

## Mamá y Eva

*Mother and Eve*

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If my mother saw me, she would be horrified. I know this because I had a nightmare once. Thrice, really. I dreamt that I had just arrived at a towering, columned vacation home in time for the whole-family reunion. She came down the stairs, linen blue dress billowing behind her, and helped me carry my bags. In the kitchen, before I could stop her, she unzipped my duffel and pulled out a bulbous, girthy dildo. For each of the three nights after that, when I would fall asleep, my subconscious would drop me back into that gaudy mansion where I would walk into the kitchen and meet my mamá's dark, furious gaze. Eva of my Dream ruined the family vacation.

Eva of the Present is quashing my weak attempts at a sexy vibe, so I physically shake off thoughts of my mother. I figure I've pondered this moment long enough and should stop the delay. It took me two months to finally make this purchase, plus an extra 24 hours, since I waited to pick the box off my doorstep, even though I was here the moment she came. *Forge on.* I tear through the packaging. *Shit!* I can't quite take the piece of tape off the rim of the box without it chipping away in bits, can't precisely expose the cardboard folds, one end tightly tucked into the other, without permanently creasing the box. *Never mind!* Decisively now, I rip off chunks of cardboard as they cringe and whine. Now, the packaging finally torn through, I take her in...with my eyes.

Two black petals curve slightly to the left. One supposedly for the outside, the other petal goes in. *The G-spot is really just an extension of the clitoris.* Phallic, but tastefully so. Intended to do all the work of a penis. *Except better?* She's ergonomic, a sharp contrast from the \$15 Ikea desk chair I'm in. However, much like this chair, she smells strongly of plastic. She is pompous, confident. The space between her two lips curve into a coy smile that looks neither pained nor rehearsed. She is made to feel natural. She is overcompensating because she is not. A glare reflects off the outside arm; she was made for a sex dungeon, not for my overpriced, under lit basement apartment with dirtied white walls and the same tile ceiling as my middle school science classroom.

*Deep breaths.*

Our fingers touch; a human to machine handshake; appendage to appendage. We—that which is supposed to awaken something within me—and I meet. As I turn her over in my hand, trace the edge of my manicured nail from the tip to the base of this stiff paperweight, I close my eyes. I will her to life. Click. Click. Click. *Fuck! Batteries not included.*

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When I turned eleven, Mamá took me to my first sex talk. Like all things remotely intimate, she preferred to outsource difficult conversations to entrusted professionals like abstinence-only health teachers, nuns, gynecologists who advertised as adamantly opposed

to birth control, and celibate middle-aged priests. Always the overachiever, I learned the rules of the subject fast, and I was the star of the show during every presentation's concluding review. Premarital sex? You'll go to hell. Birth control? Hell. Kissing girls? Hell. Abortion? Worse than hell. Masturbation? Blasphemous. Consent? Unnecessary; just tell him you're on your period and he'll leave you right alone.

I can still visualize the surprise in my mom's eyes, trim eyebrows raised in confusion, when we went out to lunch after the sex talk, and I called the little buzzing box—the square that was meant to alert us when our food was ready—a vibrator when it shook. Even then, though, we knew how to laugh at the things that made our insides curdle with shame.

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Memories of this day flood back to me as I dig through the bin at the bottom of my closet. I'm sure two AA batteries must be hiding in here. Could they be in the same little box where three discarded purity cards—I signed them at ages eleven, twelve and thirteen, vowing my virginal self to my future husband—were strewn? *No, that would be too ironic. Time for a walk to the grocery store, then, I guess.*

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For Lent, Mamá gave up carbs. I gave up nothing, so I have no remorse throwing extra chocolate chips and three packets of yeast into the cart. I'll bake sweet rolls before I go home for dinner tonight. I'll feel justified because the pastor preached from the pulpit on Wednesday that these forty days of repentance were “not about losing weight” — literally his exact words. *Fine by me.* But either it went over my mamá's head, no taller than five feet three and a half when she stands in her low heels, or she thought that that particular sentence only applied to the Cafeteria Catholics: the people who go to Mass only on Easters, Christmases, and particularly guilt-driven Wednesdays for their ashes. *Is that who I am, now, Mamita?*

Throughout the sermon, she sat stiff as a bronze *Virgen*: ankles crossed—my thighs would always be met with a discreet slap if I ever tried crossing my knobby knees in the sanctuary, but Mamá never had to be reminded—spine straight, earrings dangling, dress pressed, hair gelled so tightly into place that the freezing wind from the vents stood no chance of displacing them, fingers entwined in prayer hands. For Mamá, Lent is about losing weight and praying enough that it could seem like it wasn't, because everything is about getting back to the 120 pounds she was destined to be. Run three days a week. On rest days, yoga and abs. No dessert. No processed snacks. And, until the Lord's Resurrection, not a single slice of bread.

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By my first year of high school, I was such a decorated master in the rules and

regulations of sexuality, on display for all to see with my new purity ring—a present from my parents to *la quinceañera*—that I was asked by the leader of my church’s youth group to help organize the diocese-wide purity rally for teens and young adults at the end of the summer. My friend Rafael and I were cast in the leading roles for the widely anticipated “Skittles Skit.” Last month, when I saw Rafael again to roll a joint, smoke it to a stub, and slurp Oreo milkshakes with a spoon while glaring at the ceiling, I considered reminding him of our on-stage debut together: him, the *moreno colombiano*, and me, the *gringa mexicana* performing before a crowd of white faces.

That day, in front of 500 people, we stood side by side, and I teased open a package of Skittles that, initially, I refuse to share. We chatted casually—certainly so casually that no one could tell how rehearsed our script was—about Rafael’s fictitious, nondescript new crush, but it quickly became clear that he was walking more and more decisively towards the precipitous suggestion that he was going to seduce her into bed with him on Friday night when his parents were out of town. As Rafael blabbered, I continued to stuff my face with Skittles, collecting in my cheeks a rubbery, gnawed stash of red, green, orange, and yellow imitations of tropical fruit until, at the very end, I looked him straight in the eye to assert, “Rafa, you’re not going to marry this girl. One day, you’ll find your future spouse, and the best gift that you can give to her is you. *All* of you. So don’t go giving away little pieces of yourself to other people along the way.” And then, drawing the audience in for the punchline, I remind him that at the beginning of the conversation, he wanted some Skittles. “Do you still want some?” I ask.

“Yes!” He jumps in, eager now.

I stretch out my hand to clasp his, ready to share until, *Gasp!*, to the shock of the fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds in the crowd, I upchuck the wad of Skittles I’ve been squirreling in my cheeks right into the center of his palm. “How does it feel to get something that’s been used?” I jab. End scene.

I could have reminded Rafael about all this last month, could have asked if he’s repressed dehumanizing memories from his upbringing, too. These days, Rafael is decidedly not into pussy, and he talks to no one else from our church group, either. But instead, we counted the freckles and divots in his popcorn ceiling, constructing our own constellations that to the renters who lived there before him and the ones who will live there after could never look the same.

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I burst through my front door, sweaty from climbing the six steps, banging grocery bags draped from my arms, and I immediately fling it all aside. I scrub my hands in the kitchen sink, and then dig through my seven new plastic turtle killers and/or grocery bags until I find the yeast. *Next time don’t forget your damn reusables, Eva.* I bring the yeast to the counter while I flail my arms out this way and that, grabbing a mixing bowl, softened butter, bags of flour, measuring spoons, a dollop of cinnamon.

“Hey Siri!” I gripe, bringing my cell to life, “Call Mamasita on speaker!”

“Calling Mu-ma-sit-u mobile on speaker.” She retorts, with choppy pauses, our near-daily call and response, and then she is drowned out by an oppressive ringing.

“Hello.”

“*Hola Mamita! ¿Cómo está Usted?*” We begin our Spanglish jests. Me, feigning formality. Her, ignorance.

“Hello? Who is this?”

“It’s me, *mamá, tu hija bonita, chiquita, lindita, favorita.*” I combine flour, milk, egg, butter, and yeast to churn into an enriched dough.

“Hmm no, I don’t have one of those daughters.” She has at least four, on a good day.

“Oh, is that so? Maybe the lounging on the couch eating potato chips all day is dulling your memory.” Lucky for her, potato chips are not the type of carb she gave up.

“Or maybe all that scrolling through your phone all day is dulling yours. Anyways I’m just waiting for your real mother to come take you back.”

“Is that so?” Fingers pointed downward and curved, I begin to knead, gently and slowly at first, tender as a new lover, and then picking up speed, pounding, stretching, slapping. My breath quickens, and I arch my back into it.

“Yes, of course. Anyways, what are you up to?” This time, she matches my tone, ripping out her sing-song voice she uses just for me, because even though she’s never spoken the words aloud, everyone knows I’m her favorite daughter. I had always suspected this, but I found out for sure one evening when I was eight, and my mother had a Buy One, Get One Free Kids Meal from a fancy shmancy restaurant nearby that, with the whole family in tow, we could never afford. But, never one to turn down a coupon, Mamá decided to make it a competition: whoever behaved the best the week leading up to its expiration would get to have a special date with her; the rest of the girls would stay at home that night with Dad.

The night before the date was set, I really had no intention of snooping, but on my way down the hall to the bathroom, after my parents thought we were all asleep, I heard Mamá report, “Of course it’s Eva who won, and I’m glad to take her. The other three didn’t stand a chance.” I was not surprised, because that’s how it had always been. Eva kept her room clean and organized without having to be told; Eva offered to help with dinner; Eva was the bullied sister, but never the bully, so one could reasonably be sympathetic towards her. “Mini Blanca,” all my *tías* call me, because I was the only one who came out as a round peg who could easily lock into the round hole of a life Mamá wanted for us, nothing like the square peg *burras* Margarita, rebellious Lara, or even crybaby Ana grew up to be. Square pegs, round hole. The other three didn’t stand a chance

“I’m not doing much,” I answer her question, drawing out the vowels to continue our conversation’s jive. “I’m just making some chocolate chip sweet buns. I’ll bring some over this evening for Daddy and Lara if they turn out right.” Lara is the youngest of the four daughters, and she’s the only one to live at home still. Margarita and Ana escaped, ran out West in search of golden independence the first chance they could.

“Well, that sounds lovely, but you’d be better off bringing none. I don’t need those things sitting around when I’m bored and get the munchies.” Mamá is now often bored. As a result, she often has the munchies. Her whole adult life she didn’t have time for much more than being a mom and a homemaker. She was underpaid and, most days, underappreciated, but I wonder if she thought that was better than the in-between she lives in these days. Her only daughter left at home barely needs her help and attention. Grandchildren are a far cry from where my sisters and I are now, four single young women with only an aged cat between us as far as living, breathing responsibilities go. Between Mamá’s workouts and the twenty minutes a day it takes to clean her emptying house, her days are quiet.

“Well at least I’ll bring you a taste.”

“Hmm, well I don’t need it.” A non-committal refusal, easy enough to walk back later if her cup of perseverant grace has runneth dry by the end of the evening.

“And what are you up to?” I plop the now smooth, spent ball of dough into a bowl, giving it a chance to breath before round two.

“Well, I just cut two of my fresh zucchinis and I’m prepping them to make a lasagna with the sliced vegetable instead of noodles. I might even have to say—and you know I don’t use this word lightly—but my dinner is looking to be pretty sexi.” Yes, sexi, not sexy; one is playful and cute, the other is suggestive and lewd. She drawls out her last two words for dramatic effect, and I can picture in my mind her eyebrows raising, bouncing up and down to her sarcastic rhythm.

“Mmmm, Mamá. I can’t wait to try your sexi ricotta concoction. I’ll be there by six.”

“I sure hope you will, because dinner won’t be served a minute later, and if you’re not on time, I can’t promise there’ll be anything left for you. *Más me toca*. More for me.” She lets out a childish, slightly maniacal giggle. He he he har har.

“Okay then, little Mamá! Don’t you worry. I won’t let that happen. See you soon. I love you.” Each sentence comes out like a series of quick pecks on the head of a small child.

“I love you too. Drive safe. Bye-bye.”

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After my first orgasm, I became an addict. In the fourth grade, I learned that if I let one leg hang off the edge of my desk chair, and while it dangled, swung it back and forth, the crease between my legs would rub against the hard surface.

“Eva, come down for dinner!”

“¡*Me voy!*”

I could swing and rub, swing and be rubbed, with my forehead propped on the ledge of my desk behind the locked door of my bedroom for only a minute or two until my thighs and buttocks clenched and my cheeks flushed.

“Eva! Dinner!”

“I said I’m coming!”

And I locked my jaw, rub and swing, swing, and rub, until, throughout my whole body, I would feel a rush of release.

Then, I would dash downstairs, breathless from the exertion, and slide into my seat at the dinner table. Addict as I was, this was my daily pursuit.

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There is silence over dinner, but only because the zucchini lasagna is everything it was promised to be, and afterwards, when Mamá, Lara, and I sit around nibbling up the last crumbs of the sweet buns, kicking and touching toes under the kitchen table, I turn back to Dad, who was washing dishes, to ask if he has any spare batteries.

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After the first sex talk, I stopped rubbing myself on the edge of my desk chair. Masturbation was, after all—even if it involved no lustful thoughts, impure glances, nor even a bad intention—a sin. All the experts said so.

I quit then, cold turkey, and on my next trip to the Sacrament, I walked into the confessional sweating. “Bless me Father, for I have sinned,” I repeated my well-rehearsed lines. “It has been four weeks since my last confession.”

Before entering, I was waiting in line and, reverently—never turning my back to the altar, blessing myself whenever the line inched up and I progressed past a holy water font—I followed along in the *10 Commandments Confession Guide for Adults*. I was too old for the children’s one now. My catechism and newly acquired knowledge of sexual sin allowed me to level-up. I trotted along, making my way through the back of the church, watching sinners walk into a room and saved walk out, and reading in the confessional guide the Commandments and their sins, the sacred laws of God that I could have mortally broken.

“Number one: I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods besides me.” Bless me, Father, for I have – in my heart, but never in practice – preferred to stay home and watch television in place of coming to Mass. I have worshiped the false god of the glowing screen.

“Number two: You shall not take the Lord’s name in vain.” The words *Oh my g\*d* have passed through my lips at least 12 times this past month.

On and down the list of sins I read. *Better out then in, because not confessing all your sins on purpose is just another sin*. I marked each infraction with the green crayon I snatched—and planned to return; no stealing! —from the collection of children’s coloring sheets and activities in the Church’s foyer.

Then, I read it. “Number six: You shall not commit adultery.” The big one. The doozy. After the text of the commandment was listed a slew of potential sins, longer than

any other commandment on the page, because, if there is one thing the Catholics do well, it is demonizing sexual sin. Thank goodness, because without them, how would I have known that I was falling into a lustful trap? I lifted my crayon with trepidation to permanently stain the sheet; I circled “masturbation.”

When, finally, it was my turn to walk into the confessional, my palms could hardly grip the knob. I closed the door behind me and flung myself to my knees.

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I kiss my Mamá on my way out the door. I hug her twice.

“Thanks for dinner, Mamita. I’ll see you next week.”

“Okay, drive safe! Have a good week at work, and don’t forget to text me when you get home.” She waves from the porch as I drive away.

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Other kids loved roller coasters. But I never craved nor rejoiced in the minutes, sometimes hours, of agonizing anxiety spent waiting in line, being drenched in screams, and watching as other amusement park goers were thrust and jerked upside down and backwards, just to eventually strap myself aboard the same machine and endure the jostling for the sake of a quick release. No. Not for me. Because I experienced the same ups and downs within my heart and soul every month on my knees in the confessional. In the fourth grade, I walked out of that small, holy room, legs shaking, weightless, and full of divine joy.

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“Hey Siri!” My phone awakens. “Text Mamasita, ‘I just got home and am locked in safe and sound.’”

“Ready to send it?”

“Send.”

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I step out of the hot shower and melt into my puffed towel as I wrap it around my chest. I busy myself with any task I can: running a brush through my water-matted curls, starting at the bottom and working my way to the top, avoiding the pulling and snapping of taught, wet lines that ensues if I force too fast; brushing my teeth with meticulous swirls—front, top left, bottom left, front, bottom right, top right, back around again—until two minutes have long come and gone; massaging and smoothing lotion into the creases in my cheekbones, my forehead, the ridge of my nose, then plunging deeper, closing my eyes and swirling it into my neck, the bones in my shoulders, my underarms, the bulges of my

thighs. I touch all of me, and then I shove open the door of the bathroom, releasing in its wake an aromatic puff of heavy steam.

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I knew your body before I knew mine  
I knew the sound  
of your heart beating  
the mild taste  
of your breasts  
the bulge of your belly once, twice more, the knobs in your knees  
when that was as high as I could see.  
Naked, in my mirror,  
blue eyes locked below your dark, arched brows,  
I cradle my breasts.  
I caress my belly.  
I watch knees give way to shapely thighs as I stand on my tippy toes.  
Yours. Mine. Let me grow.

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*I am ready.* I return to my discarded toy, digging it out from the back of my bedside drawer. I slide in the batteries that I took from home, clinking them smoothly into place one behind the other, before I reattach the head of the shaft. *Come into me. Bring me into me.* I thumb the power button and utter a prayer. *Give us this day our daily orgasm.* With pressure and a flick, I bring her to life.

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***Meet the piece: "Mamá y Eva" is a creative fiction coming-of-age story of a Mexican American woman exploring her sexuality within the confines of her memory of a Catholic upbringing. I wrote it as part of a Creative Writing course at Stanford. What this piece ultimately reveals of my own life is the immense love I will always have for my Mamita.***