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# The Invasive Kind

Christina Hjelm

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**THE INVASIVE KIND**

by

**CHRISTINA ELISA HJELM**

BM, Vocal Performance, University of Miami, 2008

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Masters of Fine Arts  
Dramatic Writing**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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## ABSTRACT

This essay will explore the representation of the Latin American female identity in Dramatic Narratives. It analyzes the sexualized Latina stereotype frequently portrayed in the media and discusses how I, as a Cuban American playwright, approach creating more authentic portrayals of the contemporary Hispanic American woman. Consequently, this paper contributes to research in the fields of performance studies, specifically identity politics and the politics of representation with further implications in dramatic theory and women's studies.

The failing state of Latina representation on U.S. television must be addressed as English-language networks are presently striving to provide relatable programming to the growing Hispanic American audience. One popular trope that continues to stunt the growth of Latina Identity is that of the "Latina Sex Bomb." The most prominent embodiment of this stereotype, currently on the air, is the role of *Gloria Delgado-Prichet*, the inarticulate-but-curved Colombian mom on ABC's sitcom *Modern Family*. This essay will first examine the characteristics that form this sexualized stereotype in film and television. Then it will look at Latina characters from my works for the stage, *Casualties of Dreams & Sand* and *The Invasive Kind*, to discuss writing strategies that I implement to break away from the Latina Sex Bomb. These are strategies that I will carry into my future work as a television writer, hoping to transform Latina representation in the media. This essay also reveals how the awareness of my own individual identity as a Cuban woman inspires me to feed the current need for diversity in Latina narratives.

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## CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

### DIFFUSING THE SEX BOMB: STRATEGIES FOR BREAKING LATINA STEREOTYPES IN DRAMATIC NARRATIVES

If you are an avid watcher of American television and I were to describe myself as Latina, you might expect me to enter the room swaying my curvy hips with a full pair of red lips, cleavage that saves, long-dark waves, high-heels dancing on the ground and a passionate cry of exotic sounds. If so, you have conjured the spirit of the Latina Sex Bomb.<sup>1</sup> She is the result of America's suffering state of Latina representation in the media. She is what happens when the majority of Latina characters on scripted television perpetuate the gross stereotypes that have objectified the Latina woman since the birth of moving pictures.<sup>2</sup> I am Latina. But I am no Sex Bomb. I am an artist, a writer disappointed with the constant misrepresentation of my tribe on TV. This frustration fuels me to create Latina characters in my own writing that are original, real, and surprising; to provide authentic depictions of my tribe to a society whose impressions of the unfamiliar are so easily influenced by what is taught in the church of mass media.

As a trained playwright who has aspirations to write for scripted television, the purpose of this essay is to demonstrate character writing strategies that I have implemented in my works for the stage, which I plan to transfer to writing for the small screen to create more recognizable representations of contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> A term used by Debra Merskin in her 2007 study of actress Eva Longoria and her character, Gabrielle Solis, on ABC's drama *Desperate Housewives*.

<sup>2</sup> In 1894 a Spanish performer called Carmencita became the first woman filmed by an Edison motion picture camera. It is a 21 second silent film of her dance routine.

Hispanic women on television. First I will outline the characteristics and signifiers that commonly form the Latina Sex Bomb stereotype. Then I will examine two Latina characters of mine, Adriana and Rebecca, one from the play *Casualties of Dreams & Sand* and the other from *The Invasive Kind*, to discuss several major writing strategies I experimented with in an attempt to form Latina characters that breakaway from the Sex Bomb.

### **The Gringa Latina**

If I am going to impress upon you the fact that there are a million different types of “Latina” in the world and promote authenticity of representation, it is only fair that I first paint a clear picture of my own personal character as a Cuban American woman. I was born and raised in a hybrid Latino-Anglo family in the diverse city of Miami where I experienced what it means to be a young, Hispanic-American woman in today’s world. To be clear, I am not from my grandparents’ world of the 1960s Cuban exiles or the world of their 1970s children who were forced to speak Spanish at home but hide their accents at school. Nor am I from the unfortunate world of Hispanic immigrants who struggle with deportation issues, language barriers, and disparaging employment options. I have a close understanding of all those worlds because my community of friends and family come from them but I am of a different cut.

Let’s be honest: I’m a second-generation Cuban-American college graduate from a middleclass family who speaks *Spanglish*. My family calls me the biggest *Gringa* (white girl) of the bunch. A “Coconut,” if you will. I am not

*spicy* or vivacious; I guarantee I am the most soft-spoken Cuban you'll ever meet. My Spanish grammar is poor and I know more lyrics to Taylor Swift than Celia Cruz. But I am lucky to have grown up during a more inclusive and accepting time in society where I can celebrate my Latinidad instead of being ashamed I'm not Suzie Americana. I am from a generation of Latinas that get to pick and choose from the best of both worlds: I get to act as Americanized or Cubanized as I like. That is exciting. It's empowering. I would love to see more of that on TV—not an exact replica of myself, that would be boring- but anything different from the same played out caricatures. Who is representing all the real life Latinas who are not stereotypes? Why are we limited to the same types of stories told over and over again? I am not a maid, I am not illegal, I don't speak in broken English, I am not one of the Florida Republican Cubans, I have never been connected to a drug cartel, men don't duel each other over the sight of my glistening, tropical curves, and I rarely spend the day slaving over an exotic pot of food. I want to write Latina characters that are none of those things or all of those things but in surprising ways.



## **PART 1: SEX BOMB CHARACTERISTICS & SIGNIFIERS**

While the categorization of figures into tropes or types mimics the very act of negative stereotyping that occurs in society, it is an essential method in the analysis of characters. Tropes have been utilized in the formation of dramatic theory since Aristotle's *Poetics*. They provide the framework and vocabulary necessary when analyzing dramatic concepts. Therefore, the first step will be to identify and describe the range of characteristics that often come together to form the Latina Sex-Bomb trope. G.D. Keller (1994) and Charles Ramirez-Berg (2002) spearheaded this type of identification work in the medium of film by surveying the history of Latino stereotypes in movies. Keller divided Latina characters into the following three types, which he notes often blended and were not mutually exclusive:

The Cantina Girl: "A naughty lady of easy virtue." The Cantina girl is the Anglo-protagonist's object of desire, exuding great sexual allure. She is outgoing and exhibitionistic, often seen dancing, singing, or teasing.

The Faithful, Moral, or Self-Sacrificing Señorita: This character usually begins good, turns bad, and then realizes her wrong ways by the end of the story, typically sacrificing herself for her Anglo love interest by throwing her body before the bullet or knife intended for him. She often denounces her culture to claim allegiance with "the land of the free."

The Vamp: Like the Cantina Girl, the Vamp is presented as a sexual object but she uses her intellect and her feminine wiles to manipulate men and get what she wants. She is a self-serving psychological threat to the Anglo-protagonist.

Ramirez-Berg's three Latina film-types are similar to Keller's: The Harlot (The Vamp), The Female Clown (Cantina Girl) and The Dark Lover (The Self-Sacrificing Señorita). Keller and Ramirez-Berg's tropes ultimately informed the Latina characters that later transferred onto television but these plural film-types seem to have morphed into one monster Latina stereotype when making the leap from big-screen to small-screen. Debra Merskin (2007) noticed this during her study relating to the sexualized Latina, noting that today's Latina television characters are more of a homogenized mix of Keller and Ramirez-Berg's types. She refers to this monster-Latina-television-trope as The Latina Sex-Bomb. The rest of this section will go into depth, describing the common characteristics of the Latina Sex-Bomb as the medium of television represents her. The Latina characters from my plays will later be examined against these hyper Latina Sex-Bomb stereotype characteristics.

### **The Tropicalized Body**

The most obvious signifier of the Latina Sex-Bomb is her physical appearance. Constructed to be objects of desire, these women have hyper feminine attributes. Their bodies are curvaceous: voluptuous cleavage, petite waists, hourglass hips, and large, shapely buttocks. Their attire is designed to

highlight their figure: high heel shoes and tight-fitting or revealing clothes that are often in vibrant colors. Other ultra-feminine characteristics of the Latina Sex-Bomb are a head of long, flowing, dark hair and a pair of red-painted, full lips. These women can be found doing physical activities that call male attention to their bodies. Like Keller's Cantina Girl, we might find her singing and dancing provocatively. The contemporary Sex-Bomb often skips the dancing and blatantly traipses around in lingerie instead.

### **Language**

These women are given heavy Spanish accents in order to signify their exoticness. Their English grammar is often imperfect and to drive the point home on how "Latin" they are, they'll even speak Spanish or in a mix: Spanglish. Having these women speak with poor English grammar implies that they are uneducated and perhaps come from a lower class, which is a blanket stereotype placed on all Latina/os in America. Furthermore, regardless of what language they are speaking, their voices are always boisterous; another tool they use to draw attention to their presence in a room. The performance of their loud voices with singing vowels and rolling Rs is another way in which they are tropicalized as Latinas; these sounds evoking images of squawking island birds and parrots.

### **A Personality as Diverse as her Culture**

The Latina Sex-Bomb is expected to play a range of many roles: the lover, the other, the mother, the saint and more. They have a large bag of emotions

and tricks that they pull from to get what they want. The following is a list of the most common personality traits of the Sex-Bomb. Not all Sex-Bombs exhibit every trait listed but many of them show varying ranges of most of them.

Sexual: As previously mentioned, this Latina is highly sexualized. But the level of how aware she is of her sexuality can vary. Most commonly, they play a vamp who is extremely aware of how desired she is and wields that desire to her advantage. However, there is the rare naïve Sex-Bomb who unknowingly dangles her sexuality in the company of admirers. There are also versions who are portrayed as uninhibited sexual beings who simply enjoy the pleasure of sex and don't necessarily use it as a tool.

Hot-Blooded Spitfire: When she gets angry, she gets louder and very "Spanish." No one wants to stand in the line of fire facing her string of Spanish curses and expletives. Make her mad and she will charge at you with everything she has. This is no meek wallflower.

Passionate/Spirited: These women are rarely lukewarm about anything. They either feel the hate of the spitfire anger described above or deep adoration. The volume is turned all the way up on their opinions and emotions. Expect many impassioned speeches about her beliefs and feelings.

Self-Sacrificing: Some Sex-Bomb's play the saint or the martyr. They are often so passionate that they will sacrifice themselves for what they believe or love.

Dissatisfied: The Latina Sex-Bomb is infamously dissatisfied with her current state- whether it be in relation to the state of her love life, finances, social class, career, or even the political climate. Dissatisfaction will either send her pouting or scheming.

Manipulative: This girl uses her mind and body to get what she wants. Her sexuality is her weapon of choice and she knows how to aim it. But she can also be an expert in mental and emotional manipulation. This makes her a threat to both the men and women. Determined Sex-Bombs have been known to cheat, lie and double-cross since the early age of film when she began pinning male suitors against each other to fight for her honor.

### **Wearing Latinidad on her Sleeve**

The following values are common stereotypical indicators of Latinidad in the Latina Sex-Bomb. Not all Sex-Bombs express interest in all of these values but they usually embrace more than one. As mentioned above, regardless of which values they have, they are always very vocal about them, often delivering long, passionate declarations, speeches, or diatribes. The above personality traits are different manners in which they may go about worshipping or securing these values:

Family: Being the picture of ultra-femininity, there is nothing more feminine than the motherly instinct to protect one's offspring or nest. These Latinas put their families at the top of their list when it comes to priorities and will fight to keep their kin out of harm's way.

Love: Much like she will do anything for her family, the more Romantic Sex-Bombs will sacrifice themselves in the name of love. They will stop at nothing to ensure the happiness of the man they've given their heart to.

Culture: There's no better way to draw attention to this woman's Latinidad than to have her speak about it or act on it. Proud of their Hispanic culture, these immigrants follow traditions and/or pass them on orally to younger generations. Anglo characters around them are often made to listen to stories about Latin customs. Cooking is a common example of how they are depicted performing their culture. These women are often shown stirring a pot of something spicy.

In the same way that these women feel passionately about their roots, they can also express the same love for their new country: America. This is a characteristic of Keller's Faithful Señorita trope, which often denounces her old country to declare allegiance to the United States.

Religion: Latinas in film and television are stereotypically depicted as Catholics. While this is adverse to their sexualized nature, it also serves to emphasize their

sexuality by clashing with it. For example, many of these women sport the crucifix around their necks, nestled in their robust cleavage. They also signify their religion by doing the sign of the cross when they are troubled, praying, and going to church. Falling somewhere between culture and religion, they can also be superstitious, having many Spanish old wives tales to share.

The American Dream: Often having immigrated to the United States with nothing, many Latina Sex-Bombs are concerned with upward mobility. Even the second-generation American Latinas are imprinted with the American Dream of their elders. Money and education are priorities. They typically look to gain this from the men they manipulate or fall in love with. The previously discussed urge to protect their family sometimes fuels this value.

A Woman's Work: One generalization of Hispanics that does originate from cultural truths is how extreme gender role expectations are: the men must be macho and the women must be dedicated wives and mothers. From these expectations stem many of the above stated values that Sex-Bombs believe about how they are supposed to act. They have a certain understanding of what a Woman's job is and are set on performing it. They heavily maintain their appearances: keeping their bodies in shape and their faces always made-up. In addition, they keep house, care for their children, support the men in their lives, and if they are single, they fixate on actions that may attract the desired male. Since older generations have taught them to worship their men because they

“hold the power,” some Sex-Bombs end up feeling oppressed by their male counterpart or end up committing acts that go against their beliefs for these men. Stronger willed Sex-Bombs manipulate their men to control this male-power that they were taught to pursue.

### **Components of Character Formation**

How is character created? Understanding what dramatic components shape a stereotype is to know how to change it. In order to analyze how current stereotypical Latina characters function we must first understand what produces the impression an audience gets of a character. This section will classify five writing choices available to a writer to create a character. What a writer does with those choices ultimately determines whether we will end up with another Latina Sex Bomb or something different. The five components of character formation are:

Image: How does this character look?

Dialogue: How do they speak and what do they say?

Situation: What environment or conflict are they placed in?

Action: How do they act/react in their given situations?

Surrounding Attitudes: How do other characters speak of them, to them and act towards them?

These are the terms that will be used in the next section that discusses my approach and techniques when forming Latina characters in my own work.



## **PART 2: LATINAS IN MY OWN WORK**

Writing for the stage with the support of a theatre community that encourages cultural authenticity and experimentation has given me freedom to mold Latina characters that are fresh and surprising. This next section will examine two Latina characters from my stage works: Adriana from the play *Casualties of Dreams & Sand* and Rebecca from the play *The Invasive Kind*. I have chosen Adriana and Rebecca because they are two different female personalities who are Latina in very different ways. These characters will be used to discuss my approach to forming stereotype-breaking Hispanics.

### **Adriana**

In *Casualties of Dreams & Sand* Adriana is an Ultra-Latina who demonstrates many of the Sex Bomb characteristics at first glance but then breaks them all as the play evolves. By “Ultra-Latina” I mean that she has been born and raised in Cuba so she exhibits a close, immediate relationship to her Hispanic roots. She has a Cuban accent and speaks in Spanish as her first language. There are three major writing strategies I used to make Adriana a three-dimensional character rather than a one-sided stereotype: 1. Teasing the stereotype, 2. Altering surrounding attitudes, and 3. Creating a new cultural narrative.

### **Teasing the Stereotype**

Stereotypical signifiers can be utilized as a tactic to play with an audience's expectations. Exhibiting expected aspects of a trope to then smash them against contradictory characteristics could surprise an audience, jolting them into the awareness that the stereotype is being altered. Adriana works very much in this manner. She manifests several of the Sex Bomb characteristics when she is introduced: she enters the stage wielding a machete in a passionate blaze, shouting Spanish expletives. However, elements that contradict her Sex Bomb behavior are presented to morph her into a new form. For example, while she acts with the brazen strength of a Sex Bomb, her physical appearance is that of a naïve teenage girl wearing a cardigan and a bow in her hair. Hardly the curvy temptress we're accustomed to seeing. Salsa and bolero music, an aural signifier of tropicalization is associated with Adriana throughout the play but is eventually used against the Sex Bomb in a way that is discussed in the next section on surrounding attitudes.

At the end of act one I play with the idea of the Sexualized Latina seductress when Adriana emerges from her house wearing a sexy red dress, entirely sex-bombed out. She attempts to seduce Jake, ramping up typical vamp behavior. This stereotypical moment is flipped on its head by the surprise reveal that Adriana is a virgin. Exposing this secret of hers along with her unfulfilled desperation to be desired by her husband suddenly makes her vulnerable by proving this Sex Bomb moment of hers to be nothing more than an insecure girl playing dress up.

Sex Bomb females often fail to gain the empathy of an audience because their over-passionate, irrational and bombastic behavior can be alienating to a viewer if these actions are not supported by deeper emotional needs. I circumvented this pitfall by backing up Adriana's overzealous decisions, such as taking a stranger hostage in scene 1, with information that validates her extreme actions. By the second act we learn that her aggression is merely a shell that masks how scared she feels being left alone to protect her home in a country that is foreign to her. She is merely overcompensating to hide her shortcomings. This tactic forms a more three-dimensional character by rooting irrational actions in relatable problems. If the audience is given the information they need to forgive a character's wild behavior, they will be open to empathizing with their struggles. The goal here is to offer emotionally gratifying storytelling by making it possible for the audience to connect.

### **Altering Surrounding Attitudes**

Latina Sex Bombs have a longstanding tradition of being sexually irresistible to any man. If a man is in the room with her, he will desire her with little to no effort required on her part because it is merely a superficial desire—her intellect is not the prize these men have their eyes on. In *Casualties of Dreams & Sand* I break this tradition regarding the way that the men in this play respond to Adriana. Neither Jake, “the white male lead,” nor Diego, her husband, show any sexual desire for Adriana: Jake is focused on his guilt and suicidal thoughts while her husband refuses to have sex with her because he is secretly

homosexual. A major conflict in this play is the subject of Adriana's confusion and frustration surrounding what feels like the rejection of her femininity by the man she loves. Here I create a new narrative that moves in the opposite direction of the traditional male response elicited by the Sex Bomb. More importantly, Diego and Jake's refusal to objectify Adriana's body humanizes her—especially when she tries so hard to objectify herself during her wedding night flashback scene and in Act 1, Scene 9 where she seduces Jake in the red dress. This is crucial because the objectification of the male gaze plays a major role in the perpetuated sexualization of Latina characters. Jake and Adriana do eventually sleep together but what is important about when this change occurs is that he does not make himself intimately available to her until after the moment where they share stories about their childhoods in Act 2, Scene 4. The fact that his desire for her grows out of an emotional connection rather than a superficial drive to consume her body solidifies how drastically different these male attitudes are from that of the objectified stereotype's surrounding male attitudes.

In G.D. Keller's writing on Latina stereotypes in film, he notes that in movies that star a romanticized Latina character there is almost always a key dance scene that showcases this female as she sways and struts for a crowd that typically includes the lustful attention of the film's male hero. In Act 1, Scene 2, I take this common image of putting the Latina body in motion and I play with it by both Altering Surrounding Attitudes and Teasing the Stereotype. This dream-like scene follows Adriana's imagination as it invents a dance club on the beach where she invites the dream-representation of her lost husband to salsa dance

with her. As they dance together she changes the music to a slow bolero, hoping to romance him, but the opposite occurs. He keeps a cool distance from her and she ends up angering him when she steps on his foot while trying to snuggle up to him. In my version of “the Latina dance seduction scene” the woman ends up coming across as clumsy, humiliated, and is rejected by her male target. This humanizes her by breaking the myth that paints the dancing Latina body as a magic, hypnotic spell. It helps to splash a cold reality check in the faces of unrealistic stereotypical beliefs – such as the notion that the instant solution to any Latina woman’s problems is doing a little dance.

### **Creating a New Cultural Narrative**

*Casualties of Dreams & Sand* touches upon a topic that is of great interest to me and requires some introduction. When working with a diverse, non-Anglo character, a Latina in this case, there is always a choice to be made as to whether (or how) to address any issues related to their culture. By “issues” I mean anything in their lives affected or influenced by their ethnic background. This can range from traditions, politics, gender role expectations, immigration matters, class differences, language barriers, education, discrimination, to many other aspects of life. What is everyday life like in this character’s homeland? If they live in America, how is their experience in America different from those who live in America but are not of their same ethnicity? How does their culture make them unique? A writer can choose not to engage in any conversation with a character’s cultural roots, and I feel that is a perfectly acceptable choice, which is

dependent on the type of story being told. However, if a piece does engage in discussion about a character's cultural narrative, there should be an awareness of whether the story being told is a stereotype of that culture. An attempt to tell a new, different story about the Latino culture will contribute to the creation of a more original Latina character.

In the case of *Casualties of Dreams & Sand* I do engage in discussion regarding Adriana's connection to Cuba because immigrant issues and cultural gender role expectations are themes that have a voice in this play. Because I was going to be talking about life in Cuba, it was of personal importance to me to introduce a new cultural narrative about what it means to be a Cuban who left the island for America. The assumed story of any immigrant who has left Cuba since the 60s is that they are escaping the evil Castro's communism and it is likely they traveled to Florida on a raft to do it. Up until about five years ago, I myself had imposed this cliché Cuban narrative onto my own grandmother, wholeheartedly believing she fled Cuba to come to Miami because she wanted to find political freedom and live the American Dream. She laughed at me when I told her my version of her life events and responded with "eh... leaders over there were always changing and each time we got someone new, people got upset, and things were shaken up until the next leader came along. I was used to that." Turns out my grandma left Cuba to escape a broken heart after falling in love with, and getting pregnant by, a boy from a family who forbid him to be with her and their baby, my future dad. The revelation of how misinformed I was about her immigration story and the fact that her real reasons for leaving home were far

more moving changed me as a writer. It taught me that telling an original story rooted in emotional truth is always more interesting than the cliché.

In line with this lesson, I wrote Adriana's Cuba-escape story to be one fueled by love. You learn that Adriana only came to America to marry her childhood sweetheart who moved to Florida. Jake jokingly tells her "I never met anyone who was saving it for America" and she responds with "I was waiting for Diego, who happened to be in America." Adriana did not come to America because she wanted the typical romanticized immigrant American Dream. She simply wanted to be wherever the man she loved was, didn't matter if it was America, Cuba, or Antarctica. When she learns that Diego is dead, she no longer cares to remain in the U.S., grabbing a raft, running to the ocean, and proclaiming she is going to go back home to Cuba. Jake tells her "You can't float to Cuba!" and she says "Cubanos do the reverse all the time," "To get HERE. No one goes **back** to Cuba" he responds. This is my own little jab at the stereotype image of Cubans floating over to Florida. I wanted to create a situation where someone would actually want to go back to Cuba since all we hear about are folks doing the opposite.

Another manner in which I form a new cultural narrative for Adriana is by having her character challenge the expected gender role of what a Woman's Work is in the Cuban culture. In Act 2, Scene 4, Adriana disses the stereotypical picture of a Latina woman slaving over a hot stove for hours, cooking a spicy meal for her family. When Jake questions why she ordered pizza if all Cuban women are supposed to be "crazy-good cooks," she responds with: "You'd rather

your woman be a kitchen-slave, frozen to pots and pans all day? ... What Cuba has are all the women in my family who go to their graves smelling like garlic oil and lemon dish soap. *Both my abuelas* died at their kitchen stoves... I don't want to be found dead over a steaming pot of *arroz y frijoles*." Focus is brought to the changing cultural narrative by having Jake anticipate that she must value cooking only to be rejected by Adriana's declaration against it. This tactic of providing a new cultural narrative works to break stereotypes by creating individuals who are separated from their generalized group because of their unique, personalized relationship to their culture.

### **Adriana Conclusion**

Adriana is proof that you do not have to completely discard every stereotypical characteristic of the Sex Bomb to break away from it. Adding contradictory characteristics to the trope or altering expectations slightly will make an audience aware that a new story is being told. Perpetuating the stereotype can even be avoided by simply changing the attitudes of the characters surrounding the Latina stereotype. An audience will be thrown even more aback if they see the familiar Sex Bomb acting as predicted receive a drastically new response from the men around her. Cultural narratives and the character's relationship to their homeland should avoid clichés to better engage the audience. The overall theme with the three tactics used to form Adriana is surprise. If the audience is surprised with original spins on the stereotype, they



will be more absorbed in the story and may eventually stop thinking of Latina's through a generalized lens.

## **Rebecca**

While Adriana is a representation of the Ultra-Latina, Rebecca, from *The Invasive Kind*, falls on the other end of the Latina spectrum. She is a representation of the growing crop of second generation American Latinas who are highly Americanized but still identify with various aspects of their Hispanic heritage as they've learned from older generations of their family. As you may have gathered from my introduction, I am more of a Rebecca-Latina. The three main writing strategies I used with Rebecca to make her a departure from the Latina Sex Bomb are: 1. A.k.a Whitewashing, 2. Performing Latina as a Tactical Choice, and 3. Desexualization.

### **A.k.a. Whitewashing**

The title A.k.a. Whitewashing calls for me to begin this section with an explanation that has a disclaimer attached. In the previous section on creating a new cultural narrative I mentioned the choice a writer has to engage in dialogue with a diverse character's cultural narrative. "Whitewashing" is a term that gets thrown around, most commonly regarding television characters, to condone when a diverse character is presented but the following two things occur: the writer never engages in any conversations surrounding their cultural narrative and this character is given none to very few ethnic signifiers. The popular

argument is that Whitewashed ethnic characters are empty attempts made by writers who want to create the illusion of being culturally inclusive.

While parties that support the presence of culturally diverse characters in theatre and film are typically the ones found wielding the term Whitewashing, I feel that it is a poorly chosen word with implications that end up supporting racial generalizations. Claiming that giving an ethnic character *X characteristics* is an act of making them white (meaning Anglo American) is to say that *X characteristics* can only be authentically owned by a white character. Essentially this is a form of stereotyping to say that only one group of people can exhibit certain characteristics. This bothers me because if I were a character I would most likely be accused of being a Whitewashed Latina since I do not demonstrate many stereotypical Latina signifiers. But does that make me an inauthentic Latina? Some kind of faux Cuban? I titled this section A.k.a Whitewashing because it involves the strategy of avoiding the use of stereotypical Latino signifiers and an absence of cultural narrative to move away from the Sex Bomb but also because I think this is an important conversation to open up with the ever-growing Americanized Latino community.

In *The Invasive Kind* I create Rebecca with only two major Latina traits, which will be discussed in depth in a later section, but other than that she shows no other characteristics of the Sexualized stereotype. Her image is that of a restrained neat freak, conservatively covered up and not tropicalized in any way. Her actions are that of a timid, fearful, person rather than of a passionate, extroverted vamp and her sexuality is the last tactic she'd ever use to get what

she wants (for reasons discussed in the Desexualization section). When we learn that the “whitewashed” Rebecca is second generation Cuban, this following question is then presented with the help of her sister Ariel: how does one claim their ethnicity when they are so distanced from their roots? In Act 1, Scene 2, Rebecca makes a comment to her sister Ariel in Spanish, sparking the following argument:

ARIEL  
Bring the Spanish down a notch. We’re white.

REBECCA  
We’re not “white” white. Have some pride.

ARIEL  
Were you born in Havana?

REBECCA  
*Mami* was.

ARIEL  
Were YOU born in Havana?

REBECCA  
I have olive undertones.

ARIEL  
Pretentious undertones.

Ariel takes on the opinion of those who think whitewashed Latinos are not real Latinos. While she seemingly wins the argument with her smart-ass comments, this bit forms awareness that another type of Latina, distanced from the trope, is being presented and can exist. *The Invasive Kind* is about sisterhood, memory, and childhood trauma, so it has less of an immediate need for cultural narrative than *Casualties of Dreams and Sand*, which is a play heavily dependent on immigrant issues. Still, it includes a Latina character because I believe Latino

characters can exist in a story that is not *about* being Latino. That isn't whitewashing, it's the world I grew up in.

### Performing Latina as a Tactical Choice

Rebecca only demonstrates two signifying Latina qualities: 1. Her use of Spanglish and Spanish expletives when she is upset, and 2. Her tendency to passionately exaggerate her thoughts when she wants to get her way. I diminish those two aspects as Sex Bomb behavior by revealing them both to be performances she chooses to put on when she is afraid. In Act 1, Scene 8, Seth calls attention to her performative use of the Spanish curse words she's been throwing at him: "Talkin' Spanish is like yer musk, ain't it? ... Snakes give off this musk to shoo predators away. It's this rank piss-n-shit ooze... You squawk-off in *Español* when ya wanna scare the white-guy away. ... That ain't culture. That's a crutch. ... And I know you never used to speak in Spanish when you were little." He deconstructs the audiences' passive understanding of what it means for someone to speak in Spanish and forces them to actively rethink it by comparing it to snake musk. In Act 1, Scene 2, Ariel also calls out her sister's Latina performance of dramatically disapproving of all of Ariel's choices as a tactic to scare Ariel away from dangerous situations:

ARIEL

This is that psycho, paranoid bullshit you pull on me with everything! Just like *Mami* and *Abuela* - scaring the shit out of us with lies just to get their way/

REBECCA

That's not what I'm doing.

ARIEL

"Go to the Everglades and an Alligator will eat your legs."

REBECCA

That happens.

ARIEL

"Don't dress like a slut or the GRAVE ROBBERS WILL RAPE YOU."

REBECCA

You have to listen me!

This tactic frees Rebecca from being owned by the stereotype by putting the conscious decision to embody Latina behaviors in her control. These are not unsupported, extreme actions she does on autopilot; they are driven by serious emotions of fear and worry. This strategy can be related to the earlier mentioned goal to validate Adriana's outlandish Sex Bomb behaviors by rooting them in a relatable need.

### **Desexualization**

The sexualization of the Sex Bomb is by far the most oppressive quality of the stereotype. It objectifies the Latina, making her a commodity to be consumed by men rather than a human person with emotions, needs and hardships that an audience can empathize with. In trying to desexualize Latina characters in order to humanize them for audiences, I have played with making sex a major theme in my plays, rather than ignoring or tiptoeing around the subject. Both *Casualties of Dreams & Sand* and *The Invasive Kind* deal head-on with issues of female sexuality: Adriana struggles with her virginity and her husband's refusal to sleep with her as a sign of feminine failure while Rebecca deals with the post traumatic

stress of childhood sexual abuse and how that has warped her impression of men. Tackling the damage of inappropriate sexualization in *The Invasive Kind* immediately forces the audience to think about how objectifying a body without concern for the human it belongs to can be literally criminal.

As mentioned earlier, Rebecca's physical appearance is highly desexualized, a conscious choice she makes to avoid any extra male attention. She covers as much skin as possible, even while out in the steaming Florida Everglades. At the end of Act 2, the image of her body covered in rashes is revealed as the result of baths she gives herself in Clorox water due to an obsessive compulsion to be clean, caused by her father's sexual abuse. The negative effects of her father's objectification of her body physically manifest themselves as wounds. These scars desexualize her body, showing she is made of real, living flesh that can be harmed. This isn't the flawless, indestructible body of the almost cartoonish Sex Bomb. Rebecca is a real human in pain.

Apart from her image, her wounds also take shape in her dialogue. In Act 1, Scene 2, she projects her fear of the male gaze onto her sister's decision to wear a skimpy dress to a funeral, telling her: "You're lucky you didn't get raped by grave robbers." When a concerned Seth suggests she put lotion on her rashes she barks at him, accusing him of perversely wanting to watch her rub cream on her body. The Latina stereotype vainly indulges in the knowledge that men are constantly admiring her beauty but Rebecca takes her awareness of male attention to an obsessive level of paranoia, driven by fear instead of vanity. She interprets sexual attraction when it isn't even there.

Rebecca also actively desexualizes herself, expressing a poor body image: “You have to be sicker than I am to want to look at this, let alone touch me.” She voices her discomfort with being touched to Logan when he good-naturedly tries to brush crumbs off her pants and then again to Seth: “I don’t let people touch my legs so don’t even think about it.” She combats any possible sexualization of her body with negative self-image statements and being defensive against any possible physical contact between her and men. Her refusal to objectify herself and be objectified by others distinguishes her from the Latina trope that notoriously resorts to sex as her only necessary weapon to getting what she wants.

### **Rebecca Conclusion**

The creation of Rebecca allowed me to explore a diverse variety of stereotype-breaking strategies. Where with Adriana I played with giving her many of the stereotype’s attributes, with Rebecca I honed in on two specific characteristics of the Sex Bomb and saw how effective deconstructing select aspects of the stereotype can be in providing the audience with a new understanding of them. Further, with this “whitewashed” Latina I was able to offer a contemporary version of the second-generation Americanized Latina types that I grew up around. Rebecca’s character In *The Invasive Kind* I was able to expand from using character dialogue and action as a tool to desexualize the Latina and experimented with how themes and subjects of sexuality in story can also

function as a way to humanize the Sex Bomb. Adriana and Rebecca can almost be put up as tent poles marking the wide range of personality options and cultural narratives available when creating a Latina character. They are proof that there is no need to resort to the singular generalization when character story options are limitless.



## CLOSING THOUGHTS

The source of inspiration for this essay topic was ABC's sitcom *Modern Family*, a current television show with a large viewing audience and a lot of critical acclaim. I've always been a fan of this show's fresh spin on the family sitcom and decided to recommend it to a girlfriend who responded with: "Oh... yeah, I've seen that show. I would like it except I can't stand that Columbian mom on there. You don't find her super annoying? She's isn't even funny." My friend was referring to the Latina character Gloria, played by actress Sofia Vergara. Soon after that conversation several other people gave me that same reply to Gloria's character and I found it interesting that these were all Hispanics that were having a negative reaction to her. I began to pay more attention to Gloria's character, wondering if she was really that unlikable. I realized I never laughed at any of her character's jokes. She *is* obnoxious and the reason why finally dawned on me: she is the worst, extreme version of the sexualized Latina stereotype—Chiquita Banana and Charo mashed together and played on full blast. All the jokes given to this character are about her inability to speak correct English, reactions male characters have to her irresistible body, or her explanations of what it means to be Colombian, which perpetuate a bigoted interpretation of Colombians rather than any kind of insightful cultural narrative. I then turned to other current television shows with Latina characters to see if anyone was presenting Latinas in a forward-thinking manner but what I found was discouraging. Why is only one kind of Latina being shown? Why must she

always be sexualized? What are these writers doing that continues to reproduce un-relatable, false Latina characters?

These questions forced me to look inward at the Latina characters I was writing in my own plays. I knew that they were not stereotypes but I found myself without a language through which I could explain how I managed to keep them from being stereotypes. I just knew that I did. Most of the neatly formulated strategies that are listed in this essay did not exist while I was writing these plays, not consciously anyway. Still, both Adriana and Rebecca ended up being Latinas who challenge the Sex Bomb. This is partly because I enjoy creating surprising, complex heroines and also because I grew up surrounded by a multitude of very different Latina personalities. My quest to be able to identify and share exactly what I did to break the Sex Bomb stereotype resulted in this essay that has given me an academic lens through which I can discuss my work.

Beginning my education as a writer within the supportive incubator of creating for the theatre allowed me the necessary freedom to experiment with making new types of Latina characters that defy the cliché and challenge the stereotype. The theatre community has a wonderful no-boundaries attitude that champions diversity and pioneering in story telling. I would like to carry these values and writing strategies over into writing for television, the medium where the Sex Bomb stereotype dominates Latina representation.

At this moment in time there seems to be a female renaissance flourishing in the television industry, resulting in the creation of heroines that shatter confining feminine tropes. On Showtime we're seeing female anti-heroes taking

the helm in shows like *Nurse Jackie* and *Weeds*. HBO's new series *GIRLS* is spitting in the face of popular standards of superficial beauty with the constant on-camera disrobing of their "overweight" (by Hollywood's scale) leading lady. Even further, the show *GIRLS* goes out of its way de-romanticize the life of female twenty-somethings. Then there are shows like CBS's *The Good Wife*, ABC's *Scandal*, and NBC's delightful *Parks and Recreation* that focus on strong, respected women whose intelligence puts them at the top of their career fields. Even comedies like *New Girl* and *The Mindy Project* are presenting women who are funny because they are human and flawed. With all of these exciting roles for women emerging on the small screen, now seems like the perfect time for some of that magic to trickle down into the representation of Latinas on TV. I hope to utilize my discussed writing techniques and personal experiences as a Cuban American woman to help usher in that change, sharing the many shades of Latina, starting with my coconut brown.

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**THE INVASIVE KIND**

A Full-length Play

by Christina Hjelm

## SETTING

### Tangled within the Florida Everglades:

**MANGROVES** lurk stage left and to the right tower **CYPRESS TREES**

#### A WALL OF ORANGE WALLPAPER\*

Rots and looms. An empty picture frame hangs.\*\*

#### OBSERVATION PIER

Small. Wooden.

#### THE DOOR\*

To Motel room 9.

#### THE MOTEL OFFICE

Taxidermied critters.

The front desk.

Ratty bed for one.

Bathroom door.

#### PARKING LOT FURNITURE:

Junky Lawn Chair

Crate

Bucket

#### **A sign:**

Don't Feed 'em.

Don't Swim 'ere.

Don't Bother Me.

//////////Overgrown//////////SAWGRASS//////////covers the floor//////////

\*In Act 1 all that is seen of motel room 9 is its front door. In Act 2 the door, the orange wall, and any necessary furniture come together so that we may enter the room.

\*\*When photos are indicated in [brackets], those polaroid images are projected into the empty picture frame.

## CHARACTERS

(Cast of 6)

**ARIEL**, female, 17. Cheeky. Headstrong. Wanting.

**REBECCA**, female, early 20s. Ariel's sister. A façade of control so the cracks don't show. She speaks some Spanish.

**SETH**, male, early 20s. A motel manager. A ruff swamp-dude with little tolerance for people.

**LOGAN**, male, 18, Ariel's best-friend/sometimes-boyfriend. A sucker for the girl. He'll write you a song about it.

**MALCOLM**, 50s, Ariel's father. (Also plays "Male Voice.")

**POLIE**, male. The personification of a Polaroid camera. A playful keeper of memory and trickster of troubles. (Simply a guy dressed in black, holding a large, square light: his flash. Goofy, boxy camera costumes should be avoided.)

## NOTES

### NOTATION

/ indicates where one character's dialogue is interrupted by the next character's dialogue.

... indicates where there is a pause or drift in dialogue.

(Pause) indicates a thoughtful silence.

(Beat) indicates a shift in thought or intention.

Spanish words are italicized and followed by their English translations in brackets.

### TIME

The play is set some time during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and takes place over the course of a day.

### POLAROID IMAGES

This play requires the projection of Polaroid photo images. Descriptions of these images are can be found in brackets within the stage directions.



## SLIDE SHOW: NO SWIMMING

*Darkness. The swamp breathes: cicadas buzz, frogs bicker, and birds flutter away from the haunting grumble of a gator's deep bellow. In silhouette, The Everglades infests the stage.*

Smile for the crocodile!  
POLIE (In the dark)

(Like a kid) Cheeeese.  
ARIEL (In the dark)

*A white flash. **POLIE** appears wearing all black and holding a big square light: the source of the flash. Polie is a Polaroid camera. He takes a Polaroid out and shakes it as: Upstage, a tall, rotting wall of orange wallpaper appears with an empty picture frame hung on it. When indicated, Polaroid photos are projected into the picture frame.*

POLIE  
The Florida Everglades! A winding maze of wetlands.

*[A Photo: An aerial view of The Everglades' waterways.]*

***ARIEL** appears. She's 17 and cute with a bit of pink dye rebelling in her hair. An old Polaroid Instant Camera hangs around her neck. Her arm is dripping blood but she is happily unaware of her wounded state. She speaks as her 7-year-old self, lost in another time.*

Thickets of Mangrove forests.  
POLIE

*[A Photo: Tangled Mangroves.]*

Towering cypress swamps.  
POLIE

*[A Photo: Cypress roots sink into the dark waters.]*

POLIE  
And the endless Sawgrass that earned the Glades its nickname: "The River of Grass."

*[A Photo: A field of Sawgrass.]*

POLIE

Almost takes your breath away doesn't it...

ARIEL

How come alligators like to eat marshmallows?

POLIE

Hm? - Uh... The marshmallows paint their teeth pearly white like sugary toothbrushes.

ARIEL

Why do they sleep in the sun for so long like that?

POLIE

Beee..cauuuse alligators have to tan to stay green. Yeah, or else... they'll turn *pink*.

ARIEL

Pink! I wanna see a pink alligator pleeeese?

POLIE

Well, the pink ones are hard to find cuz they hide under the water since they're shy. About being so pink. They get called names like *Cotton Candy* and *Miss Piggy*.

ARIEL

I wanna swim in the water and catch one to have as a pretty pink pet! Can we?

POLIE

How about you sound out that sign there with those big-girl reading skills.

ARIEL

(Reads) No sah-wim-ing - Sahwimming. No swimming! (Beat) Oh. What happens if we swim in the water, daddy? ... Dad. Daddy???

*Polie flashes.*

POLIE

Naw, I'm just a camera. See? Flashy.

*He flashes a picture as she touches the camera around her neck.*

[A Photo: Ariel holding her camera.]

ARIEL

But where's my dad?

POLIE

Yikes, you're makin' tiny blood puddles in the dirt. Somethin' got you, kiddo! We gotta go.

ARIEL

Daddy?

*Polie flashes and disappears. Lights rise until it's a burning afternoon in the marsh. Ariel is standing in sawgrass. She is jolted into the present as her 17-year-old self and reacts to her wounded arm.*

ARIEL

*(Sounds of pain, ad lib) Aaaa.. Shhhhit. Shit. (Is anyone out here) HELLO? ... Shit.*

*Ariel hurries over to...*

## 1. THE MOTEL OFFICE

*No one is inside. Only a desk surrounded by an odd collection of taxidermy creations. A curtain divides a sleeping area. Ariel pounds the front desk bell in a panic. Seth sits on his cot, eating a ham sandwich, nose-deep a book on snake hunting.*

ARIEL  
**Hello???**

SETH (O.S.)  
 I'm on lunch! You best scram 'less you need a room/

ARIEL  
**I have a room - I need help!**

SETH (O.S.)  
 A/C don't get no colder, water don't get no hotter/

ARIEL  
 (Pounding the bell) **HELLO!**

*SETH, 20s, a rugged swamp-dude, emerges from behind the curtain.*

SETH  
 Jesus, what? (Sees the blood) **JESUS -**

*He jumps into action, going for the first aid kit as she freaks out.*

ARIEL  
**I was out in the marsh and this thing just bit me it bit me it jumped up and bit/ me**

SETH  
 Elevate yer arm and sit down! What/gotcha?

ARIEL  
 (Pacing) **It's bad it's bad right - I'm like raining blood - I can't look how does it look/**

SETH  
 'EY GIRL. Look 'ere. What gottcha?

ARIEL

(Screeching, barely words) *I dunno know I dunno know it really really/ hurts*

SETH

I NEED WORDS/

ARIEL

(Re: camera around her neck) **No my camera got wet!**

*He tosses her camera aside and tries to grab her arm.*

ARIEL

DON'T TOUCH IT!

SETH

Ya rather squawk 'till it falls off and yer left with a nub?

ARIEL

*A nub!?*

SETH

Could call it a "*nubbin'*," make it cuter/

ARIEL

I can't have a *nubbin'*!

SETH

Then park yer ass 'n' lemme see the damn thing er folks gonna start callin' you stumpy! This ain't a game. We got poisonous shit out here.

ARIEL

I got poisoned?

SETH

Maybe. Can I look?

ARIEL

...I checked in the water before I went in - Nothing was in there.

SETH

Yeah well "*nothin'*" don't bite a person.

ARIEL

I don't know - it had this heavy frog-looking head that *latched* on so I *punched* the fucker and

*He uses his shirt to wipe away the blood.*

(Sounds of pain) Ahhh/

ARIEL

Shit.

SETH

Shit? Why shit?

ARIEL

It's a damn snakebite.

SETH

Snake? No, it had to be a small alligator or - Why would a snake be in the water.

ARIEL

Why were *you* in the water!? (Rummaging through his desk) Keep it elevated! Tell me 'bout its colors. Was it red 'n' yellow? Green, black, brown? Did it have circles er diamonds on it?

SETH

It happened really fast.

ARIEL

*He pulls out a large needle.*

SETH

I gotta stab you with this snake-juice if that thing was poisonous, else that arm's gonna jack-up good. **But** if it wasn't venomous, and it might not'a been, you don't want this shot. It'll make you feel like you got the damn flu.

ARIEL

I can't have the flu - This weekend is really crucial. Can't you like suck the poison out?

SETH

In what world does me ingestin' poison sound like a better idea? Focus yer girl brain 'n' tell me what you saw.

ARIEL

... It was kinda brown – I think.

*Seth darts to his shelves of taxidermy animals and grabs 2 brown colored snakes. One has a turtle shell glued around its body.*

SETH

Was it this kinda brown snake or this kind?

ARIEL

(Confused) That one has a turtle body.

SETH

Ignore the shell – It's glued on.

ARIEL

I don't... They both look the same! Should we be calling an ambulance?

SETH

One last thing I can think to try.

*He breaks the lower jaw off one of the snakes and holds the dead snake's upper jaw up to her bite wound.*

ARIEL

What- what're you doing?

SETH

(Showing her the snake) Burmese Python. Invasive fuckers er eatin' up the entire swamp. Ravenous cunts would swallow a septic tank if the shit was warm enuff. BUT they ain't got venom and snakes with no venom leave different bite marks than the ones with poison do.

ARIEL

You're doing a matching-puzzle with the teeth and the bite?

SETH

Matchin' puzzle. Suppose that's how I'd explain it to a kindergartener. (Examining) Looks like... you are a very lucky dummy. Ya been bit by a Python. You are Poison free. (Recovering) Goddamn, girl – that ain't no playground out there.

ARIEL

That's it? You're sure it was a *Braw...nee...?*

SETH

**Burmese.** Yep, there's 'bout 10,000 of 'em out there bangin' eachother, makin' 10,000 more baby eggs. Yer fine.

ARIEL

Ow... (Pain) How did so much blood come out of two tiny holes...

SETH

(Beat) Have I seen you around here before?

ARIEL

Oh. Uh... I sort-of have a boyfriend/

SETH

Geez girl/

ARIEL

**Ariel.**

SETH

*Ariel*, I ain't tryin' to pick up no teenybopper. You look familiar like an old customer is all.

ARIEL

Oh - No, last time I was here I was what - six?

SETH

Well I been here since forever. (Beat) You'll wanna disinfect that and wrap it. Should heal fine.

*He tosses her a bandage. She looks around at the dead animals, snapping a picture or two, as Seth gathers his hunting gear.*

SETH

Time to get a move on – I'm headin' out. Where were you near when the snake got ya?

ARIEL

Woah. Did this have bat wings and fangs *before* it died? ... *Vampire Squirrel!*  
(Vampire squirrel sounds)

SETH

EY– this ain't no toy store!

ARIEL

This would freak my sister out. Can I have it?

SETH

I ain't in the habit of givin' my hard work away fer free.



ARIEL

You super-glued road kill together.

SETH

*With care.* (Beat) You wanna tell me where that snake was?

ARIEL

You're leaving?

SETH

Gonna catch that snake you pissed off before the sneaky shit relocates. They are a bitch to find.

ARIEL

I'm feeling really hurt and woozy though.

SETH

That's what happens to dummies that ignore signs that say, "NO SWIMMIN'."

ARIEL

I wasn't swimming. I fell in. There's a difference.

SETH

(Beat) Yer drippin' blood all over the rug!

ARIEL

Can you bandage it for me? ... I can't do it with one hand.

SETH

I'm not a nurse - I'm tryin' to head out!

*She guilt's him with her eyes. He begrudgingly wraps the wound.*

ARIEL

Wait with me? Just until my sister gets here. So I'm not alone.

SETH

I ain't no babysitter either.

ARIEL

Please! She is *pissed* - But if you're here she won't lecture me in Spanglish for an hour.

SETH

Nooo no no no. I don't get in peoples business no how no way. That's why I work in this glamour palace - Truckers 'n' hookers mind their dealin' and don't bother me none – not even fer towels.

ARIEL

I'm sensing that's a no.

SETH

That's a hell-fuck no. Now where was the snake at, girl?

ARIEL

... By the pier. (Glancing at the parking lot) You better duck out, then – the wrath of the big sister approaches the parking lot...

SETH

When I get back, I'ma be wearin' that python fer a scarf! Today is the day.

ARIEL

We'll match - My sister'll be wearing my ass fer a hat.

*Seth exits out the back of the office as...*

## SLIDE SHOW: THE VICIOUS WILD

**REBECCA**, in her 20s and neatly put together, enters outside the motel. As she looks around at her surroundings, lights shift and Polie appears. She reverts to when she was 13. They giggle together.

POLIE

Give me your scariest monster face with a big Garrrr!

*She growls and poses with a silly monster face. A flash.*

POLIE

Now... some Becky-bunny ears!

REBECCA

Daddy, do I have... *fugly* rabbit teeth?

POLIE

Who said that? If you had “fugly rabbit teeth,” you would have broken my camera. Come on, show me the sweetest porcelain smile in the world!

*A proud smile. A flash.*

REBECCA

Can we go deer watching on the trail?

POLIE

Deer? The Everglades is a dangerous place to go looking for deer. (Beat) Bigger smile...

REBECCA

But you took Ariel to all the deer crossing signs.

POLIE

The smart deer know that if they cross into the swamp they'll get *eatin'* by angry chompers.

[A Photo: Alligator jaws.]

POLIE

Or razor sharp claws!

[A Photo: A ferocious panther.]

POLIE

Maybe they'll meet a fluffy tail...

*[A Photo: A precious deer.]*

POLIE

But usually they end up strangled by scales...

*[A Photo: A python devours its prey.]*

POLIE

Gimme a wider smile, Bunny... Hey, it's my job to protect you from all those Gators hiding in the sawgrass out there. If you're not careful where you step they won't hesitate to rip your legs off. You stay inside the motel room where you're safe. K? (Beat) You look like one of those fancy French models in front of that orange wallpaper... Smile for the crocodile?

*She stares. No smile. Polie's flash goes off. He disappears.*

*[A Photo: The orange wallpaper.]*

## 2. THE MOTEL PARKING LOT

*Ariel sneaks up on Rebecca and snaps a picture of her with a:*

ARIEL

Smile!

REBECCA

*Becca is jolted back into the present, putting her hand up in time to block the camera.*

REBECCA

*Mojona!* [turd] You know I hate that/

ARIEL

(A cute attempt at deflection) But you love me/

REBECCA

Let's go! We're leaving/

*With zero tolerance, Rebecca pulls her by her snake-bit arm, which is wrapped in bloodstained gauze.*

ARIEL

HELLO. Injured person!

REBECCA

I told you I have zero time to come play with you out here. But you don't take no for an answer. You never take no for an answer!

ARIEL

I took the "no." I respected your no - Not my fault I got mauled by an animal.

REBECCA

Pretending to get injured is not you respecting my no. (Re: the bloody bandage) What is that? Ketchup on there?

ARIEL

You really think I'd fake an animal attack with fucking tomato sauce?

REBECCA

Go, show me! That arm better be falling off under that wrap.

ARIEL

I know you didn't want to come all the way out here but you did so you might as well come inside now. I got room 9.

REBECCA

Nunca [Never]. Motels are basically drive-thru brothels.

ARIEL

I know you're hot as hell in that Ann Taylor Nun outfit.

REBECCA

Fine, get in my car and I'll drive you to the hospital.

ARIEL

I don't need the emergency room/

REBECCA

You said medical emergency. I dropped everything- I'm barely done packing up Mami's house and my flight leaves tomorrow! If this animal attack is bullshit, ***lo juro por Dios- [I swear to God]***

ARIEL

Bring the Spanish down a notch. We're white.

REBECCA

We're not "white" white. Have some/ pride

ARIEL

Were you born in Havana?

REBECCA

*Mami* was.

ARIEL

Were YOU born in Havana?

REBECCA

I have olive undertones.

ARIEL

Pretentious undertones/

REBECCA

Take that bandage off ***ahora***. [now]

ARIEL

Roll one more “R” at me and I’ll start my own stupid accent.

REBECCA

(Spanish pronunciation emphasized) **Quitelo, Ariel.** [Remove it]

ARIEL

(Obnoxious British accent) Oh, I’m Sorry. I can’t hear you over all that vom’ spewing out your mouth-hole.

REBECCA

For someone who wants to be treated like an adult, you play a lot of games... (Beat) I’m... I don’t know how we’re supposed to deal, Ariel... is this... are you sad? Mad? Cuz that’s normal – that’s okay, you can say it... You’re not the only one who lost *Mami*. She was *our* mom. If you want to talk, I’m right here.

ARIEL

Wow for one more day.

REBECCA

Ariel, I have a real job – it’s not like skipping class and getting a doctor’s note.

ARIEL

Our freaking mom died. You can’t take one more week off? You’re a receptionist. An answering machine can do your job.

REBECCA

It’s more than work. (A lie) I have a serious boyfriend now, you know? He’s waiting for me to get back home.

ARIEL

I hate it when you call Albuquerque “back home.” Miami is your home, Becca. That’s just... some place you’re living.

REBECCA

I’m sorry we only get a little time together before I fly back... this isn’t the way we should be spending it - shouting out in the swamp-ville boonies where you ran away? *Ayúdame*, [help me] do you know how ridiculous this feels?

ARIEL

Not as ridiculous as your Spanglish.

REBECCA

Do you ever stop with the jokes? Jesus!

ARIEL

Don't you mean (Spanish pronunciation) "Jesús?"

REBECCA

You're impossible. (Beat) **In the car. Now.**

*Rebecca takes out her keys and starts to leave. Ariel pulls the arm-bandage off and shoves her bite wound in her sister's face.*

ARIEL

THERE. Happy?

*Rebecca stares at it... she pokes a bloody.*

ARIEL

OW!

REBECCA

What were you thinking coming out here by yourself! This is the most dangerous place in the world! (Beat. Sudden genuine concern.) Are you okay?

ARIEL

It was fine until you poked it.

*Becca rustles through her purse.*

REBECCA

Do you need Tylenol? (Finds something) Oh! Antibacterial - It kills the pain germs.

*As ridiculous as Ariel thinks that is, she humors her sister, allowing her to put a dollop of antibacterial on her hand.*

REBECCA

In between the fingers, under the nails... We should rub some on the bite.

ARIEL

NO – really. The guy at the desk said it was probably just a Python.

REBECCA

You mean some strange man who's probably a backwoods drug dealer waiting to roofy you? And in that skirt - I hope you didn't take anything from him/

ARIEL



What's wrong with my skirt?

REBECCA

Nothing. It's way better than the dress you wore to Mami's funeral Monday with your *nalgas* [butt cheeks] hanging out – you're lucky you didn't get raped by grave robbers.

ARIEL

Grave robbers don't rape. They *rob*. Otherwise they'd be called grave *rapists*!

REBECCA

**With everything I warn you about – Why would you wonder out here by yourself? An alligator could have ripped your legs clear off! They do that.**  
(Beat) We don't belong here, it's not safe - *Vamos [We're leaving]*.

ARIEL

You are such an ice queen! Don't you remember how much fun we used to have here? I was this little and I remember perfectly.

REBECCA

Then you should remember how disgusting this place was.

*Becca tries to leave.*

ARIEL

Just wait - Come inside so I can show you something!

*Ariel pulls her sister to keep her from going to her car.*

REBECCA

Show me in the car!

ARIEL

I left it in the room!

REBECCA

What's wrong with you/ let go

*They wrestle as Ariel tries to keep her sister from leaving.*

ARIEL

Stop being such a spaz!

REBECCA

I don't like this place – let me leave -

*Trying to grab the car keys, Ariel accidentally whacks her sister on the nose.*

REBECCA

(A shout of pain) **What's your problem!**

*Ariel nabs the keys and tosses them into the Everglades. Blood drips from Becca's nose.*

REBECCA

**Did you just throw my keys into the marsh!**

ARIEL

I'm SO sorry, are you okay/

REBECCA

BUT YOU MEANT TO THROW MY KEYS?

ARIEL

That is *really* bleeding/

REBECCA

**You hit me!**

ARIEL

To be fair, you hit yourself. Come in the room so I can take care of that.

REBECCA

**There isn't enough anti-bacterial in the world.**

ARIEL

Nosebleeds make you dizzy.

REBECCA

Not every time/

ARIEL

Name one time your nose bled and you didn't black out/

*Rebecca goes over to a discarded chair.*

REBECCA

Then I'll sit right there! I'm staying in this beach chair until you find my keys - IT'S A RENTAL.

ARIEL

There's no way you'd rather sit on that *dumpster-chair* than come inside an air-conditioned room with me. You're the biggest clean freak I know. You reek of Clorox.

REBECCA

I was cleaning *Mami's* bathroom - My smell is none of your business. I can sit on a chair.

*Becca defiantly sits down on the chair but is clearly disturbed by its lack of cleanliness. A stare down. Ariel gives up and hurries into motel room 9.*

REBECCA

**That is not the direction my keys went!**

*She returns with a large, cardboard box and a towel.*

ARIEL

There's ice in it.

REBECCA

*Clean* ice?

ARIEL

It's for your nose, not your mouth.

REBECCA

(Beat) What's in the box? All the bed bugs you found on the mattress?

ARIEL

It isn't *that* bad... I got the same exact room we used to stay in. It hasn't changed at all. Has that same weird orange wallpaper.

REBECCA

I hated that orange wallpaper.

ARIEL

Peak inside... The tiny green spots from when dad let us stick taffy to the ceiling are still up there. ... And they haven't even fixed that hole in the plaster where you did your ninja-kick too hard. ... Doesn't being here make you want fry bread? Dad always had the best fry bread waiting for us in the morning... If *Mami* knew

that was basically all we ate when we came here, she would have flipped. And feeding alligators marshmallows/

REBECCA

Again with the alligator story— you're obsessed with the marshmallow thing.

ARIEL

Have a sleep over with me. One night here. Before you leave.

REBECCA

Are you going to look for my keys or should I just call a cab?

ARIEL

Call a cab. I'm not getting in it.

REBECCA

What do you want from me with this place!

*Ariel puts the cardboard box on her sister's lap.*

ARIEL

Go, open it.

REBECCA

What's in it?

ARIEL

I found that in *Mami's* closet.

REBECCA

I asked you not to rummage through there after I packed it up.

ARIEL

Yeah well I wanted to make sure you weren't dumping anything important and of course, you were —You basically threw everything in the trash pile. My old Barbie dolls?

REBECCA

If it were up to you, we'd be drowning in a heap of sentimental junk.

ARIEL

Like your porcelain bunny collection? Dad spent so much on that.

REBECCA

Like that crap camera you carry around everywhere.

ARIEL

Fine. I'll show you.

*Ariel opens the box and pulls out a hand full of Polaroid photos.*

ARIEL

That was in the trash pile. All my photos!

REBECCA

I don't remember seeing this box.

ARIEL

Becca, that's every Polaroid I've ever mailed dad. Thrown in there, still in envelopes, unopened.

REBECCA

He probably sent them back. He never writes you back.

ARIEL

Because he never got any of them. These all went to a P.O. Box registered to *Mami*. She took out a fucking PO Box and told me it was dad's address.

REBECCA

How would you even know that?

ARIEL

Logan's good at looking up stuff on computers.

REBECCA

The boy with the whiney guitar songs?

ARIEL

He knows computers too. He found the P.O. Box under her name... I thought he was getting letters from me for ten years - She was just intercepting them... Did you know?

REBECCA

Of course not.

ARIEL

I've been glued to this camera taking pictures of every single thing since he left: (pulls out Polaroids) Hair cuts, pony rides, music teachers, boo-boos, gold fish, ice skating- my favorite curly fries for Christ's sake! You know how many are in

here? Almost 13 photos a month since he split ... I thought he didn't care enough to write me back.

REBECCA

I know this looks really bad. But - And I know how this must make you feel/

ARIEL

No you don't. She brainwashed you into hating him as much as she did! Do you even care that she's been fucking stabbing me in the back with this?

REBECCA

HEY. You're upset but you cannot talk about Mami's that way. *E' mala suerte*. [That's bad voodoo] What she did was wrong but she only ever looked out for your best interest... He abandoned us without a single goodbye – You think he gave a crap enough to leave a forwarding address? She probably couldn't bring herself to tell you. She knew you worshipped him. You still do.

ARIEL

Well... it's not fair. Now she's not even around so I can yell at her for this.

REBECCA

That doesn't mean she isn't listening to you right now.

ARIEL

Good. I hope she knows I'm seeing dad and there's nothing she can do about it.

REBECCA

You're what?

ARIEL

Here me out, okay? ... I found dad, Becca. ... I'm here to see dad and I want you to be with me when I do it.

REBECCA

I know you have these reunion dreams about him but you have to let them go.

ARIEL

I spoke to dad. This isn't a fantasy - There was a paper in the box with a phone number written on it... I called it and he was there... He even called me *Fishy*. Remember? I was his little Fishy and you were his Becky-Bunny/

REBECCA

Real life doesn't work like that. You're describing some Disney movie/

ARIEL

He's coming here to our place tomorrow. He wants to see me and he wants you to be there too.

REBECCA

Ariel, I don't like talking like this.

ARIEL

You never think of what it would be like to have a dad again? We're like orphans with mom gone.

REBECCA

I'm not an orphan. I'm an adult – you're almost an adult.

ARIEL

What family do I have left here when you go back?

REBECCA

I put you up with family. I wouldn't leave you if I didn't think you were going to be looked after.

ARIEL

Tia Theresa and her creepster son with the oboe? That's not real family. You are.

REBECCA

I can't raise a seventeen-year-old. I thought you understood/

ARIEL

I know, I know, I'm sorry. All I'm asking is that you do one thing - stay and see dad with me. Like a family. Look, I'll call him - you can hear for yourself!

*Ariel dials her cell. She puts the cell on speaker. We hear ringing and ringing.*

REBECCA

Put the phone down.

ARIEL

Shh – listen.

*There's no answer. It stops with a beep.*

ARIEL

Just because he didn't answer doesn't mean ... I swear this is his number!

REBECCA

*Mami* would never want us to see him. He's a bad guy.

ARIEL

Bad how? What am I missing?

REBECCA

He isn't capable of loving anyone but himself. That includes you and me.

*Ariel's cell starts to ring... She answers it.*

ARIEL

(On the phone) Hello? ... (A breath of relief) Hi dad. Yeah, that was me!

REBECCA

Oh, come on.

ARIEL

Um- I hope it's okay I have Becca here/ I think you should talk to her.

REBECCA

That is not him.

*Ariel hits the speaker button.*

REBECCA

What is this? Who is this?

*A MALE VOICE sounds through the speaker.*

MALE VOICE (On Speaker)

Hello? ... You still there? HELLO.

*Rebecca freezes.*

ARIEL

(To Rebecca) I told you. Talk to him, Becca. She's here dad!

MALE VOICE (On Speaker)

Becca Bunny? Is she there?

REBECCA

**Get rid of him now. Hang it up!**

*Becca snatches the cell and hangs up.*



REBECCA

**You knew I would never have come out here if I knew this was about him!**

ARIEL

He's afraid you hate him/ Call him back.

REBECCA

I DO. We're not staying here for this.

ARIEL

I am seeing dad tomorrow and I am not leaving until I do. You have to forgive him for leaving.

REBECCA

... I wasn't supposed to tell you... but he was cheating on mom. He slept with another person.

ARIEL

That makes him a bad husband. Not a bad dad.

REBECCA

He's dangerous.

ARIEL

How'd he go from bad to dangerous?

REBECCA

... (A lie) I think he was taking drugs. I'm pretty sure – yeah, our Dad was a drug taker.

ARIEL

You couldn't even make that up with a straight face.

REBECCA

You can't remember cuz you were little but he was on drugs – even on the weekends when he was with us.

ARIEL

No... This is that psycho, paranoid bullshit you pull on me with everything! Just like *Mami* and *Abuela* would do - scaring the shit out of me with lies just to get your way/

REBECCA

That's not what I'm doing/

ARIEL

“Go to the Everglades and an Alligator will eat your legs!”

REBECCA

That happens/

ARIEL

“Don’t dress like a slut or the GRAVE ROBBERS WILL RAPE YOU.”

REBECCA

You have to listen me/

ARIEL

The way people listened to you when you got your prom date expelled?

REBECCA

... What does that have to do with anything/

ARIEL

Like anyone really believed that Twinkie Choir-Boy wanted to go near your boobs. You think the worst of guys cuz you’re still angry at dad. Forgive him, and move past it.

REBECCA

You love it here but to me it’s just the place where dad stopped being a good dad... If he’s coming tomorrow, I won’t be here.

ARIEL

Yeah well good luck leaving without your stupid keys.

*Ariel storms away into the swamp, leaving her camera and photos behind.*

*The sound of static starts to crackle.*

[A Photo: Static.]

*Polie appears. He watches Becca. She grows uncomfortable with his gaze and rushes into the motel office to escape him.*

*The static stops.*

*Over by the pier, Ariel paces, steaming. She takes out her cell and dials.*

ARIEL

(On the phone) Hey dad. Sorry about the hang up. Uh I'm running into a problem and uh I think it might be better if you could come sooner - Today maybe. So give me a call back... I can't wait to see you - Becca too.

*She hangs up.*

## 3. THE MOTEL OFFICE

*Becca sits on the floor, against the desk, fighting anxiety. She whispers a mantra to herself.*

REBECCA

(Repeats) *Eres fuerte. Eres salvo. Tengo el control. Nada te hará daño. Puedo ser feliz.* [You are strong. You are safe. I have control. Nothing can bring me harm. I will be happy.]

*Seth returns from an unfruitful snake hunt. He has Ariel's camera.*

SETH

You lookin' fer a room?

*Embarrassed and rattled, she rushes up to leave.*

REBECCA

Sorry, it's really hot outside.

SETH

Yer welcome to the floor... I do have chairs, though.

REBECCA

Could you move that thing away from it?

*A taxidermy animal stands near the chair. Seth moves it.*

SETH

I promise he don't bite – lost most his teeth.

*Rebecca sits. She tries to avoid Seth's attention.*

SETH

The heat give ya the spins er somethin'?

REBECCA

Something like that.

SETH

Gotta keep hydrated er it'll sneak up on ya. (Beat) You the one that come fer that crazy girl? Left all her stuff out there.

*He hands Rebecca the camera and photos. The camera has an effect on her - She doesn't like holding it.*

SETH

(Stares) I know you - Yeah, I'd recognize you in a hurricane.

REBECCA

I think I need to be quiet for a bit/

SETH

My face don't strike a chord?

REBECCA

Look, I have a boyfriend. And he's a firefighter so/

SETH

Why's everyone so quick-draw to tell me 'bout all their boyfriends today? I look googley eyed er something? I just remember you. You used to stay here with yer pops, right?

REBECCA

No.

SETH

I could swear/

REBECCA

No. I've never been here before.

SETH

... My mistake. (Beat) You need some water? If you got the spins real bad, you can lay on my cot if you like... Bathroom's back there if you got chunks comin' up... Can I get you anything?

REBECCA

Not unless you have a metal detector back there.

SETH

We got magnets! Magnets are metal attracters - I suppose we could use 'em as kind of a detector by attraction. You huntin' fer gold?

REBECCA

No, sorry - My car keys got *misplaced* in the marsh.

SETH

You know, I was thinkin' of going back out there anyway to look fer snakes - I can keep an eye out fer yer keys while I'm pokin' round.

REBECCA

Could you?

SETH

I can head out there now.

REBECCA

If you could find my keys, that would be amazing.

SETH

Sure. Yeah. (Beat) Seth, by the way.

*Becca nods politely, deciding not share her name. Seth exits. She gets up and looks around. She considers sitting on the cot when the sound of static begins to crackle again.*

[A Photo: Static.]

*Polie appears with a flash.*

POLIE

Housekeeping! My, you can hardly open your eyes with all this crud in the air. You weren't thinking of sitting on that boy's bed, were you? It is just riddled with bacterium. It's already seeping into your skin.

[A Photo: A bath time Barbie doll.]

You can almost swallow it, can't you? How would you describe the flavor of filth?

[A Photo: Soda with a straw.]

*A Sound: Ice clinks in a glass.*

[A Photo: A drink on the rocks.]

POLIE

You'll wanna get away from there. That bed is festering with the mucus, oil, and spit of every man that's ever laid on it.

*A Sound: A bathtub faucet turns on and runs.*

[A Photo: A bath tub.]

POLIE

Things are unclean.

[A Photo: Ariel's Polaroid camera.]

POLIE

You, my dear, are unclean.

*A flash.*

[A Photo: A porcelain bunny.]

POLIE

You're choking on that grime. But you're stuck aren't ya? Glued to the gunk that's got you down!

*Rebecca tries to leave the room but Polie blocks her. He blinds her with another flash.*

POLIE

Nooooo. Are we gonna let little sister stay in this filth? We can't leave yet. You want to clean. You want to clean this place apart! And lucky for you, I found the Holy Grail right back there in a custodial cart...

*Polie reveals a box filled with cleaning supplies: sponges, gloves, Clorox, Windex, Comet, paper towels, etc.*

POLIE

Scrub-a-dub-dub, Becky-Bunny.

*She takes the box and he leaves. Slowly, she pulls on the pair of yellow rubber gloves and begins stripping the sheets from the bed.*

## 4. THE OBSERVATION PIER

*Seth heads towards the observation pier with his hunting backpack. He spots Ariel dangerously close to falling in the water. He runs over and pulls her back.*

SETH

**Ey ey ey! You *tryin'* to get bit again!?**

ARIEL

Let go!

SETH

You can't swim in there.

ARIEL

Why is everyone trying to tell me what to do!?

SETH

Cuz you do stupid things.

ARIEL

I WASN'T GOING TO SWIM I WAS JUST TRYING TO REACH MY MARSHMALLOWS.

SETH

Yer what?

ARIEL

I didn't get bit cuz I went *frollicking* in the swamp - I came out to toss marshmallows to the alligators and I dropped the dumb bag in the water before I could even get it open. ... I fell in trying to reach the bag.

SETH

You got bit over sugar pillows?

ARIEL

*Marshmallows.*

SETH

Yeah but they look like tiny sugar pillows.

ARIEL

Can you reach the bag under the pier?

*Seth looks in the water.*



SETH

Say goodbye to those. Ain't no gettin' them back.

ARIEL

Perfect... everything is going **so perfect**. Exactly how I imagined.

SETH

... Are you cryin' over sugar pillows?

ARIEL

NO I'M NOT CRYING OVER SUGAR PILLOWS. (She is) Maybe I'm crying cuz my arm and it hurts like hell... Do you even know anything about snakes? I bet that snake *was* venomous and you don't know anything about anything.

SETH

Lemme see. (Looking at her wound) If that was poisoned, your arm'd be black as coal and blown up like a balloon animal by now.

ARIEL

But I'm burning up - feel my head.

SETH

I ain't a doctor but I'm pretty sure yer just worked up over the hollerin' match that the entire Everglades heard you having. Go back to yer room and rest.

ARIEL

Can I hang with you for a bit?

SETH

It ain't safe fer you to be around while I'm wranglin' snakes.

ARIEL

Cool. I can help – You grab it and I'll stand there with the gun and *PSHH! Snake eyes...*

SETH

I'm not takin' you out on safari. And there's no gun – not that I'd be given it to you if there were.

*Seth tries to head deeper into the swamp. Ariel follows him.*

ARIEL

How do you catch them? You don't even have any hunting stuff. Do you wrestle them!

SETH

... Fine, I ain't huntin' fer no snakes. I'm lookin' fer missin' keys.

ARIEL

Cute, I see she sweetened you up - You gonna be her knight in shining camo that saves her car keys from the big bad swamp? She tell you I threw 'em in?

SETH

You are ten shades of Cuckoo. That is not nice.

ARIEL

Come on, it was a little funny.

SETH

If you think that's so funny, yer gonna help me look fer keys. That you lost.

ARIEL

*Pff* – I'm not helping her. Not until she stops treating me like an idiot.

SETH

(Playing her) Yeah... On second thought, that's probably a better idea - this key huntin' business is way too dangerous out in the marsh anyway – especially fer a little girl like you. I don't wanna have to worry about you getting stung by a bug.

ARIEL

You think I'm some chicken shit girl? That's my sister. I'm not afraid of everything in the freaking world – that's how people end up alone. Not me. I can look for keys in muddy grass. See?

*Ariel gets straight to searching through the marsh to prove her point. Seth enjoys his win and starts searching as well.*

SETH

You should give yer sister a break. Ain't nothin' wrong with endin' up alone. Ain't no better company for me than me.

ARIEL

You'll probably want to do less talking and more searching cuz if I find them, she's not getting them back.

SETH

Well I am a hunter.

ARIEL

Where's that python scarf you promised you'd be wearing?

SETH

... Took a wrong step towards the thing and it bolted. I lost it.

ARIEL

You are quite the hunter.

SETH

It's a new hobby - Gimme a break. I ain't never tried to catch anything with a pulse before. ... (Finds the keys) HAH! Told ya I'd find 'em.

ARIEL

Aw, come on – don't give them back to her. Not yet.

SETH

Why not?

ARIEL

Cuz she'll drive off.

SETH

You can't strand a person here.

ARIEL

Can I have the keys? Please? I'll give them back eventually.

SETH

I said I'd get them to her.

*Ariel plops herself on the ground in protest.*

ARIEL

Fine. Tell her I said bye then.

SETH

No, we're goin' back now.

ARIEL

...Do you really like being alone in this place all the time?

SETH

Alone from you? Any day.

ARIEL

I'm being serious. ... I can't be by myself for one minute without feeling like I can't breathe. How do you like it?

SETH

I don't know. Bein' alone comes simple fer me – better than bein' stuck in bad company.

ARIEL

But what about good company? Like friends?

SETH

Well you gotta give good company to deserve good company and I'm about the worst there is. Don't bother me though, just ain't come natural – wanting folks around. It really don't bother me. I'm free to live lively - Brawny Crocodile Dundee type racket whenever I want.

ARIEL

Does Crocodile Dundee spend a lot of time eating ham sandwiches in an empty office?

SETH

On his lunch break.

ARIEL

I'd be your friend. If you asked me.

SETH

I'm a grown man - that's a bit silly fer me to be askin' folks.

ARIEL

I ask people to be my friend all the time. If I think they're cool.

SETH

That's nice but by the time yer an adult yer pretty much stuck with what you got... Besides, it's motel policy not to get comfortable with our guests passin' thru.

ARIEL

Well, I wouldn't want you to go against "motel policy"... (Beat) Please don't let her leave yet. I promise, I'll give the keys back when it's right.

*Seth hands Ariel the keys.*

SETH

But no more monkey business. You get off the ground and go apologize to yer sister.

*Ariel gets up. They walk back towards the motel together.*

## 5. THE MOTEL OFFICE

Rebecca is deep into cleaning the office. There's a TAP, TAP, TAP, at the door. She ignores it but the knocking persists in an obnoxious, rhythmic beat. **LOGAN**, 18 and approachable in his Converse sneakers, stands outside the office carrying a greasy, brown bag. He's looking to Rebecca for permission to enter.

LOGAN

Becca! Hey. I was looking for you girls back at the room. What uh – you throwin' a party in there?

*She ignores him, continuing to clean.*

LOGAN

Cuz uh there's quite the party goin' on in this brown bag: I got fry bread... You want some?

*He holds out a greasy brown bag and tries to walk in.*

REBECCA

Watch it! That bag's dripping grease.

LOGAN

Means they're fresh. No worries, though: (Cradles the bag with his shirt) grease trap!

REBECCA

Kid, Ariel isn't here.

LOGAN

"Kid?" That forgettable, huh?

REBECCA

You're... (Can't remember his name) Ariel's friend. I know.

LOGAN

Best friend. *Boyfriend* – gimme a little credit.

REBECCA

(Now she remembers) Logan! (Beat) I thought she dumped you.

LOGAN

Ouch. *No* – I mean yes, Logan. But no, I wouldn't call it a full-on *dump*. It was more of a *pause*. Like in a song, you know- the killer breakdown where the drum solo goes? Classic Zeppelin- Er fuckin' Kieth Moon/

REBECCA  
What?

LOGAN  
We're working things out.

REBECCA  
Okay she's out there somewhere. Good luck finding her.

LOGAN  
I heard you guys had a big blow-out earlier. I wanted to tell you, for the record: not cool of her dragging you out here the way that went down. She should have been upfront with you.

REBECCA  
Thank you. Maybe you can tell her that.

LOGAN  
Oh I tried – you try getting Ariel to be clear about what she wants.

REBECCA  
(Beat) You are not like her usual type.

LOGAN  
Withholding and emotionally abusive? Yeah, no kidding.

REBECCA  
I meant your lack of face-jewelry and dark sadness-hair.

LOGAN  
Right, well my nip piercings kept getting snagged on my guitar strap so I had to take 'em out. (Beat) That was a joke. Not about the guitar - I play, write a bit/

REBECCA  
You've shown me.

LOGAN  
(Beat) Do you mind if I uh - I'm trying to avoid a sweat stain situation that's a-brewin' out here. Can I kick back in there 'till she comes back?

REBECCA  
Just - No grease or crumbs. I already cleaned there.

LOGAN  
(Assaulted by the cleaning fumes) That lemon scent is *fresh* – is there a window we can crack?

REBECCA

With all the mosquitos out there? All it takes is one bite y *fuácata*: [and wham] Wes Nile Virus.

LOGAN

Kinda like Syphilis.

REBECCA

Transmittable diseases aren't a joke.

LOGAN

(Eating) Mm! Well this fry bread is highly contagious. Scored it off that Miccosukee food stand on Krome. This is the real deal, though. You gotta try some.

REBECCA

No thank you.

LOGAN

... So Ariel's pretty hell bent on doing this dad thing her way, huh? But I think – I told her – you have your own feelings about your dad and she should respect that, right? She has to respect your feelings about him if she expects you to understand how special and important *her* feelings are about her dad.

REBECCA

...You seem close with her.

LOGAN

I try to help. She reaches out when things get a little crazy.

REBECCA

That's nice. To be comfortable like that. (Beat) Is she happy? Without me around.

LOGAN

She knows how to have fun – I'm not sure about about happy. She misses you a bunch. Ariel puts on her illusive brat act – the brick wall comes up and – you know - that's her way. But she cares a lot about what you think and do and say... Like with this whole dad thing - I really think she could use your blessing on it.

*Rebecca disengages from the conversation and goes back to cleaning.*

LOGAN

You don't have to clean. I'm sure they pay maids to do that.

REBECCA  
Obviously not well enough.

LOGAN  
Take a break. Have a bite before it gets cold.

REBECCA  
My hands are dirty.

LOGAN  
I can feed you a piece.

REBECCA  
No, really I don't/

LOGAN  
With a napkin, see? Not even touching/ it

REBECCA  
I'm really not hungry/

LOGAN  
**One bite it's sooo good -**

*The fry bread falls on her lap.*

LOGAN  
Oh uh...

REBECCA  
Just. Leave it.

LOGAN  
Shit... Let me/

REBECCA  
**It's fine/ stop**

LOGAN  
That'll leave a grease/ stain

*He rubs her thigh to brush the crumbs off.*

REBECCA  
KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF.



LOGAN  
SORRY. Sorry.

REBECCA  
Do you always grope people without asking?

LOGAN  
Wow I am doing so bad at this. Can I start over?

REBECCA  
Start over what?

LOGAN  
I'm trying to help. Ariel has a bad habit of pushing buttons that piss people off, I know. But if you'll just hear me out I think I can get you to see that she isn't being that unreasonable wanting to see him.

REBECCA  
You honestly want to help?

LOGAN  
Yes.

REBECCA  
Then take her home. If you really care about her/

LOGAN  
I do/

REBECCA  
Get her away from here. I'll give you forty bucks, you can buy her a nice dinner/

LOGAN  
I don't think she'll wanna leave.

REBECCA  
Then make her. You don't know our dad - he is nothing but *un hijo-de-puta mierda cabron*. [A Son of a Bitch Shit Bastard]

LOGAN  
Those are a lot of things.

REBECCA  
He's that and more.

LOGAN

Ariel has this daddy-sized hole in her heart. That's actually a lyric I wrote - but it's true. And on top of old problems she's dealing with losing your mom. This could put her back together.

REBECCA

Put her back together? What like she's Humpty-Dumpty? Thank God you're here to save all her tiny pieces – like every other guy with a fix-it complex. *Egocéntrico mamòn [Egotistical pig]*

LOGAN

Woah, if I offended you/

REBECCA

Can you please leave?

LOGAN

Like step out of the room for a minute?

REBECCA

Like I don't want to see or hear you anymore.

LOGAN

Could I get a re-do on my last start over?

*Rebecca takes his bag of fry bread and chucks it out the door.*

LOGAN

... I wasn't gonna say anything but should you be left in here alone with all that cleaning stuff?

REBECCA

**Excuse me?**

LOGAN

Ariel told me about your issues.

REBECCA

What issues?

LOGAN

The OCD stuff?

REBECCA

I like things clean.

LOGAN

My brother Jeremy went to school with you - I heard school security had to pry you out of the janitor's closet on your prom night. They found you scrubbing your legs with glass cleaner? Does Ariel know that?

REBECCA

**That is not what happened.** Are you implying that I can't be in a room with some Windex and a sponge? Maybe a roll of Bounty!?

LOGAN

What is your deal/

REBECCA

**Take it! TAKE ALL OF IT.**

*Rebecca shoves the box of cleaning supplies into his arms.*

LOGAN

I think you're the one that's bad for her. Not her dad.

*She goes into a rage, knocking taxidermy animals off their shelves. Polie appears. Lights shift, the orange wall grows in dominance.*

POLIE

Look at you, Becky-Bunny. Next to that orange wallpaper you look like one of those fancy French models on the cover of magazines... Ready to show me your best fancy model pose? Come one, like we practiced...

*[An assault of a series of a dozen photos: rough male hands, bare Barbie legs, and filth.]*

*[A final photo: A bottle of Bleach.]*

*Polie picks up a bottle of bleach that was left in the office. He holds it out to Becca, she takes it and exits into the offstage bathroom. We hear the sound of a faucet turn and a bathtub beginning to fill.*

## 6. THE PARKING LOT

*Sundown. Logan sits out in the parking lot. Seth and Ariel approach, returning from the observation pier.*

Logan?	ARIEL
Hey – I was getting worried.	LOGAN
I... didn't realize you were coming.	ARIEL
Wanted to surprise you – who uh who's this?	LOGAN
Those my cleanin' supplies?	SETH
Who is that guy, Ariel?	LOGAN
I'm the guy these belong to.	SETH
	Seth goes to grab his cleaning supplies but knocks them on the floor. He picks up the mess as Logan pulls Ariel aside.
What's going on?	LOGAN
It's nothing/	ARIEL
Looks like something. You came out of the woods with some dude – Are you seriously doing this to me again?	LOGAN
<b>He works here.</b> He was helping me.	ARIEL
With what? Bear tracking?	LOGAN

ARIEL  
We were hunting for keys.

LOGAN  
I don't - What does that even mean?

ARIEL  
I threw Becca's keys into the marsh.

LOGAN  
Ariel.

ARIEL  
I know – I know.

*Seth heads into the office to avoid the couples spat.*

ARIEL  
(Beat) I thought you were gonna hang back while I did this.

LOGAN  
You sounded so strung-out on the phone about your sister.

ARIEL  
Aw, I didn't mean for you to drive all the way out here. I know it's a pain.

LOGAN  
I wanted to.

*As Logan and Ariel talk, Seth curses as he discovers the state of his office and critters.*

SETH  
What... the... holy... what the hell! (Looking for Becca) EY? HELLO ?

LOGAN  
(To Ariel) Your arm. How're you doing?

ARIEL  
The arms okay. I have to go face Becca and find some way to get her to come around. Hopefully she's calmed down by now.

LOGAN  
*Ehhh!*

What. What's that?  
 ARIEL

Don't get mad - I tried to talk to her for you/  
 LOGAN

Who told you to do that/  
 ARIEL

I didn't know she'd be *nuts* - I had to confiscate all that cleaning shit from her.  
 She was wiping the walls with a broom.  
 LOGAN

You left her alone like that?  
 ARIEL

**She kicked me out.**  
 LOGAN

Christ.  
 ARIEL

*Seth pops out of the office.*

Ey! That girl's got herself locked in my restroom! She dun trashed the place!  
 SETH

*Ariel runs into the office. Logan follows.*

Oh my God... **Becca!? Becca are you in there? Open the door.**  
 ARIEL

She wrecked this place... And that smell/  
 LOGAN

Like damn ammonia. What's she doin' in there?  
 SETH

**Becca... are you okay?**  
 ARIEL

Move. (To Logan) Toss me that screwdriver?  
 SETH

*Logan passes Seth a screwdriver off the desk . Seth uses it to shimmy the door open. Ariel goes into the offstage bathroom.*

ARIEL (O.S.)

BECCA! ... **Seth, help me!** Get out of the tub, Becca.

*Seth runs into the bathroom.*

REBECCA (O.S.)

Get out! STOP!

SETH (O.S.)

*Jesus.*

ARIEL (O.S.)

Help me lift her out.

*Ariel runs back into the room and grabs a blanket.*

LOGAN

Do you need me to/

ARIEL

(To Logan) Just move!

*Ariel goes back into the bathroom then emerges with Seth. They're propping Rebecca up, helping her walk out of the bathroom. She's wet and wrapped in the blanket.*

ARIEL

Are you okay?

REBECCA

What are you all looking at!

LOGAN

What was she doing?

ARIEL

She was bathing in Clorox.

LOGAN

Clorox?

**A tub of Clorox, Logan.** ARIEL

Mind your own business! REBECCA

(To Seth) Get me more towels so I can wipe her off. ARIEL

*Ariel tries to dry Rebecca but she fights her.*

Will you stop. ARIEL

Get off/ REBECCA

**Let me dry you.** ARIEL

Wanna carry her to your motel room? SETH

**I'm not going in that room!** REBECCA

OKAY. NO ROOM. No room. (To Seth/Logan) Clear off that stuff - HEY - clear the bed off so she can lay down. ARIEL

*The boys clear off the bed.*

Careful with the critters. SETH

Are there any more blankets? ARIEL

I'm fine/ REBECCA

I don't think she's fine. SETH

**Yeah I know.** (To Rebecca) Okay, this way – lay down. ARIEL



*Ariel's cell phone starts to ring.*

I can take care of myself/  
REBECCA

**Lay down on the bed please.**  
ARIEL

Is that your phone?  
LOGAN

YES – HERE! Shut the stupid thing off.  
ARIEL

*Ariel tosses Logan her cell phone.*

Off?  
LOGAN

**Off. Turn it off.** (To Becca) Please. Lay down.  
ARIEL

*Becca lays down, wrapped in blankets.*

Is there a plan?  
SETH

Has she done this before?  
LOGAN

I don't know!  
ARIEL

She gonna be okay?  
SETH

She's obviously not okay, she was soaking in bleach.  
LOGAN

I'm aware. My office smells of it.  
SETH

We gotta get her home, Ariel. I'll drive her. You can stay.  
LOGAN

I'm not going anywhere with him!

REBECCA

Becca, lay back.

ARIEL

That girl ain't fit to get in no car.

SETH

Dude, this isn't your discussion.

LOGAN

"Dude?" *Dude??* This is my establishment.

SETH

She's her sister - I think she can decide.

LOGAN

That's why I asked *her*. Ariel?

SETH

Ariel. What's the plan?

LOGAN

What! All of a sudden I'm in charge!?

ARIEL

*Overwhelmed by the pressure of the situation Ariel  
rushes out of the office and on to...*

## 7. THE PARKING LOT

*Ariel paces. Logan enters.*

ARIEL

... I have to cancel. Right? I have to call him and cancel.

LOGAN

No/

ARIEL

I don't even know what that was with her! I can't do this with her like that.

LOGAN

You can't flake out on your dad. You made a commitment.

ARIEL

You make everything about us.

LOGAN

I didn't say anything about *us*. I will drive your sister *safely* home so you can finally have your moment with your dad. ... She says she's fine.

ARIEL

That looked fine to you?

LOGAN

I said I'd help make this happen because you said it was important to you, Ariel.

ARIEL

Because you think this'll fix all the daddy issues you swear I have.

LOGAN

How am I the asshole here? You said seeing him would make you happy.

ARIEL

She was in a tub of bleach.

LOGAN

I'm sorry that happened – horrible – that is horrible. But you need to wake up. She's putting on a circus and you're letting her make you the clown.

ARIEL

Is there a way for us to have an argument that doesn't sound like I'm getting a therapy session from John Mayer?

LOGAN

John Mayer? JOHN MAYER? ...If either of us is *John Mayer* it's you- Jerking me around like fucking Taylor Swift over here.

ARIEL

I'm sure you'll write me a song about it.

LOGAN

What am I to you, Ariel?

ARIEL

I'm trying to figure out what the deal is with Becca. I can't handle a relationship talk right now.

LOGAN

Becca is gonna be on a plane and out of your life by tomorrow. It's what she does. I'm the one that drops everything for you: when your mom got sick, when you were failing AP Lit, when your cat stopped eating for two days. Freshman year- I shoplifted the morning-after pill for you when you freaked out about sitting on that scuzzy toilet seat. And then *again* when you got drunk with Derek Ryker-Fucking "Ryker the Striker." Can't you see that I might be a bit more dedicated to you than the sister you've only seen – what - like three times in the past five years?

ARIEL

I know you are.

LOGAN

It doesn't totally feel like it. (Beat) Let her leave. It's what she wants. Give her the keys, let her go and we can...

ARIEL

What.

LOGAN

Forget it... Okay, this is definitely the wrong way to bring this up/

ARIEL

What Logan.

LOGAN

... Move your things to my place. Not in any official capacity- just in a *living* capacity. Don't go live with your aunt. You don't even wanna stay with her. ... Stay with me.

ARIEL

Logan. All this stuff with my family... It's really confusing.

LOGAN

That's why I'm here. Whatever you need. (Beat) I uh brought you fry bread.

ARIEL

You did?

LOGAN

It was perfectly greasy - ended up in the swamp. But I'll get you more. Say the word – All the fry bread my lady desires! I don't even care if it makes you fat. I'll still think you're the sexiest girl with pink in her hair. ... That's the hook of the new song I wrote.

ARIEL

What? Fry-bread girlfriend?

LOGAN

That would have been a way better lyric. But no. It's... *Girl with Pink in her Hair*.

ARIEL

That's cuter.

LOGAN

Yeah?

*They kiss.*

LOGAN

... See your dad. You don't *need* her to do that.

ARIEL

... I gotta clear my head for a bit. Walk with me?

*They sit together, looking out into the swamp.*

## 8. THE MOTEL OFFICE

*Dusk. Becca is on the bed, still wrapped in a blanket but wearing one of Seth's long shirts underneath. She sips a glass of water. Seth is at his desk, making a light hammering sound as he works on putting one of his animals back together.*

SETH

... That shirt fit ya alright? (She shrugs) I tried to find one without any holes.

*Seth grabs a bottle of something out of his desk.*

SETH

*(reading) Aloe Vera.* I put it on blisters. It's a lotion – Fer if yer s.kin's raw from uh...

*He tries to hand the bottle to her but she turns away.*

SETH

Er whatever. It's there if you want it.

REBECCA

... (Re: his hammering) Do you have to do that right now?

SETH

You didn't have to knock all my critters on the floor.

REBECCA

*Por favor* [please]...

SETH

I'd rather be productive and put this guy back together while I babysit.

REBECCA

(Beat) Can you get my sister?

SETH

She scurried outa here awful spooked from findin' you that way - panic breathin' with big teary bug eyes – that girl's about to go mad-cow.

REBECCA

...She shouldn't have seen me like that. Did you see the way she looked at me.

*Rebecca starts to cry.*

SETH

Hey, naw, yer okay. Hey, she got snake-bit *by accident*. How stupid's that? You took a strong bubble bath *on purpose*... Least you scuffed yerself up with conviction. **And** you did me a favor and cleaned the tub better than I ever seen it.

*This isn't comforting. She grows more upset.*

REBECCA

I'm supposed to take care of her - not the other way around. I ruined your office.

SETH

Rock Stars trash places up all the time— Just means they're cool.

REBECCA

**Is *this* cool? Does this look cool to you?**

Rebecca shows him her skin. Her body is covered in rashes.

REBECCA

***Dime lo!*** [Tell me] I did this. This is what I do. What kind of a person does this to themselves?

SETH

... Geez... You scorched yer skin raw with that stuff. ... You gotta be hurtin'.

REBECCA

... It looks worse than it feels. ... Most of it is old scarring.

SETH

Those legs look like you slept on a bed of mosquitos.

*Realizing how exposed she is, she covers herself.*

SETH

Gotta be chemical burns. The Aloe Vera will soothe that good, help it heal/

REBECCA

I don't like having my legs touched.

SETH

I meant you could put the lotion on yerself.

REBECCA

*(Defensive) Para que un hombre extraño* [so a strange man] can watch me rub my body!? *No lo creo - De ninguna manera!* [I don't think so. No way.]

SETH

Easy there. All right, I'm puttin' the cream down... Talkin' Spanish is like yer musk, ain't it?

REBECCA

My what.

SETH

Snakes give off this musk to shoo predators away. It's this rank piss-n-shit ooze... You squawk-off in *Español* when ya wanna scare the white-guy away.

REBECCA

You are so enlightened about the Cuban culture.

SETH

That ain't culture. You never used to speak in Spanish when you were little.

REBECCA

You don't know what I did when I was little.

SETH

How long you gonna keep playin' it up like you don't remember me? Yer sister already told me ya'll used to stay here... *Rebecca*. (Pause) I used to stomp on frogs for you cuz you was 'fraid they were all baby alligators that was gonna nip yer feet. And that was a slimy business.

REBECCA

I'm supposed to remember every boy that's ever stepped on bugs for me?

SETH

Mhm. So that wasn't you who I snuck moonshine to that time I found ya cryin' behind the front desk? Kinda like you are now... Spit it out – that was you – I know it – I know it was you/

REBECCA

What! Are you waiting around for me to get drunk and kiss you again!? ... Stop looking at me.

*Seth smirks: She remembers.*

REBECCA

You smell like mud.

SETH

You smell like a swimmin' pool. (Pause) We gonna get this cream on you er what?



REBECCA

No sane person would want to look at this mess, let alone touch me.

SETH

I stuff dead animals fer fun. Think I can handle some rashy skin.

REBECCA

Do you listen? I don't like having my legs touched.

SETH

Gimme an arm then. You should know I am extra gentle at rubbin' Vaseline on Gator scales. They never complain...

*He takes her arm but this is too close for comfort for Becca.*

REBECCA

... My dad had sex with me.

SETH

...

REBECCA

You don't have anything to say to that? (Pause) While you were squishing frogs and having some teen-crush on me, I was with *him*, in that room, posing for pictures and... (Pause) If that doesn't make me grosser than dead rodent flesh...

SETH

... Gettin' a wrong kinda love sounds a little nicer than gettin' beat full of meanness... Trade ya mine fer yers.

REBECCA

Are you kidding – I'd make that deal. I've done everything to get rid of this. I moved to the desert. I bought a *tiny stupid taser on a keychain* because I'm frightened of everything. I'd trade you for anything else, any day.

SETH

You willing to shake on that deal? And no take backs.

*Rebecca holds out her hand. They shake on it. She doesn't notice he keeps her hand and gently begins applying cream to her arm as they talk.*

SETH

Some advice from a fella that's had to scrape a lot of shit off his boot: you don't ever get it *all* off. What yer Pops did – that kinda thing sticks to ya fer ever.

REBECCA

My sister wants him to come tomorrow. Here. To see her.

SETH

Why does she wanna see him?

REBECCA

Because he's her super-dad fantasy hero... I never told her what he did.

SETH

You can fix that in seconds – She's still here, ain't she?

REBECCA

NO. Tell her? No.

SETH

You can't control the situation without tellin' the truth.

REBECCA

How would I even - you can't tell someone something like that after ten years of not telling them. The way she loves him –She'd hate me.

SETH

Then you gotta get right with the idea that she's gonna see him.

REBECCA

But I'm ruined because of him.

SETH

You oughta tell him that.

REBECCA

I wouldn't give that *come mierda* [shit eater] one second of my life.

SETH

Seems to me yer givin' him every second...

REBECCA

(Beat) (re: his putting lotion on her) That doesn't feel gross? All the peeling and the bumps?

SETH

Yer hardly gross.

REBECCA

That's hardly a compliment considering you play with animal carcasses.

SETH

I'm not hurtin' you am I?

*She shakes her head no. He asks for the other arm.  
She gives it to him.*

SETH

I seen how she looks at you – She'd never hate you. Not fer too long.

*Ariel enters.*

ARIEL

Hey.

SETH

I was just – She got some skin irritations.

ARIEL

I can take over. Gimme a minute with her?

SETH

Yeah, I'll be out back.

*Seth exits.*

ARIEL

... Let me see.

*Rebecca removes the blanket from around her  
shoulders. Ariel looks at the blisters on her sister's  
back.*

ARIEL

(Softly) Christ, Becca... Turn this way.

*Ariel applies lotion to Becca's back. There's silence,  
then:*

REBECCA

Ariel... I'm sorry/

ARIEL

What the fuck, Becca - Are you for real with this? You're crazy now? You're just crazy?

REBECCA

I'm not always this way – I've had it under control for a really long time.

ARIEL

So this is a thing, like a constant thing. When did this become a thing for you?

REBECCA

Please, I don't want you worrying about me... (A lie) It's just a hormone thing - it makes me sensitive to stress. I take medicine for it.

ARIEL

You have to tell me stuff like that. I wouldn't have made you come. Or I would have been better about it. (Beat) Here's your keys.

REBECCA

You found them?

ARIEL

If you need to be driven home/

REBECCA

I don't want *Logan* driving me home/

ARIEL

I will drive you home. I'll check out of the motel and take you myself. If that's what you need.

REBECCA

...What about dad?

ARIEL

What about him.

REBECCA

Are you still gonna see him tomorrow?

ARIEL

The weekend kinda went to hell. Guess I'll have to reschedule with our "drug addict dad."

REBECCA

... What do you expect to get out of seeing him?

ARIEL

I just want my chance to give him my pictures ... So he can see me and know that I exist – that I matter. I should matter to him.

REBECCA

... He isn't a drug addict. He wasn't on drugs.

ARIEL

No kidding. Why would you even tell me that?

REBECCA

... You were right. It's like you said - Mami brainwashed me into hating him as much as she did.

ARIEL

That doesn't make it okay to lie to me. We don't lie to each other.

REBECCA

... Can you drive me home now? I'm ready to leave.

ARIEL

That's it then. After all the lunatic drama, you're leaving.

*Logan enters.*

LOGAN

Hey Ariel?

ARIEL

(To Logan) One sec. (To Rebecca) Are you sure you can't do this?

REBECCA

I can't stay. And I can't ever see dad, hear dad, or be in the same room or building as him.

LOGAN

Ariel?

ARIEL

You wanna go, let's go. Can't miss that flight of yours tomorrow.

LOGAN

Ariel!

What! ARIEL

Your dad is here. LOGAN

What? ARIEL

Your dad. LOGAN

What doesn't he mean he's here? REBECCA

Your phone's off – He's been trying calling you. He's here. LOGAN

... ARIEL

I let him in the room. What do you want me to tell him? He's waiting for you. LOGAN

Ariel looks to Rebecca then out to motel room 9. Lights fade to black as the door to the motel room opens, a lamp's orange glow radiates from inside the room for the first time – the only source of light left on the dark stage.

END ACT 1

## ACT 2

## SLIDE SHOW: BONE DRY

*Rebecca stands outside, holding a suitcase. Polie appears. He whistles sounds of the desert.*

[Photos: Solitary New Mexico landscapes.]

POLIE

Mmm dry, dry, heat... I can see why you'd wanna get back to that desert, Kiddo. In the swamp there isn't a pore on you that doesn't perspire- your eyeballs would sweat out here if they could. You can almost feel the grit of that sand already, can't you? The sterile staleness of all that clay... It's too damn murky down in The South.

[A Photo: A desert cactus]

POLIE

You ask a cactus: "you out to do me wrong, cactus?" He'll tell ya: "I got spikes, girl! Don't touch my ass."

[A Photo: The barbed wire fence of a ranch]

POLIE

Talk to them barbed wire fences and they'll tell you the same. It's a beautiful thing, the desert. Quiet. Alone. *Honest*. (Beat) You know I hear the Glades is drying up. Brush fires. Water levels shrinking... Maybe one day she'll be bone dry...

[A Photo: The Everglades, parched.]

POLIE

Ain't that a thought.

*Ariel appears and Polie takes on the memory of their father. He rushes upstage, then flashes.*

POLIE

Quick- hold onto your sister's hand there, Bunny!

*Rebecca takes Ariel's hand.*

[A Photo: Dozens of baby alligators huddle together.]

POLIE

Take a look at this, girls... there's got to be 30 tiny alligators clinging together in that clump! You know sometimes the bigger alligators end up eating those baby ones cuz gator eyes don't work too good – it's a sad thing - the grown gators can't tell baby gators apart from the small raccoons or rabbits that they feed on. That's why those baby ones keep in packs like that until they're full-grown. Instincts are incredible- they know they're safer in numbers.

*Becca drops Ariel's hand.*

POLIE

(Beat) Goddammit, Becky, will you grab her hand!

REBECCA

But it's all sticky!

ARIEL

How you gonna feel if she falls in?

REBECCA

Sorry, Daddy.

*Ariel giggles.*

POLIE

S'okay. It's getting late, anyway. Time to get a move on.

*Ariel runs off. Rebecca goes over to Polie. He holds his hand out and she decides to surrender her suitcase to him. He disappears. Rebecca rushes back into...*



## 1. THE MOTEL OFFICE

*Seth is at the desk. He is surprised to see Rebecca run in.*

REBECCA

**Turn out the lights!**

SETH

I thought you left/

REBECCA

**TURN OUT THE LIGHTS!**

*He dims the office lights.*

REBECCA

I don't want him to see me in here. (Beat) Has he been in the room this whole time?

SETH

The boyfriend went in but I haven't seen anyone come out. What's going on?

REBECCA

... I don't know.

SETH

I saw you hop in yer car fifteen minutes ago. You should be on the highway by now.

REBECCA

... Am I a bad person?

SETH

Bad? Naw.

REBECCA

I am. I'm a coward.

SETH

NO - You're not. ... I'm glad you ain't hightailed it yet. I didn't get to tell you it was nice, talkin' before.

REBECCA

... Why do you like me?

SETH

Why... Yer uh... likeable.

REBECCA

I make a useless girlfriend. I can't even have my legs touched without freaking out.

SETH

I doubt yer boyfriend would call you useless.

REBECCA

Boyfriend?

SETH

The firefighter. Yeah?

REBECCA

...There's no firefighter. No one sticks around once they figure out I can't be fixed.

SETH

Nothin's ever *broken*, broken. Not even a dead raccoon. See?

*He shows her one of his taxidermy critters.*

SETH

This guy here is named *Frito*. I saw him scurry across the street to inspect a bag of Frito Lays potato chips that got left on the ground. Little dude poked his head in the bag – *Vvvooom!* Hindquarters ran over by one of them Hybrid cars - You'd be surprised how many I seen get struck by them Hybrids – I think it's cuz their engines drive all quiet like so critters never hear 'em comin'. But you can see I took that Frito bag and used it to fashion him a pair of pants... covered his missin' butt parts. Good as new. (Picks up another) Her name is *Crayon*. Most of her legs didn't make the rescue when I scooped her off the pavement... so I replaced them - with Crayons... Uh *red, violet, periwinkle, and peach* – since she's a girl. (Another) Oh now this is *Turd*. Funny story 'bout him is/

REBECCA

Okay Seth - please, I - I get it. Sorry, I'm really anxious so/

SETH

Sorry. ... I've never given anyone a "grand tour" before.

REBECCA

(Pause) Alright. One more.

*He pulls down an armadillo.*

SETH

Okay, this pretty gal is my newest one. Found her this morning... I think I'ma name her Rebecca.

REBECCA

Rebecca the armadillo?

SETH

She's got that rough and tumble skin like you. Feel 'er – it's nicer than you think.

*Rebecca takes the armadillo and takes a closer look.*

REBECCA

...She's missing her tail.

SETH

I was thinkin' of tackin' on a shoelace er some copper wire.

REBECCA

Not for a girl!

*Rebecca goes into her purse. She pulls out a lacy handkerchief.*

REBECCA

She should feel as pretty as she is tough.

*She takes a piece of tape off the desk and gives the armadillo a tail.*

REBECCA

See? (Beat) It was my mom's scarf. She always looked so beautiful. But strong. ... Armadillo should have it for good luck.

SETH

Then Rebecca thanks you.

REBECCA

My sister's the tough one, like *Mami*. You should name her Ariel.

SETH

Nah, Ariel's more of a gator. She'll bite you a new one, that girl.

REBECCA

Yeah... She really doesn't need me here... I only make things worse. (Pause) I didn't ask to be the older sister... She pops out a few years after I do and suddenly I'm braiding pigtails, filling bubble baths, and holding sticky hands... I can't hold her hand forever. (Beat) I shouldn't be here – I should have left.

SETH

You want me to get you back to yer car? We can toss my jacket over you, I'll lead you out and no one'll see you.

REBECCA

I got to my car - I snatched those keys from her and drove out so fast... But I only made it a few blocks when I got this panic feeling. My hands seized up and I had to pull off the road... (Beat) Something feels wrong. Letting her to see him alone like that.

SETH

She's right out there.

REBECCA

I can't ... Would you mind if I stay in here? To keep an eye on the room. Make sure she's okay.

SETH

You know that means you might get a glance of him.

REBECCA

Through the window. Yeah.

SETH

Can ya handle that?

REBECCA

... (Beat) Would you sit with me while I wait?

*They sit next to each other.*

SETH

(Silence) Really I'm the one ain't no good fer helpin' anyone er anythin'. I couldn't even catch that snake that bit yer sister... All I ever catch are dead things on the road.

*She reaches over and holds his hand.*

SETH

(Silence) (Beat) Sure ya wouldn't rather go in the room with her?

REBECCA

No, I feel like I'm gonna puke and faint at the same time.

SETH

I do have that effect on women.

*He instinctually places his hand on her thigh to comfort her then immediately realizes his error and lifts it off.*

SETH

I – that was inappropriate – I am so sorry.

*She takes his hand and slowly places it back on her leg... holding hands, she enjoys this moment. Then:*

REBECCA

(Tenses up) Look - someone's opening the door...

## 2. THE PARKING LOT

*Ariel sits on the lawn chair, nervously cradling her box of photos. Logan comes out of the motel room.*

LOGAN

Okay, he's ready for you.

ARIEL

Is it weird to hand him a box with a million photos in it? Should I just pick out a few - twenty? No - thirty?/

LOGAN

He'll love you if you give him an empty box. And if you get too nervous... you can pull out plan b...

*Logan hands her a bag of marshmallows.*

ARIEL

Marshmallows! I lost the bag I brought.

LOGAN

You've told me the gator-feeding story about your dad a few hundred times - it was an easy call.

ARIEL

That's... really nice. (Beat) I can't believe Becca isn't here to do this with me... What if he's mean or nasty/

LOGAN

He rolled into the parking lot blasting Joni Mitchell. Hardly seems like a hard ass.

ARIEL

I still wish I wasn't doing this alone.

LOGAN

Stop worrying. He's here because he wants to see you. All Becca would do is find a way to make it all about her. This is about you and your dad. ... Ready?

ARIEL

No.

LOGAN

You'll be great. And I'll be waiting close by.

*Ariel takes her box, knocks on the motel room door.*

## 3. MOTEL ROOM 9

*The orange wallpapered wall, a bed, a dresser, and an old TV come together to make up the interior of Motel Room 9. Walking the room, taking in all of its nostalgia is MALCOLM. He's in his 50s and is unassuming in a pair of khakis. He is holding a brown bag. Ariel enters.*

ARIEL

...

MALCOLM

Come in, come in - Before those mosquitos get ya good. Took a few bites outta me in the parking lot.

ARIEL

... Dad.

*A pause. Malcolm is nervous as well.*

MALCOLM

... Hm. (Beat) You know, what I can't figure out is- and maybe you can help me... What would you call a fish with no eyes?

*She knows this question. It makes her smile.*

ARIEL

*A fssshh?!*

MALCOLM

**A little fssshhh.** ... Ah, you remember that one.

ARIEL

Yeah it's a pretty bad joke.

MALCOLM

Always got a laugh out of you. (Beat) Hi, Fishy.

ARIEL

Hi Dad.

MALCOLM

Can I... I'm gonna steal a hug. Can I steal a hug?

ARIEL

Yeah. Yes.

*She hugs him as if to make sure he's real.*

MALCOLM

I hope this is okay – me showing up tonight. I got your message about wanting to meet sooner so I ran this way – I tried calling but/

ARIEL

I know- I'm so sorry. My phone got shut off and you know.

MALCOLM

So... this is a good surprise? Bad surprise?

ARIEL

Good. It's good.

MALCOLM

Good. (Beat) This place hasn't changed an inch... But *you* - I knew you'd be grown but knowing it and seeing it are... You're a carbon copy of your mom at seventeen. Seventeen, right?

ARIEL

One more year of high school.

MALCOLM

High school! (Regret) I am... the years go by quick... How are you? How is everything.

ARIEL

Okay... I can't believe you're here.

MALCOLM

Is uh... is it gonna be just us?

ARIEL

Becca couldn't stay so...

MALCOLM

Oh... She say why?

ARIEL

She has a flight to catch.

MALCOLM

A flight? She... tell you anything else? Anything about me coming out?



ARIEL

Um she said maybe next time. But I'm glad I get to see you.

MALCOLM

Yeah?

ARIEL

I've always hoped I'd see you.

MALCOLM

One daughter at a time, right? Hey, better for us - My attention is all yours, Fishy.

ARIEL

You look just like I remember... But gray.

MALCOLM

Gray! (Joking) Where? (Looking in the mirror) Holy - Wasn't like this when I left the house. *You* did this - Making me show my age.

ARIEL

Maybe my hair wasn't pink 'til you got here and made it rebel against my dad and *The System*.

MALCOLM

"The System!?" We need a long talk if you think your Old Man is synonymous with The System. Fight the power! Down with the machine.

ARIEL

Wow so embarrassing me comes naturally to you.

MALCOLM

Ah yes, the Embarrassment Gene lies dormant in us all until it's activated by your first-born.

ARIEL

I'm teasing.

*A pause. A search for conversation.*

ARIEL

... You said you're teaching now?

MALCOLM

Beginners English for illegals, mostly. I call 'em my flock of parrots- a lot of "listen and repeat after me." (Pause) Oh, this is cute: my student *Eduardo* thought Sky Scrapers were called "High Crappers." Guy was an architect back in Cuba, says

his dream is to build a “High Crapper” in downtown Miami. Poor sap gets here and can’t get a job cuz (Beat) You don’t wanna hear all this. I’m... all *pluhh* nervous chatter vomit.

ARIEL

I have something for you. It’s kind of dumb, I dunno/

*She gives him the box of photos.*

MALCOLM

Polaroids! I loved instant cameras. Everything is all digital now- Nothing’s tangible.

ARIEL

Totally! I’m always saying that.

MALCOLM

(Beat) So what’re all these?

ARIEL

Pictures I’ve been taking. Of me - stuff I do or see. I know there’s a lot of them- sorry/

MALCOLM

No, I missed a lot. (Beat) Are there any pictures of you with your sister?

ARIEL

She won’t pose for photos. There’s a pretty funny one of me with mom somewhere...

MALCOLM

Did Becky really say “maybe next time?”

ARIEL

...

MALCOLM

I thought maybe since *you* were ready to forgive me, maybe... (Re: The bag he has) This seems silly now.

ARIEL

What’s that?

*He hands it to Ariel. She pulls a porcelain rabbit out of the bag.*

MALCOLM

Your sister used to collect those. (Beat) Crap - I was such a nut on the way here, I meant to grab some flowers or something for you... You were so little back then - you weren't really interested in anything like the bunnies... Eh - Bunnies probably aren't appropriate for either of you anymore.

ARIEL

No, she's cute.

MALCOLM

Yeah? Keep it. Next time I'll come prepared with two gifts - Two bunnies! Maybe if you tell Becky how nice this was, she'll change her mind.

ARIEL

... Dad, what happened that made you leave us?

MALCOLM

Uh... how do you remember things happening? Did your mom ever say anything about that?

ARIEL

*Mami* said you just left.

MALCOLM

"Just left." ... It didn't feel as simple as "just left"... I don't know - maybe it was. (Beat) When I married your mother, no one was there to teach me how I was supposed to, be a dad and play house all while keeping driven about my own aspirations ... Your mom was unhappy - I was a grouch with my writing not taking off ... It was easy to blame you all as the *ultimate distraction*. (Pause) I did what I thought I needed to: I cut myself out. ... At the time it was alluring, this romantic notion that I had to be alone and *classically tragic* to succeed as a writer. Sounds delusional now ... barely lasted a year before it clicked that all I did was screw up ... but I figured you all wouldn't want to see me again after that.

ARIEL

...I did.

MALCOLM

Turns out it is also possible to be alone, classically tragic, *and* extremely unsuccessful...

ARIEL

What about with you and Becca?

MALCOLM

Why. Is... Is Becky saying things about me? Because I love you and your sister- I would never... I don't even know why she'd - Is she still saying that?

ARIEL

I don't know what her problem is. She is being so impossible. She acts like you're some *evil monster dad*. *You*.

MALCOLM

... Becky's ears fell on a lot of ugly arguments between your mom and I during those last two years. She was a very sensitive kid – wild imagination - she let the fights upset her, started acting out at school. That's why I started bringing you girls out here on the weekends - Gave yer mom and I some much needed time apart and I got to bond with my girls in the Glades.

ARIEL

I had so much fun with you here... I wish I could get Becca to feel the same way.

MALCOLM

I didn't let her get away with acting out the way she did. I got strict and she didn't think it was fair. (Beat) Do you remember the day she ran away from the motel room?

ARIEL

No...

MALCOLM

I'm hysterical looking everywhere - hours later I find her hiding behind the front office desk, **drunk** with a strange boy in a way that a twelve-year-old girl should not be with a boy. (Pause) I responded wrong to her... I got tough when what she needed was to be cared for. ... I felt like I was failing you all left and right. So I left. (Pause) Not that that's an acceptable excuse. I should have been there.

ARIEL

... I um... I feel stupid for thinking you didn't care all this time/

MALCOLM

Hey. You're not stupid. If I stuck around like I should have there wouldn't be any confusion.

ARIEL

... (Beat) You wanna go outside with me and feed these to the gators?

MALCOLM

What. ... Marshmallows?

ARIEL

How else are they gonna keep all those teeth pearly white? Right? Like you taught me.

MALCOLM

I taught you to give alligators marshmallows? (Doesn't remember) Doesn't sound like me – also doesn't sound too safe. There's signs against feeding the wildlife.

ARIEL

No, you fed them with me.

MALCOLM

Don't you think there's too many mosquitos to be going outside? And in the dark.

ARIEL

Um ... Yeah, yeah. We can hang in here and I'll show you my Polaroids. (Beat) Oh - I forgot! Check this out...

*Ariel takes her camera out. Polie appears.*

MALCOLM

Is that my old snapper!

ARIEL

That is Polie.

MALCOLM

Polie! Did you know Becky gave him that name?

ARIEL

I take all my pictures with him.

MALCOLM

Wow... Strange feeling holding this ol' guy again. Boy does this take me back.

ARIEL

(Showing him a photo) Oh this is one of my best ones...

*Polie flashes in Malcolm's face. The motel television turns on, static crackles on the screen.*

[A Photo: Static]

*Lights change as Malcolm zones out to the sound of the static. Ariel goes through her photos, telling him a story for each one as she lays them across the bed –*

*she doesn't notice he has departed from her, she continues her tales. Malcolm has the camera as he speaks to Polie.*

MALCOLM

Hmm... Give me... your scariest monster face with a big Garrrr!

POLIE

(ad lib.) Garrrrr raaawrrrr rawrrrrr!

*Polie poses as a monster. Malcolm takes the photo.*

MALCOLM

ScaAaAary! K, how about some Becky-bunny ears!

*Polie poses as a bunny. Malcolm takes another picture.*

MALCOLM

Perfecto! Look at you in front of that orange wallpaper like one of those fancy French models. Show me... your best fancy model pose. Like we practiced...

POLIE

The TV snow is too loud... that sound is scary!

MALCOLM

NO, it's loud so Fishy can't nosey-in on our bonding time. This is none of her beeswax, right? (Goes to the bathroom door) Did she get in the tub like I told her?

[A photo: A Bath Tub]

*He knocks on the bathroom door.*

MALCOLM

I don't hear that water running, Fishy! In the tub **now**.

*Polie pulls out a Barbie doll.*

POLIE

Ariel forgot to take her bathtub Barbie.

MALCOLM

Shhh - Don't. She's already in. (Beat) French model pose? Come on...

POLIE

Can we go deer watching out on the trail?

MALCOLM

Why are you being so fussy? Do you want me to mix you your favorite Cola drink?

[A Photo: A Soda with a straw.]

[A Photo: A drink on the rocks.]

POLIE

You never take me outside to have fun like you do with Ariel.

[A Photo: A porcelain bunny.]

MALCOLM

You are very close to losing this new bunny I bought you for your collection...

POLIE

...The blue one?

MALCOLM

It was supposed to be a surprise, silly. I'll trade you one blue bunny for one fancy pose...

POLIE

... Daddy, how much do you love me?

MALCOLM

I already told you. With all my heart and up to the stars!

POLIE

Where the angels...

MALCOLM

Where the angel's *bump* their heads on the clouds! How's that for love?

*Beat. Polie removes his clothes until he's left standing in a pair of little girl underwear. Malcolm takes a picture.*

MALCOLM

That's my muse. Beautiful, kiddo. ... Oops - You got one last piece getting in the way...

*Malcolm reaches for Polie's underwear but Polie shoves him away.*

POLIE

I wanna go see a deer.

MALCOLM

That hurts my feelings, Becky.

*Polie blocks another attempt from Malcolm. The static grows louder.*

MALCOLM

If you don't want to spend time together anymore I can leave you at home next time.

POLIE

**But I wanna go together - You and me - it'll be fun daddy! It'll be so fun, dad! Daddy?**

*Ariel realizes her dad hasn't been listening to her.*

ARIEL

Dad?

POLIE

Daddy?

ARIEL

Dad.

POLIE

**Dad!**

ARIEL

**DAD!**

*Polie's flash goes berserk as the static reaches an all time high and collides with the sudden ringing of Ariel's cell phone. The lights change back to normal and Polie retires to the closet.*

ARIEL

Dad!



*The TV shuts off. Malcolm comes back to the present.  
Ariel's cell phone is still ringing.*

ARIEL

Were you listening to anything I've been saying?

*She grabs her phone.*

MALCOLM

Who's calling you?

ARIEL

Dad – you were paying attention, right?

MALCOLM

Was that your sister calling you?

ARIEL

It's Logan. Texting me to check in.

MALCOLM

Why don't we call her.

ARIEL

Call Becca?

MALCOLM

Tell her we're having a good time. With the pictures.

ARIEL

We probably won't reach her this late. (Showing him another pic) Look – I was telling you how how this was my second boyfriend. Cute. But big mistake/

MALCOLM

Where is Becca going that she has to catch a plane?

ARIEL

...Out West.

MALCOLM

Out West where?

ARIEL

You aren't looking at the photo.

MALCOLM

I'm just wondering what Becky's doing all the way out West/

ARIEL

If she wasn't so wacked out she would have stayed here /to tell you herself.

MALCOLM

**Hey-** Don't say that.

ARIEL

Sorry. I feel like you aren't focused on me.

MALCOLM

I came all this way for you.

ARIEL

And Becca.

MALCOLM

We don't have to call her now. You could give me her number and/

ARIEL

Dad, I can't do that/

MALCOLM

I'll save it in my cell and try her later/

ARIEL

I'd need her permission first.

MALCOLM

You don't need permission – I'm her dad.

ARIEL

Can we just look through the photos?

MALCOLM

You have to have it there in your phone -

*Malcolm grabs for Ariel's cell phone.*

MALCOLM

Let me see it for a second/

ARIEL

**She won't want me to give it to you/**

MALCOLM

**You can't keep me all to yourself, Ariel/***They struggle as he tries to rip the phone away from her.*

ARIEL

**What is wrong with you/**

MALCOLM

**I need to make-up with her too - you're being selfish/**

ARIEL

**STOP IT!!***Rebecca rushes into the room. Logan and Seth follow.*

REBECCA

**GET AWAY FROM HER!**

ARIEL

**Becca?**

LOGAN

**What's going on/**

REBECCA

*(To Seth, re: Logan)* **GO – Get him out/**

LOGAN

**I'm not getting out/**

ARIEL

Logan, it's fine.

*Seth pulls Logan out of the room.*

LOGAN

Get off me man!

SETH

Leave it - This is their thing.

*Becca locks the door behind them.*

REBECCA

**Don't touch her- Don't you don't you touch her.** Get – get over there, Ariel - GO.

*Ariel moves to the other side of the room.*

MALCOLM

Becky...

*Malcolm tries to take Becca's hand.*

REBECCA

**Don't - Don't come near me.**

MALCOLM

Becky-Bunny, please/

REBECCA

**And don't call me that.**

MALCOLM

Bunny, I know you're upset with me, I understand. But a long time has passed and your sister found a way to forgive me/

REBECCA

**Tell her what you did.**

MALCOLM

She knows. I abandoned you girls when you needed your dad the most/

REBECCA

NO YOU *HURT* ME.

MALCOLM

You have to stop saying that.

ARIEL

What is she talking about?

REBECCA

TELL HER.

MALCOLM

Bunny, you're confused and you're confusing your sister/

REBECCA  
**Because you confused me!**

MALCOLM  
 No/

REBECCA  
**I didn't know that wasn't the way - You confused everything for me!**

ARIEL  
 What is this about!

REBECCA  
 Ariel, I'm sorry - I couldn't tell you/

ARIEL  
 Tell me what?

REBECCA  
 But you need to know.

MALCOLM  
 Becky, you told your mother some stories that hurt me very much... But I forgive you. I'm here to forgive you. Will you let me do that?

REBECCA  
 ... *You forgive me?*

MALCOLM  
 Doesn't that feel good? Forgiveness is good to hear.

REBECCA  
**YOU DON'T GET TO FORGIVE ME - I'M SUPPOSED TO FORGIVE YOU! AND I DON'T!**

ARIEL  
**Becca.**

REBECCA  
**I DON'T! I'LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU NOT UNLESS YOU ADMIT IT! ADMIT IT.**

ARIEL  
**Admit what?**

MALCOLM

You have to get over these lies – You have a wild imagination that makes you believe awful things/

REBECCA

**I'M YOUR DAUGHTER! I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE WITH YOU LIKE THAT!**  
I just wanted to be with my dad and you made that ugly. I'm your daughter. Look at me. That wasn't enough?

ARIEL

Dad.

MALCOLM

I loved you to the stars/

REBECCA

**You left. You left like a coward cuz I told. You only cared about what you wanted. It got tough and you left.**

ARIEL

Dad, what's she – is - is that true?

MALCOLM

**No/**

REBECCA

I should have told you a long time ago.

MALCOLM

I never touched you that way!

*Ariel grows uncomfortable, realizing what the accusation truly is.*

REBECCA

**WHY. Why do that to me! For fun? For the power trip over a kid? Or was it just cuz you could? ... I'M SORRY. I'M SORRY, OKAY? I'm sorry I told Mami and broke your trust - I didn't mean to make you leave. I wanted you to love me normal - Like Ariel.**

ARIEL

...

MALCOLM

She has this sick fixation with me – what you're saying is sick/

REBECCA

**You're the sick one! Just once, say you did it. Say it to her.**

MALCOLM

... Let me help you get help. Don't worry about the money – I'll pay – I wanna pay for anything you need to get past this illness, this confusion. Do you understand? I wanna help because I care.

REBECCA

If you gave me a million dollars, I would burn it. I don't want a single thing from you. Except for you to go.

MALCOLM

... Fine, I'll leave you alone if that's what you want... But you should have something – I want you to have something to remember that no matter how many bad things you say about me, I will always forgive you/

ARIEL

Dad, stop.

MALCOLM

I remembered this for you...

*Malcolm hands her the porcelain rabbit.*

REBECCA

... Did Ariel tell you she found a collection of bunnies, just like this one, under a bunch of dirt in the back yard? It's more like mud than dirt, really, because of all the dog piss. ... Thank you. I think I will keep this. This new guy will have fun meeting all his brothers in the pit where I buried them, right beneath the dog's favorite place to shit.

MALCOLM

... Okay. Give it back.

REBECCA

Its mine. I earned this.

MALCOLM

No, not if you're going to treat it like that, you didn't.

REBECCA

Apologize. Apologize and you can have it back.

ARIEL

I don't want to hear this anymore.

MALCOLM

I'm not apologizing for something I didn't do.

REBECCA

Say you're sorry for abusing my trust and I'll give you the stupid rabbit back.

MALCOLM

Why would I apologize for buying you nice things? For bringing you on trips all the way out here to spend time together, just you and me?

*Ariel starts tossing all her photos back into her box.*

MALCOLM

What – that whole time you hated being spoiled by me? You were pretending to like my attention? Some dads don't even smile at their kids. Was that what you wanted? A dad that couldn't bother to hug you?

REBECCA

If. You. Want. The. **Rodent**. I have to hear you say it.

MALCOLM

Well... I am sorry. I am sorry I wasted any love on you. And I am sorry that I am the only father in the world with a daughter so hateful that she can't love her own dad... You should be sorry. Because it's your fault that I left.

REBECCA

...

*Rebecca is surprised to find herself beginning to laugh at him.*

MALCOLM

That's enough – give me the bunny.

REBECCA

You... are *nothing*. You are nothing to me.

*Rebecca opens her hand, letting the bunny fall to the floor.*

REBECCA

***I accept your forgiveness!***

MALCOLM

... Fishy, you can't believe your dad would be capable of this sick insanity of hers.



REBECCA

We want you to leave now.

MALCOLM

(To Ariel) You gonna let her treat me like this? She's trying to ruin our visit – making it real hard for me to wanna come back and do this again with you... Weren't we in the middle of looking at those photos of yours? ... I'd really like to see the rest of 'em – go and lay 'em back out on the bed like you had 'em. What do you say, Fishy? Spend some more time with your old man?

ARIEL

... He can stay.

REBECCA

Ariel.

MALCOLM

Thank you, sweetie.

ARIEL

(To Malcolm) Can I see your phone?

MALCOLM

Uh sure.

*He hands her his cell. She fiddles on it.*

MALCOLM

Your sister should leave, don't you think? (Re: his cell) What- what are you doing on there?

*She hands his phone back.*

ARIEL

I deleted my number.

MALCOLM

Fishy/

ARIEL

If you memorized it, you should forget it. And then you need you to forget about Becca. Because if you ever try to contact her or go near her, you might find yourself in a kind of trouble you deserve.

You can't/  
MALCOLM

ARIEL  
NO. Becca and I are leaving now. And I suggest you stay in this room until  
sunup. Cuz you won't like it if we run into you on our way out.

...  
MALCOLM

ARIEL  
Let's go, Becca.

*Becca stares her father down.*

ARIEL  
Becca, we're leaving.

*Ariel grabs her camera and box of photos and exits the motel room. Becca takes one last look then exits, closing the door behind her. Malcolm sits alone. Polie appears. He examines Malcolm, content with his lonely state. Polie flashes him in the face, goes over the door, and turns out the lights. Malcolm is left alone in the dark.*

## 4. THE OBSERVATION PIER

*Ariel stands with her cardboard box, tossing Polaroids into the swamp. Quick images of photos flash by as she throws them in. Rebecca rushes in and stops her.*

REBECCA

Ariel... Ariel - what are you doing - Your photos!

*Ariel tosses more.*

ARIEL

I don't want them.

REBECCA

Hey, stop. Look at me. ... *Mami* told me it wasn't something to be talked about.

ARIEL

We don't lie to each other, Becca. What did I say?

REBECCA

You don't think you grew up happier without that in your head?

ARIEL

Ten years, Becca. (Re: the photos) Ten stupid years of waiting around for some jerk.

REBECCA

Ariel, I'm sorry.

ARIEL

Shut up... this isn't anything for you to be sorry about. Just don't lie to me anymore. EVER. I'd rather be miserable with the truth.

REBECCA

I never told you about dad because I wanted you to keep your version of him. Your dad was a nice dad.

ARIEL

There's only one dad. Doesn't really work that way. (Beat) *Mami* really said you couldn't talk to me about it?

REBECCA

Does that surprise you? She was all about proper appearances and behavior.

ARIEL

You think she knew that he was/

REBECCA

No, no... I was so afraid of what she'd think that I got really good at hiding it... If it wasn't for you, who knows how long I would have gone without telling.

ARIEL

What did I do.

REBECCA

~~You did.~~ You left your Barbie out on the motel dresser this one day and...

ARIEL

A Barbie?

REBECCA

That bath time one with the neon bathing suit? You had forgotten it and left her sitting on the dresser when dad sent you to take a bath... I stared at her the entire time I was on the bed and he was - I didn't like seeing his face like that. ... Looking at her, I noticed her hair was different: chunks had been hacked off like a Mohawk. And she had green chewing gum stuck to her scalp... I was eleven when I took (Vital: no "first") a pair of those Crayola safety scissors and decided to give all my Barbie dolls mullets ... It's a thing girls do. Like a phase. Puberty hits, we look in the mirror and our boobs don't look like Barbie's boobs so we pop her head off and fry her in the microwave. And that means we're growing up. ... You were only seven and you were already hacking up your dolls. You were growing so fast- *too* fast. (Pause) ... He started the photo shoots with me around the time when I started chopping up my Barbies... It hit me that you could end up being me one day... So I called mom and told her what had been happening... Dad left because *Mami* threatened to call the police... although I don't think she ever would have – that would have gotten us too much attention. (Pause) I'm sorry for waiting so long to tell you. I'd hoped I'd never have to.

ARIEL

...I'm glad you did. (Beat) Help me get rid of these?

*Ariel goes to toss more photos over but Becca stops her.*

REBECCA

Are you sure you want to do that? Wait -

*Becca snatches the photos out of Ariel's hands. She looks through them.*

REBECCA

I wanna see this one. Is that you? Very...

[A Photo: Ariel being goofy.]

REBECCA

Attractive.

ARIEL

Thanks.

[A Photo: A lizard in a hand.]

REBECCA

Ew. What is that?

ARIEL

A lizard - Give them back.

[A Photo: A burrito.]

REBECCA

You're a bit obsessed with pictures of food, *Gordita*. [Fat ass]

ARIEL

**Can you just toss them!?**

[A Photo: Some guy with bleached hair]

REBECCA

Does he know he looks like a Q-Tip?/

ARIEL

OH MY GOD.

REBECCA

Oo, you dated him/

ARIEL

**You're banned from looking at photos/ Gimme!**

[A Photo: A cute tattoo of an animal]

REBECCA

NO – You don't have a tattoo!

ARIEL

I have three, genius. Okay? Stop going through my photos/

REBECCA

THREE? You'll be stuck with those until you're a wrinkly *abuela* [grandma]!

ARIEL

Really. No one ever tells me that.

REBECCA

Where? I've never seen any them.

ARIEL

You have to be around to see things. (Sorting through photos) Like the cat I had for a year.

[A Photo: A kitty]

ARIEL

Or Havarti, who I lost in a month.

[A Photo: A pet mouse]

ARIEL

The monkey *Mami* wouldn't let me keep.

[A Photo: A tiny monkey]

ARIEL

I like animals. All my tattoos are of animals cuz I'll never not-love cute animals.

REBECCA

What kind of animal is this?

[A Photo: A dude who wears all his feelings]

ARIEL

Shut up! That's my friend, Crotch.

REBECCA

That is not his real name.

ARIEL

It's called a nickname.

REBECCA  
He like being called Crotch?

ARIEL  
Who wouldn't? It's awesome.

REBECCA  
What's your nickname? Ass-Crack?

ARIEL  
My name works fine.

*Rebecca sneaks photos out of the box.*

REBECCA  
I missed the Popsicle phase, huh.

[A Photo: Ariel with blue hair.]

ARIEL  
(Hands her a photo) My Little Mermaid phase was cuter.

[A Photo: Ariel with red hair.]

ARIEL  
(Another photo) My blonde crack-whore phase was less cute.

[A Photo: Ariel blonde.]

[A Photo: Food.]

[A Photo: More food.]

[A Photo: Yeah, more food.]

ARIEL  
Okay, maybe I take too many pictures of food.

*Ariel tosses the photos into the swamp.*

REBECCA  
Oye! [hey] That's littering -

*She goes to toss in another bunch when Becca stops her.*

REBECCA

Wait - That's a really old one. Let me see it?

[A Photo: An alligator eats a marshmallow.]

ARIEL

...Dad didn't even remember throwing marshmallows with me.

REBECCA

Ariel... dad didn't feed the alligators with you.

ARIEL

Yes he did.

REBECCA

He wasn't even there. He was passed out on whiskey... You were bored in the room so we stole his camera and I took you for a walk. I'm the one that told you alligators eat marshmallows to keep their teeth white.

ARIEL

I specifically remember dad saying that/

REBECCA

That gators turn pink if they don't tan in the sun?

ARIEL

...

REBECCA

After he left you'd get into these moods where you'd ask and ask me to tell you fun stories about him. I couldn't think of any but you were so little and missing him so much that I made a few stories up-

ARIEL

More lies.

REBECCA

No, the marshmallow thing happened but it was just you and me. I said it was dad who taught you all that stuff so you'd have a nice story about him.

ARIEL

Christ, Becca. Nothing I know about him is real. He's a ghost.

REBECCA

... (Beat) Do you mind if I keep this one?



ARIEL

If you want it. The rest are going in the swamp.

*Ariel gets ready to dump the whole box.*

REBECCA

Hold on – I wanna keep the box too.

ARIEL

Why do you want a box.

REBECCA

I'll keep them for you.

ARIEL

You want my photos?

REBECCA

With Mami gone, someone has to be in charge of holding on to all our special things.

*Ariel takes her camera out of the box. Polie enters.*

ARIEL

... Okay... but I think it's time to say bye to this guy.

REBECCA

Polie? Are you sure? I can barely remember a time where you didn't have that hanging around your neck.

ARIEL

He's been stuck with me long enough. It's his turn to go have his own adventures... Bye little buddy.

*Ariel gives Polie a hug. He nods to Rebecca. Ariel drops the camera into the water and Polie disappears off the pier.*

ARIEL

(Pause) I need a ride back to the house.

REBECCA

... Yeah. I can do that.

*Logan and Seth approach.*

SETH

You girls all right?

*Rebecca takes the box and goes over to Seth, giving Ariel and Logan some privacy.*

LOGAN

... You okay?

ARIEL

You really wanted this to work with my dad but/

LOGAN

I know. You all were shouting pretty loud so... Is Becca okay? (Beat) It wasn't my place to push you into doing this – or to stick my nose in your sister's business. I was making it about us.

ARIEL

No, you're always there for me – even when I'm a huge jerk... But um... I don't think moving in together would be...

LOGAN

Yeah, I'm getting that.

ARIEL

I need to straighten my head out with my family first.

LOGAN

So we're... reinstating that "pause"?

ARIEL

I do need a pause.

LOGAN

Okay... I guess... (Beat) Hey, is that your camera bobbing away in the water?

*A bit away from Ariel and Logan, Seth and Becca speak.*

SETH

I take it yer headin' out now.

REBECCA

Your swamp will be quiet again - Free of the two crazy city girls.

SETH

Um... I know this is probably the last place you'd wanna come back to... and you got yer own troubles and probably don't wanna be getting romantic with anyone... but uh... if you wanted to be my friend, that'd be nice – if you wanted.

*Rebecca kisses Seth on the cheek. Then decides to go back for a peck on the lips.*

SETH

(Seth recovers) Well... alright then.

REBECCA

... Bye Seth.

SETH

You take care.

*Seth exits. Logan does as well. Ariel approaches*

*Rebecca.*

ARIEL

Ready to leave when you are. If you're done swapping spit with your Swamp-Billy boyfriend...

REBECCA

What? He's nice, okay?

ARIEL

...He is nice. (Beat) Wanna go?

REBECCA

(Beat) Listen. I was thinking I might wanna take another week off work... Would it be okay with you if I stayed for a bit?

ARIEL

At home?

REBECCA

Yeah. With you.

ARIEL

...Whatever. (A private grin)

*Rebecca takes Ariel's hand and as the girls exit together, Polie appears sitting on the pier. He snaps a photo of them from afar and smiles as they leave.*

*[A Photo: Ten years ago. Little Ariel & Rebecca walk hand-in-hand thru the Everglades.]*

*The stage slowly grows dark: the motel drifts away... the orange wall dissolves... and Polie departs with the pier until the photo is the only thing left glowing. Then, it too fades away into the sounds of the breathing swamp: cicadas buzz, frogs bicker, and a gator's deep bellow rumbles in the distance.*

**END OF PLAY.**