

Sabor

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CHARACTERS

CLARA – Curvy, mixed-raced Puerto Rican woman, raised by her dad and abuelo, has spent most of her life wealthy and among the upper class, French-trained chef, strong, impulsive, sexual, intellectual, emotionally young, cooking is her great love, early 30s.

VICENTE – Trim, cisgendered man, Clara’s dad, Nuyorican from Bedford-Stuyvesant, served in Vietnam, started his own restaurant in Manhattan, Michelin Star chef, strong, dignified, intense, only speaks when he has something important to say, late 60s.

ABUELO – Beautiful, Mestizo man, loving, intellectual, as Clara remembers him, 30s.

LUIS – Beautiful, cisgendered man, Puerto Rican, intense, machismo, loves Clara, 30s.

MATEO – Chubby, gender non-binary, Afro-Boricua, a breath of fresh air for Clara, 30s.

SILENT FILM CHARACTERS

Cameraman (late-1930s, mid-1950s, 1968, late-1990s)

Curvy Afro-Boricua Woman (late-1930s & mid-1950s)

Old Indigenous Boricua Man (late-1930s)

Chubby Nuyorican Kid wearing thick-rimmed glasses (mid-1950s)

Heavysset Nuyorican Young Man wearing thick-rimmed glasses (1968)

White Customers (late 1990s)

Short-Order Latino Cooks (late 1990s)

Latinx Workers (Current)

NOTE ON CASTING

Sabor centers characters who touch upon the diverse experiences of what it means to be Puerto Rican. As such, casting needs to be in tandem with the basic character descriptions provided. It is equally imperative when casting to have a clear understanding of the nuances of the characters’ perceived/placed identities and how that may shift throughout the play. My hope is that this level of analysis and care is not viewed as an obstacle, but rather, an asset to be cultivated in the move towards social-conscious casting.

TIME

The present, but never separate from Puerto Rican history.

PLACE

Queens, New York. A small studio apartment consisting of a bed, dresser, and butcher block island. The main door has an old single-cylinder deadbolt and door chain. On top of the dresser is pepper spray, a pocketknife, vibrating dildo, and a framed black and white picture of what appears to be an indigenous man and black woman on their wedding day. On top of the butcher block island is a rolled-up knife bag, notebook, portable Bose speakers, and an old shoebox with papers and cassette tapes inside. Tucked underneath the island is a scratched leather stool. Hanging above the island is a pan rack with handcrafted copper cookware dangling from it. The appliances in the kitchen are old, but everything is clean and meticulously organized.

ACT I

IMPAIRED PALATE

(CLARA, a curvy woman with light caramel-colored skin and dark curly hair, is standing in the dimly lit kitchen wearing a Metallica t-shirt and underwear. She downs a glass of whiskey and opens the cabinet above the stove to pull out a nearly empty bottle of Michter's 10-year Straight Bourbon Whiskey to refill her glass. Then she tastes the food that is cooking on the stove. She immediately turns to the sink to spit it out.)

CLARA

Putain! Quinoa chili?! It's like... spic risotto. Great fucken idea, Clara.

(CLARA laughs at herself and drinks her whiskey. Then she goes to her iPhone to play music. Sounds of rough porn are suddenly blasting through the Bose portable speakers. She quickly changes it to an R&B song, then to classic rock, then blues. It's too sad. She switches it to a bomba song. Feeling the music in her body, her feet begin to step in rhythm with the percussion. Her large hips shake and then sway in rapid fire, causing her to spill her drink on the floor. She grabs the towel hanging from the oven to dry the spill. She turns on the faucet to rinse the towel but loses grip of her phone and it falls down the drain. The music suddenly stops. She turns off the faucet and looks down the drain.)

CLARA

Goodbye phone.

(CLARA laughs and throws the wet towel on the counter. She opens the cabinet above the stove to refill her glass. Then she grabs a hanging copper frying pan from the ceiling rack and places it on the stove. She opens the fridge to pull out a pork chop. She holds up the chop to look it over.)

CLARA

When did I get you? Will you make me sick? Answer me dammit!

(CLARA laughs and places the chop on the frying pan. Then she slowly sinks to the kitchen floor and falls onto her back.)

CLARA

Je suis perdu.

(A beautiful Mestizo dressed like a young Frank Sinatra appears in the kitchen. He looks down at CLARA on the floor. She looks up at him.)

CLARA

Luis?

(He kneels next to her and helps her to lie on her side with her head on his lap.)

CLARA

mmm... Maybe you were. I thought it was just young love that evolved into routine, but maybe...

(He strokes her arm. She sighs.)

CLARA

The first touch. Hours on end picking through micro herbs side by side and then your shoulder gently brushes up against mine. Such a simple thing. But it filled me with a rush of joy and nerves, splitting atoms inside me. I felt like I was going to explode. Forced into a sudden awareness of my body. But it wasn't like the violent loss of my virginity. It wasn't a loss at all. It was life. I was alive in that moment. As a woman.

(He strokes her head and sings quietly as she falls asleep.)

ABUELO

TRISTE LUCHA DEL ÁRBOL SECADO
INCAPAZ DE SENTIR SUS RAÍCES SEDIENTAS
VANO ESFORZARSE POR VIVIR
EN TRATAR DE COMPRENDER SU PROPIA VIDA

(Lights go down.)

PORK AND STAKES

(The next morning. CLARA wakes up alone on the kitchen floor, lying on her side. She hears a rattling noise from the sink and slowly stands to investigate the sound. Her hands shake as she reaches into the drain to find her phone inside.)

CLARA

The fuck?

(CLARA reaches for the towel that hangs on the oven, but it isn't there. She sees it on the counter, picks it up, realizes it's wet and smelling of whiskey, and quickly drops it. She wipes the phone on her shirt instead. Then she listens to her voicemails that comes up through the portable speakers as she prepares herself a glass of water and aspirin.)

RICARDO *(voicemail)*

Oye, mami. What's good? Making sure you're coming out tonight! You are, right? There are two Spanish guys accompanying me. And I mean by way of Spain Spanish! And the one I'm fairly confident might be straight, is so your type! Beautiful and brilliant! He's here for this sexy soiree at Le Bernardin next week to compete against some of the greatest chefs. Like Michelin Star chefs. The entire staff has been sworn to secrecy and forced to sign some legal documents not to utter a word about the secret competition. So scandalous! Tell you more when I see you tonight, mami. But I will disown you if you don't at least put on a dress! Te amo, byeeee!

(CLARA plays the next voicemail.)

RICARDO *(voicemail)*

Oye, mami. The Spaniards and I just got to the club. I'll ping you the location. Don't forget to put on lipstick! Te amo, byeeee!

(CLARA plays the next voicemail.)

RICARDO *(voicemail)*

You seriously not coming? Did I mention this is a beautiful Spaniard? Dark, dreamy, and like six foot a hundred? If I find out you stayed in to drink by yourself all night instead of enjoying a nice helping of jamón, our friendship is over! Te amo, byeeee!

CLARA *(shaking her head)*

Fucken Ricardo.

(CLARA plays the next message.)

VICENTE *(voicemail)*

Clara. It's Vicente.

CLARA

Fuck!

VICENTE

It is now two minutes past the agreed upon meeting time. You were to—

(The phone rings, cutting off the voicemail and startling CLARA. As she looks at who is calling, her posture suddenly straitens. She answers the phone.)

CLARA

Hello? Yes. I know. I'm sorry I—You are?! Oh, okay. I'll be right out. No, I'll be right out. Oh... Okay... Come on up then.

(CLARA frantically runs off to the bathroom and returns with a toothbrush in her mouth. She places the towel and used glass underneath the sink. Then she finishes brushing her teeth, rinses her mouth under the faucet, and impulsively throws her toothbrush under the sink as well. She takes a deep breath and tries to compose herself. Then she looks down and realizes she's not wearing pants.)

CLARA

Holy Fuck!

(CLARA runs to the dresser to pull out a pair of jeans and squeezes into them. There is a knock at the door.)

CLARA

Coming!

(CLARA takes off the Metallica t-shirt and tosses it under the bed. She finds a nice, plain shirt to put on instead. There is another knock at the door.)

CLARA

One second!

(CLARA goes to the door, unlatches the chain, and then sees the dildo on the dresser. She runs to pick up the dildo and shoves it under her pillow. She runs back to unlock the door and opens it to VICENTE, a fit and dignified man in his late sixties dressed in sharp business attire wearing thin eyeglasses.)

CLARA

Hi. Come in.

VICENTE

Were you sleeping?

CLARA

No.

VICENTE

We agreed on meeting at oh seven hundred.

CLARA

Sorry. Come in.

(VICENTE walks into the space.)

CLARA

I meant to be at your house by then but... I'm sorry. I'm glad you're here though. It's... It's a cozy place, isn't it? Don't you think?

(VICENTE inspects the place.)

CLARA

And no carpets! I hate carpets. Plus, I like that the focus is on the kitchen which is great, for me, because that's my focus. So... yeah.

VICENTE

Chuletas for breakfast?

CLARA

No. Um. No. Well, yes. I was cooking—preparing—preparing food for later.

VICENTE

Stove's off.

CLARA

oh.

VICENTE

You need a hot pan to sear the meat.

CLARA

Yeah. I know.

VICENTE

Color's off too.

CLARA

Yes, dad. I know, obviously.

(CLARA throws the chop in the trash and runs the pan under the faucet.)

CLARA

So why did you want to come up?

VICENTE

Pork is a fatty meat.

CLARA

You serve pork at the restaurant.

VICENTE

Everything in—

CLARA

Moderation. Yeah, I know. Although, they say it's more of an issue of simple carbs and processed foods now.

VICENTE

Hm.

CLARA

Do you want to sit down?

VICENTE

Where?

(CLARA gestures to the stool by the island, but he doesn't move.)

CLARA

I'm sorry I didn't show up this morning. Is everything okay?

VICENTE

How are things?

CLARA

I'm good. Sleeping's not great, but overall—

VICENTE

Clara, how are things with your business?

CLARA

oh... Good. Fine. Well, you know, it's always slow starting a business at first.

VICENTE

Hm.

CLARA

For most people.

VICENTE

Next month will be six months.

CLARA

Five weeks away, actually, but yeah, that happened fast. But at the same time, a lot has happened in the past four months and three weeks. Like this place. Glad you've finally come over.

VICENTE

I would have given you money for a decent place in the city.

CLARA

I like Queens. It makes me think of the old neighborhood in Bed-Stuy. kinda. Besides, I only wanted to borrow enough to get my business started.

VICENTE

What are you working on?

CLARA

I've been trying new things. Like I've been thinking about doing something with baked eggs and sofrito in like individual le creuset pans and... and yesterday I experimented with a quinoa chicken chili. Interesting, right?

VICENTE

Quinoa... in chili?

CLARA

Healthy Latinx food. Like you make but... simpler. Still complex flavor but... simple.

VICENTE

I serve Contemporary Latino. Not Latin-X.

CLARA

It's the same thing, dad, just... gender neutral.

VICENTE

The "x" isn't even in Spanish.

CLARA

Sure, but it's nice for those of us who don't speak Spanish.

VICENTE

Debes saber el idioma de tu gente.

CLARA

Are you saying I should learn Spanish in Spanish?

VICENTE

Do your clients like this... simple-complex approach of yours?

CLARA

Oh yeah! It's been going really well!

VICENTE

And they are?

CLARA

They are all for it!

VICENTE

No. Who are your clients?

CLARA

I have several prospects.

VICENTE

Clara, the reason for our scheduled meeting at zero seven hundred hours was to discuss an unexpected opening. At Sabor. If you are willing to walk away from this—

CLARA

We agreed on six months.

VICENTE

This is—

CLARA

We agreed that if I couldn't pay you back in six months that I would work for you at that point. Not before.

VICENTE

This is a rare opportunity that I'm—

CLARA

No. Thank you. But no. I will pay you back in five weeks.

VICENTE

With the pay from your... prospects?

CLARA

Yes. Are you sure you don't want to sit down?

(VICENTE walks over to the stool but does not sit. He sees the old shoebox.)

VICENTE

What is all this?

CLARA

Just some of abuelo's stuff. I was searching for recipes and found—

VICENTE

He was a short-order cook. Not a chef.

CLARA

I know, but I thought... Did you know he wrote poetry?

VICENTE

I understand the past couple of years have been hard. And... I miss him too, mi'jita. But you need move on with your life. You need structure. Discipline. A real job—

CLARA

A have discipline! Try having to do your own food prep every day and preparing every dish on your own without an entire staff of specialized chefs. That is discipline. And a real job!

VICENTE

You do all this work for your prospects?

CLARA

Yes! And good prospects at that! Wealthy prospects!

VICENTE

And they are?

CLARA

what?

VICENTE

Who are your prospects? What are their names?

CLARA

I can't remember just off the top of my head.

VICENTE

What is your plan to generate revenue from these nameless prospects by the end of the month? Honestly, Clara.

CLARA

From... from a strategic developmental marketing approach that I have plans to implement and expect great returns... from.

VICENTE

And that is?

CLARA

Have you ever heard of the elite and exclusive Chefs' Competition? Okay... Well...

CLARA cont.

It's this underground, like, festival thing where the best chefs in the world—mainly Michelin Star chefs—compete. Compete against each other. And investors, food writers, culinary experts, maybe political figures, I'm not sure, but definitely the upper echelon of the foody world attend and rank them. And It's happening here. In the city. At Le Bernardin. Next week. And I've been invited to attend. To compete. Amazing, right?

VICENTE

Hm.

CLARA

Yeah. And I was admittedly a little apprehensive about returning to Le Bernardin... and maybe even somewhat surprised to have been invited back, given how I left, and being a... a caterer now, but... But I'm attending it next week. And that should generate a lot of business as a marketing strategy for bookings, given that my business is generated mostly by word of mouth. So... I will be able to pay you back by deadline.

VICENTE

You're attending?

CLARA

Yes. Taking my food. Yes.

VICENTE

Your catering food from... this kitchen?

CLARA

Yes.

VICENTE

In Queens?

CLARA

Yes.

VICENTE

Mira. If you came on now, I would set you up as—

CLARA

No.

VICENTE

Clara, please...

CLARA

No. But again, thank you.

VICENTE

Well, then. I have meetings. And résumés to consider.

CLARA

Do you want to stay for a bit? You came all the way over here. How about I whip us up some omelets or—

VICENTE

No. You should shower up. It's a bit... stuffy in here.

(VICENTE goes to the door.)

VICENTE

I still expect you to hold true to your part of the contract, Clara.

CLARA

Yeah, I know. Bien sûr. Thanks, dad.

(VICENTE exits. CLARA locks the door and goes to hang a fresh towel in the kitchen. She opens the cabinet above the stove, hesitates, and then closes it.)

CLARA

fuck.

(CLARA leaves to take a shower.)

MEMORIA

(Later that night. CLARA is wearing a baggy Tupac t-shirt and underwear. She opens the cabinet above the stove and pulls out a full bottle of Bulleit Bourbon Whiskey. She fills her glass and takes several gulps. Then goes to her notebook on the island. She tries to think of an idea, but can't. Giving up, she goes over to the bed, places the drink on the dresser, and climbs under the sheets. She rotates her

phone horizontally and taps on it a few times. Sounds of porn are suddenly blasting through the portable speakers.)

MAN *(from the speakers)*

Get on your knees, bitch.

(The volume startles CLARA. The sounds suddenly stop and come up again through the small speaker on her phone.)

MAN *(from the phone)*

That's a good girl. Are you a good girl?

WOMAN *(from the phone)*

Yes.

MAN *(from the phone)*

Yes, what?

WOMAN *(from the phone)*

Yes, sir.

MAN *(from the phone)*

No.

WOMAN *(from the phone)*

Yes, master.

MAN *(from the phone)*

That's a good little whore.

(CLARA pulls out the dildo from underneath her pillow. She turns on the vibrating setting and puts it underneath the sheets.)

MAN *(from the phone)*

You like that don't you?

(CLARA begins to moan. A couple next door starts to yell.)

MAN *(from next door)*

You crazy!

You're a prick! WOMAN (*from next door*)

Ima prick?! MAN (*from next door*)

Yes, you a fucken prick! WOMAN (*from next door*)

(Annoyed, CLARA turns up the volume on her phone.)

Good girl. MAN (*from the phone*)

Fuck you! MAN (*from next door*)

Fuck you, you fucken prick! WOMAN (*from next door*)

That's a good little girl. MAN (*from the phone*)

Shut up! CLARA (*to neighbors*)

That's how I like it. MAN (*from the phone*)

You crazy bitch! MAN (*from next door*)

Good little whore. MAN (*from the phone*)

I'm gunna cut your prick off! WOMAN (*from next door*)

Just try, bitch! MAN (*from next door*)

Shut the fuck up!

CLARA *(to neighbors)*

Are you a good little whore?

MAN *(from the phone)*

Fuck you!

WOMAN *(from next door)*

You're master's good little whore, aren't you?

MAN *(from the phone)*

Fuck you, you fucken bitch!

MAN *(from next door)*

Ah, fuck it.

CLARA

(CLARA turns off the porn, puts her dildo in the dresser and grabs her drink. The beautiful Mestizo appears, dressed in a World War II army uniform.)

Jesus Fuck!

CLARA

(CLARA grabs her pepper spray and gets out of bed, bumping the dresser and knocking over the framed black and white picture. The man stares intensely at the fallen picture. CLARA follows his gaze and picks it up. She looks at the picture and then back at him several times.)

Are you...? It is you, isn't it? But why do you...? You look so young. Like the picture.

CLARA

I fucken hate you!

WOMAN *(from next door)*

Fuck you, cunt!

MAN *(from next door)*

Shut up!

CLARA *(at the neighbors)*

(Video footage from an 8mm camera is projected onto the apartment wall.)

(VIDEO: The footage is from the late-1930s. From the perspective of the Cameraman. He films a young, Curvy Afro-Boricua Woman walking in the streets of a rural town in Puerto Rico. The young woman stops at a food stand made of wood and WWI scrap metal. A wrinkly Indigenous Boricua stirs food floating in a large pan of oil. The young woman points at some food and the old man hands her an alcapurria. Then the old man waves at the Cameraman. She leaves the stand and keeps walking. ABUELO sings over the projections.)

ABUELO

TRISTE LUCHA DEL ÁRBOL SECADO
INCAPAZ DE SENTIR SUS RAÍCES SEDIENTAS
VANO ESFORZARSE POR VIVIR
EN TRATAR DE COMPRENDER SU PROPIA VIDA

AY, QUE DULCE A SENTIR TUS CARÍÑOS EN
LA NOCHE; PERO TAN TERRIBLE SABER
QUE MÁS TARDE EN LA MADRUGADA
LA LUCHA SIGUE SIENDO

TRISTE LUCHA DEL ÁRBOL SECADO
INCAPAZ DE SENTIR SUS RAÍCES SEDIENTAS
VANO ESFORZARSE POR EL AMOR
EN TRATAR DE COMPRENDER SU PROPIA VIDA

TRISTE LUCHA DEL ÁRBOL SECADO
LO QUE TUS CARÍÑOS MÁS SUAVES
PODRÍA TRAE NUEVOS RECUERDOS
PERO NO PUEDE SACIAR SUS RAÍCES SEDIENTAS

TRISTE Y INTERMINABLE LUCHA
SIEMPRE ENRAIZADA EN LA ARENA ROBADO
QUE NO SE PUEDE OLVIDAR
EN TRATAR DE COMPRENDER SU PROPIA VIDA

VIDEO: The young woman turns to give the Cameraman a loving look.

IMAGES: The video fades into still images from WWII: Newspaper article titled, "Soldiers of the Nation," about PRs in the war; photos of PR men in war; Iconic photo of Iwo Jima and Okinawa of men raising U.S. flag; Men from the 65th Infantry holding a Puerto Rican flag.

VIDEO: The images fades into video showing Brooklyn in the mid-1950s. A chubby little brown boy with thick-rimmed glasses appears on a stoop. He seems upset. The same curvy Afro-Boricua woman enters the frame. She tries to console the boy, but he keeps crying. We see the Cameraman's hand giving the little boy a piragua. The boy tastes the icy treat and stops crying. Then the boy gives the Cameraman a smile so big that his chubby cheeks push up his oversized glasses.

VIDEO: The video fades to the face of the boy as a heavyset young man with the same thick-rimmed glasses. It pans out to show the young man in Vietnam-era jungle fatigues, trying to look brave.

IMAGES: The footage fades into several Iconic Vietnam War images.

TRISTE LUCHA... TRISTE LUCHA. . .

IMAGE: The final image is of el Castillo San Cristóbal in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

(ABUELO stands with the colonial stronghold projected across his face.)

ABUELO

En el pasado está el presente.

MAN *(from next door)*

You fucken cunt!

CLARA *(at the neighbors)*

Shut up!

(ABUELO and the images are gone. CLARA climbs back into bed and pulls the covers over her as the lights go down.)

AFTERTASTE

(The next evening. The bed is perfectly made, and everything is in its place. CLARA is wearing a plain shirt and jeans. She goes to pull out a small le creuset pot from the oven, but her hand shakes slightly, and she burns it on the pot.)

CLARA

Ay, Dios Putain Shit!

(CLARA quickly runs her hand under cold water. Then she goes to the cabinet above the stove and pulls out the bottle of remaining Bulleit Bourbon Whiskey. She puts it on the counter and looks at it.)

CLARA

fuck.

(After a moment, CLARA gets a small spoon to taste her food. She quickly turns toward the sink, spits out the food, and throws the spoon in the sink.)

CLARA

A fancy spic omelet? Another great fucking idea, Clara!

(Then CLARA turns back to look at the bottle of whiskey. After a moment, she throws the bottle into the trash. There's a knock at the door. She goes to look through the peephole, and hesitates.)

LUIS

I know you're there. I saw your shadow over the peephole, Clara.

(CLARA unlocks and opens the door to LUIS, a beautiful Puerto Rican man in his mid-thirties wearing stylish business attire.)

CLARA

How'd you know where I live?

LUIS

Hello to you too.

CLARA

Hi. How'd you know where I live?

LUIS

Information gets around.

CLARA

Ricardo?

LUIS

Yes. Can I come in?

(CLARA lets him in. They stand in silence for a moment looking at each other.)

LUIS

It's good to see you. You look... Have you lost weight?

CLARA

No.

LUIS

Well, you look good. You have something to drink?

No. CLARA

No? LUIS

No. CLARA

Please? LUIS

(CLARA walks into the kitchen. She suddenly freezes.)

What? LUIS

Uh, yeah... Just forgot I was cleaning things out right before you got here.

(CLARA reaches into the trash to pull out the whiskey.)

There wasn't much left so... CLARA

(LUIS nods and CLARA begins prepping their drinks with ice and club soda.)

So this is where you live now, huh? LUIS

Yup. CLARA

I like it. LUIS

No, you don't. CLARA

LUIS

No. I do. It has a lot of... personality.

CLARA

Is personality a euphemism for slum?

LUIS

It's missing some of your usual yuppy princess comforts, but it's not bad. Cozy.

CLARA

Not as cozy as the Upper East Side.

LUIS

Is Upper East Side a euphemism for pretentious?

CLARA

You have no problem being a... Soigné.

(LUIS smiles)

LUIS

So do you like living out here?

CLARA

Why are you here, Luis?

LUIS

I just want to make sure you're okay.

CLARA

I'm fine.

LUIS

Are you?

CLARA

Why do you care?

LUIS

Come on, Clara.

CLARA
No. Seriously. Why do you care?

LUIS
I love you.

CLARA
You love me?

LUIS
Yes.

CLARA
Breaking off our engagement was an odd way to show it.

LUIS
I didn't make you happy.

CLARA
I was grieving! Nobody could make me happy!

LUIS
We were engaged for four years before he died.

CLARA
So?!

LUIS
So you were unhappy before.

CLARA
How is Miss Teen Puerto Rico? Caramel or whatever her name is?

LUIS
Carmen. And she's Peruvian, blanquita.

CLARA
Please don't call me that.

LUIS

Sorry. Doesn't matter though. I ended things.

CLARA

Didn't want to be her prom date, huh?

LUIS

Beauty fades quickly when it's only on the surface. You know, she wouldn't even eat my food?

CLARA

Surprise, surprise.

LUIS

What's that saying? That chef's quote about skinny people...?

CLARA

"Never trust a skinny cook."

LUIS

No... I think it was Julia Child.

CLARA

"Fat gives things flavor"?

LUIS

No... It was what you used to say to me. About people.

CLARA

Oh. "People who love to eat are always the best people."

LUIS

That's the one!

CLARA

So you broke it off with the kid because she didn't like to eat?

LUIS

Yes. Well, that and I'd always have to be... gentle... during.

(CLARA finishes making their drinks and hands LUIS his.)

LUIS

Oof. Stronger than you used to make it.

CLARA

No. Whiskey's cheaper.

LUIS

I never understood why whiskey.

CLARA

Why whiskey?

LUIS

It's so... It makes me think of old western movies. Something cowboys would drink.

CLARA

Yeah. I guess so.

LUIS

It was red wine for a long time.

CLARA

Bordeaux. A full-bodied Cab. mmm.

LUIS

Coño, even as kids you were a snob.

CLARA

Yes. But I stopped drinking red wine when I was too groggy the next day and got behind on mise en place. Because someone didn't help me with prep. Only time I've been kicked out of the kitchen. Jerk!

LUIS

Please, if I didn't take advantage of your few missteps, I never would have kept up. But I still don't understand why you switched to whiskey. Apposed to other spirits.

CLARA

Would it be better if I preferred rum? More "authentic"?

LUIS

No, I remember you and Puerto Rican Spiced Rum. Not a good combination.

CLARA (*laughing*)

Yeah... sorry about that.

LUIS

I've missed having drinks with you.

CLARA

No, you miss where those drinks led.

LUIS

Yes. I do.

CLARA

So... Tell me why you're really here, Luis.

LUIS

I heard you were invited to the Chefs' Competition at Le Bernardin.

CLARA

Ricardo?

LUIS

No. Chef Hernández.

CLARA

You were talking to my dad about me?

LUIS

He asked about the competition. Just before... Before he announced that I was going to be the new Executive Chef... of Sabor.

CLARA

What?!

LUIS

I was surprised too. He announced it yesterday afternoon. I always thought it'd be you, but... But you've never been a good businessman, mon Coeur. You're all about the food.

CLARA

I can't believe he... Wow... Well, I guess... shit. Congratulations.

LUIS

I'm worried about you.

CLARA

I mean, it's... but, yeah... I think I'll be okay.

LUIS

No, I'm worried because... I know you lied about being invited to the competition.

CLARA

No, I didn't!

LUIS

Yes, mon Coeur, you did.

CLARA

How could you possibly know that?!

LUIS

Because I was.

CLARA

Bullshit!

LUIS

No. Not bullshit. I'm the new Executive Chef of Sabor in the Flatiron District under Chef Hernández, a Michelin Star chef. Even three-star French assholes are concerned with diversity optics, verdad? I'm sorry. I know this is hard but—

CLARA

I'm the one who showed you how to be a chef!

LUIS

We were both mentored under—

CLARA

I'm the one who taught you technique between eighteen-hour shifts!

LUIS

Clara—

CLARA

I'm the one who coached you through the constant stress and hazing!

LUIS

Clara—

CLARA

I was the one who insisted my father hire you as Head Chef! If it wasn't for me you, you would have peaked at Chef de Partie!!!

LUIS

I know! I know. You helped me become the chef I am today. And I am thankful. Truly. I'm sorry, mon Coeur. But... What were you thinking? Why lie about that?

CLARA

I don't... I don't know. I guess I just didn't want to have to work under El Jefe Hernández. At least, not on his terms.

LUIS

He's not so bad.

CLARA

There's no way I'll be able to pay him back in under five weeks. It was just... wishful thinking. And Jesus fuck, now I'm going to have to work under you?! Oh my God.

LUIS

I'm not so bad either.

CLARA

You would be mortified if the situation were reverse!

LUIS

I'm sorry.

CLARA

fuck.

LUIS

I'm sorry about... about all of it.

CLARA

It's not your fault. My dad is... a difficult man. And it was a stupid impulsive lie.

LUIS

No... I meant about us. I'm sorry.

CLARA

Yeah...

LUIS

I thought I was doing the right thing by ending it but...

CLARA

Well, shit happens. It's getting late. You should probably go.

LUIS

Okay...

(CLARA takes LUIS' drink and ushers him to the door. As she goes to open it, LUIS kisses her. She kisses him back for a second and then pushes him away.)

CLARA

No.

(LUIS walks into the hallway.)

LUIS

Goodnight, mon Coeur.

(LUIS leaves. CLARA closes and locks the door. She goes to her drink.)

CLARA

Fuck. Fuck! Fucken fuck. Shit! I'm so fucked!

(She pours the rest of the whiskey in her glass and puts the empty bottle in the cabinet below the sink. Lights go down.)

NEW FLAVOR

(The following morning. CLARA is wearing a baggy Tina Turner t-shirt and underwear. Her hands shake as she pours herself a cup of drip coffee and pops a couple aspirin. Then she pulls out a piece of paper from the shoebox.)

CLARA

Triste lu-cha del ar-bol... árbol se se-cado. Triste lucha del ár-bol secado.

(There's a knock at the door. CLARA walks over and looks through the peephole.)

CLARA

What do you want?

MATEO *(from behind the door)*

Instacart delivery!

CLARA

What?

(CLARA reluctantly opens the door to a black person in their mid-thirties wearing a bright green Instacart t-shirt and casual Harlem pants, holding groceries.)

CLARA

You have the wrong place. I didn't order anything.

MATEO

Oh. Lemme jus' check the name on the—

(CLARA shuts the door. She starts to walk back to the shoebox when there's another upbeat knock at the door. She groans and goes back to open the door.)

MATEO

It says your address on the receipt. You ordered it last night at—

CLARA

I don't care what it reads. I didn't order anything.

(CLARA shuts the door again.)

MATEO (*from behind the door*)
No te llamas, Clara Hernández Rousseau?

CLARA
No!

MATEO (*from behind the door*)
No recibirás un reembolso, ya sabes.

(*CLARA opens the door.*)

CLARA
What?

MATEO
No recibirás un reembolso.

(*CLARA shakes her head, annoyed.*)

MATEO
Oh, my bad. I was jus' saying you won't get a refund.

CLARA
Are you... Afro-Latinx?

MATEO
Soy Boricua, sí.

CLARA
You speak Spanish?

MATEO
Pues, sí, por supuesto.

CLARA
So you can read Spanish?

MATEO
Yeah...?

Come in!

CLARA

Oh... uhm...

MATEO

I'm sorry. For being rude. I'm just a little hungover. Friend's birthday party last night. Please come on in.

CLARA

Uh...

MATEO

Come in!

CLARA

Ohm... kitchen?

MATEO (*holding up the bags*)

Yes. Thanks.

CLARA

(MATEO awkwardly walks to the kitchen with the bags of groceries as CLARA goes to the island.)

Where would you...?

MATEO

Counter—thanks—Would you mind translating this into English?

CLARA

Uh...

MATEO

(MATEO places the bags on the counter as CLARA hands them the paper.)

What does it say?

CLARA

MATEO

Okay... Triste lucha del árbol secado. Sad fight. No, sad struggle. Sad struggle of the dried up or drying tree? Incapaz de sentir sus. . . Incapable or unable to feel its raíces—

CLARA

You can just say it in English! ...if you don't mind.

MATEO

Mkay... Sad struggle of the drying tree. Unable to feel its thirsty roots. Vain striving to live in trying to understand your own life. So sweet to feel your affection. No... So sweet to feel your caresses in the night, but so terrible to know that later in the light of day, the struggle remains. Then it repeats... kinda.

CLARA

Romantic.

MATEO

Sad. Who wrote the poem?

CLARA

My abuelo. I think it was a song actually. He had a beautiful voice. Like Frank Sinatra. Or maybe he just listed to Frank Sinatra? I'm not sure... But I do remember him signing a lot as when I was kid. I had no idea he could write though. It's good, isn't it? I've been looking through his memorabilia, writings from when he was a young man in Puerto Rico. And I'm realizing he was this interesting person. To me he was simply, abuelo, the sweet old man who taught me how to cook and brought my dad and me together on Monday nights over arroz con gandules. I had no idea...

MATEO

We tend do that con familia, huh? It's like we spend so much of our early life with them that they become snapshots of memories instead of the complicated ever-changing people they really are.

(For the first time, CLARA really sees MATEO.)

CLARA

What's your name?

MATEO

Mateo.

CLARA

I'm Clara.

MATEO

Mucho gusto.

CLARA

Oh my God! I'm so sorry. This is so weird. Asking some food delivery—

MATEO

Instacart.

CLARA

Right. Asking you into my home when you're just dropping off groceries. It's like you walked into a cheesy porno.

MATEO

'Specially since you're not wearing pants.

CLARA

Holy Fuck!

(CLARA starts to run off to the bathroom.)

MATEO

Wait!

CLARA

What!?

MATEO

You can't jus' be leavin' a random stranger alone in your apartment! That ain't safe!

CLARA

It wasn't safe to let you in in the first place, but you seem very nice.

MATEO

Yah, but I could just be actin' that way to get you to let your guard down.

CLARA

Are you?

MATEO

If I was, it would be pretty stupid to tell you that's what I'm doin'.

CLARA

Unless you wanted to gain even more trust by pointing out that's what you're doing.

MATEO

True true. Damn, now I'm startin' to feel like a total creep. Ima gunna make my way out the door now. Let you... get dressed.

(MATEO steps outside as CLARA goes over to the dresser to squeeze into a pair of jeans. Then she goes to open the door.)

CLARA

Do I need to sign anything?

MATEO

Have you not ordered from Instacart before?

CLARA

No. I drunk ordered last night. After the party event.

MATEO

Ahhh. I see. Well that explains the jar of pickled eggs.

CLARA

What?!

MATEO

Jus' messin'.

(CLARA laughs.)

MATEO

You wan' go out sometime? A date?

CLARA

Oh! Um...

(MATEO's phone buzzes.)

MATEO

Ohp. Looks like I got another order. Do you have plans for tomorrow?

CLARA

Uh...

MATEO

Let's do dinner!

CLARA

Well, actually...

(MATEO's phone buzzes again.)

MATEO

How 'bout eight? Eight work?

(MATEO's phone buzzes again.)

MATEO

I'm blowin' up! Tomorrow at eight?

CLARA

Sure...?

MATEO

Great! See you then, Clara Hernández Rousseau.

(MATEO leaves and CLARA shuts the door and stands looking confused for a moment. There is a knock at the door.)

CLARA

I already said yes... I think.

LUIS *(from behind the door)*

What?

(CLARA opens the door to LUIS.)

CLARA

Hey. Sorry. I thought you were the Instacart delivery guy.

LUIS

That's a sad thought.

CLARA

What do you want?

LUIS

That kiss was nice.

CLARA

It's not going to happen again.

LUIS

Are you okay?

CLARA

What do you want, Luis?

LUIS

I'm sorry about Sabor and—

CLARA

It's fine.

LUIS

Which is why I reached out to Le Bernardin. They have agreed to have you attend the Chefs' Competition.

CLARA

Wait, what?! Why?

LUIS

They know how talented you are and... Well, I explained how much your abuelo meant to you and that that was the reason for why you left the way you did but that you were doing much better now.

CLARA

You shouldn't have told them that!

LUIS

Clara...

CLARA

No! I didn't become unhinged. I needed to get out of there.

LUIS

Regardless, they will allow you to return.

CLARA

Allow?

LUIS

Clara, you left in true Jerry Maguire fashion!

CLARA

No, he was a privileged white guy who threw a fit. I was the best chef in the best French restaurant in the city who got passed over because I'm a woman of color.

LUIS

But... You're French.

CLARA

Not according to them!

LUIS

I've seemed to do well and... I'm not half white.

CLARA

But you are a man!

LUIS

Sure, but...

CLARA

But what?!

LUIS

But... kitchens operate like the military. They call it a "brigade" for a reason. Maybe, just maybe you weren't passed over because you're a woman, but because you weren't good at following orders. Just saying, "Yes, Chef." Maybe if you had stayed in line...

CLARA

No. They were never going to *allow* a woman of color to run the kitchen. Period.

LUIS

So what then? You don't want to be in the Chef's Competition?

CLARA

Hell yeah, I do! The system's fucked, but I got bills to pay!

(They laugh.)

LUIS

Mira. I'm sorry you didn't get the title you deserve.

CLARA

Thanks.

LUIS

And even if you sucked at following orders... You were a magnificent chef. Watching you cook was like... experiencing the heart of humanity. As if life was boiling inside you. The kind of passion that transcends any tangible notion of beauty. It's why I fell in love with you.

(CLARA impulsively kisses him. Their kissing quickly intensifies, and they move toward the bed. LUIS pushes her down on the bed.)

CLARA

Wait.

(LUIS starts to climb on top of her.)

CLARA

Stop.

(LUIS stops.)

CLARA

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have... I can't.

LUIS

Ok. Okay. It's okay.

(LUIS goes to the door.)

LUIS

But I do still love you, mon Coeur.

CLARA

Thank you... for the Chefs' Competition.

(LUIS nods and leaves. CLARA locks the door and stands there for a moment.)

CLARA

Holy shit. Holy fucking shit!

(Lights go down.)

DINNER WITH DAD

(The next evening. CLARA enters wearing jeans and a plain t-shirt. She places perfectly folded napkins and silverware in the correct order and precise distance from the plates on the wood block island.)

CLARA

Mise en place.

(CLARA goes to the dresser and digs to the bottom to pull out a simple dress. She takes off her clothes and puts on the dress. It's a little tight. She sucks in her stomach. Then she breathes and lets her stomach out.)

CLARA

Fuck it.

(CLARA looks around the place to make sure everything is in the precise spot. Then she rushes to the cabinet above the stove to pull out a fresh bottle of Jim

Beam Bourbon Whiskey. She gets a glass, pours a shot, downs it, and makes an ugly face. There's a knock at the door.)

CLARA

Shit.

(CLARA puts the glass in the cabinet under the sink and quickly rinses her mouth under the faucet. There's another knock at the door.)

CLARA

Coming!

(CLARA rushes to her phone to play her "Latinx Playlist." The music starts with a reggaeton song coming through the portable speakers. She switches the music until it lands on a Latin jazz song. There's another knock at the door. She double checks that everything is in the right place and runs to open the door.)

CLARA

Hi, dad. Come in.

VICENTE

What was this so urgent? It wasn't a good night to leave the restaurant.

CLARA

Sorry. But I was hoping we could carry on Abuelo's family dinner tradition.

VICENTE

It's Saturday.

CLARA

I know, but you're here. And I prepared food!

VICENTE

I already ate.

CLARA

It's just veggies. And you can never have enough veggies, right? It's an avocado tomato salad with diced papaya. Something simple and nice with bold flavor.

VICENTE

Sounds a little heavy for salad.

CLARA

It's all good fat, dad.

VICENTE

Everything in—

CLARA

Moderation. I know. But good fat doesn't need to be as moderated as you might think.

VICENTE

I didn't become a 68-year-old with abs by accident.

CLARA

Right, but I think there might be a difference between a fitness diet for like image versus a nutritious way of eating for longevity, you know?

VICENTE

And how does alcohol factor into your healthy lifestyle?

CLARA

I've read that a glass of red wine here and there is actually good for you. Uh. Not *you*. Sorry. I meant for... for normal drinkers. Obviously.

VICENTE

Hm.

CLARA

Please have dinner with me, dad.

(VICENTE nods.)

CLARA

Have a seat.

VICENTE

Where?

CLARA

The seat. The stool. That is a seat, dad.

VICENTE

I'll stand.

(CLARA goes to the kitchen to artfully place the salad on a couple of small plates and places them on the island. Both CLARA and VICENTE stand in front of their salad. At the same time, they pick up their fork, take a bite, and place the fork back down. They stand in silence for a moment looking at the salad.)

CLARA

Lemon?

VICENTE *(shaking his head)*

Perfect amount of acid.

CLARA

Raspberry?

VICENTE *(shaking his head)*

Subtle. Elegant even.

CLARA

But maybe with the papaya...

VICENTE

Yes... Pepper.

CLARA

Yes.

(They both walk with the same focused intensity into the kitchen.)

VICENTE

Cutting board?

(CLARA hands VICENTE the cutting board. They prepare the salad dressing in a fast-pace choreography of straining, muddling, and whisking. Then VICENTE turns to the cabinet above the stove.)

CLARA

No!

(VICENTE stops and looks at her.)

CLARA

Uh... It's a mess.

VICENTE

Olive oil?

(CLARA finds the olive oil in a different cabinet and hands it to VICENTE. He adds the oil to the bowl as CLARA looks through her spices. She pulls out cayenne pepper.)

VICENTE

Cayenne?

CLARA

Could be fun. Especially with the papaya.

(VICENTE nods. CLARA finds the sugar and places it on the counter.)

VICENTE

Sugar?

CLARA

Yes.

VICENTE

Do we need it?

CLARA

I know you know it'll bring out the different notes, dad.

VICENTE

But do we need it?

(CLARA puts the sugar back in the cabinet.)

VICENTE

And a pinch of salt.

(CLARA adds salt as VICENTE stirs. CLARA takes two spoons and dips them in the dressing, hands one to VICENTE, and they taste it. They nod. Then they put the old salad in the trash and prepare salads with the new dressing. They stand at the island eating the salads as the music shuffles to a Pitbull rap song in Spanish.)

VICENTE

Where did you get this music?

CLARA

What do you mean?

VICENTE

Do you know what he's saying?

CLARA

No.

VICENTE

It's vulgar.

CLARA

oh. Sorry. I'll change it.

(CLARA switches the music back to a Latin jazz song.)

VICENTE

Did you get that from one of your friends?

CLARA

I'm thirty-two, dad.

VICENTE

Si tu supieras español...

(CLARA sighs.)

CLARA

I may add this salad to my menu plan.

VICENTE

Menu plan?

CLARA

For the Chefs' Competition. I will be attending, you know?

VICENTE

So you said.

CLARA

You believe me?

VICENTE

Let's just enjoy the meal, Clara.

CLARA

How's *your* business going? Anything... noteworthy?

VICENTE

It's going well.

CLARA

Anything new?

VICENTE

I fired the Poissonnier. He served the monkfish upside-down. Twice.

CLARA

You're serving monkfish?

VICENTE

Critics.

CLARA

Ah. So anything else? Maybe in the way of... Executive Chef?

VICENTE

Luis?

CLARA

Yes. Luis. My ex-fiancé! You weren't going to tell me he's now Executive Chef of Sabor?

VICENTE

It was offered to you first, Clara. And I don't appreciate being spoken to in this way.

CLARA

You did not offer me Executive Chef!

VICENTE

It was always yours, Clara. Siempre lo has sabido.

CLARA

I don't know what that means!

VICENTE

You declined the position.

CLARA

No, I didn't!

VICENTE

Did you invite me over to pick a fight?

CLARA

Do you believe that I am attending the Chefs' Competition? Well, just ask Luis—or ask Luis to ask Ricardo—I'm sure he's told you by now that he has also been invited.

VICENTE

No. He hasn't said anything.

CLARA

Well, we both are! In two days, I'll be preparing food for the top chefs, restaurateurs, and the upper echelon right alongside your new Executive Chef at Le Bernardin.

VICENTE

Le Bernardin?

CLARA

Yes, that's where it's being held.

(VICENTE puts down his fork. He takes a moment and then speaks.)

VICENTE

The Michelin Guide is the most prestigious and well-known restaurant guidebook in the world.

CLARA

Yeah...?

VICENTE

Of the tens of thousands of restaurants in New York, there are only five 3-Michelin Star restaurants, Le Bernardin being one of them, eleven 2-Star restaurants and fifty-five 1-Star restaurants.

CLARA

Yeah... So?

VICENTE

3-Stars means, "Exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey." 2-Stars is, "Excellent cooking worth a detour." And 1-Star is, "A very good restaurant in its own category."

CLARA

I know all this.

VICENTE

I am the only Latino chef to have received a Michelin star. Ever.

CLARA

Carlos Caytón.

VICENTE

No. He is not from the States.

CLARA

Okay. So...?

(VICENTE takes a breath.)

VICENTE

My point is, Clara, that no matter how exceptional the cuisine at my restaurant, I will always be seen as great for "my category." While you have great potential, Luis is... Smart. He knows how to prepare a menu and plate a dish that will impress the judges

VICENTE cont.

at Le Bernardin. They, the upper echelon as you put it, will undoubtedly compare the two Latino chefs who do not belong. And if Luis makes you look bad, which he will, nobody will hire you. Not as chef or a... a caterer. Not even I could hire you after that.

CLARA

You think so little of me?

VICENTE

Mira. This is not personal. It's just the way things are. If you decide to do this... you're on your own, mi'jita.

CLARA

I think I already was.

(There's a knock at the door. After a moment, CLARA goes to open it. MATEO is on the other side in their Instacart shirt, holding several grocery bags.)

MATEO

Hi—Wow—You look... Damn. Still not wearing pants though.

(MATEO laughs and CLARA looks mortified.)

CLARA

I, uh, forgot...

(VICENTE walks over to the door.)

CLARA

Um... This is my dad.

MATEO

Oh! Es un placer conocerte, Señor Hernández Rousseau.

(MATEO puts down the groceries and extends a hand to VICENTE.)

CLARA

No. Just Hernández.

MATEO

Pido perdón, Señor Hernández. Yo soy Mateo Imani Medina Cotto.

(MATEO keeps their hand out until VICENTE grabs it.)

MATEO

Lo siento por... por interrumpir su conversación.

(VICENTE releases MATEO's hand.)

VICENTE

Hablas español?

MATEO

Sí, señor, por supuesto.

VICENTE

Bueno. Ojalá que Clara se esforzara más en aprender. Es importante mantener vivo el idioma.

MATEO

Sí señor.

VICENTE

Y usted, eres medio español?

MATEO

No, señor, soy Borinqueñx puro.

VICENTE

Pero eres mulato, no?

MATEO

No.

VICENTE

No?

MATEO

No, no soy.

VICENTE

Mis disculpas. No quise decir que eres un... un... mutt. Sino que eres de mestizaje.

MATEO

Soy Boricua. Eso es.

VICENTE

Hm.

(VICENTE steps into the doorway. VICENTE looks MATEO up and down, studying their body. Then VICENTE speaks to CLARA.)

VICENTE

Be sure to lock up.

CLARA

Night, dad.

(VICENTE leaves and CLARA shuts the door.)

CLARA

I'm just going to... I'll be right back.

(CLARA leaves to the bathroom.)

NUEVO SABOR

(MATEO looks around the place. They pick up the black and white picture from the dresser as CLARA comes back in.)

CLARA

Sorry. I just needed to—

MATEO

Tus abuelos?

CLARA

Um, yeah.

MATEO

Son Mestizo y Afro-Boricua?

CLARA

Um, yeah, they were... I'm sorry about my dad.

MATEO (*shrugging*)

Ol' school.

CLARA

Fucking colorism. And he probably doesn't even know he was just being... Sometimes I think shit is just as bad with men of color. It's like they have to go through life dealing with all this oppression, but since they're also privileged—as men—they can't see beyond their own oppression to know when they're oppressing others. Nothing is as precious to them as their own fucking oppression! It's exhausting! Sorry. Sorry, don't mean to get all... It's just... Where we going?

MATEO

Going?

CLARA

For dinner?

MATEO

Oh, I didn't make reservations anywhere.

CLARA

That's okay. I'm not all that hungry anyways. Can I make you a drink?

MATEO

I'm good. Don't get me wrong, I like a hoppy IPA with a hot dowg every now and again, but thas 'bout it. I brought food.

CLARA

Oh. Okay. Great.

(They walk into the kitchen. MATEO places the bags on the counter as CLARA pours herself shot of whiskey and downs it. Then she pours another.)

MATEO

Like your whiskey, huh?

CLARA

No. I hate it.

(MATEO looks confused.)

CLARA

Do you have any vices, Mateo?

MATEO

Vices?

CLARA

Yeah, vices. Like, my vices are whiskey, food... and sex.

MATEO

Talk about the best things in life!

CLARA

Yeah, but when you enjoy them. See, I don't enjoy my vices anymore. I just... do them. Well, except sex. I mean, I do sex... just not in a while... Cause apparently, I only fall for the egotistical-hyper-masculine type. You know, a Chef. But yeah... Sorry. I don't seem to have a filter around you.

MATEO

Food. I guess I would have to say food. But don't really think enjoying food is bad.

CLARA

I miss enjoying food.

MATEO

But you're in Queens.

CLARA

So?

MATEO

So there's no way you can get bored with the food here! Lowkey, Queen's has the whole world in it! Like half the people here are immigrants. You can literally walk down the street and try all the international food you can imagine. From Cantonese to Nepalese, Liberian to Dominican, it's all here! So much room to explore and taste... new.

CLARA

Mmm... I love that.

MATEO

Aiight then. Sit back with your glass of... vice, and I'll whip you up a brand-new experience. I mean, technically an old one 'cause who hasn't had lasagna? I had to come straight from work, which is why I'm still dressed in business attire, and why I had to make it this morning. But it's all good.

CLARA

Sounds... good.

MATEO

Ay que ver como bate el cobre.

(MATEO turns on the oven, pulls out a casserole dish from a grocery bag, and then places it in the oven.)

MATEO

You gotta pan?

CLARA

What kind?

(MATEO sees the pans hanging from the rack.)

MATEO

Those are... Those are some nice pans you got.

CLARA

I take my cookware seriously.

MATEO

Oh?

CLARA

I'm a chef.

MATEO

An here I thought cooking for you was gone romance your pants off. Pun intended.

(MATEO laughs and CLARA smiles.)

CLARA

It'll be nice to try someone else's cuisine for a change.

MATEO

Lowkey, I wouldn't describe my food as cuisine-like.

CLARA

It'll be great.

MATEO

I mean...

(MATEO pulls out a large baguette.)

CLARA

Do you mind if I change the music?

MATEO

Go for it. Make yourself at home.

(MATEO laughs.)

CLARA

I'm not in a jazzy mood. How about you? What do you like?

MATEO

Pretty much everything and anything. 'Cept I don't mess around with mariachi. I have a pretty severe allergic reaction to mariachi.

CLARA

I think I can stay clear.

MATEO

Knife?

(Salsa music plays in the background as CLARA pulls out a bread knife. She starts to pull out a cutting board, but MATEO cuts the baguette in half before she can place it on the counter. CLARA looks at all the crumbs on the counter and floor as MATEO smells the baguette.)

Oh... that's...

CLARA

Smell this.

MATEO

That's okay.

CLARA

(MATEO holds the baguette under CLARA's nose anyways.)

God, that's good!

CLARA

Nothing better than fresh bread.

MATEO

(MATEO places the baguette in the oven.)

You gotta knife for the garlic? And a small pan.

MATEO

(CLARA pulls out a chef's knife for the garlic.)

And you can go ahead and use the cutting board!

CLARA

Gracias.

MATEO

And what kind of pan? Like a saucepan?

CLARA

Sure?

MATEO

(CLARA places a saucepan on the stove as MATEO begins mincing the garlic.)

Now, outta your kitchen, chef.

MATEO

(CLARA steps out of the kitchen and continues to nurse her drink.)

CLARA

So you grew up in Queens then?

MATEO

Here and the island.

CLARA

And you're an Instacart delivery guy?

MATEO

Instacart delivery person.

CLARA

Instacart. Right. Isn't that what I said?

MATEO

Nah, you said... "guy."

CLARA

Yeah...?

MATEO

I'm gender non-binary. Use they-them pronouns an shit.

CLARA

Oh... Sorry.

MATEO

No worries.

CLARA

So... Is that difficult?

MATEO

Oh yea, it's a lot of work being queer. Making rainbows and feeding unicorns—

CLARA

I meant being an Instacart delivery person, smart ass.

MATEO

Nah, it's not so bad. Make my own hours and get to listen to music or podcasts while I'm driven. I mean, sometimes I gotta put up with people slamin' doors in my face, but I get over it real quick when they're as strikingly beautiful as you.

CLARA (*smiling*)

So... do you do other things as well?

MATEO

Yeh, I do things. Lessee... I help out my folks. They're gettin' up there, so they need lots of help with things like doctors' appointments and connecting to the world wide web. Qué más... uhm, I play with my sisters' kids. Coupla little genius punks in the group I'm 'specially fond of. An eat. Enjoy food. And talkin' with people. Painting. Painting is my main passion. And experiencing... life.

CLARA

Oh? What kind of painting do you do?

MATEO

Acrylics mostly. I prefer oil paint, but I make do with acrylics for the most part.

CLARA

I meant, what do you paint?

MATEO

Whatever.

CLARA

So you're an artist then?

MATEO

You could say that.

CLARA

But like as a career?

MATEO

I don't get paid for it if that's what you're gettin' at.

CLARA

Oh. Sorry.

MATEO

How 'bout you? Clearly you're not from Queens, sooo...?

CLARA

Yeah, I was born on the West Coast. Seattle. We moved to Brooklyn after... when I was still a kid. We stayed with my abuelo until my dad's career took off and we could afford to live in Manhattan. So... so no, not from Queens.

MATEO

An Rousseau. Where does that come from?

CLARA

It was my mother's last name.

MATEO

Was?

CLARA

Yeah... she passed when I was a kid.

MATEO

Lo siento.

CLARA

Thanks.

MATEO

Rousseau... Is that Italian?

CLARA

French.

MATEO

Wow, really?

CLARA

Yup.

MATEO

How'd your folks end up together then?

CLARA

Um, well, when my dad was stationed in Washington state, he would go to this café near Pike Market Place to see this woman who worked there, who he would later describe as, "A classic Hollywood beauty with high cheekbones and strong shoulders." My dad was an insecure kid from Bed-Stuy but he had the bravado of someone who's fought on the front lines, so one time when he went into the café, he tried to show off by ordering in French. He said, "Ce sont les meilleurs Kouign-amann. Deux s'il vous plaît. Si ton patron est parti, veux tu me?"

(CLARA laughs and MATEO looks confused.)

CLARA

That translates to, "These are the best Kouign-amann," a denser version of croissants, and then said, "Two please" and thought he asked her to join him, but actually said, "If your boss is gone, do you want me?" My mom laughed and joined him anyways. It wasn't until later that he realized she was the brilliant Pâtissier who made the Kouign-amann and owned the café. Many cafés actually. But yeah... that's how they met.

MATEO

Ay, qué romántico. So a French mom and a... Nuyorican dad?

CLARA

Yup.

MATEO

What's that make you?

(CLARA shrugs.)

MATEO *(looking in fridge)*

Butter?

CLARA

Door.

MATEO

Ah! I was 'bout to say... What kind of French person don't have butter?

(MATEO laughs. They add butter to the saucepan. The smell of butter and garlic fills the space.)

MATEO

Love that smell! So where you cook at?

CLARA

Here. I'm a caterer now. But I was Head Chef at Le Bernardin for a long time.

MATEO

Manhattan?

CLARA

Yup. That's the one. God, that does smell good!

MATEO

That's a big deal, right? Worked at a fancy French restaurant.

CLARA

Yeah, being a French trained chef is kind of a big deal in our industry. But, truthfully? I always wanted to work in my dad's kitchen.

MATEO

Señor Hernández is a chef too?

CLARA

Oh, yes! He owns Sabor. Also in the city.

MATEO

Dang. So what, you wanted to stick with your French roots?

CLARA

No... My dad wouldn't let me work in his kitchen. He didn't want me to be a chef at all actually. He wanted me to be a lawyer or doctor or artist. Anything but a chef.

MATEO

How's that?

CLARA

I come from a long history of people who broke their bodies and spirits so that one day

CLARA cont.

one of us could be of the truly privileged. But I fucked up. I fell in love with a servant's position.

MATEO

So he wouldn't let you work for him?

CLARA

Nope. Which was probably for the best because he hates my cooking.

MATEO

Nah...

CLARA

It's true! First and only time he dined at Le Bernardin, he sat at the chef's table in the kitchen and I was so excited for him to try the dish that I created for the menu.... Striped bass tatare with apples and jalapeños, sprinkled with plantain crisps, and drizzled with a dark rum-tamarind vinaigrette. It was a masterpiece. I watched from a distance as he took the first bite. He paused for a moment, and then continued to eat expressionless. After he was done, he thanked the Executive Chef and left. Not a single word to me.

MATEO

Damn. Sorry.

CLARA

It's okay. Like I said, I'm a caterer now. And I think my business will take off. If I do well in this Chef's Competition.

MATEO

Chef's Competition?

CLARA

Yeah, it's where we prepare a menu and then get ranked. And it'll be mostly Michelin star chefs. So that's a big deal.

MATEO

What kinda chefs?

CLARA

Michelin.

MATEO

Michelin? Like the tire people?

(CLARA looks confused.)

MATEO *(like the jingle)*

Michelin Man!

CLARA

No—well—Yes. Never really thought about it before. But yes, they do sell tires. But they also rank chefs. They have a lot of power in our industry actually. So all I need to do is make a few amazing dishes. But so far I've been in the weeds.

MATEO

Weeds?

CLARA

Just... overwhelmed and blocked. Creatively. It's all over the place.

MATEO

Don't know what kind of food you wanna make?

CLARA

No, I do. Healthy Latinx food. Like Contemporary Latino, I think.

MATEO

What does that mean? Contemporary?

CLARA

It's... In pertaining to cuisine it's... I'm not exactly sure. I guess all food we cook today is contemporary.

MATEO

Highkey, I feel like my art is an expression of me. Do you feel that way too? About cooking? I feel like whatever I put on a canvas inevitably exposes who I really am. And that's an incredibly vulnerable thing. To put yourself out there. Course, that's only if you're being honest about who you truly are.

(The music switches to a classic salsa song.)

MATEO

Yas! Turn it up!

(CLARA turns it up and MATEO puts a hand out to her.)

CLARA

No...

MATEO

Vamos!

(MATEO pulls her up. They begin to salsa dance. To MATEO's surprise, CLARA is a great dancer. They move seamlessly together in the fast-paced dance with neither taking the lead.)

MATEO

Wepa!

CLARA

Wepa!

(When the song ends, they are breathing hard and CLARA is smiling.)

MATEO

I knew you was Rican!

CLARA

What's that mean?

MATEO

If you can move like that...

(MATEO starts serving the lasagna and garlic bread as they talk.)

MATEO

So how you know if you're really Puerto Rican?

CLARA

Ok. How?

MATEO

If everyone you know is nicknamed, "Mira."

CLARA

That's funny.

MATEO

Lessee... You know you're Puerto Rican if you remember Ricky Martín from Menudo.

CLARA

I think you just aged yourself.

MATEO

Ok, ok... So you're Puerto Rican if you use coño to count. One coño, two coño...

CLARA

Or if your spice rack consists of adobo, sazón, and jamón.

MATEO

If you got a Puerto Rican flag danglin' from your rearview.

CLARA

If you say you're Puerto Rican and a guy responds "Spicy" or "Exotic!"

MATEO

If you got more brothers in your family who've been locked up than gone to college.

CLARA

If you have to explain Puerto Rico is part of the U.S. when they shout, "Go Home!"

MATEO

If you can go to war, but you can't vote.

CLARA

If your president throws a roll of paper towels at you while you're drowning.

MATEO

Dang!

(They laugh.)

MATEO

Where should we eat?

CLARA

We can stand at the wood block.

MATEO

How 'bout the bed? I promise not to get crumbs on your perfectly made bed.

CLARA

Oh, I don't care.

MATEO

Sure...

(They go to sit on the edge of the bed.)

MATEO

Time to see if my food is worthy of being called cuisine.

(CLARA scoops some of the lasagna filling onto her bread and takes a bite.)

CLARA

Worthy.

MATEO

I'll take that as a rave review from a French trained chef!

CLARA

It's so simple, but...

MATEO

Fresh. All fresh. Even the noodles. From a mom'n'pops next to my place.

CLARA

That's the secret to great food.

MATEO

What's that?

CLARA

Fresh ingredients. Wars have been waged and caste systems put in place over fresh ingredients.

(CLARA laughs to herself.)

MATEO

What?

CLARA

I sound like my abuelo.

MATEO

That's right. The wordsmith.

CLARA

And cook. He used to say, "Cooking is like creating your own language with food." Beautiful, huh?

MATEO

Maybe that's what you need to do.

CLARA

What?

MATEO

Create your own language.

(CLARA smiles. They continue to eat in silence. CLARA finishes her bread.)

MATEO

Want mine?

CLARA

That's okay.

MATEO

Go ahead. There's more in there.

Thanks. CLARA

I like a woman who likes to eat. MATEO

Now this is really my greatest vice. Bread and butter. God, is there anything better? CLARA

I don't think it's a vice. MATEO

My hips disagree. CLARA

You know you're Puerto Rican if... MATEO

(CLARA smiles. MATEO gently brushes their shoulder against hers.)

You should go! I mean, I should call it a night. CLARA

Foreal? MATEO

Yeah. Sorry, I just... you should go. CLARA

(CLARA stands, grabs the bowls and takes them to the kitchen.)

Lemme help tidy up at least. MATEO

No! Um, no. That's okay. CLARA

You sure? MATEO

CLARA

Yeah. I got it.

MATEO

You good?

CLARA

Yeah, yeah, I just... I forgot I had to do something tonight.

MATEO

Aiight. Well... keep the leftovers. Case you get hungry later.

CLARA

Thanks.

MATEO

This was... nice.

CLARA

Yup.

(CLARA ushers them to the door. She opens the door and MATEO walks through the doorway. As MATEO starts to lean towards her, CLARA shouts.)

CLARA

Get home safely!

(CLARA shuts the door on MATEO and locks it. She takes a moment.)

CLARA

Get home safely? What the fuck was that?!

(CLARA goes to pour herself a whiskey. Then she walks over to her bed, brushes off the crumbs, and sits with her drink. The couple next door starts to yell.)

WOMAN *(from next door)*

I'm so sick of your shit!

MAN *(from next door)*

Fuck off!

I hate you! I fucken hate you!

WOMAN (*from next door*)

Fuck you, bitch!

MAN (*from next door*)

I fucken hate you! You worthless prick!

WOMAN (*from next door*)

Shut the fuck up, bitch!

MAN (*from next door*)

You're pathetic!

WOMAN (*from next door*)

Ima kill you, you fucking cunt!

MAN (*from next door*)

(A violent scream is heard, followed by complete silence. CLARA stands and listens, concerned for the woman next door. After a moment, the woman yells.)

I'm done!

WOMAN (*from next door*)

(The neighbor's door slams. CLARA quickly goes to her phone to make a call.)

CLARA
Hey. I'm sorry for how I ended things. Do you want to come over for... dessert?

(Lights fade.)

ACT II

BITTERSWEET

(The next day. Early morning light fills the apartment. Someone is sleeping under the covers of the bed. CLARA is humming and wearing a Santana t-shirt. Her hands shake as she pops a couple of aspirin. Then she finishes cleaning up the kitchen. A cell phone rings from a pair of slacks near the island. Groaning from the bed is heard. The ringing stops. The phone rings again. LUIS sits up in the bed. He gets up, wearing nothing but briefs, and goes to his phone, but doesn't make it in time. He watches CLARA in the kitchen as she cleans and hums.)

LUIS

What is it about a thick-ass woman?

CLARA

Excusez-moi?

LUIS

It's like a primal need.

CLARA

I'm no... Caramel.

LUIS

That's exactly what you are. My caramel.

(LUIS grabs her body and kisses her skin. He slaps her butt.)

CLARA

Ouch!

LUIS

I need espresso.

CLARA

I have drip.

LUIS

Drip?

CLARA

Drip coffee.

LUIS

No espresso?

CLARA

There's a café down the street. Good espresso. And they make *amazing* croissants.

LUIS

All that butter and starch? It's like ordering cancer with a side of diabetes. I'll make us a frittata, mon Coeur.

CLARA

No. I just got this kitchen clean. And it needs to stay that way. I need to finalize my plans for the Chefs' Competition.

LUIS

Don't stress about it too much, okay?

CLARA

Why?

LUIS

Why what?

CLARA

Why shouldn't I be stressed about it?

LUIS

Stress isn't good for you. And I don't want you to get your hopes up.

CLARA

Why not?

LUIS

Why not what?

CLARA

Why not get my hopes up?

LUIS

I don't know. Just in case.

CLARA

Just in case, what?!

LUIS

Clara, I don't want to fight. I just don't want you to get your hopes up. In case.

CLARA

Maybe you shouldn't get your hopes up.

LUIS

Okay.

CLARA

I'll be your main competition, you know?

LUIS

How you figure?

CLARA

My dad thinks only one of us will do well in the competition.

LUIS

Why's that?

CLARA

There's no need for two tokens.

LUIS

It'll still be good for your catering though, no?

CLARA

You don't think I'll be the winning token? You don't think I'm a great cook?

LUIS

You're a brilliant chef. An artist even.

CLARA

Then why shouldn't I get my hopes up?!

LUIS

This is too much interrogation too early in the day! I need espresso! Some of us actually get hungover after a night of cowboy liquor. What happened to your espresso machine?

CLARA

I sold it.

LUIS

Why?

CLARA

Rent isn't cheap.

LUIS

In Queens?

CLARA

Nope. Not even in Queens.

LUIS

How can you live without espresso? What kind of Rican are you?

CLARA

You know you're Puerto Rican if...

(CLARA laughs.)

LUIS

Why don't you just ask your dad to buy you an espresso machine?

(LUIS' phone rings.)

CLARA

Do you want me to make you a drip coffee or not?

(LUIS' gestures for CLARA to wait as he answers the phone.)

LUIS

Hello? Yes. Sorry about that. I was... I completely understand, sir.

CLARA

Sir?

LUIS

I will come in right away. No, I'm sorry. It will take me... I'm not sure.

CLARA

Jesus! At least an hour.

LUIS

An hour. I had some... personal matters to attend to outside the city.

CLARA

Very personal!

LUIS

Shh! No no no, sir. I didn't mean you, sir. I'll start making my way over right away. Thank you, sir.

(LUIS hangs up the phone.)

LUIS

Ay Dios, Clara. You know I was talking to Chef Hernández.

CLARA

Mamabicho.

LUIS

Do you even know what that word means?

CLARA

I know when to use it!

LUIS

Ay, Blanquita.

CLARA

Don't call me that.

LUIS

Lo siento... mon Coeur. I have to get going.

CLARA

Yup. Run along, Señor Executive Chef.

LUIS

Will I see you tonight?

CLARA

I don't know. I have to work on kicking your ass at the Chefs' Competition.

(LUIS walks over to CLARA and kisses her.)

LUIS

I love you. And I'm sure you are going to give me a run for my money.

CLARA *(smiling)*

I'm going to take a shower.

(CLARA leaves to the bathroom and LUIS puts on his pants. There's a knock at the door.)

LUIS

Ay Dios!

(LUIS opens the door with his pants still unbuttoned. MATEO is standing in front of the door in their Instacart shirt, holding a bag of groceries and a pastry bag.)

LUIS

Yes?

MATEO

Uhm...?

LUIS

Can I help you?

I... MATEO

Delivering groceries? LUIS

Yeah...? MATEO

Clara! LUIS (*shouting to the bathroom*)

(LUIS finishes buttoning his pants and goes to put on his shirt.)

It'll be just a moment. LUIS

Uhm... MATEO

Clara! LUIS

(CLARA enters in her t-shirt and underwear.)

Why are you yelling? CLARA

(CLARA suddenly sees MATEO. They take each other in for a moment.)

Pants! LUIS

(CLARA hesitates for a moment and then runs back to the bathroom.)

Sorry. She has artist brain sometimes. LUIS

You can jus' give her— MATEO

LUIS

She'll be right out.

(CLARA comes back with pants on. LUIS finishes dressing.)

CLARA

I um...

MATEO

I was jus' droppin-noff...

(They stand in awkwardness for a moment.)

LUIS

Pay the delivery boy, Clara. Artist brain's working overtime. Have you seen my watch?

CLARA

They're not...

LUIS

Ah! There it is.

(LUIS' phone begins to ring. He quickly checks to see who's calling.)

LUIS

I have to get this. I've got to run.

(He kisses CLARA.)

LUIS

I love you.

(He answers the phone.)

LUIS

Hello.

(He steps outside the door next to MATEO.)

LUIS

Pay him, Clara.

(LUIS leaves while talking on his phone.)

LUIS

Check the order again. Then check it a fourth time. We need fifty portions. . .

CLARA

I'm...

MATEO

I was jus' bringing you some canelé. French pastry. Hard to make. According to the person behind the—Please just take it! I already feel like an idiot!

CLARA

You're not a—

MATEO *(handing her the bags)*

An some ingredients I thought might help you find your... language.

CLARA

Thank you.

(MATEO starts to leave.)

CLARA

Mateo. Wait! I'm... I'm so sorry.

MATEO

For what? Just standing there while I get misgendered or for not telling me you're in a relationship?

CLARA

I'm not...

MATEO

Your one-night stand was sure quick to say "I love you" then.

CLARA

I'm so sorry. But, no. We're not... It's complicated. He's a chef and we—

MATEO

Right. Got it. Done sticking it to your old man by slummin' it in Queens. Back to misogynistic chefs and impressing tire people.

CLARA

Whoa! That's not—

MATEO

Sorry. Shit! I'm sorry. I shouldn't be a jerk. I just like you is all. An I thought...

CLARA

Me too. It's just...

MATEO

I hope you find what you're looking for, Clara Hernández Rousseau.

(MATEO leaves. CLARA slowly shuts the door.)

CLARA

fuck.

(CLARA puts the bags on the counter. Then she goes to sit on the stool.)

SENSE MEMORY

(ABUELO appears in the kitchen. He is wearing a guayabera, linen pants, and fedora. He walks over to the bag of ingredients MATEO brought. He pulls out a coffee bean, sugar cane, and lemon. Then he carries the items over to the island and unrolls CLARA's knife bag. He pulls out a paring knife and cuts a hole into the lemon. He holds the lemon out to CLARA.)

CLARA

What? I don't want it.

(ABUELO gestures for her to take the lemon again and she reluctantly takes it. He holds out a coffee bean and she takes that from him as well. He gestures for her to chew on the bean. She does. He gestures to the lemon. She squeezes the lemon on her tongue. Then he hands her the sugar cane and she chews on that as well. CLARA's eyes grow big.)

CLARA

Mmm... Wow, it's... It's like nothing I've ever tasted before. . . Ever. I have tasted nearly every taste I'm going to at this point in life, and this... this is not one of them. This isn't my memory, is it?

(A video takes focus on her apartment wall as CLARA speaks.)

CLARA

I remember waking up early once as a kid to the smell of fresh baked sweet bread. I stumbled into the white tiled kitchen we had in Seattle with my father and mother sitting at a red table drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and laughing together. I stood there with sleep still in my eyes, unnoticed by my parents, watching as my father carefully cut off a piece of my mother's lemon soufflé. He added a little butter to it and then took a bite. His eyes grew big. Then he started to describe being a child and visiting the island. There, his dad, my abuelo, gave him a coffee bean to chew, cut a hole in a lemon and had him squeeze it onto his tongue, and immediately after he gave him a sugar cane to chew. My father said he had never tasted anything so perfect... until her soufflé.

VIDEO: The video is of the same young, Curvy Afro-Boricua Woman walking in the streets of a rural town in Puerto Rico. She eats her alcapurria and turns to the Cameraman every once and a while to give him a loving look.

The video fades.

(CLARA looks down at the ingredients. Then she runs to the grocery bags. She pulls out all the ingredients and places them on the counter. She looks them over and smiles wide. Then runs off to the bathroom to get dressed. Lights fade.)

FUSION AMÈRE

(Later that day. The bed is still unmade, and ingredients are spread all over the countertops. CLARA, wearing a plain shirt and pants, is cooking in a flurry. Her focus shifts between three pots on the stove: stirring one, raising the temperature of another, and adding spices to the next. There's a knock at the door. She quickly goes to unlock the door and rushes back to the stove. LUIS walks in.)

LUIS

Seriously? I wasn't expecting a "How was your day, dear?" but you could at least be a little happy to see me.

CLARA

I am! I need your opinion!

(CLARA shoves a spoonful of food into LUIS' mouth.)

CLARA

Too sweet?

LUIS

What is it?

CLARA

Roasted butternut squash chipotle salsa. Is the ratio of squash to hot chili pepper off?

LUIS

No...

CLARA

But?

LUIS

But it tastes like... El Día de los Muertos.

CLARA

The day of the dead? The fuck does that mean?

LUIS

I don't know, like Mexican food mixed with... Halloween.

CLARA

Merde! It's shit.

(CLARA takes the pot with the salsa off the stove and puts it in the sink.)

LUIS

I didn't say it was shit.

CLARA

Then what is it?

Not... Good.

LUIS

Shit!

CLARA

(CLARA grabs a fresh spoon and dips it into the second pot. She tastes it, turns to the sink, spits it out, throws the spoon in the sink, and tosses the pot in as well.)

What was that?

LUIS

Doesn't matter. It's shit too.

CLARA

(CLARA frantically stirs the third pot.)

How about a drink?

LUIS

No. I'm not drinking 'til after the competition.

CLARA

Oh-kay... What's with all these ingredients all over the place?

LUIS

Mateo brought them.

CLARA

Who?

LUIS

The Instacart delivery person.

CLARA

(CLARA's attention stays with her cooking. She grabs a fresh spoon.)

The delivery boy from this morning?

LUIS

CLARA

Person. Yeah. They're trying to help me find a new language.

(CLARA dips the spoon in the remaining pot.)

LUIS

You lost your... language?

CLARA

No. I need to create a new one.

LUIS

What?

(CLARA tastes the food.)

CLARA

Too much cumin. Or too little?

LUIS

Clara, stop.

CLARA

It's not the cumin...

(CLARA gets a fresh spoon and dips it in the food.)

LUIS

Can you stop for a second?!

(CLARA stops and looks at LUIS.)

CLARA

What?

LUIS

What is going on?

CLARA

I'm cooking. Trying to create my own language. Taste this and tell me what you think.

(CLARA shoves the spoon in LUIS' mouth.)

LUIS *(with a mouth full)*

What about this... this... Instacart delivery boy?

CLARA

Person. Mateo.

LUIS

What?

CLARA

That's their name. Mateo.

LUIS

You hung out?

CLARA

Yes. We dated. Or had a date rather. What do you think of the food?

LUIS

It needs pepper.

(CLARA tosses his spoon in the sink and grabs a fresh one.)

LUIS

I'm, I'm confused...

(CLARA dips the spoon into the pot to re-taste it.)

LUIS

You dated?

CLARA

Paprika! It needs paprika. Not pepper. Your palate needs refining.

(CLARA climbs onto the counter to search in the back of the cabinet for paprika.)

CLARA

Dammit. I thought I had some.

Clara? LUIS

Yes? CLARA

When did you date the Instacart delivery boy? LUIS

(CLARA stops searching in the cabinet, sits onto the counter, and looks at LUIS.)

Person. They're clearly not a boy. Please stop saying that. It's kinda racist actually. CLARA

Ok. Fine. So when did the *two of you* date? LUIS

Yesterday. CLARA

Yesterday? LUIS

Yes. CLARA

The same night we got back together? LUIS

Are you jealous? CLARA

Of a delivery guy? No, I'm not jealous of him. LUIS

Them. CLARA

Them? More than one guy?! LUIS

CLARA

No. Their gender non-binary and use they-them pronouns.

LUIS

You dated a gay guy?!

CLARA

No. A queer person. Not a guy. And yes, I dated *them*.

LUIS

Coño! This is...

CLARA

Don't be a bigot, Luis.

LUIS

I'm not! But... So what does that make you then? What's the term for someone who was in a relationship with a man for over a decade and now dates queer people?

CLARA

Why does it need a term?

LUIS

Because! I don't know. I just. . . This is a lot of information to take in all at once!

CLARA

Oh, please!

LUIS

Coño! Do you really not understand how this hurts me? You dating someone else? Seriously, Clara? I love you.

(CLARA takes a breath.)

CLARA

Come here.

(LUIS goes to her. Standing between her legs, she gives him a gentle kiss.)

CLARA

Mon Coeur. . .

(She kisses him again and he kisses her back. Their kissing becomes more intense. Luis runs his hands over her body and she begins to breathe heavy. Then LUIS grabs her off the counter with her legs wrapped around him, takes her to the island, and sits her on top. CLARA starts to undo her pants.)

CLARA

Make me cum.

LUIS

You want me to make you cum?

CLARA

Yes.

(LUIS gently grabs her jaw.)

LUIS

Say please.

CLARA

Please.

(LUIS reaches down her pants. CLARA moans as he puts his fingers inside her.)

LUIS

Is that what you want?

(CLARA doesn't respond. LUIS drops his hand down to her throat.)

LUIS

Answer me.

CLARA

Yes.

LUIS

Yes, what?

CLARA

Yes, sir.

LUIS

Nobody can make you cum like me. Can they?

(CLARA moans, but doesn't respond. LUIS chokes her harder.)

LUIS

Answer me.

CLARA

Nobody can make me cum like you.

LUIS

That's right. I know how to make you cum. I know what you like. You like being a slut. Don't you?

CLARA

Yes.

LUIS

God, you're so wet. Fuck. I love you. I love my horny girl. My little slut. Like being banged like a slut, don't you? Like feeling my fingers inside you. I know you do. Fucking dirty slut. Just want to get off, don't you?

CLARA

Yes.

(LUIS bangs her faster. CLARA starts to squirm.)

LUIS

Damn. Are you getting ready to cum already? Have I given you permission to cum yet? Answer me!

CLARA

No.

LUIS

You cum when I tell you to. You understand?

CLARA

Yes.

LUIS

That's right, I'm in charge. I say when you can cum. I tell my little slut when to cum.

(CLARA continues to build to a climax.)

LUIS

Okay. Ok, my love. You've been good. You've been a good girl. I'll give you permission. You can cum. You can cum like a little slut. My fucking whore. Cum. Cum for me, my little whore. Cum. Cum! Fucking cum, baby!

(CLARA cums. LUIS kisses gives her a gentle kiss.)

LUIS

God, you're so kinky. I love it.

(Then LUIS pushes her body down on the island and turns her over onto her stomach with her legs hanging off the side. He pulls her pants down slightly and does the same with his own. Then he thrusts himself inside her from behind. CLARA gasps with the first few thrusts and then goes silent.)

LUIS

You like that? Like my big cock? Huh? You like it to hurt, don't you? Don't you, you little slut. I know you do. You like it to fill you up. Stretch you out. You like my big dick stretching you out. I know you like my big cock. Nobody has a better cock than me, do they? Do they, my love? Do I have the best cock? Does my cock fuck you the best? You think some gay guy could fuck you like this? He couldn't fuck this body like me.

CLARA

Stop.

LUIS

I own this body.

CLARA

Stop.

LUIS

This is my pussy.

CLARA
Stop! ARRÊTE!!!
(He stops.)
LUIS
What?
CLARA
I said “stop” like three times!
LUIS
Sorry.
(CLARA gets off the island. They both pull up their pants.)
CLARA
Jesus fuck, Luis!
LUIS
I’m sorry.
CLARA
Jesus!
LUIS
I’m sorry!
CLARA
That is not okay!
LUIS
I know. I know. Lo siento. But... Why’d you want me to stop?
CLARA
I’m... I’m just not in the mood, okay?!

LUIS
Coño... we both know that’s not true. What’s going on?

CLARA

I need to be focusing on cooking! The fucking competition is tomorrow night!

LUIS

Is this about the Instacart guy?

CLARA

Mateo! Their name is Mateo! And they're gender non-binary! Not a guy! They go by they or them! Not Him. They or Them! Why is that so fucking hard for you?! It's not like your dick is going to shrink if you stop being machismo two seconds and actually refer to them as they are!

LUIS

Carajo! Got it!

CLARA

Good!

LUIS

So then what the fuck is it?! If it's not... Mateo, then what is it? Sólo dilo, blanquita.

CLARA

Don't call me blanquita! I'm obviously not a little white girl!

LUIS

Tell me what's really going on, Clara! Stop with the bullshit and fucking tell me!

CLARA

Why does it always have to be rough or kinky with you? Why can't it ever be... gentle?

LUIS

What?

CLARA

I know I'm not a stick figure like Carmen, but... but that doesn't mean I just exist for your primal... whatever.

LUIS

And I'm supposed to just know you suddenly want things different?

CLARA

No but... but don't you ever just want things to be simple?

LUIS

Simple?

CLARA

Intimate.

LUIS

I think what we have is intimate. Being comfortable exploring each other's fantasies and being honest about our sexuality is a kind of intimacy.

CLARA

Exploring...?

LUIS

Yes.

CLARA

Yeah... I don't want that anymore. Or... I don't want to want it. I need... joy... the rush of nerves and atoms splitting inside me from a simple touch. From a celebration of the body belonging to the person I love. Not an exploration or... conquering of their body.

(LUIS takes a moment and shakes his head.)

LUIS

You're so selfish.

CLARA

Excuse me?!

LUIS

Why'd you call me? Why start this up again? Do you even love me?

CLARA

What?

LUIS

Do you love me?

CLARA

I... Je ne sais pas.

LUIS

Ay Dios! The Chefs' Competition and professing my love like some... Mamabicho!

CLARA

That's why you got me into the competition? It had nothing to do with my cooking?

LUIS

Come on, Clara. You're a caterer!

CLARA

So?!

LUIS

So a caterer can't compete with Michelin Star chefs.

CLARA

Wow. Okay. Good to know.

LUIS

It's the truth.

CLARA

Well, better a caterer than a sell-out.

LUIS

I'm a sell-out?!

CLARA

Yes. You're a fucking sell-out!

LUIS

Rather a sell-out than an unemployed drunk from Queens!

CLARA

At least I'm not a second-rate cook!

LUIS

Oh, I'm second-rate?!

CLARA

Yes!

LUIS

Wake the fuck up, Jumeta! YOU DON'T EVEN LIKE YOUR OWN FOOD!!!

(They stand in silence for a moment and then LUIS walks over to the door.)

LUIS

I hope you find what you're looking for, mon Coeur.

(LUIS leaves. CLARA gets a fresh glass and pours herself a shot of whiskey. She shoots it back. Then she pours another shot and downs it. She stands motionless.)

CLARA

I am shit.

(She fills her glass with whiskey and leaves to the bathroom with it.)

GLUTTONY

(A shower is heard from the bathroom offstage. Then the sound of a body slamming against the wall followed by a sharp burst of laughter. After a few moments, CLARA sings.)

CLARA *(offstage)*

SAD STRUGGLE OF THE DRYING TREE
UNABLE TO FEEL HER THIRSTY ROOTS
VAIN STRIVING TO LIVE
IN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND HER OWN LIFE

(The shower turns off. A sound of shower curtain rings being quickly pulled across a metal rod follows. Then a loud thud sound.)

CLARA *(offstage)*

Fuck!

(CLARA continues signing.)

CLARA *(offstage)*

SO SWEET TO FEEL THEIR CARESSES IN
THE NIGHT; BUT SO TERRIBLE TO KNOW
THAT LATER IN THE LIGHT OF DAY
THE STRUGGLE REMAINS

(CLARA walks into the kitchen as she sings, wrapped in a towel and holding an empty glass. She fills her glass with whiskey and continues to sing.)

CLARA

SAD STRUGGLE OF THE DRYING TREE
UNABLE TO FEEL HER THIRSTY ROOTS
VAIN STRIVING FOR LOVE
IN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND HER OWN LIFE

SAD STRUGGLE OF THE DRYING TREE
THAT WHICH THEIR SOFTEST CARESSES
MIGHT BRING NEW MEMORIES
BUT CANNOT QUENCH HER THIRSTY ROOTS

(CLARA takes several sips of her drink and continues to sing.)

CLARA

SAD AND INTERMINABLE STRUGGLE
FOREVER ROOTED IN OUR STOLEN SAND
THAT WHICH CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN
IN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND HER OWN LIFE

(CLARA finds her phone on the counter and makes a call.)

CLARA

SAD STRUGGLE... SAD STRUGGLE...

(The call goes to voicemail.)

CLARA

Highlow. Um. I mean. Hi. Um... Mateo. This is Clara. I am calling you. To say I am sorry for this morning. Luis is... well, a fucken prick, but also... my first love... but we're not... anymore. But you... You frighten me. Did you know that? How did you

CLARA cont.

become so...? How are you so unshackled from the imposed shoulds and shouldn'ts of this world? Most of us... most of us are so worried—obsessed—about other people's approval or fucking validation all the time. But you're not like that. You're simple. Not simple-minded but... simple. You live life on your terms, unapologetically. Like working for Instacart. Painting. Dancing. God, that that was fun! And eating. I want to eat with you again. Not just eat but take in the whole experience of tasting... Sabor. I need to dry off.

(CLARA walks offstage as projections begins to show on the wall.)

(IMAGES: Images of WWII and the 65th Infantry Regiment.)

(CLARA walks into the kitchen in a baggy Billie Holiday t-shirt and underwear. She picks up her phone to make another call. Then she picks up her drink.)

(IMAGES: As the call goes to voicemail, the images slowly fade into pictures of the Vietnam War.)

CLARA

Did you know my dad's in AA? It's weird to think of. He's this disciplined... disciplined and strong military businessman who has his life put together, but... But I've seen his ugly side. When I was a kid just after... They're mostly images... How did you put it? Snapshots of memories. Like the picture of him burying an empty bottle of gin in the trash. The one of him passed out on the toilet... thinking he had died taking a shit. And I remember him bribing me with a donut or candy bar so I wouldn't complain about the evening trips to the gas station... But that one time... The picture of beers rolling on the floor beneath my small dangling feet. And then the feeling of my skull smashing against the window and warmth flowing down the side of my face. And then the image of my dad looking at me with fear and... and unbearable shame. I'll never forget that look. I can't. I grew up to know what's behind that look. To live life with fear and shame. Every morning.

(CLARA drops the phone. She stumbles to pick it up. Then she finishes her drink and starts to make another call.)

(IMAGES: As the call goes to voicemail, images of Vietnam fade into images of Puerto Rican women as test subjects for birth control in the 1940s. Those images slowly fade into Puerto Rican women protesting practices of forced sterilization.)

CLARA

Do you like porn? I mean, most people do, right? I wonder if that's true. What kind of

CLARA cont.

porn do you watch? Are you into the standard stuff? Or twisted shit like bukkake? Do you think there's something wrong with our society? Something wrong with me? I mean, I get turned on by some fucked up shit. Like, truly fucked up shit. Do you ever wonder where that comes from? Is it the Conquistador's blood running through me? Or the generations of rape passed down? Violence forever lodged in my hip bones.

(CLARA accidentally pushes a button.)

CLARA

Hello? Merde, shit.

(CLARA hangs up the phone. She sips on her drink and makes another call.)

(VIDEO: As the call goes to voicemail, images on the wall slowly fade into video of Latinx workers: a pretty young woman cleaning a hotel room, an old man mopping a bathroom, a father and son tending to a lawn, an old woman yelling at blond kids on the playground, a boy working in the fields, a middle-aged woman bringing coffee to white men in a board room...)

CLARA

Do you ever wonder why Latinos can't cry? The machismo who can't be vulnerable. I think it comes from Latinos knowing that the white male executive chefs and white businessmen, white politicians and whatever see them as criminals or illegals or fucking lawnmowers and that's it. The white men in charge can't see the real human beings underneath the "Hispanic" label. They just see resources: gold, sugar, rum, boys to fight their wars and servants to cook their food. So the Latinos harden on the outside and prepare their babies to fight on the same battlefields as the white men in charge. And so we do. It becomes our world. Sometimes we even forget that the battlefield was never really even. We discover over and over again that they're generations ahead of us. So we thicken our armor and harden on the outside too. But inside we... but inside I... I try to will the half of my hidden privilege that pumps one half my heart to allow for the one Taíno tear still living within me to come out but... but it refuses to be exposed.

(IMAGES: The video crossfades into images that continue to change with increased speed: Propaganda of Puerto Ricans in WWI, Sugar Cane Cutters, Media on Hurricane Maria, Tourism Advertisements, Vietnam War, Pedro Albizu Campos' iconic outcry, Cruise Advertisements, armed police removing Puerto Rican flags, WWII images, portrait of Julia de Burgos, Rum Advertisements, birth control experiments, #RickyRenuncia protests, War Against All Puerto Ricans U.S. Campaign, Arrest of Pedro Albizu Campos, Puerto Rican women protesting against forced sterilization, 65th Infantry Regiment, Donald Trump throwing a role of paper towels, and Fort San Cristóbal.)

(CLARA gets dizzy and starts to lose balance.)

CLARA

Je suis malade.

(CLARA drops her phone as she falls to the floor. She passes out lying on her back.)

MUDDLED

(CLARA opens her eyes to see a blurry image of ABUELO dressed in sharp, contemporary clothing.)

ABUELO

Clara. Clara! Can you hear me?

(CLARA starts to vomit. He bends down to help her onto her side.)

ABUELO

You could die like this, Clara. The fuck were you thinking?

CLARA

Abuelo...

ABUELO

Abuelo? Ay, Dios.

CLARA

I'm gonna... I'm gonna throw up.

ABUELO

That's okay. You need to throw up.

CLARA

Don't wanna make... mess.

ABUELO

It's okay.

CLARA

No no no. Ba... bathroom.

(CLARA tries to stand up.)

ABUELO

Okay. Okay.

(ABUELO helps her stand and practically carries her off to the bathroom. Sounds of a toilet lid being lifted followed by vomiting into the bowl can be heard.)

ABUELO *(offstage)*

That's good. Get that poison out of you.

(More sounds of vomiting. After the sounds subside, they walk back into the room, and he helps CLARA to her bed. She collapses. He makes sure a pillow is tucked behind her back. He goes to the dresser and searches for a pair of pants. He finds one, holds it at the waist and shakes his head, and places it on the bed. He locks the door. Then he sits next to CLARA on the bed and strokes her head.)

ABUELO

Ay, como lo siento, mi'jita.

(After a little while, he carefully lowers himself to the floor. Leaning against the bed, he falls asleep as the lights go down.)

PURGE

(Early morning light fills the apartment. CLARA wakes up to see her father asleep, leaning against the bed.)

CLARA

Dad?

(VICENTE wakes up and looks at CLARA.)

CLARA

Dad, what are you doing here?

No memory, huh?

(VICENTE gradually stands up.)

Why are you here?

You called.

I did?

Yes. You left a voicemail.

I did?!

Yes.

Did I leave you a lot of voicemails?!

No. Just the one.

What did I say?!

Something about Latinos not being able to cry... It wasn't coherent.

Oh my God! I am so sorry.

(VICENTE goes to the kitchen.)

VICENTE

CLARA

VICENTE

CLARA

VICENTE

CLARA

VICENTE

CLARA

VICENTE

CLARA

VICENTE

CLARA

CLARA

I can't believe you came.

(CLARA realizes she is not wearing pants. She sees the pair of pants on the bed and quickly puts them on under the blanket.)

VICENTE

Aspirin?

CLARA

Counter.

(VICENTE grabs a glass and runs it under the faucet. Then he hands the water and aspirin to CLARA.)

CLARA

Thanks.

(She takes the aspirin and chugs the glass of water.)

VICENTE

This cannot happen again, Clara.

CLARA

Were you the one who pulled back my hair in the bathroom?

VICENTE

Yes.

CLARA

You took care of me last night?

VICENTE

Who else?

CLARA

Nobody... I guess.

VICENTE

You need to go to a meeting.

CLARA

Why did you come?

VICENTE

You need to go to a meeting, Clara.

(CLARA starts to get out of bed.)

CLARA

I'm not an alcoholic, dad.

VICENTE

I found you passed out lying on your back.

CLARA

I'm sorry. That's horrible. But... it was just a bad night.

VICENTE

You could have died.

CLARA

People mistakenly get drunk. It's not a big deal.

VICENTE

Mira, you could have gotten alcohol poisoning or choked on your own vomit or slipped in the bathroom. You left the front door unlocked. Did you know that?! A man could have just walked in and... You could have died. Or worse.

CLARA

Dad—

VICENTE

No. You have a problem.

CLARA

I'm not you. Not everyone who accidentally drinks too much is an alcoholic.

(VICENTE nods slightly with his chin jutting forward. Then he goes to the kitchen and directly to the cabinet above the stove. He pulls out a bottle of whiskey and places it on the island. They stand looking at each other for a moment.)

CLARA

So...?

(VICENTE goes back into the kitchen and starts opening cabinets.)

CLARA

What are you doing? Stop it!

(VICENTE opens the cabinet under the sink. He pulls out an empty whiskey bottle and places it on the island. He continues to pull out empty whiskey bottles. One by one he places them on the island. After putting over a dozen bottles on the island, he stops and looks at CLARA.)

CLARA

I don't need your judgmental crap!

VICENTE

Cómo?!

CLARA

Yes, I've been drinking too much. I've been grieving and couldn't keep working in this bullshit-boys-club-of-an-industry and made a life change. And I've gone through it all on my own. So judge me for drinking and judge me for my career...

VICENTE

Eres perdida.

CLARA

And for not speaking Spanish!

VICENTE

These are your own insecurities, Clara.

CLARA

No! You shame me for not speaking Spanish.

VICENTE

I just wish you understood the importance of holding onto the language.

CLARA

Pourquoi? Why? Why should I know that particular colonizer's language?

VICENTE

It's what unites us.

CLARA

No. It's what segregates me.

VICENTE

Then learn it.

CLARA

I shouldn't have to!

VICENTE

Mira, you with certain privileges and—

CLARA

Privilege?!

VICENTE

Yes. Privilege. And I wanted you to have privilege. But not at the expense of—

CLARA

Of what? Of being Puerto Rican?

VICENTE

That's not what I—

CLARA

So it's not enough that I'm racialized and exotified like every other Puerto Rican woman. I still don't check enough boxes for you. Spanish, no. Career, no. Not even who I love. You think I didn't understand what you said to Mateo? Didn't see the way you looked at them? What, too much of an overcorrect for you?

VICENTE

Clara...

CLARA

So brown is best, but not too brown, ignore indigeneity, and God forbid white!
Does that just about sum it up for you?!

VICENTE

Clara—

CLARA

And the fucking hypocrisy of it all! You built an empire pleasing white people. Bastardizing our cuisine with low-fat pretentious menus designed for their palates. For their bodies. Just for some fucking tire people to say how special you are for... for the spic category. And here you are shaming me? Defining who I am based on a language? If that was so important to you, maybe you should have been around more to actually teach me! Or maybe you shouldn't have knocked up a white woman!

VICENTE

Cállate! Do not speak disrespectfully of your mother's memory!

CLARA

sorry.

VICENTE

Throwing a fit isn't going to change anything. You have a problem, Clara.

CLARA

You're acting like it's not too late to raise me. But that ship has sailed. Abuelo raised me. He was the one who taught me how to cook. He was the one who made sure my homework was done and tucked me in at night and held me when I cried about a boy. He taught me what really matters in life. And it didn't include being concerned with status or prestige. He was happy being a short-order cook and having his family around. He didn't need to be a big shot chef for white people!

(VICENTE takes a breath as footage slowly appears on the bedroom wall.)

VICENTE

Most men.... Most men last six months as a short-order cook. The pressure, the pace, skill, the heat is too much for most men past six months. It can be 100 to 120 degrees behind the line during a shift. And the grill, fryer, the broiler... the flat surfaces get up to 400 degrees. You might not think of it, as someone who's never had to work her way up from the bottom, but a man can literally cook his own hands off working in that heat. Pero, su abuelo was tough, the kind of man

VIDEO: The footage is from the Cameraman's perspective as he walks down a street in Brooklyn in the late-1990s. He passes a subway station, a brick wall with colorful graffiti, a food cart with a sign for "cuchifritos" and then a wooden door to a diner. He enters the diner where white customers are eating. The white customers do not take notice of

VICENTE cont.

who thought going to war for this country was honorable, and he served his first six months in a Brooklyn-greasy-spoon-shithole like it was a vacation. But after the remaining thirty-six years as a short-order cook, serving ungrateful, gentrifying white immigrants from Manhattan, he retired with no savings, a joke for social security, arthritis in every joint of his body, no fingerprints, and a total of nine fingers. So no. He was not the energetic, sweet old man you remember. He was a tired old drunk. His soul was tired. He spent his last few days in the cold VA hospital talking about walking in the streets of Puerto Rico with tú abuela. He was ready to be home with his love. To leave this brutal life. You and your romanticized ideas of this world, your... your privilege to run around with no pants and try to find your place of belonging. You have no fucken clue. Ay, Dios. Shit. I have meetings. I need to go.

the Cameraman. The video continues with him walking into the kitchen where Latinos are cooking and washing dishes. The Latinos wave at the Cameraman and laugh. Then he goes into a small room with a desk. He puts the camera down on the desk, showing his lower half. He pulls out a bottle of gin from a jacket, takes off the cap, and lifts it out of frame with a wrinkled and shaky hand. He lifts the bottle several more times. Then he puts on an apron. He takes out a Hershey's candy bar from the jacket and puts it into an apron pocket. Then he takes off his jacket and tucks the bottle underneath it and walks out of the room, shutting the door behind him.

(The video fades as VICENTE goes to the door.)

CLARA

Meetings. Right. Go be important to strangers, dad.

(VICENTE leaves. CLARA goes to the island and stares at the bottles. She picks up the bottle with whiskey still inside it. She hesitates. Then she throws that bottle along with the others in the trash. She stands still for a moment and finally begins to cry. She goes to lie down on her bed and sobs into her pillow.)

COOKING WITH ABUELO

(ABUELO appears dressed like an old man in loose khaki pants, a faint yellow sweater, and eyeglasses hanging from his neck.)

ABUELO

Come on, Clarita. Don't cry.

CLARA

Go away.

(ABUELO sings as he preps the kitchen.)

ABUELO

TRISTE LUCHA DEL ÁRBOL SECADO
INCAPAZ DE SENTIR SUS RAÍCES SEDIENTAS
VANO ESFORZARSE POR VIVIR
EN TRATAR DE COMPRENDER SU PROPIA VIDA

*ABUELO places a large frying pan
and cast aluminum caldero on the
stove. He adds olive oil to both, turns
on the stove, and places a wooden
spoon on the counter.*

ABUELO

I could use the help from my little sous chef. Venga!

(CLARA slowly stands and walks near the kitchen, wiping tears from her face.)

ABUELO

We have to wait for the oil to start smoking.

CLARA

Why do you look so young? All ten fingers of you?

ABUELO

Ah! There it goes. We'll start with the sofrito.

*(He pulls out a bowl of sofrito from the fridge. He puts it into the caldero and
stirs. The entire place suddenly smells of sautéed garlic, onions, and peppers.)*

ABUELO

Nothing better for the soul than the smell of sofrito.

CLARA

The smell of home.

ABUELO

Now for jamón.

(ABUELO pulls out diced ham from the fridge and adds it to the frying pan.)

ABUELO

We'll let that cook until it turns a nice brown color. Then we can use the jamón and all its juices to flavor the arroz, verdad?

(CLARA nods. ABUELO stirs the ham and sofrito.)

ABUELO

Why don't you pull up a chair to stand on? Y lo recolecto los ingredientes. Okay?

(CLARA walks into the kitchen as ABUELO gathers the other ingredients.)

CLARA

Were you really a drunk? I know you liked your gin and tonic, but I don't have any memories of you actually being drunk. I don't think...

(ABUELO adds the ingredients to the caldero as he names them.)

ABUELO

Let's see... Salsa de tomate... gandules... Spanish olives. These are the stuffed olives with all the flavor. Best thing to come from Spain. Well, maybe garlic. I guess there are some perks to colonization.

(ABUELO makes himself laugh. CLARA smiles.)

ABUELO

Do you want to stir, Clarita?

(ABUELO hands CLARA the spoon. She stirs as he adds the spices.)

ABUELO

Adobo... cumin... Keep stirring. Sazón con achiote. Always con achiote! That's where the color comes from, sí? Y entonces los otros spices. Now, do you remember what we do next?

CLARA

Ham.

ABUELO

That's right. Ahora. El color 'ta bueno. Creo que esta listo.

(ABUELO adds the ham to the caldero.)

ABUELO

We'll let it come to a boil. And while we wait, we can get started on the tostones.

(ABUELO pulls out plantains and places on top of the island.)

ABUELO

Have I shown you the trick to peeling them?

CLARA

Yes.

ABUELO

So first you cut off the ends and then you run the knife down the flat side. That way you can just run your thumb down the inside to unpeel it.

(ABUELO cuts and peels a plantain.)

ABUELO

Just like that.

(ABUELO cuts another plantain and then hands it to her.)

ABUELO

You try.

(CLARA peels it just as quickly as ABUELO.)

ABUELO

Bueno.

(ABUELO continues to cut and CLARA peels as he talks.)

ABUELO

We got so many great ingredients from the Taínos. Squash... cashews and pineapples. Yuca, a type of batata. Batata means potato in Spanish, but they learned it from Taínos. Qué mas... ají dulce. The peppers we made the sofrito with. Pero not plátanos. Tostones, los verdes y maduros we got from the African slaves who were brought over and forced to work the sugar cane fields. Africanos would fry plátanos—this fruit—in large pans to make dòdò or... tostones. And here we are still honoring our mixed race... El tres razas: Taíno, African, and Spaniard. Combining the ingredients of Puerto Rico in one dish. Creating our own language with food. Now, do you want to practice slicing? It will be our secret. Banga.

(ABUELO shows her how to slice the plantains.)

ABUELO

Recuerda. Like this...

(ABUELO hands CLARA the knife. Her hands shake as she slices.)

ABUELO

We want clean cuts. You'll need to work on keeping a steady hand. Pero... Every slice the same thickness. Bueno. Your dad would be impressed.

CLARA

I'm sure he wouldn't care.

ABUELO

No, don't be upset with him. He's just... está perdido. He's lost, Clarita.

CLARA

He's not lost. He knows exactly what he wants. To control everyone around him!

ABUELO

Tapas la boca, Clarita! Don't speak that way about your dad. Se merece tu respeto.

CLARA

sorry.

ABUELO

He's been through things you cannot even imagine. Literal wars. And when tu mamá died... Well, a soul can only hold so much pain before it breaks.

CLARA

I lost my mom too.

ABUELO

Ay, Clarita, hablas como una niña... Every child thinks their experiences are their own. They think their struggles are only theirs. Pero nobody exists in a vacuum. Your struggles are your father's struggles and his are mine and so on and so on. The immense, incomprehensible parts of life... boys killing other boys in war... the rape of a person or a people and... and so many more inconceivable wrongs are passed down through the generations. But so is love. You were born of love. You see, you are the living memory, un recuerdo vivo, of all our people's past loves... and pains. And so is tu papá. En el pasado está el presente.

(The caldero begins to make noise.)

ABUELO

Ah, it's boiling!

(ABUELO goes to the caldero and lifts the lid and stirs. There's a knock at the door. CLARA walks over to the door. As she goes to unlock it, she looks back to ABUELO, but he's gone.)

COOKING WITH DAD

(CLARA opens the door to VICENTE.)

CLARA

Hi, dad.

(VICENTE stands in the doorway looking at CLARA.)

CLARA

You want to come in?

(VICENTE walks into the apartment. After a moment he speaks.)

VICENTE

Tu abuelo insisted on my speaking English only at home as a kid.

CLARA

He did?!

VICENTE

Your generation seems to put stock in Puerto Ricans being U.S. Citizens. But tu abuelo, he knew that we would never be treated that way. So English only, and no accent tolerated. He made sure I knew the difference between less and fewer, how to properly hold a pen, to strive for a Steve Reeves physique, and not to speak unless I had something important to say. He armed me to succeed in a country... a home that either doesn't want us or chooses not to see us. But... I never lost my language. Spanish was the one thing that could never be taken from me. From us. And I'm... ashamed I didn't pass it onto you.

(CLARA takes a moment.)

CLARA

But... It's different for me. I'm not just Puerto Rican. I'm... mixed. I'm... mixed-race. Yeah, it's a... neither-both experience that can be isolating sometimes, but it's not a bad thing. I'm not lacking in anything. I haven't wanted to work in your kitchen my whole life to study your version of what it means to be Puerto Rican. I just wanted to hang out with my dad. And for you to taste my food.

(VICENTE takes a moment.)

VICENTE

I remember sitting at the chef's table at Le Bernardin. The executive chef personally handing me the food you prepared. Your creation... Striped bass tatare with apples and jalapeños, sprinkled with plantain crisps, and drizzled with a dark rum-tamarind vinaigrette. Simple and... perfect. An experience I could never forget. The day my daughter surpassed me. You should have your own kitchen, mi'jita.

(CLARA smiles as VICENTE takes in the smell of the apartment.)

VICENTE

Sofrito?

CLARA

I'm making abuelo's arroz con gandules.

VICENTE

For the Chefs' Competition?

CLARA

Yes. And I'm thinking of doing mofongo paired with a roast. Pastelón as a fun play on lasagna. All fresh ingredients! I don't think I have time for black beans at this point. But defiantly tostones. I mean, not till I get there. I don't want them to get soggy, obviously.

VICENTE

Clara, you won't be successful with these dishes.

CLARA

Successful?

VICENTE

They will always see our traditional cuisine as something beneath them.

CLARA

I know.

(VICENTE nods slightly.)

VICENTE

Pero we don't have to make it easy on 'em.

(CLARA smiles. VICENTE rolls up his sleeves and they both walk into the kitchen with the same focused intensity. CLARA goes to add water to the caldero, but her hands are too shaky. She puts the caldero down and looks at her hands.)

VICENTE

Shakes?

(CLARA nods.)

VICENTE

You'll need medical detox.

CLARA

After the competition.

(VICENTE nods and takes the caldero from CLARA. He adds water while she does other food prep.)

VICENTE

So this Mateo. . . He seems like a respectful and... assertive young Afro-Latino.

CLARA

Latinx.

VICENTE

Mira. I'm not going to Anglicize Latino.

CLARA

But... Hispanic, Latin, Latino... They're all Anglicized.

VICENTE

Pero at least it's in Spanish. Latino.

CLARA

But they're bender non-binary. Latinx.

VICENTE

Hm.

CLARA

Some of us don't fit neatly in a box, dad.

VICENTE

Afro-Boricua then.

CLARA

Boricua. Eso es.

VICENTE (*nodding*)

Boricua.

CLARA

I messed it up with Mateo though. Don't think they'll be coming around anymore.

VICENTE

Your mother used to say I was an acquired taste. Maybe... tú también. What's next?

CLARA

We need to get the pork roast cooking.

VICENTE

Pork?

CLARA

Yes, dad. I'm going to use full-fat pork.

(VICENTE nods. CLARA goes to her phone to play music. They continue to cook together to the sounds of plena.)