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# **Live to Tell**

By  
ERIC COBLE

**Dramatic Publishing Company**  
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(LIVE TO TELL)

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“Creation and original production were funded by the women’s  
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“Originally commissioned and produced by Palm Beach Dramaworks.”

*Live to Tell* was commissioned by Palm Beach Dramaworks (William Hayes, Producing Artistic Director; Sue Ellen Beryl, Managing Director) and funded by the women’s philanthropic group Impact 100 Palm Beach County. The play premiered on Feb. 20, 2020 (Boca Raton, Fla.).

CAST:

ALISON .....Natalie Donahue McMahon

MAKAYLA..... Marlo Rodriguez

ISABELLA ..... Krystal Millie Valdez

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... Gary Cadwallader

Scene Designer.....Michael Amico

Costume Designer.....Benjamin Baxley

# Live to Tell

## CHARACTERS

ALISON: 15 years old, dressed in slightly heightened-sexuality teen clothes.

MAKAYLA: 15 years old, dressed in nice, middle-class teen clothes.

ISABELLA: 15 years old, dressed in a T-shirt, jeans and worn sneakers. Speaks both Spanish and English.

PRODUCTION NOTE: Producers are encouraged to update references and language to suit the needs of their community and current trends.



# Live to Tell

*(A bare stage representing different areas in a city. ALISON, ISABELLA and MAKAYLA sit in metal chairs in separate areas, facing the audience.)*

ALISON, ISABELLA & MAKAYLA *(to the audience)*.

Where are the other girls??

MAKAYLA. Why are you keeping us separate?

ISABELLA. *Nos estás arrestando a todos?*

ALISON. Are they under arrest?

MAKAYLA. Am I under arrest?

ISABELLA. *Dijieron que me arrestarías.*

MAKAYLA. He's the one you should be arresting. Not me.  
Not them.

ALISON. I just came to see the doctor, you weren't even supposed to, like, be here.

ISABELLA. *Puedo ver al médico otra vez?*

MAKAYLA. I need to make sure they're OK.

ALISON *(yelling)*. MAKAYLA!!

MAKAYLA. Them and my parents. You need to check on my parents and my brother.

ISABELLA. I need to—my English isn't so good.

ALISON. Except don't call my mom, my mom's like the exact one person you shouldn't call, she doesn't deserve to know where I am. I been gone for, like, three years and I never saw her out driving up and down looking for me. That's old news, she never—I mean stuff wasn't, like, good between us before my dad left, but after that, it ALL went



down the toilet. She, like, blamed me when I was like, “Hello? Who’s the drunk one here? Who’s out almost every night and bringing guys home and, like—I was like twelve years old, she was supposed to be the adult, you know?”

MAKAYLA (*holding herself*). My parents are cool. They’re just like, um, super busy. My mom works for the city and Dad’s with a law office. But it’s worse when they are around, because they don’t get me. And the more they don’t get me the more they come up with these stupid rules. I was twelve and getting good grades and in sports, and just when they should have been treating me like a grown-up, they were making me more and more into a baby. (*Putting on a funny voice.*) “Don’t do this,” “Don’t do that,” “Don’t do this.” (*Drops the funny voice.*) My big brother Troy is the only one who gets me, he’s smart and cool, he’s just too busy gettin’ into the next champion series of *Fortnite* to pay me any attention.

ISABELLA. *Mi madre y mi padre son como los santos—esto los va a matar*—um. My mother and father, they’re good people. Very good people. We lived in—there’s a *pueblito* in Guatemala. Maybe I shouldn’t tell you the name. But they need to know I’m OK, but you can’t tell them what happened. They sent me here to make me good. Safe. There was gangs. My cousin was killed, I was twelve, and the man, he says to *Mama y Papa*, “Isabella can get a job in *los Estados Unidos*, be safe there. There’s cooks—or cleaners, food cleaners—make \$1,000 in a week, and no gangs.” So *Mama y Papa y mi tios y tias* get \$3,000 to pay the man to take me to *El Norte*, and I had a *tio* in Florida to take me in. I would be safe even if my family’s not.

ALISON. And school’s never been my game. I’m pretty smart when it comes to people and art and makeup and pets—but like weird pets? I had this friend in third grade, he had like a snake and lizards, and those guys—like scaly things? They

love me for some reason. I know, right? So I was like, I bet I can get a job in a pet store and be like “The Lizard Lady” or whatever. But I was sucking at the whole middle school thing. And on my report card I had all these Ds and me and my mom were already in, like, *ScreamFest-O-Rama*, and I did not want to show her those grades, so instead of going home after school I went to the 7-Eleven. Except I didn’t have any money, but I know the guy who works there and he let me just sit out front for like hours. And then this Ford Mustang pulls up. And I’m not gonna lie, that car was hot. And this guy gets out—ripped jeans, boots, sunglasses, muscle shirt, jacket, twenty-one or twenty-two—not quite as hot as the car, but not bad, you know. And he smiles at me and goes into the store and I’m still sittin’ there spacin’, lookin’ at his car, and he comes back out and he’s like, “You waitin’ for someone?” and I’m like— (*Shrugs.*) And he’s like, “You want a beer or somethin’?” and I’m like “PFFF. I’m not old enough to drink!” And he’s like all surprised, all like, “You totally look eighteen.” And I’m like, “Clearly those are not prescription sunglasses, old man,” but he goes inside and buys me a hot dog and spicy sweet chile Doritos and a Red Bull, and we sit on the curb eating, and I’m wishing some of the kids from school would drive by and see me hanging with this guy—and we’re talking like about how him and his mom fought all the time too and he moved out when he was fifteen and did I need a place to stay, just for tonight? I could crash with him and his girlfriend in their apartment and I was like, you know what, none of my perv alarm bells are goin’ off and I’ve had a better time in the last twenty minutes with this guy than in the last two years at home, and if Mackenzie and Nicole happen to see me driving around with this guy in this car that’s not a bad thing ... and I’m like, “Cool, OK, whatever, let’s go.”

ISABELLA. “Let’s go, let’s go!” That’s all I hear for days and days and months. The *contrabandista*—the coyote—he knows a lot of people, and they move me in big trucks and little trucks and I sleep in houses on sacks of cocaine and marijuana and there’s rats and they never call me by my name, just “*El Paquete*,” but I think, “No, my name is Cricket.” *Mi papa* always called me Cricket. *Mi abuela* would hold me in her arms and tell me about this little cricket who made a beautiful song for her town, but she had to go share her song with the world. So, when I hide under bags in the back of a car and police get paid to not see me and I’m hungry and scared and I want to cry I think, “I’m Cricket. I’m Cricket. The world needs me.”

MAKAYLA. I needed some shoes. That’s how it started, honestly. Weirdly. I’d cry to my mom, “I just want to look good!” and she’d go— (*Snarky voice.*) “You look perfectly fine,” and that was the end of that. She wouldn’t even let me spend my own allowance! But there were these sneakers—These Guccis, sparkly pink. It was love at first sight. Because it’s not like I don’t have friends, but I’m not—if I had these shoes, I’d finally nail it, you know? Like the real me could finally come out ... I’d be me in those shoes. And I tried to get my brother on my side, but he’d just say, “I am not talking to women about shoes.” So I’m like, “Mom, pleeeeeeease,” and she’s like, “No.” I’m crying in my room and I made all these *TikTok* videos, singing all the stupid stuff my mom says. See, when I was little and I’d get mad, I’d set my dolls in a circle and I’d sing really really loud at them, which is so punchy, I know, but I was little. But now it’s videos, and this new guy, like twenty years old, comments on my songs, laughing and then doing his own songs of his dad’s sayings, and he totally gets how shoes work, ’cause he’s in the music business and knows

influencers, and it's all how you look there, and he asks how old I am and he says, "Dang, you do not look twelve, you look older than some of the singers I work with." And I check his Instagram and there's shots of him by a pool and by his convertible and at clubs and he ... he looks fine. We chat for hours until I fall asleep.

ISABELLA. All I wanted to do was fall asleep. But a bunch of us are finally in a truck driving to Florida, and we drop off people at different places and pretty soon I'm the only one in the truck, and we're in Florida and I'll meet *mi tio* pretty soon and I'm scared to start over here, no friends, new language—except I watched a bunch of USA movies and cartoons back home on *mi prima's* computer, so I know some good English already, and the truck stops behind a long building in a big parking lot and the man says "Get out," and takes me in this door and says, "We got a problem."

ALISON. So, I go home with this guy and he's got a pretty cool apartment, nothing fancy, but I meet his girlfriend, Genivive, and she's cool, she's like twenty-three or twenty-four or whatever, jeans and cute top and we order a pizza and they give me some of their beer, and I'm thinking, "Wait till I tell Nicky and Mackenzie." And we're laughing and we watch a movie, a scary movie called *Porch Light*, it was totally gross but totally fun, and they give me a blanket and I sleep on their couch and we have waffles in the morning and I'm like, "This is what families do. This is what my mom totally has no clue about."

MAKAYLA. So I keep "talking" to Mr. Music—that's what he likes me to call him—for weeks. And he's So. Cool. Funny and smart and he sends me goofball pics of him all— (*Makes a goofy face.*) And I send him pics of me all— (*Makes another goofy face.*) And he's supposed to go to Las Vegas.

But he says he wants to stay for an extra day to meet me. Can I meet him at the mall? And I'm, like— (*Big shivers.*) You know? What if I mess this up? What if he hates me IRL? But I also know I'll lose him if I don't take the chance. So I tell my mom I'm going to Britney's house, but I go to the mall for lunch on Saturday. The food court. And I meet him. And he's even cuter than his pics. Like when he moves there's a spark behind his eyes, his teeth. And his voice is like hot fudge. And then he sets a box on the table. Right there in the food court. And I open it. And there are my Gucci shoes. And I can't stop laughing. He says, "I wanted to get my girl something nice." And I can't even talk. I'm scared to talk, I always say the wrong thing, I get all, "Buh buh buh ..." But he just grins at me. *His girl.* His name was Marquan.

ALISON. His name was Anthony.

ISABELLA. His name was Señor Cortez. He's the boss of the shop. I didn't know the word then, but it was "*un sala de relax.*" A massage parlor. In the front room is a desk and some tables to get massages, but we have to stay in this little room in the back. Señor Cortez says there's a problem. He had to pay too much money to get me here, more than my \$3,000. And he still has to get me papers and documents. But that's going to cost \$30,000. And I say, "Let me call my uncle, he can get money, he can fix it." But Señor says, "No." He says I work for it. I work in his shop. I work until he has \$30,000, then I can call my uncle.

ALISON. I think about calling my mom, but I never do. Anthony and Genivive, they're just like so cool, we share like everything and we laugh so much. Geni takes me shopping and helps me pick out these amazing outfits and I help her pick out lipstick and eye liner—I've got like an intuition for makeup and people's faces. I could totally get

a job at a makeup counter in some fancy department store, be like the “The Lip Liner Lady” or whatever. But me and Geni get our nails done, our hair done, it’s like the best vacation ever, except it’s just life. And I’m not, like, going to school, but I’m learning so much about the real world, about the stuff that matters, you know? Like relationships and how you present and just how to, like, be.

MAKAYLA. Marquan lets me be me. That’s how it feels. Everytime I see him, I’m the real me. I meet him two more times that week. Pretty soon he starts picking me up at my house. Or not at my house. A block away. I tell my mom and dad that I’m going to Darlene’s or the library or something—not that they really care, they just need to hear something. And my brother, he’s so smart, you can kind of tell he thinks something’s up, but he’s cool. And I run meet Marquan in his midnight-blue Camaro. He takes me out to eat or to a movie or shopping. He tells me not to wear the clothes he buys me in front of my parents, and I’m like— (*Makes a “duh” face.*) But I change into them for our dates. And on our fifth date—we were at a fancy seafood restaurant—he gets all quiet and serious ... and he says, “Makayla. I don’t want to get too real too fast, but I feel serious things for you.” And I try to be cool. To just ... (*Plays it hyper cool.*) But I start crying! I’m wiping my eyes and he holds my hand and he says, “I want you to be part of my life. I want you to go to concerts and clubs with me and meet all my friends. And I want to protect you. I know your folks aren’t there for you, or not in the right way, not the way you need. I want to be there in the right way. I want us to complete each other.” And on the inside I’m— (*Makes a YEEEEEEE face and wriggling.*) But I can barely talk. But I think he hears me, I say, “I think that would be OK.” And he smiles the biggest smile.

ALISON. Also I'm not gonna lie, Geni and Ant and me were drinking a lot of beer and then vodka and sometimes drugs when they could get 'em. That made everything more fun too.

ISABELLA. Then I met Mamacita. She's a old lady. Or not so old, but old to me. (*Points to her face.*) Arrugas. A lot of lines. Always—(*Scowls.*) She has strong eyes that see right through you, she knows everything about you, what you're sneaky thinking. The mean dogs in the *pueblito* looked at you same way. She ran King Massage—that's the name of the place, you can find it, King Massage in the—*come se dice*—the mall. Strip mall. By the highway.

MAKAYLA. Time was racing by. Our next date he took me to his hotel room. It was nice. Not super fancy, but definitely nice. He told me we were going to a club that night, but first he wanted to introduce me to his friends in L.A., who do music videos. He loves my singing, but he said until I trained my voice, I could get my start as a model in the videos. He said I needed to take some photos to send to L.A., and he'd help.

ISABELLA. Mamacita took me in the back room, there are boards on the floor and sleeping bags on the boards. She says, "This is your room." There are already two girls and a boy there, two from Mexico—Carmen and Marco—and one from China—Lanying. Mamacita cooks me some Ramen noodles and hot chocolate, and she tells me sit on the floor and she says the rules very fast. Number one—we can never ever leave.

MAKAYLA. He shows me all these super hot clothes to wear and I'm—(*Shakes her head "no" shyly.*) But he was like, "You're shy? When you look like that? It's just some pictures, KayKay, come on, I'll help you get comfortable." And he poured me a drink. I don't know what it was. I'd

never drunk before. I was like— (*“Tastes horrible” face.*) But I didn’t show it. Or not much. But he laughed and said, “If I’m taking you to the best clubs, you are not gonna be drinking Pepsi.” So I kept drinking. We were laughing.

ISABELLA. As long as we stay in King Massage we are safe. If we talk to anyone outside or get caught by the police, they’ll start asking questions and they’ll send us back to Guatemala and Mexico and China. Or worse, we live our whole lives in jail. But if we stay inside and do what Mamacita and Señor tell us, they keep us safe and get our papers and we can leave when we pay our money back. But if I get them or me or the other kids in trouble ... Mamacita showed me this big scar on Carmen’s back. She says Señor Cortez has a knife and if he has to use it to remind us of the rules, he’ll do it.

MAKAYLA. I tried on a silk robe. He took some photos on his phone. He kept encouraging me. He loved the way I looked so much I started loving the way I looked. We keep taking photos then he says, “Do you really need the robe?” and I’m like, “Ummmmmm ...” and he says, “I am not about to hide my girl from the world. I want every man in Hollywood jealous of what I got right here.” So I do what he asks. And he keeps taking pictures and we keep drinking and ... we never got to the club that night.

ALISON. The money became, like, a problem. Anthony, one night, he was like, “Ali, we’re gonna be stuck for rent this month, I need you to step up.” And I was like, “Sure, I’ll do whatever, I’m not a mooch.” And he’s like, “Cool, I know this guy, he’s willing to pay us a bunch of money, but he’s heard a lot about you and how cool you are and he wants to get with you.” And on the inside I was like—WHAT. WHOA. WHAT. But Ant was so chill about it and Genivive was nodding and like, “She’s old enough, she’s got this.” So I was like— (*Covering her nerves.*) “OK. Whatever. Cool.”



ISABELLA. “The men will come in, I make sure they’re OK.” That’s what Mamacita says. “They pay me money for you, I write it down in the book of how much you still owe, and then you go with them in the back room and you do what they say. You can’t say no. That’s rule number two. For twenty minutes you belong to them.”

MAKAYLA. The next time I see Marquan at his hotel room, he’s smiling that private smile like he does. Like I’m the only one who gets to see that side of him. He’s making us these cocktails. He says, “Listen, KayKay, a friend of mine, Steve, is in from out of town this afternoon. He’s one of the big guys in the business and he’s really hot to meet you. He can open a lot of doors for us, but he doesn’t exactly respect personal space, you know what I mean? And the thing is, you can’t say no to him. I got your back, I’ll be in the next room making sure nothing gets too crazy, but I need you to do this for us. For you.” And I was like, “Can’t you just talk to him for me?” He was like, “Look, you wanta roll with the big kids, you gotta roll with the big kids. I don’t like sharing you, but I’ll do it. Whatever happens between you and Steve, that’s just business, you just make him happy. Whatever happens between us—that’s for real.”

ALISON. And he gives me a new name, a business name—Crystal.

ISABELLA. She says, “From now on we’re gonna call you Rio.”

MAKAYLA. He says, “I got another name for you now, a public name—Angel.”

ISABELLA. And that night—my first full night in the USA—a man in a T-shirt and shorts comes in and looks at us three girls and one boy and Mamacita whispers something to him and he points at me ... and I have to go with him into the back room. I was only twelve years old.

MAKAYLA. You gotta remember, I was twelve years old.

ALISON. I was only twelve years old.

MAKAYLA. And Marquan takes me to the hotel room next door.

ALISON. Anthony drives me to this motel by the highway.

The clerk at the front desk just kind of doesn't look at me, doesn't ask my age or anything. The hotel room's, like, cheap, but clean. Except for the water stains on the ceiling and down the wall.

ISABELLA. The room is little. There's a little bed and a chair and the lightbulb goes *bzzz*, *bzzz*. When he turns on the light, a cockroach runs under the bed.

ALISON. We wait around like half an hour and Anthony gives me some smokes to get me ready. He keeps making jokes and I laugh, but I'm scared.

MAKAYLA. And the guy walks in.

ALISON. The guy comes in.

ISABELLA. The man puts me on the chair.

MAKAYLA. He's wearing a tie and jacket, he looks like he could be my neighbor. He's bald and wears glasses.

ALISON. He looks like just some guy, you know? Like you'd never look at him twice in the grocery store.

ISABELLA. He has a big mustache like *mi papa*, but he stinks like beer and his hands are fat and *manchada*.

ALISON. Anthony leaves and the guy says something, but I don't hear him, my heart's like beating too loud and he sits by me and his breath stinks, like he swallowed something alive but it died on the way down?

MAKAYLA. He smells like cologne and he puts his hands on me, asking me, "Do you like this? How about this?"

ISABELLA. His big, fat fingers on my skin, on my face, holding my face—

ALISON. And he—

ISABELLA. And then he—

MAKAYLA. And he—

*(Pause. They hold themselves. Get it back together.)*

ISABELLA. And it was over and Mamacita cleans me in the tiny bathroom with cold water, and I go to my sleeping bag.

MAKAYLA. And on the way home, Marquan told me I did great.

ALISON. Genivive and Anthony high-fived me and were, like, “Now you’re truly a woman.”

MAKAYLA. I’m hurting, so Marquan gave me a couple of pills. He said, “These are great, they’ll make you all warm and fuzzy, but you can still do your schoolwork and stuff.” I took them. I did sleep really good that night.

ISABELLA. I lie there in my sleeping bag on the floor, crying. I try not to make noise so I don’t get in trouble. Rule number three is if you scream, Señor Cortez will use his knife so you can’t scream no more. But I shake and shake—and Carmen comes over and gets in my bag with me and holds me and I cry. I just want to hear my mama’s voice, I want her to call me Cricket and sing to me. But I’m mad at her too! How is this worse than what could happen to me in Guatemala??

ALISON. And the next day, Anthony’s bringing in another guy.

ISABELLA. And the next man comes to the store. And the next.

MAKAYLA. And Marquan introduces me to another of his friends and asks me to do them a favor too.

ALISON & ISABELLA. And another ... and another ...

ALISON. And another.

MAKAYLA. And another.

ISABELLA. You can’t say no.

MAKAYLA. You gotta do whatever they want.