

*Acting Edition*

# Laughs in Spanish

by Alexis Scheer

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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### **IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS**

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*LAUGHS IN SPANISH* received its world premiere on February 3rd, 2023, at the Denver Center Theatre Company (Chris Coleman, Artistic Director). The production was directed by Lisa Portes, with scenic design by Brian Bembridge, costume design by Raquel Barreto, lighting design by Christina Watanabe, sound design by T. Carlis Roberts, voice and dialect by Cynthia Santos-DeCure, intimacy choreography by Samantha Egle, dramaturgy by Linnea Valdivia, assistant direction by Jean Carlo Yunen, casting by Bass/Valle Casting and Grady Soapes, CSA, and stage management by Michael Morales and Wendy Blackburn Eastland. The cast was as follows:

**MARI** .....Stephanie Machado  
**ESTELLA** .....Maggie Bofill  
**CARO** ..... Danielle Alonzo  
**JUAN** ..... Luis Vega  
**JENNY** ..... Olivia Hebert

*LAUGHS IN SPANISH* is the winner of the Edgerton Foundation New Play Award, KCACTF's Harold & Mimi Steinberg National Student Playwriting Award, and was featured in San Diego REP's Latinx New Play Festival and the National New Play Network Showcase.

A workshop production of *LAUGHS IN SPANISH* was presented on February 21st, 2019, by Boston Playwrights' Theatre (Kate Snodgrass, Artistic Director), in collaboration with Boston University. The production was directed by Sara Katzoff.

## CHARACTERS

**MARIANA (MARI)** – Female. Late twenties/Early thirties. Latina.

An art gallery director. Ambitious, Uptight, Guarded.

**ESTELLA** – Female. Mid-fifties. Latina.

A movie star. Regal, Charming, Beloved.

**CAROLINA (CARO)** – Female. Late twenties/Early thirties. Latina.

A painter. Unconventional, Intuitive, Passionate.

**JUAN** – Male. Late twenties/Early thirties. Latino.

A Miami-Dade police officer. Warm, Goofy, Easy-going.

**JENNY** – Female. Late twenties/Early thirties. White.

A personal assistant. Bubbly, Savvy, Romantic.

## SETTING

Wynwood. Miami, FL.

## TIME

December. Art Basel.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

### **On code-switching**

All characters except Jenny are native Spanish speakers, and they code-switch throughout the play...affecting their dialect, style, and vocabulary based on who they are speaking to. For example, anyone speaking to Jenny will unconsciously sound less-Hispanic. Similarly, when Mari speaks on the phone to her clients, her Miami dialect drops completely. These characters never do it for comedic effect, it's simply the way they live. (But I hope, at times, we can find it funny.)

### **On style**

Everyone should always be a moment away from dancing.

### **On design**

We never see any art displayed in the gallery, so these characters should stand out as pieces of fine art on their own. Things are vibrant. Distinctly Miami. Color, sound, and texture are important.

**thank you**

*Kate Snodgrass, Melinda Lopez, Ronan Noone,  
my MFA cohort, and the many BPT/BU affiliate artists  
who helped usher this play into existence.  
Chris Coleman, Lisa Portes, and the dream team at DCPA.  
Di Glazer and Ross Weiner. Dan Ryan.*

*For Pachanga and The Button Man on 26th street, with love.*





*(The art gallery: the inside of an industrial warehouse. Concrete walls and floor with a fresh coat of white paint. There's a chic front desk and gallery seating. There is no art up. There should be art up. We should be concerned.)*

*(JUAN is taking notes. MARI is pacing. CARO doesn't know what to do.)*

**MARI.** *Quién haría algo como esto?! Coño carajo fucking coño mother fucking fucker puta bitch whore dios mío fuuuuuck!*

*(Pause.)*

**JUAN.** Is that your official statement?

**CARO.** Mari, *cálmate*. Try to breathe.

**MARI.** You! You're fired! / *Dale!* Out!

**CARO.** Woah, wait, / I didn't do anything!

**JUAN.** *Oye*, everybody calm down.

**MARI.** You were supposed to lock up last night!

**CARO.** I did!

**JUAN.** It's not Caro's fault –

**MARI.** The paintings would still be here if you knew how to lock a door.

**CARO.** I locked / the door, Mari.

**JUAN.** She locked the door.

**MARI.** How do I know for sure?

**CARO.** I remember doing it!

**MARI.** What if you're just remembering one of the other times you locked the door?

**JUAN.** She's not.

**MARI.** Like what happens with the iron. Did I unplug the iron, or am I just remembering one of the other hundred times I've unplugged the iron?!

**CARO.** I remember last night *specifically*. You texted me six thousand times reminding me to set the gallery to sixty-eight degrees so the paint wouldn't warp. So I did that. Then I armed the building, and I remember doing that cause I was on the phone with you (*Points to JUAN.*), and I said the alarm code out loud and you thought I was at the ATM saying my pin number and you got mad and told me about how last week you arrested somebody / for assaulting a person –

**JUAN.** She's right, she's right.

**CARO.** So. Exhibit A: (*Gestures to JUAN.*) And then Exhibit B: after I armed the building, I walked out, padlocked the front door, and cut myself.

(**CARO** shows her cut finger. **JUAN** examines it.)

**JUAN.** The wound is consistent with the proposed timeline.

**MARI.** So then *you* took them.

**CARO.** *Qué qué?*

**MARI.** YOU stole the paintings.

**CARO.** Oh, yeah, cause that makes total sense – *me* – the person who works here – stole the paintings.

**MARI.** You could sell them and buy a house!

**CARO.** At these interest rates?

**MARI.** Or maybe you just need to redecorate.

**CARO.** With paintings by Marco Diaz?!

**MARI.** See! I knew you hated him! / So what is this your Guerrilla Girls moment? Banksy? Is this some kind of political statement?

**CARO.** I'm not saying –

**JUAN.** Ladies! *Por fa!*

**CARO.** (*Annoyed.*) I didn't steal the paintings.

**JUAN.** I know.

**MARI.** Noooo! You can't rule her out just cause she's your girlfriend!

**JUAN.** I'm ruling her out cause she has an alibi.

**MARI.** Who?

**JUAN.** Me. She was with me all night. Sleeps *como un oso*.

*(The phone rings. MARI answers it immediately, putting on her white business voice.)*

**MARI.** Studio Six Miami, this is Mariana speaking. (*Listening, drops the white voice.*) *Hola, Carlos. Hey can you read back the order for (Listening.) What? No. You can't put me on hold, you called me! – Carlos! (To CARO.) Come mierda! This liquor store! Coño!*

**CARO.** We're still throwing a party tonight?

**MARI.** OF COURSE! IT'S ART BASEL! (*On the phone.*) Hi – no, it's fine. *Dime.* (*Listens.*)

**JUAN.** (*Bay-sil.*) I thought it's Basel?

**CARO.** Basel. (*Baw-sil.*)

**JUAN.** Basel. (*Bay-sil.*)

**CARO.** Basel. (*Baw-sil.*)

**JUAN.** Basel. (*Baw-sil.*)

**CARO.** Basel. (*Bah-sil.*) No. Yes. That was right. Basel. (*Baw-sil.*)

**JUAN.** Basel. (*Bah-sil.*)

**CARO.** Basel. (*Bah-sil.*)

**MARI.** Basel. (*Baw-sil.*)

**JUAN.** Bah-sil or Baw-sil?

**MARI.** (*On the phone.*) IT'S BASIL (*Baw-sil.*) Hold on, Carlos, other line – *CÁLLATE!* (*Putting on her white business voice and switching the line.*) Studio Six Miami, this is Mariana speaking. (*Listening.*) Karl, so nice to hear from you! (*Listening.*) No, sadly Marco won't be joining us tonight. He's on a spiritual retreat in Peru. So it's just us and (*Panic.*) his beautiful exhibit! Will you be bringing the Goldbergs? (**CARO** quietly freaks out about the Goldbergs. *Listening.*) Wonderful! There are a few pieces that I think would make a terrific addition to their collection. (*Listening.*) Sounds great. I'll see you tonight! Thanks for calling, Karl, Bye bye! (*Switching the line, dropping her white voice.*) Carlos. (*Listening.*) Throw in a few handles of rum. (*Listening.*) Everything is fine! Delivery at 6:30. *Gracias!*

(**MARI** hangs up the phone.)

The Goldbergs are coming.

**CARO.** *Aaaaaay dios miiiiiiioooooo.*

**JUAN.** Who? What's wrong?

**CARO.** Developers.

**MARI.** My landlord.

**CARO.** They own half the neighborhood.

**JUAN.** Well it's an active crime scene, what do they expect?

**MARI.** Art on the walls.

**JUAN.** Mariana, my guys are on it, but you should start thinking about putting up another exhibit just in case. I mean, have you seen Caro's work? They're kinda like Marco's.

**CARO.** (*Annoyed.*) Except, like better.

**JUAN.** Oh no, yeah, of course, I just meant like that dude was your mentor...you paint in like the same style – or like – your stuff is in – what do you guys say? – in conversation with each other. I mean, the exhibit that you were gonna show tonight? *Puertas*. All those doors of Cuba? Personally, I think he jacked your idea cause you started painting doors first. AND, that dude is Puerto Rican. He don't know shit about Cuba. But you – your paintings, you capture – I don't have the particular artsy words – but like, you capture essence and shit. You should show *your* doors of Cuba.

**MARI.** Did you check the lock on the back door?

(**MARI** moves to the back door.)

**CARO.** Mari – I can go home right now / and pick up –

**MARI.** Hahahaha I'm gonna pretend you are not suggesting that we put up some of your art.

(**MARI** goes outside to check the lock on the backdoor.)

**CARO.** Is she kidding? I have a *master's* degree.

**MARI.** I CAN HEAR YOU!

**CARO.** I MEANT YOU TO.

**MARI.** AND YOU DON'T HAVE YOUR MASTER'S YET.  
YOU NEED TO SURVIVE THIS INTERNSHIP FIRST.

**CARO.** *Pero*, how my academic future ended up in her hands, I will never know.

**JUAN.** Babe, your paintings should be up here. Put up a fight!

**CARO.** I can't get fired, I need the credit to graduate.

**JUAN.** You're like an integral part of this place, Mari can't fire you.

**CARO.** Yeah, cause then who'll get her coffee?

**JUAN.** And like, when is the next time you'll have this kinda opportunity?

**CARO.** But –

**JUAN.** Mari's all bark, no bite.

*(Something comes in on Juan's walkie.)*

*(Into walkie.)* Four-Twelve. Cancel backup.

**CARO.** *(Over walkie garble.)* I thought you already had guys on this?

**JUAN.** *(Into walkie.)* Copy that. Over and out, bro.  
*(To CARO.)* No, yeah, of course. Just letting them know that the premise is secure.

*(MARI comes back in.)*

**MARI.** The back looks normal.

**CARO.** What does that mean? Four-Twelve.

**JUAN.** I'm yours for the day! Investigating 'n shit!

**MARI.** Don't you have gang busts and like Miami Vice shit to do?

**JUAN.** You kidding me? I love this! Stolen artwork is a white people crime. I might not even break a sweat today!

**MARI.** *Chico*, you better start breaking a sweat and get me those paintings back.

**JUAN.** I told you, my guys are on it!

**MARI.** *Y tú?* What are you on?

**JUAN.** You! I have officially appointed myself your victim advocate!

**MARI.** (*A groan, and then suddenly invigorated.*) *Vamos!* We have an exhibit to re-do. Caro, call anyone who owes us a favor – see if we can wrangle together some of Marco’s older work.

**CARO.** Mari. We’re showing my paintings tonight. It’s our best option. And if we don’t, I’m walking out this door right now.

**MARI.** *Ay*, stop eating shit.

**CARO.** I’m serious.

**MARI.** No. No no no no no no, so this is the thanks I get?

**CARO.** Excuse me?

**MARI.** For keeping you around even though you only show up when it’s convenient to you.

**CARO.** I’m in grad school! I come in for the hours I’m scheduled!

**MARI.** You’re taking two weeks off this month!

**CARO.** For Christmas!

**MARI.** It’s the busiest time of year for retail and you’re gonna leave me alone so you can spend *Noche Buena* flirting with some *macho* only to find out from your *tía* he’s like your second cousin.

**JUAN.** Woah – woah – who is this guy? I’ll kick his ass.

**CARO.** No one – she’s being – UGH. This is abuse!

**MARI.** ABUSE? *Cómo que* abuse?

**CARO.** “Caro, don’t talk to the collectors,” “Caro, you’re just an intern,” “Caro, the toilet’s not flushing,” “Caro, put on a jacket, this isn’t *Spring Breakers!*”

**MARI.** It isn’t!

**JUAN.** For the record, I like the way she dresses.



**CARO.** You're not nice, Mari! I've known you for like half of my life! And you're not a nice person!

**MARI.** It's not my job to be nice! It's my job to sell art!

**CARO.** And you'd be good at your job if you were nice! So. I'm gonna go.

(**CARO** *doesn't move.*)

**JUAN.** And I'd also like to state for the record that I don't like the way she dresses cause it reminds me of the girls in *Spring Breakers*! I just mean that Caro has like style. Just wanna make that clear.

(*A pause.*)

**CARO.** No one likes Marco Diaz, Mari. You know it, I know it. The whole art community has been whispering about that *pendejo* for years. So let's cancel him for good!

**MARI.** And replace him with you?

**JUAN.** Hey, she has an MFA in Painting!

**CARO.** Babe, I can speak for myself. (*Same passion.*) I almost have an MFA in Painting!

**MARI.** An MFA? Well let me get you a little gold star for spending a quarter of a million dollars so someone could print you a piece of paper that calls you a *Mother Fucking Artist*.

**CARO.** I know you don't mean that. Your mom is an actor –

**JUAN.** Yo. She's more than that. She's like iconic.

**MARI.** Still human though, I promise.

**JUAN.** My *mamita* is obsessed with her show!

**MARI.** It's not *her* show.

**JUAN.** She wrote it. She stars in it. I think that makes it *her* show. Like, Tina Fey. Except Colombian. So like, Latina Fey. Aaaaand you didn't tell me she was in the new Batman movie! I'm sitting there in the movie

theatre and I see her and I'm like AW SHIT THAT'S MARIANA'S MOM PLAYING THE RADIOACTIVE MAID! That shit was dope!

**CARO.** My point is – she's an artist. So you know how hard this work – this *life* is – the sacrifices she had to make to be qualified and credible – to be able to stand up and assert herself within a white patriarchal culture and say “my work is good and it matters.”

**MARI.** Wow, you sound just like her. Okay, let me clarify something for you. I think you're under the impression my work here is about the art. This job is not about the art. This job is about networking. It's about cultivating relationships. It's about surrounding yourself with well-meaning *white* people and convincing them that art *matters*. The artists have the easy job. You go off to Cuba or LA or wherever and make the thing and feel good about yourself and feel like you're contributing to something larger, and you forget about all of us here in the real world. You can paint all the impoverished doors you want or sell another season of your tv show about “*family values*,” but at the end of the day who is the artist really serving?

*(The phone rings.)*

Can this day get any worse?! *(White voice into the phone.)* Studio Six Miami, this is Mariana speaking. *(Listening, dropping her white voice again.)* Hola, Mami. What's up?

**CARO.** So we're showing my paintings?

**MARI.** Shh! *(On the phone.)* Mami, I'm at work, of course I'm not answering my cell.

**CARO.** I gotta know, so I can –

**MARI.** *(On the phone.)* You just landed where?

**CARO.** Mari –

**MARI.** Shhhh – sure. *(On the phone.)* You're in Miami?

**CARO.** YES!

*(A transition. The lights shift.)*

*(ESTELLA holds court. She's what you imagine a movie star to be. Casual elegance and understated glamour. CARO and JUAN are eating out of the palm of her hand. MARI is less than enthused.)*

**ESTELLA.** It's a new drama inspired by the Diego Velasquez painting, *Las Meninas*.

**CARO.** The Golden Age!

**ESTELLA.** HBO loves a period piece. This thing has Emmys written all over it. And the Emmy is the new Oscar. TV is the thing now.

**JUAN.** And you star in it?

**ESTELLA.** I play the Queen! Technically it's about her daughter – we have to appeal to a younger market – but I star in it *thematically*.

**MARI.** Ooooo, *thematically*.

**CARO.** What's it about?

**ESTELLA.** It follows the princess who rebels against the royal family by wearing pants and refusing to get married.

**MARI.** *(Gasp.)* How dare she.

**ESTELLA.** I love it! It resonates so deeply with me. Refusing to follow society's rules to carve your own path. *(Pointed to MARI.)* I mean, of course the princess shouldn't close herself off to love, because who knows...maybe if she's open she will find *someone*.

**MARI.** *(Sarcastic.)* Oooo, *someone*.

**ESTELLA.** I just can't wait for the costumes! The corsets and hoops and ruffs!

**JUAN.** (*In awe.*) Is this what you always sound like?

**ESTELLA.** What do you mean?

**JUAN.** I've just seen you in so many different movies and TV shows, sometimes with an accent, sometimes without. Like I never knew which was actually you.

**ESTELLA.** (*Puts on a white voice.*) You're trying to figure out what I really sound like?

**JUAN.** Exactly! Damn! How do you do that?

**ESTELLA.** Yale.

**JUAN.** What?

**ESTELLA.** Yale School of Drama. They didn't want me walking around saying, (*In a heavy Spanish accent.*) "Oh, I went to Yale." (*It sounds like "jail."*)

(**CARO** and **JUAN** think that's hilarious. **MARI** has heard that joke before. **ESTELLA** relaxes into her normal speaking voice.)

Caro, your face is so familiar to me.

**MARI.** We went to middle school together.

**ESTELLA.** Caro, Caro. Rodriguez? No, you're too pretty. Fernandez. You're Caro Fernandez! And your mother is Ibis Fernandez, *pero* of course. How is your mother?

**CARO.** She's...older?

**ESTELLA.** Every moment of life is decay.

**CARO.** That's beautiful.

**ESTELLA.** That's Oprah.

**CARO.** Oh my god, I'm obsessed with her. Which episode was that?

**ESTELLA.** Oh no, this was in the bathroom at a charity gala.

**CARO.** Ahhh! Okay! You're awesome! And! This totally kills me to say! But! I gotta go! Please do not move anywhere. Mari, it's Friday, I have class.

**MARI.** Woah woah woah. What about your paintings?

**CARO.** I'm picking up the smaller ones right after class, and then my mom's bringing in the rest.

**MARI.** Your mom?

**ESTELLA.** Ibiiiiiiiiis!!!

**CARO.** They were at her house.

**MARI.** She lives in Orlando.

**CARO.** Exactly, she'll be here in four hours.

**MARI.** But it's already two.

**CARO.** So she'll be here by six.

**MARI.** She's gonna get stuck in rush hour.

**CARO.** So she's here by seven.

**MARI.** But the party is at seven.

**CARO.** Which in Cuban time means nine, so we're all good!

**ESTELLA.** Caro, you're showing tonight?!

**CARO.** I'm the artist in residence!

**ESTELLA.** I thought it was an exclusive Marco Diaz exhibit?

**MARI.** Do you see an exclusive Marco Diaz exhibit?

**ESTELLA.** Well, I don't know. Minimalism is in these days, *mija*. This could be a wall, but it could also be art.

**MARI.** It's a wall.

**ESTELLA.** Well then where's the art?

**MARI.** It was stolen.

**ESTELLA.** Have you called the police?!

*(They all look at JUAN.)*

**JUAN.** Ma'am, the situation is under control.

**ESTELLA.** I met Marco on a diversity panel last year – *un pendejo*. Have you told him?

**CARO.** He's on a spiritual retreat in Peru.

**ESTELLA.** Oh! Peru's all the rage. This producer wants me to go to Cusco and do ayahuasca with him.

**MARI.** Are you going?

**ESTELLA.** No way. I haven't done hallucinogens in fifteen years.

**MARI.** Fifteen years... I'm twenty-eight!

**ESTELLA.** Yeah, you try raising a teenager.

**CARO.** Ahh! You're so cool!!!! Ah, I'm late! Okay! I'm going.

**JUAN.** I'll drive! Put on my lights!

**CARO.** This is all gonna work out, Mari!

**JUAN.** What could go wrong?!

*(CARO and JUAN leave. ESTELLA attempts motherly affection.)*

**ESTELLA.** Aye, you're disappearing.

**MARI.** *(Child-like.)* Stop. Stop, Mami. Stop.

*(MARI pulls away.)*

**ESTELLA.** You're just like your father. You get stressed and you don't eat.

**MARI.** I'm eating!

**ESTELLA.** Coffee is not food. I sent Misha out to get us juices.

**MARI.** Juice isn't food either.

**ESTELLA.** They're green juices! It's superfood!

**MARI.** Misha's your new Sarah?

**ESTELLA.** Yes. She went to check into our hotel and drop off the luggage. Wait. No. Misha quit a few months ago. Wait. I'm confused. Lauren was the new Sarah. Misha was the new Lauren. And – ugh – what's her name? My new assistant. I see her face – [ ] is the new Misha. *Carajo*. It'll come to me.

**MARI.** You go through assistants faster than Leo DiCaprio goes through teen models. No, you know what? I can't do this. I can't stop everything to hang out with you right now. I have SO much work to do.

**ESTELLA.** *Pero*, relax your face.

**MARI.** Nothing's wrong with my face.

**ESTELLA.** Relax your face.

(**ESTELLA** touches **MARI**'s furrowed brows.  
*She swats her hand away.*)

**MARI.** Stop, Mami, stop.

**ESTELLA.** Relax, *mija*. If your face is always like this (*She does the face.*) then it's going to get stuck like that.

**MARI.** I don't have time for this! It's Art Basel!

**ESTELLA.** I know! That's why I'm here! My manager thinks it's good for my brand if I'm seen in Miami enjoying Basel, especially with my daughter!

**MARI.** I can't babysit you. I have work to do. This isn't a vacation for me.

**ESTELLA.** Well then let me help you! Put me to work. Anything.

**MARI.** Oh yeah?

**ESTELLA.** What do you need?

**MARI.** A miracle.

**ESTELLA.** Honey, I'm a movie star, not a miracle worker.

**MARI.** I need to sell out the exhibit.

**ESTELLA.** You don't have an exhibit.

**MARI.** Well, when I do!

**ESTELLA.** Mari, I can help if you need money.

**MARI.** I don't need your money if I can just do my job.  
Sell art! Basel is make or break for these galleries.

(**ESTELLA** holds **MARI**.)

**ESTELLA.** *Ay*, I've ruined you. I'm sorry.

**MARI.** You're apologizing? Are you working the program or something?

**ESTELLA.** *Mija*, the only twelve steps I believe in are the stairs down to my wine cellar.

**MARI.** A wine cellar. *Qué* fancy.

**ESTELLA.** You'd know if you ever came to visit me.

**MARI.** You didn't ruin me, Mami.

**ESTELLA.** No, that's what moms do. We ruin our daughters with our good intentions.

**MARI.** I'm always amazed at your ability to make everything about you.

**ESTELLA.** You don't quit. No matter what. You just work and work and work. Not stopping to take a breath, take care of yourself, have a *life*.

**MARI.** And that's your fault?

**ESTELLA.** Well it's what you saw me do. Work and work and work. I missed so much. Like that production of *The Secret Garden* in middle school, after you practiced that horrible British dialect for months. I booked the Che series and moved to LA, and couldn't fly back for a performance. I still think about that.

**MARI.** I don't even remember it.



**ESTELLA.** And the art show in college. Back when *you* painted. The portrait you did of me facing the bathtub. You gave me gorgeous hair and a tight ass. And then you won Best in Show with that painting / and I wasn't -

**MARI.** Best in Show?! I'm not a dog!

**ESTELLA.** You won, and I wasn't there.

**MARI.** (*Totally a big deal.*) It wasn't a big deal!

**ESTELLA.** (*Calm and centered.*) Okay. How can I best support you in this moment?

**MARI.** Don't you do your crunchy, centered, LA shtick.

**ESTELLA.** It's not a shtick, it's a lifestyle! Juicing and yoga and hiking and lots of sex. (*Gasp.*) You're not having sex!

**MARI.** MAMI!

**ESTELLA.** What?! You wouldn't be so stressed if you were having sex!

**MARI.** *Ay dios mio.*

**ESTELLA.** You need to at least - you know - take care of yourself!

**MARI.** I'm not having this conversation with you.

**ESTELLA.** Seriously! Take a break! Go lock yourself in the bathroom, I'll watch things out here.

**MARI.** MAMI!

**ESTELLA.** Or let me set you up with someone!

**MARI.** Yeah, cause that's not weird at all.

**ESTELLA.** The least you could do is wear the necklace I sent for your birthday.

**MARI.** It's heavy! It's not my style!

**ESTELLA.** It's rose quartz, it's not about style, it's about crystal energy.