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# Chatterbox

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**CHATTERBOX**

**by**

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Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, New Mexico State University, 2005

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts  
Dramatic Writing**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2016**

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my daughter Daniela Luz Sánchez. Your wisdom, creativity, and humor is a source of constant inspiration.

I also dedicate this work to my five curious nieces: Victoria, Sophia, Catalina, Monica, and Mireya.

When I create it is with all of you in mind.

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**Chatterbox****by****Rebecca M. Sánchez****B.A. Government****M.A. Curriculum and Instruction****Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction****MFA Dramatic Writing****Abstract**

This essay articulates the creative process and artistic influences of two plays written by Rebecca M. Sánchez. The plays, *Chatterbox* and *Re: Living* are influenced by a variety of artists including Emilio Carballido and Maria Irene Fornes. *Chatterbox* details the ill fated love of Valentina and Marco. In both linear and memory sequences the audience can view the complexity of obsession, and the role of perception and memory in reality. *Re: Living* begins and ends with four university professors locked in a campus closet during an active shooter situation. This play address a normalized state of violence and emergency preparedness and compares this aggressive social overtone with small workplace relationships. An exploration of how time and space, character and relationship, and theme operate in each of the plays included. Finally, the essay describes new directions and creative possibilities for the playwright.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 Artistic Influences .....	6
Chapter 3 The University, The Professor, and Politics .....	20
Chapter 4 Chatterbox and Re: Living.....	24
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	37
Appendices.....	40
Appendix 1 Chatterbox .....	41
Appendix 2 Re: Living.....	143
References.....	214

## Introduction

In my artistic and academic pursuits I have been studying the creative experience across time and place. In every era of recorded human experience there is evidence of creative capacity. I came to the Master of Fine Arts program looking for a new way to understand emotion, the world, and possibly myself. I wanted a more active role in art creation, partly in an effort to become more human and actualize my own humanity, and also to contribute a diverse perspective to material and performative culture. Creative writing, specifically, writing plays, has become a method of inquiry that has allowed me to think deeply about representation while at the same time abandoning thought and working from impulse.

### **Art for Survival**

Prior to enrollment in the MFA I had been studying artistic movements and creation across time and place. In a four-year project on Japanese Internment I discovered the art that was created in camps by Japanese Americans. This led me to consider how artistic creation is necessary not just for enjoyment, but for survival. The book *What is Art For?* by Ellen Dissanayake (1988), initiates a thorough exploration of the question. As with any substantive question, the journey toward an adequate response becomes more convoluted, and littered with equally compelling sub-questions. Dissanayake, justifies art as a biological function of survival (1988). The bio-behavioral view is asserted in an attempt to examine the question from a broad-based evolutionary perspective. One clearly made assertion by Dissanayake is that art is ubiquitous – art, like sound, seems to transcend the human experience (1988).



Although sociologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists have examined what art does for people, Dissanayake describes ways in which the explanations do not account for other non-artistic activities that serve the same end (1988). Through a deeper examination of ritual and play in animals, including humans, we began to see the notion of “making special” emerge. In making special, an intentionality for something beyond function emerges (Dissanayake, 1988). This quality is part of the making of art, and also part of the artistic product. Not only do the arts exist across cultures, across time and place, but art creation is actually a sustaining feature of the human species.

I am just as interested in considering how to make the world better, how to understand the way society shapes people and groups (and how people and groups shape society), and how to develop tools for viewing and recognizing societal problems with a desire for action. Brecht encourages us to use any means possible to understand the world. He states, “But in my view the great and complicated things that go on in the world cannot be adequately recognized by people who do not use every possible aid to understanding” (Brecht & Willett, 1964, p. 73). I find this particularly insightful as one of my intentions is to not only create art as a means to survival, but also to expose certain aspects of social order and social life that limit human potential.

The book *A Director Prepares* by Anne Bogart (2001), articulates some of my own journey into playwriting. The historical retracing of the American theatre in an early chapter explores the big questions associated with both culture and the American contribution to culture. The idea of being able to trace back, to draw upon or resist our

own cultural/artistic pedigree has been a fascinating engine in my own process, especially in thinking about artistic processes and artistic production.

Anne Bogart (2001) heightens my curiosity about how diverse ethnic, cultural, and national identities seem to be either blocked or diluted in the American theatre. When I think of the large body of popular performance in the United States it looks very much the same, and perhaps supporting Bogart's point, that American performance culture is based on a European tradition (Bogart, 2001). My work is a small attempt to offer a different perspective, sometimes as *Lehrstücke*, other times as an entertaining way to see diverse ethnicities and social situations on stage (Brecht, 1966).

### **On Process**

"To be decisive is violent" (Bogart, 2001, p. 46). Reading this statement early in my development as a playwright was crucial in the evolution of my process. This kind of decisiveness applies to many aspects of personal, professional and creative life. I was schooled away from this impulse, the impulse to create unapologetically. I was not schooled to suspend critique of the creation until after the fact. In this way, much of my creative production was sterilized because I was trained to think, analyze, and critique while creating. Bogart continues in this essay to make a strong statement on censorship (2001). Only in this case she is referring to the tragic consequences of self-censorship in the artistic process. Because my academic writing is tempered with restraint, reliant on verification, and careful not to distance through offense, I have been on a conscious journey to "turn off" my academic self while writing plays. I have attempted to take on a

decisiveness, like that suggested by Bogart (2001), in order to write from a different place, and from a different mind.

Related to process there are three important aspects of my writing process that need to be articulated:

1. The more I write plays the more I realize I begin with a big idea or question.

While elements might be specified or articulated in advance, as is the case with bake-off plays, I do not have a concrete roadmap, plot plan or character sketch before I begin.

2. Once I begin writing, the remainder of the writing time is a discovery process.

Aspects of plot, character and spectacle emerge as I am writing. I understand more about what is going on in the play world only through writing.

3. In the revision process I sharpen motif, plot, character, spectacle, etc.

In exploring the two specific plays of this paper, I must disclose that while writing early drafts of the plays I was not fully conscious or actively aware of all of the tactics, motifs, and influences I will point to in this analytical reflection of the work. However, when I consider the creative, artistic, and academic influences that inform my aesthetic choices, I can make clear correlations and identify the creative connective tissues that have shaped the plays.<sup>1</sup>

### **Overview of Essay**

The purpose of this paper is to explore two plays using a reflective analytical lens. To begin I will identify my artistic influences. In the second chapter I will highlight

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<sup>1</sup> Though I do identify artistic influences in this dissertation, I am in no way holding up my work for a true comparison.

some of the artistic movements and themes that consistently present in my plays. I will then discuss two plays, *Chatterbox*, submitted as a culminating performance, and *Re:Living*, a play developed in my third year of the MFA program. I will describe how the artistic influences in the previous section dialogue with the plays. Finally, I will identify how other processes, research approaches, and new questions will guide my future artistic production.

## Artistic Influences

As an avid connoisseur of art, culture, and theory, I am the product of countless influences. I read, watch, view, and create and the culmination of my experiences has brought me to playwriting. Before formally entering the program I read *The Poetics* (Aristotle & Hutton, 1982). Aristotle's six elements: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and music are comprehensive in scope and encompass much of what I have observed in theatre and performance. As I have developed as a playwright I find myself weaving in and out of the elements, relying on them in different ways.

In ordering the elements hierarchically, and privileging plot, the creative possibilities become limited, the product more formulaic, therefore though the elements seem ripe with possibility Aristotle's own valuation of the elements limits potential acts of performance (Aristotle, 1982). In a class devoted to the avant-garde we analyzed the limitations of Aristotle's elements and his notions about the type of stories that can be told with these elements hierarchically ordered. Aristotle's model leaves out other worldviews, other ways of (re)presenting, other types of performance knowledge and culture. Intellectually, I find myself in agreement with those like Gertrude Stein and Artaud...both artists utilized the elements but with different valuations. Creatively, I do think Aristotle's elements guide my work, and serve as useful analytical and generative tools for many playwrights, including myself. However, in this section I will zoom in on two playwrights that have sparked my curiosity activated my interest in plays and playwriting. Both playwrights, Emilio Carballido and Maria Irene Fornes, deviate from

the Aristotelian play and reject Aristotle's unities of single action, single location, and single (twenty-four hour) timeframe (Aristotle & Hutton, 1982).

### **Emilio Carballido**

Emilio Carballido was a twentieth century Mexican Playwright, credited with creating a distinctly Mexican theatre. In addition to writing more than 100 plays, Carballido authored short stories, novels, and served as a teacher of theatre at several Mexican universities (Peden, 1966; 1980). Of all his writing, it is the plays that have received the most attention and acclaim. Although he has received extensive recognition for his work within Latin America generally, and Mexico, specifically, European and American<sup>2</sup> scholars, theatre makers, and audiences have had little contact with his extensive body of work.

**Historical background.** Present day Mexico has a long history of theatre, and performance culture in Mexico predates European contact. There are numerous archeological ruins that indicate a vibrant performance culture existed among different indigenous groups such as the Aztecs and the Maya before the Spanish conquerors landed (Peden, 1980). Historical records show that early Spanish expeditions noted Maya groups performing theatre-like exhibitions that were described as resembling plays. In his journals, the explorer Hernan Cortes noted a theatre like space constructed of stone masonry in the city of Tenochtitlan. Mayan and Aztec scholars have used glyph evidence to support the assertion that theatre-like events were commonplace among the groups (Peden, 1980).

---

<sup>2</sup> In this paper American is used to refer to people/traditions of the United States. However, many Latin America peoples/countries also use the word self-referentially.

Once the Spanish colonizers arrived in the area of present-day Mexico, they began to use theatre to serve their own educative purposes, and as a tool of colonization (Peden, 1980). The Spanish were particularly good at noting, appropriating, and/or adapting existing cultural practices among Indigenous groups to aid in colonization: use of building materials, appropriation of ritualistic practices, deity transference (Chavez, 2006; Peden, 1980). For example, the Spanish priests used a form of didactic theatre to facilitate conversion activities. Early iterations of this theatre form were executed with pantomime, later with translators, and eventually, once the linguistic hegemonic dominance of Spanish had been imposed, with Spanish (Peden, 1980).

However, the purely instructional religious theatre was expanded because the Spanish had their own rich tradition of theatre and they attempted to create a similar way of life in Mexico/New Spain (Peden, 1980). As the Spanish established towns and municipalities under the auspices of the Spanish Crown, a different type of theatre was produced in the Americas. The Spanish leadership began to use theatre for entertainment purposes, to greet visiting dignitaries, for celebration, and for ceremony (Peden, 1980). So long before the Pilgrims were Plymouth Rocking, the European Spaniards were producing theatre in Mexico/New Spain. Indigenous groups claim a longer performance history in the region but much of their performative culture was transmitted orally. Mexico would not claim independence from Spain until 1821 (Chavez, 2006); therefore, under Spanish rule, all literary traditions established in Mexico/New Spain were based in the Peninsula. Literature, in all forms was initially

imported and once an emerging class of writers established in Mexico/New Spain they strictly adhered stylistically, linguistically, and theatrically to the Spanish tradition (Peden, 1980). Performances were staged using Castellan Spanish accentuation and pronunciation regardless of the fact that a new “Mexican” Spanish dialect had emerged in this place. Even after independence, the Spanish tradition remained intact in the theatre (Peden, 1980).

An early exception to this Spanish rooted and based theatre was found in the writing of Sor Juana Ines de La Cruz<sup>3</sup>, a seventeenth century dramatist and poet. Sor Juana was a brilliant (self-taught) scholar and author who deviated in form and style from the Spanish tradition (Peden, 1970; 1980; Prendergast, 2007). Self-selecting a convent in order to continue her education and writing, Sor Juana wrote some of the first literary works and plays that centuries later would warrant a feminist label (Prendergast, 2007). By the 1940’s Emilio Carballido would look to and credit Sor Juana as his spiritual and artistic “tap root” (Bogart, 2001). The following verse written by Sor Juana Ines de La Cruz is indicative her stance about women, a stance Carballido would later assume in his plays:

Hombres necios que acusáis  
a la mujer sin razón,  
sin ver que sois la ocasión  
de lo mismo que culpáis:  
  
[Silly, you men-so very adept

---

<sup>3</sup> Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz was her name after entering the convent. She was initially Juana Asbaje.



at wrongly faulting womankind,  
 not seeing you're alone to blame  
 for faults you plant in woman's mind] (Juana Ines de La Cruz,  
 1999).

After the Mexican American war (1910-1920) several groups of writers began to experiment with new forms. Although they were experimenting, the work of these writers remained firmly rooted in realism (Bixler, 1997; Peden, 1980). Experimentation continued to occur for three more decades with subsequent Mexican artists exploring and claiming a Mexican voice, distinct from the centuries of Spanish imposition (Peden, 1980). Post World War II Mexico saw the greatest departure from Spanish and realist conventions, with the emergence of Emilio Carballido. He was part of *Generación de los 50*, a group of artists asserting the voice of Mexico, by Mexicans, in the 1950's.

**Analysis of the body.** The writing of Carballido is extensive. Although Carballido authored short stories and novels, his largest and most significant contribution is as a playwright, with over 100 plays (Bixler, 1984a; 1984b; 1997; Peden, 1966; 1980). Scholars have struggled to classify the work of Carballido because of the scope and depth, diversity of form and genre, and also because the plays do not adhere to the linear dichotomy of realism and fantasy (Bisset, 1990; Bixler, 1986; 1997; Peden 1968; 1980). Rather, Carballido's realistic plays have elements of fantasy or elemental innovation, and the fantasies often follow some realistic patterns. Some scholars argue that some of the early works, such as *Rosalba y Los Llaveros*, are distinctly realistic (Bixler, 1997), especially when compared to works such as *The Golden Thread* (three

separate one-acts functioning as a whole play); however, Carballido himself stated that he never authored realistic plays (Peden, 1980). Because of the scope, diversity of genre, and sheer magnitude, the remainder of this section will address some of the important decisions Carballido made as an author, which deviated from the long theatrical tradition in Mexico.

**Carballido and women.** The history section briefly mentioned the impact Sor Juana's writings had on Carballido. Reading his plays it becomes clear that Carballido resituated the Mexican woman from passive observer to active agent (Carballido, 1950; 1957; 1965; 1979). Like Sor Juana, Carballido not only commented on the role of women in Mexico, he created women characters capable of transcending the strict rules of culture and tradition. There are different ways Carballido elevates women in his plays: centrality to storyline (Bisset, 1990; Bixler, 1997; Peden, 1970; 1980), use of active and assertive language (Bisset, 1990; Cypress, 1984); and other characteristics (Peden, 1980). Many of the plays contain strong female lead characters (Carballido, 1950; 1957; 1965; 1979). These women are sometimes played in contrast to traditional and subordinate women (Carballido, 1950; 1957). There are also cases in which Carballido highlights how women take on the role of oppressive male/patriarchy in an effort to suppress other women; this is usually exacerbated by the urban/rural divide or generational difference (Carballido, 1957).

The women characters also use language in different ways to assume power (Cypress, 1984). In *Rosalba y los Llaveros*, Rosalba on a trip to visit rural relatives uses city language and speaks freely of all topics, even those considered taboo to women

(Carballido, 1950). In her open discussion of sexuality, power, and familial decision-making, she is cast as male; or in the sense of Mexican tradition, her language is what would be expected of male characters (Bixler, 1997; Cypress, 1984; Peden 1980).

Through language, women also direct the action of the play. In *Yo Tambien, Hablo de la Rosa* young Toña uses language to direct the male characters. She tells Polo how to steal coins from the phone booth, what sweets to buy from the vendor, and she also asserts herself verbally by expressing her opinion about another character's girlfriend (Carballido, 1965). In this way, Toña directs the action not only of her own life, but she also impacts the lives of others. Through language, the female characters in the plays assume power that had previously not been seen on Mexican stages.

**Fantasy and realism.** Carballido's plays also contain elements of realism and fantasy, in the same play. Carballido achieves this in different ways, and to different degrees. For example, he uses dreams, imagery, lighting, special effects, dance, music, unconventional relationships, and other non-human characters to "tell the story" of the play (1950; 1957; 1979; 1965). The past, present, and future are also reconfigured on stage to present multiple realities across time and space. Because of the utilization of non-linear, and non-realistic forms, scholars have commented on the influence of Artaud on Carballido's work (Bixler, 1997; Peden, 1968). Even in the plays that appear largely realistic, certain characters emerge with muse-like or omniscient presence (Bixler, 1985). Merlin describes the ritual like nature of his realistic plays, moving the plays outside of strict categorical group of realism (Merlin, 2004). Rizk argues that the use of extremely large casts also adds to the sense of non-reality. Through the very act

of staging magnitude and population density on stage, something that is rarely done in theatre, realism is subverted (Rizk, 2010). Peden argues that his plays invoke the “senses” through the use of non-plot, theatrical elements (1968, pg. 133).

In the most fantastical trio of one-acts, *La Hebra de Oro/ The Golden Thread*, characters appear as beams of light, others as artistic forms such as dance or music, and still others as supernatural forces (Peden, 1968; 1970). Peden describes that the climax in these plays is nearly impossible to stage, but adhere, without question, to the Artaudian definition of spectacle (Peden, 1968, pg. 135). While these plays do contain “plot” they are contained in technically dependent, obscure settings, with unconventional characters. The stage directions serve as the “container” for the action with rich descriptions, unthinkable technological specifications, and poetic suggestions (Burke, 1945).

So much more can be said about the plays of Emilio Carballido. He brought many social and political issues to the forefront, he addressed the impact of class, ethnicity, and history on Mexican society, his work speaks to the oppression and lived experiences of Mexicans, in Mexico (rather than Mexicans as a Spanish by-product). Perhaps most significant is the fact that this social/political/historical critique is embedded in humor. Carballido’s signature contribution has been an activation of a Mexican sensibility based on humor and compassion. The plays don’t read like a montage of criticisms or bombastic lectures. Rather, they expose the humanity, love, and courage of a people with humor and gentle irony (Bixler, 1984a; 1984b; 1997; Carballido, 1950; 1957; 1965; 1979; Peden, 1966; 1970; 1980).

***Yo Tambien, Hablo de la Rosa.***

MEDIUM: I listened to my heart beat all afternoon. I finished my chores early, so I sat here, like this, quietly, looking out with bleary eyes, listening to my heart as it beat gently against my breasts, like a cautious lover knocking at my door, a chick pecking at the walls of its egg, trying to come out into the light. I summoned up an image of my heart...(Carballido, as translated by Oliver, 47)

*Yo Tambien, Hablo de la Rosa (I Too, Speak of the Rose)* by Emilio Carballido (1969) presents the “story” of two young teenagers Toña and Polo, and their day of skipping school and *atrevimiento*. *Atrevimiento*, a word that does not have a direct English translation, refers to clever, forward, naughtiness. What *seems* clear is that Toña and Polo skip school. They visit the dump, find a large basin filled with concrete, and release the basin down a hill unto a train-track, thereby derailing the train. This act is seemingly motivated by a desire of the youth to see what will happen. During the remaining scenes, the actions of the children are retold and analyzed from different lenses: Freudian, Marxist, cultural depravation, familial deficit, anarchism, with staged pantomimes and recreations occurring simultaneously. This play is often described as Carballido’s most famous or significant work (Bixler, 1997; Peden, 1980). The play resides in a realm of reality and fantasy, and leaves the reader unsure of what exactly has happened. Plot itself is therefore implicated because all of the peripheral characters retell the basic plot and shape it with their own perceptions, biases, and interpretations. Bixler has used post-modernism to analyze the play because multiple realities exist on

stage (Bixler, 1997). Furthermore, the play includes interruptions throughout, which contribute to a disjointed feel and the audience is left without answers. The lyricism and beauty of the play is made stronger by the contrasting theoretical monologues included by positioned “scholars” and townspeople. The dream-like play’s reflection is the “reality” of non-reality.

MEDIUM: Butterflies say very profound things such as “fleetingness...mystery.”

They say, “We love surprises!” They say, “Everything is possible!” They say, “All things matter!” (Carballido, as translated by Oliver, 47).

The medium opens and closes the play. The intense poverty of the children in the play is juxtaposed throughout with the poetry of the Medium.

### **Maria Irene Fornes**

Maria Irene Fornes was born in 1930 and raised in Havana, Cuba. Her mother, a school teacher, and her father, a man of many jobs including Civil Service bureaucrat, were both wanderers at heart (Cummings, 2013). The family lived in poverty but their thinking was different. Fornes attributed some of their difference to books. In an interview with Kevin Kelly of the Boston Globe, Fornes said of her father and mother, “He read all the time, and my mother read all the time. And they would talk books, books, books, ideas, ideas, ideas” (Kelly, 1990). It was in this space, one valuing ideas over goods, that Fornes developed her curiosity and love of language. Her own learning was largely through experience. Inventiveness, curiosity, and experience became a hallmark of her work.

When Fornes was fifteen, she emigrated to New York City with her mother and sister. As a Spanish Speaking newly arrived, she utilized her time to work, and to begin an intense study of painting. Her work as a painter would later influence her attention to space and dimension in her theatrical work. On a study trip to Europe Fornes saw plays, performed in German. Fornes credits this trip to the theatre as having a profound impact on her work. In an interview later in life she recounted how despite the language barrier the meaning and feeling of the play was transmitted to her (Cummings, 2013).

**The body of work.** As a playwright with more than fifty works for the stage, Maria Irene Fornes shaped the American theatre in the last century (Cummings, 2013). Her work cannot be classified by genre, theme or even format. For example, her early work had a farcical and vaudevillian feel. The play *The Successful Life of 3* uses farce to “reject dramatic logic regarding the relationship between cause and effect” (Cummings, 2013, p. 25). Her later work employs both lyricism and realism, but simultaneously eschews any distinct classification (Cummings, 2013; Wolf, 1992). Stacy Wolf describes it in this way, “Employing what might be called the ‘guideposts’ of realism, Fornes constructs a referential system, one whose coherence points to the experience of many women and to the construction of the realist form itself” (Wolf, 1992, p. 22).

The plays of Fornes use a variety of tactics such as expressionism, abstraction, realism, visual composition, aural landscapes, and disjointed time to address misogyny, repression, gender issues, and literacy, among other topics. Her characters, rather than being psychologically motivated, “respond to each other at face value” (Cummings, 2013, p. 102). The result is characters who are “spiritual beings” rather than “social

creatures” and through their actions and visible struggles the audience experiences loss along with them (Cummings, 2013).

**Relational dynamics and social order.** In many Fornes plays there is an overt or covert repressive environment. Age differences, poverty, gender all contribute to the trappings of the characters. In *Mud*, we see Mae longing for a different life and trying to satisfy different needs in her relationships with two different men. Both men have something to offer; Lloyd has lived with Mae for years and is her mate. Henry is literate and brings a robust intellectual and philosophical life to the home. As Mae rises from the mud through learning, the tension between the two men increases (Fornes, 1986). Farfan describes that the virility of the male characters is a source of constant tension. Lloyd suffers from “intellectual impotence” while “For Henry, Mae is the space through which he asserts a self, an intellectually virile self” (Farfan, 1997, p. 853). Because of jealousy, the home environment becomes more stifling and Mae, more repressed.

*Abington Square*, set in the early part of the last century, does a fine job of critiquing the existing social order (then and now) with subtlety; there is minimal sensationalism or shock attacking to advance a complex story and present characters that don’t behave in the way society expects them to (Fornes, 2000). In the play, the use of generational difference, sexual inquisitiveness, literacy, and voyeurism add depth to the characters. Marion, the central character, is many things and her position changes relative to other characters. To Juster she is: pet, infant child, housemate, housekeeper, sexual interest (Fornes, 2000). She asserts her own sexual freedom with a worker and with Frank. *Abington Square* has a visceral attentiveness to action and Marion’s



predicament and duality of desire results in her living a maddening, trapped existence (Cummings, 2013).

*Fefu and Her Friends* takes place at Fefu's country home in New England. The eight women gather for a luncheon and to plan a charity event. Throughout the course of the play there is a "more explicit focus in Fornes's writing on female characters seeking to break free of dependent or oppressive relations with male characters" (Cummings, 2013, p. 64). In different conversations, some grounded in reality, others in delirium, the women express their own trappings and muse on the capacity for self actualization and definition (Cummings, 2013). Because of its complex structure and form, the play also breaks from linear dramatic structure and the audience views the work from different rooms of the home (Fornes, 2000). Grounded in the very domestic space of a home, the audience is fractured only to return to the original women grouped together in the same position.

### **Discussion**

There is a tremendous amount of scholarship, literary criticism, and analysis on the work of Carballido and Fornes. The previous sections highlight some of the plays and the relevant scholarship. However, the plays also stand alone, as artistic products, not in need of analysis or active thought. The plays of both Carballido and Fornes are best experienced, as theatrical events, performed in time and space, or at a minimum, and in my case, read as creative works. In reading Carballido and Fornes I learn about growing and changing over the course of a career and a rejection of complacency. Both experimented with and manipulated form and content throughout their writing lives.

Carballido and Fornes cannot be easily classified because they were continually experimenting and changing. Their dynamic and prolific body of work is a testament to their own development over time. I am inspired with ideas about social class, gender, family relationships, friendship, compassion, jealousy, love and loss. I am encouraged to think about the different ways to use time, form, visual elements, and other spectacle to tell stories. In reading their work I am entertained and enraged, activated and calmed, confused and certain, in different ways and at different times. Their work makes me curious about things, and it also encourages me to let go of preconceived notions about what a play is.

### The University, The Professor, and Politics

The university in society, the search for knowledge, and the betrayal of the academy is a thematic strand that permeates my work. Another source of active creative inquiry is that of contemporary and historical politics. While my work at the beginning of the program was blatantly and bombastically political, I have been working along the continuum to craft plays with more irony and nuance.

Throughout the MFA program I have been exploring the character of The Professor in both a literal and “archetypal” sense. The Professor in modern society is rapidly becoming a caricature. Much like the famous Dr. Kheal in Fornes, the professor has an natural hyperbolic tendency, which borders on farce (Fornes, 2007). German Expressionist plays also implicate the professor or the teacher as a false authority (Schürer, 1997). As information is more easily available, and the idea of who is a keeper of knowledge shifts, the professor is in a desperate conundrum. If professors continue to adhere to their limited research dissemination practices and ivory tower mentalities, they will render themselves obsolete. In my early work I consistently wrote teacher/professors with negative qualities, flatly enforcing meaningless curriculum. In a play I wrote last year, *Chola Tripping*, the Professor is largely abstracted. He is a nameless entity and exemplifies the clueless, uni-dimensional, authoritarian sage. The Professor in *Chola Tripping*, like El Profesor in Carballido’s *El Día Que Soltaron Los Leones*, by maintaining the status quo, is a token of the regime (Carballido, 1984).

The professors in my plays have become more realistic, but authoritarianism has been replaced with desperation and unwinding. As Julia, in *Fefu and Her Friends*,

experiences a gradual unwinding, “college professors and doctors are represented as actual versions of Julia’s hallucinated judges” (Farfan, 1997, p. 444). The Professors in *Chatterbox* and *Re: Living* are indeed desperate and they portray negative aspects of the profession. At times they over-exemplify: competitiveness, obsession, hyper-specialization, unethical use of power, and inability to relate to people. However, they also have emotional lives that are presented in the plays and in this way, they are more realistic.

There are also political undertones embedded in my work. In my early plays the political states were pronounced and punctuated. In *Chola Tripping*, the characters boldly critiqued power structures and implicated identity politics in an overt way. However, the emotional lives of the characters were sacrificed for the overall political message. In more recent plays, though there is a definite politic, the delivery is more subtle. My plays continue to refer to power and access, but relationship has come to the fore. In *Chatterbox*, we see in the final reveal that the beloved author Canuto Morales, of “Border Macho” is actually a woman. One of the major critiques of the Chicano Movement largely, and the Chicano literary genre specifically, is that early generation Chicano writers were dismissive of women artists and activists. This small gesture addresses gender politics shaping a movement. *Re: Living* speaks to a larger culture in the United States of gun politics, the pervasiveness of random acts of violence, and the microcultures of aggression that are exacerbated within a larger context of violence. Though the active shooter is what gets the professors into the closet, I am again leaning in on relationships.

My characters are multi-aged, multi-ethnic, and overwhelmingly female. Is this a political choice, an artistic preference, or an unconscious result of my experience? Likely all three. In my other professional work I teach about representation, identity politics, and access. However, I am also not a twenty-two year old person and I am increasingly interested in attending plays that have more complicated relational dynamics between generations, genders, and ethnicities. In this way, my own writing is motivated by my own taste. Middle class problems are only interesting to me if there is other tension explored or revealed. I have grown up in a diverse environment and I appreciate the company of older and younger people, from different social classes and ethnic groups. When I reflect on my creative work thus far, I am encouraged with the political stance that is achieved when diverse characters, situations, and representations are included, however, I am still not fully aware of how to fully express meaning or reveal social order with subtlety. In *Chola Tripping* there is a conscious and deliberate attempt to point to hierarchy and alienation in elite educational environments, but the play also feels self conscious. As I have let go of the reins when I am writing, the characters themselves become their own agents, and even though I don't always agree with who they are or what they represent, they exist more on their own terms than in my earlier writing.

I am curious about gender politics and I notice them playing out in interesting ways in my work. I tend to investigate how women relate to each other. In two of my plays the female characters are their own worst enemies. In *Chola Tripping* and *Re-Living*, the women harass each other, are highly critical, and don't coalesce for a common good. I have at times witnessed a general lack of civility and a detrimental

competitiveness among women in the university setting and it is reflected in the plays. I don't attempt to represent all women or all views, but it is something I'm noticing in my work and leaves an opening for a feminist critique. After watching *Chola Tripping* one Latina friend was disturbed that the two Latina characters didn't remain friends at the end of the play. Her point was that Latinas must always act in solidarity against both patriarchy and racism. This is a sound theoretical argument but it didn't make sense for the creative work. I am less inclined these days to censor the words or deeds of the characters; they are made vulnerable to theoretical critique, but I don't care. "To be decisive is violent" (Bogart, 2001, p. 46).

### *Chatterbox and Re:Living*

In this section I will discuss two plays I have written in the MFA program:

*Chatterbox* and *Re: Living*. The plays have major distinctions, but they also share some commonalities. In reflecting on the plays I will attend to time and space, character and relationship, and theme.

*Chatterbox*, exists in a more lyrical world, with the present moment and memory contrasted with one another. In *Chatterbox*, memory reinforces plot and theme.

*Re: Living* has sharper edges and exists in the present moment. Memories are presented as harsh yet insightful aspects of character. The characters speak to memory in real time with the exception of a flashback sequence. Both plays have out of sequence events, though in *Chatterbox* it is a controlling element and in *Re: Living* the one out of sequence segment serves as a pressure release valve. *Chatterbox* and *Re: Living* work against the Aristotelian model of drama in that they do not adhere to the three unities of place, time and action (Aristotle, 1982).

#### **Chatterbox**

*Chatterbox* chronicles the relationship between Valentina, an effervescent and spirited kindergarten teacher and Marco, an uptight literary scholar and expert on the work of one reclusive Chicano writer. As Valentina struggles to assert herself in the relationship to become visible, Marco retreats more completely into the world of ideas. In a combination of linear scenes interspersed with vibrant memories, the play explores issues of love, the line between art and reality, obsession with the written word, and the impulse to live in the moment.

One of the literacy influences on *Chatterbox* is the novel *Hopscotch* by Argentinian author Julio Cortázar (Cortázar & Rabassa, 1966). Thematically, both *Chatterbox* and *Hopscotch* deal with obsession, fragmented story structure and doomed relationships. In *Hopscotch*, Cortázar directs the reader to approach the book in any order. Defying linear structure, *Hopscotch* encourages the reader to travel between worlds, realities, experiences and perceptions while also traversing distinct geographic landscapes (Cortázar & Rabassa, 1966).

**Time and Space.** The initial impulse while writing *Chatterbox* was to write a series of linear scenes and also a series of non-linear memory scenes. The linear scenes, taking place in the pastry shop provide a sequential view of the relationship between Valentina and Marco. The chatterbox scenes, or memory scenes, were initially intended to be interchangeable and manipulated by the narrator with the chatterbox. The thought was that the scenes might be more thematically punctuated if they, like memories, were manipulated. However, after several public readings, respondents reacted positively to the order of the script as presented so I set the script in this order. However, I am still interested in viewing the play in a different order. I think this would contribute to a liveness and sense of immediacy with the actors. While *Chatterbox* is not a piece of Epic theatre, the self-sustaining quality of the scenes, especially the titled memory chatterbox scenes, it does have an Epic Theatre quality (Brecht & Willett, 1964). Brecht describes, “...with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable



of life” (Brecht, 1964, p. 70). The chatterbox scenes can operate as disjointed stand alone scenes.

The chatterbox, then, becomes an organizing motif and controlling device, even with the scenes being set more deliberately. Not only does the chatterbox control which memory in time we see, it also dictates our space on the stage and in the world of the characters. The landscape of this play was motivated by Stein’s ideas of decentralized use of space (Durham, 2005). There is movement and choreography occurring simultaneously throughout the performance at different spots on the stage. All worlds of the play remain visible at all times.

The pastry shop is the site of the linear action in the play. The pastry shop, like the Paris of *Hopscotch*, serves as the place of intellectual life for the play (Tcherepashenets, 2008). In the pastry shop Marco and Jacob control the conversational discourse and Valentina struggles to participate in a meaningful way. Jacob acts as a translator in the pastry shop, negotiating discourse between Valentina and Marco. Valentina differs from Cortázar’s *La Maga*, in that in the pastry shop, the center of intellectual life, she is alienated and displaced (Tcherepashenets, 2008). Valentina’s lines are a pattern of attack and defense. Marco frequently talks over her or discredits her contributions while Jacob negotiates the verbal landscape to create room for Valentina’s contributions. Canuto Morales is the unseen present character in the pastry shop. Marco reads from his book “Border Macho” and uses Canuto to speak for him. Because we later learn that Patsy is Canuto Morales, we get Patsy’s voice in the pastry shop, and she directs the opening of the chatterbox scenes.

The chatterbox scenes with Valentina and Marco are characterized by a different kind of tempo. While they are each more relaxed and less combative, we see the secrets of the relationship revealed. In the Valentina recounts memories and actively and passively shares her deepest needs and desires. Marco, on the other hand, uses literature and the work of Canuto Morales to express his emotions. At other times, in the privacy of their own home, Marco gives in to Valentina. It is not through spoken language that this occurs. His gestures, which are small overtures, are significant. He dances with Valentina in one scene, in another, he combs and braids her hair.

Valentina directs the world outside the pastry shop. Her energy and vitality are more deeply actualized when she occupies space outside. She can direct the conversation and her words are peppered with action. For example, Valentina eats paletas and turns cartwheels in the opening scene at the museum. She physically and verbally drives the conversation and demonstrates that she is a person of action. These bodied experiences reveal a woman who is not only occupying an emotional and intellectual space but she approaches the world with her body and her senses.

Valentina's feelings and desires drive the chatterbox scenes. We see how she relates to Marco, but also how her sister and mother, both described as strict, have impacted her. Her physical presence commands the stage and she is a person in action. In the scene titled "Raw Meat," her state of grief has her physically frozen and immobile, it is in this state and posture that we see a more complicated type of physicality in the rigid stance.

The play utilizes two contrasting notions of time. A linear sequence takes place in the pastry shop. The memory scenes, track the non-linear stories, and appear out of

chronological order. Both the linear scenes and the memory scenes contribute to the overall narrative thread. This tactic allows for significant reveals to appear when they will have the most dramatic impact, rather than when they chronologically appear in the story. The desire to tell the story using two distinct notions of time stems from a desire to replicate the way people actually tell recount events. The altered narrative structure, which relies on the two notions of time, is a feature of the play that descends from Gertrude Stein. Although there is some narrative structure, like Stein's plays, there are numerous types of relationships present in the overall play score (Dydo, 2003). While Stein relied heavily on language and linguistic relationships, this play includes thematic relationships, language relationships, and time relationships.

**Character and Relationship.** Marco is also modeled after Oliveira, the protagonist in *Hopscotch*. For a portion of the novel, Oliveira, a writer living the bohemian lifestyle in Paris, is in a significant relationship with La Maga. It is only after La Maga and Oliveira split that he realizes the magnitude of both her and the relationship. His intellectual pursuits become halted and his obsession germinates. In subsequent or other sections of the book he is missing La Maga, and obsessively searching for her in literal and figurative ways (Cortázar & Rabassa, 1966). In *Chatterbox*, Marco shares some of these obsessive qualities, but in his case, he is dedicating his life to the study of one author. While he has the potential for a more vibrant human relationship with Valentina, and also with his confidante Jacob, his most intimate desires are satiated with literature. He is awakened to Valentina's presence only in her absence, and then, he replaces her as the object of his obsession.

Chatterbox differs from *Hopscotch* in that the protagonist is not the obsessed; rather the narrative is guided by Valentina, who is vying for Marco's attention. In some ways, Valentina is trapped in a love relationship with unreciprocated intentionality. In the first scene she explains that she wants oatmeal in a man, and Marco fits the bill. The complexity of wants versus needs when it comes to love are explored and become central to the journeys of Marco and Valentina. Valentina loves Marco, but he leaves her need for intimacy, spontaneity, and action unfulfilled.

Patsy and Valentina have two scenes together. Valentina is expressively most herself with Patsy. Patsy listens to Valentina so the tempo and style of the play shifts dramatically in these two scenes. The two women share secrets with each other and engage in a kind of cathartic series of revelations. In *Glitter and Sprinkles* we see the women talking about sex, relationships, and politics. There is no hesitation or second-guessing, and few interruptions. Each person is free to engage in meaningful conversation without discrediting. In the final scene, the two women bond over shared cultural experiences and Patsy shares her life secret.

Both Valentina and Marco have mentors of an older generation. Representing intergenerational dynamics is a long interest of mine, partly rooted in personal taste, but also influenced by the intergenerational characters in Carballido's plays (Carballido, 1965, 1984). The mentors, Patsy and Jacob share some attributes: wisdom, compassion, and interest in the present. Yet, there are two distinct relationship structures with the pairs. Jacob and Marco have time and longevity, but there is a lack of intimacy in their relationship. This becomes clear when Jacob tells Marco he accompanies his wife to the

golf course every week. Marco, unaware of this detail after twenty years of friendship, is not emotionally vested in his mentor. His focus is on a literary and intellectual relationship based on mutual company and routine.

Valentina and Patsy are recent friends but in a short time develop a meaningful and intimate friendship. As fast friends, we see a reciprocity and rounding out of each character. Both get closer to actualizing their true selves, Valentina because she can suddenly participate in a relationship as an equal partner, and Patsy because she can share and own her own past.

**Theme.** *Chatterbox* employs a narrator throughout the play. The narrator, speaking directly to the audience, introduces each of the chatterbox/memory scenes. The purpose of the narrator is two-fold. Her narrations contribute the obvious visual life in the play. I wanted to experiment with the idea of someone describing or filtering what the audience sees. In narrating what is seen, and also in expanding what the audience sees with a rich metaphorical vocabulary, certain whimsical or emotionally relevant content can be punctuated. This technique, often employed in Latin American cinema, is also present in plays. Brechtian epic theatre relies on narrators as a tool in revealing the apparatus of theatre and in order to break the fourth wall (Brecht & Willett, 1964). In *Yo Tambien Hablo de la Rosa*, a Medium interrupts the narrative sequence and deviates from the action of the train incident to introduce philosophical poems about the nature of meaning, the mystery of truth, and the possibility of reality. In this series of seemingly disjointed monologues the Medium speaks in lyrical discontinuity and invites the audience to engage in complexity and profundity

(Carballido, 1965). As this is my favorite play, I enjoy toying with the idea of a larger force commenting on the action while at the same time, revealing small insights about the characters and in doing so, revealing the apparatus of the theatre (Brecht & Willett, 1964).

In *Chatterbox*, because Patsy, a short story writer, is the narrator, there is also an impact on the story. Patsy as narrator illuminates the question, whose story is it? Is Patsy telling the story? Does her point of view change or call to question the accuracy of the events? These are lingering questions I have yet to clarify and resolve in my mind.

### **Re: Living**

*Re: Living* is a four person closet play. Four faculty members at a public university find themselves locked in a closet together during an active shooter incident on campus. However, in the closet, for much of the time it is business as usual. Inspirationally, the play began with bake-off prompts and large questions I was mulling after rereading *The Danube* (Fornes, 1986). With the bake-off specifically, we were asked to write a play with the following ingredients: A Second Chance; A Grave Mistake; Time Out of Sequence; Time Going Backwards and Time Repeating Itself; A Mushroom; The Ringing of a Bell; A Come-On; Leaving an Offering; The song “I Got You Babe” by Sonny and Cher; and A Small Furry Animal. In a bake-off writing experience the task is to craft as much of a play as possible within a forty-eight hour continuous period. The opening scene of the play, in which Maricela reads a popular children's circular book, is re-lived in reverse at the end of the play. The play, using fast-paced and snappy dialogue,

explores workplace tensions, contemporary violence threatening university campuses, relationships, and unbending aspects of character.

**Theme.** As mentioned, Fornes' play *The Danube* (1986) was on my mind when I began writing. In *The Danube*, the love story between Paul and Eve evolves while the world around them disintegrates because of nuclear fallout. The play never directly implicates nuclear disaster but the deterioration of their physical selves reveals the ultimate disaster has occurred. In thinking about *The Danube* as a source of inspiration I formulated the following questions: What disaster are we preparing for? Is there a modern day equivalent to a nuclear drill? What absurd qualities exist in our emergency preparedness plans? How do we reconcile a business-as-usual collective attitude with the active threat and preparedness of something terrible? How does being in a constant state of preparedness for disaster increase our aggression in everyday situations? Working from these questions inspired by *The Danube* (Fornes, 1986) I meshed the bakeoff elements and I began the draft of *Re: Living*.

Though there is presumably an active shooter in the building, the play is about the living that occurs within the period of threat. Not nearly as obtuse or elegantly disguised as the never directly mentioned nuclear fallout in *The Danube* (Fornes, 1986), *Re: Living* makes it clear early on that there is the active shooter in close proximity. The play continues through a sequence of relationship-based events.

**Character and Relationship.** Maricela, a combative Chicana feminist is surrounded by three other colleagues: Janice, a strong and disciplined leader; Andrew, a pre-tenured Casanova; and Laura, a new faculty member and quasi-Christian with

questionable research ethics. While in the closet their default personality traits are solidified, and the characters relive their best and worst selves. Reminded of their own mortality, the group begins a series of life confessions and storytelling bringing them closer together. This closeness is interrupted when the history of the group is revealed. As the play crashes toward an ambiguous ending, the four professors return to their hostile relationships.

The characters are colleagues, friends, and past lovers. The friendship, only lived and realized in the middle of the play, is brought on by circumstance. It is the tension from past romance and workplace drama that creates the most animosity among the characters. Carballido and Fornes effectively use relationship triangles to create intrigue and conflict (Carballido, 1984; Fornes, 1986). This play uses some of the same techniques, but the added dimension of workplace drama necessitated an additional character. I also needed the closet to feel more full, and four bodies in an enclosed space is decidedly more claustrophobic than three.

As a four person play there are different ways to generate action using combinations of characters in alliance or conflict with one another. Throughout the play this dynamic is shifting. Ultimately, there is both a three against one dynamic, and an every person for themselves dynamic at play. By the end of the play, the three women gang up against Andrew, but no character is aligned with each other. Working out relationships with a whole group and with distinct pairs is reminiscent of *Fefu and Her Friends* (Fornes, 1989). In *Fefu* we are able to better understand relationship structure



and character in contrasting whole group conversations, with the intimate conversations of pairs.

**Time and Space.** Where *Chatterbox* jumps in and out of the present and the memories, *Re: Living* operates with a finite, linear ticking clock. The ticking clock idea was inspired by several things. First, in a bake-off writing experience there is a very literal ticking clock. Get the play out in forty-eight hours. I wanted to use the momentum of the writing experience to become a palpable force in the play. In *Re: Living* we are set in continuous motion from the beginning to the ending. Clipped, telegraphic dialogue generates speed in the play to contribute to a sense of tension.

Two other time based structural elements are at work in the play. In the opening scene of the play, Maricela reads a popular children's circular book. The book, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Numeroff was rewritten to start the play (Numeroff, & Bond, 1985). This book was chosen because as I considered the bake-off ingredients, specifically the idea of time repeating itself, the book popped into my head. I decided to write a scene opening with a re-written version of this book that could be played forward and backward. I therefore repeat the opening scene at the end of the play but it is played in reverse. Writing a scene that can play in reverse while still making sense scene was an additional challenge and interest of mine. Re-living the scene in reverse at the end of the play adds an ominous dimension of time repetition to the play. The book *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* becomes a controlling metaphor for the play as well. The children's book lands the reader at the starting point by the end of the text and in the play we end too end re-living the beginning.

Another structural element related to time in the play is the flashback scene. This is deliberately added in the middle of the play to disrupt the linear narration of the story and to deactivate the ticking clock. It is only in going back in time that the full narrative arc of each character and their respective relationships can be revealed. More importantly, the audience has both a temporal and spatial distance from the pending doom.

In terms of spatial theatrical influences, I was interested in single setting, confinement, and concentrated time. *El Dia Que Soltaron Los Leones* (Carballido, 1984) and *Promenade* (Fornes, 1971) have both intrigued me and activated my curiosity around confinement. These two plays result in the main characters experiencing more liberation in a cell than in the seemingly free spaces of society. In *El Dia Que Soltaron Los Leones*, Ana ends up in a lion's cage, with the lions, and finally frees herself from attack and the confinement of her previous life of servitude with her aunt (Bixler, 1984; Carballido, 1984). In *Promenade* (Fornes, 1971) has Inmate 105 and Inmate 106 preferring their jail cell to the harsh reality of the outside or "real" world. Though *Re-Living* does not ultimately make the same overall statement, there are instances of true bliss and a kind of cathartic liberation in the closet as the characters reveal hidden secrets.

Gregory S. Moss' play *Reunion* (2014) also planted the idea of a single room setting with a continuous clock ticking. After viewing a production of *Reunion* I reflected on the satisfying tension, irony and pace that is established within the parameters of confined space and continuous action. *Re: Living* does break from continuous action.

This aspect, initially included as a bake-off has become a crucial point of tension release for the time element of the play.

## Conclusion

It took me some time to end up writing for theatre. However, after much effort and experimentation with playwriting I am convinced the theatre is a good place for my work because I am interested in live performance and I have a deep interest in language. I appreciate the ability to see people doing things, acting and reacting, moving around, and emoting, and using language in real time within a contained space. There are no take-backs, no rewinds, no start overs, the events and action are what they are in any given moment. I find sharing an artistic craft in real time to be not only risky but also satisfying because the impact of the individual on the collective experience is dynamic. The tension between rehearsed preparation and making new can be felt in live theatre performance.

Imagination and creativity are necessary in the theatre because of the constrictions of time and space. I like that the audience has to take imaginative and creative leaps to process the information of the performance (even if the play is rooted in realism). Theatre, unlike television and film, occurs right before the audience and the interactive element of a shared experience is exciting to me. After a live performance both the actor and the audience member can say, "I was there." This simultaneous presence between actor and audience member creates an artistic synergy that has the potential to catapult a script into an interactive being.

Theatre is not only time bound, but also spatially determined. The visual arts have always been appealing to me and I welcome the opportunity to integrate visual elements into a play. The stage as a container requires considerations that differ from

creating for film. The ability to see the space and mark it with artifacts, effects, lighting, and sound is a welcome challenge. I have chosen to work as a writer for theatre because I want to produce art bound by time and space; working in this genre I feel the potential for generating endless, rich compilations of visual, linguistic, and multisensory text for a live audiences.

In the next phase of my work as a playwright I hope to continue exploring two distinct creative avenues for theatrical writing: fictional plays about navigating complex political, social and cultural situations; and verbatim plays exploring relevant social and controversial issues. Related to the first, I am intrigued with staging the nuanced experiences of specific social challenges and situations. My characters consistently reveal the way power, relationships, and lived experience collide with the larger American stock story. I appreciate integrating humor, irony, language, and spectacle as theatrical elements. I write plays questioning the American dream where the boundaries between distinct personal experiences are blurred with the larger American identity and metanarrative.

Second, I want to continue writing verbatim plays based on interviews with those involved in specific contemporary issues. Theatre and performance can offer a different lens from which to dialogue about difficult to discuss topics. Working in the verbatim form is particularly challenging because assemblage is crucial to maintaining the necessary balance between information and entertainment. Recently my play *This Scarlet F: A Performance on School Grading* has expanded a conversation between community members, policy makers, parents, educational scholars, and teachers about

the unintended consequences of school grading and other punitive educational policies. Research and teaching tasks associated with my position as a professor have been a source of inspiration and have contributed to my creative production. I am determined to more carefully fuse the work of a researcher with the work of a creative artist. I must say that I fully intend to more fully invest in fiction.

I feel as if the past three years have been an intense warm-up, and just now am I ready to begin. In many ways, I wish the MFA program was ahead of me, the generative and collective experience in the classes has been invaluable in my process. As I complete the MFA program I have a fear of creative atrophy, and a list of potential barriers to prevent me from the creative enterprise of playwriting. I won't have the rigorous demands and deadlines of the MFA program. I have to make a living. Sometimes I lack ideas. I want to do other things. The list could go on. I am reminded though, that writing takes writing. I will avoid becoming a Bartleby, like those described in *Bartleby & Co.* who discontinue writing for a plethora of excuses and reasons (Vilematas, 2000). I will avoid the Bartleby syndrome by continuing the daily writing practices I have established over the past few years. Writing takes writing.

## APPENDICES

CHATTERBOX  
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## Chatterbox

### CHARACTERS:

Valentina-	38-40, Exuberant and effervescent Latina/Chicana
Marco-	Early 40s, Bookish Latino
Jacob-	Early 60s, Professorial and dignified Latino
Patsy/	Early 60s, Latina, Wise female with a voice we can trust
Narrator	

The Narrator is modeled after the Narrators in the Latin American film tradition.

The stage has a small pastry shop in the middle. All pastry shop scenes take place in this center space. The chatterbox scenes take place in the four corners of the stage. One is a bedroom, one a small living room area, another an open park space, and the fourth is a kitchen.

Pastry shop scenes tell a linear story of Valentina and Marco. Chatterbox scenes are the out of order memories.

As Patsy/Narrator provides narration on Chatterbox scenes she is seated in a section of the stage not used for the Chatterbox scene.

ACT

Chatterbox Scene:

Paletas

PATSY

La vida es un sueño. They say life is a dream. Not **like a dream**, but a dream. An actual dream. But life is also like popcorn, sometimes bursting with potential, at other times, left dry and hard at the bottom of the bowl, unpopped, un-actualized. Life is like a piano, what you get depends on how you play it. Life is like a mountain, difficult to climb but worth it in the end for the view. You get what I'm saying.

Valentina enters to center with a paper chatterbox. She manipulates the chatterbox.

Valentina rather fancied life more like a chatterbox, or cootie-catcher, saltcellar, whirly bird, fortune teller. . Maybe because she'd always been around kids, or because she loved games, she envisioned life more like a chatterbox. We make choices and the results unfold. Our future spouses, the number of kids we will have, the occupation we choose, and the type of car we will drive, are all contained in one simple piece of folded paper. Will it be this or that? Him or her? How is our destiny wrapped up in this chatterbox?

And so it goes. Give me a number, any number, one through eight. (wait for audience to call one out, the count it out loudly, manipulating the chatterbox) One, two, three, four.....(etc). Now a color.

Oh. Not many days like this one. A handsome stranger will approach you.

Blackout.

The lush park of a museum. Valentina, walking, looks over her shoulder to see Marco close behind her.

VALENTINA

Why are you following me?

MARCO

I have no idea.

VALENTINA

You've been creeping around all over the museum. I'm gonna call the cops.

MARCO

Or you could give me your number, join me for a drink.

VALENTINA

Why would I/

MARCO

We have things in common.

VALENTINA

Like/

MARCO

We both enjoy museums.

VALENTINA

What else?

MARCO

You seem to like teaching, and I like teaching.

VALENTINA

So you're a teacher.

MARCO

College, not kids, but still.

VALENTINA

When's this drink supposed to happen?

MARCO

I give finals next week, then I usually take around a week to grade them, so maybe in a couple of weeks. I could get your number or email address/

VALENTINA

A couple of weeks? Are you kidding me? Now. Let's do it now, right here.

MARCO

It's three-thirty in the afternoon.

VALENTINA

I'm off the clock.

MARCO

I was going to get your number, and/

VALENTINA

Never call me? That's how it works. Men collect numbers, lose their courage the minute they walk away, and we never hear from them. You wanna buy me a drink, buy it now.

MARCO

I really have to get back to work, but, fine. I know of this pastry shop/

VALENTINA

Let's just go to the café in the museum.

MARCO

I don't want to go back there.

VALENTINA

Then here. On the grass.

Valentina spreads her sweater on the grass  
and sits.

MARCO

I was thinking more of a pub, or/

VALENTINA

We'll get paletas. From the guy with the cart over there. I'll take coconut.

MARCO

This isn't what I/

VALENTINA

You get hibiscus and we can share.

MARCO

Share a popsicle? We've only just met.

VALENTINA

But they're both so good.

MARCO

Uhhh, would you happen to have cash?

VALENTINA

What?

MARCO

I wasn't expecting to, and I'm sure he can't take a card, sorry. I just don't carry cash any/

VALENTINA

I'll buy, this time/

MARCO

I feel like a dumbass, I invited you/

VALENTINA

But I suggested paletas. If you're not a jerk you can buy me a coffee sometime.

MARCO

Fair enough.

Marco leaves to get the paletas. Valentina  
shouts after him....

VALENTINA

What's your name?

MARCO

Marco.

VALENTINA

Polo!

MARCO

What?

VALENTINA

Nevermind. Good to meet you, Marco. I'm Valentina.

Valentina stretches in the sun like a cat in a  
window sill. She rolls around the grass and  
remembers her childhood days spent  
running barefooted. She smiles deep in the  
cavity of a private memory.

Marco returns with two paletas/popsicles.

MARCO

You look comfortable.

VALENTINA

I know it's bad to say this in the desert during a drought, but I do love rolling in grass.

MARCO

Green is good for the brain.

VALENTINA

Try this, it's delicious. So what do you teach?

MARCO

Literature.

VALENTINA

Fun. I love reading.

MARCO

I specialize in Chicano literature, the work of Canuto Morales. You ever heard of him?

VALENTINA

Of course. Border Macho is standard fare in high school now.

MARCO

When I saw you in the museum you reminded me of a character from that book.

VALENTINA

The grandma that made moonshine?

MARCO

No, a character with no name, only a brief mention is made of her, she rakes a pile of hay in a stable for Pato to sleep on, but she gets carried away and the pile reaches the ceiling. He can't get to the top of the pile.

VALENTINA

How is that like me?

MARCO

Watching you in the museum, with kids climbing all over you, looking at art, seemed exaggerated. Like that insurmountable pile.

VALENTINA

I think Border Macho is good, but kind of overrated.

MARCO

Overrated! I've spent the last twenty years studying that book.

VALENTINA

Good for you. But I personally find something unconvincing about the narrator.

MARCO

He redefined Machismo to include random acts of compassion.

VALENTINA

Whatever. We can have different opinions. What do you think of the hibiscus?

MARCO

Good recommendation. I never would've ordered this one. I usually stick with flavors like strawberry or banana.

VALENTINA

Mexicans are so much more creative than Americans when it comes to popsicles.

MARCO

I never thought about it/

VALENTINA

Give me a bite.

MARCO

Just a little one.

VALENTINA

Ummm, so good! Here, hold this. I have a sudden urge to see if I can still do a cartwheel/

MARCO

Here? But you're in a skirt.

VALENTINA

I can't resist, not with this grass.

Valentina begins doing cartwheels. Her skirt flares out around her like a Spanish fan. In each cartwheel she is all ages, innocent girl,

blooming adolescent, confident woman, the  
cycle of life in each flip.

VALENTINA

Not bad for an old lady right?

MARCO

Mesmerizing.

Valentina grabs her popsicle.

VALENTINA

You're just being nice. Your turn.

MARCO

I can't do a cartwheel.

VALENTINA

Because you're embarrassed?

MARCO

I don't know how.

VALENTINA

I'll show you.

MARCO

But I can do headstands.

VALENTINA

Really?

MARCO

Usually I do them against a wall,

VALENTINA

I'll hold your legs.

MARCO

What about this?

He gestures to popsicle.  
Valentina grabs his popsicle.

MARCO

I've never done headstands in public/



VALENTINA

It'll be fun. Celebrate the start of summer with courage.

MARCO

Okay. Hold this/

VALENTINA

Lick off the melty part first...

Valentina holds one popsicle in her mouth by the stick. The other she holds in her hand. With her free hand she helps manage Marco's legs. All the while she is trying to manage the melt.

MARCO

I can't believe I'm doing this.

VALENTINA

Blame it on the grass/

MARCO

I'm gonna blame it on you!

Marco is in a contained headstand.

VALENTINA

You're good.

MARCO

And I thought the exhibit was going to be the best part of my day.

VALENTINA

You do gymnastics or something?

MARCO

No, but I go to the gym.

VALENTINA

Yuck, one of those. I should go running for the hills.

Valentina releases his legs and he gets into an upright position. She hands him her popsicle.

MARCO

You've given me your paleta.

VALENTINA

Only for a minute. It's nice to trade sometimes.

MARCO

I do cardio and some weight lifting.

VALENTINA

I've decided I won't date workout dudes. Classic narcissists. And artists. You don't make art do you? Are you like Canuto Morales? You write?

MARCO

Not creatively. I tried writing back in the day, now I prefer the life of a scholar/

VALENTINA

Thank god. I'm continually finding myself with these self-absorbed guys that can't live in the moment/

MARCO

I'm sure not all artists and/

VALENTINA

Maybe not. But I'm not going there intentionally again. Artists are like, I love you. I don't. I need you. I don't. I do. I don't. Come close, go away. Hot-and-cold-shit. Manufacturing drama so they can get inspired.

MARCO

Sounds terrible.

VALENTINA

It's fucking horrible. Same with workout guys, only they can't get an erection or have a heated discussion unless they've been like, pumping iron for hours/

MARCO

So what is your ideal/

VALENTINA

I've dated so many guys who can't have adult conversations. They don't have real friends. They'd rather be with a mirror than with real humans. It's depressing.

MARCO

Mature. You want mature.

VALENTINA

I want an adult. Someone with integrity. Like my grandfather. He was good and strong and wholesome.

MARCO

Wholesome?

VALENTINA

A job helps, and reliable. Steady. Someone with a routine. Doing the same thing everyday. Dependable/

MARCO

So oatmeal. You're looking for oatmeal.

VALENTINA

There's nothing wrong with oatmeal.

MARCO

You get to do cartwheels in the park but you want oatmeal in a man.

VALENTINA

It's not boring.

MARCO

That's what it sounds like.

VALENTINA

I'm exhausted by all the guys our age running around chasing butterflies.

MARCO

Butterflies are code for?

VALENTINA

But you can only see a butterfly if you sit patiently. And watch. Chasing doesn't help.

MARCO

I haven't eaten a popsicle in years.

VALENTINA

You should make it a habit.

MARCO

Maybe I will, I mean, it is the start of summer.

VALENTINA

When are you buying me that coffee?

MARCO

Tomorrow morning?

VALENTINA

What about classes and grading,

MARCO

That can wait. Meet me at the pastry shop, near campus. Pan de Vida.

VALENTINA

What time?

MARCO

Anytime. I'll be there all day.

VALENTINA

And if you're not?

MARCO

I'm there everyday.

VALENTINA

Well then Marco Polo, I'll see you in the morning.

Valentina leaves the stage doing a series of cartwheels.

End Scene.

Pastry Shop  
One

A pastry shop.  
Two chairs around a table.  
Four comfy chairs around a magazine table.

Valentina stares at pastries in a case. She is mesmerized. So many choices, so much beauty. She makes the most of the visual experience, even though, the only way to

get to know a pastry is to grasp it, to bite it,  
to taste it.

VALENTINA

They all look so good today.

Marco reads from a book.

MARCO

*"There were no embraces... where there is great love there is often little display of it."*

Really? This is some advanced cliché shit.

*"But Don Quixote was so convinced that they were giants that he neither heard his squire Sancho's shouts nor saw what stood in front of him."*

I'm guessing the translator is augmenting

*"Finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind."*

A dried brain from reading? Really? I can't do it. This is crap.

He throws the book on the coffee table.

VALENTINA

You criticize everything I give you.

MARCO

What'd you like about this book?

VALENTINA

I haven't read it yet. But it's a new translation and the cover's nice.

MARCO

The cover?

VALENTINA

Look at it.

MARCO

Don't say that too loudly Valentina, not in here.

VALENTINA

I'm okay with myself. Do I like pretty things? Yes. Am I stimulated by nice covers? Yes.  
Will I apologize?

MARCO

No.

VALENTINA

Hell no.

Val sits sets a pastry and coffee down. She bites the pastry. It is a photographic moment. Her pastry is big, it is luscious. She is aware of this. Jacob sits on one of the cozy chairs next to Marco.

JACOB

Don't knock it Marco. Miguel de Cervantes is considered the father of the novel/

VALENTINA

God this chocolate éclair is to die for.

MARCO

Don Quixote is not a novel. Maybe a series of vignettes,

VALENTINA

You know how sometimes the baker at this place gets the inner filling just right.

JACOB

You're reacting to a translation.

VALENTINA

Ummmm.

MARCO

I'm repulsed by the arrogance of it. Cervantes has no respect for the reader.

VALENTINA

Taste this Marco.

MARCO

It looks/

VALENTINA

Oozy?

MARCO

No. Deflated.

VALENTINA

Just a small bite/

MARCO  
It's good.

VALENTINA  
Like...

MARCO  
Tastes like they always do.

JACOB  
That's the sign of quality.

VALENTINA  
The cream is better than usual.

MARCO  
I can't taste it.

VALENTINA  
It's cuz you're not paying attention/

JACOB  
Valentina, the reason people come back here is because they replicate a good experience.

VALENTINA  
That's not why I come back. Every time I get an éclair, or a scone, or a cup of espresso it's new. I'm different and the food is different.

JACOB  
Difference does not cultivate a following. It's all about replication.

MARCO  
I don't care about the food here at all. I come because they say this is where Canuto/

VALENTINA  
Morales wrote his last novel.

MARCO  
Yeah.

VALENTINA  
We know already.

JACOB

That's loyalty.

VALENTINA

You uptight motherfuckers are so busy studying some crazy ass author, and you can't even taste this éclair for what it is.

MARCO

Give me another bite then and I'll tell you/

VALENTINA

Buy your own.

MARCO

Val/

VALENTINA

You don't appreciate anything. Always obsessing over dead people.

MARCO

Canuto Morales isn't dead.

JACOB

You know who makes the best éclairs?

MARCO

Bite Shop Bakery.

VALENTINA

Then where is he? Hiding from the public because he's afraid?

MARCO

Yes, Jacob. Bite Shop Bakery. Their filling is more like whipped cream. I like that.  
(To Val) Canuto Morales has nothing to be afraid of.

VALENTINA

Then where's his next book? He can't write because the first one was great. The second good, and the third /

MARCO

Lay off. He's working on it.



VALENTINA

He's probably in some little room with dingy curtains waiting for a royalty check with atrophied hands.

JACOB

He released a statement a few years ago saying his next book is a cross between a manifesto and an epic psychological novel/

MARCO

That kind of thinking takes some serious time/

JACOB

And life experience/

VALENTINA

How does he experience life if he's hiding out?

MARCO

How did Gramsci write about liberation when incarcerated?

VALENTINA

So you're not going to read the book?

MARCO

Of course I'll read the book. When it comes out.

VALENTINA

I meant the new translation of Don Quixote? The present I just gave you...

MARCO

No.

JACOB

You should...for your own development as a scholar.

MARCO

Bullshit. Come sit with me in this chair Val. It's good to see you here.

She sits on his lap.

VALENTINA

I miss you.

MARCO

You know where to find me.

VALENTINA

I wanted to find you in bed this morning but you were already gone when I got up.

MARCO

I'm searching for a university position.

VALENTINA

And?

MARCO

No new listings.

VALENTINA

Write your own novel instead of obsessing over someone else's/

MARCO

I'm a scholar babe. I think.

JACOB

I knew Marco when he wrote fiction/

MARCO

I did dabble in fiction, but I was seduced by analysis/

JACOB

Some people do both/

MARCO

But not well.

VALENTINA

Or you could make a u-turn. Try writing a short story or a poem/

MARCO

I wouldn't be caught dead authoring a short story.

VALENTINA

Want to go with me on a full moon hike tonight?

JACOB

Don't knock the short story.

MARCO

I'm a novel guy. But really, let's say I would've become a writer writer. Do you think I'd still be sitting in this café today? Barely scraping by...constantly looking for work to supplement my income.

VALENTINA

The advertisement says they're going to look for nocturnal animals along the river. Apparently some owls are roosting.

MARCO

Would I be different?

JACOB

Quantum physics. The answers to your questions reside in an equation.

MARCO

Did I make the right decision or the wrong decision/

VALENTINA

And bats. I think the flier said something about bats.

MARCO

Remember as kids they made us write imaginary stories in class. I always felt like mine were so good. I didn't judge them, I kind of amused myself.

JACOB

That kind of writing existed for its own sake.

MARCO

Exactly, an intimate expression of imagination without censorship.

JACOB

And the lack of restraint visible in the accompanying drawings.

VALENTINA

It'll be chilly so if you decide to come on the hike you should bring a sweater.

JACOB

Pure indulgence!

VALENTINA

They'll provide night vision goggles.

Valentina rises and stretches with the exuberance of a baby tiger and the grace of a lion.

Jacob watches with interest as she yawns with intense satisfaction.

MARCO

Where're you going?

VALENTINA

Work/

MARCO

I'll miss you, I like when you're close.

VALENTINA

I was sitting on you and you disagreed or ignored every word I said.

MARCO

Later, when you're gone I'll think about you and the éclair.

VALENTINA

Whatever, loco.

JACOB

I think Val's wrong.

MARCO

And the cream in the middle.

JACOB

I don't think you can make a U-turn and begin writing fiction at this point.

MARCO

No?

JACOB

I think your brain has settled into itself. It has been acutely wired toward analysis. You don't have new things to say.

MARCO

But I can reflect on what others say.

JACOB

And that my friend, is what separates you from the monkeys.

VALENTINA

I like the way monkeys do it better.

Valentina leaves the pastry shop.

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:  
Birthday Wishes

PATSY

Remember your twelfth birthday? Or was it your tenth...we can't actually pinpoint the order of our memories anyway. When it comes to memory there is a constant tension between specificity, chronology, and essence. I do know there came an age when we wanted toys but someone said we were too old to continue receiving them as gifts.

Valentina is in her bedroom. She carefully removes her work clothing and changes into the cozy clothes of home. We can't fully see her, her body is an illusion. Never exposed, but always present.

MARCO

What do you want for your birthday?

VALENTINA

A baby.

MARCO

Besides that.

VALENTINA

Two babies.

MARCO

How about a third option. Something I'm willing to give you.

VALENTINA

We can raise a family together Marco.

MARCO

I'm too old for that

VALENTINA

You're only 40.

MARCO

I'm not talking about literal age, I referring to my place in life. I want to sit around and think, I like quiet for my writing, I can't see myself surrounded by constant noise and/

VALENTINA

I'd do most of the work

MARCO

Then the thing would hate me. An unresponsive father, I'd never play catch or build robots/

VALENTINA

You could read the collected works of Canuto Morales to the baby.

MARCO

It's not my thing. I don't have what it takes and I can recognize it. I'd be miserable and it would make me a mean person. I'd resent you and the child.

VALENTINA

I'd be a good mother.

MARCO

You'd be a wonderful mother, but I don't think you consider how your life would change. You're free and curious. You'd be tied down and that would kill your spirit.

VALENTINA

I'm tied down now and I still have a spirit.

MARCO

It'd be different.

VALENTINA

Our baby would be so cute.

MARCO

You're talking like those teen moms on TV that just want to hold something adorable

VALENTINA

I want to make a baby with the person I love. That's a normal thing.

MARCO

We're not even married.

VALENTINA

We don't have to be/

MARCO

You have twenty little kids to love every year. And they love you. You shape them, you care for them. Focus on the kids you already have.

VALENTINA

They're not mine.

MARCO

Everyday you come home from work and talk about the kids. My kids this, my kids that. If you think about it, they are your kids.

VALENTINA

If I don't do it now it'll be too late.

MARCO

I've been honest about this since we met.

VALENTINA

You said you were opposed to marriage for ideological reasons. I didn't think it meant/

MARCO

I'm not going to have a family Valentina. I don't have it in me.

VALENTINA

Is this about money?

MARCO

I have all the money I need.

VALENTINA

You have the money from your book royalties, but I'm talking about a livelihood.

MARCO

I have a job offer Val.

VALENTINA

You do?

MARCO

I do. It's not at the university, but it's a full time offer.

VALENTINA

At the community college?

MARCO

Yes.

VALENTINA

You said you'd never take a job there, at the teaching factory. What about your writing?

MARCO

I'll make time for that. See why I don't want a baby.

VALENTINA

Are you really going to accept the offer? It's not ideal/

MARCO

I've accepted it. I can teach a class dedicated to Canuto Morales, increase his fan base, generate more royalties for the guy. I've already started planning my syllabus/

VALENTINA

See, then it's a good time for a baby. I can take a year off since you'd be working.

MARCO

I can't have kids.

VALENTINA

But you would really like/

MARCO

No. I mean, I really can't have kids. I/

VALENTINA

How do you know? Maybe you tried before when you were married but I'm a different woman. It could have been her fault/

MARCO

I had a vasectomy.



VALENTINA

Wait, what? For your wife? Or, why would you do that anyway? You're young.

MARCO

My parents had five kids. Five. And they were smart people. They could've done so much with their lives but they were always scraping by, struggling, doing all kinds of jobs to feed five kids.

VALENTINA

Those were different times. I'm sure you wouldn't have been at risk for having five kids.

MARCO

My mother was going to go back to school when Selena started preschool, but she got pregnant again. I remember her crying. My father too. They were in the kitchen crying.

VALENTINA

They loved all of you.

MARCO

I'm not going to live my life like that. Always worried, or worse off getting stuck with a woman because she ends up pregnant. At least my parents liked each other but look at the guys that end up trapped because they have a kid with the wrong woman.

VALENTINA

Trapped. Stuck!

MARCO

The ultimate suffocation is to be with someone out of obligation.

VALENTINA

What a pessimistic view of relationships/

MARCO

It's a decision I don't regret. The doctor didn't want to do it to me because I was a young man. He said I'd change my mind. But I haven't.

VALENTINA

You should've told me sooner.

MARCO

I did, but you weren't listening.

VALENTINA

You didn't say it like this, like about a procedure, or this whole/

MARCO

I thought I was clear when I said there would be no children in my future.

VALENTINA

You watch me take a birth control pill every morning, for three years, and you don't think to tell me your shit is snipped?

MARCO

I didn't want you to think less of me.

VALENTINA

Less?

MARCO

Like I'm not manly or strong, or virile enough, hell, I don't know.

VALENTINA

This is the second time this has happened to me/

MARCO

I don't need a story about your previous lovers right now.

VALENTINA

When I was little I desperately wanted a kid brother or sister. I begged my parents every day. My mother would say, "Valentina, only god can give out babies. But say your prayers because, no mas dios sabe." So I prayed and waited but god never gave another baby to us. When I was 15 my mother told me she'd had a tubal after my birth. She let me spend my childhood like an idiot believing something.

MARCO

Do you know how hard it is for men?

VALENTINA

Fucking liars. Both of you.

MARCO

Our whole purpose deduced to constantly creating sperm, spreading wild oats...

VALENTINA

I hate liars.

MARCO

I wanted you to want me, as a lover, and/

VALENTINA

I want you Marco. With all your fucking bullshit and neurosis I can't get enough of you. You're the one that never wants to have sex!

MARCO

Don't bring that up again. (silence) I should have told you/

VALENTINA

Yeah.

MARCO

Sorry.

VALENTINA

You are a sorry motherfucker.

MARCO

Let me take you on a trip for your birthday.

VALENTINA

I don't want a trip.

MARCO

Before the semester starts.

VALENTINA

To Argentina?

MARCO

I was thinking more like California.

VALENTINA

Not California. I want dance lessons.

MARCO

What?

VALENTINA

For my birthday.

MARCO

But you already know how to dance.

VALENTINA

You don't. If you won't make a baby with me then we should at least dance together.

MARCO

A trip to San Francisco, a tub filled with flowers, or a piece of jewelry.

VALENTINA

The place near the pastry shop says four lessons for a hundred dollars. I want to make something with you/

MARCO

A dance isn't exactly making, and I'm awkward

VALENTINA

It'll be fun.

MARCO

I'll be embarrassed. Lots of women like stuff, I thought I could buy you a.... or if you want to make something we could take a painting class or cooking /

VALENTINA

It's my birthday.

MARCO

Teach me here.

VALENTINA

I want to dance with you in public.

MARCO

I mean the basics, so I'm not embarrassed at the lessons.

VALENTINA

You'll do it?

MARCO

Four lessons but you give me one here first.

VALENTINA

I have to give you lessons before you take lessons?

MARCO

Don't interrogate me or I'll change my mind.

VALENTINA

Okay. Let me show you

MARCO

Don't count on me being good.

VALENTINA

The main thing is to look at me. Unless you're holding me so close, but when there's any distance you have to look at me.

MARCO

That's rewarding!

VALENTINA

Stop looking down.

MARCO

Ok.

VALENTINA

You're too busy thinking about you. You have to be with me. Your partner, whoever you're dancing with. Focus on/

MARCO

You.

VALENTINA

This isn't a thinking exercise.

MARCO

I won't dance with anyone else.

VALENTINA

I don't trust you.

MARCO

It feels good to hold you.

VALENTINA

You're going to want to go dancing every weekend.

MARCO

No. Four lessons will be fine.

VALENTINA

But you're enjoying yourself/

MARCO

I'm enjoying you.

VALENTINA

You'll get really good and we can enter contests.

MARCO

I'm too jealous to let you do this in front of other/

VALENTINA

We can go to those weekend dance events.

MARCO

Let's have the dancing teacher come here.

VALENTINA

No, dancing is a communal thing.

MARCO

Will you dance with other men?

VALENTINA

But you can't go out to the clubs dressed in your usual clothes. I'll give you a makeover.

MARCO

You can dress me, but I won't tuck my shirt in, that's too much. You can comb me. I'll even let you give me a real shave.

VALENTINA

You'd let me put a blade to your throat?

MARCO

I trust you.

VALENTINA

Your face will be smooth as a baby's.

MARCO

You can close your eyes, touch my face, and pretend I'm the baby you've dreamed of.

VALENTINA

Not the same.

End Scene

Pastry Shop

Two

Same pastry shop.

Marco is seated in a comfortable chair (a different one from the previous scene). He is reading a book. Valentina is sitting next to Marco. Jacob is in the third chair.

VALENTINA

Oh no.

Valentina holds the newspaper up to cover her face. It is a stock move, one we've seen before. But she makes it new again with her genuine need to become invisible.

Hide me.

JACOB

What is it?

VALENTINA

I used to date that guy at the counter.

Jacob puts his pencil down to examine the man at the counter.

JACOB

He looks uptight. Where'd you ever meet a suit like that?

VALENTINA

I taught his kid.

JACOB

You date parents?

VALENTINA

Yes. I did. If they're available, and I like them.

Marco finally looks up from his book and checks out the guy at the register.

JACOB

Did he just drop his kid off and ask you out?

VALENTINA

I knew he and his wife were having problems.

MARCO

Predator.

VALENTINA

Do you wanna judge or do you wanna listen?

JACOB

Listen.

VALENTINA

His wife went through a trauma, lost her mother to aggressive breast cancer, the BRCA gene. So the wife goes and has the preemptive surgery, gets both boobs removed and rebuilt.

MARCO

You stepped in on a grieving, postsurgical woman?

JACOB

Shhh.

VALENTINA

I didn't know her when all this was happening but apparently she was really flat chested before the surgery, and after, she gained some size.

MARCO

Are you really telling this story?

The man at the register leaves the shop.

JACOB

Keep going.



VALENTINA

Jenna, that was the mom's name, she went into a state of temporary insanity with her new boobs. With all the new attention from other men and Bradley didn't like them.

MARCO

Bradley?

VALENTINA

He was missing the feel of real ones.

JACOB

How did he know yours are real?/

VALENTINA

So he left her and we started dating. I think he only liked me for my boobs.

MARCO

Why are we having this conversation in a pastry shop?

VALENTINA

That's not completely true, he thought I was a good teacher.

MARCO

How honorable.

VALENTINA

We dated and it was fun, but he still loved his wife.

JACOB

Did you tell your principal about this affair?

VALENTINA

You two get hung up on the strangest details.

MARCO

I hope you didn't count it against his son when you broke up.

VALENTINA

You think I'd ever treat one of my little students poorly because of my dating life?

JACOB

Did you?

VALENTINA

I'm a professional.

MARCO

I question your ethics/

JACOB

I want to know what happened with you and the guy.

VALENTINA

I asked his wife Jenna if she still loved him.

MARCO

How altruistic.

VALENTINA

Of course by then the novelty of her new boobs had worn off and she missed Bradley. So I told her to go back. I mean, she had already lost her mother because of breasts, I didn't want her losing another loved one over them.

MARCO

There are so many problems with this story.

JACOB

So you sent him back to her?

VALENTINA

Yeah, that's why I was hiding from him...

MARCO

Are boobs and breasts interchangeable to you?

VALENTINA

Breasts are medical, boobs are practical.

MARCO

You say things/

VALENTINA

And I mean them.

MARCO

I can't believe I love a woman who dated a parent.

VALENTINA

You're back on that! He was a consenting adult.

MARCO

I have doubts about you...your appropriateness.

VALENTINA

I'm not going to pass up a chance at love for my employer.

MARCO

Don't make excuses for bad behavior.

VALENTINA

I stand behind my actions and I don't hide them from you.

MARCO

You dated that business guy/

VALENTINA

You're just jealous because Bradley has a job. That's what this is/

MARCO

I want you to learn how to behave.

VALENTINA

You only like me from a distance.

MARCO

Shut up.

JACOB

When you use the word distance are you speaking philosophically?

MARCO

She doesn't engage with philosophy or psychology.

JACOB

She may not be aware of it, but I think she is engaging with ideas on a higher level.

MARCO

She shoots her mouth off,

JACOB

But there are little gems in there. Makes me want to delve back into discourse analysis.

MARCO

She's only thinking of what's right in front of her.

JACOB

Don't disregard so quickly.

MARCO

Like a newborn baby.

VALENTINA

I'm outta here.

MARCO

See, she can't handle a few constructive comments.

VALENTINA

She can't. So she's leaving.

MARCO

Cute.

VALENTINA

And you can kiss her ass.

MARCO

Vulgar beast.

JACOB

I think you are underestimating that woman of yours.

MARCO

You can't own another human.

VALENTINA

That's right! You'll never own me!

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:Raw Meat

PATSY

Sometimes, we think back and remember the most mundane things. Once when I was a kid I played Packman for 4 straight hours. All night I had Packman dreams, the endless dots, the voracious appetite for fruit, running from ghosts. It was terrifying. But the worst part was the repetition, the starting again and going through the very same motions. Feast, famine, death. Feast, famine, death. Feast, famine, death.

Valentina sits on the bed, in a bathrobe. She is despondent. Her hair in a towel twisted up turban style gives her an air of mystery. Her usual liveliness has left her. This is not the Valentina of endless possibilities.

MARCO

How long have you been sitting there?

VALENTINA

All day.

MARCO

No work then.

VALENTINA

Not today.

MARCO

And you've been crying.

VALENTINA

I opened the fridge. I saw that hunk of meat there.

MARCO

You said you wanted steak tonight/

VALENTINA

I thought of all the cows on the planet.

MARCO

Val/

VALENTINA

And the billions of people, you know, eating beef today/

MARCO

You don't have to eat a steak/

VALENTINA

Just today.

MARCO

I'm going to get you some water.

VALENTINA

I couldn't figure out how much beef that must be, how many cows, you know, have to be raised and slaughtered for just one day/

MARCO

I'm bringing you a pill too.

VALENTINA

Like, millions, or more maybe, I can't wrap my mind around the math.

MARCO

You don't have to take it, but/

VALENTINA

If you multiply it by 365, and then by a lifetime, how can it work out?

MARCO

It might make you feel better.

VALENTINA

It scared me so badly to think about it. All the cows, the grain, the water, billions of people, it can't go on forever.

MARCO

You don't have to think about forever right now.

VALENTINA

My sister was right. She wanted me to be a vegetarian.

MARCO

It's a personal choice/

VALENTINA

I should have done it for her.

MARCO

You can become a vegetarian now.

VALENTINA

She'll never know.

MARCO

But maybe it will make you feel better.

VALENTINA

The day before she died we had a fight about it/

MARCO

You fought about it all the time. Your sister wasn't nice either, she attacked you publically in restaurants and she'd gag when you were eating your food. She was rude about it and you know I'm right. Just because she died doesn't mean she was a more ethical person, or a saint. Even you called her a vegetarian fundamentalist. You're dealing with her death. It's natural to think the best of her, but she wasn't perfect/

VALENTINA

Don't criticize her. She was a better person than me, she made good choices/

MARCO

How long has your hair been in that towel?

VALENTINA

Hours.

MARCO

It's going to be tangled.

VALENTINA

I know.

MARCO

Here.

Marco removes the towel. Valentina is frozen. The body, mind, heart, spirit, all frozen. Even her hair is frozen, looking like a matted birds nest on top of her head.

VALENTINA

I'm sorry Marco, you don't have to deal with this.

MARCO

Let me comb your hair/.

VALENTINA

You should leave me,

MARCO

Tell me if I pull you.

Marco begins to comb her hair.

VALENTINA

We've only been together for three months, you don't owe me anything/

MARCO

I can braid it for you. If you want.

VALENTINA

Nobody likes a grieving girl,

MARCO

Your sister died two weeks ago Valentina. I'm not gonna leave you now/

VALENTINA

I wouldn't even judge you.

MARCO

Stop talking. Or I can leave it down.

VALENTINA

We had a great summer, let's end on that/

MARCO

We're not ending

VALENTINA

Now my sister is dead and you're sticking around feeling sorry for me...

MARCO

That's not why I'm here.



VALENTINA

We don't love each other,

MARCO

I care deeply for/

VALENTINA

Come on, you picked me up one day and we've been having a nice affair, but we're hanging out, summer fling, not real life.

MARCO

You called her voicemail again, didn't you?

VALENTINA

After I saw the steaks I just wanted to hear her voice/

MARCO

It wrecks you every time/

VALENTINA

and apologize. Maybe I thought it would cheer me up to hear her say, "hey there, I can't come to the phone right now so I'll call you back in a bit. Bye." But she's not calling back.

MARCO

Your hair is so soft. It's untangled now.

Marco separates her hair into sections for braiding. He slowly and carefully braids her hair.

VALENTINA

I miss her.

MARCO

In his book *Border Macho*, Canuto Morales has this character than can't speak

VALENTINA

I wish I would've turned vegetarian before she died.

MARCO

His name is Pato.

VALENTINA

I egged her on, ordering rare burgers just to annoy her/

MARCO

And he's like a genius, but nobody knows it/

VALENTINA

I didn't know a car would slam into her/

MARCO

So he goes through life observing everything/

VALENTINA

I keep wondering if it was painful for her.

MARCO

One day his mother confesses to a priest that she cut Pato's hair before his first birthday

VALENTINA

Doctors say she couldn't feel it, but how do they know, like, for sure/

MARCO

Because everyone thought he was a girl. And they called him muñeca.

VALENTINA

She died on impact. I hope she wasn't scared, even for a second/

MARCO

Well the mother was afraid she'd turn him gay if everyone treated him like a doll,

Pause

VALENTINA

You can't turn a person gay/

MARCO

So the mother goes against conventional wisdom and cuts his hair.

VALENTINA

Don't tell me sad stories/

MARCO

But the old wives tale about cutting hair before the first birthday is true, and it makes him a mute.

VALENTINA

There must have been another cause/

MARCO

His mother tells the priest she would've preferred a sissy boy to what the man becomes.

VALENTINA

Thank you for combing my hair.

MARCO

In order to compensate for his lack of speech he becomes this tough, macho guy. He can't feel anything. Even though he can't speak, he doesn't smile, or cry, or express any emotion. He sleeps with women for the sake of it, whenever he begins to care for one, he moves on. The haircut in his infancy makes him like a reverse Sampson. Stronger.

VALENTINA

He seems like a coward to me.

MARCO

He's the quintessential macho. Cutting his hair gives him strength.

VALENTINA

Only weinies are afraid of intimacy.

MARCO

Ever since reading that book I think about hair a lot.

VALENTINA

I'll understand if you walk out of this room and never come back.

MARCO

I'm not leaving you.

VALENTINA

I would leave me.

End Scene

Pastry Shop

Three

The pastry shop.

Marco is holding his beloved. A first edition print copy of the book *Border Macho*. It is old and showing its age, but he handles it like a mother would a baby.

Valentina is stretched in a comfy chair weaving in and out of a nap. Jacob, is there as usual, but we don't usually notice his presence.

MARCO

So listen to this:

*Pato's hair wouldn't settle. It poked up in odd ways and he sat restless in the church pew. In his pocket he carried the cheap rosary the nuns gave all the children at Christmas. Made in Taiwan, the package had said. The rosary was so cheap the plastic beads felt like air. They weren't even real beads. They didn't have holes in them, they were completely stuck to the string. Pato hated the cheap-ass lifeless rosary.*

VALENTINA

I had so many cheap rosaries like that as a kid.

MARCO

Keep listening.

*As the priest babbled, Pato removed the rosary from his pocket and put it in his mouth. His mother, looking straight ahead, saw him with her peripheral magic vision and inconspicuously pinched his arm. He removed the rosary from his mouth.*

VALENTINA

Church pinches were the worst.

MARCO

But this is the part. My next chapter, hell, maybe even my next book, is going to be all about analyzing this passage.

*With both hands Pato clenched the rosary and began to twist the beads. The more he twisted the better he felt. As the two beads got closer and closer to each other the string went from taut to strained. The tension made it increasingly untwistable. But he persisted until the tension was too much and the string gave out, split. Twist. Twist. Twist harder. Pop. The feeling of the twisting, the tension, and the final breaking point didn't get old. Twist. Twist. Twist harder. Pop. By the end of mass he had a pocket filled with 59 beads, and a cross. (pause)*

I can't believe I've been ignoring this passage for years.

VALENTINA

I ruined so many rosaries like that.

MARCO

I thought analyzing the religious stuff would be reaching for low hanging fruit.

JACOB

So if not religion, in what direction will you take it?

MARCO

Good. So it's not obvious.

VALENTINA

Fine motor mastery and dexterity. I think it's more about/

MARCO

No. It's sexual in nature.

JACOB

Hmm. Twist, twist, pop/

MARCO

Yes. And it's foreshadowing the sexual conquests he'll make in his adult life.

VALENTINA

You're wrong/

MARCO

Just as the Virgin Mary, and her rosary were useful in the conquest of Latin America,

VALENTINA

All kids love to twist like that.

JACOB

He's got this cheap thing/

VALENTINA

It's developmental. If you give a string of beads to a kid their natural reaction will be to handle them, to twist them/

JACOB

and he can use his charms to achieve his own pleasure.

MARCO

Yes, in front of god and everyone. Including his own mother!

VALENTINA

I agree with you about the pleasure involved, but for children it's like a form of tactile immediacy.

JACOB

Tactile immediacy?

VALENTINA

Yes.

MARCO

Is this some of your child psychology psychobabble?

VALENTINA

I made the expression up, but I've watched children. Didn't you ever twist a rosary?

JACOB

I'm not catholic.

MARCO

This passage has phallic undertones, which in turn, elevate its literary merit.

VALENTINA

How about glue. Did you get a bottle of Elmer's glue and put it all over your hands just so you could have the pleasure of peeling it off? That's tactile immediacy.

MARCO

This passage isn't about that.

VALENTINA

Or scabs. Why do children pick off scabs?

JACOB

They do love scab picking don't they.

VALENTINA

It's because it feels good. The tactile response for using fine motor skills in those ways activates the pleasure center in the brain. It's probably evolutionary,

MARCO

Now you're really reaching/

JACOB

What about biting nails, is that tactile immediacy?

MARCO

Stop encouraging her Jacob. It's not a real thing!

VALENTINA

Maybe I'll develop this into a paper of my own.

JACOB

There must be research in this area, you can build on existing studies. What would you do with the paper? Seek publication?

VALENTINA

I'll read it here at the pastry shop. I'll start the paper with the rosary quote from Canuto Morales...

MARCO

You're being childish.

VALENTINA

We all make our own meaning.

JACOB

Does Canuto mention anything further about the rosary?

MARCO

Later there is a small insignificant mention, but I don't need to include it in my analysis.

VALENTINA

Read it!

MARCO

*When Pato woke the next morning he was surprised to see his rosary. Put back together, the poor way. All the beads were glued to a piece of paper, arranged like a three-dimensional rendition of a rosary. The paper was attached to the wall above his bed with a humble nail. His mother. She must have found the beads in his pocket and put it back together so as not to offend the Blessed Mother or god himself. Pato learned his lesson, and he wouldn't hold a rosary in his hands until the death of his mother, years later.*

VALENTINA

Insignificant?

MARCO

That part seems like an afterthought! It has nothing to do with the previous section.

JACOB

You think Canuto Morales made a mistake in including it?

MARCO

He has to find a way to close out the rosary passage. Perhaps in bringing the rosary back, we get a follow-up image, you know, leading us to the bedroom.

VALENTINA

You're an idiot. The mother fixed the rosary. She made it better.

MARCO

This has nothing to do with the mother.

JACOB

It might have some to do with the mother. It can't be ignored as irrelevant

MARCO

I've been studying this stuff for years, this is Pato's story

VALENTINA

Then why does the mother get the last word?

MARCO

She doesn't.

JACOB

At the end of the scene Pato is holding a different rosary.

VALENTINA

All his fuck-ups are put back together by the woman in his life.

MARCO

I don't want to talk about this with you.

VALENTINA

Fine.

Marco gets up and moves to a table but Val doesn't quit.

JACOB

How will you shape your analysis Marco/

VALENTINA

And the mother has magic vision! She's a superhero.



MARCO

I said I didn't want to talk about this with you.

VALENTINA

I'm going to write to Canuto Morales and ask.

JACOB

Good luck with that. He doesn't engage with the public/

VALENTINA

How convenient. What a pussy.

MARCO

God, woman! I'm going to work.

VALENTINA

I'll still write to him. Just because he doesn't respond doesn't mean I can't ask him a question.

JACOB

Stop poking Valentina.

VALENTINA

It's called conversation. Where I come from people share ideas, opinions, it's not a sin/

JACOB

Can't you see it from his perspective? He's just gotten an idea for a paper and instead of congratulating him you contradict him. This is his area of expertise.

VALENTINA

But he's wrong.

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:  
Glitter and Sprinkles

PATSY

Once I told a story to the family and the entire time my mother contradicted me. She kept saying, "it didn't happen that way." Then she would tell the story her way. It was like we were telling two completely different stories about the same day.

Valentina is surrounded by cookies. She is rolling dough, using a cookie cutter, making icing, and adding sprinkles. It is a lively scene, a party. The wonder of childhood is in the room with Valentina and all those cookies.

PATSY

How many of these are you making?

VALENTINA

I have twenty students, and I'd like them each to go home with a dozen so, a couple hundred at least.

PATSY

Want help?

VALENTINA

Why don't you do sprinkles.

PATSY

I don't want them to look ugly.

VALENTINA

Nothing with sprinkles is ever ugly to a five year old.

PATSY

That's true, but yours are kind of gorgeous.

VALENTINA

I love baking. If I could've made a living as a pastry chef I might've done that

PATSY

But then the kids would miss out on your teaching/

VALENTINA

I wonder. There's something very satisfying about making something real. Teaching, it's a crapshoot.

PATSY

Maybe so.

VALENTINA

My students have twelve years of school to go after kindergarten, I try to make every moment count, but I send them off into rough terrain/

PATSY

And it's getting worse.

VALENTINA

Like the other day my principal came in and got super pissed because she saw glitter bottles at every table.

PATSY

And?

VALENTINA

Glitter isn't allowed because it gets in the carpet and it's hard to vacuum up.

PATSY

You have to be kidding me.

VALENTINA

No! She said, "why are you using glitter with kindergarten students," and I was like, because it's going to be Valentine's day and they need to make cards. And she says, "well it's going to make a big mess," and I was all, um, I teach them how to use glitter. They know how to put the glue, add the glitter, shake to paper and return the extra to the jar. I teach them to be responsible with glitter, okay!

PATSY

You really had this conversation in a school?

VALENTINA

Yes! So she said, "well it doesn't come out of the carpet." And I said, yeah, how magical for my students then. Can you imagine how exciting it must be to walk into a room every day that sparkles!

PATSY

That right there is why you need to be teaching and not making pastries for a living.

VALENTINA

Who has problems with glitter? But I know my kids will maybe never handle glitter again once they leave my room, so I try to pack it all in.

PATSY

You're inspiring me to write short story.

VALENTINA

Nobody wants to read about teachers.

PATSY

But this idea of glitter, and a magical place, it comes together so nicely.

VALENTINA

If you write the story, send it to my principal. She marked me down on my evaluation because I didn't follow the policy on appropriate use of materials in school.

PATSY

Bruja.

VALENTINA

I don't even care really.

PATSY

I hope you don't mind but I'm serious about the impact you've had on my writing.

VALENTINA

Yeah right.

PATSY

You've prompted me to write a new series of short stories.

VALENTINA

Patsy.

PATSY

Don't worry. Inspired. I'm not going to write a play-by-play of your real private life.

VALENTINA

You mean my sour relationship with Marco Aragon...that would be boring actually.

PATSY

No, more like a book of short vignettes following one character, a spirited woman, navigating through a black and white world. But her world is in color.

VALENTINA

Make her smarter than me. And give her longer eyelashes. I've always envied people with long eyelashes.

PATSY

The only one who will know the woman is loosely based on you, is me

VALENTINA

How embarrassing.

PATSY

I found an unlikely muse in you the day you showed up at my door.

VALENTINA

You've been a real friend Patsy.

PATSY

I didn't expect it, that's for sure.

VALENTINA

You! I was the one who got an earful from you when we met. Your listening has brought real adventure to my life.

PATSY

You could use some adventure. Have you ever dated a younger man?

VALENTINA

No.

PATSY

You're youthful, and the professor types are sometimes too old for young spirits.

VALENTINA

I can't do it.

PATSY

It?

VALENTINA

Date younger men.

PATSY

Oh, I'm sure you could.

VALENTINA

They wouldn't get me.

PATSY

They'd be crawling all over you.

VALENTINA

I can't get over the age barrier, and also because of, Monica Lewinsky.

PATSY

Bill Clinton was responsible for jailbaiting her. And not all age differences are so, dirty.

VALENTINA

It's not the age difference. It's because that was a cultural marker for me. Younger guys, I don't think they'd get it.

PATSY

Oh the younger ones can understand a scandalous Presidential affair with an intern.

VALENTINA

The brevity of the situation. That's what they wouldn't get. The urgency of the moment when the news was breaking.

PATSY

They can look it up on Wikipedia.

VALENTINA

Not the same as experiencing it in real time.

PATSY

So the president had an affair, what's the big deal?

VALENTINA

If I date a younger guy and he wants a blowjob, I won't give him one, and when he demands an explanation, and I say it's because Monica Lewinsky ruined them for me, he won't get it.

PATSY

You won't give blow jobs/

VALENTINA

Like, I was young then. I was just like her. I'm the same age as Monica Lewinsky and I believed in Clinton. Walked door to door for him. Made phone calls in Spanish. And when he said he didn't have sex with that woman, I believed him. But he was indeed having a relationship with a woman my age.

PATSY

You're a baby.

VALENTINA

And I'm an idiot. The whole country knew he was lying except for me. I believed the President.

PATSY

You believed him?

VALENTINA

He looked into the camera and said he didn't do it. I didn't think people told lies like that. When I found out about all the oral sex with a girl my age it made me sick. I decided then and there I wouldn't do that shit. I don't want to be like Monica Lewinsky, bartering blowjobs for a moment with a political genius...

PATSY

Maybe not all younger men expect blowjobs.

VALENTINA

Most men do. And it's not just that I won't give them, it's the cultural significance of the event.

PATSY

You lost faith.

VALENTINA

I mean, a cigar will never again be a cigar. I can't wear a navy dress, or a navy shirt, without remembering my stupidity.

PATSY

Yeah, I do think about Lewinsky every time I take my clothes to the cleaners.

VALENTINA

See!

PATSY

Who doesn't take their sex stained clothes to the cleaners?!

VALENTINA

Exactly! It's about the details. A young guy won't understand the details and that bugs!

PATSY

But maybe/

VALENTINA

I have to date people in my age group because of shared history.

PATSY

I guess it's like when I talk with my lover about Nixon getting impeached.

VALENTINA

Or even 9/11.

PATSY

It would be difficult to date a person who was in college when that happened.

VALENTINA

Try fourth grade. A twenty-four year old asked me out and I thought, you were in fourth grade when 9/11 happened. How can we ever talk seriously about anything?

PATSY

I hear you Val. I really do. But just dating guys in your age group isn't a guarantee they'll know what you're talking about. Think about Marco.

VALENTINA

True.

PATSY

I mean, he was probably reading a book through the whole Clinton scandal and doesn't understand why you don't give/

VALENTINA

Non-issue. He lives in his head, not his body.

PATSY

No requests for blowjobs?

VALENTINA

No.

PATSY

Never?

VALENTINA

Not once.

PATSY

Pass the sprinkles.

End Scene



Pastry Shop

Four

The pastry shop feels unfamiliar, it is slowly becoming a foreign land. To be in there is like wearing worn-in shoes that belong to someone else. An unusual sound. Silence.

Jacob is reading the paper.

JACOB

New memoir by Carson Gaines.

MARCO

I read a review. (silence)

JACOB

Hmm. It says they're going to add a new wing on to the library for electronic collections/

MARCO

Seems like an oxymoron. (silence)

JACOB

So many studies say reading real books is better for the brain but the library decides to increase the e-collection. (silence)

JACOB

You're not that interesting when Valentina's out of town.

MARCO

Geez! Can't we just enjoy the silence! Soon enough that chatterbox will be back and we won't get anything done.

JACOB

Chatterbox. That's not exactly a compliment. She's more like Greek Chorus of one.

MARCO

I've lost my copy of/

JACOB

I know you told me yesterday.

MARCO

Sorry if I'm redundant!

JACOB

And the day before.

MARCO

If you lost your prized possession you'd be crying like a baby.

JACOB

It's going to turn up.

MARCO

I've looked everywhere.

JACOB

You wanna borrow my copy?

MARCO

I have multiple copies, but I can't believe I've misplaced a first edition, *Border Macho*.

JACOB

You use it?

MARCO

I can't have a relationship with newer editions. I remember purchasing the first edition at the university bookstore. Subsequent printings feel cheap and offensive in my hands.

JACOB

Oh come on. It's about the content.

MARCO

Not when I'm writing. I know all the page numbers of the first edition

JACOB

Like those biblebangers,

MARCO

So if I'm looking for a passage, it's just faster.

JACOB

Books don't last forever, so maybe you should get used to newer editions.

MARCO

I can't help wonder if Valentina hid it from me.

JACOB

Why would she do that?

MARCO

Sabotage. She's kind of jealous of the amount of time I spend with the book.

JACOB

Val's not immature. Hiding things doesn't seem like her.

MARCO

I don't know. She was acting differently before she left.

JACOB

You'll know soon enough.

MARCO

Yeah. She should be here by now.

JACOB

No airport?

MARCO

Cab's just easier.

JACOB

Not really. It's not a big deal to/

MARCO

You do things your way, and I'll do things/

JACOB

Fine.

MARCO

Anyway, she drove.

JACOB

To Denver? That's a long trip from Albuquerque.

MARCO

Oh she likes to stop in little towns, visit antique shops, you know how she is.

JACOB

You passed up a roadtrip with Valentina?

MARCO

An ordinary eight hour drive can turn into days with her. I don't have days/

JACOB

I'd make time for that. She probably chooses good restaurants. Stays at inns instead of hotels/

MARCO

Goddamnit!

JACOB

What now?

MARCO

I can't find the sentence about the trip to the bar where they meet the whore with one leg.

JACOB

It's a whole chapter.

MARCO

But the first mention of her. I'm looking for the first sentence/

JACOB

Listen to this. Manuel Reed, aged 84, died on Thursday of complications from diabetes...I'll be damned. I thought that guy would live forever. He probably killed over at his desk in the English Department.

MARCO

The sentence is about her hands, her body was weathered but her hands were young, something like that.

JACOB

There might be a position opening now with old Manuel gone. (silence)

MARCO

What? You think there'll be a position?

Enter Valentina.

VALENTINA

Hello, hello! I'm back.

JACOB

Thank god!

MARCO

I can't find my first edition, Canuto Morales.

VALENTINA

I missed you too.

JACOB

Did you see everything you intended?

VALENTINA

And then some.

MARCO

What took you so long? I was expecting you a few hours ago.

JACOB

I made a few stops.

MARCO

I told you.

VALENTINA

The sky was to die for coming over the mountain.

JACOB

Raton Pass or through Glorieta/

VALENTINA

Both really. But I was thinking about Glorieta.

JACOB

That's one of my favorite spots.

VALENTINA

I was just cloud watching. I saw this one cloud that looked exactly like George Washington.

MARCO

I can't find Border Macho.

JACOB

I haven't played that cloud game since I was a kid.

MARCO

Did you hide my book?

VALENTINA

I always see things in the clouds.

MARCO

Valentina!

JACOB

He's been a little lost.

MARCO

My book is lost.

VALENTINA

So not lost without me?

JACOB

I'm sure that's the real reason for his grumpiness. I've been bored to tears here without you.

VALENTINA

I have your book.

JACOB

See! You should have just called her about it days ago.

MARCO

Why would you take it? You know I can't work without it!

VALENTINA

I met Canuto Morales.

JACOB

Haven't we all.

MARCO

You didn't mess with any of my markings did you!

VALENTINA

I didn't even open the thing.

MARCO

Can you please hand it over?

VALENTINA

I wrote to Canuto. After the argument we had about the rosary and the mother.

MARCO

Canuto doesn't respond to letters

JACOB

I wrote to him once, in the late seventy's you two probably weren't even born yet.

MARCO

I've never written him. His agent has made it clear he doesn't want to be bothered. Won't be photographed. Won't do interviews, only releases statements.

VALENTINA

Well I did. And I heard back from, I got a letter.

MARCO

I don't believe it.

JACOB

What did he say? Wait, I want to know what you said. What could you have possibly said in that letter?

VALENTINA

Doesn't matter. The letter I received said Canuto would be in Santa Fe with relatives for a few weeks and I was invited over for a drink.

JACOB

In Santa Fe!

MARCO

This is foolishness.

JACOB

Is he totally old?

VALENTINA

No. About your age Jacob.

MARCO

You got in and you didn't tell me. You know I would have gone on the trip had I known.

JACOB

So my age. He's my age.

VALENTINA

More or less.

MARCO

Why the fuck would Canuto Morales answer your letter when everyone in gods name has tried/

JACOB

What did your letter say? I'd give anything to read your letter.

VALENTINA

I had one thing in mind. I said something about loving *The Marco Aragon*, leading Canuto Morales scholar and I asked if I could meet him to settle a lover's quarrel.

JACOB

I'd reply to that. And you probably said it your special way/

MARCO

What'd you do when you got there?

VALENTINA

He was under the weather, so I saw him very briefly, mainly to repeat what I said in the letter, and to ask him to sign your book.

MARCO

Sign my book.

VALENTINA

As a birthday gift, for you Marco.

JACOB

It's your birthday?



MARCO

My birthday's not for another 5 months.

VALENTINA

But still, I never know what to give you.

MARCO

Are you pulling my leg?

VALENTINA

So he signed it. Wrote an inscription, and that was that.

JACOB

And did he say anything about the rosary scene/

VALENTINA

He was under the weather and I didn't want to be a pest, so I let it go.

MARCO

You let it go.

VALENTINA

You're the expert on his work, I'm sure you're right.

JACOB

You got to meet Canuto Morales. Is he chubby or handsome/

VALENTINA

Happy birthday Marco. I hope you like it.

MARCO

My book.

JACOB

What does the inscription say? Or is it personal/

VALENTINA

I haven't read it. I wanted it to be a surprise.

JACOB

Marco?

MARCO

It says, Marco- Literature is to the wise, as music is to the deaf. Walk in love, Canuto.

JACOB

What does that mean?

MARCO

God, it's a riddle. I love this man!

JACOB

The wise don't need literature?

MARCO

Of course they do. Even the deaf need music. It's about what we need.

JACOB

I think it's the other way around.

MARCO

Canuto Morales would never bash literature. He's a literary genius.

JACOB

Aren't you going to weigh in on this Valentina?

VALENTINA

No. *(pause)* I think it can go either way. That's where brilliance shines, in the interpretation.

MARCO

This is the best gift ever, well, unless I get the chance to meet him someday.

JACOB

Come on Val, tell us what you think of the inscription.

VALENTINA

It's like the clouds. I can see a dragon and you might see nothing.

JACOB

Why so sad?

VALENTINA

I'm tired I guess.

MARCO

Valentina, thank you. For the book, for writing the letter, for persisting, it's so unexpected.

VALENTINA

I wanted to get your attention.

MARCO

I can't use this signed copy for my studies anymore, it may be the only signed copy in existence.

VALENTINA

I mean what can you buy for a guy that/

MARCO

I'll have to get familiar with this cheapass third edition paperback.

JACOB

You'll know it like the back of your hand by this time next week.

MARCO

You're right. It's the text itself that matters.

VALENTINA

But I've played my last card.

MARCO

You better not be pulling my leg with this autograph...It's not a fake right?

VALENTINA

I'm leaving Marco.

MARCO

I'll see you at home love. Come here, give me a kiss.

VALENTINA

I'm not going home.

MARCO

Where are you going?

VALENTINA

I'm moving out.

JACOB

Moving out!

MARCO

Why would you/

VALENTINA

We're not a good match. This is a relationship of convenience. I want to climb mountains, and plant tomatoes with my man.

MARCO

I was kidding. I don't think this signature is fake.

VALENTINA

I want a lover, and a guy who doesn't fall asleep with books on the couch every night, and someone who wants to know why I never eat spinach,

MARCO

You never eat spinach?

JACOB

Even I know she doesn't eat spinach. (to Marco) You don't sleep in a bed?

VALENTINA

And a man that's more afraid to lose me, than a book.

JACOB

I'm going to give you some privacy.

VALENTINA

Don't bother. I'm leaving now. There's nothing else.

MARCO

You're tired from the drive/

VALENTINA

Goodbye boys.

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:

Filth

PATSY

If only endings felt like beginnings. Or beginnings like endings. In actuality the stories of our lives are a bunch of random fragments. Not clean and neat, or even in good order. When significant relationships end, it's comforting to remember the big happy moments, to persevere on the grandeur that existed, or even to obsess over the last

words exchanged. But when Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio broke it off, do you think they ever missed the little things? Flossing teeth. Folding towels.

Valentina is on her hands and knees  
scrubbing the bedroom floor.

Remember Valentina, back then, long before her heartbreak? She did normal things, too. Paid bills, lost her keys, looked out the window, and she scrubbed.

MARCO

I think you're being excessive.

VALENTINA

You've never met my mother.

MARCO

Is she really going to look at the grout on the floor?

VALENTINA

She looks at everything.

MARCO

It doesn't have to be perfect.

VALENTINA

She's already going to pounce because we're living in sin together. I can't add fuel to her fire by having a dirty apartment.

MARCO

But it's not dirty.

VALENTINA

My mother judges people based on their cleanliness.

MARCO

You're an adult now.

VALENTINA

She'll craft some weird story about how you and I are filthy, and once that's in her mind/

MARCO

Don't let her get under your skin.

VALENTINA

She'll make our lives miserable.

MARCO

She sounds like your principal.

VALENTINA

She's worse.

MARCO

And you stand up to your principal.

VALENTINA

It's different. I have to protect my students

MARCO

Your own sanity matters. What about protecting your sanity?

VALENTINA

My mother has this hierarchy. God is at the top, and the next thing is cleanliness. Then what others think. And way down at the bottom is generosity.

MARCO

Generosity is after cleanliness?

VALENTINA

Yes. It's always been like this. She would rather I have a clean classroom than an interesting one.

MARCO

It sounds like self hate.

VALENTINA

You say everything is self hate.

MARCO

Self hate's a powerful drug.

VALENTINA

I just wish one time, she would come into my space and say wow! You're growing herbs in your kitchen, that is so French! Or something positive like that.

MARCO

She won't criticize the microgarden,

VALENTINA

She's opposed to house plants of all kinds. Because of dirt and bugs.

MARCO

It didn't rub off on you because our house is filled with plants.

VALENTINA

By the way I'm building some shelves to have a vertical vegetable planter in the living room this year.

MARCO

I'm surprised you're not taking the plants out of here.

VALENTINA

If I move them out they'll be traumatized. I have to protect my plants.

MARCO

Your plants and your students.

VALENTINA

But I'll be damned if I have to hear one word about the grout, the fridge, or the bathroom sink.

MARCO

Have you ever talked to her about this?

VALENTINA

For my entire life. Oh, and I forgot to tell you, I laid some clothes out on the bed.

MARCO

I'll go put them away.

VALENTINA

They're new. You have to put them on.

MARCO

I can't believe you're dressing me up to meet your mother.

VALENTINA

She's not pleased with our relationship.

MARCO

You don't have to scare me.

VALENTINA

But we'll show her. You'll look good as a preppy, and my mother loves preppy men.

End Scene

Pastry Shop

Five

Jacob and Marco sit in awkward silence.

JACOB

You eating?

MARCO

What the fuck does that have to do with anything?

JACOB

You just look a little/

MARCO

I haven't written a page and I have a manuscript due at the end of the week.

JACOB

Ask the publisher for an extension.

MARCO

I've never requested an extension in my life.

JACOB

These are extenuating circumstances.

MARCO

A breakup? What do you suggest I say? I need some extra time because my girlfriend broke up with me?

JACOB

That sounds good.

MARCO

Give me a break. That's pathetic. What do you think I am, a thirteen-year-old boy?



JACOB

You're a grown man experiencing a divorce.

MARCO

We weren't married.

JACOB

You were together for four years.

MARCO

But without commitment.

JACOB

Marco/

MARCO

It's true. Valentina wanted us to be together forever. She wanted babies from me, but I didn't give her anything.

JACOB

You did. You sat here together everyday.

MARCO

There's no sympathy for folks when long relationships end if there wasn't a marriage or a blood relationship involved.

JACOB

I feel for you/

MARCO

Fuck. One of the adjuncts at work lost a dog. A dog! She only adopted it at the pound like 8 months ago and we practically had to shut the community college down when the thing died. People were crying, walking around feeling fragile, all of a sudden thinking life is so precious, but I/

JACOB

Dogs and babies should not be part of this conversation.

MARCO

I lose Valentina, and nothing. It's like nothing's happened.

JACOB

Write one page today Marco. Use your favorite copy of the book, do whatever it takes to write one page

Long silence

MARCO

How's your wife.

JACOB

Good. She's giving an invited presentation at the nursing school today.

MARCO

That woman works all the time.

JACOB

Not on Sunday.

MARCO

Pardon?

JACOB

The leading neurosurgeon in the southwest takes every Sunday off, to brunch and play golf.

MARCO

Golf? Stella golfs?

JACOB

She's quite good.

MARCO

I'm sure. Your wife doesn't...what do you do on Sunday when she's golfing?

JACOB

I go with her. I drive her around in the little cart and I work on the crossword puzzle in the times while she's hacking around out there.

MARCO

I've known you for what, fifteen, eighteen/

JACOB

Twenty years. We met in class when you were finishing your degree.

MARCO

And I don't know you play golf with Stella on Sunday. Wait, did this just start?

JACOB

She's been doing it since Medical school. When we met she said it was a dealbreaker.

MARCO

And you just obey?

JACOB

For Stella. And I've always enjoyed chasing her around a golf course every week.

MARCO

My communist mentor plays the most bourgeois game/

JACOB

Stella plays. I accompany her.

MARCO

But you belong to a country club.

JACOB

Yes.

MARCO

The most water sucking, land using, exclusive/

JACOB

My wife plays golf. It got her through college back in the day when there weren't many athletic scholarships for women. Her father was a groundskeeper and he taught her.

MARCO

I'm sure some country clubs won't even let a Mexican in/

JACOB

Stella loves the precision of it.

MARCO

But she must know how oppressive the sport/

JACOB

Listen, we both sleep at night just fine.

MARCO

How come I never knew this before?

JACOB  
You didn't ask.

MARCO  
It's the same with Valentina.

JACOB  
Marco, go home.

MARCO  
I didn't notice stuff. Little things that make a person.

JACOB  
Eat something.

MARCO  
But now when I go to bed I see her so vividly.

JACOB  
Get some sleep,

MARCO  
And I remember all the stuff she would say in the pastry shop.

JACOB  
Her observations were delightful/

MARCO  
But it's like I didn't even hear them the first time...

JACOB  
Stella misses my daily Valentina stories/

MARCO  
But I hear them now.

JACOB  
Every evening I'd pour Stella a drink and tell her a Valentina story while I prepare our dinner.

MARCO  
I have these Val reruns going on.

JACOB

Stella's favorite's still the story about Val making sand angels with her class on the playground.

MARCO

It's like a nonstop Val album is playing in my head/

JACOB

Poor kids, wishing they could make a snow angels.

MARCO

I couldn't hear her when she was right in front of my face/

JACOB

And Valentina in the dirt scuffling around, giving them the experience anyway/

MARCO

But now she's everywhere. In pastries,

JACOB

She was filthy when she came in here.

MARCO

And in books, on the bus,

JACOB

Stella would laugh.

MARCO

She's fucking everywhere except with me. At home. In the bed. In the bathroom. Hovering here in the pastry shop.

JACOB

We'll all get used to her absence soon enough.

MARCO

I thought she'd be back.

JACOB

I don't think so Marco.

MARCO

Because I'm an unfeeling asshole/

JACOB

Because Valentina always had the last word with us.

MARCO

She did?

JACOB

Always. She opened conversations and she closed them.

End Scene

ChatterBox Scene:

Pussy Feathers

PATSY

There's an old Peggy Lee song called, Is That All There Is...you all probably don't know it because you're babies. Later tonight, when you're missing your ex, or thinking about the first time you went to Disneyland, or remembering, you might play that song. Is that all there is?

To the bedroom.

A bedroom in the corner of the stage.

Valentina is in the bed wearing a beautiful nightgown. It is not tacky. It is not Fredericks of Hollywood. It is beautiful. She is kneeling on the bed. Marco enters the room. He is still in casual clothes. He removes his pants and gets into the bed in his boxers, keeping the same t-shirt on.

VALENTINA

Uhh, excuse me!

MARCO

What?

VALENTINA

The shirt.

MARCO

It's cold.

VALENTINA

Then put a different one on.

MARCO

Why waste a clean shirt for sleep?

VALENTINA

Because I don't want you to bring pollution to bed.

MARCO

This shirt isn't polluted.

VALENTINA

It is. It has your day on it. The pastry shop. The bus. The living room. A cat.

MARCO

You've never mentioned/

VALENTINA

The sheets are clean.

MARCO

How do you know it has cat on it?

VALENTINA

I can see the cat hair

MARCO

Bionic vision?

VALENTINA

I know you visit that cat everyday.

MARCO

The cat likes my shirt.

VALENTINA

Off.

Marco removes his shirt with robotic like gestures and replaces it with another that looks exactly the same.

VALENTINA

You're really putting on another shirt.

MARCO

I'm cold.

VALENTINA

Did you notice what I'm wearing?

MARCO

It's nice.

VALENTINA

Nice?

MARCO

Yes.

VALENTINA

And what about the person wearing the nightgown...impressions?

MARCO

Valentina!

VALENTINA

Comment.

MARCO

I hate it when you're insecure.

VALENTINA

This isn't about insecurity.

MARCO

You always look good. Even if you were to put on my polluted-cat hair-t-shirt you would be beautiful.

VALENTINA

I'm not asking about always. I'm asking about now.

MARCO

Jacob noticed that about you. Today when you left the pastry shop he asked how I handle your chatter.



VALENTINA

Chatter.

MARCO

Well, he didn't say chatter actually. That's my word.

VALENTINA

What'd you say?

MARCO

I said I've gotten used to it and we sometimes have good conversations.

VALENTINA

Hmmm.

MARCO

But he notices language details like that when his anthropology degree gets in the way. He's better as a philosopher.

VALENTINA

You and I met three years ago.

MARCO

What? I'm sorry. I must've/

VALENTINA

I thought I would sing the song again/

MARCO

From/

VALENTINA

The day you saw me in the museum/

MARCO

Oh yes. With all your little students.

VALENTINA

They wanted hot chocolate because we were on a field trip and they were tired/

MARCO

And bored.

VALENTINA

My students are never bored. Only boring people get bored.

MARCO

So in the middle of the traveling exhibition of nihilist art you sing the hot chocolate song in Spanish.

Valentina rises to her feet on the bed and begins to sing Uno-dos- tres-cho-co-la-te

VALENTINA

Uno-dos-tres-cho-

MARCO

It was so odd and inappropriate/

VALENTINA

Uno-dos-tres-co/

MARCO

Completely irreverent museum behavior/

VALENTINA

Uno-dos-tres-la....

MARCO

I felt embarrassed to witness it/

Valentina sings, she stirs the imaginary pot of hot chocolate with vigor and care. She looks in the pot to tend the chocolate

VALENTINA

Uno-dos-tres-te-  
Cho-co-la-te, Cho-co-la-te, va-te, va-te

MARCO

Sit down Valentina!

VALENTINA

Cho-co-la-te.

MARCO

It still makes me uncomfortable to remember that day.

VALENTINA

It's a joke. In the privacy of our own bedroom this time.

MARCO

Nobody sings in a museum/

VALENTINA

I did.

MARCO

I know. Except you.

VALENTINA

I thought you would like your own viewing of the song.

MARCO

I try to forget about that.

VALENTINA

It was the day we met!

MARCO

I like thinking about the day, but the initial moment is unsettling.

VALENTINA

You followed us.

MARCO

I was trying to figure you out. I mean, you looked normal, and you seemed smart enough, but there were two things I couldn't wrap my mind around. Bringing kindergarten students to a nihilist art exhibit and singing a hot chocolate song in Spanish in the middle of the/

VALENTINA

Uno-dos-tres...

MARCO

So yes, I did follow you. It was like licking a 9V battery...mostly painful but oddly appealing. That was you.

VALENTINA

I see you lurking at the end of the line, right behind Jorge.

MARCO

I don't know how you noticed with all the commotion the kids were making.

VALENTINA

I notice everything.

MARCO

Next thing I know the security guard is asking me to leave.

VALENTINA

You saw me talking to him.

MARCO

I didn't. I was thinking about the hot chocolate song and Nietzsche. Trying to see if there was any overlap between the two.

VALENTINA

You were being a creeper.

MARCO

And then there you are, sitting in the museum café waiting for the last child to be picked up.

VALENTINA

You slither closer,

MARCO

You coloring and chattering with a child.

VALENTINA

I don't chatter.

MARCO

Another point to examine. Coloring.

VALENTINA

No more memory lane/

MARCO

And I seduced you. An adult woman that likes to sing kids songs in quiet museums and fill in other people's pictures.

VALENTINA

Seduce me now...

MARCO

It was a long seduction. One of those summers where you become obsessed with a person. Spend every moment together/

VALENTINA

Your bed, my bed, finally this bed. Come back to this bed Marco. Right now.

MARCO

I didn't write a single page that summer. Thank god for fall, if you wouldn't have gone back to school I might have lost years of hard work/

VALENTINA

But you didn't. Don't think about work.

MARCO

The book I wrote that fall was the best yet. Hailed as the seminal analysis of Canuto Morales/

VALENTINA

It was because of the summer.

MARCO

Three years together, huh....

VALENTINA

Marco, hold me.

MARCO

I wonder what would have happened if I would spent my summer writing.

VALENTINA

I have a surprise for you/

MARCO

My book might have come out sooner...

VALENTINA

It's based on that painting we saw at the Nihilist exhibit.

MARCO

...and I could've gotten a university position

VALENTINA

The one with the swans on the sofa, acting like cats.

MARCO

I don't remember any of the art pieces/

VALENTINA

I remember them all.

MARCO

Turn the light out.

Valentina stands on the bed, slits open a pillow and releases goose feathers all over the room.

VALENTINA

This is for us Marco! For three years!

MARCO

Not now Valentina. What the hell is this/

Valentina slits another pillow and releases the feathers. They float all over the room. Covering the bed. One lands carefully on Marco's head. Valentina stands on the bed with feathers falling gracefully over her. She appears to be a character in a snow globe. With feathers falling over her.

VALENTINA

What was the painting called? We talked about it after the first time we made love.

MARCO

I don't remember.

VALENTINA

You live in the fucking past and you can't remember?

MARCO

I don't even remember the image much less the name.

VALENTINA

Pussy feathers!

MARCO

That's crude.

VALENTINA

That's what it was called. We laughed about it in bed. You couldn't believe I'd show my kinder students Pussy Feathers.

MARCO

That's right. And you said, "they can't read."

VALENTINA

All they noticed were swans sitting on the couch acting like cats.

Marco not lost in a moment of ecstasy or romance, sneezes. His rational mind is at war with the experience unraveling in his own bed and the audience sees this through his gestures and facial expressions.

MARCO

I can't imagine not being able to read.

VALENTINA

You'd be more fun if you were illiterate.

Another Sneeze.

MARCO

I'm going to the couch. The feathers are too much. Good night Valentina.

He exits. Valentina jumps on the bed and picks up the feathers and throws them around.

She grabs another armful and tosses them. At first her actions are sad, defeated. But she begins to enjoy the feathers and jumping on the bed. The loneliness starts to leave her body and she becomes free with the feathers.

End Scene

Pastry ShopSix

The silence is amplified, two men, with nothing to connect their existence, drink coffee and absently talk about weather, sports, dead writers, reclusive writers. A cemetery has replaced the once fertile valley.

There are pauses and silences between the dialogue.

How's the writing.

Mediocre.

Any new pages?

No.

I heard you received a call from the English Department.

Yeah.

Congratulations.

It's cool. A tenure track position teaching Chicano literature. Finally.

What you've always wanted.

Right.

JACOB

MARCO

JACOB

MARCO

JACOB

MARCO

JACOB

MARCO

JACOB

MARCO



JACOB

Your job talk was well received by the faculty.

MARCO

I presented the paper on the Rosary.

JACOB

Any new findings in there?

MARCO

I stuck with my original hypothesis.

JACOB

I always thought it a good one.

MARCO

Thanks for pulling whatever strings you had to pull to get me the interview.

JACOB

You got that all on your own.

MARCO

Remember when Valentina started a fire in the pastry shop?

JACOB

It wasn't really a fire,

MARCO

Well the alarm went off/

JACOB

Mainly from smoke.

MARCO

I was frustrated with her for going behind the counter to retoast the English muffin.

JACOB

She acted like she owned the place.

MARCO

She was doing it for me.

JACOB

You wouldn't stop commenting on how you hate lightly toasted/

MARCO

You mean complaining....

JACOB

It might have been perceived that way.

MARCO

And she just goes back there and shoves it in the toaster oven.

JACOB

You got so angry/

MARCO

Now I miss those things.

JACOB

Things.

MARCO

Her.

JACOB

It takes time to heal.

MARCO

It's been 6 months.

JACOB

Well she wasn't like a fling or something. And she was the real deal. Stella and I never had kids, but we like to imagine our daughter might have turned out like Valentina.

MARCO

I can't stop thinking about her. Her hair. The way it felt to touch her hair. The smell of citrus I inhaled every time I was close to her hair. Never mind.

JACOB

I'm happy to listen.

MARCO

She's on my brain and I never run into her.

JACOB

I do find that odd.

MARCO

I go to the same grocery store, all of our restaurants, she's never there, did she stop loving all of those places?

JACOB

I think you need to read your first edition copy of Border Macho. A strong dose of Canuto Morales will get you on track.

MARCO

I have no interest in Border Macho or Canuto's other two books. All I want is to find Valentina. I'm analyzing every conversation we had,

JACOB

Do you remember them? You sometimes seemed/

MARCO

All of our memories,

JACOB

Distant.

MARCO

I'm trying to make some meaning of every action, every exchange, all of our time together.

JACOB

That's what you used to do with the collected work of Canuto Morales.

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:  
Canuto's Autograph

PATSY

Some people say life is a dream. Who will open the door when you knock? Will it be your mother? A kid from your childhood? Your next lover? Or a new friend... When Valentina knocked on the door she expected to find a boring, decrepit man. A cowardly sage. Some phantom named Canuto Morales, but instead, a breath of fresh air opened the door, and Valentina sucked the air in with delight.

Patsy opens the door to greet Valentina.

PATSY

May I help you?

VALENTINA

I'm Valentina. I'm here to see Canuto Morales. I wrote to him a few months ago/

PATSY

Yes. He's expecting you.

VALENTINA

Are you, sorry if I'm staring, but, you look like, are you Patsy Aranda?

PATSY

I am.

VALENTINA

Oh my gosh! I've read all your books. Every time I see a turtle I think of the Virgin of Guadalupe County. My grandparents were from there. That story is hilarious.

PATSY

You weren't offended?

VALENTINA

God, no. I laughed my ass off.

PATSY

Want some tea while we wait for Canuto?

VALENTINA

Sure. Do you have any herbals?

PATSY

Pardon?

VALENTINA

Sorry. I'm being rude, but I'd hate to get a caffeine high when I'm having tea with the badass of Chicana literature!

PATSY

I have a ton of teas to choose from. Have a seat.

VALENTINA

I never knew you lived in Santa Fe.

PATSY

I share my time between here and California.

VALENTINA

I always intended to share my time between Albuquerque and Buenos Aires, but hasn't worked out yet.

PATSY

No freedom with your job?

VALENTINA

I could make it work, I'm a teacher.

PATSY

University?

VALENTINA

Kindergarten.

PATSY

Better.

VALENTINA

I think so.

PATSY

So Marco Aragon is married to a kindergarten teacher.

VALENTINA

We're not married. (pause) But I guess he's the reason I don't take off every summer. He can only think at home and at one very specific pastry shop. You know his work?

PATSY

Sure. The leading authority on Canuto Morales. He has a reputation.

VALENTINA

It's annoying really. I mean, he misses so many other good books because he's fixated.

PATSY

I don't have that kind of commitment.

VALENTINA

How long have you known Canuto?

PATSY

Since the early days.

VALENTINA

Lifetimers?

PATSY

Yes. I suppose we are lifetimers.

VALENTINA

I feel like an idiot for being here. I just wrote the letter because I was mad at my boyfriend Marco. He never takes my ideas seriously. I don't actually have any interest in Canuto Morales if you want to know the truth. I was surprised when I got a response. So I brought this book, a first edition and Marco's favorite. I thought I could get an autograph/

PATSY

Hopefully Canuto gets back soon.

VALENTINA

It seems kind of juvenile to ask for an autograph, I mean, I don't want his autograph for myself. I don't want anyone's autograph; I'm like a true and diehard fan of yours but I don't want your autograph, you know what I mean?

PATSY

Maybe.

VALENTINA

That's not an insult. It's a compliment. I think you're a smart and interesting human but having this cup of tea is more significant to me than looking at your signature all the time.

PATSY

It's a relief. I don't have to perform the part of writer.

VALENTINA

God, that would be boring. I get that everyday at home.

PATSY

Did you have other business in Santa Fe?

VALENTINA

I'm actually driving back from Denver. I was up there at a seminar.

PATSY

For work?

VALENTINA

No, to learn the basics of backyard permaculture.

PATSY

Permaculture.

VALENTINA

If I can't spend my summer in Buenos Aires I might as well plant one hell of a garden.

PATSY

I've never had a green thumb but it's a quality I envy.

VALENTINA

Oh if you go to one of these seminars you realize that even Dr. Death can grow stuff to eat. All those weeds along your driveway out front, some of them are edible.

PATSY

So I should eat my weeds.

VALENTINA

Yes! We took this walk around downtown Denver and we identified all the edibles in an urbanscape. If you come to see weeds as your friend it automatically gives you a better relationship with yourself as a gardener.

PATSY

How do they taste?

VALENTINA

Bitter but we cooked up a pan of weeds with garlic and lemon and they were tasty enough.

PATSY

I'll have to try that sometime. It reminds me of what we used to do when we were kids back home.

VALENTINA

In Guadalupe County.

PATSY

Yeah. My grandpa would take us out to the hills and we would collect stuff, herbs, roots. Once he taught us to identify wild onions. We sat on some rocks and ate an entire bed of wild onions. For the rest of the day I smelled my hands to activate the memory.

VALENTINA

That's the way it should be. Beats paying five-hundred dollars to attend a workshop with metro-hippies.

PATSY

One way's not better or worse, they're just different.

VALENTINA

Any of your relatives till in the state?

PATSY

Some of my aunts are still alive up north. They work the land, maybe if the farm to table movement had started earlier there could have been a better life for them.

VALENTINA

It's weird how people with lots of money can grow vegetables and make jam and it's seen as an art, but our relatives have always done those very same things and it's considered poor work.

PATSY

Pobrecitos.

VALENTINA

Some people even buy new things and make 'em look old.

PATSY

I know people who intentionally leave their hair dirty!

VALENTINA

And like darning socks and wearing patches on your clothes is cool now and before there was so much shame with it for people like us/

PATSY

So much shame for everything.

VALENTINA

The names were terrible.

PATSY

Dirty Mexican

VALENTINA

Sucia



PATSY

It's no wonder our folks named their restaurants things like Spic and Span/

VALENTINA

Comet Drive In/

PATSY

Sanitary Bakery and Café.

VALENTINA

My mom used to say, we may be poor/

PATSY

but we're not dirty.

VALENTINA

I refused to wear my hair up in a braid for years after my childhood because of all the fights I had with my mother about hair.

PATSY

I know, and it was worse for my generation. You had better keep your hair tidy and combed or people would talk.

VALENTINA

The name-calling.

PATSY

Or the nuns would make you a special hygiene bag with American soaps. It was sad.

VALENTINA

But you fought back. Women like you give girls like me courage. Your work exposes shameful things and makes us laugh and cry and fight.

PATSY

I haven't always had courage.

VALENTINA

But mostly. Your first book was published when you were in diapers.

PATSY

Yeah right. It was hard. (silence)

VALENTINA

Even though I could talk to you til dawn I've gotta get on the road.

PATSY

Maybe we can meet up for tea again soon. It's been nice to chat with you.

VALENTINA

Really? You like talking to me? Marco says I ramble on, he doesn't get the things I say/

PATSY

Then, Marco's not listening.

VALENTINA

I'm sorry I didn't get to meet Canuto, but can I leave this book with you and maybe you can mail it to me?

PATSY

I can do that.

VALENTINA

It'll make Marco so happy.

PATSY

Do you love him?

VALENTINA

He followed me in a museum one day. Nobody had ever gone out of their way to meet me like that.

PATSY

That's a good meeting story, but why do you stay?

VALENTINA

I don't have a good reason.

PATSY

Do you think if you get the autograph from Canuto he'll take your ideas more seriously? Will it make him a better listener?

VALENTINA

How do you know I criticize his listening skills/

PATSY

It was in the letter.

VALENTINA

Canuto let you read the letter?

PATSY

I'm Canuto Morales.

VALENTINA

You're Patsy Aranda.

PATSY

No...I wrote those books. I'm Canuto Morales.

VALENTINA

But Marco/

PATSY

And I read the letter.

VALENTINA

What?

PATSY

I started my career with a pen name, so I could get published. Chicanas were struggling so I cooked up an idea with my sister, she worked at small publishing house/

VALENTINA

Arte Libre Press/

PATSY

Yes... and they weren't too keen on publishing women's novels. So I tweaked Border Macho, and submitted it under a male name. I didn't think it would work. Then the reviews started coming in, and the acclaim, and an additional contract for two more books in the series, I was sucked in.

VALENTINA

But Patsy Aranda writes her own great stories and they're nothing like Border Macho.

PATSY

I couldn't keep it up. My heart wasn't in the second two books. I quit writing novels/

VALENTINA

He has a bio, with a life history. Who can trick people for decades? There're no secrets anymore/

PATSY

My sister was the only one in the loop and she worked for the publishing company.

VALENTINA

She never told anyone?

PATSY

Not that I know of. But when I die it will go in my obituary.

VALENTINA

Your obit/

PATSY

I've already written it.

VALENTINA

Then Marco's work, his life, is a farce/

PATSY

Be honest Valentina. If Marco wasn't chasing Canuto Morales would it make a difference?

Valentina

He's built this thing that doesn't exist/

PATSY

The novels exist.

VALENTINA

But he's in love with Canuto. It's like he's in a committed relationship with, with what?

PATSY

I didn't know the book would land like it did. I was a young Chicana and the boys were leaving us in the dust. All I did was change the title and create a pen name and suddenly my voice was heard.

VALENTINA

So Canuto Morales doesn't exist.

PATSY

I'm sorry.

VALENTINA

Why are you trusting me with this information?

PATSY

I didn't intend to tell you. I was curious by your letter because it was honest. A lover's quarrel over the rosary scene...You had questions, and now, after talking with you for a while, I don't know. Seems like you can handle the truth.

VALENTINA

What if I write an exposé/

PATSY

It would ruin Marco's career.

VALENTINA

He's going to ruin his own career. I mean, he's analyzing three novels to death. It can't last forever.

PATSY

If you tell the press it won't be the end of the world for me. I'm established now and I don't mind talking about the 1970s. But I do prefer to reveal it in my obituary.

VALENTINA

What does it say?

PATSY

The last sentence says, Patsy's only regret was using the name Canuto Morales in the early days of her writing career.

VALENTINA

You regret it.

PATSY

I don't like liars.

VALENTINA

I don't either.

PATSY

That's why it's my great regret. I hope you'll have tea with me again.

VALENTINA

Maybe. My selfish side wants to say yes because I want to know you, my loyal side thinks I should say no.

PATSY

Do you still want me to sign the book?

VALENTINA

Sure, what the heck.

PATSY

What would Canuto say?

VALENTINA

What would Canuto say. He'd say, Marco- Literature is to the wise, as music is to the deaf. Walk in love.

End Play

RE: LIVING  
By Rebecca M. Sánchez

NOTE:  
Play should be read with a quick tempo.  
RE: LIVING is 62 pages; it reads in approximately 45 minutes.

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## RE: LIVING

## CHARACTERS:

Maricela-	Early 40s, Associate Professor of Education, Latina
Andrew-	Early 40s, Assistant Professor of Education, White
Janice-	Early 40s, Associate Professor of Education, Latina
Laura-	Late 30s-Early 40s, Assistant Professor of Education, any ethnicity

## SETTING:

The closet of a classroom in a College of Education building at a State University.



## SCENE 1

*A dimly lit closet. Emergency lights. The walls of the closet are lined with with books and supplies. There is also a center bookshelf dividing the closet in two. Four people are sprawled around on the left side of the closet.*

*Lights up on Maricela. She is sitting reading a children's book. She reads the book as if she has an audience of children surrounding her.*

Maricela

If you give a mouse a doughnut, she's going to ask for a carton of milk.  
 When you give her the milk,  
 She's gonna want a straw to drink the milk up.  
 Using the straw will inspire her to shoot off some spit wads  
 When she finishes with the spit wads, she'll need a broom to sweep up.  
 Sweeping the floor will get her dancing around the room.  
 So she'll pretend the broom is a handsome dance partner.  
 Dancing with the broom will encourage her to play some music.  
 She'll put on her favorite record.  
 Listening to music will inspire her to write a letter to Mozart.  
 She'll get some paper and a pen.  
 After writing a letter to Mozart she'll draw him a picture.  
 Drawing a picture of chickens, and pigs and cows will remind her of milk  
 So she'll ask for a carton of milk.  
 And you can be certain, if she asks for a carton of milk, she's gonna want a doughnut to go with it.

Andrew

Shut up already.

Maricela

Really? That's it? Someone got famous for this book?

Janice

Let's just sit/

Laura

I don't think we're supposed to be talking/

Maricela

I totally could've written this book.

Laura

It's on the New York Times bestseller list

Maricela

It makes a circle, nothing happens/

Andrew

We don't care/

Maricela

All these children's authors must totally be fucking the publishers/

Laura

don't use that language right now/

Maricela

I mean, some of those sillyass books have like literally 26 words, in the whole book, and the writers get famous.

Andrew

It's about assemblage/

Maricela

Just another cluster fuck of people with connections being promoted while true talent/

Janice

I've tried writing one. It looks easy but it's not/

Laura

I get so mad when famous people just think they can write a children's book because they're famous/

Andrew

That bugs me too. Madonna doesn't know what to say to children.

Maricela

I'd rather read a Madonna book to my kid than this mouse and cookie shit/

*A loud school bell rings!*

Andrew

JESUS!

Laura

Ugh....

Maricela

Oh my god.

Janice

Quiet!

*A loud school bell rings! They sit.*

Janice  
Just keep calm.

Laura  
And please stop cussing.

Maricela  
I was praying to god.

Laura  
You were using his name in vain.

Andrew  
Jesus, I'm gonna be pissed if I die today.

Janice  
We might survive if you all can keep your mouths shut.

Maricela  
You think we're gonna die?

Andrew  
There's an active shooter in the building/

*Maricela begins running in circles around the bookshelf in panic.*

Maricela  
No! I can't, the air in here, we're going to suffocate

Janice  
Quiet!

*Maricela goes to the door.*

Maricela  
I'm not staying in here! I don't want to asphyxiate in a closet/

Janice  
Grab her.

*Laura begins to cry. She slumps on the floor in the fetal position.*

Andrew  
Laura!

Laura

She's right. We're doomed.

Janice

(to Andrew referring to Maricela) Get her under control!

*Janice moves Laura into a flat position on the ground.*

Laura, stop with the crying. Please, I'm beggin you. Just stop with the crying.

*Andrew has Maricela in a restrained position. He lowers her to the ground.*

Laura

(crying) it's happening. This isn't a drill. I'm so scared.

Maricela

(whispering) I can't die, I haven't lived.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Blackout*

*The closet. Same four people. Different positions.*

Andrew

Is that "I've got you babe" playing out there?

Maricela

It's been on this whole time.

Janice

I put it on repeat play when I was setting up for the presentation,

Andrew

I hadn't noticed it before.

Maricela

Adrenaline.

Laura

My mother hates Cher,

Maricela

I love her/

Andrew  
I mean, she still looks good for being an old lady,

Laura  
Says she's a tramp.

Andrew  
Well I'd do/

Maricela  
All guys say they'd do her/

Janice  
It was intended to build community, interconnectedness,

Laura  
Having so many plastic surgeries goes against god's plan/

Janice  
if we want to eliminate microaggressions in the workplace/

Maricela  
Like Cher can still rock-it after tons of cuter, younger, stupider performers have come along.

Andrew  
How weird that I didn't hear it til now.

Laura  
Our hearts were beating too loudly. Blocked it out.

Janice  
we need to learn to rely on each other in the workplace. That's why I chose that song,

Maricela  
She's totally hot and really smart too.

Janice  
Microaggressions are tearing our institution apart.

Andrew  
So, how many times is that song going to play?

Janice  
Until the computer battery runs out.

Laura  
Isn't it dangerous?

Janice  
If the computer runs unattended?

Maricela  
Four professors found shot to death in a closet while "I've got you babe/"

Andrew  
plays in the background.

Maricela  
Psycho lured by tranquil sounds of Sonny and Cher.

Laura  
You think we're going to die in here?

Maricela  
(sings) I got flowers in the spring

Andrew  
(sings) I got you to wear my ring

Laura  
Oh please no. Even though I am always ready, I mean, there are no guarantees, and I have confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, but I never thought/

Maricela  
(sings) And when I'm sad, you're a clown...And if I get scared, you're always around

Andrew  
You should've turned it off/

Janice  
You should've turned it off/

Andrew  
I wasn't in charge of the workshop.

Maricela  
 Stop with the blaming/  
 Andrew  
 It puts us in harms way.  
 Maricela  
 Everyone's in harms way.  
 Laura  
 Good thoughts, Laura, come on, good thoughts  
 Maricela  
 When we cross a street, we're in harms way.  
 Laura  
 My mother once told me I could drown in a spoonful of water.  
 Janice  
 That's true you know. One spoon of water gets in the lungs the wrong way and a person  
 can be a goner.  
 Laura  
 I feared spoonfuls of water, but probably more than that, I was perplexed by spoonfuls  
 of water. I'd stare at them thinking, is this water gonna get me? And/  
 Maricela  
 I wonder if there's water in this closet/  
 Janice  
 Non-toxic paints/  
 Laura  
 how can this spoonful of water kill me?  
 Maricela  
 Four dead professors with non-toxic paint all over their mouths, they must have been  
 really thirsty.  
 Andrew  
 Janice, this is serious... all of our lives might hinge on that goddamned song playing.  
 Maricela  
 Block it out.

Andrew  
What were you thinking?

Janice  
What were you thinking?

Maricela  
Hey. Enough now.

Laura  
I don't even know you guys.

Maricela  
Favorite childhood memory.

Laura  
You want to travel down memory lane right now?

Maricela  
Beats thinking about/

Andrew  
Why do you have to do that?

Janice  
Whisper, people, whisper.

Laura  
She's right folks. If anything gets us it'll be cuz we're screaming in here.

Andrew  
It's like you bring up childhood on purpose.

Maricela  
Just trying to distract us, nothing more.

Andrew  
When I was a kid I was in foster care. I think people know that about me/

Laura  
I didn't know that. I don't even know you guys/



Maricela

You can still have a good memory, even if you/

Janice

This isn't the most appropriate time to bring up painful memories/

Andrew

There is this thing I think of often, when I'm pissed, or bummed/

Laura

When I'm down and out I pray/

Maricela

Keep going/

Laura

That's what we should be doing right now/

Andrew

My foster mother didn't believe in sports because she was afraid of the sun.

Janice

Afraid of the sun?

Andrew

Like sitting in the sun during soccer practice and stuff like that. You know, a skin cancer phobe. But I really wanted to be in sports.

Laura

What about basketball?

Maricela

Let him talk/

Laura

Basketball's indoors/

Maricela

Shh/

Andrew

Well the school music teacher told my foster mom that sometimes playing an instrument can burn more calories and be more exhausting than playing sports.

So my foster mother did all this research about instruments and she learned that trumpet players use more body and lung strength than some soccer players so she signed me up.

Maricela

I didn't know you play trumpet.

Andrew

Not anymore. But one day my classroom teacher heard I was in lessons and she asked me to perform for the class. She said it would be like a concert. She arranged the chairs and she told the class that a special guest expert was coming.

Laura

Wait. What grade was this?

Andrew

Third. So I played and the principal heard the racquet I was making and she stormed in the classroom. My teacher, I can't even remember her name, stopped the principal. She said something like, 'excuse me, but Andrew is our guest performer today and you are interrupting his concert.' And the principal was freaking out because this wasn't exactly part of the curriculum, and my teacher asked her to leave.

There I was, with spit gushing out of the trumpet, stunned, because the principal actually turned around and left the class. One kid thought the spit was gross and started making comments but my teacher just started asking me questions about the spit like it was some marvelous thing to have spit dripping from a brass instrument. She made me seem like this bigshot professional. She even asked if I would allow my classmates to take turns pressing the spit valve button. Everyone raised their hand and the teacher told me I could choose students to come up. I'd play a bit and let the spit collect and then I'd call on people to press the spit release valve over the trashcan. It was the first day I didn't feel dirty.

Janice

Dirty?

Laura

What does being dirty have to do with the story?

Andrew

I can't really explain it.

Laura

When I was a kid I wanted to be chosen by god for something. Like a miracle. Stigmata. Sainthood. Anything like that.

Janice  
You're catholic?

Laura  
No. But I saw the movies. Like about saint Bernadette. And how Mary appeared to her and the water started flowing at Lourdes.

Maricela  
That movie scared me/

Laura  
Me too, but in a thrilling way/

Maricela  
Same with religious paintings, those creep me out/

Laura  
One day I was in the backyard and I saw this water coming right out of the ground.

Andrew  
Sprinkler head.

Janice  
Cynic/

Laura  
We didn't have a sprinkler system. I got down on my knees and started to pray. I was looking right at the wooden fence, trying to find the face of Mary in the boards. But I just saw knots in the wood.

Maricela  
I went to see the face of Mary in a tortilla once/

Janice  
Yeah, they say she appeared in the texture of the ceiling near my old house, or maybe the texture was Jesus. I can't remember/

Andrew  
I have never tried to find anyone's face in/

Laura  
Then I heard giggling behind the fence. It was my brother and his friends.

Andrew

Sucker!

Laura

For that brief moment while I watched the water flow out of the ground I thought their laughter was persecution because I had been chosen by god.

Andrew

You brothers were probably high-fiving because you were a gullible fool.

Janice

You're mean/

Andrew

No, I'm a brother. I know about these/

Maricela

Where was the water coming from?

Laura

They'd made a tunnel between the yards, strung the hose through the tunnel and turned it on.

Maricela

Clever.

Janice

You're telling this story because/

Laura

Favorite childhood memory/

Andrew

Your favorite memory is of getting duped?

Laura

Before I started digging at the water, before I found the source, there was a moment where I truly believed I had been chosen.

Janice

Hmm.

Maricela

I would've beat the shit out of my brothers they'd of done that to me.

Laura

Even after I found the hose under there, I still wondered if I had been chosen. It was like that moment of excitement was so powerful, it made me a blind to the facts.

Janice

There must be a psychological name for that, believing something to be true even after all evidence indicates otherwise.

Laura

I'd go out to that spot everyday to leave flowers for Mary and to pray, and double check.

Maricela

Like, when you know your lottery tickets doesn't have the winning numbers because you've checked. But you still imagine you might be a winner, even after you know. You've stared at the newspaper, compared the numbers/

Andrew

Yeah, what's that all about/

Laura

I'd dig around the spot with a stick, but it was always totally dry/

Janice

Once I ran into a ex-boyfriend and he was with his wife and kids, but when I walked away I thought, 'I bet he's wishing he had chosen me.' And I had no reason to think that, the family looked totally happy and perfect, but that weird thing was happening/

Maricela

Hope. I think the psychological term is hope.

Andrew

It's not hope.

Janice

Hope is when you still think something can happen/

Andrew

What we're talking about goes against rational thought and facts/

Maricela

Not Janice's example/

Janice

I'm still struggling to see how that was a happy childhood memory.

Laura

For five minutes I truly believed I was a saint. How many people get to say that?

Janice

I can't.

Maricela

God, we can't even conjure up childhood memories worth telling.

Janice

I can't remember last week much less my childhood.

Laura

Nothing Janice?

Janice

I grew up in a town that would have flattened all you wimps out.

Laura

I seem weak but I've shoveled my share of shit.

Janice

Everyone had a nickname, and they usually weren't nice.

Maricela

I knew a kid called torcido/

Laura

You wouldn't know by looking at me that I've identified dead bodies.

Andrew

I've never heard that word.

Maricela

Kind of like crooked. Or physically screwed up.

Janice

Yeah. In my hometown they called the mechanic Bozo.

Andrew

What? That's cruel.

Janice

He even called himself Bozo. His business was called Bozo's/

Laura

I wonder if he got that name in school or from his family/

Janice

At what point does a person go from Juan, to Bozo.

Maricela

And when does it become fun rather than painful.

Andrew

A moment of vulnerability?

Janice

And there was this woman One-eye.

Laura

My mother wouldn't ever let us talk about people by their looks/

Andrew

Not even for a compliment?

Janice

But One-eye could see everything.

Laura

Not at all. We weren't allowed to say someone was pretty. Or fat. Or tall.

Maricela

At least you could say if someone's a bitch. That's not looks based.

Andrew

Or a whore.

Maricela

Or a prick.

Laura

You guys know what I mean.

Andrew

If I had a nickname like that, they would call me/

Prick.

Hey!

Kidding.

I'd be called pizzaface. I had really bad acne as/

Did they actually call you that?

I guess so.

Ouch.

I was four-eyes and bottlecaps.

They called me bastard. But I had a dad, he was the bastard/

They called me train. It was really bad/

Train?

Nevermind.

Choo choo!

Shut up!

Maricela

Andrew

Maricela

Laura

Janice

Laura

Janice

Maricela

Andrew

Janice

Andrew

Janice

Andrew

Laura



Andrew

All aboard!

Laura

Leave her alone! If you don't shut up I'm going/

Andrew

I didn't mean anything/

Laura

to slit your throat!

Janice

It's okay, Laura. One night of too much drinking, a string of bad choices, and you are forever called train. That's why I don't go back to that smallass, narrowminded town. If you so much as walk into a grocery store without make-up on the folks talk for months.

Laura

There's a nice side to small towns, coming together for potlucks, or something like that.

Maricela

I do know there was a time I stopped believing in humanity. Maybe when I was a teenager. I think the first time I really realized... I don't know. I dated this guy,

Andrew

That's how you start every story.

Maricela

Shut the fuck up.

Laura

Did the guy make you feel bad?

Maricela

Bad? Yes. About myself. About other women. About male entitlement. His dad was a Vietnam vet, kind of a real tough man, hunter, retired colonel, shot birds for fun/

Andrew

What kind of birds?

Maricela

Quail.

Janice

Didn't they eat them?

Maricela

Yes. Thing is, this guy liked the hunt more than the meal. But these people were living an upper class lifestyle, two luxury cars in the garage, dream home, good wine in a wine storage thingy, so, fancy people, but their edges were fucking jagged.

Laura

This is happy?

Maricela

It's just a memory okay.

Andrew

Don't bite her head off.

Janice

Maybe what she means is that we should treat this moment like a cleansing,

Andrew

a confessional of sorts.

Maricela

In case we/

Laura

Fair enough.

Maricela

Once my boyfriend's dad got drunk with his Vietman buddy who was in town visiting, and both of them looked at me. Like, they were really studying me. It made me uncomfortable. The dad said, 'what do you think of my boy's girlfriend.' And the buddy said, I think his name was Merv/

Andrew

Merv the perv/

Maricela

but that doesn't matter. He said, 'a young petite Mexican girl is almost as good as a gook.' And my boyfriend was standing right there. I didn't know what to do, but I thought he would defend me. Or at least get pissed. He didn't.

Andrew

He was probably so embarrassed.

Maricela

He was a fucking baby.

Laura

I don't know. If someone said that to me or my girlfriend, I think I would freeze. I would literally just freeze.

Janice

The Vietnam War damaged people.

Maricela

I knew I shouldn't have told this story/

Andrew

Janice is right. A whole generation of men screwed up/

Janice

And then they raised us to be screwed up.

Maricela

Why are you defending these guys! They made me feel/

Andrew

Dirty? Welcome to my childhood.

Laura

My dad didn't go to Vietnam.

Janice

No wonder perfectpants.

Maricela

All I'm saying is that, like I never knew being a petite Mexican was a thing.

Andrew

Of course it's a thing.

Maricela

I wasn't even petite, I was young. All young girls are little. I mean, look at me now. I'm not exactly/

Janice

That war/

Maricela

They'd probably hurt girls like me. Small and young/

Andrew

You can't judge people for what they do in times of war/

Laura

But god can/

Andrew

Look at my mother.

Laura

You guys are scaring me.

Maricela

My guy was raised in a home where it was perfectly acceptable to say "as good as a gook."

Janice

We don't really hear that word much anymore.

Maricela

Uh, of course we don't! It's a fucking slur. So derogatory! It made me mad.

Laura

And hurt?

Maricela

Hurt?

Andrew

She doesn't have feelings like that/

Maricela

It hurt me. Yeah, I guess it did. It hurt me.

Janice

At least you don't hurt yourself. That's a real problem.

Andrew

Like people that like to beat themselves physically? Or like anorexia/

Laura

I've been reading about the penitentes here in New Mexico. They really believe in torturing themself

Janice

Not literally, you fools.

Maricela

How can people figuratively hurt themselves

Laura

I steal stuff.

Andrew

What?

Janice

You do?

Maricela

I didn't peg you for a clepto/

Laura

Only lipstick. I'm obsessed with lipstick.

Maricela

Well you are wearing it right now/

Andrew

What an odd thing to steal/

Laura

I have every color, different brands,

Janice

How do you get the ones that are behind the glass counter.

Laura

And I can put it on without using my hands.

Maricela

Like in The Breakfast Club?

Laura

I think was a pivotal moment in my lipstick fetish.

Andrew

What do you mean without hands,

Janice

With her cleavage.

Andrew

How do you put lipstick on with cleavage?

Maricela

Watch the movie.

Laura

I'm not proud of this.

Janice

You shouldn't be proud of stealing.

Laura

The first time I took a lipstick I did it for a friend. She really wanted it so I went the drugstore, I thought I had enough money to buy it for her, but I didn't. I held it in my hand and it fit right here, such a perfect fit in my hand. I kept looking at other stuff in the store and I finally went to the gum section and as I picked up a pack of gum I slid the hand with the lipstick into my pocket. It was so easy. I took it to my friend as a gift, and it was the wrong color. So I kept it. I feel like I'm in total control when I steal lipstick and when I wear lipstick.

Andrew

What are you in control of?

Laura

I even sleep with it on. And when I go to a fancy restaurant and open my pristine white cloth napkin, I print my lips on it.

Janice

That stuff doesn't come out.

Laura

I just don't like thinking of myself as a thief. And it all started because I wanted that girl to like me.

Andrew  
Don't look back. That's my motto.

Janice  
Maybe. But would you change your past, if you could?

Andrew  
I'd do so many things differently.

Maricela  
Like, if we got a real do-over?

Janice  
Yeah.

Andrew  
What would I do with one do-over? I need twenty.

Laura  
I'd live the story I just told over.

Janice  
Lipstick stealing?

Laura  
No, stigmata.

Andrew  
That's not a do-over/

Maricela  
You can't tell someone what to do with their do-over/

Andrew  
But that's wasting it/

Mariclea  
Maybe not to her/

Andrew  
Do-overs are to fix regrets/

Maricela  
They don't have to be/

Laura

I'd want the five minutes thinking I was a saint one more time. Since then, I've had too many doubts, my faith always shakier.

Janice

That's a fair use of a do-over/

Andrew

If I could get just one, I'd go back to the last time I saw my dad and I'd punch him in the face/

Maricela

What'd you do the last time you saw your dad/

Andrew

I was hiding in the bottom cupboard, under the kitchen sink/

Laura

If you fit under the sink you might've been too small to punch your father.

Andrew

My instinct was to beat the shit out of him, but instead I hid/

Maricela

Then your instinct was to hide/

Andrew

He was fighting with my mother and he started in on her. But she went wild, finally snapped and fought back. If I could've come out from under the sink I might've stopped her. They wouldn't have taken her away.

Janice

It wasn't your job to protect an adult.

Andrew

This is my do-over. I would've at least distracted the situation. I don't think my mother would've fired the gun if I'd of been beating on him.

Janice

Geez. That's a heavy do-over. I was only going to say that I would've chosen a different career.

Maricela

You don't like what you do?



Not at all/ Janice

I think it sucks too/ Maricela

I fucking hate this job/ Andrew

You hate being professors? Laura

Totally. Andrew

Absolutely. Maricela

Every fucking day of my life. Janice

That's not encouraging to hear in my first month/ Laura

It's cuz we're not like real professors or anything. Andrew

Yes we are. Janice

We're in the College of Education. That's the lowest in the university/ Maricela

We'd get more respect if we taught kindergarten. Andrew

But we have to do research, that's like professor-ish... Laura

Come on, we teach adults how to use finger paints and how read to kids/ Andrew

My classes are more rigorous than that/ Janice

Maricela

Racism. I encourage my students to analyze texts for racism. Like I mean, why is the mouse in the story white. Oh, white is adorable. If that mouse was black/

Andrew

It would still be cute,

Maricela

It would be a deviant. And we'd probably call it a rat.

Janice

They say rats are smart/

Laura

Do you know some people let rats crawl in their mouths?

Andrew

All I'm saying is that we're not treated like real professors.

Janice

I hate the politics/

Maricela

What did you want to be Janice?

Janice

I like making things. Bread. Quilts.

Andrew

Why not? Martha Steward does it.

Janice

But you can't make a living with cottage industry stuff.

Laura

You make bread?

Janice

I do. And jam. And I can cure meat, and I dry my own fruit.

Laura

Where'd you learn/

Janice

From my grandma. She was the real deal, she could make stuff, everything was made into something else. Used again. She was poor and that's what poor people did in small towns.

Andrew

Now they just drug themselves.

Laura

Not true. I know lots of non druggies from small towns.

Maricela

My relatives make stuff. I have an aunt and uncle that made a dining room table out of some saw horses and an old door.

Laura

I saw something similar in a restaurant back in/

Maricela

If a hipster makes a table from a door it's chic. Poor people have been doing it all along and they don't get a medal for it.

Laura

I'm just saying/

Janice

Hipsters making their cute clothes from old bed sheets because they're rich and bored/

Maricela

Roughing up perfectly good furniture to make it look distressed/

Andrew

Aren't you two judgy/

Maricela

Andrew buys in/

Laura

You have a distressed table?

Andrew

It's an aesthetic. I'm drawn to the aesthetic.

Maricela

Andrew has to purchase an image/

Andrew

You keep changing the subject so you don't have to share shit. What's your do-over Ms. Avoider?

Maricela

I don't know.

Andrew

Maybe it should be to watch your mouth so you stop insulting people all the time.

Maricela

And you need to stop telling people what to do.

Janice

Do you have a do-over Mari?

Maricela

I have lots. Once I broke up with a guy because he was too nice to me. Aside from him, I think I've only dated real assholes. I think I'd do-over every romantic relationship I've ever had.

Laura

And do them again better?

Janice

Or not do them at all?

Maricela

It'd be best if I didn't do them at all.

Janice

You just pick losers?

Maricela

They're not even necessarily losers, but I tend to date people who hate me, just a little bit. And it gets complicated quickly if the person you're with hates the things you love most about yourself.

Laura

That doesn't make sense/

Maricela

You know how we can be intrigued with things we don't like? Well, the men I've dated, and once a woman,

Janice

A woman.

Laura

Wow.

Andrew

A woman?

Maricela

That's another story, anyway, they're like attracted to me even though they don't like me, and slowly they rip me apart. And I find myself becoming more and more like a Raggedy Ann doll with a painted on smile, but sad eyes. And absolutely no backbone/

Janice

I still don't get why you date them in the first place/

Maricela

Until finally, I hate myself as much as they do. And then I'm pissed that they've won.

Laura

This story kind of doesn't make sense. Can you give an example?

Maricela

No. I don't want to talk about this right now.

Andrew

Of course she doesn't.

Maricela

They hate that I know what I want.

Laura

That's a good quality.

Maricela

Until I act on it. Then it becomes personal. Have you ever given a man instructions in bed?

Janice

No.

Laura

Not me.

Maricela

Try telling a guy what you want and they'll hate you. Then, you'll stop telling them what you want, and you'll hate yourself. And you'll stop suggesting which movie to see, places for vacation. You won't mention that you prefer grapefruit juice over orange juice. Your own decisiveness becomes a burden.

Laura

I just don't picture you as a shrinking violet.

Janice

Did you act this way with the one woman you just mentioned/

Maricela

Do you know how many times I've been told I'm too much, or too intense, or too something. But deep down I'm not anything anymore. All the guys have chipped away at me and now I'm just a big, boring coward. Like Raggedy Ann.

Andrew

Mari.

Laura

It's too heavy in here. Happy thoughts. Let's get back to happy thoughts.

Andrew

I'd just like to finish a day without thinking about ways to kill myself.

Janice

How dare you!

Laura

We're sitting in here fighting for our lives and you stay that?

Janice

That is such a disrespectful thing to say right now.

Laura

You think of ways to kill yourself and all I care about is living! You insensitive asshole! Some of us don't want to die!

*Laura starts hitting Andrew.*

Maricela

But what about heaven?

Laura

I'm not ready afterlife. What the hell does forever mean anyway? I don't want forever, I just want/ I can't even wrap my head around eternity, that's terrifying. I can't die. Is it going to hurt? That guy is going to get us. I just know it. Because of the music. It's going to lure him to the room. What if we bleed to death? I don't want pain! I can't handle pain. And you treat it all like a game, not worth living. What kind of jerks intentionally kill themselves!

Janice

Shut up Laura. You're going to get us killed.

Laura

Suicide! Really!

Maricela

Restrain her.

Andrew

I wouldn't really do it! I just think about different ways/

Janice

Andrew pin her to the ground!

*Andrew holds Laura down.*

*Maricela strokes her hair.*

*Janice bites her nails.*

Maricela

Laura honey. You're not going to die.

Laura

You don't know that for sure.

Maricela

We've been here for a while, and nothing's happened. The building is probably safe now.

Laura

Then why won't they let us out?

Maricela

Precautions.

Janice

I wish I had some water. Or a cigarette.

Laura

You don't smoke dummy. I do have Cheetos.

Maricela

Now you're talking. This closet is reserved for the living!

Andrew

Bust them out.

Laura

And gum.

Andrew

Perfect. For after.

Janice

I hope the Cheetos don't make me thirstier.

Andrew

When we get out of here I'm going to stop for a very large coffee.

Laura

Not me. I'm going to have trouble sleeping as it is.

Janice

I'm going to call my parents. I'm sure they're worried.

Andrew

Why the fuck don't any of us have our phones?

Janice

We just ran. I mean, there wasn't much time to think.

Andrew

Laura had time to bring Cheetos.

Laura

I grabbed my backpack. I don't know why, but not my purse.



Maricela

and you have bubble gum/

Laura

I don't think microaggressions will be a problem after this kind of an experience.

Janice

I know. We're going to be like, best friends forever now.

Maricela

If we get out of here you all should come over to the house for a potluck or something.

Laura

I make the best mojitos/

Andrew

I didn't picture you as a drinker.

Laura

I know I like to pray but lots of Christians drink socially.

Andrew

Janice can bring homemade bread with jam.

Janice

No. I want to bring a pie. A big pecan pie/

Andrew

I don't know what I'll bring/

Maricela

Music. You have a good playlist.

Janice

He does?

Maricela

Yeah, he sends me suggestions sometimes.

Janice

I didn't know that/

Maricela

I think we should dance at this shindig/

Janice

Imagine, us dancing/

Andrew

I'm not much for dancing/

Maricela

I mean, who cares, right?

Janice

True, what've we got to lose now.

Laura

I can two-step.

Maricela

See. Laura can two-step.

Janice

I've always been too uptight to really let go with dancing. I mean, I can two-step too, but to really let loose and go wild on the dance floor, I've never had the confidence.

Maricela

But with another chance. Show me the way you're gonna dance if you get outta here.

*The crazy dancing begins.*

Janice

How's this.

Andrew

Check out my new moves.

*Dancing continues. Imagine MC Hammer meets Pee-wee Herman*

Maricela

We don't have to be anything like our old selves.

Janice

God it will be liberating. I'm going to quit obsessing about a clean house.

Andrew

I'm going to spend some of the money I've been hoarding. And for what? The rainy day is now.

Maricela

I just want to calm down and stop being so goddamned edgy with everyone. Like, I really don't have to do a racial, social, gender, and class analysis every time I meet someone.

Laura

I'm gonna try to stop publically correcting people about god. Who am I to say what people carry in their hearts. You all cuss and use the lord's name in vain, and apparently have extramarital sex, and I think you're totally cool.

Janice

You're the only group I'd want to be with in a time like this.

Maricela

You think they're dancing in any of the other closets in this building?

Andrew

Hell no!

Janice

With Sonny and Cher in the background/

Andrew

With fucking Sonny and Cher in the background.

Laura

Should we bring our significant others?

*Dancing stops*

Andrew

What?

Laura

To the potluck.

Janice

You have a significant other?

Laura

I'm married.

Janice  
To a man?

Laura  
Yeah. I have a husband.

Janice  
You're the only one.

Laura  
Oh, then better to leave him home with the kids.

Janice  
You have kids?

Laura  
Two daughters.

Janice  
Laura has two kids.

Maricela  
Are you worried about them?

Laura  
I'm worried about me.

Maricela  
That's what I mean, are you worried about them because you're in here?

Laura  
I just want to think about those mojitos we're gonna drink. And how I was almost a saint. But, true. I should be thinking about them. That's what being a mother's about right? Thinking about your kids all the time.

Maricela  
It's not healthy to think about them all the time.

Laura  
But right now. This could be the end, this could be *it* you know.

Andrew  
We can't think like that.

Janice

I should've grabbed my phone. I need to talk to my parents.

Laura

And I could've called my kids.

Maricela

Write to them.

*Maricela starts passing out supplies.*

Andrew

We got tons of supplies.

Maricela

After writing a letter to Mozart the mouse will want to draw him a picture.

Andrew

She'll hang it on the refrigerator.

Laura

Hanging the picture on the refrigerator will remind the furry white mouse that she's thirsty.

Janice

She'll probably ask you for a beer/

Andrew

When you open the fridge she'll remember the vodka in the freezer.

Maricela

So she'll ask for a mixed drink instead/

Laura

Thinking about the mixed drink will remind her of the tilt a whirl at the fair/

Andrew

And chances are, if she's thinking about the spinning and neon lights/

Janice

While she drinks his delicious vodka tonic,

Maricela

The little furry drunkard rodent is going to want a mushroom to go with it.

*Janice and Laura start writing. Maricela pulls a book from the shelf and starts reading. She goes to the other side of the bookshelf. Andrew follows her. She browses the books.*

	Janice
You writing to your husband or your kids?	
	Laura
Kids. You?	
	Janice
My mom.	
	Laura
You're still close?	
	Janice
Very.	
	Laura
Codependent.	
	Janice
Not pathological. Just love Laura. We don't have to label everything/	
	Laura
Says the woman giving a seminar on microaggressions.	
	Janice
Why don't you write to your husband?	
	Laura
I should be writing to him, but, kids first you know.	
	Janice
I don't know. I've never had any.	
	Laura
It's not for everyone.	
	Janice
I guess not.	
	Laura
What are you telling your mother?	

Janice

About my papers, where to find my account numbers, I'm writing a living will, just in case I barely survive, stuff like that.

Laura

God Janice,

Janice

Don't use the lord's name in vain.

Laura

Turn the tables, I deserved that.

Janice

When you're single nobody knows your wishes. Your secrets, the inner life you your finances, end of life arrangements. So now seems like a good time to let someone know.

Laura

What are your wishes these days?

Janice

About life or death.

Laura

Life, I guess.

Janice

I don't have any. Things haven't really worked out for me. I just go along.

Laura

How can you say that! You get like five publications a year.

Janice

And I eat organic frozen dinners alone every night.

Laura

Well you're respected. That's something.

Janice

If you don't have successful relationships, a million publications don't mean shit.

Laura

I wish I had a million publications/

Janice

It's a sorry substitute for life.

Laura

You have your mother,

Janice

She has to love me. You should know that, mothers have to love their children.

Laura

I'm just saying it's not as grim as you/

Janice

But when people choose to love each other, and they go for the long haul, that's special.

Laura

True love isn't really a choice it's a gift from /

Janice

With relatives, you can hate each other's annoying qualities, irritating habits, but you still love each other because, you know, Mary complains all the time like uncle so-and-so, or Janice can't get a date like cousin Shirley. That kind of stuff. Negative traits are almost endearing because there is a visible lineage. Not so in romantic love.

Laura

My husband and I love each other like brother and sister,

Janice

Well at least twice you/

Laura

The kids are his. But. Yeah. We consummated our relationship all of about, two times.

Janice

That's boring.

Laura

It is.

Janice

I always imagine my married friends enjoying regular sex. Good or bad, at least there is access to regular sex.



Laura

Most married people I know don't even have sex. Especially if they have young kids.

Janice

Whose fault is that?

Laura

In our case it stems from a total lack of interest from both of us.

Janice

Is your man/

Laura

Having an affair? He isn't.

Janice

I was going to say, gay.

Laura

Aren't we all?

Janice

Aren't we all.

Laura

Do you want life support?

Janice

No.

Laura

But technology is so good, and what about/

Janice

What about god? If I'm shot, and god wants me to live, I'll just live right? If I die, it's god's will.

Laura

Not me, hook me up to the machines. I'm not ready. I have things to do/

Janice

Even if you're a vegetable/

Laura

Even in a coma. I could have a rich internal life, it would be like a long rest/

Janice

With tubes and machines doing all the work for you/

Laura

I don't want to die.

Janice

I don't either but I don't want a huge tube down my throat/

Laura

I'm terrified.

Janice

Yeah. Me too.

*Other side of the bookshelf.*

Andrew

No letter writing?

Maricela

I don't have anyone to write to.

Andrew

Some new boyfriend?

Maricela

I don't have a boyfriend.

Andrew

How bout one of your ten million relatives.

Maricela

They know how I feel about them.

Andrew

You take them for granted.

Maricela

I don't want to jinx myself okay! I'm not preparing for death in this cell. Writing goodbye letters.

Andrew  
Your sister would like a letter.

Maricela  
I'll hyperventilate if I start thinking about it.

Andrew  
I wonder where our students are.

Maricela  
I hadn't even thought about them.

Andrew  
They don't know the codes to get in the closets.

Maricela  
How many shots did you hear?

Andrew  
I couldn't count them.

Maricela  
Like, was it dozens, was it hundreds/

Andrew  
More than one, less than a thousand.

Maricela  
It was like, I walked into that classroom and the guns started sounding/

Andrew  
Slow motion to the closet.

Maricela  
Our students could be dead out there, what if they're in the halls drowning in blood

Andrew  
Calm down!

Maricela  
And why don't we hear sirens?

Andrew  
Maybe the shooter's not in this building.

Maricela

But something! Shouldn't we hear someone say "clear the building" or "swat!"

Andrew

This isn't a movie.

Maricela

Were the shots in our building or outside?

Andrew

It sounded like/

Maricela

Oh my god. I can't breathe. I need to get out of this closet. What if they got Blanca in the office. Not Blanca.

Andrew

Come here.

*Andrew hugs Maricela to calm her.*

Maricela

How do we tell the parents of our students.

Andrew

We don't know what's happening. Let's just think pleasant thoughts. Stay calm.

*Andrew starts kissing her.*

Maricela

What are you doing!?

Andrew

Shh.

Maricela

Andrew!

Andrew

Let's do it. Right here/

Maricela

Are you kidding me?

Andrew

What are we waiting for/

Maricela

Janice and Laura are/

Andrew

If this is the end we shouldn't have regrets. I want to be able to say I was happy when I died.

Maricela

You're a fucking piece of work. This isn't the time/

Andrew

When's the time? You have that skirt on,

Maricela

You've known me for how long and this is the/

Andrew

let me just get in there, we can be quick. I promise/

Maricela

I hate you.

Andrew

You won't regret it

*Gunshots at a distance.*

*Maricela and Andrew duck to the ground.*

Andrew

God!

Laura

Fuck.

Maricela

Jesus!

Janice

Everybody down!

*Blackout for 30 seconds while "I've got you babe" plays.*

*Lights up on the classroom.*

*To the left of the closet, a classroom. Janice is setting up equipment and a Powerpoint. On the screen she projects the following, "Eliminating Microaggressions in the Workplace." The song "I've got you babe" is playing. Enter Laura.*

Hey. Laura

Welcome Janice

Thanks Laura

How've your first few weeks been? Janice

My office is finally unpacked. Laura

That's good. Janice

Students complained when they saw the syllabus but I think they're on board now. Laura

That's good. Janice

*Other side of the closet, lights up on a bed. Maricela is under a comforter.  
Andrew is pacing around.*

We're colleagues. Andrew

That didn't stop you before. Maricela

I mean, you say things in meetings and I think to myself, am I really sleeping with this chick? Andrew

Chick? You refer to women as chicks? Maricela

And I'm white Maricela. I can't *not* be a white guy. Andrew

Maricela  
You refer to me as a chick?

Andrew  
You say horrible things about white men/

Maricela  
I do not/

Andrew  
White men are sexually inferior/

Maricela  
I was speaking in generalities/

Andrew  
They can't last in the sack/

Maricela  
You know *you* can last. I wasn't talking about you/

Andrew  
how am I not supposed to take it personally/

Maricela  
I'm speaking from theoretical points of view/

Andrew  
And when you said quickies are my specialty/

Maricela  
That was a compliment!/

Andrew  
I don't want to be with someone that analyzes everything/

Maricela  
Then go find yourself a young, dumb, frigid, white girl if you don't like fucking someone with a brain.

Andrew  
See there? Like that. This isn't about a white girl and where the hell does frigid come in/

Maricela

You know my libido is much stronger than yours, you say it yourself/

Andrew

It's insulting. I'm always on the defensive/

Maricela

We've been doing this for three years.

Andrew

And it's been fun/

Maricela

Fun. You stay at my apartment more than your own and now you're going to walk/

Andrew

Every conversation with you has to be so deep.

Maricela

No they don't/

Andrew

Sports. I want to talk about sports. Or what I watched on TV without you criticizing every character/

Maricela

I'll watch TV with you.

Andrew

I can't handle complications. I'm going through tenure this year, I don't want people to think/

Maricela

Think what/

Andrew

That I slept my way to tenure/

Maricela

Nobody knows we're lovers/

Andrew

I just can't do it.



Maricela

I'm only one vote. It can't save you and it can't sink you.

Andrew

It's about perception.

Maricela

You came here, slept with me, knowing full well you were gonna break up with me.

Andrew

I just can't do it.

Maricela

You greedy bastard, have to eat all the cake you can, even if you're just going to vomit it out.

*Lights out on the bed.*

*Other side of the closet in the classroom.*

Laura

You didn't attend my job talk during the interview.

Janice

I didn't want to influence the search committee/

Laura

Like, influence them good, or influence them bad/

Janice

Why did you come here?

Laura

It's a great university, research one, high graduation rates/

Janice

and our college is in the red, the dean is superimposing a business model, morale is at an all time low, and I work here. Seems like four good reasons to stay away.

Laura

I have no reason to avoid you.

Janice

Did you think about what I want? Maybe I want to avoid you.

Laura

It's been years, Janice/

Janice

And you sign up for this workshop, really now, how ironic for you to sign up for my workshop on microaggression/

Laura

We're required to take at least one and it seemed like the most interesting workshop.

Janice

Don't play innocent, naïve girl with me.

Laura

Fresh start Janice. We're colleagues now.

Janice

I know you better than that. Behind your façade you've always been completely manipulative of every situation/

Laura

Don't bring up the past.

Janice

You used me. Twice.

Laura

I didn't plan it Janice. It was a weird/

Janice

Experiment?

Laura

No/

Janice

Were you going through a phase Laura, did your parents send you to one of those rehab camps/

Laura

I was genuinely interested, I was. But then I wasn't/

Janice

Did you leave for god? You pretend god influences your decisions. It's not god, you just can't face being judged by humans.

Laura

I thought I could do it but I couldn't. I didn't love/

*Andrew walks in.*

Andrew

What's up ladies! (to Laura) Hi I'm Andrew.

Laura

I'm the new hire in literacy. Laura/

Andrew

I was at your job talk remember?

*Enter Maricela. She sets her stuff down.*

Laura

Oh.

Maricela

Not everyone remembers you Andrew/

Andrew

I wasn't implying/

Janice

Good summer everyone? I'm glad you/

Andrew

Does anyone have a cell phone charger, my phone is dead.

Maricela

Mine's in my office.

Janice

Maybe, I'll check my bag in a/

*The sounds of gunshots can be heard.*

Janice  
Oh my god.

Laura  
What was that?

*On the screen an alert presents. "Active shooter on campus. Secure the building."*

Maricela  
What the/

Janice  
Get the door, Andrew! Everyone to the closet!

*They all rush to the closet. Blackout for 30 seconds. The sounds of Sonny and Cher singing "I've got you babe" can be heard.*

*Lights up in the closet. Andrew and Maricela are crouched to the left of the tall center bookshelf. Laura and Janice are lying on the floor on the right, hands over their heads. Sonny and Cher continue to sing.*

Andrew  
Why did she leave the computer playing?

Maricela  
Get over it already.

Andrew  
The shooter is gonna come in the classroom.

Maricela  
Keep calm

*Andrew hits his head against the shelves*

Andrew  
I just know it. That guy's gonna hear it. My heart, it's going crazy in my chest. It feels like it's going to explode.

Maricela  
You're gonna hurt your head!

Andrew

Right before my mother fired the gun the air was thick. It was dirty and filled with, and my heart was pounding just like now/

Maricela

Stop pulling your hair/

Andrew

I think I'm having a heart attack.

Maricela

I'm here with you. Remember? This is how we'd want to go, right? Together,

*She holds him close.*

Andrew

In a closet?

Maricela

Andrew, you know, maybe we should/

Andrew

What?

Maricela

You know how before you were saying/

*Laura crawls to the side with Maricela and Andrew.*

Laura

Are you okay?

*They quickly separate.*

Maricela

Just shaken.

Andrew

What's Janice doing?

Laura

The impossible. See for yourself.

*Andrew crawls to the other side.*

	Maricela
You write your kids?	
	Laura
No.	
	Maricela
Your husband?	
	Laura
No.	
	Maricela
What were you doing?	
	Laura
Chatting up Janice.	
	Maricela
Are you really religious or you just messing with us.	
	Laura
I don't know what I am.	
	Maricela
You're a professor.	
	Laura
At a second rate university.	
	Maricela
Don't call this place second rate.	
	Laura
My parents wanted me to do something more important.	
	Maricela
Like become a doctor or something?	
	Laura
The kids aren't mine.	

Whose are they? Maricela

Some woman my husband was married to. Laura

That's cool. Maricela

It's a business arrangement. Laura

What do you get out of it? Maricela

Security. Laura

Gross. Maricela

I know. My husband adores me, but like a museum piece. I met him at a retreat for/ Laura

Where's the mother? Maricela

She left him. He doesn't really/ Laura

Is he loaded? Maricela

Yeah. You ever heard of Burger Shack? Laura

I love that place. Maricela

It's his. Laura

*On the other side Janice is sitting with her back up against some shelves praying the rosary with her eyes closed.*

Janice  
Leave me alone Andrew.

Andrew  
Where'd you get the rosary.

Janice  
My pocket.

Andrew  
You carry a rosary? I didn't think you were religious/

Janice  
It's a habit from childhood.

Andrew  
Well Laura will feel better/

Janice  
I'm not trying to make her feel better/

Andrew  
You look like an angel praying there.

Janice  
I feel like shit.

Andrew  
Here. Let me...

*He starts rubbing her shoulders.*

Janice  
That's nice.

Andrew  
How come we've never/

Janice  
Never/

*Andrew starts kissing her neck.  
She turns to him and he straddles her over his lap*



Janice  
They're right on the other side!

Andrew  
Shh. Let's do this. Right here.

Janice  
You always talk shit about me/

Andrew  
I don't mean it/

Janice  
I've never been remotely attracted to you/

Andrew  
If this is the end we shouldn't have regrets. I want to be able to say I was happy when I died.

Janice  
They might come over here and see us/

Andrew  
Let me just get in there, I'll be quick. I promise/

*Maricela and Laura each crawl around the bookshelves from different sides.*

Laura  
Oh my!

Maricela  
You little fucker!

Laura  
Maybe we should go/

Janice  
It's not what you think.

Maricela  
Did he give you the, 'this is the end' speech/

Laura  
Is this a rerun?

Maricela

five minutes ago he was trying to seduce me on the other side/

Andrew

Stop exaggerating/

Laura

Ewww.

Janice

Ewww what?

Maricela

I can't believe you would throw the moves on Janice/

Janice

You're not the only woman people find attractive/

Laura

I just think if a guy will sleep with two women in the same day he might be sporting a cootie bomb/

Janice

Since when do *you* use that kind of language/

Laura

You're the last person I'd expect to defend a player/

Andrew

Are all of you forgetting we may be living our last moments?

Maricela

That does not justify your behavior/

Andrew

How do you want to die/

Janice

I kind of have to agree with Andrew on this one. I don't know what else is as distracting as a quick fu/

Maricela

It's white privilege gone wild.

Andrew

Oh let go of that/

Maricela

I won't let go of it. You can die your way, I'll die my way.

Laura

What's your way?

Maricela

You white people have the audacity to choose the activity you'll be doing when you're spontaneously killed by a gunman. Most people of color just have to die. They don't get to choose their favorite adventure. But not you. You get a menu and order your flavor of death. How's that not privilege?

Janice

It's no surprise that Andrew likes women. I could've pegged him for a guy that would want to die screwing. So I won't go so far as to say white privilege. But I'm a little surprised that he'd sleep with you or me because we're the same age as him. He does chase young women.

Laura

They all do.

Janice

Why are you so terrified of women your own age?

Laura

That's a microaggression.

Janice

Is it control?

Laura

Microaggression

Janice

Or are you afraid of being with women who know what they want/

Laura

And another/

Maricela

It's white privilege.

Laura  
Microaggresion/

Andrew  
Why are you all tearing me down/

Janice  
Laura's not. She's just tallying it all up, like usual.

Maricela  
When I first met you I thought you were a pompus ass, but I thought you had some endearing qualities/

Andrew  
I thought you were a wacky, militant feminist.

Maricela  
And you were wrong. I don't align with feminists! They hate women of color more than white men do.

Andrew  
Nobody wants to die during one of your lectures. And let's be honest, nobody wants to live during one of your lectures.

Maricela  
You have the goddamn nutritional value of a twinkie/

Laura  
Why do you have to say god every time you cuss/

Andrew  
That's the meanest thing anyone's ever said to me/

Laura  
Some of us are praying here/

Maricela  
Of course it is, you privileged little fuck/

Janice  
We all know you're not really praying/

Maricela

Poor guy gets called a twinkie and it's so hurtful to him. Go post it on facebook. You and all your self-indulgent white friends can start a banner or twitter feed saying 'all twinkies matter.' You can make this about you, again, rather than looking at your fucked up participation in institutional racism. Then, all you twinkies can start saving yourselves and you can post about your good work. You can be a leader in the next wave of the white industrial savior complex.

Janice

(to Laura) Are you recording this conversation so you can write an article about us using your fancy discourse analysis techniques without following ethical research procedures?

Laura

I don't know what you're talking about/

Janice

I read your article, the one where you quoted 'Janine' and everything I ever told you in confidence was written up and analyzed with your screwed up Christian brain.

Maricela

You two know each other?

Laura

We kind of go way back.

Janice

We kind of go way back. Kind of, my ass! Shall I tell them Polypurefart?

Andrew

We all need to calm down here. I have just the thing. Anyone interested?

*He pulls a joint from his pocket.*

If we have to die, we might as well be relaxed.

Maricela

No way! You've been holding out this whole time?

Laura

I don't smoke but under the circumstances/

Janice

Like hell you don't smoke. I've seen you higher than a kite hundreds of times/

Maricela

You and your goddamned hoarding.

Janice

You especially love getting high after sex/

Laura

I don't know what you're talking about Janice!

Janice

Why don't you ask Janine!

Maricela

Hand it over/

Janice

You got a lighter too?

Andrew

I'm no amateur.

Laura

I wonder if we'll set off the smoke alarm.

Janice

That's the least of our worries.

Andrew

I'm surprised you're game Maricela. You usually chastise me for/

Maricela

I said hand it over.

*He hands her the joint. Maricela lights it and takes a long, luxurious drag. Then she extinguishes the joint and starts stomping on it. She pulls a bottle of paint from the shelf and drowns the joint with paint.*

Andrew

What the hell are you doing?

Maricela

I'll be damned if I'm going to let you die in peace.

Andrew  
You're a real/  
Laura  
So I'm guessing we won't be having the potluck?  
Janice  
I wouldn't go to a potluck with you if my life depended on it.  
Laura  
Earlier you said/  
Janice  
You think I trust you?  
Laura  
How is that not a microaggression?  
Andrew  
You ruined a perfectly good joint/  
Janice  
I'd rather die than go to a party with you/  
Andrew  
The happiness police strikes again/  
Maricela  
I'm proud of who I am/  
Laura  
I don't even know you guys/  
Janice  
Same lie you tell your husband?  
Maricela  
I hate you all.  
Laura  
Your company is disturbing/  
Andrew  
I hate you all too. (to Maricela) But especially you.

Janice

If we get out of here alive I'm going to make your lives a living hell/

Maricela

If I get another chance you better watch your back. I'm going to tell it like it is. Sexual harassment/

Laura

With witnesses.

Janice

I'm in. But I'll find a way to screw you too Laura.

Laura

Can I quote you on that, Janine?

Andrew

You mean Janice?

Janice

Except when she's using my private life for her research, without my consent.

Maricela

I hate you all.

*The sounds of guns closer. Sonny and Cher sing "I've got you babe." A final gunshot rings and no more music can be heard. Silence for a moment.*

*They all sprawl on the floor.*

*In whispering tones...*

Janice

He's here.

Laura

He's gonna get us.

Andrew

He might be a woman.

Maricela

We all know it's a man.



Andrew

He never would've chosen this room if he hadn't heard that goddamned song.

Maricela

Stop with the blaming.

Janice

Why aren't there any more shots?

*Silence*

Andrew

The silence is killing me/

Maricela

(sings) Don't let them say your hair's too long  
'Cause I don't care, with you I can't go wrong

Janice

(sings) Then put your little hand in mine

Laura

There ain't no hill or mountain we can't climb

Maricela

(sings) I got you babe  
I got you babe

Andrew

(sings) I got you to hold my hand  
I got you to understand

*They hold hands.*

*The sound of one more gun shot. Prolonged silence.*

Maricela

I got you babe.

*The closet door opens. Blackout*

\*\*\*\*\*

Maricela

(whispering and shivering) I can't die, I haven't lived.

Laura  
(crying) it's happening. This isn't a drill. I'm so scared.

*Andrew has Maricela in a restrained position. He lowers her to the ground*

Janice  
Laura, stop with the crying. Please, I'm beggin you. Just stop with the crying.

*Janice moves Laura into a flat position on the ground.*

Janice  
(to Andrew referring to Maricela) Get her under control!

Laura  
She's right. We're doomed.

Andrew  
Laura!

*Laura begins to cry. She slumps on the floor in the fetal position.*

Janice  
Grab her.

Maricela  
I'm not staying in here! I don't want to asphyxiate in a closet/

*Maricela goes to the door.*

Janice  
Quiet!

Maricela  
No! I can't, the air in here, we're going to suffocate

*Maricela begins running in circles around the bookshelf in panic.*

Andrew  
There's an active shooter in the building/

Maricela  
You think we're gonna die?

Janice

We might survive if you all can keep your mouths shut.

Andrew

Jesus, I'm gonna be pissed if I die today.

Laura

You were using his name in vain.

Maricela

I was praying to god.

Laura

And please stop cussing.

Janice

Just keep calm.

*A loud school bell rings!*

Janice

Quiet!

Maricela

Oh my god!

Laura

Ugh...

Andrew

Jesus!

*They sit. A loud school bell rings!*

Maricela

I'd rather read a Madonna book to my kid than this rat and cookie shit.

Andrew

That bugs me too. Madonna doesn't know what to say to children.

Laura

I get so mad when famous people just think they can write a children's book because they're famous/

Janice

I've tried writing one. It looks easy but it's not/

Maricela

Just another cluster fuck of White people with connections being promoted, while true talent/

Andrew

It's about assemblage/

Maricela

I mean, some of those sillyass books have like literally 26 words, in the whole book, and the writers get famous.

Laura

don't use that language right now.

Maricela

All these children's authors must totally be fucking the publishers.

Andrew

We don't care/

Maricela

It makes a circle, nothing happens/

Laura

It's on the New York Times bestseller list.

Maricela

I totally could've written this book.

Laura

I don't think we're supposed to be talking.

Janice

Let's just sit.

Maricela

Really? That's it? Someone got famous for this book?

Andrew

Shut up already.

Maricela

You can be certain, if she asks for a carton of milk, she's gonna want a doughnut to go with it.

So she'll ask for a carton of milk.

Drawing a picture of chickens, and pigs and cows will remind her of milk

After writing a letter to Mozart she'll draw him a picture.

She'll get some paper and a pen.

Listening to music will inspire her to write a letter to Mozart.  
She'll put on her favorite record.  
Dancing with the broom will encourage her to play some music.  
So she'll pretend the broom is a handsome dance partner.  
Sweeping the floor will get her dancing around the room.  
When she finishes with the spit wads, she'll need a broom to sweep up.  
Using the straw will inspire her to shoot off some spit wads  
When you give her the milk, She's gonna want a straw to drink the milk up.  
If you give a mouse a doughnut, she's going to ask for a carton of milk.

*End Play*

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