

TENGO VOZ

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CHARACTERS

OLDER / BERENICE – Puerto Rican woman, Theater Arts Graduate Student

YOUNGER / SPIRIT – Puerto Rican girl, Younger Berenice and her Inner-Spirit, Junior High School Student

BLAKE – White Man, Theater Arts Graduate Student

MR. NELSON & PROFESSOR – White Man, Junior High School Teacher & Theater Arts Professor

GRAD STUDENT A & THE PRINCIPAL – White Man, Graduate Student & Junior High School Principal

GRAD STUDENT B – White Woman, Theater Arts Graduate Student

GRAD STUDENT C – White Man, Theater Arts Graduate Student

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT / CÉSAR – Mexican American Man, Theater Arts Graduate Student

I am two parts/a person
boricua/spic
past and present
alive and oppressed
given a cultural beauty
. . . and robbed of a cultural identity

I speak the alien tongue
in sweet boricueña thoughts
know love mixed with pain
have tasted spit on ghetto stairways
. . . here, it must be changed
we must change it.

"Here" by Sandra María Esteves

SCENE 1

The school bell rings.

YOUNGER, a teenage girl with wild curly hair and no makeup, wearing baggy jeans and an oversized hoodie, is sitting at an old-fashioned wraparound school desk.

She speaks directly to The Audience.

YOUNGER

Mom says they used to be modeled after factories, but now they design'm like Prisons. An it sure as fuck feels like a prison, no windows an fucken security shit everywhere. But I do my time. I sit at my desk an listen to Head Guard Nelson talk bout Martin Luther King Jr. We're learnen American History in school, which is somehow only bout White and Black people. Like all Native Americans are just ghosts from the past and Latinos are ghouls sneaking across the border and Asian Americans are like... I dunno... good at math? An coño, the way these white teachers love MLK... I mean, of course I do too an all, but I think they just like him cause he did shit without violence, less intimidating, you know? I'm more of the Malcolm X "by any means necessary" approach, but qué mierda.

MR. NELSON (offstage)

And now I'll read what you all wrote for your Identity Poems.

YOUNGER (to MR. NELSON)

Ah, fuck.

YOUNGER (to The Audience)

So I'm sittin' in the Principal's office. Mr. Nelson usually sends me to detention, not the fucken Principal's office. I never liked Mr. Nelson, but in my defense, he never liked me neither. First time he sent me to detention was for reading. I mean, this is a fucken school, if I got all my homework done, I should be allowed to read my own books. Pero joke's on him cause MiSS Tate—she likes me to say it like that, with the hard Ss, kinda like Chicanos do, you know, except she's white, which is kinda confusing—but MiSS Tate lets me read whatever the fuck I want so long as I don't draw on the desks no more. Coño, there was no reason for him to send me to the Principals office. Dick!

YOUNGER slouches back in her desk, trying not to appear nervous.

But then she feels something wrong

In her gut.

It hurts.

She stands.

A low tonal sound is heard in the distance.

She moves towards the sound as it gets louder.

The hurt spreads to her chest.

The sound becomes more chaotic.

The pain in her gut and chest intensify.

The sound starts to resemble a deep guttural noise.

The noise begins to take the shape of song or a romanticized argument.

Then OLDER emerges from the same direction.

Everything becomes muffled and the physical pain subsides as YOUNGER sees OLDER.

OLDER does not see YOUNGER.

After a moment of study, YOUNGER recognizes OLDER and is startled.

She moves in closer to observe OLDER.

OLDER BERENICE is dressed in sophisticated, casual clothes designed to appear comfortable. Her curly hair is tamed and her makeup elegant, the kind of simple look that takes a while to achieve. Her posture is too upright, of someone determined, focused, and very guarded. Her walk is purposeful and steady, without attitude. She would look happy and youthful to anyone else, but not to her YOUNGER SPIRIT, to her

She looks tired and in pain.

SCENE 2

The noise returns and crescendos as PROFESSOR, GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT, and BLAKE enter. BERENICE takes her seat in a graduate Theater Arts seminar as they continue their discussion.

SPIRIT proceeds to observe BERENICE, unseen by anyone.

GRAD STUDENT A

Chekhov.

PROFESSOR

Chekhov. Yes.

GRAD STUDENT B

Miller.

PROFESSOR

Miller. Right.

GRAD STUDENT C

Williams.

PROFESSOR

Williams. Indeed.

BLAKE

Albee.

PROFESSOR

Albee. Precisely.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Mamet.

PROFESSOR

Mamet. Yes. And?

GRAD STUDENT A

Shaw

GRAD STUDENT B

Stoppard

GRAD STUDENT C

Bernstein

BLAKE

Shanley

GRAD STUDENT A

Coward

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Beckett

GRAD STUDENT C

Ludwig

GRAD STUDENT A

Wilde

GRAD STUDENT B

Hammerstein

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

McNally

BLAKE

Welles

GRAD STUDENT A

O'Neil

BLAKE

Durang

GRAD STUDENT C

Rogers

GRAD STUDENT B

Allen

GRAD STUDENT A

Shepard

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Molière

BLAKE

Brecht

GRAD STUDENT A

Pinter

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Shakespeare

GRAD STUDENT A

Robbins

GRAD STUDENT B

Laurents

GRAD STUDENT C

and Sondheim

BERENICE

Fornés.

They look at BERENICE confused.

BERENICE

María Irene Fornés.

They still look confused.

BERENICE

José Rivera?

GRAD STUDENT B

Churchill!

PROFESSOR

Churchill. Yes.

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

Ay, Carajo!

BERENICE thinks she hears something, but does not see her SPIRIT.

PROFESSOR

What do these playwrights all have in common? What's the pattern here?

GRAD STUDENT A

A Common Habitus.

BLAKE

Cultural Capital.

GRAD STUDENT B

A working of the Lacanian Imaginary.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Dialectical Relationship.

GRAD STUDENT A (correcting THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT)

Relational Dialectics.

GRAD STUDENT B

Commonality of the Social Condition.

GRAD STUDENT C

Social Commonality.

BLAKE

Disparity in Power Relations.

GRAD STUDENT B

Simulacra

GRAD STUDENT C

and Simulation

GRAD STUDENT B

of the Hyperreal.

BERENICE

They're mostly White Men?

The other students look at BERENICE and then to the PROFESSOR who takes a moment to think of the best way to handle the situation.

PROFESSOR

We are actually looking for the connecting threads... thematically, Ber-nice.

GRAD STUDENT A

This isn't about Race.

PROFESSOR

Yes. Race is not part of... this conversation.

GRAD STUDENT B

But Gender is.

GRAD STUDENT C

Gender. Indeed.

PROFESSOR (to GRAD STUDENT C)

That is a valid point.

PROFESSOR (to all students)

And a nice segue into a discussion of our first mainstage production this year, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* from the late nineteenth century. The play revolves around Hedda, the daughter of a general and wife of an academic who schemes to bring more excitement and beauty into her middle-class existence, but who ultimately fails and takes her own life. As one of Ibsen's iconic plays, it poignantly centers themes of feminism and classism. Now, keeping *Our Great Playwrights* in mind, how can we apply a similar lens to Hedda? What are the Aristotelian markers of tragical plot being implemented in the aforementioned play?

BERENICE

Inciting Incident.

PROFESSOR

Good, Ber-niece.

GRAD STUDENT B

Exposition.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Catharsis.

GRAD STUDENT A (clarifying)

Purge of Pity and Fear.

GRAD STUDENT C

Rising Action.

BERENICE

Denouement.

GRAD STUDENT B

Peripeteia.

BLAKE

Anagnorisis.

PROFESSOR

Very Good.

BERENICE

But, um, does she actually undergo an anagnorisis?

PROFESSOR

Let's unpack that, shall we? What must occur for an anagnorisis to take place?

BERENICE

There is a—

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Recognition and Reversal.

GRAD STUDENT A (clarifying for THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT)

In the end, she Recognizes her true identity and Reverses her position.

PROFESSOR

Precisely.

BERENICE

I'm not sure she does because—

GRAD STUDENT B

I think she does.

BERENICE

I'm not sure she does... reverse because—

GRAD STUDENT C

Of course she does!

BERENICE

Maybe not bec—

GRAD STUDENT B

If you think about it—

BERENICE

But it's just that—

GRAD STUDENT C

If you think about it—

BERENICE

But if she is continuously striving to live life on her own terms, then her suicide might be more about holding onto her own autonomy rather than—

GRAD STUDENT A

Listen. You're overcomplicating matters. Ibsen was writing in an era where people like Freud were connecting psychoanalysis with theater, and in this case, the first fully developed neurotic female protagonist, therefore—

BERENICE

I don't understand what that—

GRAD STUDENT A

Scholarship suggests that Ibsen was interested in the then-embryonic science of mental illness.

BERENICE

Okay...

GRAD STUDENT B

Hedda was not well.

BLAKE

Hedda was mentally unhinged.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Hedda was a woman with some sort of organic brain disease.

GRAD STUDENT C

Hedda was a malicious and destructive woman who exhibited signs of a personality disorder.

GRAD STUDENT A

Hedda was a sexually manipulative woman struggling with an identity disorder whose materialistic appetite for power finally got the better of her and in a moment of lucidity she realizes she has lost at the little games she was playing at and forfeits by taking her own life. A Reversal.

PROFESSOR

In-depth analysis!

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

Ay, Dios!

BERENICE hears her SPIRIT again and searches for her, but does not see her.

PROFESSOR

I hope you found this beneficial as your papers on the critical discourse analysis of *Hedda Gabler* are due next week. No extensions. No exceptions. Please see that you bring a copy of *The Empty Space* to our next seminar as we shift gears into reimagining the role of Theater Arts in reshaping and reclaiming large scale ethics and value systems. Until next time.

SPIRIT

Bere...

BERENICE hears her SPIRIT again, and finally sees her. She is surprised to see her SPIRIT but recognizes her instantly.

PROFESSOR, GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT, and BLAKE leave.

SCENE 3

SPIRIT and BERENICE take each other in.

SPIRIT

Coño. This a trip, Bere. You lookin' all fancy-sophisticated an shit. You workout?

BERENICE

What?

SPIRIT

I'm not coming onto you, shiiit. I'm just asking if you workout. Cause of genetics, you know? You take after Abuela, which is a good thing cause she all woman-like with the Latina hips and the big tatas, but there's like a fine line before you start to look like an actual abuela, am I right? But I'm glad you didn't get all soft. Kept your guard up. Ready to go! Am I right?

BERENICE, still observing SPIRIT, does not respond.

SPIRIT

I said, am I right?

BERENICE

You look so... precious.

SPIRIT

Precious?! Damn. Nobody's called me fucken precious before.

BERENICE

I just mean... Are you... Are you okay?

SPIRIT

I'm good.

BERENICE

It's okay if you're not. You know that, right?

SPIRIT

Yeah... I don't know what to do with all that. But tell me how shit goes down. Like... Did you ever make Mr. Nelson pay for being such a prick? Did you ever get to hear Santana live? Or Lauren Hill? Did you finish the collection of Alexandre Dumas books? How many times have you read *House of the Spirits* by now? No wait! Did you ever kiss Luis? Please tell me you finally kiss him! I know he's a little skinny, but damn, he's like a Puerto Rican version of *The Crow*. Actually, Brandon Lee does kinda look like a PR. Did you ever go? Did you ever go get to Puerto Rico?! Pick shrimp from the ocean with your bare hands and taste a real sure cane? Did you?!

BERENICE

I have been to Puerto Rico.

SPIRIT

Was it like... going home?

BERENICE

yeah...

SPIRIT

No?

BERENICE

It was... It was beautiful.

SPIRIT

Aiiight. Cool. I guess I can try to move passed this... yuppie princess thing you got goin' on then.

BERENICE

Yuppie princess?

BERENICE looks at her outfit and laughs a little.

BERENICE

Yeah, I guess so.

SPIRIT

But ain't you a little old to still be going to school? What are you? Like forty-five?

BERENICE

Forty-five?! Are you fucking kidding me?!

SPIRIT

Forty?

BERENICE

No! I'm like the average age for grad school! I think...

SPIRIT

Grad school? So... that means you're going into teaching? Like Papá? You pullen on the same strings? Is this the same university?

BERENICE

I'm getting my MFA in—

SPIRIT

MFA?

BERENICE

Yes.

SPIRIT

What's that stand for, again? MFA. Mutha Fucken Artist?

They laugh.

BERENICE

Yeah, I'll be a Mutha Fucken Theater Artist.

SPIRIT

Theater?

BERENICE

Yeah.

SPIRIT

So you're studying to teach like drama club?

BERENICE

No, to work in theater. At theaters. Productions...?

SPIRIT

So you're in the entertaining business?

BERENICE

Somethen like that.

SPIRIT

To entertain... white people?

BERENICE

No. Not just white people.

SPIRIT

So who were all those white people you were just fucken around with then?

BERENICE

They weren't all white.

SPIRIT

Yeah, I saw the Méjicano. He's pretty. You hittin' that?

BERENICE

No.

SPIRIT

Coconut?

BERENICE

No. Well... probably.

They laugh again.

BERENICE takes another moment to observe SPIRIT.

BERENICE

You sure you're okay?

SPIRIT

I'm chill.

BERENICE

But... then why are you here?

SPIRIT

You know, it was funny, watchen you with those Títeres. Made me think of that thing Mom would say from that movie... that movie... you know, the one with Demi Moore before she got the big tatas y Whoopi who could see that dead white dude? *Ghosts*. That's right, *Ghosts*. So Whoopi's sisters walk in on her talken to what looks like herself but it's actually the dead white dude an they ask her who she's talken to, cause obviously they can't see the dead white dude, an when Whoopi tells them, they don't think she's gone crazy for talken to an invisible person. Nah, instead they say, "Somebody call the doctor, she's talking to white people!" Remember how Mom would say that about Papá? "Somebody call the doctor, he's talking to white people!" Well, I'm pretty-fucken-sure Mom would say that bout you right now. "Somebody call the doctor, she's talking to white people!" An what the fuck did you go an do, huh? You went an made a fucken career out of talken to white people, fool!

BERENICE

That's a real narrow lens you're operating with, Chiquita. Living in the real world as an adult takes a bit more critical thinking than that. Maybe you should just stick to playing kid games.

SPIRIT

Yeah. Aiight. Good fucken call, Bere.

SCENE 4

PROFESSOR, GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT, and BLAKE enter the classroom in mid-discussion as SPIRIT focuses her attention on them.

BLAKE

Ethical

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Accessible

GRAD STUDENT C

Tolerant

GRAD STUDENT B

Inclusive

GRAD STUDENT A

Progressive

BLAKE

Authentic

PROFESSOR

Authentic. Yes.

SPIRIT

HEY PUPPETS!

PROFESSOR, GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT, and BLAKE look to SPIRIT.

SPIRIT

It's time to play! Please take your places, Títeres!

In a semi-conscious state, they each stand in front of a chair.

SPIRIT

Bueno. And here we go!

Music starts playing. It is fun carnival-like music.

PROFESSOR, GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT, and BLAKE start walking around the chairs.

The music stops.

They each sit in a chair.

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

Um... So, yeah... This is kinda awkward... But you're supposed to walk around the chairs and then try to sit on one when the music stops and then one person is out. See, that's kinda how the game works.

BERENICE

No thanks. I'm good.

SPIRIT

Yeah... But, you're not the only one here though, are you?

PROFESSOR, GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT, and BLAKE stand and glare at BERENICE.

SPIRIT

We really can't start without you.

BERENICE

Fine.

BERENICE reluctantly walks over to the chairs.

The music starts playing again.

They all start walking around the chairs.

The music stops.

BERENICE is left standing.

SPIRIT

Tough break. Let's go again!

The music starts again.

BERENICE acts as if she doesn't care, but she starts to move a little more methodically: lingering near a chair and briskly walking to the next.

The music stops.

BERENICE starts to sit on a chair at the same time as GRAD STUDENT B, but she manages to take up more space, and BERENICE is left standing.

The music starts playing again right away.

BERENICE moves even faster and more desperately to find a chair.

Just as the music stops, BERENICE plants herself squarely in front of a chair and goes to sit, but SPIRIT yanks it out from underneath her and she falls to the ground.

SPIRIT laughs uncontrollably.

BERENICE

Hey!

SPIRIT

How did you not see that coming?

SPIRIT continues to laugh.

BERENICE

Enough.

SPIRIT

It was so fucken obvious!

BERENICE

Enough!

SPIRIT

Uh-oh Títeres, we're in trouble.

BERENICE

I said ENOUGH!

PROFESSOR, GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT, and BLAKE all look at BERENICE on the floor. They no longer see SPIRIT.

PROFESSOR

Are you okay, Ber-niece?

SPIRIT (correcting PROFESSOR)

Beah-reh-niece-eh.

BERENICE

Yeah. Just slipped. Sorry.

PROFESSOR

Where were we?

GRAD STUDENT A

We were discussing ethics.

PROFESSOR

Theater ethics. Yes.

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

That was embarrassing.

SPIRIT

That was fucken hilarious!

BERENICE

Fuck off!

PROFESSOR

What was that, Ber-niece?

SPIRIT (to PROFESSOR)

Berenice!

BERENICE

Nothing. Sorry.

PROFESSOR (to all students)

So as we embrace this forward momentum of progress where diversity is being more readily celebrated onstage, how can we help foster a safe space in support of this equitable paradigm shift?

GRAD STUDENT B

I think hiring more women, L.G.B.T.Q.I.A. plus, and minorities in leadership positions maybe.

SPIRIT tires to mouth out the acronym in confusion.

GRAD STUDENT C

Like Directing!

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

More inclusive hiring practices.

PROFESSOR

Inclusive. Yes.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Perhaps priority should be given to theater artists whose ethnicity — and so forth — are in line with the coinciding... issues presented in the play.

BLAKE

Yes, but... But that is what we do as Theater-Makers.

PROFESSOR

Theater-Makers. Yes.

BLAKE

We advocate for other people's stories all the time.

GRAD STUDENT A

Precisely. It shouldn't matter if we are different demographically.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Yes.

GRAD STUDENT B

True.

GRAD STUDENT C

Yes. True Indeed!

BERENICE does not fully agree with their conclusion
but does not speak.

SPIRIT

Nod along, Títère.

BERENICE (to SPIRIT, defensively)

NO!

BLAKE (to BERENICE)

Why “no”?

BERENICE

I, uh... nothing.

BLAKE

You said “no” for a reason.

BERENICE

I didn’t mean “no,” definitively.

BLAKE

But?

BERENICE

but?

BLAKE

But, don’t you think it is our job as Theater-Makers to advocate for people’s stories?

GRAD STUDENT A

No matter the given demographics.

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

It might be more complex than that. Maybe.

BLAKE

How so?

BERENICE

It just could be, is all.

BLAKE

But why?

BERENICE

Well... maybe we—Theater-Makers—don't necessarily have a right to tell just anyone's story, you know?

BLAKE

Okay, but... If I were to do a play, for example, about someone from... Georgia, even if I've never been, I would still have to do research, study the culture, the dialect, and above all, advocate for the human condition.

BERENICE

Georgia. Right.

SPIRIT

Dilo, Bere.

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

Are they white?

GRAD STUDENT B

That makes me Uncomfortable.

GRAD STUDENT C

Very Uncomfortable!

PROFESSOR (to BERENICE)

Let's stay on topic, shall we?

BERENICE (to PROFESSOR)

I'm sorry, I...

BLAKE (to BERENICE)

What does race have to do with it?

GRAD STUDENT A

Seriously!

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

It's just... your scenario was about white people, right?

BLAKE

I don't know. I didn't think about it.

GRAD STUDENT A

What if it was?

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

Well, what if it was a play about... a woman of color? Do you think that it might still be okay for you to do that play? To tell our story?

GRAD STUDENT A

Jesus!

BLAKE

Of course I would still do all the necessary research, but no matter, I would just be advocating for people. We're all people after all.

SPIRIT

Coño!

BERENICE

But, um...

BLAKE

It was the same thing when I did *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine... uh, Lorraine...

BERENICE

Hansberry. But what about a play that wasn't written half a century ago?

BLAKE

I don't see why that—

BERENICE

Or what about a Latina playwright?

BLAKE

What would their being Hispanic have to do with anything?

SPIRIT (to BLAKE)

Latina, not Hispanic, fool!

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

Latina. And it comes back to advocacy as you said. It might not be your story to tell.

SPIRIT

Fucken right!

BLAKE

But I don't understand why I couldn't tell a... Lah-teen-o's story.

SPIRIT (to BLAKE)

Latina!

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

Latina.

BLAKE

What?

BERENICE

You have plenty of stories to choose from.

BLAKE

So...?

BERENICE

So maybe, just maybe you aren't entitled to speak on the behalf of everyone.

PROFESSOR and other GRAD STUDENTS lower
their heads and slowly start backing away from the
uncomfortable conversation until they finally leave.

SPIRIT

You tell him straight!

BLAKE

You don't need to be taking this so personally.

BERENICE

Personally?

BLAKE

I am just disagreeing. I'm allowed to disagree.

BERENICE

No, you're being dismissive.

BLAKE

I'm sorry, it's not my intention to be "dismissive."

SPIRIT

Fuck your Intentions!

BERENICE

There's a history of oppression you're ignoring.

BLAKE

Okay.

BERENICE

BUT—wait, what?

BLAKE

Okay.

BERENICE

Okay?

BLAKE

Okay. I believe you. How am I doing that?

BLAKE and BERENICE start moving in towards each other as they speak.

BERENICE

Well, like...

BLAKE

I want to Understand.

BERENICE

Because...

BLAKE

Tell me.

BERENICE

Uh...

BLAKE

I'm Listening.

BERENICE

...um

BLAKE

Speak.

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

Fuck that fucken white boy up!

BERENICE suddenly kisses BLAKE.

Both BLAKE and BERENICE are surprised at first.
Then BLAKE kisses her back.

As their kissing intensifies sexually and aggressively,
SPIRIT returns to her desk confused and
disappointed in BERENICE.

SCENE 5

BLAKE and BERENICE are in BLAKE's apartment. There is an atmosphere of satisfaction and uncertainty between the two.

SPIRIT is still sitting at her desk, removed from the action, but still present. She eventually looks back to BERENICE.

SPIRIT

That's not what I meant by "fuck him up."

BERENICE waves her SPIRIT off with a sharp flick of her wrist. BLAKE pulls out a vape pen.

BLAKE

You mind?

BERENICE shakes her head. BLAKE takes a drag and lets out smoke. SPIRIT takes a whiff.

SPIRIT

Whaaat is that white boy smoken?

BERENICE

That's not just... vape, is it?

BLAKE

You want some?

BERENICE

Um...

BLAKE

I get it from the bus boy where I work.

BERENICE

Oh. Where's that?

BLAKE

The Mexican restaurant on main street. Next to the weird coffee shop with all the hanging doors on the walls and ceiling.

BERENICE

Cool... Good espresso... Never been to the restaurant before though.

BLAKE

You should. The guys tend to come on Margarita Wednesdays to get drunk for cheap and give me a hard time.

BERENICE

What do you do there?

BLAKE

I'm a waiter—server—I'm trying to get better at being gender neutral.

SPIRIT looks confused.

BERENICE

Server? On top of classes and teaching?

BLAKE

Yeah, I like being able to buy food.

BERENICE

Oh. Sure, yeah.

BLAKE takes another inhale from the vape pen. He speaks through his exhale.

BLAKE

Not all of us have wealthy alumni parents, right Ber-niece?

SPIRIT

Berenice!

BERENICE

Berenice.

BLAKE

What?

BERENICE

My name. It's pronounced Berenice, not Ber-niece.

BLAKE

Damn. I'm sorry! So its...?

BERENICE

Berenice.

BLAKE

Ber-niece-say?

BERENICE

No. It's four syllables.

BLAKE looks a little scared.

BERENICE

Here. Repeat after me, Beah-reh

BLAKE

Beah-reh

BERENICE

niece-eh

BLAKE

niece-eh

BERENICE

Beah-reh-niece-eh.

BLAKE

Beah-reh-niece-eh. Berenice.

BERENICE nods.

BLAKE

What does it mean?

BERENICE

What?

BLAKE

Your name. What does it mean?

BERENICE

Oh... I gotcha. It's a word people use if they want to get my attention.

Her SPIRIT laughs.

BLAKE

No, what does it mean in English?

BERENICE

What does yours mean?

BLAKE

What do you mean?

BERENICE

What do you mean "what do I mean"?

BLAKE

Our names don't mean anything.

BERENICE

Whose “our”?

BLAKE

What?

BERENICE

You mean white people’s names don’t mean anything?

BLAKE

Yeah, I guess so. We don’t have... Culture in the same way.

BERENICE

Everyone’s got culture

SPIRIT (to BLAKE)

fool

BERENICE

you’ve just gotten blind to it.

BLAKE looks confused.

BERENICE

Your culture is everywhere you look.

BLAKE

Hm. Good point.

BLAKE pulls out his cracked, older model iPhone and starts typing something.

BERENICE

Crusin’ Tinder already?

SPIRIT

Tinder?

BERENICE waves off her SPIRIT.

BLAKE

“Blake” is Scottish for... “dark complexioned.”

BERENICE laughs and her SPIRIT rolls her eyes.

BERENICE

I might as well call you Balackay.

BLAKE smiles.

BLAKE

So what does your name mean?

SPIRIT (to BLAKE)

Nah

BERENICE does not respond.

BLAKE

It is Spanish though, right? I mean, I think I heard someone say that you’re Porto Rican. Is that right?

BERENICE

My father is, yes.

BLAKE

I’m sorry to hear about the hurricane. Maria.

SPIRIT

Hurricane?

BERENICE

Yeah.

SPIRIT

Are things okay there now?

BLAKE

Is your family okay?

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

No.

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

Yes. Thanks.

BLAKE

That whole thing was handled so poorly. What stupid thing did Trump say...?

SPIRIT

Trump?

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

President.

BLAKE

Porto Ricans not willing to help themselves, right?

SPIRIT

Our President said that?!

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

Yes.

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

It's a tired trope.

SPIRIT

That's messed up.

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

Yes. It is.

BLAKE

I actually got to go there—Porto Rico—a couple of years ago for my brother's wedding.

BLAKE cont.

We stayed at a resort. I mean, it wasn't a fancy one, but it was still the nicest vacation we'd ever gone on. And the beaches?! So beautiful and exotic. The rainforest was so... And the food was so rich and flavorful. I loved the mo-fungo and the, uh... ah-rows con gan... gan...

BERENICE

Arroz con glandules.

BLAKE

Yes! All the food was great. Especially the fried street food! And the, uh, I forget the name of it, but the colonial strongholds in San Juan? Amazing! Just thinking about the kind of masonry work that went into that is overwhelming. And everyone was so friendly and so full of life! Just, truly paradise.

SPIRIT

Mmhmm

BERENICE looks to her Spirit with a slight nod and shrug.

BLAKE

So when did your family come here?

BERENICE

Here?

BLAKE

America.

BERENICE

1493.

BLAKE

Huh?

BERENICE

Christopher Columbus first landed in the Americas in Puerto Rico in 1493. Taínos, the

BERENICE cont.

Indigenous people of Puerto Rico were already there so maybe I should say before 1493, although African slaves weren't brought over until later so maybe I should say after 1493, but I think the name of the Americas started around 1493, so I'll just go with that.

BLAKE

That's really interesting. But, I actually meant North America—the U.S.—when did your family come here, to the U.S.?

BERENICE

The U.S. claimed the island in 1898.

BLAKE

Okay, so when did your family immigrate here from the island?

BERENICE

You cannot **im**-migrate into this country when you're already a U.S. Citizen of this country.

BLAKE

Right. Okay. But... but that's not completely true—that Porto Ricans are fully citizens though—right? I mean, Porto Ricans can't even vote.

BERENICE

After fighting in the five United States wars, Puerto Ricans may be second-class citizens, but we're still U.S. Citizens.

BLAKE

Right. I wasn't saying that... Sorry.

BERENICE

Thanks.

BLAKE

You're a... a...

BERENICE

A What?

BLAKE

Um... not defensive, but... but prepared to go to battle at any minute, aren't you?

BERENICE

Excuse me?!

BLAKE

It's not a bad thing! And I get it. I'm sure you have to go through a lot being a... and people assuming things about you like... like assuming you're some illegal... undocumented immigrant all the time—and obviously it's not a bad thing to be an immigrant—or undocumented—but... but to constantly have to prove your right to claim this as your home must be... It must be exhausting. I'm just... I'm wondering if you ever get to take the armor off?

BERENICE smiles. BLAKE smiles.
Then he offers her the vape pen.

BLAKE

Do you want some?

BERENICE

Um...

He passes the vape to BERENICE.

SPIRIT

Coño, I'm all for that good kush, but don't you think your mind is cloudy enough?

BERENICE ignores her SPIRIT.

SPIRIT

You already tasted your vanilla treat. Vámonos, Bere!

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

Cállate!

BERENICE takes a drag. Then she coughs with a surprising lack of control. BLAKE laughs at her.

BERENICE

Hey, it's been a minute. Last time I smoked was probably out of an apple.

BLAKE

Wait, what? Why?

BERENICE

Oh. Ha. Uh... Couldn't afford anything this... sci-fi back in the day. So I'd make it out of an apple or the paper from a refried cigarette. But sometimes I'd take my Mom's piece. It was made of a crappy metal so it would burn your hands a bit, but it was still better than fruit. And she wouldn't notice. Actually, sometimes when my Mom would have the women over—her friends from night school who she met during an architecture—no, she had switched majors by then to...?

SPIRIT

History

BERENICE

Oh yeah. She had switched to a History major by then.

SPIRIT

Navajo History

BERENICE

And she took my sisters and I to this Navajo History class once. She probably couldn't afford a babysitter, my father was just an overworked assistant professor back then, but either way, she was so excited that we were attending the class because she wanted us to be a part of the Women of the World. It was one of my favorite memories from my childhood. Well, that and her decadent chocolate cake that she'd make for special occasions.

BLAKE

Women of the World?

BERENICE

Yeah, that sounds a little silly. But that's what they were. Women from all over the world sat in that classroom. There was a woman from Bangladesh, Morocco, Unega from Arizona, and...?

SPIRIT

Tootsie Rolls!

BERENICE

Right! And the old Haitian woman who always carried tootsie rolls in her purse for me. Those were her friends. Her Community. An they would all get together and talk about Marxist theory or the exclusion of feminism to particular groups of women or something too complicated for me to really follow as they smoked and they'd be so caught up in the conversation

SPIRIT

and a little high

BERENICE

that they'd occasionally pass me the pipe by accident. But still, I never hit from it in front of my Mom. It would have felt... disrespectful. You know what I mean?

BLAKE

Not exactly... I was raised by a strict single mom. Disrespecting her was like complaining about my brother's hand-me-downs or having to show her a subpar report card. I can't even imagine if she knew I smoked actually. But it sounds like you have a very cool mom.

BERENICE

yeah...

BERENICE goes to take another drag, and then decides to pass the vape pen back to BLAKE instead.

BLAKE

You're so... different.

Different? **BERENICE**

Not like other girls. **BLAKE**

Oh? **BERENICE**

You challenge me. **BLAKE**

And that's a good thing? **BERENICE**

Yes. **BLAKE**

Guys usually find me too... Intense. **BERENICE**

My manhood isn't so easily threatened. **BLAKE**

Well, you've got a pretty big... manhood. **BERENICE**

Thank you. **BLAKE**

Thank you. **BERENICE**

Gross. **SPIRIT**

I always love hearing your thoughts in class. They're often different but... But earlier **BLAKE**

BLAKE cont.

today... I don't know. You seemed so... unreserved. Like the whole debate about who has a right to tell who's story. It was fascinating.

BERENICE

Oh, thanks. But... but you didn't really seem to agree with me.

BLAKE

I didn't not agree. I just think it's a complicated issue.

BERENICE

Hm.

BLAKE

What?

BERENICE

It is a complicated issue, but... but stopping the conversation just because it's complicated is...

BLAKE

If I recall, you were the one who stopped the conversation first.

BERENICE

That's true.

BERENICE and BLAKE laugh.

BLAKE

But okay, continue.

BERENICE

I think I've had enough debating for one day.

BLAKE

O.K. No battle. Let's just talk. Why do you think it wouldn't be okay for me to do a play about Lah-teen-os?

SPIRIT

Coño.

BERENICE

Latinas. My example was about Latinas.

BLAKE

Okay. Lah-teen-as then. Why wouldn't I be allowed to tell a Lah-teen-as story? And conversely, can you do plays about Caucasians?

SPIRIT

Caca what? Bere, cut this boy loose!

BERENICE ignore her SPIRIT.

BERENICE

Okay... fine.

BERENICE takes a deep breath and then takes her time to search for the right words.

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

So... If I belong to a racialized group like Latinxs or...

SPIRIT

Latin-X? What the fuck is that?

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

It's how people say Latinos now.

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

Or...

SPIRIT

Why?

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

It's less binary and... sexist. Can I go back to my conversation now?

BLAKE

Or...?

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

So no matter my—

SPIRIT

But if we're gunna have a *superhero* name shouldn't it be in Spanish? LATIN-EQUIS!

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

Not all Latinxs speak Spanish. Do we?

BLAKE

You alright?

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

Yeah. Sorry. Just, uh, trying to think of the right words.

BLAKE

Take your time.

SPIRIT

But if—

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

Hush up!

SPIRIT turns away from BERENICE.

BERENICE

So... okay, as a woman belonging to a racialized group, I may not have... membership in the dominating group, but... but I do need to know how to navigate the dominating culture.

BLAKE

Dominant group?

BERENICE

Dominating. Like people belonging to the upper middle class or the truly wealthy, heteronormative... cisgender... um... able-bodied... white, and of course, male. Their privilege comes simply from having or being those things.

BLAKE

Okay...?

BERENICE

So those of us who aren't fully part of the dominating group still have to navigate the world on *their* terms. Like... a woman may not have membership to the privileges of being a man, but we know the rules of a man's world. And same thing with other oppressed groups. People of color, for example, aren't afforded white privilege, but we better know how to walk-the-walk and talk-the-talk of the white dominating culture if we want access to resources... like a good paying job or education. Or shit, sometimes just to survive.

BLAKE

So then... you're saying that... In applying the lens of recognizing one's privilege in belonging to the dominant—

BERENICE

Dominating.

BLAKE

Dominating group that... that... a woman might have an easier time more ethically advocating for a man than a man would for a woman because... because women have had to study "male culture" their whole lives?

BERENICE

Yeah...

BLAKE

And a white person probably shouldn't tell a... a person of color's story because they'd likely have no idea what those experiences are really like. Right?

BERENICE

Yeah.

BLAKE

And that would get even more complicated if it was a story about a woman of color. Or a queer woman of color and so forth, right? Is that what you're trying to say?

BERENICE

Yeah. Yes, that's exactly what I mean.

BLAKE

So what about *West Side Story* then? Since we're doing it at the end of the year and it's like the iconic Puerto Rican play. I mean, um, just that people know it in reference to, uh, refer to the play—the musical—centering, uh, Puerto Ricans. I'm sorry. Is that offensive?

BERENICE

Yes. And it's still true. Go on.

BLAKE

Okay. I wasn't... Sorry. But okay, so you are saying that the only way *West Side Story*, for example, should be done is if it is specifically a Puerto Rican telling the story? Like a Puerto Rican director?

BERENICE

Like I said, I don't think it's a definitive line of "should or should not." But it would likely be more ethical and do more service to a play written by and about Puerto Ricans to also have a Puerto Rican director. Or maybe a Latinx director. But that's a little different with *West Side Story* because it was created by white men.

BLAKE

Right. Okay... But wouldn't a Puerto Rican make it more... authentic?

BERENICE

The script is already "inauthentically" written. It's going to be offensive no matter what.

BLAKE takes a moment to process the conversation.

BLAKE

This shit is rigged, isn't it?

SPIRIT accidentally laughs.

BLAKE

I mean, here we are discussing who has a right to tell whose stories, but the real power is in who's selecting those stories. It's the people who chose the plays or books or curriculum that truly control whose voices get to be heard.

BERENICE looks at BLAKE differently.

BERENICE

You're kinda different too. Aren't you?

BLAKE smiles.

BERENICE suddenly stands up and quickly gets ready to leave.

BLAKE

Where are you going?

BERENICE

I, uh. Um... Have script analysis to do.

BLAKE

I can help.

BERENICE

No! Uh... no thank you.

BLAKE

Okay. Can I call you? To go on a date sometime?

BERENICE

Date?

SPIRIT

Comó?

BLAKE

Yes. A date.

BERENICE

Didn't we already skip that part?

BLAKE

I don't know about you, but I don't just sleep around.

BERENICE

I'm no slut!

BLAKE

I don't think you are! I just mean that I like you is all.

BERENICE

I'm not really looking for a relationship right now.

BERENICE goes back to collecting her things.

BLAKE

How about seeing a movie sometime?

BERENICE

Not a lot of time to go see movies.

BLAKE

What about dinner?

BERENICE

Um...

BLAKE

Or a drink?

BERENICE

Uh...

BLAKE

Coffee?

BERENICE stops and looks at him.

BERENICE

I like espresso.

BLAKE

How about we go get an espresso now, Berenice?

BERENICE

Yes.

BLAKE goes to BERENICE and gives her a gentle kiss.

BLAKE

I'll go grab my stuff.

BERENICE

Okay.

He leaves.

SPIRIT

Ay Carajo. Who the fuck are you?

BERENICE

People grow up. Shit changes, Chiquita.

SPIRIT

Mentirosa.

SCENE 5

A man singing to folk rock music, maybe Mumford and Sons, begins to fill the space as it transforms into a hip college bar.

BLAKE starts bouncing around wildly and BERENICE laughs. He pulls her onto the dance floor with him. She tries to join in, but has a hard time finding a way to move to the music and eventually stops. The music switches to a slower song. It plays quietly.

BLAKE

What's wrong?

BERENICE

I feel awkward.

BLAKE pulls BERENICE to him. He puts her arms around his neck and his arms around her waist.

BLAKE

Anyone can do high school style.

BERENICE smiles and kisses him. They slow dance together.

BLAKE

I'm crazy about you. You know that?

BERENICE

Yes. I do.

BLAKE

Good. And I'm glad you're here. It means a lot to me that my friends finally get to know my beautiful girlfriend outside of class.

BERENICE kisses BLAKE again as GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C enter with drinks and begin playing darts.

BERENICE

Sure, but I am going to need a *really* good IPA.

BLAKE

You got it!

They stop dancing and BLAKE leaves to get their drinks. BERENICE reluctantly joins GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, followed by her SPIRIT.

GRAD STUDENT C

Bias.

BERENICE

What?

GRAD STUDENT A

Prejudice.

GRAD STUDENT C

Discriminatory.

BERENICE

What?

GRAD STUDENT A

Racist, even.

BERENICE

What is?

GRAD STUDENT B

The school's remaining productions.

BERENICE

A Streetcar Named Desire?

GRAD STUDENT C

And West Side Story.

BERENICE

Why would you all have a problem with that play selection?

GRAD STUDENTS C

Because...

BERENICE

Yeah...?

GRAD STUDENT B

They're going to be cast based on the department's new diversity statement that was just drafted.

GRAD STUDENT A

Apparently, they are no longer interested in making choices based on... Merit.

GRAD STUDENT C

Skill.

GRAD STUDENT A

Talent.

GRAD STUDENT C

Experience.

BERENICE does not speak.

GRAD STUDENT A

Obviously, you and any other Hispanic will be privileged over others for *West Side Story*, but all minorities considered for *Streetcar* simply for being minorities?! Absolutely absurd!

BERENICE does not speak.

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

Qué pasó? Obedience to your blanquito got your tongue?

BERENICE shakes her head at her SPIRIT and then speaks.

BERENICE

But they're not really going to cast someone who's not talented or experienced. Right?

GRAD STUDENT B

That's true.

GRAD STUDENT C

True indeed.

GRAD STUDENT A

They're just trying to reach a quota!

GRAD STUDENT B

That's also true.

GRAD STUDENT C

Yes, also true indeed.

BERENICE

Well, that's not okay.

GRAD STUDENT B

Precisely.

BERENICE

I actually meant for people of color.

SPIRIT

Oh, shit!

GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C look confused.

BERENICE

If a person is equally qualified and equally skilled as their white counterparts, despite the lack of equal opportunities, not only does a person of color still have to wonder if they were cast based on their perceived race, but they also have to consider if this representational appearance of diversity is actually making it easier for those in power to be let off the hook from making any real, systematic changes.

GRAD STUDENT B

Huh?

GRAD STUDENT C

What?

BERENICE

It sucks for everyone!

GRAD STUDENT B

True.

GRAD STUDENT C

Indeed.

GRAD STUDENT A

A shame, really. And that just proves that the department's new casting model to cast diversity for diversity sake is flawed.

BERENICE

Sure. Yeah. It's obviously a band-aid solution, but in the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, it is a "wound that cannot heal."

GRAD STUDENT A

Until someone needs to meet their diversity quota!

SPIRIT

Ay, qué puto!

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

I hear you. It's not fair. But—

GRAD STUDENT A

Precisely.

BERENICE

But—

GRAD STUDENT A

It's all for show!

BERENICE

But maybe—

GRAD STUDENT A

It's Tokenism!

SPIRIT (to GRAD STUDENT A)

You're the fucken Token, cashen out on your privilege, you fuck!

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

Right?!

GRAD STUDENTS A

What?

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

I'd tell him what's good, Bere!

BERENICE

Um...

SPIRIT

I'd let that Bitch have it!

GRAD STUDENT A (to BERENICE)

Yes?

SPIRIT

I'd tell that little Bitch to shut the fuck up!

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

It's just...

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

I'd tell that little Bitch to get on his knees and suck mi concha!

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

Cállate ya!

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

Never mind. Sorry.

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

Don't be so fucken crude! Fuck.

SPIRIT shrugs.

GRAD STUDENT A throws the last dart.

GRAD STUDENTS B & C cheer at his victory.

BLAKE returns with a pint of beer and a glass of wine. He hands the glass of wine to BERENICE and sips from the beer.

BERENICE

Oh. Um...

BLAKE

Yeah?

BERENICE

Never mind. Thanks.

BLAKE

So what did I miss?

BERENICE

They were discussing how the department's new casting model aiming for *diversity* is *racist*.

BERENICE gives BLAKE a look for his help.

BLAKE

Hey! No more shoptalk guys! Time to drink up!

GRAD STUDENT B

Here,

GRAD STUDENT C

Here!

BLAKE, GRAD STUDENT B, C, and BERENICE all clink their glasses. They settle into a booth.

GRAD STUDENT A

It's not to say I don't understand the disparity of the disenfranchised. I do. And it's for that very reason that they have less training, which isn't fair. Honesty, I get that. But not casting someone simply based on race when they have had more training and thereby more talent isn't right either. It should be a decision based on merit. That isn't to say we shouldn't do more to help the disenfranchised receive more training, it just means we shouldn't be punished when we are more experienced or right for a role. That's reverse-discrimination.

BLAKE

You're being offensive.

GRAD STUDENT A

Sometimes the truth is offensive. But... I will take a reprieve to the gentleman's room.

BLAKE

I think we'll be the ones receiving a reprieve.

GRAD STUDENT A

Touché Douché.

They laugh, and GRAD STUDENT A leaves to the restroom.

GRAD STUDENT B (to BERENICE)

I'm sorry. He can be a bit too much sometimes.

GRAD STUDENT C

He once took a bite from a ghost pepper on a dare.

BERENICE

okay...

GRAD STUDENT B

And I've seen you in class. You're very talented.

BERENICE

thanks.

BLAKE

And classically trained!

GRAD STUDENT B

Oh?

GRAD STUDENT C

Shakespeare?

BLAKE

Yes. She does a terrifying and super sexy Cleopatra!

GRAD STUDENT C

Really?!

BERENICE

Shakespeare was my first theater love. Cliché, I know.

GRAD STUDENT B

No, it's romantic.

BLAKE

You should tell the story of how you were first introduced to Shakespeare.

BERENICE

No, that's okay.

GRAD STUDENT B

I'd love to hear it!

GRAD STUDENT C

Yes!

BLAKE

Tell it, please?

BERENICE

It's not exactly a romantic story.

BLAKE

But it's honest.

BERENICE

Um...

BLAKE

Please?

BERENICE

Uh...

BLAKE

It was in Juvie!

BERENICE

Blake!

SPIRIT

Say what?!

BLAKE

After being expelled from school! That's right, my girlfriend's a badass!

SPIRIT

Straight up?

BLAKE

True story!

GRAD STUDENT B & C

my my my

GRAD STUDENT B

do tell!

BLAKE

Please??

BERENICE shakes her head.

BERENICE

Okay. Fine. But... But first off, I did not get expelled from Jr. High. Not exactly. See I was... uh... sent to The Principal's office for something that I wrote. No big deal. But when they called my Mom in, she... she lost her temper. It wasn't like she did that often, it was just... See, my Mom is, was, really tough. She had done some hard stretches of time when she was younger. Not for anything bad, just circumstances, you know? But yeah, she had it rough and...

SPIRIT

The Hole

BERENICE

That's right. She once did twenty days in the hole. No people. Nobody to talk with. Nothing but a bucket, a mattress, and a tiny window just big enough for her to know if it was day or night outside.

SPIRIT

Twenty Days.

BERENICE

For twenty days straight. Can you imagine?

SPIRIT

The Guard

BERENICE

There was this one person, might've even been a guard actually, that showed my Mom a bit of empathy. After three days of isolation, she went to pick up her food plate and felt something taped underneath it. It was two cigarettes, a short yellow #2 pencil and...

SPIRIT

Matches

BERENICE

And a book of matches. So she took each match and carefully split them down the center to make them last and then at nighttime she would use the light from them to write on the walls, but...

SPIRIT

The Cinderblock

BERENICE

But the walls were made of cinderblock, which is bumpy and actually kinda soft, so she wrote very carefully so as not to break the point off the pencil. That was all she focused on until they finally let her out. It was through writing—writing stories—that she was able to keep her sanity. And I could go on about the shit that woman has overcome, or overcame, but yeah, she was tough, and a survivor. An when she walked into the Jr. High School and into that office to see her baby sitting in the corner behind The Principal, this fucker who looks like a blown-up mosquito, she fucken squashes him. Next thing I know, I'm expelled.

SPIRIT

no shit?

BERENICE

Yeah. An from there I got in a few fights. No big deal. But eventually I ended up in a... in... institutional placement.

SPIRIT

fuck me.

BERENICE

But it was okay. I know how to put up the hands. An I can take a beating. This one day while I'm in there, this older black woman who was a volunteer from some theater, or maybe a social worker even, came in to read *Othello* to us. An I pretended like I wasn't listening—I mean, she might've been a fucken social worker, right?—But I was actually blown away! I couldn't believe how some white dude who's been dead for however long was actually talken about some real stuff. Not that it was all perfect, cause he was definitely steppen in some nasty stereotypes, but those words just landed in my soul. By the time she spoke, "Mere prattle without practice is all his soldiership," I was hooked. I knew what I had to do with the rest of my life. I needed to be a part of this Revolutionary Art Form. To make room for other girls who are also being hurt to hear plays like *Othello*, or even better, to tell their own stories.

SPIRIT

fuck

BLAKE (to GRAD STUDENTS)

Amazing, right?

BLAKE kisses BERENICE.

GRAD STUDENT B

Yeah.

GRAD STUDENT C

Wow.

GRAD STUDENT A returns from the restroom.

GRAD STUDENT A

What I miss?

GRAD STUDENT B

Ber-nice was just saying how she first heard Shakespeare.

GRAD STUDENT C

In juvie!

GRAD STUDENT A

Huh.

GRAD STUDENT B (to BERENICE)

I think that *is* romantic.

GRAD STUDENT A (to BERENICE)

How did you end up... here?

BERENICE

Here?

GRAD STUDENT A

At this university? In this grad school program?

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

Papá.

BERENICE ignores her SPIRIT.

BERENICE

I applied. Got accepted. Same as all of you.

GRAD STUDENTS B & C

Great. Good for you.

GRAD STUDENT A

Yes. Great. And I'm sure you helped with the department's diversity quota also.
What are you? Mexican?

BLAKE

She's Porto Rican.

GRAD STUDENTS B & C

Great.

GRAD STUDENT A

Good for you... And the department.

BLAKE

I'm sure it had more to do with her just graduating magna cum laude.

GRAD STUDENT A

I also graduated with honors but getting in was not readily assured to me.

BLAKE

What are you getting at?

GRAD STUDENT A

Nothing. I'm sure they allowed a Hispanic girl into the department purely out of merit.

BLAKE

Like I said, she's Porto Rican.

GRAD STUDENT A (to BERENICE)

You must feel so out of place away from a more... urban environment.

BLAKE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

You don't know where she's from.

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

This is like home to me actually.

GRAD STUDENTS B & C

Nice. Good for you.

SPIRIT (to BERENICE)

Home?

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

Right at home.

GRAD STUDENT A

Your Home?

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

It's like a family here really.

SPIRIT

Tu Familia?

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

Real family dynamic.

SPIRIT

Coño.

GRAD STUDENT A

Your Family?

SPIRIT

You're lying.

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

Yes, love it here!

SPIRIT

Lying to yourself.

GRAD STUDENT A

Really?

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

Love. It.

SPIRIT

MENTIROSA.

BERENICE (to SPIRIT)

I AM NOT!

GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C, and BLAKE look at
BERENICE confused.

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENTS)

I am not... going to stay here. I mean. Cause it's getting late... for me. So, yeah...

GRAD STUDENT A smiles at BERENICE.

BLAKE

You sure?

BERENICE

Yeah. I'm tired.

GRAD STUDENT A stands and gestures to a different part of the bar.

GRAD STUDENT A

Round of pool?

GRAD STUDENTS B

Yes!

GRAD STUDENTS C

Yes!

GRAD STUDENT A

Blake?

BLAKE

I don't... Maybe. Go ahead.

GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C leave.

BLAKE

I'm sorry he was being...

BERENICE

a Dick!?

BLAKE

Yes. He's a dick. Sorry.

BERENICE shrugs.

BLAKE

I'm sorry.

BERENICE

It's fine.

BLAKE

No, I am sorry.

BERENICE

Thanks.

BLAKE

Did I say you look beautiful tonight?

BERENICE

Yes.

BLAKE

But did I say how incredibly hot and amazingly gorgeous you look tonight?

BERENICE tries not to smile.

BLAKE

Or how I kept getting distracted looking at your incredibly voluptuous... mind?

BERENICE laughs.

BLAKE

Seriously, I am so thankful that you came out tonight. Letting them see another side of you means a lot to me!

BERENICE

Another side?

BLAKE

More than the girl who ruins the grading curve for everyone else.

BERENICE

Whoa! Are you calling me a nerd?!

BLAKE

Absolutely!

BLAKE grabs BERENICE's hand and pulls her to him.

BLAKE

My intense

He kisses her hand.

BLAKE

badass

He kisses her collarbone.

BLAKE

sexy

He kisses her neck.

BLAKE

and very *nerdy* girlfriend

He kisses her lips.

BLAKE

who I love.

SCENE 6

SPIRIT

You're in love?

BERENICE

Yes.

SPIRIT

Really?

BERENICE

What do you want?

SPIRIT

I can tell you what I don't want.

BERENICE

And what is that?

SPIRIT

To end up like you. Where's the girl who wanted to make those evolutionary plays?

BERENICE

Revolutionary. And I'm right here.

SPIRIT

Nah. You ain't "by any means necessary."

BERENICE

You're right. "I defend our country with weapons of knowledge."

SPIRIT

Quoting MLK now?

BERENICE

Pedro Albizu Campos.

SPIRIT

Who?

BERENICE

Our great Revolutionary. Don't think you can out school me, child.

SPIRIT nods once with her chin at BERENICE, slowly struts over to her small desk, and sits with her back to her.

SCENE 7

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT enters with several books in his arms.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Um... You okay?

BERENICE

Yeah. Just lost in thought.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT and BERENICE take their seats in the graduate seminar.

They sit awkwardly with each other for a moment.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Hope class isn't canceled.

BERENICE

It's canceled?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

No. It's not. I don't think. It's just, when I show up to class and I'm the only one, or there are only a couple of us and it's the almost time for class to...

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT looks at his watch.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Or it *is* the designated start time and it's just the two of us, I begin to wonder if I maybe missed an e-mail or... Did you check your e-mail?

BERENICE shakes her head slightly.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Right, well... it's probably not, you know, canceled or... yeah.

They sit in silence a bit longer.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Did I see your name on the casting list for Streetcar?

BERENICE shakes her head.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Oh... Sorry.

BERENICE shrugs.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

I think you're, uh, a pretty good actress, actually.

BERENICE

My emphasis is more in directing anyways.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Then why do you keep auditioning?

BERENICE does not answer.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Directing's a tough field for a... but, yeah. Good for you.

BERENICE nods slightly.

They sit in silence.

BLAKE and the other GRAD STUDENTS slowly start to trickle into the classroom. BLAKE has two books under his arms and two to-go cups of coffee in his hands. He sits next to BERENICE.

BLAKE

Hey, beautiful.

BLAKE hands BERENICE one of the books.

BLAKE

You forgot yours at home.

BERENICE

Oh. Thanks!

BERENICE kisses BLAKE.

BLAKE

And I risked being late to bring you a decadent latte, me a-more.

BLAKE hands her the latte.

BERENICE

Uh... thank you. You know I like a doppio espresso though, right?

BLAKE

Yeah, but it's their seasonal pumpkin latte. With two shots.

BERENICE

Thanks.

BERENICE gives BLAKE another kiss.

GRAD STUDENT A

You two are sickening.

BLAKE (to GRAD STUDENT A)

Thank you.

They all sit in silence for a bit. THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT looks through a book. GRAD STUDENTS B & C quietly chat about something. BLAKE sips on his coffee. BERENICE looks at her latte and then places it to the side. GRAD STUDENT A periodically looks at the door to the classroom, agitated.

GRAD STUDENT A

Professor's late.

The others acknowledge that PROFESSOR is indeed late and then go back to what they were doing before.

GRAD STUDENT A

This is ridiculous. I don't pay an obscene amount in tuition to wait around all day.

BLAKE

You don't pay anything in tuition. Your father does.

GRAD STUDENT A

Same difference.

Everyone continues what they were doing as GRAD STUDENT A becomes even more overtly agitated.

GRAD STUDENT A

I could have used this time to brush up on my Es-pan-yol.

BERENICE

What?

BLAKE

He's just throwing a fit because he's unhappy about casting.

GRAD STUDENT A

Should I not be?! Messing with the authenticity of Shakespeare was bad enough, but now this?! Tennessee Williams is probably rolling in his grave!

BLAKE

At least you got cast.

BERENICE

What happened?

GRAD STUDENT A

So ridiculous!

BERENICE

What happened with casting?

GRAD STUDENT A

Preposterous!

BERENICE

Who's cast as who?!

GRAD STUDENT B

I'm playing Blanche.

GRAD STUDENT C

I'm Mitch!

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Stanley.

GRAD STUDENT A

...Pablo.

BERENICE

Wait, what? But that doesn't make any sense.

GRAD STUDENT A

Precisely! Cast as a... a Pablo!

BLAKE

I mean, yeah. It's quite clear that you're not Latin-x.

GRAD STUDENT A

This is the problem with trying to reach a diversity quota!

GRAD STUDENT B

Yes.

GRAD STUDENT A

We should just be honest, and denying a person's Nationality is honestly, problematic.

GRAD STUDENT C

Yes.

GRAD STUDENT A

It's Reverse-Discrimination!

BLAKE

I mean, yeah, it actually is pretty unethical if you think about it.

SPIRIT turns to look at BERENICE.

Then BERENICE turns to look at THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT, and tries to speak to him in code.

BERENICE

What are *your* concerns?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Excuse me?

BERENICE

Are *you* concerned with playing Stanley?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Not in the slightest.

BERENICE

Really?

THE CHICANO STUDENT

Yes.

BERENICE

No concerns?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Nope.

BERENICE nods slightly and looks again to SPIRIT who stands up from her desk. Then she turns her attention back to THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT.

BERENICE

If you do have—

GRAD STUDENT B

It's a great role!

BERENICE (to THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT)

If you do have—

GRAD STUDENT C

It's a dream role!

BERENICE (to THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT)

If you do have concerns, that would be—

GRAD STUDENT A

Why would he have any concerns? It's the lead role!

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

He's right, I rarely get cast in lead roles.

BERENICE

That's great. But they shouldn't be blindly casting—

GRAD STUDENT A

It's preposterous!

GRAD STUDENT B

Crazy!

GRAD STUDENT C

Insane!

SPIRIT begins to move toward BERENICE.

BERENICE (to THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT)

But have you thought about what you playing Stanley would mean?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT does not speak.

BERENICE

You're not going to be seen as a Marlon Brando type, you know that, right?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT does not speak.

BERENICE

You're being typed as... machista, you know that, right?!

GRAD STUDENT A

But we all have a "type."

GRAD STUDENT B

And we have to accept our "type."

GRAD STUDENT C

And let our "type" accept us.

BERENICE

What does that mean?

GRAD STUDENT A

My Type is The Hero.

GRAD STUDENT B

I'm The Ingénue.

GRAD STUDENT C

The Romantic Man of Great Mystery and Deep Desire!

GRAD STUDENT B (to GRAD STUDENT C)

what?

GRAD STUDENT C

The Outlaw???

GRAD STUDENT A

We all have a “type,” Ber-niece.

BERENICE

Okay. Fine. So what “type” am I? What is my “type”?!

GRAD STUDENT A

The Antagonist?

GRAD STUDENT B

The Best Friend?

GRAD STUDENT C

The Femme Fatale?

SPIRIT

Oh shit! Here it is! Here we go!

SPIRIT steps forward and directly speaks to the graduate students and The Audience, seen by all.

SPIRIT

Are you all ready for this?! It’s the Word Game!

Game show music starts playing.

SPIRIT

Puppets, please collect your Words!

The grad students search through The Audience for their words that are written on large cards.

SPIRIT (to The Audience)

Can I get some applause?! That's right! Sí, señoras y señores, an everyone in-between, this is the Word Game!

When the grad students have returned with their words, SPIRIT continues with the game.

SPIRIT

Okay, Títeres. Time to reveal your Words. Berenice is...

GRAD STUDENT A holds up a card that reads,

GRAD STUDENT A

Hispanic

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT holds up a card that reads,

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Tenacious

GRAD STUDENT B holds up a card that reads,

GRAD STUDENT B

Women Solidarity

GRAD STUDENT C holds up a card that reads,

GRAD STUDENT C

Hollywood Bombshell

BLAKE does not hold up a card. Instead he says,

BLAKE

My Beautiful Girlfriend

SPIRIT

Nah, come on, you can do better than that!

GRAD STUDENT C turns his card to the other side that reads,

GRAD STUDENT C

Rita Moreno

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT turns his card to the other side that reads,

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Alpha Female

GRAD STUDENT A turns his card to the other side that reads,

GRAD STUDENT A

Bad Hombre

GRAD STUDENT B turns her card to the other side that reads,

GRAD STUDENT B

#Feminism

SPIRIT

Balackay?!

BLAKE starts to hold up a card that reads, EXOTIC, but stops. Then he leaves, taking his set of cards with him.

SPIRIT

Fine. Fuck him. It's time for the rest of you to get real!

They throw their first set of cards on the floor near BERENICE. Then they hold up a second set of cards and throw them near BERENICE after they finish reading them.

Stop Pulling Us Apart **GRAD STUDENT B**

Salma Hayek **GRAD STUDENT C**

Border Hopper **GRAD STUDENT A**

Stop Overcomplicating It **GRAD STUDENT B**

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT
Ballbuster

GRAD STUDENT B
Stop Making It About Race

SPIRIT
Aiiight, there you go! Now it's time to turn this shit up a notch!

GRAD STUDENT A, B, C, and BLAKE reveal the remaining layers of cards, and continue to throw them at BERENICE after they read them.

GRAD STUDENT A
The Wall

GRAD STUDENT B
Divisive

GRAD STUDENT C
Sofía Vergara

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT
Crazy Bitch

SPIRIT

That's it! Bring it home!

They reveal their final layer of cards and keep them raised up after reading them.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

CUNT

GRAD STUDENT A

DIRTY IMMIGRANT SPIC

GRAD STUDENT B

TRAITOR

GRAD STUDENT C

MARIA CHARACTER

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT holds up an extra card and BERENICE reads from it,

BERENICE

RAPIST

Everyone looks at THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT's card.

The others lower their cards and toss them around Berenice.

Then THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT lowers his card and looks at it with confusion and hurt.

The Word Game ends.

SPIRIT returns to being unseen by anyone other than BERENICE.

BERENICE walks over to THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT.

He looks up from the card and then hands it to her.

BERENICE (to THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT)

Do you really want to play a character that is described as a Brut?
That acts like an Animal? A Savage?!

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT does not speak.

BERENICE

Do you really want to play a character that... that...

PROFESSOR walks into the classroom, unnoticed by BERENICE.

SPIRIT

Bring it home, Bere!

BERENICE

To be a Wetback who rapes a White Girl?

The students look at BERENICE, horrified.

PROFESSOR

Ber-niece!

BERENICE is startled by PROFESSOR.

PROFESSOR

Ber-niece, my office. Now. Please! The rest of you, let's just call it a workday.

PROFESSOR leaves to his office.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT slowly starts to collect his things as the others leave quickly.

SCENE 8

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT and BERENICE
are left in the graduate seminar with the Words still
surrounding them.

BERENICE

I'm...

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

...Yeah?

BERENICE

...sorry

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Yeah?

BERENICE

...yeah

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

But...?

BERENICE

but...

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

But?

BERENICE

But...

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

But you aren't really sorry.

BERENICE

No. Sorry.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

I was looking forward to that production.

BERENICE

I know.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

I was looking forward to playing Stanley.

BERENICE

I know.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

A lead role outside of... *West Side Story*. Someone who isn't a Gangster or... Gardner or Drug Lord or... or some pathetic horny d-bag. Not to say Stanley isn't highly... um... you know, has those needs, but... I guess he is read as "oversexed" and that would—could—be problematic with my portrayal... I mean, myself as Stanley. I suppose. But I'm also... I'm also a decent—no, I'm going to come out and say it—I'm a darn fine actor. I have worked on professional, large scale stages since I was a kid. I have studied at some of the most highly reputable drama schools in this country. And truth be told, I work harder than most on my craft. Seriously! I live and breathe acting. It's my passion. And I deserve a complicated and interesting role for once. And while you have maybe never given me the time of day—which is fine—I have been told that I have the kind of... Rico Suave looks that many women, so I have been told, as I said, you know, find not too bad to look at. So not only do I have the talent and ability and determination, but also perhaps even the *je ne sais quoi* needed to be a fine or even great Stanley!

BERENICE

yeah...

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

I would bring so much heart and fight to that character! Isn't that what really matters?!

BERENICE

Yes.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

But all you see is a... is a stereotype of a... Spic. huh?

BERENICE

No.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

But you think others will?

BERENICE

Yes.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

See, I don't know about that. I'm not entirely sure that, that people will see me and think, "Ah, now there's a... a... typical, horny, um... macho Hispanic."

BERENICE

Maybe not Consciously...

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

But...?

BERENICE

but... But we need to think of the visual storytelling because... because we do see race. And we do assign meaning to race. Take... *Hamilton* for example.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Hamilton?

BERENICE

Yeah. Beyond being an amazing and brilliant production, people love *Hamilton* at least in part because our Founding Fathers are being played by Latinx and black actors.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Lin-Manuel Miranda wanted to connect the past with Today's America.

BERENICE

Yeah. And that's a unique and hopeful concept. But what else might it be doing?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT looks confused.

BERENICE

Is *Hamilton* instilling the empowerment and patriotism in the potential youth of color watching this major Broadway production? Is it showing the revolutionary potential of theater? Is it reclaiming how this country was built on the backs of people of color? Is the diversity represented onstage making space and opportunities for other people of color? Or is the *representational* diversity *displayed* onstage distracting from the slower progress of diversity in positions of power behind the scenes? Can a person's wealth, like the George Washington's, buy himself out of the discriminated status of being perceived as a black man? What does it mean that they owned slaves?! Is it doing more harm than good to have a womanizing Puerto Rican man sing about never being "satisfied"? Would having a black president abolish racism? Okay, we already know the answer to that one. But would it somehow be less historically accurate to have our founding fathers reimagined as founding mothers? Is it erasing Indigeneity from American History? What does it mean to have an all-person-of-color-cast performing primarily for wealthy white people? So... okay... I don't have the answers to all of those questions, but I'm... I'm scared that those kinds of questions aren't being asked... or wrestled with enough before selecting a production or deciding on a concept or casting a play. Like you playing Stanley. And it is not only symbolic of our place in this country but it could also be directly reinforcing our oppression.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Wow. Yeah, see, I just... I just don't think it's as big of a deal as you're making it out to be. Lin Miranda, myself, we're just artists, individuals with our own take on a character, and on the world, with... with our own point of view. I can have opinions about... about whatever! I'm not some... "a representative of the people." That's crazy!

BERENICE

It is crazy...

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

But?

BERENICE

But you are.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Do you represent all... eres puertorriqueña, verdad?

BERENICE

My father is, yes.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Y tu madre?

BERENICE

She's white.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Hablas español?

BERENICE

Why?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

It's just... I was going to ask if you represent all Latinas to white people, but—

BERENICE

Of course I do.

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

But... but you're... you're white.

SPIRIT (to **THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT**)

Oh, yeah? Where your Pachuco Spirit at?

BERENICE gestures to **SPIRIT** that she'll handle it.

BERENICE

As my Mom used to say, "Race is an illusion. Racism is real."

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT looks at her confused.

BERENICE

I better get to The Principal's office. But hey, I am sorry... uh, um... fuck, I'm so sorry, I'm blanking on your... your name...?

THE CHICANO GRAD STUDENT

Me llamo César. My Name Is César.

BERENICE

César. Got it. And again, sorry.

CÉSAR nods slightly and leaves.

Then BERENICE leaves.

SCENE 9

With the cards from the Word Game still surrounding her, YOUNGER slouches in the desk, trying hard not to appear nervous.

After making her wait for a little while, THE PRINCIPAL finally enters. He is holding a piece of notebook paper and starts pacing in front of her desk.

THE PRINCIPAL

I don't know what we're going to do with you. This behavior is unacceptable. What do you have to say for yourself, Ber-niece?

YOUNGER does not speak.

THE PRINCIPAL

Do you want to explain why you turned this into Mr. Nelson? Hmm? We're going to need some answers, young lady.

YOUNGER does not speak.

THE PRINCIPAL

We need answers. Now.

THE PRINCIPAL slams the piece of paper onto the desk.

THE PRINCIPAL

If you don't start talking, we're going to have to expel you.

YOUNGER

You gunna expel an Honor's Student?

THE PRINCIPAL

I would be forced to expel a student who has already been in a handful of fights since your transfer. A student who I have caught smoking, drinking, doing unlady-like things with boys, and ditching class on a regular basis.

YOUNGER

Yeah, but you gunna expel me for somethen I wrote?

THE PRINCIPAL

Why did you turn that into Mr. Nelson?

We need answers. Now.

YOUNGER

It was an assignment to write a poem on our Identity for MLK day.

THE PRINCIPAL

And does that seem appropriate? Hmm?

YOUNGER

Yeah.

THE PRINCIPAL

Ber-niece?

YOUNGER

Berenice.

THE PRINCIPAL

Can you please read what you wrote for your Identity poem? Now!

YOUNGER reluctantly picks up the piece of paper
and reads from it.

YOUNGER

Fuck identity. And fuck you.

As a white-boy-singing-black-music says, "I am whatever you say I am."

The focus shifts to the PROFESSOR's office as
PROFESSOR enters followed by OLDER BERENICE.

They sit in silence for a few moments as PROFESSOR
looks at OLDER with genuine concern.

PROFESSOR

First off, please know that this is a safe space, Ber-niece.

OLDER

Berenice.

PROFESSOR

Sorry?

BERENICE

My name. It's pronounced Berenice, not Ber-niece.

PROFESSOR

Yes. Um. Sorry. I just have a hard time rolling my Rs.
But I called you in here because, well, I'm worried about you.

OLDER does not speak.

PROFESSOR

How are you doing?

OLDER

Fine.

PROFESSOR

It doesn't, um, really seem like you're doing, "fine."

OLDER

I'm maintaining a good GPA, aren't I?

PROFESSOR

Yes, yes, of course. This is not about your scholarship.

OLDER

I'm not on scholarship.

PROFESSOR

Oh. Right. Well, it's really more to do with how you are doing. Emotionally.

OLDER does not speak.

PROFESSOR

Um, I can see how attending here might have been a bit of a... Culture Shock.

OLDER

Culture Shock?

PROFESSOR

Yes. Living in a less... diverse environment. I understand that's hard. Truly. I too have lived outside the country, in Mexico, where I was one of the only... Americans. And it was really hard. And I just want you to know that you are not alone in your experiences with being a... with being one of the few, um... Hispanics.

OLDER

Puerto Rican.

PROFESSOR

Yes, as one of the few, um, Porto Rican Americans on campus.

OLDER

That's redundant.

PROFESSOR

Pardon?

OLDER

Puerto Ricans are Americans.

PROFESSOR

Sure, yeah. And as a... an American with a Porto Rican nationality, I just want you to know that I support you. And want you to know that you can talk to me.

OLDER does not speak.

Focus shifts back to THE PRINCIPAL's office.

THE PRINCIPAL

Is something going on at home to make you question yourself? To be acting out like this? Hmm? This is a safe space.

YOUNGER

No, no es.

THE PRINCIPAL

We want to be sensitive to the apparent Identity Crisis you're going through, but you're making it very difficult on us, Ber-niece.

YOUNGER

Mira. Yo sé quién soy.

THE PRINCIPAL

Enough. You're not in the bar-rio. What do you have to say for yourself? In English?

YOUNGER does not speak.

THE PRINCIPAL

Okay then. Looks like we're going to have to bring in your parents.

YOUNGER smirks.

THE PRINCIPAL

That's funny to you, is it?

YOUNGER

Go ahead, Warden. My Mom es callejera.

Focus shifts back to the PROFESSOR's office.

PROFESSOR

You are not alone.

OLDER

No?

PROFESSOR

No. You can talk to me.

OLDER

Yeah?

PROFESSOR

Yes.

OLDER does not speak.

PROFESSOR

Do you remember at the beginning of the year when you got so beautifully emotional discussing *Hedda Gabler*?

OLDER does not speak.

PROFESSOR

Well, you were so open then. She was the sweet, albeit somewhat tenacious girl, who I remember letting into our department. But um, I have been observing you change since then. And well... You've seemed a bit aggressive lately.

OLDER does not speak.

PROFESSOR

Are you angry about something?

OLDER does not speak.

PROFESSOR

I can't help if I don't know what the problem is.
Are we letting you down somehow?

OLDER does not speak.

PROFESSOR

What do you have to say for yourself, Ber-niece?

OLDER does not speak.

PROFESSOR

Why aren't you answering me?

Focus on both the PROFESSOR's office and
THE PRINCIPAL's office simultaneously.

THE PRINCIPAL

We can't have any more assignments like this.

PROFESSOR

Why are you being so rebellious with me?

THE PRINCIPAL

We can't tolerate any more bad behavior.

PROFESSOR

Why are you being so hostile with me?

THE PRINCIPAL

We can't have this kind of attitude anymore.

PROFESSOR

Why are you being so combative with me?

THE PRINCIPAL

We have given our last warning.

PROFESSOR

Why are you being so uncooperative with me?

THE PRINCIPAL

We will have no more exceptions.

PROFESSOR

Why are you being so obstructive with me?

THE PRINCIPAL

Do you hear me, Ber-niece?

PROFESSOR

Do you hear me, Ber-niece?

THE PRINCIPAL

You need to learn your place.

OLDER

Thank you.

YOUNGER

Fuck you!

THE PRINCIPAL and PROFESSOR leave.

OLDER starts to go to YOUNGER as BLAKE enters.

BLAKE goes to BERENICE and holds her. This hurts her SPIRIT.

SCENE 10

BERENICE breaks away from BLAKE and starts to pick up the cards from the Word Game.

BLAKE

Are you feeling any better?

BERENICE

No.

BLAKE

Are you ready to talk?

BERENICE

No!

BLAKE

Okay. Sorry. But you haven't talked since you got home. And I'm worried about you. Are you okay?

BERENICE

No.

BLAKE

What happened? Did the Professor say something?

BERENICE

Yes!

BLAKE

What did he say?

BERENICE

A bunch of racist bullshit!

BLAKE

Seriously?

BERENICE

Is that surprising to you?

BLAKE

Yeah.

BERENICE

Is it?!

BLAKE

...yeah

BERENICE

Okay, well he just compared a lifetime of dealing with racism to being treated poorly for a little while in a place that never claimed to be his home in the first-fucken-place! And then he went on to make it all about himself. What can he do? How can he help? How can he fix the "minority" problem? Him Him Him Him HIM!

BLAKE

okay...

BERENICE

Okay?!

BLAKE

So... he was trying to find out what he could do to help?

BERENICE

Did you not listen to what I just said?

BLAKE doesn't know how to respond.

BERENICE

Well...?!

BLAKE

I guess I'm just a little confused.

BERENICE

What's so confusing?

BLAKE

I mean... he's a good guy.

BERENICE

So...?!

BLAKE

So, he can be ignorant sometimes, but I don't think he's a racist.

BERENICE

Some of the **Kindest** people I've known have been **Racists**.

BLAKE

Okay, but—

BERENICE

It doesn't fucken matter if a person means well if what they're fucking doing is... or saying is... is... that they... Ah fuck! Never mind.

BLAKE

Hey! Okay. I hear you. You're right. I know you're right. It's... "Systemic."
I just like the guy is all. I'm sorry.

BERENICE shakes her head.

BLAKE

Hey, I'm sorry.

BERENICE

I'm just... I'm just so tired.

BLAKE

I know.

BERENICE

So tired of fighting all the time.

BLAKE

I know.

BERENICE

Everything's a fight.

BLAKE

I know.

BERENICE

Sometimes I feel like I'm just gunna lose it.

BLAKE

I know. But it's going to be okay.

BERENICE

I don't think so.

BLAKE

Of course it will.

BERENICE

No.

BLAKE

This will pass.

BERENICE

No.

BLAKE

Yes, it will.

BERENICE

No. It won't.

BLAKE

You're just going through a hard time, but it will pass.

BERENICE

The problem isn't with me.

BLAKE

I know that. But this will blow over with him.

BERENICE

Is that what you think this is all about? It's not just about one fucking person.

BLAKE

I know.

BERENICE

He just confirmed that I don't belong. Not even in Theater.

BLAKE

You belong here.

BERENICE

No. I don't.

BLAKE

You're just still searching for your... identity... your place within the department. I went through that during my first year in grad school too.

BERENICE (to BLAKE)

Why do *you people* always jump to a fucken Identity Crisis?

BLAKE

What?!

BERENICE

You people don't give a shit about how I Self-Identify!

SPIRIT

Tell it straight!

BLAKE

You people?

SPIRIT

Tell'm what's good!

BERENICE (to **BLAKE**)

I don't struggle with my Identity! I've known who I am for long-ass time!

SPIRIT

Fucken right!

BERENICE (to **SPIRIT**)

Shut up!

SPIRIT puts both hands up in the air like a kid playing "cops" and backs away.

BLAKE

I just meant it can be a bit of a culture shock, for everyone—All People—during their first year.

BERENICE

Your culture isn't new to me. It's been my whole life!

BLAKE

What?

BERENICE

An entire lifetime of me accommodating you.

BLAKE

You don't have to accommodate me.

BERENICE

No. Not you. But *you*.

BLAKE

What?

BERENICE

Constantly accommodating those of you in the dominating group! Remember?

BLAKE looks confused.

BERENICE

That those belonging to the dominating group may not be able to hear the voices of the othered even if they tried because.... because you've never fucking had to! You get to go on hiding behind your intensions, absolving yourself from your own fucking culpability, but we have no choice but to listen to you. You don't remember that?!

BLAKE

When we first...?

BERENICE

Yes!

BLAKE

Yeah, okay.

BERENICE

So there you go! That's the fucken *you people* I'm talken about!!!

BLAKE

Jesus! Can you stop acting like I'm part of some oppressive regime?! I am on your side. Okay? I just... I just want to understand what's going on with you! Please?!

BERENICE tries to explain, to speak from her mind,
but the words fail her. She stops.

Then she speaks from a place deep inside.

BERENICE

You know, as a child, I would often dream of... of my mystic homeland.
Of picking shrimp from the ocean with my bare hands.
Of tasting the fresh bitterness of a lemon with the sweetness of the sugar cane.
Of running barefoot on the beach and playing in the caves.
My Jíbara spirit darting through the rainforests of Borikén.

As an adult, I went to the island. And swam in the ocean.
But in those waters, all I can taste is the salt of fallen warriors.
Where you saw impressive masonry,
I see the beginning structures of capitalism.
Where you enjoy fun, exotic street food,
I taste the earth soaked in the desperation of canola oil.
And for the people you saw so full of life,
I see second-class citizens smiling wide and saying, "thank you, Sir"
To feed their babies.

But that ain't about you, right?
That isn't about your craft.
You make art.
You tell stories.
Advocate for the human condition.
Transcend our interconnected histories.

What a privilege it must be to simply be an artist.

This... colonial legacy is like a disease.
And it eats away at my mind and soul.
And it can't be cleansed or... eradicated.
It will always be a part of me.
But it's not my own. It's our disease.
Can't you see it? Feel it?
Our disease pulsing through
Your veins?

BERENICE fully releases her guard and breaks down.

BLAKE rushes to her and holds her, with the Words still in her hands.

They stay like this for a while.

BERENICE

I love you.

BLAKE

I love you.

BERENICE

I'm sorry.

BLAKE

No. You don't need to apologize. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry you're going through all this. I just wish there was more I could do.

BERENICE

You're doing it right now.

BLAKE

Do want to go grab a drink? How does that sound? Get you an IPA and just... just be for a bit. I think that'll do you—us—some good, you know?

BERENICE

You said IPA.

BLAKE

Yeah...?

BERENICE smiles and lets go of BLAKE.

BERENICE

You should go get a drink.

BLAKE

Without you?

BERENICE

Yeah, I think I'll just get some work done.

BLAKE

You sure... ?

BERENICE

Yeah.

BLAKE

I don't need to get a drink. We can stay here, I just thought...

BERENICE

You should go. I could use some alone time to decompress.

BLAKE

Yeah?

BERENICE

Yeah, it sounds nice.

BLAKE

Okay.

BLAKE gives BERENICE a gentle kiss.

BLAKE

It will be okay. You'll see.

BLAKE leaves.

SCENE 11

SPIRIT

I'm sorry about Puerto Rico.

BERENICE

Me too.

They stand with each other for a moment, in silence.
Then BERENICE starts to move away.

SPIRIT

Pero...

BERENICE

What?

SPIRIT shakes her head and BERENICE starts to put
the Words away.

SPIRIT

Pero...

BERENICE turns back to SPIRIT.

BERENICE

You got somethen to say?

SPIRIT

Nah

BERENICE

Good.

BERENICE puts the Words away.

SPIRIT

Remember how Alma...

BERENICE

Ay, Dios!

SPIRIT

Or was it Sonia? One of the sisters. Nah, it musta been Almita with her fucken mouth always runnen. Yeah, Alma had been trying to solve that question about the tree, remember? Coño, how does it go? Somethen like if a tree falls in a forest and nobody is around to hear it, does it still make a fucken sound? An Alma just kept repeating the damn thing over an over again, driven everyone crazy, until she finally came to the conclusion that it does make a sound cause sound is just fucken vibrations anyways, an she was so proud of herself for solving the puzzle, but then Mom said that she was missing the point. That the point is to question if somethen can truly exist without being perceived.

BERENICE

So what? I'm supposed to be Alma in that little story?

SPIRIT

Nah, Bere. You're the fucken tree.

BERENICE takes that in for a moment and then starts to walk away.

SPIRIT

He don't get it.

BERENICE

What?

SPIRIT

You're white boy. He doesn't get it.

BERENICE

He will... eventually.

SPIRIT

Aiight. Okay. You know what? You win, Bere.

BERENICE

I win?

SPIRIT

Yup. You win. I'll just come out and say it. Come straight out and tell you the truth. So here it is... The truth is... The truth is... I peaked at his, you know, huevos con carne, once, or twice, an it really ain't worth all this fuss!

BERENICE

Stop it.

SPIRIT

Come on, you know that boy isn't su gente.

BERENICE

Seriously, stop it!

SPIRIT

Can you picture him with la familia? With Mom? She'd lose her shit!

BERENICE

Just fucking stop it!

SPIRIT

For real though!

BERENICE

Fucking stop!

SPIRIT

Mom would—

BERENICE

Jesus fuck! Mom again?! Really?! What is it? What is it about Mom? You want me to end up like her, is that it?

SPIRIT

At least Mom's a fighter!

BERENICE

You don't know shit!

SPIRIT

Mom taught you how to really see the shit around you and to fight back! An this is how you end up? A fucken sellout?! A little bitch who's chosen a boy over her family? You weak ass mamabicho!

BERENICE

Mamabicho?!

SPIRIT

You fucken heard me!

BERENICE

Oh yeah, well I hate to break it to you Chiquita, but Mom's not so tough anymore. She's locked up in some place that smells like tomato soup and bile surrounded by strangers who can't understand a fucken word she says.

SPIRIT

verdad?

BERENICE

Yeah, your great big fucken hero is just a shell of a human being now. And... I'm on my own. Following... My purpose. My passion. See, you think it's all about a boy. Maybe it is in part, but it's also about... the love of theater. The stage. The magic. The power. The possibilities. It's about all the books I've read and theories I've studied and terminologies I've memorized. It's about the hundreds of sleepless nights pushing my mind and body far beyond their limits. It's about the years of sitting next to the men, watching them shape the story. It's about selling out pieces of me to triage the rest. Changing things from within to make a fucking difference in this world. Here. Now. So go back to when you came from, little girl, cause I don't fucken need you. Or Mom!

SPIRIT slowly begins to circle BERENICE.
The atmosphere of the space starts to shift.

SPIRIT speaks to BERENICE with an intensity and deep resonance that she has never heard before.

SPIRIT

Oye, let me take you to, back in the day.

Before this world did its number on you.
Back when you had more Senses than a few.

A time when it was small, but you had a Voice.
And life was still full of hope and you had Choice.

Where you were seen for who you are by loving faces.
Where Sounds and Smells and Sabor were in your favorite places.

So close your eyes and follow your feet
And move to the rhythm of the Rumba beat.

BERENICE closes her eyes as music starts playing.

Music from her early childhood, a woman singing to
a rumba beat, maybe Celia Cruz.

BERENICE starts to feel the music in her body.

SPIRIT takes her hands and begins to guide her.

They dance. It is fun and full of life.

After a little while, the music slowly subsides.

BERENICE stops moving and opens her eyes.

The space has completely transformed.

SCENE 12

BERENICE takes a moment and then realizes where she is.

BERENICE

Papá's kitchen.

SPIRIT

Bueno.

BERENICE

My favorite place.

SPIRIT

I know.

BERENICE

Papá cooking an Mom reading at the kitchen table an them exchanging little love looks with each other. They aren't here though, are they?

SPIRIT

What do you smell?

BERENICE takes in the smell of the room.

BERENICE

Pork... Chuletas?

SPIRIT

Yes. And what is Papá serving with it?

BERENICE takes another breath in.

BERENICE

I smell fresh sofrito.

SPIRIT

Yes...?

BERENICE

Arroz con gandules!

SPIRIT

Con tostones!

BERENICE

Yes! And what's for dessert?

SPIRIT

Guayaba and Saltines!

BERENICE

No... Mom's chocolate cake. With the fresh espresso she puts in the chocolate frosting!
Mmm. My favorite.

SPIRIT

And what do you hear?

BERENICE tries to listen, but doesn't hear anything.

SPIRIT

Las hermanas?

BERENICE

Sonia y Alma?! Are they here? Can I see them?

SPIRIT

No, you need to listen. What do you hear?

BERENICE listens.

BERENICE

Nothing.

SPIRIT

Try again.

BERENICE listens again.

BERENICE

I do hear las hermanas! But where are they?

SPIRIT

Close your eyes.

BERENICE closes her eyes.

SPIRIT

Listen.

BERENICE takes a moment to listen.

BERENICE

Oh. It's the chaos after dinner! Our food rush! I can hear feet running all over. A chair getting knocked over. Laughter. Alma talking. Of course Almita's talking. Lots of rough housing. Papá getting annoyed and walking away. More laughter.

BERENICE opens her eyes.

BERENICE

Can I see them?

SPIRIT

What do you feel?

BERENICE

I don't know what you mean.

SPIRIT

What do you *feel*?

BERENICE takes a moment.

BERENICE

Small. But why?

SPIRIT

Everything was bigger then. Like when Papá would hug and kiss Mom—

BERENICE

and Alma and Sonia and I would all go “ewww”

SPIRIT

an he’d say, “How’d you think you got here?!”

BERENICE

and then we’d rush between their hug by their feet and call it our tree house.

As BERENICE speaks, she grabs her SPIRIT’s hands
and they rush into the tree house.

They stay like this for a little while.

BERENICE

Can I stay here?

SPIRIT

Things weren’t always bad, were they? Pero they were never easy. Tiny you, with your potbelly and wild afro are about to walk into the kitchen to ask Mom:

BERENICE

“Why does the Guatemalan kid call me a Mutt?”

SPIRIT

Or:

BERENICE

“What makes the Blond girls prettier than me?”

SPIRIT

Or:

BERENICE

“Why did the Navajo kid get beat up at recess during Capture the Flag?”

SPIRIT

Or:

BERENICE

“Did our people have to use ‘colored’ bathrooms too? Where did we sit on the bus?”

SPIRIT

And:

BERENICE

“What’s a Cherry-Picker?” An she said, “It’s a racial slur for Mexicans. See, not all racists are going to be intellectuals, Bere. The correct racial slur for Boriqueños should be Sugar-Cane-Cutters.”

They laugh.

BERENICE

She was funny.

SPIRIT

You’re forgotten her.

BERENICE

I know.

SPIRIT

Because of your white people.

BERENICE

You do know Mom is white, right?

SPIRIT

Yeah, but Mom's been through some shit. Remember when you once asked if she was also called a "Beaner" when she was a kid and she said, "No" and that she was called a

BERENICE

"Hillbilly" and "Trailer Trash"

SPIRIT

Straight up!

BERENICE

Yeah, but... but that doesn't mean she knew what it was like to be a woman of color. See, I just think she loved me so much that when I said stuff like, "the teacher looks at me differently than the other students," she trusted that. She didn't need my experiences to reflect her own for her to believe they were true.

SPIRIT

What's your point?

BERENICE

Maybe white people can understand... affectively.

SPRIT looks confused.

BERENICE

Through empathy.

SPIRIT

You sounden like Papá.

BERENICE

What?

SPIRIT

Remember when Papá got his fancy new job at this fancy university?

BERENICE

Yeah...?

SPIRIT

It was only a couple of years ago for me, but it musta been a *long* time ago for—

BERENICE

I remember.

SPIRIT

He was so excited to finally be able to make a difference. To be heard on the big stage. I could tell Mom didn't want to go, but she did. She left the Women of the World for Papá's big break. Pero no. He preached to distracted rich kids who thought college was as normal as wiping their fucken asses and other teachers who called him "paranoid" and liked to say "progress" a lot. An that shit adds up. Eventually he'd come home at night too tired to cook. No arroz con gandules y tostones anymore. He'd just fucken plop in front of the television and watch Law and Order reruns as he quietly drowned himself in gin. An Mom would yell, scream, even once threw a pot of hot coffee at'm just to try to get through to him. So he could see how he was abandoning us for this place. For the love of a people who didn't even want to hear what he had to say. But he didn't listen to Mom. He just let his soul slowly die.

BERENICE

Mi pobre Papá.

SPIRIT

You enden up like him, Bere.

BERENICE

But... Mom went insane.

SPIRIT

Who wouldn't?

BERENICE makes The Choice.

Her SPIRIT slowly backs away and observes from a distance with her chin held high.

SCENE 13

PROFESSOR, BLAKE, CÉSAR, and GRAD
STUDENTS A, B, C enter.

Ethical
GRAD STUDENT A

Accessible
CÉSAR

Tolerant
GRAD STUDENT C

Inclusive
GRAD STUDENT B

Progressive
GRAD STUDENT A

Progressive?
BERENICE

Progressive.
GRAD STUDENT A

What is?
BERENICE

West Side Story.
BLAKE (apologetically)

Progressive?
BERENICE

Progressive. Yes.
PROFESSOR

BERENICE

Get the fuck outta here!

PROFESSOR

Language, please.

BERENICE

You're messing with me, right? *West Side Fucken Story* is Progressive?

PROFESSOR

Language, please!

BERENICE

I hate to play the White Card, but that's like Reverse-Progression.

GRAD STUDENT B

But we're going to do in a way that is...

GRAD STUDENT A

Ethical

CÉSAR

Accessible

GRAD STUDENT C

Tolerant

GRAD STUDENT B

Inclusive

GRAD STUDENT A

Progressive

GRAD STUDENT B

Authentic

BERENICE

Authentic?!

PROFESSOR

Authentic. Yes.

BERENICE

There's nothing Authentic about it!

BLAKE

It was written by white men.

BLAKE catches SPIRIT's attention.

GRAD STUDENT B

But *this* production *is* going to be Authentic.

GRAD STUDENT C

It's going to be cast with real Hispanics.

BERENICE

Real?

GRAD STUDENT A

Hispanics.

GRAD STUDENT B

Not like the film.

BERENICE

Hispanics?

BLAKE (to GRAD STUDENT B)

You mean Latin-X.

SPIRIT observes BLAKE more closely.

GRAD STUDENT B

Yes, Latin-x.

GRAD STUDENT C

Latin-x Actors!

BERENICE

You mean Puerto Rican actors?

GRAD STUDENT B

Well...

GRAD STUDENT C

Hmm...

CÉSAR

I don't know...

GRAD STUDENT B

But real Latin-xs!

BERENICE

Good, because Puerto Ricans and all Latinxs are the same!

GRAD STUDENT B

And the creative team

GRAD STUDENT C

they're Latin-xs too!

BERENICE

Great, because who doesn't like being the forced Representative!

GRAD STUDENT B

And the gangsters

GRAD STUDENT C

they're going to look like real gangsters!

BERENICE

Perfect, because Puerto Ricans are never portrayed as criminals!

GRAD STUDENT B

And the casting will be

GRAD STUDENT C

multicultural!

BERENICE

And how is that different?

GRAD STUDENT C

Multi-Cultural!

BERENICE

Like Irish? German? Italian.

GRAD STUDENT B & C

No, you know . . .

BERENICE

No.

GRAD STUDENTS B & C

You know . . .

BERENICE

No.

GRAD STUDENT B & C

Y o u k n o w

BERENICE

Do you mean not white?

GRAD STUDENT B & C

Yes! Multicultural!

BLAKE (to GRAD STUDENTS B & C)

Multi-Racial.

SPIRIT continues to observe BLAKE.

BERENICE (to GRAD STUDENTS B & C)

A mix of people of color?

GRAD STUDENT B & C

Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes!

BERENICE

But... Aren't the Jets called like "Polack" and "Mick" and "Wop" —white cultural groups—in the script? The actual words on the page? Where's the dramaturgy in that?!

GRAD STUDENT A

It's called a CONCEPT!

BERENICE

But with all that random display of diversity, isn't it going to make it seem like the two gangs have equal power in this world, when they don't?

GRAD STUDENT A

But—

BERENICE

There's a reason why the white Jets get to talk back to the cops.

GRAD STUDENT C

But—

BERENICE

Just picture a Latinx or black man singing, "This **boy** don't need a job, he needs a year in the pen!"

CÉSAR

Yes, but—

BERENICE

Ay Dios! Is Anita going to be nearly Gang Raped by a bunch of Thugs?!

GRAD STUDENT B

Jesus!

PROFESSOR

This has gone on—

BERENICE

And will it detract from white people's underlying fear of the Browning of America?

PROFESSOR

This has gone on long en—

BERENICE

And the threat of an interracial couple!

GRAD STUDENT B (spoken)

ONE OF YOUR OWN KIND.

BERENICE

What?

GRAD STUDENTS C (spoken)

STICK TO YOUR OWN KIND!

BERENICE

What's... ?

GRAD STUDENTS B & C (singing)

ONE OF YOUR OWN KIND.

STICK TO YOUR OWN KIND!

BERENICE

What are you... ?

GRAD STUDENT B (singing)
A BOY LIKE THAT WANTS ONE THING ONLY,
AND WHEN HE'S DONE HE'LL LEAVE YOU LONELY.
JUST WAIT AND SEE,
JUST WAIT, MARIA,
JUST WAIT AND SEE!

BERENICE
Cut that shit out!

PROFESSOR
Language, please!

BERENICE
But that needs to fucking stop!

PROFESSOR
Language, please!

BERENICE
Coño! Stop fucking policing me an listen to what I am saying! What **WE** are saying!

Then CÉSAR steps forward.

CÉSAR
I love the play!

BERENICE
So what?!

CÉSAR
So... You don't speak on behalf of all of us.

BERENICE
And you don't have the right to speak on behalf of Puerto Ricans!

CÉSAR
Tanto como tú. Eres... eres Blanquita!

BERENICE

Oh yeah? You think they see me any differently than you, papi?

CÉSAR begins to sing, without an accent.

CÉSAR

I LIKE TO BE IN AMERICA,

BERENICE

Ay, qué puto!

CÉSAR

O.K. BY ME IN AMERICA,

BERENICE

Puerto Rico is in America!

CÉSAR

EVERYTHING FREE IN AMERICA—

BERENICE

Puerto Ricans are U.S. Citizens, Tonto!

PROFESSOR and GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C begin to sing with over-the-top “Spanish” accents.

BLAKE observes, becoming more disillusioned by what’s happening. SPIRIT fully homes in on BLAKE.

PROFESSOR and GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C
AY, AY, AY AY AY!

CÉSAR

BUYING ON CREDIT IS SO NICE.

PROFESSOR and GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C
ONE LOOK AT YOU AND THEY CHARGE TWICE.

CÉSAR

I'LL HAVE MY OWN WASHING MACHINE.

PROFESSOR and GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C
WHAT WILL YOU HAVE, THOUGH, TO KEEP CLEAN?

CÉSAR

SKYSCRAPERS BLOOM IN AMERICA.
CADILLACS ZOOM IN AMERICA.

PROFESSOR and GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C
TWELVE IN A ROOM IN AMERICA.

CÉSAR

LOTS OF NEW HOUSING WITH MORE SPACE.

PROFESSOR and GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C
LOTS OF DOORS SLAMMING IN YOUR FACE.

CÉSAR

I'LL GET A TERRACE APARTMENT.

PROFESSOR and GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C
BETTER GET RID OF YOUR ACCENT!

CÉSAR

LIFE IS ALL RIGHT IN AMERICA.

PROFESSOR and GRAD STUDENTS A, B, C (rhythmically spoken)
IF YOU'RE ALL-WHITE IN AMERICA.

SPIRIT sees BLAKE become more horrified by the
scene.

BERENICE

Ay, carajo!

PROFESSOR (singing)

PORTO RICO...
MY HEART'S DEVOTION

GRAD STUDENT A (singing)

LET IT SINK BACK IN THE OCEAN
ALWAYS THE HURRICANES [Maria] BLOWING

BERENICE

Did you hear yourself?!

GRAD STUDENTS B (singing)

ALWAYS THE POPULATION GROWING,

GRAD STUDENTS C (singing)

AND THE MONEY OWING,

GRAD STUDENTS B (singing)

AND THE SUNLIGHT STREAMING,

GRAD STUDENTS C (singing)

AND THE NATIVES STEAMING.

BERENICE

NO NO NO! This is not okay!!!

BLAKE goes to BERENICE to comfort her.

BLAKE

It's going to be okay.

BERENICE

No, it won't.

BLAKE

Yes, it will.

No. **BERENICE**

This will pass. **BLAKE**

No. **BERENICE**

It has to! **BLAKE**

I love you. **BERENICE**

I love you too. **BLAKE**

SPIRIT feels their love.

THEN CÉSAR, PROFESSOR, GRAD STUDENTS A,
B, C swarm in and start to pull BLAKE away.

SPIRIT quickly grabs BLAKE's hand.

BLAKE sees SPIRIT and they try to break him free.

SPIRIT loses grip of BLAKE.

BLAKE becomes a reluctant member of The Chorus.

BLAKE (singing)
MARIA

MARIA...

THE CHORUS

AY, AY, AY AY AY!

PORTO RICO...

YOU UGLY ISLAND . . .

MARIA...

ALWAYS THE HURRICANES

SPIC

STEAMING

NATIVE S

SPIC

SPIC

BERENICE feels something wrong

In her gut.

BERENICE and SPIRIT grab their stomachs.

The hurt spreads to BERENICE's chest.

Then her ears.

BERENICE and SPIRIT cover their ears.

PORTO RICO...

WOMAN SOLIDARITY

DEAR OFFICER

MARIA

BALLBUSTER

HISPANIC

STICK TO

SPIC

YOUR OWN KIND

TENACIOUS

SPIC

BERENICE

Stop! I have—

RITA MORENO
HISPANIC
SPIC #FEMINISM
ONE OF YOUR OWN SPIC
DEAR OFFICER FIERY SPIC
SPIC DEAR OFFICER
BAD HOMBRE
ALPHA FEMALE
SPIC
MARIA...

BERENICE

I have a—

STOP PULLING U S APART
STOP OVERCOMPLICATING
BALLBUSTER
SALMA HAYE K SPIC
SPIC
DEAR OFFICE R
I'M DOWN ON MY KNEES
M A R I A
S TOP MAKING IT ABOUT RACE
BORDER H O P P E R

SPIRIT and BERENICE try to push through the pain
to get to each other.

BERENICE

I have a voi—

LEAVE SPIC
NOT MY FAULT
DEAR OFFICER
CUNT DIRT
BALL BUSTER
EXOTIC
THE WALL
SPIC
DIRTY IMMM...
EXOTIC
NOT MY FAULT
SPIC

SPIC CUNT
SOFÍA VERGARA
M ARIA
CHARACTE R
X THE WALL
OTIC
SPIC
CRAZY
CUNT
D I R T Y IMMIGR ANT SPIC
BIT CH
CRAZY BITCH
C R A ZY
MA R
IA!
M A R I A C H A R A C T E R
R
H U R I C A N E
S P I C
SPIC

SPIRIT and BERENICE finally reach each other and hold hands.

BERENICE

Tenemos Voz!

Everything goes still and silent.

SCENE 14

SPIRIT looks at BERENICE with pride

and sorrow.

Then her YOUNGER SPIRIT returns to her small wraparound school desk.

The focus shifts to YOUNGER slouching in the desk, trying hard not to appear nervous.

THE PRINCIPAL finally enters.

He is holding a piece of notebook paper and starts pacing in front of her desk.

THE PRINCIPAL

I don't know what we're going to do with you. This behavior is unacceptable. What do you have to say for yourself, Ber-niece?

YOUNGER does not speak.

THE PRINCIPAL

Do you want to explain why you turned this into Mr. Nelson? Hmm? We're going to need some answers, young lady.

YOUNGER does not speak.

THE PRINCIPAL

We need answers. Now.

THE PRINCIPAL slams the piece of paper onto the desk.

OLDER steps into focus.
She is seen only by YOUNGER.

THE PRINCIPAL

If you don't start talking, we're going to have to expel you.

OLDER walks behind YOUNGER.

THE PRINCIPAL

Why did you turn that into Mr. Nelson?

We need answers. Now.

YOUNGER picks up the piece of paper.

OLDER gently puts her hands on YOUNGER's shoulders.

YOUNGER makes The Choice.

She puts the paper back down.

THE PRINCIPAL

Okay then. Looks like we're going to have to bring in your parents.

YOUNGER and OLDER smile.

THE PRINCIPAL

That's funny to you, is it?

YOUNGER does not speak.

THE PRINCIPAL

You need to learn your place.

THE PRINCIPAL leaves.

YOUNGER and OLDER look to THE AUDIENCE