

Jenka & the Bosswoman

by Christine Kallman
(excerpt)

Characters

- MACKIE Astrophysics prof at a large California University. Brilliant. Driven. Age 44. Caucasian.
- PHOEBE Mackie's daughter. Tough but with a vulnerable core. Has trouble committing. Age 24. Caucasian.
- CELINA Outwardly calm, smart. Latina, age 35. Mexican immigrant with a slight accent. While Celina's lines indicate a politeness, she is not meek or a pushover. Underneath there is a kind of desperation.

Setting

The action takes place in present day Southern California: in Mackie's condo, in a college lecture hall, on an ocean beach, in a nursing home room.

Distance and intimacy between characters is very important in the script. It can be conveyed by such things as: physical distance between characters on stage, distance between audience and characters, visual connection or disconnection (perhaps barriers) between characters or between characters and audience, etc. Lighting design will play a crucial role in permitting distance and intimacy to resonate. In most cases, touching and even proximity are not casual.

PROLOGUE/SCENE ONE

(Darkness. We hear low drumbeats like a heartbeat, soft then gradually louder. Perhaps fade in still projection of stars birthing. Lights up on MACKIE atop a ladder. Or she is standing and the ladder is in the background.)

MACKIE

I'm standing on the ladder
polishing the glass globe
I have it in my hands
or I thought it was in my hands

(Beat. She turns to face a different direction.)

MACKIE, cont'

I'm standing on the ladder polishing the glass globe
when I reach up to put it on the fixture it slips
the glass globe is in my hands now it's falling
I had it in my hands or I thought it was in my hands

(Lights down on MACKIE. Perhaps video fades in and starts to move— stars birthing. Lights up on PHOEBE on another part of the stage.)

PHOEBE

I'm standing in the bathroom
Holding the wand that will rule my future
I'm standing all alone in the cold bathroom
Watching the red line appear on the little wand
The line some women hope for
The line that I don't want

I've peed on the little stick
Watching my future loom
As the red line grows distinct
There's the moment before you know it
Did I always know it?

There with my bare feet on the cold floor
Something tiny
swimming deep inside me
Attaching

I've peed on the little stick
As the red line grows dark
This is the second test
The second red line
Unmistakeable

(Pause)

I'm alone

(Lights up on MACKIE.)

MACKIE

I had it in my hands or I thought it was in my hands
the globe is both in my hands and falling
there's the moment before you know it's going to fall
did I always know it?

PHOEBE

Everything was shimmering
my moon was waxing confident
the universe was humming my tune
finally
for once
I had it in my hands
or I thought it was in my hands

MACKIE

there's the moment before

PHOEBE

it comes crashing down

MACKIE

glass is flying everywhere
still the globe is whole in my hands
how tightly I want to hold it

PHOEBE

(overlapping with the above line)

how tightly I want to hold it

MACKIE & PHOEBE

my teeth clench
my feet grip

PHOEBE

Standing on the cold floor.

(CELINA enters. She looks stunned. She has just gotten off the phone.)

CELINA

Lo tenía en mis manos. O yo pensé que estaba en mis manos.

PHOEBE
outside a siren wails

MACKIE
my heart beats

MACKIE & CELINA
lifeLife lifeLife lifeLife lifeLife

PHOEBE
I'm alone

CELINA
(desperate, in pain)
Dios mio!

PHOEBE
Careening through space on an untethered satellite

MACKIE
dark matter bends the flesh of the heavens

PHOEBE
I look to the one
my one great source of life
my one great source of suffering

(beat)
my mother

(Cut to black. Music disintegrates into noise.
Segue directly to next scene.)

SCENE TWO

MACKIE'S living room, mid-afternoon. There is a telescope. MACKIE has been working there so we may see evidence of this, such as papers scattered. We may see other astronomical artifacts, such as telescopic lenses, meteorites, and perhaps old prints of famous astronomers. She also collects geological specimens. Even if the set is not fully

realized, it is helpful if in some way
the room can reflect MACKIE, the sense that it is
full of her stuff, and the feeling that she creates
a whirlwind wherever she goes.

(Lights up on MACKIE and CELINA. MACKIE
is having trouble with her eyes and has a terrible
headache and a sore arm, but continues to work at her
laptop, sending texts and checking texts on her phone,
and moving around the room to where she has
her stuff scattered. CELINA stands watching her awkwardly.
Despite her health issues, MACKIE is a powerful force. She seems
to be unaware of the effect of this power on others. At the
beginning of the scene CELINA really wants to leave, and
keeps a physical distance from MACKIE, but gradually she
is drawn in.)

CELINA

I'll be going now.

MACKIE

(On her laptop. Very annoyed, in a bit of a rage.)

Document save . . . document duplicate . . . document file . . . under Star. Velocities. Keck.

CELINA

Can I call someone for you? Just in case?

MACKIE

(still on her computer)

Data. . . to mail . . . document attach-- Christ! [blinking her eyes] There's no one to call.
Document send . . . Send you bastard! Send! There. Going . . . Going Gone. Seven
hours late but it'll get there. They'll make do. God.

CELINA

Your eyes?

MACKIE

Fine. They're fine.

CELINA

You're blinking. And you're rubbing them.

MACKIE

They're fine! Remember they didn't find a *speck* of glass in them.

CELINA

Is your eyesight still blurry?

MACKIE

A bit. Like I'm on the set of *Dark Shadows*. And I feel like someone tried to drive a stake through my head.

CELINA

You didn't fall? You said you stumbled a bit. When you came down the ladder.

MACKIE

Yes and I caught myself on this arm. Might. Explain. Why. It Hurts. [getting a text] Damn there's the lab again. [as she texts] RE-PORT ON ITS WAY!!! [then to CELINA] My eyes have been bothering me for a few weeks. It's allergies. And the smoke.

CELINA

What smoke? Do you smoke?

MACKIE

No. No. The forest fires. The Santa Ana winds.

CELINA

The fires are far to the north. There's no smoke here.

MACKIE

Then it must be allergies. Slowed me down these last few weeks. But it'll be fine. It's fine.

(CELINA seems unsure whether to stay. She'd like to go.
MACKIE gets another text followed by her phone ringing.
She throws it down on the couch.)

CELINA

I'm sorry. I must go. You have everything you need?

MACKIE

I probably had this coming--whatever it is. Ground myself into the ground.

CELINA

My mother used to say, if you hurry, the devil will put a stone in your path.

MACKIE

Ha! More like a boulder--if I believed in the devil. So you're like the doctor. You think it's all in my head.

CELINA

No, no! Did the doctor say that?

MACKIE

Not in so many words. But that's what it boils down to. Conversion disorder. The patient converts some— some idiocy— into a physical symptom. I'm not converting anything! What the hell! I would never do that. I hate being out of control!

CELINA

I should call someone for you. A friend? Some family?

MACKIE

No. There's no one.

CELINA

I thought you said you had a--

MACKIE

There's *no one* to call. [beat] Where's the Chick-Fil-A? Here would you hand me that. That-- over there. The bag-- the food!

(CELINA, confused at first, hands MACKIE a fast food bag.)

CELINA

I need to be going but I don't want to leave you—

MACKIE

(interrupting, oblivious)

They won't like that I cancelled my class. The beloved survey class.

CELINA

You're a teacher?

MACKIE

I pretend to be. Some people are fooled.

CELINA

What do you teach?

MACKIE

Very basic. Ketchup.

CELINA

(confused)

You teach children?

MACKIE

Ha! Yes children. Freshmen. Infants. Ketchup. [indicating] The packets--

(CELINA hands her the ketchup packets.)

CELINA

You teach at the University?

MACKIE

Very basic. General survey. Birth of the universe. Big Bang.

(MACKIE makes as if to smash the ketchup packet between her hands, but stops with a grin as CELINA cringes. MACKIE makes a gesture as if to say "got you.")

MACKIE, cont'

(eating)

It wasn't an explosion. Everyone thinks that. There was no space for the universe to explode *into*.

MACKIE, cont'

At the moment immediately before the Big Bang everything that makes up the Universe was there, in one singularity. Then within a hundredth of a second it expanded to the size of the Sun. And it's still expanding. At faster and faster rates.

(MACKIE uses her food and food packaging to demonstrate, favoring her sore arm.)

MACKIE, cont'

Look. Think of the universe as an expanding four-dimensional closed unit, with Time being the fourth dimension. It's all contained in the surface of the sphere. Everything needed to make a universe. The Universe is curved. [Beat. MACKIE eats. Then, without gesturing:] If you'll hand me that object at the apogee.

(CELINA picks up a paper cup at the far side of the array of food objects. MACKIE is surprised.)

CELINA

Apogee. Latin *apogaeum*. The most distant point.

(beat)

MACKIE

Unbelievable. All the clerks at Greenway, and the one who scrapes me off the pavement can recite Latin.

CELINA

I learned it from my mother. But certainly it's not *that* unusual.

MACKIE

There aren't many of us.

CELINA

Tell me again what you said. The universe is curved?

MACKIE

(drawing a large circle in the air)

Yes. If you traveled long enough and far enough you would come back to where you started.

(Pause. This idea has captured CELINA.)

CELINA

It's amazing work you're doing.

MACKIE

I'm not working on that.

CELINA

Oh.

MACKIE

I don't care about that stuff.

CELINA

Oh?

MACKIE

(pointing)

There. That.

What?
CELINA

Right there.
MACKIE

I'm sorry I don't--
CELINA

There. There. The--
MACKIE

This?
CELINA
(holding up something)

No. No the--
MACKIE

This?
CELINA
(holding up something else)

The drive!
MACKIE

Oh. This? [looking at a disk drive]
CELINA

I'm right on the cusp. Closing in on it.
MACKIE

I'm sorry. I--
CELINA

Constraints on measuring star formation and its relationship to dark matter.
MACKIE

Oh.
CELINA

MACKIE

What we're finding is that massive halos of dark matter approach a dwarf galaxy and compress the gas in the dwarf, triggering massive amounts of star formation. It's an explanation for exactly what we've been observing. But we need far more accurate measures.

CELINA

Dwarf galaxies. Very small. A few billion stars.

MACKIE

You know your way around the sky a bit.

CELINA

No. I don't know much. I know nothing about dark matter.

MACKIE

I give it one minute in my survey class. Insipid survey lectures.

(Without pause, MACKIE moves to a lectern where she is giving the lecture. An image representing new star formation in a dwarf galaxy is projected. MACKIE speaks quickly, in an emotionally detached manner. Her eyes and arm are normal.)

MACKIE, cont'

Roughly twenty-seven percent of the universe is dark matter. Yet we know next to nothing about it. Dark particles are very small-- subatomic. In fact as I speak millions of these particles are passing right through your body. Gives you a shiver doesn't it. How do we know they exist? Gravity. Large fields of dark matter exert gravitational force on objects in space. For years these particles were considered essentially inactive-- in fact boring. But dark matter may be more active than we believed. Some scientists suggest it may emit light-- albeit a form of light to which our eyes are totally blind.

Excuse me! Put. The cell. Phones. Away.

(MACKIE moving back to CELINA in the condo.)

SCENE CONTINUES. END EXCERPT.

www.christinekallman.com