

Rewriting My Destiny:
The Process of writing a Play

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Table of Contents

Artistic Aims: pg 3

Research Paper: pg 8

Technical Paper: pg 20

Coming Together: pg 26

Work(s) Cited: pg 81

Artistic Aims: Artistry and Influence

The writing of *Coming Together; The Journey of Me...I Guess* primarily covers themes of family & perseverance, and tells the story of an inner-city kid with big dreams. The work is a combination of interviews done with my family members and personal memoirs that we've shared within the past year. Though this was not my original purpose, nor do I study the playwriting concentration in my major, the past year has shifted my world views beyond recognition. Initially, I had always been taught that planning ahead will prevent me from any and all failures. However, with the world being thrown for a loop, both the senior project process and my experiences within the past year have taught me that loving theatre again was possible, even in the face of adversity.

Prior to the world flipping upside-down in response to the pandemic, I was living on campus majoring in Theatre and Performance with a minor in sociology. My concentration centered on performance art, with my interests in particular leaning towards theatre for social justice. The initial project was a festival piece written by my peer, Kiara Cuthbertson called *Zemi*. The 20 minute play centered around the culture surrounding Puerto Rico, specifically delving into my Afro Latino ancestry and conveying the history of our heritage and spiritual beliefs that have suffered at the hands of whitewashing for centuries. My involvement specifically was playing the role of either a confused tour guide relearning their ancestry the correct way, or one of the prominent spiritual figures of Taino culture. Altogether, my reason for even going to

school was to prove that people like myself could make it in the theatre, with my minor educating me on the systems in place that prevented my folk (poor, people of color, queer) from progressing farther in life. At the time, Zemi helped fulfill that, and my involvement felt full circle for my acting career. I worked hard throughout several adversities growing up in a poorer neighborhood in the Bronx, so this was the final step in making myself proud. Though the piece was set for smooth sailing, the pandemic hit and everything was up in the air. With the stress of the pandemic, I decided to take a break after the second semester of my junior year, instead of immediately going back in the fall. As the date for school came closer and closer, I remained flustered, with everything I planned vanishing almost instantly. Working retail was taking a harsh toll on my body and mental state, returning to campus was unaffordable and not worth the stay just for online classes. The rigor it would take to go back and forth between campus and my job, plus my at home responsibilities, ultimately pushed me to withdraw from my initial plan. Now I was back at square one, well maybe two?

From here, I was stuck at a standstill, I wanted to dive more into my drag persona, even get into live performing, but I was miles away from Purchase and outside was still locked up. With the new year rolling in, it was terribly hard to stay optimistic when the reality was I was going back into school with an attitude I never had before: despair. I was desperate to find motivation to just keep going. Cue in my brother feeling the same, with his job at PetSmart's pet hotel coming to a tragic end as a result of the pandemic. One random December evening the week before New Year's Eve, he brought up an idea: starting a project together focused on animals. Though my love for acting was always second nature, my first love was veterinary care and zoology. The

idea sparked my interest, with reconnecting to my roots being a goal of my initial project. With some planning, budgeting, saving, and pleading with my mother, at the end of January, my brother and I began a journey in starting a business together. Known as *Interstellar Animals*, we're working on breeding, rehoming, and educating people about reptiles. Both of these endeavors fueled me to get started again and remain hopeful, but two questions remained, the first being how was any of this considered theatre? These were two contrasting subjects, and bringing them together just complicated my thought process. Secondly, even if I did manage to work something out, will it help me graduate on time?

Upon starting my final semester at Purchase, I spoke with my advisor Andrew Saito, who very graciously held my hand through the process all over, and my journey was changed once more. Though I pride myself in being an aspiring actor, I switched gears towards playwriting, specifically a piece morphed with documentary theatre. With this, plus my enrollment in my advisor's course on learning the art of Documentary Theatre, I was back on track to get onto my project. Firstly, I had to establish the focus of this play, what exactly was I going to write about and how would I be able to properly execute it. I knew two things were definitely going to be a part of it: creating a drag persona and the realm of animals and entrepreneurship, which I was still struggling to combine. Contrary to the usual senior project with several team members, I had to strategize on my feet by planning smaller steps to get ahead of the game, establishing the four steps to success:

- Trying a new makeup look every week to hone my developing skills, while monitoring progress and staying motivated

- Encouraging myself to write in a journal every day to keep record of the semester all together
- Keeping data and information on the reptiles up to date and logged consistently, monitoring growth/change over time;
- Always keep an open mind and share my art: remain open to feedback, critique and listen first.

With these four steps I'd be able to fight with my most formidable opponent- procrastination. Keeping myself engaged daily would stimulate my senses, while also reminding me that there's work to be done. From this point, I began to think of a timeline in which most of these events occurred. Looking back on my memory, I've wanted to do drag since I was 18, but my first time in drag was October 31st, 2020. That date symbolized the start date for my project and I wanted to finish writing my work by the last week of April/first week of May, though this was subject to change. With a time frame, a plan, and a focus set, the work began to come together itself.

In terms of journaling, I made sure to be very vivid in my writing as to how I felt within the moment, and took those exact words to transfer them over. An added note, a skill I had to hone was remembering to be completely unbiased toward anyone in the play, especially myself. Rawness and authenticity are pivotal to my project, so I had to be careful not to sugar coat or paint anyone in a certain light, especially myself. Using nouns and verbs to describe my feelings within the recordings evoke the memory as to how I felt that specific day. Additionally, I kept track of most of my purchases for the reptiles, with the dates of acquisition, good dates and bad ones all carefully recorded in a completely separate folder. In terms of reptiles, a good day could be progress in a

gecko's health, and a bad day could be an egg being infertile. Lastly, I talked to everyone I wanted to involve in the project, and will let them read over the scene they're featured in. The people of focus were primarily my two brothers and my mother, with other close friends being involved for smaller parts of the scenes. If it was recorded verbatim, I just let them hear how it sounds over, but if written from memory, I ask for feedback and insight.

In regards to my future goals, this project serves as an "I told you so" to everyone that doubted me within the field. Facing adversities as a child growing up in the hood, moving from school to school, then discovering I was queer, I've always had to fight to be seen. Most of the time I had to resort to being loud either verbally, physically, or just through my presence, but this project is the opposite. For the most part, it's positive, with uplifting short stories and funny encounters of a family trying to make their own way up. I also tried my best to stay away from anything too heavy, as I'm tired of reading plays on our suffering rather than us just living life. Post graduation I would love to get into the performing world through my drag, to show the queer kids from my hood and anywhere that you can be whatever you want to be. Moreover, I have always wanted to teach high school kids theatre, and this is one stepping stone along that path. In regards to my animal related business, it's another endeavor that I would love to grow and expand immensely, showing people from here that you can do it no matter what circumstances are in your way.

Altogether, with the completion of this project I hope to rediscover the drive I have for the art form that made me who I am. The original message still stands, as my research paper will cover the topics surrounding the backgrounds and benefits to

following your dreams and the fields I'm involved in. Moreover, I want my project to still serve the kids in the hood that regardless of the adversities that they face, they can make a difference. Regardless of the obstacles that aren't your fault, your art is valued, loved, and worthwhile. Chasing your dreams is not an upper-class figment of your imagination and ultimately, your life and legacy has value.

Research Paper: Information and Education

On Pets, Queer Performance, and COVID-19 Disparities

The play *Coming Together: The Story of Me...I Guess* came about in a time of crisis, with the COVID-19 pandemic playing a large role in shaping the writing itself and my long-term goals as a whole. Prior to the closing of the world around me, I had my four years of college and post-graduate career majorly drawn out and prepared upon. Once the plans fell apart, it was only through my frustration that I realized that it was time for me to do what made me happy. Going for a drag career and attempting to start a business involving animals are two risky endeavors, with no physical pay at first. Not to mention the systemic barriers that a family of color endure living in an underprivileged community, the challenges were everywhere. However, through writing a play and utilizing documentary theatre techniques, I will be able to convey the importance of pursuing what makes you happy, in addition to going in depth about the obstacles set by current affects that affected the trajectory of my endeavors.

To start off, we have to identify the factors that influence the direction of this project altogether, with the primary cause being the forced closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning in March 2020, the shutdowns began and initially, it

was assumed this would be a temporary closure, with everything being fixed within the next month or so. Flash forward to April 2021, and we're still in this very perplexing situation, with closures not being consistent across the nation. With the United States being in this constant fluctuation of closings and reopenings, there's bound to be rising stress levels and health changes that are associated with the effects of the pandemic. Specifically Claire Platt's piece *Emotional and Psychological Distress Related to COVID-19 Isolation, Quarantine, and Physical Distancing: Evidence of Gender-based Differences*, goes in depth about the exact side effects or ailments that may be hyperactive during periods of quarantine "Family members experiencing intricate social and psychological circumstances may spend the mandatory COVID-19 lockdown while being exposed to growing levels of stress and panic, and being frequently endangered by terrifying, intense, and continuous degradations derived from increasing micro-traumas." To expand on the point made, stress is already a natural occurrence in response to the pandemic, but with increased shut downs and financial burdens, there's more pressure on top of the existing excruciating circumstances. Platt's study delves into the logistics behind COVID-19 related stress, with differences between sexes and individual groups being prevalent and well documented. She defines the most common side effects of the quarantine being stress, sleep loss, anxiety, and various unhealthy coping mechanisms. These mechanisms change from person to person, with an overall increase in substance usage plus inactivity, opening the possibility of severe health issues developing within this time period "Heightened alcohol consumption in both women and men is related to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression (Tran et al., 2020), and life-style associated risk determinants (e.g., smoking, excessive weight, and

inactivity) develop medical conditions, resulting in an escalated mortality and morbidity amongst psychiatric patients.” Though these conditions and habits could’ve been present prior to the lockdown, the state of our nation has contributed to accelerating the rate at which this is happening. Moreover, the connection between COVID precautions and gender are very apparent, with differences being noted in the results. The response from men illustrated a more lackadaisical, somewhat resilient approach to the virus. Fueled by the societal norms of being breadwinners and remaining tough in the face of adversity, their concern was noticeably smaller. On the contrary, women were documented to have a much more worried response, tending to be much more concerned about the virus/it’s impact on one’s life. Correlating with sex and gender norms, women are often more hospitable, worrying about the welfare of themselves, and those they take care of. Nonetheless, both sexes equally experience the same amount of sleep deprivation, anxiety, and quarantine related stress. “Women undergo more severe COVID-19-related stress and anxiety symptoms, and men display better resilience to stress. (Hou et al, 2020) There is no relevant dissimilarity between the frequency of sleep disturbances, anxiety, and depression in COVID-19 male and female patients. (Deng et al, 2020)”. Additionally, it was proven that certain marginalized groups are more susceptible to these stress induced conditions “The mental health of women, of emerging adults, of persons having socially underprivileged backgrounds, and of individuals having prior mental health issues has been considerably damaged during the COVID-19 pandemic.” This held a lot of weight within the United States, as medicalized racism began to play in the disproportionate COVID rates amongst communities of color. Jocelyn Turner-Musa’s article entitled *Examining Social*

Determinants of Health, Stigma, and COVID-19 Disparities, she goes in depth about the way COVID-19 disproportionately infected the population “In the United States, Blacks, Hispanics/Latinx, and Native Americans are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. For example, Blacks comprise 13% of the U.S. population and, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), account for 28% of COVID- 19 cases and 33% of hospitalizations, whereas Hispanics/Latinx account for 18% of the U.S. population and 28% of COVID-19 cases [8]. Mortality rates for Blacks and Hispanics/Latinx are also higher [9].” . These statistics were suspected prior to release, with tensions increasing among poorer communities of color due to their limited access to resources and space to safely practice social distancing. This is often a result of these areas being highly condensed, with more systemic barriers in terms of financial assistance “In the US, White workers earn 28 percent more than Black workers and 35 percent more than Hispanic/Latinx workers. Blacks and Hispanics/Latinx are also more likely to have service, transportation, and jobs in sales compared to Whites [24,25]. With COVID-19, members of minority groups may be at greater risk of infection as workers in essential industries who must continue to work despite the outbreaks in their communities or due to their economic situations.”. Regardless of the factors at play, communities of color end up facing COVID related deaths, complications, and financial issues, resulting in a strenuous and stressful environment. Tying it back into my own personal experiences, living in a public housing complex where the conditions were already subpar, on top of a majority of the population surrounding us being impoverished and having limited access to resources, there was a huge amount of stress that hasn’t gone away yet. Even with all of the social distancing, my mother and

brother remained essential workers throughout the pandemic, with my mother eventually falling ill herself. Throughout the process of maintaining a job, the household, and working towards our own individual goals, there was massive tension and stress amongst us all, which ultimately affected our interactions with each other. Not to mention, the financial issues that come about when governmental assistance benefits are prolonged or not even offered. The effects of COVID-19 will linger on for years to come, and bearing the brunt of it prior to my senior year of college made the journey much more tedious.

Getting into the gist of the activities I began to dedicate my focus to, one of them has absolutely nothing to do with my degree or field of study. Growing up, my biggest inspiration was Steve Irwin and I yearned to be a zoologist on the scale that he had. As you get older ideals change, but being home all day I noticed the solace I did receive was from my pet dogs. Over the duration of the lockdown, we obtained a few new pets to keep our minds preoccupied, which also assisted in the family bonding over a common interest. This was the initial thought that evoked the idea of starting an animal breeding/rehoming business. Specifically, Helen Louise Brooks' study *The power of support from companion animals for people living with mental health problems: a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence* engages with the theory that having animals as companions is beneficial, especially for people dealing with mental health issues. While the study revealed that pet owners and non pet owner still have the same chance of being affected by depression, the alleviation pets provide was undeniable "The mechanisms through which pets made the perceived contribution to emotional work seemed to be the provision of a consistent source of comfort and

affection [9, 34, 36, 41, 42]. This constant presence meant that this provision was available instantaneously without request [9, 27, 36, 42]. Pets provided calming support and were perceived to have a 'sense' of when it was needed.”, The sense of companionship that an animal radiates is inexplicable, especially when there’s a time of crisis like our current situation. Pets can provide the comfort that is missing from our out of whack routines, providing grounding in the face of adversity. Having a pet of course is a lengthy commitment, with responsibilities and care expenses being a given, but it’s easier than getting on antidepressants or anxiety medications. Moreover, the accessibility and range of pets there is can give people free range choice and autonomy in terms of responsibilities of said animals, in addition to the varying age ranges, allowing for different levels of commitment. Speaking from the perspective of living through a pandemic, one issue that also comes about is the limitation of communication. Prior to the widespread adoption of Zoom and virtual based experiences, social withdrawals were a big issue that still is a struggle to solve. Oftentimes people feel less comfortable communicating over the internet about big issues in their lives, and it’s impossible to recreate the social energy that once existed. Owning a pet was proven to eliminate loneliness, in addition to forming a bond that allows for people to open up more “By providing unconditional positive regard, pets promoted emotional stability through the regulation of feelings, management of stress and helping people to cope with difficult life events [27, 42]. For people living alone, pets provided a source of 'connectedness' [27], reassurance, and normalcy [31].”. Though at first glance it can be argued that pets rely on their owners, quite the opposite has been proven true through this study. Pets often serve as the emotional outlet that everyone

needs, readily available, without interrupting or casting a burden, and also as a means to make a routine functional again. Establishing a routine with your pets and the effects on your demeanor are discussed further in Ursula Aragude-Kohls research journal, *Interaction and Emotional Connection with Pets: A Descriptive Analysis from Puerto Rico* “This means that we not only integrate them into our daily lives by taking care of their basic needs, such as providing water and food, but we also interact with them on emotional and physical levels. This relationship is an opportunity for many to connect on intimate and deep levels [68-73]. We develop ways to communicate, create rituals, and provide the necessary sensitivity to interact with them appropriately such that both species are benefitted [74].”. Through constant interaction and proper care of pets, more often than not, bonds form between the two parties that mutually benefit one another. With the consistent care of their environment and nutrition, the pet at hand develops a level of trust in the owner that naturally increases as time goes on. Likewise, pet owners feel responsible for another life, fulfilling and adding purpose into their own lives, while also gaining a bond with their respective animal. Lastly, pets provide a shift in environment that is often well needed, and in return makes the space much more enjoyable “It was observed how coexistence with a pet can awaken different feelings, such as joy [80,88-91] and love, in their interaction with the subjects, with very high levels seen among those who live with a pet compared to those who do not. As for the feeling of protection, those living with a pet were more likely to feel protected than those who did not live with a pet.”. People have been recorded to feel safer at home, and with the pandemic forcing everyone to operate remotely, pets have become a crucial part of the household. From a personal perspective, I wholeheartedly agree with the findings,

with the pandemic even furthering the investment in my pets. Taking care of our animals was my main source of tranquility, as it was the only routine I was actively able to keep and control, while also reminding me of priorities, as lives literally depended on my responsibility. Altogether, it inspired the idea behind Interstellar Animals, as caring for creatures who provide undivided attention and support, whilst educating and providing others with said solace in a pet of their own.

Moving on, while drag wasn't my initial venue as a theatre major, it was the most practical and detrimental to my own well being. From a professional standpoint, the theatre world had been shut down for an unknown amount of time, due to COVID restrictions. Additionally, not being on campus made it impossible for me to maintain the connections with performance opportunities as well. Preparing to become a drag performer allowed me to safely quarantine, while also learning of a new way to engage in theatre. This meant learning new techniques for make-up, implementing performance practice into my day-to day routine, and more importantly, continuing to learn and expand my knowledge on the origins of said art practices. My involvement in the Queer People of Color organization on campus educated me well on the true origins of drag, being derived from ballroom culture. Historically speaking, queer performance has existed for years on end, as documented within Cameron Cookstons article, *Off the clock: Is drag 'just a job'?*. Though there was a lack of distinction between sexualities and gender differences, cross dressing was common in feudal plays, with men playing women and costumes not having a sex or gender association "Female impersonation was an increasingly popular component of vaudeville, minstrelsy and pantomime throughout the nineteenth century; however, the same period saw the emergence of 'the

homosexual' as the subject of psychological and criminal study, leading to an era of intense homophobic paranoia." Acceptance surrounding homosexuality was nonexistent, with most of these queer people putting themselves in harms way just to express themselves. One of the most prevalent eras in queer history were the Stonewall Riots, fronted by two transwomen of color, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera in 1969 "The Stonewall riots, which have historically been labelled a watershed for the dawning of the gay liberation movement, are generally depicted as having had a positive effect on the gay community and leading to a time of increased solidarity and acceptance for queers". Though this was a major win for the progression of queer rights, this was at the expense of queer people of color, as white led queer liberation movements excluded them from seats at the table. This also disproportionately affected the transgender community and the drag community, as back then they were often grouped and excluded together. As time went on, queer and trans people of color began forming communities in the form of balls as means to express themselves. Connecting it back to my personal goals, I really began to use drag as a way to explore my gender identity more, as doing so in the privacy of my own room kept me safe from the outside world. Thais G. Olivera's work entitled *Identifying As A Drag Queen And The Meaning of Work*, further discusses the generational shift in gender expression, as opposed to former gender standards "Postmodern trends also reveal other terms commonly used to designate practices related to this gender ambiguity--that is, other ways of being transgender, such as being a cross-dresser (drag artist), androgyne, intersex, and queer. In this case, considering that drag queens form one of the possible subsets of transvestism, it is important to have a definition that is capable of defining this practice

in its complexity. According to Alvarez and Perez (2009), drag artists are "a group marked by an uncertainty regarding gender identity with which they are identified since, being men, they usually use women's clothing and accessories to resemble a woman during a performance". With shows like RuPaul's Drag Race, *Legendary* and *Pose* gaining in popularity, they put the stories of those living the queer experience on the forefront. By putting gender non-conforming and transgender people in the spotlight, it spreads awareness of gender fluidity, while giving them a platform to express themselves safely and creatively. On a personal level, exploring drag and observing these queer forces in television helped me healthily cope with my own gender issues and pushed me to keep going. The article also tells the story of a gay man named Steve from Brazil, who goes by the drag name of Suzy Stab. Steve goes in depth about how drag performance became an escape from his homophobic household, in addition to an outlet to explore the boundaries of sexuality and gender. Performing in particular, fulfilled his purpose, to be recognized authentically for who he was "For Steve, being a drag queen is not restricted to a performance; it is an entire art, a beauty requirement, in setting up himself and his scenario, elements that make up his mask and his fantasy. His biggest concern is related to the satisfaction of his audience--that is, to fulfill the role to which he was assigned: to entertain, animate, and cheer. In this sense, the feeling of accomplishment in the work derives, above all, from the gaze of recognition of the public:..". Upon entering a ball or a drag show, there is an indescribable feeling of acceptance and warmth that shrouds you. Especially as a queer person, this kind of interaction is seldom from our heteronormative society, so these spaces are safe and make room for self expression. The conclusion of the journal entails "The popularization

of a drag queen's work opened up a whole social space that allowed this subject to find value and recognition in an office that preserves important elements of his identity, his fantasy, and his way of enjoying life, all at the same time. The dress--that is, the costume of the drag queen--is both his work tool and his uniform. As a uniform, it fulfills less the function of uniformization and much more a psychic, phantasmatic function of hiding and unveiling a point of conflict.”. Although recent breakthroughs and the legalization of gay marriage across the United States in 2016 have brought us closer, there are still barriers to overcome. Jobs concerning this form of art are often ridiculed and belittled, however, they do provide a service to the masses, entertainment. As an entertainer, you provide content to your audience and inspire them to do so as well. Particularly, as a drag artist, you are inspiring younger queer kids just by getting in a dress and heels. Quite often, jobs pertaining to the arts field in its entirety aren't taken seriously due to their “inconsistency”. Though not traditional, partaking in the performing arts is a serious job, regardless of the field you study in. These pieces live on for generations, and keep the world afloat in times of strife. Overall, the common theme throughout this was the fact that queer folk have been fighting for their rightfully deserved platforms for generations. From the beginnings of the Queer Rights movement with Stonewall, to the AIDS crisis throughout the 80's and 90's, to modern day, we continue to push barriers and fight for representation. In correlation with the project at hand, being isolated resulted in me questioning my gender expression and place in the performing world. Reflecting on the martyrs and pioneers that came from my predecessors reminded me not only that I belonged, but that the fight was far from over. My initial interest in theatre came from showing people in my community that they

could do it, and performing as a drag artist will pave that way for me. Whether it's in an underground ball in New York City or on the mainstage of RuPaul's drag race, my craft will move mountains.

Altogether, though the project isn't the most orthodox, writing a play and using documentary theatre techniques helped encapsulate my post graduate goals, while keeping me in lighter spirits. Through consistently journaling, writing down progress and losses, it assisted in coping with the extremities surrounding my everyday life. The pandemic caused a burden of stress from transitioning to being a student all over again, to handling a contagious virus in a condensed public housing complex. Through the creation of a family business involving animals, it greatly improved my mental state, in addition to reinforcing routines within my life. Moreover, expressing myself became essential, as I began to experience my first bouts of gender dysmorphia. When it came to the senior project procs, covering topics that I intended on pursuing for potential careers helped me prepare for the world upon reopening. Moreover, the work was authentic, capturing both the progress I've made studying theatre at Purchase, while providing an outlet for any frustrations or mishaps I would encounter. Through pursuing what made me happy, my senior project prepared me for the world after college, while leaving me with a work of art that's unique to myself and my journey.

Technical Paper
The Creative Process Defined

The overall experience of writing a play surrounding what was happening around me was awestrucking, for the simple fact that I had never seen my day to day routine as climactic. Oftentimes I'd view my own routine as a bit mundane, simple, undermining the investments I actually put into my work and the projects I've invested time and energy in. Moreover, in terms of this senior project, I had to track my work in several different areas in completely different ways. Setting my starting point, I began the work for the recording process in the first week of January, with the recording of everything varying in terms of tracking data and keeping information logged. My previous recording point served as too far back, with this play covering the first four months of 2021. Additionally, I was combining traditional playwriting skills with documentary theatre techniques. Overall, the environment I was in made this so much more challenging, especially since this wasn't the way I planned my initial exit project, nor my senior year as a whole. Nonetheless, *Coming Together: The Story of Me...I Guess* came to fruition beautifully, keeping me on my toes throughout this semester and teaching me lessons I'll never forget.

Prior to meeting with my advisor I distinguished my initial focuses; documenting my drag journey and my potential business endeavors. Additionally, I wanted the piece to serve as a memoir for myself to look back on and reference post graduation. My

concerns were vast, as I was worried about the workload, in addition to the ongoing pandemic preventing me from going on campus and extending the project scalewise. Also, the topics at hand contrasted each other, and just barely fit the typical theatre & performance guidelines. I scheduled a meeting with my advisor, Andrew Saito, and addressed everything at hand. He suggested writing a play about everything, while also incorporating a familiar genre to me, documentary theatre. We also agreed upon taking his corresponding course, Introduction to Documentary Theatre, in order to further familiarize myself with the techniques and learning through examples. From there on, I decided to do the play based on two separate parts. entitled *Coming Together: The Journey of Me...I Guess*. Originally, the title was a joke, as I felt that it sounded cliché, plus I used to loathe the term 'I guess'. However, as I began to write over the following months, I really resonated with the theme of togetherness and it reflected what I intended to write. The journey wasn't linear, and throughout it all I was consistently trying to beat my biggest enemy: second guessing myself. Within the first part, would be a memoir based play, focusing on the four months leading up to my graduation, featuring my two brothers and my mother. These were the people I was around most, and I was able to observe their behaviors easily, making the writing a breeze. Moving on, the second part would be called Words of Wisdom, the documentary theatre piece centered around receiving advice from my loved ones. Within this section, I wanted to get different perspectives on how I could further my journey, plus any guidance in areas I may not realize I need help in. Altogether, the foundation was set for my project, now shifting gears to centering my attention on writing a play and establishing research protocols for the play itself.

First and foremost, I needed to establish an outline of the play section, in addition to a time constraint, framing how I would be recording all of my data. I traced my journey beginning on Halloween 2020, which marked my first time in drag. Upon further reevaluation, I realized that it was going to be strenuous attempting to document life over all of those holidays and special occasions, so I switched it for early January and set myself to stop recording at the end of April. Each section was set to have four scenes for each month, consisting of either monologues, two person, or three person scenes. The materials of the scenes were yet to come, as I didn't want to immediately incorporate scenes based on how I was feeling at the moment. Due to the length of the piece itself, I wanted to be able to balance out good days with bads, and also include every aspect of preparing for my new endeavors. Specifically, maintaining the reptiles was subject to change on a day-to-day basis, and rehearsals of numbers nor make up looks would come out consistently crisp. The main focal point of the play was documenting a work in progress, not a how to guide. From that point on, I would formally write down and format all of my evidence within the last two weeks of May. With the timeline established, I began to set different recording methods for each area of focus that I had established. It was pivotal to maintain a routine, in order to familiarize myself with recording my patterns and encapsulating every aspect of the scenes I was writing.

From there, the recording methods varied on the basis on what topic I was covering. Setting the ground for the basics, I began to journal much more frequently than I usually would. I tried my best to avoid missing days, though gaps in journal entries were often analyzed, as I began to question what caused the pause in the first

place. My preferred method of documenting my interactions was through writing a small blurb, entailing the details surrounding my day. From there, I would draft up a mind map, a chart consisting of a big circle with a primary focus written in the middle, and corresponding feelings stemming off of the center with little circles connected by lines. The center circle pertained to summing up how I felt after writing, with the corresponding words serving as next steps or motivational phrases. Journaling kept me aware of the time that was going by, the emotions I felt in that month overall, and provided the content that my scenes needed. Every word that would be written in scenes encapsulated several dimensions to my journey, from the exact time I was going through it, which proved to be a big help. For the animals involved, I recorded the weights of our geckos constantly, monitored mating and reproduction records of our breeding females, in addition to interacting with them on a daily basis. While this may seem like traditional animal keeping practice, for an artist this fueled the scenes being written about the animals themselves. Every animal had a different response to being held, eating and behavioral patterns, which made it easier to describe them. Also, the journey glosses over the logistics of breeding the geckos, which was unpredictable in terms of laying times and hatching rates, providing additional unexpected twists and turns. For example, the scene entitled *Bebe's Story* was completely unplanned, with our future plans for rehabilitating sick animals coming into fruition upon a random pet store trip, and in *Eggy*, an unplanned pregnancy throws us in for a loop. From there, the universal recording method utilized for both aspects was taking photographs consistently. For both makeup and reptiles, photos speak volumes, showing the fruits of your labor visually. I made sure to take a photo of myself every time I finished doing my

makeup, and record my initial reaction to the look itself. With the reptiles, documenting the physical writing with the visual growth through photographs helped show the growth of both the animals and the business. Taking pictures of the geckos themselves, the eggs they laid, and progress photos of rehabilitated animals, helped push and shape the scenes as well. Documenting the change in my make-up would spark a certain feeling, or make me reminisce on what I had done that specific moment. Oftentimes, the scenes I would write were inspired by certain makeup looks, or documented attempts for me to refine an older look. Altogether, establishing these routines in my daily life, in addition to balancing my school and home routines was tedious, but worthwhile in the long run.

Once collecting the information for the base of the play was done, I reached out to my friends, and asked for them to record voice notes giving me advice for my Words of Wisdom section. I kept the parameters minimal, having it done on one take and no time limits, prevented me from influencing their answers in any way. This worked to my advantage, as the voice notes received varied in length from around 30 seconds to an astounding six minutes, bringing their characters to life just through their unique responses. I then asked the three main characters, my mother and brother for advice randomly, in order to get the most authentic response from each of them, while still gaining their consent prior to me recording. Upon the completion of the recording process, I then began to write the play itself. Formatting the scenes initially was having at least four per month, and making sure there was an even balance between monologues and scenes. From there, I titled every single month, the inspiration coming from hurricanes. Though they are catastrophic and oftentimes lethal, they are necessary

and ultimately, clean the area of debris and everything in its path. Drawing parallels to the content at hand, the play was contrasting, some being lighthearted, while others show vulnerability from the main character.

The second part was much easier, as transcribing was tedious yet mesmerizing. Through Andrew Saito's Documentary Theatre course I began to ease my way into the transcribing world, with the class as a whole providing unwavering support and uplifting energy. The process was simple yet hard at the same time, as you would record the person being interviewed and transcribe it verbatim. In terms of voice notes, this meant picking up on every little change from pauses to breath patterns. One exercise we had to do was performing a documentary theatre piece based on an interview done with someone you knew. This was the first time I had done the work required of documentary theatre, which pushed me out of my comfort zone. Traditionally, actors don't tend to do the behind the scenes work, let alone write a whole monologue. Through exercises like this, I began to pay more attention to the way characterization comes into play from a person's actions. For example, the person I interviewed was very jittery, and couldn't stop moving his leg. This influenced the way he would speak, as the speed of his leg would indicate the intensity of the story at hand. Upon performing the character, I made sure not just to notice the voice, but the whole demeanor of a character. With Saito's teachings in addition to prior knowledge, I became familiar with Anna Deveare Smith's and her exceptional plays like *Twilight Los Angeles*. I was always captivated by the way she performed and wrote her characters authentically. Even though she was the sole performer, every single monologue varied and it incorporated into bringing the show itself to life. With every recording or conversation recalled, I could describe the

characters vividly, keeping the characters true to their real life counterparts. As a result of these recording methods, the play practically wrote itself, my real life situations and loved ones shaping the play as a whole. Additionally, Saito's course helped fuel my drive to continue to perform, with our required readings every week stimulating my brain and driving me to write.

Altogether, I was working on the play for months, with road blocks like my phone breaking and my mother catching COVID slowing or stalling the process at a whim. Specifically, the month of March was the most challenging, with the influx of midterms aiding in delaying the progress of the play. Upon completion, the first part consisted of 18 pieces, with eight of them consisting of solo monologues, the other 10 are scenes. Out of all the scenes, only one scene is with someone besides the main characters. Though unexpected, it was needed, as the only person who could understand the senior project process was a fellow senior at Purchase. For the words of the advice column, 12 solo pieces were recorded, with the final one being a word of advice to my future self. Reflecting on the past four months, I did not expect to invest myself this much into the project as a whole. The writing process became a stress alleviator, and pushed me on days where I wasn't there mentally. Also, it left me with a detailed account of this semester, which was more beneficial than I realized. Through writing a play and utilizing documentary theatre tactics, I was finally able to fulfill the premise, finding my love for theatre again in a way unique to me.

Coming Together: The Story of Me.....I Guess

By Jose Velasquez

Main Characters

Jose: early 20's, Latino, goes by he/she/they pronouns, vivacious, full of life, dramatic and quick speaking

Josh: early 20's, Black, goes by he/him pronouns, nonchalant, reliable, spontaneous, low-spoken and sarcastic

Phillip: 18-20, Latino, goes by he/him pronouns, honest, reserved, understanding, low-spoken and level headed

Mom: late 40's, Latino, goes by she/her pronouns, fast spoken and loud, affectionate, emotional, intense

Supporting Characters

- *Amya: early 20's, Black, goes by she/her pronouns, quick spoken, poised, good listener, straightforward*
- *Sara: early 20's, white, goes by she/her pronouns, soft spoken, empathetic, gentle, quiet*
- *Liz: early 20's, white, goes by she/her, extra, loud spoken, loyal, fierce, energetic*
- *Alecia: early 20's, Latina, goes by she/her pronouns, soft spoken, distant, caring, enthusiastic*

- *Isiah: early 20's, Latino, goes by he/him pronouns, low-spoken, sarcastic/humorous, supportive*
- *Nalysha: early 20's, Black, goes by she/her pronouns, loud, outspoken, comedic, loving*
- *Monica: early 20's, Black, goes by she/her pronouns, wise, well-spoken, firm, motherly*
- *William: early 20's, Latino, goes by she/her pronouns, outrageous, loud spoken, loyal, independent*

Table of Contents:

January: Fresh Start

- *Prologue: Who TF Are You?*
- *Senior Project Woes*
- *The Drag Queen at Michael's*
- *Interstellar Animals: The Beginnings*

February: Turning of Tides

- *So Mom...About Me Being a Boy.....*
- *Animal Intercourse*
- *Dancing Queen? You Wish!*
- *Eggy!*

March: The Hurricane Hits

- *COVID Where!?!?!?*
- *Bebe: The Light in the Darkness*
- *Family Meeting*
- *Isabella: Who's She?*

April: The Eye of the Storm

- *Decisions, Decisions*
- *Wow....Life Sucks!*
- *RuPaul's Drag Race: Can My Lil Ass Win?*

- *Life Sucks....Again*
- *Reflection and Eyeshadow: What's Next for Me?*

Words of Advice

January

the scene opens on Jose sitting on the couch, with the TV in the background playing music. He has a drink in his hand, presumably alcoholic

Jose: Honestly, this pandemic done fucked me up and over. *sips drink* Pardon my French but it's true. I mean come on now, *takes long sip of drink, the taste visibly affecting him* I was born to be a starrrr! Like, the fact that my whole college experience and basically everything I've had planned for myself since I was 18 went into the garbage OVER NIGHT. Then it was all of this online class and then Broadway's shut down and you start to go crazy. I mean everything was standing still, forced in place, while my mind was spiraling out of control. Negative thoughts everywhere...but you know *sips drink* we gon be aight. That's all I can say, pick myself up say "It be like that" and keep it moving, Being in quarantine was like being stuck in time, I don't even wanna talk about it right now. The only thing I miss is that unemployment bonus. How is it that I went back to work and made sooo much less money? Believe me *gulp of drink* I def liked everyone, it was cute, but the job was draining, people have no public decency and: we're in a pandemic?!?!? Ugh anyways: my job ended up closing right

before school started and I took it as a sign to invest. I had my first time in drag around October? Yeah it was Halloween and after that I wanted to do it again: so I had dedicated that, got a sewing machine, but then my brother came into the picture. I'll get into my family more later, but anyways he wants to do reptile breeding *finishes drink* Ahhhh, that's some good shit. Back to the point, yeah he wants to breed reptiles and at first I'm like "How the hell we gon do that in the hood??" but we talked it out more, and we agreed. So, now I'm part aspiring entrepreneur/animal specialist??? And also an aspiring drag artist while also going for my degree in Theatre???? *sigh* Wow that was a mouthful. I'm tired now *yawn* but yeah to wrap this up I'm just trying my damn best. Finding love again in my study and reconnectin to my roots I guess. I hope it pays off. Actually no. I just KNOW it will pay off. *pours a little shot* to us, progress and trying my best! *drinks, grimaces, and then burps* Ew, that was a bad idea, bad idea

Jose is sitting on the futon in the bedroom, and gets a FaceTime call, he positions the phone and answers the call

Amya: Hiii friend

Jose: Hiii friend I miss you!!

Amya: I miss you too boo, how've you been?

Jose: *smirks and nods their head* It's been.....going

both of them laugh

Amya: I felt that, life just been all over the place

Jose: Right, how're classes going for you?

Amya: It's been good, they've been doing a lot, but it's -it's gettin done

Jose: Good to hear, how about your senior project? What're you doing again?

Amya: I'm doing a solo show, remember?

Jose: That's rightttt, the play right?

Amya: Yeah it's the play No Child by Nilja Sun

Jose: Oh really what's it about?

Amya: It's basically a one person show about a teacher who goes to work in the Bronx-

Jose: *screaming* AHHHHH THE BRONX!

the pair both start laughing

Amya: I knew ya extra ass was gonna do that

the laughing continues

Amya: Nah but seriously though ummm *pause* where was I?

Jose: Ummmm *pause* damn we were just talking about it too

pause continues, the pair thinking intensely

Jose: *snaps and picks his head up quickly* You were telling me bout ya senior project

Amya: *sigh of relief* Riiiiighhhhtttt. Okay so yeah it's a teacher who works in the Bronx and is trying to get the kids into theatre, there's several characters though

Jose: Ohhh okay, that sounds fire, I thought you wanted to direct?

Amya: Yeah, I had to switch to performing cause of a class I missed but it's aight

Jose: Yeah that's not bad, how's it going

Amya: *quiet for a second and starts to talk* You know...ummm... it's going

Jose bursts into laughter, with Amya joining in

Jose: *laughing subsides* Nahhh see at least you started

Amya: Speaking of that-What're you doing for yours? Weren't you in that play-

Jose: Zemi?

Amya: Yeah that one, with that Kiara girl how's that going?

Jose: Well that's cancelled *laughs*

Amya: *looks at me with confusion* Bitch how the- what- what happened?

Jose: Well *inhales and starts again* they wanted to do a performance in person and I'm just not fucking with it. Plus with me trying to start my drag and the business-

Amya: What business?

Jose: The leopard geckos

Amya: *grimaces* Oh right

Jose: Girl don't tell me you don't like those either?!?!

Amya: Jose I am from the South we do not play that shit!!!!

Jose: I mean come on they're sooo cute!

Amya: *fake gags*

Jose: *rolls eyes* Anyways, yeah it was just so overwhelming, plus you know I just got off of work so I wanna

Amya: Rightttt that Michaels is done right?

Jose: YES! Finalfuckingly. I can breathe again

Amya: Good, good, fuck that job

Jose: FACTS! But now, I'm probably gonna write a play

Amya: A play? What about?

Jose: *sigh* I want it to be like my life until I graduate- you know with what i mentioned earlier- and it's supposed to be a documentary theatre piece too soo...

Amya; Well bitch it's damn near the end of January, you gotta have more than that

Jose: I knowwww it's just so hard

Amya: Bro, we're almost there, don't give up now

Jose: I know bro, I know

Amya: Just get that shit done so we can get up outta there

Jose: Now that's a fucking fact, can you believe we're almost there?!?

Amya: Nahhh I can't honestly, it's so surreal

Jose: That's why I just need to get this project done

Amya: You better! We need to graduate together and with that bein said, imma let you go and get yo shit together *they both laugh*

Jose: *still laughing* You right girl, imma text you

Amya: Alright good luck byeeee

Jose: Byeeeeee *the pair smile at one another, while the phone call hangs up*

Jose is sitting on a couch, looking at an eyeshadow palette, with a mirror and a box full of makeup related items on a small brown table

Jose: My first time in drag? *big exhale* WHEW that was a moment that I didn't expect, nor would I have done a year ago. Did that sentence even make sense? *pause* Oh well. So, I had a shift on Halloween, which was annoying to start with, but with my bplans I just took it as an excuse to make this EVEN more ballsy. I mean to most it seems like a lot to go to their basic ass retail job in the middle of a pandemic dressed up

in heels, make up, a glittery mask and butterfly wings. *pause* Okay maybe that is a lot, but hey if anyone was gonna do it, I had to do so. The goal was queen of the butterflies and BOY, did I prepare and work my ass off for this one. I had this pair of black flared pants that fit snug, this shimmery top from some store ion remember, silver heels I found at the thrift shop down the block *hits make up brush and continues on* and these wings I got from Party City. NOWW before ya clock me for the party city wings, it was what needed to be done and it gave what it needed to give okay? Okay. So I had the outfit down packed and I freestyled my eyeshadow because in the words of one of my favorite managers ``Halloween is one the very few days where you can get away with looking like a hot ass mess”.*puts down the make up brush* Not saying that I was gonna look like a hot mess, but I mean if I did look like one nobody would care. It’s like I don’t care what nobody gotta say, but at the same time I wanna get “Wooowww” not “Ohhhhhh...” Okay let me get back on track, so at this point we get to the hair and LET ME TELL YOU NOW *this part is emphasized, but at the same time Jose messes up the eyeshadow a bit* NO ugh- fuck I wasn’t supposed to use that color again *shifts through makeup bag* okay but see this is exactly what happened. Unexpected circumstances *laughter, while Jose touches up the make up* okayyy, much better. I was doing the two ponytails, initially I was going for queen of the butterflies on some extra type of thing, but I couldn’t find the butterflies so that was deaded. Anywho, my hair is super difficult and that took legitimately an hour. I was supposed to ummmm be at work by *pause* lemme think I guess like 3-yeah it was 3pm *puts down makeup brush* Yup! It was a 3 to 8 shift because we had a lil gathering at my house afterwards, so I was already worried. It’s getting late and I don’t even have my nails on, my shoes

aren't on and this was gonna be my first time going out in drag. *picks up makeup brush again* It was a hot ass mess. My entire being was all over the place and low and behold, my mama done saved the day and offered to drive me there. So I finally got myself together at ummmm like 3:30 and of course my unprepared ass was putting these press on nails on IN THE CAR *laughter* and yeah I got there pretty late, got straight to work and actually killed it? *giggle* I mean I know I gas myself up for surface measures but that day felt so accomplished for me? People complimented me, my coworkers ate it up, and I felt in my element again. I mean granted it wasn't the smartest idea to wear heels for a shift like this and go up and down ladders in it buttt I mean *puts brush down, picks up mirror* beauty is pain I guess * examines themselves* okay this isn't the worst but hey practice is practice *puts mirror down* That's the biggest take away I had from this all, you can't be worried bout what the next bitch gotta say. Like right now? I know damn well someone would clock me for my hair not being refreshed, or my eyeshadow for not being defined *inhale* but I *exhale* need to not let what other people think bother me. Whew that felt good to say. I'm my own worst enemy, so if I just have fun with it, I know it will get better. I'm practicing in my bedroom now but who knows, maybe I'll be on stage in a year?

the two of us are huddled over the set up, fixated on the new arrivals. The two bright orange geckos are on the table, in two separate carrying containers. In the background is a wooden rack

Jose: Wooooaaahhhh, they are so pretty

Josh: I told you I got the best taste

Jose: Well technically, I always said I wanted them, buttt we needed a different genetic at the time-

Josh: Nah, this was all me

Jose: *laughs* Whatever helps you sleep at night, but that brings us to six right?

Josh: Yup

Jose: Okay good, so laying wise each female has the potential to lay at least 20 eggs each

Josh: Right, so 60 all together *he pokes the container and the gecko bucks*

Jose grab the plastic container, and start to set up, placing a rock, and a box filled with soil

Jose: Well yes, but remember the girls we have already are first years, so probably around 45, plus that's if they even get pregnant

Josh: True, true *the gecko bucks again* you better get the bin for him ready

Jose: You can put him in here, the shelf is ready too

Josh: Imma try to hold him *he opens the container holding the rambunctious gecko* come here boy *holding the gecko, it begins to immediately thrash, he puts him down in the bin* okay so he didn't like that, what a dick

Jose: Well we did, just get them. He's lucky he's cute, look at how orange he is and the green spots on the side?

Josh: Yeah, he's stunning *puts the container on the rack, then picks up the other small container with another bright orange gecko* but not as pretty as her!

Jose: *repeats the same process with another container* Yeah she's super pretty, but more of a lighter orange

Josh: I love the spot on her back, plus the freckles she has on her head are the cutest

Jose: I wonder how she is with handling

Josh: Well, there's only one way to find out *he opens the small container and holds the gecko, it makes a little croaking sound* WOAHH, that was unexpected

they both laugh

Jose: Nahhh she's upset, I knew the babies could scream but the older ones? That's insane

Josh: Okay and now I put you down *he puts the gecko into the bin, and slides it into place* okay, so names for them

Jose: I guess we'll think about that later, let's check on the other four

Josh: Alright then, who first?

Jose: Let's look at Magik, she's the fussiest one

Josh: Yeah, I doubt she'll let us hold her *he pulls out the container to reveal a white gecko with a pink tail. He places his hand in and she immediately scurries away* and of course she runs back

Jose: Yeahhh, it's gonna take a minute to calm her down, she lucky she cute enough to put up with her shit

Josh: And she's the key to our babies!

Jose: Fingers crossed she gives us some hatchlings, now to check on the next girl *he slides out a bin and picks up an all grey gecko with all black eyes. The gecko starts to frantically climb on Josh's shoulder* Aht aht- you get back here * he grabs her again

and continues to palm hold her* Hi Jubilee *whistle* whew, she's honestly forever gonna be my favorite

Jose: Of course she is, typically on brand for you

Josh: The Eclipse eyes on the solid grey? Crisp

Jose: I really wanna pass that gene off onto her kids, that would be fire

Josh: Well that's what we got Lucci for *He puts the squirmy gecko down and slides the bin back in. He then pulls out another bin and pulls out a yellow gecko with brown marks, an Eclipse eye and a white eye* right poppas, you such a good boy

Jose: He's so calm now, I really hope the others calm down like he did *Jose reaches his hand out and the gecko climbs onto it* He's already learning who we are too

Josh: He's pretty smart, plus his eyes are fire, and with him we'll get Eclipse babies

Jose: Listen his shooters better shoot that's all I gotta say

Josh: Don't sleep on my son he gon get the job done *he puts the calm, nonchalant gecko back into the bin*

Jose: Speaking of sons *Jose slides open another bin and pulls out a bright yellow gecko with white spots* here's my baby Gambit! *the gecko stays still on her hand, analyzing the situation at hand, and proceeds to climb up Jose's arm* he's really so cute

Josh: And friendly, pass him *he reaches his hand out and the gecko quickly climbs over* he's gonna be the star of the YouTube videos

Jose: Yes ma'am my baby is gonna get big, and strong, and he's just so adorable I love him, pass him back

Josh: Hell no

Jose: Pleaseeeeee

Josh: *sucks teeth* Just take him *he picks up the gecko and places him on my shirt*

Jose: We gotta wait on him to grow up a little bit, but soon he'll be big enough

Josh: I want babies already

Jose: You're insane *puts the gecko back in his bin* that's a hell of a responsibility

Josh: I know, but so is this whole business

Jose: True, I just hope it works

Josh: Hey *pats Jose's head* we're gonna do fine, don't be hard on yourself it's the first year

Jose: Also true, I wonder how much we'll actually make

Josh: Like a thousand

Jose:*laughs* I doubt that much but hey, we could dream

February

I'm doing my hair while my mother passes by my room, she peeps in

Mom: You look pretty

Jose: Thank you, I'm trying to get my hair together

Mom: No it looks really good, you've been using the products we bought?

Me: Yeah, I love that curl pudding it works so good for my hair

Mom: Ooooh you're right, plus it smells sooo good

Me: Right, and it keeps my hair light and defined at the same time

Mom: Well you look beautiful son- I mean daughter

Me: *slight laughter* Thanks mom

Mom: Of course honey, that reminds me, I've been meaning to ask you something- well that's if right now isn't a bad time

Me: No it's fine, what's up?

Mom: I know you're getting into drag and stuff like that, which I'm so proud of by the way, but I wanna know like *pause* Do you like being called he or she more specifically?

Me: *breath in* Honestly- I'm still figuring that out myself, like honestly I know I'm a femme

Mom: Right

Me: But like gender is so weird for me *pause* Like Purchase was fucking annoying as shit but lemme tell you, they taught me so much

Mom: I could only imagine, all of this stuff ya know, my mom didn't even like me being gay *slight laughter* ya know, Abuela only got familiar with it towards the very end and if I hadn't met Siomara who knows

Jose: Yeah, Abuela was smart though cause she the best girl you've had

the pair laugh in agreeance

Mom: Yeahh, she is *pause* but back to you-

Jose: Oh right so ummm yeah at the moment I would have to say I'm a non binary femme

Mom: Okay....what does that mean exactly

Jose: Okay so it's like *claps hands* I'm not a boy, but I'm not exactly a girl either

Mom: Alright

Jose: However, I also would say femme because I'm naturally feminine

Mom" Right right

Jose: So in drag I would be she, but you can also call me she out of drag

Mom: So is that what you'd prefer?

Jose: Well that's the thing I also don't mind either, like you say son or daughter and it doesn't bother me, I just don't want to be boxed into one specific gender. *Jose starts to do her hair again, looking into the mirror* you know, my whole life it was never to one side. Whenever I tried to make guy friends it rarely works out and most of my guy friends are queer themselves *they both laugh*

Mom: Yeah we all a lil gay *laugh*

Jose: Exactly, and even with the ones who aren't, they actually respect ME for who I am. Y'know boys like Jimmy and William come around oh so often, that's why I was so staticky growin up, I just wasn't with gettin picked on. My girlfriends always had my back, like you know who I be with

Mom: Oh yeah, they all crazy

Jose: Exactly, but I was always still a boy because of what's in my pants

Mom: Which you're okay with? You're not tryin to transition or anything? I don't wanna be intrusive so-

Jose: Nah it's fine, yeah I'm happy with my sex, my gender expression has always separated me from the rest. I've never fit into either and going to Purchase helped me not only find who I am, but people who related to me. Working in QPOC was a big responsibility that I adored so much because I found who I was through it all. It's what I

miss the most about Purchase, but hey everything happens for a reason. That's why I'm so grateful for you guys. I mean- you all support me no matter what.

Mom: Of course, you didn't choose any of this and you've always been a good kid.

You're a pain in the ass *Jose laughs* but you're mine. I've been arguing with people my whole life about how I'm raising you and it's because they want their kids a certain way. I wanted my kids happy and healthy, and that's what I still have. Express yourself the way you want to

Jose: Awww mom stop this is so emotional *they both laugh*

Jose gets up and they hug

Mom: Don't let anyone take your shine away baby, I gotchu no matter what.

Jose: I love you Mom

Mom: I love you too

Josh has a gecko in his hands, over an open bin, Jose walks into the room

Jose: What're you doing?

Josh: I'm about to pair the geckos

Jose: Ooooooh I wanna see

Josh: *looks at me confused* You're weird

Jose: I mean this is sorta my forte

Josh: *looks at Jose perplexed* Animal sex is your forte? Good to know

Jose: No idiot, when I was a kid I really wanted to be a reproductive specialist when it came to animals

Josh: Wow really?

Jose: Yeah, I had this whole dream of going to a giant panda reserve in China, and becoming a reproductive specialist to study their super unsteady birth cycles

Josh: That's oddly specific

Jose: Right, I was a weird kid *pause* but that's not the point, what're you doing here

Josh: Well I got Lucci *gestures to the unbothered gecko* and I'm gonna drop him in with Magik and see what happens

Jose: Eeeeeek I'm so excited!!

Josh puts Lucci down and the encounter goes, not too well. The geckos begin playing cat and mouse, but to no avail

Josh: Let's see maybe she's putting up a front

Jose: Nah, just take him out, she's obviously upset

Josh: Yeah you're right, he keeps vibrating his tail, but she won't even let him get near her

Josh lifts up Lucci, with Magik darting across the enclosure and into her cave

Josh: Geez, okay pushy *he slides the container closed, and opens Jubilee's* alright let's see if these two pair up

Jose: I hope she's calmer than the other one, we need them eggs soon

Josh: Yeah if we breed them now, we should have babies by late March early April

Jose: Riiight, their gestation is pretty solid cause they lay like two eggs a clutch, with a potential of 20 all together

Josh: Oh so a pair every like two weeks?

Jose: *snaps* Exactly, so if we breed them now, she'll be laying till about late April- give or take maybe May

Josh: That's perfect, we got two other girls as well, so hopefully they all lay at the same time. *inhale* with that being said *exhale* drop him in, fingers crossed this works!

Josh puts the male in the container, and they automatically start getting along. Soon after intercourse commences

Jose: Annnnd we'll have eggs in about two weeks *sigh* phew that was a relief

Josh: She received him much better than Magik, you peeped her body language and how she lifted her tail?

Jose: Yeah and plus she actually got closer to him, Magik kept running and tensing up

Josh: You must be so excited watching this huh

Jose: What?

Josh: Yeah a little animal intercourse *slightly pushes me*

Jose: *laughs* Shut up I wasn't that weird, though I did watch animal births as-

Josh: What's good with you?

Jose: REPRODUCTIVE SPECIALIST

Josh: Still you were like six-seven watching that nasty shit *looks back at the bin to see the pair done* speaking of nasty shit, they're done *he picks up Lucci* good boy, now you can go back to sleep *places him back in his bin and slide's Jubilee's closed* now let's leave her alone and keep her food bowl packed

Jose: Okay, I'm gonna check on Gambit

Josh: *looks at me weird* For what?

Jose: He's the baby we gotta check on him

Josh: He ain't a baby, he's just younger than the rest

Jose: Well I don't care *he sticks his tongue at Josh mockingly and picks up the excited gecko*

Hi Gambit, you look soo good and healthy

Josh: Put him back

Jose: Say hi first

Josh: Hi *the gecko looks at him, and extends himself to reach for his shirt sleeve* And he's climbing me. Of course *he picks the gecko up, slides out his enclosure, and puts him back* Now, back to business

Jose: Onto Cyrus and Elektra now?

Josh: Yeah, get the container for Cyrus, you know how he gets

Jose: *sigh* He's such a pretty gecko, but his attitude? Far from it

they slide open the bin to the orange gecko, he immediately starts running across the enclosure

Josh: Get him!

Jose struggles for a bit, until he finally gets him into a smaller container

Jose: Well *sigh* I'm glad to still have all my fingers, now let's get this shit started *she slides open the female orange gecko, Elektra's bin and places him in* Now let's hope that they get to doin the nasty

For once, Cyrus calms down at the scent of Elektra, and the mating ritual starts again

Josh: And we got Tangerine babies

Jose: Perfect, good job us *they high five* I love the way the boys vibrate their tails, they're like little rattlesnakes, only they're not cause he's a lizard

Josh: I'm just surprised he was so calm, that's the easiest he's been with us since we've had him

Jose: Well he did say that they were paired before

Josh: Hopefully they're super fertile this time around too

Jose: I wouldn't doubt it, my son puttin in work over there

Josh: Wow, you really do have fun watching this *Josh laughs while Jose proceeds to swat him on the head* Okay I'm sorry chill out

Jose: Just get the container, he finished doin what he needed to do

Josh picks up the lizard and immediately slides out the container to readily close it

Josh: Only time he didn't flip out was after mating. Wow.

Jose: Well, he was happy *chuckles* what'd you expect? But seriously though, now it's just a waiting game

Josh: Soon we should have some eggs and then the hatchlings!

Jose: Yup, I can't wait, what do you wanna do now

Josh: Watch TV and roll up?

Jose: Hell yeah can we watch some animal shows?

Josh: What, didn't watch enough animal sex you weir-

Jose: Just get outta my room, we can watch Spongebob instead

Josh: Now that's better, anything but more animal intercourse

Jose looks into the mirror and sees herself with a ponytail extension, bright blue eyeshadow, silver heels and a silver dress. Low high energy music is playing in the background

Jose: *heavily breathing* Whew, this dress keeps making my underwear all over the place *adjusts her dress* this performing shit is so hard, I can feel my extensions lifting up too, WHEW lemme turn off this music *walks over to the futon, turns off the music and throws herself into the futon* Imma really have to start stretching all over again huh? Plus these heels? Girl I ain't even tuck either *drinks water* this is literally the tip of the iceberg *slowly exhales*. I'm gonna need to start stretching more cause this is ridiculous. The craziest part is that I've never been a dancer, like I was always known for having two left feet, except when it came to shaking my ass *laughs obnoxiously* nah I'm being serious though, my waistline is just separate from the rest of my body. Like put on some "Booty Me Down" or "Needle Eye " and I swear imma hit every beat and look good doing it. Choreography? Deaded. Like off rip, I'm missing every step. I grew up a musical theatre kid, so believe me I've had my moments off messing up in a crowd of people. Then again, at Purchase I would vogue at our Club Kid nights and parties, and I did well. Especially Fall Ball, when I participated in the Face category? I didn't have to dance much but I served it the fuck UP *claps* I still can't believe I didn't win, but hey, that's the entertainment world. Anyways, for some reason, even though I can't dance I love performing like lip syncs and think of choreo and steps in my head *sigh* it's just getting them out. Like in my room, facing my mirror, I feel like a

supermodel like I put on my vogue beats or my lipsync playlist? I'm in my own world just living and being so happy. Regardless of the heels hurting my feet, the eyeshadow smudging, the tight dresses, I feel ALIVE whenever I perform. It's why I fell in love with acting, and drag is what's making me fall in love with the art of performing all over again. I wanna get into the ballroom scene as well, watching the videos just makes me feel at home *sigh* shows like Drag Race and Pose made me feel like I had a place in the world, as a queer kid of color. That my existence wasn't some kind of burden or self imposed trauma. So, I'm gonna keep dancing in these little thrift shop heels *plays the music again, turning it up a little* practice my songs and my vogue beats, and someday soon I'll be booking gigs and performing at balls, but until then, my bedroom mirror will be enough audience

Jose bursts into the boys room, with Josh and Phillip sleeping

Jose: YOOOOO!

Josh and Phillip awaken startled, Phillip sucks his teeth, and pulls the blanket over his face, Josh grunts

Phillip: Jose what in the hell are you yelling for

Jose: Sorry Phillip but I had to wake him up *he shakes Josh, while Phillip goes back to sleep* Guess what

Josh: *half asleep* Whattt

Jose: We got an egg

Josh's eyes immediately widen and he jumps up from bed

Phillip: Congrats, now get out

Jose: Fine, fine, fine, but you *points at Josh* hurry up

Josh: I'm coming, I'm coming

the pair both walk into the room and Jose eagerly yet gently pulls out the enclosure, to reveal Magik, sitting over a single egg in a dirt hide box

Josh: What? How did she- wait is it viable?

Jose: Well it looks good, it's not like that weird yellow one she passed

Josh: But how did she even get pregnant? It's not like we paired the- *silence ensued, with Josh's face slowly changing*

Jose: *waves hand in front of Josh's face* You aight?

Josh: Hold up, I'm thinking *snaps his fingers as he comes to a realization* I did mate them, but accidentally

Jose: What do you mean?

Josh: Well, remember when Jimmy was up here, and his family was here and all of that extra stuff with Phillip's desk was going on?

Jose: Yeah, that day was annoying as hell, but what about it?

Josh: Well, that day I went to check on the geckos, and I picked up Lucci to interact with him, but Mom called me so I put him back in his container

Jose: But what does that-

Josh: Let me finish! When I came back to the room, I noticed that I had accidentally put Lucci in Magik's container

Jose: *gasps* And that was about three weeks ago.....

Josh: So she must've gotten pregnant! Damn, I'm good at this

Jose: But now we need an incubator

Josh: *winces* Yikes, we can order it now, but it won't be here for another few days

Jose: Well we can just put the dirt box over where her heat pad is for right now, at least until it gets here

Josh: Right, but hey we got an egg!

Jose: Yes. We got an egg. All we need is the other girls to get pregnant

Josh: *slides out another container and picks up a notably chunkier orange gecko* Well, she has that all handled

Jose: Woah big mama, she gonna give us some good ass eggs *Jose pets her and she chirps, with Josh putting her down* she's gotten better with handling too

Josh: That's very true, I think she's always gonna be noisey *they both laugh*

Jose: *slides the enclosure in and pulls out Jubilee's container* She don't look too big, but hey, it' come with time *he tries to grab her but she darts away* Eh hh imma leave you alone *slides the enclosure closed*

Josh: Within the next few weeks we should have more, but for right now-

Jose: We got Eggy!

Josh: Eggy? That's so creative

Jose: Shut up, the point is to be cliché

Josh: *grumbles* Well you sure did that

Jose swats Josh in the head repeatedly, chasing him out the room

Josh: Ow-okay-I'm sorry-MOOOM

March

Jose walks into the living room and sits at the table, with his mask on. Mom walks out the bathroom to the hallway, with a mask on as well

Mom: Hey

Jose: Hey mom, how're you feeling

Mom: I'm feeling alright, just a slight fever, and I'm super tired

Jose: Okay that's good

silence between them as Mom sprays with disinfectant

Mom" Yeah I've been spraying this disinfectant everywhere to keep you guys safe

Jose: I know you're being careful mom, I just get so worried about things like this, especially COVID?

Mom: I know Jose but you have to ease up sometimes, the world isn't just on your shoulders, I'm still ya mom

Jose: I know, it's just scary, plus it's just horrible timing too ya know?

Mom: Believe me, I get it, I was just starting this new job, then I get this diagnosis and I'm like "Whatttt?" *cough* like it's just crazy how this happened so much later

Jose: I guess that's why it had to happen at some point

Mom: I'm saying! It had to happen and I'm just glad to still be okay and that you guys aren't sick as of right now

Jose: We all feel fine, I'm supposed to be getting tested tomorrow

Mom: That's good, I bet you guys are fine, but you know we have to quarantine anyways

Jose: I know, but I have to go out and get the animals their food, plus resources period *sigh* cause we ain't got shit in the house right now

Mom: I know, and we can't keep ordering out the way we are

Jose: That's facts *pause* Mom, I hope you know I don't think it's your fault

Mom: I know, we were just all very overwhelmed

Jose: Plus I came home super drunk which just wasn't the time to find out, and I came back from dinner, which is ironic considering this was the first time I've gone out to dinner the whole damn pandemic and this happens *they both laugh*

Mom: Yeah and you came home off your ass *they both laugh again*

Jose: Damn right, but yeah mom I just worry about you a lot. Like we all do.

Mom: I know, and I'm so grateful for what you guys do, just know we will get through this. It'll be okay

Jose: You're right, let me know if you need anything, and get your rest!

Mom: I will, imma take myself to bed right now

Bebe Story

Phillip is in the kitchen making a sandwich, with Josh and Jose struggling to come through the front door, Josh holding a 10 gallon tank with a little box inside, and Jose carrying several bags

Phillip: Where did ya go?

they both put their items down, Jose throwing the items and Josh gently placing the tank, the pair is out of breath, and take off masks and gloves

Jose: *catching their breath* Well, as you know I got tested for COVID and it was negative, so I knew we were all okay *more heavy breathing* Whew is it hot in here

Phillip: Alright I get that, Jesus give yourself some time to fucking breathe

Josh: *grabs the box from inside the tank and opens it* Look at the baby

inside the box lays a little yellow and black gecko, with an immense amount of dry skin stuck to its body. One of it's eyes are practically shut, with the legs looking nimble and weak

Phillip: Awwww it's so damn small, look at how cute that is

Jose: Well yeah, that's the premise of the story *Jose finally catches his breath*

Basically, we managed to convince mom to let us rescue a baby gecko from the damn Petco.

Phillip: How'd you manage to do that?

Josh: I made him ask her

they all laugh

Jose: Thanks Captain Obvious, honestly I didn't even think it would work, you know how mom is with that kinda stuff. But, I'm guessing that her having COVID is making her more generous?

Josh: Oh please, you know ma is mad emotional, you think she was gonna say no to that little cutie

Jose: Did you ask her

Josh: *silence, then a low grumble* No

Jose: And why didn't you ask her?

Josh: *grumbling* Because I thought she would say no

Jose: Exactly my point

Phillip: Back to the damn topic at hand, so mom said yes, what's up with this little guy, he doesn't look so good. Do you even know if it's a boy or a girl

Josh: Nah, too young, but basically, the baby was in a sand tank with other geckos, and it was obviously the smallest

Phillip: *winces* I can see where this is going

Jose: So we kept walking back and forth contemplating if we should take it home or not right? Tell me why while we're looking at the baby- and it's laying like belly first, mad dirt all in the eyes and face- this lil gecko comes over, and starts whoopin lil dude's ass

Phillip: Damn for what, my son started whooping ass for no reason

Jose: Yup, and that's when I lost it, so Josh gets me to text mom in the group chat-

Phillip: Wait, this all went down in the groupchat?

Jose and Josh: Yeah

Phillip: Damn, I should really unmute that sometime

Josh: Honestly, I just be checking when it's convenient

Phillip: Yeah if anything I know Jose will answer cause he doesn't shut the fuck up

Josh and Phillip laugh, with Jose sucking his teeth

Jose: ANYWAYS, so yeah surprisingly she was on board with everything, so we brought her home in this new tank, the dumbass store didn't even have the right stuff for a leopard gecko

Josh: That store honestly sucks -not the people who work there- the company as whole just sucks

Phillip: So what now?

Jose: Well we gotta get her stuck shed off, hope her legs aren't messed up, get her fat and if she makes it through, find a new home

Phillip: Aw, that's mad nice of ya

Mom leaves the bathroom, wearing two masks and gloves

Mom: Hey boys

Phillip, Jose & Josh: Hi Mom

Mom: Did you bring home the baby?

Jose: Yes we did! Wanna see?

Mom: Of course

Josh places the small box in the center of the dining table, while Mom walks towards it, Josh takes three big steps back

Mom: Awwww, that's a tiny guy, do you know how old it is?

Jose: Nope, just that she was a baby, cost \$35, and needed assistance shedding

Mom: I could see that *she gestures towards the box and the baby stands up, scrambling at the sight of her shadow* Well you for sure got a fighter *laughter*She'll fit in good here. I'm glad you guys rescued her

Jose: Yeah thanks for letting us bring her home mom

Mom: Oh don't bother, she needed help. That's what we're here for, to help others, no matter who or what. So what're you gonna name her?

Jose: I don't know right now

Josh: How about Bebe?

they all agree in semi-unison

Jose: Cute, it's short and gender neutral

Mom: Yeah I like that one

Phillip: I can't believe I'm saying this, but good job Josh

they all laugh

Josh: Alright, with that being said, let's go set Bebe up

Phillip, Josh and Jose sit in Josh and Phillip's room, with Mom opening the door and standing in the doorway

Mom: Well guys, I'm officially COVID free

the three of them start clapping, while Mom does a little bow

Mom: Thank you, thank you, now to get back to work

Jose: Have you gone to the doctor since?

Mom: No, but I don't have time right now, I gotta get back to making money

Phillip: Just be careful ma, I mean you just got over this

Josh: Yeah, you don't wanna wear yourself out

Mom: I understand, but I haven't worked for two weeks, and now that I'm out of a job, I wanna get back into real estate

Jose: I believe in you momma, believe me *pause* we just want you to stay safe

Mom: Don't worry about me, I got this, honestly-as like- y'know weird it sounds, this was sorta a blessing in disguise for me?

Jose: Really? I mean I could see that but also-how the-

Mom: Well, the real reason why I got sick- and I hate to cut you off- but the reason why I got sick in the first place was because of my old job. I mean I was drivin to Brooklyn everyday, exhausted, driving BACK home to the Bronx, doing my best to keep the house up, and on the weekends I was dead tired. So getting COVID was the only way for me to get out of that job, sad enough to say. I mean thank God I'm doing fine, but yeah that was my big sign to get into everything all over again.

Jose: I sorta felt that, the only way I got outta Michaels was through it literally shutting down as a result of COVID

Josh: Same with PetSmart, they never would've let me go but that job was so DRAINING. I mean I enjoyed it, but at what cost? I was constantly tired and I barely got paid

Phillip: That's how I even feel now, I'm stuck in my job and miserable, I gotta wait till fucking June to be outta there

Mom: See how all of you guys have that same experience? That's what I'm talking about, it's ridiculous how we all had to suffer by doing the "right thing" and getting on the books jobs. Honestly, I'm fed the fuck up! I wanna take control of my life and be my own boss again. That's why I wanna get back into real estate because I have all the time to do so being unemployed, and COVID reminded me that life is fucking short. *pause* No like seriously, I mean we lost Abuela not even two years ago, the world around us is

terrifying, and I don't wanna- God forbid- die waiting on a change that just might- might never happen because I decided to wait.

Jose: That's true, it's the only reason why I'm finishing school

Josh: It's why I wanna start the business, like I'm fucking tired of listening to like- um- just fucking bullshit from corporate assholes who don't know shit about me

Phillip: Whewww you got angry there huh?

we all laugh

Josh: Nah but seriously, it's like they slave you to death *pause* just to always complain anyways

Phillip: Nah I seriously felt you *pause* like my animation is going to be SO much better when I'm done dealing with this job. Like-like don't get me wrong, I love the kids I work with, but the Department of Education is so strict and I feel unappreciated even though I know I be workin my damn ass off

Mom: That's it! I'm tired of putting in work that I don't feel reciprocated, and honestly-like forreal, I have to thank you guys for it. Like ya always support my dreams and my crazy ass missions and ya really inspired me to chase my own dreams again. You know Josh with the animals, Phillip with the animation, Jose with graduating and wanting to do drag, it's all beautiful to watch and it makes me wanna do better for myself AND for ya.

Jose: Thanks mom, we couldn't have done it without you and honestly this is just the beginning

Mom: I'm sure of it, I want my damn house, so we gonna get this money and get successful!

Jose: Period cause I want mad stuff

Josh: Facts, I still want more snakes and a reptile room

Phillip: Yup and I want my helicopter

they all laugh

We come in on Jose in their room, sitting over a small glass tank, cupping Bebe in his hands, to then have her jump out of his hands

Jose: *laughing* Well, in the past few weeks your sure gained a personality *applies hand sanitizer and sighs* now get some rest, I'll finish feeding you later. To think, I was worried bout you making it through the night, and now your stuck shed is gone, you eat, and you're calmer than half of our breeders *laughs again, while pulling out a box full of makeup from under the couch* Now, to get started on this mug. It's crazy how I only know like- well ion even properly know how to but I do it- I only be doin eyeshadow, and like that's kinda ridiculous but at the same time, it's the most fun. *she begins doing her makeup* Like today, I'm gonna do a blue eyeshadow look that I did before and try to make it look better. *hits makeup brush on side of eyeshadow pallet* Honestly, doing drag is so surprising to me because a couple years ago? I hated makeup. I couldn't stand it, and even now I would prefer a more natural look. I guess it's because I was always-y'know a bit smaller than the boys and just naturally more feminine. Even before I knew what gay meant I was called it *laughter* nah but I detested makeup because of that very reason. Everyone assumed that I wanted to get into makeup cause I was femme, then when I was out it just became more persistent! So upon entering Purchase

I was gagged to see myself interested in all of this. Then when I started watching Pose and Drag Race? Oh it was over for me! I want to do balls and drag shows so bad! The craziest part is, even though I can't dance really or do make up, I know this is my calling. Something is telling me to go for it and *taps makeup brush twice* here I am! My drag is gonna be so cute, my name is Isabella Amore *attempts to roll the R but fails miserably* ugh I really need to get the hang of that *pause* but anyways. My drag name first comes from my abuela's middle name, Isabel. Before she passed she LOVED me being extra, from the long nails to the hoops and pigtails, she ate it all up *laughter*. So I had to honor mi reina (my queen). From there, amor means love in Spanish, plus it looked better with an E at the end. I decided to have the "E" stand for extra cause I just be like that. And that's exactly what I want my drag to be! I wanna be a hood glam bitch, like I want crystals and beads and just- to live my fantasy. I'm talking using my natural hair and accentuating it, embracing my body, my hood, my culture. Isabella is just me only more femme which is also fun. Being in lock down really triggered some gender dysmorphia in me, so drag has been the way of me learning who I am. *puts make up brush down* Speaking of learning, ya see this eyeshadow?!? It's immaculate! I swear I get better each day- ya see! Ya see I told you bitches ion know how, but I meant to do this. In a few years I will be competing in balls with the greats, booking my own gigs, and just continuing to find myself! And for once, I'm so excited for what's next.

April

scene set in the bedroom, the two of us are hovering over the laptop, a seemingly heated discussion ensues surrounding...leopard geckos?

Josh: I just don't want to get one that we already have in the collection

Jose: But is that not how we're supposed to pair them up? With ones that look like one another?

Josh: Yeah we can do that, but why not try something else?

Jose: *eyeroll* like what?

Josh: Like this one here

squinting at screen ensues, Josh awaits Jose's reaction while he thinks

Jose: It's alright

Josh: *sigh* That means you don't like it

Jose: Noooo, it's nice, I just don't want a normal looking one

Josh: But that's not normal, it's a Bold Stripe, can't you see that?

Jose: *squinting* Uh huhh yeah I see it

Josh: *straight face* Just choose one yourself

Jose: You're gonna tell me no anyways

Josh: Because you don't want the ones I want

Jose: Listen, we don't need another one right now any-

Josh: But we have permission to, sooo I'm gonna take advantage

Jose: Where are we gonna put it?

Josh: We'll make space.

Jose; We just rescued a baby and have six others, do we really need anymore?

Josh: Might as well take the opportunity

Me: I don't know..... I mean Bebe is a big handful, plus the eggs-

Josh: At the moment we've had a few dud eggs, no babies, and Bebe is making a great recovery. All of her stuck shed is off, she's eating on her own

Jose: Yeah, she's so cute, I'm so glad she's growing and getting bigger- *Jose pauses and realizes the ploy* Waiiiit, you just tryin to derail the convo so I can agree to a damn gecko

Josh: It ain't my fault you don't shut up *Jose swats Josh* Alright alright, but I didn't lie

Jose: You didn't, but like I was saying, it just seems overwhelming-

Josh: Like I said- we got the opportunity to, let's not question that and make an investment

Josh looks at Jose, while she contemplates, and eventually changes her mind

Me: Okay fine, I need to get out of my head and trust you more, we're in this together and-

Josh: *he smiles and pats my back* It's not that serious, you're good. Thanks though

Me; Okay good, hmmm I wonder which one-

Josh: *gasps* Looooookkkkk

Jose: Oooooooh, that one's nice

Josh: Real nice

Jose: Odee nice

Josh: Super nice

Jose: Very nice

Josh: REAL FREAKIN NI-

Jose: ALRIGHT I GET IT

Josh: So should we get it?

Jose:..... I don't know

Josh sighs and slaps his forehead

the scene opens with Jose in front of open textbooks, a laptop, and writing utensils, looking clearly flustered

Me: It's the first week of April, I'm supposed to be graduating May 21st, but is an online graduation even a real graduation? Anyways, it's this far in the year and it's like nothing makes sense to me. Like at all. I thought I would be so farther ahead, so much more put together, so much better. Just different ya know? A year ago I was just as ill motivated and now it feels like it's getting worse?? I mean believe me I love theatre but it's dead, I try to pay attention in class and it's just a whole bunch of words scrambled in my head and I don't even care for scrambled!!! I'm more of an over easy egg type of person..ya know with the runny yolk and toast and- WHAT AM I EVEN TALKING ABOUT?!?!?!

pause while Jose's hands are on their head, sigh and recollection of thoughts it's just hard. That's it. Life is difficult, the eggs aren't hatching yet, we ended up losing Eggy, money isn't consistent, I'm always tired and sometimes it's just hard to believe in myself when the whole world is on my shoulders. I miss school *sigh* like real school. I was so productive, I was a part of QPOC, I was making a difference, healthily expressing myself and just doing so much MORE. Believe me I love my family, and I'm so grateful

that things are worse than they could be, but it's stressful. Livin in this run down ass apartment, barely making ends meet, pouring water on seeds yet to bloom. *sigh* Going out and doing mundane things takes up so much energy from me nowadays, and I know it's normal. I mean with the amount of information I've researched, it's a nationwide issue. People are tired, the world feels like it's falling apart and we're supposed to act like it's normal? It's just a lot of pressure and not what I planned at all.... I mean I'm a performer for crying out loud and here I am writing a play? I know I sound ungrateful but UGHHHHHH *throws face into pillow* life is just annoying and frustrating and I just wanna make everyone proud. *takes face out of pillow* And I wanna be happy. That's it. I feel ungrateful for complaining but I have to remember I'm only human. Regardless of the circumstances of the past year, I made it and I will continue to just improve from here on out. Just wait on it. I hope- wait I know, I KNOW that it will get better. But for right now, *grabs pillow again* I'm overwhelmed and over it *screams into the pillow again and lays face down* I feel better already

*The three boys are in Josh and Phillip's room, with both the boys on video game systems, while Jose sits in a stool

Me: So guys question

Both: What's up?

Me: So let's say hypothetically, I were to get onto drag race, what do you think would be a good placement

Peady: Winning

Me: I mean I know that

Peady: Good, so do it, kick their asses

Phillip: I mean he's right though, you gotta win Jose, we don't take L's here

Jose laughs

Me: I know that, and believe me I wanna win just as much as the next person, but being realistic, I got mad competition, so you gotta be realistic

Phillip and Peady mumble in agreeance

Peady: Okay so second place

Jose: Well, that's a lot too, is like top four cute?

Peady: Yeah that's not bad either

Jose; Personally, I'm fine with getting to at least top 8

Phillip: Honestly, either of them aren't bad

Jose: Yeah, I just wanna last long enough to make the mark ya know?

Phillip: Well then again, getting on there is an accomplishment in itself too

Peady: Facts, how many people can say they made it?

Jose: That's also facts, like I'm nowhere near ready so the thought of me even thinking about a placement before even getting started?

Phillip: Besides, the whole point of it all is to show your personality in the best way..and that's by being you and showing what you really are

Peady: Just show them that you're better than them and it'll be fine

Jose; Yeah I never thought of it that way, making my mark is much more important than the numbers behind it. I mean I'm starting drag now at 21, so I want to try to audition by the time I'm 23. That seems practical, right

Peady & Phillip: Yeah

Phillip: I mean two years is a long time and it will help you get everything ready, plus we're here to help you out--I mean I don't know shit about makeup but you know- I'll help you get stuff

Jose: Oh yeah I know, I appreciate that of course, I know ya got me- that reminds me Peady imma need your help

Peady: **looks up from laptop suspiciously** With what

Jose: You can do a flip right?

Peady: Of course I can

Jose: So you're gonna have to teach me

Peady: That'll be easy for you

Jose: While dancing and bouncin all over the place?? I think the fuck not

Peady: That's very true, but don't worry bout that I gotchu, just know with all this help you better fucking win

Phillip: He's right, you gotta win like I said we don't take any L's

Jose: I know, I know, imma do my damn best

the scene is set in Jose's room, he sits on the futon with an open textbook, looking visibly down

Jose: **big inhale and a slight snuffle, followed by an exhale** You know, losing Lyra just hit me in a weird way, it almost didn't bother me immediately, but then it hit in so many

ways. Coincidentally it was the day we got vaccinated for COVID, so the side effects were hitting, but that was just the straw that broke the camel's back. To lose a snake is one thing, but this wasn't the first time and she's probably already dead and I just feel like wow. How could I do that to her? It was my job to be more observant, to care more, to be more vigilant.*inhale* I know it sounds like I'm being excessively hard on myself, *exhale* but that's really just how I always have been. Super hard on myself. *pause*

To give you some background: I've been begging for a snake for a long time and the first one I got at the beginning of this all done escaped and presumably passed away so I thought okay maybe this won't happen again....turns out it happened AGAIN! I mean we just overcome so much to run into frustrations all over again. Like we get through the whole mom having COVID situation and then BOOM this happens. Fuck, I can't stand it.

Ya know, when things like this happen I just ask spirit why, and always say thank you after. It sounds weird to say thank you for the situation I'm in, especially regarding a beloved animal going missing *gulp* well in this instance I guess dying? I mean snakes can live but I have such small little cracks in the walls and the cold and just *sigh* let me not make myself more sad. *inhale* I say thank you because everything is meant to happen for a reason. Even though I don't understand why in that moment, I know it's a learning lesson. It's just hard. Doing drag is a gamble because being an entertainer is not a "promised" career. Same thing with starting a business, we thought it would be so much easier to get these babies and still. No eggs hatched. I just get tired ya know? I'm

almost at the finish line but I already feel so. Burnt. Out. I know I can do it, but I pray I don't push myself too hard doing so.

Jose pauses and picks up the book and begins to read, she then lifts up the book

This right here *he taps on the book cover* This is what's keeping me going. I love them all so much, that's even why I started the business because animals are what originally made me happy! I got into acting later and even at that, it was always so much more competitive. Animals are just so sweet and I love watching them grow. Like Lucci and Gambit are the sweetest boys in the whole world, and they legit will nuzzle their heads into your hand. It melts my heart really, and then saving Bebe really made everything feel like it had a purpose! Turns out the baby was a girl and she's the sweetest, and has gained over 20 grams! It's like watching a baby grow in front of your very eyes. Elektra starting warming up to us, though believe me she still yells *laughter* Cyrus pulls a front, but he's coming down from it, Jubilee is skittish but she's also so sweet and those eyes are just to DIE for! Magik is a bit mean, but hey *shrugs shoulders* it happens. It's not her fault. I don't know, for me without these animals, I would be so much more lost. They keep me sane, and I remind myself every day that I need to keep myself well because THEY depend on me! So *puts the book down* I'm just gonna keep doing that. Like I said before, I'm just so tired. So. Damn. Tired.

Jose is sitting on the futon doing her make-up

Jose: So like, I know I left off on a really negative note, yknow like the last time *winces* and this like the big last scene - Should I even be saying that it's the last scene? I mean I change things around alot *pause* Nah, forget it-it's the last scene *claps hands and begins to do make-up* So, ya have followed me since what-January since I started recording this stuff and yeah, just to give a quick synopsis *pause again* I don't know what I'm doing with my life but hey *laughter* I mean it works like that for everyone- but no seriously *sing song voice* I'm going to graduate in a week! And I'm also doing my eyeshadow at the same time! *sing song voice stops* Oh wow I can sing- anyways- but yeah it's been new for me because you know I always had this standard to go to school, and do well in school and *pause* Now I'm done? *pause* Surreal. I'm gonna be the first one to graduate- y'know from college in general? I don't know I don't like my family like that but my mom keeps a record of stuff, and she's telling me that I'm gonna be the first one to graduate with my Bachelors?? It's insane! I mean how many kids have there been- well there's like 9 or 10? I'm like which cousin? *pause* I don't remember Puerto Rican households got a lot of people. So it's just like, bizarre to me that I've been this like martyr in a sense- y'know this *pause* placeholder? I don't know I'm the oldest child so- ROLEMODEL! That's the word I was looking for, role model. There you go WHEW one point for me! But yeah I've been this role model but I don't feel like I've done anything. That's my problem, I'm my own worst enemy. I feel like, even like recording this for class right now, -Note that this monologue is for class, I mean it's for the senior project but, just note that-. And I just don't feel like I've been in school, I don't feel like

I've done anything. I don't feel like anything I've been doing the past four months have been worthwhile. I mean yeah- I smoke *laughter* I get high and procrastinate but what're really the achievements? Like- I just- I don't see it. I don't see what everyone else sees. I mean like yeah I work hard, but isn't that what you're supposed to do? *sigh* I don't know, self doubt is a B-I-T-C-H (cause I'm tryin not to curse too much in this play). It sure is one because I KNOW I've done a lot! Like who tries to start a business on their own I mean really- I got geckos! Who got geckos on the block?!?! You got sour, you got sneakers, but you don't got geckos and that's on period! And I'm tryin to be like a whole drag queen in the middle of a panoramic (aka that's a pandemic for ya that don't get it). I'm trying to be this whole artist aficionado thing and it's like I need to give myself more credit! Like damn I did the damn thing. I grew up in an area where *pause* Oooh that's a LOT of glitter *hits make up brush and starts again* Anyways- back to the topic- I grew up in an area where it was more likely that you'd get arrested by 18 instead of graduating high school by then. Going to Purchase, I realized that I'm one in a million- like I'm the statistic. On top of being the eldest child. On top of being the first to graduate from college. On top of being an aspiring entrepreneur- and of course I had to go to school for theatre and the self doubt plus the *fake voice* "What're you gonna do with that in real life" comes out. *pause, then exhale* But I did it. I literally did it. I made it, I haven't failed a class, I'm starting a business, I mean it wasn't going well but then- the eggs hatched! I mean- I'm a very spiritual person, so when things happen I try to rationalize it, the best way I can because I can't control it. Spirit is continuously moving, whatever is meant to happen will happen, and no matter what I do, I can't change the circumstances that have been set before me. And that brings me

a lot of peace, but it also drives me crazy because why is stuff not working the way I want it too? I mean come onnn I'm a Capricorn moon I plan everything. And when it doesn't work out I go crazy, so this year was just the hardest for me because I had my senior year planned out since I was eighteen. *pause* Flash forward and it's like "Ooops it's gone" in the matter of a night. So, I guess the moral of the story is, even though this eyeshadow look is bad because I don't know how to do make up, and even though I lost a lot of eggs through this breeding process and fought with my family time and time again, and I feel tired, I feel like I'm not invested in school and people don't know me, I feel like I'm a completely different entity than I was on campus but, that's alright. It's okay, I'm gonna be alright I mean I'm doing the best I can! And I know I'm setting up for my future. It's crazy cause I have so many people who believe in me. The only person who can't believe in me? Is myself. *pause, then deep sigh* Ain't that some shit. But, to close off this chapter, imma say: I did it. I did it and that's all that matters. Hopefully ya see me on Drag Race in the next few years. If you wanna buy a gecko off me, holla at me but *pause* yeah. I don't know what's next for Jose, but hey, bigger and better!

Words of Advice

Sara: Um for advice, if I could give you,- ummm..... I think first and foremost with anything that you wanna do you need to do it with passion. Which you already do so I don't know if it's just your Leo tendencies. But you do have passion and when you work hard for something, you always put your mind to it, which is really commendable. I think regarding your business, um- *aouse* definitely take your time and remember to breathe. I know taking care of animals is hard and breeding them is hard, and wanting things to be faster or egg time-or hatching time whatever you call it, but remember be patient, everything happens for a reason so if something does go wrong (God Forbid)- it's time. And you need to remember you can't fix everything, not everything is fixable sometimes and you just have to let it be, let go, and whatever happens, happens as corny as that sounds. And I think that also can correlate to drag too cause, not every look isn't gonna hit right away. Not every choreographed dance is gonna hit the right way and not every performance is gonna hit right away. It takes time, it takes practice, so if I could give you anything, I'd just- be patient with what you're doing, and know that

the outcome is gonna come out the way you want it's just gonna take time to get there and you're gonna get there. Yeah.

Liz: Hello, hello helloooo, are we rollingggg? Hii Joseeee *insert British accent here*
Sooo it seems as if you want me to send you, maybe just a little bit of encouragement, soooo I suppose I can do that. Ummm let's see *switches back to regular voice* Jose. You. Are. The baddest bitch. Period! And you're a Leo soo, when you really get this makeup game togetherr? You KNOWWWW, you knowww that you're going to be- it's-it's gonna be trouble. It's gonna be trouble, bitches should be scared. Really scared like. A lot of people are gonna be shaking in their boots when you pop out. A LOTT of people okay? Soo.. and you already do that without makeup, so when you get this drag makeup shit goin- when you're finally ready to put all of your effort and eagerness into starting? Bitch, it's going to just blast off. Boom, just like that. As for everything else, well *pause* good luck on your senior project, which I am pretty sure this is for heyyyyy senior project. Ummmm, yeah good luck on your senior project I cannot wait to see how it comes all put together. You know us Leo's, we're creative, we're creative bitches and I know with that Capricorn moon with the work ethic is coming through strong right now, and you're gonna put together an amazing, creative senior project that has NEVER been done before and will NEVER be done again in the history of Purchase College. Just remember that when you're up until 4 o'clock in the morning, working on this shit, contemplating on why you ever went to college: just think about the fact that this project is a one of a kind project. It will never be done ever again. It's yours. And it only exists in this moment in time so- don't let it pass you by. Enjoy the process. Cause we're so close

to just being thrown into the real world, not knowing what we're doing soooooo *pause* where was I going with that? ... Yeah just trust the process and be present and learn from it, because this- I mean trust me, I had to do a senior project too and this shit will really have you questioning your life's decisions. The first one being: Why did I go to college? But now that I've done it I've found out SO much about myself. As a student, as a person, as an actor, I learned so much going through this process. Not saying it was worth the blood, sweat, and tears because they definitely could've made some shit easier on us but- you know Purchase, you know Purchase. It's always going to be an obstacle in the way. But, I am going to say I am grateful that I did the senior project I did, and I think you will too at the end . But, you I mean- you just have so much going for you - OH and you're geckos! Hello how could I forget?!? Your freaking geckos!! You're literally a gecko queen, lizard queen, just- *pause* like I don't know how to explain it. Breeding these cute, little, cool-looking lizards just in your free time like, how many people can say that they do that? And know how to do that, that's like- insanity. That is so freaking cool!!!!!! I cannot wait to see what you do with your gecko business, I honestly think that your work ethic is elite. And you're going to really-I know you love those lizards too so you're gonna take your gecko/lizard business by the horns and just- you're gonna fuck shit up. You're gonna fuck shit up. And at the end of the day, if anybody has shit to say: they're haters. And they're broke and they're losers and dumb, and they're tired and boring, and they probably STINK so don't let the haters get to you. Everything you're doing, you're meant to be doing, you were born to do this. Drag, geckos, theatre. Whatever it is that YOU decide to focus on, just know you're making the perfect choice. Every choice you make is the perfect one for the rest of your life.

Cause you can't go back and change it, once you make the choice you know sooo.

Yeah... I'm rambling! I literally just sat down and started freaking talking sooo hopefully

pause this is okay. Let me know if you need anything else, BYEEEE!

Alecia: Oh my god cuteee *tongue click* Ummm okay for me if I had to give you advice?

Ummm- this sounds a little cliché but like , just don't give a fuck about what anybody might say or think because if there's one thing to take away from seeing people do drag

it's people being unapologetically themselves. Like they're authentically themselves and

they're serving everything they got right on a platter like "Here you go sis, like this is

me!". Like these people show the fuck out so, just do your damn thing. And I also think

it's really really awesome that you wanna do drag like I think you're gonna flourish in

this and do your thing like I wanna see you do shows- I wanna see you do all of that.

Sooo yeah. Maybe this isn't the best advice and it's cheesy and corny but yeah- I love

you bitch!

Isiah: So since you didn't answer my text Jose, I'm gonna send it through a voice note

like Alecia did- but I am so happy to see you living out your dreams. Nah honestly ever

since you told us about doing drag bitch we- wait can I say bitch in a scene? *laughter*

this is literally for assignment so I'm gonna try again *adjusts himself*

Hello, I am looking for Jose Rafael Velasquez, I am Isiah Thomas Rodriguez and I am

here to give you advice. So, what I wanna say is, I'm very proud of you, I want you to

keep going after your dreams. Don't let anybody stop you, don't let anybody tell ya you

can't do it-t. You can and you've done-you done it already, you killin it and you're gonna keep killin it. Um, people are gonna hate regardless of whatever you're doing in this world. There's always gonna be somebody in this world who's gonna hate you and try to stop you. So, all you gotta say is "Not now" and you'll be fine. So yeah I support you *pause* oh I thought the voice note went away but I support you 100%, don't let haters get in your way, your haters are your motivators and that's on period.

Nalysha: I'm not good at this, what am I supposed to say? *pause* Aight imma try this: I think you and drag: equals success. The only thing I'm going to say is that you take criticism really hard sometimes, so when you feel like someone's being hard on you, you'll close up like a turtle in a shell, and I'm gonna need you not to do that. So if someone says they don't like anything, simply just say "That's you're not me" and keep doing you. Cause you a bad *pause* I don't know if I can curse- but you a bad b and whatever makes you happy, is what's important. **AND THIS IS WHAT YOU CAN DO YOU'RE DESTINED TO DO IT SO DO IT!!**

Monica: Ummmm so I don't know *laughter* I didn't realize how you wanted me to do this soooo, imma just send a voice note, and you let me knowww if it's good Honestly, I just think that, like this pandemic it just really taught me and I think it just reinforced to everybody that like we just need to follow our dreams likee, whatever makes you happy- And I know it sucks like especially from us as like um y'know, um children of immigrants or immigrants ourselves and just having so much pressure of like y'know you wanna do good. Like your parents are counting on you to do good and like

do good for them and be financially stable. Which is why it's kinda like "Damn like let's go to college, let's get a *pause* formal career" and stuff, but if drag is what makes you happy and doing the business with your animals and stuff. Originally, you wanted to be a vet anyways so like, doing business with the geckos makes perfect sense. And then like uhh doing drag that's like- you exploring something- an area that you've always wanted to but always been afraid to. But it's like-now is the time like, grow into your identity and be hopefully and just be, y'know *pause* authentically you. So y'know, honestly just doing that and making sure you're putting yourself first and you're doing what makes you happy y'know? Regardless of your place, nobody is financial stable or secure, the money will come.

William: My advice to you is to never change. I've seen you accomplish many hardships in life and you've always managed. To stay positive and be true to yourself. No matter what you do in your life Jose I will always, ALWAYS be proud of you because you were always you throughout everything. I love you so, so much, you got this.

Amya: I feel so weird giving like advice ummm- about graduation *chuckle* when we're both graduating. Like I gotchu on the advice and stuff like that but just thinking about it like, what imma say *fake voice* "Best of luck out there bro, it's crazy" like *laughter* bitch we goin through the same thing you know? But bitch I GOTCHU *pause* Jose *claps hands together* First off, congratulations, you did it, you survived college, you survived a pandemic, you did it and I'm so very proud of you. My first piece of advice would be to not limit yourself. I think you're capable of many things and I think you're

very talented and you are- you are capable of doing different things and I think you should be able to express yourself and figure out what parts of you have you not discovered? What's something that you're good at that you haven't found , something that you're uncomfortable with? Which brings me to my second piece of advice, be okay with being uncomfortable and failing. *pause* Putting yourself out there and trying new things is definitely scary, and you're definitely bound to fall some- y'know you're bound to fall on the way. But I think that the more that you pick yourself up, the more that you take these failures and these experiences and you take a lesson from it. That's when you've really won something from it y'know? Umm *pause* be okay with being uncomfortable and see where life takes you and exploring. I definitely am so proud of you for getting into the gecko business and for getting into drag. I'm glad you're finding what you're interested in and going for it and being passionate. And I think you should take that passion with you in anything you do because YOU have a lot of passion. Your heart is humongous so I know you are going to do so many amazing things!

Phillip: My one key advice that I was hinting at yesterday is that you're toxic. That's it, it's you're toxic. You're toxic as fuck. *pause* But nah seriously, you're so-you're so angry and shit. I mean yeah- a lot of people don't see that though, I'll give you that. The majority doesn't see that you get angry and shit, but you get really fucking upset. That's pretty much all you have to worry- I-I don't have much else it's like- I mean you're you. You're great. I mean there's not much wrong with you at all. You're almost perfect and that's pretty cool. But, y'know, one thing I overlooked at *pause* I mean one thing I looked at and saw not much movement from; you get fucking pissed. You get REALLY

fucking pissed and you let a lot of emotion out too? I mean throughout the years- I mean I bet you dealt with a lot of bitches- but you still had a LOT of drama throughout. I mean, once again, it could probably be them, it's just- at least from my perspective, I never get into it. And of course, that would be an aspect of different sociali-socialization, but even when I was social , nobody had problems with me- I didn't get into problems in general you get the gist- but when anyone would have problems in general? I would in turn just solve it, or if I needed to talk to somebody I would just talk to them. The only thing you would need to work on- especially being somebody that's going to be a *pause* motivation for others uhh- a role model for others. You obviously have a lot of power with what you're aiming for and what you're going to be is going to be a powerful position. As you're obviously some sort of motivator or influencer. That's gonna have quite the emotional grasp on a lot of people, you're going to have a large impact I'm sure of it. Plus with this drag thing? You're going to be a star. Nobody's gonna deny that or nor can they. So my one thing would be, to just be kind. People think other ways and you see somebody who- worst case scenario- is racist. Like your first instict would be "Fuck that guy, he's racist, he's a shithead, an asshole" but you know, a person like me would think "Who got them to that position?" y'know a person who's racist is taught that. It's like deep digging down into characteristics and why a person's characteristics would be that way. With that, you'd probably just get upset with them -no offense to you- *pause*. So it's like, more understanding. Realizing that- don't let your emotions get to you either, y'know your emotions are strong. Very strong, you get emotional from time to time. And that's not bad, some of the things I say have a negative to them, and that's the first thing people focus on, but there are positives I want you to focus on too. A

highly emotional person would be able to think *pause* more deeply about what others feel and what others think, and being able to interpret and perceive their certain perspective. Better understanding that person, what they're going through, and what you could do to help them. Just guide that specific emotionalness. Guide that specific amount of anger you use, how much emotions you feel, even upset. I know there's been some- but turn that negative energy into positive energy and always understand that, as a role model, one thing you should definitely do, is spread kindness. I think it's one of the biggest things I could say cause in this world- everyone fucking hates eachother. It's about goddamn time for somebody, or other people, y'know step up - cause we do have people like that who're kind to the world. We need more of them, you're going to be one of them, and you'll be able to influence more people to do so.

Josh: Uhhhh- always remember to- well always remember that what you do, is ALWAYS going to be weird to other people. It's not gonna matter as much as it matters to you, as it matters to them. What's important is that you make that shit the best shit you've ever done in your life. You be the best at it. You provide quality services.

Mom: What I would give you is uhhhh *pause* Be persistent. Be constant. Stick to your dream. Stick to those people who support you most. Rid all the toxins in your life and be true to yourself. Be true to yourself. Respect yourself and don't take- don't accept anything else that what you should- what you think you need and deserve.

Jose: Imma keep it short and sweet this time *laughter* nah but seriously congrats! I am so proud of you! It's gonna be weird reading this back some day and remembering how fucked up you were *laughter* but I promise, life has its purpose. You will graduate and

not only go onto do bigger things, but EXCEL at everything you do. You are showstopping. Immaculate. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise and just know I love you more than life itself. You will be a phenomenal drag queen, reptile breeder, performer, artist, person- girl you just that bitch! You are a non-binary femme from the Bronx who's ready to turn shit up. Make your family, your culture, your hood, and more importantly *clears throat* YOURSELF proud. I love you, go take over the world bitch! Dim your light for no one and shine on and be the bad bitch you were born to be!

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