

Carrot Sticks
A short play

by Hope Villanueva

CHARACTERS

MARIA: A college junior
PAUL: A high school sophomore
SARA: An eighth grader, autistic, almost non-verbal
REINA: Their mother.

PLACE and TIME

Santa Barbara, CA. May 23, 2014. The modest home of Reina and her family.

Maria is only ever on the phone, but she is present onstage.

Reina is present onstage, but never in the same place as any of her children.

CARROT STICKS

A short play

REINA checks her voicemail. She hears the voice of her daughter, MARIA.

VOICEMAIL

You have one new message.

MARIA

Mom, it's me. Don't forget that Paul is catching the bus home from school today. I have to swing by the sorority house. But I should be home at the normal time. Besos and carrot sticks.

REINA dials. She gets Maria's voicemail greeting.

MARIA

It's Maria. I'm probably in class, or studying or doing something deeply important. You know what to do. (Beep.)

REINA is about to speak, but hangs up. She dials again.

Elsewhere PAUL is walking in their front door, playing on his cell phone. It rings.

REINA

Paul?

PAUL

I'm home, ok. Just walked in.

REINA

No. I know. Is Sara home yet?

PAUL

Not yet.

REINA

Wait at the door.

PAUL

Mom –

REINA

Turn on the TV. Maria... Turn on the TV.

PAUL

Ok. Geez.

He does. He watches the news in silence.

REINA

She's not picking up. Pablito... She isn't answering.

Time passes. Later that afternoon. The sound of a bus pulling up.

PAUL goes outside and returns a few moments later with his sister, SARA. She holds his hand. He is awkward.

SARA offers him her backpack. He takes it. They stare awkwardly at each other a moment. PAUL is "doing it wrong". He remembers himself and hangs her backpack up. He removes a small plush toy that had been connected to the bag and hands it to SARA. Better. She takes it and sits on the floor at the coffee table.

PAUL dials his cell as he walks toward the kitchen. He returns with a plastic baggie of celery sticks.

PAUL

Mom. I don't know... I don't know. Maria's gonna come home. She has to. (Listens to Mom panicking.) I don't know what to do. Maria always watches Sara.

REINA

You have to do it now. I'm calling her again.

PAUL

Mom, I –

REINA hangs up on him. PAUL is troubled. SARA gradually begins responding to his energy.

REINA dials.

VOICEMAIL

You have no new messages. To listen to your old messages, press 1.

REINA presses 1.

MARIA

It's Maria. I'm probably in class, or studying or doing something deeply important. You know what to do. (Beep.)

REINA hangs up.

Time passes.

PAUL tries to soothe SARA, who has started to rock a little.

PAUL

Oh, um... don't... Maria was good at helping you. She's the one...

His anxiety heightens hers. He checks himself.

PAUL

Routine. Routine, right? Backpack. Plushie. Snacks. What else? What did she...

PAUL helps SARA take out some of the celery, encouraging her to eat. She doesn't want them. He munches on one to demonstrate.

PAUL

See? It's good. And crunchy. Mmmmm.

SARA looks, but doesn't eat. PAUL makes faces to encourage her.

REINA's phone rings. She answers.

REINA

Hola?

PAUL

Mmmm...

REINA

No...

PAUL

Where is Maria?

REINA covers her mouth, silencing her pain.

SARA takes a celery stick and starts hitting it on the table. Firmly, but not destructively. PAUL is reminded of something.

PAUL

What is...

Almost with her hits of celery on the table...

SARA (very unclearly)

Carrot sticks. Cel-er-ee.

PAUL

That's right.

PAUL runs in the kitchen and returns a moment later with a matching baggie of carrot sticks. He has SARA's attention.

SARA (still muddy)

Carrot sticks.

PAUL

How did it go? Show me. Sara. How did the song go?

SARA takes a carrot stick in one hand and a celery stick in the other. She begins to make a beat on the table. PAUL starts to follow her, celery and carrots in hand. She leads him with her blurry words and he joins her...

SARA

Carrot... Cel-er-ee.

PAUL

Carrot stick. Celery.

He remembers what he's heard Maria sing to SARA. He drums on the table as he sings... And SARA begins to smile as he says the familiar words.

PAUL

Carrot stick and a celery stalk. Carrot stick and a celery stalk. Carrot stick and a celery stalk. Annnnnnddddd CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH!

He makes a silly face as he crunches into his carrot stick. SARA does the same, starting to eat her snack.

PAUL

Maria sings it better.

SARA nods.

PAUL

I know! I did my best. And it's just for today.

Does he believe that?

PAUL

Maria will be back anytime.

PAUL tries to relax. His phone rings and REINA is on the end of the line.

PAUL
Mom? (Silence) Mom... You talked to her, right?

REINA
Pablito...

PAUL
Mom, no...

REINA
She was there, mijo. She...

REINA chokes on sobs. PAUL drops the phone and the line cuts out.

He paces. He bottles up screams of rage. Disbelief.

PAUL dials.

MARIA
It's Maria. I'm probably in class, or studying or doing something deeply important. You know what to do. (Beep.)

PAUL curls to his knees and crumbles.

SARA goes to Paul. She leads him by the hand to sit back at the coffee table, then gently puts carrot sticks in his hands.

SARA
Carrot... Celery.

PAUL tries to shrug her off, but SARA gently starts drumming the beat on the table. Oddly comforted by the rhythm, PAUL begins to drum with her.

REINA dials.

MARIA
It's Maria. I'm probably in class, or studying or doing something deeply important. You know what to do. (Beep.)

REINA dials again to listen to her voicemail.

VOICEMAIL
You have no new messages. To listen to your old messages, press 1.

REINA presses 1.

PAUL and SARA begin to sing together softly as REINA listens to the voicemail.

PAUL and SARA

Carrot stick and a celery stalk. Carrot stick and a celery stalk. Carrot stick and a celery stalk.

MARIA

Mom, it's me. Don't forget that Paul is catching the bus home from school today. I have to swing by the sorority house. But I should be home at the normal time. Besos and carrot sticks.

PAUL and SARA

Annnnnnddddd CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH!

END OF PLAY