

## GEORGETTE

It is November 2, 2019. Tomorrow, November 3rd, is the anniversary of my mom's death. It has been 3 years. Today is Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). In México, a tradition where our souls may cross over and celebrate together; and, for the first time in my life... I am feeling called to walk in a procession. It isn't totally lost on me that on this day, the veil between the living and the dead is even thinner than paper thin. I work hard to assemble an entire cornucopia on top of my head. Flowers and bluebirds and a little skull barrette that belonged to my mamá. I glue little rhinestone dienteitas over my mouth and paint big black holes around my eyes like a calavera. Calaveras are skulls. We dress as skeletons and adorn ourselves to celebrate our connection to the dead- because death is a part of life. I head to the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center. I carry with me a basket of ofrendas- offerings for our muertitos to enjoy. Inside, there's copal, flowers, galletas to snack on and, of course, tequila. ¡Un poco para mi, un poco para ti! Lastly, an illustration my mom made of a skinny skeleton dancing in a pretty pink dress. She called it *La Flaca Calaca*. So, off I go into the streets to walk the procession with a bunch of strangers. Leading us are life-size bride and groom skeletons held high above the puppeteers' heads. El humo de copal wafts through the air, as músicos play their tune. We walk through el barrio until we arrive at a mural painted by the community for the young people killed in gang violence. We stop to read poetry and pray. When we return, we drink hot chocolate and pan de muerto, bread of the dead. I have my fill, and I step out of the Esperanza center and into the dark street. And then, I hear a little voice-

S/HE

Hey LADY. Do you do the acts?

GEORGETTE

What?!

S/HE

You know, the ACTS! (*Waving little spirit fingers as S/HE says THE ACTS!*)

GEORGETTE

This little girl, or maybe she was a boy, it doesn't matter- I have never seen this kid before in my life, and I am an actor. But, I'm a little "in the closet" about it still and HOW DO THEY KNOW? I say, what made you ask that?

S/HE

*(Shrugging.)* oh, You just look like you do them. *(Pause. Each new sentence for him/her is a brand new thought.)* HEY! So how did you get those jewels on your face?

GEORGETTE

With eyelash glue-

S/HE

Oh. So when ladies put their eyelashes on with the glue that's what you did huh? *(Pause.)* CAN I TAKE THEM OFF?

GEORGETTE

Of my face?! No!

S/HE

Oh. *(Pause.)* I've always wanted to do the acts. But, I don't know how to get in.

GEORGETTE

Well, you kinda just gotta start doing them.

S/HE

But where?

GEORGETTE

Anywhere! I bet you could do them right here. Look at all these people. I bet, if you asked them, they would let you do your act right here.

*(GEORGETTE takes a moment as if to ask the audience permission for the little girl or boy to do their act. A hopeful nod, but S/HE bursts their bubble-) - make transitions faster*

S/HE

I bet my mom wouldn't let me. She works a lot at the hospital and she says I have to stay home with my brothers. *(New thought.)* HEY LADY! Do you see that light over there? Well that's where we live, underneath that light, right over there.

GEORGETTE

I turn, and I look, but when I turn back around- she's gone. I stop for a moment... WAS I JUST TALKING TO MYSELF?

##

*(Lights shift, georgette moves down stage L- and sits in a small chair with a notebook and pencil in her hand.)*

GEORGETTE -

Early memory. I am practicing writing my name in cursive with my mom. She has really long black hair with a perm. She likes wearing giant black sunglasses. We live near the beach, in Florida. She likes it here because she says there are so many different hispanicos - cubanos, puertorriqueños, - that nobody knew or even cared that she is Mexican. I think I am in third grade, because that's around when children learn to write in cursive, back when we were teaching children to write in cursive. Little Georgie thought that making art meant everything had to be perfect. The pencil-rigid sharp in my hand, my fingers pressed white against it, moves slowly, carefully, straight. My mom, an artist, huffs and rolls her eyes. She puts her hand over mine and we write, together in great swooping, curly, loopy lines. She scolds me, "Georgette-a, let the pencil go. It doesn't have to be perfect."

Years later, as a moody pre-adolescent, I would go searching in her closet for treasures like spare dollars and my brother's adderall. I found diet pills, and other pills too. Two decades later, I would learn there was a lot more hiding behind that closet door.

##

*Georgette moves down stage center R.*

GEORGETTE

It is 1994 and I am packed inside of a giant, gold van. It's fancy. Not like ours. Our van is burgundy red with white stripes on the side and gray vinyl interior. This van has TV's on the backs of the seats and soft, brown leather interior. With air-conditioning. I'm squished together with what seems like 20 of my cousins watching Disney movies like Pocahontas as we bounce

together in 4 rows, traveling from El Paso, Texas to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. My tias have taken my cousins a million times before, I'm the only one who has never been. They call me la guerrita because I am the whitest of all my cousins. My mom married my dad and he's from Germany so he's El Guerro. He's not on this trip with us. We park our van on one side of the border, and we have to walk across a big bridge. It's kind of weird- why do they need a bridge? There's not even any water. Our first stop is the mercados, and my mom gives me 10 single dollar bills to spend. My tia Chayo buys me a grip of beautiful gold bangles. There is an intricate carving on each of them and I like how they shuffle along my arm. My tío pulls me aside, "¡Mija! Tenga unas tortillas de maíz!" Corn tortillas? I only like flour. "¡No mija! You have never had corn tortillas like these. ¡FRESCAS!" I take one flat pancake out from the foil. It doesn't crumble like the ones in the grocery stores that I'm used to. My tío puts a tab of butter inside, and when I bite in, I can't believe it. It melts in my mouth. I wonder what happens to the corn tortillas that go to the grocery stores. I stroll out of the mercado, with my new temperament regarding tortillas de maíz. There are small children outside in the street, yelling from all sides, "¡CHIQULE, CHIQULE!" They are skinny and dirty and brown. I don't want any, but I have never seen children like this before, so I give the little girl a one dollar bill and say, "You can just keep it." She looks at me, blank. She takes the dollar. She runs away. But then there's another kid, and another. Soon, I was giving away all of my dollars. She must have gone back and told her friends about this pinche gringa with gold bangles giving away dolares over here. I find my family and we go to have lunch. My tia warns me to only drink my coke out of the bottle. Something about the ice.

##

*(Georgette moves down stage L to the Closet area. And picks up her mother's diary, a yellow notebook and reads in her mother's voice.)*

ROCIO

My name is Rocio. R-O-C-I-O. Not Rosie or Rose or Rozio. Se signifique the morning dew. It is 1971 and I am a resident of the U.S. I am almost 11 years old going into 6th grade in

Mèxico. I am an honor roll child proud to come to America, where I am going to learn another language. Little did I know, that to be an American, or to learn English, was to destroy the only language I knew. The language that showed me the way to be who I am.

ROCIO

The tienda - a little magazine and candy store - had all the cuentas and novelas that they would rent to children. 5 cents was for five minutes. Cinco centavos por cinco minutos. These magazines were tied with a string to the chair we sat in. Then we read as fast as we could to see if we could read it before our time was up. It was extremely fun because I would get to read to my younger brother. We sat, and I started reading we laugh how we wanted to save money. The man was strict about the fee. There was a timer with sand (*Drawing the shape of an hourglass in the air. The journal denotes a picture of the shape.*) to measure and when he was not looking we turn it over so we could get more time. If we were caught, the man would just pull the string and the magazine slid out of my hands and we all laugh. Sometimes, we would get to read to the last page. I would spend 5 cents on reading and the rest to buy a jicama con chile and limon and the rest of my brothers and sisters would do the same. It was an enjoyable time.

##

GEORGETTE

*(Georgette goes back to down stage L to the small chair.)*

My mom was a color all her own. I used to ask her, "What's your favorite color Mom?" "White." "Why?" "Because white is just all of the colors mixed together." She was still making art then, attending the Miami School of Design.

*(GEORGETTE brings out a drawing of herself as a little girl.)*

It's strange to think my mom saw me like this, it's very sweet and innocent and happy. I had always liked to look in the mirror when I was a really little girl, like in the drawing. I would look long enough until I felt this weightless feeling of, "Who

am I? What am I even looking at? Kind of like when you say the same word over and over again, until it doesn't sound like a word anymore and you don't even know what it means or what language it is. I was maybe 9 or 10. I can remember my mom telling me if I kept looking at that mirror, (um no) she would smash my face into it.

##

*(Georgette goes back to center stage which represents the space where is more as an adult.)*

#### GEORGETTE

It's 2020. My mom has been dead 4 years. I am sitting in my studio efficiency with the worn pages of a yellow spiral notebook. I've known about its existence for a little over a year. It's been collecting dust. I finally called my pops and requested to see it when I was going stir crazy during the pandemic. It's May 5th, the day before my birthday and I decide to do a deep clean in my apartment. I put a bunch of junk outside on the porch in cardboard boxes and black garbage bags. So, my dad comes by when I'm not home. In a total dad-move, he tucks the precious yellow notebook into one of the boxes outside to keep it super safe. He didn't know the boxes were junk. I forgot to tell my boyfriend that my dad was coming by to make a sacred drop, and my boyfriend comes home before me and throws the whole pile into the dumpster. Luckily, I come home later that evening because the following day is garbage day. I retrieve it before it would have been thrown out.

So there I am, having saved the yellow notebook out of the dumpster. I'm holding it in my hand and I have so much anxiety from almost having lost it forever. It's not usually my thing, but I pour a glass of gin, with only a whisper of tonic and I feel like my heart is about to explode. I start chain smoking cigarettes as I sit down to explore its pages. It belonged to my mom, my dad found it, *in that closet* almost a year after she died. In this notebook, are her notes that she kept while studying bilingual education. It morphs into a full on autobiography of her childhood memories coming to the U.S. I know that these are things she never shared in detail with

anybody while she was alive. I know that the secrets in this notebook could show me why she was so deeply depressed. I didn't know everything, but I knew that when my mom looked at me- she saw a tiny version of her unbroken self from the time in her life before she crossed the border. She looked at me with bitterness and jealousy and I felt it. And that made us both very angry. Maybe it's not nice to say, but what other choice do I have? Should I look through the page, or close the yellow notebook? My dad gave it to me. I can't ask her if I have permission to read it. Do I turn on the light, and untuck the spiral-bound sheets, and peek inside to see if my monsters are real?

##

*Lights- x-fade back to the closet stage L where Rocio speaks*

ROCIO

My experience at the school where I attend in the U.S. was not what I expected. For the first few months, my teacher Mr. Barrigan did not know I did not spoke English. That I spoke at all. School was fine. But it change. I was pulled out of the class for a couple hours in the morning to go to ieL Di- that's what I thought they were saying.

*Lights- Shift*

*(Georgette: What I found out later which wasn't in my mom's diary is that she was referring to ELD which stands for English Language Development where the put kids of all ages - and with all kinds of emotional problems together, not just new English learners.)*

*Lights- Shift back to Rocio*

ROCIO

In that class, Most of the students them younger than me. My sister who was in kinder, she would finish her day at 12 pm. I stay all day. My job was to pass out and collect supplies. That means color paper, pencils, and help my brothers and sisters with their work. Lili, Sara (5), Ruben (7 ½), Daniel (8 ½), Ruth (9 ½), my twin Cesar (11), and me. Rocio (11). I had just

completed 5th grade in Ciudad Juárez, but when I started school I was sent to fourth grade and my twin brother too. 4th grade with different teachers, but we were at iel-Di together. The classes were extended. I was to report to my regular class for roll calling then leave to my special class, where there was no children my age to interact or make friends with except my twin. I once heard the teacher talking about our certificates because I overheard the teacher mention my name and how our family lived in Mexico.

##

*Back to Georgette Down Center.*

#### GEORGETTE

My mom never really cared that people found her eccentric. No matter what anybody thought of her, she would defend what she thought was right. This rule-breaking was the mark of an artist, for sure. When she became a teacher, she was hell-bent on convincing her students that they were smart, strong, and resilient. She would almost seek out the problem child, or the child who would not speak, or the child hiding the back, and she would dig in and refuse to give up on them. One look at this notebook put it all in context- she was on a mission to become the teacher she needed when she was younger. She was better with children than with adults. I was the exception to the rule. She also had a hard time getting along with administration... That rule-breaking...

There was one woman in particular that she butted heads with while studying to go into bilingual ed. This lady was high up in the admin or the board for her program, something like that. One day they took a trip to an art exhibition. This woman stood up in front of one piece, and was criticizing the work, and how she couldn't understand it. Rocio had a very hard time stringing two words together, but the creative artist in her couldn't let it go. She asks the woman, "Can't you see what the artist is trying to say?" It turns out that this woman actually had a glass eye and immediately assumed my mom was making side-eyed comments. She always had trouble with words.

I was 11 years old when she told me she would hang herself on the tree outside in the front yard. *(come forward)* I knew that wasn't true, though, because it was a baby tree and the branches would have been too flimsy to hang off of. She told me that she would take my brothers and leave my dad and I behind, "Ya estoy harta de ti cabrona!" I can still hear her saying that. One time, she told me I was a disease she could never get rid of. She would get fuming mad, and if it got bad enough- she would implode like a big, angry star. She would stop yelling, and go inside herself. She would press her lips together, close her eyes, and go somewhere else. *Survival skills*, she called it.

##

*(Back to the closet stage L.)*

ROCIO

I never gave up, the teacher did, the school did, and my parents did. I never gave up, they stop being there for me. I still wonder why. I was not worth their time and love. After a few months of school, I was no longer happy. My soul was hurting. My old house. The culture that we would wake up in the morning selling vegetables or buying old clothes, calling out to people to buy their red, juicy tomatoes. Somehow, my joy of being a child was fading away. I no longer speak to no one. I refuse to cooperate with teacher at iel-Di and they sent a note to my mom. I feel that everyone is under stress, and I added to it. Not a good thing.

My mom made me do more chores. I was in charge of dinner once a week, then she added responsibility to make tortillas de harina every day, beans and papas fritas. I was demanded to do that plus the dishes. That's what happens when I don't follow in school. It was not only at home but teacher were my physical abuse. I would be pushed down because I refuse to sit. Then teacher would want to make me pick up and clean. The only way was to scream a very high pitch whenever they would get close to me. But it would not help. They had a plan to get me. This time they would tape my hands to a desk and one to my mouth. That would prevent me from screaming, But I sat there and only

listened. Then again I kick my feet. I warned them to stop. But this only added. They would pull my desk to the closet and turn off the light and close the door until I settle down. This time my feet were tied to the chair. But I learned to run out of the classroom. They could not close the room and I was too fast, I just stay at the the black top. But then, they would get some 6th grader to chase me and to hold me down. And I could not deal with that many times I would just run to my house and climb the tree where they could not catch me.

My parents were not only beating me up for this, but I have to wear long sleeves and long pants to cover the bruises. The teacher would send me to the office, to our principal. He was nice at the beginning and would let me sit and feel safe. But it change. Teacher told me that I was not being punished enough. He hit me with a paddle the same way he was doing to my twin Cesar. There is nowhere to run. Nowhere to go. I want to go home to Juárez. There, life was better.

##

*(Georgette back to center stage.)*

GEORGETTE

Once- after a really big blowout between me and my mom, I finally asked my dad, Why? She doesn't get angry at anybody else like she does with me. Mother wounds are stubborn to heal, because they are cut from so much love. I was about 12 or 13 years old when I first heard anything about my mom's childhood. My dad told me that when my mom was little, some of her siblings wouldn't go to school. They would go across the border to Texas and pick strawberries and onions in the fields. They would gather up what they could, and bring it back to sell in the mercados. The eldest children were in charge of the younger ones, and that was the plan in case something happened. And, one day, something happened. Immigraciòn came to raid the field, and it wasn't said- but I don't think they were supposed to be taking the produce. Rocio did what she could to hide her siblings, but by the time she finished- all the good hiding spots were gone. She covered herself with branches or brush and she waited. An officer saw her, and I imagine there was a moment where they just looked at each other. I don't know what that

officer saw, but after a moment he covered her all the way back up and he walked away. I consider what would have happened if he had blown the whistle. I feel guilty and selfish. I've always had everything I needed. Does this mean I should forgive her?

##

*(Back to the closet where Rocio is talking.)*

ROCIO

What about me? What about what I want? My rooster is gone. Mom kill my rooster. I found the head and feet. My rooster is gone. Soon, I will be too. Mom said that she would make me beg for my life. She denied food. No dinner for a week. School is my only chance. I realize that hunger is (was was) strange. I started helping 100% at class, but not speak. I would not say a word. I been sent to the principal too many times. I received the paddle. I can no longer sit still like my twin Cesar. If we move, he was hit hard on the back. There was nothing we can do. When mom was mean to me, sometimes he would stand for me. But, he gave up on me too.

##

*(Back to Georgette down stage R standing next to the small chair.)*

GEORGETTE

One time, I came home and my mom was sitting on the couch with a beautiful, giant red and white chicken pecking around above her. She was just sitting. And looking. At the TV. Not watching it, just looking. She gives me The Look. You know the one: eyebrows raised, a blank look in the eye. The Look. You know the one, eyebrows raised, blank look in the eye. You know. The Look. I'm too afraid to ask, so we're in this sort of Mexican stand-off. She's staring at the TV, and I'm staring at her. I'm the first to break.

So, what's with the chicken? There's a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. I regret it immediately. She's not saying anything. She huffs. Arms crossed, legs crossed. I don't know what to do because she's ticking like a time bomb while there is a live chicken like cluck cluck clucking on the couch and it's

getting weird. I ask again. What's happening with the chicken?  
Another long pause. Finally

*(Shift lights)*

ROCIO

Georgett-a, this my chicken. I brought it home to MY house. If I want to have a chicken, then I'm allowed. Because I can do whatever I want. SO THERE.

*(The chicken clucks.)*

GEORGETTE

I retreat. My dad comes home, and I catch him at the door before he steps in literal and figurative chicken shit. My dad and I have an unspoken agreement that neither will let the other set my mom off if we can help it.

DEAN

What's with the chicken?

GEORGETTE

*(To Dean.)* We're not talking about it, Dad. *(Aside.)* In this family, you learn not to ask questions.

ROCIO

but the pandemic drove me crazy enough to finally request it from my pops.