

RISING

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A one-act drama by  
Arthur M. Jolly

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[www.youthplays.com](http://www.youthplays.com)  
[info@youthplays.com](mailto:info@youthplays.com)  
424-703-5315

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

STEVE, athletic, a do-er more than a thinker. (Failed a class.)

ANNABEL, short, sensitive. (Failed several classes.)

JENNIFER, popular, skates by on her looks. (Excessive absences.)

THOMAS, book-smart but awkward. (Excessive absences.)

ZOEY, smart-alec, aware. (Disruptive behavior.)

YOLANDA, tough, no-nonsense. (Disruptive behavior.)

JAVIER, guarded, touchy. (Fighting.)

All are middle school students.

NOAA ALERT - the prerecorded, robotic voice alerts of the NOAA automated warning system. Inhuman.

## SETTING

A middle school classroom in Houston, Texas.

## TIME

Friday, August 25th, 2017.

## NOTE ON CASTING DIVERSITY

The only characters who are specifically identified through the text are Xavier and Jennifer: Javier is a student of color, Jennifer is not.

A typical Houston summer program would have a broad diversity of students, and it is hoped that the casting can reflect a somewhat equal balance, in particular to avoid one character being seen as "representing" their race; but given the segregated nature of the city, and the realities of casting options for some drama groups, either Javier or Jennifer might indeed be the sole person of their particular heritage in the cast. An alternate line [in brackets] is included for those productions.

## NOTE

All author royalties from the sale or production of this play go to local charities involved in hurricane relief.

SCENE 1

In darkness:

NOAA AUTOMATED ALERT

Category 4 hurricane Harvey approaching. Catastrophic and life threatening flooding expected. Flash flood emergencies in parts of Southeastern Texas including Greater Houston. Do not attempt to travel in the affected area. Remain where you are and shelter in place.

Lights up. A classroom.

ANNABEL, JAVIER, JENNIFER, STEVE, THOMAS and ZOEY mill around, check their phones, etc. They move quickly but purposelessly - stressed but unable to do anything about it. YOLANDA stares out the window.

STEVE

(Looking at his phone:)

No signal. You?

JENNIFER

Nothing. Nothing at all.

THOMAS

This is like an emergency. There's no phones.

ANNABEL

I can't live without my phone. This is not good.

ZOEY

(To Yolanda:)

How's it looking?

YOLANDA

It's still coming down.

JAVIER

Coming down or coming up?

YOLANDA

Both. Oh, daaaaamn! Is that Miss Vee's car?

Others rush to the window.

ANNABEL

That's hers. Right? The yellow one.

Others ad-lib agreement, discussion.

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ZOEY

She is gonna be *i*-rate.

ANNABEL

Why do teachers always have such crappy cars?

JAVIER

Stuff like this happens to'em.

YOLANDA

It just moved. Like, sideways!

STEVE

Cars don't... it's not like they *float*.

YOLANDA

It slid like a foot.

THOMAS

That current's gotta be bad.

ANNABEL

Maybe that's why the bus never came. You think anyone can get to us?

ZOEY

Not driving. 'less they got like a monster truck.

YOLANDA

My mom don't even have a car.

JAVIER

She's out of luck - there ain't no buses running now.

YOLANDA

Ya think? You like, you figured that all by yourself, huh. You're real smart.

JAVIER

(Huffily, moving away:)

Pfffah!

THOMAS

Well, they said to shelter in place. Guess this is the place.

ANNABEL

Last day of Promotion Retention. Gotta be ready for the new year.

ZOEY

Think it was worth it? Do you feel you have "satisfied promotion standards and demonstrated preparedness for the next grade level?"

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JAVIER

I think I'm taller.

ANNABEL

I don't even know what Promotion Retention means.

STEVE

Summer school for dumbasses and troublemakers.

ANNABEL

Speak for yourself.

STEVE

Bite me.

JENNIFER

I wasn't gonna come in today. My mom said we should just stay home.

JAVIER

Well, that's fine for you.

JENNIFER

What?

JAVIER

Nothing.

JENNIFER

Are you mad at me about something?

JAVIER

Nah.

JENNIFER

I don't want to be here. I shouldn't be here. None of us should - they should have told everyone to leave. Get out of town before it hit.

JAVIER

Oh, okay. Yeah. Your Mom gonna give Yolanda a lift?

YOLANDA

Don't bring me into this.

JENNIFER

I don't know. Sure, you know what? Sure. If she'd asked.

JAVIER

How about everyone else? She gonna give them all a lift? Whole town?

JENNIFER

What is your issue? Do you need a hug?

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JAVIER

Not everyone can just leave.

JENNIFER

Well, we could, and we should of, so excuse me if I'm a little annoyed that I'm stuck here with you guys.

JAVIER

You're annoyed.

(To the others:)

She's annoyed. A little annoyed.

STEVE

Hey, don't start.

JAVIER

I'm not starting nothing.

THOMAS

This is not helping.

JAVIER

(To Jennifer:)

My mom works, and I'm in P-R-S-P 'cause I got nowhere else to be - and we can't just pick up and drive somewhere else.

JENNIFER

It sucks to be you, I guess. If it makes you feel better, looks like me and all my privilege are gonna drown right next to you, so that kind of evens out.

THOMAS

No one's gonna drown.

ANNABEL

I can't swim.

THOMAS

Seriously, no-one's gonna drown! The water's like two feet deep, we could wade home. You'll get your pants wet, this is not life or death.

YOLANDA

Oh shoot! Look at it now!

They rush to the windows.

STEVE

Cars don't float. Cars can't float.

THOMAS

It's not floating, exactly - just... sliding.

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YOLANDA

It's going into the bayou. It's... it's...

ZOEY

There it goes!

They react audibly, watching a car rolled over by flood water.

JAVIER

Miss Vee's car just tipped over. It's in the bayou.

ZOEY

She is gonna be *i-rate*.

A beat.

JAVIER

Where is Miss Vee? She ain't back yet.

STEVE

She wouldn't have left us. It's not like she would just leave us alone, right?

ZOEY

Her car's still here. Well, in the bayou, but...

STEVE

It's upside down, but it's here.

ZOEY

Yeah!

A beat.

ANNABEL

Would she have, you know...tried to go for help?

JAVIER

What do you -

ANNABEL

She wasn't in it, was she?

A worried moment.

Lights out.



## SCENE 2

In darkness:

NOAA AUTOMATED ALERT

Hurricane warnings continue for inland areas near the center of Harvey. Unprecedented flooding occurring across Greater Houston. Do not attempt to travel in the affected area. Avoid areas of standing water - flood waters may be contaminated. Remain where you are and shelter in place.

Lights up.

Steve enters.

STEVE

She's not here. There's no-one else on this floor.

ANNABEL

She wouldn't leave without us.

STEVE

Well she's not on this floor.

ZOEY

What about other - there's got to be other teachers, right? Getting ready for Monday, or... I mean, there's no kids, but there's still some - like, adults? Who's in charge?

STEVE

There's no one else up here. The stairs just go down into water, dunno if anyone's still down there, you're welcome to go down and look if you want.

YOLANDA

We're on our own?

STEVE

I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine.

ANNABEL

She wouldn't just leave us.

STEVE

I. Don't. Know. ...Oh, and the water's out.

ANNABEL

What do you mean, the water's out?

STEVE

The drinking fountain. You know how you press the button and water comes out?

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ANNABEL

Why are you talking to me like I'm -

STEVE

Well, you press the button now, and water doesn't.

ANNABEL

I'm not an -

STEVE

Come out. As in, no water in the drinking fountain, as in:  
The water's out. Thought that was pretty clear.

YOLANDA

You don't have to be a jerk about it.

JAVIER

Can we all just - look, we're all kinda stressed -

STEVE

Ya think?

JAVIER

So just chill. Cut each other a break.

ZOEY

Someone's gonna have to go to the cafeteria, get some water  
bottles.

JENNIFER

They're gonna be here soon.

ANNABEL

You've been saying that for three hours! We are stuck here.

JAVIER

We could be here overnight.

JENNIFER

Nah-unh.

JAVIER

Yah-unh. We could be here for a couple of days.

JENNIFER

That won't happen.

JAVIER

You don't know that.

STEVE

And you don't know either. We're not gonna be here for days.  
They don't just leave kids stuck in a flooded building.

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JAVIER

My Mom was in Katrina, she told me all about it. Don't tell me people don't get left in buildings - don't think for one minute people don't get left. She was pregnant, with me. I was born in Katrina. A whole hospital full of people got left. For a week.

JENNIFER

Not white people.

YOLANDA

What did you just say?

JENNIFER

Hey - I'm not saying it's right, I'm not saying it's fair - but this isn't New Orleans. This is Houston, and white kids don't get left. They will come for us.

A beat.

JAVIER

Go to hell.

THOMAS

This isn't about race -

JAVIER

Don't you start -

THOMAS

Or maybe it is, but there are people who will come and get us, we just need to wait this out.

JAVIER

'Cause white kids are just so precious.

THOMAS

All of us. They're gonna come for all of us.

YOLANDA

We're in this together.

JAVIER

It's gonna be a lot longer than you guys think.

ZOEY

Then someone needs to go to the cafeteria and get some water bottles.

JAVIER

Knock yourself out.

ZOEY

We're gonna need water.

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YOLANDA  
So who goes?

STEVE  
Rock, paper, scissors? How deep is it?

Yolanda checks the window.

YOLANDA  
Dunno. Maybe four feet.

ANNABEL  
I can't swim.

YOLANDA  
Yeah, you said.

ANNABEL  
And I'm short.

STEVE  
So?

ANNABEL  
So I don't think I should be the one to go.

YOLANDA  
Nah, means you should go now while you still can. Tomorrow,  
when it's deeper, then we send the tallest.

Some of them laugh.

JENNIFER  
Shortest goes first!

THOMAS  
Yeah, pipsqueak!

ANNABEL  
How about the best swimmer?

JAVIER  
That makes sense, right Steve?

STEVE  
Oh, so I'm the best swimmer.

ANNABEL  
Aren't you?

STEVE  
Well... yeah. But...

A beat. The amusement ends.

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JENNIFER

What if it does get to... what if we have to swim for it?  
It's getting higher.

THOMAS

Zoey's right. Someone should get water now - food too, if there is any - whatever's in the cafeteria. Look, if the Sheriff's department comes and rescues us in ten minutes, fine, someone got wet for nothing - we'll all get wet getting down to the boat anyway.

ANNABEL

I can't -

STEVE

I'll carry you, shorty.

THOMAS

(To the others:)

And if Javier's right, and they don't come - we have supplies. We can get through the night... however long this takes. If we wait now, that water's only gonna be deeper.

YOLANDA

That makes sense.

Everyone ad-libs agreement.

ANNABEL

But who's gonna go?

(To Steve:)

You wanna volunteer? You're on the swim team.

STEVE

I'm not on the wading team.

ZOEY

We choose for it.

YOLANDA

I'm thinking of a number between one and ten, and everyone chose it 'cept me.

JAVIER

Funny.

THOMAS

I have my dice.

He rummages in his book bag -  
finds an RPG die.

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THOMAS (cont'd)

Twenty sided. We take turns - first one to roll a twenty goes.

JENNIFER

You are such a nerd.

THOMAS

It's fair.

He rolls the die. A beat, and he quickly covers it with his hand.

THOMAS (cont'd)

Wait.

ZOEY

Did you just -

STEVE

Lemme see that.

THOMAS

Wait, cause we didn't all agree yet. We hadn't started yet.

Steve pulls Thomas' hand away.

STEVE

Oh, man. What are the odds?

YOLANDA

I'm thinking one in twenty.

ZOEY

You are gonna get *dee-renched*.

THOMAS

But you guys didn't agree that's how we were gonna choose!

YOLANDA

Hey, you rolled it.

JENNIFER

Look at it this way - think of it like a quest. Like, you're gonna go throw the one true ring into Balrog.

THOMAS

Balrog? Are you kidding me, Balrogs are Demons of Might. Durin's Bane was a Balrog - I think you mean -

JENNIFER

Who cares!

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THOMAS

Well, Gandalf for one, when he defeated Durin's Bane at the Bridge of Khazad-dûm.

JAVIER

I'm about ready to throw you down the stairs myself.

THOMAS

Okay! I'll go! Natural twenty. The dice decide. It's like they say in my group - "Live by the die, and die by the die."  
(Beat. No one laughs.)

I'm not going to betray a sacred oath.

ZOEY

You're very brave.

THOMAS

And Steve can come with me.

STEVE

What?

THOMAS

How much water can I carry by myself? It's gonna take two of us.

STEVE

Have you looked down the stairwell?

ANNABEL

Why is this our problem? Where's the teachers? Where's anyone?

YOLANDA

They're all down in the teacher's lounge, grading papers.

ANNABEL

Really?

YOLANDA

No. Not really.

JAVIER

Okay, look - you two go get water, food. Check if anyone is downstairs, like up on their desks or something. We're gonna check the rest of the second floor, make sure no one else is up here, just "shelterin' in place" like us fools.

STEVE

I looked up here.

JAVIER

We're gonna look again. Search everywhere, closets, labs - wherever.

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STEVE

A lot of the doors were locked.

JAVIER

So we kick'em open. Bust a few windows.

JENNIFER

I don't think you should do that.

JAVIER

What are you talking about? Are you worried we're gonna damage school property? The first floor is underwater!

JENNIFER

It's... No, you're right. We... it's just weird to... you're right. If we need to break a door, we break a door.

ZOEY

This is survival. Different rules.

THOMAS

I have always wanted to kick the vending machine. That thing jams - I have lost more money in that -

JENNIFER

Real food. Not just snacks. Water, first.

THOMAS

Okay.

ZOEY

Get some bags too.

JAVIER

Bags?

ZOEY

Like, plastic bags. From the cafeteria, or the janitor's - just bring some bags.

STEVE

Why do we need bags?

A beat.

ZOEY

Where are the restrooms?

STEVE

On the first - Oh Jeez...

ZOEY

Yeah.

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STEVE

They're under water.

ZOEY

Yeah.

THOMAS

Which means all the water down there will be... like... overflow. Floating...

ZOEY

It's flood water, how clean did you think it would be?

THOMAS

How bad do we actually need those water bottles?

ZOEY

How bad do you think I need a bag right now?

THOMAS

You're gonna go... in a bag?

ZOEY

I'm not exactly happy about it.

THOMAS

What if you like... out the window.

ZOEY

Oh my God, shut up. Seriously, shut up.

YOLANDA

She's a girl.

THOMAS

I know. It's just -

ZOEY

No "*just*" - shut up.

THOMAS

Okay. I'll shut up.

(Beat.)

They never show that in disaster movies. Like the volcano one, or the aliens blow up New York... where does everyone go to the bathroom?

ZOEY

He's not shutting up.

THOMAS

But they never show it. I mean, not *show* it, but they never explain it. When the world ends, and the good guys are trying to escape the whatever it is...they've got to go sometime.

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ZOEY

Why isn't he shutting up?

THOMAS

The Rock's saving his daughter after that earthquake - where does he go to the bathroom?

YOLANDA

Out the window.

JENNIFER

Get going! That water's only getting deeper.

Steve and Thomas head for the door.

STEVE

Wait!

YOLANDA

What?

STEVE

Are there any dry clothes? For after?

YOLANDA

Thought all you jocks had a gym bag somewhere.

STEVE

I do. In my locker, on the first floor.

YOLANDA

Oops.

ANNABEL

We'll check the lockers up here. We'll find something.

STEVE

'kay.

(To Thomas:)

All right, hobbit. Let's do this. Onward into Balrog.

THOMAS

(As they exit:)

I literally just explained that. Were you not even listening - it's not Balrog, it's Mordor. Okay, in the Second Age, Sauron disguised himself as Annatar, and taught the elves how to forge these rings which give like magical powers to whoever wears them...

Lights out.

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## SCENE 3

In darkness:

NOAA AUTOMATED ALERT

Flooding conditions contin....

(Static.)

... unprecedented rainfall amounts...

(Static.)

... exceeding forty two inches. Flash flood warning in effect for...

(Static.)

... expected to reach more than seventeen feet in some...

(Static.)

... where you are and...

(Static.)

... in place and...

A long burst of static, then...  
silence.

Lights up.

The room is darker. There are six  
absolutely disgustingly filthy  
water bottles on the floor.

Zoey flicks the light switch a  
few times.

ZOEY

And we've lost power.

YOLANDA

Well, we knew that was gonna happen at some point.

ANNABEL

(To Javier:)

How's your foot?

JAVIER

Shut up.

ANNABEL

That was pretty funny.

(Mocking Javier:)

I'm gonna kick this door down! I'm so big and strong! I'm  
tougher than any door!

She mimes kicking a door, grabs  
her foot and hops around.

ANNABEL (cont'd)

Bong! ... Ow! Ow! Oh my poor wittle-piggies!

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JAVIER

Shut up!

ZOEY

You didn't notice the doors are metal!

JAVIER

It's not funny.

YOLANDA

It's pretty funny.

JAVIER

I think I broke a toe.

ZOEY

We're gonna have to be smarter about this. We gotta think things out.

JAVIER

How about I just kick *you* a bit, I could do that.

JENNIFER

It's not like Steve and Tommy did much better.

ZOEY

They got water.

JENNIFER

That we can't drink! Six bottles covered in... I don't want to *know*.

ANNABEL

I'm hoping it's just mud and stuff from outside.

YOLANDA

I got it.

JAVIER

What?

YOLANDA

The water bottles. I got an idea.

JENNIFER

The water bottles are disgusting. There's like - you can't just wipe that off.

ZOEY

They are *con-taminated*.

YOLANDA

There's always that hand sanitizer on Mr. Sperry's desk, right?

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ZOEY

Mr. Clean-freak? There was last year.

YOLANDA

We put that hand sanitizer all over'em, kill the bacteria and stuff. Then we open one, and we use that water to wash off the others.

JENNIFER

That's pretty good.

YOLANDA

I'm gonna go check his room.

Yolanda exits as Steve and Thomas enter - wearing mismatched, ill-fitting clothes.

YOLANDA (cont'd)

(In passing:)

Stylin'. ... I'll be back.

STEVE

Do not laugh.

ANNABEL

That's okay - we're all laughed out after Javier kicked a metal door.

THOMAS

Sorry about the water. We did what we could. Maybe if this all happened next week, there'd be more supplies.

ANNABEL

It's okay, Yolanda figured something out.

THOMAS

Like what?

ANNABEL

Hand sanitizer, then use one to wash the others.

THOMAS

Nice.

STEVE

If we've got hand sanitizer, I wanna do my whole body from the neck down.

THOMAS

Me too.

JENNIFER

That bad?

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THOMAS

You have no idea.

Yolanda enters with a bottle of hand sanitizer.

YOLANDA

He had a brand new one. Must be getting ready for Monday.

ANNABEL

I'm guessing the first day of school is gonna get pushed back a few days.

JAVIER

Or a few weeks - a little extra vacation time.

ANNABEL

'less we drown.

(Beat.)

I'm just saying.

Yolanda tosses the hand sanitizer at Annabel.

ANNABEL (cont'd)

What?

YOLANDA

You ain't too short to clean'em.

Annabel starts to remonstrate, Yolanda bristles... Annabel backs down and starts cleaning the water bottles.

ZOEY

(To Thomas:)

So your quest wasn't in vain.

THOMAS

That's something. Sorry about the food.

JENNIFER

You got what you could.

ZOEY

I think you were very brave.

THOMAS

Thanks.

YOLANDA

You two are so cute together.

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Shut up.

ZOEY

Wish you could've got something, though. I'm hungry.

JAVIER

Me too.

ZOEY

Anyone got anything?

JAVIER

I got a bag of Ritz crackers.

YOLANDA

Well, break'em out!

JAVIER

Yeah!

ZOEY

Well, I don't have - It's like, you know. They're all I -

YOLANDA

Come on - make with the Ritz!

JAVIER

Yolanda reluctantly takes a sandwich baggie out of her book bag or desk.

That's like four crackers.

JAVIER (cont'd)

Yeah.

YOLANDA

You said a bag of crackers.

JAVIER

They're in a bag.

YOLANDA

That's four crackers!

JAVIER

That's four more than you got!

YOLANDA

Okay. Sorry. I would be very grateful if you could see your way to giving me one of your four whole crackers.

JAVIER

Yolanda offers him a cracker -  
which he eats.

What about me? ZOEY

Well... YOLANDA

Well? ZOEY

I'm hungry too. STEVE

We're all hungry. ANNABEL

I've got three left. YOLANDA

Maybe, we can - share them. THOMAS

Half a Ritz cracker? Oh, we're gonna be stuffed. Need to take a nap after that. ZOEY

These are mine. YOLANDA

Why don't we choose who - THOMAS

Put your damn dice away. These are mine. I'm sorry if you think that's selfish, but - YOLANDA

Well, a little. STEVE

These are mine. YOLANDA

A beat.

I'll give you a dollar. JENNIFER

What? YOLANDA

I'll give you a dollar for a Ritz. JENNIFER

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I'm not selling my - YOLANDA

Two. JENNIFER

That's not fair. ZOEY

They're her crackers. She can do what she wants with them. ANNABEL

I don't have any money. ZOEY

I do. That's capitalism. JENNIFER

How much you got? YOLANDA

Like, eight bucks. JENNIFER

Huh. Eight bucks for a Ritz? YOLANDA

A beat.

I'll give you twenty. THOMAS

The others react.

What? YOLANDA

Thomas gestures to hold on, it's okay - and carefully reaches into the bag and pulls out a cracker.

I will give you twenty dollars for this cracker. THOMAS

Okay. YOLANDA

He eats it.

A pause.

Mmm-mmh. THOMAS

Well?  
YOLANDA

Well what?  
THOMAS

Where's my twenty dollars?  
YOLANDA

I don't have it. I don't have twenty dollars, I'm not gonna be able to get it.  
THOMAS

But you can't do that.  
YOLANDA

But I did.  
THOMAS

That's like - you stole that. That's theft.  
YOLANDA

You were charging eight bucks for a single cracker, that's also theft. That's called price gouging.  
THOMAS

Nah, that's - she said it, that's just capitalism.  
YOLANDA

I don't know... It didn't feel right.  
JENNIFER

You started it.  
ZOEY

But it didn't feel right.  
JENNIFER

It's wrong.  
THOMAS

Wrong? Bitch, you just stole my Ritz!  
YOLANDA

A beat.

I'll give you twenty bucks for another one.  
THOMAS

Yolanda tries to hit him.

Zoey grabs the bag and runs.

Annabel grabs it from her.

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Steve grabs it from Annabel, but  
Jennifer jumps in.

YOLANDA

(Overlapping the action:)

Those are mine! Get off - give those back!

They end up scrabbling over the  
bag - which gets ripped open, the  
crackers crushed and eaten by  
whoever can get to the pieces.

The others pull away, leaving  
Yolanda holding the ripped - and  
empty - bag.

A beat.

JAVIER

What are we doing?

Yolanda goes off by herself,  
crying.

Lights out.

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