

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

CAFÉ: The Brewing of a first generation American

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In the play *Café*, I use the ritualistic tradition of preparing Cuban espresso to symbolize the struggle of constructing cultural identity for many first generation Americans and reconciling familial obligation with individual desire. Through food, spoken word, and movement I want people to question their own cultural upbringing.

CAFÉ: THE BREWING OF A FIRST GENERATION AMERICAN

By

Claudia Rosales

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## Dedication

Para mi familia.

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# Chapter 1: Research and Influences

## Primary Research

The following images come from a personal collection of family pictures that my great-grandmother saved from Cuba by mailing out to my grandmother in Honduras, bit by bit. The first image is of my great grandmother, Mercedes Esther Catalina Giroud Grimany, the main source of inspiration for Abuela. My entire life Abuela Chea, as we called her, was a strong matriarchal presence in my large family. She wanted all of her daughters and granddaughters to grow into independent, knowledgeable women. One of her greatest achievements was sending her daughters to the United States in order to study English. Abuela Chea always pushed for us to continue our educations, to wait to marry, to travel the world and gain life experiences prior to settling down. It was her persistence and unfailing confidence that inspired me to continue studying performance though it took me further from family. We conversed often about the struggle to follow one's desire versus leaving home which leads to much Eréndira's story.

Of all the people, I am the only one Abuela taught how to make Cafe Cubano. Each time I make *un cafecito* for the family, it is as if Abuela is with us again.

Image 1



Mercedes Esther Catalina Giroud Grimany, maternal great-grandmother Cuba 1930s



Image 2



(clockwise from center) Esther Giroud, Mercedes Esther Catalina Giroud Grimany, Esther Maria Grimany Vinent, Esther Maria Vinent Miami, FL 1961

Image 3



Rafael Grimany (maternal great-grandfather) Mercedes Esther Grimany (maternal great-grandmother) Honduras 1983

Image 4



Farmhouse Caobabo, Cuba early 1940's

The Cookbook

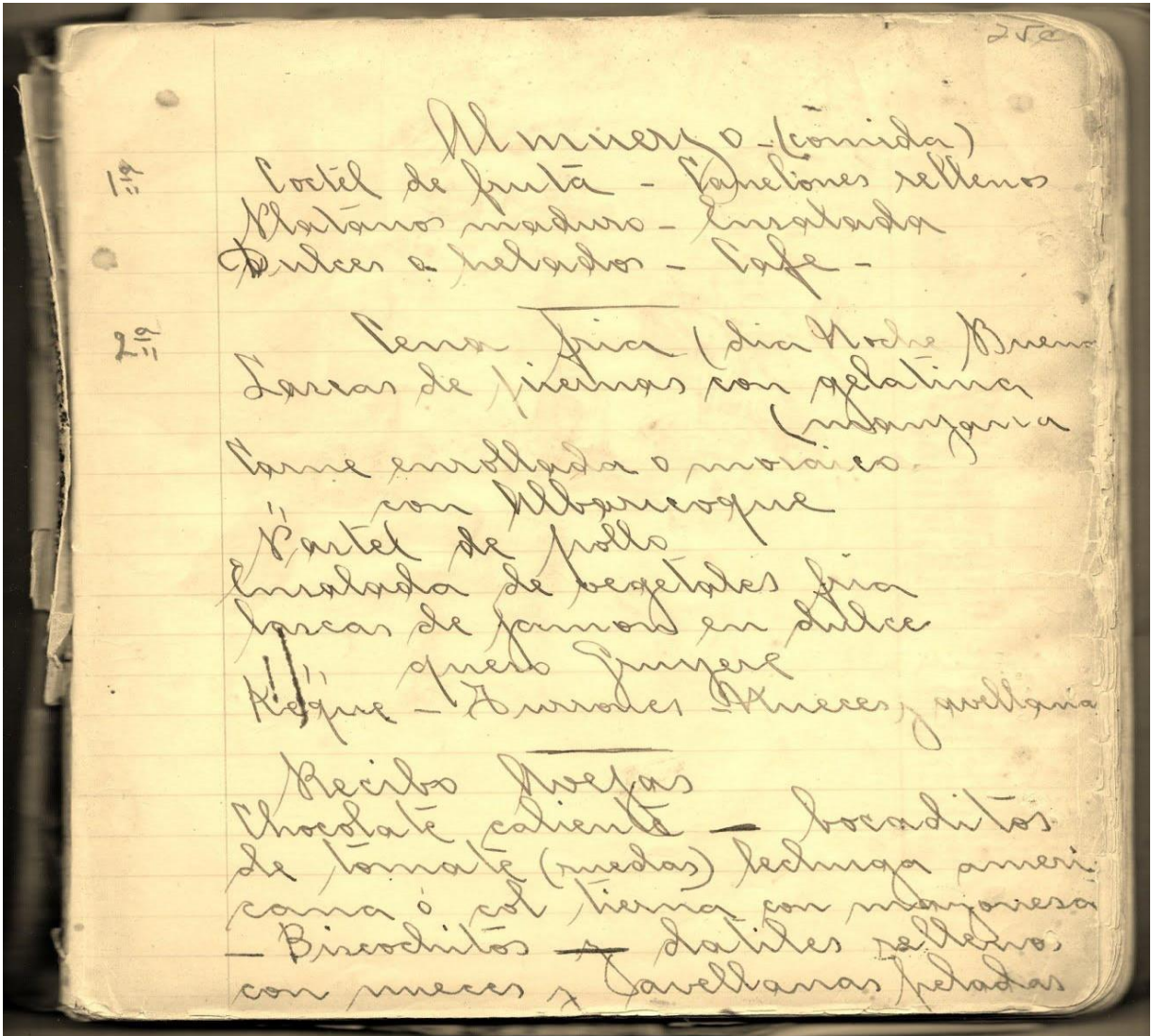
The following two images are of Mercedes Esther Catalina Giroud Grimany's cooking notebook she started after her marriage to Rafael Grimany. In it are various recipes of traditional Cuban cuisine, her famous cakes, and newspaper clippings throughout the year recommending certain dishes or the best way to set the holiday table. This is the notebook I used at the end of the play.

Image 5



Mercedes Esther Catalina Grimany Grioud's cookbook.

Image 6



A lunch menu she prepared including fruit cocktail, a chicken pie, and hot chocolate.

## Video Transcription

This is a transcription of a video Isabel Vinent made of Mercedes Esther Catalina Giroud Grimany in 2008. In the video she discusses her childhood in Cuba, meeting her husband and raising her daughters, and leaving the two countries she considered home: Cuba and Honduras. Portions of the interview informed the dialogue throughout the play; Abuela's story of selling dance tickets without Abuelo's "permission" is used in the play as a bases for Abuela encouraging Eréndira to go for her dreams. *Café* page 61

### *Su vida en la Finca de Caobabo:*

- Yo quería estudiar en el instituto pero no me dejaron porque era mujer.
  - Estudié hasta el sexto grado y de ahí tuvo una (tutor) hasta los 18 años
  - En Francia, habían dos medio hermanos y cuando se murió el padre, se fajaron por la herencia. Y en la época de los españoles vino uno a América y de allí a Cuba. Se enamoró y se quedó. Empezó una fábrica (las campanas). En ese pueblito se crió la familia Giroud. (Trinidad)
- Giroud vs Giraud (French brother)
- Yo nunca supe que la finca era de mamá, fíjese. Mamá era única. Todo de la finca era papá ...el pleito de gasto. Mamá era muy gastadora. Mamá era parrandera y viajaba mucho.
  - Mamá era la dueña de la finca de Caobabo. Esther García, de Asturias. Era la hija rica.
  - En la finca, Abuela Esther hizo de todo. Mamá era única en su modo de ser. Se llevaba con todos. Mamá era de detalles.
  - De ocho hijos, todos grandes, solo se quedó con tres vivos. Se murieron ya grandes. Y adoptó a una niñita de dos años de una mujer española quien había perdido otra hija de 18 años.
  - El único abuelo que conocí fue el Abuelo Giroud pero fue como un sueño. (Coronel Giroud).

### *Sobre su vida con Abuelo Rafael:*

¿Cómo conociste a Abuelo?

- En la sociedad, como se conoce todo el mundo. Jugando tenis en el club en Camagüey.
- Cuando uno está enamorado, siempre lo pasa bien. Rafael era muy parrandero. Ay, mi madre, las veces que él me buscaba a las dos de la mañana.
- Rafael creía algunas veces que yo era hija de él.
- Lo que más admiro: el cerebro que tenía.
- Y me alegré en el alma. ¿Sabes lo que era para ellos aprender el inglés? Yo habría querrido que me hubieran puesto de interna en los Estados Unidos. Dije que mis hijas iban a ir a aprender inglés.
- La mujer no se puede esclavizar mucho. Rafael me mandaba pero yo hice lo que me daba la gana.

### *Irse de Cuba:*

- Eso no da. Ya esas son cosas en que no quiero pensar.
- Ese sí mató. Concho, como mató gente. (Castro)
- Antes de salir yo le mandaba los retratos a Chiquitica.
- Lo doloroso fue verlos quitarnos todo. La finca de Caobabo.
- Allí no vuelvo. La Cuba que yo dejé no la voy a encontrar. Cuando te botan de un lugar nunca quieres regresar.
- Me dolió irme de Honduras

Translation:

Life on the Farm in Caobabo:

- I wanted to study at the university but they wouldn't let me because I was a woman.
- I went to school until I was in sixth grade and then I had a tutor until I was 18.
- There were two brothers in France. They fought and during the time that the Spanish were in America one of them came here and then went to Cuba. He fell in love and he stayed there. He started a factory (the bells). In that little town were born the Giroud.
- I never knew that the farm actually belong to Mamá. She was so unique Papá took care of everything having to do with the farm and they were always fighting over money. Mamá was big spender. She was a partier and travelled a lot.
- Mamá owned the farm. Esther García de Asturia. She was the rich daughter.
- On the farm, Mamá did everything. She was unique in her way of being. She got along with everybody. She was all about details.
- Of eight children, all adults, only three lived. The rest died as adults. And she adopted a little girl of two from a Spanish woman whose daughter (the mother of the little girl) died at 18.
- The only grandfather I met was Abuelo Giroud but that was like a dream.

On her life with Abuelo Rafael:

How did you meet Abuelo?

- In society, like you meet people. We played tennis at the club in Camaguey.
- When some one is in love you always have a good time. Rafael was a partier. The amount of times hat he would come pick me up at two in the morning.
- Rafael sometimes thought I was one of his daughters.
- I admired his brain most.
- I was so happy. Do you know what it meant for my daughters to study English? I wanted to boarding school in the United States and when they wouldn't let me I said that my daughters were going to learn English.
- A woman cannot make herself a slave to her husband. Rafael would tell me what to do but I just didn't whatever I wanted.

Leaving Cuba:

- It won't do. I don't want to think about those things anymore.
- He killed. He killed so many people. (Castro)
- Before we escaped I would mail all my albums to Chiquitica.
- What hurt most was watching them take everything from us. They took the farm.

-I will never go back. The Cuba that I left I will never find again. When they throw you out of a place, you never want to go back.

### Design Images

The following images greatly inspired me during the writing process, especially the first image. I found a deep attachment to the woman in Itene Caranza's painting *Madagascar Jasmine*. The woman with history imprinted on her skin inspired the repeated verse lines: "our skin is an external coastline/ our veins are filled with iodine" (*Cafe* 58). I felt the guitar on her back represented how we embody music, which fed into how I wished to utilize music within the play. I worked with my musicians to make the music derive from the scene itself. The girl in "Coffee Splash," by dreamsCrEaToR, is painted out of coffee; the artist used coffee like watercolor paint. Again, this plays into the ideas I have history being embedded into the physical body of a person. The sense of flow in her hair presents a dream-like quality I wanted to match in Eréndira's style at the end of the play, when she fully embraces her past.

When speaking with the Drew Kauffman, the lighting designer, I showed him "Madagascar Jasmine" by Irene Carranza as well as "Coffee for Mister Klein," by Floriandra, in order to provide him with ideas for the colors I sought. The deep, mustard yellows of the walls as well as the sun setting in the coffee served to inspire the sun yellows we used to represent Abuela. The saturated blues in *Coffee* inspired the ocean blues that painted the Key West scene. I showed them "Coffee Dream," by Zim-dez, to express the surreal qualities I wished to achieve in during the flashback sequences.



Image 7



Madagascar Jasmine by Irene Carranza



coffee splash by dreamsCrEaToR

Image 9



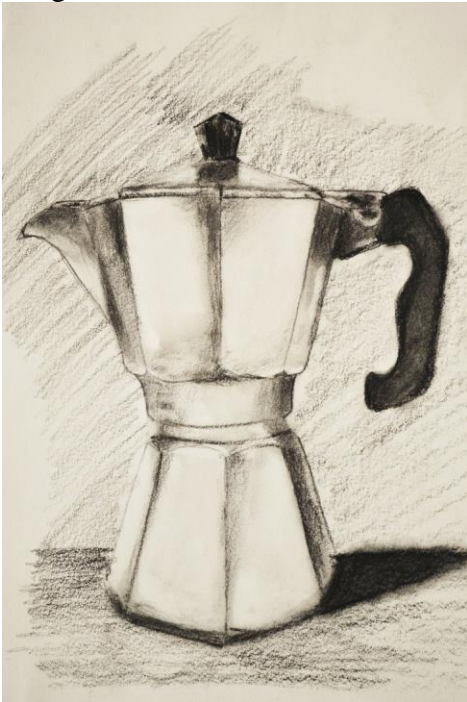
Coffee for Mister Klein by Floriandra

Image 10



Coffee Dream by Zim-dez

Image11



Cuban Coffee Maker by therealGeorgieboy

## Food in Theatre

Following are the mission statements of three theatre companies who integrate food into the theatrical experience in very different ways.

### **Café Nordo**

Cooking is human. Cooking and food science began our evolutionary ascendancy. We examine the world in order to eat it. Entertainment is the human story. Storytelling began our exploration of the mysteries. We wonder in order to understand, and we fall down for a laugh. These are our addition to the world, and yet, men and women have languished in hunger for millennia. Due to a lack of dramatic foods and a dearth of delectable entertainment souls today rumble with pangs and shrivel. In Café Nordo's pursuit of unadulterated digestions, theatrical cuisine combats the theology of blandness that permeates our culture, and hopefully busts a gut or two. Carnal Food is the cleansing of one's perception of diet, a hedonist's approach to gastronomic revelation, a melodramatic confrontation with what lies on the plate. This is food the way a man and woman were meant to eat it . This is a conversation with your food and the food talks back.

To dine is to experience the corporeal. To relive a story is to touch the mythical.

### **Bread and Puppet: Cheap Art and Political Theatre**

*"We give you a piece of bread with the puppet show because our bread and theater belong together. For a long time the theater arts have been separated from the stomach. Theater was entertainment. Entertainment was meant for the skin. Bread was meant for the stomach. The old rites of baking, eating and offering bread were forgotten. The bread became mush. We would like you to take your shoes off when you come to our puppet show or we would like to bless you with the fiddle bow. The bread shall remind you of the sacrament of eating.*

*We want you to understand that theater is not yet an established form, not the place of commerce you think it is, where you pay to get something. Theater is different. It is more like bread, more like a necessity. Theater is a form of religion. It preaches sermons and builds a self-sufficient ritual. Puppet theater is the theater of all means. Puppets and masks should be played in the street. They are louder than the traffic. They don't teach problems, but they scream and dance and display life in its clearest terms. Puppet theater is of action rather than dialogue. The action is reduced to the simplest dance-like and specialized gestures. A puppet may be a hand only, or it may be a complicated body of many heads, hands, rods and fabric.*

*We have two types of puppet shows: good ones and bad ones, but all of them are for good and against evil. " -Peter Schumann*

The Bread and Puppet Theater was founded in 1963 by Peter Schumann on New York City's Lower East Side. Besides rod-puppet and hand puppet shows for children, the concerns of the first productions were rents, rats, police, and other problems of the neighborhood. More complex theater pieces followed, in which sculpture, music, dance and language were equal partners. The puppets grew bigger and bigger. Annual presentations for Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving and Memorial Day often included children and adults from the community as participants. Many performances were done in the street. During the Vietnam War, Bread and puppet staged block-long processions and pageants involving hundreds of people.

### **Sojourn Theatre Company**

“Led by Michael Rohd and based in Portland, Oregon, Sojourn Theatre's ensemble of 13 core artists makes new theatre around the country. Our work is a rigorous practice that blends metaphor with public reality to bring strangers together amidst experiences where the ethical possibilities of imagination are placed alongside the communal muscle of responsibility. National/international touring, a body of 24 major works over the last 12 years, and a reputation for consistent innovation as artists and engagement practitioners has led to our work being featured regularly at conferences and universities nationwide as a "best practice model" for arts-based civic dialogue.

In 2005, Sojourn was one of only 12 National Exemplar Organizations selected by the Ford Foundation/Americans for the Arts as "important and vital incubators of emerging artists' work, sites of artistic experimentation and innovation, and leaders in community and civic engagement." Our unique, often site-based and frequently participatory approach has led to acclaimed productions engaging issues as diverse as democracy and war (THE WAR PROJECT: 9 ACTS OF DETERMINATION), public education (WITNESS OUR SCHOOLS, toured 32 towns/cities in 32 weeks), business ethics/personal responsibility (GOOD, created and staged in an operating Subaru dealership), demographic change/civic planning (BUILT, created and staged in a high-rise condominium realty demo-space) and contemporary urban/rural conversations in the United States (ON THE TABLE, staged in a church, a barn, school buses and a riverside parking lot). Presenters/partners/hosts have included Della'Arte in California, The Town of Molalla Oregon, The National Touring Anne Frank Exhibit, The Connecticut State Legislature, Georgetown University, Duke University, The Pacific Edge Festival in Australia, Kansas City Repertory Theater, The Orchard Project in NY, Americans for the Arts, Independent Sector, Catholic Charities USA, National Federation of State Humanities Councils, Animating Democracy, TCG, and the Network of Ensemble Theaters.”

## Poetry and Music

A great aunt wrote the poem that follows one summer when all the cousins were at the beach. In the music for the play we used the first verse as the lyrics for “Abuela’s Melody.” Below the poem are the lyrics for the songs “Amorosa Guajira,” whose melody helped inform the musicians and inspired the creation of the melody accompany the lyrics of the poem.

### *Sabores*

By Virtudes Biosca Giroud de Escarrá

Soy todo sabor de sales,  
Tengo yodo en el mirar...  
Es que vengo de la playa,  
Y me he impregnado de mar

El mar me besó los labios,  
Espuma llevo en la piel,  
Y mis ojos se ven más verdes  
Desde que me he visto en él.

El sol se escondió en mi pelo  
La arena me aprisionó,  
Y tengo un algo en las vena  
Que la playa me dejó...

Como el rumor de las olas  
Así mi risa he de ser,  
Y traigo mis ojos claros  
Cargados de amanecer...

Soy todo sabor de sales,  
Tengo yodo en el mirar.  
Es que vengo de la playa  
Y me he impregnado de mar

“Amorosa Guajira”

By Miguel Aceves Mejía

En una alegre campiña □  
Donde brota en flor la piña □  
Aroman las flores □  
Y arrulla el palmar . □  
Hay bajo el cielo azulado □  
Un guajiro enamorado □

Sus penas de amores □  
Se puso a cantar ... □□

"Ven, amorosa guajira □  
Que ya nada me inspira □  
Ni el canto del ave □  
Que surca el azul . □  
Ven, a alegrar mi bohío □  
Que hasta el lecho del río □  
Se ha vuelto sombrío □  
Porque faltas tú . □□

Ven, que mi blanca casita □  
Se ha quedado solita □  
Y al verla tan triste □  
Me causa dolor . □  
Ven, porque el sol ya se muere □  
Y mi alma no quiere □  
Preciosa guajira □  
Vivir sin tu amor.”

## A History of Cuban Coffee

Here is an excerpt of an article written by the University of Miami's School of Communication. In the overall article, they discuss the four major types of making un cafécito but I selected the type Eréndira makes in the play. The article also mentions the ventanitas where one purchases coladas to share just like Eréndira did when she bought coffee for the nurses at the hospital when Abuela was sick.

### *Miami Loves Coffee*

University of Miami School of Communication

Coffee, or cafécito, is more than just a drink or a pick-me-up; it has become a social ritual that is an integral part of the Miami community. Cuba's geographical position and tropical climate lends itself to a rich environment perfect for a major coffee industry. In the mid 18th century, coffee production was introduced to the island, and soon became a major export to Spain. With the Haitian Revolution, French coffee producers immigrated to Cuba and settled. The decline of Cuba's coffee industry came with the Cuban Revolution in the late 1950s as coffee farms became nationalized. The industry experienced another decline with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990. Today, in communist Cuba, citizens do not have the luxury of drinking a cafécito whenever they please. Cubans are only allocated 2 ounces of coffee every 15 days, and the quality of the brew suffers since they blend the grains with other ingredients to make it last longer. A few popular Cuban coffee brands from the island include Cubita Coffee, Estrella del Norte, and Serrano Coffee. In Miami, Cubans drink coffee to remember where they came from, and to carry on their cultural tradition.

Important Terms:

**Cafétera:** standby stovetop espresso maker

**Tasita:** ceramic demitasse cup

**Ventanita:** walk-up window where cuban coffee and pastries are served

**Espumita:** froth created by mixing sugar with the first (and strongest) drops of coffee

Cafécito is typically served in a very thick rimmed ceramic demitasse cup. Cuban coffee cups are known for being thick and rounded. Cafécito is usually taken in several sips, either at the counter of a ventanita, or at the table of a Cuban restaurant.

Coladas are basically 4-6 shots of cafécito in one large styrofoam cup, meant for sharing. The shots are individually served in tiny, thin plastic cups that come with the colada when ordered at a ventanita.

How to make a cafécito:

1. Pour cold water into the cafétera. Be careful not to fill the chamber with too much water. Pour Cuban coffee grounds into the coffee chamber of the cafétera, making sure to pack it as tightly as possible. You should use 4-5 tablespoons of coffee grounds. Place the coffee chamber on top of the water chamber and screw it closed as tightly as possible.
2. After turning on your stove top to a high temperature, place the cafétera off-centered



on the stove. Watch for the first (and strongest) drops of coffee to appear from the spout.

Pour the first drops into a container of sugar (the amount of sugar varies on taste). After placing the cafetera back on the stove, stir vigorously with a spoon.

3. Keep stirring until the texture of the sugar and coffee mixture becomes smoother and the color changes from a dark brown to a light caramel. This step takes a lot of force, but is a crucial step resulting in a frothy espumita.

Pour the remainder of the coffee into the espumita and stir until all the espumita rises to the top, creating a thick foam.

How to drink cafécito:

1. Approach a ventanita and order your choice of Cuban coffee. The price usually ranges from 50-75 cents.

While you are waiting, drink a glass of water. This will cleanse your palette and prepare your taste buds for the strong coffee flavor. Usually, ventanitas will have a jug of water available near the counter.

2. If you are drinking a cafécito, sip it slowly to savor the layers of flavor. Coladas are typically taken in one shot - don't worry, there is usually enough for seconds.

If you are a smoker, dip your cigar (preferably a Cuban brand) into the espumita, then light it up for a unique blend of tastes. This old technique helps to moisturize the cigar.

3. Socialize with the people around you. If you see someone you know on the street, invite them to some Cuban coffee and a good conversation.

This step is optional. Some Cuban coffee drinkers will not drink water for half an hour after drinking a cafécito to keep the taste lingering in their mouth, and others will in order to dilute the strong coffee in their stomach.

## Chapter 2: The Writing Process

### The Initial Idea

*(In the darkness, we hear the quiet echoes of waves crashing on a shoreline. Slowly, the waves blend into water boiling, seething and then spitting as it transforms into coffee bursting from the spout of an Italian Espresso maker suddenly lit center stage. SHE walks towards it, bending to lift the lid. Before she can, however, another light appears on another Italian Espresso maker. Confused, she walks towards that one and again bends to lift the top. Another light, another espresso maker. This continues more rapidly as the sound of coffee grows louder and louder. Unable to find the source of the coffee, SHE frantically searches through the field of espresso makers as the lights dim. The boiling coffee still loud in the darkness.)*

I pictured the first image in my mind long before the character's name arrived: a young woman searching frantically in the dark for a boiling-over Italian Espresso maker. I saw a stage littered with makers of diverse sizes, ranging from tiny to huge. And, SHE, overwhelmed by uncertainty. I saw my protagonist, my themes, and in the most abstract version possible, my story.

This sea of espresso makers symbolizes years of tradition within my family: the character's inability to find the boiling pot derives from a great sense of loss consuming my family the past few years. Two years prior to writing this vignette - one of many self-contained scenes that made up the first drafts of the play - my father's eldest sister passed away from pancreatic cancer. A year later, my great-grandmother slipped into a calm, well-deserved sleep after 102 years of living. Last May, my uncle passed away from a rare genetic disease. Three family members in three years: three teachers. I knew these people my entire life. They taught me to cook, to make Cuban espresso, and to dance. Panic overtook me and I feared that their deaths took with them all they taught me. In order to cling to these cultural lessons, I collected stories from family members about

their lives, drinking in as much information about my family as possible -- and myself.

As I sifted through my family's history, I remembered a quote from another Master's of Fine Arts in Performance candidate. Rob Jansen once asked: "How do we know who we truly are if all the people who have known us from the beginning are gone?" This thought echoed in my head, along with others questions such as: "How could I carry on the traditions, the culture and the language of my family if those who taught me were gone? How could I keep those traditions alive when I am mixed with another culture, pressed and boiled into a different flavor than the rest of my family?" My initial concepts for the play revolved around fear of losing, of loss already suffered, and of my own uncertainty as to the perpetuation of my heritage.

“Café is before, after, and in-between meals. It stops the day and makes everyone sit down to laugh, cry, talk till it’s gone.” *Abuela, Café 46*

Cafe refers to Cafe Cubano, espresso grounds placed in the center of an Italian coffee maker, brewed and then added to a tiny bit of sugar for sweetness. Cafe happens at any point day or night. Hispanic culture practices a myriad of traditions, and each of those traditions vary by household. For the play, I felt the making and enjoying of Cafe Cubano symbolized the sense of tradition and ritual in my family. Instead of focusing on the concepts of loss, I chose to focus on what I gained: what my family taught me. Each time, my mind wandered back to food. In our house, a meal meant time, preparation, and love. If I could explain what the smell of garlic does for my soul, how it transports me home the moment I smell it! Mary Urrutia Randelman's book *Memories of a Cuban*

Kitchen lives on a stand in the corner of my mother's kitchen. Inside, are not only over a hundred traditional recipes, but countless stories of Urrutia's childhood in Cuba for "those who have never seen Cuba" (xvii). As I read and re-read these stories, I connected familiar dishes with unfamiliar places. I spent days pouring through my great-grandmother's cook book as well, spotting her "do as I want" personality in the little ways she altered traditional recipes, or the clips she cut from different magazines.<sup>1</sup> When I realized how intricately tied to food my story was, I chose the ritualistic practice of making *un cafécito*, because a cup of coffee in an Hispanic household is an event, whether between two people talking quietly or between thirty family members all screaming over each other.<sup>2</sup> Café happens at any point in time during the day or night; it starts and finishes parties. In this case, café Cubano refers to the espresso grounds placed in the center of an Italian coffee maker brewed and then added to a tiny bit of sugar for sweetness. The Hispanic culture practices a myriad of traditions, and each of those remain particular to a myriad of household, but I felt the making and enjoying of café as a strong symbol for tradition and ritual.

Eréndira struggles with "becoming first-generation on a distant shore/ carrying the smiles and tribulations of three generations more" (*Café* 63) Her conflict within the story deals with compromising familial obligation and personal desire. This derives from cultural conflicts between the root culture of an immigrant family, and culture they immigrate into. In *Hybrid Cultures*, by Nestor Graci Canclini, the author provides a sociological definition of hybridization among people as "the process of inter-ethnic contact and decolonization. Globalization process, travel & border crossing, and artistic,

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<sup>1</sup> See Research and Influence Images 6 & 7

<sup>2</sup> See Research and Influences pages 19-20

literary and mass communication fusion” (xxiv). The idea of hybridized cultures intrigued me because I often refer to myself as a “hyphen”: a Cuban-Honduran-American as opposed to only Cuban or only Honduran, etc. Like many people in the world today, especially Latin Americans, I do not claim single origin. In many ways, all cultures are hybridized and with such high degrees of combining and mixing of cultures in society, Canclini discusses the conflicting ideologies between these cultures. In this play, I explored the societal expectations of women and men within Hispanic culture as compared to US culture with particularity in regards to caretaking and education. As I developed the character of Miguel, Eréndira’s brother, I examined two terms attributed to Hispanic males. The first was *machismo*, “the exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggressiveness in male-to-female relationships” (Sequeria 8). The second was *caballerismo*, “represents positive attributes and chivalrous qualities; such as emotional connectedness and social responsibility” (Melnik 68). Through Miguel, I explored where these traits – sometimes prized, sometimes condemned – intersect and how they can be misconstrued in the US as compared to their use in Latin America.

### Evolution from Theme to Plot

Initially, I wrote several abstract vignettes -- they lacked a linear story order -- exploring the process of making coffee and Eréndira’s inability to make a cup that tastes "right." In order for the coffee to taste "right" Eréndira wants it to taste like Abuela's, or at least, how she *remembers* Abuela's coffee tasting. While these vignettes expressed the themes surrounding clashing cultural ideologies, they lacked motivation for the character:

action. For example, one vignette included Eréndira's poem regarding her sense of displacement as a first generation American.

“Their fears  
Combined with mine  
And we become first generation  
On a distant shore,  
Carrying the smiles and tribulations  
Of three generations more.  
For better or worse  
It's in our blood.  
Expectations left unspoken” *Café* 63

This poetic monologue conveyed Eréndira's internal conflict between culture and tradition yet she had no reason to speak them, no why. The play had no concrete conflict. I kept pitting the idea of Eréndira as a rebel woman against the larger themes of the play, but nothing or no one to really challenge her.

I rewrote the opening vignette as an exercise in search of the story and the conflict. Originally, Miguel, Eréndira's brother, called her on the phone to tell her of their grandmother's death. While this established the decision she must make – to return home for the funeral or not – the cell phone kept the conflict distant and intangible. It is much less difficult to tell someone "No" over the phone than in person. For the exercise, I had Miguel arrive at her apartment. Eréndira's now faced a physical personification of her struggles: she now faced her conflict and answered to it. If Eréndira chose to sever ties fovea, she would have to tell Miguel to his face. By concentrating on the relationship between Eréndira and Miguel, I let go of the thematic metaphors and focused on the literal. The opportunity to work with a male character allowed me to delve further into a completely opposite Hispanic voice suffering from his own cultural issues. As the relations between Eréndira and Miguel expanded, a more linear story evolved: te

audience would follow Eréndira and Miguel struggle through their issues in order to forgive each other.

The journey of Eréndira and Miguel's relationship drew from three vignettes I wrote originally. They were: making a traditional meal for her birthday, spreading their parents' ashes in Key West, and discovering that Abuela was in remission from cancer. Each of these scenes existed as flashbacks that the siblings relive in order to work through their differences. Abuela's part in the story took shape around Eréndira and Miguel; she chose which flashback they relived and lead them into memories exemplifying issues often experienced by first generation Americans. In the "Key West" vignette, Miguel wishes to spread his parents' ashes so that the current will take them to Cuba. Eréndira, however, feels that this is another form of loss and fails to understand why her parents' home was Cuba, instead of Miami. I worked to employ this duality of belonging that is somewhat inherited, like a semi up-rooted tree.

As I continued writing, four theatrical devices formed structure of the play: food, spoken word, movement, and music.

## **Chapter 3: From Page to Stage**

### Food as a Shared Experience

The kitchen was the center of my family. We spent hours creating dishes, and even more hour devouring them. Each act of preparation, chopping, sautéing, boiling, all rises together until we arrive to the ultimate climax of eating the meal, the denouement usually consisting of a nap afterward mirrors the classical theatrical structure: exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution. This connection in anticipation, climax, and release with a theatrical event is more and more pronounced in the world of performing arts as different companies utilize food within performances as a form of engagement with the audience. In preparation for the play, I researched companies that combined food and theatre: Café Nordo, Bread and Puppet, and Sojourn Theatre. I sought to elicit all the senses of the audience, throughout the play.

This carnal take – the stimulation of all the senses to elicit a physical response – on food and meals is the basis for Café Nordo’s mission in combining food with the human experience: “This is a conversation with your food, and the food talks back” (Café Nordo: The Nordo Doctrine). Chef Nordo, the culinary brains behind the company, believes food provides another medium to tell a story regarding the human condition.<sup>3</sup> This company builds and experience stimulating all the senses and humors of a man through a dramatic take of people, and the food or meals that define them. In this sense, the audience fully understands or revels in the tale before them because they are not just sharing the event as spectators but are completely consumed by it as they consume the food of the play.

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<sup>3</sup> See Research and Influences page 15



Peter Schumann, founder of Bread and Puppet Theatre, compares theatre to food in the sense that we need both of them for nourishment: one nourishes the body, and the other the soul (Schumman “About Bread and Puppet”). Since 1963, the company has served bread after post-puppet shows in order to forge a transcendental connection with their audiences. They liken the experience to the Eucharist, emphasizing how theatre fulfills on a more spiritual level.

Sojourn Theatre Company<sup>4</sup> does not typically use food however, in their play *On the Table*, they constructed the third act around a wedding reception. between two people of extremely socially different areas of Portland, Oregon. The final act consists of the audience – members of the two conflicting communities— and actors down at a table to enjoy a meal. During the dinner, actors facilitate conversation between the differing communities. In this fashion, Sojourn sought the communal experience of a meal to open conversation between people who might never have talked outside of this event (Rohd “Sojourn Theatre”).

Through these examples we see distinct ideologies in terms of experience for the use of food: carnal, spiritual, communal. Each company used food with a different intention, I tried to find a way to combine all three.

Originally, I intended to cook an entire meal of *bistec empanizado* – a thinly sliced cut of steak that is then breaded and fried – on stage. However, for practical purposes, cooking a meal became a flashback in which Miguel and Eréndira relive her fifteenth birthday dinner, emphasizing the garlic browning in oil on the stove. As the spirit guide, Abuela places a coffee maker filled with chopped garlic for Eréndira to

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<sup>4</sup> See Research and Influences page 15

discover on the counter. She asks Miguel if he smells the garlic before she opens the coffee maker and reveals its content. The smell initiates the transition into the flashback, playing on the power of scents to ignite memories: the smell of the garlic alone brought them home. During the actual production, a full clove of garlic rests amongst the chopped bits within the top of the coffee pot in order for me to display for the audience. Cooking involves all the senses, aside from the obvious of smell and taste; each food also holds its own textures that can be triggered by seeing the garlic, and sound is peaked when the audio of sizzling oil plays. By tapping into each of a person's senses, I wanted to elicit their own memories of a specific meal that would allow them to tap into Eréndira's story in a more personal way. Without the actual elements of a full meal present, I used sense memory to ignite in the audience a moment they could relate to and bring into the theatre with them as the scene unfolded.

Still wanting to retain some form of dramatic tension through the actual process of creating a meal, I chose making café Cubano as the event. The process of making Café Cubano is inherently contains theatrical tension as the Eréndira could ruin the coffee at in the end; the process also fit within the time constraints a scene that lasted only seven minutes. Eréndira's failed attempts at making café at the beginning of the play ignites an emotional investment between her and the audience, so that they are connected to the sense of joy and fulfillment of the final scene and that cathartic batch of café.

Coffee is deeply embedded in my family as well as in the Latin American culture. Serving coffee at the end of the piece for me was extremely important due to the shared nature of coffee. Coladas, for example, are purchased in a large Styrofoam cup with several plastic cups to take with you as you go share the coffee with people. So there is

an exchange of what comes to fruition with the brewing of the coffee, as if in the end I am opening up the conversation to them: here were all my issues, now take some coffee and tell me about yours. Where do you come from? What is your history? What are you battling or embracing?

People told me post-show much of the audience purchased coffee during intermission.

### From Poetry to Spoken Word:

The Norton Anthology defines poetry as:

“One of the three major genres of imaginative literature, which has its origins in music and oral performance and is characterized by controlled patterns of rhythm and syntax (often using meter and rhyme)...concentrated emphasis on the sensual, especially visual and aural, qualities and effects of words and word order; and especially vivid, often figurative language.” (“Literary Terms”)

Through interviews conducted with my great-grandmother and grandmother.<sup>5</sup> I found when my grandmothers spoke of past events, whether devastating or wonderful, their description of the events altered - or rather *how* they described the event alters. Abuela Chea always said that everything in Cuba was bigger: lobster, palm trees, houses. In truth, if everything were as big as she proclaimed them to be, nothing would fit on the actual island. People subconsciously enlist poetic devices in order for those listening to understand them on not only an intellectual level, but also an emotional one. They find a means to “[translate experience]” (Nelson “First Cousin”) in order to inspire love and adoration for people who were not there. Allen Berliner said, when speaking of his movie *My First Cousin Once Removed*, that “Memory is not what happens, it’s what you

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<sup>5</sup> See Research and Influence pages 9-10.

remember happened” (Nelson “First Cousin”). I distinctly recall my grandmother<sup>6</sup> telling me she remembered nothing of the rebellion in Cuba, only the blue shade of the sky.

The shape of a poem – the way it is written down on the page – often signals the mood or tone before one ever reads the words: the author achieves this by typing the poem in the shape of a specific image or typing the word out in a way that reflects the meaning of the word.<sup>7</sup> Within the verse itself I work quite a bit with enjambment, “the technique of running over from one line to the next without stop” (“Literary Terms”). In order to play with the possibilities in a word’s meaning when placed at different sections of a sentence/thought.

These are the written poetic elements, and now I needed to give them voice.

The art of spoken poetry existed since ancient. Modern spoken word poetry arose out of the postmodern art movement during the Harlem Renaissance (“Literary Terms”). Throughout the years, its popularity has spread amongst minorities as form of expressing cultural and political ideologies. For the play, I employed a musical theatre conceit: when emotion overtakes a character so completely that no traditional form of dialogue or expression successfully conveys their desires, they break out into song. I utilized this concept when writing the verse within the flashbacks; the characters, reliving moments of great emotional depth, speak in verse. Poetry, I believe, happens without conscious thought when we speak; I found it most natural for the characters to relive the flashbacks with “a little touch of poetry” (*Café 52*). Using rhetorical devices such as enjambment and repetition I wrote sections of poetry serving to heighten the emotion of the flashbacks Eréndira and Miguel that work through in order to reform their bond.

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<sup>6</sup> See Research and Influences Image 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix Poetry and Shape Sample page 72.

I kept the transitions from prose to verse as smooth as possible, except for the initial transition into the scene where the siblings cook *bistec empanizado*. I made this transition more abrupt in order to signal the audience of a shift in tone, time, and place. In other words, the rhetorical devices innate to verse are driven by emotion and intention of the character that may pull the audience out slightly when they notice the spoken word. The audience dropping out of the story – taking a moment to critique or analyze the play, as opposed to being a part of the play – was not an issue because it heightens their attention as the poetry and written words integrate more fully, indicative of the heightened stakes. We, my fellow actors and musicians, played with different way to use the verse and rhythms without giving in too much to them versus when the two take over, and how to use them to paint a picture or express a mood.

Examining two lines from the Key West scene wherein Miguel and Eréndira discuss spreading their recently deceased parents’ ashes so they ride the current back to Cuba we see:

“There’s just so much  
Leaving/left/going/gone  
Their country and home  
And now  
They leave  
us” (*Café 57*)

In this case, I played with the words “leave” at the end of the verse line and “us” existing as its own verse line - it is alone, a line unto itself. These structural choices are only noticeable when viewed on paper. It helped us figure out how to play vocally with the poetic shape of the emotion within the lines expressing the loneliness of “us” as its own verse line, separated from the “they,” the deceased parents in the line above. Taking the shape of the poem and the enjambment of the two lines into consideration while

speaking, I emphasized the sound of the word “leave” and let that space hang at the end of the line so that when the word “us” was *alone* the characters were also singular and alone. Using this tactic emphasized specific words and the emotional thought behind those words, such as’s feeling of abandonment at the death of her parents.

With repetition, I chose a few core phrases to disperse throughout the play, in some cases taking a poetic line and placing it during more realistic scenes. For example, the phrase “I don’t cook. Not anymore” breaks the rhythm of the *bistec empanizado* flashback (*Café 52*). Eréndira speaks this after the dialogue portraying her innocent thought that feeding her grandmother might make her well, transitioning in her mind from the rhythm of her memories to the break in her mind of these memories versus reality. This break in her mind reflects the breaking of the rhythm in the poetry of the prior flashback. Not home to make food for Abuela after the cancer returns, Eréndira feels responsible for her death. However this break within her mind, the separation of rhythm and reality, is ironic since she actually says the verse in rhythm. It is the repetition of this phrase, said in rhythm with the traditional dialogue, that subtly informs how the cadence of the spoken word is conjoined with that of the beat of cooking and making café that still lives within her despite her denial. This rhythm occurs to enliven and praise the garlic scene, and is echoed in other cases as well. Abuela’s melody is another example, where repetition of gestures and melody are more complex. It begins with Abuela, Miguel as a transitional element in the middle, and Eréndira as the final embodiment of the voice. When all three of these elements - traditional, transitional, and the medley of these with the present - combine that Eréndira finds herself in the end.

## Movement and Text:

In the same way that emotion drives people to verse when prose is insufficient, it drives people to movement when text no longer suffices; gestures become repetitive, such as in the case of the choreography for Abuela's melody.

“our skin is an eternal coastline  
our veins are filled with iodine  
you can live in the middle of continents  
on the sides of mountains  
and upon a desert dune  
but the waves crash  
eternal.” *Café* page

Movement and phrases are physical poems the body memorized long before becoming conscious of it. Movement is unconscious poetry. Choreography was improvised and revised in accordance with the musicians playing and movement being a reaction to the entire event. For example, the breeding of the *bistec* is a stylization of the actual process brought about by natural actions and stylized with the music.<sup>8</sup> I also played with the idea that in flashback we paint things in a more poetic fashion, which includes how people move. If everything else is poetic, such as the spoken word, then our bodies can be fluid and expressive as well.

## Music and Memory

The main inspiration for the music derived from my great-grandmother's favorite song “Amorosa Guajira,” a traditional Cuban song in the “guajiro” genre<sup>9</sup>. My musicians and I worked with three instruments: the acoustic guitar, the violin, and Conga drums.

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendices Image 16

<sup>9</sup> see Research and Influences pages 16-17

The music was meant to round out the story, presenting the rhythms that are innate in people's speech and movement. Again, playing with the concept of memory as poetry, I felt music a necessary element not only for its cultural importance, but also for its ability to help emphasize certain scenes.

Initially, the only person available to attend all the rehearsals was Aiden Walsh, the drummer. He used the djembe, a traditional African drum, which sounds deeper and rounder than the Congas typical to Cuban music. Together we established a creative process for the building of the music that allowed the rhythms to derive from the scene itself. For example, we repeated the Key West flashback – where Miguel discusses the siblings' inheritance of the ocean – several times. The first time we rehearsed the scene, Aiden, the drummer, watched; the second time he played the drums. We continued this process in rehearsals with each scene and in some of the transitions. Aiden played when he felt compelled to, followed by a discussion until we created a shell of the music while waiting for the guitarist and violinist to round out the sound. Despite being a last minute replacement Scot Zimmerman, a Flamenco and classically trained guitarist was a phenomenal addition. Completely new to the world of theatre, he jumped right in, revamping the music we previously constructed and giving it a whole new life by providing a classical layer. Having both musicians available allowed for my acting to improve by reacting off the music and vice versa, such as the guitar strumming more and more frantically as Eréndira suffers from her inability to get the coffee “right.”

When Kristen Vasan, the violinist, arrived she listened to the music and watched the scenes repeatedly, adjusting to add to the frenetic energy of the *bistec empanizado* flashback and slowing down for a melodic tone to Abuela's melody. She and Scot used



the melody of “Amorosa Guajira” as inspiration for the Abuela’s melody: they fit the poem to the melody. Together, these musicians pulled in the old world musicality of the poem, making it seem as old as the ocean itself.

### Working with the Designers

Traditionally when putting together a theatrical piece there is one director, one lighting designer, one costumer designer, and one set designer all working together to give life to a single vision. However, in the case of the Festival of New Works, that expanded into seven writer/directors and seven extremely different plays. In initial conversations my fellow cohort members and I were asked to devise some sort of overarching theme connecting each of our pieces. At this point in the process, each person’s pieces existed as general ideas, with little concrete to provide the designers with. It quickly became clear that the best approach to attempting to build a versatile set and light plot for seven different shows required a more “festival” ideology behind it: that is to say, one easily adaptable and quick to change between pieces.

Immediately, I knew to alter the way the flashbacks functioned in terms of travel: I cut excess set pieces and movement. I knew that I still wanted to create two different apartments: Eréndira’s and Miguel’s. However, I couldn’t have two different counter units and two different sofas. Instead, I relied on the moving walls in Andrew Cohen’s set design to move.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendices Image 12

I spoke with Andrew Kaufman, the lighting designer, about the feel of the scenes with Abuela. To contrast the icy-cold lights of the apartment, Abuela needed a wash with its own tone/color similar to that of the sunset: her warmth reflected in the deep ambers and yellows we used. In this way, even when Abuela was not physically in a scene, we used her light palette to show her spirit's presence.<sup>11</sup> Most of the palette revolved around sunset oranges, ambers, pinks and ocean blues. These are the colors of my family home and Florida.

When working with the costume designer, Rebecca DeLapp we discussed starting Eréndira out at the top of the play in a structured and dark dress, emphasizing her restricted attitude and uptight physicality.<sup>12</sup> For her second dress, after she remembers her old self, we chose a garment that flowed like the ocean with similar blue hues. This dress symbolizes her acceptance of her past and her movement into her future. I wanted the musicians to exist on the edges of the world as specters of memory and the musical embodiments of the Old World. Therefore, their costumes consisted of subdued and still be physically reminiscent of young men in Miami. Dressing Kristin Vasan, the violinist, was more complicated because we sometimes needed her to blend in with the musicians and sometimes play Abuela. For this purpose, we kept her in softer shades yet made her clothes reminiscent of the 1940's.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendices Image 17

<sup>12</sup> See Appendices Image 14

<sup>13</sup> See Appendices Images 13 & 15

## Chapter 4: Production Reflection and the Future

With the garlic, only a few people in the audience smelled it, that the reason for the garlic was lost. For the next attempt I would like to push the garlic even more, filling the coffee pot with *freshly* chopped garlic, allowing the smell to truly permeate the house. In this way, the meal can truly become a shared experience. Luckily, the aroma of fresh brewed coffee filled the house. Due to theatre regulations I was not unable to serve the freshly made café to the audience, nor could I find a way for a catering service to supply the coffee post-show. This took away from the shared experience which was a large part of the idea behind the use of real food. As Eréndira in those final moments, I badly wanted to extend a cup of the café to the audience in thanks for following me through this journey of discovery and acceptance. There is a shared understanding when people sit together to drink or eat: they have experienced an event together and more in common through it. For a future production of *Café*, these are two elements I want to emphasize in order to drive this theme home.

In regards to movement, from some of the comments received, a few people were surprised at first by the sudden arrival of it into a seemingly “normal” piece. However, after the first “garlic” scene, they accepted it. As mentioned above, I have no issues with the gently pulling-out of the audience - I want them to recognize that something has changed. This allowed me to trust my fellow actor as well; I knew Patrcik Prebula, the

actor playing Miguel, could move, but I realized my need to control got in the way of his exploration. I gave him more freedom of choice in order for more gestures to come from his natural reaction while acting, as opposed to adapting choreography I taught him. I also learned to trust myself more, allowing some of the choreography to have more life - especially allowing it to lead me to a place of frustration during which I speak of feeling confined and constricted by tradition and family and need to break free.

During the scene where Eréndira expresses the weight of her family's expectations on her, I felt myself as the actor drop out of the scene – stop being the character and start being overly critical. This happened each time I performed and my writing mind took over as I felt sections of the text grow redundant. While on stage, I am always aware of the audience's energy whether they are attentive and draw-into the scene, or have pulled out. As I dropped out during the scene, I noticed the audience drop out as well. I no longer sensed the heat of their attentiveness; instead it was as if air suddenly filled the room. The audience's reaction or lack thereof, pinpointed the weaknesses within the scene for me. I would like to find a few more subtle ways for Eréndira to express her issues with expectation without being said outright. I also want to explore adding in much more Spanglish, and moments where there can be sections of only Spanish. For the basis of this performance, most of I wrote most of the "Spanglish" into the script, but only as a means of signaling to the actor that this section allowed for it. Instead of sticking strictly to the script, we improvised switching between the two languages in order to provide a more natural feel. I did little research on code-switching and multilingualism in literature and society for this project, drawing mostly from my experiences and those of my fellow actors. I am interested in studying these topics further

in order to explore how code-switching might inform the story to greater degree. I felt Eréndira wanting to slip into Spanish more often than I anticipated when writing the script, especially when Miguel speaks Spanish. I think there exists another layer of discovery with her relationship to the language as in her own reactions to speaking Spanish automatically or when she makes the conscious choice to speak.

The audience also allowed me to discover that parts of my script were actually funny. At the very beginning of the play, Eréndira struggles to recreate her Abuela's recipe, going through four attempts and commenting on just how disgusting they taste to her. I played the part very seriously, wanting to convey her struggle - in a way, forcing it. During the first dress rehearsal, as she talked about the high sugar contents of one of her attempts, the audience laughed. Surprised at first, I gave into their laughter and, by the final run of the show, I played up the comedic aspects. Abuela's comments on Eréndira's process also invited laughter. Later, in talking with people, I realized that the comedy in the opening allowed a way in for the audience; they were able to start becoming attached to the characters. Another instance of comedy occurred when Miguel mentions his desire to avoid being hit by a *chancleta*. The audience laughing at Miguel's discomfort allowed a cultural reference to be understood by the audience no matter their heritage.

After conversations with various people, I wonder what other first-generation Americans would say about their experiences. An older gentleman stopped me after the show bursting to tell me about his experiences as a second-generation German-American; the excitement he felt and what it brought up in him coming from a strong yet different cultural background was something I found incredibly fascinating. His story inspired in me the desire to one day create a festival of pieces around the themes from the

perspectives of other cultures. Also, I would like to create a piece from the perspective of the family members who immigrated here and how they reflect upon what they see happening. The greatest realization for me throughout the whole process and performance was that serving café at the end of the play was not the end of the experience. Instead it was the opening of a discussion. In the next production, I will invite conversation with my audience as we sit and drink and share together – we will have reflected on our cultures carnally, spiritually, and finally as a community.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix Image 18

**CAFÉ**

**By**

**Claudia Rosales**

**Final Production Script 02.15.2013**

## Prologue

*(We are in a non-descript apartment. Rather cold, unlived in, IKEA-esque. The dressing can be suggestive of an apartment without the entire interior needing to be built. DSR there is a black, short table with two austere chairs. All too modern and streamlined. USL there is a counter and a young woman leaning against it. She has lined several small, white, plastic cups with little bits of coffee inside and each of the cups has a number on it. She writes in a coffee recipe in her notebook. As she writes, the words of the recipe project onto the set. She takes a sip from one of the cups.)*

## ERÉNDIRA

Trial 17. And for August alone! Ugh. No, too much coffee.

*(she scratches out her last notation and writes another. We see the words erase in the projected image just the way her pencil erases them in the notebook. Maybe we even see the shreds of pencil eraser and bits of paper. ABUELA's presence, which is a sensation created through warm yellow lighting, the melody played by the MUSICIANS and ever once and a while, her voice begins to fill the room. ERÉNDIRA tries another of the cups.)*

Trial 18. Ugh, oh God, no. That would kill a diabetic. Too much sugar.

*(She writes, sips, scratches, writes, sips, scratches, until she slams her pen down in frustration. With each failed tasting, ABUELA's light saturates the apartment more. It is as if Eréndira's mistaken attempts are bringing ABUELA into the room. Beside ERÉNDIRA, on the counter, sits and open Italian coffee maker, a bag of café Pilon, a glass Pyrex measuring cup, a small fork.)*

None of these are right.

*(She grabs a small Italian coffee maker and begins fervently attempting to make another pot. Golden and red beams saturate the apartment, signifying her entrance. We hear a voice, perhaps as an echo to emphasize that this is a memory speaking.)*

## ABUELA

ERÉNDIRA, you are doing it wrong.

*(ERÉNDIRA begins making the Cuban espresso. Even though her grandmother attempts to help her, ERÉNDIRA cannot hear her. Every*



*sounds haunts, as if we hear the echo of the original sound from years before: the scraping of the coffee pot untwisting, the vacuum seal breaking of the coffee bag, the spoon dipping into the grounds...etc)*

ABUELA

Fill this place, Ernedira. It's so empty. The kitchen is supposed to be filled with the smell of food cooking.

ABUELA

Café. Not Coffee. Café. Coffee you drink alone, on the run. Out of a Starbucks cardboard cup in venti, medium, grande, small – no se que. It's a double-mocha-shot of something made by a machine and smothered under a layer of canned whipped cream. Headphones in your ears. Talking to no one.

ABUELA

Café is before, after, and in-between meals. It stops the day and makes everyone sit down to laugh, cry, talk till it's gone. It's the window stands in Miami where you used to buy coladas and the dozen plastic cups it comes with to take back and share with the nurses at the hospital.

ABUELA

Sing! Mija! You are alone, in a dark apartment, with an empty kitchen! That's what's missing from your recipe – soul! ¡Alma!

*(ABUELA's melody begins, her voice beautiful and low. Distant.)*

ABUELA

Soy todo sabor de sales	<i>I am flavored of salt</i>
Tengo yodo en el mirar	<i>I have iodine in my stare</i>
Es que vengo de la playa	<i>It's that I come from the beach</i>
Y me he impregnado de mar.	<i>And am impregnated with sea</i>

*(As ABUELA sings, the first bits of coffee brew. ERÉNDIRA catches those drops, pouring them into the sugar, whisking them together. Then, she pours coffee into a white plastic cup. ERÉNDIRA sips from the cup in her hand.)*

Ugh. No. It's still wrong.

*(ERÉNDIRA slams the coffee pot down. ABUELA's MELODY cuts out. The warm lights shatter and the grey returns. ABUELA's spirit is gone.)*

*(A sharp knock on the door) Who the hell is that? Going. I'm going.*

*(She answers it. On the other side stands a man, around 27 years old. He is medium height with the build of a person who has done manual labor all his life. ERÉNDIRA stills, her hand clutching the doorknob as he rushes past her into the apartment, carrying a box.)*

ERÉNDIRA

I didn't invite you in. What're you doing here?

MIGUEL

Does a brother really need an invitation from his sister?

ERÉNDIRA

You do.

MIGUEL

Thanks for the invitation.

ERÉNDIRA

That wasn't one. Get out. *(She gestures frustrated at the door.)*

MIGUEL

Here. Take this.

ERÉNDIRA

What is it?

MIGUEL

A box.

ERNEDIRA

No shit.

MIGUEL

It's for you.

*(She walks to the table, takes the box, and walks back to the door)*

MIGUEL

And me. But, I can't open it without you. Don't you want to know what's inside? Can't escape everything, huh Ren

ERÉNDIRA

How do you-

*(Before she can finish, MIGUEL catches sight of the counter for the first time. He walks over, tucking the box under his arm, and begins investigating.)*

MIGUEL

Can't escape everything, huh Ren? Making café?

*(He picks up the cup with TRIAL 17 written on it.)*

ERÉNDIRA

Miguel, don't!

*(He takes a sip and tries to hold back a smile)*

MIGUEL

This tastes just like I remember it.

*(She grabs the cup from his hands and tries to push him away from the counter, unveiling the open notebook. MIGUEL places the box down, grabs the notebook before she can stop him and begins reading aloud.)*

MIGUEL

“Trial 17. For the month of August. Too much coffee?” What are you doing, ERÉNDIRA? This isn't how you make café.

ERÉNDIRA

Fine. We'll open it! *(She finally closes the door, walking towards him.)* But we open it, then you leave.

*(As she reaches for the outstretched box, MIGUEL pulls it up and away from her. As if they were kids playing monkey in the middle.)*

Seriously? Isn't this what you wanted!

MIGUEL

Little sister, this comes with something –

ERNEDIRA

An apology?

MIGUEL

From you?

ERÉNDIRA

I don't care what's in the fucking box. It isn't worth putting up with you. Get out. *(She starts moving towards the door)*

MIGUEL

Abuela's dead.

*(She stops, as if the wind has been knocked out of her.)*

ERÉNDIRA

When?

MIGUEL

Yesterday.

ERÉNDIRA

And you're already here?

MIGUEL

I thought you would want to know.

ERÉNDIRA

How?

MIGUEL

The cancer came back. Didn't take very long.

*(She takes a few steading breaths.)*

ERÉNDIRA

You could have just called.

MIGUEL

What, and miss this loving reunion? No way. Besides, I needed to bring you this.

ERÉNDIRA

What's the deal with the stupid box? What else do you need from me?

MIGUEL

Need? From you? Right, I see. All this time you have been gone "writing." That wasn't enough for you? *(He catches himself and holds the box out to her once more.)* You think I need something from you? If you want to find out what's in this thing, you have to come home.

ERÉNDIRA

No.

MIGUEL

No?

ERÉNDIRA

That's not my home anymore.

MIGUEL

Y esto? This gringo apartment? It's as cold as an IKEA catalog. Worse even.

ERÉNDIRA

I don't belong there anymore.

MIGUEL

There? Where do you belong then? Here, with all the white kids?

ERÉNDIRA

God, Miguel, seriously? I don't want to start this over with you. Why do I have to go home to open this?

MIGUEL

'buela wanted all of us to open this together. You, me, and her. I promised her we would before – So I started looking for you. Then she died and now...there's only you and me, sis. And I can't open it without you. She would know. *(He pulls off his flip flop.)* I don't want to know what a celestial smack with a chancleta feels like.

*(He rubs his butt as if remembering a particular smack...or several.  
Waiting for some sort of response from ERÉNDIRA.)*

MIGUEL

Come on, Eréndira. Ren. Abuela asked for this.

ERÉNDIRA

*(takes a breath as if to say “how dare you” but stops) Fine.*

*(She walks over to Miguel. They place the box down on the counter, each  
on one side of it. They take part of the lid into their hands.)*

MIGUEL

Ok, count of three. One, two, three!

*(They pull and pull but the top does not budge. This attempt at opening the  
box seems to call ABUELA’s presence back into the room, as if she has  
been lingering in wait. The warm yellow light of her spirit brightens  
slowly.)*

ERÉNDIRA

What the hell, Miguel? Is this some trick?

MIGUEL

No. I don’t think so. Maybe it’s taped.

*(MIGUEL searches the edges of the box for tape, but shakes his head not  
finding any. As this happens ABUELA’s spirit arrives fully.)*

ERÉNDIRA

I knew this had to be bull. There’s nothing in there, is there? You’re playing with me  
again. You know what, just go. Go. I’ll help pay for the funeral arrangements –

MIGUEL

You’ll help pay? That’s what you have to offer after leaving us? A payment?

*(As if angered by their sudden fighting, ABUELA sheds a light on one the  
cafeteras on the counter. The smell of freshly chopped garlic fills the  
room.)*

ERÉNDIRA

*(Sniffing) Do you smell that?*

MIGUEL

Smell what? [Pause.] Eréndira, don’t try and change the –

ERÉNDIRA

Do you smell that? *(Sniffing she makes her way to the lit cafeteria.)*

MIGUEL

Is that...garlic?

(Ignoring him, she slowly unscrews the pot only to find the middle filled with garlic as well. MIGUEL is suddenly beside her.)

Garlic. You remember? You remember, hermanita?  
Our kitchen. Back home. You're 15.  
Newly proclaimed: a woman.  
Do you remember?  
Thick orange beams  
From a Florida sunset  
fall in through the windows

*(Miguel's verse takes us into our first flashback. The apartment is slowly painted by a Florida sunset, garlic fills the air. We are in the kitchen of ABUELA's house in Miami.)*

And on the counter, waiting  
For your birthday dinner:  
Steak, cut so thin  
We buy it from a Cuban  
Butcher in Miami.  
Huevos beaten in separate plates  
Panco bread crumbs seasoned with adobo.  
Abuela before the stove,

*(Somewhere, quietly, we hear the faint sizzle of heated oil.)*

Aceite popping with anticipacion.

ERÉNDIRA

I don't cook. Not anymore.

MIGUEL

On 'buela's mark we start  
You and me  
Bistec, huevo, pan, huevo, pan

*(He begins the repetitive motion of dredging and breading the steak.)*

Bistec, huevo, pan, huevo, pan  
Dipping and breading  
Dipping and breading

Till the steaks look like cracking clay  
Sheets,

ERÉNDIRA

topographical maps of flavor  
from a lost city.

MIGUEL

Abuela keeping an eye on the bistec  
dancing in the oil.

*(He tries getting her to dance. She keeps as rigid as possible, though little bits of her start twitching with excitement. He sees her giving in to the memory.)*

We bread

ERÉNDIRA

and double bread.  
That's the secret.

MIGUEL

Our secreto  
The kitchen counter - an altar  
Candles glowing before Abuela

ERÉNDIRA

Before she got sick. Before the cancer took hold.

MIGUEL

Her skin always warm,  
sun kissed golden.

ERÉNDIRA

Smelling Chanel and hot oil.  
Elegant.

MIGUEL

Candles glowing before abuela

ERÉNDIRA

She shines like she just got back from tripping 'round the stars.



(the following is a quick back and forth, finishing each other's sentence)

MIGUEL

Chopping onions  
Garlic browning  
Permeating skin.  
Filling mouths

ERÉNDIRA

meat cooking  
golden.  
Stinging eyes.  
With a deluge of saliva.

BOTH

Bistec, huevo, pan, huevo, pan  
Bistec, huevo, pan, huevo, pan

Mami and Abuela hum,  
a little coke and rum

ERÉNDIRA

a Cuba libre

MIGUEL

a mentirita

ERÉNDIRA

a free Cuba.  
a little lie  
A lie. (*She stops.*) I thought:

MIGUEL

bistec, huevo, pan, huevo, pan

ERÉNDIRA

if I could make her realize

MIGUEL

Bistec, huevo, pan, huevo, pan

ERÉNDIRA

how hungry she was she will just keep eating till she's healthy again.

MIGUEL

Remember Eréndira  
Bistec, huevo, pan, huevo, pan

ERÉNDIRA

Till the cancer would just go away. Shut up, Miguel.

*(At her will, the glow of the garlic memory fades. Miguel stops dancing, the drum goes silent. We are back in present day.)*

You were always good at making things sound better than they were. Like Papi. A little touch of poetry. And while we're dancing Abuela's body was already working against her. I knew something wasn't right. When she said she wasn't hungry. I...

MIGUEL

Oh, come on Eréndira. You couldn't have known. None of us could. Besides, the cancer did go away. She went into remission.

ERÉNDIRA

Only to come back and kill her 3 years later.

MIGUEL

You weren't there, Eréndira. Trust me, no matter how much food you cooked for her, she...

ERÉNDIRA

Well, I don't cook, not anymore.

MIGUEL

I thought that stove over there looked too clean. Usually after you cook it looks like dinner exploded. The countertops stained red from Sazon packets.

ERÉNDIRA

It isn't like you cleaned up after me.

MIGUEL

Who the hell do you think cleaned up after you when you left?

ERÉNDIRA

That wasn't my mess.

MIGUEL

Mierda! That was my mess, right? That's what you want me to say, right? I'm the one who broke our family up. I drove you away.

ERÉNDIRA

It was a decision you forced me to make. I spent two years taking care of her, remember? Oh no, of course not, that's when you weren't there. You just phoned in once a week,

stopped by once a month for two hours at a time. And she just stared at you, like you were mana from heaven. While I –

MIGUEL

I was working. Don't you forget, I paid for the all that food you cooked.

ERENDRIA

You had to do something.

MIGUEL

You weren't this time so –

ERÉNDIRA

I didn't know she got sick again!

MIGUEL

Because you left. You moved to another state, you changed your number, hell I bet you're two steps away from changing your name! Ren! I might not have been there, but at least I wasn't missing. I didn't abandon you.

ERÉNDIRA

O yes you did. You just had different terms of agreement. Money didn't help me carry her to the bathroom at four o'clock in the morning, or bleach the house from top to bottom to make sure nothing could get her sick while her immune system was so low a speck of dust would just flatten her out for days.

MIGUEL

[After a pause.] Alright, I get it. You worked your ass off. But when I came back, you were ready to take off.

ERÉNDIRA

I wasn't ready to take off, Miguel. I was ready to start living my life. Living it for myself. It was so simple what I asked from you. You're my brother, you were supposed to support me, not –

MIGUEL

You weren't supposed to leave either. That's what we promised Mami and Papi, wasn't it? That day in Key West.

*(An ocean blue-grey light rises on the coffee pot that sits down stage. The lid of the pot is open and the sound of crashing waves seems to come from it. ERÉNDIRA goes to inspect it. She gasps slightly when she sees what is inside. MIGUEL walks forward to meet her at the edge of the stage as if they stand on shore.)*

Right at sunset.

*(The lights shift to pinks and golds, capturing a sunset over the ocean city. ERÉNDIRA clutches the pot to her chest, as if holding something precious.)*

Look at this thing. This giant, red, concrete buoy statue thing. “Southern Most Point” in big black letters. And hey, look, it’s on that tourist sign, and that sign over there, and that bar, and that sign too.

ERÉNDIRA

Ok! Miguel. It’s everywhere. You can’t miss it. You can’t miss the drunk people either. How many times do you think they gotta fish someone out of that water after falling over these rocks? *(She peers over the edge of the stage as if looking over the jagged shoreline.)* Gross, is that puke over there? Miguel, this is not the place to do this. They need to be somewhere sacred. This is a drunken tourist trap! Can we spread our parents’ ashes somewhere that does not look like the set of a Jimmy Buffet music video.

MIGUEL

It’s 90 miles to Cuba from here, ‘Dira. The current will take them back.

ERÉNDIRA

Take them back to what? What’s in Cuba for the current to take them back to? I should have stayed with Abuela. Look at this, this stupid giant buoy. Seriously, we are putting our parents to rest at a photo op. Let’s bury them by the house. *(She turned to leave the shore.)*

MIGUEL

No. *(He grabs her arm.)* No. They have had enough taken from them: their land, their home, and now...I won’t take this from them.

ERÉNDIRA

It isn’t their home anymore. What’s there now isn’t the Cuba they knew, not the one Papi used to write all those poems about. That version, it’s practically fiction. Nothing but verses and metaphors in people’s memories.

There’s just so much  
Leaving/left/going/gone  
Their country and home  
And now  
They leave us  
Can’t we  
At least  
Keep this piece of them

MIGUEL

Then we promise  
To keep the sea.

*(ERÉNDIRA looks sharply at him.)*

We are sea people.  
Water people.  
Our skin is an eternal coastline  
And our veins are filled with iodine  
So as to make  
Escape  
Impossible.  
I carry in me  
The salts of the seas  
Of countries: three  
And centuries long  
Uncounted.  
It never goes away.  
We inherit memories.  
We could live in  
the middle of continents,  
On the side of mountains  
And upon a desert dune,  
But the waves  
Crash  
Eternal,  
And the cricket buzz  
Of metropolitan traffic  
Can only be drowned by  
melted teal;  
smooth  
and quiet.  
Because that pulse,

*(MIGUEL gently takes the coffee pot top from ERÉNDIRA. She struggles before finally giving it to him.)*

That clave', (maybe a light drum beat here?)  
That ebb and flow,  
It's our blood, hermanita.  
No matter how far we go  
From the shore

*(He starts to pour out the ashes within the coffee pot. Grey streaks his hands. ERÉNDIRA watches him sadly.)*

Our parents, abuelos, bisabuelos,  
Called it home.

*(He offers the top to her. She shakes her head "No.")*

ERÉNDIRA

I just don't see how we can have such a strong attachment to a land we never set foot on.

*(She turns from MIGUEL and leaves. As she does this, we come back to the apartment from the flashback. MIGUEL is left holding the coffee pot top, uncertain what to do next. He places it on the table and sits. The bottom of the pot remains on the floor, down stage under a pale light.)*

ERÉNDIRA

What are you doing with Abuela's ashes?

MIGUEL

She, well, she asked me to do something with them.

ERÉNDIRA

What, take your boat out to the middle of the ocean?

MIGUEL

Not the middle of the ocean so much as –

ERÉNDIRA

As...as close to Cuba as you can get?

MIGUEL

It was her last wish, Dira, and after everything she did for us, helping us after Mami and Papi died...

ERÉNDIRA

I know. You don't have to explain it to me. Do you think she knows? That I wasn't mad at her. For not saying anything. That I love her?

I used to call her cell phone and just listen. Holding my breath. Till she got pissed and started yelling "no se quien me está llamando, pero deja de joder." Then I would hang up. Just like that. Just before I said anything.

MIGUEL

I knew that was you. No one would call and hang up that often.

ERÉNDIRA

That's how you found me.

MIGUEL

Numbers are trackable, 'mana.

ERÉNDIRA

I wanted to tell her but I just couldn't bring myself to say anything. I didn't want her to tell you. I wasn't ready to forgive you.

MIGUEL

You like to hang on to things.

ERÉNDIRA

Family trait, no? *(she mocks his position)* Don't trivialize what you did. Don't pretend you didn't betray me.

MIGUEL

Betray you? How did I do that?

ERÉNDIRA

The moment you assumed I would stay.

*(she grabs her chair and drags it to the center of the room, mumbling)*

You know what, fine, you don't want to leave my house, I don't have to look at your face

*(Another coffee pot appears under a faded pink light. It hangs from the roof.)*

*(Miguel grabs his chair, and drags it next to hers)*

MIGUEL

I thought it would be our chance for our lives to get back to normal, not for you to just pack up and go. *(slams chair down)*

ERÉNDIRA

Do not slam my chairs!

MIGUEL

When they said she was in remission, when they handed us that paper...

*(ERÉNDIRA, frustrated, goes to the coffee pot and pulls out a piece of paper.)*

What does it say?

ERÉNDIRA

They're clear. Her tests are clear! She is in remission. Officially!

*(She watches Miguel, carefully folding the paper as if trying to work her way towards a confession.)*

This means I can go!

MIGUEL

What?

ERÉNDIRA

I wanted to wait until we knew for sure before I told you– I got a writing job in Chicago! It is with this creative writing magazine, and they want me on the editorial staff! And I get to publish my stuff in it!

MIGUEL

*(Shocked)* So you're gonna leave? Just like that? What about Abuela?

ERÉNDIRA

Abuela knows. She was the one who told me to apply. Well, I haven't told her yet that I got the job because I haven't wanted her to worry about anything. But now, now everything can go forward again.

MIGUEL

And who is she going to live with?

ERÉNDIRA

She isn't an invalid, Miguel, she can live on her own, maybe go back to work.

MIGUEL

Who is going to check up on her? What if she gets sick again?

ERÉNDIRA

Miguel, you and Alexa will be here. I'll have a phone. It isn't like we'll lose all forms of communication. Besides, you could take care of her if something happens.

MIGUEL

How am I supposed to take care of her? I don't cook. I don't clean. I don't know how to do those things. You do and Abuela does. I've never done them before.

ERÉNDIRA

You're amazing, you know that. You just expect me to stay around for the rest of my life, taking care of Abuela. Just in case anything happens? Keeping you updated but safely away, so you never have to endanger yourself or be scared by how sick she can get. You know writing is what I have always wanted to do.

MIGUEL

I'm just used to the routine we have. I work and you take care of Abuela and –

ERÉNDIRA

But you don't just work, Miguel. You met Alexa and dated her and married her. You graduated college, got a job, have a LIFE somewhat built around how you planned it to be! Taking care of Abuela is my life, which I have been happy to do, but I put everything else on hold. I barely graduated college before she got really bad. But since then? Do you know how long it's been since I've tried to get any of my work published? Come on, be happy for me!



MIGUEL

I just don't think it's a good idea for you to go. There are plenty of places you can work here.

ERÉNDIRA

But not to do what I want to do. This is unbelievable. I never would have expected this from you. Abuela? Abuela, I got that writing job you told me to apply for. Miguel doesn't think I should take it. Abuela, por favor, tell him it was your idea, tell him you're fine with me going.

Abuela?

Abuela, remember when I told you about it?

Tell Miguel what you told me.

*(The lights dim slightly as we focus on ABUELA upstage. ERÉNDIRA and MIGUEL stand completely still down stage. She is lit as if in another time altogether from the current scene. She sits, her body weak from sickness.)*

ABUELA

Eréndira, no te suena un cafecito? Perfecto! The cafetera is ready for you. Tighten it because con mis manos (*she rubs her hands*), my hands can't. Don't put too much sugar. Miguel does not like his café sweet y a tu abuelo nunca, he didn't like it with sugar either. I always take a little coffee out just for them. Sabes, en Cuba your grandfather and I would go out dancing to the big club. It is always hot in Camaguey. The cielo azul, blue like the water, tan alto como profundo. (*Blue encompasses ABUELA.*) The sun always big, color mostaza. (*The lights go a mustard yellow.*) Y gente. Always people, people walking everywhere you looked. Anyway, we were recently married and while Abuelo worked, I went out with a friend to sell tickets to that night's dance. After a while, tu abuelo me dice, "no más, Lala. No te quiero vendiendo boletos. We don't need the money. No more selling tickets." He says my going out no es apropiado, and we did not need the money. Your Abuelo, sometimes he treated me like one his daughters. Pero, what was I going to do with my time? Quedarme en la casa? – (Empezó a colar? como se tarda. Y lo tenes encendido lo mas alto posible? That is as hot as it goes? Bueno.) Bueno, tu abuelo would leave for work and my friend and I would go selling. I always returned before him and put the money in one of my drawers. One day, yo estaba caminando and my friends says, "Lala, mira alli esta tu esposo." Y, since he didn't know I left the house or was still selling tickets, empecé a caminar, even faster. I did not think he saw me. To make sure, as I walked back to the house, I took out my espejito a ver – to see if I saw him. And there he was, walking behind me. No dijo nada, he did not say anything. He did not even catch up to me. Solo me seguía así, following me a la casa, y yo watching him in my espejito. After, uy he was mad. But like everything else, when he said, "No." I said, "Ok." And then did it anyway. You have to do what makes you happy. Por que si no, you will always wonder what would have happened "if." Don't worry about me. Mira, this sickness is going to go away. I am not going anywhere. And I can try and teach Miguel how to make me un cafecito.

ERÉNDIRA

*(We move out of the flashback into present day.)*

And then Abuela just sat there.  
Silent.  
She didn't say a thing.

MIGUEL

You ambushed her with the news, Eréndira. What did you expect. You never gave her a chance to—

ERÉNDIRA

The woman who always pushed me to go further. To do more. She was silent when I needed her most. I realized I needed to leave. Don't you see? How could I become me when all I did you dictated in a way. It's too late for absolution. And maybe it *was* a selfish conclusion to come to...to leave. But when history is what it is, a story of struggle, and loss, and fear, and disillusion I could barely relate to...I made decisions based on memories that were never mine.

I needed time  
Away.  
To step out of the traditions  
Binding me  
To some ideologies  
I barely believed,  
To a language  
My tongue trips over  
Desperately  
Wanting to speak

MIGUEL

I get it.  
It's heavy  
What we walk with  
Our hopes  
And the hopes of those of who brought us here.

ERÉNDIRA

Their fears  
Combined with mine  
And we become first generation  
On a distant shore,  
Carrying the smiles and tribulations  
Of three generations more.  
For better or worse

It's in our blood.  
Expectations left unspoken.

MIGUEL

To expectations  
You're too scared to achieve.

ERÉNDIRA

Not scared. I left.

MIGUEL

Yes, you did.  
You left.  
You ran  
From all those  
Fears of theirs,  
Of those three generations and more.  
You ran  
From heavy expectations,  
From the fear of being  
What, like Abuela?  
Trapped at home?

ERÉNDIRA

Can you blame me? She constantly told me to do better "go to college 'dira," "wait to get married, 'dira," "travel, 'dira." But the moment the opportunity actually arises, suddenly it's "go far but don't go too far."

MIGUEL

She was scared.

ERÉNDIRA

I get that now. But you? Miguel, you had a wife and a job and a home. You had a life! Why couldn't you let me have one, too.

MIGUEL

I was scared.

ERÉNDIRA

Scared.

MIGUEL

You were so ready to go and the only person you thought you were leaving behind was Abuela. You left me behind, too 'Dira. It's been you and me our whole lives. When Mami and Papi died, when Abuela got sick...we covered each other's ass.

But I didn't know how to be at home. I didn't know how to take care of some one like that. How to make a meal or tell stories. I did what I knew how to do. I know how to use my hands. I know how to show up at 6am and go till midnight. And I know it was hard for you. I know you felt trapped. But you got the poetry, not me. You two worked with a system, Abuela all tiny and trapped in a bed. You knew what she needed even when she couldn't speak.

ERÉNDIRA

We had to figure out a system or else neither one of us would survive.

MIGUEL

I felt so inútil. I stayed away for so long because I didn't know what else to do. How else to help her. Help you. When she got the all clear, man, I was ready for things to go back to normal, or at least to not feel so useless again. I took care of you guys the only way I knew how. So when you brought up this new job . . .

ERÉNDIRA

You never even congratulated me.

MIGUEL

I know. I guess in a way I was jealous. I am jealous. You figured out how to get out. Out of the expectations. Out of the past. I want my daughter to know that.

ERÉNDIRA

You have a daughter!

MIGUEL

She's six months.

ERÉNDIRA

And you couldn't track me down then to tell me that I have a niece!

MIGUEL

Would you have come any sooner? I wanted to tell you. I want you around, in her life. You are the person who can teach her all those details about our family that I lacked the patience to learn. You can teach her to make café.

ERÉNDIRA

Not anymore. Six months ago I'm driving down a back road on my way home from work. I drive it everyday. Only this time I notice a little mercadito in the corner of a strip mall. All of a sudden I'm standing in the middle of the store looking at their tiny collection of Cosi Italian coffee makers with a bag of Café Pilon in my hand. I have no idea when I pay and get home. It's like I'm blacked out drunk. When I come to, all my supplies are set up in front of me. Just like I used to. The cafetera. The spoon. The fork. The measuring cup. The bag of coffee. All in order. And then I'm making coffee. I keep making it, and making it, and making it, Café, café Cubano, cortadito, café con leche, all

of them over and over and over again and none of them come out...right. None of them come out like Abuela's. It's like I've forgotten this whole part of me, who could make it with her eyes closed. I could fill a room with people begging for a cup. But here, it's empty. I moved here determined to make something new of myself, to finally be the person I always wanted to be. For myself. I thought I would come up here, work at this great job, write a million short stories and get handed a friggin' Pulitzer. But that hasn't happened. Obviously. Do you know how long it's been since I've written anything? I just keep writing and rewriting this stupid recipe. Writing and erasing, writing and erasing. But I can't seem to fill in the blanks. Great writers write about what they know. I've always written about myself. So how can I write about myself when I don't know who that is anymore? I can't fill in the blanks I've erased. My café doesn't taste like Abuela's anymore because it never did. I just convinced myself otherwise.

MIGUEL

Of course they don't. Eréndira, you aren't Abuela. Just like you aren't Mami. Or Papi, or me for that matter. If you were me, you wouldn't be making Café to begin with. I never took the time with that stuff...I never had the patience for it like you did.

ERÉNDIRA

Maybe not before. But now you do. Now you have the patience and the poetry to do it all, Miguel. You have your words to give your daughter.

*(MIGUEL grabs the box and brings it between them. Together they tug at the lid once more. This time it opens easily. MIGUEL gently pulls out a tattered composition notebook. It is browned from age, held together by clear packing tape and a large rubber-band with the tattered edges of news-paper clippings sticking out of the sides. He lovingly peels off the rubber band and opens the book. The creaking of the tape echoes quietly in the distance. ERÉNDIRA struggles to look at him as he presents the notebook to her. She takes it as if wrapping a newborn in her arms, pressing it to her nose and breathing in deeply.)*

ERÉNDIRA

It smells like her

MIGUEL

Elegant

ERÉNDIRA

Like hot oil and Chanel.*(She flips through the pages hurriedly.)* Ugh, it isn't in here.

MIGUEL

You can't write out what your café tastes like, 'Dira.  
Your café tastes like like...

ERÉNDIRA

The 25 tries  
it took to get it there.  
The jittering in my veins  
from so much caffeine my  
12-year-old heart didn't know  
what to do.

### ERÉNDIRA

It taste like...  
it tastes like  
humid Florida nights  
sticking to the skin  
while the drum plays deep and low  
it tastes like low salsa downbeat  
and merengue flows

like two languages dancing on my  
tongue  
tripping it up on occasion

the dual citizenship of my soul

looking for compromise between  
traditions  
it tastes like the sugar fields in Cuba  
and the beaches in Florida

It taste like all they were

All I am

All I'll be

And what I can give to live on

### MIGUEL

Chopping onions, meat cooking  
Garlic browning golden.  
Bistec, huevo, pan, huevo, pan  
Dipping and breading  
Till the steaks look like cracking clay  
Sheets, topographical maps of flavor

### MIGUEL

we become first generation  
On a distant shore,  
Carrying the smiles and tribulations  
Of three generations more.  
Our skin is an eternal coastline  
And our veins are filled with iodine

Soy todo sabor de sales

Tengo yodo en el mirar

Es que vengo de la playa

Y me he impregnado de mar

## ERÉNDIRA

My café tastes like

My café' tastes like home

## EPILOGUE

*(ERÉNDIRA enters her brother's kitchen. This kitchen is filled with the warm yellows and oranges of a Florida sunset. SHE places the box on the counter and breathing deeply for a moment, steadies herself. She methodically sets up the coffee maker, sugar, coffee, fork, spoon, and measuring cup. Humming ABUELAS's melody lightly to herself, she begins. The projected recipe is filled in with words such as "soul" "clave" "café" "familia," etc. ERÉNDIRA pours the café into tiny cups, arranging them on a platter. She smiles. In the middle of the kitchen, holding the tray before her ERÉNDIRA steps towards the audience. With a breath and a nod to the spirit of her grandmother. The lights grow warmer. ERÉNDIRA steps into the audience and begins passing out her café. Blackout.)*



## Appendix

The following images include the designers' renderings of set and costume based off of our collaborative conversations as well as the finished production.

Image 12



Set Rendering by Andrew Cohen

Image 13



Abuela and Miguel costume renderings by Rebecca DeLapp

Image 14



Eréndira costume rendering by Rebecca DeLapp

Image 15



The musicians and Abuela. Scott Zimmerman, Aidan Walsh, Kristen Vasan

Image 16



“...bistec, huevo, pan...” Claudia Rosales and Patrick Prebula

Image 17



Abuela, Kristen Vasan

Image 18



*"It tastes like home."* Eréndira, Claudia Rosales

Shape and Poetry Sample

The following poem exemplifies my exploration of shape and meaning dissected

**I wanted to tell you:**

I'm not angry with you.

I never was.

I probably should have been

(We both know I had every reason)

But I never was.

Honestly

I want to move

past

this

it's exhausting. This constant

invisible rock

between

u s.

A jagged reminder of the line  
we so foolishly crossed.

Besides,

I can't take her looking at me  
like that.

I'm sure she doesn't mean to,  
but it's there – this "I'm sorry"

she's not sure whether or not  
she should say. I want it gone.

I've never been good with pity

Anyway

I knew it would all turn out  
like this.

From the moment you said her name.

I pretended the stone in my chest meant  
nothing.

Silly me.

But,  
my stomach's stopped dropping  
when you suddenly burst in the room.  
And I've stopped listening for your name  
I don't care so much if you notice me.

Or

if you don't.  
I'm taking these as good signs:

I think about you less.

I want you less.

I miss you

less.

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