) I said les' go, man. You deaf?

VALENTINA *(pulling ESTEBAN back)*. *Esteban, no—no.*
Don't go with them.

ESTEBAN *(throws off her grip)*. *Get off 'a me.*

(VALENTINA and ESTEBAN lock eyes—a beat.)

ESTEBAN *(cont'd)*. *I mean it.*

(Looks up into the eyes of the GANG MEMBER STUDENT and nods that he's with him. He exits.)

The school bell rings; time to get to class.)

ROBERTO (*pause*). Uh, I, uh ... gotta go ... to, uh—

(He waves weakly to his friends and exits.

VALENTINA is visibly anxious. LAURA takes a deep breath, calming her own nerves. She turns to her friend, recalling their coping ritual.)

LAURA. Valentina ... *Vale*. Remember, *recuerda*—“Shake it off, shake it off?”

VALENTINA. I hate that song. *La odio*. It’s annoying.

LAURA. Come ooon— (*Playfully*.) “Shake it off!”

VALENTINA (*pointing in the direction of ESTEBAN*). Just shake *that* off?

LAURA. Yeah.

VALENTINA. No. (*Turns away*.) The gang—*ese banda*—all the time they just— (*Snaps her fingers*.) and ... he goes. My brother, he’s in trouble, Laura, so, no. I can’t. I can’t shake it off.

LAURA. *Vale*. Valentina.

(LAURA takes VALENTINA’s hands in hers. They take a few deep breaths together.)

LAURA (*cont’d*). I got one. Come on.

(They both close their eyes.)

LAURA (*cont’d*). In my *abuela’s jardin*, with *mi perrito*, Ronald. *Tranquila*.

VALENTINA (*softly smiles*). Under my yellow blanket, *debajo de mi colche amarilla*, with the little suns, all wearing sunglasses. *Segura. Feliz*.

LAURA. Playing *cebollitas* under the street light *con mis amigos*. *Honduras*.

VALENTINA. *Jugando ladrones y policías* with *mis* cousins! (Pause.) And climbing to the top of *mi* volcano, *Volcan Izalco*. Collecting rocks, (Takes rock from her pocket.) *pedras de lava*. Watching the clouds. *El Salvador*.

LAURA. By my *abuela*'s side; *al lado de mi abuela*.

VALENTINA. *Al lado de mi Mami*. (Pause.) *Y, aqui, con tigo*. With you.

LAURA. *Mejoras amigas*. Best friends.

VALENTINA. *Las mejores*.

(They clutch each other's hands.

The school bell strikes, triggering VALENTINA and LAURA's nerves again. School noises intensify.)

VALENTINA (cont'd). Maybe we say it one more time?

LAURA. *No hay tiempo*. We gotta get to class—

VALENTINA (desperate). In the kitchen, *la cosina, haciendo pupusas con Mami, oyendo mi musica—*

LAURA. Valentina, no more *chica* ... I'll see you later.

(The hallway fills. LAURA and VALENTINA are separated in the crowd.)

VALENTINA. Laura!

(STUDENTS aggressively bump and jostle them.

Amidst this sea of chaos, VALENTINA and LAURA are invisible. Separated. Lost. Alone. After a few moments, we hear their inner voices emerge. If lighting is available, perhaps it shifts here, bringing each girl under a circle of light. Spoken verse; musical beat may underscore.

Standing at opposite ends of the space, talking to themselves—both girls grasp their backpack straps with a mixture of determination and fear.)

VALENTINA (*cont'd*). Another day—

LAURA. To make it through, take a breath—

VALENTINA. Too hard to do.

LAURA. I hear *abuela's* prayer, I'm not alone, she'll get me there.

VALENTINA. *Papi*, I'm here, *Mami*, so far away, each day I climb, I fight for air. But with this— (*Takes a lava rock from her pocket.*) *pedra* from our volcano, I hear you, I see you, you'll get me there.

LAURA. Hear me now, *Óyeme*. This day is mine, I'll find my way.

VALENTINA. Another day, just hold your breath, find your heart, count to ten—

VALENTINA & LAURA. *Uno. Dos. Tres ...*

(School bell sounds. They push off into the crowd, into their day. LAURA exits.

As VALENTINA moves on, a locker door slams! And another. VALENTINA's eyes shoot upwards into the unseen eyes of FEMALE and MALE BULLY STUDENTS.)

FEMALE BULLY STUDENT (*V.O.*). Watchit, *Chanchi*. Oh my God, what is she wearing? Ugh, for real? Seriously??

MALE BULLY STUDENT (*V.O.*). Can't speak English, don't know nothing, not even how to dress. Man! Go home. You don't even belong here.

FEMALE BULLY STUDENT. I mean can you say "ugly?" Cuz that is one u-gu-ly dress. *Chanchi*.

(VALENTINA stares at her dress. And the scene transitions.)

SCENE 2: “15”

(VALENTINA enters math class behind STUDENTS. MALE TEACHER enters.)

MALE TEACHER. OK, crack open those math textbooks. Page twenty-seven. “The directions on a can of orange juice say to mix five cans of cold water with one can of concentrate. What is the ratio of concentrate to cold water? Write the ratio in three ways.” Go.

VALENTINA *(writing in her notebook)*. Five, one. One, five ... *Uno y cinco. Cinco y uno. Uno y cinco.* *(Pause.)* *Quince.* Fifteen ... *Quince.*

(VALENTINA stands. MALE TEACHER and STUDENTS transform into MAMI, PAPI and ESTEBAN. PAPI and ESTEBAN exit.)

MAMI *(holds a festive quinceañera sign)*. *Te gusta, Vale?* It’s for the party. *Tu fiesta.* We can hang it ... right here.

VALENTINA *(touches her new quinceañera dress)*. *Mi quinceañera ... dress.*

MAMI. *Ay, cuidado!* It took me two nights to sew each little stone— *(Pointing to rhinestones throughout the dress.)* *cada pierdita, hecha a mano.*

VALENTINA. It’s beautiful.

MAMI. Like you, *mija*.

VALENTINA. *Mami.* Please, I—

MAMI. *Y mira que tengo aqui ...*

(MAMI exits and re-enters with what is clearly a batch of balloons.)

VALENTINA. *¿Globos?*

MAMI. *Blancos to match your vestido, eh. Quince balloons, fifteen. Uno, dos—*

VALENTINA. *Stop—*

MAMI. *Tres, cuatro—*

VALENTINA. *Mami!*

(MAMI stops.)

VALENTINA *(cont'd)*. I don't want this. *Quiero celebrar mi quinceañera en dos años*, when I'm really fifteen. Not now. I'm thirteen—*trese*. *(Takes the balloons from her and sets them aside.)* I want to celebrate it—

MAMI. *Ay, Vale—*

VALENTINA. In two years. Here. *Aquí. En dos años, contigo, con Papi, y Esteban, y todo mi familia, mis primos, mis tías, mis tíos—*

MAMI. It's better, *mija*, to celebrate now, *cuando estamos juntos*. We want you to know—

VALENTINA. I know what you want. *Yo se que quieren*, but I don't want—

(PAPI enters. A farmer, he is haggard and worn from laboring in the fields.)

PAPI. *Mmm ... huelo pollo? ... Con—*

MAMI & PAPI *(to VALENTINA)*. *¡Pupusas!*

MAMI. *Y frijoles, y arroz, y platanos fritos.*

PAPI. What's going with you two, eh? *¿A caso esto no es una fiesta—una quinceañera?*

(ESTEBAN enters. He carries a fishing pole and a worn bag for his bait and tackle across his chest.)

MAMI. *¡Esteban!* (Goes to him, grabs the pole.)

PAPI. I told you. No more river—you don't go there no more!

MAMI. And, never alone. *¿Estabas solo?*

ESTEBAN. *No, no te preocupes.* I was with Kike. I'm OK.

PAPI (sitting down, grumbling with concern). *Ellos saben que te gusta ir al río*—They know where to find you.

MAMI. *Bueno, mira, Esteban*—help me move the table, to get ready. *Andale, ayúdame, tenemos que estar listos*—

VALENTINA. *Ya les dije*—no quiero celebrar nada.

PAPI. *Vale*—

VALENTINA (wiping away tears). I know why you and *Mami* are doing this —cuz you're scared!

MAMI. We only want to give you the *quinceañera* you always dreamed of—we want to see you happy—

VALENTINA. You think this *fiesta* will make me happy? Make me turn fifteen just like that, and then I'll be ready to, to leave?? No, you're scared. Like me—

MAMI. *Vale, ya les dijimos*—

VALENTINA. You're scared you'll never see me turn fifteen! You're scared you'll lose us. Cuz we're gonna be alone, we're gonna be alone—

MAMI. *No va a estar sola. Tu tío y tu tía*, your *Papi's* brother, his wife, you will live with them. *¡En los Estados Unidos!* They'll take care of you—

VALENTINA. And how do we get there? Where do we go, eh? We'll be out there, all alone.

MAMI. *Mañuel's* cousin, we paid him all we have, he'll get you there—

PAPI. And you go with Esteban. *Con tu hermano.* He'll protect you.

ESTEBAN. I will.

MAMI. Together you will be—

VALENTINA. I can't do it. I'm thirteen! I can't walk thousands of miles on the *camino*, through *El Salvador*, *Guatemala*, through *Mexico*, through—

PAPI. *¡Basta!* (*A beat.*) They are killing us. *Las maras*, the gangs, the government', *la policia—todos*. *El Salvador*; *nuestro barrio*, *nuestra familia*— it's not safe.

VALENTINA. *Papi*, we'll be OK here—we will!

PAPI. They shot Pedro in the head—threw him off the bridge! Every day, bodies, dead in the street.

VALENTINA. I close my eyes. I don't look at them, I don't.

PAPI. *Rolando y su familia*. *Los echaron a la calle, como perros*—took his house, took *Mariela!* She's *younger* than you. They say they'll kill your brother if he does not join. They'll take—you.

ESTEBAN. *Papi*, I won't let that happen, I can fight them, I can—

PAPI. No! You *have to go!* *Both of you!* ... You've seen things you're too young to see. (*Pause.*) *Vale*. You will celebrate your *quinceañera*—your real *quinceañera*—*en un mundo seguro*.

MAMI. We want you to live to fifteen. To 100.

PAPI. We want you to live. For us.

(*MAMI takes a ring from her pocket.*)

VALENTINA (*quiet*). *Un anillo? Mi quincenera* ring. How did you get—

MAMI. *Es de tu abuela*.

VALENTINA (*pause*). But, they will steal it! *En el camino*—

ESTEBAN. No, *no van a robarlo*. I won't let them, *Papi*—I won't.

PAPI. You wear it *mija*—

(*VALENTINA puts it on her finger.*)

PAPI (*cont'd*). *Por una semana*. For one week you are our *quinceañera*. Then, it stays here with us.

MAMI. That way *tu sabes*— (*Touches VALENTINA's heart.*)
home, *tu hogar*, is always here. You and Esteban are never alone.

VALENTINA (*hugs MAMI, a beat*). What will happen to us?

PAPI. You can do this, *pero juntos*. Together.

MAMI (*to VALENTINA*). *Recuerden*—remember—*always*—
you are—beautiful—

PAPI. And strong. Like our *Volcan Izalco, eh? Las piedras de Volcan Izalco*, the rocks tell our story, they'll keep you strong—

ESTEBAN. I ... (*Searches for his rock in his fishing bag.*) I have them, *las piedras, Papi*. (*Holds the lava rocks in his fist.*) I promise. We won't let go.

VALENTINA (*to MAMI and PAPI*). In two years—you both will come.

(*PAPI exits, then ESTEBAN.*)

VALENTINA (*cont'd*). You will. And, we will celebrate my real *quinceañera* together.

(*VALENTINA gazes at the ring on her finger, and then hands it to MAMI. MAMI kisses her and exits.*)

The school bell sounds. VALENTINA stands alone for a beat. She takes a deep breath to gather the strength and peace she's gained from this memory. She exits.)