

The Dirt is Fertile

A full-length play

By Alisha Espinosa

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

RITUALS

LA MUJER, Lady Liberty's fraternal twin sister, the tender of the city.

**LA MUJER can be played by either the actor who plays the Ella track or the Belen track or both alternatively as needed.*

Act I

(Cornelia, Joey, Belén, and Morgan should use some light dialect; Sam and Inkwell should sound firmly "American" either general or New York; Ella should have a Southern dialect. Emma should sound either American or slightly Irish.)

SAM, a Jewish Butcher (M)

EMMA ACOO, a Chinese/Irish laundress (F)

INKWELL, a Black writer/aspiring poet (M)

ELLA, Black entrepreneur/gardener/fisher (F)

CORNELIA, German beer heiress who likes the slums (F)

JOEY "DOLCE," Italian sugar factory worker (M)

BELEN, a Puerto Rican dressmaker (F)

MORGAN, Irish beat cop (M)

ACT II

CHERYL, a Black teacher

JAMES, a Black WW II Vet, Cheryl's husband

CLARKE, a White WW II Vet

ROSEMARY, his wife

WAYNE, Clarke's younger brother

WILLIAM (*Gillo*), a White Puerto Rican WWII Vet

MARY (*Maria*), a Black Puerto Rican factory seamstress

CONNIE, a Chinese factory seamstress

THE CASIO RADIO

Act III

(the most youthful characters in the play)

CASSANDRA, a *Boricua morena* server (F)

LOS, a Mexican barback (M)

MULBERRY, bartender (F)

TODD SMITH, server (M)

AMOS, Host Manager (M)

IVORY, Floor Manager (F)

CARNEL, server (M)

NAOMI, server's assistant (F)

Doubling (Act I/Act II/Act III)

SAM/WAYNE/AMOS

EMMA/CONNIE/NAOMI

CORNELIA/ROSEMARY/MULBERRY

JOEY/WILLIAM/LOS

MORGAN/CLARKE/TODD SMITH

ELLA/RITUAL TWO LA MUJER*/CHERYL/IVORY

RITUAL ONE LA MUJER*/BELEN/MARY/CASSANDRA

INKWELL/JAMES/CARNEL (could also do the VO for the Radio in Act II)

SETTINGS

Act I:

1890s, The Five Points

Act II:

1947, Queensbridge Houses, Queens NYC

Act III:

2018, The Pitmaster, a corporate restaurant in NYC

NOTES

Always remember how loud and busy New York City is, especially for Act I.
Five Points *points* of reference: Leslie's Illustrated, Tyler Andbinder's
*Five Points: The 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap
Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slums*

Pronunciations

Emma Acoo - "Ah-Coo"

Shufen - "Shoe-fen"

Amos - "A-mos"

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Act I
The Five Points, 1890s

RITUAL ONE

Several men in suits from various decades (1890s, 1910s, 1930s, 1940s, 1980s, 2000s) enter the stage at intervals carrying trash. Not in cans, but in armfuls. Trash of all kinds--paper, organic, ash, plastic. They do a kind of dance, the sole purpose of which is to give up responsibility for their trash until one of them decides to bury it. Portions of the stage are lifted open, the trash is dropped in, those portions of stage are closed. Meanwhile, LA MUJER enters wearing a copper and green dress and a rust and gold crown. LA MUJER digs into the trash and pulls out a plant with its dirty roots exposed. The trash men ignore her. INKWELL enters. She hands him the plant. He plants it in an old crate and exits. The trashmen exit. LA MUJER is alone on stage. Black out.

SCENE ONE

Two tenement buildings rise out of the dawning.

INKWELL enters the stage with a newspaper tucked under his arm, a newsboy cap cocked on top of his head, and a cigarette in his mouth.

INKWELL

Light is beginning to show some streaks of color over there beyond the river.

Gas lamps haven't yet been turned down so it's a little hazy still. It's awful pretty when the sky's all streaked with peach and coral and pink behind the Pulitzer building. It's a mighty fine building--from the outside.

Well, by now you've figured out--this town is called New York City. Now you may say it's not right to call a place like this a town, but a city is just a series a tiny towns. You'll eventually call them boroughs I hear. This section here is my town--well, it's all my town, my city. But this section is my favorite: Five Points.

On the roof of one tenement, ELLA enters bearing a few empty crates. There is a small garden on the roof and a light emanating from one of the plants. ELLA is packing the plants into the empty crates.

INKWELL

This is Five Points. Not this (He clears his throat for a Daniel Day Lewis impersonation): "You see this knife. I'm going to teach you to speak English with this knife." Not the Hollywood white-washed Five Points. The Five Points of the 1890s, full of immigrants: Italians, Germans, Irish, Polish--"ethnic whites" as they were called--the Chinese and of course, the Blacks. We're here too: those of us forced here, those of us who ran before and those of us running from Jim Crow and the new slavery of share-cropping. Running--always running. Most of us anyway. Not me. My family been New Yorkers since at least 1645. We had us a piece of Little Angola. The Land of Blacks was full of farms and hopes and row houses. Then away that went too. But I was talking about runners, runners like Ella here. She's a right lovely lady. She tries to hide it but she's not so good at it.

ELLA walks downstairs with her plants to the basement level of the tenement--the restaurant. There are worn out trunks tucked in the corner of the room and ELLA adds the plants to the pile.

INKWELL

She's packing up her tiny corner of this tiny tenement for an equally tiny corner in a brownstone uptown to live with some of the Dutch. We've all been trying to tell her there's no need to leave the Points, but well...she's got a few reasons not to listen to us now. Me in particular.

BELÉN enters.

BELÉN

Mamita, I woke up the children. Do you need anything else before I take them upstairs?

ELLA

No, Belén. Thank you. I should be done moving by the evening.

BELÉN

De nada.

ELLA

It's not nothing. *Gracias*. Tell me you're not spinning lace all day today.

BELÉN

Not all day. I have a veil to finish--got the dress wrapped up yesterday.

ELLA

Are you sure you can handle all the children?

BELÉN

Don't insult me. Four kids is nothing. When I was a child in Lares, my mama used to wash clothes with the others wives in the river. Sometimes twenty children and they always knew when one of us was close to drowning.

ELLA

You left Puerto Rico when you were two years old. How do you remember that?

BELÉN

You never mind how I remember. I remember. Ay, let me help you.

BELÉN begins to organize and pack odds and ends with ELLA.

INKWELL

Belén left on her mother's hip and with her hand in her father's palm in 1868. Her family was on the run--they were rebels who took a chance on *El Grito de Lares*, trying to free Puerto Rico from Spanish rule. You see, Puerto Rico's not quite in America yet and they sure as hell didn't want to be Spain's.

ELLA

You're sewing in the building today, right? Not near the Hudson?

BELÉN

Ha ha, very funny. Yes, I won't drown the children in the Hudson... But if you find time for the river today, I would appreciate a clam or two or maybe some oysters. Eladio is already down in the Tenderloin, preparing tea for those fancy business men.

BELÉN

He'd love to find some oysters for supper today.

ELLA

For you? I can help with that.

INKWELL

The Tenderloin is the best brothel in New York City, weighing against its competitors at two-square city blocks wide and taking up the length between 23rd street and 42nd street. Full of gambling, dancing, and pretty girls for all tastes. But the prettiest girl in town can be found at Madison Square Garden and 26th street, showing you the direction of the wind with her bare breasts 300 hundred feet from the ground--the gold weathervane Diana, who watches over all vice in this great city. Nothing like the Tenderloin, but I don't want to offend any one's delicate sensibilities talking about the sensuous sin of that area. Let's talk about them oysters! A famous New York City staple--not a delicacy--a staple for rich and poor alike. Ella's got a particular knack for pulling up clams no smaller than a foot.

ELLA

And you tell my daughter she better not fuss when you ask her to help with the basting?

BELÉN

You still trying to get that poor Ida to like sewing?

ELLA

It's a good living.

BELÉN

Making dresses for Macy's ain't all that much money. Being a tailor in your own shop--that's the dream.

ELLA

Belén, who is going to let Eladio own a shop in this country?

BELÉN

Don't know, but God will helps us find a way. And Eladio is not working in that hotel for nothing. We need enough money for the storefront and then my lace making will keep us in business.

ELLA

Teach my daughter that optimism if you teach her nothing else.

BELÉN

She already has that from her Papá.

ELLA and BELÉN embrace.

ELLA

I'm done letting her go to school; they're filling their heads with nonsense.

BELÉN

Ay, my youngest came home telling me to stop putting salt on the food. White people trying to teach our children how to cook. Nonsense.

ELLA

Ida told me they were teaching them how to plant fruits and vegetables.

I did not bring my behind up to this cold, brick city for them to teach my children how to be sharecroppers. She's supposed to learn how to read and add--not how to plant more food for White folks.

BELÉN

Oh, you didn't hear? They're claiming it's for our own good--so our city children don't grow up to be heathens disconnected from the natural world.

ELLA

I heard--just didn't listen. Heathens. Plenty of them are heathens and they are mighty connected to the earth and natural world.

BELÉN

They want our children to know how to plant and cook and clean so all those worthless housewives can have a fresh supply of servants to boss around.

ELLA

That's precisely why Ida is not going back. She's been picking up work at the Market, but I want her to be able to get work in a garment factory soon.

BELÉN

I'll work on her today. She'll be sewing up a storm by the time I'm done with her.

ELLA

Would it be alright if I keep sending her down here for lessons twice a week?

BELÉN

Of course, we'll get her a good job. Let me go check on these children before someone lets the stove go out.

ELLA

Thank you, Belén.

BELÉN

Stop it. You'd do the same for me. You want to thank me. Light a candle and pray for me.

BELÉN exits. ELLA keeps packing,
but stops.

She grabs her bucket, oyster rake,
and fishing line instead and
exits. As she enters the street,
JOEY "DOLCE" enters. He's carrying
a paper cone of sugar and a bag.

JOEY

Hey, Ella! Ella, where you off to so fast? I've got that
cone for you here--any way I can get that basil?

ELLA

Joey, I told you I don't have the time today.

JOEY

You ain't coming down to the market to trade with the rest
of us? I told you there ain't no reason to be scared. Those
cartoons always been around. They be making those cartoons
about me too--making me look like a violent monkey.

ELLA

Please. I don't want to hear about it. I done told you I'm
leaving today. I don't have time. You can get your basil
from plenty other places.

JOEY

Miss Ella, you're too predictable. I'm not trying to bother
you, but I knew riling you up was the only way to get you
to slow down. I got a sugar cone here for your bambinos and
a little bait for your fishing trip today. I know you don't
like to fly fish, but I made it special for you and there's
some worms in this jar here.

ELLA

One day they're gonna catch wise to you stealing from the
factory.

JOEY

It's a little hard to count sugar, like counting grains of
sand. Watch that temper of yours uptown; I won't be around
to look after you.

ELLA

You criticizing my temper like I don't have plenty to be
angry about?

JOEY

Sure, Miss Ella, there's plenty wrong in this world. But don't pretend I don't know you were born with this temper.

ELLA

Will Sam still be able to help me today?

JOEY

Oh, yeah, you know that boy worships you; he'll be here to brave the cable cars with you.

ELLA

I can brave them cable cars by myself. It's the heavy lifting I need done.

JOEY

Well, Sam will be there for certain and so will I.

ELLA

Thank you, Dolce.

JOEY

Don't you start flattering me now, Ella. You don't never call me "dolce." What if it goes to my head?

ELLA

I know it will.

JOEY

Ma'am, before you go--you haven't seen Miss Acoo around yet, have you?

ELLA

She's probably still bringing coal upstairs to start her stove.

JOEY

I got her sugar here to make her candy. She told me her supply is running thin.

ELLA

I'm sure you'll catch her soon.

JOEY

Alright, I'll see you later tonight.

ELLA

Only if you're going to see me uptown.

JOEY

What time do you plan on going?

ELLA

Well, I have to wait on Sam and these new renters are supposed to come by. They did not do me the courtesy of setting a time.

JOEY

How about I keep an eye out in case someone comes by while you're gone?

ELLA

Thank you, Joey.

JOEY

It's a tragedy for the whole neighborhood, losing your restaurant. I wonder what will be there instead.

ELLA

I am entirely sure that I do not care, but they did purchase all the furnishings, even the soda machine, so the odds are good that it will remain a restaurant. Now, Joey, you are making me late.

JOEY

Sorry, Miss Ella. I

ELLA exits. JOEY looks around the street.

INKWELL

Not yet, Joey, but in a brief moment...and there it is.

JOEY hears the sound of high heels on pavement. He hides. CORNELIA enters.

INKWELL

Now if you're thinking that lady's looking too sharp to be wandering around Five Points in the dawning with the working folk, you'd be right. But I'll let you know she's trying her hardest to blend in;

hard to do as the heiress of the family beer brewing fortune. Daddy left the Lower East Side for the Upper East many years ago now. Bet he never imagined how often his daughter would return.

As CORNELIA passes, JOEY reaches out a hand and grabs her wrist. She squeals. He stifles the sound with a kiss.

CORNELIA

How many times have I told you not to do that?

JOEY

I'll stop doing it once you stop getting scared. Trying to toughen you up since you insist on walking through Five Points by yourself at all hours of the day and night.

CORNELIA

You better get used to it, seeing as we are going to be living here soon.

JOEY

I still think we could find another neighborhood.

CORNELIA

I told you I don't want another neighborhood. There's a short list of things my father would not do, but stepping in Five Points is on the top of that list.

JOEY

Is that so? What--he's afraid of the dirt he came up from or the hardened criminals he employs to rough up smaller breweries?

CORNELIA

Worse. He's afraid it will tarnish his precious reputation with the Protestants.

MORGAN enters.

MORGAN

What's this you got against Protestants now, Miss Cornelia?

CORNELIA

Aside from the fact that you're one among their number, only that they hate the rest of us.

MORGAN

So this is the famous Coney Island charmer?

JOEY

What's that supposed to mean?

MORGAN

Not too hard to figure out, even for a dumb factory worker like you. Rumors of your Coney Island conquests are far-reaching. Though I'm not sure you can call them conquests when you paid for it.

JOEY

Cornelia, ain't none of that true now--

MORGAN

Oh relax, Casanova, Cornelia never believes me, even though I have her best interests at heart.

CORNELIA

You have something right there, Morgan. I surely will never believe you.

MORGAN

It was Coney Island where you met, correct? What a romantic place for you two to stoke your romances--among the freaks and grifters and death trap amusements. Do tell me: was it the stench of squalor or the style of it that made your heart pitter-pat for this gutter rat?

CORNELIA

Call it what you will. I call it honest, human, vibrant. But if you hate it so much, why are you always bringing your Tenderloin tricks down there to play carnival games with you?

MORGAN

For the same reason you and Sweet Joey here are always slumming together in the Five Points. Privacy.

JOEY

Privacy? You've done a shit job of maintaining that. We all know about your whores.

MORGAN

Be careful where you sling that word. I may think your talking about Miss Cornelia. And as an officer of the law, I have a duty to detain any woman suspected of prostitution.

EMMA makes her appearance from the top floor of the second tenement.

EMMA

It's not a crime to solicit sex, only to allow it in your building. So I guess you'll have camp out in the tenement and wait to catch them midthrust. Never took you for a watcher, Morgan.

MORGAN

Emma Acoo. Never took you for a watcher either.

EMMA

I watch everything, and it's not hard when you're screaming in front of my building. Run along now, Officer; I think I hear your mother calling. And if you find our landlord, tell him the outhouse should have been emptied about a month ago.

MORGAN

Careful, China doll, I could easily mistake you for a whore.

EMMA

I know you can. You've already done it once. Or was it twice?

CORNELIA

Nasty habit of yours, Morgan.

MORGAN

So daring for a girl with no rights. I can do anything I want to you in this country.

EMMA

I'm a citizen of this country.

MORGAN

The law's not so clear on that point.

EMMA

I was born in this country.

MORGAN

Want to take your chances on that in a court of law? We both know the technicalities don't matter as long as the government sees more yellow than white in you, you mixed race mutt.

INKWELL

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first significant restriction of immigration to the United States. Turns out the Chinese were welcome to build the railroads but not welcome to stay and use them afterwards. Oh, I could say more, but it appears that Dolce is about to lose his temper.

CORNELIA

Joey, you're going to be late meeting Sam at the butcher shop. Why don't you give Emma her delivery?

JOEY

I have plenty of time for all of that.

CORNELIA

Go up and help Emma. We have to get going with our plans for today. I don't want Sam waiting on us.

JOEY

I thought he was meeting us--

EMMA

He is meeting you later, Dolce. She is trying to save me from pouring a chamber pot on this schmuck. You got sugar for me, don't you?

JOEY

Sure do; I'm coming up. (Beat) You and me, pal, we oughta play the finger game one of these days. I'll show you some Italian hospitality.

EMMA

I still know where your mother lives, Morgan. We haven't forgotten that you came from the Points just like us.

JOEY exits. EMMA disappears.

MORGAN

So little Jew boy Sam is helping with your great escape I see.

CORNELIA

We had a deal. Silence for silence.

MORGAN

Ah, yes, but that was when you still had your bartender informant tipping me off to the preachers and teetotalers trying to raid the dens of vice in New York. The unfortunate news of his death did reach me, however, so I am not quite sure what bargain you think is keeping me silent now.

CORNELIA

I have more dirt on you than there are oysters in the bay. How long do you think your Tammany friends will hide your gambling and money laundering after I splash your name all over the papers? They will use you as a scapegoat and feed you to those same preachers you've been hiding from.

MORGAN

How different this day could have been had you merely been more polite to me when we met in Coney Island.

CORNELIA

How polite did you expect me to be after you tried to get your hands under my skirts?

MORGAN

Didn't see you complaining when Sweet Joey Dolce did it.

CORNELIA

When you look in the mirror, what about what you see looking back at you makes you think you can take the same license as the Sweet Sugar Slinger of Five Points?

MORGAN chuckles darkly. He raises his hand as if to strike her.
CORNELIA ducks.

CORNELIA
You have always been sloppy, Morgan. It is a shame. My father liked your mother, but he always knew there was something not right about you. There was a time a thought he might be wrong.

MORGAN
Bitch.

CORNELIA
Have a good day, Mr. O'Grady.

MORGAN exits.

CORNELIA
You can stop hiding now you two. He's gone.

EMMA and JOEY pop up over the windowsill.

JOEY
Let me kill him, love. That is the only wedding present I need.

CORNELIA
Stop being ridiculous. Get down here and wait for Sam with me. Come keep me company, Emma.

EMMA
No, I have too much to do. Already lost a day of business because I ran out of supplies.

JOEY
Oh come on, Miss Acoo. You know Sam will give you all the sugar you need.

EMMA
Get out of my flat, Joey. You know I don't want nothing to do with that sweet boy.

JOEY

Then why'd you call him sweet?

EMMA

Cornelia, control this man.

CORNELIA

Joey!

JOEY

Coming, love.

JOEY disappears from the window.

CORNELIA

If it might sway you at all, I have to say that I agree with Joey. You should give Sam a chance.

EMMA

Oh should I? Like you gave good old Morgan there a chance?

CORNELIA

That is utterly unfair. I know you are not sweet on him, but you do not have to insult the poor butcher's son by comparing him to Morgan. They are not similar in any way.

EMMA

All I meant is we all have our reasons for what we like and don't like and I don't question yours.

CORNELIA

You can question me all you like, but I thought it was obvious why we do not like Morgan O'Grady.

EMMA

I dislike him because he is a glorified thief who calls me a whore simply because I am Chinese. I can not see how that could be your reason.

CORNELIA

How is that not enough considering you are my friend?

EMMA

Not even your sweet Joey is that simple. I am not asking you to tell me your reasons, but do not tell me they are the same as mine.

CORNELIA

He reminds me of my father.

EMMA

What reminds you of him? His cruelty?

CORNELIA

Yes, but also his airs. Morgan was raised not far from here. His mother is still on Orchard Street--it is not the Five Points but it is no Fifth Avenue either. He carries on like he is so much better than everyone.

EMMA

He has to distance himself from us. He knows it was not that long ago that the Irish were outcasts.

CORNELIA

Before that it was the Germans. I don't understand why Morgan and my father have decided to make the world more cruel. We all come from the same dirt; I wish they would nurture the ones sprouting up after them.

EMMA

My mother was that way. An Irish outcast met a Chinese outcast and here I am. Except for all the love I saw between them--for the brief time I had them both--I never understood how they could have come together. Now I suspect she might have been a little like you.

CORNELIA

Like me? Optimistic?

EMMA

Naive.

CORNELIA

Oh, well thank you.

EMMA

I will say this for Morgan, I do not blame him for leaving.

CORNELIA

You would leave the neighborhood?

EMMA

We are not all like you. This place is not only romantic to us; it is necessary. It is what comes before what comes next.

CORNELIA

But you agree--there is some romance?

EMMA

Speaking of romance, please stop encouraging Sam.

CORNELIA

I will if you tell me why you spurn a man who thinks you are the most precious flower in the all world.

EMMA

It is simply not meant to be.

CORNELIA

Because he is Jewish and you are Chinese. What was that you were telling me about your parents?

EMMA

I was telling you they loved each other, but love kept them in the Points. My father broke his body running his laundry service and my mother was a victim of tuberculosis. That's what Five Points romances get you--stuck and then dead. Sam's father has plenty of nice, Jewish girls hoping to marry the kosher butcher.

CORNELIA

He works so hard. I think you'd have a shot to get out together, if that is what you wish.

EMMA

I have my father's candy recipes to help me make my own way out of here. Do not think me ungrateful. Sam helped me when after my mother died--found me a place to leave and helped me practice my English. But gratitude is not love.

BELÉN appears in EMMA's window.

BELÉN

Cornelia!

CORNELIA

Belén, how are you?

BELÉN

I'm better now. I'm borrowing your good for nothing Dolce to fetch me some coal and water from the rear-yard.

CORNELIA

Belén, why do you and Ella like to pretend you don't like Joey?

BELÉN

Because we like to get on your nerves, little rich girl. He will be down when he is done. Emma, how is the cooking coming along?

EMMA

Well! Only a few more dishes to prepare.

BELÉN

Stop distracting her, Cornelia.

BELÉN disappears.

EMMA

You heard the lady. I have candy to make and a feast to prepare. I might even have a cake for you if I get working now.

CORNELIA

Thanks, Emma.

EMMA

Do not thank me yet. Taste it first.

EMMA disappears from view.
 CORNELIA walks the street leisurely. She listens to the sounds of people and children waking and preparing for the day as if it was a symphony. Horses neighing and the clatter of carriage wheels on pavement soothe her. JOEY enters. He kisses CORNELIA.

CORNELIA

Do you hear that?

JOEY

What? The sound of my heart aching to make you my wife?

CORNELIA

No, you hopeless fool. That!

The sound of a carriage going way
too fast along the street.

INKWELL

In all of New York, you best heed the sound of an oncoming carriage. There's no speed limit to follow and no telling what direction of the street they are going up or down or if they'll collide into each other or collide into you trying to swerve away from another carriage.

CORNELIA

Go see what that is. Make sure no one is hurt.

JOEY

Yes, ma'am.

JOEY exits. ELLA enters with cloth
bags full of fish, clams, and
oysters.

CORNELIA

Miss Ella! Let me help you there.

ELLA

Morning, Cornelia.

CORNELIA

How was Oyster Bay?

ELLA

Packed and peaceful, exactly how I like it.

CORNELIA

I thought you weren't trading today.

ELLA

Not here. These are going uptown with me and I will use them to make new friends with my neighbors. Well, some of them are for Belén and Eladio. And Sam.

CORNELIA

Where did you get the ice for all this? I can buy an ice-block for you if you need.

ELLA

Sam is supposed to be bringing it.

CORNELIA

He is such a good boy. (Beat) I know you asked us not to, but I am begging you to stay.

ELLA

Begging me to stay for what? What do you need me here for? Or are you finally going to tell me where you and Joey plan to settle down?

CORNELIA

We are not going far from here. I want to be a part of this community and this community is nothing without you and--

ELLA

Are you going to finish that sentence?

CORNELIA

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. But the neighborhood is safe. The riot was--

ELLA

You are a nice girl, but stop pretending your white friends resorting to violence is something out of the ordinary. Do not insult my husband's memory. It is safer uptown and cheaper. And if I don't leave to be with my own people, I am going to end up with my children at the East River Hotel or at McGlory's. I did not flee the sharecropping of the South to break my back in other ways.

CORNELIA

I meant no disrespect. I will not needle you any more about it, except to say that I was very much looking forward to being your neighbor.

ELLA

You really are going to marry that boy.

CORNELIA

I am. Tonight.

ELLA

And your father will disown you.

CORNELIA

He will. Well, now that I have accepted we will not be neighbors, I will have to find another supplier for my fresh basil.

ELLA

Well not quite yet. Hold on a moment; I have something for you.

ELLA exits. CORNELIA lights a cigarette. A loud crash is heard and she drops her cigarette. SAM enters.

CORNELIA

Mein Gott, Sam, was that you making all that ruckus? What is on your face?

SAM

Oh, paint, Miss. Good afternoon to you.

CORNELIA

Paint? Your father had you paint the butcher shop black today?

SAM

Oh no, Miss. Father would never paint the shop; says the grease stains and blood spatter let people know we're not playing fast and loose with the product. No, I got a little going away present for Ella, but it had to be touched up a little first.

The loud neighing of horses is heard.

CORNELIA

Sam, you did not! I got you that job mixing drinks so you wouldn't have to keep thieving. What makes you think Miss Ella wants a stolen horse and carriage?

CORNELIA begins hitting SAM.

INKWELL

Cornelia, with her romantic sensibilities and moneyed connections, is trying to help Sam woo Emma. He spends his days creating cuts of meat and at night he is creating stimulating liquors composed of any kind of sugar, water, and bitters to make more money all in the name of love.

SAM

Well now, you don't have to tell her it's stolen. How could I let that saintly woman cart all her worldly belongings on a street car--and make her go uptown and downtown two or three times? And with young children? I could not allow it. And me holding her late husband's poetry in my breast-pocket? No, no. I have to honor his memory and this is the best way to do it. Also, the slaughterhouse is donating a variety of meats as a house-warming present and I needed quite a bit of ice to keep it. Couldn't transport that on the streetcar.

CORNELIA

Does Joey know all this?

SAM

It was his idea! He's touching up the paint job on the horses now.

CORNELIA

Joey Dolce, be careful, you scoundrel!

JOEY (OFFSTAGE)

I love you too!

EMMA enters at the same time
trying to sneak out unseen.

SAM

Hello, Shufen!

EMMA

Hello, Sam!

SAM

Where are--

EMMA

Work. Goodbye.

EMMA exits. ELLA enters carrying a simple but beautiful bouquet of flowers and a bundle of basil.

ELLA

Shouting already? Sounds like marriage.

SAM

Good afternoon, Miss Ella. Are you ready to take your next big step?

ELLA

Hello, Sam. Give me one moment. Cornelia, here is your basil and--well, the flowers do not transport so well for replanting. I made this for you; it's not much of a wedding present but you should have something to hold on to in case your hands start shaking as badly as mine did.

CORNELIA

They are so beautiful. Gott bless you. Is Belén coming down?

ELLA

No, she is minding the children for me.

SAM

Oh! Do we have time to play with the children?

ELLA

You are not to play with my children covered in paint the way you are. You are a mess, Sam.

SAM

Not even if I did it all for you?

ELLA

For me? What does paint have to do with me?

SAM

Well, you see, uh--what I meant to say is that--

CORNELIA

Sam brought a horse and carriage to take you to Harlem?

ELLA

Me?

SAM

It's how it should be. I have to respect your husband's memory and see you uptown in proper fashion. (beat) They wrote a nice obituary for him in the *Christian Recorder*.

ELLA

They better have. His poetry practically sold that paper for them. Least they could do for me since I had to deal with the kerosene lamp on at all hours of the night.

SAM

Everybody misses him, Miss Ella.

ELLA

I know, Sam.

She hugs him. EMMA enters running.

SAM

Shufen, back so soon?

EMMA

Sam, I asked you not to call me that.

INKWELL

Emma Shufen Acoo - her full name.

SAM

I know, if it wasn't so pretty I'd probably be able to resist. I'm earning money now mixing drinks at the Hoffman House. I could treat you some night if you like.

EMMA

That's very sweet, Sam, but--

SAM

I also have a present for you.

He goes digging in his
breastpocket.

EMMA

Sam, not now. Cornelia, your father is coming with the
police.

CORNELIA

Scheisse.

INKWELL/ELLA

Language.

CORNELIA

Joey!

JOEY (OFFSTAGE)

Yes, sugar!

CORNELIA

Get over here!

JOEY (OFFSTAGE)

I can't leave these horses to come over and kiss your
lonely lips, sweetheart.

ALL

JOEY!

JOEY (OFFSTAGE)

Coming--

He enters.

JOEY

What's the mat--oh look, a party! Sam, you making the
slings?

INKWELL

Sling was our word for cocktail.

ELLA

The cops are coming, Dolce.

JOEY

Scheisse.

INKWELL/ELLA

Language.

JOEY

How'd you let them follow you, Sam. You're out of practice with the high-speed robbery--

CORNELIA

They are coming for me.

SAM

And look at you, taking the opportunity to criticize my high speed chase techniques when it's your lady who's on the run.

ELLA

High speed robbery--did you steal that carriage, Sam?! And do not like to me.

SAM

Yes, ma'am.

ELLA

I have some words for you later, Sam. For now, Cornelia and Joey should take the carriage and go.

JOEY

We can't go. We're taking you to Harlem.

ELLA

I can take a cable car by myself. Sam, I have your clams and oysters. You can get them from me later tonight. Can someone get these others to Belén?

SAM

I'm not worried about the shellfish. In fact, I don't even want the shellfish. It was supposed to furnish our--

CORNELIA

Sam--quiet!

ELLA

What?

JOEY

You're not taking a cable car.

ELLA

I can ride a cable car alone. It's just going to take me a few extra trips.

JOEY

You were never going to take a cable car. We brought the carriage for you.

ELLA

Sam! Joseph! What makes you think I would want a stolen carriage!

SAM

I knew we shouldn't have mentioned it was stolen.

CORNELIA

Ella, please, get in the carriage and go. You have all your things ready, right?

ELLA

There are a few more things in the backroom.

CORNELIA

Joey, grab them. Sam, get Ella in the carriage.

JOEY

I'm not going without you.

CORNELIA

You have to go. They're looking for me. If they find me and a stolen carriage, there's more trouble for everyone.

SAM

They'll be looking for dappled horses, not black ones. They won't ever know that's the stolen carriage.

CORNELIA

You can't be sure of that.

JOEY

They're looking for you, not me. You go and I'll meet you later. We can go to City Hall tomorrow.

CORNELIA

I love you, darling, but you can't keep your mouth shut. They'll beat you to a pulp the second they know you're the one I'm eloping with. If they don't know already.

EMMA

Morgan is with them. They know.

ELLA

You go. I will stay.

CORNELIA

That's not going to happen.

ELLA

Yes it is. Take my things. I'll distract them, send them the wrong way. I can take my children tomorrow. I can't leave any way. I was supposed to give the keys to the new renter and they didn't show up.

She hands them a small sheet of paper.

ELLA

Go already!

SAM bolts for the carriage. JOEY heads for the apartment.

CORNELIA

Emma, change of plans for the rest of tonight. Think you and Belén can handle the preparations.

EMMA

Makes my job easier honestly.

ELLA

What are you two going on about?

EMMA

Nothing, I'm going to see if I can stall them, throw some trash in the way. Oh! I'll get Belén's kids to help.

ELLA

Be careful.

EMMA exits.

ELLA

Keep that boy out of trouble.

CORNELIA

I thought you always told him I was the trouble he should avoid.

ELLA

I did. Be better.

CORNELIA

Yes, ma'am.

CORNELIA exits.

ELLA

Goddamn you. You won't keep me here any longer. I will leave this place.

INKWELL

I know you will.

SAM enters with a few crates.

ELLA

Sam, give Emma the poem--for me. For Inkwell.

SAM

I will.

ELLA

And tell Cornelia and Joey not to come back here until tomorrow.

SAM

On it.

SAM exits.

ELLA

God bless those love sick fools. They have no idea what they're up against. I don't want to hear any of your wide-eyed optimism. And guess what? I don't have to any more because guess where it all landed you? Dead.

Damn it, Inkwell. I been begging you for months to leave this neighborhood. The heat from the Irish gangs and the Protestants was already singeing our clothes. You had such high hopes for us here. And I know to talk with Joey and Cornelia and Sam you'd think white and black could get along, but they are only dollars and cents away from burning our home down. (Beat.) Your son's already been getting into all your ink pots. I read them that poem you wrote. I really sang it to them because you know I don't like reading out loud. I'll be taking your poems with me, but I can't read them like you do so I'll sing them to our children so they know your words, if not the sound of your voice. Other than that, I'll make my garden and tell the children about you. But it won't be here.

ELLA hums a song to herself.

INKWELL

Hear that? No, not the sound of that carriage careening into the streets. No, I'm talking about the most beautiful sound in New York City--Miss Ella, my wife, fooling with a melody. She's right; she won't be staying here. But she's have one more night in the Points, and one last face off with Morgan.

Morgan never was a match for my Ella. Especially not now. My wife never did have much patience for white folks, but the riot that killed me has proved there was some left to lose and now it is gone. She parades him and his goon squad through every tenement on the block to prove that Cornelia is not in the neighborhood. While she does that, Joey and Cornelia make it to City Hall while Sam is left to move all of Ella's things in. He's happy to do it since there's no coal stove to wrangle and reassemble. Ella eventually makes it back to the restaurant.

SAM enters and waits outside the restaurant. ELLA enters, bone tired.

SAM

There she is.

ELLA

That Morgan. He is spiteful--kept running me around even after he knew they were long gone.

SAM

Belén put your children to sleep. How about something to eat?

ELLA

Yes, I am starving.

SAM

Let's put that restaurant to good use then! You never did let me try that fancy soda fountain you have.

ELLA

Alright, I think you've earned it.

ELLA leads the way into the restaurant; she lights a candle. EMMA, BELÉN, JOEY, and CORNELIA are sitting at a long table covered with a linen cloth; they all shout, "Surprise!"

ELLA

Sweet merciful Jesus! Are you all insane?

JOEY

That's the kind of thanks I would expect from you, Miss Ella.

ELLA

What is going on here?

BELÉN

We're here to send you off in style!

SAM pulls the linen cloth from on top of the table.

CORNELIA

We made you a feast!

JOEY

It's our feast too--

BELÉN

It's a shared celebration.

JOEY

--we did get married after all.

CORNELIA and JOEY kiss.

EMMA

Enough of that. That's what bedrooms are for. We're here to eat.

ELLA

What is all this?

EMMA

Belén and I were able to cook up a few things while everyone was out.

SAM

I brought oyster crackers!

BELÉN

I let this orphan girl borrow all my cookbooks from my days as a domestic. I thought this was a good way to make sure she was reading them.

EMMA

So now everyone gets to taste test if I'll make someone a good wife.

SAM

I know the answer to that.

EMMA

I made the stuffed and baked cod fish, the Alamode Beef, Spinach with Egg sauce, escalloped potatoes, biscuits, the cauliflower fritters, lemon cake and the apple butter custard pie.

BELÉN

I shucked the oysters.

CORNELIA

None of this meat came from a can, did it?

JOEY

What do you have against canned food?

EMMA

People been dying from it, that's what I've got against it.

SAM

It's unnatural--everyone should be able to know where the animal they are eating came from. Don't worry, Miss Ella, my family's butchershop ain't ever leaving 14th street so you always know where to find the real, natural stuff.

JOEY

Tastes plenty fine and natural to me--and it's simple. No more half-beaten to death cows coming off the railways, bruised and sick.

SAM

The problem there is buying that Chicago meat when we have enough good farms right here in Long Island.

JOEY

I'll take the can.

CORNELIA

That's because you have no taste, my dear.

JOEY

I picked you though so I must have some.

They nuzzle each other.

EMMA

Stop with the kissing. You're giving Sam ideas. (To Sam)
Stop looking at me like that.

ELLA

Belén, you gave her all those fancy housewife cookbooks but didn't teach her how to make fried chicken and okra and collard greens.

BELÉN

How can I pretend to teach her something when I know a master like you can teach her so much better. I'm the master of arroz con gandules and Emma says she doesn't want to learn how to cook more rice.

ELLA

Well now we have to eat all this rich, white folks food.

CORNELIA

In case it's that odious to you, Miss Ella, I brought plenty of beer to wash it down with. A few servings of my brew and you won't care how it tastes.

ELLA

Speak for yourself.

JOEY rolls out a barrel of beer.

ELLA

Did you steal this too?

SAM

Why are you looking at me?

ELLA

If you get fired from that job because you stole from the hotel, I am going to get a switch for you.

SAM

I did not steal this!

ELLA

Then where did it come from?

CORNELIA

I brewed it. I have been brewing beer since I was twelve. My mother used to be the brewer in the family, but now my father believes brewing is not the place for women so my good for nothing brothers get to run her beer empire instead of me. So, I have been sneaking off hops and malts from his operation ever since I met Joey, and my first brew is going to be tasted here by my favorite people in honor of you.

ELLA

In honor of you too.

SAM

In honor of love.

EMMA

In honor of overcoming.

JOEY

In honor of tricking Morgan one more time.

INKWELL

In honor of us.

ELLA

Let's eat so I can clean this up.

SAM

What's the rush?

ELLA

This place is no longer mine. It needs to be ready to turn over tomorrow.

JOEY

Don't worry about that Miss Ella.

ELLA

Why? Are you going to worry about it?

CORNELIA

Well, yes, in fact.

ELLA

Excuse me?

CORNELIA

One final surprise: we are the new tenants you were waiting for. We're moving into your apartment and your restaurant. We even got a new sign already. Sam, could you?

SAM reveals a new sign that reads
"The Inkwell."

ELLA

Now I do need a drink.

END OF ACT I

Act II

The Queensbridge Houses, January 6th, 1948

RITUAL TWO

Someone enters and recovers some of the trash from underneath the city. They make a city out the trash. Someone else--a car--drives through the narrow city street. We hear FM/AM radio sounds (music, talking, static). Another someone-car and then another drive through making loud car noises and they demolish the trash city. Simultaneously, LA MUJER takes the crated plant from ELLA's apartment and moves it into WILLIAM and MARY's apartment. The trash city is swept underneath the floor again. Black out except for a light on the plant.

SCENE ONE

The gloaming reveals an apartment on the middle level of a residential building.

THE CASIO RADIO

Bienvenido, Nueva York. If you are not aware, you have entered the Queensbridge Houses, famously the home of Marley Marl -- producer of the Juice Crew, Nas, and LL Cool J. You may know the famous Y-Shape design of these buildings, but you may not know that prior to the 1950s this building was un-segregated. In fact, this "project" was primarily white. For a while. Hallelujah, war is over and to keep the communists from over taking the imagination of its citizens, the United States champions housing development to keep the proletariat happy enough--at least the white proletariat. The suburbs are born.

MARY enters, turns the knob of the The Casio Radio, scanning through static until she hears *un aguinaldo*. She pours rum into a blender. She is dancing a little bit. There are Christmas decorations and a few boxes marked "Cocina." The blender whirls. There are empty cans around the blender. WILLIAM enters and slowly approaches. He waits for the blender to stop, then wraps his arms around her.

MARY

¡Ay, coño, me ca' buen na'! You want me to beat you over the head with this blender.

WILLIAM

What? What did I do?

MARY

You gave me a heart attack! Why would you scare me like that?

WILLIAM

I was trying to love you. I didn't know my love was so terrifying.

MARY

Pendejo. It's very terrifying. You know why? Ask me why!

WILLIAM

Why?

MARY

Because you love everyone so much you invite them to our home for our Three King's Day celebration and I am the only one who has to cook. Terrifying.

WILLIAM

It's our last holiday in the apartment. I want to give a proper goodbye to our neighbors.

MARY

Then you cook it.

WILLIAM

You love cooking. You love parties.

MARY

I love cooking for people when I know what they like. You've invited the United Nations! What am I supposed to cook for *blanquitos*?

WILLIAM

Why do you have to cook different for them? You're an excellent cook.

MARY

They don't believe in seasoning, *amor*, I can't cook a *pernil* without seasoning.

WILLIAM

They're going to love it. And if they don't, they'll be too polite to say so.

MARY

Mphm.

WILLIAM

Please, Maria, be happy. We're moving into a house. We're going to Levittown.

The doorbell rings.

MARY

The door, *Guillermo*, *por favor*.

WILLIAM exits. MARY pours a generous portion of liquid from the blender into a glass.

WILLIAM (OFFSTAGE)

Connie's here!

MARY

Gracias a Dios.

CONNIE AND WILLIAM enter.

MARY

Did you bring it?

CONNIE

I did, but I don't know how it's supposed to taste. I don't understand this dish.

CONNIE produces a meatloaf pan covered with aluminum foil.

WILLIAM

¿Qué es? I mean--what is that?

MARY

Meatloaf.

WILLIAM

Meatloaf?

CONNIE

It was a recipe I found in a magazine during the War. Very popular magazine.

MARY

And the soy sauce?

CONNIE presents a bottle of Oriental Show-Yu soy sauce.

WILLIAM

Soy sauce?

MARY

You said the GI's love it.

CONNIE

They do.

WILLIAM

I'm not putting soy sauce on *pernil*.

MARY

It's not for you. It's for the *blanquitos*.

WILLIAM

You're supposed to put soy sauce on things, like ketchup. I'm not going to let them put soy sauce on *pernil*.

CONNIE

I bought Chop Suey in case they won't eat anything else. Soy sauce goes on the Chop Suey.

WILLIAM

And you were complaining about cooking for people--you didn't mention you got Connie on duty as well.

CONNIE

Isn't Cheryl bringing something too?

MARY

Ay, I need all the help I can get.

WILLIAM

This woman has been trying to make me feel guilty about having the neighbors over. Meanwhile, she has an army cooking for her.

CONNIE

You should feel guilty. There's a reason we've never had a party together.

WILLIAM

We all live in the same arm of the Y on the fifth floor. We're friends.

MARY

We're not friends.

WILLIAM

What's that supposed to mean?

CONNIE

She's right. We're not friends with them. I don't even live here. Mary and I are friends. They are your neighbors.

WILLIAM

You're friends with Mary and you work together. Why wouldn't we be friends with the people we live with?

MARY

Because we're not.

WILLIAM

Cheryl isn't your friend?

MARY

Obviously I'm not talking about Cheryl.

WILLIAM

So Cheryl is your friend, but not James--her husband?

MARY

James is your friend.

CONNIE

James is your military friend.

WILLIAM

No, James is my friend. James, Clark, and I were friends. We are friends, and not because of the military. The military separated us. It said we couldn't fight together, but when we got back, the fighting brought us together again. They are my friends. And their wives are your friends.

MARY

Rosemary is not my friend.

WILLIAM

Ay, Dios Mio--do you want me to cancel? I will cancel.

CONNIE

And waste all this food? You're crazy.

MARY

It's too late to cancel.

WILLIAM

No, it's not. Look we have a telephone and everyone has a telephone. We can call and cancel.

MARY

No.

WILLIAM

Even better--I can knock on their doors. Because they are our neighbors I'll go right now.

MARY

Stop. Stop it right now.

CONNIE picks up the blender and
sniffs it.

CONNIE
Does this have alcohol?

MARY
Yes.

CONNIE
Lovely.

A knock on the door.

MARY
See. It's too late to cancel.

CONNIE
Cheers.

MARY and CONNIE clink glasses
together and drink. WILLIAM goes
to open the door.

WILLIAM (OFFSTAGE)
What did you get recruited to bring, Cheryl?

CHERYL (OFFSTAGE)
Hello to you too.

They enter.

WILLIAM
Where's James?

CHERYL
He'll be late. He's got a meeting at the bank.

WILLIAM
Finally using his GI bill? It's about time.

CHERYL
Hopefully.

CONNIE, CHERYL, and MARY hug.

WILLIAM

You offer her *coquito* before I even get a glass?

MARY

You have hands.

WILLIAM tries to get a glass as
MARY pours for CHERYL. There's a
knock at the door. No one goes for
it. All the women look at WILLIAM.

WILLIAM

Don't rush. I'll get it.

WILLIAM exits.

CLARKE (OFFSTAGE)

Buddy!

ROSEMARY (OFFSTAGE)

It's so nice to see you again, William.

CLARKE (OFFSTAGE)

This is my brother, Wayne.

CHERYL

Did he say brother?

CLARKE, ROSEMARY, WAYNE, and
WILLIAM enter. ROSEMARY and CLARKE
are wearing leis. ROSEMARY is
carrying a pineapple and CLARKE is
holding a plated jello mold. WAYNE
has a case of beer and a case of
Coca-Colas.

ROSEMARY

Thank you so much for having us, Mary.

MARY

Thank you for coming. Connie, I don't think you've met
Rosemary before?

CONNIE

Hi, Connie.

ROSEMARY

Connie--that's such a simple name. Lovely. This is my husband, Clarke, and my brother-in-law, Wayne. Connie, Wayne. Clarke, Connie.

CLARKE

Cheryl, where's James? Did you finally run him off?

CHERYL laughs uncomfortably.

CHERYL

No, he's at an appointment with the bank. It seems they're running behind.

CLARKE

The bank? Are you and James going to join us all in the wonderful world of home ownership?

CHERYL

We're hoping to get our finances in order.

CLARKE

She doesn't want to say. Just like you, William, with your superstitions.

WILLIAM

Ha. Well, those superstitions got me through the war so they have to be worth something.

MARY

What is that?

She stares at the pineapple.

WAYNE

Don't ask.

ROSEMARY

Wayne, you're so funny. Of course you can ask. I figured since we were celebrating an island holiday that we should have some island drinks. I made a Mai Tai!

CONNIE

Just one for everyone?

ROSEMARY

No, no! Well it is one but a very big one. I made ten and then poured them all into this pineapple, which means two lucky people get seconds! Mai Tais for everyone

MARY

What is it?

ROSEMARY

Oh, it's, uh, --I thought you'd know what this was, Mary. Don't they have these in Por-to Ri-co?

MARY

Um...well..no, but that was very thoughtful of you.

Beat.

THE CASIO RADIO

Either in spite of or because of the particularly horrific violence in the Pacific theater of World War II, GI's came back with a craving for the islands flavors--salty and sweet alike. Still, there was very little "craving" for the actual people of the pacific. But Don the Beachcomber provided a comfort with his tiki drinks and recipes that spread from west to east.

WILLIAM

This damn The Casio Radio--has a mind of its own. You know I remember some of those California boys talking about this drink. It's got rum or some other stuff.

ROSEMARY

Yes, rum and simple syrup and lime juice. Oh, I won't bore you with the whole recipe.

WAYNE

And there's Jell-O.

MARY

How do we pour this?

ROSEMARY

Oh. Uh, I guess. Do you have a ladle? Maybe we should spoon it instead of pour it?

WILLIAM

That's a great idea. Mary, why don't you get some glasses?

MARY

Okay. Who wants a glass?

CLARKE

I certainly want to taste what these California dream boats were gushing about.

CHERYL

I'm still finishing this *coquito*.

CONNIE

Me too!

ROSEMARY

Oh--I didn't realize we were already drinking. I'll have some of this co-key-toe.

WILLIAM

I can have *coquito* any day. I'll try some of this Mai Tai with Clarke.

MARY

Can I get you anything, Wayne?

CLARKE

Water for Wayne.

WAYNE

I brought my own.

WAYNE opens a Coca-Cola.

MARY

Oh. How kind of you to bring your own. That's--

CHERYL

Do you need help setting the table?

CONNIE

Yes, let us help put the food out!

MARY directs CONNIE and CHERYL to the location of plates and silverware and platters to be put out.

WILLIAM

Wayne, what do you do?

WAYNE

I drive a taxi.

WILLIAM

How do you like that?

WAYNE

I like it about as much as most things.

WILLIAM

Huh. Okay.

CLARKE

Wayne's my younger brother. He'll never stop being jealous that he wasn't old enough to join us in the war effort. He made eighteen the day we bombed those Japs. No offense, Connie, dear.

CONNIE

I'm not Japanese.

CLARKE

Right, well. There you have it.

ROSEMARY

Connie, I feel terrible. How have we not met? I thought I knew everyone in the building.

CONNIE

I don't live in the building.

ROSEMARY

Oh, well I feel a little better right now. Ha ha. Do you live in Lower Manhattan.

CONNIE

I live in Chinatown.

MARY

Connie and I work in a women's clothing factory in the Lefcourt building.

CLARKE

On 7th Avenue?

WILLIAM

That's right. These ladies are proud union members!

CLARKE

What do you know about unions, buddy?

WILLIAM

I know it comes with benefits. My lady gets to retire!

WAYNE

The International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

ROSEMARY

How did you know that?

WAYNE

I know things, Rosemary. Do you like working under a union?

CONNIE

Like?

MARY

What do you mean like?

WAYNE

Would you rather not have one?

CONNIE and MARY laugh.

CHERYL

You can thank Unions for the actual weekend.

CONNIE

I can thank unions for keeping the doors unlocked. I don't want to die in a fire like those Triangle factory girls.

ROSEMARY

Why would they lock the doors?

MARY

To keep people from stealing. They did it in Puerto Rico all the time. We didn't have a union on the island. It could be better but not having a union is much worse.

THE CASIO RADIO

Operation Bootstrap brought industry to the island of Puerto Rico, but it did not bring a living wage. Don't you know the Constitution doesn't count in Puerto Rico? The industry belonged to the mainlanders. Meanwhile, the island (and the islanders) stayed poor.

CHERYL

We're lucky we can be in our unions. My grandfather left the south because of that damn farmers' union.

THE CASIO RADIO

The Southern Farmers' Alliance.

CLARKE

Are you in a union too?

CHERYL

The American Federation of Teachers.

ROSEMARY

You're a teacher! Which school?

CHERYL

P.S. 15.

ROSEMARY

Oh, our children go to Florence Nightingale. I admire you mothers who work so much. I just don't know how I would get dinner on the table if I had to work.

MARY

Must be so hard with three children.

ROSEMARY

It's definitely trying since our newest addition.

WAYNE

Don't you have three children, Mary?

MARY

Four.

CLARKE

I don't know if I forgot or if our little bundle screams more than the others did.

ROSEMARY

And we're so crowded in this apartment! It's going to be so nice to have a home to live in.

CLARKE

Levittown here we come!

ROSEMARY

Yay! Oh, we'll have to return the favor and throw a holiday party for everyone!

CLARKE

Fourth of July cook out!

WAYNE

Great.

ROSEMARY

Connie, you're invited, of course.

CONNIE

Can't take the subway to Levittown.

ROSEMARY

Oh. Well. Wayne can pick you up in his taxi.

WAYNE

That's an expensive fare from Chinatown.

CLARKE

Come on, Wayne. You could give the lady a discount.

CONNIE

I don't need a discount.

WILLIAM

Cheryl, do you think James would mind if we eat a little before he gets here.

MARY

Oh, I don't think.

CHERYL

We can do the appetizers.

MARY

Are you sure?

CONNIE

Can I serve the eggs?

CHERYL

Of course, we can have eggs and--are these...?

MARY

Pastelitos de carne---um, they're meat pies--and *pasteles*--they're like...*Cómo se dice pasteles en inglés?*

WILLIAM

Ay, no sé. Son como...

CLARKE

This is why they kept us separate in the war. I surely would have gotten my head blown off if Will and I were in the trenches. He'd be telling me shrapnel was coming my way and I'd miss the whole thing in translation.

CHERYL

Then why do you think they separated my husband out? Last time I checked Black isn't a language barrier.

WILLIAM

How are those eggs, Connie?

CONNIE

Good.

ROSEMARY

Are these deviled eggs? Did you make these, Mary?

MARY

No, Cheryl made them.

ROSEMARY

Wow, Cheryl, so fashionable. I'm going to try them--I'm sure they're better than mine.

CLARKE

Where are the kids?

WILLIAM

Oh, my mother has them. They're doing a little *paranda*--uh, a parade to celebrate. I thought it would be nice to have an adult dinner party.

ROSEMARY

That's why we got a sitter. Who's got your little one, Cheryl?

CHERYL

My sister.

ROSEMARY

Older or younger?

CHERYL

Older. She has a few of her own so she doesn't mind.

ROSEMARY

It's so nice to have family close by.

WAYNE

Oh yeah. It's so nice to be close to family.

ROSEMARY

Wayne moved in with us about a year ago. He was living in Connecticut and needed a change of scenery.

MARY

How do you like New York?

WAYNE

Fine.

CONNIE

Fine? What is that supposed to mean.

ROSEMARY

Oh, well, New York is so...crowded and it can be dirty.

CLARKE

There's a reason we're all going to the 'burbs.

MARY

It's so exciting here.

WILLIAM

Exciting?

MARY

We're not all *jibaros*--I'm sorry--uh, country people like you.

WAYNE

Country-bumpkins.

MARY

Right. That.

CONNIE

I love New York. My family has been here for decades. I've never wanted to leave.

CHERYL

Are you still saving to open that restaurant, Connie?

CONNIE

Getting closer everyday.

CLARKE

Well, that's a good reason to be here. Business. But the business of raising children?

ROSEMARY

Exactly. They need space, fresh air. Plus, there's so many people here; you never know who's living next to you.

CLARKE

Better to have a fence between you at least.

WILLIAM

You're saying you don't like the elevator rides with people sweaty from work, Clarke?

ROSEMARY

I'm saying I don't. It hasn't been the same here since the Depression. If you ask me, that slum clearance project didn't clear enough.

CHERYL

My family lost their home to that project.

WAYNE picks up some *pasteles* and stuffs it in his mouth.

MARY

Ay, um...you might want some ketchup.

WILLIAM

Ketchup?!

WAYNE

Why? I like it as is.

MARY

You like it?

CLARKE

Wayne doesn't like anything. Let me try some.

CLARKE takes a large forkful of *pasteles*. He clearly does not like it.

CLARKE

Oh, yes, this is...good. Very good.

CHERYL

Uh huh. I'll try it with some ketchup.

MARY

Connie?

CONNIE is stuffing her face with eggs.

CONNIE

No, thank you.

A knock at the door.

CLARKE

James! You're late.

WILLIAM

Thank God.

ROSEMARY

What was that, Will?

WILLIAM

Oh--nothing. I said I'd get the door.

WAYNE

No, you didn't.

CHERYL

I'll get it.

WILLIAM

You're our guest. Sit.

MARY

Let her get the door. Maybe she wants to kiss her husband without you watching.

WILLIAM

You never want to kiss me when I come home.

MARY

Maybe you should ask yourself why that is.

ROSEMARY

You two are so feisty.

CHERYL

I'll be right back.

CHERYL exits.

CLARKE

I always know when our children have been playing together. The boys come home saying the darndest things. They're always talking gibberish.

CONNIE

Well, it's not gibberish. They're trying to speak Spanish.

CLARKE

Right. Right--but when they try it sounds like gibberish.

CHERYL and JAMES enter.

CLARKE

There he is.

MARY

Thank you for coming, James.

WILLIAM

Glad you could make it.

JAMES

Glad to be here. If you've all been waiting on me, I apologize.

CONNIE

Don't apologize. Now we can eat!

ROSEMARY

To speak truly, we were going to begin without you.

CLARKE

But only the appetizers.

ROSEMARY

It was a little naughty of us.

WAYNE

He was late.

ROSEMARY

Wayne.

JAMES

He's exactly right. My mother would not approve of my tardiness. I promise you it was not my intention.

CHERYL

How was your appointment at the bank?

JAMES

We'll talk about it later. No one wants to talk finances at the dinner table.

CLARKE

Hardly finances--good old Uncle Sam giving us our reward for fighting off Communism. Let us know if we should be celebrating.

ROSEMARY

Oh yes, I'd love to know if we'll be neighbors in Levittown!

JAMES

I'd prefer to keep this to myself until Cheryl and I can discuss it--in private.

ROSEMARY

Oh, please, James. Tell us so we can toast to the future of our friendship.

WAYNE

Leave him alone, Rosemary.

ROSEMARY

You are a guest here. Please stop embarrassing me.

MARY

It's fine.

WILLIAM

I'm with James here. Mary would have shown me what for if I had told a whole table about our life before I spoke with her. Right, Mary?

MARY

Right.

CHERYL

Mary, let me help you put the rest of this food out.

MARY

Cheryl, *calma*.

ROSEMARY

I can help.

MARY

Oh. Okay. Let's get the meatloaf.

MARY and ROSEMARY exit.

CLARKE

Meatloaf? Who can we thank for that treat?

WILLIAM

Connie made it.

WAYNE

Is meatloaf a traditional dish for Three King's Day?

CONNIE

No.

WAYNE

Why are we eating it then?

CONNIE

You are rude.

CLARKE

Excuse me?

WAYNE

Yes. I am. I didn't want to be here.

CONNIE

Well, I didn't want to make a meatloaf but we did make it because you are here so you can at least try it.

CLARKE

I love meatloaf.

ROSEMARY enters

ROSEMARY

And Cheryl made Deviled Eggs!

JAMES

Did you now? Full of surprises. Is that Budweiser?

WAYNE

Sure is.

JAMES

May I?

WILLIAM

You like that stuff?

JAMES

I like it alright.

WILLIAM

Flavorless.

MARY and ROSEMARY enter.

MARY

Don't pay him any mind. If it's not *malta*, he doesn't want anything to do with it.

JAMES

Malta? They don't even put alcohol in that.

WILLIAM

You know I always have to stay sharp.

MARY

Well, now that we're all met. Let's say grace. Oh, Rosemary, would you like to check on the baby before we settle in?

ROSEMARY

Check on the baby? Whatever for? We have the sitter all night.

MARY

Of course, I thought you might want to feed the baby.

CHERYL

I remember how much it hurt if I waited too long to feed our Sylvia.

ROSEMARY

(laughing) Oh, I don't breastfeed.

MARY

Really?

CHERYL

That makes sense.

MARY

But, the formula is so expensive.

ROSEMARY

But the convenience. It's simply more fashionable not to.

WAYNE

Don't you know that's what matters most, Mary? Staying fashionable.

CONNIE

Who's going to say grace?

CHERYL

I can.

Everyone arranges around the
table, clasps hands, and bows
their heads.

CHERYL

Bless us, oh Lord, for these thy gifts which we are about
to receive from thy bounty through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

ALL

Amen.

WILLIAM

Let's eat.

CLARKE

Oh, if I might, before we dig in. A toast!

WAYNE

For Christ's sake. Let us eat.

ROSEMARY

Wayne.

MARY

It's okay. It's okay. Does everyone have a full glass for
the toast?

Everyone except for Wayne murmurs an acknowledgement ("yes," "thank you," "a little more to top off," etc.)

CLARKE

A toast to family and friendship!

ROSEMARY

Here here!

CHERYL and CONNIE snicker.

CLARKE

James, are you still working in that garage?

JAMES

For now.

CLARKE

We'll have to send Wayne to you the next time his cab needs a tune up.

WAYNE

I can take care of my own car.

ROSEMARY

Don't be rude.

JAMES

Got to be careful when you do your own repairs, but I'm sure Wayne knows what he's doing.

CONNIE

I can't imagine having a car. Seems like too much hassle.

CHERYL

They're not exactly a picnic. We're thinking of selling ours.

CLARKE

Can't do that if you're headed to the suburbs!

JAMES

Well, my sister lives in the Bronx so we're not sure if we're going to get rid of it.

MARY

Do you take that awful bridge to get there?

WILLIAM

Awful bridge?

MARY

Oh you know! The Tri-borough bridge.

JAMES

We do sometimes. What's so terrible about that bridge?

MARY

It's cursed.

WILLIAM

Ay, amor. She's joking.

MARY

I am not. They broke ground on that bridge the day before the Stock Market Crash.

CONNIE

I remember my mother used to call it the Bridge to Nowhere.

WAYNE

Everyone called it that.

CHERYL

I don't know much about the bridge, but I'm not a fan of the man who built it.

CLARKE

Robert Moses? What's there bad to say about him? He's a genius.

CHERYL

Sure.

WAYNE

The parkways are nice.

ROSEMARY

Wayne has something nice to say.

CHERYL

I'm sure he does.

CLARKE

What am I missing, Cheryl?

CHERYL

Nothing. Nothing. I can't quite put my finger on it; the man simply rubs me the wrong way.

RADIO

Cheryl and James and Maria--not William, he's a little blind some times in these matters--knew exactly what they didn't like about Moses. It seemed every project he spearheaded found a way to destroy their friends neighborhoods. The knew something was fishy about that Southern State Parkway. You may have heard, out there, that bridges were built low over that parkway to keep public buses from going through. Can't have those poor Blacks and "Porto Ricans" traveling down to Jones Beach after all.

Can't have them in the pools the WPA built either. Moses kept the pool at Jones Beach colder too--Black people don't like the cold (or so he thought) so it helped to keep them out. All this according to his biographer, Robert A. Caro. So I'll let you decide if you believe him or not. But I'll add one thing--would you trust a man who championed building highways but didn't even drive?

MARIA

Let's talk about something else.

RADIO

Oh, one more thing. They don't even know that the Cross Bronx Expressway Moses is soon to build will destroy the neighborhoods of their friends and families--some might even say it contributes to why the Bronx burns. Don't worry about Lower Manhattan though. Jane Jacobs will keep those neighborhoods safe for you. But back to 1948.

WILLIAM

This radio.

CONNIE

Maybe the Three Kings will bring you a new one.

ROSEMARY

Is that what they do?

CHERYL

That's what they did for Jesus.

CLARKE

Brought him a radio?

JAMES

No, gifts.

CLARKE

Of course!

ROSEMARY

Oh, oh, let's all say what we want to get from the Three Kings!

MARY

That's not--

WILLIAM

Great idea. Uh, I'll start. I would like a plane ticket to Puerto Rico.

WAYNE

Marijuana.

ROSEMARY

Wayne!

WAYNE

What? Do you want to go next, Rosie?

ROSEMARY

I--well I---maybe a dishwasher for the new house.

WILLIAM

Better write that down, Clarke.

CLARKE

Who's next? Connie!

CONNIE

An extra day off so I can sit in the movie theater all day.

CHERYL

What would you watch?

CONNIE

Lady in the Lake.

JAMES

A mystery--nice choice.

WAYNE

What's the point in watching a mystery more than once.

CONNIE

You pick up on new details every time.

ROSEMARY

Please, excuse him. Connie, pick who goes next.

CONNIE

Cheryl.

CHERYL

Oh, dear. Um... maybe some perfume.

WILLIAM

Frankincense or myrrh?

Cheryl laughs.

CHERYL

How about you, Clarke?

CLARKE

A new baseball bat and glove.

MARY

That was quick.

ROSEMARY

It sure was. He's got a birthday coming up I suppose.

CLARKE

Oh, I suppose I do. You're next, Mary.

MARY

Oh, the same as, William. A trip back home.

WAYNE

I thought those flights were cheap.

MARY

Well, they aren't very expensive, but we had to put quite a lot of money away for the house.

CLARKE

Right, of course.

MARY

James, it's your turn.

JAMES

All I want is a smile on Cheryl's face.

CHERYL

You're making me blush.

JAMES kisses CHERYL sweetly,
delicately.

CLARKE

You want a smile on her face, hurry up and get her into a house.

ROSEMARY

No, hurry up and get her a kitchen aid. Changed my life that little gadget!

CLARKE

And a house to put that gadget in.

CHERYL

Yes, maybe one day.

CLARKE

You know what. I propose another toast to--to a new beginning for all of our families, whether it's in Levittown or one of the other fine sub--

JAMES

Who is going to Levittown with you?

CLARKE

William and Mary.

JAMES

Excuse me? You--how did you get a loan approved?

ROSEMARY

What do you mean? The G.I. Bill, of course.

JAMES

No, no, that's not--William, how?

WILLIAM

Maybe we should talk about this later, James. If you're having some difficulty--

JAMES

Having some difficulty? Tell me how you did it!

CHERYL

James, honey, are you okay?

JAMES

No. No I am not okay. I was not at the bank late. My trip to the bank was very quick. Too quick, in fact. They declined our mortgage application so quickly and succinctly that I thought I should look into it. So I went to the NAACP office to see if they knew anything and they did. Our application for a loan for a home in Levittown was denied because of the covenant.

ROSEMARY

Covenant?

JAMES

Don't you dare. Yes, the covenant, Rosemary.

CHERYL

James!

JAMES

Cheryl, we won't be moving to Levittown. They denied our loan application because Levittown does not allow Black people to live in Levittown. So how are you moving to Levittown, William?

CLARKE

But William isn't black.

WAYNE

He's not white either.

JAMES

I'm not only talking about William.

MARY

Me? Are you talking about me?

JAMES

You're his wife, aren't you? How are you going to live there with him? How are your children?

MARY

No entiendo eso. No soy negra. Guillermo, explicalo.

CONNIE

Maybe we should leave.

WAYNE

I'm not going anywhere.

JAMES

How did you do it? You're not allowed!

MARY

What does he mean "we're not allowed?"

WILLIAM

We're not married.

ROSEMARY

What?

MARY

Yes, we are.

WILLIAM

We were married in Puerto Rico. We never got an official marriage certificate. When the first bank denied us, I asked around and someone told me that maids were allowed.

MARY

Maids?

CHERYL

Black maids. Only Black maids are allowed to live in Levittown. He made you his live-in maid.

The silence is an abyss.

CONNIE

We should go. Now.

ROSEMARY

We...had a lovely--

CHERYL

Rosemary, please.

CLARKE

Good night, folks.

CLARKE ushers ROSEMARY out. WAYNE piles two *pasteles* into his hand.

WAYNE

I had fun.

CLARKE, ROSEMARY, and WAYNE exit.

CONNIE

I will see you at work, Mary.

CHERYL

Good night. Come on, James. Let's go.

CHERYL, JAMES, and CONNIE exit.
There is only a table of food
between WILLIAM and MARY.

MARY

¿Qué has hecho?

WILLIAM

I tried. Mary, I tried.

MARY

What have you done?!

The abyss deepens. The Casio Radio
screams white noise.

END ACT II

Act III
The PitMaster - Lower Manhattan, 2018

RITUAL THREE

Bright, blinding lights. The sounds of police sirens, fire alarms, rap music, a Drag Show MC. Three people slice and share an apple. A man enters, smiling. He offers a heart made out of dollar bills. They give him an apple slice.

The Wall Street bell and the sound of a calculator printing paper are heard dully in the background and builds to a crescendo under the following: the piece of apple is cut into infinitesimal pieces and is handed out to a repeating line of people. Giant paper zeros, ones, and bright red hearts (cut out like chains of paper dolls) begin to fall from the sky.

The apple people are drowning. LA MUJER walks across the stage with an umbrella. The money man exits. Some of the drowning people are able to get under the umbrella and exit with LA MUJER.

The plant that glows falls to the ground and smashes.

SCENE ONE

The PitMaster service bar. There are garnishes on the corner of the bar, a few stools can be seen, but the bar extends beyond our sight.

There are shelves for glassware and whiskey. Across from the service bar opening is a beverage station with a soda machine, industrial sized coffee and tea brewers, and a old, beat-up espresso machine. MULBERRY is polishing wine glasses. CARNEL is posted up against the bar. NAOMI is pulling an espresso shot and sweeping her area. The sounds of printers spitting food and drink orders is ever present.

Off to the side, CASSANDRA sits. She is repotting the glowing plant and eating apples and oysters.

CARNEL

Girl, I do not know. I took the cut last night. Me and this queen.

NAOMI

Too many queers on the floor last night I guess.

CARNEL

I call it discrimination.

NAOMI

So we went to the Eagle to testify about it.

MULBERRY

Damn, ya'll had the energy for the Eagle?

CARNEL

After free drinks from that cutie across the street and a shot of adrenaline from skipping out of work.

MULBERRY

Surprised they didn't make more cuts tonight.

NAOMI

This magical, mystical--

LOS enters with a crate of loose beers.

LOS

Mythical--

NAOMI

Tuesday pop.

MULBERRY

Fuck Tuesday. Fuck the summer.

LOS

Amen. Coming under.

CARNEL moves so LOS can slip under
the bar.

LOS

Anyone seen Cassandra lately?

CARNEL

She was at pre-shift--

TODD SMITH enters followed by
AMOS. CARNEL scatters. NAOMI keeps
tidying her station. LOS peels off
to put beer away. MULBERRY stays
exactly where she is.

TODD

Man, I just think if we're going to be serving it, we
should put Angel's Envy on the list.

AMOS

Yeah, yeah. I mean Katherine thinks the Kentucky bourbon
list is beefy enough but it's a serious exclusion.

TODD

I mean Seth knew how to make a beverage program;
Katherine's great but I think she changed some things that
weren't broken.

TODD starts to lean on the bar.

MULBERRY

Todd Smith, you need to ask me something?

TODD

Oh, no, man, just waiting on my drinks.

MULBERRY

You know the rule--no hovering at the bar. Also, I didn't get a ticket.

TODD

Oh--oh, yeah, man, I'll just, uh, resend it.

AMOS

Mulberry.

MULBERRY

Amos.

AMOS exits. LOS sneaks up beside
MULBERRY.

LOS

Ticket's right here.

MULBERRY

I know. It's a game I like to play with him. Make him resend it and void it off. Pretentious ass.

NAOMI

What was he talking about?

MULBERRY

The whiskey of the week--he doesn't like it because it's aged a second time in cherry wood barrels.

NAOMI

He's like a frat boy and a hipster had a baby and it makes me want to vomit.

MULBERRY pours a glass of wine.
CARNEL reenters.

CARNEL

Is that for me, sweet thing?

MULBERRY

You know it.

CARNEL

Lord, I can't stand that boy.

NAOMI

I haven't forgiven him since he talked shit about that Brooklyn sour. That shit is my jam.

CARNEL

You know that boy only likes what he thinks is the next big trend in alcohol or something completely inaccessible.

NAOMI

Like that American Single Malt we tried.

LOS

The one that was peated from Islay?

NAOMI

Mhmm. Straight gasoline.

CARNEL

Blech.

CARNEL exits.

NAOMI

Did you hear Cassandra's song?

MULBERRY

Song?

LOS

Oh, yeah, it's good.

The following song is in the tune of the verse from Foreigner's "I Wanna Know What Love Is."

NAOMI

"I don't wanna close with Todd Smith. I don't wanna do it."

LOS does the bass sound.

LOS

It's so good.

MULBERRY

That's perfect. Tell me that's the whole song.

NAOMI

Oh, yeah. Just repeat until you can bear to be around him.

MULBERRY

So it's the song that never ends?

CARNEL reenters.

LOS

Eh--speaking of. Cassandra is...?

CARNEL

She's on her break. Closing tonight.

LOS

But where she been? I feel like she disappeared.

CARNEL

She took some kind of personal leave; I thought she was going to quit.

LOS

Quit?

NAOMI

I heard the same.

LOS

Why?

NAOMI

Don't know.

CARNEL

I was hoping she booked something.

NAOMI

I'm surprised she's back.

MULBERRY

Why?

NAOMI

She was in some kind of mood when I texted her last--
sounded a little unhinged.

LOS

She always sounds a little unhinged.

CARNEL

That's why I love her.

LOS

Me too.

CARNEL

Oh, damn it, I got sat.

NAOMI

Oh, here she comes. Oh shit.

MULBERRY

Oh shit is right.

LOS

What?

NAOMI

She's got that face on.

MULBERRY

That face she thinks is concealing her bubbling rage but is
doing nothing of the sort.

LOS

She's so cute.

MULBERRY

Go change the keg already.

LOS exits. IVORY enters.

IVORY

Well the Jazz club is dead, and I've been expoining for the
last fifteen minutes because the machismo never rests.

MULBERRY

Oh the woes of management. Salaried life must be so hard.

IVORY

You make more than me and you know it.

MULBERRY

I do.

NAOMI

What's up on the line?

IVORY

Oh, whoever was on fry at lunch didn't detail the station right, and the special for tonight has to be fried, so the line's backed up because Crystian's behind on prep and Luis is on 'Que today and he lost his temper so Chef is taking them both aside because there was almost a fist fight.

NAOMI

Another exciting day at the PitMaster.

MULBERRY

Oh she is pissed.

IVORY

Who?

CASSANDRA enters, walks determinedly passed them tying an apron, and exits.

IVORY

Oh. Yeah. Wait. She's been off for like a week. What's she got to be pissed about?

NAOMI

Being here.

MULBERRY

She's been gone that long?

LOS enters with five bottles of wine.

IVORY

Yeah. So I repeat: what's she got to be pissed about?

LOS

Who's pissed?

IVORY

Wait for it.

They all stare in the distance.
CASSANDRA passes tying her apron
on.

LOS

Oh shit.

NAOMI

Los! You still trying to move?

LOS

Yeah, who's asking.

NAOMI

Me! I have a friend trying to move to the city.

LOS

What's the timeline?

NAOMI

Um...doesn't matter. He can be ready with the money in a
month.

LOS

So like two months or longer? I can do that. My lease is up
in three. Neighborhood?

NAOMI

I think he was looking Harlem? Are you still looking there?

LOS

Yeah. Harlem or the Heights. But I don't know if I can
afford Harlem any more.

NAOMI

Come to Brooklyn. Be my neighbor!

LOS

Hell no. Your commute is trash.

IVORY

Everyone's commute is trash.

LOS

Are you still in Queens?

IVORY

Jackson Heights forever! I've been in my place for five years and my landlord only owns one building. I'm never leaving.

MULBERRY

Jealous.

NAOMI

Yeah, my building is owned by a giant management company. I'm lucky the super lives in the building or nothing would get fixed.

IVORY

Queens is where it's at.

LOS

Yeah, but it's two trains to get here. My commute is one train--as good as it gets.

NAOMI

Bitch, it's one train and three avenue five block walk. It gets better than that.

LOS

Not for people like us.

MULBERRY

Yeah, Manhattan is for the ruling class. Those here to serve gotta live that outer borough life.

IVORY

I gotta get a better job.

MULBERRY

Oh, Cassandra's on the floor.

CASSANDRA enters.

LOS

Hola, mama.

CASSANDRA

Hola, corazón. Como estás?

LOS

Bien. Bien. Dondé estabas?

CASSANDRA

Ay, I don't want to talk about it.

LOS

Heard.

He exits.

IVORY

I should make sure Chef hasn't killed any one. Glad you're back, Cass.

IVORY exits.

MULBERRY

I thought you were with your man in Philly?

CASSANDRA

I was supposed to be. Well, I was but he booked a film so it was mostly me and Philly and a literary rabbit hole that I won't be able to stop talking about so don't ask me because if I start talking I won't be able to do my job.

NAOMI

Deal.

MULBERRY

What film did he book?

CASSANDRA

Some Lifetime movie, supporting role thing. Got laid every night but not much more than that.

MULBERRY

Fuck.

CASSANDRA

Yep. So I apologize in advance--I may have come back a more irritable human than I left. You went to see your man too, right, Mulberry?

MULBERRY

I did. It was a success. Except for his family asking me when I'm moving out to Buffalo.

NAOMI/CASSANDRA

Gross.

NAOMI

Would you do it?

MULBERRY

Don't know. The theater scene out there isn't insignificant.

CASSANDRA

As I'm sure they kept reminding you.

MULBERRY

Oh yeah. (Beat.) I don't know. I'm just not done with the city yet.

NAOMI

Well, it's sure not done with us.

MULBERRY/CASSANDRA

Amen.

NAOMI

Why do you look like you want to vomit, Cass?

CASSANDRA

Controlling my rage.

MULBERRY

Well, I've missed you.

CASSANDRA

Oh you know I always miss you guys. Just not the entitled fucks who eat here.

NAOMI

Oooh, let's do the tally tonight!!

MULBERRY

Yes, I've already gotten one "sweetheart" tonight.

MULBERRY feeds a piece of paper
from the POS printer and tears it
off. She writes.

MULBERRY

Alright, let's see how many "sweethearts," "babys," and
"sugars" we get tonight.

NAOMI

Sugar. That's a rare one.

CASSANDRA

Let's see what lucky girl gets that oh so rare form of
sexual harassment.

CARNEL enters.

CARNEL

My beautiful, Boricua. I've missed you.

CARNEL and CASSANDRA kiss cheeks.

CARNEL

You get what you needed from that man.

CASSANDRA

At least twenty orgasms in five days so--yes, but somehow
no.

NAOMI

How are you still grumpy?! I'm a lesbian and I've had
partners who couldn't make that quota.

CASSANDRA

Ugh. Okay, I'll tell you.

CARNEL

Gonna have to wait till you're done with table 11.

CASSANDRA

Fuck. I've been sat? How do I always get sat the second I step on the floor.

She exits. MULBERRY holds up a ticket.

MULBERRY

What does this mean, Carnel?

CARNEL

Girl, I don't know. They want to replace the bourbon in the Seelbach with vodka.

NAOMI

Ew.

MULBERRY

So they want champagne and bitters with extra alcohol.

CARNEL

I tried to tell them.

MULBERRY

Whatever. But please, if they hate it, make them drink it. Do not comp it off.

AMOS walks through this conversation.

AMOS

What's this now?

CARNEL

Oh, nothing.

CARNEL takes his tray of drinks.
Everyone returns to "busy" work.

AMOS

Remember: if you have time to lean, you have time to clean.

He exits.

MULBERRY and NAOMI work: polishing
glasses, cleaning their station.
CASSANDRA enters.

CASSANDRA

Heads up: Amos is already panicking about nothing.

MULBERRY

Great. He just came by here and passive aggressively
scolded us.

NAOMI

He's the worst!!

MULBERRY

Not to mention a condescending misogynist.

NAOMI

At least he's not a sexually abusive misogynist.

CASSANDRA

Thank God for small blessings.

MULBERRY is mixing drinks. CARNEL
enters.

CASSANDRA

Where did you take your break? I was looking forward to our
coffee break together.

CARNEL

I didn't take a break.

CASSANDRA

What? Aren't you closing with me?

CARNEL

Girl, I only swap with a closer on the days I have therapy.

CASSANDRA

Fuck me. Who do you usually swap with? Who the fuck am I
closing with?

CARNEL

Todd Smith.

CASSANDRA

No. No no no no no.

MULBERRY

Eww.

CARNEL

Sorry, boo boo.

CARNEL takes his drinks and exits.

CASSANDRA

I wouldn't have had added the double shot to my chai if I knew that.

NAOMI

Why not?

CASSANDRA

Because the caffeine makes me jumpy--and more likely to punch that asshole in the face when he's watching baseball instead of doing his closing side work.

MULBERRY

I'll be here with you.

CASSANDRA

Thank god.

MULBERRY

But I didn't have any coffee.

NAOMI

I can't remember if I did a test shot of the espresso, would you like to help me with that?

MULBERRY

Ooooh, I think I might.

NAOMI

I mean it's not as good as Black Press, but...

TODD and AMOS enter.

TODD

This morning I was rocking to DMX while sipping my chicory infused coffee--I am the face of gentrification.

TODD and AMOS exit.

MULBERRY

Steady, girl. No murders on camera.

CASSANDRA

I hate him. I fucking hate him.

MULBERRY

The thing is--he really think he's funny.

NAOMI

Wanna sing the song with me?

CASSANDRA

Yes. Yes. Please before I slit my ankles and cha cha to death.

NAOMI

"I don't wanna close with Todd Smith. I don't want to do it."

CASSANDRA

"I don't wanna close with Todd Smith. I don't wanna do it!!!" Damn it--here comes Amos.

She grabs her drinks. MULBERRY and NAOMI back to business. LOS rolls through. AMOS enters and exits. CARNEL enters.

CARNEL

Naomi, I know you're on barista tonight, but could you please help a sister out?

NAOMI

Depends.

CARNEL

Marc is in my section and he is moving slower than molasses in winter.

NAOMI

Marc is the worst.

CARNEL

And you are an angel.

NAOMI

Alright, what table?

CARNEL

54! Bless you.

NAOMI

Make sure nobody leaves my milk out.

NAOMI exits.

CARNEL

Honey, what have you been saying to sell this special to people?

MULBERRY

Me? I'm the bar. I don't sell specials unless someone asks.

CARNEL

Why am I still a lowly server? I keep trying to sell these fried spare ribs and people keep looking at me like I'm offering them HIV BBQ sauce instead.

TODD enters.

TODD

Having a hard time with the special?

CARNEL

I'm not, honey; our guests are.

TODD

Yeah, I keep mentioning it pairs well with the Other Half IPA to my bro tables and they are literally eating it up. I put like ten orders in.

MULBERRY

Oh, so you're the reason fry is exploding.

LOS and NAOMI enter.

NAOMI

54 is clear and I watered 57. Oh, and 56 wants another of whatever bourbon he was having.

CARNEL

Bless you.

CARNEL exits. CASSANDRA enters without acknowledging TODD; he follows suit.

LOS

Were you talking about the special?

MULBERRY

Yeah, it shouldn't be that hard to sell. It's fried food.

CASSANDRA

You know people in this place like to act all bougie like they're not here eating the food my enslaved ancestors invented, but if you offer them a plate of cheese fries with bacon and jalapeños that's more worth their money than a delicately fried beef spare rib glazed with a sweet and slightly tangy homemade sauce.

TODD

Carnel needs that pitch.

MULBERRY

Were you looking for a ticket, Smith?

TODD

No, dude. My section is dead.

MULBERRY

Oh, well, Amos was looking for someone to clean the lowboys in the kitchen. Why don't you go see if you can help him?

NAOMI

I can get him for you.

TODD

No, no, dude. I'll find him.

TODD exits.

LOS

Anyway, I heard we were 86 those spare ribs.

MULBERRY

No one told me that.

CASSANDRA

Noooo! Noooo! Don't tell me that.

NAOMI

Did we run out already?

LOS

That's what I heard.

NAOMI

Hey, Cass. Table 18 is waving you down.

MULBERRY

I fucking hate the wavers.

CASSANDRA

I fucking hate this table. I have to check on this special situation. I can't deal with them right now.

LOS

I can check on it for you.

CASSANDRA

Really?

LOS

Of course, amor.

CASSANDRA

Thank you!

MULBERRY

Did you finish the ginger syrup?

LOS

It's cooling.

MULBERRY

Mmmm. It better be, lover boy.

IVORY enters.

IVORY

86 special.

CASSANDRA

No, is it sold out? Please if I tell table 21 something else is 86'd they're going to eat me instead.

IVORY

The kitchen can't handle the orders. Talk to chef maybe he can make one last order for you.

CASSANDRA

I'm putting in an order of free biscuits for them first. They are heinous.

IVORY

I'll comp it off later.

CASSANDRA

Thank you!

CASSANDRA darts off.

IVORY

I love our back of house but they are driving chef bananas.

MULBERRY

And water is wet.

LOS

What's the problem?

IVORY

Oh, come on. We all know we hire too many green horns. They've never had a job with more demanding plating so they lose all sense of structure when you throw a special at them. Then, by the time they're trained, they go off to one of our partner restaurants to makes more money and we end up promoting another porter. And the cycle continues.

NAOMI

I thought you liked that about this place?

IVORY

I do. I'm just overdue for a Oaxaca Old Fashioned and a day at the beach. Also, Chef is the biggest baby of them all and Amos refuses to confront him.

NAOMI

Gotta love a sausage fest.

LOS

I thought I took offense to that, but I don't. You're the best manager we have, Ivory, and it's mostly because you don't have a penis.

MULBERRY pulls a small plastic cup from behind the bar. She pours the drink she was shaking into it and hands it to IVORY.

MULBERRY

Oops. I made a regular margarita instead of a spicy one.

IVORY

You are the real MVP of this restaurant.

IVORY exits.

NAOMI

So can I volunteer to save the next mistake?

MULBERRY

Do I look like someone who wants to lose her job?

NAOMI

You gave one to Ivory!

MULBERRY

Who is a manager. Who, if we play our cards right, will give us all shift drinks at the end of the night, but who won't if she finds out I've been helping you drink on the job.

NAOMI

You are the real MVP.

LOS

Think chef will let us eat the leftover spare ribs since the special blew up in his face?

MULBERRY

Ask Cass to ask him, he's obsessed with her.

NAOMI

I'm obsessed with her.

LOS

Back off.

NAOMI

Intimidated by my high frequency queer vibes?

LOS

Yes, you'll definitely give her better head than me.

MULBERRY

Maybe if you ask her boyfriend nicely, he'll let you both have a taste. Los, I need cukes.

LOS

Done.

CARNEL and CASSANDRA come back to the service bar together.

CARNEL

I can't believe you're not going.

CASSANDRA

Believe it because that's what I'm telling you.

CARNEL

You're going to deny me the chance of playing Benny to your Nina?

NAOMI

The *In The Heights* EPA?

CASSANDRA

Yes.

CARNEL

And this girl not going!

NAOMI

You have to go!

CASSANDRA

I can't. My mind's not right. Besides, casting directors don't think I look Latina enough.

NAOMI

Aren't you one-hundred percent Puerto Rican?

CASSANDRA

100. But I'm too Black to be Puerto Rican according to casting.

CARNEL

Girl, you yellow.

CASSANDRA

Don't get me started, Carnel. Do. Not. I'm just as Black as you and just as Puerto Rican as the island.

CARNEL

You Black enough to get stopped and frisked on the subway?

CASSANDRA

I don't have a big enough penis for that.

MULBERRY

I had two cops at the bar last night who were blowing off steam about the new MTA quota.

CASSANDRA

MTA quotas?

CARNEL

Say what now?

NAOMI

Are they raising the fare?

MULBERRY

They might. One of them was saying that they're planning on more patrols of the subway.

CARNEL

What the hell for?

NAOMI

So they can keep homeless people from sleeping, of course.

CASSANDRA

How did this even come up?

MULBERRY

Apparently, there's some lawsuit from an NYPD whistleblower about quota systems for ticketing people. Some cop is taking the NYPD to court claiming they've been racial profiling. Duh.

CARNEL

So more cops in the Upper East Side, right?

NAOMI

Yeah fucking right.

CASSANDRA

You gotta be fucking kidding me.

MULBERRY

I really wouldn't be surprised if they raised the fare.

LOS enters.

LOS

They're raising the fare again?

CARNEL

Why are you even surprised?

NAOMI

Probably.

CASSANDRA

Does the fucking theft of this city's soul never stop?

LOS

What are you talking about?

AMOS enters.

AMOS

Vrrrrr--CLUSTER BUSTER.

CASSANDRA

Oh, Jesus Christ. Fine. Just trying to get drinks and do my job.

AMOS

Uh-oh. Someone's grumpy.

CARNEL and CASSANDRA exit without answering. MULBERRY comes to the pass and stares at AMOS.

AMOS

Mulberry.

MULBERRY

Amos.

AMOS exits. TODD enters and goes for the soda machine.

LOS

I'm going to check the jazz club.

MULBERRY

Beware of the cluster busterrrrrrr.

LOS exits.

TODD

Naomi, what's up with this machine?

NAOMI

Did you break my machine?

TODD

No, come on. You're just the soda machine whisperer.

NAOMI

Yeah, right. Move.

NAOMI hits the machine. MULBERRY shakes drinks. CARNEL enters.

CARNEL

Easy, girl. If you need to get out some aggression, I got prettier options for you.

NAOMI

Damn machine is being bitchy again.

TODD

I don't know why people drink Coke any more anyway. The hand-crafted small batch stuff is so much better.

CARNEL

And expensive.

MULBERRY

Yeah, Todd, just let people like what they like.

LOS and IVORY enter. NAOMI has climbed on the counter and is banging very loudly.

IVORY

Get down from there.

NAOMI

This damn machine is busted again. When is it getting replaced?

IVORY

Replacement is on hold until next quarter. Too many financial pieces in the air.

MULBERRY

Financial pieces? So are we finally moving over to the non-tipping model?

IVORY

Alright, 86 fountain soda. I'll be upstairs.

NAOMI

86 fountain soda!

LOS

Damn, that's my mid-shift caffeine boost.

TODD

I'm just going to offer them the bottled soda.

MULBERRY

I'll comp it off.

TODD

Thanks, Mulberry.

MULBERRY

It's not for you, pretentious ass.

TODD

Ouch.

NAOMI

Not gonna lie, I kind of agree with Todd on this. The bottled is way better.

TODD

Thank you.

NAOMI

Shut up.

LOS

You see how fast Ivory dipped when we mentioned the change over?

TODD

Dude, it's totally coming.

NAOMI

I wouldn't mind getting paid an hourly rate.

MULBERRY

As long as it's equal or more than the hourly rate I make on a good night.

CARNEL

Should be based on what we make on a great night.

TODD

We'll be lucky if it's equal.

LOS

What do you think you make an hour, Mulberry?

MULBERRY

Somewhere between \$35 - 40. Depending on the night, obviously I'm not counting Monday afternoons.

TODD

No way they'll pay us that. New York State minimum wage is \$15; I bet that's where they start and add a dollar more for every position.

CASSANDRA enters, loads a tray.

LOS

So what, bar back would be \$19?

MULBERRY

I'm not staying here to make \$20 an hour.

NAOMI

Nevermind, I'll keep my tip rate. This shit sounded better in theory.

TODD

I heard they might eliminate tips all together.

ALL

The fuck?

CASSANDRA

Sounds like something our fuck face owner would do.

CASSANDRA exits.

LOS

Yeah, but isn't his whole thing "we answer to our employees first not our investors?"

CARNEL

Don't tell me you've even tasted that Kool-Aid. You know that's some corporate lingo bullshit he tells those rich investors to make them feel like they aren't the modern day robber barons.

MULBERRY

I don't get why they're trying to fix something that isn't broken. We have pooled tips--that's the only way to protect from bad tippers.

CARN;

We could add auto-grat.

They all laugh.

TODD

That will never happen.

CASSANDRA enters, loads drinks on
a tray.

NAOMI

I fucking hate this job.

TODD

Then quit.

MULBERRY

Fuck you.

TODD

What?

MULBERRY

Quit and do what?

CASSANDRA

Yeah, you're either in white collar in NYC or you're in the
service industry.

TODD

What about cops and fire fighters?

LOS

Service industry.

NAOMI

The arts?

CASSANDRA

Service industry. Even if you don't have a side hustle.

CASSANDRA exits.

MULBERRY

You're either rich or you serve--whether it's food or
entertainment, it's service.

LOS

I'm doing back to Jazz; this is depressing.

AMOS enters.

AMOS

Cluster busterrrrrrrrr!!!

LOS, TODD, and CARNEL grumble and exit. AMOS looks at NAOMI.

NAOMI

What? I belong here.

He looks at MULBERRY.

AMOS

Mulberry.

MULBERRY

Amos.

AMOS exits. A swift dance begins involving the comings and goings of everyone in the restaurant. Unheard conversations, drinks made and picked up, supplies carted in and distributed. MULBERRY and NAOMI rarely leave their posts. Eventually it comes to a halt when CASSANDRA enters, quietly puts her hands on the bar and silently screams.

CASSANDRA

I don't think I'm going to make it through tonight. Mulberry, please tell me we are not 86'd Weller 12 year. It wasn't on the pre-shift list of 86's but it's closed out in the computer.

MULBERRY

We're still out.

CASSANDRA

Aaaaaahhh!

NAOMI

What's the matter?

CASSANDRA

Will you please get me Ivory? Please. Tell her it's table 18.

NAOMI

Yeah, yeah, sure.

NAOMI exits. CARNEL enters.

CARNEL

Cass, 18 is flagging you down again.

CASSANDRA

I'm going to kill them. I'm going to kill them

MULBERRY

What is happening?

CASSANDRA

Grown men, grown men acting like toddlers.

CARNEL

Mullberry, dude at 58 says this is not a Dark and Stormy.

MULBERRY

What? Yes, it is. What didn't he like about it?

CARNEL

Didn't even taste it--just looked at it and said "that's not a Dark and Stormy." Said it wasn't dark enough.

TODD SMITH enters.

TODD

What's up, nerds.

MULBERRY

Give me that.

MULBERRY takes a small straw and stirs the cocktail.

MULBERRY

Now try it.

TODD

Yo, dude, I think table 18 wants you.

CASSANDRA

I know!

CARNEL

Bye, girl. Thanks.

CARNEL exits.

TODD

You need some help?

CASSANDRA

No, I don't need your help. I need Ivory.

TODD

Amos is right there.

CASSANDRA

No. Never mind. I got it.

CASSANDRA exits.

TODD

She's gotta chill. Right?

MULBERRY

Don't you have somewhere to be?

TODD

Nah, private party in the balcony with a drink package.
Piece of cake.

MULBERRY

Isn't there glassware to polish? Can you do anything other
than lean on my bar?

IVORY enters with NAOMI behind
her.

IVORY
What's going on at 18?

TODD
Dude, she's drowning.

NAOMI
She didn't say that.

TODD
She came over here acting like she was drowning.

IVORY
What did she say?

CASSANDRA is in another portion of the stage. Throughout the following it is as if a hand is being thrust down her throat. Imagine the opposite of being force fed--she is retching: trash, paper hearts, receipts, ticker tape, apples, oysters, and dollar bills.

NAOMI
Uh...Ivory, you better get over there.

IVORY
What do you mean?

TODD
Oooh shit!

IVORY
Jesus Christ.

IVORY exits fast. LOS enters.

NAOMI
I can't believe she did that.

MULBERRY
Oh my God that's amazing.

LOS

What? What happened?

TODD

She's always been crazy but damn.

LOS

What happened?

MULBERRY

She punched that dude at seat one right in the face.

LOS

What?!

CARNEL enters, carrying CASSANDRA,
with AMOS trailing behind.

AMOS

Cassandra, I have to call the police.

CASSANDRA

Call them then! Do you think I give a shit?

CARNEL

Girl, calm down.

AMOS

Do you really think you're in a position to yell right now?
You just assaulted a guest.

CASSANDRA

He assaulted me! We have cameras all over this place. Go
and review the tapes.

AMOS

What do you mean?

CASSANDRA

I mean he was screaming about his god damn beef ribs and he
thought he could do it better in my face so he grabbed me
by the wrist and pulled my face down to his level and then
I punched him in the face.

IVORY enters.

IVORY

I called the ambulance. He's waking up so I left him with his friends. Cassandra, are you okay?

CASSANDRA

No! No, I'm not okay! This is exactly what we've been trying to tell you, Amos, about the kinds of fucking entitled assholes who come in here. They've been touching and grabbing us like crazy the passed couple months and I told you I wasn't going to put up with it anymore. They think they have a right to scream and assault people over BEEF RIBS--

AMOS

You told him we were out when you greeted them, right?

CASSANDRA

No, Amos, no, I didn't because we weren't out when they sat down. We ran out after they barked their drink order at me and wouldn't let me tell them the other 86s for the night. And then by the time I got back to the table with their four pitchers of IPA, and their biscuits and deviled eggs and wings were already served, they barked at me again about wanting SEVEN FULL RACKS of BEEF RIBS before I could tell them we were out of beef ribs because it's a fucking Tuesday night and we just didn't happen to make as many as we needed.

So I explained to the dickhead that the meat was smoked over 24 hours ago so no I don't have an extra rack just lying around for him. But that's not enough for the gentrifying, house in the Hamptons, fuck you for wanting healthcare Baby Boomer. So he demands that I give him free stuff. And I inform him that of course I can send him some biscuits and he pulls me down and begins to scream at me that they come here four times a year just to eat beef ribs and how dare we--and then I punched him in the face because how dare he. How dare he treat me--how dare any of them treat us like dirt! And if you want to fire me then do it because I'm sick of this place. There's blood in this place, in this foundation, in these walls. There's blood in our mouths and our hands and our wallets from eating here, from working here.

The so called ethical owner of this restaurant is a perfect example of the bullshit from all sides.

One side of his mouth says he values us while he's plotting to cut our pay and say it's for our own good. A man who says he values his employees over his investors and wants to respect the community around it, but he is no better than the colonist ancestors who gave him the fucking trust fund that bought this place.

He is at the masthead of the ship of gentrification that's causing the housing crisis in this city--that's destroying the fabric of how weird and wonderful New York City was. This was the city of the working class and it's being gobbled up by restauranteurs and billionaires cleaning their money by owning unused apartments. He plops his restaurants down as lighthouses in the sea of semen left from the wet dreams of Gulliani, Robert Moses, Bloomberg, and Roger Starr. And all he attracts and cultivates here are these people--bigots, narcissists, racists, close minded and close fist ed subhumans who don't believe in community or ethics or morals but still want everything to be clean and tidy and palatable.

This city was never meant to be clean and you sterilized it of all the good, dirty fertile things--of art, of music, of laughter, of freedom, of freaks, of kindness. You tried to drive us out and when you couldn't you took everything we loved so we would be beholden to you. But I'm done. I'm done working along asshats like this obsequious moron who thinks the best thing that happened to New York City was Target coming to Queens. I'm done being hospitable to rich fucks who never learned how to be human. I'm done. I'm done because we are all complicit--every one of us in the restaurant have disenfranchised the heart and soul of this city. Did you know every wave of hyper-gentrification follows where the artists live? They wait to see if the actors, musicians, and painters can thrive--survive--in the dangerous terrain of filthy, poor New Yorkers. They consider us--me--a pioneer on the frontier of real estate they want to claim; they consider choking the life out of a community their manifest destiny! And they wait for us to send letters back home that it's safe before they use their wagons to trample everything and steal whatever they can. We're your scouts and then you trample us into the dirt once you've gotten what you want.

I'm fucking done. Because this city is so much more than the ragged cycle of thriving and theft.

I'm not going to participate in the evil that's leeching out the good and grit. The city is the kindness of a stranger wordlessly lifting a stroller up the subway stairs. It's the resilience of a hip hop beat and the bravery of a subway busker. It's the ingenuity of squatters turning abandoned buildings into community centers and abandoned lots into gardens. This city is a brick through a window and a sea of black and brown berets. This city is for everyone and you want to suck the marrow from its bones, abandon it, and wait till we revive ourselves again, but I refuse to assist you anymore. So arrest me--that's what you'll always do. Do it. And if we're dirt, I accept because the dirt is richer than you small minded fucks could ever imagine.

END OF ACT III

END OF PLAY