

THE BREATH: COMING HOME

A Musical

Book, Music & Lyrics by Richard Ehrlich

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Scene-by-Scene Overview

ACT I

SCENE 1 — WE'RE STILL HERE (MORNING)

Pre-dawn in a surveilled neighborhood. Alex keeps watch from his corner, counting cars and tracking faces—his ritual since the Garcia family disappeared. As morning breaks, the community wakes: Abuela Luz making coffee, Marisol walking Miguel to school, Tomás opening his bodega. Life continuing despite fear. Inside the community center, Sofia organizes—greeting people, making lists, building connections. Their eyes meet for the first time across the street. Neither knows the other's name yet, but something shifts.

SONG 1: "We're Still Here (Morning)" — Opening ensemble celebrating daily resistance through existence.

SCENE 2 — ROOFTOP / "SOFIA"

Later that morning. Alex returns to his rooftop surveillance post—notebook, binoculars, compulsive counting. He watches the woman from earlier moving through the neighborhood: greeting people, carrying boxes, stopping to listen. He realizes he's been watching her longer than necessary. He doesn't know her name. "Who are you?" The question unsettles him. For someone who tracks everything, she's become an unknown variable he can't quite catalog.

SCENE 3 — COMMUNITY CENTER HALLWAY

Late morning. Sofia sets up chairs for a meeting. Alex appears at the threshold, hovering. She turns, recognizes him: "Hi. Alex, right?" He's stunned she remembers his name. "Names are the first thing they take away when they start counting people," she explains. Then: "I'm Sofia." The moment he hears her name, time stops.

SONG 2: "Sofia" — Alex's euphoric discovery. His "Maria" moment.

After the song, they work together in comfortable silence, moving chairs. A loud scrape makes them both flinch—shared reflex, instant understanding. Sofia invites him inside: "You could sit in here today. Just... be in the room." He hasn't sat with people in years. "Then start now."

SONG 3: "Before The Door Opens" — Intimate duet about daring to step into connection.

SCENE 4 — CONFRONTATION

A white man (Evan) appears in the neighborhood asking about housing. Alex immediately confronts him—every stranger is a threat. Hostile questioning. Sofia intervenes, testing Evan: visit twenty families, prove you're trustworthy. Alex defers to Sofia's judgment—early sign of trust and attraction.

SONG 4: "Outsider" — Trio exploring who belongs and who decides.

SCENE 5 — THE COMMUNITY GATHERS

Sofia moves through the neighborhood organizing the gathering: visiting Mrs. Hernandez for tres leches, asking Mr. Torres about sound equipment, confirming with the Ramirez family. Every conversation building toward something larger. From across the street, Alex watches—not just for threats anymore, but watching *her*. Their eyes meet. She smiles, small and just for him, then returns to her work. He's terrified she's going to burn out.

SCENE 6 — THE RETURN

Evening. Evan exits the community center. Alex has been watching, decides to approach. Evan expects another interrogation. Instead, Alex speaks quietly about fear, about surveillance, about the Garcia family. A moment of unexpected vulnerability. Sofia finds them talking, joins the conversation. Three people beginning to understand each other.

SONG 5: "We're Both Breaking" — Alex and Sofia's major duet acknowledging shared exhaustion and fear.

SCENE 7 — THE WALL AROUND US

The community center hums with focused energy. Sofia coordinates preparation for the gathering: checking lists, fielding phone calls, positioning people. Marisol greets arrivals. Isabel updates on cancellations: "Two families canceled." Sofia responds: "Then we plan for twenty-three." Miguel suggests keeping the door open "so people can see who's inside." Sofia agrees: visibility as choice. A shadow passes the window—everyone freezes. Sofia: "It's okay. Just keep moving." Alex appears in the doorway, watching. She acknowledges him: "You don't have to stay out there." He stays anyway. The community creates a human barrier, a wall of protection.

SCENE 8 — MIGUEL'S WORLD

Miguel draws detailed maps at a table—every house, every family in the neighborhood. Evan notices some names are crossed out. "People who left. Or got taken," Miguel explains matter-of-factly. Elena's name is still there; she's his best friend, but her mother wants to leave. Marisol enters, urgent: "Time to go home." The map remains on the table—evidence of loss, hope for return.

SCENE 9 — SOFÍA ALONE

Late evening. Everyone gone. Sofia sits surrounded by lists, phone dead, exhausted. She breaks: "Mrs. Ortiz still hasn't called back. Three days now... Gone." Her armor cracks: "I can fight all day. But nights... nights I can't breathe." She confesses her deepest fear: "What if I organize this gathering and they come for all of us at once?"

Alex enters—he saw the light still on. She tries to send him away, but he kneels beside her. She asks the question that's been breaking her: "You watch the streets. But who watches me?" His answer: "I do. Every night when you walk home, I watch you. I count your steps. I wait." The confession shifts everything. "But who holds me?" she whispers. "Let me," he responds. She stands, moves into his arms, finally lets herself break. He holds her carefully. "Then breathe now. With me."

SONG 6: "Every Corner" — Sofia's organizing anthem, vulnerability underneath.

SCENE 10 — ROOFTOP AFTER

Alex walks Sofia home. At her building, she invites him to the rooftop. They sit under stars and city lights, the neighborhood spread below. She asks if he really counts to sixty every night. "Every night," he confirms. "Because I need to know you're safe." They talk about fear, about holding each other up. She offers him something: "Tomorrow night when you count to sixty... I'll turn the light on and off. Two blinks. So you know I'm okay." Their secret signal. Their connection made visible. As he leaves: "For what it's worth... you're not failing anyone."

SCENE 11 — MORNING LIGHT

Next morning. Sunlight streams through community center windows. Marisol makes coffee. Miguel draws. Sofia organizes, calmer today. Alex helps set up chairs. They work together quietly, comfortable. "Thank you. For last night," she says. "Anytime," he responds. Marisol watches them with a knowing smile. For this moment, everything is peaceful. Then Alex's eyes catch something outside. His counting starts again—quiet at first, tension building.

SCENE 12 — SOMETHING'S CHANGING

Evening. Alex paces, counting compulsively out loud: "Forty-seven. Forty-eight. No—forty-seven again?" He's spiraling. Sofia finds him, tries to ground him. He can't stop. His control is cracking.

SONG 7: "Something More" — Alex's breakdown solo building to ensemble support.

After the song, Sofia lifts his face gently. "Look at me." He does, eyes wet. She touches his face; he leans into her hand. "Come inside." This time, he agrees.

SCENE 13 — THE QUESTION

Evening. The space is tense—Carlos has been questioned twice this week. Isabel bursts in: enforcement outside, three cars, asking for Carlos. Panic. Carlos is walking home, phone off, doesn't know they're waiting. The door opens—Carlos enters, unaware. The room goes silent. They tell him.

Carlos makes his choice: "I'll go talk to them." Isabel begs him not to. "If I don't go out, they come in. And then everyone's at risk." He says goodbye to each person—specific words to Isabel, Sofia, Miguel, Marisol. "Keep fighting. Keep the gathering happening." He walks out. Gets into the enforcement vehicle. The cars drive away. Isabel collapses. Alex spirals: "I should have counted better." Sofia stops him: "This isn't your fault." Isabel transforms grief into resolve: "The gathering happens. For Carlos."

SONG 8: "I'll Watch" — Community's response to loss.

SCENE 14 — LOOK AT ME

Days later. Rumors spreading: "Another sweep tonight." Phones buzzing with conflicting information. Fear multiplying. Alex tries to count people, loses track, panic rising. The community fractures under uncertainty. Then Evan steps forward: "I'll watch. I'll take the corner. The roof." Alex looks at him—conflicted, relieved. An outsider offering to become a watcher. Trust earned. Sofia steadies the room: "We keep going."

SCENE 15 — INSIDE (*End of Act I*)

Late night. Sofia works alone. Alex enters. She looks up, genuinely surprised: "You're inside." "Evan's watching," he explains. The weight of this—Alex letting someone else watch, choosing to be with her instead—shifts the air between them.

"I don't know how to be with someone when everything's falling apart," he confesses. Sofia steps closer, touches his face: "Maybe that's exactly when you need to." They look at each other. Everything they've been through, everything they're about to face. "I'm terrified," he whispers. "Me too." "Not of them. Of this. Of you. Of what I'm feeling." "What are you feeling?" "Everything." "Then feel it."

They kiss. Finally. Gentle, testing, then deeper—months of tension and shared fear pouring into this moment. When they part, both breathless. They work together in comfortable silence, his arm around her. "Tomorrow everything changes." "I know." "I'm scared." "Me too. But I'll be right there. Next to you."

END ACT I

ACT II

ACT II OPENER

SONG 9: "Standing Here" — Isabel's solo. Days after Carlos's detention, everyone expects her to announce she's leaving. Instead: defiance. Grief transforming into fierce determination. This is the moment Isabel becomes a leader in her own right.

SCENE 16 — MORNING AFTER

Early morning. Sofia and Alex enter the community center together—their relationship now visible. Sofia is lighter today, almost humming. Marisol notices: "You're in a good mood." "I'm always in a good mood." "Not like this." Miguel: "You're smiling. At your phone." Caught. The community watches Alex and Sofia try to act casual and fail spectacularly. Everyone's delighted.

Tomás to Gabo: "About time." The warmth is palpable. Marisol to Miguel: "Hope is contagious, mijo. And right now, those two? They're full of it."

SCENE 17 — THE RUMOR / STANDING HERE

Flashback: Isabel and Carlos before his detention. Isabel begging him to come to Seattle with her family. Carlos refusing: "I've been running my whole life. When does it stop?" His choice to stay: "I'd rather lose here—in a place I chose—than keep running." Their goodbye at her car. "If anything happens to you, I'll never forgive you." "I'll never forgive me either." He watches her drive away, then turns back to the community center. Still here. Still standing.

SCENE 18 — DON'T GO YET

Days before the gathering. María enters with suitcases—she and Elena are leaving tonight. Miguel sees them, devastated. Elena crying.

SONG 10: "No Te Vayas (Don't Go)" — Bilingual ballad. The pain of families separating.

After they leave, Miguel stands at the window watching Elena disappear. "Are we going too?" Marisol kneels: "No. We belong here. This is our home." "Even without Elena?" "Even without Elena. Even without the Garcias. Even without Carlos. This is still our home." Miguel processes, then: "I choose to stay too." One by one, the community echoes the choice: "We belong here."

SCENE 19 — BELONG

Evening before the gathering. Isabel's phone rings—Carlos from detention. His hearing is tomorrow morning. He asks one thing: "Will anyone show up?" The gathering is tomorrow evening. Final debate: is gathering publicly worth the risk? Alex and Sofia: "I'm terrified." "Me too." "But I'll be there. Right next to you." They commit to each other, to this moment: "Can we figure it out together?" They kiss, rest foreheads together. "I'm not going anywhere." "Neither am I."

SONG 11: "Home" — Ensemble decision song. They will gather.

SCENE 20 — THE GATHERING / AQUÍ ESTAMOS

Late afternoon. The gathering is tonight. Sofia nervous: will anyone come? Alex watches from the window. "See anyone yet?" "Not yet. It's still early." The space perfectly prepared—water stations, first aid, exit routes marked. Miguel holds his updated map.

Then: someone appears on the street. Rosa, who left weeks ago, walking back with a sign: "STILL HERE." Sofia rushes out. "You came back." "I had to. For this. For all of us." Then another person. Another. Three more. The street filling. Miguel counting excitedly. Elena and María return: "We came back!" Families arriving. Couples. Elderly. Children. The space overflowing. Doors opened wide, gathering spilling onto the street.

Alex counting: "Sixty. Sixty-two." Marisol: "Stop counting, Alex. Just feel it." For the first time ever, Alex stops counting. An old man (Roberto) approaches Sofia: "Forty years here. Never came to one of these. Too scared. But tonight... I'm here." Isabel climbs on a chair: "My brother Carlos was taken so we could be here tonight. He's not here with us. But he IS here. In every person who showed up."

SONG 12: "Aquí Estamos (We Are Here)" — Massive ensemble showstopper. The 11 o'clock number. Seventy-eight people standing together, publicly visible. Lights strung above them, music playing. Resistance through existence. Hope made manifest.

SCENE 21 — AFTER THE BREATH

Dawn. The gathering is over. Golden light streams through windows. Alex and Sofia sit together on the floor, backs against the wall. Exhausted. Exhilarated. Just breathing. "You did it." "WE did it." "I stopped counting at sixty-five." "You stopped counting?" The significance of this settles between them.

Alex confesses about the two-blinks signal: "It's the best part of my day. Because it means you're safe." Then, the deeper truth: "Last night I wasn't at the window. I was WITH you." The build to what he needs to say: "I lose everyone I love. And I'm terrified that if I love you, I'll lose you too."

The word hangs between them. Love. **"You love me?"** "Yes. I do. I love you." She responds: **"I love you too."** They talk about their quirks—his counting, her organizing. "Maybe you stop counting quite so much." "Maybe you stop organizing quite so much." "I can't promise that." "I can't promise to stop counting either." "Then we just... love each other anyway. Counting and organizing and all."

They kiss, cry happy tears. The community arrives: Miguel with his expanded map (all 78 people!), Marisol with coffee, Isabel with news about Carlos.

SCENE 22 — STILL HERE / WE'RE STILL BREATHING

Three months later. The community center transformed: windows open, light streaming in, more alive than ever. Miguel's map now shows five new families. Elena's family came back permanently: "We came back because we stayed. Because the gathering showed them it was safe."

Isabel on the phone with Carlos: he's been moved to minimum security, might be released in six months. "He's coming home. Because of you. Because of what we did."

A letter from Evan: he's teaching his students about their community. "Tell Miguel his map is now part of my curriculum. My students are making maps of their own communities." "I stopped counting cars three weeks ago. I'm counting students who believe they can make a difference instead."

The community gathering again—not in fear, but in celebration. Children adding colors to Miguel's map. María and Elena settling back in. The space full of life and hope.

SONG 5 (REPRISE): "We're Both Breaking" — Callback to Act I, but transformed: no longer breaking alone, breaking together, building together.

SCENE 23 — THE BREATH (*Finale*)

Three months after the gathering. Evan has his bag packed—going back to his teaching position. Alex enters. Their goodbye conversation: Alex processing guilt about the violent grab in their first encounter. Evan: "You let go. That's what matters." Evan observes Alex's transformation: "When I got here, you were clenched. Like a fist. Always ready to grab, to hold, to control. Now you're... open."

"When's the last time you counted cars?" "Two weeks ago. Maybe three." "Did the world end when you stopped?" "Not yet." Evan smiles. "That's growth, Alex. Real growth." They discuss Alex and Sofia: "That's not the same person who grabbed me in the dark. That's someone who learned that love isn't control. That's transformation."

The word that changes everything: "**Love isn't control.**" They embrace—Alex and Evan, full circle from violence to care. Evan's final lesson: "You chose each other. You chose community. You chose hope. You chose to be visible. That's everything."

SONG 13: "The Breath" — Title song. The finale. Everyone breathing together, visible and whole. Alex and Sofia at the center, no longer breaking alone. Not an ending—a beginning. The promise of presence.

LIGHTS FADE

END OF PLAY

PRODUCTION NOTES

Running Time: Approximately 2 hours 15 minutes (including intermission)

Cast: 12-15 principals + ensemble

Orchestra: Piano/keyboard minimum; full orchestration available

Set: Flexible unit set representing community center, street corners, and rooftops

Setting: A surveillance-era immigrant neighborhood in a major American city, present day.

Themes: Visibility as resistance, community over isolation, choosing to stay, love as presence not control, hope as contagious.

Each scene description captures the emotional arc while maintaining the narrative drive toward the climactic gathering and its aftermath.