

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

GOOD GIRLS DON'T SHOUT

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by

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This thesis, written by Madari Pendas, and entitled Good Girls Don't Shout, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
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GOOD GIRLS DON'T SHOUT is a collection of thirteen short stories that explore exile and trauma.

"In Rooms with Boys" presents a mother who must confront a son who she is certain has sexually assaulted his classmate and then reckon with the fact that he may do it again. In "Say Anything," two girls are psychically linked after being victimized by the same man. The use of second-person narration, as in Junot Díaz's story "Miss Lora," highlights the dissociative effects of trauma.

Opportunities test allegiances. A Cuban-American producer of Late Night with David Letterman must decide whether he'll allow a Cuban comic to perform. In "Possession" a woman left behind in Cuba learns when she gets to Florida that her lover didn't wait for her.

Whether struggling to craft a new identity or seeking to understand their pasts, these characters are driven to survive and to give their suffering meaning.

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Jaja-Haha

1989, Midtown Manhattan

Freddy was unaware that as he worked the past was storming down Broadway and 53rd, past security, past his secretary, and into *The Late Show with David Letterman* offices.

He perked up when he heard a knock at his closed door. Before he could ask who was there, the door swung open and there he was: Porfirio Suárez.

Freddy shook his head; it was too early for this nonsense. He had only recently been promoted to executive producer and didn't have the time or patience to deal with a cunning talent agent, even if that cunning talent agent was an old friend. "No, no, no. I'm busy."

Porfirio closed the door and took a seat. "Tranquilo. I'll be quick. I'm faster than a virgin at a brothel."

Freddy watched as Porfirio took out a headshot from a peeling brown valise. Even when Freddy was an associate producer, people still slipped headshots under his door, into his mailbox, and even into the bags of his lunch orders.

"Come on, I have work to do."

"Bueno, this is what happens when you don't return my calls." Porfirio slid the headshot across the desk. "This is your next guy. One of the best upcoming comics on the scene right now."

Freddy looked at the picture. The young man in the photo had a one-guard buzz, an angular jaw, a long nose, and hauntingly deep-set eyes. His collar was undone and revealed a gold chain over a shock of chest hair. The black-and-white tint of the image

made it difficult for Freddy to tell how dark the kid's skin was. "What's his name? How old is he?"

"Yusniel Fernández. Twenty-two."

There was a silence between them. Freddy looked at the photo again. He had always stayed quiet when the more senior EPs asked him about a particular Hispanic comic. Freddy didn't want to seem partial or like he was pushing an agenda. He wanted to show his bosses he could do the job just like them. He had only gotten the promotion last Monday. The retiring EP, Jack, had told Freddy, "Give 'em what they're used to. They know what they like. And they like what they know."

Freddy slid the photo away. "Let's talk some other time, okay? I already have the comics booked for the next month."

"So book him for the month after," Porfirio insisted. "You got some power now. Use it, viejo."

"I'm not a viejo. We're the same age."

"Si and fifty-four is the new forty-four, right? This fucking industry and age. Come on. You're finally the gatekeeper and you're still keeping the gate closed."

Freddy rubbed his temples. "Some other time. Please."

"Federico, por favor—"

"Don't call me that." Freddy looked to make sure the door was closed. He didn't use that name anymore. He had taken the Steven Bauer and Anthony Quinn approach to success and rid himself of anything that could hinder his upward mobility in this country, even if that included his name. He remembered Porfirio urging him not to change it. "Our names are all we left with," Porfirio insisted. Freddy didn't want his first conversations

with new people to begin with corrections or explanations. When they were coming up, some of the Anglo comedians had the habit of calling Porfirio *Por Favor*. It was apt, Freddy thought. His old friend always seemed to be begging.

“I’m sorry,” Porfirio said. He took the headshot off the desk. “He’s performing in the East Village tomorrow. Come out. See him yourself.”

Freddy listened to the thrumming of the A.C. and the patterned honking down on 53rd Street. He didn’t want to agree to anything he could be held to.

“Río Guaso,” Porfirio said.

Freddy shook his head. “No, not that—”

“You owe me.”

Back in Cuba they used to go fishing in the Río Guaso. They’d sell their illegal catches and split the money, though selling anything not in the ration books would have gotten them in trouble. Freddy was determined to make more money and snuck to the cove early one morning, but the rip current pulled him under. If Porfirio hadn’t been there—to also catch fishes by himself— Freddy was certain he would have died and washed up in Haiti.

Freddy took out a notepad. “Give me the details.”

“Ten. At Brouhaha. He’s headlining.”

Freddy scribbled the information down. He knew he was going to get grief from Judy for not coming directly home after work. Any place above 95th St was dangerous according to her.

“I’m agreeing to see him. Not committing to anything.”

“Yet!” Porfirio grinned. He got up and headed for the door.

As Freddy wrote the kid's name, he called out, "Oye, tell him to change his name to something...easier to remember."

"You mean Gringo?"

Freddy shrugged. It wasn't that big a deal. Who cared what people called you as long as they called you?

* * *

Freddy left the Friday taping early. Friday shows were laxer and in his twelve years there he had seen plenty of producers and EPs duck out before wrapping. However, Freddy felt strange doing so. One of the line producers arched her eyebrows as he left, as if saying *Wow, already abusing the new position.*

Freddy lit a cigarette on the other side of Saint Mark's Place. The more he smoked, the warmer he felt. Sixteen years in New York and he still wasn't used to northeast winters. When he first moved, he'd hard-boil an egg in the mornings and keep it in his jacket's front pocket to warm his hands.

The club, a popular haunt, was a renovated basement that still smelled like the inside of a cupboard. The space was cramped. Freddy was certain they were violating all sorts of fire codes. While grooming Freddy to take over, Jack had insisted on sending underlings to night clubs. That was the point of being the boss, according to Jack. "Have someone else eat shit." Freddy hadn't realized how much he missed the frenetic energy and charge of the club scene.

He felt a tingle in his fingers as he strolled in.

"There you are!" Porfirio rushed over to Freddy. He took Freddy's topcoat and guided him to a middle seat. "I thought you weren't going to show."

Freddy had considered it. “I always keep my appointments.”

They sat and waited in the theater for the show to begin. In front of them the semi-circular thrust stage had an overhead spotlight with tied-off black drapes, which looked like braids on a round face. There was a screen downstage projecting the club’s logo, the Melpomene mask chugging a beer.

“Just to warn you, the first guy does *a lot* of crowd work.”

Freddy scoffed. “Don’t make the audience do your job for you. These new guys are so lazy.”

“Come on. It’s fun. Some people like to participate.”

“That’s outsourcing your work. You have to show the audience you’ve earned the *right* to be up there. Comedy is a battle. That’s why it’s called *killing*.”

Porfirio patted his shoulder and made a *tsk tsk* sound. “No, you’ve got it all wrong. They’re rooting for you from the beginning. They want you to succeed,” Porfirio said. “Not everything is so adversarial. That’d be like me hoping my butcher circumcises his thumb when he cuts my mortadella.”

"Oh, that's not the same," Freddy said. He was rankled by the wrap of cigarette smoke that hung above their heads like thoughts in a comic strip. Freddy opened his mouth to complain, but the lights dimmed. The show was beginning.

The first three comics performed. There were: Soviet Union jokes (“in Soviet Russia TV watches you”); observations on women-men relations; observations on Black-white relations; and a Lenny Bruce style discussion on whether pedophiles had a hierarchy. A scrawny, nervous comedian with long bangs that he blew out of his eyes asked, “Do the ones that like teens look down on the ones that like babies? Or all they all