

To **LIVE** and **DIE** — IN — **EL VALLE**



Oscar Mancinas

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Recovering the past, creating the future

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To my unborn child

“These [kids], now, were living as we’d been living then, they were growing up with a rush and their heads bumped abruptly against the low ceiling of their actual possibilities.”

James Baldwin



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
<i>Comenzamos: Falsas Promesas</i>	1
<i>Entradas</i> 2001	3
Boxhood.....	33
Mari's Shot, Reshot	53
Roach Meets the Surf	57
Melissa Gets Out.....	79
To Live & Die in EV	85
Tourista	89
Cut & Fade.....	93
Alicia Returns <i>a la nada</i>	101
Arizona Boy.....	107
Cero, AZ	125
The Suicide Survivor's Guide to What's Next	129



Comenzamos: Falsas Promesas

What difference did it make? *Después de haber sufrido tanto, nos fuimos.* That's how it started, that's how it kept going. When we lost almost everything, the only option left to live was to leave. So we left. But leaving did not fix everything. We still needed to survive, to provide life. *A trabajar pues.* We worked. We worked our bodies, we worked our land, we worked our sky, we worked. We worked with the promise that come nightfall, the dark desert would soothe our soreness, ease our pain. We worked until we forgot, or tried to forget, what kind of sun would rise tomorrow. *Por lo pronto, ¡nos pusimos a pistear en la pinche pachanga! ¡A romper todo con nuestros gritos, se ha dicho!*

Meanwhile, our little ones sat, watched, learned, remembered. *¿Qué más?* What else?

The night begins like it can never stop, but there's a point in the party where the men say to the women, "I love you. No. I *REALLY* love you." They sound angry, but what do love and anger have to do with each other? *Mamá* and *las tías* act like they don't hear them. They've felt this before: the 2 am summer, the *norteña* pouring from the speakers and collecting on the floor in a sea so big, so deep, no one gets out. They close their eyes, and they face the darkness of the ground or the darkness of the sky. It's been the same darkness their whole lives, even now—even

en el otro lado, where people pay cash to have their houses all look the same—here, too, the darkness overflows from the cups, the cans and the bottles, and we try to drink it. Drink it all before the adults open their eyes. The lights come on and we're still.