Mami's Recipe Book

By Guadalís Del Carmen

A Short Play Full of JOY
A Micro Commission for the Play At Home Series 2020

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CAST

CARMEN, 20-25 years old, restless.
DAWN, 30-40's, professor
JANE, Early 30's, stay at home mom
JULIANA, 9 years old, just wants to dance and is full of energy
ANTOINE, Mid 30's, Attorney
MARIE, Early 30's, worked for an ad agency
HARRY, 30's, scientist, lives alone
MS. SANTANA, 70-80's, used to be friends with Carmen's mom

SETTING
NYC...or any major US city
Now...lockdown now

Notes: (/) indicates the interruption of line by next character.
FINDING MAMI’S TREASURE

A building in a large city on lockdown. Kids yelling, adults yelling, TV sounds, music, lights…even sounds that should be on the streets are now in these apartments.

CARMEN paces in her apartment, 2B. It’s day 35.

CARMEN
Welp. I guess I should go through these books and see what else I can read. God I’m bored.

She walks to her bookshelf and caresses the spines of the books with her index finger. She gets to a book...

CARMEN
Mami’s Recipes.

She lets out a deep breath. She hasn’t looked at it in a long time, not since her mother passed away before the lockdown.

She’s startled by her neighbor upstairs.

CARMEN
Is he bowling up there?

She hears yelling from her neighbors on the left.

CARMEN
Day 35, I don’t know that those two are gonna make it.

Something crashes at her neighbor’s on the right.

CARMEN
Sounds like Juliana is avoiding going to sleep…again.

All the sounds get louder. The soundscape becomes almost unbearable.

CARMEN
Ok! That’s it!

Sounds simmer….
She looks to the side-table by the couch. There’s a portrait of her mother.

CARMEN

I’m gonna need your help.

She lights a candle and puts it by her mother’s picture. She takes the book and opens it looking through the many recipes.

As she does this, four apartments light up behind her. They’re stacked two on two. All lit in different colors, red, blue, green, orange. There’s another crash to her right.

CARMEN

Ok, I’ll start there. Mami, what would you recommend?

She flips the pages and lands on...

CARMEN

Oh this is perfect!

More yelling to her left.

CARMEN

And for those two?

The pages of the book turn, as if a gust of wind blew through her window...or someone was trying to get to the right recipe. Carmen smiles...

CARMEN

Ah. Yes, of course.

More bowling upstairs. More flipping through pages.

CARMEN

Sounds like Harry can’t concentrate again...let’s see...here we go! This’ll stop his pacing.

She accidentally drops a spoon. She kneels to pick it up.

CARMEN

This floor is pretty cold, I wonder if Ms. Santana needs anything...

3/25/20
The book shakes in excitement, pages turn...

CARMEN
Oh! Oh that’s perfect...thank you mami.

Carmen gets all the ingredients and gets to work. Spoons fly, ingredients dancing above her head waiting for their turn. Pots taking their places on the stove.

TOO MUCH SUGAR, TOO MUCH NOISE IN 2C

Apartment in red lights to normal. 9 year old JULIANA is dancing around in a tu-tu. Her mothers DAWN and JANE are frustrated and trying to clean up the mess of the day.

DAWN
Juliana, it is bed time. Please get out of the tu-tu and into the tub.

I’m not sleepy!

JULIANA

That’s because you were up until 3 am last night. Please, it’s bedtime now.

JULIANA

No!!!!!!!

As she runs away she crashes into a vase breaking it into a million pieces.

Jane sweeps up the many pieces.

DAWN

SEE WHAT YOU DID!!!

JANE
Don’t yell at her! That’s not productive.

DAWN

Then what is (deep breath), we’ve tried everything and she won’t go to bed.

JANE

She’s a kid, and she can’t go outside/ so

3/25/20
DAWN
That’s not an excuse for her to not settle down! It’s 11 o’clock.

_The doorbell rings._

DAWN
Great, we probably woke up a neighbor.

_Jane goes to the door and looks through the peephole._

DAWN
Who is it?

JANE
There’s no one there.

_As Jane walks away the doorbell rings again. Dawn grabs a bat and opens the door._

_There’s no one there. Just a tray with cookies and a teapot. Jane brings the tray in and closes the door behind her._

JANE
There’s a note. (reads) Hi! This is Carmen from next door, please enjoy these sugar free chamomile and rose cookies and a warm serving of Earl Grey tea latte.

DAWN
That was nice of her.

JULIANA
COOKIES!!!!!

DAWN
It’s too late for more sugar, I think we’ve had enough for the day.

JANE
It says they’re sugar free.

_Juliana keeps dancing and almost knocks down another vase._

DAWN
Juliana! That’s enough young lady!
JULIANA

Sorry!

JANE

I’ll have some of that tea.

Jane pours herself some tea. The room fills with the
warm scent of bergamot. She bites into one of the
cookies. Her shoulders relax.

JANE

Dawn, you have to try these. I feel warm and happy all over.

Dawn reluctantly grabs a cookie and takes a bite.

She giggles to herself.

I want one!

Juliana chomps on a cookie.

JULIANA

Mmmm.

Juliana grabs Dawn and Jane by the hands. They
plié together. All three twirl gracefully across their
living room, barely touching the floor.

Juliana settles down on the couch with her moms
and they eat cookies while drinking their tea.
Juliana starts to doze off.

Dawn and Jane smile to each other. Dawn gets up
and carries Juliana to bed.

CARMEN (VO)

These cookies will soothe the most rambunctious of souls and carry them to a deep sweet
slumber. This tea recipe is the perfect night cap and brings calm. Shape each cookie with
love and patience, pour the tea slowly making sure not to lose one drop.

Lights fade out on apartment 2C...

LOVERS QUARREL IN 2A

Apartment in green lights to normal. ANTOINE
looks out the window, shoulders tense. MARIE
angrily flips through TV channels.
You always do that you know.

Here we go again.

You see that I’m watching something and you just grab the remote and change the channel. You’re not even watching anything, you’re just, just browsing. PICK SOMETHING!

Don’t yell at me! You’ve seen this show a million times and I’m sick of it. Ten times in 35 days. ENOUGH!

At this point, it’s the only thing I can put up with, I feel like I’m losing my mind.

And I’m losing my mind hearing this fake laugh track. THOSE JOKES AREN’T FUNNY ANYMORE!

The doorbell rings.

Are you expecting someone?

It’s 11 o’clock at night, we’re on lockdown. No I’m not expecting anyone.

The doorbell rings again. Marie checks the peephole.

No one’s there.

The doorbell rings again.

Antoine opens the door. There’s a tray with three small pots.

What’s this?

There’s a note. (reads) Hi! I’m Carmen from next door. I had all this extra food and figured I’d share. Please enjoy this oxtail stew with yellow rice and fried plantains.

Isn’t this what we had on our honeymoon in Jamaica?
ANTOINE
And what my mom made when she last in town.

*Antoine lifts the lid from one of the pots. The room fills with the smells of garlic, onions, pepper, and well seasoned meat. Antoine and Marie inhale deeply. They place the tray on the table and sit to eat. They smile. With each bite, they lose themselves in each other’s eyes.*

*Their bellies full, Antoine takes Marie’s hand and they slow dance to Frank Sinatra’s LOVE...a song only they can hear.*

CARMEN (VO)
A perfect meal for two, a sure way to remind one another of the love they’ve forgotten. Simmer in low heat, not too high so tempers don’t flare. Stir all the ingredients lovingly. Before adding the oxtails, massage with loving strokes. Serve each dish in a separate container until ready to eat. Love will do the rest.

*Lights low on apartment 2A...*

RESTLESS IN 3B

*Apartment in orange lights to normal. HARRY stomps, pacing around his apartment. He bounces a stress ball off the floor, the walls...any surface that’ll bounce it back to him....*

HARRY
If I could just figure out the sequence, we’d be able to reverse the injected formula. But which strain do we use? Do we use strain S or L?

*The doorbell rings. Harry looks at the door confused. He continues to pace ignoring the door.*

HARRY
Maybe if we start with the same sequence China used/ we can

*The doorbell rings again.*

HARRY
Who is it?

CARMEN (OFFSTAGE)
It’s your neighbor from downstairs.

HARRY
Oh.

3/25/20
Harry opens the door. Carmen stands beaming with a smile and a pot on a tray.

CARMEN
Hi, I’m your neighbor from downstairs/ my name...

HARRY
Sorry, I’m trying to get some work done but have some writers block. I’ll be quieter.

Harry goes to close the door.

CARMEN
I just wanted to bring you some food. I cooked a lot and figured I’d share some with my neighbors. I’m Carmen by the way.

HARRY
Carmen. Hi. Nice to meet you. I’m not very hungry. Too much on my mind.

CARMEN
Oh! Well, I think this’ll help. It’s my mom’s special recipe, she called it brain food... Don’t worry its just legumes, no brains...I promise.

HARRY
Ha. That’s kinda funny. Um. Ok, thanks.

Harry takes the tray.

CARMEN
No problem. You can leave the tray at my door whenever. Bon appetite. Bye!

She leaves.

HARRY
Bye.

He closes the door and sets the tray on the table. He cautiously lifts the lid. He takes a whiff of the peppers, and Adobo seasoning. He gets a spoon and begins to eat. He settles at his computer.

HARRY
Holy Moly!

He works furiously tapping his keys, only breaking to take bites from his food. He is more focused than ever.
CARMEN (VO)
Lentils, well seasoned in a broth. For clarity in times of stress. Make sure to measure each ingredient accurately. This formula has to be precise. But as with all these recipes, add each ingredient lovingly and with purpose.

*Computer lights flicker on apartment 3B...*

COLD LOCKDOWN IN 1B

*Apartment in blue lights to normal. MS. SANTANA checks the window. She makes sure it’s closed. She puts on another sweater and grabs her scarf. She looks at the radiator.*

MS. SANTANA
Did they turn off the heat? Oh dear.

*The doorbell rings.*

*The doorbell rings again.*

CARMEN (OFFSTAGE)
Ms. Santana, it’s Carmen, from upstairs, Consuelo’s daughter.

*Ms. Santana opens the door. Carmen, wearing a carpenter’s mask, holds a tray with a large pot.*

MS. SANTANA
Oh hello sweetie! I don’t get visitors these days, wasn’t sure if I should open.

CARMEN
I hope I didn’t scare you. It’s freezing in here!

MS. SANTANA
Yes, I think they shut the heat off.

CARMEN
Well I brought you something that’ll hopefully warm you up.

*Carmen places the tray on the table and opens the lid. Ms. Santana smells the cilantro and basil. Her face immediately lights up.*

MS. SANTANA
Is that...oh it smells just like how my mother used to make it.

CARMEN
I hope you like it! I tried my best to get it just right. I can’t believe how cold it is in here.

3/25/20
Carmen checks Ms. Santana’s radiator. She turns the knob.

CARMEN

This was turned all the way off.

MS. SANTANA

Huh. Wonder how that happened? Thank goodness you’re here.

Ms. Santana sits and takes in the smells of the broth.

CARMEN

Bon appetite!

MS. SANTANA

Will you join me?

CARMEN

I don’t want to risk you getting/ sick or...

MS. SANTANA

Have you been outside in the last couple weeks?

CARMEN

No.

MS. SANTANA

Washed your hands and did all the things you’re supposed to?

CARMEN

Yes.

MS. SANTANA

Please stay.

Carmen smiles wide.

CARMEN

I’d love to.

Ms. Santana gets two plates and two spoons. She serves Carmen a plate.

MS. SANTANA

Your mother was very special. Did I ever tell you the time her and I walked one hundred blocks because the train wasn’t running...again?

CARMEN

Sounds like the train’s never really work well huh?

3/25/20
MS. SANTANA

Some things never change.

They eat together.

CARMEN (VO)
Sancocho, as my mother and her mother before her made it, is a broth of meat and veggies that brings warmth to the heart and soul. Pour each ingredient with care. Stir counter clockwise to slow down time a bit. Savor each bite as its own moment. Best if served over conversation and sharing of memories.

Lights and sounds fade... a quiet night, a sleepy apartment building full of love and warmth, in the middle of a city on its way to healing.

END OF PLAY