

Scavengers



A Play in Two Acts

By

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Cast

Cuauhtémoc:	The leader, 16. Highly educated, a good 'father', certain he is right.
Diego:	Cuauhtémoc's lieutenant, 16. A hot-head and a mathematician.
Tulo: [Maricio]	A boy, 12. Conflicted and arrogant, he thrives on Cuauhtémoc's approval.
Chicle: [Mirabel]	A girl, 13. Insightful. Came from a wealthy family, resents communal living.
La Chichiloca: [Margarita]	A girl, 14. Smart, loud, opinionated. The closest in the story to a 'mother'.
El Babas: [Eduardo/Lalo]	A boy, 16. Large, careful, diligent.
Chayo: [María del Rosario/Rosario]	A girl, 12. Religious. Though a servant before, here she is equal to the others.
Ponchi [Gustavo] and Loco [Joel]	2 boys, 10, always together. Loco is silent. They have one name: Ponchi-LoCo.
Other Orphans	10-16
Avery	North American, 40. He has lost everything he worked for; he fills the loss within by helping others.

Scene

Casa Hogar para Niños Vicente Guerrero, an orphanage in Ciudad Juarez.

Time

The present. Summer time.

Notes:

Oquichtin = warrior

Tlatuami = lord

/ = The line is interrupted by the next speaker

. . . = the speaker is searching for words

Act IScene 2

Late Morning. The courtyard of an orphanage in Ciudad Juarez. The building - in poor repair - is surrounded by a wall of metal bars to protect it from the street. There is a gate in the wall.

(AVERY and FERNANDEZ in the courtyard. The KIDS are far from them. AVERY'S clothes are as worn as the orphans'. He wears a Houston Astros baseball cap and carries a gym bag. He speaks accented but fluent Spanish. He is looking at FERNANDEZ' photos. Each shocks him. He hands them back.)

FERNANDEZ - They mock Him. They need Him and they mock Him, and it's poison. They need a man who understands.

AVERY - Understands kids?

FERNANDEZ - Jesus.

AVERY - I can't look at these anymore.

FERNANDEZ - If you don't have the stomach, I advise you to go back to Texas. (beat) Of course I have no say in whom Pastor Lloyd sends me.

AVERY - Is this . . .

FERNANDEZ - That's the girl standing over there, and her father, and the pliers they used to pull out his eyes, and the saw that . . . I assure you she does not accept Christ as her savior.

AVERY - How do you know?

FERNANDEZ - They call Him a spider.

AVERY - Our Savior was called a lot worse. Maybe they are making Him their own.

FERNANDEZ - They call Him shit. They call Him a spider crawling through their shit. Their parents were criminals, and worked for criminals. And this is the result. All of their parents were killed in one night. A vendetta. And the next week, the children arrived here.

AVERY — Drug dealers?

FERNANDEZ — Obviously. Mostly their parents were sicarios, the drivers, the messengers. I'm not sorry they died.

AVERY — That's hard.

FERNANDEZ — They were terrible people, and they left their children so far from God.

AVERY — Did these come with them?

FERNANDEZ — Nothing came with them.

AVERY — Then . . .

FERNANDEZ — I cut them from the newspapers. Do you play the guitar?

AVERY — No.

FERNANDEZ — Good. The other pastors strummed and called it gospel. But what they need is a hard hand and a sure hand. They are hard and sure, but about the wrong things. How will you do it?

AVERY — Encouragement. Time. Prayer.

FERNANDEZ — Prayer's best. Not just playing football with them twice a week or singing folksongs.

AVERY — Too frivolous?

FERNANDEZ — Not on point. Prayer and instruction in their own salvation. Help them to see Him and to want Him.

AVERY — Is there a rush?

FERNANDEZ — They're getting older. They will all leave in a few years. It will be very bad for them out there.

(They look at the KIDS.)

AVERY — Are they happy? They look happy.

FERNANDEZ — Hmm.

AVERY – All children deserve to be happy.

FERNANDEZ – Happy. Well. . . who knows?

AVERY – God. (beat) They look fed.

FERNANDEZ – That I can do at least.

AVERY – “At least”! I’d say you have given them a great deal more.

FERNANDEZ – I’m aware of what I’ve given them. All Pastor Lloyd’s men want to see happy children, happy children, and they are of no use to them. Do you see Christ’s face in a child’s smile?

AVERY – I have.

FERNANDEZ – Do you love to see that?

AVERY – I do.

FERNANDEZ – Don’t. They’ll figure that out in a second.

AVERY – I –

FERNANDEZ – I wish he’d send me men to terrify them.

AVERY – I –

FERNANDEZ – Accept nothing from them until they believe. I hope you have that insight. To be honest there is very little about you that reminds me of a pastor.

AVERY – I’ve been through a really bad time.

FERNANDEZ – (sarcastic) A bad time? Do you realize you’re standing in an orphanage in Juarez?

AVERY – Yes, señora, I’m very aware of it. I won’t hide it from you, I need this job very much. That truck’s all I got left.

FERNANDEZ – Fill them with His spirit, Pastor, otherwise they’ll eat you alive. It usually takes them a month. Pastor Carmichael, Pastor Mickey, Pastor Bobby, Pastor Randy, Pastor Lloyd. Pastor Lloyd lasted longest. I can

show you where you'll be staying. Do you want to follow me in your truck?

AVERY - I - sorry - I'm still new to how to do this.

FERNANDEZ - This?

AVERY - Could you . . .do you have maybe some crackers. I drove all night to come here. I had to skip breakfast.

FERNANDEZ - I'll see what I can find.

AVERY - Mrs. Fernandez -

(FERNANDEZ exits into the building. AVERY drops his bag, takes a package from it and walks into the courtyard. As he does so, the kids come out to meet him. DIEGO and CUAUHTÉMOC advance in front of the rest of the KIDS.)

DIEGO - That your truck out there?

CHAYO - That's no way to talk to a pastor.

CHICLE - Don't be stupid. He's not a pastor. Pastors wear Gap and they shave.

TULO - If you're not a pastor, then what are you doing here?

(AVERY says nothing.)

PONCHI-LOCO - It's a piece of trash.

TULO - The gears are stripped.

EL BABAS - Tires don't match.

DIEGO - Needs an oil change.

PONCHI-LOCO - Grills' rusted off and all the good shit's been boosted already.

DIEGO - How much are you going to pay me to keep it safe?

TULO - Hey, I'll fix your *tailpipe*. . . I think the string wore off.

(KIDS hoot.)

TULO - Fifty dollars.

(KIDS hoot.)

CHICHILOCA - Maricio!

TULO - Okay, I'm sorry. Forgive me. Forty dollars.

(KIDS hoot.)

CHICHILOCA - Maricio, that's just rude.

TULO - What's rude is the smell from that truck. (TULO gags) Oooo (TULO gags).

DIEGO - You're not going get any pussy in that thing.

(KIDS hoot loudly.)

DIEGO - Or maybe you like guys.

TULO - Diego, that's just rude!

(KIDS hoot loudly.)

DIEGO - Hey, I don't know, looks like maybe he likes the dick. You a dick-loving gringo?

EVERY - Good morning. (admiringly) Look at this place you have here. Look at it all!

TULO - Oooo, Diego, I bet he knows what dick means.

CUAUHTÉMOC - Good morning.

EVERY - I'm Pastor Avery.

CUAUHTÉMOC - Cuauhtémoc.

EVERY - (turning to others) What are your names?

(The kids wait for CUAUHTÉMOC to respond. He does not, so they do not.)

EVERY - Am I speaking to the man of the house?

CUAUHTÉMOC – All right.

AVERY – I'd like to give you what I brought, Cuauhtémoc.

CUAUHTÉMOC – What for?

AVERY – I thought you'd like them. I thought you might not have something like this.

(AVERY hands the package to CUAUHTÉMOC who indicates he should hand it to DIEGO. DIEGO opens it – a box of colored chalks.)

DIEGO – Where'd you find them?

AVERY – Our congregation sent them.

DIEGO – Some of them seem used.

AVERY – It was what we could afford.

CUAUHTÉMOC – Thank you.

AVERY – What's wrong with your leg?

CUAUHTÉMOC – Playing baseball.

AVERY – It's a tougher sport than people think. Have you seen a doctor?

CUAUHTÉMOC – Yes, Pastor.

AVERY – When? (beat) I thought football was the sport down here.

CUAUHTÉMOC – Baseball's huge here, Pastor.

AVERY – What position do you play?

CUAUHTÉMOC – Play?

AVERY – When you got hurt?

CUAUHTÉMOC – Pitcher.

AVERY – That's what I played. I used to have a killer curveball. I bet you're a slugger, too. That was my problem. I could pitch, but I couldn't hit.

CUAUHTÉMOC – So you became a pastor.

EVERY – No – get this. When I was your age, my goals were – pitch for the Astros, and if that didn't pan out, become a racecar driver, then, waaaay under that, maybe an astronaut, and below astronaut . . . a rock star.

TULO – So why'd you become a pastor?

EVERY – Bon Jovi wouldn't let me open for him. Did you get the . . . whatever out of your leg? May I look at it?

DIEGO – No.

CUAUHTÉMOC – Must be a huge disappointment. Settling like that.

EVERY – Listen, I appreciate it might be hard to make me out. But it's simple. I just believe in being the best person I can be. So, I try to be the change I want to see in the world. You know who said that?

CUAUHTÉMOC – You.

EVERY – Gandhi. He was –

CUAUHTÉMOC – I know Mahatma Gandhi. He didn't say that exactly. What kind of change?

EVERY – Make life a little better.

CUAUHTÉMOC – For whom?

EVERY – A rising tide lifts all boats.

CUAUHTÉMOC – What's your boat wanting?

EVERY – For right now, I think whatever it is, I might find it here.

CUAUHTÉMOC – Really?

EVERY – I'd say if I can just get some food and a place to sleep and a shower – that'd be a change.

DIEGO – Maybe Texas has these things.

EVERY – No. Well, enjoy the chinks.

(Pause)

CUAUHTÉMOC – Did you find out what you what you wanted to know?

AVERY – (beat) Can I ask you one thing?

CUAUHTÉMOC – All right.

AVERY – If you could be anything, what would you be?

CUAUHTÉMOC – I'm already something. But if I could be something else waaaay under that . . . I'd be you.

AVERY – Why?

CUAUHTÉMOC – Because you can leave.

AVERY – All right. So, the chalks.

CUAUHTÉMOC – Yes, nice gift, Pastor.

AVERY – It's Avery. (beat) Do you like to draw?

CUAUHTÉMOC – No.

AVERY – Do you mind if they do?

DIEGO – What are they going to draw on? Maybe you want us to draw you some pictures on the ground. Get on the ground and draw you some pictures?

AVERY – I brought paper.

(The kids accept the chalk. AVERY gives other kids a roll of paper to tape to a wall. No one draws.)

CUAUHTÉMOC – Draw a house.

AVERY – Or anything you like.

CUAUHTÉMOC – Draw a house.

(The kids draw. AVERY approaches CHICLE.)

AVERY – Look how you got the perspective and the shading. It's just beautiful the way you drew it with the shadow like that. Did you take drawing classes?

(No answer. AVERY approaches TULO.)

AVERY – What is your name? How did you know about the tailpipe? Do you know a lot about engines?

TULO – I'd say your tailpipe is always loose.

AVERY – Oh, I see – that's that area over there, isn't it? You draw really well.

(No answer)

AVERY – I like how you capture the feel of the place. That big broken hole – I can feel it. You're good, man.

TULO – Can I stop now?

AVERY – If you want.

CUAUHTÉMOC – Yes.

AVERY – Can I ask you a question? Why are you drawing that part over there?

(No answer)

Do you know why the plaster's falling off?

TULO – Who the fuck cares?

AVERY – It's dried out. That hole's going to just get bigger. Would you like to repair it, man?

TULO – What! Phwww. Fuck you, man.

AVERY – It's your home. You're a man. You can repair your home.

TULO – Phwww – I'm twelve, what the fuck do I know?

AVERY – You can do anything. You know that, don't you?

TULO – What?

AVERY – You're a human being. It's your birthright to do anything you want. Repairing this – Phwww – it's so easy. Ninety-nine percent of fixing things is desire because, frankly a blind monkey with a broken arm can mix plaster.

TULO – Yeah?

AVERY – That’s all I need to hear. A little hope. High Five, my man! You got a team?

TULO – Los Indios.

AVERY – Who?

TULO – Fucking Indios of Ciudad Fucking Juarez. Fucking kick fucking ass. Fucking own this place.

DIEGO – Shut up.

TULO – What, Diego? You like them, too, man.

AVERY – Do they stand a chance?

TULO – Yeah.

AVERY – I’ll pray for them.

TULO – Better pray your fucking Astros learn to hit.

AVERY – Okay.

(AVERY moves on encouraging the KIDS, who ignore him. Soon they all have chalk on their hands and face.)

AVERY – (laughing) You guys need to wash your hands. And your faces.

TULO – We don’t have water this week. Again.

AVERY – How do you wash or use the toilet?

EL BABAS – I don’t use it.

AVERY – Where do you—

CHICHILOCA – There’s animals living in the toilets.

PONCHI-LOCO – He saw this hairy-ass spider crawling through his shit.

(Beat. AVERY dumps out his case and finds duct tape, work gloves, and a hammer. The head has been taped to the handle.)

TULO – Give me that. (AVERY hands TULO the hammer.) Damn, even your shit is jacked.

AVERY – I think I can fix the pipes.

TULO – You got a work order?

AVERY – No, I'm a contractor.

CHICLE – I thought you were a pastor.

AVERY – I'm a lay pastor. When they need me–

CHICLE – You're not real?

Diego? – Damn, they're sending us repurposed, marked down, off the rack, half-off generic pastors.

AVERY – It's okay, I'm licensed.

(CUAUHTÉMOC and DIEGO blocks AVERY.)

CUAUHTÉMOC – Fernandez says the maintenance staff's coming later.

AVERY – Please.

CUAUHTÉMOC – She's in charge.

AVERY – I'd like to make this right. It's so simple and you guys smell to heaven.

DIEGO – She has to approve repairs. This is Mexico, you might not understand how things work.

AVERY – Are they coming today?

(KIDS come closer.)

DIEGO – Yes.

AVERY – What time? (beat) I promise in five minutes I can have your water running. Toilets working, showers. (to CHICLE) You want to wash your hair?

(Beat.)

AVERY – (to others) Before it stopped, did the water come out black?

EL BABAS – Black, brown, green.

AVERY – Great, there's only a couple things it could be. (to CUAUHTÉMOC) You got anything in there I'm not supposed to see?

(Beat. AVERY disappears into the building.)

CUAUHTÉMOC – Do we?

DIEGO – No. (to TULO) Fucking asshole, Tulo, the pastor-man was about to leave.

CUAUHTÉMOC – He's not a pastor. You know who he is?

TULO – The guy who shot you?

CUAUHTÉMOC – He's a border dog. Did you see how he was sniffing shit out. He's a damn scavenger.

TULO – What does he want here?

CUAUHTÉMOC – Shit no one else wants.

DIEGO – Damn, it was a nice – four weeks without some pastor to torture us with his deep desire to befriend us.

CHICLE – Or the other one who wanted to practice his Spanglish.

CHICHILOCA – I don't like it that this one speaks Spanish.

CUAUHTÉMOC – Who was the last guy with the extra long prayers and loved his tequila?

TULO – Pastor Micky?

CUAUHTÉMOC – No.

TULO – Pastor Randy, with the toenails.

CUAUHTÉMOC – No.

TULO – Lloyd.

CHICHILOCA – I don't know, but this one's poor . . . shit.

TULO – I never trust the poor. They always steal.

CUAUHTÉMOC – That's how border dogs work. They squeeze in anywhere. "Yon . . . Cassius has a lean and hungry look." Now he's going to peck around , sniff it out, and dig it up.

TULO – Sniff what out?

CUAUHTÉMOC – I don't know. We have to figure it out. Find it before he does.

DIEGO – Well, look at that. A new day in the Aztec Calendar: a poor gringo crossing the border to get something here.

TULO – Diego, get what?

DIEGO – Fuck if I care. I just wonder how much he'll pay us for it.

(Suddenly the building shudders as the sound of water courses through the pipes and the toilets flush with a loud happy sound. Some kids run toward the building as AVERY returns.)

TULO – That's pretty cool.

DIEGO – You better hope he doesn't find it.

TULO – What, Diego?

DIEGO – Whatever he's come for. It's on you if he does.

TULO – Why?

DIEGO – Because you offer him shit. "No water. Yip-yip-yip." Fucking escuincle.

AVERY – I rigged around the leak and now you got one toilet and a couple of sinks. It's just a temporary fix.

(AVERY picks up his gym bag. FERNANDEZ enters.)

FERNANDEZ – What's up?

DIEGO – He fixed the water.

AVERY – It was a simple fix. Little blockage.

FERNANDEZ – Thank you. We'll have the maintenance come anyway and check on things.

AVERY (to FERNANDEZ) – It cut down on the spider talk. By the way, they are deeply religious.

FERNANDEZ – What are you talking about?

AVERY – I got glimpses. I'll know more later. Where do I stay?

FERNANDEZ – You're at the Community House.

DIEGO – Calle Zaragoza 142.

FERNANDEZ – You can follow me in your truck.

DIEGO – Back the way you came.

(FERNANDEZ offers him the bolillos.)

AVERY – Thanks for the snacks.

FERNANDEZ – They are not snacks.

AVERY – No?

FERNANDEZ – It is the breakfast your church provides us.

AVERY – Thank you.

(AVERY picks up his case. They start out.)

TULO – He's not a pastor.

(FERNANDEZ stops.)

FERNANDEZ – Is that true?

TULO – Yes.

AVERY – I'm a lay pastor.

CHICHILOCA – When they need him.

AVERY - When they need me.

FERNANDEZ - When they need you!

TULO - Oh, but he's licensed to kill.

AVERY - I'm licensed to be a contractor.

FERNANDEZ - He sent me a handyman! They need an ordained pastor.

AVERY - I have more experience than-

FERNANDEZ - They aren't pipes you can tape up.

PONCHI-LOCO - She's going to MIGRA his ass back to Texas.

AVERY - I can do anything they can do.

FERNANDEZ - No. I specifically told him. Ordained.

AVERY - Why?

FERNANDEZ - I told you why. Of course I have no say in whom that man sends me.

AVERY - Seven pastors in the last two years. I'd say you have a great deal of say. Certainly in who does not stay.

FERNANDEZ - Even pastors' visas expire suddenly sometimes.

AVERY - Pastor Lloyd sent me, Mrs. Fernandez. He brought me out from the country and sent me. And he sent me because he described this place, and the children and your work . . . and I said yes, I want to come.

FERNANDEZ - You wanted to come. That's why you're here? You wanted to come. What about what they need?

CHICLE - She's going to kill him. I hope.

AVERY - We were talking of the work you do. Your work. We were speaking of the grace that comes through work.

FERNANDEZ - Grace comes from accepting Jesus as our Savior. Work has nothing to do with it. But I imagine it's different in Texas. You are completely unsuited.

AVERY – (to FERNANDEZ) Please let me stay. Our . . . we had a catastrophe . . . I haven't had work . . . I need, I need this. I need to make this work. Please don't pull my visa, . . . please.

FERNANDEZ – I'm sorry, it's really not up to me. Your visa is none of my business. I have no say in this matter.

(CUAUHTÉMOC and DIEGO move under the eaves.)

CUAUHTÉMOC – Diego, did you thank Mr. Avery, for the gift?

(CUAUHTÉMOC tears up TULO'S drawing. It is a performance for AVERY, which FERNANDEZ does not see.)

DIEGO – Thank you for the chalk.

AVERY – You're welcome.

(TULO brings the chair and sets it under the eaves for CUAUHTÉMOC, who sits, flanked by DIEGO and TULO. AVERY starts off, stops and returns.)

AVERY – So. Maintenance is coming tomorrow?

FERNANDEZ – Yes, they promised plumbers.

AVERY – (to FERNANDEZ) And?

FERNANDEZ – And what?

AVERY – Maintenance promised plumbers, and – Plumbing is the least of your worries.

FERNANDEZ – What?

AVERY – Those joists are shot, that hole there, where the plaster's coming off is just going to get bigger, the eaves are about to come down, and that wall, the sagging thing, is load-bearing and it's a sign that your roof is going to avalanche.

FERNANDEZ – The building is fine.

AVERY – (to TULO) Get out from there.

(AVERY reaches above CUAUHTÉMOC and pounds on the eaves. Several feet of eaves crash to the ground. The boys scamper away.)

DIEGO – Motherfucker!

AVERY – (to FERNANDEZ) They were never coming to fix the water, were they?

FERNANDEZ – Fix that, and get out of here.

AVERY – It's garbage. Look. Look at it. Tomorrow, I'll cut out the rot and make a new eave.

FERNANDEZ – Forget it. You could have hurt them. I should call the police. You would need a great deal of money to get out of prison here. Do you have a great deal of money? Then get in your truck. The minute you leave, I'll call Pastor Lloyd and make sure you are recalled.

AVERY – I'll put on a fresh coat of paint. I'll patch the holes in the wall. And I will reinforce the gate and nothing will get in. I get it, Señora Fernandez, you've been feeding them, and the rest of us abandoned you.

FERNANDEZ – You're not ordained – I've no use for you.

AVERY – Let me repair Casa de Niños.

FERNANDEZ – There is nothing you can do here.

AVERY – I can make it the home you want. Is God's grace here?

FERNANDEZ – Of course not – they will not accept him.

AVERY – How can you tell me His grace isn't here with all you've given them every day. He is here everywhere, in your bolillos, your locks, your cots, and your lies to protect them from strangers. It's just a matter of opening their eyes to Him.

FERNANDEZ – Pastor, you are unsuited – you are just talk.

AVERY – Children are children. He will come to them. God does not discriminate.

FERNANDEZ — You are terribly wrong. You're like all the other pastors that man sends.

AVERY — No, Ma'am, I am not. I know how to build. If the whole place falls down, how can you bring them anything, let alone His grace?

I know you have manipulated, and connived, and borrowed, and paid out of your own pocket to keep this place open. Look at the drawings. Cuauhtémoc told them to draw a house. They didn't draw their own houses, they drew this one. They drew the home you made for them. I know that they love this home. The one you built for them. Did any other pastor figure that out? How much more suited does a man have to be?

Why did Pastor Lloyd chose me? I don't know. But if he had to send for me specially, driving days out in the ranches to find me. . . we're probably thinking the same thing - after me, he's got no one else to send.

FERNANDEZ — What do you want?

AVERY — Give me room and board for two months. One month. I will fix your roof inside of four weeks.

FERNANDEZ — I can't offer you—

AVERY — Take half my stipend they send you. Use it to buy the children whatever you want. If I can't fix it in a month, I will leave.

(beat)

FERNANDEZ — One month.

AVERY — Go Indios.

FERNANDEZ — I'll show you to the Community House.

DIEGO — Calle Zaragoza 144.

(AVERY drops his gym bag down.)

AVERY — I've got a tent. Here's good.

(BLACKOUT)