AMONG AND BETWEEN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts
in English

By

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For Zabelle

whose being makes mine worthwhile
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I thank Gor, for keeping up the love while picking up the slack. And I thank my mother, for reading to me while I dwelled inside her.
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ABSTRACT

AMONG AND BETWEEN

By

Hudit Simonyan

Master of Arts in English

Among and Between is a collection of dramatic works – two one-act plays and a comic solo performance piece. Although the individual pieces do not explicitly connect thematically, stylistically, or otherwise, they share a fascination with language. Their often ambiguous and incongruous language leads and misleads characters, builds and disturbs communication among and between them, creates and disrupts meaning.

Between Cats is a comedic exploration of the intricacies within the various relationships among the human and non-human members of one modern-day conservative family.

Words Between examines the rather disruptive quality of spoken language and the inability of humans to connect through other, more sensory means, whenever they engage in verbal communication. Among The Angles surveys the life of the speaker, focusing on the last decade spent working odd jobs. The language of this piece is simple and unadorned, even crude at times – it perfectly mimics the speaker’s life. Using language as a driving force, these three works strive to find dramatic forms to embody various concepts and issues whose relevance stretches far beyond the page.
Between Cats

A play in one act
Characters

AIDA and ARTIE, newlyweds
MARTHA and MARVIN, Artie’s parents
SARA, Artie’s sister
CRAMER, the family’s first cat, played by a man in his 60s
PEACHES, the family’s second cat, by a woman in her 20s
Scene One

Martha’s kitchen. Thursday, around 1:00pm. Aida is sitting at the table, while Martha and Sara are walking around the kitchen, doing random things.

MARTHA
(to Aida)
He likes it hot, first thing in the morning. With a muffin. Not yesterday’s. Fresh. You put it out at night and then put it in the oven in the morning. (pause) So when he’s up he can have it. Nice and hot. (pause) Sometimes he wants to sleep again afterwards. Just a little. You let him. Or he’ll be cranky all afternoon. So, just let him.

(holding a peach)
He likes these ripe and juicy, peeled off completely. Sugar on top. Lots of it. Whipped cream on top of the sugar. Plenty of it. (pause) Do you shower at night or in the mornings?

SARA
Yeah, if he’s up, he might want to go in first.

MARTHA
Are you getting all this?

AIDA
I think—

SARA
If you go before him, he might be cranky all afternoon. So, let him go first. Wait. I think he’s up.

MARTHA
Oh my, it’s not ready yet. Sara, you get the table set…
(relieved)
It’s not him, you silly, you scared me. It’s Cramer.

Cramer, the family cat walks in. He is old and grumpy, obviously overweight and can barely walk and breathe at the same time. He situates himself on the cat bed by the entrance.

MARTHA
Come here, Cramer, ps-ps.

SARA
No, don’t come here, you stupid animal. I hate you.
MARTHA
Don’t talk like that, Sara. (turns to Aida)
I certainly hope you don’t talk like that. (pause) She wasn’t like this, you know, he was a sweet little—

SARA
Get this stupid animal out of here or I swear I am going to—

MARTHA
Sara, you stop it right now! (to Aida)
Take Cramer to the garden, dear, won’t you?

Aida and the cat leave the stage. Martha waits until they are gone, then speaks.

MARTHA
What’s the matter with you? Talking crazy in front of her. What is it you want to prove? (pause) Pretty soon she’ll be talking like you. You just wait and see, she’ll be talking just like you.

SARA
Mother—

MARTHA
Don’t mother me. You know how your brother feels about this kind of talk. And your father. Thank goodness he’s never around. Who are you, Beth from 4th street? That girl, I’m telling you. (pause) All she needed was someone like me to teach her right from wrong. But no, she had a (mockingly) “loving” mother, the kind you wish you had, and look where that got her.

SARA
She is not loving. She is fucking crazy.

You—

MARTHA
She stops, as she notices Aida walk.

MARTHA
(to Aida)
Where is Cramer? Did he poop?

AIDA
No.
MARTHA
Why not? (pause) Did you tell him to poop?

AIDA
I…I… What do you mean?

MARTHA
I mean, did you tell Cramer to poop?

SARA
The stupid cat is so stupid it doesn’t even know when it has to take a shit.

MARTHA
Sara! Out! Enough! Get out!

AIDA
I thought—

SARA
Fine!

MARTHA
Don’t fine me! You disrespectful little bi.. bitter girl.

SARA
(laughing)
What did you call me? You couldn’t say it, could you?

MARTHA
I said what I meant to say.

SARA
No, you said what you are meant to say.

AIDA
Should I set the table—

MARTHA
At least I never disrespected my elders.

Sara gets up to leave, then sits back down as she turns around and sees Artie entering. He walks in yawning and stretching, sporting an obvious erection.
Oh, Artie, honey, you are up! We were just talking about you. You want your coffee and your muffin and your peaches?

She places a plate with a fresh muffin in front of Artie.

I was just telling Aida here, you know how you like your muffin fresh in the morning? And for good reason. Old muffins are no good.

(quietly to Sara, who has picked up a newspaper) Although I do slip one to your father every now and then. No harm in that.

SARA Disgusting.

AIDA Good morning, Artie.

MARTHA (as she is pouring coffee) Get the peach, Aida dear.

Aida walks to the refrigerator.

MARTHA (to no one in particular) You know, I read in the morning paper that too much sweet at once might not be too good for you, in the long run. Better little by little. Better for the long run.

Aida hands Martha a plate with a peach and a knife. Martha begins to peel the peach, then dices it.

SARA (reading from the paper) “We have known about the harmful effects of sugar for a long time, yet people continue to consume it in different forms and quantities on a daily basis. Sugar consumption, even as little as a teaspoon a day, has been linked through scientific research to such problems as diabetes, high cholesterol, cardiovascular disease, impairment of the DNA structure, and obesity.”

MARTHA (as she is putting whipped cream on top of the diced peach) Exaggerated. That enough whipped cream for you, honey? And how is your muffin, dear? I thought I left it sitting out a little too long. The dough, I mean. Longer than I usually do. Do you need more sugar in your coffee?
She keeps adding sugar in the coffee and stirring.

ARTIE

Mother.

MARTHA

Yes, dear?

ARTIE

Enough.

MARTHA

(removing the spoon from the cup)
Is that too much sugar for you, sweetie?

ARTIE

Enough talking.

Martha is taken aback by this.

Good morning, Aida.

AIDA

Good morning. How was—

MARTHA

(to Artie)
Did you sleep well? You should have seen Cramer this morning. He was purring. Asking for you, I’m sure.

SARA

Sure.

MARTHA

Looking at me with those sad eyes, as I stood in the cold waiting for him to, you know, go to the bathroom?

Aida looks at her, confused.

SARA

Sure you did.

ARTIE

Where’s my paper?
MARTHA
(to Aida)
Won’t you go get the paper, dear?

Aida exits.

(to Artie)
She’s been acting awful strange, your sister. Poor thing. Must be the weather.

ARTIE
Has she, now.

SARA
I’m sitting right here, you know.

MARTHA
(shouting)
Aida, did you get lost in there?

AIDA
(from the other room)
Which one is his paper?

MARTHA
Oh, dear. If you want to get something, you have to go get it yourself. Your grandmother, before she could even open her mouth, I already knew what she needed. Done, (snaps her fingers) like that. No complaints, no questions, no “ifs,” no “buts.”

ARTIE
(to Sara)
You know which one is my paper, don’t you?

Sara leaves the stage. Cramer enters, barely walking. He stops a few feet from Martha.

MARTHA
(in “baby voice”)
Come here kitty, ps-ps-ps. Come and see who’s up! Come and see who’s here! Artie is here. Artie is up. Who loves you? Who loves you? Who loves you?

ARTIE
Mother, please.

MARTHA
Yes, sweet pie?

Cramer goes to the cat bed, lies down.
ARTIE
(after a long pause, during which Martha is staring at him, waiting)
Cramer is getting kind-a old.

MARTHA
Why, that’s not entirely true, honey. He’s just getting heavy, that’s all.

Sara walks in with the paper.

ARTIE
He can’t see, mother.

Sara hands the paper to Artie, then sits at the table across from him.

MARTHA
You think? I think he sees just fine.

ARTIE
He can barely walk. His belly is hanging all the way down to the floor.

SARA
That’s ‘cause it’s been a week since he last took a sh—

MARTHA
(giving Sara a nasty look)
That’s because I feed him leftover muffins every morning, you know, from the day before. The kind I slip to your father every now and then. (pause) He loves, loves them! He had two this morning. He wanted more, but I didn’t want to give him any more. I had just read the paper, you know, the part about sugar. Nonsense, really, but I said, you know, I’ll just give him two now and save two for later. Better that way. Poor thing just meowed and meowed.

Aida walks in.

AIDA
I can’t find the paper.

MARTHA
Sara got it already. Sit down, dear. I have so much more to tell you. Maybe you should write some of it down? You know. To go over it later.

(to Sara)
Why don’t you go get the yellow pad and a pencil for—

ARTIE
Mother.
MARTHA

Yes, honey? (pause) Yes, dear?

ARTIE

Nothing.

MARTHA

Did you want something, honey?

ARTIE

(irritated)


MARTHA

(shocked and offended at the same time)

Oh?

The telephone rings. Sara answers.

SARA

Yes, daddy. Ok. I will. Yes.

MARTHA

Is that your father? Let me speak to him.

SARA

Oh, ok. She is. Yes. I will. Ok.

She hangs up.

MARTHA

(disappointed)

I wanted to speak to him.

SARA

He’s on his way.

MARTHA

Oh, is he? Wait, it’s not even noon yet. (pause) Did he say why?

SARA

I don’t know.

MARTHA

Well, this just isn’t like him. Why is he coming so early?
SARA (irritated)

I didn’t ask, mother.

MARTHA

I hope he is feeling well. Did he say he was feeling sick? Was he nauseous?

SARA

I couldn’t tell on the phone.

MARTHA

Did he sound alright? Is he getting a cab?

ARTIE

Why would he?

MARTHA

He’s sick, he can’t drive, that’s why. That’s it. It must be the muffins. I’m throwing them all away at night. First Cramer, now your father. This is too much. This is just too much.

SARA

Relax, mother.

ARTIE

He is probably done already.

MARTHA

Your father is never done before the job is done.

ARTIE

So, the job must be done then.

MARTHA

The job is never done this early. No, that’s not it. It’s the muffin. It was stale. I should have never given it to him.

ARTIE (amused)

You gave him what?

MARTHA

The new ones were still in the oven. There was no time—

ARTIE (worried)

What about the one I just ate? Was that stale, too?
I think Cramer is dying.

MARTHA
They were nice and fresh for you before you were even up.

AIDA
He is?

MARTHA
They were nice and fresh for you before you were even up.

AIDA
He is?

MARTHA
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AIDA
He is?

MARTHA
They were nice and fresh for you before you were even up.

AIDA
He is?
MARTHA
Don’t be silly.

SARA
—how you say, (mockingly) relieve himself. Was that better, mother?

AIDA
I think I have some… I have some—

MARTHA
(to Aida)
Oh, don’t be embarrassed, dear, we all need help sometimes.

AIDA
—nausea, too.

MARTHA
(surprised)
Oh? Well, that’s good news, honey!

SARA
What?

AIDA
What?

MARTHA
Do you have something to tell me?

ARTIE
What’s going on?

MARTHA
You want to go to your room and talk?

AIDA
I am not sure I understand—

MARTHA
Oh, don’t be shy, dear. I was nauseous with both of them.

ARTIE
What?

SARA
What the hell?
Sara! Watch your mouth! MARTHA

Marvin walks in and stands in the doorway. No one notices him.

What the fuck is going on? ARTIE

Don’t you worry, honey, mommy will help you, you’ll see, it’ll be just fine. This is going to be just great! Oh, I can’t wait. You— MARTHA

(to Artie)

For what? ARTIE

I didn’t mean that— MARTHA

—want to name her Martha? Oh, please, please, Artie, please, name her Martha. For me, please! AIDA

Who is she talking about? SARA

I think it will be a wonderful thing to do. To show your mother your love for her. MARTHA

Are we getting another cat? SARA

It’s a beautiful name, don’t you think? Mar-tha. This is just wonderful! MARTHA

I want to name it— SARA

Wait till I tell your father. Oh he’s going to be ecstatic— MARTHA

Wait, no— AIDA

—cause you named this one. Cra-mer. Who the hell names their cat Cramer?
—when he hears about this. Sara, one more time, and you are out!

SARA

Peaches, I want Peaches—

MARTHA

There might be a couple in the fridge—

SARA

—if it’s a girl. Yes, Peaches. No, I mean, I want to name the cat Peaches, if it’s a girl.

ARTIE

(confused)

Aida?

MARTHA

What kind of a name is that? (mockingly) Peaches. What cat? Are you feeling alright, young lady?

AIDA

I might have given you the wrong—

SARA

What do you mean what cat?

MARTHA

Named Peaches?

Marvin walks into the kitchen.

SARA

Exactly. You named the first one.

ARTIE

Good morning, father.

MARTHA

Oh, Marvin, dear, I didn’t see you. Did you hear the good news?

AIDA

No, no—

MARTHA

Tell him, Artie, tell your father the good news.
We are getting a new cat. Peaches.

SARA

You got off early?

ARTIE
(to Marvin)

Sara, enough with the new cat already.

MARTHA
(to Artie)

Tell your father about Martha, honey.

Who?

MARVIN

I think there’s been a misunderstanding—

AIDA

Can I tell him, please, oh please, Artie, let me tell him. Please, please, Artie?
(to Marvin)

Sit down, dear, let me get you some coffee.

Martha walks to the stove, overtaken by joy.

What in the world—

MARVIN

You can’t name the cat Martha, mother, we already have one Martha.

SARA

The boss’s wife called. Said it was an emergency. So he—

MARVIN
(to Artie)

Martha turns away from the stove, terrified, and screams.

What? An emergency? Everybody stay calm!

MARTHA

—let us go early.

MARVIN

I see.

ARTIE
Relax, mother.

SARA

Don’t tell me what to do.

MARTHA

(to Aida)

You need to stay calm, dear.

(to Marvin, almost in tears)

How bad is it, Marvin? What did the doctor say? It was the muffin, wasn’t it? We’ll get through this. Don’t you worry, now. I am sorry, Marvin, I am so sorry, I didn’t think you’d get so sick—

MARVIN

What muffin? Who’s sick?

ARTIE

The boss’s wife had an emergency, mother. What’s wrong with you?

SARA

She never listens, that’s what’s wrong with her.

MARVIN

Don’t talk about your mother like that, Sara.

MARTHA

(crying)

That’s what she does. That’s what she does all the time.

ARTIE

Stop it, both of you!

MARVIN

What is all this talk about a new cat? Where’s Cramer?

SARA

He’s dead.

AIDA

He’s sick.

MARTHA

(hysterical)

Dead!? What?! Not my Cramer! Not my little boy! I can’t take this any more.

She collapses on the chair.
ARTIE (to Aida)

Check on Cramer, will you?

Aida leaves the kitchen.

SARA

He’ll be dead by tomorrow.

ARTIE

Stop it, Sara.

MARTHA (crying)

No, no, I can’t take this.

MARVIN

What a day.

ARTIE

Tell me about it.

MARTHA

Yes, dear, tell us about it. Did the doctor give you a prescription?

MARVIN

Martha, listen to me, there is no doctor, there is no prescription—

MARTHA

There’s not?

MARVIN

I am just fine.

MARTHA

Oh, that’s just wonderful, dear. That’s the best news I have heard all day. Thank you, dear Father.

Aida walks back in.

AIDA

He’s panting.

MARTHA

Where is he? Tell him to come here.
I don’t think he can.

SARA

That’s ‘cause he’s half dead.

ARTIE

Sara, drop it now. (pause) I think I might go take a nap.

MARTHA

(as Artie is getting up to leave)

No, honey, wait, you haven’t told your father the great news yet.

MARVIN

More news?

AIDA

There’s no news, really—

MARTHA

Oh, don’t be shy, dear, we’ve all gone through this.

ARTIE

(to Aida)

What is she talking about?

MARVIN

What are you talking about?

SARA

She thinks Artie is getting her a new cat. She wants to name it Martha.

MARVIN

(indifferently)

Oh.

ARTIE

Huh?

MARTHA

(irritated)

Sara, I have really had it with you and your new cat today, you know that?

SARA

What did I say now?
Artie and Aida, wait for it… are—

AIDA

No!

MARTHA

— having a baby girl and they are going to name her Martha like me, like her grandmother, isn’t that just wonderful, Marvin?

ARTIE

Huh?

MARVIN

Oh.

AIDA

We are not.

MARTHA

Lord, have mercy. Aida, how can you say that? How can you even think about killing an innocent being?

SARA

(to Aida)

You want to kill Cramer? (excitedly) I knew I would like you eventually! You are the best!

ARTIE

Somebody better tell me what the fuck is going on. Forgive me, father.

MARTHA

Yes, pray, my sweet boy, pray. We should all pray.

What?

AIDA

I don’t want to kill Cramer—

SARA

Why not? Seriously, I will help you. I can find out the best way to—

MARVIN

(to Sara)

You really are scaring me, you know that?
ARTIE
Nobody is killing anybody. Aida, what is going on?

MARTHA
What’s going on is that she wants to kill my sweet little innocent angel and—

Shut up, mother.

He looks at Marvin apologetically.

Ah!

SARA
She doesn’t know how to—

ARTIE
Sara, I swear I am going to kill you if you don’t shut your—

MARTHA
(wailing)
Artie no! Don’t do it! What would I do without you!

Aida hesitantly puts her hand on Sara’s shoulder.

MARVIN
(holding his head in his hands)
I should have stayed overtime.

MARTHA
What? You can do that? You said they never offer you any overtime. Marvin, did I hear you say overtime?

ARTIE
(jumping up from his chair)
Everybody shut the fuck up! (to Marvin)
Forgive me, father. (to Martha)
Mother, don’t you say a word. (to Sara)
Say a word and I swear I will… (to Marvin)
I am sorry.
What is mother talking about? (to Aida)

I don’t know. AIDA

She knows exactly— MARTHA

Sh! ARTIE

Don’t you sh me. MARTHA

(very quietly)

Aida? ARTIE

I have no idea why she would get this idea— AIDA

Because she’s crazy. SARA

Sarah! ARTIE

(to Aida)

So, are we having a baby or are we not having a baby? MARTHA

Of course we are, honey, of course we are. AIDA

(frustrated)

We are not. MARVIN

Well, that’s good. Artie sits back down.

Good? How could you say that’s good?

MARSHA (desperately)
SARA
(to Artie)
We are getting a new cat though, right?

ARTIE
Not until Cramer dies.

MARTHA
(wailing)
Cra-mer! Cramer is not going to die. And I want my granddaughter. You cannot not have her. Artie, please!

Artie signals Aida, and the two of them leave the stage.

MARVIN
You need to take it easy, Martha. You are damaging your nerves.

And my life.

SARA
That’s it! Out!

MARVIN
Sara leaves the stage.

C’mon now, Martha. Don’t cry. You want to share a muffin with me?

BLACKOUT.

Scene Two

Early Sunday afternoon. Martha and Sara are sitting at the front porch. Peaches is curled up by the front door.

SARA
Come here, Peaches, ps-ps-ps. (pause) Come here, kitty.

MARTHA
(indifferently)
She can’t hear you. She is deaf.

SARA
You don’t know that, mother. (pause) You’re just bitter.
MARTHA
All animals are God’s children. I love them all. But this one is deaf. I am telling you.

SARA
She’s just ignoring you.

MARTHA
Ignoring me? You’re the one calling on her. I haven’t said her name once since you dragged her in here.

SARA
Rescued her, mother, I res-cued her.

MARTHA
Aha. (pause) I wanted to be rescued when I was young. Then your father came along—

SARA
On his white horse and off you went into the lavender sunset—

MARTHA
No. And off I went into the shit-hole I now call my life.

SARA
Mother!

MARTHA
What, I said it! You think you are the only one who knows how to complain? You think you’re the only one who is disappointed? The only one whose heart hasn’t caught up with her brains yet?

SARA
What heart? What brains?

MARTHA
(as she sees Artie coming)

ARTIE
Mother. (pause) Where’s Aida? Peaches?

SARA
I have both of them. You just never bothered to look for either one.

ARTIE
Huh?
Aida is in the kitchen.

SARA
And you never will, ‘cause, you know why? ‘cause it doesn’t matter to you. I’m not the one who matters—

ARTIE
What’s there to eat?

SARA
— but guess what? I don’t care what you think—

MARTHA
Peach cobbler. Made it this morning.

SARA
—I know I have both.

ARTIE
What is it, Sara? What now?

MARTHA
Never mind her, dear.

SARA
(mockingely, as she gets up to leave)
Yeah, never mind me, dear.

ARTIE
OK…

Sara and Peaches leave the porch.

MARTHA
Is your father back?

ARTIE
Yes.

MARTHA
Is he… Is he alone?

ARTIE
(pause) Yes, he’s in the shower. (pause) I am sorry, mother.
MARTHA
(emotionless)
Yes. Me too.

ARTIE
Do you want me to get Aida to make you something to eat, to drink, maybe? I don’t know—

MARTHA
That’s sweet, but no. Tell her to come out here, though, will you?

Artie walks into the house. Martha keeps staring sadly at her feet. Aida comes out, clearing her throat.

MARTHA
Sit down, dear. Come sit next to me.

Aida sits next to Martha.

Ever since Cramer (pause) Ever since Cramer got sick…

(beginning to cry)

He’s gone, Aida. He’s gone. Marvin came back alone.

AIDA
Yes, he said they had to, you know, put him—

MARTHA
No, please, don’t. I don’t want to know.

AIDA
I am sorry.

MARTHA
It’s stupid, isn’t it? That it would matter this much. It is simply stupid.

AIDA
(trying to console her)
You loved him, Martha. It’s not stupid.

MARTHA
And yet, I killed him.

AIDA
Cramer was old, you know that.
MARTHA
He would have lived another good five years, if I hadn’t given him those, those—

AIDA
He loved your muffins, Martha.

Marvin comes out of the house, his hair still wet from the shower.

MARTHA
Marvin, you’ll get sick, don’t come out here with your hair wet. Please, Marvin, I can’t take another tragedy in this house.

MARVIN
Tragedy? Oh, you mean the… yeah, no, I am not going to die, don’t worry.

Aida throws a sharp look at him.

Sorry.

ARTIE
(calling from the other room)
Ai-da!

AIDA
(getting up)
I’ll go see what Artie’s up to.

MARTHA
Yes, dear, he’s probably looking for the cobbler. I made it this morning.

Aida walks back into the house.

Marvin, you should try some of the peach cobbler I made this morning. It’s out of this world.

MARVIN
I am sure it is.

He sits down next to Martha.

It was time, Martha, they said it was ready. It had been ready for a while now—

MARTHA
I don’t want to hear it, Marvin, please.
MARVIN
Well, it’s something you have to hear, ’cause it’s better that you know what to expect when you see it.

MARTHA
What? He’s here? You brought him back home?

MARVIN
Well, I thought you’d want a burial, you know, to say good-bye—

MARTHA
(excited)
A Funeral!
(with deep sadness)
Oh, my poor baby.
She begins sobbing.

MARVIN
There, there, cry if you need to. But don’t cry for too long, ’cause we have to talk about arranging this thing—

MARTHA
(excited again)
Yes, I’ll make the guest list, the food list—

MARVIN
I mean, where in the backyard would you want it to be, Martha, that’s what I mean. This ain’t a festival, you know.

MARTHA
The yard? Are you out of your mind? You want to bury my sweet boy in the backyard like some damn bird?

MARVIN
I thought you’d want it to be close to you, is all.

MARTHA
What about the lot you bought after your father died, Marvin, can’t we—

MARVIN
Are you crazy? You want the damn thing buried next to my father?

MARTHA
(reproachfully)
Don’t talk about him like that, Marvin. And, it’s not like your mother is going to be buried next to him any time soon, I mean, she has probably been dead for years now—
MARVIN
Why do you always have to drag my mother into it? And that’s not the point, Martha, that’s not the damn point.

MARTHA
What is the point then? Can’t you see I am heartbroken? Why can’t you make this one nice gesture towards me?

MARVIN (getting up)
One nice gesture? Do you understand what you’re asking me to do here? Do you really understand—

MARTHA
All these years, Marvin, I have never asked you for anything. I have given you everything and I have never asked for anything in return. I’m asking you this one favor—

MARVIN
Favor? What about me, ha? What about me?—

What about you?

MARTHA
Where in hell am I going to be buried? In the damn yard, I suppose?

MARSHA (playfully)
So you can be close to me.

MARVIN
I’m gonna dig up a hole and put the damn cat in it, whether you want it or not. And then I’m gonna wash my hands and go get me a cold one. You can dig it out yourself if you ain’t satisfied.

MARTHA
What, like you’d want to be buried next to your father?

MARVIN
Damn right I would.

MARTHA
There’s only enough room there for one of us. Whoever dies first, then? Is that your plan?

What plan?
MARTHA
What is your plan for me, Marvin? Did you think I was just going to evaporate, turn to air—

MARVIN
I wish.

MARTHA
— to dust and just fly away with the wind? Don’t you think I need a decent lot?

MARVIN
I hadn’t thought that far ahead.

MARTHA
Oh, you hadn’t? But you sure had thought ahead enough to plan your own funeral. The hell with me. I don’t matter. You first. As always, you come first.

Marvin leaves the porch, visibly upset.

(very loudly)
And now you walk out. You’re done. And I’ll just take care of myself. I’ll calm myself down. As always.

Aida and Artie enter, each holding a plate of peach cobbler.

ARTIE
What’s with the yelling?

AIDA
This cobbler is out of this world, Martha.

ARTIE
It’s really good.

AIDA
Mmm. Delicious.

ARTIE
It’s really sweet.

AIDA
The sweetest ever.

ARTIE
And soft.
It’s orgasmic.

Artie and Martha simultaneously throw a sharp look at Aida, stunned.

I mean, it seems organic.

Yes, organic.

Oh, we’re all adults here.

I’m sorry, I —

I used the same stuff I always use. Not one organic thing in it. Not one.
(cunningly)
(pause) And I’ll teach you how to fake it, too.

What?

I will teach you how to make it so it tastes natural.

These aren’t real peaches?

Sara and Peaches approach unnoticeably and stop by the doorway, just as Martha is delivering the following line.

(playfully)

Peaches won’t give you an orgasm.

I didn’t think so—

(annoyed)

OK, enough.
SARA (terrified)

What are you talking about?

Everyone turns towards her.

(to Artie)

What did you do?

ARTIE

Huh?

AIDA

Oh, it’s nothing, we were just talking about—

SARA

No no no no no. Someone better tell me what happened.

MARTHA

I can’t take any more of your nonsense today, Sara, please, stop.

SARA

Artie, I know that look on your face. I’ve seen it enough times. What did you do to Peaches?

ARTIE

Nothing.

MARTHA

Somebody go get Marvin.

SARA

Yes! And I’m telling him everything. I don’t care if he kills both of us—

ARTIE

You need to relax.

MARTHA

Poor thing has lost her mind. Mar-vin!

ARTIE (yelling)

Stop yelling!

Artie grabs Sara by the hand and drags her out, leaving Peaches behind.
SARA
(as she is being dragged out of the room)
You’re not lying your way out of this one, Artie. Is your wife in on it too? You sick fuckers.

AIDA
I guess, Cramer’s death has been hard on all of us.

MARTHA
She hated Cramer.

AIDA
Oh, that’s not entirely true, Martha, you know Sara has a good heart.

Marvin comes out of the house.

MARVIN
Did you call?

MARTHA
You’re late. As always, you’re either too early or too late.

AIDA
Excuse me, I’m going to take Peaches out for a walk.

She leaves with Peaches.

MARVIN
What’s all the fuss about?

MARTHA
Sara is acting out. Again.

MARVIN
That’s why you called?

MARTHA
Sit down, will you?

Marvin sits down next to her.

Did you try the cobbler? Wasn’t it good?

MARVIN
Very good. Now if you don’t have anything else to say—
It was soft wasn’t it?  MARTHA

What?  MARVIN

The cobbler. Was it soft?  MARTHA

I guess.  MARVIN

Was it sweet?  MARTHA

Yes?  MARVIN

Was it delicious?  MARTHA

Are you alright?  MARVIN

It was just orgasmic wasn’t it?  MARTHA

Shocked, Marvin begins to look around nervously.

Martha?  MARVIN

Say it. Say it was orgasmic.  MARTHA

I don’t have time for your shenanigans. I got a hole to dig.  MARVIN

Wait. Did you go for seconds?  MARTHA

Marvin starts to walk away.

That’s right, you were never too good with seconds.
He stops for a second, turns around and looks at Martha, then leaves the stage.

BLACKOUT.

Scene Three

The backyard. Aida is sitting on the grass, beside a freshly disturbed patch of soil, eating sunflower seeds and spitting the shells. A shovel and yellow rubber gloves are laying next to her. Sara enters stage left, carrying a suitcase, with Peaches following. She stands unnoticed for a few short moments, looking at Aida, then throws a glance towards the house, and slowly walks off the stage. Peaches approaches Aida and lies down on top of the fresh patch of soil.

AIDA
(as she is patting Peaches’ head)

Do you miss Cramer?

Peaches seems to be enjoying this tremendously – she is purring and searching for Aida’s hand with her head.

AIDA

There, there, it was his time.

BLACKOUT.
Words Between

A play in one act
Characters

WOMAN, in her 40s
MAN, in his 40s
Scene One

As the scene opens, the stage is in complete darkness. We hear the voices of a woman and a man in the dark.

WOMAN

Sorry.

MAN

Tell me.

WOMAN

No.

MAN

Do you want out?

WOMAN

Yes.

MAN

Then tell me.

WOMAN

It is stupid.

MAN

That’s what you said last time.

WOMAN

I am sorry.

MAN

I hate that word.

WOMAN

I am sorry.

MAN

Stop saying that.

WOMAN

OK, sorry. Shit. I’m sorry. OK. OK. OK. (long pause) We can try again.

MAN

I don’t want to.
Scene Two

Sunrise. The light gradually illuminates the stage. A wall divides the stage in the middle. A man and a woman are asleep, leaning against the wall. The man is on the right side, and the woman, on the left. Their heads are hanging, their arms dangling, their clothing has seen better days – they are obviously exhausted. Every once in a while, one of them lets out a muffled grunt, or makes a sudden movement, like an uncontrolled twitch of the arm, or jerking of the shoulder, etc. The woman begins to show signs of awakening. She opens her eyes and looks around as if trying to remember where she might be. A sudden terror fills her eyes, and she begins to sob. The man wakes up. The two can’t see each other, but can hear each other’s voice through the wall.

I got the first three right.

WOMAN

Don’t tell me.

MAN

I’m sorry.

WOMAN

Stop it.

MAN

(pause) I got the first three right, then—

WOMAN

You answered “no” to the fourth one?

MAN

(pause) Why are we doing this?

WOMAN

You answered “no.”

MAN (frustrated)

A long pause follows, during which the man is making air drawings with his index finger. Unable to see what he is doing, the woman is tracing his finger movements with her eyes, staring above her in the air.

WOMAN

I answered “no.” (pause) You said we should always be honest. If you’d been honest, you would’ve said “no.” That’s why I said “no.”

(after a long pause)
You know he’s not going to ask us the same questions again. There is no point in arguing about it now. Let’s practice other questions.

MAN
It doesn’t matter. We will never think alike.

He gets up and faces the wall. In a few moments, the woman does the same. During the rest of the dialogue, which begins after a short silence, they are both facing the wall, and their gestures are strikingly similar, if not identical.

And if we never give the same five answers, then we will never what? (long pause) Answer me, damn it! If we never give the same five answers, then we will never—

WOMAN
Get out of here. Then we can never get out of here! Then we can never ever ever get out of here!

(after a long pause)
It’s your fault just as much as it is mine.

MAN
You are thinking about what I would do, when you should be thinking about what I would say, what I would say to him.

They both turn away from the wall simultaneously and sit down, leaning against the wall, facing away from it.

Focus on the answer, not the question. (long pause) Let’s practice reading each other’s mind.

The light begins to fade gradually.

BLACKOUT.

Scene Three

Upbeat instrumental music is playing, heavy on the percussion. The man’s half of the stage is lit, while the woman’s half is in complete darkness. He is sitting on the floor, keeping time with his right foot, obviously anxious. A different woman, who very much resembles the first one (her “double”), appears from the dark and begins to river-dance in front of the man, as he continues his nervous gesturing. She appears in and out of darkness throughout her dance, which lasts about a minute. As the light begins to fade on the man’s half of the stage, he and the woman’s double slowly disappear from view.
Simultaneously, the woman’s half of the stage is slowly illuminated, until it is fully lit. The woman is sitting on the floor, looking around in desperation, fidgeting, and biting her fingernails. A different man, who very much resembles the first one (his “double”), appears from the dark and begins to perform capoeira (or a similar form of martial art) in front of the woman, as she continues her nervous gesturing. He, too, appears in and out of darkness throughout his dance, which lasts about a minute. The light begins to fade in the woman’s half of the stage, until complete darkness falls. A few seconds later, the stage is fully lit. We see the “original” man and woman facing the wall and talking excitedly. Their voices are completely muffled by the loud music. The two exude anger, disappointment, and despair. The music stops, as they simultaneously collapse to the floor. During the rest of the dialogue, the doubles appear in and out of the dark and perform their dance moves in front of the woman and the man, respectively, this time to no music (the river-dancer’s steps are quiet).

**WOMAN**

We almost had it.

**MAN**

I know what color your eyes are.

**WOMAN**

We were so close.

**MAN**

You know I know what color your eyes are.

**WOMAN**

We could’ve been—

**MAN**

(getting upset)

He did not ask me the color of your eyes. He asked me the color of your stupid dress.

**WOMAN**

—home. (pause) You loved that dress.

**MAN**

I love all dresses. I love all of your dresses.

**WOMAN**

Do you?

**MAN**

Ok, I don’t. I hate them all. I hate all dresses, blue, green, grey, I hate them all. (long pause) He asked me the color of your dress.
He asked you the color of my eyes.

No, he asked if the color of your eyes is a) the color of the dress you were wearing when we first met b) the color of the dress you were wearing on our first date c) the color of the dress you were wearing when I proposed to you. (pause) And I said “c,” because you were wearing grey, weren’t you?

I was wearing blue. You think my eyes are blue?

No, I think the dress you were wearing on the day I proposed to you was grey.

You must be color-blind.

I just don’t remember.

Exactly.

Don’t start. (pause) What was I wearing, ha? Do you remember what I was wearing?

When?

On any of those days. What was I wearing on any one of those three days?

The same thing you always wear, a black T-shirt.

Was I?

It doesn’t matter, because you wouldn’t remember anyway, even if I told you you were wearing a pink tu-tu.

(pause) What do you want from me?
WOMAN
I want you to remember the color of my eyes.

MAN
But he did not ask me the color of your eyes.

WOMAN
That is exactly what he asked.

The light begins to fade.

MAN
Grey. Grey. Grey. Grey. Grey is the color of your eyes. The color of your eyes is grey. Your eyes are grey.

WOMAN
Stop it.

BLACKOUT.

Scene Four
The light gradually fills the stage. The man and the woman are alone on the stage. They are eating pretzel sticks. They have four pretzel sticks each. Their movements are in perfect unison, as they each move one pretzel stick close to their mouth, bite it, begin chewing it, etc. Simultaneously, they take a new pretzel stick and put in their mouth, holding it as if it were a cigarette. They both begin to “smoke” the pretzel stick, inhaling the “smoke” and exhaling it, puffing, acting as if they’re making “smoke clouds,” etc.

WOMAN
How many you got left?

MAN
Two.

WOMAN
Me, too.

MAN
I am savoring them.

WOMAN
I know. (long pause) I hate him.

MAN
You don’t know him.
He is holding us hostage.

You don’t know why.

Does it matter?

I don’t know. It might.

You just want to argue for argument’s sake.

We’re practicing.

Are we, now?

Should we stop talking then?

After a long pause, the woman turns towards the wall, “facing” the man.

I want to see you.

I know.

Just for a second.

I wonder if you look the same.

I wonder about that, too.

About me or about you?
MAN
About both of us. (pause) About me, mostly. (long pause) You always look good.

WOMAN
Not always. I didn’t look good enough on the day you proposed or you would have—

Stop it.

—remembered.

They both turn away from the wall and sit back down. They “stub out” their pretzel and begin to eat it. Within a few moments, their gestures synchronize, as they continue eating the rest of their pretzel sticks in unison. The light begins to fade.

BLACKOUT.

Scene Five

As the scene opens, the man and the woman are standing with their foreheads pressed against the wall, holding their heads in their hands, looking down at their feet.

MAN
Do you want to tell me?

The woman shakes her head “no.”

(long pause) Tell me. (pause) Which one was it?

(pause) The third.

MAN
(knowingly)

Ah, the third.

WOMAN
I am so tired. (long pause) You said we should be honest with him.

MAN
(as he steps away from the wall)

I did. What else did I say?
You said many things.

She steps away from the wall. They both turn away from it.

None of which you remember. (pause) I said, think about the answer I would give him. Don’t worry about the question, the situation, or the truth.

It doesn’t matter now.

Now doesn’t matter! What mattered was then! But you screwed up then!

They collapse to the floor, then slowly get in the fetal position, as if trying to sleep. The woman speaks after a long pause.

Say something. (long pause) I can’t sleep.

Me neither.

(pause) Sing for me.

What?

Never mind.

No, what do you want me to sing?

Really? How about “Yellow Submarine.”

I knew it.

How?
I read your mind.

MAN (bitterly)

WOMAN (pause) Do you think they really meant drugs?

Who?

MAN

Who else?

WOMAN

The song? I don’t know. I hope they did.

MAN

Or maybe they felt like they were under pressure, like when you’re under water.

Does it matter?

WOMAN

Don’t you ever think about what the words mean?

In this song?

MAN

Anywhere.

WOMAN

What do you mean?

MAN

What do they mean?

WOMAN

They mean what they mean.

MAN

Or, do they mean what you want them to mean? (pause) Anything means anything you want it to mean. (long pause) I want everything to mean nothing.

Yeah ok.
WOMAN

Sing it.

MAN

We- all- live- in-a-yel-low-sub-marine
in-a yel-low- sub-marine
in-a yel-low- sub-marine.

The woman joins him.

We- all-live-in-a-yel-low-subma-rine
in-a-yel-low-subma-rine…

WOMAN
(pause) You know, I used to think it said “subma - rine.”

It does.

MAN

WOMAN

No, like, “subma - rine.” Say “submarine” a few times, and it will start to sound like “subma - rine.”

What does “subma - rine” mean?

MAN

WOMAN

Just sounds, I guess.

MAN

WOMAN

Just sounds. Sounds like a girl’s name – Subma Rine.

Say “submarine, submarine, submarine, submarine.”

MAN

WOMAN

It doesn’t make sense.

If you repeat it over and over again.

MAN

WOMAN

Your game doesn’t make sense.

Any word is like that.
MAN
(pause) I guess.

WOMAN

MAN
Are you sleepy yet?

WOMAN
Kind of. (pause) Thank you. For singing to me.

MAN
Sub-marine, sub-marine, sub-marine, sub-marine…

WOMAN
Subma- rine, subma-rine, subma-rine, subma-rine…

The two continue saying “submarine,” but their voices do not merge into one. Instead, one’s first syllable falls into the other’s second syllable. This goes on for a few moments, then their voices begin to fade, as does the light on the stage.

BLACKOUT.

Scene Six

Slow, dramatic music begins to play, as the light fills the stage. In unison, the man and the woman are pressing their lips against the wall and caressing it, as if trying to kiss and hug each other through it. Their movements are perfectly simultaneous, as they move up and down, pressing their bodies against the wall, tilting their heads for the “kiss,” “touching” fingers, etc. After a few minutes, they slowly move away from the wall and sit on the floor, as the woman’s double appears on the man’s half of the stage, and the man’s double, on the woman’s half of the stage. The woman’s double is wearing a grey dress, and the man’s double, a black T-shirt and a pink tu-tu. As the doubles begin slowly moving towards stage front, the “original” man begins to speak. The light around him and the woman begins to fade.

MAN
(pause) Do you remember what I told you when we first met?

WOMAN
I need that button.
The doubles have reached stage front at this point. The light illuminates them. They gently embrace each other and begin to dance in slow motion.

You were speechless.

I found you appalling.

You found me delightful.

The nerve!

The courage!

Predictable.

Unheard of.

Do you remember how you felt the first time we kissed.

Yes.

Tell me.

(long pause) I can’t.

There must be words for it.

(long pause) I felt what you felt.
What did I feel?

Tell me.

(pause) I felt what you felt.

The music plays for a few more moments, as the doubles continue dancing. The light begins to fade. The music plays on.

BLACKOUT.
Among The Angles

A piece for solo performance
My life is a collage of random articles placed together in a tasteless form. Depending on your angle, you might look at it and wonder, “Who the heck would think this was worth the time to create?” Better yet (or worse), “Who the heck would think this was worth the time to look at? I want my money back.”

Throughout the years, I studied hard and used that as an excuse to work odd jobs, “Hey, I’m smart, I could serve beer for all I care.” And I did that, for four years, in this Mexican diner, where I picked up Spanish and a drinking habit: I used to feel so sad over all that sweet and sour mix and the cheap house tequila that I would drink the remaining margarita mix every night, instead of throwing it out like I was supposed to after cleaning the margarita machine. For four years.

Before they entrusted me with the highly responsible job of bartending, I was a waitress – or, do they call them servers nowadays? (Which one is worse?) I was one of them ladies walking around with a tray bigger than my body, a pen and a notepad sticking out of the pocket of my apron, which itself was a collage of various Mexican salsas – the mild, the medium, the hot, and the verde. My customers loved me because I am from “Whatcha say, Romania? Where’s that at, honey?” Arm-enia. And it’s in Eastern Europe.

Or at least that’s how I tend to explain the location of my country of origin to most white Americans. Anybody with some sense of geography calls it Western Asia, or the Middle East, and anybody with more than a little sense of geography calls it South Caucasus. Anybody with any sense at all would say, “It’s on planet Earth,” and even that, with reservation, because we don’t know what planet Earth is really called beyond our planet. The Middle East – east of what? You know, to them, that is the center; how would you like it if they called the United States North of the Middle?
Mexicans loved me, because I’m not too white, but just white enough, and because I can really roll my r’s, I’d like to think. They taught me everything I needed to know about good beer – draft is better than bottle and I am a lager girl. I became quite popular, actually, right after I got my wisdom teeth pulled. Did you know they give you an entire month’s supply of Vicodin for that, plus another refill, if you still experience pain? And pain I experienced, for I was not about to give up my popularity or the Spanish lessons – an hour for a pill. I had to quit that job after four years, though, because I started having reoccurring nightmares about it.

Have you ever had a nightmare about a job? Say you’re working at a gas station – you’ve probably often dreamed how the station has run out of gasoline, and there is a line of angry drivers shouting at you, and you have to hide behind the counter to call 911, but the phone line is down, and you can’t reach your wife to tell her to call 911 for you because your fingers have turned into sticks, and you can’t seem to dial her number to save your life, literally.

Or if you’re a lifeguard – you’ve probably often dreamed that there is a group of toddlers at the swimming pool getting their first swimming lesson from their kindergarten teacher who was too lazy to teach them anything else and decided to bring them to the pool instead, and they all jump in and begin to drown, and your job is to save them, so you jump in, but you realize you have forgotten how to swim and you start drowning too and, as you drown, you see their eyes desperately searching for your hand.

Well, while I was a waiter-server, my nightmare went a little like this: It is a Saturday evening. I have five tables in my section. The two-top is down again, the two four-tops are waiting for their checks, the eight-top is waiting for drink, and the six-
top just got done with the appetizers.

I need a runner for the eight-top’s drinks.

Grandpa from one of the four-tops is staring at me.

The guy with the crazy wife is waving at me from the six-top – Juan just ran their food to the wrong table.

The old lady from the four-top is now walking slowly towards me – she asked for the check fifteen minutes ago.

The two-top has been waiting forever to order.

No, Tim, I’m swamped, I can’t take that table on the patio.

The pregnant woman at the eight-top just spilled her virgin raspberry daiquiri, extra whipped cream all over her huge belly.

The two-top is holding up the menu, waving it in the air – they are ready to order.

The six-top’s food needs to be put on a rush order – the wrong table ate half of it before they realized it’s not their food.

The ice chest is out of ice, and frigging Enrique just dropped an entire case of salsa on the kitchen floor. Juan slipped and fell. Tim just called him a pinche guey.

The two-top is pissed – well, there goes my tip:

OK, yes, no jalapeños, extra cheese, sour cream instead of guacamole – no, no extra charge. For cheese, yes, there’s an extra charge. No, I’m afraid you can’t get cheese instead of lettuce. (I guess ‘cause cheese is not a leaf vegetable?) And for you, sir? The taquitos? Yes, they’re very good, my favorite. Excuse me, for one second please.

No, Andre, I can’t run your food (Está loco, “run my food”) – can’t you see I am taking an order?
It’s OK, take your time, sir. (Hurry the hell up, you stupid idiot – can’t you see I’m in the weeds?) The enchilada is not the same as the burrito, sir. A taco, that’s different, too. The red sauce, yes, I think that’s the most authentic. I’ll be right back, excuse me.

What do you mean, they walked out? Did they pay? Crap!

Yes, Tim, I already greeted them. Yes, within one minute. Yes, I told them about our specials, and offered an appetizer and beverages. Yes. Pinche guey.

I need a runner for table fourteen! That’s the six-top – their fajitas stopped sizzling five minutes ago, the guacamole on the fresh plate is rapidly turning brown, the sour cream has turned into milk by now, and the tomato in the pico de gallo is no longer raw.

Can someone pick up that phone, and where the hell is that hostess! No, Jason, not the one with the boobies. Refill the ice chest, will ya?

The pregnant woman at the eight-top wants more hot salsa – Really? REALLY? What do you mean, we’re out? Then just give her the medium. What do you mean, she won’t take it? I don’t care if she thinks the hot salsa will give her contractions or a giant orgasm – Give her the medium, if that’s all we have. Of course it’s free, stop asking stupid questions! When have we ever charged for salsa in this damn place! (We should, though, and we should also charge for tap water, ’cause maybe then the skinny bitch at the six-top will stop drinking it like it’s from her own private fountain.)

Here is your check, sir, sorry about the wait, we were out of printing paper. Well, I don’t know what to say, sir, I apologize. My manager?

Maria! Get Tim.

Split it? I’ll see what I can do. (There’s no frigging way! You idiots should’ve told me earlier – now I don’t know who had what. Can’t eight adults decide who’s paying how
much?)

You did ask for well-done, yes sir. I will get this taken care of right away.

Andre could you run this back to the kitchen? (Screw you too, then.)

Pete, do me a favor and burn this piece of… meat for the dumbass at fourteen.

I’d wake up in the middle of the night sweating and swearing and swearing never to go back to that dump. But, of course, I’d get up the next morning and go work a double shift, ‘cause I had bills to pay and being in college for English wasn’t necessarily the brightest perspective – isn’t, I should say.

One day, I gave my shift manager a two-week’s notice, just to piss her off, and then asked the general manager the next day to allow me to take the notice back. He said, no.

So, I started working for a student loan company instead, which isn’t that different from waiting tables, really – you’re still serving the public, and taking all kinds of shit while at it, only now your clothes are somewhat cleaner and your hair doesn’t smell as bad. And instead of running in and out of the kitchen in your slip-resistant shoes, you’re stuck in a cubicle all day with a receiver in your left hand and a pen in your right, writing fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, fuck you on the notepad laying next to your computer, while some white lady is on the phone bitching at you about the interest rate, even though she knew damn well when she was signing that promissory note that the rate was flexible and not fixed, and that the interest would begin accruing the moment the funds were disbursed to the student, and not six months after graduation, because these are private funds and not Uncle Sam’s subsidized loans that you get if your income is low enough, and while she may think hers was, her husband’s wasn’t, and it doesn’t matter if he spent it all on gambling this year, because we’re still looking at last year’s taxes, back when he hadn’t
yet developed the nasty habit from which he has been suffering ever since, making the entire family suffer with him. “I’m so sorry ma’am, but I don’t really know what to tell you,” and “Please, don’t cry,” and “I would kindly ask you not to call me that because I’m just telling you the truth,” and “Who am I to know the truth? I agree,” and thanks for hanging up on me, bitch, bitch, bitch, bitch. I need another notepad.

It turned out I wouldn’t need one, after all, because the manager discovered my scribbles and quickly decided I am not fit to deal with people, so he moved me to the department that deals with financial aid officers instead.

There, stuck in a similar box working similar countless hours, I battled over the phone and via email with various members of financial aid staff from various educational institutions all over the country, most of whom belonged to that category of humans who, given the slightest amount of authority, believe themselves to be the kings of the world. As such, they make their speech as complicated as humanly possible, or should I say, inhumanly, using terms only they could know, since these pertain to their particular institution and mean nothing outside of it, “I apologize, our COSDs are down and we cannot access the SLID, so you might have to call the ITSAD, or I can call you back when they are back up. What is your number?”

Yeah, ok, my number is WTF-DID-USAY just now?

Or, sometimes they use phrases whose meaning they could not possibly know because these pertain to the outside world and have not been explained to them within the premises of their institution or anywhere else, for that matter. And yet they use them freely, shamelessly, out-of context, creating a level of absurdity beyond my ability to self-control. So, I let them know when they misuse a word, here relying on my English
major – finally, a use for it! – “You mean, eligible, not illegible, ma’am, ‘cause students can’t be illegible for a loan, unless you are referring to their handwriting, maybe?” And they get defensive and ask to speak to a manager, because, apparently the manager belongs to that same species, whose importance couldn’t be more superficial and yet is so vastly accepted by the rest of us – servers, so he will understand.

He did understand. And I was left wondering what I had done wrong this time, but before they could show me the door, I found it and closed it behind me forever.

This was before the recession, so my hopes were high – I am an educated person with years of working experience. It doesn’t matter where I have worked, ‘cause I have been able to develop the traits – good organizer, multi-tasker, fast thinker, problem solver, reliable, responsible – the, what you might call, social skills necessary to impress any prospective employers. Not to mention, I speak more languages than their entire staff combined, plus I have big brown eyes, dark curly hair, what white Americans call an exotic look, whatever that means – exotic from whose perspective? Ask an Armenian if Armenian women look exotic…

But what I didn’t realize was that employers simply didn’t exist – prospective or actual – because times were about to get really tough, and they knew it, so they looked at you from one perspective and one perspective only – you are a commodity they can’t afford at the moment. They can do with Sally over there who knows how to press the right buttons to get to the next interpreter, who, regardless of having been told time and time again not to paraphrase the foreigner’s speech (from whose perspective a foreigner?) but rather, to translate it word to word, still omits huge chunks of it, rendering them insignificant: “Es que se murio mi hijo y no sé que es lo que tenemos que hacer con sus
deudas. Es que nosotros no las podemos pagar porque vivimos en Mexico y no tenemos trabajo y no sabemos que hacer. Pues por eso los llamé para ver si hay alguna solución para nuestro caso, si podríamos pagar en partes, o si tal vez nos podrían perdonar el préstamo, por favor señora?”

“Yeah, she said her son died and she doesn’t want to pay the loan.”

But Sally is affordable – she got her GED some fifteen years ago, and the interpreter services aren’t that bad either, plus you don’t have to worry about paying for their chipped teeth.

So, no, unfortunately, they do not have an opening for me at the moment but would gladly take my application into consideration for future openings.

I am sipping away at the worst coffee ever and carefully taking tiny bites off that stone-hard waffle they call breakfast at this cheap motel near the Westbound I-40 in Amarillo, TX, or as white folk call it, Amarilo, TX, when the news announces that the country has officially entered recession, and suddenly that waffle doesn’t seem so bad, and I pour the rest of my coffee in a to-go cup. I’m leaving the Mid-West, headed to the West (clarification on the perspective needed), headed to what seems to be a fairytale ending, with a prince and all. Recession, who? – Love is in the air, and so is the smell of Fritos and V8 juice, ‘cause that’s what we are both craving, but I’m the only one pregnant, although my prince certainly looks the part.

Los Angeles, often referred to as (the) Lost Angels, is not what I wanted it to be – as a matter of fact, it is probably the worst place I have ever lived in and I have lived in some really scary places, having been through war and natural disasters and everything –
but that’s getting off topic (and we all know I don’t like doing that). The traffic, the bad
air, the crazy people, the fact that the only stars you see are the ones on the sidewalks in
that dump they call Hollywood – none of these things would have mattered as much if
only it snowed here every now and then, just a little.

You can’t understand this need to see the seasons change, unless you’ve seen
them do that almost your entire life. Like, when it’s almost spring and you almost want to
eat that new grass, so appetizing it looks, you almost envy those cows that eat it and then
shit all over it, and you see the tree trunks turning from grey to greenish and hear the
birds chirping early in the morning, reminding your lazy ass that it’s time to get up and
go see the sun rising from behind that mountain whose top is now almost snowless. So,
you get up and the minute you get out the door you’re happy to be alive, because that’s
just what spring does to your blood. And then, you slowly start to see the first flowers
bloom and then the bees taking advantage of their sweetness, birds making nests and
rivers overflowing with joy, and you say, “I’m ready for summer!” because that’s when
the water gets warm enough to swim in – but you forgot you forgot how to swim.
And as the days get warmer and longer, children stay out later, running around screaming
like maniacs interrupting your siesta, and the smell from the grills fills the air, making
you crave that burning meat so bad that you go out looking for it, only to find it in your
nasty-ass neighbor’s back yard, where a bunch of hairy dudes sporting wife-beaters have
surrounded the fire like in old times and are drooling as they wait for the beast to roast.
And you gently start a conversation with one of them, even though he is gross and his
armpits smell so bad you can smell them even through the smell of the burning flesh, but
you want that flesh so bad you stick around for it. And then his wife comes outside
wearing a collage-of-an-apron splattered with flour and oil and food coloring, and so you stick around for freshly baked scones that you later enjoy underneath the canopy of willows on which two love-birds are doing who-knows-what, judging from their odd chirping, until the real stars come out and fill up the sky, making you feel so happy you could die right now and right here regretting nothing and everything at the same time. And you know you don’t have to roast for much longer because the days will get cooler soon, as the shadows get longer sooner, and before long you will see the tree trunks get darker in shade, while the leaves get brighter. The chirping will subside, as will the noise of the maniacs and the smell of the burning flesh and the hairy armpits, which will now be covered underneath longer sleeves, thankfully, but the stars will be there still to remind you why you love summer and why you are ready to bid it farewell, for the stars won’t fall as fall falls in your corner of the planet – they will just get crisper, as will the air at night and the waters in the river.

You know they will change the time again, so your lazy ass can sleep for an hour longer than before, and isn’t that reason enough for celebration! Yet you still have so much more to look forward to. Like, the fact that soon it will be time to eat all of the delicious dried fruit your mom has prepared for winter and the smoked meat your neighbor so kindly shared with you, and your entire clan will be getting ready for the New Year’s celebration, all of the women suddenly having developed OCDs – cooking and cleaning like maniacs, washing and drying and baking and roasting and boiling and broiling and frying all kinds of beasts and vegetables. And you can just feel the joy fill the air, and the smell of everything that is winter – wood smoking, snow falling, coal burning, tires burning, bread baking, cows shitting, and many many other things you savor, knowing
they will be gone soon, when spring takes over your corner of the planet again to do what it does to your blood.

But you wouldn’t understand any of this, unless you have lived through it over and over again, absorbing this cycle like it is part of your being.

I could come to terms with Lost Angels, if only it gave me the seasons. But it gives me a series of scorching days and freezing nights instead, and not much else in between. And here I found my nest, where I gave birth to my only child – an Angeleno from birth, she will forever call this seasonless dump her birthplace, and she has me to thank for that.

Shortly after her birth I decided I needed to do something other than breastfeeding and changing diapers all day – though I have nothing to say against those who find themselves fully satisfied completing such chores (I probably shouldn’t call them chores). So, I said, “The hell with it – English it is,” and I went back to study it more, harder this time – after all, I am to become its master (or so the title suggests), I am to master that which has forever been my master. Oh, what a future awaits ahead! – The kind of future suited for masters, one would suppose.

I began teaching soon after I began studying – don’t ask. And don’t get me wrong, teaching has always been my thing, as in, I always dreamt about the day when I would enter that first classroom and introduce myself, “Hello, my name is Hudit Simonyan. You may call me Hudit or Ms. Simonyan.” So, I don’t have complaints, really, maybe a story or two I’d like to share, and yes, I do have nightmares about this job, too:

I go to class unprepared, meaning, I have not prepared the lesson for that day (yes, teachers do do homework). So, I begin rambling irrelevancies just to kill time, but to my
disappointment, my students are smart and they have been paying attention all semester, so now they know something is off because nothing makes sense (and I usually make all kinds of sense), so they start making fun of me because of my accent, which has absolutely nothing to do with the situation because the situation is about my not having prepared for class and not my inability to get rid of my accent no matter how hard I try (I haven’t tried, really). Then they start making fun of my name – “What did she say her name was?” “Who did?” “What?” “What she say?” But I’m used to all that, you know. I’ve heard it all: “Hoodie,” “Who did?” “Who done it?” “Who done what?” “Hootie” “Houdini” “Hootie and the Blowfish” “Who’s on first?” “Who’s line is it anyway?” “Who let the dogs out? Who- who- who –who.” I pretend none of this bothers me but it does, and so I begin shouting all kinds of indecencies at them, and one of them runs to the dean, because colleges do not have principals, and tells on me, while two others are holding me down to keep me from running away. But the worst part is, I’m not even trying to run away because I still believe I could explain the situation to them and to the dean, hoping it won’t get to that, but it does, and she enters the room with a few of my colleagues, who just stand there, staring me down with disgust.

It is a scary scene, really, good thing it never really happened (not quite like that, anyway). But it is tough, you know, teaching is tough. You dream about it all your life, you prepare for it – when you’re little, you line up your little dolls and your little stuffed animals and you teach them the alphabet, you grade their “homework” and you wish they could actually respond in their own voices, so that you didn’t have to do ten different voices at once, so you promise yourself that when you grow up, you will teach real humans, and then you do, and you realize that blank stares and silent voices aren’t
specific to toys.

And here I have been ever since, trying to find meaning in the blankest of the
stares and the most silent of the voices, so I can call that meaning the meaning behind my
messy collage-of-a-life, but somehow the idea that this might be my forever scares me to
goosebumps and I secretly contemplate returning to a place with seasons and leftover
margarita mix not to be thrown out and folk who think accents are cute.