

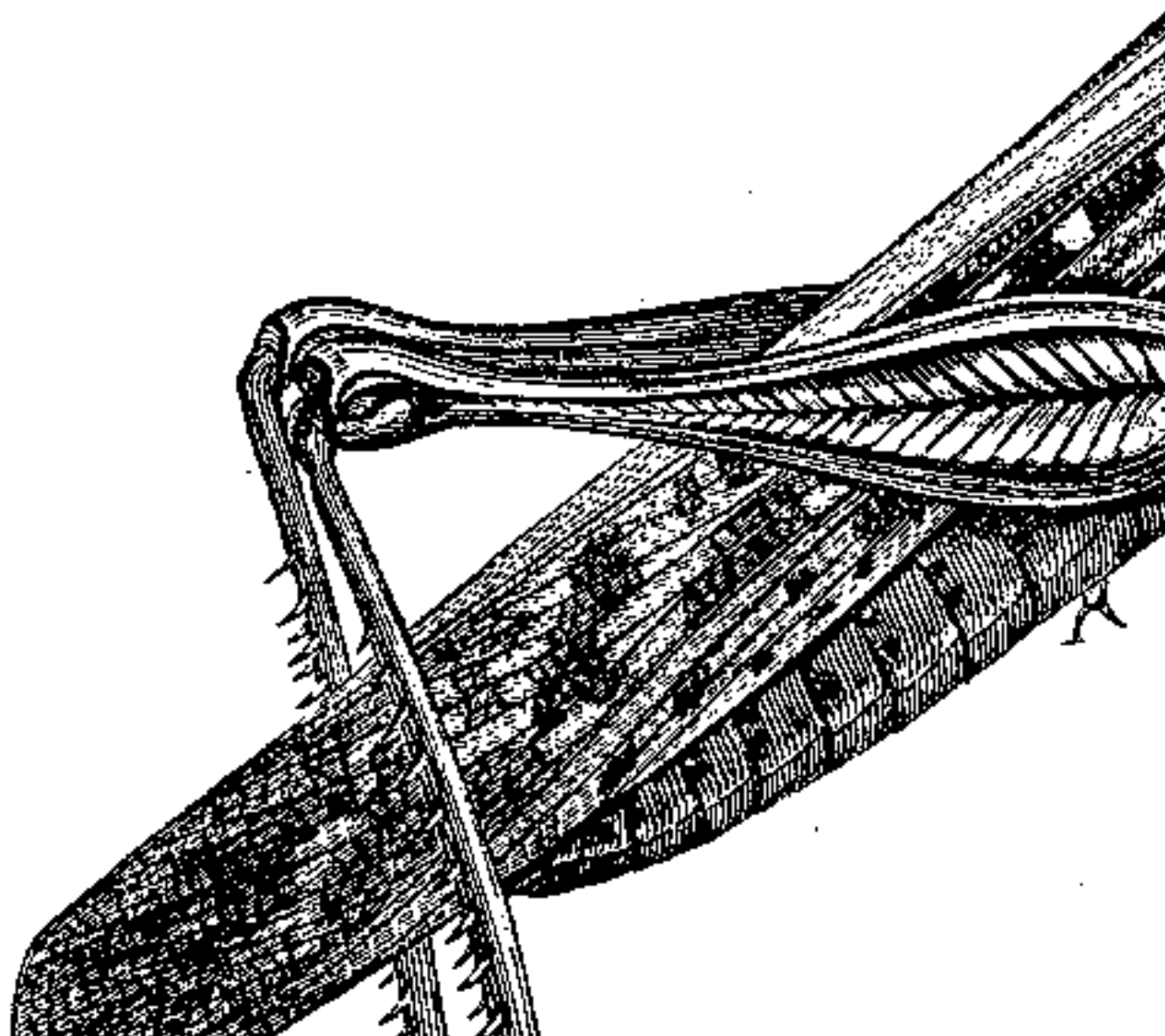
Filling

A Surreal Hypothesis of Transmutation and Design

**a play to satisfy
by Krista Knight**

Ruben moved from Mexico to live with his grandmother in the ripe strawberry fields of Central California. Pressure builds for him to adapt—for him to become an American. But Ruben will design another way.

Ruben se había ido de Méjico para vivir con su abuela en los sembrados de fresas maduras en California Central. La presión para que él se adapte va creciendo—para que él se transforme en un americano. Pero Ruben va a diseñar otro camino.



Preface:

The debate over Intelligent Design and Evolution stems from the central anxiety: where we come from.

-A paraphrasing of Phillip Johnson's argument in support of Intelligent Design in *Darwin on Trial*

Materials:

Ruben: Underdeveloped—in every way but girth. Moved in with his Grandmother a year ago. “13.” Excitable. Spongy. Emotionally porous. Mexican.

Bern: Stunted. “13.” With a stutter. White American.

Lily: Moulting.”14.” Sexy but doesn't know what to do with it. White American.

The kids should be played by adult actors.

Grandma Ruben: Ruben's grandmother. Named in the manner in which Ruben sees her. Mexican.
Having a very good time.

Mantis Kid/Old Man Mantis: Male, mature. A praying mantis.

Abstract:

The insects *Drosophila* are popular test subjects of genetic heritability, especially those tests studying evolutionary biology, because of their short generation time and the high rate of chromosomal mutation.



In this experimental hypothesis there is an insect chorus member with varying degrees of insectian qualities.

He manifests a geriatric and a kid.

(Note above the unusual variability of the insect class)

When he is not involved in the action of the scene, he may play music/sound folly from some point of choice perspective. Perhaps with a trumpet.

Setting:

- The strawberry fields in Central California
- The county fairgrounds of a parking lot. Prime real estate for frying ants, or hawking pies.
- The landscape of Ruben's mind, and migration.

+++

The play begins to swarm...

VARIANT I: Phase 1:

Buzzing.

4 Days till the County Fair

The Mantis Chorus as the Mantis Kid ambulates the premises with a Polaroid camera. The Mantis Kid has a lisp.

MANTIS KID:

The house on this side of the highway sound wall has a porch with screens to keep out insects.

Flash.

In a vertical slice—you can see the lattice of the shingle pastry, the kitchen filling, the dark under-porch crust.

Flash.

But it's what wafts through the screen door that draws the insects that have been beating voraciously against it. Coriander.

Flash.

Ground Cumin.

Flash.

And chili powder.

Flash. Flash.

From within the underbelly of the house, Ruben is burrowing—throwing up dirt.

Ruben would be the kind of insect you have to be afraid of stinging you—not in the course of a calculated attack—but as he crashes into you in the process of trying to escape from you.

But he's not an insect. It's everyone else here that's an insect to him.

**Above, a window opens, wafting music and pollen.
A long limb extends, netting its thigh in a fishnet stocking with a wrinkled, vibrating hand.**

BERN, a local American kid, enters and buzzes the bell to the door on the porch with the netting.

Bern buzzes again.

GRANDMA RUBEN opens the kitchen door.

BERN:
Hi.
Mrs.
Um.

MANTIS KID:

In there is her kitchen, which is her bedroom, which is where she cooks, which is where she beds.

The woman who lives here is old like guacamole in the back of the frig.

But with sex appeal.

Like the spine of her nylon stockings.

Like her negligee from Maoist China.

Like insects fucking.

BERN:

Like insects fucking.

BERN:

Good Morning, Grandma...Ruben.

This is Bern, um, from down the, um...

Are you selling sex for money?

Grandma Ruben draws Bern in through the screen door.

RUBEN bounds from the burrow into the window—that keeps him shut out.

RUBEN:

Allá en el país natal en pueblos atrofiados mejicanos, las ventanas abiertas de marcos de concreto le permiten a cada buen católico observar las vidas de cada uno de los vecinos buenos católicos.

MANTIS KID:

Here, in central California, it's *sound* that leaks from screen doors and raised backyard pools—

Here it's smells from the Taco Bell on the other side of the sound wall and from migrant manned strawberry fields on this one.

And something that sounds like the sticking and un-sticking of thighs.

A faint buzzing—this time not of the door.

The Mantis Kid retreats to the periphery as Bern emerges through the screen door. Bern ruffles his shirt, fixes his hair—a show of it.

Ruben ducks out of sight.

Bern looks for him in the thick shadow of the porch.

BERN:
Ruben?
Ruuuuben?
Rurururuben?

Come out, come out, I have news for you!

Unseen, from within his burrow:

RUBEN:
Can you tell me from here?

BERN:
No.
And you want to hear this.
You want to hear this, Ruben.
I am in possession of very pertinent information to you, Ruben.

Ruben squeezes out from under.

RUBEN:
What?

BERN:
Not so fast!

RUBEN:
What?

BERN:
If I tell you. You've got to let me.

RUBEN:
How many times?

BERN:
Eight.

RUBEN:

Five.

In the leg.

BERN:
In the face.

RUBEN:
I'm not letting you punch me in the face!

In the stomach.
And one in the ear.

BERN:
Deal.
So.
I checked for you. On your grandmother.

RUBEN:
And?

BERN:
Sorry, she's not a whore.
All she did was make me pies.

But!

Bern practices his boxing moves on one of the structural beams of the house. *Bern v. Beam!*

But...

RUBEN:
What, Bern?

BERN:
She does smell like cat semen.
Sweet, almost of celery, mixed with Purina.

RUBEN:
So?

BERN:
So she's probably doing it with cats with big dicks.

RUBEN:

No, she's not.

BERN:

Yes she is Rururu-Ruben.
Does it smell like that in Mexico?

RUBEN:

No!

BERN:

Then why you'd go from not-smelling of cat semen to smelling of cat semen? It's an uneven equation it seems to me no-no?

RUBEN:

Things are better for me here.

BERN:

Yup. Well. Good. Cuz I said it:
Better, if better is big hung cats.
And your grandmother smells of it.
Cat semen, Ruben.
Cat semen oozing out of wrinkled skin.
Bet you haven't heard it described so aptly before—

RUBEN:

Wrinkled skin holds smells. Stuff gets in there.

BERN

You should tell *her* that.
It's disgusting.

Bern accidentally fractures the beam of the house. It appears that something's already been chewing through it.

BERN:

I eat those pies she makes. Everyone eats those pies.
I don't want to catch that smell.

Bern begins boxing the air.

RUBEN:

I have an idea—maybe everyone should just stop eating the pies then.

Pow.

BERN:

Then what reason would people have to always be over at your house?

RUBEN:

Her, a, activities.

BERN:

But she's not.

So they wouldn't.

Pow. Pow.

BERN:

So maybe you should have thought of that instead of sending me over here to initiate carnal congress with your grandma.

RUBEN:

That's not, Bern, that's not what I, is it, Bern? No, no I think if you'll think back that's not what I asked you.

BERN:

Not that I've got anything against your Grandma Ruben.
It's the old ladies who stretch who never get broken hips.
And I haven't seen her with a walker.

RUBEN:

You were *supposed* to let her make the offer, not ask *her*. Otherwise she's not implicated. This is not how experiments are conducted.

BERN:

Not that I've got anything against walkers.
It's all about leverage.

Bern air humps an imagined walker.

RUBEN:

You said she's not doing it.

Hump.

You know, selling it. So if she's not doing it, I was wrong, she's not doing it, ok? You can shut up about it.

Hump. Hump.

Beat.

Hump.

BERN:
What am I shutting up about?

RUBEN:
You know...

BERN:
No...

Fecund pause.

BERN:
The toe sucking?

RUBEN:
No.

BERN:
The wrinkled-butt slapping?

RUBEN:
It was *you* said she's not—

BERN:
You should be more comfortable with your own accusations. Own it.

RUBEN:
I guess I was wrong.

BERN:
But she does make those pies.
Can't deny that.
With strawberries in the filling.

The County Fair is on Saturday. She beats my mom every year at the County Fair with those pies.

RUBEN:
Bern, I don't want to hear your pie theory again. It's not the pies.

BERN:
There's something in those pies. It's what Grandmas do.
Grandmas planning, scheming to get people eating. And growing.

That's why people are always coming over here. That's why people love *her*—and *you're* the one under the house.

RUBEN:

No. No.

I'm fitting in. I'm doing exactly what I need to do to fit in.

BERN:

You don't really f-f-f-fit in.

RUBEN:

I speak English—you speak English—sort of.

BERN:

I just found you under the porch. We don't spend a lot of time under the porch.

RUBEN:

That's the only place I can hear if she's hooking!

BERN:

Except she said she's not.

RUBEN:

Well then whatever she's doing.

BERN:

You'll probably get deported first.

RUBEN:

No. No. Because I'll be under the porch!

BERN:

Suit yourself. You're messing up the census, you know.

RUBEN:

¡las cosas están mejores para mí aquí!

BERN:

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I tell you what. Give me two to the head, and I'll rethink letting you in my gang.

RUBEN:

I told you I do not want to be in your gang.

BERN:

Geez, how many times do I have to tell you, I'm just trying to help you out, I thought it was a prerequisite for you guys.

RUBEN:
No, Bern.

BERN:
Well, will you at least follow me around?
We need to fill the group out a little bit.

Ruben heads back for the hole.

BERN:
You know pretty soon that house is going to get so filled with termite holes, there's going to be more of a hole here than there is a house.
Yeah.
It'll be made entirely out of termites doing it
and crawling
and eating
all throughout every bit of what was your house.

RUBEN:
When my mom gets here we're moving into a new place.

BERN:
Then why do you care what your grandmother is doing?

RUBEN:
Because if she's a bad influence, my mom will have to come sooner.

BERN:
Um. That's great. So then I've got to ask as to what about collecting on our deal for today, then.
I checked didn't I to see if she would prostitute to me?
She didn't, and I told you the info: 4 to the stomach and one to the ear.
So be a man about it and come out of hiding so I can get the accumulation of those hits like we agreed.

RUBEN:
I'm not hiding!

BERN:
And if anyone asks about the bruises, you tell them...you brought it on because of your own cruelty to humanity.
And animals. We'll tell people you hurt small animals.

Calling from the cleavage of the kitchen curtains of the house above:

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ruben, are you down there?

BERN:
Yes he is, Grandma Ruben!

RUBEN:
Get out of here, Bern.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Are you hungry, honey-Rub?

BERN:
You better enjoy your burrow now. Because pretty soon...

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ruben?

BERN:
Termite fridge.
Termite windows.
Termite toilet!
Hey, but at least you'll still have a place to crawl back into.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ruben?

RUBEN:
¡Ya vengo!

GRANDMA RUBEN:
English, Ruben!

RUBEN:
I said I'm coming!!

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Don't bother! Just wanted to make sure you are full. Go ahead and stay down there awhile with your friend. I have some Grandma things to do!

And Ruben!

RUBEN:

What?

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Toilet paper goes in the toilet, Ruben.

**The Mantis Kid affixes a bow tie and changes into Old Man Mantis.
He approaches the house replete with flowers:**

MANTIS KID→OLD MAN MANTIS:

In the kitchen, Grandma Ruben is boiling something sickly sweet on her baroque stove.

She grabs handfuls of strawberries.

And adds them to the pot.

Grandma Ruben turns on her red oven light casting a seductive shadow across the crocheted table placemats and hand painted ceramic refrigerator magnets.

Grandma Ruben lets Old Man Mantis, in through the screen door.

Bern and Ruben both turn their heads and watch him be enveloped.

RUBEN:

Bern, ok what is that!

BERN:

What?

RUBEN:

¡Ella acaba de dejar entrar a un cliente!

BERN:

Um. English, Ruben?

RUBEN:

A customer!

Trying to get into the house:

RUBEN:

I was right, this, this is what happens.

You think you come from America, you act like an American!

BERN:

Ok.

RUBEN:
Didn't I tell you she was selling sex for money?

BERN:
Yeah, you did. You said that.

RUBEN:
And that's what she just did!

BERN:
Maybe. It's hard to tell.

RUBEN:
I don't come from someone like that!

BERN:
Cool, so about our arrangement...

RUBEN:
But you were wrong.

BERN:
Doesn't matter.

RUBEN:
How doesn't that matter? That matters.

BERN:
Ruben, you need to recognize we aren't just going to go around soliciting your relatives if we don't have something we got coming to us, coming just a *little* bit easier.

RUBEN:
How's that?

BERN:
Easier on account of our deal.

RUBEN:
You were wrong!
You want me to just stand here while you pummel me?

BERN:
It's called passive resistance.
Though I wouldn't mind if you rotated every so often.

Ruben, resigned, comes fully out of hiding.

Bern wails on him.

Music plays.

Bern is small and sticky and Ruben is large and squishy.

The blows barely bruise him.

Phase 2:

**The Praying Mantis Chorus holds up a sign:
*Three days till the County Fair.***

Birds twitter, a tractor pulls, and a lawn mower gets grass reflux.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
I made pies!

Ruben runs inside the house to join Grandma Ruben in the kitchen—sliced open now like a pie to expose the following familial digestion.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
I made pies!

RUBEN:
I'm not hungry—

GRANDMA RUBEN:
You are wasting away, look at you, look at *you*.
You are starving. You just can't tell because you are so very fat.

Ruben looks. She's right. He can't tell, because he is so very fat.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
You should not let yourself get so starving, people all over the world are doing just that so you can eat.

RUBEN:
I'm not hungry.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Food makes us healthy, Ruben.
You are just so used to not having it, you forget what it does.
But now you're in America.

Grandma Ruben pulls out a pie. The implication being she hasn't washed her hands since the coital activities.

Look, Ruben, fresh from the oven!
They're hand-made, I made them with my hands.

RUBEN:

Grandma!

She slices it.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Right now fat can't squeeze past your shoulders so it spills over into sacks under your armpits and it can't squeeze past your thighs so it buckles over your knees. It's not distributed. That's why your stomach is empty.

Do you think your mother would have sent you here if she didn't think things would improve for you?

RUBEN:

She didn't *send* me. She's coming. She just couldn't make it before.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Survival of the fittest.

RUBEN:

What?—

GRANDMA RUBEN:

—Have a slice, Ruben.

RUBEN:

Can't I just sit here for a little while?

GRANDMA RUBEN:

What does that do?

RUBEN:

I don't know. People are strange out there.

Ruben makes the gesture of a praying mantis.

RUBEN:

Unusual.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Starving makes you cranky.

Not like those kids on television. They are so quiet and respectful they don't even swat the flies always buzzing around their eyes.

You know those kids on the television? Your starving yourself is sort of like killing all the children starving the world over.

In these countries, they call the bloat in the stomachs of malnourished children the "Ingrato Nino."

After you.

RUBEN:

Grandma! I'm not hungry!

GRANDMA RUBEN:

So what does that mean? I can't even get you one single slice of strawberry pie?

It is fresh, I plucked them this morning.

They're delicious, try it.

The trick is to wait until the strawberries are so ripe they are practically *screaming* at you for release.

Come on, one bite!

RUBEN:

I don't like pie. I –

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Yes. Pie. You live in California now. Californians like pie. American pie. Open the hatch.

RUBEN:

No.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Just one juicy morsel?

For Grandma?

RUBEN:

No.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

I'm going to raise you again. You'll see. Better than before. Birth you into an American.

You just wait, the longer you're here the more it'll happen.

RUBEN:

What'll happen?

GRANDMA RUBEN:

I'm glad you asked: I'm sure there are plenty of girls you like. Yes?

You stay outside, and you toughen up. You shed your former skin and you become a man.

You pass that tougher shell onto your children one day and who knows, in three generations the Rubens are like stag beetles instead of spongy little larva.

RUBEN:
Grandma!

The doorbell buzzes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Don't worry, assimilation is evolution, you will change.

RUBEN:
No I won't!

GRANDMA RUBEN:
You learned a new language.

RUBEN:
That was to come here.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
And you come here so you can change.

The doorbell buzzes again.
It's the Praying Mantis Chorus, Old Man Mantis, baring chocolates.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
I'm going to have to get the door, honey-Rub, do you mind hanging out with your friends outside for a little bit?

RUBEN:
Outside?

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Yes, sweetie. Remember what we said, about the toughening up?

RUBEN:
But last time you locked the door. I knocked. You didn't answer.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
So go for a walk.

RUBEN:
What are you going to be doing?

The doorbell buzzes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Remember, in the afternoons is when I like to get grandma things done.

RUBEN:

Does Mom know about these 'grandma things?' Mom doesn't do these 'grandma things.'

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Why don't you work instead on thinking up a project for the County Fair on Saturday? It's only three days away. Everyone brings something. I'm bringing strawberry pies. Freshly picked.

It would be good if you brought something to the County Fair.

RUBEN:

Ok!

The doorbell buzzes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Don't worry, we'll think of something, in 20 to 60 minutes...depending.

Grandma Ruben swats Ruben through the back door.

RUBEN:

¿Abuela?

¿Ya comenzaste?

Grandma?

No answer.

The sound of kitchen tables thumping kitchen chairs. A whisk is tossed in the air.

I think those strawberries you are picking aren't screaming for release, I think they're screaming to stay. Just how they were made. Before the pie. I bet some of them burrow underground. Hello? Ok. That's ok.

Ruben leans against the house, exposed.

Phase 3:

The street.

The neighborhood kids fly in on their bikes, on their skateboards, on their scooters.

Bern, LILY and the Praying Mantis Chorus—playing the Mantis Kid.

Species Sidebar

You can tell already its Lily's last layer of skin she's lost.
--

BERN:

Wham.wham.wham.

I'm telling you went that Angora¹.

That's the last time it chews through my Gameboy.

One kick and it's ten feet high of flying white rabbit hurdling through the sky.

MANTIS KID:

Teeth blazing.

BERN:

Ears ballooning.

MANTIS KID:

Paws whaling.

BERN:

Tail...doing what fucking bunny tales do. But through the air.

Like it'll think. Like it'll think—

or any of it's little buddies'll think to come near me or my stuff. Not when. Not when I just...

LILY:

What's the big deal?

MANTIS KID:



¹ Angora:

The new Gameboy.

Bern tries to peer into a window of Grandma Ruben's house.

LILY:
So?

BERN:
It's a deal.
X-2000,
X-3000 practically with all the features I loaded on that thing.
Triple pixel display screen and external base attachment.

MANTIS KID:
The new Gameboy!

LILY
What do you care?

MANTIS KID:
He was going to let me borrow it.

Bern finds a window with the shade drawn up.

BERN:
Yeah, right here.
Hoist me up.

The Mantis Kid lifts him up.

LILY:
What are you guys doing?

BERN:
Get out of here, Lily.

LILY:
That's convincing.

MANTIS KID:
This is a meeting of Bern's gang. You're not allowed.

LILY:
Bern's what?

BERN:
Never mind.

MANTIS KID:
Bern's Gang!
If you let Bern beat you up maybe you can be a member too.
Bern gives the best beatings.

BERN:
Shut up!
Go home, Lily, doesn't someone need to inject your mom with fertility
drugs?

MANTIS KID:
Really Lily, she's too old.

BERN:
Unless she just can't get your dad to do it anymore.

MANTIS KID:
Yeah, that could be it.

BERN:
That could be it.

MANTIS KID:
I bet it's that.

BERN:
It could be that.

LILY:
My parents have sex.

BERN:
How do you know?

LILY:
I don't know. I know. I hear them sometimes.
They're probably doing it now. That's why I'm on my way to do an errand
for my mom. And.
Grandma Ruben said I could come by...if I had questions.

Peering into the window:

BERN:

Ok, everybody really shut up, this is it.

Here we go.

**Bern pulls out a Polaroid camera.
Starts taking pictures.**

**Suddenly, the shade is drawn shut.
Bern falls back.**

MANTIS KID:
Did you get it?

LILY:
You're taking pictures of Grandma Ruben!

BERN:
That's right.
Except it's not just Grandma Ruben in there.

MANTIS KID:
Let me see.

BERN:
What did I tell you?

**Bern presents his loot—
They wait.
The pictures develop.
They wait.
The pictures develop.
Bern shakes them a little bit.
The pictures develop into several versions of compromising
position.**

BERN:
You almost didn't believe me, but what did I tell you about/

MANTIS KID:
The toe sucking.

BERN:
Yeah, and the/

MANTIS KID:
Wrinkled-butt slapping

BERN:
And how about the the/

Looking at the Polaroids:

LILY:
Ohh...

MANTIS KID:
How does she even do that?

BERN:
It's all the extra skin...

LILY:
You guys are disgusting.
That is an old woman's private life.

BERN:
It's not her private life if she's charging a fee.

LILY:
What? What are you talking about?

MANTIS KID:
Yeah, Bern found out. He has this theory/

BERN:
I suspected it all along.
That's how these sex crazes start. Someone instigates them and gets everybody hot and heavy. Those pies are an aphrodisiac.

Revealing herself as crazed:

LILY:
What sex crazes—No one's crazed about sex—Where'd you hear that?—
Who'd they say was crazed about sex?

MANTIS KID:
Like how the sound of locusts' thighs rubbing against each other causes other locusts. To start. Fucking.

BERN:
Yeah, sure, something like that.

LILY:
Not everyone is having sex.

BERN:
Everyone *else* is having sex.

Looking at a picture:

MANTIS KID:
Why does Grandma Ruben have a bucket of birth control right next to her bed?

BERN:
Where?

MANTIS KID:
Right, there, see it?

LILY:
Oh.

To Lily:

BERN:
How do you know that's what it is?

LILY:
I know what it looks like.

To Mantis Kid:

BERN:
Then why did you think that's what it was?

MANTIS KID:
I think everything's birth control.

LILY:
Why the pictures of her, Bern, are you that perverted that you need souvenirs?

BERN:
It was Ruben's idea, you know. He's the one paying me for the pictures.

LILY:
You're lying. He's not paying you.

BERN:
He's letting me beat him up.

MANTIS KID:
We all hear Grandma Ruben with them. In the afternoons.
Like loud breathy secrets they don't mean to share.

BERN:
I've got a racquet going. Evidence she's hooking, evidence she's not
hooking. I bring it in for both. Ruben hopes for the best but really
expects the worst.

LILY:
What's going to keep me from telling Grandma Ruben you've been spying
on her?

BERN:
The fact that you won't.

Calling up to the house:

LILY:
Grandma Ruben!

BERN:
Stop it.

LILY:
Grandma Ru-ru-ru-Ruben!

BERN:
What do you want?

LILY:
Give me the Polaroids.

BERN:
No.

LILY:
Give me the Polaroids!

BERN:
I need these as evidence.

LILY:
Evidence for what?

MANTIS KID:
That Grandma Ruben is selling sex for money.

LILY:
Since when are you in on it?

MANTIS KID:
He's going to let me borrow the Gameboy.

LILY:
Oh my god, it's not a big deal!

BERN:
It's chewed up!
It's in Game-Fucking-Boy limbo.
That's why I had to launch that rabbit.

MANTIS KID:
Wham!

BERN:
That's right.

MANTIS KID:
Wham!

BERN:
You got that.

MANTIS KID:
WHAM WHAM.

BERN:
Wham!!

LILY:
You *did* not!

MANTIS KID:
What's Lily implying?

In a whisper a little bit softer than poking.

MANTIS KID:
She's implying you're faking it, Bern. Bern.
What're you going to do?
Bern.
Bern. Bern.

BERN:
What are you implying?

LILY:
Exactly what I just said about the *not* having *did*.

BERN:
I just illustrated the angora whaling. Would you like to see it again?

LILY
I hear you coddle them.

MANTIS KID:
He does not.

LILY:
Oh no, Bern?

MANTIS KID:
No.

Beat.

MANTIS KID:
No, right, no Bern? Bern?

LILY:
Cuz I hear you help your mom breed those rabbits
and when the big white one pops out all those moldy cotton-ball angora
rodents
that she surrogates for phantom grandchildren
you feed them with an eye dropper
until their red eyes are the size of buttons
and then you cover yourself in honey and lie down in the middle of a pile
of them so they'll swarm around you and lick it off.

BERN:
Watch it, Lily.

LILY:

I saw her website and she's got pictures of you lying there.

BERN:

You wanna get punched in the nipples?

LILY:

And they're licking.

And there's honey everywhere
in their fur

and in your hair

and the whole thing is captioned:

Bern in the Bunny Nest.

What?

BERN:

You calling me a bunny nester?

LILY:

Not previously, but yeah, seems like an accurate account of the case to me.

BERN:

You calling me a bunny nester?

LILY:

What did I just say about acquiescing to your douche phrasing?

BERN:

You want me to teach you a lesson?

LILY:

I don't know if you want to do that, Bern.

Ruben and your friend here might get jealous, what with your special relationship of gang beatings already going on, what are they going to think if you start treating me to it?

I'll tell you what. *You* get out of here and back to breast suckling your bunnies and I won't do anything more than watch you go.

BERN:

Virgin bitch.

LILY:

I warned you, Bern, on account of or else I was going to let you have it.

Come here.

Lily sticks to her word.

Mantis Kid watches in loving admiration.

She takes the Polaroids from Bern.

Phase 4:

Lily studies the polaroids.

LILY:

I like to imagine old people crying.

I like to imagine old people crying because there's no getting up. Up out of wherever it is that was getting them in there.

So they're like eye puss stuck way down deep in tear ducts somewhere between the milky cornea and lip of the lid.

Because that's what happens when you get all old and dried out.
Only option is, staying lubricated in puss.

They cry because they see how we see
which is that there is no up and out at all past the puss and the broken hip.

Cept I don't like broken hips on old people.
Because if they've got broken hips maybe it is cuz of that why they're crying, which doesn't make a ton of a lot of sense anyway because old people are so used to pain.
I like it when old people cry because they see how we see them.

I like to imagine old people crying
But even more than that I like to imagine old people having sex.

Ruben!

Ruben sees her and tries to scuttle back under the porch. A cross between the shy boy at the 7th grade dance and a pincher bug who hasn't figured out how to use his pinchers.

LILY:

Ruben, wait, Ruben?

Ruben? Hey. You can come out, I think they're done.
Are you down there?
Ruben?

Ruben reemerges half way.

RUBEN:

Yeah, yeah, I'm here.

LILY:
Will you come out of there?

RUBEN:
I can't.

LILY:
It's just me.
You don't have to be scared.

RUBEN:
I'm not, I'm just stuck.

LILY:
What?

RUBEN:
I think I'm stuck in the porch.

**Ruben is caught between two of the support beams of the house.
It is because he is so very fat.**

RUBEN:
Yeah, I'm stuck.

Lily tries to pull Ruben out.

LILY:
I was just thinking. I thought maybe.

RUBEN:
What?

She stops.

LILY:
I was just saying I think your Grandmother and Mr. Mantis are done.

RUBEN:
Done what?

LILY:
You know.

RUBEN:

No.

LILY:

Not no, Ruben.

There's no way you can't hear them, everyone can hear them.

RUBEN:

They can?

Are they going to come after her for hooking?

LILY:

What?

RUBEN:

You know, swarm the house.

LILY:

I don't know.

RUBEN:

Do *you* think she's hooking?

LILY:

Don't you want her to be hooking?

RUBEN:

No!

I don't know.

Only if I can control the spread of information.

LILY:

I've never actually seen money being exchanged.

RUBEN:

But you watch it happen.

LILY:

The window's right there. I'm not some pervert, Ruben. Sometimes, you can just see things.

RUBEN:

The windows only right there if you're standing right here.

LILY:

I was looking for you.

RUBEN:
Oh.

She stops again.

LILY:
Did you know Bern claims he beats up those Angora rabbits his mom raises?

RUBEN:
No.

LILY:
You don't think that's cruel?

RUBEN:
I'd rather he beat up bunnies than me.

LILY:
But you're bigger than Bern is.

RUBEN:
So?

Lily tries pulling again.

LILY:
So, I don't know, doesn't that matter?

RUBEN:
No. It just makes me easier to get picked off.

LILY:
Picked off?

RUBEN:
Picked on—you know—when I'm out in the open.

LILY:
On the count of five ok?

RUBEN:
Ok.

LILY:
FIVE.

RUBEN:

My mother used to tell me if I made it to 5 she'd know I was strong enough to make it in the world.

LILY:

Really?

FOUR.

RUBEN:

But 5 was the only number I could count to, and I didn't know the difference between 5 minutes, 5 hours, 5 years.

LILY:

THREE!

RUBEN:

I kept counting all the time to 5 and I never knew which time it would mean something.

LILY:

Almost got it.

TWO.

RUBEN:

When I was 13 she decided we would leave for California. After 7 days it was clear she wasn't going to make it in the desert and had to go back home.

LILY:

Is she ok?

TWO!

RUBEN:

At the 5th trumpet of the 5th angel the bible says locusts are supposed to come for the unbelievers for 5 months.

And she'll come back for me.

LILY:

ONE!

Lily pulls Ruben out. Perhaps a beam has to break in the process.

LILY:

There.

RUBEN:
You pulled me out of the porch.

LILY:
Yeah.

RUBEN:
Thanks.

LILY:
Your mom is coming here?

RUBEN:
Soon.

LILY:
When?

RUBEN:
I don't know, I'm working on it, soon.

LILY:
Ok.

Beat.

How'd you get in there?

RUBEN:
I crawled.

LILY:
I mean how come you couldn't get out if you got in?

RUBEN:
I squeezed.

LILY:
Then how come you couldn't/ get out.

RUBEN:
Sometimes I eat down there.

LILY:
Ok. Hey, so.

Do you get stuck a lot?

RUBEN:
Usually no one pulls me out.

LILY:
Ah. So it's a good thing I came along.

RUBEN:
Yeah!
I mean. Thanks.

LILY:
Ruben!

RUBEN:
Yeah?

LILY:
Maybe we could try it, sometime.

RUBEN:
Try what?

LILY:
Don't make me say it, Ruben.

RUBEN:
Ok.

LILY:
Maybe we could try having sex.

What?

RUBEN:
I didn't say anything.

LILY:
I thought you liked me!

RUBEN:
Yes.

LILY:
You do?

RUBEN:

I mean, yes, I could see how you would think that.

LILY:

You told me about your mother.

You asked my mom if she had any of my old teeth.

RUBEN:

She didn't.

LILY:

I know!

Ruben. What's going on? You're a teenage guy.

That's, that's kinda what they like to do here. I thought.

I know how.

I have pictures.

So are you saying no?

RUBEN:

No.

Not no.

LILY:

Do you want me to punch you?

RUBEN:

No! Why? I don't want you to punch me. Why would I want you to punch me?

LILY:

That's what you and Bern do.

RUBEN:

I do not want you to punch me.

LILY:

Ok! I'm not doing this right. Will you at least meet me at the fair?

We don't have to make any decisions about the sex, but maybe so, can we just meet at the fair? Ruben?

RUBEN:

Yeah, um, ok, maybe.

LILY:

I don't understand. What am I doing wrong? You're grandmother said you were in love with me!

RUBEN:

I don't know. No, I'm sorry. I can't. No. I can't.

LILY:

Ok. Ok, fine. I have something else to do with everyone else anyway.

Phase 5:

Grandma Ruben enters a classroom at the local high school. She unloads some posters. One or two 3D diagrams of anatomical genitalia that are neither distinctly human nor distinctly insect (confusing in the way human genitalia is confusing before you understand the mechanisms):

Grandma Ruben wears a nursing uniform. An old one—from eras—and veteran hospital fantasies—past.

Her tag says “VOLUNTEER.”

GRANDMA RUBEN:.

Any questions to begin? Yes...? No.

What have they told you already? Oh, don't be embarrassed. There are no boys here—your school figured boys didn't need sexual education because they have been doing experiments at home for so long!

It's like learning how to cook.

Like what have the other seniors taught you girls?

Well, I think that was disproven in the 40s.

See, this is what your principal gets for recruiting volunteers from the nursing homes.

I come of my own volition.

Let me demonstrate.

See this diagram. This is a man.

That is where the sperm comes from. It comes out here, goes through there, and circles back through that. Understand?

The sperms are a seed. When you squeeze him, you are plucking that seed.

Maybe the man tells you—this, this is straight from God's mouth to yours—. He is wrong. This is just a man.

He thinks he comes from God, designed perfectly in His image, so he can stay thinking that he is like Him.

But *you* are the ones who change everything. You are the ones through which all changes are tracked.

I am supposed to tell you not to take birth control.

I tell you not to take birth control.

See? Good.

But I am supposed to tell you not to take birth control because if you do, you will feel like you can have sex without consequences.

So I am telling you not to take birth control.

But my *advice* is to grow.

The only way to grow is to change.

And certain changes can only come through certain...explorations.

Please. Come by my house if you have any questions.

I have some things I could show you.

Phase 6:

**Grandma Ruben tills her windowsill garden. Poppies pop.
Corianders coo. Cherry tomatoes wiggle at her touch.**

**The Praying Mantis Chorus soundtracks the scene with
appropriate suspense.**

Holds a sign that says:

Two Days to the County Fair

Ruben runs to the door. Knocks!

RUBEN:
Let me in!

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Just a minute.

RUBEN:
Let me in.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Just putting on my face.

RUBEN:
Quick, come on, open the door.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Who is it?

RUBEN:
Grandma!

Grandma Ruben opens the door.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Oh hello, Ruben. Good to see you.

RUBEN:
Close the door, close, yeah, the door.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
What is it? Do you want some pie?

RUBEN:

No. No pie. They're swarming.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Who?

RUBEN:
The townspeople.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
The townspeople?

RUBEN:
And now they're swarming.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Swarming?

RUBEN:
Yes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
They wouldn't. The townspeople?

RUBEN:
Yes!

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Oh, Ruben. If I could record the things you say. You say such funny, silly things. I should record the things you say.

RUBEN:
Look, look outside the window. I didn't think it would actually happen, not this fast, but I saw it on the way here. Tell Mom, tell Mom they are coming for you, where's the phone?

GRANDMA RUBEN:
I don't see anything.

RUBEN:
They're coming.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Why shouldn't they come here?
Everyone is *always* welcome here.

RUBEN:

Right, that's why people love you?

GRANMA RUBEN:

Yes. They do love me, Ruben.

RUBEN:

Well, I think they found out what you're doing.
What you're doing to fit in so well.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

I do fit in well, Ruben. I have regular contact with the locals.

RUBEN:

This is a small town.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

This is a 'face to face' town.

RUBEN:

A small town is the kind of place where they find out your secrets.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

And what's so bad with that? I have nothing to hide.

RUBEN:

I do! What happens when the Migra come for me because of the
attention you're causing. You are supposed to protect me.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Look at you, so worried. You have nothing to worry about. As long as
you listen to your grandmother. And I keep filling them up.

RUBEN:

No. No.

You got them crazed and now they want more. You get them all riled up
and it is not safe. They come asking me...for things.

A small town is a place they are never full.

A small town is a place they swarm you with pitch forks.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Oh, please.

Lily appears with a pitch fork.

RUBEN:

They swarm you with pitch forks and knock on your door.

Lily knocks on the door.

RUBEN:

And say:
Grandma Ruben.

LILY:
Grandma Ruben.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Excuse me, Ruben, this is all very interesting, but I'm needed at the door.

RUBEN:

You know what they'll do to you?
They'll say:

LILY:

Grandma Ruben?

Grandma Ruben swings open the screen door.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Yes?

LILY:

Hi it's Lily, from down the, you know.
I wanted to talk to you again. Also, my mom has a pie request. But mostly. When you came to my school, you said we could come by if we had any questions, and well. There are some things.
I guess what I'm trying to ask is—

Seeing Ruben.

LILY:

Oh, hi Ruben.

RUBEN:

Hi.

LILY:

I didn't know you'd be home. In the house.

RUBEN:

Yeah.

LILY:

I mean, Grandma Ruben. I'm just here to tell you—

RUBEN:
What? Tell her what?

LILY:
Um, we love your pies.

RUBEN:
What?

LILY:
Yeah. Ok.

RUBEN:
That's not what they say. Where are the rest of you?

LILY:
My mom would have come too, but she's busy. So she sent me.
We love your pies.
And as you know, she runs the pastry events at the county fairs and
because you've won the baking competition so many times she wants to
know if you'll judge the pie eating contest on Saturday.

RUBEN:
No!

LILY:
Yeah, she did. She just sent me over here to tell you. That's why I'm
here.
I think I have a note saying the same thing somewhere if you really don't
believe me or if you just want to think about it.
You have to make the pies. And you have to pick the winner based on
how much they eat.
That's pretty much it.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
I'd be honored!

LILY:
Cool.

RUBEN:
But the pitchfork.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Absolutely honored, Lily.

RUBEN:
What are you doing with the pitchfork?

LILY:
Oh. Right. My mom thought it would be festive. Looks farm-y you know. Like we live in a small town.

Stepping outside:

RUBEN:
What about the swarming?

LILY:
I don't know what you mean.

RUBEN:
You don't have to leave.

LILY:
Ok.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

LILY:
Well, Thanks Grandma R.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Lily, wait. Ruben is asking you to stay (that is a good sign). I absolutely cannot let you leave without a slice of pie? To celebrate?

LILY:
Um. I don't know.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Didn't you say you wanted advice? Sit, sit. Just one slice.

Grandma Ruben sits Lily at the kitchen table and cuts her a slice of Strawberry pie.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

See, Ruben. They love my pies. Californian pies. I'm becoming a pillar of the community.

This Lily is a nice girl isn't she?

RUBEN:

Um. Grandma!

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Oh Ruben. Just like at your school. They are afraid of sex at your school so I am supposed to teach about abstinence. Well, right *now* it's abstinence and I am supposed to tell the students not to take birth control, but *before* they gave me birth control to give out, so you can never tell it is always changing. The only people they always want to be taking birth control are Mexicans. Do you know why?

RUBEN:

No.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

If you had a baby with her, the baby would be an American.

RUBEN:

Grandma!

Lily keeps eating pie, tries to ignore the conversation.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Lily is hungry. Lily likes my pie. Lily is growing up fast.

RUBEN:

Grandma, Lily is right there!

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Yes. She'd be a good one for you, Ruben.

I've been watching her and the other young people here for awhile. They are hungry for something. I fill them up with pies.

I've become indispensable. You adapt or you die off.

I adapted, and wouldn't you say for a grandmother I am doing pretty good?

Lily?

LILY:

Oh, yes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Yes, you would. Thank you. You would. I'm the kind of grandmother you like.

But don't worry, adaptation is not a choice, it's just what you do. What will happen for each of you.

LILY:

Ok.

RUBEN:

She thinks she knows everything. She doesn't think that at any minute she could be proven wrong.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

What, Ruben, we have guests! Contradiction in front of guests is not polite.

And change is not something you can stop, even if you wanted to.

RUBEN:

You can.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

No, I don't think so.

LILY:

Maybe I should go.

RUBEN:

Can't you just leave me alone and let me be what I want?

GRANDMA RUBEN:

No! This is what happened to me so this is a good thing that will happen to you too. I didn't waste my time here Ruben, creating a place for you and your mother to come.

RUBEN:

She would think so.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Then go back to her.

RUBEN:

She's coming here.

LILY:

Thank you for the pie!

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Sure. Of course.

RUBEN:
When is she going to come here? When I tell her what you're doing.
That's what will make her come here.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Listen, Ruben.

RUBEN:
Or I could go back there. Me podría regresar.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
No Spanish in this house, Ruben.

RUBEN:
I'm going to go home, I think.

LILY:
What? Ruben, no.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Don't be silly.

RUBEN:
I've been thinking about it and I'm going to. After tomorrow. Sometime
next week maybe.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Oh, you are? ¿Hablas en serio?
You really think you are?
Going back to your mom in Mexico? Because I am not enough for you.
Fine. Be my guest.
Ruben's-Friend Lily, Ruben never seems to realize he is *always* my
guest.

Ruben starts to leave.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Wait! Just so you know, it won't be the same. When you go home.

RUBEN:
I haven't changed. I haven't been here long enough to change. Not into
what you've become.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ok.

RUBEN:
I haven't changed, it's going to be the same!

GRANDMA RUBEN:
She needs to tell you.

RUBEN:
Tell me what?

LILY:
I should go.

Lily tries to collect her stuff but her pitch fork is lodged behind the oven or between the trash compacter and the cabinet.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
She should have already told you.

RUBEN:
It's going to be the same.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ruben, Dios mío, it isn't. Your mom is pregnant.

RUBEN:
What?

Lily stops.

RUBEN:
What?

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Tú mama está embarazada.

RUBEN:
You're lying. She doesn't do...what you do.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Soon, she'll have another family. Las cosas serán muy diferentes aunque tú no cambies.

RUBEN:
No.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ella no esperó a que tú regresaras, ¿no lo entiendes? Ella no está esperando hasta que pueda venir aquí. Life goes on.

RUBEN:
NO.
You can stop it. I know how to stop it.

LILY:
Ruben, it's going to be ok.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Aunque no lo creas, fuera de América la vida continúa. Life outside America is always going on.

RUBEN:
She's coming back for me!

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Oh, Ruben, I'm sorry but you have got to live your life. You want to die a virgin? When will you start living your own life?

Ruben exits.

Go back if you want to or keep trying to get her to come here. Pero ahora lo comprendes. Now you see how life goes forward no matter what.

Ruben?

This time Grandma Ruben and Lily stay behind. Lily begins again to breach the question she came for:

LILY:
So, um Grandma Ruben...

Phase 7:

**The phone rings—Grandma Ruben answers it before it can continue.
Ruben outside on the porch.**

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Bueno. Yes.
Yes.

Todo le van bien a Ruben.
Yes.

RUBEN:
You might not recognize him.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
He's fitting in.
Running faster.

RUBEN:
Running faster.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Losing the accent.
Walking straighter.

RUBEN:
Walking straighter.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
He's met a girl. He meets many
many girls.

RUBEN:
He knows you're not coming.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
I tried. He won't come to the phone.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
He knows you're not coming.
He knows—

RUBEN:
He knows you're not coming.

RUBEN:
He's got to design another future.

Beat.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
And just so you know, I am doing it for you.
Better than you.

Grandma Ruben hangs up the phone.

Phase 8:

Bern runs on stage. Lily runs after him—pitch fork still in tow.

LILY:
Why not?

BERN:
I said no.

LILY:
Why no?

BERN:
Stop it....stop it!
Ok, try it.

What?

LILY:
Actually, I don't know.
Where are you going?

BERN:
Off, off!

LILY:
Bern! You want some pie? God-damit. Bern?

Bern runs off. Lily pursues.

Phase 9:

Below, Ruben hears the door open, scrambles out of his burrow.

Gets stuck.

Ruben Squirms.

Time passes.

Old Man Mantis emerges from the house, steps on Ruben.

Bern emerges from the house, steps on Ruben.

Lily emerges from the house, steps on Ruben.

Lights fade.

Phase 10:

Later.

Ruben stands outside the door to the house with the screen.

The Praying Mantis Chorus approaches as Old Man Mantis.

—With a brand new pair of fuzzy slippers wrapped in a bow.

He stands on the porch next to Ruben waiting outside the door to the house with the screen.

Ruben waits. Mantis waits.

Grandma Ruben passes by the kitchen window. They both lean to catch a glimpse.

Ruben waits. Mantis waits.

OLD MAN MANTIS:

I grow tomatoes, and in fall I grow gourds.
Do you like gourds?

RUBEN:

Yeah, gourds are nice I guess. Is that what you're going to enter in the fair?

OLD MAN MANTIS:

Oh, no! I breed dogs.

RUBEN:

Oh, ok.

OLD MAN MANTIS:

Finally, science is paying off for the common man. Yes, you know what I mean, science?

RUBEN:

Yeah.

OLD MAN MANTIS:

Sometimes you have to help dogs mount each other. Mounting has been bred out of some dogs. Like pugs, have you ever seen pugs breed?

RUBEN:

No.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
That's because their legs are too short.

RUBEN:
Oh ok.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
It's not such a problem. Not like you're thinking. If you can control when and how the pugs breed, you take out the guess work. You can design how they'll turn out. You're never going to have a feral pug. You ever think about the future?

RUBEN:
I guess.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
No one would care about pedigree if it didn't mean something for the future generations. See, pugs are only as good as their ability to make better pugs. More pug like pugs. Having kids, that's the only way to confirm the trait. That's the only way to get pure pug.

RUBEN:
Oh good.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
Not having kids, are you?

RUBEN:
I don't know.

Grandma Ruben passes by the kitchen window going the other direction. Ruben and Old Man Mantis both lean to catch a glimpse.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
Can I tell you a secret?
—Women after menopause.

RUBEN:
I like abstinence.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
That's an option.

RUBEN:
Yeah.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
Stay just as you are.

RUBEN:
Exactly.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
You'd think!
But you know if you choose not to sow your own garden, you become fertilizer for everyone else's.

RUBEN:
What?

OLD MAN MANTIS:
Everyone else will be having kids around you, passing on their goodies, you know what I mean, goodies, and you'll be here working away to make sure those other ones prosper. Yes. You'll be fodder. If you aren't already. Life at the back of the kitchen making food or in the back of the yard pulling weeds. Know what I mean, amigo?

Old Man Mantis whacks Ruben jollily.

OLD MAN MANTIS:
You're waiting for her too? A slice of her strawberry pie, huh?

RUBEN:
No, I'm. Um—

OLD MAN MANTIS:
Everyone eats her pies.

Grandma Ruben passes by the kitchen window going the other direction. Ruben and Old Man Mantis both lean to catch a glimpse. Old Man Mantis pushes Ruben slightly but distinctly—to the side.

Grandma Ruben turns on her red oven light again which casts that tell-tale seductive shadow.

The door opens.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Good Afternoon, Mr. Mantis.

OLD MAN MANTIS:

Good Afternoon, Grandmother Ruben.

What is the delicious smell I'm smelling just now?

GRANDMA RUBEN:

It's probably my strawberry pumpkin seed marmalade pie filling, but you didn't come here to talk jam did you, Old Man?

Grandma Ruben pulls Praying Mantis in without seeing Ruben.

RUBEN:

That's ok.

So he says, but Ruben buzzes the door.

RUBEN:

It's the strawberries who get picked who get made into pie.

Ruben buzzes the door again.

Buzzes again.

RUBEN:

Buzzing.

Ruben retreats to his sub-porch nook.

RUBEN:

That's what the strawberries sound like. That's what the strawberries sound like when they're trying to burrow back into the ground. To keep from being picked. Buzzing like. Like. Something.

Grandma Ruben draws Old Man Mantis Chorus into her web—I mean her kitchen.

A table cloth is unfurled.

Oven mitts are whipped out.

Perhaps a spatula is involved.

Saucy.

The pair retreat to the back of the house.

Ruben emerges from underground, arms laden with packages of birth control. Purple packs of Seasonel, single doses of Plan B, red containers of orthotryclicline, pink containers of Lo/Orvral.

During the following he empties the pills from their packages and grinds them into a white powder.

Grandma Ruben can be heard letting off a coital groan from the back.

RUBEN:
Screaming.

That's what the strawberries sound like.
That's what they sound like when they're trying to burrow back into the ground.
Buzzing, almost like screaming.

It's spring, the strawberries are out.
And it's jam country.

When the fruit realizes they're exposed, their screaming makes their seeds pop.
The seeds pop out and fall to the ground and grow off of the debris of dead plants.
That's why we let the strawberries sit on the plant before cutting them off.
So the seeds will pop. In the course of screaming.

It's jam country.

And it's not a good time to be a strawberry.

Not when the fields are being plucked dry of any berry that hasn't thought to burrow back into where they came from
 by first squeezing back into the stem
 and then climbing down the stalk
 and then pushing through the roots to the ground
 soil.

They suffocate down there,
stuck,
but when a strawberry's faced with suffocation or being boiled alive and made into pie,
you can see where something would choose the stalk-way down.

Not all strawberries can see what's coming.
The ones that don't, suck up sugars through their roots without knowing
it's the sugars of the bodies of the ones burrowed underground.

They're so desperate to be picked —they just keep going about their berry
business.

Popping seeds and breeding more and more berries that'll be faced with
the choice: fertilizer in the ground or filling in the pie.

The air here smells like copulating strawberries.

You're either part of evolution or nothing at all.

Pouring the BC powder into the filling:

Unless you design a way to stop it. And the only way to stop it is at the
source.

The Mantis Kid sneaks around the bend and takes a Polaroid.

MANTIS KID:

Ruben!

Ruben returns underground.

End of VARIANT I

VARIANT II: Phase 11:

Just as the coital incident subsides.

The air smells of deep breaths and unsticking thighs.

Grandma Ruben shows Old Man Mantis the door.

She wraps herself in her terry cloth negligee, and turns off the heat on the stove.

She pins her hair back up in curlers and pours the (NOW BIRTH CONTROL SPIKED) gooey red contents from the pots into the waiting hollow crests of raw dough.

MANTIS KID:

One day till the County Fair.

The Praying Mantis as the Mantis Kid ambulates, Polaroid camera in hand, looking for teens caught in crazed embrace to photograph.

MANTIS KID:

Here, bunny bunnies....

The Mantis Kid takes gorilla shots of dark corners and suspiciously sexy alcoves.

Flash.

MANTIS KID:

Bunny!

Flash. Flash.

MANTIS KID:

Teenage bunnies?

Stalking:

MANTIS KID:

The sound of locusts having sex:

Flash .

The sound of kissing antennas—
And thighs rubbing—

thorax against thorax
And 16 sets of googily eyes goutily staring—
The sound of them doing it—
causes locusts to eat.

Flash .

And the sound of them eating:
the sound of picking at plants—
Picking plants and crop chewing—
and fruit masticating—

Flash .

Causes locusts to fuck.

Flash .

Huzah!

The Mantis Kid has gotten a shot of something underneath the porch.

The Polaroid develops.

He shakes it a bit.

The Polaroid develops.

Ruben?

Ruben emerges.

Mantis Kid takes another shot.

RUBEN:

What are you doing?

MANTIS KID:

You're not teenagers having sex.

What are you doing down there?

RUBEN:

Nothing, go away.

MANTIS KID:

Where are you going?

RUBEN:
To find Lily.

**Mantis Kid looks at his photograph.
Then at Ruben.**

MANTIS KID:
What's on your hands?

RUBEN:
Nothing.

MANTIS KID:
No, your hands, what is it on your hands?

RUBEN:
Nothing.

MANTIS KID:
No, what is it Ruben.
Ruben.
Ruben.

Is that birth control?

RUBEN:
No!

MANTIS:
Then what is it?
What is it Ruben?
Ruben.

RUBEN:
It's nothing.

MANTIS KID:
It's nothing. You've got nothing on your hands. That doesn't make sense, Ruben.
Nothing doesn't look like a ground up white powder. Did you put it in your grandmother's pies?

RUBEN:
What?

MANTIS KID:

Yesterday I saw you talking about strawberries and putting white powder in your grandmother's pies.

Beat.

RUBEN:

Are you going to tell anyone about this?

They come upon Lily in a frilly dress.

Mantis Kid runs to Lily trying to appear as though being chased by her.

MANTIS KID:

Lily!

LILY:

Stop it.

MANTIS KID:

You can't catch me, Lily.

LILY:

I don't want to catch you, you're in my way.

Mantis Kid faux falls in front of Lily, half tripping her.

MANTIS KID:

Don't kiss me. Don't kiss me!

LILY:

I don't want to kiss you. Really, I have no intention of kissing you.

MANTIS KID:

But. Um. I thought you liked gang members.

LILY:

No.

MANTIS KID:

Bern told me you tried to kiss him. So. I'm in Bern's gang. So. Um. Now you can try to kiss me.

Mantis kid makes some approximation of a pass.

LILY:

Ok, don't do that.

MANTIS KID:

Bern beats me up and you beat Bern up.

LILY:

I'm not interested in Bern anymore. Grandma Ruben told me some things. About men.

MANTIS KID:

Can I watch?

LILY:

No.

MANTIS KID:

Can I take pictures?

LILY:

No! There are teenagers doing it all over town. Go find them.

Lily pushes Mantis Kid away. He exits.

RUBEN:

Hi.

LILY:

Hi.

RUBEN:

What are you doing?

LILY:

Fox-trot.

RUBEN:

Why/

LILY:

Cotillion.

RUBEN:

Oh.

I've been thinking about what you said the other day.

LILY:

When I pulled you out of the porch.

RUBEN:
Yeah, that day.

LILY:
I remember.

RUBEN:
I've been thinking I'll meet you at the fair tomorrow if you want.

LILY:
Thanks.

RUBEN:
And the other part too. If you want.

LILY:
Ok. Thanks.

Do you want to dance?

RUBEN:
Ok.

**Lily plays scratchy band music from a tape recorder.
Lily and Ruben begin Fox-Trotting.**

LILY:
This is nice.

RUBEN:
My mom is having another kid.

LILY:
I know.

RUBEN:
Now she isn't going to move to California.

LILY:
I know.

RUBEN:
Now I won't have anyone.

LILY:
Oh.

She stops dancing.

But now maybe you can have me?

Beat.

RUBEN:
Don't you have other people to hang out with? Other people you'd rather be with. Didn't you say everyone else was doing something? Something else?

LILY:
Relax, they're not doing anything anymore.

RUBEN:
Well, that's ok.

LILY:
It is ok.

RUBEN:
You don't have to stay here.

LILY:
I was here first.

RUBEN:
I don't mind, I'm happy by myself.

LILY:
Ruben.

RUBEN:
I always am.

LILY:
Ruben! They're not doing anything anymore!

RUBEN:
They said that?

LILY:
Yes.

RUBEN:
Maybe they're joking.

LILY:
They're not joking.

RUBEN:
They might be joking.

LILY:
Listen, I don't care if they are joking.

I think it's ok that I'm just here with you. Do you think that's ok?

Ruben dips her.

RUBEN:
Let me get you a slice of my Grandmother's pie.

Phase 12:

The middle of the night.

Bern is back.

Peach pit warm darkness.

BERN:

Grandma Ruben? Grandma Ru-ru-ru-Ruben?

Bern steps partly into the light of the mosquito zapper on Grandma Ruben's porch. The light casts a Bern shadow much bigger than he will ever be.

It's me. From down the...well you know, Grandma Ruben.

I need to talk to you again, will you let me in?
I need to tell you something.

It worked! What you said. With the magazines.
I'm not defective!

I have more questions.
Grandma Ruben?

Hello! Hello?
Can you, a, open the door?
It's *really* important.

Insectian coital soundscape:

Hello?

I know what you're doing in there.

People know what you do, you know. They kno-kno-kno Ruben's I'm just going to say it he's been telling them.

Bern mimes boxing temples.

Grandma Ruben?
Will you open the door?

You're in there with someone.

I can hear you.
Behind the blinds.

Insectian coital soundscape subsides.

You can close the blinds but everyone can hear you.
We all know what you're doing.

Grandma Ruben?
Grandma Ruben?

**The window opens and the blinds are tossed out onto the ground.
The coital soundscape resumes.
Now sounds *and* sights can waft from her kitchen.**

Phase 13:

Grandma Ruben runs in half dressed in her nurse's uniform.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Some of you may have misunderstood what I was saying the other day.

I'm happy to provide you with materials, if that's really what you want, but I have to show you how to use them, taking the incorrect dose can have *disastrous consequences*.

No one is in trouble—

But how many of you came to my house and took birth control?

A recess bell.

Phase 14: Outcome

Saturday.

Grandma Ruben lays out the pies.

Bern, Lily and The Praying Mantis Chorus as the Mantis Kid scurry about setting up exhibits and demonstrations.

**The Mantis Kid holds up a sign that says
*El Mercado Local***

MANTIS KID:
Saturday Morning, the County Fair.

Species Sidebar

It is less an actual county fair, then a 7-up commercial of a county fair.

MANTIS KID:
On the left, the registration booth. The list of would-be entrants span the sizzling parking lot—each with a tastier item of imminent competition.
Pies. Big and juicy.
Prize-winning worthy hams and hams to be, ie pigs.
Oversized gourds of all shapes, all sizes.
Bern's mother dressing four white angora rabbits in four white crotched jumpers, the littlest one in a teeny, tiny, pink bunny bow on what could only be called the closest approximation of a bunny neck.
Homemade chili recipes. Spicy.
Pies. Flaky outsides with gooey centers.
Trained chinchillas.
Hostage demonstrations.
A goat with three legs.
A table with five.
And Pies, Pies. Pies!!

**The Mantis Kid takes pictures with the Polaroid camera.
Grandma Ruben poses. Licks some whipped cream.**

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Everything you've been waiting for is right here.
In my pie eating contest.
Ready Bern?

BERN:
Yes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ready Lily?

LILY:
Yes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ready Ruben's-Friend?

MANTIS KID:
No thanks.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Get set!

Oh, you said no? How funny. Did you say no?

MANTIS KID:
Yes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
You kids are usually so hungry. Strange. Oh well.
Ready Bern?

BERN:
Yes.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Ready Lily?

LILY:
Yes.

RUBEN:
Wait.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
For what?

RUBEN:
For everyone else to join the contest.

Looking at her clip board:

GRANDMA RUBEN:

No, it looks like it's just going to be these two for today.

RUBEN:

Why isn't anyone else in the contest? Everyone needs to be in the contest. Everyone needs to eat the pies.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Is this your way of saying you'd like to enter?

RUBEN:

No, I just.

Grandma Ruben shrugs and blows a whistle and Bern and Lily dig their faces deep into the pies. The Mantis Kid takes pictures.

Grandma Ruben officiates.

Ruben tries to hand out pies.

RUBEN:

They're good. See, they like it.

MANTIS KID:

Tongues stretch down into three pounds of whipped butternut cream,
Six hulled strawberry husks, four cups gelatin lemon powder
—sucking up estrogen and progestin.

Flash

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Look, they like it!

It's almost time for refills. I will get more.

Grandma Ruben exits.

One by one, the pie eating contestants pop up to present their own entries.

Lily lifts her head.

LILY:

My project is about these guys that came awhile ago and brought song. But the problem was that the beauty captivated some people so much that they forgot to eat and they forgot to drink. So these guys turned

these people into locusts. So they could sing all the time in the swimming of thorax against thorax. And you know. Do all the other stuff that locusts do. All the time. It's from a Bowie album I think. I'm waiting for my final transformation.

That's it, I'm done. That'll be my project.

Lily returns to pie.

RUBEN:

My turn?

Ok, um, life can be designed.

My project shows what happens when we trust how we are made. When we have to act for ourselves instead of because of what's going to happen in the future.

Porque no nos tendremos que preocupar por el futuro. Y si las cosas van a cambiar o no. I designed this project so that now no one can accuse me of taking things from people who aren't even born, porque ellos no van a nacer. Now you don't have to be afraid of me. You can find me under the porch.

Um. Results are expected in 9 months.

I mean, the lack of results in 9 months will be the results. It's a negative proof.

Everyone should have some pie.

Bern lifts his head. Clears his throat of pie.

MANTIS KID:

It's your turn now, Bern.

What'd you bring, Bern?

Bern, what'd you bring?

Bern. You can do it. Bern.

BERN:

I'm getting to it!

Um, Ruben, if you could come back up here and explain what you meant.

What you meant when you said you were cruel to humanity?

RUBEN:

What?

BERN:

You know what I mean, Ruben, what you meant when you said you were cruel to humanity! (For the pictures of your Grandma!)

RUBEN:

Oh, yeah. I meant, I'm cruel, to humanity.

BERN:

So might it also be fair to enact some sort of retribution.

RUBEN:

I guess.

BERN:

You guess?

RUBEN:

Yes, I guess yes, someone should beat me up because of it.

BERN:

Thank you. For my first demonstration, I would like to beat Ruben up. I call it, exhibit, um...exhibit *Ruben gets it*.

Bern poses, but he isn't looking so good.

To the Mantis Kid reloading the Polaroid camera:

BERN:

Hey, are you ready?

MANTIS KID:

Bern.

BERN:

What? Take the picture.

MANTIS KID:

Um Bern.

Bern.

BERN:

What is it?

MANTIS KID:

Bern.

BERN:

I said/

MANTIS KID:
Why do you have breasts, Bern?

BERN:
What?

MANTIS KID:
Why are you growing breasts?
You're growing breasts, Bern.

**Bern, is indeed, growing breasts.
A side effect of the progesterone and estrogen in the birth control
pie concoction.**

MANTIS KID:
Oh wow, those are nice.

Mantis Kid starts eating the pie.

BERN:
What do you mean, what breasts?

A pool of blood is starting to form under Lily.

LILY:
What's going on?

MANTIS KID:
It's looks like you've got flow.

RUBEN:
Uhoh. Um. Let's see.
This is what happens when, well. Um.
Maybe people should stop eating the pie.

MANTIS KID:
It's good pie.

Lily passes out.

RUBEN:
Lily? Lily, are you ok? LILY.

Yeah, I'd say everyone should probably stop eating the pie.

Maybe people should move *away* from the pies.

Looking at his chest:

BERN:

Oh fantastic, now they're lactating!

The Mantis kid is bloating. Still eating pie.

RUBEN:

EVERYONE STOP EATING THE PIE.

BERN:

What are you talking about?

MANTIS KID:

Ruben, tell them what you did to the pies.

RUBEN:

I mean. No, um. Well. The point is you have a choice. Changing into something isn't a given. It's not random. I come from somewhere!

But. Um, so.

Don't swarm me, don't swarm me!

Grandma Ruben enters.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

Strawberry pies! Who's ready for another?

Lily wakes up. And throws up.

Bern throws up.

BERN:

I feel sick.

GRANDMA RUBEN:

That's normal. You ate a lot of pie.

MANTIS KID:

Good pie.

RUBEN:

I put your birth control in the pies.

Beat.

Beat.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
That's where it all went.

RUBEN:
Are you mad? What are you going to do to me?
Are you going to kick me out?

GRANDMA RUBEN:
You're already out.

RUBEN:
You're kicking me out?

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Why? Imposing your ideas on everyone else, what's more American than that? You're beginning to fit right in.

RUBEN:
What?

GRANDMA RUBEN:
What do you want me to say?

Bern and Lily throw up.

If they're throwing up, that's a good sign, it won't hurt them, after a few hours.

Just don't tell your school.

Bern and Lily throw up.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
And tell them to come by our house if they want grape throat lozenges after it's all out.
I'll even leave the door open.

RUBEN:
Ok.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Oh, but just be sure to knock, yes? Before you come in? Because of the /Grandma things?

RUBEN:
Ok! I got it.

GRANDMA RUBEN:
Good Niño. You are growing up. It is not quite how I thought it would be, it's more pie poisoning than I thought it would be—but maybe things will be better for you this way.

Grandma Ruben exits.

**Bern is still lactating.
Mantis Kid wanders off eating pie.**

RUBEN:
Can I go home now?

BERN:
No, when I feel better, I'm letting you have it Ru-ru-Ruben, like we agreed.

LILY:
And after that, remember? We agreed. And maybe again later. Because of the pie.

RUBEN:
Oh right. So I guess I'll just wait here. If you'd like that.

BERN:
I'd like it.

LILY:
So would I.

The three wait in the dwindling fair grounds. Bern and Lily occasionally throw up. Ruben sits with them. Above Ground. Maybe there's a sunset.

End of play.

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AUDIO:

Kansas Evolution Hearings: Day 1 (5/5/05)

Kansas Evolution Hearings: Day 2 (5/6/05)

Kansas Evolution Hearings: Day 3 (5/7/05)

Gustavo Arellano , Ask a Mexican

Edgar Lustgarten, The Monkeyville Case

American RadioWorks , Intelligent Designs on Evolution

Margot Adler , Justice Talking: Intelligent Design: Scientific Inquiry

Jim Fleming , To the Best of Our Knowledge, Electrons to Enlightenment, Part Four: Debating Darwin

Teenage Diaries: Juan in El Cenizo, TX, Looking at the Rio Grande

Teenage Diaries: Juan in Denver, CO, Back to Mexico