

RECETAS DE AMOR, RECETAS DE DOLOR

RECETAS DE AMOR,  
RECETAS DE DOLOR

A play in one act  
Written by Emily Mesa

## RECETAS DE AMOR, RECETAS DE DOLOR

### CHARACTER LIST

MARIELA, Female Identifying, Queer, Mexican American: 22 years old, recently graduated from Los Angeles Community College, originally from Boyle Heights. Guarded, awkward, not quite sure how to step into her power.

JULI, Female Identifying, Queer, Dominican, Afro-Latinx: 25 years old, Bronx native. Never went to college, but that doesn't stop her from being smart as hell. Unapologetic, loud, though a little jaded.

MAN 1, Male Identifying, Queer, White: Entitled gay, cis man. The worst kind of person. Leader of the pack.

MAN 2, Male Identifying, Queer, White: Entitled gay, cis man. The worst kind of person. Follower of the pack.

THING 1, Male Identifying, Any Race

THING 2, Male Identifying, Any Race

ALBERTO, Male Identifying, Dominican: Juli's father. Humble, kind, warm. Owner of a Latinx food store.

PA, Male Identifying, Mexican American: Mariela's single father. 2nd generation immigrant. Loves cooking. Would do anything for his daughter but was not always present in her life. A man who is sure of himself. A force to be reckoned with. Traditional and set in his ways.

**PROLOGUE**

*(The past. A projection. The film looks grainy and shaky, like a shitty home movie made with a handheld camcorder. A montage of childhood memories between Pa and Mariela. Mariela's birth, her first steps, playing on the playground, etc. Cut to the interior of a modest home. It's visibly old and worn, but clean. Lively. Full of trinkets, old photos. Rosaries, crosses, and statuettes of La Virgen de Guadalupe litter the home. A younger Mariela enters into frame from the back porch. She's just come home from school, backpack still on. She finds a handwritten note attached with a magnet on the fridge. As she reads it aloud, her father's voice overlaps her own.)*

**MARIELA/PA**

Sorry Mija. Got called in to work last minute this morning. I won't be home until tomorrow night. Make sure to lock the doors when you leave for school tomorrow. There's oxtail stew in the fridge. Love, Pa.

*(Mariela sighs. She puts the note back in its place on the fridge and rummages around the fridge, pulling out a Tupperware and a gallon of milk. She drinks from the gallon while she waits for her food heating in the microwave. As her food continues to heat she moves to a wall calendar by the sink. On today's date in big red letters reads "Mariela's choir recital," with little hearts and stars next to it. She takes the marker and x's out the date. The microwave beeps, loudly. The video ends. Blackout.)*

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### I

*(The present. Interior of a small, shabby studio apartment in the Bronx. It is completely empty and dark. Mariela, now 22, enters very obviously stressed. She carries two boxes and keys in her hands. She struggles to get the light on, a single bulb hanging from the center of the room. She sets down the boxes and inspects the room.)*

### MARIELA

Damn. Ok.

*(She exits and re-enters multiple times with more boxes, progressively getting more out of breath each time. She mutters expletives under her breath the whole time.)*

God damn, why don't they have elevators in this bitch.

*(She sets down the final set of boxes and takes in the room for a second time. She crouches and runs a finger on the wooden flooring. Her finger comes up full of dirt and dust. She gags.)*

Uuuuugh. Gross.

*(She stands and finds the flaws of the rest of the room. Cracked walls. Shitty heating. An odd smell. Finally, she goes to one of the boxes and sees that it's completely soaked through with water.)*

Aw, dude. What the fuck.

*(She looks up to find a leak coming from the ceiling. She looks back to the box, on it is written "Dad's stuff." She moves the box and opens it in a panic, checking the contents inside.)*

Shit. Shit shit shit. Uggh.

*(There are old photo albums and loose photos she pulls out that are soaking wet.)*

Fuuuuuck.

*(She pulls out an old-school boombox.)*

Please tell me this didn't get wet.

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*(She runs her hand over it, checking for wetness, then goes to plug it into a socket.)*

If I get electrocuted, imma lose my shit.

*(She holds her breath as the plug goes in and she presses the on button. Soft bachata music begins to play.)*

Thank God.

*(Beat. She hums softly to the music. She goes back to the box and pulls out what looks to be a tin of tea cookies. When she opens the tin it's full of notecards and scraps of paper. She pulls out an envelope with a rosary and a letter. She reads.)*

“Para mi hija.

I can't believe you're all grown up and leaving you're old man behind. It's been the two of us for so long, but I guess you've gotta fly the nest at some point. I'm proud of you and the woman you've become. I can't wait to see what you're new life in NYC brings.

Here's a little piece of me to you.

This is every recipe your abuela Miche ever made in her lifetime. There's a recipe for every occasion, every celebration. Christmas pozole. Wedding hojarascas. Funeral ponche. Dia de los Muertos Atole. Every meal I cooked for you growing up is in here.

Now I'm passing them down to you. Keep the tradition alive, mija. I don't ever want you to forget your roots.

Can't wait for the atole and pan dulce you're gonna make me at your new place.

Love, Pa.

P.S. You forgot your rosary at home.

*(Mariela rolls her eyes at this.)*

Pray if you get sad, call me if you get lonely.

*(Many beats. Mariela is moved. She holds the rosary and decides to pray.)*

Padre nuestro que estás en el cielo,  
santificado sea tu Nombre;  
venga a nosotros tu Reino;

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hágase tu voluntad  
en la tierra como en el cielo...(etc.)

*(The music swells and the scene change occurs as Mariela continues to pray. She finishes her prayer and changes into work clothes mise en scene as the scene change finishes.)*

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II

*(A small, hoity-toity Tapas restaurant in gentrified South Bronx. Minimalist tables and a bar. The restaurant is empty except for a White, gay couple sitting across the room from the bar. They are the worst type of people. Traditional flamenco music plays, obnoxiously. Mariela's first day. She has been thrown to the wolves.)*

**MARIELA**

Hi. My name's Mariela. I'm going to be taking care of you all this evening. Could I get you started with--

**MAN 1**

Great, Mary Ella, I'm gonna want a dirty martini. Stirred not shaken. Three olives. My husband here is gonna want a *(butchers the pronunciation)* caipirinha with coconut milk.

**MARIELA**

Oh um...I'm not sure our caipirinha's can be made with coconut milk, but I can check in at the bar and--

**MAN 2**

We've been here before and they've definitely been able to make it so...

**MARIELA**

O...K... I'll go put these drinks in and just check in with the bartender.

*(Mariela goes to the bar to speak to Juli, 25, the bartender.)*

Hi...uh

**JULI**

*(Beat)* Juli?

**MARIELA**

Yeah, Juli! Hi. Um, I'm Mariela. Mari. Whichever. Um, I need a dirty martini... *(she checks her ticket)* stirred not shaken. Uh...Three olives...

**JULI**

You know you can just give me the ticket, right?

**MARIELA**

Oh. Shit. Right. Sorry.

**JULI**

Is this your first time working in a restaurant?

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**MARIELA**

No, no of course not!

**JULI**

Girl, you're like sweating.

**MARIELA**

Ok yeah fine it is. I feel like I'm gonna pass out. They asked for a caipirinha with coconut milk. I don't even know what that is! It's not on the menu!

**JULI**

Hey, hey. Mari. Calm down. We don't have coconut milk here. Just tell them I can do a regular caipirinha or they can order something else.

**MARIELA**

But they said they've been here before and ordered it.

**JULI**

Look, these White people come into any vaguely Latin sounding restaurant and see brown folk serving and think they've been there before. I have never seen those two in my life.

**MARIELA**

Oh, ok.

**JULI**

Calm down, you're gonna be fine.

**MARIELA**

Ok. Yeah. I got this.

*(Mariela makes her way back to the table.)*

Hi guys. So, we unfortunately do not have coconut milk. So I can offer you a regular caipirinha or if you'd like a different cocktail on our menu I can--

**MAN 1**

Right, ok. Mary Ella, was it? Look. We're regulars here. This is the same thing we order literally every time. We're the Colemans. I'm sure if you go ask the bartender or the chef, they'll know exactly who we are.

**MARIELA**

The...Colemans. Right. Ok. Mr. Coleman, I already spoke to the bartender and she's actually never seen you here before. Maybe you're mistaking this restaurant for somewhere else. But here, at Tapas Bravas, we don't have coconut milk. I'm sorry. I can offer--

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**MAN 1**

Look, I'm not sure if English perhaps isn't your first language--

**MARIELA**

Excuse me?

**MAN 1**

I'm just not getting why you're not understanding us. Obviously there must be some sort of language barrier for you to not be understanding basic English--

**MARIELA**

What the fuck did you just say to me?

**JULI**

*(From across the restaurant, Juli whispers.)*

Mariela.

*(She mouths "stop" and gestures her hand across neck.)*

**MAN 1**

Honey, you're obviously not from around here. I don't know where you came from or what border you crossed, but in New York City the customer's always right.

**MARIELA**

What border I crossed???

**MAN 2**

Can we speak to the manager?

**MARIELA**

Like fucking hell you can—

*(Juli has been creeping closer and suddenly swoops in.)*

**JULI**

Hi! I couldn't help but overhear the conversation. What seems to be the problem?

**MAN 1**

You're little waitress here REFUSES to bring us the drinks we ordered and has spoken to us in such a rude, disgusting, demeaning—

**JULI**

I'm sorry sir, but as Mariela has already told you we don't—

**MAN 2**

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Honey, forget these people, we're getting no where with them.

**MAN 1**

Fine. We'll just go to a different Mexican place. Maybe one that actually has coconut milk.

*(As they leave he bumps shoulders with Mariela and whispers.)*

Spik.

**MARIELA**

THIS IS A FUCKING TAPAS PLACE YOU PRICK!

*(Mariela goes to follow them out the door. Juli holds her back.)*

**JULI**

Mariela!

*(Beat. Mariela is crying. Juli softens. She goes to hug her.)*

**JULI**

C'mere.

It's ok.

Shhhh. It's ok.

Why don't you take the rest of the day off.

*(Music swells as the scene change occurs. They stay in the hug for as long as they need to.)*

III

*(Mariela's apartment. It's dark. Some of the boxes have been unpacked, though quite a few remain. It's kind of a mess, though the apartment looks a little more alive than before, full of weird knick knacks, cultural momentos, and funky antiques. There's a bucket in the middle of the room collecting water from the leak. A steady drip is heard. Books and other half un-packed things lay strewn around. Mariela enters, exhausted from the day. She goes to kick off her shoes and sees a trail of ants. She stomps on them with every bit of rage in her.)*

**MARIELA**

Aaaaahhhh, God. FUCK! Get out, you. Little. Sons. Of. Bitches.

*(She goes to turn on the shitty hanging bulb. It doesn't turn on. Slight panic. She tries the lamp. Nothing. She checks the microwave. It's not working.)*

Whaaaaat? What??

*(She tries every switch and electrical device in the apartment to no avail.)*

WHAT!?! Whyyy? I literally paid the electric bill, what is going on!

*(She pulls out her phone to dial her landlord.)*

Please pick up.

*(No answer.)*

FUCK!

*(She slams her hand onto the small dining table in defeat, knocking over the tin of recipes. Many beats. She stands and looks at what she's done. A sigh. She slowly starts to pick up each recipe, methodically and carefully. She picks up the letter last. A decision. She reaches for her phone and dials her dad's number. It rings and eventually goes to voicemail.)*

Hey Pa.

I'm sure you're asleep  
Or...maybe you're at work or something.

You said to call when I'm lonely.

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So...

I had my first day of work today.

Waitressing.

It sucked.

Y'know, I can take a lot of things. I think.

Like when my 1st grade teacher mispronounced my name all year...or when that girl in high school bullied me because of my hair...or when I sang a Selena song in college and someone said wetback under their breath.

It's not new to me, y'know.

But I guess you were always there for those. You were always waiting at home to comfort me with hot atole and pan dulce.

What am I supposed to do now? Do I cower in fear? Do I assimilate? Say yes sir, yes ma'am while they call me a spik. Is that what they want from me? To be easy and manageable?

My apartment is cold and leaky and ant infested and my fucking landlord never picks up her phone. The electric's been cut off. I don't know why. I paid it, I swear to God I paid. My back aches from carrying box after box up 6 flights of stairs. I feel so stupid and incapable.

It hasn't even been that long but I miss you.

I don't know how you did it. Being a single dad, raising me, working all the time. And still somehow getting food on the table every night. Not just any food, good food.

*(Beat. Mariela pulls herself together.)*

Thanks for the recipes. I swear to God I'm gonna learn.

Love you.

*(Suddenly the lights come back on in the apartment. The microwave beeps back to life and the boombox starts playing salsa music loudly. Blackout.)*

**III**

*(Mariela's apartment, a few weeks later. Most of the boxes have been unpacked, only a couple remain. It finally feels like home, though the leak and bucket are still there. A Spanish ballad plays softly on the boombox. Mariela is in the kitchen, cooking ferociously. She hand kneads tortillas. A stew of sorts is boiling on the stove. She looks at the package of Maseca and the tortilla recipe written on the back.)*

**MARIELA**

Dude. What. This can't be right.

*(She holds up a clump of dough that is definitely not the right consistency. It's hella dry and lumpy.)*

What??

*(She feverishly adds more water and kneads the dough to no avail. Her front door buzzes.)*

Shit. Coming!

*(Her hands are covered in sticky masa. She tries wiping them on a towel with little success. The buzzer rings again.)*

Ahhh. Coming!!

*(She panics and opens the front door awkwardly with her elbows. It's Juli.)*

Juli? What are you doing here?

**JULI**

Sorry, I know this is really random. But you left this at work earlier today. *(She pulls out Mariela's rosary.)* It must've fell out of your pocket or something and I didn't wanna lose it or forget to give it to you. It seems important.

**MARIELA**

Oh. Thank you. Wait how did you know where I live?

**JULI**

Rafi keeps all the employee addresses on file at work. I just asked him.

**MARIELA**

Cool. It's nice to know that my personal info can just be given to anyone.

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**JULI**

Shit. I'm sorry. This must be so weird. I didn't mean to intrude. You're obviously in the middle of something.

**MARIELA**

No no no. It's fine. I don't mind. Thank you. Really. I appreciate it. That's not really something I'd wanna lose so...thanks.

*(Juli tries handing Mariela the rosary. Mariela's hands are still covered in masa.)*

Fuck, sorry. Would you mind putting it on the coffee table.

**JULI**

Sure.

*(Juli enters the apartment.)*

What are you making?

**MARIELA**

I was attempting to make tortillas.

**JULI**

Attempting?

**MARIELA**

Yup. Trying. And failing.

**JULI**

Do you need any help?

**MARIELA**

Oh no it's fine. I wouldn't wanna bother you. I honestly don't think the masa can be salvaged either way.

**JULI**

You sure?

**MARIELA**

I mean you can take a look at it if you want.

*(Juli fiddles around in the kitchen.)*

**JULI**

How much water did you put in this?

**MARIELA**

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Well I panicked and used way more than I was supposed to cause it didn't look right. But originally I just did a one to one ratio. Like the packaging says.

**JULI**

Oh, girl. Never follow the packaging. That shit will always turn out wack.

**MARIELA**

Then why do they put instructions on the back of the bag?

**JULI**

Look.

*(Juli starts measuring out ingredients into a new bowl.)*

My mom always taught me to do just a little more water than flour. Lukewarm. Never cold. And you gotta knead it for at least 15 minutes. C'mere, lemme see how you were kneading this.

*(Mariela goes to the bowl and starts kneading, weakly. She continues to knead for the duration of the scene.)*

Uh uh. What is that?

**MARIELA**

What do you mean? I'm kneading it.

**JULI**

Girl, you aren't kneading shit. Put your back into it. It's not gonna bite you.

*(She kneads with more gusto.)*

**MARIELA**

Like that?

**JULI**

Lemme see.

*(Juli places her hands over Mari's and guides her.)*

You gotta put some muscle into it. Really mash the dough with your fingers. Make sure to scrape down the sides as you go.

**MARIELA**

But it's still so sticky?

**JULI**

You just gotta keep at it.

*(Juli wipes her hands and peeks under the lid of the pot.)*

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What's this?

**MARIELA**

It's supposed to be an oxtail stew. But I couldn't find oxtail anywhere so...

**JULI**

*(Beat.)* Sooo what did you replace it with?

**MARIELA**

...ground beef.

**JULI**

What? Those aren't even remotely close to being the same thing.

**MARIELA**

Well where the fuck am I supposed to find oxtail?? I'm sorry but the local bodega doesn't just have oxtail lying around.

**JULI**

Is this the recipe.

*(Juli reaches for a notecard balanced atop the recipe tin. Mariela stops kneading.)*

**MARIELA**

Be careful with that!

**JULI**

Sorry.

*(She drops it.)*

**MARIELA**

No. I'm sorry. It's fine. It was just a gift. From my dad and my abuela. It's all the recipes they've collected over the years. So...it's special.

**JULI**

That's so sweet. Was it a going away gift? For when you moved here?

**MARIELA**

Yeah, something like that. *(Beat)* My dad's a single dad so he always had a lot on his plate, raising me. He couldn't always be there for me all the time, y'know, like in the flesh, so I think he used food as a way to show his love. He's an incredible cook. He's always been big on tradition. He gave me that tin full of recipes to make sure I remember my roots. Keep the legacy alive, or something.

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**JULI**

That's beautiful.

**MARIELA**

Yeah. Except I'm shit cooking. And before I moved he never got around to showing me how, so I'm trying and failing miserably with these recipes.

**JULI**

May I?

*(Juli gestures to the tin.)*

**MARIELA**

Sure.

*(Juli picks up the notecard.)*

**JULI**

Chile guajillo. Sofrito. Comino. Cola de Res. Consome. Carrots. Onions. Potatoes. Chayote. It sounds relatively simple.

**MARIELA**

Yeah, but, like I said I couldn't find oxtail. And then, I didn't use the chile. I don't even know what chile guajillo looks like. I definitely overcooked the veggies and the broth I made doesn't have any flavor.

**JULI**

Oh c'mon, your being hard on yourself. Lemme try it.

**MARIELA**

Ooooookk.

*(Mariela hands her a spoon. Juli tastes the stew. It's not good. But it isn't terrible.)*

**JULI**

Ok. Needs some work. But could be worse. Honestly for you butchering the recipe and not using the right ingredients it's not half bad.

**MARIELA**

*(She laughs.)* Fuck you.

**JULI**

I'm being serious. *(Beat)* By the way if you need ingredients, my dad runs a shop nearby. Its attached to a little Dominican restaurant on University Ave. He has oxtail.

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**MARIELA**

He has oxtail? Good to know.

**JULI**

*(Beat)* Sorry I completely just invaded your space and like invited myself in.

**MARIELA**

Oh no it's fine. Really. It gets kinda lonely in this little apartment. So. It's a nice change of pace to have company.

**JULI**

Well. I'll leave to your meal.

*(Juli goes to exit. She turns around.)*

By the way, your masa's done.

*(She exits. Mariela looks down to see the dough has formed into a perfect ball, not sticky and just the right consistency. She pulls a piece off and forms it into a ball then flattens it into a circle. It's perfect. This fills her with joy. She laughs out loud as the music swells. Blackout.)*

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IV

*(A back alley in The Bronx. Mari is very clearly lost. She checks her phone multiple times to no avail. She's panicked.)*

**MARIELA**

Goddammit, work you piece of shit.  
Where the fuck is University Ave?

*(She stops briefly to look around and orient herself. Enter Thing 1 and 2. Thing 1 wolf whistles.)*

**THING 1**

Ayo lil mama.

**THING 2**

You lost.

*(She ignores them and tries to keep moving.)*

**THING 1**

Aw c'mooooon. Don't be like that.

**THING 2**

Smile a little for us.

*(They get way too close. She flinches.)*

**MARIELA**

Get off of me.

**THING 2**

Woooo calm down baby.

**THING 1**

We was just messin' with you.

*(They circle her.)*

Damn you are one fine piece of ass.

**THING 2**

Where you headed pretty lady?

*(Mari attempts to push through. Thing 1 grabs her arm.)*

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**THING 1**

Hey we're talkin to you.

**THING 2**

Don't you got manners.

**THING 1**

Walkin up in here like your shit don't smell.

**THING 2**

You think you better than us.

*(Mariela tugs her arm away. She keeps moving forward, towards a busier street. We hear cars and laughter. The light at the end of the tunnel.)*

**MARIELA**

Fuck off.

**THING 2**

The fuck you just say to me?

**MARIELA**

Eat shit.

*(She keeps moving forward.)*

**THING 2**

Watch your tone, bitch, or I'll watch it for you.

*(The cars get louder. The laughter gets closer.)*

Hey slut, where do you think your going?

**THING 1**

You think you real big and bad huh.

*(They've cornered her.)*

I'll show you something big and bad, babygirl.

*(Thing 1 puts his hands on her. Mariela panics and does the only thing she can think to do. She screams bloody murder. She makes the biggest scene possible.)*

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**MARIELA**

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH. AHHHHH!!! HEEEELLLLPPP!!! HELP! HELP!!

*(They immediately back the fuck up. She keeps screaming.)*

**THING 1**

Yooooooo.

**THING 2**

What the fuck is wrong with this bitch?

**THING 2**

This bitch is crazy.

**THING 1**

Nah man fuck this. Let's get the fuck outta here.

*(They leave. Mariela makes it to the light at the end of the tunnel. It's a park. She looks around. Some people are staring at her with mixed looks of disgust and concern. They quickly turn away. No one asks her if she's ok. No one helps. Mariela collapses onto a nearby bench, near a storefront. She's in shock. She takes many beats. She looks up again, searching, pleading. No one is looking at her. No one cares. She dials her dad's number on her phone. We hear it ring and it goes to voicemail.)*

V

**MARIELA**

Yeah.

Yeah, I knew you wouldn't answer.

Do you remember that little boy who'd tease me in the third grade? Alejandro, I think was his name. He'd pull my hair and push me on the playground. And one day I came home, sobbing, because he had put gum in my hair. And you slathered my head in oil and used a baby blue wide tooth comb to brush it out. And you did it with such a gentle touch, while you said to me, "Mari, boys will tease you and push you and put gum in your hair and y'know why they do it? Because they like you. They like you and they have no other way to express it, but to hurt you." And by that point the gum was out of my hair and I had stopped crying and you told me to go take a shower. And I did. But the greasy feeling of oil in my hair never quite left me. For weeks.

Why? Why would you tell me that? Why would you sell that lie to me?

Because then I believed it. I believed it when boys would slap my ass in middle school. I believed it when my high school boyfriend grabbed my arm a little too hard. I believed it when my college professor told me I was too stupid to graduate. Or when the man on the back of the bus felt me up.

Do you think that was love? What just happened? Do you think I felt love when they backed me into a corner and I couldn't breathe and the only thought coursing through my mind was "I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die, holy fuck do something, I'm gonna die."

I remember when you used to be there to scare the monster's away from under my bed. You'd sing *duérmete mi niña, duérmete mi amor, duérmete pedazo de mi corazón*. And kiss my cheek and everything would be all better.

What about the monsters now, Dad?

Because they don't go away with a song or a kiss on the cheek.

They hold. They hurt. They dig their nails in and twist.

And the thing is, you're not here anymore to scare them away. You were barely there to scare them away in the first place.

*(Mariela breaks down. She hangs up. Many beats. The door next to the storefront she's sitting at opens. Cumbia music floods out. Alberto, the owner of the store, steps out.)*

**ALBERTO**

Muchacha!

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*(Mariela flinches.)*

Mija, estas bien?

**MARIELA**

Perdon senior. I didn't mean to bother you. I can sit somewhere else.

**ALBERTO**

No no no. It's ok. Don't worry about it. Are you ok? Do you need anything?

**MARIELA**

I'm ok, thank you.

**ALBERTO**

What's your name?

**MARIELA**

Mari.

**ALBERTO**

Ooooooh, you're Juli's friend. She's told me a lot about you!

**MARIELA**

Wait are you...?

**ALBERTO**

Yo soy el Papa de Juli.

*(Mari looks up at the street sign and realizes she made it to University Ave. She laughs. It's funny in a bittersweet way.)*

**MARIELA**

Juli told me about your shop. I hear you have oxtail?

**ALBERTO**

Mmm hmmm. I've got whatever you need. *(Beat)* Mija, do you wanna come inside? I can make you some empanadas, or I've got pan dulce and café con leche nice and hot?

**MARIELA**

I don't wanna bother you.

**ALBERTO**

Don't worry about that. It's on the house and you can stay as long as you want.

*(Alberto extends his hand. Mariela's apprehensive. She looks out at the park, at the people who turned a blind eye. She grabs*

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*Alberto's hand and lets him lead her inside. As the lights dim, we see their silhouettes inside the store. We hear muffled cumbia music and chatter. Suddenly, the silhouettes dance to the music, a cumbia full of pride, joy, and love. As the scene changes, music swells and we hear laughter.)*

VI

*(Mariela's apartment. There's not a single box in sight. The leak has been fixed and it's even more vibrant than before. Mari and Juli lie haphazardly on Mariela's bed. Empty and half empty Corona bottles are strewn on the floor. Selena plays on the boombox.)*

**JULI**

Nope. You cannot sit there and make me choose.

**MARIELA**

Oh c'mon you've gotta like one more than the other.

**JULI**

NO, we are talking about two absolute legends. There's no comparing them.

**MARIELA**

Ok ok. Put the whole "they both did so much for la cultura" thing aside. You gotta like one over the other.

**JULI**

I mean Selena made cumbia and Celia made salsa. They're completely different genres.

**MARIELA**

Look I'll just say it. I like Selena more. Nothing against Celia, the woman's obviously brilliant, but there's something about Selena's cumbias that are ICONIC.

**JULI**

What??

**MARIELA**

And boom. You just revealed to me what side your on.

**JULI**

Ok ok. First off there are no sides. It's like comparing apples to oranges. HOWEVER, Celia produced absolute BANGARS. Like, have you heard *La Negra Tiene Tumbao*? *La Vida es un Carnaval*? C'mon now. Not to mention the shit that woman did for moreno's across the Caribbean. Like?? Huh??

**MARIELA**

Alright alright. I'm not gonna argue with you. Both are absolutely phenomenal in their own right.

**JULI**

Yup.

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**MARIELA**

You can't compare the two.

**JULI**

Mmm. Hmm.

**MARIELA**

Buuuutt you obviously like Celia better so...

**JULI**

Man, fuck you.

*(They both laugh. Juli gets up to open another Corona. She admires the Mexican and Indigenous art on Mariela's wall as she takes a swig. Beat.)*

Damn, I love you're apartment. It just so...you. Y'know. So authentic. So homey.

**MARIELA**

Thanks. I guess I'm scared it can come off a little aggressive. Like... "Look everyone, I'm Mexcian!" But it reminds of Boyle Heights. It makes me feel safe.

**JULI**

I didn't know you were from Boyle Heights?

**MARIELA**

Yup. Born and raised. It's so different from here. It's wide open highways and palm trees, heat, humidity. And goood ass food. I know ya'll claim to be the food capital of America, but...I dunno. LA might have ya'll beat.

**JULI**

C'mon you cannot be trynna convince a New Yorker that there's better Dominican food in LA?

**MARIELA**

Ok maybe not Dominican food, but Mexican food. I have yet to find a good taco here. And y'know what, I haven't been living here long. I'm sure there's places I'm missing, I'm sure there's a way to tap into the culture that I just haven't found yet. But... Boyle Heights...it's different. The culture's there, in front of you, all around you. There's no escaping it. It's beautiful.

**JULI**

What about your dad? Is he from Boyle Heights too?

**MARIELA**

No he immigrated from Mexico. Got some random girl knocked up and they had me. She ditched pretty early on and then it was just me and my dad for most of my life.

RECETAS DE AMOR, RECETAS DE DOLOR

**JULI**

Damn. You must miss him.

**MARIELA**

Yeah. It was just the two of us for so long in Boyle Heights, coming up here sometimes I just feel so...lost. Like I don't know how to live my life without him.

**JULI**

I mean just the two of you your whole life, I'm sure you guys spent a lot of time together. Suddenly being alone in a new city is...crazy. I don't how you do it.

**MARIELA**

Honestly, we really didn't spend as much time together as you'd think. He was a construction worker so he'd work really crazy hours. Sometimes I wouldn't see him for days. But...he'd make up for it with a nice home cooked meal. I knew he loved me very much, even if he couldn't be...y'know...present all the time. *(Beat)* Sorry, I don't really wanna talk about my dad.

**JULI**

Oh. Yeah. Sure. That's cool.

**MARIELA**

Juli, can I ask you something?

**JULI**

Yeah, what's up?

**MARIELA**

When you came over a few weeks ago to give me my rosary. I just...it's been my mind recently. Why? Like why did you go through all the trouble of finding my address and coming to my apartment. You could've just waited until we went back to work and given it to me then.

**JULI**

Yeah your right. I mainly came because I was worried about you. Especially after the incident at work. You never really talked about it. You just came into work the next day like nothing happened. I wanted to make sure you were ok.

**MARIELA**

Oh. That's sweet.

**JULI**

*(Beat)* Are you ok?

**MARIELA**

What? After those two idiots asked me if I could speak English or not?

**JULI**

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Mari, he called you a spik.

**MARIELA**

Yeah. I mean it hurt obviously. But I've heard worse before.

**JULI**

I mean, you're allowed to feel upset—

**MARIELA**

I'm fine. Juli. Really. It isn't that big of a deal.

**JULI**

Why do you do that?

**MARIELA**

Do what?

**JULI**

Deflect like that. You can be angry.

**MARIELA**

I mean, c'mon Juli, you're not much better.

**JULI**

What do you mean?

**MARIELA**

You wanna talk about deflecting? You were the one who stepped in right before I was about to go off on them. And you came in with your customer service smile and your White girl voice asking "What seems to be the problem here?" You were ready to offer them a free dessert and kiss the ground they walk on. I *was* upset. I *was* angry. And I was ready to stand up for myself because I'm not gonna let anyone treat me like that. But I couldn't, and now it's over and done with and I don't wanna talk about it.

**JULI**

Ok that's not fair. I don't know what fantasy you lived in in Boyle Heights, but I have lived here my whole life. I have seen my neighborhood be torn down block by block by rich, White motherfuckers who wanna capitalize offa my culture. We work at a fucking Tapas restaurant for Christ's sake. If I wanna preserve the bit of sanity I have left I have to choose my battles. I have to put on a brave face and say to myself "It is not worth it to blow up on these White folks right now. It is not worth my time."

**MARIELA**

You act like I don't know what gentrification is. Like I don't know it intimately. Like it didn't seep into every part of my neighborhood, my home, my psyche. But growing up, when they would call me wetback or beaner, when high rise apartments overtook my favorite mom & pop

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shop, or eloteros were getting beat up on the corner, I didn't just sit there and take it. I fought back.

**JULI**

God, you are a walking contradiction Mariela!

**MARIELA**

What??

**JULI**

When I met you, you were awkward and scared you could barely make a fucking tortilla. And I've heard you doubt yourself over and over again, saying shit like "I don't know how to live without my father. I don't know how to do things on my own." But the thing is you are the most capable woman I've ever met. You have so much fire and fight inside of you. It's shit that I wish I had. Mariela, I know you love your dad, but from what you've told me, you already had to grow up without him. You know how to take care of yourself and yet you sit here and victimize yourself and go running back crying to your daddy because you're too scared of your own power.

**MARIELA**

You don't know shit about my Dad, and I'm not gonna sit here and let you talk about him like that in my house. I think you should leave.

*(Juli leaves. Mariela is visibly upset. She rips the cord of the boombox out of the outlet. Silence. Blackout.)*

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VII

*(The Tapas restaurant. Flamenco music plays loudly. It's empty. Juli halfheartedly sips on a cocktail she made for herself. Mariela wipes down an already clean table. They don't speak to each other. The tension is heavy in the air. Enter Man 1 and Man 2. Slight panic. Juli looks at Mari, Mari looks away. She doesn't want Juli's help. Mariela goes to greet them at the door with the biggest smile on her face.)*

**JULI**

Hi, folks. How many?

**MAN 2**

Oh, it's this girl again.

**MAN 1**

I'd really rather not deal with this today. Could we have a different waitress?

*(In her best customer service voice, sickly sweet but riddled with sarcasm. The sarcasm and camp amplify as the scene moves forward. )*

**MARIELA**

Unfortunately, we're very understaffed and I'm the only one working today. But I assure you, nothing like what happened last time will happen today. I want to ensure the best dining experience possible for...The Colemans!

**MAN 2**

That sounds more like it!

**MAN 1**

What was your name again? Maria?

**MARIELA**

Yup, that's my name.

**MAN 1**

Great, Maria! We'd like that corner table please.

**MARIELA**

No problem-o!

*(She seats them at their table.)*

What can I get ya'll to drink today?

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**MAN 2**

I'll have a sparkling water please, no ice, with a lime wedge.

**MAN 1**

Could I get a mojito with...coconut milk?

*(He's very obviously trying to push her buttons. Mariela doesn't budge.)*

**MARIELA**

Lovely! I'll get that order in right away for you.

*(Mariela goes to the bar and hands Juli the ticket wordlessly. Juli looks it over.)*

**JULI**

We don't have coconut milk.

**MARIELA**

Figure it out.

*(Juli rolls her eyes and starts working on the cocktail. She hands the drinks to Mariela. A sparkling water and a weird, milky concoction. It should look unappetizing. Mariela walks the drinks over to the table.)*

Here are your drinks.

*(Man 1 takes a sip. It's gross.)*

**MAN 1**

Maria. Darling. I hope we're not going to have another problem.

**MARIELA**

Oh no Mr. Coleman, what seems to be the issue?

**MAN 1**

Honey, this is very obviously not a coconut milk mojito. This tastes like shit.

**MARIELA**

Oh! Well, I could've sworn I asked the bartender for coconut milk. But you know, me and my broken English. I'm sure I made a mistake.

**MAN 1**

Are you mocking me?

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**MARIELA**

Why, of course not. If I know anything, it's that the customer's ALWAYS right! You know what? Let me get the bartender and maybe we can fix this together. A collaborative solution!

*(Mariela goes to the bar and grabs Juli's arm leading her to the table. They whisper.)*

**JULI**

What the hell are you doing?

**MARIELA**

*(A challenge.)* C'mon it'll be fun.

**JULI**

*(At the table. A tight smile.)* Hi. What seems to be the problem?

**MAN 1**

Hiiii. We've been in this same predicament before, so my patience is wearing a liiiittle thin. Whatever this is, it's not a coconut mojito.

**JULI**

Well, sir, as I've mentioned before, we don't have coconut—

**MAN 2**

This again.

**MAN 1**

Why can't you get it through your thick skulls—

**JULI**

*(She breaks.)* I'm gonna stop you right there. Mr. Coleman was it? Where are you right now? Do you know?

**MAN 1**

What?

**JULI**

This restaurant. What kinda food do we serve here?

**MAN 1**

Well, Spanish food of course.

**JULI**

Mmmm. Bingo. And what is Spanish food? Any dishes? Common ingredients?

**MAN 2**

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Well...rice. Beans.

**MAN 1**

Right, beans.

**MAN 2**

Mmmm...enchiladas? Oh, I got it! Salsa!

**MAN 1**

I don't see the point—

**JULI**

And what about us? Where do you think we're from, since we obviously crossed SOME border? Take a wild guess.

**MAN 1**

Well you look Mexican. But I'm not allowed to say that without a witch hunt coming—

**JULI**

EEH. Wrong. You see, Mr. Coleman. You come here, to a gentrified part of South Bronx and you feel safe. You feel comfortable. You waltz around with your husband looking at the upscale high rises and overpriced restaurants and you must think, "God I love being White in America." And you come into our restaurant, with two brown women serving you, smile plastered across our faces even though what really wanna do is slap you across the face. And we serve you, and we take your insults, your slurs, your White ego in all it's glory. And you don't even have the common courtesy to figure out what kind restaurant you're eating at. What kind of cuisine you're paying ridiculous prices for and shoving down your throats. It never once crossed your pea sized little brains to learn the difference between fucking Mexican food and Spanish food. Because brown is brown is brown to you motherfuckers.

*(Man 1 stands. He gets in Juli's face, finger jabbing at her chest.)*

**MAN 1**

I will NOT have you speak to me like that, you bitch. I'd like to talk to the owner of this restaurant or I will call the police for harassment.

**MARIELA**

Touch her one more time, and see what happens.

**MAN 1**

Oooooooooohhhh.

*(He waves his finger in Mariela's face, mocking her.)*

I'm so scared. What're you going to do?

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*(Mariela reaches for the drink on the table and throws it in his face, before pushing Man 1. He falls to the ground. Man 2 rushes over. They're scared.)*

**MAN 2**

What the hell?!

**JULI**

You have to the count of 3 to get the fuck out of our restaurant.

*(Mariela scribbles a phone number haphazardly onto a napkin.)*

1

*(Mariela throws the paper at the men.)*

2

**MARIELA**

There's our bosses number since you wanna talk to him so bad.

*(They're shocked. They don't move.)*

**JULI**

3

*(They scramble up and leave. Many beats. Juli and Mariela laugh. It's absurd what just happened.)*

**MARIELA**

Yo, what the fuck. *(Beat)* You were kinda badass.

**JULI**

You too. *(Beat.)* Mari, I'm sorry. I crossed a line, I shouldn't have—

**MARIELA**

No, Juli. I'm sorry. Because you were right. And I got upset at you because I couldn't handle hearing the truth. I think it's time I let my dad go.

**JULI**

C'mere.

*(They hug for a long time. Juli caresses Mariela. Perhaps they kiss. It's sweet and intimate and full of joy. Scene changes. A movement/montage sequence. A dance of sorts between Juli and Mariela. Laughter. Joy. Alberto enters and joins in. As the scene*

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*change ends, Juli and Alberto exit and Mariela gathers ingredients.)*

**VIII**

*(Mariela's apartment. Months later. It is Dia de los Muertos. A table is set with the best linens and an assortment of colorful pots, pans, and dinnerware. A beautifully decorated altar stands in the center of the room. Celia Cruz plays on the boombox. Mariela hums softly as she cooks, multiple pots going at the same time. The smell of burning fills the room.)*

**MARIELA**

*(Realization)* Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

*(She opens the oven, smoke pouring out.)*

Shit. Shit!

*(The fire alarm blares.)*

Oh dammit.

*(She goes to pull out the baking sheet without an oven mitt on.)*

Ow! FuuuuuuCK!

*(She looks for an oven mitt. There isn't one. She tears apart the kitchen looking for one. The alarm is still blaring.)*

AHHHHHHHH! Shut up. Just shut up! Shit.

*(She fans desperately at the alarm.)*

Oh my God. Kill me. Just kill me.

*(A knock at the door.)*

What?? No!!! Who the fuck is that??

*(She goes to open the door. Enter Pa, a force to be reckoned with. Mariela stops in her tracks. He sweeps in, finds the oven mitt, and pulls the steaming pile of black ash from the oven. She watches him as he does so. He opens a window and the alarm finally stops ringing. They see each other for the first time.)*

**PA**

RECETAS DE AMOR, RECETAS DE DOLOR

You been calling my phone?

**MARIELA**

Yeah. You never answer.

**PA**

You shouldn't expect me to.

**MARIELA**

I know.

**PA**

What're you making?

**MARIELA**

The Dia de los Muertos recetas.

**PA**

And what's this nonsense that I just saved from the oven?

**MARIELA**

...conchas.

*(He gives her a look.)*

Don't gimme that look. No one ever told me that some bitchass conchas were gonna be that hard to make.

*(A pot on the stove boils over.)*

NOT THE GRAVY!

*(She sprints to the stove. Pa stands in her way.)*

**PA**

Mari! Mariela! I need you to sit your anxious ass down.

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*(She goes to the table and sits. Pa goes to work on the kitchen, handling everything with ease. He continues to cook for the duration of the scene. She watches him.)*

**MARIELA**

Why'd you come now? Y'know I coulda used you here when I was moving a million boxes...or when I got lost in a back alley of The Bronx.

**PA**

It's Dia de los Muertos. A day for honoring and remembering the dead. You know I couldn't come before today. Mind you, I also could smell the food you were cookin' up from a mile away.

*(Mariela starts shuffling through the tin of recipe cards, reading them out individually.)*

**MARIELA**

Recetas para Dia de los Muertos. Tamales. Biscuits with Gravy. Cornbread. Atole. Conchas. How does one person make all of that. Like, why do we even need that many dishes? We aren't feeding an army.

**PA**

Ask your grandma, I don't make the rules. I just follow them.

**MARIELA**

*(Slightly panicked and looking around)* Is she here??

**PA**

*(He laughs)* No. But don't look so panicked or I promise you she'll rise from the grave and hit you with her chancla.

*(He takes a lid off of one of the pots and pokes around.)*

What in God's name did you do to these tamales?

**MARIELA**

...they're meatless.

**PA**

Girl, you better be playin with me.

**MARIELA**

Stooooop! I wanted to try something different.

**PA**

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Oooooor you couldn't find the right ingredients to make them?

**MARIELA**

Actually, for you're information, I know the perfect place to find ALL the weirdly obscure ingredients I need. And I've successfully made tortillas, huevos rancheros, salsa verde, and...drum roll please...oxtail stew.

**PA**

Oook ok mirala.

**MARIELA**

Yeah it was no thanks to you.

**PA**

Aw c'mon mija don't be like that.

**MARIELA**

Why'd you never teach me how to cook?

**PA**

I dunno. I was away so often, I couldn't be there for you like I should've been. So...food, cooking, it was the one way I could connect with you. The way I could tell you I love you. I guess I never taught you because I wanted to keep it special. Keep it a thing I could do for you when I failed to do so many other things. Maybe I was selfish.

**MARIELA**

Dad, a concha and some pozole doesn't fix everything. Food isn't a bandaid for every choir concert you missed, every homework assignment I needed help with, every boy who harassed me. I needed you. And you weren't there.

**PA**

I know, baby. I'm sorry.

**MARIELA**

I forgive you.

**PA**

*(Beat)* If they don't have meat in 'em, what's the filling?

**MARIELA**

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...tofu.

**PA**

*(Terrified)* Dear God.

**MARIELA**

Maybe I wanna save the pigs!!

**PA**

You were raised on lard and carne asada. I sure as hell know you don't wanna save no pigs.

*(Beat)* Why'd you really make them like that?

**MARIELA**

I met someone. Her name's Juli. She's not the biggest fan of pork. *(Mariela rolls her eyes at this. Beat.)* I think you'd really like her. Maybe I'll take her to Boyle Heights. To visit you.

**PA**

I'd love to meet her, mija.

*(Beat. He sees that the sun is starting to set.)*

I should get going.

**MARIELA**

Pa. Will you sing to me? Just one more time.

**PA**

Mari, I don't know—

**MARIELA**

Just one more song. Just one moment to feel like a kid again. To be held again. To be protected again. I have had to fend for myself for so long. Just one more song and then I'll go back to my ratty apartment and making ends meet and burnt conchas and lumpy gravy. You owe it to me. You owe it to that little girl from Boyle Heights.

**PA**

Ok. Just once.

*(Pa cradles Mariela in his arms in front of the altar. He sings a traditional lullaby.)*

Duérmete Mi Niña  
Duérmete Mi Amor  
Duérmete Pedazo  
De Mi Corazón

RECETAS DE AMOR, RECETAS DE DOLOR

Esta Niña Linda  
Que Nació De Día  
Quere Que La Lleve  
A La Dulcería

Esta Niña Linda  
Que Nació De Noche  
Quere Que La Lleve  
A Pasear En Coche

Duérmete Mi Niña  
Duérmete Mi Amor  
Duérmete Pedazo  
De Mi Corazón

*(The lights flicker and finally go out in the last stanza of the lullaby. Black out. The same Celia Cruz song that played earlier slowly fades in. Lights flicker and come back up. Mariela is alone in front of the altar. She looks around before reaching for her phone and dialing her dad's number. An automated voice saying "The number you have dialed is no longer in service," is heard. It's bittersweet. Mariela just nods. She goes the kitchen and starts cleaning, sopping up the spilled gravy and scrubbing halfheartedly at the burnt baking sheet.)*

Gross.

*(She starts throwing all the ruined food into a trash bag. She hesitates at a small clay pot filled with atole. She decides to taste it. It's delicious. She laughs.)*

Thanks, Pa.

*(She serves the atole in two mugs and goes back to the altar, setting one mug in front of the picture of Pa. She drinks. A sigh of relief. She takes her rosary and begins to pray. Blackout.)*

**END OF PLAY**