

UNTITLED DRAMA SAMPLE FILM TREATMENT

by Josefina Lopez

A mother loses a baby and is unable to go on with her marriage and life, but with the emotional support and cooking of several women from a humble Mexican village in which she seeks refuge, she gains the courage to face her loss, save her marriage, and help other mothers experiencing the same heart break.

The year is 1997.... LINDA ROBLES, 35, a Latina Professor of Latin American Studies, lectures on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the university where she teaches. At the end of class, one of her Latina students tells her she needs an extension on her essay for her final because she has been unable to focus after her father passed away. Linda tells her she does not give extensions. She can turn in the paper late, but she will penalize her for it by lowering her grade. Her student begs her for some compassion because if she can't maintain her GPA, she could lose her scholarship and will have to drop out. Linda tells her that she understands her situation, but can't make an exception for her. "You're a Latina, you know you have to work three times harder to stay in college, this is unacceptable. Look at me, I'm pregnant and I have strep throat, but I don't let that stop me from doing my work."

Linda and her husband ANDREW OLSEN, 40s, a tenured Biology Professor at the same university where Linda teaches, attend a dinner party with their colleagues and friends from the university. They discuss how amazing Linda is to be pregnant and working so hard to get tenure. DEAN ESTELA SANCHEZ, 60s, a wise Latina with a kind heart, tells Linda that not only does she look beautiful pregnant, but she has not slowed down and is probably going to get tenure. Her husband agrees and remembers how challenging it was for him to get his tenured position in the Science Department. Linda reveals that she and her husband don't know the gender of their baby, but she feels that she is going to give birth to a son and she wants to call him Alex. "Last night I had a dream where my son told me he wanted to be called Alex." They all smile at her not knowing how to respond. Dean Sanchez asks her, "So the baby could talk in your dream?" Linda replies, "No, he was already a grown man."

At a New Year's Eve party, Linda, now nine months pregnant and ready to give birth, dances in a circle with her sister, CATALINA, 30s, and her mother, DELIA, 60s. Linda's water suddenly breaks and she gasps. Andrew runs to the dance floor to hug her and they rush Linda off to the hospital.

Linda gives birth to a baby boy at Sacred Heart Hospital. The baby boy has the chord wrapped around his neck and he is born blue. Linda asks, "Why is he blue?" The doctor and nurses assure her everything is fine, but the baby looks distressed.

At the hospital Linda takes a selfie with her husband and her baby, her mother and sister, and posts it on Facebook to inform all her friends and colleagues about Alex's birth. All her friends give her 'likes' and congratulations.

Linda takes the baby home, but a few days later the baby has a seizure. They rush the baby to the hospital and they discover the baby suffers from a condition called Tetralogy of Fallot; one of his arteries did not develop when she had strep throat. The Doctor informs her, "There's nothing we can do. Your baby will only live two or three weeks, but he can die at any second." Linda hugs her baby tightly and cries, "No, no, no, he can't die!" Time passes and Linda is still holding him and refuses to let go of him. Andrew tells her, "Come on, let's go home. You haven't had any sleep. Look, he's going to die. We can't do anything about it. We have to let him go." She snaps back at him, "No, didn't you hear he can die at any second. I can't leave Alex alone, he needs me. I will not let him go!" Andrew shakes his head and leaves frustrated.

The pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) contains all the babies born with medical conditions. Linda is always there holding her baby and caressing the other babies. Linda asks the nurse, "Where are the mothers of all these other babies?" The Nurse sincerely replies, "Well, some of these mothers have other children to tend. Some mothers are single or teenage mothers who don't want to be here when they die."

Linda falls asleep in the PICU. It is night and no one else is around. She wakes up and sees a Priest standing over her. Linda stares at him and he sits next to her. "How are you doing?" he asks kindly. She doesn't really want to answer him. He tells her, "I'm Father O'Malley. I just want you to know you are not alone. You are doing a fine job of looking after these other babies too. Just know that no matter what happens, you are going to be all right." Linda nods and smiles. "You have a good night my dear child, you will be all right." The next morning she asks one of the nurses when Father O'Malley will be returning. The Nurse tells her there is no priest working at the hospital and she's never heard of Father O'Malley. Linda tries to explain to her what happened last night, but the Nurse looks at her with concern shaking her head. A short time later Andrew shows up also worried for her mental state. "The doctor and nurses are concerned you are not well. You have been here for more than two weeks without sleep." Linda angrily replies, "I swear to you I saw that priest. I'm not imaging things, so don't look at me like I'm going crazy." Andrew tells Linda she has to come home. Linda accuses him of abandoning the baby and her. Andrew tells her that he's not. He just has to move on and take care of the household. He's trying to be a good provider for her. Linda tells him, "Stay with me and be here for me. That's what I need right now." Andrew shakes his head and tells her he wants to be there for her, but he just can't, and he leaves.

That night, the baby takes his last breath in Linda's arms. She yells for the nurses, but the baby dies. Linda goes into shock. She is numb and can barely stand to be at the funeral. She cries when they throw dirt on the grave. Linda becomes outraged when

she comes back to her senses and realizes only her husband, sister, and parents came to the funeral. Linda sees that she has several posts on her FB with condolences for her loss, but none of her so-called friends and colleagues came to the actual funeral to be there for her. Linda loses it and sends out an angry post on Twitter and Facebook calling everybody a phony, and that they should all go to hell.

Linda's mother and her sister Catalina try to cheer her up, but she refuses their emotional support. She locks herself in her room and doesn't want to talk to anybody. Her sister Catalina tells her she knows how to help her. She suggests they go see her trusted friend Jules, a medium who might be able to communicate with babies' soul. Linda dismisses that idea as "stupid." "You must think I'm crazy for suggesting that."

Linda goes to the cemetery every day and sits at Alex's gravesite. The groundskeeper has to remind her every day that it's closing time. One day there is a fresh unearthed grave next to Alex's gravesite that reveals his coffin. Linda touches the dirt and little by little unearths more of the coffin. The groundskeeper sees her and asks her what she is doing. She whispers, "I just need to see him one last time." He tells her that's not possible and asks her where she works, and if he can call anyone to come get her.

Andrew finds out from the groundskeeper what she was trying to do and he tells her that she needs to go see a psychiatrist because she needs help. "I just wanted to see him one last time," she explains. He begs her, "You need to get on medication because you're depressed and not thinking straight. You can't let this break you."

Linda is called in to see Dean Sanchez at her office. Dean Sanchez has a beautiful office with pre-columbian art and a desk with a beautiful picture of a small Mexican village on her desk. Linda notices the picture and asks her about it. Dean Sanchez tells her she was born in La Jolla, in the state of Jalisco, but she left when her parents moved to the U.S. for a better life. She remembers how beautiful it was. She visits her aunt, who still lives there, on occasion. After the small talk, Dean Sanchez tells her that she got a call from the grounds keeper at the cemetery who was concerned about her mental state. A red flag went up for her when she saw Linda's nasty social media post after the funeral. "Linda, I believe in you, so I won't hold these things against you, but you do need time off to mourn and regroup. Take the summer off and I can get someone to cover your class. Go get fresh air, get away from social media, and just focus on getting back to you. I want you to get tenure. I need you to rest and get well so I don't have to let you go." Linda replies, "I don't know where to go. My husband has to teach this summer and I can't travel alone." Dean Sanchez tells her she is welcomed to go to her pueblito. She can stay with her aunt, who would be happy to host her. They will take care of her and she can do nothing but be with nature. Dean Sanchez tells her, "There's a beautiful river close by that is so serene. You'll love it there." Linda asks her, "Do I really have a choice?" Dean Sanchez replies, "Yes, you can choose to continue being a mess and ruin your academic career or you can go rest. Think about it."

Linda goes home and finds her husband has made a candlelight dinner for her. Linda plays along trying to appreciate his efforts to cheer her up. They finish dinner and he tries to kiss her and romance her to the bedroom. He whispers to her, "Let's have another baby." She pushes him away outraged. "Don't you get it?! Alex died and I lost a little piece of my soul! We are never going to replace him. You are not going to pretend like he didn't exist." He angrily replies, "I am not pretending he didn't exist. Alex is dead. He's gone. You have to get over it and move on. You can't keep crying and talking about him anymore." She snaps back, "I can't stop crying and I can't move on. I just can't get over it. I will never get over it!" He yells back, "Alex is dead, there's nothing more we could have done. You can't die with him." Linda yells, "I already died... I want to die. I just can't go on." She breaks down crying. He guides her to bed and she falls asleep crying.

In the middle of the night Linda gets out of bed, takes her purse and a few belongings and leaves her house. Linda arrives at the airport in Guadalajara, and a man named PORFIDIO SANCHEZ, 60s, lanky with a big moustache, picks her up and drives her to La Jolla. Linda is taken to Dean Sanchez's aunt's house up in the mountains in the middle of nowhere. Linda's cell phone does not work. No one has wifi, Porfidio explains. "There is only one telephone in the only mini-market in town, but it's too expensive to make calls, so hardly anyone uses it." La Jolla is a colorful town full of indigenous Mexicans dressed in traditional clothes and lots of regular Mexican campesinos (farmers).

Linda meets ANGELA, 70s, the matriarch of the Sanchez family, who instantly hugs and kisses her. She escorts her into a humble compound made of several small houses called "chosas." Angela explains how all of her brothers and sisters live in the same compound with each family living in a small chosa. The outdoor kitchen covered with an aluminum roof is a communal kitchen where everyone gathers to eat. The women cook for the men first and then after the men eat, the women eat. Linda will be staying with her, and Angelea has prepared her room. Linda's room is made-up of a corner in a bigger room, with curtains as walls. Linda is shocked and asks, "This is my room? But there are no walls." Angela says, "All our houses are one big room and we use curtains to divide the rooms, that way we can configure it however we like so that everyone fits." Angela excuses herself and goes to cook. When she returns to get Linda for dinner she refuses to come out and just wants to rest.

Linda refuses to come out of her makeshift room for several meals. She finally has to go to the bathroom and goes to the communal kitchen to ask where the bathroom is. FIVE MEXICAN WOMEN cook and laugh and joke around until they stop and see Linda. The women stare at Linda like a rare bird. Angela introduces Linda to the women. ROSA, 30s, a happy go lucky lady making tortillas by hand, waves at her. ELVIA, 40s, a short woman cutting cactus, smiles and nods. MARIANA, 30s, skinny with a long braid, plucking out the feather of a recently-killed chicken, tells her "Hola, bienvenida." JUANITA, 20s, shy and pretty, roasts peppers over the fire, nods to her. DOLORES, 60s, a quiet woman, washing dishes, turns and waves with one hand.

Linda tells them “Nice to meet you. Where is the bathroom?” They point to the bathroom and give her a stick. “What’s this for?” Linda asks. “To scare away the snakes and the frogs.” Linda does a double take thinking they are joking. She asks one of the ladies to come with her. Dolores volunteers and takes the stick.

Dolores goes into the bathroom which is an outhouse with only a curtain for a door. She lifts up the sticks revealing she is missing a hand. Linda tries not to stare at her missing hand, but can’t help but notice. Dolores scares the few frogs in the bathroom and catches a large snake with the stick. Linda screams, “Where are you taking that snake?” Dolores replies, “To the kitchen to cook it. You ever had snake? It’s delicious.” Dolores laughs and walks away leaving Linda to fend for herself.

The next day Linda joins the women for breakfast and sees how the women dutifully and quietly feed the men and prepare their lunches for their work. The men take off to the fields and the women go back to being jovial and playful like little girls.

The women invite Linda to join them at the river to do laundry. Linda doesn’t want to go, but they joke about her being a princess. The women teach Linda how to do laundry by hand in the river. They teach her how to feed chickens, plant seeds, harvest herbs, etc. They try to teach her how to do embroidery, but she’s so bad at it, they laugh at her. The women have a great time making fun of her in a loving way.

One morning they invite Linda to get up and cook. She’s exhausted from all the work she’s been forced to do and doesn’t want to get up. They joke with her and get her to come to the kitchen. They invite her to cook her favorite dish, and she tells them she does not like to cook. They ask her, “Your husband married you knowing you don’t cook?” Linda replies, “Yes, he married me because he was impressed with how smart I am.” “So what do you like to do?” Rosa asks her. Linda looks at them and smiles, “I love to teach. I love learning history and reading history books.” Mariana tells her, “You are so lucky you grew up in the U.S. and got to go to school.” The women tell Linda her life has been easy compared to theirs. Linda replies, “You may think growing up in the U.S. was easier, but I left Mexico when I was 13 and it was hard having to start over and learn a new way of life. I studied English, but I have a thick accent, so the gringos made fun of me and assumed I was dumb. I had to work three times harder to graduate from high school and college.” Juanita asks Linda if she can teach her how to write her name. Linda realizes that none of the women know how to read or write, and she teaches them to write their name. The women light up with joy when they see their name on a piece of a paper.

The next morning Linda wakes up early and prepares the corn so they can take it to the mill to turn it into masa (corn meal). On the way to the mill she sees homeless women on the street, including a deaf-mute woman, and the town prostitute. Women without men in this town are considered worthless. Linda is taught by Rosa how to make tortillas by hand and hears her sad story of how she almost killed herself because her

uterus stopped working, and she keeps having miscarriages, so her husband resents her and cheats on her to punish her.

Linda is taught how to make cheeses by Elvia, who shares her tragic story of how she was molested. She tells dirty jokes all the time so she can get over it.

Linda is taught how to make mole by Mariana, who shares how she was forced to get married at 14 and had several miscarriages and lost two children. Linda realizes that these ladies love to play like little girls because they never had a childhood. They have always had to work.

One day they visit the makeshift cemetery for the Sanchez family in the mountain, bringing flowers and food. Linda discovers that all the women have lost children too. All the women sit at their children's gravesite and talk to their children without shame or embarrassment. She realizes that these women have so much love and joy in their heart, despite their tragic life.

One day Linda is told her father is calling her. She runs to the mini-market and is disappointed to discover it's Andrew. She was hiding from him and he found her. He begs her to come to her senses and come back home. Linda angrily tells him, "You and I no longer have a home. I am not coming back. As a matter of fact I want a divorce." She hangs up.

Linda has to fly out the next day, but she is still too sad to leave. Angela asks her, "How do you escape? What makes you happy?" Linda tells them that dancing makes her happy so she decides to teach the women how to dance. They have the time of their life dancing and being little girls.

The next morning Linda tells Porfidio she can't leave to the airport. She's not ready to go back to her life. Linda helps Dolores get the corn ready for the mill. She notices a doll made out of corn husks which belongs to Dolores. Dolores tells Linda that her name is perfect for her because she is so pretty like a doll. Dolores tells her that when she was a young girl she always wanted a real doll that looked like her, but her family was so poor and what little money they had the father drank it away. One day he came home so drunk he had a machete and was going to kill her mother with it, but she got in the middle to protect her and he chopped off her hand.

Linda gets a call from Dean Sanchez asking her why she didn't attend the university orientation for the incoming Freshmen. Linda tells her she needs more time in La Jolla. Dean Sanchez tells her she needs to return by tomorrow or she's replacing her. Linda agrees to go back. The women see her sadness and ask her what's wrong. Linda explains she has to return to Los Angeles. She's afraid to go visit Alex's gravesite. She confesses to the women that she was trying to dig up her son's grave because she wanted to see him one more time and that she's not sure she won't do it again. The women stare at her with compassion and Dolores tells her, "You can't hold on to him or

he won't get his wings." They all take turns hugging her and making her feel better. Linda tells them, "I don't know what to do." Angela tells Linda, "All the answers are inside of you."

Linda has one last meal with the women and says goodbye to them. She thanks them for feeding her and sharing their stories, and tells them she will never forget them. Linda returns to the U.S. and stays with her sister. Catalina asks her whether she is serious about divorcing her husband. Linda assures her that she can never forgive him for the way he acted when Alex was still alive.

Linda visits Alex's gravesite. She says to Alex's spirit that she is going to let him go. She wants him to move on and get his angel wings. At that moment, Linda feels someone touching her shoulder, kissing her forehead. Linda feels him holding her and she cries from joy. She whispers, "You are here with me, I know it."

One of Linda's professor friends asks to join her for lunch. The professor apologizes for not going to Alex's funeral. Linda accepts her apology and tells her she apologizes for her comment on FB. Linda tells her that she is finally okay. When she visited her son's gravesite she felt him touching her on the shoulder and kissing her on her forehead, and after that she realized that her baby was not in his grave, but is always with her. She can feel him around her. The professor smiles at her, but she doesn't believe Linda is okay.

At the university she passes Andrew in the hallway and he tries to talk to her. She refuses to speak to him and tells him she is going to have her lawyer draw up the divorce papers soon. Andrew accuses her of abandoning him and not honoring her vows. She reminds him that he's the one who emotionally abandoned her and Alex first. He denies it. Linda tells him, "I wish you would believe me... I went to Alex's gravesite and Alex's spirit is around me. I wish you could feel him too." Andrew tells her she's not making sense and needs to get help. Linda tells him, "Stop dismissing what I feel. I know what I feel is real."

Linda agrees to go with her sister to see JESSE MARTIN, 30s, a Medium who is able to connect with Alex's spirit. He tells her that she and her baby's soul made an agreement. He's an old soul and they knew each other in a past life. Linda gets up and shakes her head, "No, you're just making this up. You're just taking advantage of me because I'm so desperate - -" He interrupts her, "Your son is here and his spirit is present... But he is appearing not as a baby but as a man in his thirties and he is standing behind you. He is touching your shoulders now." She cries and says, "I can feel him holding me! That's what I've been telling people and nobody believes me." Jesse reassures her, "Well, he's here and he's smiling. He's saying, 'Don't you remember we agreed that you would call me Alex and that I had to die so you would learn to open up your heart and let in love and compassion?'" Linda cries from joy having an epiphany. She touches her heart and says, "Yes, my heart remembers now. That's right. I wanted to learn the lesson that love never dies and you agreed to help

me learn it... Thank you. Thank you." Jesse tells her, "He is kissing you on the forehead and is saying to me that he has to go now. He will see you on the other side when it's your time to go." Catalina reaches out to her sister and they hold each other crying.

At the university, Linda meets with Dean Sanchez and several other male professors in a sterile conference room. Dean Sanchez reviews her performance and tells Linda, that despite some hiccups, she is most likely going to get tenure, but they have to ask her some questions that have raised red flags for the review committee. They found out from other professors that she has been telling them that her dead son's spirit is always around her and holding her by the shoulder. A male professor asks her, "You don't really believe that do you?" Linda looks at them and replies, "No, I don't believe that." They smile in relief that she's not crazy. She continues, "I don't believe that because I know it's real. My love for my son is so real that I can feel it." Dean Sanchez tells her, "Think very carefully what you are saying Professor Robles." Linda turns to her, "Dean Sanchez, thank you for letting me recuperate at La Jolla because I got to realize where I really belong, who I really am. I belong where I don't have to apologize for how I feel. I belong at a job where what's in my heart is what matters." Linda gets up and looks at them with love in her heart, "...And it's not here."

Linda walks into the pediatric intensive care unit at Sacred Heart Hospital. She sees a Latina mother all by herself crying over her baby. Linda walks up to her and asks, "How are you doing?" The mother tells her she has not slept and can't let her baby go because she is afraid if she puts him down, her baby will die. Linda tells her, "I will hold your baby so you can sleep for a few hours. I have been through what you're experiencing. I know how you're feeling. No matter what happens, you will be all right." The mother nods and hands her the baby. The mother rests on the bed next to the baby's incubator and Linda walks around with the baby talking to all the other babies born with birth medical conditions and who are going to die.

Linda agrees to meet Andrew at a diner to discuss their divorce. Andrew tells her to give him one more chance. He tells her he does not want to lose her, and that he is willing to believe her. She tells him that she doesn't care if he believes her or not, she knows what is real. What happened with Alex is real. Andrew opens up about how when she left him, he had time to reflect, and he realized that when he told her to "get over it and move on," he was repeating what his mother told him when he was five after his father died. He admits that losing Alex was so hard and painful, he couldn't be there for her because it brought up all the unresolved emotions he had when his own father died. He was not allowed to talk about it with his mother, and he learned to emotionally close down, and he stopped believing in God. He confesses, "Why would God allow the people we love to die?" Linda tells him, "Maybe God allows it because that's one way we know how much love we have for each other. I don't blame God anymore. My love for Alex will never die." Andrew cries, "That's right. The love I have for Alex and my father is still with me." Linda and Andrew embrace; he finally understands her.

Linda goes shopping at a department store for Christmas gifts and sees a sale for 50% off on all the large dolls. She looks at them and has a flashback of all the women in La Jolla laughing in the kitchen. Linda puts several dolls in her shopping cart.

Back in La Jolla, humble Christmas decorations adorn the pueblo and the house of the women. The ladies are busy making tamales for the Christmas Eve celebration. They hear a knock at the door and discover Linda and Andrew are outside with several bags. The women gasp when they see Linda outside with her gringo husband. They tell her he is so handsome. Linda tells all the ladies to gather in a private room. She tells their husbands to wait outside. Andrew awkwardly waits with the husbands of the women. She dims the lights and tells them to close their eyes. She puts the dolls on their laps and tells them to now open their eyes. The women ask, "Who do these dolls belong to?" Linda assures them, "These are your dolls." The ladies gasp in delight and then some of them cry with joy. They all start playing with the dolls and talking to their dolls as though they are the children they lost. Dolores asks, "Why is my doll missing a hand? I don't want her." Linda tells Dolores, "I gave you this doll because she is the most beautiful doll. Her name is Linda. She needs you. Don't you want her?" Dolores cries and takes the doll back and hugs her as though she is finally embracing and accepting all of herself.

Linda cooks them a delicious and elaborate meal and makes them sit at the table with flowers and decorations. The women sit the dolls on their lap and eat with them. Andrew pours them wine and Linda makes them feel special. The women are impressed by her cooking and thank her for treating them with such love. They have never been treated this kindly or felt this loved.

On New Year's Eve, Linda and the ladies celebrate with their dolls. They dance together in a circle with their dolls in front of them. Linda whispers to Andrew, "Let's have another baby." He lights up and kisses her.

THE END