

SCRIPT TITLE

Written by

Name of First Writer

Based on, If Any

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EXCERPT -
"POVERTY RIDGE,"
P 33-45.

Scene takes place in mid-morning, August, 1875. EDDIE has just come home from law school in New York to his family's home on the outskirts of San Jose, CA. The family is having breakfast with their friends.

CAST

Eddie - 25, Mexican-American, man, educated, cousin to Epi
Epifania - 25, Mexican-American, loud, hard-drinking woman in trousers, cousin to Eddie
Grampa - 60s, Mexican-American, speaks slow but strong, raised in indigenous ways, Grampa to Eddie + Epi
Wesley - Late 20s, Black, cool, friendly older-brother type
Keiko - Early 20s, Japanese-American, well-read & thoughtful

EPIFANIA

Good to see you again, Keiko.

KEIKO

You too, Epi--

EPIFANIA

How come you only come by to visit when handsome young Eddie is here?

EDDIE

Epi why you always gotta--

GRAMPA

No...!

KEIKO

That's not true. I come hang out with Grampa a lot.

EPIFANIA

Wait-- y'all hang out?

GRAMPA

Mhm. We read.

EPIFANIA

You guys READ?

GRAMPA

Well, you know I can't hardly read a word anyhow, but, you know, sometimes I wanna hear a story-- So Keiko here comes by and reads em to me sometimes--

KEIKO

I really find that *hearing* a story-- the way the words twist in the air, and land on your ears-- is a whole different experience--

EDDIE

Yes-- yeah, it *is*--!

KEIKO

Mhm! You know how we always used to say that poetry just doesn't seem to have the *impact* of a longer novel, a romance, a play-- but just reading with Grampa, it really does seem that--

EDDIE

That prose is poetry, and poetry is prose--

KEIKO

Yes-- yes, exactly--

EPIFANIA

Man, Grampa, I didn't know you liked--

WESLEY

Man Gramps, great job inviting Keiko over-- now none of us is gonna get a word in edgewise over the two professors--

GRAMPA

He started talkin about that Shakespeare guy; I wanted to bring someone by who could understand him...!

EDDIE

What've you guys been reading, then?

KEIKO

I mean-- I mean, whatever we can get our hands on-- you know San Jose has a library now--!

EDDIE

Yes!

GRAMPA

We read a lot of stuff. I really liked that, uh... *Hunchback of Notre Dame*? And that one with the Creature. Um, Frankenstein.

GRAMPA here gets up to leave to tend to more food and mess around with the pile of dirt in the backyard; Before he leaves:

EPIFANIA

Frankenstein! You know that was written by a girl, Grampa?

GRAMPA

I know. Pretty incredible.

He moves, letting the four dominate the foreground, the kitchen table.

KEIKO

Yes; We really do read a bit of everything, Dumas, of course-- and Dickens--

EDDIE

Dickens! Oh, Keiko, you would not believe how absolutely New York belongs in a Dickens story--

KEIKO

I can imagine--

WESLEY

Ed here was just tellin us all about life in the big city, right before you came.

KEIKO

Yes, Grampa was telling me--

WESLEY

Talmbout Shakespeare--

KEIKO

Shakespeare--! I mean, of course, prose as poetry--

EDDIE

Right--

KEIKO

To hear one of those plays read aloud--

EDDIE

You know I saw one? In New York? Staged and everything--

KEIKO

Saw one?

EPIFANIA

Eddie was just saying somethin bout how Shakespeare is like law school.

WESLEY

Or--

EDDIE

No-- well, no, no, how it--

KEIKO

It *facilitated* your understanding--

WESLEY

It helped you sorta get--

EDDIE

Yes! Yes. Exactly. Ok. So, we had this case we had to read, right? First case.

EPIFANIA

This case is damn near a hundred years old too, mind you-- you believe that?

KEIKO

That's-- why would they--

EDDIE

And, well, what's hilarious is that the case opinion itself is written like it's like-- like it's two-hundred years old, or older!

EPIFANIA

Classic.

WESLEY

What, cuz--

EDDIE

Cuz--

WESLEY

Cuz every one's trippin over themself tryna look the most educated--

EDDIE

Right--

EPIFANIA

Classic.

EDDIE

So-- hehe, so-- ok. So the case is about two hunters, right? Fighting over, over this fox, right?

KEIKO

Why were they fighting over a fox...?

EPIFANIA

Man, don't even ask--

WESLEY

It was some bullshit, to be honest--

EDDIE

Point is! The case is about two hunters taking each other to court. But-- even before or beyond all the bullshit about actual possession, and shit-- *no one else understood the case*. No one else could even-- no one else even figured out it was about two hunters! That first day in lecture, I was the only one who could answer the--

EPIFANIA

Why? They can't read, or what--

EDDIE

No, no, so get this! Well the opinion starts off with all this *ferae naturae* this, and "uninhabited ground" that, and only in like the fourth paragraph drops, like, "two votaries of Diana."

KEIKO

/Amazing

WESLEY

/Now who in the heck is Diana--

EPIFANIA

/What in the fuck is a votary?

All laugh. They share in the coolness/absurdity of this story, this whole other world.

EDDIE

Ok well-- so, a votary-- well, I kinda had to guess on that one, but Diana--

KEIKO

Is the goddess of the hunt.

EDDIE

--Right.

WESLEY

Goddess--?

EDDIE

Goddess of the hunt, yeah-- I think, Roman, I think-- but see, I was the only one who had picked up on that! Cuz--

KEIKO

Midsummer Night's Dream.

EDDIE

Yes!

KEIKO

“Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,
Or on Diana's altar to protest
For aye austerity and single life.”

WESLEY

Nice.

EDDIE

Damn! You got that memorized--

KEIKO

Of course. It's one of my favorites, remember?

EPIFANIA

I still don't get it--

EDDIE

I mean, there's nothing-- it's just, "votary of Diana"-- it's a highfalutin way to say hunter, basically.

EPIFANIA

Right! I get that. But why would they write that shit that way--

EDDIE

Just to be difficult--

EPIFANIA

It's stupid.

EDDIE

But I mean ironically, that's the only reason I was able to figure out what was goin on--

WESLEY

Hold on, though, so what's a votary? That ain't gotta do with like, suffrage or...?

KEIKO

No. *[Turns to Eddie]* And *you* shouldn't have had to guess on that one, either.

EPIFANIA

Oh-ho...!

EDDIE

What--

KEIKO

It means... Like, devoted. You're a "votary" to a cause, or a goddess.

"But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
 Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
 And the imperial *votaress* passed on,
 In maiden meditation, fancy-free."

[turns to Epifania] And that, my dear, is about *you*.

EPIFANIA

What? Me? What'd I--

WESLEY

Ooooh, I get it!

*All but EPI and GRAMPS, who is still in
earshot, laugh*

EPIFANIA

What? Get what?

WESLEY

You're the imperial votaress.

EDDIE

To Diana.

EPIFANIA

I still don't know what y'all are on about but I reckon I don't like it very much--

EDDIE

Meaning--

WESLEY

Meanin Cupid ain't been able to shoot you yet cuz you're too busy runnin round these hills barefoot like a lil fancy-free maiden, stealin horses and playing poker and drinking whiskey--

KEIKO

“Earthlier happy is the rose distill'd,
Than that which withering on the virgin thorn
Grows, lives and dies in *single* blessedness.”

EDDIE

Though Epi ain't exactly *chaste*--

WESLEY

Yeah, “virgin thorn” ain't quite it--

KEIKO

I've never known you to entertain any man--

EPIFANIA

That's cuz every single man up on this ridge is an idiot-- *present company* included--

WESLEY

But that don't mean anything!

KEIKO

What--

WESLEY

Let's just-- let's just say Epi sometimes, ah, rides side-saddle. That's it! That's all I'm saying--

EPIFANIA

Do you *want* me to knock you out? You know I can and will---

EDDIE

That's true.

KEIKO

Side... saddle?

EPIFANIA

Damn right, and I can ride straight, and standing, and backwards better'n all of you put together, too. So-- man fuck you!

EPI aims a kick at WESLEY, who giggles and falls back out of his chair avoiding it. EPI takes his chair, turns it around and straddles it.

EPIFANIA (CONT'D)

You sure know a lot of that Shakespeare shit.

KEIKO

Yeah, well-- I love it, so--

EPIFANIA

Why?

KEIKO

I mean... where to begin? I just think it's so special that something written so long ago can still say so much about who we are today.

EDDIE

Exactly! Even--

EPIFANIA

I'm asking *her*. Continue, Keiko.

KEIKO laughs and EDDIE puts his hands up, giving way.

KEIKO

Thank you, Epi. No, I... I mean, look at that fox case, right? That's something written decades ago that already feels silly to read about. But by contrast, look at *Midsummer Night's Dream*. To read that is to be reminded that, wherever you are... you're a *part* of this, this... history. This lineage. That there have always been-- like you, Epi-- strong, independent women. That there have always been young people, struggling against the expectations of their fathers. And that love continues to make a fool of us, still...

EPIFANIA

But not me, though.

KEIKO

No, of course.

EPIFANIA

Nor you. Not yet, anyway.

KEIKO

Haha-- no... Not yet.

EPIFANIA

... You ever think of moving off this ridge? Going to town?

KEIKO

I...

EPIFANIA

Smart girl like you. There can't be too many people for you to talk with up here in these hills.

KEIKO

There's... a few.

EPIFANIA

You never think about... yeah, San Jose? Or Oakland? Frisco?

KEIKO

I mean, sometimes, yes. But, in a way... I mean, even, going back to Midsummer Night's Dream. Here, this ridge. It's the virgin thorn, in a way. We're not... the "rose distilled," right? We're not... "plucked..." we're not mixing with all the comings and goings of what's going on down there but, in a way, we are singly blessed. We are free.

EPIFANIA

Mm.

KEIKO

You know, I went to the market the other day with my father-- and I heard a merchant talk about how impressed he was that my father produced such exemplary work despite living in a "no man's land."

EPIFANIA

Mm.

KEIKO

And that kind of... stayed with me, somehow. You know the way words can, can get stuck in your brain? A no man's land. Maybe poverty ridge is a no-man's land. But then that might mean that down there, in the city... that's "man's land." You know?

EPIFANIA

Mm.

KEIKO

And... maybe we won't be so loved in man's land. In man's world. Not loved the way we want to be, anyway... Here, I can come read with Grampa, and, and talk to you, and... do you understand what I'm saying?

EPIFANIA

... I do. But still, it's... it's so... boring up here! You know? Backward and boring and dead and dust and old. And... I don't... I mean, I'm ALIVE. You're alive. We should be able to... we should be able to make a mark. To live with some... *meaning*...

KEIKO

So, you do want to move away.

EPIFANIA

Or something!

WESLEY

... Epi and I are thinking of moving to Oakland. Raisin and sellin horses.

KEIKO

I see. Yes, I... for all of that, I do think of moving away. Sometimes.

EDDIE

You do...!?

KEIKO

... Yes, I do. I... did you hear? That they're going to make education compulsory for children now, all throughout California.

EDDIE

Yeah, I'd heard--

KEIKO

Obviously, I'd never want to go work in a mission-- cutting little Indian boys' hair and rapping their knuckles if they don't speak English-- but... they'll be opening a lot of secular schools, now, in the cities. And there'll be jobs there, for teaching. For women, too-- who know how to read, and write, and--

WESLEY

You'd be great at that, Kei--

EDDIE

You'd be AMAZING at that!

EPIFANIA

... You'd really like that? Teaching some white people's kids how to sing their ABCs, and bein inside all day, and...

KEIKO

Well! I understand it might not seem so adventurous to *you*, Epi-- maybe even, yes, boring--

WESLEY

Boring? This girl'd die if she ever had to set foot in a schoolhouse--

EDDIE

Die, she'd damn near burst into flame--

KEIKO

-- but... I think that's exactly it! It's... we're almost at the end of the 19th century. We are approaching a dawn of a new age. For the state to say that *everyone* is meant to be educated-- to be able to survive in the modern world... I, well, that excites me! It's not just a world of tutors and governesses and dry, patrician curriculum-- this could be a world for *everyone*. This could... little girls won't have to beg the wealthiest man in town for a few hours in his study every Friday afternoon, poring over books alone, in silence. There's going to be libraries, and children of all races in California able to write, to read, to tell their own stories... to make history! And to be someone who could awaken them to the world of... of passions, of idea, of story? To be someone who could... could make a difference? Yes, that... I do consider that.