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Nadie: A Modern Rapunzel Story

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SCENE 1

OLDER NADIA sits downstage, stage left, in the back seat of a car, as if she is waiting for someone. MAMI and NADIA sit in the front seat, not seeing OLDER NADIA; NADIA and OLDER NADIA are dressed exactly the same way, except for NADIA wearing a backpack.

MAMI and NADIA get out of the car and walk slowly center stage. MAMI is holding NADIA's shoulder protectively and NADIA is eyeing her surroundings warily, clutching her textbooks to her chest. Several blond people dressed completely in white emerge from the right wing, chatting animatedly but silently to each other, carefree and oblivious to either of them. NADIA and MAMI oggle at them shamelessly.)

NADIA

(nervous smile) *Everyone* is white.

MAMI

(equally unnerved) Yes.

NADIA

I actually had no idea so many white people existed in the whole wide world.

MAMI

...Me neither.

NADIA

(eyes pleading for reassurance) … what am I going to do?

MAMI

Don't be reverse racist. (thinks better of it) Oh, I'm joking, there's no such thing, ever.

NADIA

(pinches fabric of shirt gingerly, weak attempt at lightheartedness) Look, the uniform isn't actually ugly, it's just mine! Theirs actually fit their bodies…

MAMI

That's because they bought those clothes at expensive, brand-name stores.

NADIA

(slight panic, hurt)… well, why didn't *we* go there?

MAMI

(sighs, realizing this conversation needed to happen eventually) Nadia. Nadia Navarro, look at me. I wish I could tell you that you are not an outsider, but it would be a lie. But don't worry, it is nothing to be ashamed of. You, you are not one of them. You are not rich. You're here to get a good education. These kids go here, because this is what they were destined for. Their parents have the money, earned the money, inherited the money, whatever, and, from the moment they were born, they were destined to go to schools like these. Not you. *You* earned your place at this school, *you* earned your own scholarship, it was not your Papi or me who did this for you. You are here because (taps temple with two fingers) because of this. Your brain. Your intellect. (starts fixing NADIA's hair absently) You'll just have to play Cinderella for a little while; once the school bell rings at 3 in the afternoon, I will come pick you up in a pumpkin carriage, and you come back to reality.

NADIA

(makes face) Cinderella was the most boring of all the princesses.

MAMI

(smiles) You're right, it's never a good idea to base your life in a fairy tale anyway. Have a good first day, hijita.

(MAMI kisses the top of NADIA's head and exits stage right. NADIA sits center stage looking wary.)

OLDER NADIA

These were the reassuring Spanish words my mother told me my first day of Vantage private school. Mind you, these words were not good for my young ego. Especially since, as it turned out, my classmates were all rich and beautiful *on top* of being very smart; talk about unfair!

They were all so kind to me, though, the sort that would prolong my childhood just a little bit longer, unlike the atmosphere at my previous school where everyone was in such a hurry to grow up. Maybe out of necessity.

There was no necessity here. Real-life princesses. They lived in mansions, communities bravely guarded by gates. They had summer homes. Who has summer homes??

(NADIA sits on top of an elevated surface and gazes out dreamily into the distance, holding an open book. MAMI stands a little ways away, preoccupied with housework.)

But me? (comfortable chuckle) My home was a small one-bedroom apartment in a much more modest neighborhood. All our beds only fit in that room because we were all collectively really good at Tetris. My brother slept on the bottom bunk, I slept on the top one, and I would think of it like… Rapunzel's tower. I would sit there and stare out the window with spiderweb curtains and a view of a road paved with those white spherical lamps that looked like moons.

And I'd surround myself in a fortress of books. And I'd write, sometimes, dreaming of becoming a rich and famous writer. Famous, so I could be immortal. And rich, so I could buy my parents the house they'd always wanted.

Though, I personally didn't see any problem with living in a one-bedroom apartment; I didn't understand my Mami's claustrophobia. I didn't know we were poor. (beat) At least, not until Vantage.

NADIA

Mami, are we poor?

MAMI

(alarmed) Noooo, there are starving children in Africa, *that's* poor, there are people that can't afford to eat!

NADIA

But, sometimes you and Papi skip out on meals—

MAMI

(interrupting) but that's not the same! That's just, that's just, because we run out of groceries for that one day, but it's not the same as going for weeks on end without knowing when you'll have your next meal! There are people in the world who can't afford educations, and here, education is mandatory! So no, we're not poor, hijita.

OLDER NADIA

It was definitely a bargain my mother had made… a good education, a prolonged childhood, in exchange for these horribly awkward conversations.
But I can't complain. It was at this school that I met Helena. And I can never regret that.

(enter HELENA stage right. NADIA is obviously overjoyed to see her; they meet center stage and grasp hands.)

HELENA

You know my parents are immigrants too.

NADIA

Really? Well, no wonder you're the only one who can understand my parents' accents!

HELENA

Yep. (bad Russian accent) It is lifetime of practice!

NADIA

(laughs) Where are they from?

HELENA

France and Russia. Yeah my dad came here to attend Purdue, and now he works at Netflix. My mom does project management at a video game company, and some stuff for Disney.

NADIA

Oh… wow. That's, really…

HELENA

Yeah they're cool, I'm proud of them. What do *your* parents do?

NADIA

They…

OLDER NADIA

My dad worked from 5am to 11pm working three jobs. Paperboy in the morning, Jack-in-the-Box in the afternoon, and valet at night. My mom worked in telemarketing for a little while, but then, became her worst fear… a stay-at-home mom. (smiles guiltily) I hadn't exactly learned how to properly brag about my parents yet. I could have told Helena how my parents both had Computer Science degrees back in Peru, how we came to the US when I was a little kid so that they could give me and my brother a shot at attending a US university. I could have told her how after 9/11, all US tech companies suddenly caught a mysteriously nasty bug of xenophobia, and fired my dad for no good reason. And how that messed up our immigration process and left my parents at the mercy of the bureaucratic sty that is the US immigration system. And how they swallowed their dignity out of pure love for me, and decided to do any odd job to keep us in the country. But instead I said…

NADIA

They don't do much.

OLDER NADIA

I'll admit, this immigration stuff was pretty difficult for me to understand anyway, so perhaps it was best that I couldn't explain it. But one night, my dad made it horribly simple and clear to me; I was sitting in this car with him on our way to the 99 cents store when I asked him why we couldn't go back to our country to visit our family. And he stared ahead at the street, and he told me we were… illegal.
My blood ran cold. (puts knees to chest) I immediately curled up in a ball, trying to take up as little space as possible.

(NADIA stumbles in stage right, and lies down on the floor in a fetal position.)

When we got home, I crawled into my Rapunzel tower, and I cried, and I tried to not breathe, because I thought that my breath was taken away from an American citizen who could be breathing it, and I tried not to step too much, because I thought I would erode the ground a little more than it was meant to be, I tried to be as invisible as possible because I really did think I didn't deserve to be there. I don't think I've ever cried that hard since then. I was such a dramatic child.

So anyway, Mami found me, tangled in my sheets practically trying to suffocate myself. And I demanded of her:

NADIA

Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me we were illegals?

MAMI

No, we're not illegal!

NADIA

But Papi said—

MAMI

Your Papi is exaggerating, we just have visas that are frozen, they're frozen in the process, they can't be moved right now, I mean we don't exactly have green cards, but that doesn't mean we're illegals! Your dad has a work permit. We came here on a plane, we didn't cross any border like those poor people. Don't worry about it, Nadia.

(MAMI kisses the top of her head. NADIA sniffs, nods, climbs up the elevated surface and sits there. Then she picks up a book and buries her nose in it.)

OLDER NADIA

I guess, in that moment at least… I just needed to believe her. I needed to trust her. Mami had always been very strong in her opinions. Back when we lived in Peru, I was

the sole granddaughter in a sea of fourteen grandsons. My aunts, my grandma, they all treated me like a princess. So I guess Mami was, by extension, the Queen. (beat) I don't think she ever forgot that title. She controlled my life.

MAMI

(screaming) You've been sucked into American culture, and look what it's done to you!

OLDER NADIA

Whoa, whoa. I'm getting too ahead of myself, that's far in the future.
I put it from my mind. If anyone asked, I told them what Mami had said: work permit. Non-expiring tourist visa for six years. Young kids don't question these things.

(Green *Finch and Linnet Bird* begins playing softly in the background.)

But I was trapped. Unable to leave the country, unable to live with dignity within it. The United States was a magnificent prison, but it was a prison nonetheless… a cage. And… if I had no papers, I had no name. With no name, I had no legacy to leave, no fame to eventually claim.

I'd curl up in my Rapunzel bunk and I'd find that I had no words to describe my sudden claustrophobia. So I'd listen to my favorite songs instead… sing my misery out of my body.

NADIA

Outside the sky waits, beckoning, beckoning, just beyond the bars
How can I remain, staring at the rain, maddened by the stars?

My cage has little rooms, damask and dark
Nothing here sings, not even my lark
Larks never will, you know, when they're captive
Teach me to be more adaptive

Green finch and linnet bird, nightingale, blackbird, teach me how to sing
If I cannot fly, let me sing…

OLDER NADIA

But what did it matter? Temporary, we all echoed to each other. These were humble beginnings. This was how storybooks started, right? And I swore, I was going to be the one to immortalize our stories and bring us to the altar of history. If there was one lesson I learned during all my time sitting in my little Rapunzel bunk surrounded by books and showtunes, it was that there is no glory to pioneers unless history pardons their audacity.

SCENE 2

(OLDER NADIA sits in the same spot in the backseat of the car. NADIA and HELENA are center stage. If there is long enough transition, OLDER NADIA and NADIA have changed clothes, but are still wearing identical clothing to each other. Evidently years have passed; they are leafing through college brochures.)

HELENA

God Yale looks amazing. Should I even bother applying to anywhere else? It's perfect for me. And look, Miss English Major, their writing program is not so bad either… (looks meaningfully at NADIA)

NADIA

I mean, I'll *apply*… but I'm not really sure I'll get in. Plus, I don't think we'd have the money… I mean, all of these schools look really pricey…

HELENA

Just get a full-ride somewhere.

NADIA

(laughs) I *wish* it were that easy.

HELENA

Sure it is; you got a full-ride to *this* place. Financial aid is given to really smart low-income minority students. You've got a Vantage education, but the non-spoiled-rich-kid background. You're lucky. You're a shoo in. (holds out one brochure) Look, this scholarship is for hispanic girls who are aspiring writers and do a lot of community service. That's you. You've already won this award, basically.

NADIA

(only half-teasingly) You do know I'm not the only hispanic writer who likes community service in the world, right?

HELENA

Oh come on, how many can there be? And besides, isn't there that general financial aid thing you can do? The FAFSA or whatever?

NADIA

(squirms) I can't… do the FAFSA.

HELENA

Why not?

NADIA

I've told you. Because I… still have that tourist visa. I don't count as a citizen.

HELENA

(throws head back and groans) Those damn bureaucrats! Disorganized as all hell. (shakes fist at sky comically, then settles down with genuine curiosity) Why would they keep you on a tourist visa for this long?

NADIA

(laughs uncomfortably, glances meaningfully at the audience) Ha ha, yeah why would they.

HELENA

Can't you tell colleges the situation? Won't they understand?

NADIA

Seriously Helena? They read, like, a million applications a minute. They're not going to care.

HELENA

Is there seriously nothing we can do between now and application deadlines? That's a really shitty situation to be in.

NADIA

(jokingly) I could seduce and marry a rich American citizen. *That'd* get me a visa in a jiffy.

HELENA

(absently putting away brochures) I'd marry you…

NADIA

(looks at her slowly) Really?

HELENA

Yeah, I mean, I have a dual citizenship. (grins) I have two and you have none.

NADIA

Well, I'm still a Peruvian citizen—

HELENA

(waves it off, talking over her) I would give you one of mine. It'd be only fair, you know?

(NADIA smiles and leans her head on HELENA's shoulder. HELENA returns the gesture. They both sit there a while, then NADIA puts her knees to her chest and buries her face in her knees.)

I wouldn't worry too much about it. The college system *always* rewards those who've earned their stripes.

(They sit there happily for a while, then HELENA checks her phone.)

Hey, your mom says she's almost here.

(They hastily break apart.)

NADIA

It's really funny how my mom uses you as a beacon for finding me.

MAMI

(entering) It's because Helena actually answers her phone.

NADIA

(hugging her) It's because Helena actually *owns* a phone.

MAMI

Uh-uh. (to Helena) You hear this? This one wants me to buy her a phone after what she did to the first one.

HELENA

(comfortably, laughing) Mrs. Navarro, that was five years ago!

MAMI

I have no doubt that she is just as capable today of dropping a phone into a pool as she was when she was thirteen. "I'll never get you a phone again," I said. I kept my word, didn't I?

NADIA

(whining playfully) Maaaaaami…

MAMI

Anyway. Did you and Nadia advance a lot on your applications?

HELENA

(very comfortably, almost familial casualness) Yeah, we sorta… actually didn't get that much work done. (laughs apologetically) We got distracted.

MAMI

Oh you kids. It's difficult for you to get work done around your friends when you are this age, isn't it?

HELENA

Oh it's chill. We have plenty of time to do it.

MAMI

(fussing) Nadia, let me take these to the car for you…

NADIA

No, Mami, I can do that myself…

MAMI

(talking over her) … and I'll wait for you to finish packing up these last few things, okay? I'll bring the car around. (to Helena) See you tomorrow, Helena!

HELENA

Bye!

(MAMI goes to car, stage right.)

HELENA (cont)

Ahh, your mom's great.

NADIA

(grudgingly) She *is*…

HELENA

Come over tomorrow. Screw all this college stuff, we can work on our English essays or something.

NADIA

I mean, so long as we don't… distract each other this time. (tension)

HELENA

Don't worry, next time we'll be so productive we won't even notice we're there. I'll be nothing!

(HELENA exits.)

OLDER NADIA

Something was happening. Something incredibly weird and strange and unfamiliar. Like Sauron's Eye, my eye of sexual attraction had long roamed in every direction, but now it had fixated itself in a most unexpected point.

NADIA

(panicking) I'm straight. This is just happening because… I've spent so much time with her. Gah, emotional proximity is weird.

OLDER NADIA

I was so emotional and empathetic and not quite sure how to stand up for myself, whereas Helena was this big badass of rational thinking; if someone was too emotional, she'd smite them with her logic. (smirks*). I wanted to be a writer, she wanted to be a programmer. She was rich, I was… neh, lower middle class. She was white, I was latina. She was a bit more sophisticated, while I was unashamedly childish. She was sometimes a bit violent, I was a total pacifist.* She stood up for herself, I let her stand up for me.

(MAMI enters stage left and sits in the driver's seat of OLDER NADIA's car.)

NADIA

(snaps out of thoughts) Mami, how on earth are we going to pay for those schools?

MAMI

Just get a full-ride somewhere. You're a shoo in. I know Yale offers some giant financial aid packages.

OLDER NADIA

It's funny, how I couldn't have ended up falling for a girl who was more like Mami in every way.

NADIA

You know what I mean. How are we… how are we going to even apply for aid, if we don't have papers?

MAMI

I've been thinking about that. It looks like you're going to have to apply international, right?

NADIA

(darkens) yes. And Mami, that's really hard. The competition is the worst in international. Also they don't give much financial aid at all…

MAMI

I know. This is exactly what we were trying to avoid when we left Peru…

NADIA

I wonder how many of my friends even *need* to know what the FAFSA is.

MAMI

(sighs)Your Papi and I were just talking about this. I've been meaning to tell you for a while, but I guess now is the right time. I'm thinking about… paying someone to marry me.

NADIA

What?

MAMI

Your abuela's midwife lives in New Jersey right now, and she knows a nice Puerto Rican man who is willing to marry me for ten thousand dollars.

NADIA

And what does Papi think about all of this??

MAMI

(carefully) He thinks it's a lot of money to fork over, but it's worth it if we can simplify your application process. That way, you'll have nothing stopping you from getting into any college you want. (pats NADIA's head fondly) Remember, with your brain, you are unstoppable.

OLDER NADIA

(leans head out of window) One time, many years ago, one of my cousins called us and told us he was considering going to Harvard. We congratulated him, and then he asked us if it was okay if he commuted there from our apartment, since room and board was too expensive. We live in Southern California.

All right, I'll admit, it was a bit of a cute mistake to make, if a little tragic. But, I don't think my parents ever got out of this mentality… they seriously and honestly thought I could get into Yale.

MAMI

It's not that complicated. In Peru you have to take one college-entrance exam, and that alone determines the rest of your life. It's not like that here. Just tell them your story.

NADIA

I don't want to. I don't want them to take me because they feel sorry for my circumstances or whatever. I want them to take me because of me.

MAMI

Your circumstances are part of you. Don't be ashamed of them.

NADIA

I'm not ashamed. I just don't want them to define me.

OLDER NADIA

Then that's when things started to get a little complicated. That man Mami mentioned… we gave him the money, and then he fled. Ten thousand dollars… that could have been used to pay for my college education. It was…painful.

Around this time, too, Helena's gated community got a new security guard. And he asked Mami for her documents… which of course she didn't have. She kept insisting she was only there to pick her daughter up and that she had forgotten her license at home, but the guy took one look at her face and listened to her accent and called the police. Even the cops knew this was an overreaction… but they gave her a ticket for "not stopping for 8 seconds at the stop sign".

My Mami, with a traffic ticket. She was going to have to go to court for it, and we were so, so afraid they would find us out. She had no papers!

MAMI

Nadia… I'm so sorry this is happening to you.

NADIA

No, Mami, it's not your fault.

MAMI

And I'm sorry I have to ask this… It shouldn't have ever come to this, it's not fair… we, we promise to keep you safe through everything…

NADIA

(long silence) I'm going to have to marry a man, aren't I?

MAMI

Yes.

NADIA

Wow. Okay.

MAMI

You know why. We don't have enough time to find another man I can marry so that my marriage visa will be processed in time to help my dependents, my children. It needs to be faster, direct.

NADIA

I understand.

MAMI

I'm so sorry.

NADIA

It's okay, Mami.

MAMI

I wish I could give you what you deserve.

NADIA

You have…

MAMI

No, I haven't, you don't deserve this. But it's so… out of my control. Undocumented people are *nadie* in this country. *Nadie.* Nobody. We're invisible and everyone takes their profit out of us.

NADIA

You're not *nadie*, Mami. You're… (she falls into silence as the words begin to sink in. long beat.) You ever notice how much *nadie* sounds like Nadia?

MAMI

That's ridiculous, don't think like that.

NADIA

It's true, though. My friends have no idea who I really am. I'm *nadie* to them. *Nadie* to my friends, *nadie* to my country. And since we can't tell anyone… no one will ever know our story. This too will be lost to history, because it's people in power, like my friends, who will tell it. And they don't know.

(NADIA walks over to the center of the stage to where HELENA is waiting.)

Mami, I think I'm going to tell my friends what is happening.

(HELENA claps her hand to her mouth and sits back in shock. MAMI remains on the other side of the stage, crossing her arms instinctively.)

MAMI

Now, why on earth would you do that?

NADIA

Because they're my friends… (turns to face HELENA) and I trust them. And I need them.

HELENA

I'll marry you.

NADIA

Helena, that's really brave, but it doesn't work like that… gay marriage isn't federally legal…

MAMI

I wouldn't trust them. They might call you a criminal, they might ask you really personal questions. They… might feel *sorry* for you. (makes face) Pity is the absolute worst thing. It distances people from each other. Why would you involve your privileged friends in a situation they can never understand?

HELENA

(on the verge of tears) No, really. I'll marry you. I'll do it. Somehow…

NADIA

(reaches out to hold HELENA's hands… turns around to face MAMI) … because I can't do this alone.

MAMI

You're not alone. You have me…. isn't that enough?

(MAMI pulls NADIA into a loving embrace. NADIA sinks into it gratefully, but as MAMI strokes her hair, her face becomes more and more perturbed, glancing back at HELENA.)

SCENE 3

OLDER NADIA

I was sitting in my living room planning my wedding when Mami came into the room holding the phone from LMU.

MAMI

(weakly) They say you have the full-ride to go to their school.

OLDER NADIA

I listened with a deadpan expression, nodded, and then went to take a nap. It was only when I woke up that I realized it wasn't a dream.

Not long after, Obama passed an executive act for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Meaning, that if you were brought to the US as a child and were undocumented, you could get a driver's license, and a work permit, and were not in risk of deportation for the next two or four years.

My life was saved. I wouldn't have to marry anybody. I wouldn't get deported. My family celebrated and cried. The next day, I went out to celebrate with Helena.

I guess, in the dark, and the alcohol, and the euphoria, we were filled with bravado enough to talk about how we felt about each other. And… we kissed. There we were, kissing in the middle of the living room of our classmate's house party.

Mami came to pick us up.

(MAMI sits in driver's seat of car, NADIA in front passenger seat, HELENA in backseat behind NADIA, and OLDER NADIA in the remaining backseat. HELENA reaches out and holds NADIA's hand from behind, obviously drunk. MAMI glances at them and looks disgusted.)

MAMI

Why didn't you tell me.

NADIA

Tell you what?

MAMI

What that girl did to you. Why did you not trust me enough to tell me.

NADIA

Tell you what?

MAMI

Don't play dumb! (begins to cry) You are smarter than that, I know you.

NADIA

I don't know what you're talking about…

MAMI

Don't lie! (throws object to the ground, advancing on NADIA)

NADIA

I didn't do anything wrong…

MAMI

I know… I know… my poor baby. How could I have let this happen to you.

NADIA

She didn't do anything wrong, either.

MAMI

Don't defend that scheming little lesbian. No, don't you dare.

NADIA

I started it. I wanted it, Mami, I instigated.

MAMI

No, she forced you into it. She took advantage of you, forced her body upon you and now you're all confused and I'm so sorry this has happened… If I had known…

NADIA

What? Who has been telling you these things??

MAMI

One of the mothers called me over the phone anonymously. She says her daughter witnessed Helena force you to drink, and then take advantage of your body.

NADIA

That is a complete and total lie!

MAMI

Is it? I've seen the way she looks at you!

NADIA

Have you seen the way I've looked back at her?? No, Mami. I wanted her to kiss me. I liked her. I am bi.

MAMI

She has confused you.

NADIA

Why are you doing this?

MAMI

(screaming) You've been sucked into American culture, and look what it's done to you!

NADIA

No...!

MAMI

She has manipulated you into being her sex slave. That's all she wants, to prey on you. That's what she's been planning this entire time.

NADIA

Planning since the 7th grade??

MAMI

Planning since she figured out she was a lesbian! Planning since she knew you would be kind and pliant and too naïve to see through her schemes!

NADIA

I'm not a child, Mami. I'm eighteen years old.

MAMI

That means nothing. You are my daughter till you die. Till I die.

NADIA

I am your bisexual daughter.

MAMI

(revulsion in her face) No. You are my victim daughter.

NADIA

(small sobs) You were willing to marry me off to a man for ten thousand dollars… but you aren't willing to let me explore a genuine relationship with a girl I like?

MAMI

What a cruel comparison. I will not be made the enemy, she is the enemy. She wants to turn you against me, to ruin our mother-daughter relationship.

NADIA

Oh yes, Mami. I'm sure Helena spends all her time plotting in her room about how to ruin our mother-daughter relationship.

MAMI

She lied to me. She betrayed me. I let her into my house, I let you sleep under her roof, always under the presumption that everything was innocent. Never knowing she was secretly a pervert.

NADIA

But that's *your* fault. *You* assumed she was straight. She never had any responsibility to tell you anything, it's *her* personal business!

MAMI

Not when it involves my daughter! Then it becomes *my* personal business! (beat) I would not have let you sleep over with a boy. I shouldn't have let you sleep over anywhere, it's such an imbecilic American custom.

NADIA

That happens to be one of my favorite imbecilic American customs.

MAMI

(whirls around) You cannot be bisexual. You have never shown any inclinations of it before… it came out of nowhere, it had to have been manipulation.

NADIA

Well… I'm showing inclinations now.

MAMI

And what's next? Inclinations for dead people? Children? Animals?

NADIA

How… could you *say* that to me…

MAMI

It's the gateway!

NADIA

(grips chair, bending over, trying to breathe. Then raises head with vengeance in her eyes) I feel so sorry for you.

MAMI

(breath catches) What?

NADIA

(quietly, viciously) Poor little ignorant immigrant housewife with no concept of tolerance. I was stupid to expect that much from you. (voice breaks) No one taught you better, so how would you know?

MAMI

(buries face in hands) You… you…

NADIA

Me what?

MAMI

You are… a little hypocrite. You call yourself open-minded, ohh, how open-minded these Americans think they are. But that falls apart when it's inconvenient, huh? You can't even be patient with your own mother.

NADIA

Patience?? You don't *deserve* my patience. If you wanted me to end up like you, why did you bother bringing me over to this damn country?

MAMI

I… wanted what was best for you. I'll always want what's best for you. This girl… is not what's best for you.

NADIA

Ever think that maybe *I* could maybe, for once in my life, figure out what's best for myself?

MAMI

(pained, reaches out to stroke NADIA's cheek) You're still so young…

NADIA

(forcibly shoves MAMI's hand away) Don't… touch me.

MAMI

Look… at what she's done. To us…. To you. I've never in my life done anything to wrong you… never. I gave up my life, my family, for you. And… you're going to toss that away like it's nothing… for this girl.

NADIA

(filled with cruelty) Yes.

MAMI

You're making… a huge mistake…

NADIA

You made the mistake, when you made that ultimatum. Now you have an answer you didn't want to hear.

MAMI

Stop… please stop this.

NADIA

Stop what? (loses composure, tears flowing freely) Growing?

MAMI

… Don't leave your Mami.

NADIA

(agonized) If you can't leave the tower with me… I don't… really have a choice.

(OLDER NADIA walks slowly behind NADIA and takes her hand. NADIA turns, and hugs her, drawing strength. She then exits, not letting go of OLDER NADIA's hand until the very last second. MAMI also exits.

Light change. OLDER NADIA sits center stage. MAMI reenters the room catiously.)

MAMI

Nadia… I've been… thinking. Here's…

(OLDER NADIA looks up expectantly, defensively, waiting for another fight.)

… I got you a phone. I think… you're old enough to be able to take care of one. Use it, okay? Call me, every night. Or, less often if you want. Just… (pleading) call me.

(MAMI holds out the phone for OLDER NADIA to take, but OLDER NADIA remains tensed up. MAMI then places the phone next to OLDER NADIA's leg, sighs, and turns to walk out of the room slowly.)

OLDER NADIA

Can I use it to call Helena?

(OLDER NADIA watches her mother carefully for a reaction. MAMI stops, makes to clench her fists but stops herself. She twitches her head irritably and does not reply, marching out of the room.
OLDER NADIA moves up into passenger seat of the car. MAMI sits next to her in the driver's seat. Neither of them can bear to look at the other. A pertinent song begins playing on the radio. They sing along.)

MAMI

We're driving slow through the snow on 5th Avenue, and right now radio's all that we can hear.

We haven't talked since we left, it's so overdue, it's cold outside but between us it's worse in here.

OLDER NADIA

Everyday, seven takes of the same old scene, seems we're bound by the laws of the same routine.

I've got to talk to you now 'fore we go to sleep, but will we sleep once I tell you what's hurting me?

MAMI

The world slows down, but my heart beats fast right now. I know…

OLDER NADIA

I know…

MAMI

This is…

OLDER NADIA

This is…

MAMI and OLDER NADIA

The part…

MAMI

Where the end starts.

OLDER NADIA

I know you'll ask me to hold on, and carry on like nothing's wrong, but there is no more time for lies…

MAMI and OLDER NADIA

'Cause I see sunset in your ***eyes!***

MAMI

I can't take it any longer

OLDER NADIA

I can't take this…

MAMI

Thought that we were stronger, all we do is linger

OLDER NADIA

Is linger

MAMI

Slipping through ***our fingers,*** *I don't wanna try now*

OLDER NADIA

Try now

MAMI

All that's left's goodbye to

OLDER NADIA

Good bye now…

MAMI and OLDER NADIA

Find a way that I can tell you…

(MAMI stops steering the wheel, turns her body to face OLDER NADIA, and steels herself to speak to her. Meanwhile, OLDER NADIA has her hand on the door handle and is plucking up the courage to leave MAMI behind.)

But I gotta do it.
I gotta do it.
I gotta do it.
I hate this part,
But I gotta do it!
I gotta do it!
I gotta do it!

(OLDER NADIA wrenches the door open and leaves the car. MAMI is left with her words on her lips, hand slightly outstretched to the spot where OLDER NADIA sat moments before.)

MAMI

Oh… I hate this part right here.

OLDER NADIA

I hate this part right here.

MAMI

(face crumpling) *I just can't take these tears.*

MAMI and OLDER NADIA

I hate this part right here.

(Light change. OLDER NADIA sits on opposite side of the stage, alone. She smiles ruefully, and picks up the phone, putting it to her ear. Lights out.)