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Lucas Baisch, Author

Dry Swallow

By

Lucas Baisch

B.F.A., DePaul University, 2014

Thesis

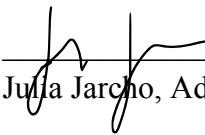
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre Arts & Performance Studies at Brown University

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

MAY 2020

This thesis by Lucas Baisch is accepted in its present form
by the Department of Theatre Arts & Performance Studies as satisfying the
thesis requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Date 22 April, 2020



Julia Jarcho, Advisor

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date _____

Andrew G. Campbell, Dean of the Graduate School

DRY SWALLOW

By Lucas Baisch
04.21.20

CONTACT:
(415) 608-8483
lucas_baisch@brown.edu
www.lucasbaisch.com

Recipient of The Kennedy Center's
KCACTF Latinx Playwriting Award, 2020

TIME:

Present.

SETTING:

1 – A Boyle Heights, East L.A. street corner covered in sediment.

2 – A Central Illinois chain pharmacy.

3 – A cosmopolitan somewhere, white gallery walls, probably New York.

The play exists within the confines, and surrounding the perimeter of, a single shipping container – the audience watching from its side view. As scenes move forward, characters add and remove items suggestive of changing locations. Whether fabricated or authentic, this vessel should maintain the ability to be manually opened and closed.

CHARACTERS:

PAL – he/him, Latinx-American street vendor, 20

CHULA – she/her, Latinx street vendor, 50s - 60s

DORI – she/her, pharmaceutical assistant, early 20s

SIK – she/her, POC, chain pharmacy security guard, late 20s

PORTER – they/them, White [or white passing] art-type, late 20s / 30s

NASIR – he/him, Indian-American conceptual artist, late 20s / 30s

SHITSTAIN – he/him, prep school student, drug store customer, gallery plebian, 18 / ageless

*This play **will never** be performed with an entirely cis-gendered, white cast.

A NOTE ON COSTUME:

All performers wear work gloves as they are in a constant state of doing work. Production should embrace this, however cumbersome this may be while performing action. Deliberate attention should be given by the director as to when // how these appendages are removed // put back on.

WHAT IS A MODIFIED-RELEASE DRUG DELIVERY SYSTEM?

The first documented usage of modified-release medication delivery (including delayed-release and sustained-release) was patented in 1938 by Israel Lipowski, when he first tested coating medication to maximize dosage with minimal side effects.

This system involves a multi-compartmental model of release in orally administered medication, that releases the drug over a prolonged period of time,

A slow burn,

An accumulation of events that lead to a physiological change in the body.

This play is the event,

The free fall,

The weight and gravity that arrive with a body transported.



Photo courtesy of National Geographic

ENGINEERING SPACE

*The sound of a heavy lifting and settling down.
Industrial noise. Saw blades hitting metal.
Jackhammers pummeling foundation.
The sound of drilling rebounds from the walls of a hollow
place, away and back again.*

*The shipping container is sealed.
Around it:
A path of orange safety cones –
One, knocked over.*

*PAL enters.
A rolling luggage suitcase pulled behind.
He wears a sweat-stained button up, a tie, dirty slacks.
An attempt at appearing professional,
Without the means to do so.*

*PAL parks himself.
Construction sounds fade.
Luggage open:
A pair of yellow work gloves.
A cinder block.
He puts the gloves on.
He hoists the block into the air.*

PAL. One
 Dry
 Heave.

*The following speech is delivered until PAL can no longer
carry the weight of the twenty-eight pound concrete block.
If the performer drops before this segment of text, they skip
to the “***.”*

Took me twenty years,
From fetus to fuck-up,
To know what weight looked like,
What weight feels like,
What weight makes a body do in place of freedom.

Here, hitched to my hip is something I call a burden.
My burden: a place. Un país.
Escúchame: I draw a line – a narrow line – make it widen.
A white striped crosswalk covering up that

black and brown-bruised asphalt.
 Una demarcación of East L.A.
 I make it reach my foot to yours.
 I introduce my name with capital letters.
 The entirety of the fuckin' word, large,
 Like the shape of my tongue, CLAP.
 Pal. My name is Pal.

Maaan, you think I'm some muthafucker, huh?
 Some idiot top-button cholo?
 Well, I'm privy to the notion of a self-anointed privilege
 When it comes to occupying – not occupying – consuming a space.
 Like the thickness of my speech is a measura'
 Social currency.

Like yer shriveled bag of bones is some salted-ass,
 Butter-laden, popcorn
 For me to shovel into my grimacing garbage face.
 But hey,
 I ain't no asshole.
 You see me siphoning fuel from the neighborhood gas joint?
 Stealin' purses, snatching wallets?
 I'm just tryna make a living, y'all.

Ya see, I attribute a personal taste for troublemakin'
 To a big ole' barrel of sickness.
 The people made unhealthy.
 Pregnant with a moral ill.
 The only alleviation comin' with
 Yelling, shrieking, making loud noises,
 Kids playing soccer on the street, screaming:
 "PAL, my name's PAL. P-A-L, Pal."
 Capital S-H-I-T shit,
 But not like *anger* shit.
 It's like: "shit I've made it, I've arrived,
 I'm the fuckin' cargo ship crashing into yer private beach
 With four hundred deliveries
 Of filet mignon to dangle in fronta yer nose,
 Some new car shit,
 A white boy's lavish lifestyle shit,
 Ten thousand exact replicas of my goddamn mug
 To scare yer stupid-ass," kind of shit.
 That kinda shit.

Gotta play the game.
 Gotta make my sale.

Tryna snatch a new pair of shoes.
 I'm lookin' for these Velcro kinda kicks cuz, y'know,
 I never learned to tie my laces.

And see I have willed myself
 To believe hunger's a symptom of choice.
 The fact I haven't eaten in six days ain't a point of weakness,
 But deliberate, calculated choreography.
 A fuckin' dance.
 Euphoric, even.

Punch me in the gut, puta,
 Capital P-U-N-C-H, then bold italics gut,
 Then a question cushioned by parentheses.
 "Yo, you scared of me?"
 Vamos,
 Let's go,
 I gotta stash,
 I'll meet you at the tienditas.
 Ay! Yer head hurt?
 Empachado?
 Caida de la mollera?
 You get a susto?
 Mal ojo?
 I got you.

I believe in a generational gentrification.
 You know what that is?
 My boy Marco, he says
 Y'all old heads better pick up n 'get.
 Whack asses with your:
 Boyle Heights?
 Aliso Village?
 Al & Bea's, Hollenbeck Park –
 All about to be a gated community
 Sectioned off for Richard and Margaret
 From Dayton, Ohio to claim land, make family.

Catch me shouting at these transplants,
 Your café decorated with
 Aesthetic bullet holes on subway tile,
 Your pop-up art gallery,
 Your neo-ghetto restaurant theme – it ain't cute.
 Ain't what I fuck with.

Porque aquí – sequestered inside a highway underpass lives an uncle, un padre, a primo, a postre. Things to hold onto. People to buy dinner for. People dying without the capacity to survive.

Y tú? Whatchu want, ah? I got it all.
 Acetaminophen, ibuprofen,
 Valium, viagra, penicillin,
 Trazodone, amoxicillin, ciprofloxacin,
 Tetracycline, doxycycline,
 Hydro – oxy – roxi – codone
 5 milligrams of morphine sulfate
 Fentanyl, fluoxetine, hydroxyzine, tramadol,
 Pre-exposure prophylaxis,

Short-acting, rapid-acting, long-acting insulin,
 Gentrifi-mycine,
 Xeno-phoba-cycline,
 Fuck-a-faggot oral tablets,
 Queer-bash- dronate,
 Pop-a-tranny injectables,
 Cut-a-crip-azole,
 Intravenous wetback-bitol, and
 Dead-gangbanger-shot-in-the-mouth-before-he-got-his-GED
 -before-he-fell-in-love-before-he-left-the-projects-fibrate.

Toxic
 Toxic
 Toxic.

PAL drops the cinder block.

If it shatters, it shatters.

PAL. Got everything but a glass of water for you to take it with.

PAL notices the last safety cone knocked over.

He corrects it. He sets his things down,

He proceeds to open the shipping container.

This is a loud and exhaustive event;

Arduous and drawn-out.

SCENE 1

The inside of the shipping container, unlocked: Nighttime.

The interior is a light box. A pharmacy.

Shelves of bottles – white and orange, neatly organized,

Wedged in the back corner of a drug store.

SIK in security uniform, with a duffel bag, and

DORI in medical coat,

Her pregnant belly ripe.

DORI. Then I hear this doctor in town's prescribing all these kids Fentanyl for Lyme disease. Lyme disease? This is bum-fuck farm-ass middle of nowhere Illinois. I live in a *cloud of pesticides*. No fucking way a tick's gonna survive some poison airway to come give every other child in town *Lyme disease*.

SIK. (*Surveying stock.*) Jesus.

DORI. So last week, some mom comes in yelling at me about the opiate epidemic, yeah? Right as she's stocking up on these, uh – trans – transdermal patches. For a daughter's chronic headaches or some bullshit – and I'm like – look in the mirror, lady. You – you're the one – you're enabling. You are an enabler. These parents, getting all their kids zombified, hooked on –

SIK. –

DORI. Are you listening?

SIK. –

DORI. You're gonna get me fired.

SIK. You'll get fired anyways.

DORI. Get me sent to jail. You too.

SIK. The lights stay on?

DORI. All night.

SIK. And cameras –

DORI. Angled towards food aisle.
People prefer to pocket wine bottles, chips, frozen pizza.

SIK unzips her duffel bag.

She starts pocketing pharmaceutical stock.

DORI. The whites of yer eyes are all yellow.
Corn on the cob yellow.
Yellow-ass yellow.

SIK. The bag. Hold it open, huh?

DORI. You drunk?

SIK. Hell no. I'm breastfed.

DORI. *Breastfed.*
—
My mom, she said she gotta
Bad infection with my older sister,
Teeth on teat,
Like, real crusty sore,
So when I was born —
Well,
I was formula —
She gave me formula, instead.
Probably didn't even know the difference.

SIK continues to explore behind the counter.

SIK. They gotta whole buffet of Benzos out here.

DORI. That good?

SIK. What, they just have you throwing out old milk?

DORI. Still new to pharmacy. Honestly, I'd rather go back to register.

SIK. So they let you handle stock without training? An education?

DORI. I *got* an education.

SIK. Dori. Two community college courses means you can hold a pencil.
Yer no smart-ass.

DORI. They were training me in photo. Almost got to do passport.

SIK. Quit playin', Dor. Okay?

DORI. –

SIK. –

DORI. Hurry up then.

SIK. I owe you, bug. A kiss?

SIK pecks DORI's cheek.

SIK. Remember: you won't make a sound.
Come into work like a typical Monday morning.
They ask what's up with stock, you play dumb.

DORI. It'll never work.

SIK. Chalk it up to delivery. Record malfunction.

DORI. They're bound to notice. Everything's all digitized. Specific.

SIK. Specific? This is the *least* specific place.
Just chicken feed and people aimless for miles.
You stay quiet in a place like this and no one catches a thing.

DORI. What about you?

SIK. Like I said – *quiet*.

DORI. It's a shame yer so smart and don't pick up in other places.

SIK. What places?

DORI. Jobs 'n things. Real ones.

SIK. This *is* my job. I'm a keyholder. I keep watch.

DORI. Glad yer so disciplined. The most disciplined CVS, security guard, rent-a-cop I ever met. You gotta moral compass in there too?

SIK. Cut it. We make this work and we gotta steady system on our hands.

DORI. Steady scam, more like it.

SIK. –

DORI. Would ya at least pick me up a burger or something after all this?
Baby's hungry.

SIK. Baby?

SIK crouches and pushes her ear to DORI's belly.

DORI. I don't like it so much. The kick –
It's like a truck backing up over my bladder.
People looking at me all-knowing.
But you – you'll be a good mama.

SIK kisses her womb and returns to stealing stock.

DORI. I'm scared, Sik.

SIK. We gonna do this all over again?
When you look at my face, do you see me?

DORI. Of course, I –

SIK. No, but do you see me?
Standing right in fronta you?
When I'm watchin' customers duck in 'n outta this place,
Buying their bullshit,
You, the world's most unqualified medicine lady,
Me, a mirror, fifty feet away,
Tryna catch a look from you –
Do you *see* me?

DORI. C'mon.

SIK. I am poor. In all sortsa ways. And the only thing that's gonna satiate this poorness
is you. And Baby. Baby's gonna get us outta this poverty, this mess.

DORI. You're sweating, Sik.

SIK. Look, I finish here and I'll pick you up whatever you want.

SIK moves out of sight.

DORI continues talking.

DORI. I was on smoke break yesterday –

SIK. –

DORI. Didn't smoke nothing.
Just watching Maggie.
Smelled her exhale.
By recycling out back.

SIK. (*Offstage.*) Can't hear you.

DORI. We're sitting, watching this rat eat a tampon wrapper.
Maggie going on about her parole officer and
I'm thinking: "look at this rat."
"Look at this cute little guy."
Thinkin' I should name this *thing*.
What am I gonna name the thing?
Thomas? Marcy?

SIK. (*Offstage.*) What'd you say?

DORI. And then I kind of sit into my ass, this concrete curb,
This island in the middle of the parking lot, and I think:
Huh. Do I have to name it?
Why's my first impulse gotta be to name the thing?
Why do people need to name their houses and their cars
And their plants and their feelings?
It's to, uh, familiarize.
Or something like that. Yeah?
To put on some personal ownership.
To tell a little rodent body that it's mine.
Even if it's not.
And I don't want this baby to think it's mine.
Not mine and mine only, I mean.

No sound.

DORI. You done yet?

No sound.

DORI. You done?

SIK reenters.

DORI. Y'know, you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen.

SIK. That right?

DORI. Push up.

SIK holds DORI close.

DORI. Pull your pant leg up.

SIK. What?

DORI. Just do it.

SIK does.

DORI smiles.

The women hold each other, rubbing ankles, soft.

DORI. The spiny hairs on your legs. I like 'em.
Like miniature inchworms.
Pine tree coniferous. Feels nice.

SIK. I gotta Cat 5 Hurricane crush on you.

DORI. That's the stupidest thing.

SIK. I'm contaminated.

DORI. No, I am. See.

She points to her belly.

At this point, NASIR and PORTER have entered.

NASIR disassembles pharmacy.

PORTER unfurls a large green hose.

SIK. I'm gonna get you a burger, bug.
Soon as we leave.

SIK and DORI look to the security camera.

DORI feels something quiver in her belly.

SIK. You okay?

DORI. Oh.
 Oh, shit.

PORTER turns on the hose,

Drenching DORI.

Her water's broke.

Shit.

SIK and DORI exit.

SCENE 2

The container shapeshifts to a gallery –

Typical white-walled, sterile.

Two gallery pedestals and one garbage can in the corner.

Currently, the gallery is not the gallery,

But NASIR's studio.

NASIR and PORTER face one another.

They're both artist types,

Both engaged with appearances.

Well-curated performances of creative identity.

They come from money.

They can afford to be here.

On one pedestal:

A cinder block.

On another:

An orange bottle of prescription medication.

NASIR. What's the most disgusting thing you've ever experienced?

PORTER. Aside from myself?

NASIR. I'm asking for *one inch*, one spittle's worth of serious engagement.

PORTER. I don't see how this has / anything to do with –

NASIR. You asked me what the point is.
Well, it requires explanation.
The most disgusting thing you've ever experienced.
Tell me.

PORTER thinks.

NASIR. Well?

PORTER. Give me a second. I can't just conjure shit without thinking.

PORTER thinks.

PORTER. (*Sighs.*) I don't know if this counts because I wasn't there personally / per se –

NASIR. Just tell me.

PORTER. My doctor mother said in medical school she –

NASIR. Greta's a doctor?

PORTER. Yes, you know that.

NASIR. I did not know that.

PORTER. Are you fucking kidding me?

NASIR. Just keep / going –

PORTER. My doctor mother. Greta. Who you know very fucking well, you little piece of shit. She said in med school they chainsawed through cadavers, and once – once they must've hit some digestive tract. Then – feces. A fountain. Everywhere.

NASIR. A literal chainsaw?

PORTER. Electric saw, whatever.

NASIR. That's incredible.

PORTER. Is it?

NASIR. I wonder if any landed on students.

PORTER. I'd hope so.

NASIR. Y'know what? Why don't you ask?

PORTER. Excuse me?

NASIR. Call her.

PORTER. You want me to call my mother?

NASIR. Yes.

PORTER. Here, in your studio?

NASIR. Yes!

PORTER. Just to prove a point.

NASIR. I'll call her if it makes you feel better.

PORTER pulls out their phone.

Dials.

PORTER. Ringing.

NASIR. Sure.

PORTER. Oh. *(Phone.)* Mother, quick question.
You remember that story you told me from medical school.
The story of the raining cadaver shit.
I'm doing a studio visit with Nasir and he wants to – she says hi.

NASIR. Hi Greta.

PORTER. He wants to know if any excrement got on the students.

PORTER listens.

PORTER. Because he's repulsive that's why.

Listens.

PORTER. Uh-huh.

Listens.

PORTER. Yeah.

Listens.

PORTER. Great, thanks. *(They end the call.)*
She said at one table some of it sprayed onto a man's lips.

NASIR. *Sprayed?*

PORTER. Sure.

NASIR. His lips?

PORTER. His mouth.

NASIR. See that's it. That's the weight of the thing *right* there! The moment some dead thing's gut-fluids impact you, your body, your being, vibrating and flung across a surgeon's quarters with the velocity of approaching disgust. That's the emotion people feel when experiencing a kind of violence. A punch to the face? You recoil. A kidney stone? You squirm across your kitchen floor, sobbing.

PORTER. And this?

NASIR. This is the same thing, just at an elongated speed. So, ya see, if I don't wake up, you shake me.

PORTER. –
I, what?

NASIR. You shake me. Hard. Even hit me if ya wanna.

PORTER. Because if I don't –

NASIR. 'Cause if you don't it ruins the whole performance, The whole concept, the whole practice.

PORTER. *Practice.*

NASIR. Yeah. It's a revival thing. It's about risk. I die for a second, and then I come back.

PORTER. Nasir, we should address that this was just supposed to be a studio visit. The gallery isn't commissioning you, we aren't offering representation, We can't afford to – there's no making promises. And now?

NASIR. Now.

PORTER. You're implicating me –

NASIR. Implicating?

PORTER. That's what it is, isn't it? Implicating?

NASIR. Think of it like a spotter. Like, I'm lifting weights.

PORTER. It's kind of the opposite of that.

NASIR. Don't.

PORTER. You smell like – are you high?

NASIR. I'm not.

PORTER. (*To cinder block.*) What about this one?

NASIR. No.

PORTER. A little cold, but ultimately more –

NASIR. *Porter.* No.

PORTER takes the pill bottle from the pedestal.

NASIR. Online.

PORTER. On-line?

NASIR. Yeah, you use a special browser, get loads of whatever. Untraceable and fuckin' cheap.

PORTER. They're from –

NASIR. Delhi.

PORTER. Again.

NASIR. And this time it'll be my body. Mine.

PORTER. Shouldn't the whole performance be about getting the actual prescription? Legally. Consultation, diagnosis, paying the market-list price? That's the whole concept, right?

NASIR. –

PORTER. The basis of your performance?

NASIR. –

PORTER. Or am I being generous?

NASIR. It's about – look, people attribute narratives all the time –

PORTER. You mean make up / narratives.

NASIR. Yeah, yeah, people don't care.

PORTER. Legitimacy –

NASIR. Suspended. Implied.

PORTER. That's lazy process.

NASIR. I do this and I'll have content for exhibition.
The gal – a gallery will pick me back up.
They'll forget what happened last year and –

PORTER. Which? Mine?

NASIR. It's not yours. You just *work there*. Remember?

PORTER. –

NASIR. One of them'll come outta the woodwork.
Maybe a few. I mean –
They always do.

PORTER. –

NASIR. Just say it.

PORTER. It's been less than a year.
You should take more time off.
It'd be good for you.

NASIR. You used to always complain that people never took you seriously. That you'd
been – what, pigeonholed into championing other artists? Let your own
perspective wither out to the wayside? Just because you gave up on making work
doesn't mean you have to stifle my ability to do so.

PORTER. Show me the accompanying text again.

NASIR pulls a piece of paper from his back pocket.

NASIR. It's a rough statement. First draft. Don't – don't make fun of it.

PORTER. Just read.

NASIR. (*Clears throat.*) “Sick em. Sick em like you’re a mutt. Til yer pulling out shrapnel from their throat, little metal pieces the shape of colonization, abnormalities, a taxonomy of ailments induced by the world around you. This piece celebrates indifference and self-induced pain. A parable. Praxis.”

PORTER. –

NASIR. Look. The traditional artist statement – it’s tired.

PORTER. And mock suicide?

NASIR. It’s not mock suicide. / That’s why you’re here.

PORTER. I’m not a medical professional, Nasir. I have no training. I don’t even know how / to do fucking CPR.

NASIR. That’s part of the risk.

PORTER. For all you know, I could watch you choke. Writhe on the floor. A little fish out the ocean.

NASIR. But you won’t.

PORTER. Oh?

NASIR. You could even – consider it a collaboration.

PORTER. And how long am I supposed to wait?

NASIR. If it gets real bad, just call paramedics.

PORTER. This is a big ask. An inconvenience, certainly.

NASIR. I know.

PORTER. And you say it won’t be like last time.

NASIR. I’m grateful. Really.

PORTER. You loop me into your child’s play,
Under the guise of highbrow social critique,
And you assure me nothing will go wrong.

NASIR. We’ve known each other since / boarding school, Porter. I –

PORTER. Which really isn't the best stance to take,
Because it comes off as a giant F you to the audience and –

NASIR. Please, P. I need this.

PORTER. –

NASIR. It's my work.
It's the most important thing.

PORTER unscrews the cap of the pill bottle.

They hand it to NASIR.

NASIR smells it.

He shakes it.

He puts it to his mouth.

He waits.

PORTER. You gonna –

NASIR. – I'm gonna!
Jesus, there's a chronology to things, yeah?

PORTER. –

NASIR. YEAH?

PORTER. What happened to “grateful,” huh?

NASIR. Sorry, I'm – nervous.

PORTER. *(Teasing.)* The darling reemerged. Peaking, even.
At this hour, the little cherub self-admits nervousness.

NASIR. *(Playful.)* Fuck you.

PORTER. You ever wonder what allowance has been given to us?
In coming from –

NASIR. From *what?*

PORTER. A kind of wealth, Nasir.

NASIR. –

PORTER. Sometimes I think culture means as much to me as an ingrown toenail.

NASIR. I really am.

PORTER. What?

NASIR. Grateful.

NASIR swallows the contents of the orange pill bottle.

All of it.

PORTER watches, watches,

Then vomits into the nearby trashcan.

PORTER stands.

Sluggishly,

The two of them deconstruct the surroundings.

The gallery evaporates, as –

SCENE 3

CHULA enters, with a lawn chair in hand, a grocery pushcart pulled behind.

She sits.

She fans herself.

She wears sunglasses and guards her makeshift bodega.

We are at a street corner.

Boyle Heights.

That part of East L.A., once untouched by the auspices of gentrification, now in a development chokehold.

PAL enters with a handheld megaphone.

He carries a bushel of flowers under his arm.

He activates the megaphone siren.

CHULA unfazed.

PAL shuts the mechanism off.

PAL. Ay.

CHULA. –

PAL. AY!

CHULA. (*Fanning.*)

PAL. What'd I say 'bout passin' here?

CHULA. –

PAL speaks into the megaphone.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) Ay vieja, you passing here or what?

CHULA. –

PAL. *(Megaphone.)* You can't pass this spot.
I told you: that orange shiny – that means caution.

CHULA. –

PAL. That means *my* spot.

CHULA pulls out an apple and starts eating it.

PAL. *(Megaphone.)* You got yer papers, vieja?
They'll come n cuff ya if you don't.
This my spot, you know that? Where *I* sell.
Not a lotta foot traffic for grandma to be selling her
Magazines, her frutas, her bootleg cosméticos.

CHULA. Ya-hah.

PAL. Who you “ya-hah”-ing at?

CHULA. –

PAL. Hablas ingles, viejita?

CHULA. *(Speaking sarcastic prophecy.)*
Distill your fear into a tiny container.
Una cosa pequeña.

PAL. A small what?

CHULA. Develop a pedagogy, then take it back.

PAL. Yo, you fucked up.

CHULA. Record yer trauma in bite marks to Styrofoam cups.

PAL. You making fun of me, old lady? I can make fun of you too.
(Megaphone.) Use words, dumb words, simple –
I outlined it clear, ah?
This spot's my *jur-ees-deeck-shun*. Entiendes?
I got Whittier between Boyle Ave. and Soto.

CHULA. I'm parked.

PAL. Oh, you parked?

CHULA. You got some shit in yer ears? You heard me.

PAL. I told Marco, I said, “What if the old lady don’t budge?”
And he says, “you make her.”

CHULA. (*Eating, fanning.*)

PAL. You a curandera?

CHULA. I’ma chingóna.
A merchant.
A businesswoman.
Mira este chiquitito – clownin’.
Que tienes?

PAL. Who’s askin’?

CHULA. Your competition.

PAL. Why would I tell *you*?

CHULA. Que paso, guey? You bustin’ my balls out here, better got some good ass shit.

PAL. I got VHS, DVD, books on tape, watches, earrings, custom grills –

CHULA. I’m talkin’ inside the bag. You got heavy stock?

PAL. I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.

CHULA. Quit playin’ boy.

PAL. –

CHULA. Me-di-ci-na.

PAL. Okay.
Okay.
Yer askin’ for the hook-up.
Metrics, powder, packed in capsule.

CHULA. There ya go.

PAL. Sure.
My pockets heavy.
(*Quiet.*) Lotsa *things*, lotsa *wares*.
You gotta headache?
Some limp-dick syndrome?

A cough-cough, sneeze, salud?
 Lotsa people think it's the filler shit.
 Counterfeit. Drywall, rat poison.
 Shoved into a casing.
 Inkjet labels, fake merch, whatever.

Yo, I got the real stuff though.
 Orange bottle. Baby lock.
 Large quantity,
 Top quality.
 Gonna sell it *real* quick.

CHULA. Hm.

PAL. Tryna buy some shoes, expand my block, get more cones out here.

CHULA finishes her apple.

CHULA. Mira. I hear if you stare straight into a dog anus, it's lil puckering culo, you'll see how yer gonna die. I want that. That's a thing I want. Right now, maybe. I also hear there some other ways to buy shoes than peddling deceit.

PAL. I ain't dying for a long-ass time.

CHULA. –

PAL. You eat that whole apple? Seeds and stuff?

CHULA. Maybe.

PAL. Yo, you got another one?

CHULA. What, I look like a fuggin' Whole foods? Shit.

PAL. –

CHULA. Who the flowers for?

PAL. None ya.

CHULA. You gotta girlfriend? Boyfriend?

PAL. They're for my pops, yo. Chill.

CHULA. I give you manzanita then. A trade.
 You let me see what you got?

I won't take nothin', promise.

PAL considers.

CHULA exposes another apple.

She offers it.

PAL takes the gift, hands her his luggage.

CHULA rifles through his things,

Tossing boxes and trinkets, pill bottles to the wind –

CHULA. Dang, son.

PAL. Don't go shakin' things or whatever.

She holds up a box, squints at it.

CHULA. You got it nice.
Mi sobrino, he brings me mine from across the border,
But not this much.

He takes it from her.

PAL. You prolly got the fakes then. Po-po see that shit and they lock you up.

CHULA. (*Snapping.*) Y los chinos, ah?
Why ain't they gettin' pulled over?
Seen them doin' the same shit in Koreatown, ah-ha.

PAL. Why you yellin'? Shit.

*PAL takes his flowers and begins placing them in the tips of
the safety cones.*

CHULA, fanning herself.

CHULA. That shit is booboo, honey.

PAL. The fuck you talkin' 'bout?
You the one tryna make a belief system
Where you read the future lookin' up a dog's ass.

CHULA. Paah, you prolly never seen a dead thing in ya whole life.

PAL sits, eating his apple.

- PAL. Lady, you –
–
My Pops, he’s –
My Pops is an English teacher.
- CHULA. Boy, no one asked.
- PAL. You talkin’ death, shit, lemme speak my peace.
I was sayin’ –
LA County Unified.
Always tryna make me and my sisters *verbose* or some shit.
But none of that savior crap like in the movies.
Some white lady with the nice yellow-brown hair
Comin’ in to teach brown kids about fuckin’ poetry.
He’s a hard-ass, big nose motherfucker.
So when his immune system goes down, he –
My pops ain’t tryna raise gangbangers.
He proud ‘n shit.
- CHULA. You go on.
Set up.
It’s all good.
We playin’ the same game, pendejo.
Put yer daddy’s flowers in the safety cone.
See if I care.
- PAL. Lady, I’m –
Los borrachos with the false teeth, yeah?
Walkin’ up and down First, puke dribbled on their sleeve?
They don’t got no single-payer. No premium. No co-pay.
I’m, uh –
Shit, I’m *alleviating* pain.
I’m on that Robin Hood shit,
Yo, I’m fighting the megallo-empirical-man
Come wipin’ away LA’s working class, like –
- CHULA. Oh, you *working*?
- PAL. What’s good, Chula? Why you fighting?
- CHULA. They’ll never see you as anything more than what you is.
No matter if you got a sick papi,
A real estate license,

Or some birdshit on yer face.
Now eat your goddamn apple.

PAL, defeated, bites the apple.

PAL. Fine. We can split block, but if Marco hears about this –

CHULA. –

PAL. You hear me?

PAL sits.

They wait.

PAL. Yo, anyone come ‘round today or what?

The droning of the Interstate 10.

Cars passing.

No one’s coming.

CHULA exits as:

SCENE 4

The street side dirt of the shipping container becomes

Drug store sterile.

The pharmacy, just moments after water breaking.

DORI, in lab coat, lies across counter.

SIK, at her side.

Our mother-to-be screams a low scream.

Painful.

PAL pipes into his megaphone.

PAL. *(Megaphone.)*
Sik and Dori,
Set up in some CVS,
Tryna steal from pharmacy.
When the big “uh-oh,”
The big “ay, dios mio,”
Slips on through with a mother’s water breaking.

DORI screams.

PAL. Side effects may include: dizziness,

DORI. Fuck!

PAL. Dry mouth,

DORI practices breathing technique.

PAL. Constipation.
Blurred vision,
Fever, fatigue.

DORI heaves. She cries.

PAL. And one premature delivery – hot and heavy.

PAL exits.

SIK. Sheeeee iiiiii pregnant.
 Pregnant.
 She is *preg-nant*.
 Bun in the oven,
 Sock in the basket,
 Mud in the water,
 Baby in the motherfucking demolition zone,
 Spillin' pill bottle, tryna break on outta there.

DORI screams again.

SIK. Dori's screaming now, cuz labor looks like labor.
 Real physical pain and struggle.
 A popping of the belly bones,
 A readjusting of organ alignment
 To push out that person inside her.

Who is this person?
What is personhood?
 Me, their dumb dyke mother tryna make
 Sense of two women crafting baby.
 Two ladies love turned into –

DORI. (*Screeching.*) Sik, you dumb motherfucker,
 Gimme a wooden spoon to bite on.
 Gimme something to squeeze.

SIK. Where'm I s'posed to find a wooden / spoon inside a –

DORI. Find *something*.

SIK. What, y'all got an IV?

DORI. FUCK YOU, SIK. I'M HAVING A BABY.

The chaos holds still.

The fluorescent of the pharmacy flickers.

SIK moves to deliver child.

DORI. Sik said it was something like four or five hours,
 But all I remember was a ball of mud.
 This earth-sphere, in front of me,
 Rotating. Smelled nice. A little hot.
 Started swiveling faster till it was just a brownish-yellow whirl,

And I'm here thinkin':
This is obscene.

SIK. Piss and
 Blood and
 Milk mixed together.

DORI. I shit what little food I've eaten.
 I'm filled with this indiscernible love.
 Tears streaming down my face for baby,
 I don't even know what time it is.
 Then you hear your holes are torn and won't heal for weeks.
 It's about compromise, I guess.
 Child comes out and I hear no noise.

*SIK, with work glove, exposes the baby –
 one industrial cinder block.*

DORI. A sediment-grainy 8 by 8 by 16 inches cubic.
 A poem made of concrete rough.
 Something you'd find on construction pallet – covered in plaster.
 But my baby, blunt edged, dipped in amniotic fluid,
 My baby's quiet. Hard.

SIK. Mostly 'cause the little shit knows it has to be.

DORI. A cinder block. Foundation.

SIK. What we gonna name 'em?

DORI. I told you, we're not –

NASIR and PORTER enter and dismantle the pharmacy.

DORI. I don't like names.
 No names here.
 Just. Baby.

SIK. My concrete cast.
 The one that tore at Mommy's entryways.
 A cinder block, with
 Two dirtwad mamas who love them more than
 At least a hundred thousand things.
 Honey mustard,
 Can openers,
 Salad.

DORI. –

SIK. Don't we, Dor?
Love Baby more than salad?
Dori?

SIK and DORI watch their newborn cinderblock,

Lull it to sleep.

They exit.

SCENE 5

The gallery.

NASIR: the focal point.

PORTER outside of the container.

PAL enters, but not PAL, with megaphone.

PORTER. Months earlier.
An artist's talk.
Days after Nasir's last opening.
He situates himself at the center
Of an auditorium, off-site.
A bottle of water.
No moderator.
He surveys the group.
Thanks them for coming.
One bustling pride bursting from his
Shit-vacuum of a grin.

NASIR. I'd love to open up a Q & A, if anyone has something they'd like to offer.

PAL. *(Megaphone.)* "Could you tell us a bit about the genesis of the work? Initial impulses? Ideologies?"

NASIR chuckles.

NASIR. Feels like I'm droning on at this point, but I'll re-articulate for the uninformed in the room. Let's see. The work is a commentary on global exchange. How people fight for survival while working in illicit industries.

PORTER. The crowd clenches. A voice from the back of the room:

PAL. *(Megaphone.)* "Fraud!"

NASIR clears his throat.

NASIR. There's a cycle, ya know? Pharmaceutical companies dictate who gets to be healthy. They contribute to these systems of oppression – these illegal pipelines being created for distribution – and those on the ground, the people actually handling the product, they're the ones suffering the consequences.

I came across the counterfeit drug market almost by chance on a visit to India with my family, maybe four, five years ago. I left Delhi for a few days. Research.

I find men packaging syringes of fish oil, capsuling pills with drywall, branding it as *authentic* and – well, you could say the synapses started firing from there.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “And the piece itself?”

NASIR. The piece.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “The participants.”

NASIR. Of course. Everyone signed contract before performance. Since the drug is administered intravenously, I had to make sure consent was accounted for. I mean, also, it’s not easy to come by. You can only get *this brand* of material in places like India, China, Mexico, and – obviously, I paid them. Obviously, I’d met with medical professionals to make sure when it came to the day of performance I was administering safe doses, but – I mean, come on, man, that was the heart of the piece. *I* was performing the administration of anti-inflammatory injectables. Not a nurse. Not a doctor.

PORTER. He sips his water. So satisfied. So smug.

NASIR. I wish you all could’ve been there, in the room, with the subjects and myself. It’s a chilling energy that’s impossible – and I truly mean impossible – to convey in the final documentation.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “Did it ever occur to you that working with such a high-profile gallery would draw criticism to the ethic of your work?”

NASIR. What, are you suggesting there is some singular ethic?

Silence.

NASIR. Look, “ethics” will always be called into question, especially when dealing with embodied performance.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “You mean violence?”

NASIR. I mean performance. Prescription drugs are consumer objects. They have brand identities. Narratives. Emotional bonds built between medicine and consumer. *Consumer*, not patient. They’re lifestyle ads for God’s sake –

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “And the repercussions.”

NASIR. I told you, they signed forms of consent.

PAL. –

NASIR. The work is a conduit for the fascist tightening of western trade, *especially* the labor being imposed on South Asian bodies. What I make is uncomfortable, but purposeful.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “Weren’t you born in Palo Alto?”

NASIR. That has nothing to do with –

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “Went to a boarding school outside of Scarsdale?”

NASIR. That’s beside / the point.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “Has it crossed your mind that using a Hyper-specific narrative from your ethnic heritage Could come across as appropriative? As false justification for – ”

NASIR. Go on.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “Well, as a – a privileged – ”

NASIR. I’d caution this rhetoric of appropriation, privilege –

PAL. “As a person of color coming from wealth, the experience of cultural coercion isn’t really *lived* on your part. ”

NASIR. I’d have to agree to disagree then.

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “And what of the fatality?”

NASIR. –

PORTER. A deafening quiet. A security guard makes an advance –

NASIR. No, no, I can respond.

(*To audience.*)

The anonymous participant who passed weeks after the administering performance, again, signed contract. And here’s a fun fact: He lied! He lied during the physical evaluation, failed to mention predisposed conditions, and that was his choice. His contribution. A statement has been made by both my team and the deceased’s family. My condolences have been exhausted. I don’t quite understand what people expect me to say at this point, as there was absolutely no unlawful action being –

PAL. (*Megaphone.*) “You killed a man.”

NASIR. I didn’t do anything / wrong –

PAL. *(Megaphone.)* “And how does it feel to have this specific controversy, function as instigator for the closing of your show? Was it intentional to – ”

NASIR. Could you repeat the question?

PAL. *(Megaphone.)* “Was it intentional to disrupt the – ”

NASIR. No, before that. What the fuck are you talking about?

PAL. –

PORTER. Camera shutters, fluttering. Nasir’s sharp façade cracking. A slender stream of piss slithering down his well-ironed pant leg. The cameras shut down. The audience leaves the auditorium. Lights dim. He takes the subway to the gallery, finding his videos, his wall labels, his objects removed.

PORTER and PAL exit.

NASIR is alone.

He drags his fingers around the walls of the gallery,

Outlining the shapes of where his works were this morning.

In a corner, a white gallery pedestal.

He contemplates it from afar. After a moment, he approaches.

He gestures to the pedestal as if it was a gallery guest,

A high-profile visitor at his exhibition opening.

He offers a hand to dance, the pedestal politely rejects.

NASIR motions closer, sensually, writhing his hipbones.

He whispers inaudibles, deft flirtations.

He tries to take the pedestal back home with him.

Then, he grinds his pelvis on the corner of the shape.

He unbuttons his pants and simulates penetration.

His rhythm is slow to start,

Then speeds up,

Then slows again.

He maybe ad-libs some “you like that, huh?” or “daddy feel good?” or some other verbal atrocities of the sort.

PORTER enters the shipping container.

They clear their throat.

NASIR stops with his pants around his ankles.

With his back turned, he begins to sing a little song, humming to himself.

PORTER. Nasir.

Singing, humming.

PORTER. Nasir!

NASIR. If you despise a thing you typically just turn away.

He pulls up his pants, turns.

PORTER. Were you – ?

NASIR. It was a joke.

PORTER. Were you humping the pedestal?

NASIR. I was just doing a thing –

PORTER. It’s the gallery’s property –

NASIR. It was a joke! I was making a joke, with myself, okay?

PORTER. –

NASIR. –

PORTER. Preparators removed the pieces this morning.

NASIR. During my talk?

PORTER. They've put them in storage.

NASIR. Were you all going to – was there even an official statement / being made?

PORTER. You put a thing up, you take a thing down.

NASIR. Heartless.

PORTER. It wasn't my decision.

NASIR. You've known what works I wanted to include / for months –

PORTER. Yes, but we didn't know someone had died, Nasir.

NASIR. –

PORTER. You'll still get paid.

NASIR. I don't care about getting fucking paid; this is my reputation on the line.

PORTER. I'm the assistant curator, not God.

NASIR. You're my *friend*. Can't you figure something out?

PORTER. Our contract outlined the ability to redact the show / at any point in time.

NASIR. This is crushing, Porter. That you're cutting me like this.

PORTER. I just work here.

NASIR. I see.

PORTER. I have been telling you for years that what you practice borders on abusive. I'm not going to play "told you so" because that'd be incredibly unprofessional, but this time you really crossed the line –

NASIR. *Unprofessional?* You let me make a face-to-face ass of myself, while the public knew my show was cancelled.

PORTER. Take it up with the director. I don't know how else to –

Gunshots.

From outside?

PORTER and NASIR perk up.

A police siren.

The siren of a megaphone?

A fading away.

NASIR. What's that?

PORTER. I'll have the intern send you details for returning property to studio.
I'm sorry, Nasir, but this is how it has to go.

PORTER exits.

NASIR alone.

SCENE 6

As the gallery disappears:

DORI and SIK enter some place domestic.

DORI lulls cinder block.

SIK holds onto the megaphone.

DORI. Who'd a thunk you stick a turkey baster fulla some idiot's cum up my cooch and we end up like this? Waking up at 5am. The crying. The coddling.

SIK. You know we didn't have money for surrogate.
You and I made a decision together.

DORI. *Together?* We flipped a coin –
I wouldn't call that a decision, so much.
Grab a blanket for Baby, would you?

SIK. *(To the audience, on megaphone.)*
You follow a pill backwards, from chain store to factory.
You trace the route it takes to a human mouth.
I'm that thing pitched between.
I am corporate-sponsored,
Just in that I sell. I eat. I want.

(Off megaphone.)
Listen: this place is flat.
My town is landlocked. Leveled.
The only disruption made on a Midwestern horizon
Found in strip malls and cornstalk – and people like me?
A woman of my skin?
I'm made to be a mountain.
Stickin' out sore, selling pill bottles like sticks of butter,
Like it's nothing. Commonplace –

(Megaphone.)
Slather my service on your state fair –

(Off.)
And I know that's what they want of me.
These high school drop outs made into farm hands,
Pissin' themselves drunk and wanting.
Willing to make *me* criminal, yet full-on wanting.
The glaze-over. The serendipity.

The “get me outta here.”
When all I want’s to be *good*.

DORI. What’s “good” mean, Sik?

SIK. If not good, at least healthy. Safe.
 Where I ain’t worried ‘bout holding my girl’s hand in public,
 Take my kid to the movies or some shit.
 So I make sale.
 Baby’s born and I move in with Dori.
 Month by month, I go to pharmacy.
 I take a little more each time, she and I keepin’ low.
 I buy us a car. A nice one – no rinky-dink.
 I make us dinner, I –

DORI. You never cooked a thing in your goddamn life –

SIK. But like the tweakers I give rush to –
 I find an itch, a hunger, a craving, a habit.
 The intake of a needle stuck up their forearm.
 Like them, I get the thing I’ve always wanted,
 And I end up wanting more.

DORI. Could you get a rag? There’s dribble.

They fade.

SCENE 7

Floodlights.

The siren of megaphone – or maybe a larger siren elsewhere – making its return.

A hot and heavy white light cooks the inside of the shipping container.

CHULA and PAL, erect, unable to move.

CHULA. The bulldozer light.

PAL. That *good-good*.

CHULA. Sucio.

PAL. Hospital light. Surgical white.

CHULA. La Llorona, crying out at the concrete pavers, the compactors –

PAL. Pneumatic. A hundred fourteen horsepower –

CHULA. Flattening her casita –

PAL. Shoveling aside bodies –

CHULA. The people's hurt trumpeting out like a thousand mariachis –

PAL. (*Calling out.*) Que buscas? Tylenol? Advil?
Somethin' to make ya sleep at night?

CHULA. No matter how much I got, that white light gonna steal it from me.

PAL. Gonna gift it to me.

CHULA. Bury me here, sick and bitter.

PAL. Refurbish my insides, mariposas blanquitas.
Your condominium is my butterfly.
I'ma learn to tie my shoes.
Get a new pair from that boost in sales.
I'ma run out this joint. Promise.

The hot light shuts down.

Generators revving off to a stand still.

CHULA and PAL pant like the wind knocked out of them.

The streetcorner.

Another day.

Early evening.

The clouds gone grey.

CHULA's at her pushcart.

PAL limps, sets his things down.

They catch their breath.

CHULA. Damn trigger-happy pendejos. You hear that drive-by? It is *four PM*.

PAL. Gonna rain soon. Real soon.

CHULA. Boy, you got flakes of unshaved beard hair round yer dimple, one side, lopsided.

PAL. Guess I don't care nuff to look at my dumb face in the morning.

He moves to his safety cones and begins stacking them, removing flowers.

CHULA. What's wrong with you?

PAL. You want these?

He offers CHULA the bundle of flowers.

She takes them.

CHULA. Bonitas.

PAL begins to spread his blanket of wares, organizing items for sale. He sits.

PAL. Yeah thank, pops.
Brought em to inpatient 'n he goes:
"I don't need none o' that fag shit."

Y’know he – he said that.
Just tryna make his sick ass feel loved or somethin’
And he still gotta play cabrón.

CHULA. You corny.

PAL. This look corny to you?

PAL rolls up his pant leg – below the knee a bloodied wound.

CHULA. Puta –

PAL. It look bad?

CHULA. It don’t look good, that’s for damn sure.

PAL. Fuck.

CHULA. Oughtta put some VapoRub™ on top.
Rub it in. Blow on it.
Mira, got some right here.

PAL. I’m fine!

CHULA. Shoot, all right big boy, got his big chonies on.

PAL. –

CHULA. Ah. You did him bad huh?

PAL. I didn’t do no one bad. I just – nah, fuck you.
I don’t gotta tell you nothing.
Fuck.
Fuck.

CHULA finds her VapoRub™.

CHULA. Ven aquí.

She removes her work glove.

PAL sits,

Resting his leg in her lap

She makes contact.

He winces.

The cars of the Interstate 10,

Passing and passing.

PAL. You got kids, vieja?

CHULA. Not really.

PAL. Whatchu mean “not really?”

CHULA. –

PAL. One o’ Marco’s boys dropped me off.
Saw me walking from County General.
Told him I was just headin’ East a coupla blocks,
But he’s all: “Naaaah, man. I gotchu. Your load’s heavy.”
So we chillin’, tryna roll a joint.
Has me sittin’ in the back seat.
We talkin’ Lakers, girls, whatever –
Thought I was good.
Y’know.
Good.
Then right as I’m ‘bout to get outta the car
He turns to me from the driver seat,
Takes a box cutter,
You know, for like, opening boxes,
Holds my knee down:
“A graft.”
A sample.
Driver says Marco wanted a piece of me.
A fuckin’ piece.
A gift he says.

CHULA. –

She rubs his leg.

CHULA. They got ridda my girl Paola’s hair salon. Put up “a gallery.”

PAL. –

CHULA. Galería.

PAL. That's chill.

CHULA. Ain't *chill*, puto.
 Ya see – when I was a little girl, I usedta have my braids all did.
 Thought I looked cute. Had my cute dress, my cute bike,
 Doin' whatever the hell I wanted while Mami's out working.
 Rode my pigtail head on out to Hollenbeck,
 Thinkin' damn this shit's nice. I'm boutta have a *wholesome* – ah-ha –
 Wholesome day in the park. Pero, que paso?

A sad reality claws itself at all that cute and wholesome
 And you spot a dead body tucked into the bushes, bloated in the water.
 Nowadays, instead of a drive-by, ya catch new folks, coming in
 Yuckin' for paradise thinking East L.A.'s all hot, no cold,
 Playin' poker, lil galleries showing paintings of their dicks,
 Their literal dicks, shoving it down *my* throat.
 Whatchu think is violent, huh?

PAL. I gotta deadline.

CHULA. Whuss that?

PAL. A deadline. I've got – like, a quota. Ya know? And if I don't meet quota, Marco says he's gonna keep pawning lots of my skin off til' there ain't none left.

CHULA goes into PAL's bag.

She finds his megaphone.

CHULA. (*Megaphone.*) Whuss keepin' you then?

PAL. What?

CHULA. From makin' bank? What's keepin' you?

PAL. Yo, I make bank.

CHULA. Look at you, puffin' up. You ain't fancy. I can smell the EBT card from here.

The rumbling of thunder.

Rain begins to fall.

CHULA. Godammit.

She pulls an umbrella out of her grocery pushcart.

PAL. I ain't tryna be fancy,
I just –

CHULA. I get it.
You a little rat.
You kept Marco's money for yourself.
Kept it for Papi.

A crack of thunder.

PAL. Now you –
You gotta go.
And I mean like, go.
Take that trash you get at the botánicas,
The swap meets,
And dip.

CHULA. Baby, I ain't goin' anywhere.

PAL. Marco gave me a package.
Says it's *good*.
Shipped from some hospital in Jalisco.
Wherever, I don't care.
Bottom line is I'm 'sposed to hawk it fast or –
So, if we out here, lucky enough to get a single person pullin' up,
That shit is mine.

CHULA. (*Laughs.*) Boy.

PAL. Yer laughin' but at this rate I'm fixin' to die by next Tuesday.

CHULA. Good. Help my business.

PAL. Who you think's gonna show up here, vieja, come get my soaking ass dry?

Another crack of thunder.

From the back of the void,

The shipping container peels away a bit.

A shadow in a burst of light.

The rain has cleared.

A boy enters, teenaged, private school uniform,

Free of work glove.

It's the SHITSTAIN.

He holds out keys.

He presses a button.

The sound of a locking sports car.

CHULA. You lost?

SHITSTAIN. Uh – hola.

CHULA. The fuck?

SHITSTAIN. Hi.
Sorry.
Hello.
Hi.
Yes, hi.
Are you –
Um, is this –

PAL. What do you want?

SHITSTAIN. Should we
Shake hands, I'm –

He dries his hands on his pants.

SHITSTAIN. Sweaty.
They're always –
Wet.
Oh, wow.
Stopped raining,
I guess.

PAL. –

CHULA. –

SHITSTAIN. This is cool. Really cool. Great set-up. I love the – what is that? No, that. Nice. You buy that online? No? Okay, yeah, that’s okay. Um, so. Look, I – I uh, I had to borrow my mom’s car to make it out here and honestly I almost crashed it cause I didn’t – she doesn’t know I’m – this is weird – I’m going to this thing tonight. This thing that’s been planned for, like, weeks. Months maybe. And people, some people will be there, expecting me to come through in regards to said thing, but some – some kids were waiting ‘til I stepped off campus and they stole my – they just grabbed me and they – I, uh, I read on a message board that you could – that I could – come around here. This intersection. To find some – uh. Shit. Shit, I’m sorry. Shit. I really mean no disrespect or anything, but I – do you guys sell Xanax? Klonopin? Ativan? Percocet? Oxy? Vicodin? Lortab? Any kinda tranq, sedative, anything? Because, I’m in like, big trouble. I mean big. Big-big. And I could – I really don’t want to get fucked up over this. I’m not talking black eye, bloody nose, I mean, I can deal. I may not look so big, but I’m like *okay* in track. I could take someone. I figure just go for the shins, right? But seriously, can you imagine? *Big* trouble. *Me*. In jail? Prison. This guy. Holed up with –

PAL. With what?

SHITSTAIN. Not what. Who. Y’know. And it’s kinda funny, sure, but I mean it, I can’t – this is a large issue and I am small. A small person. I’m like three fucking years old. My parents still leave a baby monitor in the next room because they’re, like, *nuts*. Literal nuts. Hypochondriacs who don’t want me to leave the Hills when I’m literally only three bedroom doors down. Like, it’s not really that big a deal if I can’t drink lactose, Mom, it’s – I mean, I’m already grabbing yer painkillers from the medicine cabinet. For what, migraines? Like you’ve ever had a migraine in your life, you – and if they – if they knew what other shit I’m stirring, they’d freak. Honestly.

I mean, Mom’s sitting there, a physical appendage of our living room sofa, fossilized. Finding empty bottles of chardonnay, forgetting she put them there in the first place – like someone’s left ‘em there on purpose – like there’s some benign white wine ghost in my parents’ condo leaving benign white wine bottles just to mess with her – like – she’s freakin’ crazy man. A running marathon of Jerry Springer. Morning, night, morning, night. “Jerry! Jerry!” Barely lifts her legs for Rosa – wait, fuck – not Rosa. The new one. Um. Um. Sarita! Yeah, Sarita. Yeah – like, Mom won’t even lift her legs for Sarita to come wipe down the living room coffee table. It’s just “Jerry! Jerry!” Who the fuck is Jerry, right? I shouldn’t even know who Jerry Springer is; he’s from 1924 or some shit, *what the fuck*.

Okay. You’re looking at me. You’re confused. Confused and looking at me, Like, who the fuck – who let this kid – ya know it’s not *my* fault. It was never *my* fault. They just keep calling me worm, and I can’t show up to this thing – this party – as a fucking worm. Worms don’t get scholarships. Worms don’t get laid.

Worms bomb their placement tests and get rejected from club sports and – it’s either this or Venice and I have to say, this seems like a more legitimate option, y’know. Plausible. Legitimate, cuz like – you guys at least put things in boxes, right? The little packages with the foil backings ya press your finger through and it’s like “beep, there it is” – from the doctor, right? *The doctor, any goddamn doctor.*

Sorry, can you see my car? Over there? Parked? My car? It’s still there, right? Okay, cool. My dad’s gonna fucking kill me. Anyways, I mean, Jerry Springer. My mom’s shitty Yorkie barking and barking. *Jerry Springer* is an asshole. The Yorkie is an asshole. The kids who stole my shit. I wouldn’t call them assholes, but – well, no, actually they’re fucking assholes and I could probably just write a post – “online” – on these message boards, to try and get what I need, but I don’t wanna get doxxed. I don’t wanna get doxxed. I. Don’t. Want. To. Get. Doxxed. I mean, college applications, dude, I just – I promised everyone we’d have a good time, we’d get just a little fucking high, and if I don’t come up with *something* to show, how the hell’s that supposed to happen? How am I supposed to look? I am such an idiot. I’m such a goddamn idiot. And now I’m here. With you. Asking for some kind of saving. Bullshit salvation. Like we have parallel lives, like we could help each other out, but at the end of the day I am just a worm. I am THE worm. And all I can do is thrash and scream and sulk and *beg* – beg that you lament for *me* – for *me*, goddamnit! Are you going to lament? For me? Who is lamenting? Because it doesn’t seem like anyone recognizes the fucking SCALE of the issue at hand. Ya know?

PAL. –

CHULA. –

SHITSTAIN. Sorry.
Sorry.
That was insane.
That was fucking insane.
It’s the Adderall. I just –
I just need –

CHULA. Oh, you *need*?

SHITSTAIN. I’m looking for something.

CHULA. Uh-huh.

SHITSTAIN. Something sharp.
Something that’ll – work.
Something clean.

CHULA. Whatchu want that's clean?
 Clean air.
 Clean house.
 Clean dog.
 Clean baby.
 Clean fuckin' grave.

PAL. Ay vieja –

CHULA. Que chucho. They got me cleaning, all right.

SHITSTAIN. Sure.

CHULA. Fine then. What we gonna fix you up with?

SHITSTAIN. Fix me – ?

CHULA. Yes, bebito, how can Tia Chula help you out?

He points to PAL.

SHITSTAIN. You.

PAL. Me?

CHULA. 'Scuse me?

SHITSTAIN. Yeah.
 Yeah.
 Hell yeah.
 Yes, you.
 Okay.
 Okay.
 Yes.
 Yes, this is perfect, I –
 Shit. Shit.
 Shit, you're gonna hate me for this, but –
 You don't have a square, do you?
 Chip reader?

PAL. –

SHITSTAIN. Sure.
 Fine.
 No problem, uh –
Cambio?

PAL. –

SHITSTAIN. Cambio like change? Cambio?

PAL. –

SHITSTAIN. Sorry, I mean like, cash.
Do you have – ?
I'm in AP Spanish, so –

PAL. How much you want?

SHITSTAIN. I'll take it all.

PAL. All of it?

SHITSTAIN. Everything. Just give me everything that you have.

PAL. You don't wanna see what I got first?

SHITSTAIN. (*Different.*) I said give me everything.

Lights alter.

A droning noise.

Metal blades slicing air.

Slowly,

PAL takes a plastic bag of pills from his pocket.

He places it in his mouth.

PAL and SHITSTAIN meet at a kiss,

Intimate,

Exchanging bag, making sale.

The SHITSTAIN removes the purchase from his mouth,

Stashes it away.

Sound and lights cease.

CHULA. *Muthafucker.*

SHITSTAIN. This is the greatest day of my fucking life, man.

He pulls a wad of cash from his pocket.

He counts out bills.

SHITSTAIN. This should cover it.
You're a lifesaver.
Really.

The SHITSTAIN exits.

PAL looking out to where he'd gone.

PAL. Whatchu know 'bout Marco, huh?

CHULA. That was my sale.

PAL. I see you.

CHULA. You don't see shit.
Go on. Steal for yer daddy.
Might as well cuz someone's always stealing.
Stealing from your ass right now, gone off with yer leg skin, make it into jerky.

PAL. —

CHULA. Whatchu lookin' at?

PAL. Gotta piss.

CHULA. —

PAL. —

CHULA. Gotta pee or what?

PAL goes to pee, not so far from CHULA.

He unzips.

He urinates.

He stares at her.

He finishes.

CHULA. You go 'round pulling yer lil baby carrot out wherever you go?

PAL. That turn you on?

CHULA. –

PAL. My spot. Marked. Mine.

CHULA. Papito.
You lookin' dead-on into this dog's asshole.
Better watch yerself.

A stare down.

A stand off.

CHULA and PAL split away

As space transforms into:

SCENE 8

SIK and DORI's apartment bedroom.

Nighttime.

Television light.

The faint sound of a pharmaceutical ad.

DORI, at bed's edge, buttons her blouse up.

SIK wipes her mouth with towel.

She checks on cinderblock child, lulling it in her arms.

DORI. If yer gonna drink some every night, you could at least use less teeth.

SIK. –

DORI. What, yer milkbag ain't good enough no more?

SIK. There's something wrong with you.

DORI. Fuck off.

SIK. No.
You don't taste the same.
Different than usual.
All chemical-y.

DORI. Oh, I –

DORI checks herself.

DORI. Sometimes a capillary ruptures. Makes it taste like iron.

SIK. Not blood. Like –
Cleaning product?
Industrial.
Like – burning a little.
My tongue.

DORI. Quit drinkin' then. Jesus.

SIK. I'm hungry.

DORI. I don't like that, Sik. I don't like when you say it like that. Used to be sexy now you made it all –

SIK. All what?

DORI. All desperate.

SIK. Turn off the TV.

DORI. –

SIK finds PAL's megaphone.

SIK. *(Megaphone.)*
 For every headlight
 That lingers past our bedroom window,
 A month passes,
 Months passing,
 I remember the dot of an embryo gone wide,
 Gone big,
 Made baby.

DORI. My hips bunch up at the corners.
 I'm a body bag. I'm un-fun now.

SIK. *(Megaphone.)* She pipes out loud. Like conjuring up a spell.

DORI. It's not like you get to make your own choices all the time,
 So much as things just happen to you.
 The weather happens to me.
 What I eat, more often than not, just happens.
 My foot falls asleep, I black out on weekends,
 I'm pissing all the time, the nausea, my milk, it –
 They're all happenings.
 I'd like to be able to choose things more.

SIK. Here, I got you something.

SIK gives DORI a present.

SIK. Open.

DORI. What is this?

SIK. A box cutter. Multi tool. Sharp at the tip.

DORI. I can see that, but –

SIK. You keep it under your pillow.

DORI. I don't need a box cutter under my –

SIK. We're gonna take a trip now.
A trip that might mean danger.

DORI. You go to your shift up at the store?
Maggie called. Said she didn't see you 'cross the way.

SIK. We're rich now.
We got all rich in the world.
No need for security guard.
No more sets of keys.

DORI. Did you leave the job?

SIK. –

DORI. Sik, answer my question.

SIK. –

DORI. Okay.
You want to suck off? Make me prune dry? Sure,
The best I got to offer, some nutrient, some satiating, me,
It's *my* fuckin' tit, my hollowed out womb,
Hours at the store, still doing work.
At least then I'm a "me" and not a "them," or an "us."
Not two. Not twice. Not a pair. I –
What about my promotion?
The only reason I took it was cuz of this thing.
I wanna go back to register, I wanna do passport, I –

SIK. Quiet, Dor. Babe can hear you.

DORI. They can't hear shit.

SIK. Don't get all – all detrimental.

DORI. Detrimental! Don't tell me you have a knack for what's detrimental or just all right because if you do – if you pull that bullshit – I'll, I don't know I'll throw something, I'll –

- SIK. Dori.
- DORI. Sure.
This town's just milk crates and boarded up windows. People who think loving is like fixing things, like filling out prescription, when really to push maintenance on a *thing* is to say that *thing*'s not good enough.
- SIK. So I'm a thing now.
- DORI. But it's my home. I wanna stay. I wanna be here, but not like this.
- SIK. I gotta tell you something, Dor.
I – I fucked up.
- DORI. Yeah, so did I –
- SIK. I mean like real bad.
Some kid – he died.
- DORI. What?
- SIK. Last night. A party. Bunk stash I sold from the pharmacy. Made the pass around to some kid. Last night, the upstairs bathroom, a coupla painkillers became a pin-prick, a puncture wound, a kiss. I fucked up, Dor. I – I fucked up.

NASIR outside of the container, holding the megaphone.

SIK and DORI, freeze in time.

- NASIR. (*Megaphone.*)
My work is at the juncture between two moving points.
A breath, another breath.
Lungs collapsing.
Puncture wound.
A tetanus shot.
That icky spectacular,
That rusty shiny –
That's the thing I want to attend to.
"Rusty, shiny"
As in: imperfect desire.
The aged want, the dilapidated "American Dream"
Dreaming, dreamer, fucking my own asshole,
Because no one will do it for me.
Does that – does that make sense?

Time returns.

DORI. Were you gonna say something sooner?

SIK. I don't know.

DORI. They know it was you?

SIK. I said, I don't know.

DORI. –

SIK. We gotta go now.

DORI. –

SIK. Gonna get rid of the meds. Tomorrow. All of 'em. Cut my ties, clean up a few things, and I'm gonna come back here – noon sharp. Things packed. You, me, Baby – we'll take off. For real. We'll go where they don't know our names – no naming – just like you want – no naming – and we'll find the healthy thing. The small box for us to live, all quiet.

DORI looks at her new box cutter.

DORI. I love you.

SIK. –

DORI. –

SIK traces the buttons of DORI's blouse with her finger.

SIK. Noon tomorrow.
I pick you up and we're gone.

SCENE 9

Around them,

NASIR and PORTER warping space.

Bed sheets become an inpatient wing.

The container becomes hospital.

IV pole. EKG machines.

The hum of defibrillators and distant staff.

SIK and DORI exit.

PORTER watches NASIR sleep in hospital bed.

PORTER flips through a magazine,

Checks their watch,

Flips.

PORTER. (Reading) Everyone at Hoffman & Parker's getting a solo spot in the modern wing. Next our intern'll be showcasing some charcoal crap downtown. Must be nice to hit jackpot with a donor Daddy. Boring.

NASIR stirs.

PORTER. What happens when you overdose on pills, Nasir? You froth. Ya stiffen.

NASIR stirs.

PORTER reads.

PORTER. And of course, Rodrigo's show gets pulled. Look. The one for next spring. Some BFA kid called him out on plagiarism. I don't really see it, to be honest.

NASIR stirs.

PORTER. (*Snapping fingers.*) Nasir. Nasir. C'mon, wake up now.

NASIR grumbles. Gains consciousness.

PORTER. That's right. Pumped yer lil innards clean. Feels good, yeah?

NASIR. Porter.

PORTER. Happy to see me? I could fucking kill you.

NASIR. Jesus –

PORTER. Your parents couldn't make it.
Ya could've told me they'd be in motherfucking Mumbai.

NASIR. Porter, this is –

PORTER. Who pays for your insurance, by the way?
Because this shit'll cost you a fortune.

NASIR. This is – perfect.

PORTER. Christ, you need a pen?
Something to write on?
Record it for portfolio?

NASIR. Tell me everything.

PORTER. Well, twenty minutes in you start speaking gibberish.
I leave the room to mop up *my* puke, come back, and guess who's on the floor?

NASIR. We are entrenched in process.

PORTER. Y'know you shit yourself?
Yer anal retention a lil challenged from one too many laxatives in the cocktail.

NASIR. Did you keep any?

PORTER. *Did I keep any?* Of your shit, Nasir?

NASIR. You could've sopped some up. It's archival.

PORTER. You should be paying me.
I deserve an honorarium with this lowbrow bullshit.
"Sop some up." Get the fuck out of here.
It's people like you that make us seem intolerable.

NASIR. Kettle. Black. Like blaring, black abyss.

PORTER. And who's propped up supervising your inpatient services?

NASIR. But this isn't some lowbrow highbrow conversation, is it? Fuck. My stomach.

PORTER. Here.

PORTER gives NASIR water.

PORTER. Liquids.

He drinks.

PORTER. You remember that skin-grafting piece you did? Little squares cut up from people's legs, their arms, something about inheritance? That was literal bribery.

NASIR. Early work.

PORTER. The time you fucked your patron as performance?

NASIR. Staaahp.

PORTER. Okay! What about that piece where you – that time you took the tip of your dick, dipped one end in motor oil, cruised parkside, fucking men in the ass, arguing you were a “mechanized body.” Was *that* lowbrow?

NASIR. You're revising. Help me up. You're – thank you – you're screwing with the order of things. It was cruising, fucking, then penis in *automotive grease* – not oil – then painting using the tip of the phallus. Genital generated works. The end a – water, please – the end a comment on brown queer bodies functioning as commodity, based on –

PORTER. Horny twinks in the park aren't the equivalent to an un-stretched canvas.

NASIR. I didn't say they were.

PORTER. What tradition are you even working in?
Do these efforts rhyme with Mendieta?
Ono? Burden?
Your finger-quote predecessors?
You – you are four decades too late.
Trying to gobble up relevance like – sure,
Sackler founded Oxycontin. Great!
Eli Lilly, Johnson & Johnson, they're all the same.
Philanthropists donating millions upon trillions
To the livelihood of you and me and every museum,
Every cultural worker we know.

NASIR. I'm not going to cheapen myself by arguing –

PORTER. Just cuz you're queer doesn't mean you get to –

NASIR. Oh.

PORTER. –

NASIR. Okay. I see where we are.

He sits up in his bed.

NASIR. “Just cuz I'm queer.”
Just cuz the boundaries of gender and sexuality
Blah blah what the fuck ever. Please, I –
This isn't a race to the finish, Porter.
We aren't shooting for gold.
And *honestly* –

PORTER. Honestly –

NASIR. I'm tired of being put on blast because –

PORTER. Because?

NASIR. Look at us. Look. At. Me.

PORTER. No.

NASIR. Do you get followed in convenience stores?
You get the extra pat down before flying business?

PORTER. Sometimes, sure –

NASIR. Oh-*kay*. Oh-fucking-kay.

PORTER. What are you even / talking about?

NASIR. You get a little more choice in the matter, huh?

PORTER. I do not have to be here right now.

NASIR. Same private school. Same prestigious undergraduate education.
Unpaid internships. Summers farming in Eastern Europe.
Published articles in your uncle's arts criticism journal.

PORTER. You think I'm using my identity, my –

That I'm working towards inclusivity, to advance my career?

NASIR. C'mon. Your gallery only signed on as my representation in reaction to getting called out for having some wonder bread-ass roster of creatives.

PORTER. I know you're dazed and all, but you're embarrassing yourself.

NASIR. I *am* embarrassed. I'm embarrassed that my identity finds cultural resonance through a meager "namaste," tainted by Bikram fuckwads. Embarrassed, that my mother settled for English in the home, because "Nana worked for me to have a different way." A way that whips left of brownness. You think I can't recognize the sources of my guilt? I know who I am. I *know* going to the Met Opera at twelve, the viola lessons, the fencing bouts – it was all just cultural masturbation, but I did not choose the way the world would allocate me. I didn't choose any of this, I –

PORTER. That doesn't mean you can't hold yourself accountable for –

NASIR. YOU are white space, Porter. You epitomize the idea of a circle filled with blank. I'm not a fucking collapsible Russian Doll for you to tokenize –

PORTER. You tokenize yourself –

NASIR. Just go then. Go!

PORTER. (*Different.*)

I'm going to compare our relationship to an earthworm getting diced by the segment, because it seems as though that sort of violent language is the only thing that gets through to you. Every stage of life we've shared is one unit of the worm's body. Childhood to adolescence, every single moment: crushing the poor worm, rendering it – me – you immobile. Now what are we, but a scattering of chopped up segments trying to make ourselves whole?

This obviously has something to do with the solo show, or maybe something even bigger than that, that you don't have the ability to look me in the eye and say. Do you want to fuck me? Is that it? Do you want to scratch at my cornea? Or are you just fucking jealous? Because the way you treat me is pure vitriol and I – I apologized for the way I handled what happened at the gallery, but – Nasir, a man died as a result of your work. Does that not fester for you in *some* shape or form?

There is no world in which you get to treat me like a wet paper bag, especially since I have stayed. I stuck around because I wanted and still currently want to make sure you're not veiling suicide. I am not trying to prescribe a biography upon your life. I do not want to put you in a petri dish. But you make it very easy for yourself.

NASIR. –

PORTER. Anything?

NASIR. –

PORTER. Anything, Nasir?

PORTER kicks the stacked safety cones outside of the shipping container.

The whole world quakes.

PORTER. Look. I can make a mess too.

NASIR. I just want to create something beautiful.

PORTER. Well, not everything's about aesthetics is it?

NASIR pulls his phone out from underneath him.

He clicks it.

PORTER. –

NASIR. Playback. Might be difficult to hear –

PORTER. You recorded me.

NASIR. Documentation. *This*. This is the art-making, P.

PORTER. You –

NASIR and PORTER's eyes, locked.

The sound of a backing truck.

The incessant safety siren, repeating,

Running over PORTER.

Decimating their trust.

DORI and SIK and PAL and CHULA,

Stripping away hospital,

IV pole, bed sheet,

To blank slate.

PORTER and NASIR disappear.

As do SIK and CHULA.

PAL wields megaphone.

SCENE 10

DORI in a hospital waiting room.

Months earlier.

Abdominal pain.

A bend, a whip, a crack.

The container becomes macro-scoped womb:

A single cinder block's been placed inside.

PAL. *(Megaphone.)*
 Side effects may include:
 A cross-contaminated conception of time.
 Backwards. Things muddled. A memory.
 Dori, sitting lonely in hospital waiting room.
 Check up. Checking-in.

PAL exits.

DORI. I want to tell you a joke.
 A joke about walking.
 A joke about this trick I can do
 With my hands where they open and they close,
 And then they open again.
 I want to tell you a joke where I divulge into speech,
 Then rambling, then maybe even apology.
 A joke-apology.
 For you.
 For future you and future me.
 It's a kind of sorry I write
 With my fingers cupped over my belly, made one step bigger,
 Because I'm mostly sorry to have conjured you at all.

CHULA enters with a wheelbarrow –

Three cinder blocks inside.

She lays them out. One. Two. Three.

They say you're the size of a quarter,
 But ya feel more like a stretch, an avalanche,
 A heavy metal hurricane,

And actually – (*Indicating container.*)
 My womb is this fucking big.
 My insides made of steel now.
 Roof panel.
 Floor brace.
 Embryo.
 Cervix.
 I'm welded shut from a factory up in Shanghai.

CHULA helms a pulverizer hammering tool.

CHULA. Muthafuckers be barkin' at me:
 "Bitch, get up off the block"
 No more fruit stand at Mariachi Plaza.

DORI. A night light. I'll leave Baby a night light.

CHULA. Pushin' me outta Pico Rivera, Bell Gardens, South Central.

DORI. Maybe you'll see it, glowing,
 Between you and the slight skin of my thickening uterus.
 And I'll take my vitamin, my iodine, my calcium,
 And Sik'll move in with me,
 And she'll be happy.

CHULA. "Push" another word for scream.

DORI. A nurse asks: this yer first born?

CHULA. Had three boys. All my own.

DORI. I stiffen up, not sure how to answer.

CHULA. And in tryna feed a family,
 My motherhood – like my turf – gets stripped from me.
 A story of one viejita – gone and lost all her children:

CHULA takes the pulverizer and smashes the first cinder block to pieces.

CHULA. One. Stillborn.

She smashes the next block.

CHULA. Two. En el sueño.

She smashes the last block.

CHULA. Three.
 Drive-by,
 Helicopters,
 Trigger-click like lullaby.
 A reminder for Sunday nights
 And Saturdays,
 Strike face and claw end.
 My children dead.
 I don't want this life for you or nobody else.

NASIR appears, working in his studio,

Preparing new pieces, cutting material with box cutter.

*He listens to a composite track he's made of remixed audio,
 spliced together from conversations with PORTER.*

[A potential example of stitched sound:]

AUDIO. Fuck me.
 Fuck me.
 You are white space.
 White. Space.
 Prescribe a – Fuck me
 Wet paper – biography.
 Diced at the segment.
 Fucking jealous – Bikram fuckwads.
 Not everything's about aesthetics.
 Crushing the poor worm.
 My mother settled for – convenience stores.
 Gobbled up – honorarium –
 Money laundering –
 Fucked your patron.
 White space.
 Fester – fester – fester.
 Every stage of life – getting diced.
 Childhood to adolescence.
 You are white space, Porter.

*Over the course of the audio PAL enters, with his fresh
 kicks and luggage pulled behind.*

PORTER and SIK follow.

In tandem:

PORTER pulls a folded check from their mouth

PAL pulls shoelaces from his mouth.

SIK pulls a necklace out of her mouth.

Then:

PORTER signs check.

PAL threads laces into his new shoe.

SIK puts the necklace on DORI.

SIK. You like it?

PORTER. *(Handing check to NASIR.)* First sale. The gallery takes fifty percent.

DORI. Sik –

PORTER. I'd congratulate you on the big return,
But – what's that worth, huh?

DORI. Sik, it's happening. We're going to have this baby.

PORTER, DORI, NASIR, and SIK

– gone.

SCENE 11

Nighttime.

East L.A.

PAL parked at the edge of the container –

His head in his hands.

CHULA shielded by the shadow of container.

CHULA. Tsst. Tsssst.

PAL stands.

PAL. Who's there?

CHULA. –

PAL. Better show yerself.

CHULA. *(Playing.)* Adelaaaante. Joven. Que buscas?

CHULA steps out of darkness,

Drinking a beer, holding another.

CHULA. Whatchu whimperin' at?

PAL sits back down.

CHULA. All up in his feelings now he a rich fool.

Head in his hands.

She sips.

CHULA. Manzanita?

PAL. –

She sips.

CHULA. They look good.
Shoes 'n all.

Learned to tie ‘em too.
 Better be careful,
 Fools come pull ‘em off yer feet,
 String ‘em up.
 Telephone wire.

PAL. I don’t wanna be here no more.

CHULA. Well, –

She sets an open beer beside him.

CHULA. I been waitin’ for ya, mijo.

Head still buried –

PAL. Whatchu think’s gonna happen here, ah? La Raza is dead. Working class is long-gone, and yeah you ‘n me are hustling, but the coffee shops n galerías aren’t boutta pay you back with rent control. Ya know why? Cuz this big myth of *amenities* – shit ain’t real. I say buy a car and drive north.

CHULA. Aaaah, esa mierda es cancer.

PAL. Cancer is cancer.

CHULA. Pues.

PAL. –

CHULA. –

PAL. Got his new kicks and pops gone kicked the bucket.

PAL downs the beer beside him.

PAL. Fuckin’ timely ass bullshit.

He kicks his feet at the ground.

Quiet.

He kicks again.

A sound.

Scratches his foot again.

A sad laugh.

CHULA. Okay música. I see you.

PAL taps his foot.

CHULA. Whatchu got?

PAL continues to tap, perhaps clapping, perhaps stomping, creating a beat in the night.

CHULA, tipsy, dancing.

CHULA. Mira. Pah. Pah. Pah. Pah-pah pah pah pah –

PAL. You crazy ass –

CHULA. You love it.

She dances.

They laugh –

A moment of peace.

PAL. Ay Chula.
Ay Chula.
Fuggit up.
Fuh-fuh fuggit up.
Fuh-fuh fuggit up.
Chulita.
Chulita.
I see you.
Chulita.
Ayyyyyy –

Streetlights go out.

Everything, dark.

CHULA.
(Megaphone, hushed.)
Me llamas curandera,
Pero, soy más un angel.
Y aqui, la palabra de Dios

TRANSLATION.
(Megaphone, hushed.)
You call me curandera,
But, I'm more an angel.
And here, the word of God

Toma la forma de medicina,
 De contención.
 La pregunta del futuro es facil.
 Especialmente en la medianoche,
 Cuando voy a caminar la calle.
 Solamente yo y mis cosas,
 Esperando.
 Claro, ya tenemos
 Idiomas del cielo, de la tierra.
 Y cuando necesitamos crear el idioma
 Del futuro, te sientas en un hoyo.
 Sin movimiento.
 Me pregunto si esto es lo mismo
 Como un idioma de curación
 (*Singing.*)
 “Buena salud.
 Buena salud.”
 (*Off megaphone.*)
 Duérmete, mijo.
 Have a good dream.

Takes the form of medicine,
 Of containment.
 The question of the future is an easy one.
 Especially at midnight,
 When I go to walk the street,
 Only me and my things,
 Waiting.
 Of course, we already have
 Languages of heaven, of the earth,
 And when we need to create the language
 Of the future, you sit in a hole.
 No movement.
 I wonder if this is the same
 As a language of healing.
 (*Singing.*)
 “Good health.
 Good health.”
 (*Off megaphone.*)
 Go to sleep, my son.
 Have a good dream.

The Interstate 10 highway –

Cars passing in the night.

SCENE 12

Lights up.

PAL is gone.

CHULA remains.

Daytime.

The pharmacy.

DORI without belly.

The SHITSTAIN, as customer, collects prescription from the counter.

DORI. You take it with water.
Once in the morning, once at night.

CHULA. *(On megaphone.)*
Side effects may develop over time.
Nerve damage. Loss of appetite.

DORI. If you skip it, miss anything for any reason, don't double-up.
That's the worst you can do.

CHULA. *(Megaphone.)*
Two unspent lovers, before Baby, before mess.
Sik and Dori – a new kinda love.

CHULA exits.

DORI. Your receipt. Have a good day.

She hands him his meds.

The SHITSTAIN exits.

DORI busies herself as SIK enters the periphery.

SIK. Attention customers.
Clean-up on aisle four.
We gotta resident shop girl breakin' hearts,
I repeat, clean-up on aisle –

DORI. There she is.

SIK. Miss me?

DORI. What's there to miss?

SIK. Ouch.

DORI. I think I filled the wrong prescription.

SIK. Aaah, he'll be fine.

DORI. Will he?

SIK. –

DORI. Y'ever pull at yer skin and think, wow, this is just holding all the juice in?

SIK. You're cute.

DORI. Didn't think you'd show face after the other night.

SIK. Sunday shift through Wednesday.

DORI. The guard before you didn't talk so much.

SIK. Good thing. They mighta caught you first.
Besides, I make a much stronger first impression, no?

DORI. Yer local retail pharmacy ain't the place for hot impressions.

SIK. It's a side gig, bug.

DORI. *Bug?*

SIK. I wanna see you again. I'm gonna.

DORI. You're gonna?

SIK. That's right.

DORI. I've been with girls like you.
Lookin' to latch on and call me sweet names
Like "bug" and "Dor."
Always love a name.

SIK. Who says I'm lookin'.

DORI. —

SIK. I'm joking. I'm joshing. Hello! I'm Josh.

DORI laughs.

SIK. Can I come 'round again tonight or what?

DORI. —

SIK. Well?

DORI. Pick me up when I'm off. We can figure it out from there.

The memory fades.

SCENE 13

The container as gallery.

PORTER steps forward.

PORTER. And I'd like to continue tonight's event by congratulating – no, not congratulating. *Celebrating* Nasir. Not only for the incredible vehicle he's made of our space, but for the stunning step forward he's taken with his body of work. Everyone –

We arrive simultaneously in East L.A.

Early morning.

CHULA has tied PAL to a cinder block,

Within the shipping container,

His mouth gagged and hands tied.

NASIR steps forward.

NASIR. Thank you. All of you. A thunderous thank you to everyone at the gallery for making this show possible.

CHULA. Put some roofie in yer drink. Told you I got that good-good.

NASIR. The curatorial staff, volunteers, the admin with their incredible public programming. Christ, the install team – Andrew, are you in the back?

NASIR looks out.

NASIR. Andrew, everyone.

Applause.

CHULA fans herself.

CHULA. Look up, boy. That's the sun.

NASIR. But truthfully, I could not have done this without the advocacy of my longtime friend, collaborator, champion of my work. Porter, you are to cultural cultivation as sunshine is to a field of fucking roses. I am honored, dipped in honey, so elated to share this work by your side.

It's abysmal, how often a maker can feel overlooked. Unworthy. It's like you have to come close to death in order to catch any possible future. I just hope – I want this to act as a marker of moving forward. Of taking care of each other. Of a radical empathy. Thank you.

Applause.

NASIR and PORTER pose together, smiling.

CHULA. You awake?

PORTER. I'm impressed.

NASIR. I'm impressive.

PORTER. That they bought it. That they can't read a one-trick pony from –

NASIR. Hey.

CHULA. You missin' out on dawn.

NASIR. Did you see my parents?

PORTER. Your mother looked confused.

NASIR. She did, didn't she?

PORTER. Charming how supportive / they've –

NASIR. I get a decent write-up and neither of them will care.

PORTER. Right.

CHULA. Despierta, chico.

NASIR. Kind of Greta to make it.

PORTER. My mother's always had an unfortunate penchant for you.

NASIR. Most people do.

PORTER. –

NASIR. Anyone help with clean up?

PORTER. We'll have the interns come on Monday.

NASIR. I see.

PORTER. You don't have to stay.

NASIR. Were you planning on hanging around?

PORTER. I was gonna lock up. Take a walk, I think.

NASIR. –

PORTER. You're welcome to join me.

NASIR. No thanks. I don't want to spend any more time with you than I have to.

PORTER. Of course.

NASIR. –

PORTER. You know. After all this, I begin to think something's wilted inside of you. Not anything you'd see in your own reflection, but something really embedded. Looking at you, the sneering, the smiling – to label things deceitful doesn't feel so far-fetched. The terrible thing is it's me looking right back at myself.

NASIR. I'm an artist, P. Not a used cars salesman.

PORTER. Goodnight, Nasir.

NASIR. –

NASIR nods and exits.

PORTER, alone in the white space.

CHULA goes to the open door of the container.

CHULA. When they put you in a cell,
You often don't get water, no place for resting heads.
I been there and I ain't goin' back.

PORTER exits.

CHULA. You take from me, you take from Marco.
You think you an artist, boy. But chu ain't no savior.

CHULA reveals box cutter.

CHULA. A child in this world is taught to be spiteful. Then they grow to be men. Men sully up. They pull your hair, beat their baby mama. Press your face so hard against metal fencing that when you pull back, the diamond cross sections leave an imprint all up n' down your cheek. Part of me gets mad, but the other part –

She points it at PAL.

He yells in muffled distress.

CHULA. Vamos.

CHULA strikes him in the stomach.

CHULA. Lo siento mijo.

She removes his work gloves.

Tosses them.

CHULA. Don't gotta dirty yer hands no more.

As PAL groans in pain,

CHULA begins to close the door.

She pushes the door, halfway closed.

PAL panics.

CHULA continues to seal the container.

CHULA. No fighting, ah.

PAL yells for her to stop.

CHULA seals the container.

She contemplates the structure.

Runs her finger over its surface.

The muffled yells from within reverberate against metal.

They continue as she speaks:

CHULA. Smoother than a cinder block.
Wider than my fruit box.
I don't gotta pill for our pre-disposed condition.
But I hear you can cure a headache
By banging yer damn head on the metal siding.

The yelling stops.

She knocks.

CHULA takes a final look, gathers her grocery cart,

Her makeshift bodega, and walks away.

SCENE 14

SIK and DORI's apartment.

Daytime

Television light.

The faint sound of a pharmaceutical ad.

SIK enters.

SIK. Dori!
 It's noon, Dor.
 I got our things packed up in the back, we can –

She looks for DORI.

SIK. Dori, I said noon sharp. Where the hell's this girl at?

She knocks on the closed container door.

SIK. You in there?
 You washing up or something?
 We gotta go.

She looks around.

SIK. Dori?

DORI surfaces, in another place, and watches.

She rocks cinder block in her arms.

Did she take the Baby and run?

Did she go to pick up groceries?

The thought of DORI leaving dawns on SIK.

A moment confused:

Heartbreak, but perhaps a weight lifted.

SIK. Fuck.

DORI. A prescription made out to Sik,
Sik, like Sicko,
Ailing like angel.
Keep hydrated.
Plenty of rest.
Inside that fever-headache,
You'll be tricked into thinking:
Living life's like an endeavor.
Rendering you a ghost.
But we're not ghosts, not joke-apologies.
We're not things to make sense of.
But my fingers tingle with the weight of our child.
They sing the same song –
I love you.
I love you.
I'm gone.

She's gone.

SCENE 15

The SHITSTAIN returns,

Frazzled, uniform-less.

He lugs canvases onstage – as many as he can carry.

Some wrapped in paper, others exposed.

He sets them against the container.

He catches a breath.

He goes offstage and returns with more.

He sets. He catches. Offstage. Returns.

PORTER arrives, eyes glued to phone.

PORTER. You're not finished.

SHITSTAIN. If I'd had a break –

PORTER. You'd still be working.
The collector's expecting delivery by the end of the week, so –

SHITSTAIN. –

PORTER. *(Smiles.)* Haven't got all day.

The SHITSTAIN goes offstage, returns with more.

Repeat.

And repeat.

With work glove, the SHITSTAIN moves to one end of the container and tugs a door half-open, PAL's body obscured.

The SHITSTAIN begins to place art pieces inside, when –

SHITSTAIN. *(Inside.)* UH –

PORTER. Line them up at the corner. The wooden edges, they pierce the canvas.

SHITSTAIN. UH, PORTER, UH –

They look up from their phone.

PORTER. Hello?

The SHITSTAIN reappears.

SHITSTAIN. There's something – there's someone inside.

PORTER. Someone?

SHITSTAIN. Yes, someone.
Someone,
A body,
Someone.

PORTER. Oh.
Well.
Huh.
–
Work around it then.

SHITSTAIN. –

PORTER. –

Uneasy, the SHITSTAIN “works around it.”

He continues to work.

To fill the container with work.

Every piece.

One by one.

The discrepancies between health and commerce make collision.

The animal inclination of container as cargo slowly makes its return.

Precious, precious cargo.

The artifice of a sealable shape erased [or revived].

PORTER texts.

The SHITSTAIN struggles – but not so much.

He finishes.

He reseals the container, with PAL discarded inside,

And upon closing:

An eruption of shoveling metal,

Scraping, band saw, sand belt.

SHITSTAIN and PORTER eventually disappear from view,

But the shoveling noise of shipment continues.

Sound becomes louder,

The larger sound of making,

Then flattening,

Demolition,

Development,

Expansion,

Expanding –

END OF PLAY