

Therapeutic {!}

By

Leticia Arbelo

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JOHN SULLIVAN writes... This play covers ground not often visited in American drama. Paula Vogel's The Oldest Profession comes to mind, but not much else, and her emphasis on aging sex workers with an aging clientele is very different from this intergenerational piece.*

I really like how the younger character, Juli, effortlessly develops new methods of monetizing her business – integrating her social media presence and cannabis into her younger / hipper business model – while her mother, who's been in the biz for quite a while struggles a bit to keep pace with her daughter's entrepreneurial innovations. I'm sure some might object to the objectification (and politics) of bodies in this business, a point of view which I think I understand and appreciate, this play presents a delightful mother / daughter interaction and ultimate collaboration in seeing this old world through new and very non-judgmental eyes. Again, Leticia Arbelo's alternative cultural lens takes its audience to that ancient, often abrasive locus of (for the most part loving) intergenerational struggle via a unique point-of-view.

THERAPEUTIC

By Leticia Arbelo

Karina and Juli, mother and daughter, are in a one-room apartment. The kitchen is separated by a small curtain. They are sitting in front of a table that is full of small things. Juli is wearing a towel robe and reading on her cell phone. Karina is in homely clothes. She is listening to Juli, drinking a glass of cheap champagne and doing her pedicure.

Juli: *(reads)* I'm a sweet and daring young girl.

Karina: Naughty girl...

Juli: An executive escort in every way. V- P- I, VIP

Karina: It's V-I-P, you ignorant!

Juli: Whatever. The order of factors doesn't alter the product.

Karina: Ok. Go on. What else?

Juli: I'm a therapeutic escort, a sensual massage expert.

Karina: A therapeutic escort! *(laughs)*. You've got some cheek...

Juli: I take credit cards, some foreign currencies and Argentine pesos at the exchange rate of the day.

Karina: Good.

Juli: *(continues reading)* My eroticism has no other limit but your pleasure.

Karina: ...Daddy.

Juli: What?

Karina: Add “daddy”. “My eroticism has no other limit but your pleasure, daddy”.

Juli: No way. It takes out all the poetry.

Karina: Guys don’t give a damn about poetry.

Juli: You’re an old fossil, Mum.

Karina: Come on, add something hotter! If not they aren’t going to call you. Turn them on, baby.

Juli: Shut up and listen. (*Reads*) Come and meet me in my place, the one in the photos. You’re going to have an awesome time.

Karina: Don’t lie. This apartment is not the one in the photos. And, for the record, it’s not yours, it’s mine.

Juli: When you die, it’s going to be mine.

Karina: As I said. You’re a demon.

Juli: Well, that’s the truth.

Karina: Why don’t you serve your customers in Albert’s apartment? It has several rooms and you could work there, like all the local girls. It’s right outside San Pedrito Station, A-line subway. The old man charges only a small commission, he’s a good guy.

Juli: No, that’s history.

Karina: What?

Juli: That idea. It’s absolutely out.

Karina: What do you mean?

Juli: What’s in now is serving in a private apartment.

Karina: Ok, then rent it.

Juli: And how do I get the cash?

Karina: What about your wages? Don’t you earn enough at the bank?

Juli: Yes, I do. I can’t complain, actually.

Karina: Why do you want to do this then?

Juli: For fun. Can't you fuck for pleasure? Is it wrong? And I get some dough for my vacations by the way. I love to travel. Don't you?

Karina: I'd love to.

Juli: Besides, now women want to get satisfaction, not only give it to men. Pleasure is there, inside you.

Karina: Ok then. Rent an apartment for pleasure, with some friends, and work there, not here.

Juli: Listen. (*Resumes the reading*) I always have cannabis and I like to share it.

Karina: No way! No joints smoking here, no.

Juli: (*Keeps reading*) I think we may have a better, more relaxed experience. And I can give you some good massage with essential oils on your back and then... wherever you like.

Karina: Oil? It'll stain the sheets. No, no, forget it. Sheets are very expensive.

Juli: (*Ignores her mother's words*) As soon as you get here, a candle-lit path leads you to lust and pleasure.

Karina: Candles? Do you want to burn down the house? No way, baby. No clients here. You can bring here your mates from college to do those group jobs, if you want, but don't give me weird stuff!

Juli: You have to change, Mum.

Karina: Don't bug me with that.

Juli: You're a vintage whore, Mum. Look at you, drinking cheap champagne that looks like Sprite. Why don't you drink some sugar beet and plum juice?

Karina: Because I'd shit on myself.

Juli: Much better. That way you'd let it out, total detox.

Karina: Look, I don't want you to work here, Juliana. It's safer to work at Alberto's. Me and this house are going to be in peace that way.

Juli: (*Imitates her mother*) Me and this house are going to be in peace that way.

Karina: When I was your age I was already working with Alberto. I felt really, really good. He used to choose my clients. All of them had to be very clean.

Juli: Not quite... Dad was quite filthy.

Karina: Well, yes. Except for your father, the rest were clean.

Juli: Remember the nails box.

Karina: What?

Juli: Dad's nails box.

Karina: Oh, yes. For years I thought it was his mother's ashes but it was his toenails pieces.

Juli: Which he clipped with his teeth...

Karina: And he kept them in the box. Anyway, each to his own. He also rubbed his ears with cotton swabs and then he collected them. He stopped doing that when you were a baby, because you wanted to put the swabs in your mouth.

Juli: How disgusting!

Karina: He couldn't go to work without rubbing his ears with a Q-tip first. He dipped it in alcohol (or even vodka when we had run out of alcohol) and then said, "Oh, what a pleasure! Now I can go". Then he left the swab on the table and went out. Quite a character!

Juli: And you married that ...freak.

Karina: "That freak" was your father. And actually we didn't get married. He was a bit unpleasant but he made me feel like Julia Roberts in "Pretty Woman". Why do you think your name is Juliana?

Juli: But she is *Julia* Roberts, not Juliana.

Karina: Well, I had to negotiate with your father: The name Julia reminded him of María Julia Alsogaray¹ and he didn't like her. (*Pause*) But he treated me like a queen. The only complaint I have is that he didn't take me to Los Angeles. I wanted to go to the hotel where *Pretty Woman* was shot. Not to stay for the night, only to have a coffee there.

Juli: Mum, it's *you* who has to make your dreams come true.

¹ T.N.: An Argentine politician.

Karina: I met him and I stopped working.

Juli: Too bad.

Karina: We were so much in love from the very beginning...

Juli: I've heard that a hundred times.

Karina: ...that when Alberto told me "Kari, Mario is here" I got butterflies in my stomach and rushed to make mate² and get ready to listen to his truck stories and his road adventures. Sex and money didn't matter. (*Sighs*). A movie story, Juliana. I hope one day something like that happens to you.

Juli: I don't want to depend on anyone. Besides, I want to choose my patients.

Karina: Patients?

Juli: Yes, they are patients.

Karina: Juliana, you're going to be a whore, not a doctor.

Juli: I'm going to be a therapeutic escort or in any case an empowered whore.

(Message ringtone on the cell phone)

Karina: What's that?

Juli: It's the escorts' page. *(Looks at her cell phone)* Let's see.

Karina: *(Tries to grab the phone)* What does it say?

Juli: Hold on, Mum. *(reads)* Hi, pretty.

Karina: Pretty Woman. Julia Roberts. There you are.

Juli: *(Reads)* Tell me what time I can go today, goddess. I feel like having a nice massage. You know what I mean. Happy ending. You're gorgeous, babe. What a nice apartment. I'm going to do naughty little things to you. I'll be there as soon as I leave this shitty office. I'm just a silly worker but at least I have the cash to be with you, blonde babe. I've just got my salary. We're going to have a wonderful time together. I'm waiting for your answer. .

Karina: He's got money now, Juliana. Squeeze him.

Julia: Yea, I'm writing to him.

² T.N.: Argentine traditional drink.

Karina: Tell him that you'll be at Alberto's because you're getting your apartment painted right now. (*Takes her own cell phone*). I'm calling Alberto to tell him that you're going with a guy. Don't tell Alberto that the man has fresh money, don't even think about it. He may charge you more than he usually does. (*Looks at the cell phone*). Come on, he's already online. What time are you going?

Juli: Late.

Karina: But what time? You've got to be a professional.

Juli: I mean it's late. I've already told the guy to come here.

Karina: What? No! I said no!

Juli: (*Takes off the towel robe. She's wearing a sexy black bodysuit underneath the robe.*) Come on, Mum. I'll give you ten per cent.

Karina: This doesn't make sense! I'm retired.

Juli: Come on, give me a hand.

Karina: I can't believe it!

Juli: There are some little flowers and a lighter in my bedside table, first drawer.

Karina: What flowers? We don't have any plants because the cat eats them.

Juli: It's a joint, Mum, a joint. Bring it, it's already rolled.

Karina: (*Horried*). Oh, no!

Juli: (*Clears the table*) Go while I tidy up this mess. (*Karina covers her mouth and shakes her head*) What is it? (*Laughs*) What's the matter?

Karina: This is wrong.

Juli: This is therapeutic, and what is therapeutic is always right.

Karina: If you see it that way...

Juli: Come on, heat those stones in the microwave. The chap wants massage with warm stones.

Karina: Stones?

Juli: The ones we brought from San Clemente. They're in the plant pot.

Karina: Those are sea shells, not stones.

Juli: Whatever. Bring them anyway. He will lie face down, so he won't know if they are sea shells or stones. (*Karina goes to the kitchen*). By the way, bring me the Marolio³ oil too.

Karina: You can mix it with some 31oil⁴ ...

Juli: Exactly. Now you got it, Mum.

Karina: (*Sits. Pause*) This is insane, Juliana.

Juli: (*Goes to the bathroom*) Take it easy. Everything is under control. (*From the bathroom*) Can you trust me for once in your life? (*Comes back with a room freshener in her hand*) He also wants aromatherapy (*reads the label*) "Countryside Pleasures" (*Vaporizes and smells*) It's ok ¿isn't it?

Karina: Yea, it smells like a bathroom but it's ok.

Juli: Look, there are some red candles in the bottom drawer, together with the kitchen cloths. Bring them.

Karina: No, not those candles. They are for San Expedito.

Juli: Come on, tomorrow we'll buy some more. The oriental is paying a lot after all.

Karina: How much? (*Thinks*) No, no. This is insane. (*Stands up*) What do I do while you're with him? Oh, no, I'm going to hear everything. (*pause*) I'll go to our neighbor's.

Juli: No way. Stay here. Come on, put on this apron and help me. From now on you're going to be my assistant and this is going to be a sex spa.

Karina: No, no. You're completely mad (*The bell rings*).

Juli: That's him. Go!

Karina: What? (*Takes off the apron*) No, no Juliana, wait a minute.

Juli: Come on, Mum. If all this works out, I'll take you to Los Angeles. I promise. (*Pause*)

Karina: Really? To the hotel?

Juli: Of course, Mummy.

³ T.N.: A popular cooking oil brand.

⁴ T.N. A relaxing and aphrodisiac massage oil.

Karina: Are you serious Juliana? (*The bell rings again. Juli puts on some perfume*)

Juli: I swear to God. Go!

Karina adjusts her apron, takes a deep breath and opens the door.

THE END

Character breakdown

Juli: Female, 23 YEARS old, Latin American

Karina:: Female, 58 YEARS old, Latin American

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THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

I am Argentinean. I was born and raised in this country that always has problems of all kinds. I think that's why I developed a creativity that most Argentines have. I love my country and I like to share my texts with the whole world. Proud to make our culture known, that's why I approached FOTD. As a playwright I am interested in exploring certain themes such as the differences between social classes, daily life in Argentina, mother-daughter relationships, discrimination and poverty. I feel influenced by Argentinean authors such as Roberto Arlt, Ricardo Monti, Mauricio Kartun and Griselda Gambaro authors that I have studied during all these years.

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