

FROM *Memory Is in Your Heart*

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I wanted to write a screenplay that featured contemporary life with characters and situations that we have not seen on film. One of my goals as a queer Chicana lesbian artist has been to create complex Latina/Latino LGBT characters. And, specifically, Chicana lesbian characters to empower a segment of the population that continues to be stereotyped or ignored on stage and on screen.

This script features six strong Chicana characters ranging between the ages of forty-five and eighty-two. In the film world, we have been conditioned to believe there are no women over forty. I wanted to bring to the screen the age range of women that I am familiar with. As I was writing the matriarch of this story, Dolores Cruz Alvarez, I envisioned my own mother—played by Rita Moreno. I am responsible for creating work for Chicana/Latina actresses.

It was important to showcase the main character as a fifty-year-old woman, MonaLisa Alvarez, who not only uses her intellect but also her body to express herself; she plays basketball throughout the film, as do her female friends. Traditionally, athleticism has been reserved for male characters. Rarely are women shown in film engaging in sports. Generally, the only on-screen women being athletic are white: playing tennis, jogging, swimming, or riding a horse. MonaLisa is a middle-aged Chicana lesbian who is a professor and plays basketball because it is part of who she is.

On the morning of her 50th birthday, an unexpected meeting with her ex-wife spins MonaLisa into an emotional mess. With the wisdom of her

feisty eighty-two-year-old mother and the support of new and old friends, MonaLisa learns there is life beyond divorce and love does not get easier with age—it gets arthritis. Growing up is hard even if you are an AARP member. *Memory Is in Your Heart* is a comedic drama about relationships, familia, forgiveness, memory, aging, and Lipitor.

Italics in the script below indicate the Spanish pronunciation of a name, word, or phrase. The story takes place in the city of Santa Monica. Present day. Older sister CLAUDIA MUÑOZ, sixty-years-old, and her husband, MANUEL MUÑOZ, sixty-years-old, are on vacation. During their absence, younger sister MONALISA ALVAREZ, forty-nine-years-old, has come to stay in their house to take care of their elderly mother DOLORES ALVAREZ, eighty-two-years-old.

SCENE: Two days after CLAUDIA's departure.

EXTERIOR. Muñoz residence, driveway—afternoon

Returning from a doctor's appointment, MONALISA pulls her '99 black BMW into the driveway and finds her cousin, VERONICA BUENO, forty-five-years-old, dressed in a tracksuit with the words Saint Monica Mariners on the back of her jacket. VERONICA is shooting hoops in the freestanding basketball hoop that is also in the driveway. VERONICA comes over to open the door for her aunt.

VERONICA: *Hola, Tia.* Let me help you out.

DOLORES looks at VERONICA trying to figure out who she is.

VERONICA: I'm your niece, *Veronica?*

MONALISA gives DOLORES her walker.

DOLORES: *Vero*, yes, I know who you are. (*VERONICA hugs DOLORES.*)
How are you?

VERONICA: I'm good, *Tia*.

MONALISA: We just got back from her physical and the doctor told her she's
in good shape for her age.

DOLORES: I'm strong all right. If some man tries to attack me, I'll give him
a *patada*—(*DOLORES kicks out her foot*) in the you-know-where.

VERONICA: *Ay Tia*, you're fierce.

DOLORES: You two play ball. I'm going to make sure my birds have food in
their little house. They like *flautas*.

*DOLORES shuffles off away from the driveway and into the patio area and
garden. VERONICA starts to casually shoot baskets, then MONALISA joins in.*

MONALISA: Shouldn't you be teaching high school girls how to do sit-ups,
lay-ups?

VERONICA: We got out early today. Gave me a chance to go for a jog.

MONALISA: Yeah, it looked kind of quiet as we drove by a minute ago.

VERONICA: Listen, I know you don't want a party on your birthday. . .

MONALISA starts shaking her head, no, realizing where this conversation is going.

VERONICA: Which I think is nuts. But, we have to have a little something.

MONALISA: *Vero*, get it through your head—I don't have to be reminded I'm half a century.

VERONICA: We need a party with mariachis. Fifty is festive!

VERONICA pretends she's wearing a folklorico skirt and fans out her baggy pants and twirls around.

MONALISA: Wow, so femme.

VERONICA: Yeah, I can be girly. . .

MONALISA looks at her as if to say "Nice try."

MONALISA: No party. Besides, I'm going to be here with my mom on that day.

VERONICA: Then let's have a *pachanga* here.

MONALISA: No. Not while *Claudia* is on vacation. Besides, she's a neat freak and...no, forget it.

VERONICA: They're gone for three weeks—plenty of time to clean up vomit.

MONALISA gives her a look.

VERONICA: I'll do all the work. You just show up and be your handsome self.

MONALISA shakes her head in disagreement.

VERONICA: C'mon, I know two bachelorettes who want to meet "older women." And...they're referees...both twenty-five-ish....*(Moves eyebrows up and down.)* Limber...great stamina....

MONALISA throws the ball at her cousin.

MONALISA: *Vero*, I'm not dating twenty-five-year-olds. No, thanks. Although...I do like referee shirts.

VERONICA: I'm kind of detecting you're...ready to date?

VERONICA throws the ball to MONALISA who catches it and holds it.

MONALISA: Let's just say, I feel open to the idea. I don't know if I'll do anything about it.

VERONICA: All right, cousin, you're making a come back. Woo-hoo! *(Pause.)* Seriously, is she finally out of your system?

They're playing basketball one on one.

MONALISA: Yeah...I think so. It's been a year...I feel lighter...I think.

VERONICA: Well then we definitely have to celebrate. C'mon. I don't want to beg.

MONALISA: Oh but I like it when you do.

MONALISA shoots and makes a basket.

VERONICA: Hey, pretty good, grandma.

MONALISA: Shut up!

CAMERA pulls back and tilts up toward the blue sky.

INTERIOR. Hallway—morning—three days later.

MONALISA is in her pajamas and robe walking down the hallway. She's just rolled out of bed with her hair messy, face unwashed, and has funky morning breath.

MONALISA (*yawning, rubbing sleep from eyes*): Mom...hey mom, you up yet?

MONALISA walks into the kitchen and then walks back down the hallway toward her mother's room. She passes by the large hall mirror and catches her reflection. She stops abruptly, stares, and gets a little closer. She steps even closer, bringing her face inches away from the mirror.

MONALISA: So this is fifty, in the morning. (*Sighs.*) Scary.

She continues into her mother's room.

MONALISA: Mom, yoo hoo....

She looks in the bathroom. Walks back out to the hallway and looks into the family room, then living room, and then back into the kitchen.

MONALISA: Mom, where are you?

She opens the back kitchen door that goes to the backyard. She looks around the big backyard where there are lots of plants and flowers. She heads to the side of the house that goes around to the front patio and garden.

As MONALISA approaches the garden she can see her mother in her pajamas and robe. DOLORES is talking to someone who is also in the garden. MONALISA can't see who this is with the sun in her eyes.

MONALISA: Hey mom, I got a little worried when you didn't answer me. I thought you snuck out with your boyfriend.

MONALISA finally sees the other person standing in the garden. She freezes.

ANGELA (*surprised*): Mona...Lisa. I...I didn't expect you...to be here.

MONALISA is speechless as she stares at ANGELA ORTIZ, fifty-one, her ex-wife.

DOLORES: You know each other?

MONALISA: Yes.

DOLORES: From church?

MONALISA: No mom. Not church.

ANGELA: I told you earlier, *Dolores*, MonaLisa and I used to be together. Married.

Awkward pause. MONALISA and ANGELA look at each other and don't look at each other.

MONALISA: Mom. Why...don't you go...put the kettle on...for hot tea.

DOLORES is calm and not registering the many emotions coming from both women.

DOLORES: Okay.

DOLORES pushes her walker down the walkway on the side of the house to get to the backdoor. MONALISA waits for her mother to get out of earshot.

MONALISA (*trying to keep voice down*): What the fuck do you think you're doing here—coming to my mom's house unannounced?! You can't do that!

ANGELA (*trying to keep voice down*): Sorry. I have a new client in this neighborhood and I had to drive down your mom's street.

MONALISA looks at her as if to say, "You had to?"

ANGELA: I saw her in the garden. I stopped my car, stared at her for a bit, got a little teary-eyed... (*MonaLisa rolls her eyes.*). Then I decided to say hello. I just wanted to say, hi—that's it, Mona.

MONALISA: I specifically told you to stay away from my family!

ANGELA: I didn't plan this. It just happened. I have history with your mom in this house. I just wanted to say hi. I didn't see your car. I figured it was ok. She's my friend.

MONALISA: No! She's not your friend! Get out.

MONALISA herds ANGELA out of the garden.

MONALISA: Leave—get out of here!

ANGELA (*walking*): At least let me say goodbye to her.

MONALISA continues to herd ANGELA to the door of her Prius in the driveway.

MONALISA: She's already forgotten you were even here. Leave!

ANGELA: Mona, it doesn't have to be this way. . .calm down.

MONALISA: You can't waltz back into our lives as if nothing, Angela. You don't get to do that because (*sarcastic*) your work schedule allows you the "freedom" to do what you want. (*In her face.*) You don't get to always do what you want!

ANGELA: Mona, I'm sorry, please, calm down...I'm not trying to—

MONALISA: Get in your car and leave—just leave!

ANGELA: All right!

ANGELA gets in her car and rolls down her window.

ANGELA (*apologetic*): I didn't stop by to be disrespectful.

MONALISA: Go!

ANGELA wants to make things better but she can't.

ANGELA: ...Happy...Birthday...

MONALISA: No! I don't want that from you! It means nothing to me!

ANGELA starts to back her car out of the driveway. Just then DOLORES returns, sees that her daughter is upset, and doesn't understand why ANGELA is driving away. ANGELA, now in the street, waves goodbye to DOLORES, stares at MONALISA, and drives away.

DOLORES (*watches car drive away*): Why is she leaving? Why are you mad at her?

MONALISA (*watching car drive away, getting emotional*): She thinks she can... (*Starts to cry.*) She doesn't get to come back when she wants.

DOLORES walks over to her daughter.

DOLORES: *Mi' ja*, why are you sad?

MONALISA (*crying*): I'm not sad, Mom. I'm pissed and hurt and she doesn't give a shit. (*Crying.*) And then she tries to make it better by telling me, "Happy Birthday."

DOLORES: It's your birthday?

MONALISA nods her head, wipes away tears.

DOLORES: Today's your birthday?

MONALISA nods her head again. Tears are slowing.

DOLORES: How old are you?

MONALISA: Fifty.

DOLORES (surprised): Fifty? ¿De versa?

MONALISA: Yeah. Fifty.

DOLORES: I thought you were...forty-two, forty-five—maybe. Not fifty.

MONALISA is calming herself down with deep breaths.

MONALISA: Good answer, mom.

INTERIOR. Muñoz kitchen—a week later.

MONALISA and DOLORES are eating dinner.

MONALISA: Thank the lord for frozen lasagna.

DOLORES: It's tasty.

MONALISA: Mom, that was really nice that Danny sang "Mona Lisa" to me this afternoon at the center.

DOLORES: ¿*Quién?*

MONALISA: Danny, from the senior center. He sang—(*sings*) Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa—(*speaks*) you know the song?—to me, today when I dropped you off there.

DOLORES: I went there today?

MONALISA: Yes, we walked in and they were serving lunch and Crystal introduced me and Danny sang the song, "Mona Lisa." He has a nice voice.

DOLORES: If you say so....

MONALISA: Do you want more tea?

DOLORES: No, thank you. (*Pause, thinks.*) What does your husband do?

MONALISA (*chuckles*): I don't have a husband, Mom. I'm a lesbian—remember?

DOLORES: Oh yeah. (*Pause, thinks.*) Do you know Ellen?

MONALISA: DeGeneres?

DOLORES: Yeah, her.

MONALISA: Not personally, but I know who she is.

DOLORES: She's funny. (*Thinks.*) Do you have a...partner? That's how you say it, right?

MONALISA: Yes, partner, is the correct word to use and no...I don't have a partner.

DOLORES: But didn't you have a partner? *¿Como se llama?*

MONALISA: Yes, I had a partner. (*Reflective.*) Her name was—still is—Angela.

DOLORES: Angela, that's right. An-ge-la...yes.... (*Thinking.*) Did I talk to her recently?

MONALISA: Yup. You spoke to her last week. She stopped by to say hello to you.

DOLORES: You used to live together, right?

MONALISA: Yes...we...did.

DOLORES: I visited you guys a couple of times.

MONALISA: Yes. We lived by the beach.

DOLORES: Yeah...the beach... (thinks, remembering) you went to work... and I walked to the beach by myself.... *¿Que paso?* How come you don't live together anymore?

MONALISA: Because...we broke up.

DOLORES: How come?

MONALISA: We had to get a divorce.

DOLORES: How come?

MONALISA: Because we couldn't be married anymore.

DOLORES (*a little annoyed*): Ay, how come?

MONALISA: Do you really want to know?

DOLORES: Yes.

MONALISA: Okay. I'll tell you. (*Matter-of-factly.*) She was screwing a twenty-eight-year-old. She was having a mid-life crisis. She felt trapped in the marriage. (*Pause.*) Do you want more lasagna?

DOLORES truly thinks about what she heard and concludes—

DOLORES: She was acting like a man!

MONALISA (*surprised*): Yes, she was.

DOLORES: Ay, I expected more from Angela.

MONALISA: Me too. Yes, yes, me too. (*Pause.*) I thought we were going to grow old together, like you and Dad.

DOLORES: Well, that's what you're supposed to do when you're married—you stay married. Until you kick the bucket.

MONALISA: Yes, I totally agree. I mean, that was my plan. I married her... forever.

DOLORES: *Ay*, people don't know how to be in love anymore.

MONALISA: Yeah...and she's the one who asked me to marry her.

DOLORES: I'm sorry, *mi'ja*.... It's her loss.

DOLORES places her hand on MONALISA's hand.

MONALISA: Thanks, Mom. I really appreciate your understanding.

They nod to each other in agreement.

DOLORES: Love...is love.

MONALISA: Yeah...it is.

Again, they nod to each other in agreement. Pause, then—

DOLORES (*as if asking for first time*): So...what does your husband do?

MONALISA looks at DOLORES as if to say, "Seriously?"

END OF EXCERPT