

THE KITCHEN

A play in one act

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CHARACTERS

JASMYN	South-Asian, Punjabi ethnicity.
NATALIE	Free spirit. Mixed ethnicity but appears white. Recently experienced a bad break up.
ANTONIA	Mexican American.
CASHIER/MOM	Adolescent/Gen Z woman of color. Old soul. A sage.

SETTING

Three individual and distinct kitchens.

An open store front bodega.

TIME

Various days leading up to a Friendsgiving celebration. Observed holidays around this time include:

- The annual Diwali celebration. On day 2 of celebration one prepares mithai (sweets) to drop off at a neighbor's home.
- Thanksgiving.
- Dia de la Candelaria

SCENE 1

(Lights up on JASMYN and the bodega where the CASHIER appears. The three kitchenettes are dimly lit)

CASHIER: Hello, Madame

JASMYN: Good afternoon *(she scans the shelves, taking the cumin and garam masala and inhaling.)*

(Musical Interlude: A melody that is nostalgic of a memory/grandma's home)

CASHIER: Can I help you find anything?

JASMYN: Oh, just picking ingredients to make Kaju Burfi

CASHIER: You know we have prepackaged assortments in the freezer

JASMYN: Oh! I plan to make it from scratch

CASHIER: *(slightly grinning)* of course, let me know if you need any help finding the ingredients

JASMYN: Thank you. *(Music starts again. She brushes over the handful of spices. In her body, the intoxicating scents of curry powder and turmeric)* Aloo Gobi- mama's cauliflower!

CASHIER: *(JASMYN turns to exit)* Sat Sri Akall *(Their hands in a prayer)*

JASMYN: Shukria

SCENE 2

(Lights up on three distinctly different kitchen areas, "kitchenettes". There is a moment where only the kitchenettes and guitarist are present)

(Musical Interlude: The women begin a kitchen ritual including a dance sequence and song)

JASMYN: 8 cups of milk powder

ANTONIA: $\frac{2}{3}$ gallons of water...whoah

NATALIE: 18 6 inch corn tortillas, torn in half

JASMYN: 400 gm of condensed milk

ANTONIA: ½ tbsp salt, ½ onion

NATALIE: One can cream of chicken

ANTONIA: Garlic cloves (my fav)

JASMYN: 1 handful of pistachios

NATALIE: Garlic salt to taste

ANTONIA: Corn husk

JASMYN: 2 tablespoons of ghee

NATALIE: 1 package shredded Monterey Jack cheese.

ANTONIA: 4 lb of pork shoulder.

JASMYN: Step 1: Take a large bowl and add milk powder in it along with condensed milk.

NATALIE: No one seems to know where this recipe came from.

ANTONIA: 4 cups of instant masa.

SCENE 3

(Lights up on NATALIE's kitchenette, low light on other kitchenettes and oven. She speaks into a podcast mic with headphones on)

NATALIE: Sometimes I like to imagine both of my grandmothers meeting. *(JASMYN walks to the oven)* In a place that doesn't span space or time. They're both teenagers. I see them in crisp sun dresses with *(ANTONIA walks to the oven)* Peter Pan collars passing one another *(both cross)* on the street carrying groceries or pushing strollers. I wonder what the price of milk and bread was. I wonder if they would have waved to one another or walked right past by. *(JASMYN/ANTONIA step upstage and downstage)*

From the onset, it doesn't seem like they have anything in common. One Chicana from California, the other from the Midwest. But they were both Catholic (*both make a gesture symbolizing religion*); both homemakers who had to work in department stores after divorces and their kids were grown. They cooked, cleaned, and took care of people. Family meals relied on the same staples- processed meat, dairy, and canned foods. They made do with what they had. They did everything they could for their children. They both outlived two of their sons. Even in old age, they retained the starch of youth.

SCENE 4

(Lights up on ANTONIA's kitchenette. We see her going through shopping bags)

ANTONIA: Starch....where are you?...oh no I forgot the starch *(She picks up the phone)*
 Hi mi amor que haces?..... I am just getting started on the tamales but I realized I forgot the starch from the store, could you pick some up for me on your way home from the community center?.....I forgot the town hall was tonight, you got this, remember what you are fighting for, all those families believe in you, you are the voice for those who don't have one... ..I know, I know, I just feel the pressure to get these tamales right...*(NATALIE and JASMYN clank)* well with all this hate that is going around its important now than ever to preserve our culture *(NATALIE walks to oven and turns on, leaves pan with onions on to cook)* and I also told your mom that I would make some for noche buena and she is an amazing cook who I would not want to let down *(NATALIE puts pan down)*. I know it is not until next month but I feel like I should get some practice in now, the consistency of the masa is delicate *(NATALIE & ANTONIA sprinkle ingredients)* and a precious treasure that has been passed down from our ancestors...Don't worry..our friends are going to love them when we take them to Friendsgiving tonight....Sounds good, talk to you later.

(She picks up the Ipad)

Maybe there is a substitute for starch *(spelling out loud what she is typing)* Juaja Cocina, tamales

SCENE 5

(Lights up on JASMYN's kitchenette. MOM/CASHIER voice is heard from offstage)

JASMYN: Mom, have you finished sweeping the floor so we can get started? When I went to the grocery store, Meena and I spoke for quite a while. I have to tell you about the conversation.

MOM: Yes, I heard she is quite a storyteller. Let's first count the ingredients for the Kaju Barfi

“1 ½ cups Cashew Nuts
90 ML Water or 6 Tablespoons
¾ cup of sugar (+2 tbsp optional) 150-180 grams
1 teaspoon cardamom powder”

(JASMYN is shuffling the ingredients around to ensure they are in place)

JASMYN: Meena asked if I was Punjabi?

MOM: What did you say?

JASMYN: I said yes, my parents were born in Mumbai and Amritsar. She grinned effusively and said her family was from Punjab too *(ANTONIA walks to oven slightly smiling)*; her dad a literary poet. *(Pause)* She first tried to offer me prepackaged Burfi and I told her I am making Diwali sweets from scratch.

MOM: I like to soak the cashew nuts in advance. *(ANTONIA pours water into pot)* Adding TLC makes the burfi's tastier, the same way your Nani taught me that improvising in the kitchen is trusting your heart to lead. *(Pause)* What did Meena say?

JASMYN: She was happy and excited to talk about Punjab. Her family is from West Punjab. *(She uncomfortably moves ingredients around in an OCD like manner bearing for MOM's reaction, and an unquestionable thirst for truth, in asking the next question)* Mom, was Diwali celebrated when the British (Raj) ruled over India? *(NATALIE heads to oven, ANTONIA returns to her kitchenette)*

“2 teaspoons ghee for cooking
2 teaspoons ghee for grease”

MOM: Yes, of course! Okay, bache

“Add 1 ½ cups cashews to a blender jar and pulse a few times until it turns to powder”

JASMYN: Did you have any *(pause)* Muslim friends in Mumbai?

MOM: Yes, of course, on the playground. (During Diwali we'd share sweets. I had, um, "school friendships." *(NATALIE & JASMYN are momentarily both at the oven, not looking at one another)*)

JASMYN: *(Pausing slightly uncomfortable)* Remember when we were at the Wagah-Attar Border during Diwali in 2015. I remember how excited your cousin Raju was as we drove past the Golden Temple to the border. With the dust and the humidity, I don't know why I had butterflies about what to expect. *(pause)* We sat there and watched the young Indian soldiers raise their legs as high as possible to the even younger-looking Pakistani guards, gifting the tri-color burfis you make so well. They were intimidating as they stared each other down, showing who had the higher kicks. Babbu Maan was blasting in the background; the dhol and chimta, the bodies moving and smiling. I remember turning around in front and back, and seeing all the red and pink saris, *(NATALIE and ANTONIA put scarves on)* the platts folding and rolling. I looked across the fence to Pakistan, the women in their burkas on one side of the road, and the men in their regal attire, on the other. The familiarity of Arif Lohar, the way we moved our bodies to the music to their more restrained gestures. We exchanged glances. Even then, I felt both pride and, later, sorrow for the fences that divided us *(NATALIE and ANTONIA reach for ingredients on one another's kitchenette/ are stopped possibly?)*.

MOM: I watched you tear up during the ceremony. I was proud to see you proud to be Indian. Do you know how long I waited for you to embrace your roots?

JASMYN: I was because um, I felt overwhelmed in a good way with the celebration. Call it geography, call it humanity *(responding to the relationship between Pakistan, just not embracing her Indian-ness)*

(Musical Interlude which continues until the end of this scene)

MOM: *(In a sadder tone)* After the suicide attack on the Attar border/Pakistani side in 2016, our forces stopped exchanging sweets *(NATALIE walks to oven/ JASMYN walks back to kitchenette)* with the Pakistan rangers. Over 100 people were killed.

SCENE 6

(Lights up on NATALIE at the oven)

NATALIE: *(leaving a voicemail)* Hi Aunt Doreen! I know you're busy at the hospital... Just checking about the enchilada recipe. I think you're the only one who knows it from scratch. Give me a call back when you can. Or else I may have to use cream of chicken or something..k bye!

(NATALIE puts headphones on and speaks into mic)

Welcome back everyone to "Keep Cookin'" a podcast on family and food. On this week's episode, I'll be talking about my own family.

So, no one ever writes anything down on my Mom's side. When people ask what's in the enchiladas, I don't mention the canned ingredients. Real chefs consider it cheating.

(ANTONIA walks to the oven) But- when you're cooking for ten children and many more multiples of grandchildren and great grandchildren, sometimes you've got to cut corners.

(ANTONIA cuts an onion at the oven) Or you'd never be able to leave the kitchen. With my dad's Mom Elaine though, I have books of recipes. *(She drops cookbooks on counter)* She was meticulous in maintaining her documents, clothes, home. Maybe that's why I wanted to be a journalist.

My favorite recipe to cook with Elaine was molasses cookies. Rolling the dough into balls and dipping it into sugar was my favorite part. She always let me lick the spoon. *(pull out other ingredients)* I brought them to every holiday party until last year's Thanksgiving when someone remarked that molasses should only be used in rum. Fortunately, I do not have to attend a holiday gathering with that person again, but for the sake of research and humblebragging I'm tackling two recipes. Cheating, because: canned ingredients. But I don't think anyone will know!

(She stops recording, pulls out and names ingredients)

"8 ounces cream cheese
12 ounces butter
3 cups flour
28 ounces canned filling
Confectioners sugar for dusting"

SCENE 7

(Lights up on ANTONIA's kitchenette)

(Musical Interlude: Juaja Cocina plays in the background... "hola me llamo janet")

ANTONIA: Time to start the chile. Boil the chile... How?

(She picks up the phone and dials her mom. She doesn't want to make a trip to the store)

Hello my gorgeous mama....I need help! (*whiny*) Every Christmas you make your delicious tamales con chile rojo and they are the best recipe that I know, so I have decided to make them for my Friendsgiving but... I don't know how to make them.....well every year when the stove was cooking the pork and chile and while the table was filled with all the ingredients Laura, mela i would anxiously wait our turn to get our hands messy (*NATALIE and JASMYN wipe their hands on apron/clothing*) in the masa and after that part I would run away without a clue of the next steps.....(*chuckles*) I know I know.....I am ready (*while writing down ingredients*) uh huh...yep... es todo?...ok muchos thank yous!... You are heading to the mountains for the day?... I wish I didn't get stuck here for the holidays but I have that big gig coming up. I miss you guys..... but I am glad to have friends who are like family to spend the holiday with..salé... Safe travels....wait! any other advice..... Love you bye.
(*to herself out loud*) Love and patience. Love and patience.

(*Musical Interlude: JASMYN plays with a chime in her kitchen*)

(*Lights fade down on ANTONIA*)

SCENE 8

(*Lights up on NATALIE's kitchenette*)

NATALIE: (*Leaving a voicemail*) Hi Cindy. Sorry to hear that you have the flu. Wondering if you can send me the enchilada recipe? Miss you! Adios!

(*to herself*)

“Gather the ingredients.

In a large bowl, beat cream cheese with butter until light and fluffy.

Add flour, 1 cup at a time, and mix well.”

ANTONIA: “Once the water is boiled, drain the chile.”

(*ANTONIA dumps pot of water off stage*)

NATALIE: Ok so we've got an entrée and dessert. One entrée and one dessert. You can do this,

Natalie. It's just two dishes. You can cook two dishes...

“In a bowl mix together cream of chicken soup, 1/3 cup sour cream, 1/3 cup enchilada sauce, salt and pepper.”

(starts to call Mom)

“Add chicken and diced green chilis and just mix until everything is combined.”

JASMYN: “But don’t run the blender for a long time. The cashews will release oil and become lumpy.”

NATALIE: *(Leaving voicemail)* Hi Mom! Call me back when you get the chance. Or I could call Karen. Cindy and Annette haven’t called back. Anyway. Talk to you soon. Bye.

(Starts to record)

You wouldn’t be able to tell which side of my family I’m talking about based on their names. If I list them off and it sounds like I’m listing off Mickey Mouse Club members that’s because- I am listing off Mickey Mouse Club members.

(Musical Interlude: Mickey Mouse Club inspired tune starts)

Josephina named all of her kids after the Mickey Mouse Club- Cindy, Ricky, Larry, Susie, Karen, Doreen, Marky, Jonny, Billy. And my Mom- Sharon Darlene.

(Musical Interlude: Tune continues but gets more solemn /transitions into JASMYN guitar music)

SCENE 9

(Lights up on JASMYN’s kitchenette, a few moments of JASMYN’s theme before she starts)

JASMYN: *(distracted by the 2015 border memory)* Remember during the opening commencement of the Wagah celebration, I waved to the Pakistani girls and the guards on both sides scorned me....

MOM: Yes, I remember, and your antics have carried from your youth. Let’s not go back in time. Tell me about your conversation. But first,

“Don’t run the blender for a long time. The cashews will release oil and become lumpy.”

JASMYN: She wanted to talk about India before the partition. She started to hum *(NATALIE & ANTONIA hum)* soft lullabies as I was walking the aisles. Her father would

sing to her as a child, his own poems, and hymns about the fertile fields of Punjab. It was her father who led that famous Punjabi Conference in Lyallpur in 1956, right after the partition. Do you remember the Bazm-e-Adam, its main purpose was consciousness-raising?

MOM: Consciousness-raising? No bache (*light laugh*), I was only 6 at the time .

“To ensure the powder is not grainy, blend the coarse particles again.”

JASMYN: Yes! (*exuberantly*) Poets came together from East and West Punjab. They were Punjabi and relating on a heart level.

“The cashew powder will be slightly grainy”

MOM: Like how Nani taught me to cook, on a heart-level. (*The smile on mom’s face shifts to a memory, body locks in a vertical position*).

ANTONIA: Papa chato, estos son para ti, you used to love tamales de chile rojo.

MOM: Your Nana had to flee Rawalpindi during the partition. She already had Bhaljit, Bhupi and Toni, and I was on the way. Nani wouldn’t talk about her experiences. I asked her all the time as a child. What happened? Why do you look so sad sometimes? All she told me was that I was not to bring a Muslim friend home.

JASMYN: Didn’t you ever question why? How abruptly your communities became strangers.

NATALIE: It doesn’t seem like they have anything in common

JASMYN: There was a time when your communities shared grains and jute, helped each other during famines and stood shoulder to shoulder during wars. The dhol, flute, folklores of Sohni Matiwal, Heer Rahjha, Mirza Sahiban.

MOM: Fear, suspicion, and hatred took over our two communities, and then it became a conflict of land, culture and religion. (*poem incorporating rhythm and movement*)

“You tore into our land
a crooked line.
That morning
we learned”

JASMYN: With devastating impact. Meena's father had an undeniable sadness when Urdu and Punjabi poets attempted to say the unsayable. *(poem incorporating rhythm and movement)*

“We left, trying to preserve
at least memory. Our language ,
like us, had no land.”

MOM: Hundreds of thousands beaten and raped, our communities ravaged. Do you know what we learned in school? It was worse than Nazi death camps. Pregnant women with their breasts cut off, babies hacked out bellies, infants roasted on spits.

JASMYN: On both sides of the border, mom.

(JASMYN takes the stool from behind her kitchenette to down stage right, turning her back to MOM/CASHIER and sitting)

(Music Interlude: Incorporating the poem “Dividing Line” by Adeeba Talukder)

“You tore into our land
a crooked line.
That morning
we learned: the dawn
had been bitten by moths,
flying in droves, in madness
towards light.

Unsure of the nature
of light, they had consumed
everything.

From above, we saw only
a silver abyss, one mile long,
either side plunged
in darkness—

the darkness of night, the darkness
of ash. We searched, sifting
the soil but found nothing.”

“We left, trying to preserve
at least memory. Our language,
like us, had no land.”

MOM: Let’s not get sidetracked.

SCENE 10

(Lights up on NATALIE’s kitchenette. She sings a song reminiscent of the past to herself briefly)

(Phone rings, she stops what she’s cooking. She has flour on her hands making it difficult to touch her phone)

Ugh, I can’t keep getting sidetracked...

(she answers the phone)

Hi Mom! Yep thanks for calling me back.

Nothing’s wrong.

I’m just wondering if you know the enchilada recipe from scratch. *(ANTONIA walks to oven)*

Right. I figured Annette would be the only one who knows. Damn..

Sorry..Sorry. DARN. I’m just on my way to this party/

No Ryan isn’t coming...

Because as stated *several* times: We. Broke. Up. *(ANTONIA and JASMYN have been making noises sweeping and rolling which culminate here)*

(scoffs/laughs) I’m NOT afraid of dying alone/

I’m FINE *(looks at sour cream expiration date)* but..this sour cream is a little old.

You’re sure I don’t need it?

The enchiladas aren’t from scratch! Maybe if I just put a big ol spoonful of sour cream on top...

Mom, MOM. Please stop worrying about me being lonely during the holidays. It’s not the 1960s. And even if it was, Grandma Elaine AND Grandma Josephina lived the last 30 years of their lives alone and were just fine...

How do you know they didn’t like cooking-for-one ? Maybe it was relaxing for them to cook for themselves and no one else for a change!

I cook for one all the time! *(throws away a take-out container on the counter)* I’m also cooking kolazches as we speak/

Kolazches...Uh Grandma Elaine’s recipe/

I'm talking fast because I'm cooking two canned ingredient recipes, POORLY. Shit/
 Yes I know I know. "Cuida/mi/boca"..
 Do you have any idea when Annette gets off of work?
 Ok (*deep breath*)..how did Mexico go? Did Duolingo help you at all?

SCENE 11

(*Lights up on ANTONIA at the bodega*)

CASHIER: Buenas tardes!

ANTONIA: Buena tardes.

CASHIER: Tamales? First time making them huh?

ANTONIA: Umm... yea how did you know?

CASHIER: You *millennials* always have this face of confusion when you don't know what ingredients to buy. Did you know that tamales are one of the oldest foods alive and thriving today, they date back to 8000bc.

ANTONIA: No I didn't know that.

CASHIER: oh yea and they have manifested into so many different versions since then.

(*Musical Interlude: Guitar strums, there is a brief song about tamales*)

There is the chile rojo tamal, the tamal con chile verde, the hot cheeto tamal the dulce tamal, the bean and potatoes tamal, the tamal con pollo, the burnt strawberry tamal, the elote tamal....

ANTONIA: (*staring at the cashier*).....

CASHIER: It's incredible right...all these kinds of tamals have added and changed ingredients as they've traveled through time, from country to country adapting to their environment, trying to fit in and here and there, sharing this deliciousness with the rest of the world.

ANTONIA: Well now there are so many options, i'm not sure which one to cook.

CASHIER: Go with the red, the ones your abuelo used to love

ANTONIA: What did you say?

CASHIER: Go with the red, your abuela is going to love them

ANTONIA: Right....how much again?

CASHIER: \$7.55.....see you later

SCENE 12

(Lights up on NATALIE's at the oven)

NATALIE: *(She pulls the enchiladas out of oven/ places the kolazches in the oven cuts into it hopefully)* No one will notice there's cream of chicken in here and I skipped the cumin...

(phone rings, she answers)

Hola Auntie Doreen! Como esta?!

So do you/

I know you don't speak Spanish

Well I'm going to a friend's party so I/

No I was just joking around...Ok well I was just calling for the enchil/m

Woah woah calm down.

(long pause/ ANTONIA moves toward center near CASHIER) Maybe, they're speaking to you in Spanish because you look friendly, not because you look Mexican

(starting to actually get angry) So. How do you know they're in the ER and aren't citizens/

You do know that you don't have to speak English to be a US citizen, right?

I..don't get...why you have to talk like this? You know for someone who doesn't want to speak Spanish you sure cook a lot of Mexican food/

Hello?

(Realizes Doreen has hung up. She shakes head and clicks Siri)

Siri, how do you say racist bitch in Spanish?

(She tastes the enchiladas, the sour cream was spoiled and ruined them)

Shit! That sour cream was bad!

SCENE 13

(Lights up on ANTONIA's kitchenette. She is back from the grocery with bags still in hand. She sets her bags down and starts looking through her bags.)

ANTONIA: No, no, no!! I lost the recipe my mom gave me *(pause)* Maybe I should just pick up so pre-made tamales from Tamale Kitchen, no one will even notice right?

NATALIE: "How to Catfish Your Culinary Skills"

(She picks up the phone ready to dial the number, the picture of her grandpa catches her eye, she picks it up and stares at it then sets it down)

ANTONIA: Ay Antonia no seas ridicula. Soy Mexicana, what would Papa Chato think of that? Te acuerdas de esa vez en Mexico when I wanted to buy the RBD cd from the guy at the centro who responded with "tambien tengo la de OV7 gringa." That was the first moment I didn't feel Mexican enough... so no I can't make up pre-made tamales.

(She picks up the phone and calls her mom she doesn't pick up. She dials another number, they don't pick up.)

Doesn't anyone in this family know how to pick up the phone *(frustrated)*

"Mix water into the MASA mix."

JASMYN: "Add the cashew powder and lower the heat."

ANTONIA: Crap. The cumin!

(She begins to mix some of the ingredients in the bowl together. Phone rings)

SCENE 14

(Lights up on JASMYN'S kitchenette)

JASMYN: *(lifting an empty spice shaker)* Ah, looks like I'm out of cumin

Mom, each side blaming one another for provoking the slaughter continues today with the genuine fear that India, in its power, will destabilize any Muslim nation that comes in its way.

MOM: Your generation didn't experience the pains and atrocities Nani and Bari-Nani did. Anxieties about constant threats would be dinner table conversation endlessly. Pakistanis and Indians are different beings. There is nothing in life which links Pakistan and India together. Our names, our clothes, our foods—they are all different; our economic life, our educational ideas, our treatment of animals.//

We challenge each other at every point of the compass. To think past the hurt and suffering feels incomprehensible.

“Hurry, when the sugar melts off completely and begins to boil rapidly, add the cashew powder and lower the heat.”

SCENE 15

(Lights up on NATALIE's kitchenette)

NATALIE: *(answers phone)* Hey! *(pause)* Yes, in a hurry but def looking forward to seeing everyone/

Anything will beat last year's...It's nice that I get to choose who I spend the holidays with now.

Uh, no my mom's not super happy I'm not coming home...

Guess what I'm calling the upcoming pod episode?/ “How to Catfish Your Culinary Skills”

Do you like it? You hate it. I can tell that you hate it./Omg stop..

Your dish is going to be fine! At least you can get your family recipe from the source/

No, ya. I talked to my aunt. She was rude again

I don't know. It's so weird. She has like, internalized cultural hatred.

I don't know where she learned how to cook. Self-taught? My Grandma Josephina had so many kids she couldn't/

I never thought about it like that. Cooking as her safe place.

Well...That's deep...*(laugh it off)* OK fine. See you tonight. BYEEEE.

(Food timer goes off. She takes kolazches out of the oven/anxiously flips them over...they're a mess)

Who messes up two dishes the same night?!

SCENE 16

(Lights up on CASHIER)

CASHIER: Here, take these laddu to your mom - my Dadi would make these in Punjab.

JASMYN: Shukria

(Lights up JASMYN's kitchenette)

JASMYN: *(Handing over the laddu as a gift from Meena, the Cashier)* Meena told me her father would sing her of a time in Punjab, when the green fields were fertile and abundant.

(JASMYN softly sings poem aloud with movement choreography:

"Punjab, The Land of 5 Rivers, now lies divided between Pakistan and India. The land is famous for three things: golden wheat, stalwart soldiers, and beautiful women. In India, the old Granny is the talking record. A village woman's speech is full of images, proverbs, poetic flashes. She improvises her curses, lullabies and wails. Farmers till the land, women, working their spinning wheel, girls embroidering shawls, and artisans at their craft, sing and compose, sharing sweets during Diwali")

MOM: Unless you recognize why there was a need for borders...

SCENE 17

(Lights up on ANTONIA's kitchenette)

(Musical Interlude: She is singing a song about borders)

Antonia: Hey girl... cooking tamales is harder than I thought. What are you going to bring tonight?.....mitai...oooh what is that?....that sounds yummy! I was having a hard time deciding what to make. My grandma Luisita on my mom's side makes the best tortillas and I almost went with that but that would be too easy...I will have to take you to her house one day...I love walking into her house filled with our family pictures and little trinkets, she saves everything and the moment you walk into the door, the aroma of the tortillas fills the whole house and then a craving hits you like as if you haven't eaten all day. *(She is lost in her story and pulls out a tortilla and avocado for a light snack.)* Sounds great. Talk to you soon.

(At this point she has already started to cook the meat because it takes the longest. She starts to cook the chile and heads to the stove to take in the smell of the pork that is cooking. Pause. She begins to sing Un Puño de tierra, a song that she sings with her Grandma Luisita. Lights fade as she sings her song)

SCENE 18

(Lights up on NATALIE at the bodega)

CASHIER: Good Evening, Miss

NATALIE: Hopefully, at least. You ever think you've mastered a dish, and then f-mess it up royally? I should have only made one item. Never try two tricky recipes in one night!

CASHIER: Well luckily it looks like a lot of canned ingredients, shouldn't take/

NATALIE: Eh. You'd be surprised at how long it/takes

CASHIER: Well, time is a relative thing

NATALIE: Ya... *(confused)*

CASHIER: What made you decide to do two recipes?

NATALIE: It's for a Friendsgiving. I'm not going home for the first time. Feeling a little home sick so I thought I could bring home to me. But I couldn't decide between my Mom or Dad's side. *(She gestures to two different cans)*

CASHIER: Ah, what are they?

NATALIE: Well, my Dad is Polish, Irish. Midwestern. White, basically. And my Mom is Latina/or Chicana.

CASHIER: Oh, I meant the recipes.

NATALIE: Oh! Oh. Of course. Enchiladas. And kolazches.

CASHIER: Ah, well. It sounds like you're a good cook!

NATALIE: *(shakes head slightly)* I don't cook much.

CASHIER: The food we cook never tastes as good as when someone cooks it for us, does it/

NATALIE: Right/

CASHIER: Someone must have cooked these recipes well for you too!

NATALIE: *(starting to leave)* One of them at least. My Aunt Doreen. She makes the best enchiladas I've ever had.

CASHIER: What side of your family is she from again?

SCENE 19

(Quick light shift off of bodega. Lights up on JASMYN's kitchenette)

JASMYN: The partition is horror on both sides, Mom
"Mix well to blend the sugar syrup and cashew powder
The mixture must be smooth without any lumps."

MOM: Unless you recognize why there was a need for borders/
"Keep stirring/cook on medium heat/until slightly thick"

JASMYN: Well the border enabled them to become their own nation. Borders still suffocate our understanding of one another, Mom. Contradictory versions of the events pass through generations, while those who experienced it first-hand are passing. All we are left with are stories.

MOM: The wound remains open today. There are no easy villains and very few heroes.
"1 tbs rosewater (1 tablespoon of Ghee)"
"What has lived in your past?"
"Also add 1/8 teaspoon of Cardamom powder."
"Which direction
have you found forward?"
"Cook until the kaju hatli mixture turns thick and begins to leave the side of the pan."
"In the distance, the horizon trembles
like a heartbeat."

SCENE 20

(Light shift on ANTONIA. The bodega is again in fog. It has gotten thicker.)

CASHIER: Hey! Long time no see!

ANTONIA: yep, I'm back..*(out of breath/awkardly)* Sorry, my heart's beating fast. Ran here/

CASHIER: I'm glad to see that you haven't given up. *(pause)* Tamales are sacred food you know? They were once known as the food of the gods to the Maya and Aztecs. Maiz was very sacred to them and was the ingredient that gave humans their lasting form.

ANTONIA: Wow! That is really cool. No wonder us Mexican eat corn tortillas with everything and I don't know about you but they are my favorite thing to unwrap during Christmas.

CASHIER: I always help my abuela make tamales for Christmas. I love helping her around the kitchen and the way the house smelled while cooking the chile. Mis primos still get together and help my *abue* with the few dozens that she makes.

ANTONIA: I always would help my mom. I wish that I could make them like her. She used to spend hours making them for Navidad.

CASHIER: All you need is love and patience. That's the secret. *(Zapping out of her wisdom talk)* That'll be \$7.86

SCENE 21

(Lights up on NATALIE's kitchenette. She is recording/ cooks new bach of kolazches at the same time)

I have a secret- I lied to my mother. Kolazches are not one of Elaine's recipes. We ate kolazches with her but I think she bought them at Kroger. She mainly cooked American cuisine. Meat loaf, roasts, molasses cookies. She loved her Betty Crocker, canned ingredients and all. As single senior women both my grandmothers relied on canned goods to save on money and leftovers.

“Roll out dough 1/4-inch thick

Cut into 2-inch squares.

Place 1/2 to 1 teaspoon filling on center of each square.”

Elaine told everyone that her kids had “the map of Ireland on their face”, like their father. And no one questioned it. Genetics are a funny thing. I know less about Elaine's family

than anyone's but I look most like her. People guess "Eastern European". And when I explain "actually Irish, Polish, Chicana", things get weird. Once on a first date a guy joked: "So you like booze. And parades."

"Overlap opposite corners of dough to the center, pressing dough together lightly."

JASMYN: "Mix well to blend...the mixture must be smooth"

ANTONIA: *(she may be reading from book, not necessarily doing this)* "Fold the corn husk in half so that the masa wraps around the filling, using your fingers to pinch it together"

NATALIE: *(to herself)* Why am I?/ I'm trying to cook kolazches for Elaine and write down the enchilada recipe from Doreen. I don't know where the enchiladas or Doreen's passion for cooking came from. Is it possible to inherit ancestral talent? In Doreen's case, from ancestors you don't want to know?

JASMYN: "Mix well to blend"

ANTONIA: "Use your fingers to pinch it together?"

But maybe if I cook these kolazches and enchiladas right even once, I can bring part of my family back. Part of them I've never really known.

(papers fly out of one of the cook books, Natalie picks up letter from Elaine and starts to read)

SCENE 22

(Lights up on ANTONIA's kitchenette. She walks into the house for hopefully will be one last time. She notices that the meat has been turned off. Antonia picks up the phone and calls Mateo upset.)

ANTONIA: Were you home? Did you turn off the stove?...I left the meat cooking! You weren't supposed to turn it off! Ugh! I can't do this..I am so confused how to make them and I am running out of time...I know, I just really want to try to get this right. *(pause)* I almost made gorditas...you haven't tasted my mama kikas gorditas yet...oh I loved waking up to the sound of a rooster at my dad's family's house in Juarez. I would walk downstairs to the rhythmic beat of my mama kika slapping the masa against the table before I got to the kitchen. She knows they are my favorite dish of hers and made them

multiple times on my visits, no one makes them like her. That is why I didn't want to make them. I wouldn't do them justice.... *(smiles)* thank you amor....yes yes...I'll try to be more positive...i got this *(soft, awkward)*...I got this *(more confident, giggles)* ...you take your time and don't rush to get home. Alright see you soon.

I've got this *(to herself aloud)*

SCENE 23

(Lights up on JASMYN's kitchenette)

MOM: "If it doesn't then drizzle, keep mixing."

JASMYN: This burden we carry

MOM: "At this stage the mixture should not look dry"

JASMYN: Quietly weighing us,

MOM: "But is moist and sticky".

JASMYN: Travels through generation

MOM: Check if the mixture is ready!

JASMYN: Mom, naming what hurts us can free us.

MOM: How, bache *(reluctantly)*?

JASMYN: The poets in East and West Punjab wrote from the heart even while hurting, and didn't Nani say trust your heart to lead in cooking? How about we take a turn reading to one another, to hear the words aloud, in our bodies.

You told me you were proud of me acknowledging my roots. The origins and soil of my ancestors in Punjab have been planted by Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs alike, and we can illuminate its light source.

SCENE 24

(Lights up ANTONIA's kitchenette. Twinkling/ candle light near picture of Papa.)

(ANTONIA checks the meat and it seems to be fine. She takes another pass on the masa when she overfills it with water. She starts crying hysterically. The picture of her grandpa catches her eye.)

Hola Papa chato.*(beat)* Te extraño mucho. *(beat)* Remember that one time in Mexico when you and my tios were building a house down the street and me and my sisters and my tias thought it was a good idea to make a pool that turned into mud? We got so dirty, my mom and mama Kika had to wash us off with the hose and we had to walk back to the other house in our calzones. That still makes me laugh. I wish it were still that simple. I can't even make a tamale. I know it wasn't easy for you to accept that your son married a chicana but she tried just as hard to preserve her culture and learned for herself and him. It's not easy you know. I never feel like I am from here nor from there. The Mexicans make me feel like I am not Mexican enough and don't even get me started with the gringos. Do they really know how to make someone out of place. I don't know if you know this but my moms parents were on this land before the colonizers came and stole everything and yet we are treated like we don't belong here. I get so angry sometimes but I have to remind myself that I get to have twice as much food to choose from, twice as much books to read, and twice as much music to listen to. My favorite songs are the ones you used to play on your guitar when we would visit. *(music begins)* If you were still here, I know we would be playing music together.

(Musical Interlude: A song that papa chato liked. CASHIER begins to sing along with her at some point)

Te quiero papa chato and I hope you're proud of all of us down here.

(ANTONIA feels better after a talk with her papa chato and is determined to get everything right. She takes out all the ingredients ready for a new shot. The phone rings.)

SCENE 25

(Different light shift. A dimmer light than usual on NATALIE's kitchenette as if she is reading under a desk lamp)

(Start record)

I'm rereading the letters Elaine wrote me because/

(stop record)

Elaine wrote me this letter and if I/

(start record)

She didn't leave me a kolazche recipe but she did write me a letter every week/

(stop record)

"My Dear Natalie,

Your Dad called and told me of your breakup with Ryan. Please keep faith in yourself and chalk it up to a learning experience like I did. When your Grandfather and I got a divorce we both went to the same lawyer- Ron Kaminski!

(CASHIER begins to read letter overlapping text with NATALIE momentarily before reading on her own)

Polish lawyer! Well, he's gone to Heaven and I'm still here.

I must have done something right. I know I enjoy life and love the sunny side of it. I lost your Grandfather and a wonderful son. And if you think losing Ryan is tough, trust me it can't get any worse than losing a wonderful son. So, take a deep breath-you won't forget this. But do yourself a favor and remember the gifts you have been given. Life is short. Don't let one person take over your life or go to bed angry. Like, we say- get happy!

Love,

Grandma Elaine

(Musical Interlude: NATALIE theme starts)

SCENE 26

(Lights up on ANTONIA who is heading back to the bodega which is in a fog. Light shift)

CASHIER: Looking for this? *(hands the bottle of cumin)*

ANTONIAThank you....*(stares at her)* how did you know?

CASHIER: You've been here like 3 times today and I am quite the tamale expert , pero my favorites are the ones con hot cheetos.

(ANTONIA doesn't agree, CASHIER laughs)

ANTONIA: Gracias

CASHIER: De nada chamaca. Now that you're on your last step don't forget the most important ingredient...love and patience *(She yells this to ANTONIA as she exits)*

SCENE 27

(Lights up on NATALIE at the foggy/misty bodega)

CASHIER: You're back!

NATALIE: *(she takes a large amount of cans out of basket, loudly passes them over)*
Guess I'm going with a blog recipe again/

CASHIER: Why do you need a blog to get a recipe? I have a good family recipe I can/

NATALIE: *(frustrated)* I HAVE family I can ask *(sees CASHIER looks hurt)* Sorry...I just haven't been able to get in touch with her yet.

CASHIER: The holidays are hard on some people/

NATALIE: That's not it. She has eh, problematic views. I don't think there's any way to get through to her

CASHIER: Political views?

NATALIE: Sort of. It's not just who she voted for...She's prejudiced, racist even. But she's Latina. I don't know if racist is even the right/ word

CASHIER: Your aunt is Latina... married to one of your uncles?

NATALIE: No, nope. My mom is Latina, Chicana. Hispanic? My aunt is her sister.

CASHIER: Oh! Is your family from Mexico originally?

NATALIE: Kind of. From New Mexico, when it was still Mexico.

CASHIER: *(dialogue starts to overlap)* Oh/

NATALIE: Ya/

CASHIER: So/ you don't look much like your Mom and Aunt then?

NATALIE: Yes and no.

CASHIER: Genetics are a funny thing. *(pause)* Perception isn't the only way into ethnicity.

NATALIE: That's true, actually...*(awkwardly starts to shift after finishing the transaction which has been ongoing)* I feel like I should tell you- I don't like speaking about Doreen this way, even if it's true. I just don't understand how someone who is usually kind can be rude to those different from her

CASHIER: *(She looks down at the register or does some sort of cleaning)* Anger.

NATALIE: Anger? At what?

CASHIER: Anger because some people get to be in this world without others making assumptions on first glance. You get to pick what pieces of yourself you want to share, but she doesn't ever get to take her skin off.

NATALIE: That doesn't excuse her /behavior

CASHIER: It doesn't, but anger cannot be sucked out with more anger. You said before that your aunt is the best cook in your family.

NATALIE: What does that have to do with/anything

CASHIER: *(reaches to touch Natalie's arm)* Simply put- life is short.

NATALIE: *(pulls away/rolls eyes)* Ok...

CASHIER: Sometimes we love people who are in the wrong. We can't force people to change their views, but we can love them and talk to them like we do. Your gift is how you craft language, don't be afraid to use it! She may not be transformed by the alchemy of your words, but perhaps by sharing ingredients you can get somewhere. The antidote may be in the recipe itself. *(starts to hum)*

NATALIE: *(awkwardly)* Uh thanks... *(turns away/back to Cashier but turns head slightly)* How do you know that I'm a writer?

CASHIER: *(humming Natalie theme gets more legible)* My Dear, I have my ways of knowing all. And I am here for you always: "Shout Hallelujah, come on,/ get happy"

NATALIE: *(she finishes the verse with her)* "Get happy"

(NATALIE turns back to look at the CASHIER who has already exited)

(Musical Interlude: NATALIE theme/ transition to ANTONIA theme)

SCENE 28

(Lights up on ANTONIA's kitchenette)

ANTONIA: Hey girl! How's it going with those enchiladas? I cannot wait to try them...what a day!...it felt like everything was going wrong but I think I was putting a lot of pressure on myself....yea I think I'll perfect them by the time I have to make them for Christmas for Mateo's family.

SCENE 29

(Lights up on NATALIE's kitchenette)

NATALIE: *(leaving a voicemail)* Aunt Doreen. It's me. Hey I, uh. I wanted to apologize for how I spoke to you. I know that there's things, about you, and Josephina and Mom that I- I. I can't know. I won't ever really be able to understand what... it was like/ What I am trying to say is/ You're the best cook in the family. No one else cooks it like you do. So. Give me a call back please. Love you.

SCENE 30

(Lights up on JASMYN)

(Movement gestures to convey the steps)

- “1. Turn off the stove and set the pan aside
2. Take ¼ teaspoon of Kaju Jatile mix and cool down a bit
3. Roll it to a ball with greased fingers. You must get a ball that isn't sticky
4. Upon cooling completely this has to get the texture of the katli or fudge

SCENE 31

(Lights up on NATALIE's kitchenette)

NATALIE: *(phone rings)*
Aunt Doreen?

Oh hi!

Oh it's so good to hear from you/

ANTONIA: Mom! It's about time you called back....

JASMYN: "1. Turn off the stove and set the pan aside"

ANTONIA: Oh yea I forgot you went to the mountains...

JASMYN: "6. Let the temperature come down to warm or slightly hot."

NATALIE: Ok we don't have to talk about it/

Yes yes I/

I have the ingredients. I should have everything I need...

ANTONIA: What was the last secret ingredient?

NATALIE: Do you think I need the cream of chicken?

ANTONIA: Perfect! I have it

JASMYN: "10. Place the ball on a greased aluminum foil or a butter paper and cover it."

NATALIE: Hahaha, yes Auntie, I promise to never use cream of chicken again!

JASMYN: "12. Cool completely and cut to desired shapes. Store kaju katli in an airtight box"

ANTONIA: I am lucky to have a mom like you

NATALIE: Ok! I'm ready for the recipe...let me grab a pen so I can write this all down.

SCENE 32

(Musical Interlude: As the music plays, two of the women pull out a large table and chairs. They are setting the table and chatting in anticipation. A knock on the door is heard. The third woman enters, carrying items to share. They discuss how excited they are for Friendsgiving.

Another knock on the door is heard. Audience members, some of who have been identified before the show (and potentially any audience members who fell called to join) also take a seat at the table.

The women and Friendsgiving guests decide to go outside to see something. A neighborhood musician, an ice cream truck, to play a game?

After they exit, the CASHIER finally leaves her bodega area, perhaps carrying incense, walking toward the table and browsing what's on it. The guitarist plays. She walks to each kitchenette, turning the lights out in each kitchenette as she walks past, browsing and possibly putting a thing or two away.

Lights out.)

END OF PLAY