

Sabor

By
AnaSofía Villanueva

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CHARACTERS

CLARA – Puerto Rican and French woman, Latina presenting, full-figured, born in France, raised by her dad and abuelo in Brooklyn and Manhattan, spent most of her life wealthy and among the upper class, French-trained chef, strong, impulsive, sexual, romantic, intellectual, emotionally young, trying to live life on her own terms, early 30s

VICENTE – Clara’s father, cisgendered man, Nuyorican from Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, Latino presenting, served in Vietnam, started his own restaurant in Manhattan, Michelin Star chef, fluent in Spanish, strong, dignified, intense, disciplined, pragmatic, does not easily show his emotions, wears black thin-rimmed glasses, late 60s

ABUELO – The spirit of Clara’s grandfather, Indio-Boricua from Puerto Rico, served in World War II, was a short-order cook at a diner in Brooklyn, fluent in Spanish, nurturing, intellectual, beautiful signer, conductor of the spirit ensemble, 30s

LUIS – Clara’s former fiancé, cisgendered man, Nuyorican from the Upper East Side in Manhattan, Latino presenting, wealthy and upper class, French-trained chef, intense, driven, machismo, enamored by Clara’s culinary gift, 30s

MATEO – Instacart delivery person, gender non-binary, Afro-Boricua, Black and masculine presenting, grew up in Queens and Puerto Rico, fluent in Spanish, goofy, strong, vivacious, romantic, intellectual, enamored by Clara’s spirit, 30s

SPIRIT ENSEMBLE

ABUELA / WOMAN / MAID – Clara’s abuela, voice of Clara’s next-door neighbor, maid, Black presenting, 30s

BISABUELO / OLD ABUELO / JANITOR – Clara’s great grandfather, Abuelo as an old man, janitor, late 60s or older

YOUNG VICENTE / MAN / SUGARCANE CUTTER – Vicente as a young man in Vietnam with black thick-rimmed glasses, voice of Clara’s next-door neighbor, sugarcane cutter, Latino presenting, late teens to early 20s

CHILD VICENTE / FIELD HAND – Vicente as a boy with black thick-rimmed glasses, field hand, Latino presenting, not yet a tween

NOTES ON CASTING

All characters should be cast with Puerto Rican actors or Latinx/e actors who understand the identities, cultures, and use of language specific to Puerto Ricans. The actors’ racial presentation and visual identity markers should also be in tandem with the basic character descriptions provided.

TIME

2018. But never separate from Puerto Rican history.

SETTING

Queens, New York. A small studio apartment consisting of a kitchen, butcher block island, bed, and dresser. The bathroom is offstage. The main door opens to a hallway. The door has a peephole and old single-cylinder deadbolt and door chain. The bed sits on a simple metal frame and is made in military style with hospital corners. Next to the bed is a French baroque dresser. On top of the dresser is a combat knife, pepper spray, vibrating dildo, and three framed pictures. There is a black and white picture of an Indigenous man and Black woman on their wedding day and another black and white picture of the same man, dressed in an army uniform, holding a rifle. The third picture is of a handsome white woman sitting at a red table in a café, drinking espresso, smoking a cigarette, and giving a loving look to the camera. On top of the butcher block island is a rolled-up knife bag, portable Bose speakers, and an old shoebox with papers, cassette tapes, and World War II era dog tags inside. Tucked underneath the island is a scratched leather stool. Hanging above the island is a pan rack with handcrafted copper cookware dangling from it. The appliances in the kitchen are old, but everything is clean and meticulously organized.

NOTES ON PRODUCTION

Whenever possible, the magical realism of the play should juxtapose with the stark realism of the set, costumes, props, food preparation, and cooking. The kitchen and apartment walls should look like ordinary walls. The spirits should appear through the walls as if by magic, wearing detailed and accurate costumes and holding tangible props. The audience should see the military precision and artistry of a French-trained chef and take in the scent of lemon and the aroma of garlic and butter. And the entire theater should fill with the smell of sofrito by the end of the play.

NOTES ON DIALOGUE

The language of the play is fast and should never be poetic or precious for too long. The punctuation carries the rhythm of the language. Words in Spanish should be pronounced with a Puerto Rican or Nuyorican dialect. Misspelled words in English are meant to be pronounced phonetically. A slash (/) indicates that the next line of dialogue overlaps there. A dash (—) indicates an interruption. Ellipses (...) signal trailing off mid-sentence or a search for the perfect word.

ACT I

IMPAIRED PALATE

(Early evening. Five days to the Chef's Competition. CLARA is standing in the kitchen wearing a Tina Turner t-shirt and underwear. She downs a glass of whiskey and opens the cabinet above the stove to pull out a nearly empty bottle of Michter's 10-year Straight Bourbon Whiskey. She fills her glass with the remaining whiskey and places the empty the bottle in the cabinet under the sink. Then she tastes the food that is cooking on the stove. She immediately turns to the sink to spit it out.)

CLARA

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

(CLARA downs more whiskey. Then she goes to her iPhone to make a call. It goes to voicemail.)

CLARA *(into phone)*

Heyum. It's me. Clara. I know this is a voicemail. It is not you. You are no longer here to taste my food and to tell me if I'm going to get into the stupid competition or just make an ass out of myself... I miss that part. Not the ass part. But the tasting food together part. I miss... I thought it was young love that evolved into... l' ébriété. But maybe...

(CLARA touches her arm. She sighs.)

CLARA *(into phone)*

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

MAN *(from next door)*

Fuck you!

WOMAN *(from next door)*

Fuck me? Fuck you!

MAN *(from next door)*

Stupid bitch!

CLARA *(to the neighbors)*

Shut up!

(CLARA hangs up the phone.)

Fucken hate you!

WOMAN (from next door)

Dumb fucken whore!

MAN (from next door)

(CLARA taps her phone to drown the neighbors out with music. Sounds of rough porn are suddenly blasting through her Bose portable speakers. She quickly changes it to an R&B song, then pop, then classic rock. She can no longer hear the next-door neighbors fighting. Then she switches it a bomba song. Feeling the music in her body, her feet begin to step in rhythm with the percussion. Her large hips shake and then sway in rapid fire, causing her to spill her drink on the floor. She grabs the towel hanging from the oven to dry the spill. She turns on the faucet to rinse the towel but loses grip of her phone and it falls down the drain. The music suddenly stops. She turns off the faucet and looks down the drain.)

CLARA

Goodbye phone.

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

CLARA

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

(CLARA laughs and places the chop on the pan. Her mood quickly changes. She becomes somber. She slowly sinks to the floor and falls to her back.)

CLARA

Je suis perdu.

(ABUELO, dressed like a young Frank Sinatra, appears in the kitchen. He looks down at CLARA on the floor. He kneels next to her and helps her to lie on her side with her head on his lap. ABUELO strokes her head as he sings.)

ABUELO

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

ABUELO (*whispering*)

En el pasado es el presente.

CLARA

Abuelo?

(Lights go down as Clara falls asleep.)

PORK AND STAKES

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

CLARA

The fuck?

(CLARA wipes the phone on her shirt and plays her voicemails through the portable speakers as she starts to prepare herself a glass of water and aspirin.)

VICENTE (*voicemail*)

Clara. / It's Vicente.

CLARA

Fuck!

VICENTE (*voicemail*)

I'm about to—

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

CLARA (*into phone*)

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

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

CLARA

Holy Fuck!

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

CLARA

Coming!

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

CLARA

One second!

(CLARA goes to the door, unlatches the chain, and then sees her vibrating dildo on the dresser. She runs to pick it up the vibrator and shoves it under her pillow. She runs back to unlock the deadbolt and opens the door to VICENTE, dressed in sharp business attire and wearing black, thin-rimmed eyeglasses.)

CLARA

Hi. Come / in.

VICENTE

Were you sleeping?

CLARA

No.

VICENTE

We agreed on meeting at oh seven hundred.

CLARA

Sorry.

VICENTE

It took my driver over an hour to get / here.

CLARA

I'm sorry. Do you want to come in?

(VICENTE walks into the apartment.)

CLARA

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

(VICENTE pauses to look at the pictures on the dresser.)

CLARA

I think it's called a... miniature loft. And the focus is on the kitchen. Which is great. For me. Because that's my focus. So... yeah.

VICENTE

Chuletas for breakfast?

CLARA

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

VICENTE

Stove's off.

CLARA

/ oh

VICENTE

You need a hot pan to sear the meat.

CLARA

Yeah. I / know.

VICENTE

Color's off too.

CLARA

Yes, dad. I know, obviously.

(CLARA throws the meat in the trash.)

CLARA

So why did you want to come up?

VICENTE

Pork is a fatty meat.

CLARA

You serve pork at the restaurant.

VICENTE

Everything in / moderation.

CLARA

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

Hm. VICENTE

Do you want to sit down? CLARA

Where? VICENTE

(CLARA gestures to a single scratched leather stool tucked under the butcher block island, but he does not move.)

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

How are things? VICENTE

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

Clara, how are things with your business? VICENTE

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

Hm. VICENTE

For most people. CLARA

The repayment deadline is next week. VICENTE

Four days away, actually. Not that that helps me. But, yeah... that happened fast. But at the same time, a lot has happened in the past six months. Like this place. Glad you've finally come over! CLARA

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

I like Queens. It makes me think of the old neighborhood in Bed-Stuy. kinda. Besides, I only wanted to borrow enough for start-up supplies and to rent a commercial kitchen. CLARA

VICENTE

What are you working on?

CLARA

I've been experimenting with new dishes here in the apartment... before making it for clients. Like, I've been thinking about doing something with baked eggs and sofrito in like individual le creuset pans and... and yesterday I experimented with a quinoa chicken chili. Interesting, right?

VICENTE

We don't do chili. That's Chicanos. And I don't know who does quinoa.

CLARA

Okay, well, I was trying to do healthy Latinx food. Like you make but... simpler. Still complex flavor but / simple.

VICENTE

I serve Contemporary Latino. Not Latin X.

CLARA

It's the same thing, dad, just not... gender binary.

VICENTE

The "x" isn't even in Spanish.

CLARA

Right, but the term is about the U.S. Not about like the entire Spanish-speaking world.

VICENTE

Debes saber el idioma de tu gente, Clara.

CLARA

Are you saying I should learn Spanish in Spanish?

VICENTE

Your clients like this... simple-complex approach of yours?

CLARA

Oh yeah! It's been going really well!

VICENTE

And they are?

CLARA

They are all for it!

VICENTE

No. Who are your clients?

CLARA

I have several prospects.

VICENTE

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

CLARA

We agreed on six months.

VICENTE

This is—

CLARA

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

VICENTE

This is a rare opportunity that I'm offering / you.

CLARA

No. Thank you. But no. I will pay you back in four days.

VICENTE

With the pay from your... prospects?

CLARA

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

(VICENTE walks over to the stool but does not sit. He sees an old shoebox on top of the island.)

VICENTE

What is all this?

CLARA

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

VICENTE

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

CLARA

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

(VICENTE's looks to the framed pictures on Clara's dresser.)

VICENTE

Clara, I understand this past year has been hard. And... I miss him too, mi'jita. But you need move on with your life. You need structure. Discipline. A real job.

CLARA

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

VICENTE

You do all this work for your prospects?

CLARA

Yes! And good prospects at that! Wealthy prospects!

VICENTE

And they are?

CLARA

Um.

VICENTE

Who are your prospects? What are their names?

CLARA

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

VICENTE

What is your plan to generate revenue from these nameless prospects in four days? Honestly?

CLARA

Well... Have you ever heard of the elite and exclusive Chefs' Competition? Okay. So... It's this underground like festival thing where the best chefs in the world—mainly Michelin Star chefs—compete. Compete against one another. And investors, food writers, culinary experts, maybe political figures, I'm not sure, but definitely the upper echelon of the foody world attend and rank them. And It's happening here. In the city. At Le Bernardin. In four days. And I've been invited to attend. To compete. Amazing, right?

VICENTE

Hm.

CLARA

Yeah. And I was admittedly a little apprehensive about returning to Le Bernardin... and maybe even somewhat surprised to have been invited back, given how I left, and being a... a caterer now but... But I'm attending. And that should generate a lot of business as a marketing strategy

CLARA cont.

for bookings. Given that my business is generated mostly through word of mouth. And! It has a cash prize for the first-place recipient. A significant amount, actually. So... I will be able to hand over a big fat check. On deadline.

VICENTE

You're attending?

CLARA

Yes.

VICENTE

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

CLARA

No.

VICENTE

Clara / please.

CLARA

No. But again. Thank you.

VICENTE

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

CLARA

Want to stay for a bit? You came all the way over here. How about I whip us up some / omelets?

VICENTE

No. You should start your day. And open a window. It's a bit... stuffy in here.

(VICENTE goes to the door.)

VICENTE

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

CLARA

Yeah, I know. Bien sûr. Thanks, dad.

(VICENTE exits. CLARA goes to the cabinet above the stove, hesitates, and then closes it.)

CLARA

Fuck

(CLARA leaves to take a shower.)

AFTERTASTE

(That evening. CLARA is in the kitchen. She goes to pull out a small le creuset pot from the oven, but her hand is too shaky, and she burns it on the pot.)

CLARA

Ay, Dios Putain Shit!

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

CLARA

fuck

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

CLARA

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

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

LUIS

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

(CLARA unlocks and opens the door to LUIS, dressed in sharp business attire. The stand in silence for a moment.)

LUIS

Can I come in?

(CLARA lets him in.)

LUIS

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

CLARA

No.

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

CLARA
No.

LUIS
No?

CLARA
No.

(LUIS give CLARA a look.)

CLARA
Fine. One drink.

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

LUIS
Qué?

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

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

CLARA
There wasn't much left so...

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

LUIS
So this is where you live now?

CLARA
Yup.

LUIS
I like it.

CLARA
No, you don't.

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

CLARA

Is personality a euphemism for a slum?

LUIS

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

CLARA

Not as cozy as the Upper East Side.

LUIS

Is Upper East Side a euphemism for pretentious?

CLARA

Please. You've never had a problem being a... Soigné.

(LUIS smiles.)

LUIS

So do you like living out here?

CLARA

Why are you here, Luis?

LUIS

I just want to make sure you're okay.

CLARA

I'm fine.

LUIS

I got your voicemail.

CLARA

What voicemail?

LUIS

Don't worry about it. I just wanted to make sure you're okay.

CLARA

Why?

LUIS

Come on, Clara.

CLARA

No. Seriously. Why do you care?

I love you. LUIS

You love me? CLARA

Of course I do. You know I do. LUIS

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

I didn't make you happy. LUIS

I was grieving! Nobody could make me happy! CLARA

We were engaged for four years before he died. LUIS

So?! CLARA

So you were unhappy before. LUIS

How is Caramel, Miss Teen Puerto Rico? CLARA

Carmen. And she's Peruvian, blanquita. LUIS

Please don't call me that. CLARA

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

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

Turns out that thing people say about beauty fading quickly when it's only on the surface is real. You know, she wouldn't even eat my food? LUIS

CLARA

Surprise, surprise.

LUIS

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

CLARA

"Never trust a skinny cook."

LUIS

No, no, I think it was Julia Child.

CLARA

"Fat gives things flavor"?

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

That's the one!

CLARA

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

LUIS

That and I'd always have to be... gentle... during.

(CLARA finishes making their drinks and hands LUIS his. He takes a sip and then whistles.)

LUIS

Stronger than you used to make it.

CLARA

No. Whiskey's cheaper.

LUIS

I never understood why whiskey.

CLARA

Why whiskey?

LUIS

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

CLARA

Yeah, I guess so.

LUIS

It was red wine for a long time. Your drink of choice.

CLARA

Bordeaux. A full-bodied Cab. mmm.

LUIS

Coño, even as kids you were a snob.

CLARA

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

LUIS

Please, if I didn't take advantage of your few missteps, I never would have kept up. But I still don't understand why the switch to whiskey.

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

Yeah... sorry about that.

(They laugh.)

LUIS

I've missed having drinks with you.

CLARA

No, you miss where those drinks led.

LUIS

Yes. I do.

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

How?

LUIS

Chef Hernández.

CLARA

You were talking to my dad about me?

LUIS

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

CLARA

What?!

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

I'm worried about you.

CLARA

I mean, it's... but, yeah... It's fine.

LUIS

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

CLARA

No, I didn't!

LUIS

Yes, mon Coeur, you did.

CLARA

How could you possibly know that?!

LUIS

Because I was.

CLARA

Bullshit!

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

We were both mentored / under...

CLARA

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

LUIS

/ Clara...

CLARA

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

LUIS

/ Clara...

CLARA

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

LUIS

Cállate! I wasn't raised by cuisine royalty! I had earned my way up!

CLARA

Bullshit! You didn't pull yourself up from the bootstraps! You're a man from the fucken Upper East Side!

LUIS

Mira, it isn't my fault you weren't offered the position! You are the one who lied! Ay, carajo. What were you even thinking? Why lie about that?

CLARA

I don't... Fuck! I don't... I don't know. I guess... I guess just didn't want to have to work under El Jefe Hernández. At least, not on his terms. And I thought... maybe with an amazing menu they might let me in the competition. Despite how I left. But there's no way I'll be able to get in.

CLARA cont.

Let alone win and pay him back! It was just... wishful thinking. And Jesus fuck, now I'm going to have to work under you?!

LUIS

I'm not so bad.

CLARA

You would be mortified if the situation were reverse!

LUIS

I'm sorry.

CLARA

fuck

LUIS

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

CLARA

I'll figure something out.

LUIS

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

CLARA

yeah...

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

Okay...

(CLARA takes LUIS' drink and ushers him to the door.)

LUIS

Mira, I know you helped me get to where I am today. And it wasn't just because Chef Hernández is your father. You had a gift. Something truly special. Just being near you was... intoxicating. And I'll never forget our first kiss. Standing side by side for hours chopping vegetables, our shoulders brushing up against each other. Then finally getting up the nerve to kiss you.

(LUIS kisses her. She kisses him back for a second and then pushes him away.)

CLARA

No.

(LUIS walks into the hallway.)

LUIS

Goodnight, mon Coeur.

(LUIS leaves. CLARA closes and locks the door. She quickly walks to the kitchen to down her whiskey. She pours another shot and downs it.)

CLARA

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

(CLARA fills her glass with whiskey and walks over to the dresser. She wiggles out of her jeans and takes off her shirt. She puts on a baggy, Buffy Sainte-Marie t-shirt. She takes a few more swigs of her whiskey, grabs her phone, and climbs into bed. She rotates her phone and taps it a few times. Sounds of porn are suddenly blasting through the portable speakers.)

MAN *(from the speakers)*

Get on your knees, bitch.

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

MAN *(from the phone)*

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

WOMAN *(from the phone)*

Yes.

MAN *(from the phone)*

Yes, what?

WOMAN *(from the phone)*

Yes, sir.

MAN *(from the phone)*

No.

WOMAN *(from the phone)*

Yes, master.

MAN *(from the phone)*

That's a good little whore.

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

MAN *(from the phone)*
You like that don't you?

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

MAN *(from next door)*
You crazy!

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

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

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

(CLARA turns up the volume on her phone.)

MAN *(from the phone)*
Good girl.

MAN *(from next door)*
Fuck you!

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

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

CLARA *(to neighbors)*
Shut up!

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

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

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

I'm gunna cut your prick off!

WOMAN (*from next door*)

Just try, bitch!

MAN (*from next door*)

Shut the fuck up!

CLARA (*to neighbors*)

Are you a good little whore?

MAN (*from the phone*)

Fuck you!

WOMAN (*from next door*)

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

MAN (*from the phone*)

Fuck you, you fucken bitch!

MAN (*from next door*)

Ah, fuck it.

CLARA

(CLARA turns off the porn. She drinks the rest of her whiskey. Then lies on her back and pulls the covers over her.)

Stupid cunt!

MAN (*from next door*)

(ABUELO appears in the kitchen, dressed in a guayabera, linen pants, and fedora. He goes to the fridge and pulls out a lemon. He walks over to Clara who is already falling asleep. He places the lemon on the dresser. Then he grabs a pillow, gently rolls CLARA on her side, and tucks the pillow behind her back. He sings as he strokes her head.)

ABUELO

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

(Lights go down.)

NEW FLAVOR

(The following morning. Three days to the Chef's Competition. CLARA wakes up and sees the lemon on the dresser next to the empty glass.)

CLARA

Jesus fuck, Clara.

(CLARA pulls herself out of bed. She takes the lemon and empty glass to the kitchen. With a shaky hand, she pours herself a glass of water and pops a couple of aspirin. Then she goes over to the shoe box on the island and pulls out a piece of paper.)

CLARA

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

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

CLARA

What do you want?

MATEO *(through the door)*

Instacart!

CLARA

What?

(CLARA reluctantly opens the door to MATEO, dressed in a bright green Instacart t-shirt and casual Harlem pants. In one hand, MATEO is holding a brown paper bag with raw sugarcane stocks poking out the top. In the other, a giant mesh bag of lemons.)

CLARA

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

MATEO

Oh. Lemme jus' check the name on the—

(CLARA shuts the door.)

MATEO *(through the door)*

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

CLARA

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

MATEO (*through the door*)
No te llamas, Clara Hernández Rousseau? No recibirás un reembolso, ya sabes.

(*CLARA opens the door.*)

CLARA
What?

MATEO
No recibirás un reembolso.

(*CLARA shakes her head, annoyed.*)

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

CLARA
Are you... Afro-Latinx?

MATEO
Soy Boricua, sí.

CLARA
You speak Spanish?

MATEO
Pues, sí, por supuesto.

CLARA
So you can read Spanish?

MATEO
Yeah...?

CLARA
Come in!

MATEO
Oh... uhm...

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

MATEO
Uh...

Come in!
CLARA

Ohm... kitchen?
MATEO (*holding up the groceries*)

Yes. Thanks.
CLARA

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

Where would you...?
MATEO

Counter—thanks—Would you mind translating this to English?
CLARA

Uh...
MATEO

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

What does it say?
CLARA

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

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

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

Romantic.
CLARA

Sad. Who wrote the poem?
MATEO

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

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

CLARA

What's your name?

MATEO

Mateo.

CLARA

I'm Clara.

MATEO

Mucho gusto.

CLARA

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

MATEO

Instacart.

CLARA

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

MATEO

Specially since you're not wearing pants.

CLARA

Holy Fuck!

(CLARA starts to run off to the bathroom.)

MATEO

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

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA

Are you?

MATEO

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

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

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

CLARA

Do I need to sign anything?

MATEO

Have you not ordered from Instacart before?

CLARA

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

MATEO

Ahhh. I see. Well that explains the strange order.

CLARA

What do you mean?

MATEO

Lemons, sugarcane, and coffee beans?

CLARA

Maybe I am planning to make a... caffeinated lemonade. You dunno!

(They laugh.)

MATEO
You wanna go on a date?

(MATEO's phone buzzes.)

CLARA
Oh! / Um...

MATEO
Ohp. Looks like I got another order. You have plans for tomorrow?

CLARA
/ Uh...

MATEO
Let's do dinner!

(MATEO's phone buzzes again.)

CLARA
Well. / Actually...

MATEO
How 'bout eight? Eight work?

(MATEO's phone buzzes again.)

MATEO
I'm blowin' up! Tomorrow at eight?

CLARA
Sure...?

MATEO
Great! See you then, Clara Hernández Rousseau.

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

CLARA
I already said yes... I think.

LUIS *(from behind the door)*
What?

(CLARA opens the door to LUIS.)

CLARA

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

LUIS

That's a sad thought.

CLARA

What do you want?

LUIS

That kiss was nice.

CLARA

It's not going to happen again.

LUIS

Are you okay?

CLARA

What do you want, Luis?

LUIS

I'm sorry about Sabor.

CLARA

It's fine.

LUIS

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

CLARA

Wait, what?! Why?

LUIS

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

CLARA

You shouldn't have told them that!

LUIS

Clara...

CLARA

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

LUIS

Regardless, they will allow you to return.

CLARA

Allow?

LUIS

Clara, you left in true Jerry Maguire fashion!

CLARA

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

LUIS

But... you're French.

CLARA

Not according to them!

LUIS

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

CLARA

But you are a man!

LUIS

Sure, but...

CLARA

But what?!

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

(They laugh.)

LUIS

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

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

CLARA

Wait.

(LUIS starts to climb on top of her.)

CLARA

Stop.

(LUIS stops.)

CLARA

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

LUIS

Ok. Okay. It's okay.

(LUIS goes to the door.)

LUIS

But I do still love you, mon Coeur.

CLARA

Thank you... for the Chefs' Competition.

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

CLARA

Holy shit. Holy fucking shit!

(Lights go down.)

DINNER WITH DAD

(The next evening. Two days to the Chef's Competition. CLARA enters from the bathroom wearing a plain t-shirt and jeans. She goes to the kitchen to collecting ingredients to make a salad dressing and places them on the counter. Then she takes out napkins and silverware from the drawer and places them in the correct order and the precise distance from the plates on the wood block island.)

CLARA

Mise en place.

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

CLARA

Fuck it.

(CLARA looks around the place to make sure everything is in the precise spot. Then she rushes to the cabinet above the stove to pull out a fresh bottle of Jim Beam Bourbon Whiskey. She gets a glass, pours a shot, downs it, and makes an ugly face. There's a knock at the door.)

CLARA

Shit!

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

CLARA

Coming!

(CLARA rushes to her phone to play her "Latinx Playlist." The music starts with a reggaeton song coming through the portable speakers. She switches the music until it lands on a Latin jazz song. There's another knock at the door. She double checks that everything is in the right place and goes to answer the door. ABUELO appears in the kitchen, dressed in the same guayabera, linen pants, and fedora outfit as before. As CLARA and VICENTE talk in the doorway, ABUELO walks over to the salad dressing ingredients, removes the lemon, and leaves.)

CLARA

Hi, dad. / Come in.

VICENTE

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

CLARA

Sorry. But I was hoping we could carry on abuelo's family dinner tradition. It's not his arroz con gandules but... It's an avocado tomato salad with diced papaya. Something simple and nice with bold flavor. And you can never have enough veggies, right?

VICENTE

Sounds a little heavy for salad.

CLARA

It's all good fat, dad.

VICENTE

Everything in / moderation.

CLARA

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

VICENTE

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

CLARA

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

VICENTE

And how does alcohol factor into your healthy lifestyle?

CLARA

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

VICENTE

Hm.

CLARA

Please come in and have dinner with me, dad.

(VICENTE nods and enters.)

CLARA

Have a seat.

VICENTE

Where?

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

VICENTE
I'll stand.

(CLARA goes to kitchen to quickly prepare the salad dressing. The music shuffles to a Pitbull rap song in Spanish.)

VICENTE
Where did you get this music?

CLARA
What do you mean?

VICENTE
Do you know what he's saying?

CLARA
No.

VICENTE
It's vulgar.

CLARA
oh. Sorry. I'll change it.

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

VICENTE
Did you get that from one of your friends?

CLARA
I'm thirty-two, dad.

VICENTE
Si tu supieras español...

(CLARA sighs. She pulls out a large metal bowl with salad, tosses the dressing, artfully places the salad on a couple of small plates and takes them on the island. At the same time, CLARA and VICENTE pick up their fork, take a bite, and place the fork back down. They stand in silence for a moment looking at the salad.)

CLARA
Raspberry?

VICENTE (*shaking his head*)
Subtle. Elegant even.

CLARA
But maybe with the papaya...

VICENTE
Maybe...

CLARA
Lemon.

VICENTE
Yes.

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

VICENTE
Cutting board?

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

CLARA
NO!

(VICENTE stops and looks at her.)

CLARA
Uh... It's a mess. Sorry.

VICENTE
Olive oil?

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

VICENTE
Cayenne?

CLARA
Could be fun. Especially with the papaya.

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

Sugar? VICENTE

Yes. CLARA

Do we need it? VICENTE

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

But do we need it? VICENTE

(CLARA puts the sugar back in the cabinet.)

And a pinch of salt. VICENTE

(CLARA adds salt as VICENTE stirs. CLARA takes two spoons and dips them in the dressing, hands one to VICENTE, and they taste it.)

Perfect amount of acid. VICENTE

(CLARA tosses the old salad in the trash and prepares the new salads with the dressing. She places the new salads on the island, and they resume eating.)

I may add this salad to my menu plan. CLARA

Menu plan? VICENTE

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

So you said. VICENTE

You believe me? CLARA

Let's just enjoy the meal, Clara. VICENTE

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

VICENTE
It's going well.

CLARA
Anything new?

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

CLARA
You're serving monkfish?

VICENTE
Critics.

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

VICENTE
Luis?

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

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

CLARA
You did not offer me Executive Chef!

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

CLARA
I don't know what that means!

VICENTE
You declined the position.

CLARA
No, I didn't!

VICENTE

Did you invite me over to pick a fight?

CLARA

Do you believe that I am attending the Chefs' Competition? Just ask Luis! In two days, I'll be preparing food for the top chefs, restaurateurs, and the upper echelon right alongside your new Executive Chef at Le Bernardin.

VICENTE

Le Bernardin?

CLARA

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

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

VICENTE

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

CLARA

Yeah...?

VICENTE

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

CLARA

Yeah... So?

VICENTE

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

CLARA

I know all this.

VICENTE

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

CLARA

So...?

(VICENTE takes a breath.)

CLARA

My point, Clara, is that no matter how exceptional the cuisine at my restaurant, I will always be seen as great for my... “category.” While you have great potential, Luis is... Smart. He knows how to prepare a menu and plate a dish that will impress the judges at Le Bernardin. They, the upper echelon as you put it, will undoubtedly compare the two Latino chefs who do not belong. And if Luis makes you look bad, which he will, nobody will hire you. Not as chef or a... caterer. Not even I could hire you after that.

CLARA

You think so little of me?

VICENTE

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

CLARA

I think I already was.

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

MATEO

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

(MATEO laughs and CLARA looks mortified.)

CLARA

I, uh, forgot...

(VICENTE walks over to the door.)

CLARA

Um... This is my dad.

MATEO

Oh! Es un placer conocerte, Señor Hernández.

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

MATEO

Yo soy Mateo Imani Medina Cotto.

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

MATEO

Lo siento por interrumpir su conversación.

(VICENTE releases MATEO's hand.)

Hablas español? VICENTE

Sí, señor, por supuesto. MATEO

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

Sí señor. MATEO

Y usted, eres medio Latino? VICENTE

No, señor. Soy Borinqueño. MATEO

Pero eres mulato, no? VICENTE

No. MATEO

No? VICENTE

No, no soy. MATEO

Disculpame. No quise decir que eres un... mutt. Sino que eres de mestizaje. VICENTE

Soy Boricua. Eso es. MATEO

Hm. VICENTE

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

Be sure to lock up. VICENTE

CLARA

Night, dad.

(VICENTE leaves and CLARA shuts the door.)

CLARA

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

(CLARA leaves to the bathroom.)

NUEVO SABOR

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

CLARA

Sorry. I just needed to—

MATEO

Tus abuelos?

CLARA

Um... yeah.

MATEO

Son Indio y Afro-Boricua?

CLARA

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

MATEO *(shrugging)*

Ol' school.

CLARA

So... where are we going?

MATEO

Goin'?

CLARA

For dinner?

MATEO

Oh, I didn't make reservations anywhere.

CLARA

Great. I'll just make us some drinks.

MATEO

I'm good. Not a big drinker. I mean, I like a hoppy IPA with a hot dawg every now an then, but that's bout it. I brought food.

CLARA

Oh. Okay. Great.

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

MATEO

Like your whiskey, huh?

CLARA *(genuinely)*

No. I hate it.

(MATEO looks confused.)

CLARA

Do you have any vices, Mateo?

MATEO

Vices?

CLARA

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

MATEO

Talk about the best things in life!

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA

I miss enjoying food.

MATEO

But you're in Queens.

CLARA

So?

MATEO

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

CLARA

Mmm... I love that.

MATEO

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

CLARA

Sounds... good.

MATEO

Ay que ver como bate el cobre.

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

MATEO

You gotta pan?

CLARA

What kind?

(MATEO sees the pans hanging from the rack.)

MATEO

Those are some nice pans you got.

CLARA

I take my cookware seriously.

MATEO

Oh?

CLARA

I'm a chef.

MATEO

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

(MATEO laughs and CLARA smiles.)

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA

It'll be great.

MATEO

I mean...

(MATEO pulls out a large baguette.)

CLARA

Mind if I change the music?

MATEO

Go for it. Make yourself at home.

(MATEO laughs.)

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA

I think I can stay clear.

MATEO

Knife?

(Salsa music plays in the background as CLARA pulls out a bread knife. She starts to pull out a cutting board, but MATEO cuts the baguette in half before she

can place it on the counter. CLARA looks at all the crumbs on the counter and floor as MATEO smells the baguette.)

CLARA

Oh... that's...

MATEO

Smell this.

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

CLARA

God, that's good!

MATEO

Nothen better than fresh bread.

(MATEO places the baguette in the oven.)

MATEO

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

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

CLARA

Here. And you can go ahead and use the cutting board!

MATEO

Gracias.

CLARA

And what kind of pan? Like a saucepan?

MATEO

Sure?

(CLARA places a saucepan on the stove and refills her whiskey.)

MATEO

Now, outta your kitchen, chef.

(CLARA steps out of the kitchen and nurses her drink.)

CLARA

So you grew up in Queens then?

Here and the island.

MATEO

And you're an Instacart delivery guy?

CLARA

Instacart delivery person.

MATEO

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

CLARA

Nah, you said... "guy."

MATEO

Yeah...?

CLARA

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

MATEO

Oh. Sorry.

CLARA

No worries.

MATEO

So... Is that difficult?

CLARA

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

MATEO

I meant being an Instacart delivery person, smart ass.

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA (*smiling*)

MATEO

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

CLARA

Oh? What kind of painting do you do?

MATEO

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

CLARA

I meant, what do you paint?

MATEO

Whadever.

CLARA

So you're an artist then?

MATEO

You could say dat.

CLARA

But like as a career?

MATEO

I don't get paid for it if that's whatchur gotten at.

CLARA

Oh. Sorry.

MATEO

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

CLARA

Yeah, we moved to Brooklyn after... when I was a little kid. We stayed with my abuelo until my dad's business took off and then moved to Manhattan. So... so no, not from Queens.

MATEO

An Rousseau. You're mom's last name?

CLARA

It was, yeah.

Was? MATEO

She passed when I was a little kid. CLARA

Lo siento. MATEO

Thanks. CLARA

Rousseau... Italian? MATEO

French. My mom was French. CLARA

Wow, really? MATEO

Yup. CLARA

Like French French? Or like by way of French heritage French? MATEO

My mom was French. From France. CLARA

Wow. So how'd your folks end up together then? MATEO

Um... Well... when my dad was stationed in Italy, he would go to this café on the French border to see this woman who worked there. This woman that he would later describe as, "The most elegant woman he'd ever seen." My dad was an insecure kid from Bed-Stuy but he had the bravado of someone who'd fought on the front lines. So this one time when he went into the café, he tried to show off by ordering in French. He said, "Ce sont les meilleurs Kouign-amann. Deux s'il vous plaît. Si ton patron est parti, veux tu me?" CLARA

(CLARA laughs and MATEO looks confused.)

That translates to, "These are the best Kouign-amann," a denser version of croissants, and then said, "Two please" and thought he asked her to join him, but actually said, "If your boss is gone,

CLARA cont.

do you want me?” My mom laughed and joined him anyways. It wasn’t until later that he realized she was the brilliant Pâtissier who made the Kouign-amann and who owned the café. Many cafés actually. But yeah... they fell in love and when my dad got out of the service, they moved to Marseille, got married, eventually had me, and just lived a simple life together... until she passed. And then, yeah, Brooklyn.

MATEO

That’s... wow. So a French mom and a... Nuyorican dad?

CLARA

Yup.

MATEO

Unique combo. So what’s that make you?

(CLARA shrugs.)

MATEO *(looking in fridge)*

Butter?

CLARA

Door.

MATEO

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

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

MATEO

Love that smell! So where you cook at?

CLARA

Here. I mean, I test out dishes here. I’m a caterer now. But I was Head Chef at Le Bernardin for a long time.

MATEO

The one in the city?

CLARA

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

MATEO

Dang, that’s a big deal, right? Worken at a fancy French restaurant?

CLARA

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

MATEO

Señor Hernández is a chef too?

CLARA

Oh, yes! He owns Sabor. Also in Manhattan.

MATEO

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

CLARA

No, my dad just didn't want me working in his kitchen. He didn't want me to be a chef at all actually. He wanted me to be a lawyer or doctor or artist. Anything but a chef.

MATEO

How's that?

CLARA

I come from a long history of people who broke their bodies and spirits so that one day one of us could be of the truly privileged. But I fucked up. I fell in love with a servant's position.

MATEO

So he wouldn't let you work for him?

CLARA

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

MATEO

Nah...

CLARA

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

MATEO

Damn. Sorry.

CLARA

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

MATEO

Chef's Competition?

CLARA

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

MATEO

What kinda chefs?

CLARA

Michelin.

MATEO

Michelin? Like... Like the tire people?

(CLARA looks confused.)

MATEO *(like the jingle)*

Michelin Man!

CLARA

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

MATEO

Weeds?

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA

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

MATEO

What does that mean? Contemporary?

CLARA

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

MATEO

I feel like my art is an expression of me. You feel that way too? About cooken? I feel like whadever I put on a canvas inevitably exposes who I really am. An lowkey, that's an incredibly vulnerable thing. To put yourself out there. Course, that's only if you're bein' honest about who you truly are.

(The music switches to a classic salsa song.)

MATEO

Yas! Turn it up!

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

CLARA

No...

MATEO

Vamos!

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

MATEO

Wepa!

CLARA

Wepa!

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

MATEO

That's what's up! I knew you was Rican!

CLARA

What's that mean?

MATEO

If you can move like that...

(MATEO starts serving the lasagna and garlic bread.)

MATEO

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

CLARA

Ok. How?

MATEO

If everyone you know is nicknamed, "Mira."

CLARA

That's funny.

MATEO

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

CLARA

I think you just aged yourself.

MATEO

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

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

CLARA

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

MATEO

Dang!

(They laugh.)

MATEO

Where should we eat?

CLARA

We can stand at the wood block.

MATEO

Or sit on the bed? I promise not to get crumbs on your perfectly made bed.

CLARA

Oh, I don't care.

MATEO

Yah, okay...

(CLARA goes to refill her whiskey.)

MATEO

You'll be able to taste the food better without the booze. Ya sabes?

(CLARA leaves her glass and they go to sit on the edge of the bed.)

MATEO

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

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

CLARA

Worthy!

MATEO

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

CLARA

It's so simple, but...

MATEO

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

CLARA

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

(CLARA laughs to herself.)

MATEO

What?

I sound like my abuelo.

CLARA

That's right. The wordsmith.

MATEO

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

CLARA

Maybe that's what you need to do.

MATEO

What do you mean?

CLARA

Create your own language.

MATEO

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

Here.

MATEO

That's okay.

CLARA

Go ahead. There's more in there.

MATEO

Thanks.

CLARA

I like a woman who likes to eat.

MATEO

Maybe this is my greatest vice. Bread and butter. God, is there anything better?

CLARA

I don't think it's a vice.

MATEO

My hips disagree.

CLARA

MATEO

You know you're Puerto Rican if...

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

CLARA

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

MATEO

Foreal?

CLARA

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

WOMAN *(from next door)*

I'm sick of it!

MAN *(from next door)*

Shut up!

MATEO

Lemme help tidy up at least.

CLARA

No! Um, no. That's okay.

MATEO

You sure?

CLARA

Yeah. I got it.

MATEO

You good?

WOMAN *(from next door)*

Fucken sick of it!

CLARA

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

MATEO

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

WOMAN *(from next door)*

Fucken done with this shit!

Thanks. CLARA

This was... nice. MATEO

Fuck you! MAN (*from next door*)

Yup. CLARA

Fuck me? Fuck you! WOMAN (*from next door*)

(CLARA ushers MATEO to the door. MATEO stops in the doorway and starts to lean in to kiss CLARA.)

Get home safely! CLARA

(CLARA shuts the door on MATEO and locks it. She rushes to the kitchen to finish her drink.)

Fuck. CLARA

Shut the fuck up! MAN (*from next door*)

(CLARA pours a full glass of whiskey and takes it over to her bed. She brushes off the crumbs, takes a few more sips, and sits on the bed. She picks up the picture of her Abuelo as a young man in his army uniform and looks at.)

Shut the fuck up, bitch! MAN (*from next door*)

I'm so fucken sick of your shit! WOMAN (*from next door*)

Fuck you! MAN (*from next door*)

I hate you! I fucken hate you! WOMAN (*from next door*)

MAN (*from next door*)

Fuck you, bitch!

WOMAN (*from next door*)

I fucken hate you! You worthless prick! You're fucken pathetic!

MAN (*from next door*)

IMA KILL YOU, YOU FUCKING CUNT!

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

MEMORIA

(ABUELO appears in the kitchen, dressed in a World War One army uniform, and walks toward CLARA.)

CLARA

Jesus Fuck!

(Startled, CLARA drops the picture. ABUELO stares intensely at the fallen picture. CLARA follows his gaze and picks it up. She looks at the picture and then back at him several times.)

CLARA

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

(ABUELO begins to sing.)

ABUELO

TRISTE LUCHA... TRISTE LUCHA...

(An image begins to take shape on the apartment wall. It is the same picture CLARA has on her dresser of ABUELO and ABUELA on their wedding day. Then the image crossfades to CHILD VICENTE eating a piragua on a stoop. Then ABUELA eating an alcapurria. Then the image of CLARA's mother sitting in a café giving the camera man a loving look. Snapshots of memories slowly fade into the next as ABUELO sings.)

ABUELO

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

(ABUELA comes through the wall, wearing a simple dress. She gives ABUELO a loving look. He goes to her, and they dance a slow rumba together as he sings.)

ABUELO

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

(CHILD VICENTE comes through the wall. He runs to ABUELO and ABUELA and hugs their legs. As ABUELO continues to sing, BISABUELO comes through the wall, dressed in in a WWI army uniform, holding a folded Puerto Rican flag. ABUELO gives ABUELA a kiss and puts a hand to CHILD VICENTE's cheek. Then he goes to BISABUELO. ABUELA and CHILD VICENTE watch ABUELO.)

ABUELO

LO QUE TUS CARIÑOS MÁS SUAVES
PODRÍA TRAE NUEVOS RECUERDOS
PERO NO PUEDE SACIAR SUS RAÍCES SEDIENTAS
LA LUCHA SIGUE SIENDO

(The images fade from family memories to images of World War One. In ceremonial military fashion, ABUELO and BISABUELO unfold the flag as they would the American flag. After they complete the unfolding, an image of the 65th Infantry in World War One of men holding a Puerto Rican flag is seen. YOUNG VICENTE walks through the wall, dressed in Vietnam-era jungle fatigues and black thick-rimmed glasses, trying to look brave.)

ABUELO

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

(ABUELO continues to sing as the images fade to violent images of the Vietnam War. BISABUELO salutes ABUELO. Then YOUNG VICENTE takes BISABUELO's place at one end of the flag. BISABUELO stands by himself, watching ABUELO. YOUNG VICENTE and ABUELO ceremoniously fold the flag. As they finish, the iconic image of Iwo Jima and Okinawa of men raising a U.S. flag in World War Two is seen.)

ABUELO

TRISTE Y INTERMINABLE LUCHA
SIEMPRE ENRAIZADA EN LA ROBADO
QUE NO SE PUEDE OLVIDAR
EN NUESTRA MEMORIA VIVA

(ABUELO salutes his son and YOUNG VICENTE goes to stand by himself, holding the folded flag and watching ABUELO. ABUELO continues to sing to CLARA as the images crossfade to images of Puerto Rico throughout history: sugarcane cutters, Hurricane Maria, tourism attractions, Lolita Labrón, cruise advertisements, Pedro Albizu Campos, rum advertisements, Julia de Burgos, and Donald Trump throwing a roll of paper towels. The final image is of el Castillo San Cristóbal in San Juan, Puerto Rico.)

ABUELO

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

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

ABUELO

En el pasado es el presente.

(The spirits look to CLARA. She hesitates, and then runs to her phone.)

CLARA *(into the phone)*

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

(Blackout.)

ACT II

BITTERSWEET

(The following morning. One day to the Chef's Competition. Someone is sleeping under the covers of the bed. CLARA, wearing a Celia Cruz t-shirt and underwear, is in the kitchen. She tries to open the bottle of aspirin, but her hand tremors and she drops the bottle. A cell phone rings from a pair of slacks near the island. Groaning from the bed is heard. The ringing stops. CLARA gets the bottle open and takes a couple aspirin. The phone rings again. LUIS sits up in the bed. He gets up, only wearing briefs, and goes to his phone, but does not make it in time. He watches CLARA in the kitchen as she cleans and hums.)

LUIS

What is it about a thick-ass woman?

CLARA

Excusez-moi?

LUIS

It's like a primal need.

CLARA

I'm no... Caramel.

LUIS

That's exactly what you are. My caramel.

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

CLARA

Ouch!

LUIS

I need espresso.

CLARA

I have drip.

LUIS

Drip?

CLARA

Drip coffee.

Where's your espresso machine?
LUIS

Sold it.
CLARA

Why?
LUIS

Rent isn't cheap.
CLARA

In Queens?
LUIS

Nope. Not even in Queens. But there's a café down the street with good espresso. And they make amazing croissants.
CLARA

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

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

Don't stress about it too much, okay?
LUIS

Why?
CLARA

Why what?
LUIS

Why shouldn't I be stressed about it?
CLARA

Stress is bad for your health. And I don't want you to get your hopes up.
LUIS

Why not?
CLARA

Why not what?
LUIS

Why not get my hopes up?
CLARA

I don't know. Just in case.
LUIS

Just in case, what?!
CLARA

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

Maybe you shouldn't get your hopes up.
CLARA

Okay.
LUIS

I'll be your main competition, you know?
CLARA

How you figure?
LUIS

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

Why's that?
LUIS

There's no need for two tokens.
CLARA

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

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

You're a brilliant chef. An artist even.
LUIS

CLARA

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

LUIS

This is too much interrogation too early in the day! I need espresso! Some of us actually get hungover after a night of cowboy liquor. What kind of Rican doesn't have espresso?

CLARA

You know you're Puerto Rican if...

(CLARA start to laugh, but stops herself.)

LUIS

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

(LUIS' phone rings.)

CLARA

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

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

Sir?

LUIS

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

CLARA

Jesus! At least an hour.

LUIS

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

CLARA

Very personal!

LUIS

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

(LUIS hangs up the phone.)

LUIS

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

CLARA

Mamabicho.

LUIS

Do you even know what that word means?

CLARA

I know when to use it!

LUIS

Ay, Blanquita.

CLARA

Don't call me that.

LUIS

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

CLARA

Yup. Run along, Señor Executive Chef.

LUIS

Will I see you tonight?

CLARA

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

(LUIS walks over to CLARA and kisses her.)

LUIS

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

CLARA *(smiling)*

I'm going to take a shower.

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

LUIS

Ay Dios!

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

Yes? LUIS

Uhm...? MATEO

Can I help you? LUIS

I... MATEO

Delivering groceries? LUIS

Yeah...? MATEO

Clara! LUIS (*shouting to the bathroom*)

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

It'll be just a moment. LUIS

Uhm... MATEO

Clara! LUIS

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

Why are you yelling? CLARA

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

Pants! LUIS

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

Sorry. She has artist brain sometimes. LUIS

You can jus give / her... MATEO

She'll be right out. LUIS

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

I um... CLARA

I was jus droppinoff... MATEO

(They stand in awkwardness for a moment.)

Pay him, Clara. LUIS

/ them MATEO

Have you seen my watch? LUIS

they're / not... CLARA

Ah! There it is. LUIS

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

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

(He kisses CLARA.)

I love you. LUIS

(He answers the phone.)

Hello. LUIS

(He steps outside the door next to MATEO.)

LUIS

Pay him, Clara.

(LUIS leaves while talking on his phone.)

LUIS

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

CLARA

I'm...

MATEO

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

CLARA

You're not!

MATEO *(handing her the bags)*

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

(MATEO hands her the groceries.)

CLARA

Thank you.

(MATEO starts to leave. CLARA puts the groceries on the floor.)

CLARA

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

MATEO

Yeah, I didn't think we were exclusive or nothen but... But I don't think a one-night stand would say "I love you." An you sure weren't actin' like it was an open thing so...

CLARA

It's complicated. He's a chef and works for my dad and we have this history and—

MATEO

Got it. Done stickin' it to your old man by slummen it in Queens. Back to misogynistic chefs and impressin' tire people.

CLARA

That's / not...

MATEO

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

CLARA

I'm sorry.

MATEO

Yuh... It's aiight. I hope you find what you're looking for, Clara Hernández Rousseau.

(MATEO leaves. CLARA shuts the door and leans against it.)

CLARA

Fuck.

SENSE MEMORY

(ABUELO appears in the kitchen wearing the same guayabera, linen pants, and fedora outfit as before. He walks over to the bag of groceries on the counter and pulls out a sugarcane stock and coffee bean. He pulls out a lemon from the mesh bag. Then he carries the items over to the island and unrolls CLARA's knife bag. He pulls out a paring knife and cuts a hole into the lemon. He holds the lemon out to CLARA.)

CLARA

What? I don't want it.

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

CLARA

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

(An image of a food stand made of wood and WWI scrap metal appears on the wall. Inside the stand is a firepit and a large pan of oil with fried food floating in it. ABUELA walks through the wall, holding an alcapurria. As CLARA speaks, ABUELO walks over to ABUELA. ABUELA touches the alcappuria to test the temperature. She blows on it and then feeds a bite to ABUELO.)

CLARA

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

(The image fades and ABUELA leaves. CLARA looks over to the bag of groceries MATEO brought near the front door. She goes to pick it up and place it on the kitchen counter. She pulls out all the ingredients: tomato paste, garlic, bell peppers, cilantro, parsley, spices, green olives, plantains, rice, and guava paste. She looks them over and smiles wide. Then runs off to the bathroom to get dressed.)

FUSION AMÈRE

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

I am! I need your opinion!

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

CLARA

Too sweet?

LUIS

What is it?

CLARA

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

No...? LUIS

But? CLARA

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

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

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

Merde! It's shit. CLARA

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

I didn't say it was shit. LUIS

Then what is it? CLARA

Not... Good. LUIS

Shit! CLARA

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

What was that? LUIS

Doesn't matter. It's shit too. CLARA

(CLARA frantically stirs the third pot.)

How about a drink? LUIS

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

Mateo brought them.

LUIS

Who?

CLARA

The Instacart delivery person.

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

LUIS

The delivery boy from this morning?

CLARA

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

(CLARA dips the spoon in the remaining pot.)

LUIS

You lost your... language?

CLARA

No. I need to create a new one.

LUIS

What?

(CLARA tastes the food.)

CLARA

Too much cumin. Or too little?

LUIS

Clara, stop.

CLARA

It's not the cumin...

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

LUIS

Can you stop for a second?!

(CLARA stops and looks at LUIS.)

CLARA

What?

LUIS

What is going on?

CLARA

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

(CLARA shoves the spoon in LUIS' mouth.)

LUIS *(with a mouth full)*

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

CLARA

Person. Mateo.

LUIS

What?

CLARA

That's their name. Mateo.

LUIS

You hung out?

CLARA

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

LUIS

It needs pepper.

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

LUIS

I'm, I'm confused...

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

LUIS

You dated?

CLARA

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

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

CLARA

Dammit. I thought I had some.

LUIS

Clara?

CLARA

Yes?

LUIS

When did you date the Instacart delivery boy?

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

Yesterday.

LUIS

Yesterday?

CLARA

Yes.

LUIS

The same night we got back together?

CLARA

Are you... jealous?

LUIS

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

CLARA

Them.

LUIS

Them? More than one guy?!

CLARA

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

LUIS

You dated a gay guy?!

CLARA

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

LUIS

Coño! This is...

CLARA

Don't be a bigot, Luis.

LUIS

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

CLARA

Why does it need a term?

LUIS

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

CLARA

You don't have to fucking get it!

LUIS

Wait, so... so... You really liked this... person?

CLARA

Yes.

LUIS

Whoa... I don't... I don't know what to say.

CLARA

Come on, Luis!

LUIS

You really don't understand how this hurts me? You having real feelings for someone else? Seriously, Clara? I love you.

(CLARA takes a breath.)

CLARA

I'm sorry. Come here. Come. Here.

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

CLARA

Mon Coeur. . .

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

CLARA

Make me cum.

LUIS

You want me to make you cum?

CLARA

Yes.

(LUIS lightly grabs her jaw.)

LUIS

Say please.

CLARA

Please.

(LUIS reaches down her pants. CLARA moans.)

LUIS

Is that what you want?

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

LUIS

Answer me.

CLARA

Yes.

LUIS

Yes, what?

CLARA

Yes, sir.

LUIS

Nobody can make you cum like me. Can they?

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

LUIS

Answer me.

CLARA

Nobody can make me cum like you.

LUIS

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

CLARA

Yes.

LUIS

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

CLARA

Yes.

(CLARA moans louder and starts to squirm.)

LUIS

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

CLARA

No.

LUIS

You cum when I tell you to. Understand?

CLARA

Yes.

LUIS

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

(CLARA continues moan louder.)

LUIS

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

(CLARA's moans build and then suddenly stop. She sighs. LUIS gives her a kiss.)

LUIS

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

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

Stop.

LUIS

He couldn't fuck this body like me.

CLARA

Stop.

LUIS

I own this body.

CLARA

Stop! ARRÊTE!!!

(He stops.)

LUIS

What?

I said “stop” like three times!

CLARA

Shit. Sorry.

LUIS

(CLARA gets off the island. They both pull up their pants.)

Jesus fuck, Luis!

CLARA

I’m sorry.

LUIS

Jesus!

CLARA

I’m sorry!

LUIS

That’s not okay!

CLARA

I know. I know. Lo siento. But... Why’d you want me to stop?

LUIS

I’m... I’m just not in the mood, okay?!

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

Is this about the Instacart guy?

LUIS

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

CLARA

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

What?

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

Simple?

CLARA

Intimate.

LUIS

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

CLARA

Exploring...?

LUIS

Yes.

CLARA

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

You're so selfish.

LUIS

Excuse me?!

CLARA

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

LUIS

What?

CLARA

Do you love me? It's a simple question. Do you love me? Answer me!

LUIS

I... I... Je ne sais pas.

CLARA

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

LUIS

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

CLARA

Come on, Clara. You're a caterer!

LUIS

So?!

CLARA

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

LUIS

Wow. Okay. Good to know.

CLARA

It's the truth.

LUIS

Well, better a caterer than a sell-out.

CLARA

I'm a sell-out?!

LUIS

CLARA

Yes. You're a fucking sell-out!

LUIS

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

CLARA

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

LUIS

Oh, I'm second-rate?!

CLARA

YES!

LUIS

WAKE THE FUCK UP, JUMETA! YOU DON'T EVEN LIKE YOUR OWN FOOD!!!

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

LUIS

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

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

CLARA

I am shit.

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

GLUTTONY

(Later that night. A shower is heard offstage. CLARA sings.)

CLARA *(offstage)*

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

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

CLARA (*offstage*)

Fuck!

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

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

CLARA

THAT WHICH THEIR SOFTEST CARESSES
MIGHT BRING NEW MEMORIES
BUT CANNOT QUENCH HER THIRSTY ROOTS
THE STRUGGLE REMAINS

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

CLARA

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

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

CLARA

SAD AND INTERMINABLE STRUGGLE
FOREVER ROOTED IN OUR STOLEN SAND
THAT WHICH CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN
IN OUR LIVING MEMORY

(The call goes to voicemail.)

CLARA (*into phone*)

Highlow. Um. I mean. Hi. Um... Mateo. This is Clara. I am calling you. To say I am sorry for this morning. Luis is... well, a fucken prick, but also... my first love... but we're not... anymore. But you... You're so... alive. And real. Did you know that? How did you become so...? How are you so unshackled from the imposed shoulds and shouldn'ts of this world? Most of us... most of us are so worried—obsessed—about other people's approval or fucking validation all the time. But you're not like that. You're simple. Not simple-minded but... simple. You live life on your terms, unapologetically. Like working for Instacart. Painting. Dancing. God, that that was fun! And eating. I want to eat with you again. Not just eat but take in the whole experience of tasting... Sabor. I need to dry off.

(CLARA walks offstage singing as an image begins to show on the wall of WWI. The images slowly progress to images of WWII and the 65th Infantry Regiment.)

CLARA *(offstage)*

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

(CLARA walks into the kitchen in a baggy Tracey Chapman t-shirt and underwear. She picks up her phone to make another call. Then she picks up her drink. As the call goes to voicemail, the images slowly crossfade into pictures of the Vietnam War.)

CLARA *(into phone)*

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

(CLARA drops the phone. She stumbles to pick it up. Then she finishes her drink and starts to make another call. As the call goes to voicemail, images of Vietnam crossfade into images of Puerto Rican women as test subjects for birth control in the 1940s. Those images slowly fade into Puerto Rican women protesting practices of forced sterilization.)

CLARA *(into phone)*

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

(CLARA accidentally hangs up the phone.)

CLARA

Hello? Merde, shit.

(CLARA pours more whiskey as she makes another call. The call goes to voicemail.)

CLARA *(into phone)*

I've got a joke for you. That's right. You're not the only funny one. Okay. So. What do you call a man of color? A man.

(CLARA laughs to herself and then her mood quickly shifts back to somber. As she continues to speak, the image crossfades to the iconic outcry image of Pedro Albizu Campos. JANITOR, dressed in a janitorial uniform, walks through the wall with a mop and bucket. He slowly starts mopping the floor. The image crossfades to men working in the sugarcane fields. SUGARCANE CUTTER walks through the wall with long sugarcane stalks and a cane knife. Then FIELD HAND walks through the wall with a large sack. SUGARCANE CUTTER peels the stock and tosses it on the floor for FIELD HAND to pick up. Then the image changes to Lolita Labrón. MAID, dressed in a housekeeping uniform, walks through the wall. MAID begins to tidy and make the bed.)

CLARA *(into phone)*

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

(JANITOR, SUGARCANE CUTTER, FIELD HAND, and MAID continue to work as the images crossfade with increasing speed between historical moments of Puerto Rico and family memories. CLARA gets dizzy and starts to lose balance.)

CLARA

Je suis malade.

(CLARA drops her phone and falls to the floor. She passes out lying on her back. JANITOR, SUGARCANE CUTTER, FIELD HAND, and MAID leave. Lights dim.)

MUDDLED

(Later that night. A pounding sound crescendos from behind the front door. Then

ABUELO, dressed in contemporary business attire enters through the front door. He finds CLARA lying on her back in the kitchen.)

ABUELO

Clara. Clara! Can you hear me?

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

ABUELO

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

CLARA

Abuelo...

ABUELO

Abuelo? Ay, Dios.

CLARA

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

ABUELO

That's okay. You need to throw up.

CLARA

Don't wanna make... no mess.

ABUELO

It's okay.

CLARA

No no no. Ba... bathroom.

(CLARA tries to stand up.)

ABUELO

Okay. Okay. I got you.

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

ABUELO *(offstage)*

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

(More sounds of vomiting. After the sounds subside, they walk back into the room, and he helps CLARA to her bed. She collapses. He makes sure a pillow is tucked behind her back. He goes to the dresser and searches for a pair of pants. He finds

one, holds it at the waist, shakes his head, and places it on the bed. He locks the door. Then he sits next to CLARA on the bed and strokes her head.)

ABUELO

Ay, como lo siento, mi'jita.

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

PURGE

(Early next morning. The day of the Chef's Competition. CLARA wakes up to see her father asleep, leaning against the bed.)

CLARA

Dad?

(VICENTE wakes up and looks at CLARA.)

CLARA

Dad, what are you doing here?

VICENTE

No memory, huh?

(VICENTE gradually stands up.)

CLARA

Why are you here?

VICENTE

You called.

CLARA

I did?

VICENTE

Yes. You left a voicemail.

CLARA

I did?! Did I leave you lots of voicemails?!

VICENTE

No. Just the one.

CLARA

What did I say?!

VICENTE

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

CLARA

Oh my God! I am so sorry.

(VICENTE goes to the kitchen.)

CLARA

I can't believe you came.

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

VICENTE

Aspirin?

CLARA

Counter.

(VICENTE grabs a glass and runs it under the faucet. He takes the water and aspirin to CLARA.)

CLARA

Thanks.

(CLARA's hand tremors as she takes the aspirin and chugs the glass of water.)

VICENTE

This cannot happen again, Clara.

CLARA

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

VICENTE

Yes.

CLARA

You took care of me last night?

VICENTE

Who else?

Nobody... I guess.

CLARA

You need to go to a meeting.

VICENTE

Why did you come?

CLARA

You need to go to a meeting, Clara.

VICENTE

(CLARA starts to get out of bed.)

I'm not an alcoholic, dad.

CLARA

I found you passed out lying on your back.

VICENTE

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

CLARA

You could have died.

VICENTE

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

CLARA

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

VICENTE

Dad—

CLARA

No. You have a problem.

VICENTE

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

CLARA

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

CLARA

So...?

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

CLARA

What are you doing?! Stop it! Stop! I said stop it!

(VICENTE opens the cabinet under the sink. He pulls out an empty whiskey bottle and places it on the island. He continues to pull out empty whiskey bottles. One by one he places them on the island.)

CLARA

I don't need your judgmental crap!!!

VICENTE

Cómo?!

CLARA

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

VICENTE

Estas perdida.

CLARA

And for not speaking Spanish!

VICENTE

These are your own insecurities, Clara.

CLARA

No! You shame me for not speaking Spanish!

VICENTE

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

CLARA

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

VICENTE

It's what unites us.

CLARA

No. It's what segregates me!

VICENTE

Then learn it.

CLARA

I shouldn't have to!

VICENTE

Mira, I raised you with certain privileges / and...

CLARA

Privilege?!

VICENTE

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

CLARA

Of what? Of being Puerto Rican?

VICENTE

That's not what / I...

CLARA

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

VICENTE

/ Clara...

CLARA

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

VICENTE

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

CLARA

sorry

VICENTE

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

CLARA

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

(An image slowly appears on the wall of a Brooklyn diner in the late 1990s. OLD ABUELO walks through the wall, dressed in loose khaki pants, a faint yellow sweater, eyeglasses hanging from his neck, and white apron tied around his waist. He is holding a small brown paper bag. As VICENTE speaks, the images change from white customers eating in the diner to Latinos cooking in the kitchen. At the same time, OLD ABUELO slowly pulls out a pint of gin from the bag. He takes off the cap and takes a swig with a wrinkled and shaky hand. He looks around and takes a few more drinks from the bottle before tucking it into his apron.)

VICENTE

Most men.... Most men last six months as a short-order cook. The pressure, the pace, skill, the heat is too much for most men past six months. It can be 100 to 120 degrees behind the line during a shift. And the grill, fryer, the broiler... the flat surfaces get up to 400 degrees. You might not think of it, as someone who's never had to work her way up from the bottom, but a man can literally cook his own hands off working in that heat. Pero, su abuelo was tough. The kind of man who thought going to war for this country was honorable. And he served his first six months in a Brooklyn-greasy-spoon-shithole like it was a vacation. But after the remaining thirty-six years as a short-order cook, serving ungrateful, gentrifying white immigrants from Manhattan, he retired with no savings, a joke for social security, arthritis in every joint of his body, no fingerprints, and a total of nine fingers. So no. He was not the energetic, sweet old man you remember. He was a tired old drunk. His soul was tired. He spent his last few days in the cold VA hospital talking about walking in the streets of Puerto Rico with tú abuela. He was ready to be home with his love. To leave this brutal life. You and your romanticized ideas of this world, your... your privilege to run around with no pants and try to find your place of belonging. You have no fucken clue, kid. Ay, Dios. Shit. I have meetings. I need to go.

(The video fades and OLD ABUELO leaves. VICENTE goes to the door.)

CLARA

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

(VICENTE leaves. CLARA goes to pick up the bottle with some whiskey remaining.)

ABUELA (offstage)

Vicente!

(CHILD VICENTE runs through the wall. He stands, staring at CLARA for a moment.)

ABUELA *(offstage)*

Vicente!

(CHILD VICENTE runs off. CLARA puts down the bottle and finally begins to cry. She goes to lie down on her bed and sobs into her pillow.)

COOKING WITH ABUELO

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

ABUELO

Come on, Clarita. Don't cry.

CLARA

Go away.

(ABUELO sings as he goes to do food prep in the kitchen. He put a large caldero on the stove and adds oil.)

ABUELO

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

ABUELO

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

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

ABUELO

We have to wait for the oil to start smoking, verdad?

CLARA

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

ABUELO

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

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

ABUELO

Nothing better for the soul than the smell of sofrito.

CLARA

The smell of home.

ABUELO

Now for jamón.

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

ABUELO

Let that cook until it turns a nice brown color, okay? Then we can use the jamón and all its juices to flavor the arroz, verdad?

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

ABUELO

Why don't you pull up a chair to stand on? Yo recolecto los ingredientes. Bueno?

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

CLARA

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

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

ABUELO

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

(ABUELO makes himself laugh. CLARA smiles.)

ABUELO

Do you want to stir, Clarita?

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

ABUELO

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

CLARA

Ham.

ABUELO

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

(ABUELO adds the ham to the caldero.)

ABUELO

We'll let it come to a boil. Now to get started on the tostones.

(ABUELO turns to look at the alcohol bottles on the island.)

ABUELO

Ay, clean up this mess, Clarita. A chef must always keep a clean work space.

(CLARA throws the bottles in the trash as ABUELO pulls out plantains and places them on top of the island.)

ABUELO

Have I shown you the trick to peeling?

CLARA

Yes.

ABUELO

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

(ABUELO cuts and peels a plantain.)

ABUELO

Just like that.

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

ABUELO

You try.

(CLARA peels it just as quickly as ABUELO.)

ABUELO

Bueno.

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

ABUELO

We got so many great ingredients from the Taínos. Squash... cashews and pineapples. Qué mas... ají dulce. The peppers we made the sofrito with. Yuca, a type of batata. Batata means potato in Spanish, but they learned it from Taínos. Ay, if only the Taíno's had won the rebellion of 1511. Such warriors. Even the women. But then we wouldn't have olives! Pero not plátanos. Tostones, los verdes y maduros we got from the Africano slaves who were brought over and forced to work the sugarcane fields. Africanos would fry plátanos—this fruit—in large pans to make dòdò or... tostones. And here we are still honoring our mixed race... Las tres razas. Indigenous, African, and Spaniard. Combining the ingredients of Puerto Rico in one dish. Creating our own language with food. Now, do you want to practice slicing? It will be our secret. Venga!

(ABUELO shows her how to slice the plantains.)

ABUELO

Recuerda. Like this...

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

ABUELO

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

CLARA

I'm sure he wouldn't care.

ABUELO

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

CLARA

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

ABUELO

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

CLARA

sorry

ABUELO

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

CLARA

I lost my mom too.

ABUELO

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

(The caldero begins to make noise.)

ABUELO

Ah, it's boiling!

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

COOKING CON FAMILIA

(CLARA opens the door to MATEO.)

CLARA

Hi.

MATEO

Hi.

CLARA

I didn't... I wasn't expecting to see you again. I mean, I'm happy to see you. I just... Just didn't expect.

MATEO

Got your voicemails.

CLARA

Oh. Shit. I'm so sorry.

MATEO

No need to be sorry. Jus' wanted to make sure you were good.

CLARA

I mean, yeah. I'm... No.

Sorry you're hurting.

MATEO

Thanks.

CLARA

Can I... Is there's anything you need or... Somethen I can do...?

MATEO

Thank you, but... I... I like you. A lot. Actually. But... I think I need to figure my shit out. You know, before...

CLARA

Yah. I get it.

MATEO

But maybe after?

CLARA

Forsure. Jus' gimme a call. A sober call.

MATEO

(They laugh as VICENTE appears in the doorway.)

Uh...

CLARA

Señor Hernández.

MATEO *(nodding)*

(VICENTE does not respond.)

Mateo.

MATEO *(gesturing to self)*

(VICENTE nods.)

Me estaba yendo. Que tenga un buen día, Señor. Later, Clara.

MATEO

(MATEO leaves.)

Respectful and... assertive young Afro-Latino.

VICENTE

CLARA

Latinx person, actually.

VICENTE

Mira. I'm not going to Anglicize Latino.

CLARA

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

VICENTE

Pero at least it's in Spanish. Latino.

CLARA

But Mateo's gender non-binary. And not all of us speak Spanish. Latinx.

VICENTE

Hm.

CLARA

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

(VICENTE takes a moment.)

VICENTE

When I was a kid, tu abuelo insisted on my speaking English only outside of the home.

CLARA

He did?

VICENTE

Tu abuelo was born only a handful of years after Boricuas were made U.S. citizens. And he grew up knowing that was only so that men like his father, your great grandfather, could be drafted to fight in World War One. He knew it wasn't real. He was a second-class citizen without constitutional rights. But. Maybe his son who was born on the mainland might have a chance at being a real citizen. So English only and no accent tolerated outside of the home. And he made sure I knew how to properly hold a knife and fork, the importance of maintaining a Steve Reeves physique, and not to speak unless I had something important to say. He armed me to succeed in a country that either doesn't want us or chooses not to see us. But he also made sure we spoke Spanish in the home. We never lost our language. It was the one thing that could never be taken from me. From us. I wish you understood that. I wish you had that connection to mi gente.

CLARA

Just because I had a French mom and I don't speak Spanish doesn't mean that I am any less Puerto Rican than you. It's just different. I didn't want to work in your kitchen my whole life to study your version of what it means to be Puerto Rican. I just wanted to hang out with my dad. And for you to taste my food.

(VICENTE takes a moment.)

VICENTE

I remember sitting at the chef's table at Le Bernardin. The executive chef personally handing me the food you prepared. Your creation... Bass tartare mixed with jalapeños and apples and topped with plantain crisps and a dark rum-tamarind vinaigrette. And even if we don't do the jalapeños—Chicanos do jalapeños—it was... exceptional. An experience I could never forget. The day my daughter surpassed me. You should have your own kitchen, mi'jita.

CLARA

Do you want to come in?

(VICENTE walks in and takes in the smell of the apartment.)

VICENTE

Sofrito?

CLARA

I'm making abuelo's arroz con gandules. Mateo inspired the idea. They kinda remind me of abuelo actually.

VICENTE

You're making arroz con gandules for the Chefs' Competition?

CLARA

Yes. And I'm thinking of doing mofongo paired with a roast. Pastelón as a fun play on lasagna. I had forgotten how good lasagna is. And all fresh ingredients! I don't think I have time for black beans at this point. But defiantly tostones. I mean, not till I get there. I don't want them to get soggy before tonight, obviously. And I have an idea for a dessert with guava / and...

VICENTE

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

CLARA

Successful?

VICENTE

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

CLARA

I know.

(VICENTE nods slightly.)

VICENTE

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

(CLARA smiles. VICENTE rolls up his sleeves and they both walk into the kitchen with the same focused intensity. CLARA begins food prep, but her hands are too shaky. She stops and looks at her hands.)

The Shakes? VICENTE

(CLARA nods.)

You need medical detox. VICENTE

After the competition. please. CLARA

(VICENTE nods.)

What's next? VICENTE

We need to get the pork roast cooking. CLARA

Pork? VICENTE

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

(VICENTE nods. CLARA turns on some music and then pulls out the pork roast from the fridge. ABUELO and ABUELA appear, dressed in traditional white bomba outfits and begin to dance. Then BISABUELO, YOUNG VICENTE, and CHILD VICENTE join them and dance while CLARA and VICENTE cook to the sounds of bomba.)