Chatterbox

Rebecca Sanchez

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Candidate

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Gregory S. Moss, Chairperson

Amanda Hamp

Matthew McDuffie

Donald Zancanella
CHATTERBOX

by

REBECCA M. SÁNCHEZ

B.A. Government, New Mexico State University, 1996
M.A. Curriculum and Instruction, New Mexico State University, 1999
Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, New Mexico State University, 2005

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts
Dramatic Writing

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2016
Dedication

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

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

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

Thank you to Gregory S. Moss, Dramatic Writing Program Head at the University of New Mexico. Greg, you are a great teacher, an inspiring mentor, and a creative powerhouse. I am particularly grateful to you for holding my feet to the fire, for telling me my early work felt like “reporting,” and for not letting me quit the program three different times. When I took the avant-garde class during my sabbatical I woke up from a long winter’s nap. Thank you for that.

I am also grateful to Caroline Prugh. Caroline, I have learned so much from your vast expertise as a writer and theatre maker. You notice my tricks, help me overcome creative fears and blocks, and you have provided constructive feedback along the way. Most importantly, in the first semester you made me realize I could generate.

Matthew McDuffie, you push me to see stories. I’m a definite work in progress when it comes to writing films, but I now have a different perspective about needs and wants, character motive, and the visual life of story. Thank you.

Amanda Hamp, your class came at just the right time in my professional and creative life. With new tools as a playwright and a continued commitment to the field of education, your instruction has helped me merge my creative and scholarly work. I also have acquired a new research vocabulary to articulate practice as research. I know this will continue to inform my work.

Don Zancanella, as educators and artists we share a great hope for humanity. I have admired your work for many years and I know we work in quiet solidarity with each other. I appreciate your willingness to step in and serve as a committee member. I am grateful for your insight and assistance.

To my cohort members Denise, Raphael, Drew, Stephanie, Krista, Monica, and Diego, thank you for your friendship and support during the program. Without your help listening, reading, responding, and writing I would have forever written preachy, clunky plays. Denise, you more than anyone, keep me accountable.

A big thank you to the Sánchez family (including my daughter Daniela, my parents, Albert and Christine, my brother Greg, my sister Margaret, and my brother-in-law Jim, and my nieces and cousins). You encourage me to go for it, without questions or doubts.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge two of my dear friends, Ruth and Sylvia. For the past three and a half years you have been very patient with me, excused my absences, and understood the journey. I am forever grateful for your support and camaraderie.
This essay articulates the creative process and artistic influences of two plays written by Rebecca M. Sánchez. The plays, Chatterbox and Re: Living are influenced by a variety of artists including Emilio Carballido and Maria Irene Fornes. Chatterbox details the ill fated love of Valentina and Marco. In both linear and memory sequences the audience can view the complexity of obsession, and the role of perception and memory in reality. Re: Living begins and ends with four university professors locked in a campus closet during an active shooter situation. This play address a normalized state of violence and emergency preparedness and compares this aggressive social overtone with small workplace relationships. An exploration of how time and space, character and relationship, and theme operate in each of the plays included. Finally, the essay describes new directions and creative possibilities for the playwright.
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Introduction

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

Art for Survival

Prior to enrollment in the MFA I had been studying artistic movements and creation across time and place. In a four-year project on Japanese Internment I discovered the art that was created in camps by Japanese Americans. This led me to consider how artistic creation is necessary not just for enjoyment, but for survival. The book What is Art For? by Ellen Dissanayake (1988), initiatives a thorough exploration of the question. As with any substantive question, the journey toward an adequate response becomes more convoluted, and littered with equally compelling sub-questions. Dissanayake, justifies art as a biological function of survival (1988). The bio-behavioral view is asserted in an attempt to examine the question from a broad-based evolutionary perspective. One clearly made assertion by Dissanayake is that art is ubiquitous – art, like sound, seems to transcend the human experience (1988).
Although sociologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists have examined what art does for people, Dissanayake describes ways in which the explanations do not account for other non-artistic activities that serve the same end (1988). Through a deeper examination of ritual and play in animals, including humans, we began to see the notion of “making special” emerge. In making special, an intentionality for something beyond function emerges (Dissanayake, 1988). This quality is part of the making of art, and also part of the artistic product. Not only do the arts exist across cultures, across time and place, but art creation is actually a sustaining feature of the human species.

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

The book A Director Prepares by Anne Bogart (2001), articulates some of my own journey into playwriting. The historical retracing of the American theatre in an early chapter explores the big questions associated with both culture and the American contribution to culture. The idea of being able to trace back, to draw upon or resist our
own cultural/artistic pedigree has been a fascinating engine in my own process, especially in thinking about artistic processes and artistic production.

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

On Process

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

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

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

2. Once I begin writing, the remainder of the writing time is a discovery process.
   
   Aspects of plot, character and spectacle emerge as I am writing. I understand more about what is going on in the play world only through writing.

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

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

**Overview of Essay**

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

¹ Though I do identify artistic influences in this dissertation, I am in no way holding up my work for a true comparison.
some of the artistic movements and themes that consistently present in my plays. I will then discuss two plays, *Chatterbox*, submitted as a culminating performance, and *Re:Living*, a play developed in my third year of the MFA program. I will describe how the artistic influences in the previous section dialogue with the plays. Finally, I will identify how other processes, research approaches, and new questions will guide my future artistic production.
Artistic Influences

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

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

**Emilio Carballido**

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

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

---

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

However, the purely instructional religious theatre was expanded because the Spanish had their own rich tradition of theatre and they attempted to create a similar way of life in Mexico/New Spain (Peden, 1980). As the Spanish established towns and municipalities under the auspices of the Spanish Crown, a different type of theatre was produced in the Americas. The Spanish leadership began to use theatre for entertainment purposes, to greet visiting dignitaries, for celebration, and for ceremony (Peden, 1980). So long before the Pilgrims were Plymouth Rocking, the European Spaniards were producing theatre in Mexico/New Spain. Indigenous groups claim a longer performance history in the region but much of their performative culture was transmitted orally. Mexico would not claim independence from Spain until 1821 (Chavez, 2006); therefore, under Spanish rule, all literary traditions established in Mexico/New Spain were based in the Peninsular. Literature, in all forms was initially
imported and once an emerging class of writers established in Mexico/New Spain they strictly adhered stylistically, linguistically, and theatrically to the Spanish tradition (Peden, 1980). Performances were staged using Castellan Spanish accentuation and pronunciation regardless of the fact that a new “Mexican” Spanish dialect had emerged in this place. Even after independence, the Spanish tradition remained intact in the theatre (Peden, 1980).

An early exception to this Spanish rooted and based theatre was found in the writing of Sor Juana Ines de La Cruz³, a seventeenth century dramatist and poet. Sor Juana was a brilliant (self-taught) scholar and author who deviated in form and style from the Spanish tradition (Peden, 1970; 1980; Prendergast, 2007). Self-selecting a convent in order to continue her education and writing, Sor Juana wrote some of the first literary works and plays that centuries later would warrant a feminist label (Prendergast, 2007). By the 1940’s Emilio Carballido would look to and credit Sor Juana as his spiritual and artistic “tap root” (Bogart, 2001). The following verse written by Sor Juana Ines de La Cruz is indicative her stance about women, a stance Carballido would later assume in his plays:

Hombres necios que acusáis
a la mujer sin razón,
sin ver que sois la ocasión
de lo mismo que culpáis:

[Silly, you men-so very adept

---

³ Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz was her name after entering the convent. She was initially Juana Asbaje.
at wrongly faulting womankind,
not seeing you're alone to blame
for faults you plant in woman's mind] (Juana Ines de La Cruz, 1999).

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

**Analysis of the body.** The writing of Carballido is extensive. Although Carballido
authored short stories and novels, his largest and most significant contribution is as a
playwright, with over 100 plays (Bixler, 1984a; 1984b; 1997; Peden, 1966; 1980).
Scholars have struggled to classify the work of Carballido because of the scope and
depth, diversity of form and genre, and also because the plays do not adhere to the
linear dichotomy of realism and fantasy (Bisset, 1990; Bixler, 1986; 1997; Peden 1968;
1980). Rather, Carballido’s realistic plays have elements of fantasy or elemental
innovation, and the fantasies often follow some realistic patterns. Some scholars argue
that some of the early works, such as *Rosalba y Los Llaveros*, are distinctly realistic
(Bixler, 1997), especially when compared to works such as *The Golden Thread* (three
separate one-acts functioning as a whole play); however, Carballido himself stated that he never authored realistic plays (Peden, 1980). Because of the scope, diversity of genre, and sheer magnitude, the remainder of this section will address some of the important decisions Carballido made as an author, which deviated from the long theatrical tradition in Mexico.

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

The women characters also use language in different ways to assume power (Cypress, 1984). In *Rosalba y los Llaveros*, Rosalba on a trip to visit rural relatives uses city language and speaks freely of all topics, even those considered taboo to women
(Carballido, 1950). In her open discussion of sexuality, power, and familial decision-making, she is cast as male; or in the sense of Mexican tradition, her language is what would be expected of male characters (Bixler, 1997; Cypress, 1984; Peden 1980). Through language, women also direct the action of the play. In Yo También, Hablo de la Rosa young Toña uses language to direct the male characters. She tells Polo how to steal coins from the phone booth, what sweets to buy from the vendor, and she also asserts herself verbally by expressing her opinion about another character’s girlfriend (Carballido, 1965). In this way, Toña directs the action not only of her own life, but she also impacts the lives of others. Through language, the female characters in the plays assume power that had previously not been seen on Mexican stages.

**Fantasy and realism.** Carballido’s plays also contain elements of realism and fantasy, in the same play. Carballido achieves this in different ways, and to different degrees. For example, he uses dreams, imagery, lighting, special effects, dance, music, unconventional relationships, and other non-human characters to “tell the story” of the play (1950; 1957; 1979; 1965). The past, present, and future are also reconfigured on stage to present multiple realities across time and space. Because of the utilization of non-linear, and non-realistic forms, scholars have commented on the influence of Artaud on Carballido’s work (Bixler, 1997; Peden, 1968). Even in the plays that appear largely realistic, certain characters emerge with muse-like or omniscient presence (Bixler, 1985). Merlin describes the ritual like nature of his realistic plays, moving the plays outside of strict categorical group of realism (Merlin, 2004). Rizk argues that the use of extremely large casts also adds to the sense of non-reality. Through the very act
of staging magnitude and population density on stage, something that is rarely done in theatre, realism is subverted (Rizk, 2010). Peden argues that his plays invoke the “senses” through the use of non-plot, theatrical elements (1968, pg. 133).

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

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

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

Yo Tambien, Hablo de la Rosa (I Too, Speak of the Rose) by Emilio Carballido (1969) presents the “story” of two young teenagers Toña and Polo, and their day of skipping school and atrevimiento. Atrevimiento, a word that does not have a direct English translation, refers to clever, forward, naughtiness. What seems clear is that Toña and Polo skip school. They visit the dump, find a large basin filled with concrete, and release the basin down a hill unto a train-track, thereby derailing the train. This act is seemingly motivated by a desire of the youth to see what will happen. During the remaining scenes, the actions of the children are retold and analyzed from different lenses: Freudian, Marxist, cultural depravation, familial deficit, anarchism, with staged pantomimes and recreations occurring simultaneously. This play is often described as Carballido’s most famous or significant work (Bixler, 1997; Peden, 1980). The play resides in a realm of reality and fantasy, and leaves the reader unsure of what exactly has happened. Plot itself is therefore implicated because all of the peripheral characters retell the basic plot and shape it with their own perceptions, biases, and interpretations. Bixler has used post-modernism to analyze the play because multiple realities exist on
stage (Bixler, 1997). Furthermore, the play includes interruptions throughout, which contribute to a disjointed feel and the audience is left without answers. The lyricism and beauty of the play is made stronger by the contrasting theoretical monologues included by positioned “scholars” and townspeople. The dream-like play’s reflection is the “reality” of non-reality.

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

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

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

**Maria Irene Fornes**

Maria Irene Fornes was born in 1930 and raised in Havana, Cuba. Her mother, a school teacher, and her father, a man of many jobs including Civil Service bureaucrat, were both wanderers at heart (Cummings, 2013). The family lived in poverty but their thinking was different. Fornes attributed some of their difference to books. In an interview with Kevin Kelly of the Boston Globe, Fornes said of her father and mother, “He read all the time, and my mother read all the time. And they would talk books, books, books, ideas, ideas, ideas” (Kelly, 1990). It was in this space, one valuing ideas over goods, that Fornes developed her curiosity and love of language. Her own learning was largely through experience. Inventiveness, curiosity, and experience became a hallmark of her work.
When Fornes was fifteen, she emigrated to New York City with her mother and sister. As a Spanish Speaking newly arrived, she utilized her time to work, and to begin an intense study of painting. Her work as a painter would later influence her attention to space and dimension in her theatrical work. On a study trip to Europe Fornes saw plays, performed in German. Fornes credits this trip to the theatre as having a profound impact on her work. In an interview later in life she recounted how despite the language barrier the meaning and feeling of the play was transmitted to her (Cummings, 2013).

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

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

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

*Abington Square*, set in the early part of the last century, does a fine job of critiquing the existing social order (then and now) with subtlety; there is minimal sensationalism or shock attacking to advance a complex story and present characters that don’t behave in the way society expects them to (Fornes, 2000). In the play, the use of generational difference, sexual inquisitiveness, literacy, and voyeurism add depth to the characters. Marion, the central character, is many things and her position changes relative to other characters. To Juster she is: pet, infant child, housemate, housekeeper, sexual interest (Fornes, 2000). She asserts her own sexual freedom with a worker and with Frank. *Abington Square* has a visceral attentiveness to action and Marion’s
predicament and duality of desire results in her living a maddening, trapped existence (Cummings, 2013).

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

**Discussion**

There is a tremendous amount of scholarship, literary criticism, and analysis on the work of Carballido and Fornes. The previous sections highlight some of the plays and the relevant scholarship. However, the plays also stand alone, as artistic products, not in need of analysis or active thought. The plays of both Carballido and Fornes are best experienced, as theatrical events, performed in time and space, or at a minimum, and in my case, read as creative works. In reading Carballido and Fornes I learn about growing and changing over the course of a career and a rejection of complacency. Both experimented with and manipulated form and content throughout their writing lives.
Carballido and Fornes cannot be easily classified because they were continually experimenting and changing. Their dynamic and prolific body of work is a testament to their own development over time. I am inspired with ideas about social class, gender, family relationships, friendship, compassion, jealousy, love and loss. I am encouraged to think about the different ways to use time, form, visual elements, and other spectacle to tell stories. In reading their work I am entertained and enraged, activated and calmed, confused and certain, in different ways and at different times. Their work makes me curious about things, and it also encourages me to let go of preconceived notions about what a play is.
The University, The Professor, and Politics

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

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

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

There are also political undertones embedded in my work. In my early plays the political states were pronounced and punctuated. In Chola Tripping, the characters boldly critiqued power structures and implicated identity politics in an overt way. However, the emotional lives of the characters were sacrificed for the overall political message. In more recent plays, though there is a definite politic, the delivery is more subtle. My plays continue to refer to power and access, but relationship has come to the fore. In Chatterbox, we see in the final reveal that the beloved author Canuto Morales, of “Border Macho” is actually a woman. One of the major critiques of the Chicano Movement largely, and the Chicano literary genre specifically, is that early generation Chicano writers were dismissive of women artists and activists. This small gesture addresses gender politics shaping a movement. Re: Living speaks to a larger culture in the United States of gun politics, the pervasiveness of random acts of violence, and the microcultures of aggression that are exacerbated within a larger context of violence. Though the active shooter is what gets the professors into the closet, I am again leaning in on relationships.
My characters are multi-aged, multi-ethnic, and overwhelmingly female. Is this a political choice, an artistic preference, or an unconscious result of my experience? Likely all three. In my other professional work I teach about representation, identity politics, and access. However, I am also not a twenty-two year old person and I am increasingly interested in attending plays that have more complicated relational dynamics between generations, genders, and ethnicities. In this way, my own writing is motivated by my own taste. Middle class problems are only interesting to me if there is other tension explored or revealed. I have grown up in a diverse environment and I appreciate the company of older and younger people, from different social classes and ethnic groups. When I reflect on my creative work thus far, I am encouraged with the political stance that is achieved when diverse characters, situations, and representations are included, however, I am still not fully aware of how to fully express meaning or reveal social order with subtlety. In *Chola Tripping* there is a conscious and deliberate attempt to point to hierarchy and alienation in elite educational environments, but the play also feels self conscious. As I have let go of the reins when I am writing, the characters themselves become their own agents, and even though I don’t always agree with who they are or what they represent, they exist more on their own terms than in my earlier writing.

I am curious about gender politics and I notice them playing out in interesting ways in my work. I tend to investigate how women relate to each other. In two of my plays the female characters are their own worst enemies. In *Chola Tripping* and *Re-Living*, the women harass each other, are highly critical, and don’t coalesce for a common good. I have at times witnessed a general lack of civility and a detrimental
competiveness among women in the university setting and it is reflected in the plays. I don’t attempt to represent all women or all views, but it is something I’m noticing in my work and leaves an opening for a feminist critique. After watching *Chola Tripping* one Latina friend was disturbed that the two Latina characters didn’t remain friends at the end of the play. Her point was that Latinas must always act in solidarity against both patriarchy and racism. This is a sound theoretical argument but it didn’t make sense for the creative work. I am less inclined these days to censor the words or deeds of the characters; they are made vulnerable to theoretical critique, but I don’t care. “To be decisive is violent” (Bogart, 2001, p. 46).
Chatterbox and Re:Living

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

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

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

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

Chatterbox

Chatterbox chronicles the relationship between Valentina, an effervescent and spirited kindergarten teacher and Marco, an uptight literary scholar and expert on the work of one reclusive Chicano writer. As Valentina struggles to assert herself in the relationship to become visible, Marco retreats more completely into the world of ideas. In a combination of linear scenes interspersed with vibrant memories, the play explores issues of love, the line between art and reality, obsession with the written word, and the impulse to live in the moment.
One of the literacy influences on Chatterbox is the novel *Hopscotch* by Argentinian author Julio Cortázar (Cortázar & Rabassa, 1966). Thematically, both *Chatterbox* and *Hopscotch* deal with obsession, fragmented story structure and doomed relationships. In *Hopscotch*, Cortázar directs the reader to approach the book in any order. Defying linear structure, *Hopscotch* encourages the reader to travel between worlds, realities, experiences and perceptions while also traversing distinct geographic landscapes (Cortázar & Rabassa, 1966).

**Time and Space.** The initial impulse while writing *Chatterbox* was to write a series of linear scenes and also a series of non-linear memory scenes. The linear scenes, taking place in the pastry shop provide a sequential view of the relationship between Valentina and Marco. The chatterbox scenes, or memory scenes, were initially intended to be interchangeable and manipulated by the narrator with the chatterbox. The thought was that the scenes might be more thematically punctuated if they, like memories, were manipulated. However, after several public readings, respondents reacted positively to the order of the script as presented so I set the script in this order. However, I am still interested in viewing the play in a different order. I think this would contribute to a liveness and sense of immediacy with the actors. While *Chatterbox* is not a piece of Epic theatre, the self-sustaining quality of the scenes, especially the titled memory chatterbox scenes, it does have an Epic Theatre quality (Brecht & Willett, 1964). Brecht describes, “…with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable
of life” (Brecht, 1964, p. 70). The chatterbox scenes can operate as disjointed stand-alone scenes.

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

The pastry shop is the site of the linear action in the play. The pastry shop, like the Paris of Hopscotch, serves as the place of intellectual life for the play (Tcherepashenets, 2008). In the pastry shop Marco and Jacob control the conversational discourse and Valentina struggles to participate in a meaningful way. Jacob acts as a translator in the pastry shop, negotiating discourse between Valentina and Marco. Valentina differs from Cortázar’s La Maga, in that in the pastry shop, the center of intellectual life, she is alienated and displaced (Tcherepashenets, 2008). Valentina’s lines are a pattern of attack and defense. Marco frequently talks over her or discredits her contributions while Jacob negotiates the verbal landscape to create room for Valentina’s contributions. Canuto Morales is the unseen present character in the pastry shop. Marco reads from his book “Border Macho” and uses Canuto to speak for him. Because we later learn that Patsy is Canuto Morales, we get Patsy’s voice in the pastry shop, and she directs the opening of the chatterbox scenes.
The chatterbox scenes with Valentina and Marco are characterized by a different kind of tempo. While they are each more relaxed and less combative, we see the secrets of the relationship revealed. In the Valentina recounts memories and actively and passively shares her deepest needs and desires. Marco, on the other hand, uses literature and the work of Canuto Morales to express his emotions. At other times, in the privacy of their own home, Marco gives in to Valentina. It is not through spoken language that this occurs. His gestures, which are small overtures, are significant. He dances with Valentina in one scene, in another, he combs and braids her hair.

Valentina directs the world outside the pastry shop. Her energy and vitality are more deeply actualized when she occupies space outside. She can direct the conversation and her words are peppered with action. For example, Valentina eats paletas and turns cartwheels in the opening scene at the museum. She physically and verbally drives the conversation and demonstrates that she is a person of action. These bodied experiences reveal a woman who is not only occupying an emotional and intellectual space but she approaches the world with her body and her senses. Valentina’s feelings and desires drive the chatterbox scenes. We see how she relates to Marco, but also how her sister and mother, both described as strict, have impacted her. Her physical presence commands the stage and she is a person in action. In the scene titled “Raw Meat,” her state of grief has her physically frozen and immobile, it is in this state and posture that we see a more complicated type of physicality in the rigid stance.

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

**Character and Relationship.** Marco is also modeled after Oliveira, the protagonist in *Hopscotch*. For a portion of the novel, Oliveira, a writer living the bohemian lifestyle in Paris, is in a significant relationship with La Maga. It is only after La Maga and Oliveira split that he realizes the magnitude of both her and the relationship. His intellectual pursuits become halted and his obsession germinates. In subsequent or other sections of the book he is missing La Maga, and obsessively searching for her in literal and figurative ways (Cortázar & Rabassa, 1966). In *Chatterbox*, Marco shares some of these obsessive qualities, but in his case, he is dedicating his life to the study of one author. While he has the potential for a more vibrant human relationship with Valentina, and also with his confidante Jacob, his most intimate desires are satiated with literature. He is awakened to Valentina’s presence only in her absence, and then, he replaces her as the object of his obsession.
Chatterbox differs from *Hopscotch* in that the protagonist is not the obsessed; rather the narrative is guided by Valentina, who is vying for Marco’s attention. In some ways, Valentina is trapped in a love relationship with unreciprocated intentionality. In the first scene she explains that she wants oatmeal in a man, and Marco fits the bill. The complexity of wants versus needs when it comes to love are explored and become central to the journeys of Marco and Valentina. Valentina loves Marco, but he leaves her need for intimacy, spontaneity, and action unfulfilled.

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

Both Valentina and Marco have mentors of an older generation. Representing intergenerational dynamics is a long interest of mine, partly rooted in personal taste, but also influenced by the intergenerational characters in Carballido’s plays (Carballido, 1965, 1984). The mentors, Patsy and Jacob share some attributes: wisdom, compassion, and interest in the present. Yet, there are two distinct relationship structures with the pairs. Jacob and Marco have time and longevity, but there is a lack of intimacy in their relationship. This becomes clear when Jacob tells Marco he accompanies his wife to the
golf course every week. Marco, unaware of this detail after twenty years of friendship, is not emotionally vested in his mentor. His focus is on a literary and intellectual relationship based on mutual company and routine.

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

**Theme.** *Chatterbox* employs a narrator throughout the play. The narrator, speaking directly to the audience, introduces each of the chatterbox/memory scenes. The purpose of the narrator is two-fold. Her narrations contribute the obvious visual life in the play. I wanted to experiment with the idea of someone describing or filtering what the audience sees. In narrating what is seen, and also in expanding what the audience sees with a rich metaphorical vocabulary, certain whimsical or emotionally relevant content can be punctuated. This technique, often employed in Latin American cinema, is also present in plays. Brechtian epic theatre relies on narrators as a tool in revealing the apparatus of theatre and in order to break the fourth wall (Brecht & Willett, 1964). In *Yo Tambien Hablo de la Rosa,* a Medium interrupts the narrative sequence and deviates from the action of the train incident to introduce philosophical poems about the nature of meaning, the mystery of truth, and the possibility of reality. In this series of seemingly disjointed monologues the Medium speaks in lyrical discontinuity and invites the audience to engage in complexity and profundity
(Carballido, 1965). As this is my favorite play, I enjoy toying with the idea of a larger force commenting on the action while at the same time, revealing small insights about the characters and in doing so, revealing the apparatus of the theatre (Brecht & Willett, 1964).

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

**Re: Living**

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

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

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

**Character and Relationship.** Maricela, a combative Chicana feminist is surrounded by three other colleagues: Janice, a strong and disciplined leader; Andrew, a pre-tenured Casanova; and Laura, a new faculty member and quasi-Christian with
questionable research ethics. While in the closet their default personality traits are solidified, and the characters relive their best and worst selves. Reminded of their own mortality, the group begins a series of life confessions and storytelling bringing them closer together. This closeness is interrupted when the history of the group is revealed. As the play crashes toward an ambiguous ending, the four professors return to their hostile relationships.

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

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

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

Two other time based structural elements are at work in the play. In the opening scene of the play, Maricela reads a popular children’s circular book. The book, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Numeroff was rewritten to start the play (Numeroff, & Bond, 1985). This book was chosen because as I considered the bake-off ingredients, specifically the idea of time repeating itself, the book popped into my head. I decided to write a scene opening with a re-written version of this book that could be played forward and backward. I therefore repeat the opening scene at the end of the play but it is played in reverse. Writing a scene that can play in reverse while still making sense scene was an additional challenge and interest of mine. Re-living the scene in reverse at the end of the play adds an ominous dimension of time repetition to the play. The book *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* becomes a controlling metaphor for the play as well. The children’s book lands the reader at the starting point by the end of the text and in the play we end too end re-living the beginning.
Another structural element related to time in the play is the flashback scene.
This is deliberately added in the middle of the play to disrupt the linear narration of the
story and to deactivate the ticking clock. It is only in going back in time that the full
narrative arc of each character and their respective relationships can be revealed. More
importantly, the audience has both a temporal and spatial distance from the pending
doom.

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

Gregory S. Moss’ play Reunion (2014) also planted the idea of a single room
setting with a continuous clock ticking. After viewing a production of Reunion I reflected
on the satisfying tension, irony and pace that is established within the parameters of
confined space and continuous action. Re: Living does break from continuous action.
This aspect, initially included as a bake-off has become a crucial point of tension release for the time element of the play.
Conclusion

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

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

Theatre is not only time bound, but also spatially determined. The visual arts have always been appealing to me and I welcome the opportunity to integrate visual elements into a play. The stage as a container requires considerations that differ from
creating for film. The ability to see the space and mark it with artifacts, effects, lighting, and sound is a welcome challenge. I have chosen to work as a writer for theatre because I want to produce art bound by time and space; working in this genre I feel the potential for generating endless, rich compilations of visual, linguistic, and multisensory text for a live audiences.

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

Second, I want to continue writing verbatim plays based on interviews with those involved in specific contemporary issues. Theatre and performance can offer a different lens from which to dialogue about difficult to discuss topics. Working in the verbatim form is particularly challenging because assemblage is crucial to maintaining the necessary balance between information and entertainment. Recently my play This Scarlet F: A Performance on School Grading has expanded a conversation between community members, policy makers, parents, educational scholars, and teachers about
the unintended consequences of school grading and other punitive educational policies. Research and teaching tasks associated with my position as a professor have been a source of inspiration and have contributed to my creative production. I am determined to more carefully fuse the work of a researcher with the work of a creative artist. I must say that I fully intend to more fully invest in fiction.

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

Rebecca M. Sánchez
1821 Georgia NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110
(505) 917-3435
sanchezr@unm.edu
CHARACTERS:

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

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

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

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

As Patsy/Narrator provides narration on Chatterbox scenes she is seated in a section of the stage not used for the Chatterbox scene.
La vida es un sueño. They say life is a dream. Not like a dream, but a dream. An actual dream. But life is also like popcorn, sometimes bursting with potential, at other times, left dry and hard at the bottom of the bowl, unpopped, un-actualized. Life is like a piano, what you get depends on how you play it. Life is like a mountain, difficult to climb but worth it in the end for the view. You get what I’m saying.

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

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

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

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

Blackout.

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

VALENTINA

Why are you following me?

MARCO

I have no idea.
VALENTINA
You’ve been creeping around all over the museum. I’m gonna call the cops.

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

VALENTINA
Why would I/

MARCO
We have things in common.

VALENTINA
Like/

MARCO
We both enjoy museums.

VALENTINA
What else?

MARCO
You seem to like teaching, and I like teaching.

VALENTINA
So you’re a teacher.

MARCO
College, not kids, but still.

VALENTINA
When’s this drink supposed to happen?

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

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

MARCO
It’s three-thirty in the afternoon.
VALENTINA

I’m off the clock.

MARCO

I was going to get your number, and/

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

I don’t want to go back there.

VALENTINA

Then here. On the grass.

Valentina spreads her sweater on the grass and sits.

MARCO

I was thinking more of a pub, or/

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

This isn’t what I/

VALENTINA

You get hibiscus and we can share.

MARCO

Share a popsicle? We’ve only just met.

VALENTINA

But they’re both so good.
MARCO
Uhhh, would you happen to have cash?

VALENTINA
What?

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

VALENTINA
I’ll buy, this time/

MARCO
I feel like a dumbass, I invited you/

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

MARCO
Fair enough.

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

VALENTINA
What’s your name?

MARCO
Marco.

VALENTINA
Polo!

MARCO
What?

VALENTINA
Nevermind. Good to meet you, Marco. I’m Valentina.

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

You look comfortable.

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

Green is good for the brain.

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

Literature.

Fun. I love reading.

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

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

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

The grandma that made moonshine?

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

How is that like me?

Watching you in the museum, with kids climbing all over you, looking at art, seemed exaggerated. Like that insurmountable pile.
VALENTINA
I think Border Macho is good, but kind of overrated.

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

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

MARCO
He redefined Machismo to include random acts of compassion.

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

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

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

I never thought about it/

VALENTINA
Give me a bite.

MARCO
Just a little one.

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

MARCO
Here? But you’re in a skirt.

VALENTINA
I can’t resist, not with this grass.

Valentina begins doing cartwheels. Her skirt flares out around her like a Spanish fan. In each cartwheel she is all ages, innocent girl,
blooming adolescent, confident woman, the cycle of life in each flip.

Not bad for an old lady right?

Valentina grabs her popsicle.

You’re just being nice. Your turn.

I can’t do a cartwheel.

Because you’re embarrassed?

I don’t know how.

I’ll show you.

But I can do headstands.

Really?

Usually I do them against a wall,

I’ll hold your legs.

What about this?

He gestures to popsicle.

Valentina grabs his popsicle.

I’ve never done headstands in public/
VALENTINA
It’ll be fun. Celebrate the start of summer with courage.

MARCO
Okay. Hold this/

VALENTINA
Lick off the melty part first...

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

MARCO
I can’t believe I’m doing this.

VALENTINA
Blame it on the grass/

MARCO
I’m gonna blame it on you!

Marco is in a contained headstand.

VALENTINA
You’re good.

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

VALENTINA
You do gymnastics or something?

MARCO
No, but I go to the gym.

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

Valentina releases his legs and he gets into an upright position. She hands him her popsicle.
MARCO
You’ve given me your paleta.

VALENTINA
Only for a minute. It’s nice to trade sometimes.

MARCO
I do cardio and some weight lifting.

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

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

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

MARCO
I’m sure not all artists and/

VALENTINA

MARCO
Sounds terrible.

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

MARCO
So what is your ideal/

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

MARCO
Mature. You want mature.
VALENTINA
I want an adult. Someone with integrity. Like my grandfather. He was good and strong and wholesome.

MARCO
Wholesome?

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

MARCO
So oatmeal. You’re looking for oatmeal.

VALENTINA
There’s nothing wrong with oatmeal.

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

VALENTINA
It’s not boring.

MARCO
That’s what it sounds like.

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

MARCO
Butterflies are code for?

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

MARCO
I haven’t eaten a popsicle in years.

VALENTINA
You should make it a habit.

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

When are you buying me that coffee?

MARCO

Tomorrow morning?

VALENTINA

What about classes and grading,

MARCO

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

What time?

MARCO

Anytime. I’ll be there all day.

VALENTINA

And if you’re not?

MARCO

I’m there everyday.

VALENTINA

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

Valentina leaves the stage doing a series of cartwheels.

End Scene.

Pastry Shop
One

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

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

VALENTINA

They all look so good today.

Marco reads from a book.

MARCO

“There were no embraces... where there is great love there is often little display of it.” Really? This is some advanced cliché shit.

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

I’m guessing the translator is augmenting

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

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

He throws the book on the coffee table.

VALENTINA

You criticize everything I give you.

MARCO

What’d you like about this book?

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

The cover?

VALENTINA

Look at it.

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

No.
VALENTINA

Hell no.

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

JACOB

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

VALENTINA

God this chocolate éclair is to die for.

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

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

JACOB

You’re reacting to a translation.

VALENTINA

Ummmm.

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

Taste this Marco.

MARCO

It looks/

VALENTINA

Oozy?

MARCO

No. Deflated.

VALENTINA

Just a small bite/
It’s good.

VALENTINA

Like...

MARCO

Tastes like they always do.

JACOB

That’s the sign of quality.

VALENTINA

The cream is better than usual.

MARCO

I can’t taste it.

VALENTINA

It’s cuz you’re not paying attention/

JACOB

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

VALENTINA

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

JACOB

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

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

Morales wrote his last novel.

MARCO

Yeah.

VALENTINA

We know already.
JACOB
That's loyalty.

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

MARCO
Give me another bite then and I’ll tell you/

Buy your own.

VALENTINA
You don’t appreciate anything. Always obsessing over dead people.

MARCO
Canuto Morales isn’t dead.

JACOB
You know who makes the best éclairs?

MARCO
Bite Shop Bakery.

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

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

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

MARCO
Lay off. He’s working on it.
VALENTINA
He’s probably in some little room with dingy curtains waiting for a royalty check with atrophied hands.

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

MARCO
That kind of thinking takes some serious time/

JACOB
And life experience/

VALENTINA
How does he experience life if he’s hiding out?

MARCO
How did Gramsci write about liberation when incarcerated?

VALENTINA
So you’re not going to read the book?

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

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

MARCO
No.

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

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

She sits on his lap.

VALENTINA
I miss you.
MARCO
You know where to find me.

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

MARCO
I’m searching for a university position.

VALENTINA
And?

MARCO
No new listings.

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

MARCO
I’m a scholar babe. I think.

JACOB
I knew Marco when he wrote fiction/

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

JACOB
Some people do both/

MARCO
But not well.

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

MARCO
I wouldn’t be caught dead authoring a short story.

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

JACOB
Don’t knock the short story.
MARCO
I’m a novel guy. But really, let’s say I would’ve become a writer. Do you think I’d still be sitting in this café today? Barely scraping by...constantly looking for work to supplement my income.

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

MARCO
Would I be different?

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

MARCO
Did I make the right decision or the wrong decision/

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

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

JACOB
That kind of writing existed for its own sake.

MARCO
Exactly, an intimate expression of imagination without censorship.

JACOB
And the lack of restraint visible in the accompanying drawings.

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

JACOB
Pure indulgence!

VALENTINA
They’ll provide night vision goggles.
Valentina rises and stretches with the exuberance of a baby tiger and the grace of a lion.

Jacob watches with interest as she yawns with intense satisfaction.

MARCO
Where’re you going?

VALENTINA
Work/

MARCO
I’ll miss you, I like when you’re close.

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

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

VALENTINA
Whatever, loco.

JACOB
I think Val’s wrong.

MARCO
And the cream in the middle.

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

MARCO
No?

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

MARCO
But I can reflect on what others say.
JACOB
And that my friend, is what separates you from the monkeys.

VALENTINA
I like the way monkeys do it better.

Valentina leaves the pastry shop.

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:
Birthday Wishes

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

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

MARCO
What do you want for your birthday?

VALENTINA
A baby.

MARCO
Besides that.

VALENTINA
Two babies.

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

VALENTINA
We can raise a family together Marco.
I’m too old for that

You’re only 40.

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

I’d do most of the work

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

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

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

I’d be a good mother.

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

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

It’d be different.

Our baby would be so cute.

You’re talking like those teen moms on TV that just want to hold something adorable
VALENTINA
I want to make a baby with the person I love. That’s a normal thing.

MARCO
We’re not even married.

VALENTINA
We don’t have to be/

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

VALENTINA
They’re not mine.

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

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

MARCO
I’ve been honest about this since we met.

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

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

VALENTINA
Is this about money?

MARCO
I have all the money I need.

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

MARCO
I have a job offer Val.
VALENTINA
You do?

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

VALENTINA
At the community college?

MARCO
Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

MARCO
I can’t have kids.

VALENTINA
But you would really like/

MARCO
No. I mean, I really can’t have kids. I/

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

MARCO
I had a vasectomy.
VALENTINA
Wait, what? For your wife? Or, why would you do that anyway? You’re young.

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

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

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

VALENTINA
They loved all of you.

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

VALENTINA
Trapped. Stuck!

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

VALENTINA
What a pessimistic view of relationships/

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

VALENTINA
You should’ve told me sooner.

MARCO
I did, but you weren’t listening.
VALENTINA
You didn’t say it like this, like about a procedure, or this whole/

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

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

MARCO
I didn’t want you to think less of me.

VALENTINA
Less?

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

VALENTINA
This is the second time this has happened to me/

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

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

MARCO
Do you know how hard it is for men?

VALENTINA
Fucking liars. Both of you.

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

VALENTINA
I hate liars.
MARCO  
I wanted you to want me, as a lover, and/

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

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

Yeah.

VALENTINA  
Sorry.

You are a sorry motherfucker.

MARCO  
Let me take you on a trip for your birthday.

I don’t want a trip.

VALENTINA  
Before the semester starts.

To Argentina?

MARCO  
I was thinking more like California.

VALENTINA  
Not California. I want dance lessons.

What?

MARCO  
For my birthday.
MARCO
But you already know how to dance.

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

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

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

MARCO
A dance isn’t exactly making, and I’m awkward

VALENTINA
It’ll be fun.

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

VALENTINA
It’s my birthday.

MARCO
Teach me here.

VALENTINA
I want to dance with you in public.

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

VALENTINA
You’ll do it?

MARCO
Four lessons but you give me one here first.

VALENTINA
I have to give you lessons before you take lessons?
MARCO
Don’t interrogate me or I’ll change my mind.

OKAY. LET ME SHOW YOU

MARCO
Don’t count on me being good.

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

That’s rewarding!

VALENTINA
Stop looking down.

MARCO
Ok.

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

MARCO
You.

VALENTINA
This isn’t a thinking exercise.

MARCO
I won’t dance with anyone else.

VALENTINA
I don’t trust you.

MARCO
It feels good to hold you.

VALENTINA
You’re going to want to go dancing every weekend.
MARCO
No. Four lessons will be fine.

VALENTINA
But you’re enjoying yourself/

MARCO
I’m enjoying you.

VALENTINA
You’ll get really good and we can enter contests.

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

VALENTINA
We can go to those weekend dance events.

MARCO
Let’s have the dancing teacher come here.

VALENTINA
No, dancing is a communal thing.

MARCO
Will you dance with other men?

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

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

VALENTINA
You’d let me put a blade to your throat?

MARCO
I trust you.

VALENTINA
Your face will be smooth as a baby’s.
MARCO
You can close your eyes, touch my face, and pretend I’m the baby you’ve dreamed of.

VALENTINA
Not the same.

End Scene

Pastry Shop
Two

Same pastry shop.

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

VALENTINA
Oh no.

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

Hide me.

JACOB
What is it?

VALENTINA
I used to date that guy at the counter.

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

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

VALENTINA
I taught his kid.

JACOB
You date parents?
VALENTINA
Yes. I did. If they’re available, and I like them.

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

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

VALENTINA
I knew he and his wife were having problems.

MARCO
Predator.

VALENTINA
Do you wanna judge or do you wanna listen?

JACOB
Listen.

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

MARCO
You stepped in on a grieving, postsurgical woman?

JACOB
Shhh.

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

MARCO
Are you really telling this story?

The man at the register leaves the shop.

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

MARCO
Bradley?

VALENTINA
He was missing the feel of real ones.

JACOB
How did he know yours are real?

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

MARCO
Why are we having this conversation in a pastry shop?

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

MARCO
How honorable.

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

JACOB
Did you tell your principal about this affair?

VALENTINA
You two get hung up on the strangest details.

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

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

JACOB
Did you?
VALENTINA

I’m a professional.

MARCO

I question your ethics/

JACOB

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

VALENTINA

I asked his wife Jenna if she still loved him.

MARCO

How altruistic.

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

There are so many problems with this story.

JACOB

So you sent him back to her?

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

Are boobs and breasts interchangeable to you?

VALENTINA

Breasts are medical, boobs are practical.

MARCO

You say things/

VALENTINA

And I mean them.

MARCO

I can’t believe I love a woman who dated a parent.
VALENTINA
You’re back on that! He was a consenting adult.

MARCO
I have doubts about you...your appropriateness.

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

MARCO
Don’t make excuses for bad behavior.

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

MARCO
You dated that business guy/

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

MARCO
I want you to learn how to behave.

VALENTINA
You only like me from a distance.

MARCO
Shut up.

JACOB
When you use the word distance are you speaking philosophically?

MARCO
She doesn’t engage with philosophy or psychology.

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

MARCO
She shoots her mouth off,

JACOB
But there are little gems in there. Makes me want to delve back into discourse analysis.
She’s only thinking of what’s right in front of her.

Don’t disregard so quickly.

Like a newborn baby.

I’m outta here.

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

She can’t. So she’s leaving.

Cute.

And you can kiss her ass.

Vulgar beast.

I think you are underestimating that woman of yours.

You can’t own another human.

That’s right! You’ll never own me!

End Scene
Chatterbox Scene:
Raw Meat

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

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

MARCO
How long have you been sitting there?

VALENTINA
All day.

MARCO
No work then.

VALENTINA
Not today.

MARCO
And you’ve been crying.

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

MARCO
You said you wanted steak tonight/

VALENTINA
I thought of all the cows on the planet.

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

MARCO
You don’t have to eat a steak/

VALENTINA
Just today.

MARCO
I’m going to get you some water.

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

MARCO
I’m bringing you a pill too.

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

MARCO
You don’t have to take it, but/

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

MARCO
It might make you feel better.

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

MARCO
You don’t have to think about forever right now.

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

MARCO
It’s a personal choice/
I should have done it for her.

You can become a vegetarian now.

She’ll never know.

But maybe it will make you feel better.

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

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

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

How long has your hair been in that towel?

Hours.

It’s going to be tangled.

I know.

Here.

Marco removes the towel. Valentina is frozen. The body, mind, heart, spirit, all frozen. Even her hair is frozen, looking like a matted birds nest on top of her head.
VALENTINA
I’m sorry Marco, you don’t have to deal with this.

MARCO
Let me comb your hair./

VALENTINA
You should leave me,

MARCO
Tell me if I pull you.

Marco begins to comb her hair.

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

I can braid it for you. If you want.

VALENTINA
Nobody likes a grieving girl,

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

I wouldn’t even judge you.

MARCO
Stop talking. Or I can leave it down.

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

We’re not ending

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

That's not why I’m here.
VALENTINA

We don’t love each other,

MARCO

I care deeply for/

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

You called her voicemail again, didn’t you?

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

It wrecks you every time/

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

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

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

VALENTINA

I miss her.

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

His name is Pato.

VALENTINA

I egged her on, ordering rare burgers just to annoy her/
MARCO
And he’s like a genius, but nobody knows it/

VALENTINA
I didn’t know a car would slam into her/

MARCO
So he goes through life observing everything/

VALENTINA
I keep wondering if it was painful for her.

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

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

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

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

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

Pause

VALENTINA
You can’t turn a person gay/

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

VALENTINA
Don’t tell me sad stories/

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

VALENTINA
There must have been another cause/
MARCO
His mother tells the priest she would’ve preferred a sissy boy to what the man becomes.

VALENTINA
Thank you for combing my hair.

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

VALENTINA
He seems like a coward to me.

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

VALENTINA
Only weinies are afraid of intimacy.

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

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

MARCO
I’m not leaving you.

VALENTINA
I would leave me.

End Scene

Pastry Shop
Three

The pastry shop.

Marco is holding his beloved. A first edition print copy of the book *Border Macho*. It is old and showing its age, but he handles it like a mother would a baby.
Valentina is stretched in a comfy chair weaving in and out of a nap. Jacob, is there as usual, but we don’t usually notice his presence.

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

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

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

VALENTINA
Church pinches were the worst.

MARCO
But this is the part. My next chapter, hell, maybe even my next book, is going to be all about analyzing this passage. 
_With both hands Pato clenched the rosary and began to twist the beads. The more he twisted the better he felt. As the two beads got closer and closer to each other the string went from taut to strained. The tension made it increasingly untwistable. But he persisted until the tension was too much and the string gave out, split. Twist. Twist. Twist harder. Pop. The feeling of the twisting, the tension, and the final breaking point didn’t get old. Twist. Twist. Twist harder. Pop. By the end of mass he had a pocket filled with 59 beads, and a cross._ (pause)
I can’t believe I’ve been ignoring this passage for years.

VALENTINA
I ruined so many rosaries like that.

MARCO
I thought analyzing the religious stuff would be reaching for low hanging fruit.
JACOB
So if not religion, in what direction will you take it?

MARCO
Good. So it’s not obvious.

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

MARCO
No. It’s sexual in nature.

JACOB
Hmm. Twist, twist, pop/

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

VALENTINA
You’re wrong/

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

VALENTINA
All kids love to twist like that.

JACOB
He’s got this cheap thing/

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

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

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

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

Tactile immediacy?

VALENTINA

Yes.

MARCO

Is this some of your child psychology psychobabble?

VALENTINA

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

JACOB

I’m not catholic.

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

This passage isn’t about that.

VALENTINA

Or scabs. Why do children pick off scabs?

JACOB

They do love scab picking don’t they.

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

Now you’re really reaching/

JACOB

What about biting nails, is that tactile immediacy?

MARCO

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

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

JACOB

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

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

You’re being childish.

VALENTINA

We all make our own meaning.

JACOB

Does Canuto mention anything further about the rosary?

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

Read it!

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

Insignificant?

MARCO

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

JACOB

You think Canuto Morales made a mistake in including it?
MARCO
He has to find a way to close out the rosary passage. Perhaps in bringing the rosary back, we get a follow-up image, you know, leading us to the bedroom.

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

MARCO
This has nothing to do with the mother.

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

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

VALENTINA
Then why does the mother get the last word?

MARCO
She doesn’t.

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

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

MARCO
I don’t want to talk about this with you.

VALENTINA
Fine.

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

JACOB
How will you shape your analysis Marco/

VALENTINA
And the mother has magic vision! She’s a superhero.
I said I didn’t want to talk about this with you.

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

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

How convenient. What a pussy.

God, woman! I’m going to work.

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

Stop poking Valentina.

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

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

But he’s wrong.

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:
Glitter and Sprinkles

Once I told a story to the family and the entire time my mother contradicted me. She kept saying, “it didn’t happen that way.” Then she would tell the story her way. It was like we were telling two completely different stories about the same day.
Valentina is surrounded by cookies. She is rolling dough, using a cookie cutter, making icing, and adding sprinkles. It is a lively scene, a party. The wonder of childhood is in the room with Valentina and all those cookies.

PATSY
How many of these are you making?

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

PATSY
Want help?

VALENTINA
Why don’t you do sprinkles.

PATSY
I don’t want them to look ugly.

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

PATSY
That’s true, but yours are kind of gorgeous.

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

PATSY
But then the kids would miss out on your teaching/

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

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

PATSY
And it’s getting worse.

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

PATSY
And?

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

PATSY
You have to be kidding me.

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

PATSY
You really had this conversation in a school?

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

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

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

PATSY
You’re inspiring me to write short story.
VALENTINA
Nobody wants to read about teachers.

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

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

PATSY
Bruja.

VALENTINA
I don’t even care really.

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

VALENTINA
Yeah right.

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

VALENTINA
Patsy.

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

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

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

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

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

How embarrassing.

PATSY

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

VALENTINA

You’ve been a real friend Patsy.

PATSY

I didn’t expect it, that’s for sure.

VALENTINA

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

PATSY

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

No.

VALENTINA

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

I can’t do it.

PATSY

It?

VALENTINA

Date younger men.

PATSY

Oh, I’m sure you could.

VALENTINA

They wouldn’t get me.

PATSY

They’d be crawling all over you.
VALENTINA
I can’t get over the age barrier, and also because of, Monica Lewinsky.

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

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

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

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

PATSY
They can look it up on Wikipedia.

VALENTINA
Not the same as experiencing it in real time.

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

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

PATSY
You won’t give blow jobs/

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

PATSY
You’re a baby.
VALENTINA
And I’m an idiot. The whole country knew he was lying except for me. I believed the President.

PATSY
You believed him?

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

PATSY
Maybe not all younger men expect blowjobs.

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

PATSY
You lost faith.

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

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

VALENTINA
See!

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

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

PATSY
But maybe/

VALENTINA
I have to date people in my age group because of shared history.
PATSY
I guess it’s like when I talk with my lover about Nixon getting impeached.

VALENTINA
Or even 9/11.

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

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

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

VALENTINA
True.

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

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

PATSY
No requests for blowjobs?

VALENTINA
No.

PATSY
Never?

VALENTINA
Not once.

PATSY
Pass the sprinkles.

End Scene
Pastry Shop

Four

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

Jacob is reading the paper.

JACOB

New memoir by Carson Gaines.

MARCO

I read a review. (silence)

JACOB

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

MARCO

Seems like an oxymoron. (silence)

JACOB

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

MARCO

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

MARCO

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

JACOB

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

MARCO

I’ve lost my copy of/

JACOB

I know you told me yesterday.

MARCO

Sorry if I’m redundant!
And the day before.

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

It’s going to turn up.

I’ve looked everywhere.

You wanna borrow my copy?

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

You use it?

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

Oh come on. It’s about the content.

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

Like those biblebangers,

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

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

I can’t help wonder if Valentina hid it from me.
Why would she do that?

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

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

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

You’ll know soon enough.

Yeah. She should be here by now.

No airport?

Cab’s just easier.

Not really. It’s not a big deal to/

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

Fine.

Anyway, she drove.

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

Oh she likes to stop in little towns, visit antique shops, you know how she is.
JACOB
You passed up a roadtrip with Valentina?

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

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

MARCO
Goddamnit!

JACOB
What now?

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

JACOB
It’s a whole chapter.

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

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

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

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

MARCO
What? You think there’ll be a position?

Enter Valentina.
VALENTINA
Hello, hello! I’m back.

JACOB
Thank god!

MARCO
I can’t find my first edition, Canuto Morales.

VALENTINA
I missed you too.

JACOB
Did you see everything you intended?

VALENTINA
And then some.

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

JACOB
I made a few stops.

MARCO
I told you.

VALENTINA
The sky was to die for coming over the mountain.

JACOB
Raton Pass or through Glorieta/

VALENTINA
Both really. But I was thinking about Glorieta.

JACOB
That’s one of my favorite spots.

VALENTINA
I was just cloud watching. I saw this one cloud that looked exactly like George Washington.
MARCO
I can’t find Border Macho.

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

MARCO
Did you hide my book?

VALENTINA
I always see things in the clouds.

VALENTINA
So not lost without me?

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

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

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

VALENTINA
I met Canuto Morales.

JACOB
Haven’t we all.
MARCO
You didn’t mess with any of my markings did you!

VALENTINA
I didn’t even open the thing.

MARCO
Can you please hand it over?

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

MARCO
Canuto doesn’t respond to letters

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

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

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

MARCO
I don’t believe it.

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

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

JACOB
In Santa Fe!

MARCO
This is foolishness.
JACOB
Is he totally old?

VALENTINA
No. About your age Jacob.

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

JACOB
So my age. He’s my age.

VALENTINA
More or less.

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

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

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

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

MARCO
What’d you do when you got there?

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

MARCO
Sign my book.

VALENTINA
As a birthday gift, for you Marco.

JACOB
It’s your birthday?
MARCO
My birthday’s not for another 5 months.

VALENTINA
But still, I never know what to give you.

MARCO
Are you pulling my leg?

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

JACOB
And did he say anything about the rosary scene/

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

MARCO
You let it go.

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

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

VALENTINA
Happy birthday Marco. I hope you like it.

MARCO
My book.

JACOB
What does the inscription say? Or is it personal/

VALENTINA
I haven’t read it. I wanted it to be a surprise.

JACOB
Marco?

MARCO
It says, Marco- Literature is to the wise, as music is to the deaf. Walk in love, Canuto.
JACOB
What does that mean?

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

JACOB
The wise don’t need literature?

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

JACOB
I think it’s the other way around.

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

JACOB
Aren’t you going to weigh in on this Valentina?

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

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

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

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

JACOB
Why so sad?

VALENTINA
I’m tired I guess.

MARCO
Valentina, thank you. For the book, for writing the letter, for persisting, it’s so unexpected.
VALENTINA
I wanted to get your attention.

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

VALENTINA
I mean what can you buy for a guy that/

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

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

MARCO
You’re right. It’s the text itself that matters.

VALENTINA
But I’ve played my last card.

MARCO
You better not be pulling my leg with this autograph...it’s not a fake right?

VALENTINA
I’m leaving Marco.

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

VALENTINA
I’m not going home.

MARCO
Where are you going?

VALENTINA
I’m moving out.

JACOB
Moving out!

MARCO
Why would you/
VALENTINA
We’re not a good match. This is a relationship of convenience. I want to climb mountains, and plant tomatoes with my man.

MARCO
I was kidding. I don’t think this signature is fake.

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

MARCO
You never eat spinach?

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

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

JACOB
I’m going to give you some privacy.

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

MARCO
You’re tired from the drive/

VALENTINA
Goodbye boys.

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:
Filth

PATSY
If only endings felt like beginnings. Or beginnings like endings. In actuality the stories of our lives are a bunch of random fragments. Not clean and neat, or even in good order. When significant relationships end, it’s comforting to remember the big happy moments, to perseverate on the grandeur that existed, or even to obsess over the last
words exchanged. But when Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio broke it off, do you think they ever missed the little things? Flossing teeth. Folding towels.

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

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

MARCO

I think you’re being excessive.

VALENTINA

You’ve never met my mother.

MARCO

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

VALENTINA

She looks at everything.

MARCO

It doesn’t have to be perfect.

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

But it’s not dirty.

VALENTINA

My mother judges people based on their cleanliness.

MARCO

You’re an adult now.

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

Don’t let her get under your skin.
VALENTINA

She’ll make our lives miserable.

MARCO

She sounds like your principal.

VALENTINA

She’s worse.

MARCO

And you stand up to your principal.

VALENTINA

It’s different. I have to protect my students

MARCO

Your own sanity matters. What about protecting your sanity?

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

Generosity is after cleanliness?

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

It sounds like self hate.

VALENTINA

You say everything is self hate.

MARCO

Self hate’s a powerful drug.

VALENTINA

I just wish one time, she would come into my space and say wow! You’re growing herbs in your kitchen, that is so French! Or something positive like that.
MARCO
She won’t criticize the microgarden,

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

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

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

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

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

MARCO
Your plants and your students.

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

MARCO
Have you ever talked to her about this?

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

MARCO
I’ll go put them away.

VALENTINA
They’re new. You have to put them on.

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

VALENTINA
She’s not pleased with our relationship.
MARCO
You don’t have to scare me.

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

End Scene

Pastry Shop
Five

Jacob and Marco sit in awkward silence.

JACOB
You eating?

MARCO
What the fuck does that have to do with anything?

JACOB
You just look a little/

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

JACOB
Ask the publisher for an extension.

MARCO
I’ve never requested an extension in my life.

JACOB
These are extenuating circumstances.

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

JACOB
That sounds good.

MARCO
Give me a break. That’s pathetic. What do you think I am, a thirteen-year-old boy?
JACOB
You’re a grown man experiencing a divorce.

MARCO
We weren’t married.

JACOB
You were together for four years.

MARCO
But without commitment.

JACOB
Marco/

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

JACOB
You did. You sat here together everyday.

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

JACOB
I feel for you/

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

JACOB
Dogs and babies should not be part of this conversation.

MARCO
I lose Valentina, and nothing. It’s like nothing’s happened.

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

MARCO

How’s your wife.

JACOB

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

MARCO

That woman works all the time.

JACOB

Not on Sunday.

MARCO

Pardon?

JACOB

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

MARCO

Golf? Stella golfs?

JACOB

She’s quite good.

MARCO

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

JACOB

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

MARCO

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

JACOB

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

MARCO

And I don’t know you play golf with Stella on Sunday. Wait, did this just start?
JACOB
She’s been doing it since Medical school. When we met she said it was a dealbreaker.

MARCO
And you just obey?

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

MARCO
My communist mentor plays the most bourgeois game/

JACOB
Stella plays. I accompany her.

MARCO
But you belong to a country club.

JACOB
Yes.

MARCO
The most water suckling, land using, exclusive/

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

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

JACOB
Stella loves the precision of it.

MARCO
But she must know how oppressive the sport/

JACOB
Listen, we both sleep at night just fine.

MARCO
How come I never knew this before?
MARCO
You didn’t ask.

JACOB
It’s the same with Valentina.

MARCO
Marco, go home.

JACOB
I didn’t notice stuff. Little things that make a person.

MARCO
Eat something.

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

MARCO
Get some sleep,

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

MARCO
Her observations were delightful/

JACOB
But it’s like I didn’t even hear them the first time...

MARCO
Stella misses my daily Valentina stories/

JACOB
But I hear them now.

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

JACOB
I have these Val reruns going on.
JACOB
Stella’s favorite’s still the story about Val making sand angels with her class on the playground.

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

JACOB
Poor kids, wishing they could make a snow angels.

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

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

MARCO
But now she’s everywhere. In pastries,

JACOB
She was filthy when she came in here.

MARCO
And in books, on the bus,

JACOB
Stella would laugh.

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

JACOB
We’ll all get used to her absence soon enough.

MARCO
I thought she’d be back.

JACOB
I don’t think so Marco.

MARCO
Because I’m an unfeeling asshole/
JACOB
Because Valentina always had the last word with us.

MARCO
She did?

JACOB
Always. She opened conversations and she closed them.

End Scene

ChatterBox Scene:
Pussy Feathers

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

To the bedroom.

A bedroom in the corner of the stage.

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

VALENTINA
Uhh, excuse me!

MARCO
What?

VALENTINA
The shirt.

MARCO
It’s cold.
Then put a different one on.

Why waste a clean shirt for sleep?

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

This shirt isn’t polluted.

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

You’ve never mentioned/

The sheets are clean.

How do you know it has cat on it?

I can see the cat hair

Bionic vision?

I know you visit that cat everyday.

The cat likes my shirt.

Off.

Marco removes his shirt with robotic like gestures and replaces it with another that looks exactly the same.
You’re really putting on another shirt.

I’m cold.

Did you notice what I’m wearing?

It’s nice.

Nice?

Yes.

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

Valentina!

Comment.

I hate it when you’re insecure.

This isn’t about insecurity.

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

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

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

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

VALENTINA
What’d you say?

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

VALENTINA
Hmmm.

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

VALENTINA
You and I met three years ago.

MARCO
What? I’m sorry. I must’ve/

VALENTINA
I thought I would sing the song again/

MARCO
From/

VALENTINA
The day you saw me in the museum/

MARCO
Oh yes. With all your little students.

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

MARCO
And bored.
VALENTINA
My students are never bored. Only boring people get bored.

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

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

VALENTINA
Uno-dos-tres-cho-
MARCO
It was so odd and inappropriate/

VALENTINA
Uno-dos-tres-co/
MARCO
Completely irreverent museum behavior/

VALENTINA
Uno-dos-tres-la....
MARCO
I felt embarrassed to witness it/

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

VALENTINA
Uno-dos-tres-te-
Cho-co-la-te, Cho-co-la-te, va-te, va-te
MARCO
Sit down Valentina!

VALENTINA
Cho-co-la-te.
MARCO
It still makes me uncomfortable to remember that day.
VALENTINA
It’s a joke. In the privacy of our own bedroom this time.

MARCO
Nobody sings in a museum/

VALENTINA
I did.

MARCO
I know. Except you.

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

MARCO
I try to forget about that.

VALENTINA
It was the day we met!

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

VALENTINA
You followed us.

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

VALENTINA
Uno-dos-tres...

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

VALENTINA
I see you lurking at the end of the line, right behind Jorge.
I don’t know how you noticed with all the commotion the kids were making.

I notice everything.

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

You saw me talking to him.

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

You were being a creeper.

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

You slither closer,

You coloring and chattering with a child.

I don’t chatter.

Another point to examine. Coloring.

No more memory lane/

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

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

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

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

VALENTINA
But you didn’t. Don’t think about work.

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

VALENTINA
It was because of the summer.

MARCO
Three years together, huh....

VALENTINA
Marco, hold me.

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

VALENTINA
I have a surprise for you/

MARCO
My book might have come out sooner...

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

MARCO
...and I could’ve gotten a university position
VALENTINA
The one with the swans on the sofa, acting like cats.

MARCO
I don’t remember any of the art pieces/

VALENTINA
I remember them all.

MARCO
Turn the light out.

VALENTINA
This is for us Marco! For three years!

MARCO
Not now Valentina. What the hell is this/

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

MARCO
I don’t even remember the image much less the name.

VALENTINA
Pussy feathers!
MARCO

That’s crude.

VALENTINA

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

MARCO

That’s right. And you said, “they can’t read.”

VALENTINA

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

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

MARCO

I can’t imagine not being able to read.

VALENTINA

You’d be more fun if you were illiterate.

Another Sneeze.

MARCO

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

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

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

End Scene
Pastry Shop
Six

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

There are pauses and silences between the dialogue.

How’s the writing.

JACOB

Mediocre.

MARCO

Any new pages?

JACOB

No.

MARCO

I heard you received a call from the English Department.

JACOB

Yeah.

MARCO

Congratulations.

JACOB

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

MARCO

What you’ve always wanted.

JACOB

Right.

MARCO
Your job talk was well received by the faculty.

I presented the paper on the Rosary.

Any new findings in there?

I stuck with my original hypothesis.

I always thought it a good one.

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

You got that all on your own.

Remember when Valentina started a fire in the pastry shop?

It wasn’t really a fire,

Well the alarm went off/

Mainly from smoke.

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

She acted like she owned the place.

She was doing it for me.

You wouldn’t stop commenting on how you hate lightly toasted/
You mean complaining....

It might have been perceived that way.

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

You got so angry/

Now I miss those things.

Things.

Her.

It takes time to heal.

It’s been 6 months.

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

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

I’m happy to listen.

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

I do find that odd.
MARCO
I go to the same grocery store, all of our restaurants, she’s never there, did she stop loving all of those places?

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

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

JACOB
Do you remember them? You sometimes seemed/

MARCO
All of our memories,

JACOB
Distant.

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

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

End Scene

Chatterbox Scene:
Canuto’s Autograph

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

Patsy opens the door to greet Valentina.

PATSY
May I help you?
VALENTINA
I’m Valentina. I’m here to see Canuto Morales. I wrote to him a few months ago/

PATSY
Yes. He’s expecting you.

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

PATSY
I am.

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

PATSY
You weren’t offended?

VALENTINA
God, no. I laughed my ass off.

PATSY
Want some tea while we wait for Canuto?

VALENTINA
Sure. Do you have any herbals?

PATSY
Pardon?

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

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

VALENTINA
I never knew you lived in Santa Fe.

PATSY
I share my time between here and California.
VALENTINA
I always intended to share my time between Albuquerque and Buenos Aires, but hasn’t worked out yet.

PATSY
No freedom with your job?

VALENTINA
I could make it work, I’m a teacher.

PATSY
University?

VALENTINA
Kindergarten.

PATSY
Better.

VALENTINA
I think so.

PATSY
So Marco Aragon is married to a kindergarten teacher.

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

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

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

PATSY
I don’t have that kind of commitment.

VALENTINA
How long have you known Canuto?

PATSY
Since the early days.
VALENTINA
Lifetimers?

PATSY
Yes. I suppose we are lifetimers.

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

PATSY
Hopefully Canuto gets back soon.

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

PATSY
Maybe.

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

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

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

PATSY
Did you have other business in Santa Fe?

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

PATSY
For work?
VALENTINA
No, to learn the basics of backyard permaculture.

PATSY
Permaculture.

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

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

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

PATSY
So I should eat my weeds.

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

PATSY
How do they taste?

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

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

VALENTINA
In Guadalupe County.

PATSY
Yeah. My grandpa would take us out to the hills and we would collect stuff, herbs, roots. Once he taught us to identify wild onions. We sat on some rocks and ate an entire bed of wild onions. For the rest of the day I smelled my hands to activate the memory.
VALENTINA
That’s the way it should be. Beats paying five-hundred dollars to attend a workshop with metro-hippies.

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

VALENTINA
Any of your relatives till in the state?

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

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

PATSY
Pobre citos.

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

PATSY
I know people who intentionally leave their hair dirty!

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

PATSY
So much shame for everything.

VALENTINA
The names were terrible.

PATSY
Dirty Mexican

VALENTINA
Sucia
PATSY
It’s no wonder our folks named their restaurants things like Spic and Span/

VALENTINA
Comet Drive In/

PATSY
Sanitary Bakery and Café.

VALENTINA
My mom used to say, we may be poor/

PATSY
but we’re not dirty.

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

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

VALENTINA
The name-calling.

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

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

PATSY
I haven’t always had courage.

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

PATSY
Yeah right. It was hard. (silence)

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

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

VALENTINA

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

PATSY

Then, Marco’s not listening.

VALENTINA

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

PATSY

I can do that.

VALENTINA

It’ll make Marco so happy.

PATSY

Do you love him?

VALENTINA

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

PATSY

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

VALENTINA

I don’t have a good reason.

PATSY

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

VALENTINA

How do you know I criticize his listening skills/

PATSY

It was in the letter.

VALENTINA

Canuto let you read the letter?
I’m Canuto Morales.

You’re Patsy Aranda.

No…I wrote those books. I’m Canuto Morales.

But Marco/

And I read the letter.

What?

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

Arte Libre Press/

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

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

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

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

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

She never told anyone?

PATSY

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

VALENTINA

Your obit/

PATSY

I’ve already written it.

VALENTINA

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

PATSY

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

Valentina

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

PATSY

The novels exist.

VALENTINA

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

PATSY

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

VALENTINA

So Canuto Morales doesn’t exist.

PATSY

I’m sorry.

VALENTINA

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

VALENTINA
What if I write an exposé/

PATSY
It would ruin Marco’s career.

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

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

VALENTINA
What does it say?

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

VALENTINA
You regret it.

PATSY
I don’t like liars.

VALENTINA
I don’t either.

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

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

PATSY
Do you still want me to sign the book?
VALENTINA
Sure, what the heck.

PATSY
What would Canuto say?

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

End Play
RE: LIVING
By Rebecca M. Sánchez

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

Rebecca M. Sánchez
1821 Georgia NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110
(505) 917-3435
rebeccasanchez505@gmail.com
CHARACTERS:

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

SETTING:
The closet of a classroom in a College of Education building at a State University.
SCENE 1

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

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

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

Andrew
Shut up already.

Maricela
Really? That’s it? Someone got famous for this book?

Janice
Let’s just sit/

Laura
I don’t think we’re supposed to be talking/

Maricela
I totally could’ve written this book.

Laura
It’s on the New York Times bestseller list
Maricela
It makes a circle, nothing happens/

Andrew
We don’t care/

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

Laura
don’t use that language right now/

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

Andrew
It’s about assemblage/

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

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

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

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

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

A loud school bell rings!

Andrew
JESUS! Laura
Ugh.... Maricela
Oh my god. Janice
Quiet!

A loud school bell rings! They sit.
Janice
Just keep calm.

Laura
And please stop cussing.

Maricela
I was praying to god.

Laura
You were using his name in vain.

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

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

Maricela
You think we’re gonna die?

Andrew
There’s an active shooter in the building/

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

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

Janice
Quiet!

*Maricela goes to the door.*

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

Janice
Grab her.

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

Andrew

Laura!
Laura
She’s right. We’re doomed.

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

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

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

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

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

Maricela
(whispering) I can’t die, I haven’t lived.

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

Andrew
Is that “I’ve got you babe” playing out there?

Maricela
It’s been on this whole time.

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

Andrew
I hadn’t noticed it before.

Maricela
Adrenaline.

Laura
My mother hates Cher,

Maricela
I love her/
Andrew
I mean, she still looks good for being an old lady,

Laura
Says she’s a tramp.

Andrew
Well I’d do/

Maricela
All guys say they’d do her/

Janice
It was intended to build community, interconnectedness,

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

Janice
if we want to eliminate microaggressions in the workplace/

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

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

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

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

Maricela
She’s totally hot and really smart too.

Janice
Microaggressions are tearing our institution apart.

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

Until the computer battery runs out.

Laura

Isn’t it dangerous?

Janice

If the computer runs unattended?

Maricela

Four professors found shot to death in a closet while “I’ve got you babe/

plays in the background.

Andrew

Maricela

Psycho lured by tranquil sounds of Sonny and Cher.

Laura

You think we’re going to die in here?

(sings) I got flowers in the spring

Andrew

(sings) I got you to wear my ring

Laura

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

Maricela

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

Andrew

You should’ve turned it off/

Janice

You should’ve turned it off/

Andrew

I wasn’t in charge of the workshop.
Stop with the blaming/
Andrew

It puts us in harms way.
Maricela

Everyone’s in harms way.
Maricela

Good thoughts, Laura, come on, good thoughts
Laura

When we cross a street, we’re in harms way.
Maricela

My mother once told me I could drown in a spoonful of water.
Laura

That’s true you know. One spoon of water gets in the lungs the wrong way and a person can be a goner.
Janice

I feared spoonfuls of water, but probably more than that, I was perplexed by spoonfuls of water. I’d stare at them thinking, is this water gonna get me? And/
Laura

I wonder if there’s water in this closet/
Maricela

Non-toxic paints/
Janice

how can this spoonful of water kill me?
Laura

Four dead professors with non-toxic paint all over their mouths, they must have been really thirsty.
Maricela

Janice, this is serious… all of our lives might hinge on that goddamned song playing.
Andrew

Block it out.
Maricela
What were you thinking?  Andrew
What were you thinking?  Janice
Hey. Enough now.  Maricela
I don’t even know you guys.  Laura
Favorite childhood memory.  Maricela
You want to travel down memory lane right now?  Laura
Beats thinking about/  Maricela
Why do you have to do that?  Andrew
Whisper, people, whisper.  Janice
She’s right folks. If anything gets us it’ll be cuz we’re screaming in here.  Laura
It’s like you bring up childhood on purpose.  Andrew
Just trying to distract us, nothing more.  Maricela
When I was a kid I was in foster care. I think people know that about me/  Andrew
I didn’t know that. I don’t even know you guys/  Laura
Maricela
You can still have a good memory, even if you/

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

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

Laura
When I’m down and out I pray/

Maricela
Keep going/

Laura
That’s what we should be doing right now/

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

Janice
Afraid of the sun?

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

Laura
What about basketball?

Maricela
Let him talk/

Laura
Basketball’s indoors/

Maricela
Shh/

Andrew
Well the school music teacher told my foster mom that sometimes playing an instrument can burn more calories and be more exhausting than playing sports.
So my foster mother did all this research about instruments and she learned that trumpet players use more body and lung strength than some soccer players so she signed me up.

Maricela

I didn’t know you play trumpet.

Andrew

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

Laura

Wait. What grade was this?

Andrew

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

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

Janice

Dirty?

Laura

What does being dirty have to do with the story?

Andrew

I can’t really explain it.

Laura

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

You’re catholic?

Laura

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

Maricela

That movie scared me/

Laura

Me too, but in a thrilling way/

Maricela

Same with religious paintings, those creep me out/

Laura

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

Andrew

Sprinkler head.

Janice

Cynic/

Laura

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

Maricela

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

Janice

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

Andrew

I have never tried to find anyone’s face in/

Laura

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

Sucker!

Laura

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

Andrew

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

You’re mean/

Janice

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

Andrew

Where was the water coming from?

Maricela

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

Clever.

Janice

You’re telling this story because/

Laura

Favorite childhood memory/

Andrew

Your favorite memory is of getting duped?

Laura

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

Janice

Hmm.

Maricela

I would’ve beat the shit out of my brothers they’d of done that to me.
Laura
Even after I found the hose under there, I still wondered if I had been chosen. It was like that moment of excitement was so powerful, it made me a blind to the facts.

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

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

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

Andrew
Yeah, what’s that all about/

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

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

Maricela
Hope. I think the psychological term is hope.

Andrew
It’s not hope.

Janice
Hope is when you still think something can happen/

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

Maricela
Not Janice’s example/
Janice
I’m still struggling to see how that was a happy childhood memory.

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

Janice
I can’t.

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

Janice
I can’t remember last week much less my childhood.

Laura
Nothing Janice?

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

Laura
I seem weak but I’ve shoveled my share of shit.

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

Maricela
I knew a kid called torcido/

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

Andrew
I’ve never heard that word.

Maricela
Kind of like crooked. Or physically screwed up.

Janice
Yeah. In my hometown they called the mechanic Bozo.

Andrew
What? That’s cruel.
He even called himself Bozo. His business was called Bozo’s.

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

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

And when does it become fun rather than painful.

A moment of vulnerability?

And there was this woman One-eye.

My mother wouldn’t ever let us talk about people by their looks.

Not even for a compliment?

But One-eye could see everything.

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

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

Or a whore.

Or a prick.

You guys know what I mean.

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

Hey! Andrew

Kidding. Maricela

I’d be called pizzaface. I had really bad acne as/ Laura

Did they actually call you that? Janice

I guess so. Laura

Ouch. Janice

I was four-eyes and bottlecaps. Maricela

They called me bastard. But I had a dad, he was the bastard/ Andrew

They called me train. It was really bad/ Janice

Train? Andrew

Nevermind. Janice

Choo choo! Andrew

Shut up! Laura
Andrew

All aboard!

Laura

Leave her alone! If you don’t shut up I’m going/

Andrew

I didn’t mean anything/

Laura

to slit your throat!

Janice

It’s okay, Laura. One night of too much drinking, a string of bad choices, and you are forever called train. That’s why I don’t go back to that smallass, narrowminded town. If you so much as walk into a grocery store without make-up on the folks talk for months.

Laura

There’s a nice side to small towns, coming together for potlucks, or something like that.

Maricela

I do know there was a time I stopped believing in humanity. Maybe when I was a teenager. I think the first time I really realized… I don’t know. I dated this guy,

Andrew

That’s how you start every story.

Maricela

Shut the fuck up.

Laura

Did the guy make you feel bad?

Maricela

Bad? Yes. About myself. About other women. About male entitlement. His dad was a Vietnam vet, kind of a real tough man, hunter, retired colonel, shot birds for fun/

Andrew

What kind of birds?

Maricela

Quail.

Janice

Didn’t they eat them?
Maricela
Yes. Thing is, this guy liked the hunt more than the meal. But these people were living an upper class lifestyle, two luxury cars in the garage, dream home, good wine in a wine storage thingy, so, fancy people, but their edges were fucking jagged.

Laura
This is happy?

Maricela
It’s just a memory okay.

Andrew
Don’t bite her head off.

Janice
Maybe what she means is that we should treat this moment like a cleansing,
a confessional of sorts.

Andrew
In case we/

Laura
Fair enough.

Maricela
Once my boyfriend’s dad got drunk with his Vietman buddy who was in town visiting, and both of them looked at me. Like, they were really studying me. It made me uncomfortable. The dad said, ‘what do you think of my boy’s girlfriend.’ And the buddy said, I think his name was Merv/

Andrew
Merv the perv/

Maricela
but that doesn’t matter. He said, ‘a young petite Mexican girl is almost as good as a gook.’ And my boyfriend was standing right there. I didn’t know what to do, but I thought he would defend me. Or at least get pissed. He didn’t.

Andrew
He was probably so embarrassed.
Maricela
He was a fucking baby.

Laura
I don’t know. If someone said that to me or my girlfriend, I think I would freeze. I would literally just freeze.

Janice
The Vietnam War damaged people.

Maricela
I knew I shouldn’t have told this story/

Andrew
Janice is right. A whole generation of men screwed up/

Janice
And then they raised us to be screwed up.

Maricela
Why are you defending these guys! They made me feel/

Andrew
Dirty? Welcome to my childhood.

Laura
My dad didn’t go to Vietnam.

Janice
No wonder perfectpants.

Maricela
All I’m saying is that, like I never knew being a petite Mexican was a thing.

Andrew
Of course it’s a thing.

Maricela
I wasn’t even petite, I was young. All young girls are little. I mean, look at me now. I’m not exactly/

Janice
That war/
Maricela
They’d probably hurt girls like me. Small and young/

Andrew
You can’t judge people for what they do in times of war/

Laura
But god can/

Andrew
Look at my mother.

Laura
You guys are scaring me.

Maricela
My guy was raised in a home where it was perfectly acceptable to say “as good as a gook.”

Janice
We don’t really hear that word much anymore.

Maricela
Uh, of course we don’t! It’s a fucking slur. So derogatory! It made me mad.

Laura
And hurt?

Maricela
Hurt?

Andrew
She doesn’t have feelings like that/

Maricela
It hurt me. Yeah, I guess it did. It hurt me.

Janice
At least you don’t hurt yourself. That’s a real problem.

Andrew
Like people that like to beat themselves physically? Or like anorexia/
Laura
I’ve been reading about the penitentes here in New Mexico. They really believe in torturing thems/

Janice
Not literally, you fools.

Maricela
How can people figuratively hurt themselves

Laura
I steal stuff.

Andrew
What?

Janice
You do?

Maricela
I didn’t peg you for a clepto/

Laura
Only lipstick. I’m obsessed with lipstick.

Maricela
Well you are wearing it right now/

Andrew
What an odd thing to steal/

Laura
I have every color, different brands,

Janice
How do you get the ones that are behind the glass counter.

Laura
And I can put it on without using my hands.

Maricela
Like in The Breakfast Club?
Laura
I think was a pivotal moment in my lipstick fetish.

Andrew
What do you mean without hands,

Janice
With her cleavage.

Andrew
How do you put lipstick on with cleavage?

Maricela
Watch the movie.

Laura
I’m not proud of this.

Janice
You shouldn’t be proud of stealing.

Laura
The first time I took a lipstick I did it for a friend. She really wanted it so I went the drugstore, I thought I had enough money to buy it for her, but I didn’t. I held it in my hand and it fit right here, such a perfect fit in my hand. I kept looking at other stuff in the store and I finally went to the gum section and as I picked up a pack of gum I slid the hand with the lipstick into my pocket. It was so easy. I took it to my friend as a gift, and it was the wrong color. So I kept it. I feel like I’m in total control when I steal lipstick and when I wear lipstick.

Andrew
What are you in control of?

Laura
I even sleep with it on. And when I go to a fancy restaurant and open my pristine white cloth napkin, I print my lips on it.

Janice
That stuff doesn’t come out.

Laura
I just don’t like thinking of myself as a thief. And it all started because I wanted that girl to like me.
Andrew

Don’t look back. That’s my motto.

Janice

Maybe. But would you change your past, if you could?

Andrew

I’d do so many things differently.

Maricela

Like, if we got a real do-over?

Janice

Yeah.

Andrew

What would I do with one do-over? I need twenty.

Laura

I’d live the story I just told over.

Janice

Lipstick stealing?

Laura

No, stigmata.

Andrew

That’s not a do-over/

Maricela

You can’t tell someone what to do with their do-over/

Andrew

But that’s wasting it/

Mariclea

Maybe not to her/

Andrew

Do-overs are to fix regrets/

Maricela

They don’t have to be/
Laura
I’d want the five minutes thinking I was a saint one more time. Since then, I’ve had too many doubts, my faith always shakier.

Janice
That’s a fair use of a do-over/

Andrew
If I could get just one, I’d go back to the last time I saw my dad and I’d punch him in the face/

Maricela
What’d you do the last time you saw your dad/

Andrew
I was hiding in the bottom cupboard, under the kitchen sink/

Laura
If you fit under the sink you might’ve been too small to punch your father.

Andrew
My instinct was to beat the shit out of him, but instead I hid/

Maricela
Then your instinct was to hide/

Andrew
He was fighting with my mother and he started in on her. But she went wild, finally snapped and fought back. If I could’ve come out from under the sink I might’ve stopped her. They wouldn’t have taken her away.

Janice
It wasn’t your job to protect an adult.

Andrew
This is my do-over. I would’ve at least distracted the situation. I don’t think my mother would’ve fired the gun if I’d of been beating on him.

Janice
Geez. That’s a heavy do-over. I was only going to say that I would’ve chosen a different career.

Maricela
You don’t like what you do?
Janice

Not at all/

Maricela

I think it sucks too/

Andrew

I fucking hate this job/

Laura

You hate being professors?

Andrew

Totally.

Maricela

Absolutely.

Janice

Every fucking day of my life.

Laura

That’s not encouraging to hear in my first month/

Andrew

It’s cuz we’re not like real professors or anything.

Janice

Yes we are.

Maricela

We’re in the College of Education. That’s the lowest in the university/

Andrew

We’d get more respect if we taught kindergarten.

Laura

But we have to do research, that’s like professor-ish...

Andrew

Come on, we teach adults how to use finger paints and how read to kids/

Janice

My classes are more rigorous than that/
Maricela
Racism. I encourage my students to analyze texts for racism. Like I mean, why is the mouse in the story white. Oh, white is adorable. If that mouse was black/

Andrew
It would still be cute,

Maricela
It would be a deviant. And we’d probably call it a rat.

Janice
They say rats are smart/

Laura
Do you know some people let rats crawl in their mouths?

Andrew
All I’m saying is that we’re not treated like real professors.

I hate the politics/

Maricela
What did you want to be Janice?

Janice
I like making things. Bread. Quilts.

Andrew
Why not? Martha Steward does it.

Janice
But you can’t make a living with cottage industry stuff.

Laura
You make bread?

Janice
I do. And jam. And I can cure meat, and I dry my own fruit.

Laura
Where’d you learn/
Janice
From my grandma. She was the real deal, she could make stuff, everything was made into something else. Used again. She was poor and that’s what poor people did in small towns.

Andrew
Now they just drug themselves.

Laura
Not true. I know lots of non druggies from small towns.

Maricela
My relatives make stuff. I have an aunt and uncle that made a dining room table out of some saw horses and an old door.

Laura
I saw something similar in a restaurant back in/

Maricela
If a hipster makes a table from a door it’s chic. Poor people have been doing it all along and they don’t get a medal for it.

Laura
I’m just saying/

Janice
Hipsters making their cute clothes from old bed sheets because they’re rich and bored/

Maricela
Roughing up perfectly good furniture to make it look distressed/

Andrew
Aren’t you two judgy/

Maricela
Andrew buys in/

Laura
You have a distressed table?

Andrew
It’s an aesthetic. I’m drawn to the aesthetic.
Maricela

Andrew has to purchase an image/

Andrew

You keep changing the subject so you don’t have to share shit. What’s your do-over Ms. Avoider?

Maricela

I don’t know.

Andrew

Maybe it should be to watch your mouth so you stop insulting people all the time.

Maricela

And you need to stop telling people what to do.

Janice

Do you have a do-over Mari?

Maricela

I have lots. Once I broke up with a guy because he was too nice to me. Aside from him, I think I’ve only dated real assholes. I think I’d do-over every romantic relationship I’ve ever had.

Laura

And do them again better?

Janice

Or not do them at all?

Maricela

It’d be best if I didn’t do them at all.

Janice

You just pick losers?

Maricela

They’re not even necessarily losers, but I tend to date people who hate me, just a little bit. And it gets complicated quickly if the person you’re with hates the things you love most about yourself.

Laura

That doesn’t make sense/
You know how we can be intrigued with things we don’t like? Well, the men I’ve dated, and once a woman,

A woman.

Wow.

A woman?

That’s another story, anyway, they’re like attracted to me even though they don’t like me, and slowly they rip me apart. And I find myself becoming more and more like a Raggedy Ann doll with a painted on smile, but sad eyes. And absolutely no backbone/

I still don’t get why you date them in the first place/

Until finally, I hate myself as much as they do. And then I’m pissed that they’ve won.

This story kind of doesn’t make sense. Can you give an example?

No. I don’t want to talk about this right now.

Of course she doesn’t.

They hate that I know what I want.

That’s a good quality.

Until I act on it. Then it becomes personal. Have you ever given a man instructions in bed?
Janice
No.

Laura
Not me.

Maricela
Try telling a guy what you want and they’ll hate you. Then, you’ll stop telling them what you want, and you’ll hate yourself. And you’ll stop suggesting which movie to see, places for vacation. You won’t mention that you prefer grapefruit juice over orange juice. Your own decisiveness becomes a burden.

Laura
I just don’t picture you as a shrinking violet.

Janice
Did you act this way with the one woman you just mentioned?

Maricela
Do you know how many times I’ve been told I’m too much, or too intense, or too something. But deep down I’m not anything anymore. All the guys have chipped away at me and now I’m just a big, boring coward. Like Raggedy Ann.

Andrew
Mari.

Laura
It’s too heavy in here. Happy thoughts. Let’s get back to happy thoughts.

Andrew
I’d just like to finish a day without thinking about ways to kill myself.

Janice
How dare you!

Laura
We’re sitting in here fighting for our lives and you stay that?

Janice
That is such a disrespectful thing to say right now.

Laura
You think of ways to kill yourself and all I care about is living! You insensitive asshole! Some of us don’t want to die!
Laura starts hitting Andrew.

Maricela

But what about heaven?

Laura

I’m not ready afterlife. What the hell does forever mean anyway? I don’t want forever, I just want/ I can’t even wrap my head around eternity, that’s terrifying. I can’t die. Is it going to hurt? That guy is going to get us. I just know it. Because of the music. It’s going to lure him to the room. What if we bleed to death? I don’t want pain! I can’t handle pain. And you treat it all like a game, not worth living. What kind of jerks intentionally kill themselves!

Janice

Shut up Laura. You’re going to get us killed.

Laura

Suicide! Really!

Maricela

Restrain her.

Andrew

I wouldn’t really do it! I just think about different ways/

Janice

Andrew pin her to the ground!

Andrew holds Laura down.
Maricela strokes her hair.
Janice bites her nails.

Maricela

Laura honey. You’re not going to die.

Laura

You don’t know that for sure.

Maricela

We’ve been here for a while, and nothing’s happened. The building is probably safe now.

Laura

Then why won’t they let us out?
Maricela

Precautions.

Janice
I wish I had some water. Or a cigarette.

Laura
You don’t smoke dummy. I do have Cheetos.

Maricela
Now you’re talking. This closet is reserved for the living!

Andrew
Bust them out.

Laura
And gum.

Andrew
Perfect. For after.

Janice
I hope the Cheetos don’t make me thirstier.

Andrew
When we get out of here I’m going to stop for a very large coffee.

Laura
Not me. I’m going to have trouble sleeping as it is.

Janice
I’m going to call my parents. I’m sure they’re worried.

Andrew
Why the fuck don’t any of us have our phones?

Janice
We just ran. I mean, there wasn’t much time to think.

Andrew
Laura had time to bring Cheetos.

Laura
I grabbed my backpack. I don’t know why, but not my purse.
Maricela
and you have bubble gum/

Laura
I don’t think microaggressions will be a problem after this kind of an experience.

Janice
I know. We’re going to be like, best friends forever now.

Maricela
If we get out of here you all should come over to the house for a potluck or something.

Laura
I make the best mojitos/

Andrew
I didn’t picture you as a drinker.

Laura
I know I like to pray but lots of Christians drink socially.

Andrew
Janice can bring homemade bread with jam.

Janice
No. I want to bring a pie. A big pecan pie/

Andrew
I don’t know what I’ll bring/

Maricela
Music. You have a good playlist.

Janice
He does?

Maricela
Yeah, he sends me suggestions sometimes.

Janice
I didn’t know that/
I think we should dance at this shindig.

Imagine, us dancing/

I’m not much for dancing/

I mean, who cares, right?

True, what’ve we got to lose now.

I can two-step.

See. Laura can two-step.

I’ve always been too uptight to really let go with dancing. I mean, I can two-step too, but to really let loose and go wild on the dance floor, I’ve never had the confidence.

But with another chance. Show me the way you’re gonna dance if you get outta here.

_The crazy dancing begins._

How’s this.

Check out my new moves.

_Dancing continues. Imagine MC Hammer meets Pee-wee Herman_

We don’t have to be anything like our old selves.

God it will be liberating. I’m going to quit obsessing about a clean house.
Andrew
I’m going to spend some of the money I’ve been hoarding. And for what? The rainy day is now.

Maricela
I just want to calm down and stop being so goddamned edgy with everyone. Like, I really don’t have to do a racial, social, gender, and class analysis every time I meet someone.

Laura
I’m gonna try to stop publically correcting people about god. Who am I to say what people carry in their hearts. You all cuss and use the lord’s name in vain, and apparently have extramarital sex, and I think you’re totally cool.

Janice
You’re the only group I’d want to be with in a time like this.

Maricela
You think they’re dancing in any of the other closets in this building?

Andrew
Hell no!

Janice
With Sonny and Cher in the background /

Andrew
With fucking Sonny and Cher in the background.

Laura
Should we bring our significant others?

Dancing stops

Andrew
What?

Laura
To the potluck.

Janice
You have a significant other?

Laura
I’m married.
To a man?

Yeah. I have a husband.

You’re the only one.

Oh, then better to leave him home with the kids.

You have kids?

Two daughters.

Laura has two kids.

Are you worried about them?

I’m worried about me.

That’s what I mean, are you worried about them because you’re in here?

I just want to think about those mojitos we’re gonna drink. And how I was almost a saint. But, true. I should be thinking about them. That’s what being a mother’s about right? Thinking about your kids all the time.

It’s not healthy to think about them all the time.

But right now. This could be the end, this could be it you know.

We can’t think like that.
Janice
I should’ve grabbed my phone. I need to talk to my parents.

Laura
And I could’ve called my kids.

Maricela
Write to them.

*Maricela starts passing out supplies.*

Andrew
We got tons of supplies.

Maricela
After writing a letter to Mozart the mouse will want to draw him a picture.

Andrew
She’ll hang it on the refrigerator.

Laura
Hanging the picture on the refrigerator will remind the furry white mouse that she’s thirsty.

Janice
She’ll probably ask you for a beer/

Andrew
When you open the fridge she’ll remember the vodka in the freezer.

Maricela
So she’ll ask for a mixed drink instead/

Laura
Thinking about the mixed drink will remind her of the tilt a whirl at the fair/

Andrew
And chances are, if she’s thinking about the spinning and neon lights/

Janice
While she drinks his delicious vodka tonic,

Maricela
The little furry drunkard rodent is going to want a mushroom to go with it.
Janice and Laura start writing. Maricela pulls a book from the shelf and starts reading. She goes to the other side of the bookshelf. Andrew follows her. She browses the books.

Janice
You writing to your husband or your kids?

Laura
Kids. You?

Janice
My mom.

Laura
You’re still close?

Janice
Very.

Laura
Codependent.

Janice
Not pathological. Just love Laura. We don’t have to label everything.

Laura
Says the woman giving a seminar on microaggressions.

Janice
Why don’t you write to your husband?

Laura
I should be writing to him, but, kids first you know.

Janice
I don’t know. I’ve never had any.

Laura
It’s not for everyone.

Janice
I guess not.

Laura
What are you telling your mother?
Janice
About my papers, where to find my account numbers, I’m writing a living will, just in case I barely survive, stuff like that.

Laura
God Janice,

Janice
Don’t use the lord’s name in vain.

Laura
Turn the tables, I deserved that.

Janice
When you’re single nobody knows your wishes. Your secrets, the inner life you your finances, end of life arrangements. So now seems like a good time to let someone know.

Laura
What are your wishes these days?

Janice
About life or death.

Laura
Life, I guess.

Janice
I don’t have any. Things haven’t really worked out for me. I just go along.

Laura
How can you say that! You get like five publications a year.

Janice
And I eat organic frozen dinners alone every night.

Laura
Well you’re respected. That’s something.

Janice
If you don’t have successful relationships, a million publications don’t mean shit.

Laura
I wish I had a million publications/
It’s a sorry substitute for life.

You have your mother,

She has to love me. You should know that, mothers have to love their children.

I’m just saying it’s not as grim as you/

But when people choose to love each other, and they go for the long haul, that’s special.

True love isn’t really a choice it’s a gift from /

With relatives, you can hate each other’s annoying qualities, irritating habits, but you still love each other because, you know, Mary complains all the time like uncle so-and-so, or Janice can’t get a date like cousin Shirley. That kind of stuff. Negative traits are almost endearing because there is a visible lineage. Not so in romantic love.

My husband and I love each other like brother and sister,

Well at least twice you/

The kids are his. But. Yeah. We consummated our relationship all of about, two times.

That’s boring.

It is.

I always imagine my married friends enjoying regular sex. Good or bad, at least there is access to regular sex.
Laura
Most married people I know don’t even have sex. Especially if they have young kids.

Janice
Whose fault is that?

Laura
In our case it stems from a total lack of interest from both of us.

Janice
Is your man/

Laura
Having an affair? He isn’t.

Janice
I was going to say, gay.

Laura
Aren’t we all?

Janice
Aren’t we all.

Laura
Do you want life support?

Janice
No.

Laura
But technology is so good, and what about/

Janice
What about god? If I’m shot, and god wants me to live, I’ll just live right? If I die, it’s god’s will.

Laura
Not me, hook me up to the machines. I’m not ready. I have things to do/

Janice
Even if you’re a vegetable/
Laura
Even in a coma. I could have a rich internal life, it would be like a long rest/

Janice
With tubes and machines doing all the work for you/

Laura
I don’t want to die.

Janice
I don’t either but I don’t want a huge tube down my throat/

Laura
I’m terrified.

Janice
Yeah. Me too.

*Other side of the bookshelf.*

Andrew
No letter writing?

Maricela
I don’t have anyone to write to.

Andrew
Some new boyfriend?

Maricela
I don’t have a boyfriend.

Andrew
How bout one of your ten million relatives.

Maricela
They know how I feel about them.

Andrew
You take them for granted.

Maricela
I don’t want to jinx myself okay! I’m not preparing for death in this cell. Writing goodbye letters.
Your sister would like a letter.

I’ll hyperventilate if I start thinking about it.

I wonder where our students are.

I hadn’t even thought about them.

They don’t know the codes to get in the closets.

How many shots did you hear?

I couldn’t count them.

Like, was it dozens, was it hundreds?

More than one, less than a thousand.

It was like, I walked into that classroom and the guns started sounding/

Slow motion to the closet.

Our students could be dead out there, what if they’re in the halls drowning in blood

Calm down!

And why don’t we hear sirens?

Maybe the shooter’s not in this building.
Maricela
But something! Shouldn’t we hear someone say “clear the building” or “swat!”

Andrew
This isn’t a movie.

Maricela
Were the shots in our building or outside?

Andrew
It sounded like/

Maricela
Oh my god. I can’t breathe. I need to get out of this closet. What if they got Blanca in the office. Not Blanca.

Andrew
Come here.

*Andrew hugs Maricela to calm her.*

Maricela
How do we tell the parents of our students.

Andrew
We don’t know what’s happening. Let’s just think pleasant thoughts. Stay calm.

*Andrew starts kissing her.*

Maricela
What are you doing!?

Andrew
Shh.

Maricela
Andrew!

Andrew
Let’s do it. Right here/

Maricela
Are you kidding me?
Andrew
What are we waiting for/

Maricela
Janice and Laura are/

Andrew
If this is the end we shouldn’t have regrets. I want to be able to say I was happy when I died.

Maricela
You’re a fucking piece of work. This isn’t the time/

Andrew
When’s the time? You have that skirt on,

Maricela
You’ve known me for how long and this is the/

Andrew
let me just get in there, we can be quick. I promise/

Maricela
I hate you.

Andrew
You won’t regret it

*Gunshots at a distance.*
*Maricela and Andrew duck to the ground.*

Andrew
God!       Laura
Maricela
Jesus!       Janice
Fuck.                   Everybody down!

*Blackout for 30 seconds while “I’ve got you babe” plays.*
*Lights up on the classroom.*

To the left of the closet, a classroom. Janice is setting up equipment and a Powerpoint. On the screen she projects the following, “Eliminating Microaggressions in the Workplace.” The song “I’ve got you babe” is playing. Enter Laura.
Hey.

Welcome

Thanks

How’ve your first few weeks been?

My office is finally unpacked.

That’s good.

That’s good.

Students complained when they saw the syllabus but I think they’re on board now.

That’s good.

Other side of the closet, lights up on a bed. Maricela is under a comforter. Andrew is pacing around.

We’re colleagues.

That didn’t stop you before.

I mean, you say things in meetings and I think to myself, am I really sleeping with this chick?

Chick? You refer to women as chicks?

And I’m white Maricela. I can’t not be a white guy.
You refer to me as a chick?

You say horrible things about white men/

I do not/

White men are sexually inferior/

I was speaking in generalities/

They can’t last in the sack/

You know you can last. I wasn’t talking about you/

how am I not supposed to take it personally/

I’m speaking from theoretical points of view/

And when you said quickies are my specialty/

That was a compliment!/

I don’t want to be with someone that analyzes everything/

Then go find yourself a young, dumb, frigid, white girl if you don’t like fucking someone with a brain.

See there? Like that. This isn’t about a white girl and where the hell does frigid come in/
Maricela
You know my libido is much stronger than yours, you say it yourself/

Andrew
It’s insulting. I’m always on the defensive/

Maricela
We’ve been doing this for three years.

Andrew
And it’s been fun/

Maricela
Fun. You stay at my apartment more than your own and now you’re going to walk/

Andrew
Every conversation with you has to be so deep.

No they don’t/

Andrew
Sports. I want to talk about sports. Or what I watched on TV without you criticizing every character/

Maricela
I’ll watch TV with you.

Andrew
I can’t handle complications. I’m going through tenure this year, I don’t want people to think/

Think what/

Andrew
That I slept my way to tenure/

Maricela
Nobody knows we’re lovers/

Andrew
I just can’t do it.
Maricela
I’m only one vote. It can’t save you and it can’t sink you.

Andrew
It’s about perception.

Maricela
You came here, slept with me, knowing full well you were gonna break up with me.

Andrew
I just can’t do it.

Maricela
You greedy bastard, have to eat all the cake you can, even if you’re just going to vomit it out.

*Lights out on the bed.*
*Other side of the closet in the classroom.*

Laura
You didn’t attend my job talk during the interview.

Janice
I didn’t want to influence the search committee/

Laura
Like, influence them good, or influence them bad/

Janice
Why did you come here?

Laura
It’s a great university, research one, high graduation rates/

Janice
and our college is in the red, the dean is superimposing a business model, morale is at an all time low, and I work here. Seems like four good reasons to stay away.

Laura
I have no reason to avoid you.

Janice
Did you think about what I want? Maybe I want to avoid you.
It’s been years, Janice/

And you sign up for this workshop, really now, how ironic for you to sign up for my workshop on microaggression/

We’re required to take at least one and it seemed like the most interesting workshop.

Don’t play innocent, naïve girl with me.

Fresh start Janice. We’re colleagues now.

I know you better than that. Behind your façade you’ve always been completely manipulative of every situation/

Don’t bring up the past.

You used me. Twice.

I didn’t plan it Janice. It was a weird/

Experiment?

No/

Were you going through a phase Laura, did your parents send you to one of those rehab camps/

I was genuinely interested, I was. But then I wasn’t/
Janice
Did you leave for god? You pretend god influences your decisions. It’s not god, you just can’t face being judged by humans.

Laura
I thought I could do it but I couldn’t. I didn’t love/

Andrew walks in.

Andrew
What’s up ladies! (to Laura) Hi I’m Andrew.

Laura
I’m the new hire in literacy. Laura/

Andrew
I was at your job talk remember?

Enter Maricela. She sets her stuff down.

Laura
Oh.

Maricela
Not everyone remembers you Andrew/

Andrew
I wasn’t implying/

Janice
Good summer everyone? I’m glad you/

Andrew
Does anyone have a cell phone charger, my phone is dead.

Maricela
Mine’s in my office.

Janice
Maybe, I’ll check my bag in a/

The sounds of gunshots can be heard.
Janice
Oh my god.

Laura
What was that?

*On the screen an alert presents. “Active shooter on campus. Secure the building.”*

Maricela
What the/

Janice
Get the door, Andrew! Everyone to the closet!

*They all rush to the closet. Blackout for 30 seconds. The sounds of Sonny and Cher singing “I’ve got you babe” can be heard.*

*Lights up in the closet. Andrew and Maricela are crouched to the left of the tall center bookshelf. Laura and Janice are lying on the floor on the right, hands over their heads. Sonny and Cher continue to sing.*

Andrew
Why did she leave the computer playing?

Maricela
Get over it already.

Andrew
The shooter is gonna come in the classroom.

Maricela
Keep calm

*Andrew hits his head against the shelves*

Andrew
I just know it. That guy’s gonna hear it. My heart, it’s going crazy in my chest. It feels like it’s going to explode.

Maricela
You’re gonna hurt your head!
Andrew
Right before my mother fired the gun the air was thick. It was dirty and filled with, and my heart was pounding just like now/

Maricela
Stop pulling your hair/

Andrew
I think I’m having a heart attack.

Maricela
I’m here with you. Remember? This is how we’d want to go, right? Together,

She holds him close.

Andrew
In a closet?

Maricela
Andrew, you know, maybe we should/

Andrew
What?

Maricela
You know how before you were saying/

Laura crawls to the side with Maricela and Andrew.

Laura
Are you okay?

They quickly separate.

Maricela
Just shaken.

Andrew
What’s Janice doing?

Laura
The impossible. See for yourself.
Andrew crawls to the other side.

You write your kids?

No.

Your husband?

No.

What were you doing?

Chatting up Janice.

Are you really religious or you just messing with us.

I don't know what I am.

You're a professor.

At a second rate university.

Don't call this place second rate.

My parents wanted me to do something more important.

Like become a doctor or something?

The kids aren't mine.
Maricela
Whose are they?

Laura
Some woman my husband was married to.

Maricela
That’s cool.

Laura
It’s a business arrangement.

Maricela
What do you get out of it?

Laura
Security.

Maricela
Gross.

Laura
I know. My husband adores me, but like a museum piece. I met him at a retreat for/

Maricela
Where’s the mother?

Laura
She left him. He doesn’t really/

Maricela
Is he loaded?

Laura
Yeah. You ever heard of Burger Shack?

Maricela
I love that place.

Laura
It’s his.

On the other side Janice is sitting with her back up against some shelves praying the rosary with her eyes closed.
Janice
Leave me alone Andrew.

Andrew
Where’d you get the rosary.

Janice
My pocket.

Andrew
You carry a rosary? I didn’t think you were religious/

Janice
It’s a habit from childhood.

Andrew
Well Laura will feel better/

Janice
I’m not trying to make her feel better/

Andrew
You look like an angel praying there.

Janice
I feel like shit.

Andrew
Here. Let me...

*He starts rubbing her shoulders.*

Janice
That’s nice.

Andrew
How come we’ve never/

Janice
Never/

*Andrew starts kissing her neck.*

*She turns to him and he straddles her over his lap*
Janice
They’re right on the other side!

Andrew
Shh. Let’s do this. Right here.

Janice
You always talk shit about me/

Andrew
I don’t mean it/

Janice
I’ve never been remotely attracted to you/

Andrew
If this is the end we shouldn’t have regrets. I want to be able to say I was happy when I died.

Janice
They might come over here and see us/

Andrew
Let me just get in there, I’ll be quick. I promise/

*Maricela and Laura each crawl around the bookshelves from different sides.*

Laura
Oh my!

Maricela
You little fucker!

Laura
Maybe we should go/

Janice
It’s not what you think.

Maricela
Did he give you the, ‘this is the end’ speech/

Laura
Is this a rerun?
Maricela
five minutes ago he was trying to seduce me on the other side/

Andrew
Stop exaggerating/

Laura
Ewww.

Janice
Ewww what?

Maricela
I can’t believe you would throw the moves on Janice/

Janice
You’re not the only woman people find attractive/

Laura
I just think if a guy will sleep with two women in the same day he might be sporting a cootie bomb/

Janice
Since when do you use that kind of language/

Laura
You’re the last person I’d expect to defend a player/

Andrew
Are all of you forgetting we may be living our last moments?

Maricela
That does not justify your behavior/

Andrew
How do you want to die/

Janice
I kind of have to agree with Andrew on this one. I don’t know what else is as distracting as a quick fu/

Maricela
It’s white privilege gone wild.
Andrew
Oh let go of that/

Maricela
I won’t let go of it. You can die your way, I’ll die my way.

Laura
What’s your way?

Maricela
You white people have the audacity to choose the activity you’ll be doing when you’re spontaneously killed by a gunman. Most people of color just have to die. They don’t get to choose their favorite adventure. But not you. You get a menu and order your flavor of death. How’s that not privilege?

Janice
It’s no surprise that Andrew likes women. I could’ve pegged him for a guy that would want to die screwing. So I won’t go so far as to say white privilege. But I’m a little surprised that he’d sleep with you or me because we’re the same age as him. He does chase young women.

Laura
They all do.

Janice
Why are you so terrified of women your own age?

Laura
That’s a microaggression.

Janice
Is it control?

Laura
Microaggression

Janice
Or are you afraid of being with women who know what they want/

Laura
And another/

Maricela
It’s white privilege.
Laura
Microaggression/

Andrew
Why are you all tearing me down/

Janice
Laura’s not. She’s just tallying it all up, like usual.

Maricela
When I first met you I thought you were a pompus ass, but I thought you had some endearing qualities/

Andrew
I thought you were a wacky, militant feminist.

Maricela
And you were wrong. I don’t align with feminists! They hate women of color more than white men do.

Andrew
Nobody wants to die during one of your lectures. And let’s be honest, nobody wants to live during one of your lectures.

Maricela
You have the goddamn nutritional value of a twinkie/

Laura
Why do you have to say god every time you cuss/

Andrew
That’s the meanest thing anyone’s ever said to me/

Laura
Some of us are praying here/

Maricela
Of course it is, you privileged little fuck/

Janice
We all know you’re not really praying/
Maricela
Poor guy gets called a twinkie and it’s so hurtful to him. Go post it on facebook. You and all your self-indulgent white friends can start a banner or twitter feed saying ‘all twinkies matter.’ You can make this about you, again, rather than looking at your f*cked up participation in institutional racism. Then, all you twinkies can start saving yourselves and you can post about your good work. You can be a leader in the next wave of the white industrial savior complex.

Janice
(to Laura)Are you recording this conversation so you can write an article about us using your fancy discourse analysis techniques without following ethical research procedures?

Laura
I don’t know what you’re talking about/

Janice
I read your article, the one where you quoted ‘Janine’ and everything I ever told you in confidence was written up and analyzed with your screwed up Christian brain.

Maricela
You two know each other?

Laura
We kind of go way back.

Janice
We kind of go way back. Kind of, my ass! Shall I tell them Pollypurefart?

Andrew
We all need to calm down here. I have just the thing. Anyone interested?

He pulls a joint from his pocket.

If we have to die, we might as well be relaxed.

Maricela
No way! You’ve been holding out this whole time?

Laura
I don’t smoke but under the circumstances/

Janice
Like hell you don’t smoke. I’ve seen you higher than a kite hundreds of times/
Maricela
You and your goddamed hoarding.

Janice
You especially love getting high after sex/

Laura
I don’t know what you’re talking about Janice!

Janice
Why don’t you ask Janine!

Maricela
Hand it over/

Janice
You got a lighter too?

Andrew
I’m no amateur.

Laura
I wonder if we’ll set off the smoke alarm.

Janice
That’s the least of our worries.

Andrew
I’m surprised you’re game Maricela. You usually chastise me for/

Maricela
I said hand it over.

He hands her the joint. Maricela lights it and takes a long, luxurious drag. Then she extinguishes the joint and starts stomping on it. She pulls a bottle of paint from the shelf and drowns the joint with paint.

Andrew
What the hell are you doing?

Maricela
I’ll be damned if I’m going to let you die in peace.
Andrew
You’re a real/

Laura
So I’m guessing we won’t be having the potluck?

Janice
I wouldn’t go to a potluck with you if my life depended on it.

Laura
Earlier you said/

Janice
You think I trust you?

Laura
How is that not a microaggression?

Andrew
You ruined a perfectly good joint/

Janice
I’d rather die than go to a party with you/

Andrew
The happiness police strikes again/

Maricela
I’m proud of who I am/

Laura
I don’t even know you guys/

Janice
Same lie you tell your husband?

Maricela
I hate you all.

Laura
Your company is disturbing/

Andrew
I hate you all too. (to Maricela) But especially you.
Janice
If we get out of here alive I’m going to make your lives a living hell/

Maricela
If I get another chance you better watch your back. I’m going to tell it like it is. Sexual harassment/

Laura
With witnesses.

Janice
I’m in. But I’ll find a way to screw you too Laura.

Laura
Can I quote you on that, Janine?

Andrew
You mean Janice?

Janice
Except when she’s using my private life for her research, without my consent.

Maricela
I hate you all.

*The sounds of guns closer. Sonny and Cher sing “I’ve got you babe.” A final gunshot rings and no more music can be heard. Silence for a moment.*

*They all sprawl on the floor.*

*In whispering tones...*

Janice
He’s here.

Laura
He’s gonna get us.

Andrew
He might be a woman.

Maricela
We all know it’s a man.
Andrew
He never would’ve chosen this room if he hadn’t heard that goddamned song.

Maricela
Stop with the blaming.

Janice
Why aren’t there any more shots?

Silence
Andrew
The silence is killing me/

Maricela
(sings)Don’t let them say your hair’s too long
’Cause I don’t care, with you I can’t go wrong

Janice
(sings)Then put your little hand in mine

Laura
There ain’t no hill or mountain we can’t climb

Maricela
(sings)I got you babe
I got you babe

Andrew
(sings)I got you to hold my hand
I got you to understand

They hold hands.
The sound of one more gun shot. Prolonged silence.

Maricela
I got you babe.

The closet door opens. Blackout

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Maricela
(whispering and shivering) I can’t die, I haven’t lived.
Laura (crying) it’s happening. This isn’t a drill. I’m so scared.

\textit{Andrew has Maricela in a restrained position. He lowers her to the ground}

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

\textit{Janice moves Laura into a flat position on the ground.}

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

Laura
She’s right. We’re doomed.

Andrew
Laura!

\textit{Laura begins to cry. She slumps on the floor in the fetal position.}

Janice
Grab her.

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

\textit{Maricela goes to the door.}

Janice
Quiet!

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

\textit{Maricela begins running in circles around the bookshelf in panic.}

Andrew
There’s an active shooter in the building/

Maricela
You think we’re gonna die?
Janice
We might survive if you all can keep your mouths shut.

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

Laura
You were using his name in vain.

Maricela
I was praying to god.

Laura
And please stop cussing.

Janice
Just keep calm.

A loud school bell rings!

Maricela
Quiet!

Laura
Oh my god!

Andrew
Jesus!

They sit. A loud school bell rings!

Maricela
I’d rather read a Madonna book to my kid than this rat and cookie shit.

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

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

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

Maricela
Just another cluster fuck of White people with connections being promoted, while true talent/
Andrew

It’s about assemblage/

Maricela

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

Laura
don’t use that language right now.

Maricela

All these children’s authors must totally be fucking the publishers.

We don’t care/

Andrew

It makes a circle, nothing happens/

Laura

It’s on the New York Times bestseller list.

Maricela

I totally could’ve written this book.

Laura

I don’t think we’re supposed to be talking.

Janice

Let’s just sit.

Maricela

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

Andrew

Shut up already.

Maricela

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

End Play
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