

November in Evanston

by **Isabel Amat**

CHARACTERS

Juliana: A 16-year-old high school junior. Volleyball player. Intelligent, anxious, bilingual.

Juliana's mom: Latina, gentle but weary. Picks Juliana up from school daily.

Coach: Strict but nice. Obsessed with "being consistent."

Teacher: AP Language teacher; polite, thoughtful, leads class dialogue and students like her.

6 Students from Spanish class: Classmates and teammates; several voices that create school vibe.

Juliana's friend from the volleyball team: A teammate; she appears briefly in Scene 4.

SETTING

A suburban high school in Evanston, Illinois.

Middle of November. Cold and gray skies and dim lighting.

The play takes place in a classroom, gym, hallway, and a parked car outside the school.

SCENE 1. Hallway

(Lights come up on a bustling school hallway. A fire alarm test buzzes. Students hustle between lockers. The buzzing intensifies. Movements are slow as students get into classrooms.)

Juliana

(to audience):

Being sixteen feels like the fire alarm testing constantly
Can't open my locker,
I will be late again.
AP homework, tryouts, college, clubs, leadership
and ICE is outside at OUR school,
everything flaming at once.

MEGAPHONE

(Offstage)

Attention students. Attention students:

The school is now under a lockdown.
If you are currently on lunch break (Block Three),
you must remain inside.
Do not exit the building.
If you're in Block Four, go to your regular classroom.
This is not a drill.

(A heavy silence follows. No one moves. Then, the sounds of some exhalations.)

STUDENTS

(a murmuring chorus, voices overlapping faintly)

Keep your head down
Hi, let's meet up after school
Don't look, but Rommy is behind you
What are you wearing for homecoming?
The math teacher will be so mad
Do you have practice today?

(Students avoid each other's gaze. A fluorescent yellow light starts to move.)

SCENE 2. "AP Language: Chac Mool by Carlos Fuentes"

(AP Language classroom, Block 3. The light turns red and glows above the door. The room inside is still, and the white light is bright. Two phones vibrate on desks; no one checks them. One window shade is half-closed.)

Teacher

I hope you all at least attempted to read "Chac Mool."
Carlos Fuentes is a challenging author, I know.

(Some shuffle; some dig through their backpack searching for the story packet.)

Take out the handouts I distributed.
Let's start with a simple question:
who tells the story?

Student 1

(nervously flipping pages)

Uh... Carlos Fuentes?

Student 2

(snorts softly)

Bro, that's not what she meant.

Teacher

(interrupts before the discussion escalates)

Not the author.

We know that Carlos Fuentes is the author.

But who is the narrator?

Who is telling us the story?

Student 2

Filiberto?

Teacher

Can't be Filiberto. Why not?

Student 3

(frustrated as this should be obvious)

Because he died, and the story keeps going.

Student 4

Filiberto's friend?

Teacher

Yes. Great, his friend is the narrator.

Everything we know about Filiberto

(his aversion to water, the arrival of the statue, the strange smell in the basement.)

All of it comes from the diary he leaves behind.

**(A brief silence. A phone vibrates loudly. One of the students silences it immediately.
Another coughs and rubs their forehead, exhausted or bored.)**

Teacher

Ok, the story begins with water and death.

(The class stiffens. The red light buzzes again and brighter.)

Teacher

What does that suggest?

Student 2
(after a long pause)

That something's... coming back?

Teacher

This is correct. There is something circular.
But let's go deeper:
How did Filiberto die?

Student 3
(softly)

Drowned while swimming...

Teacher
(interrupts again)

Yes, Filiberto dies in the water, and that element is important to understand the rest of the story.

Student 1
(defensive and loud)

Bro, if we know the ending, what's the point?

Teacher
(calmly)

Not so fast.
Knowing the ending doesn't ruin a story.
It just changes how we read the story.

(The red-light pulses. Someone taps their foot too fast and makes an annoying noise.)

Teacher
(Writes on board: "CHAC-MOOL?", and she speaks very slowly.)

Who is Chac-Mool?

(The teacher uses a clicker. A PowerPoint presentation illuminates the classroom wall. Slides of Chac-Mool flicker in a bright, intense light over the students.)



(A few students flinch at the sudden bright projection.)

Student 5

(raises their hand)

I know, I know:
he is the Mayan god of rain!
I looked him up!

Teacher

Could be Mayan... or is he Aztec?
Fuentes never tells us clearly.
Remember, the seller says the statue is from Yucatán
on page 92, first paragraph,
which would be Mayan territory,
but Filiberto later imagines “Aztec thunder” on the following page.
Maybe the story refuses to choose one origin.
Or maybe the origin is complicated.

Student 3

Wait... so the author just didn't bother doing research?

Teacher

Let's think:
Why might the origin or lack of origin matter?

Student 2

(soft, unsure)

Maybe because it mixes things up,
like it did not matter.

Teacher
(enthusiastically)

Yes. Excellent. That's the point.
It's like people assuming I'm from Argentina when I'm actually from Venezuela.
They flatten the differences and nuances.
It is not the same, and it matters.
Let's now think:
Is Chac-Mool mad?
Why?

Student 5

Because Filiberto didn't care about Chac-Mool's origin.

Teacher

Good. And? Explain

Student 5

He got the Chac-Mool from a store and used him as decoration.

Student 4

(The projected Chac-Mool seems to darken slightly as the slide shifts.)

Decoration and not even in an important place of the house
He placed the ancient god in the basement.

Teacher

Good. Can you think of a real-life example of something similar?
Have you ever used something sacred as decoration?

(No one answers. Two new slides click onto the wall: tourist markets, shelves of cheap replicas, bright colors with the red light.)



Teacher

Think about souvenirs:
Which kind do you buy if you travel?
What would you bring home from another country?

Student 1

I bought a miniature replica of the Eiffel Tower from Paris.
It's part of a keychain.

(He raises his hand and shows it to the class)

Student 4

I bought a little Indra statue when I went to India to visit my grandparents

Student 2

Wait — like... the god?

Student 4

Yeah. Have you seen it?

Teacher

Exactly.
Something many of us could do without a bad intention.
Imagine bringing home souvenirs or symbols that represent parts of another culture.
That is never simple.
In our story, it is a god in one civilization and a very large,
unimportant decorative piece for Filiberto.

Student 6

Oh...Chac Mool has the right to be angry.

Teacher

(The teacher hesitates, choosing her words carefully.)

I agree. Let's keep thinking about this.
But now, let's write Filiberto's itinerary in pairs:
where does he go, what happens each day?

(Students murmur. Get in pairs. Time passes. The bell rings faintly.)

Teacher

All right, we'll stop here.
Remember your partners, as we will continue on Monday,
Please read the story again.

(Noone moves. The red lights buzz louder than the students.)

SCENE 3. Between Classes

(Hallway in slow motion. Lockers like closed mouths. Fluorescent light buzzes underfoot.)

Juliana

(to audience)

“Chac-Mool” is weird.

(A nervous laugh.)

A student asks about ICE
And another student changes the subject.

(A pause. A phone screen's glow)

We scroll through headlines
Pretend not to care.

(Her voice cracks slightly. The light intensifies.)

My mom waits in the car,
Spanish accent, soft and brave,
and I hope no one notices.
She has green eyes,
maybe they won't look at her.

(A car engine hums faintly. The mom brings a bag with Juliana's gym clothes; She swapped them for her school backpack. A fluorescent buzz clicks off for a second and then returns and stays.)

SCENE 4. Volleyball Practice

(The court glows. A whistle echoes, then fades. Then a strong, firm whistle, a bouncing ball, and some footsteps. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.)

Juliana's Friend

(with a sarcastic tone)

Juliana, why did you come to practice
if you didn't make the team?

Juliana

Coach told me to keep showing up.
I don't know what that even means.

(Students run to the court and jog around. The ball bounces fast. The hum thickens.)

Coach

Consistency! That's all I ask.
Serve, block, breathe.
Again!

Team

(soft echo)

Again.

Coach

Juliana, play!

(The coach tosses her the ball. A single whistle pierces the air. She looks down at her shirt: it doesn't match the team's uniform. It is last year's team shirt, and the rest of the team has a different one.)

Juliana

(to audience)

When he called me onto the court,
I didn't know if I was angry or relieved.
Maybe both.
Maybe neither.

Then he said I was on the team now.
Very confusing.

I don't even have the right shirt.
All the team members are looking at me.

(a brief pause)

Coach says, "consistency," like a prayer.

(The gym sound drops, only her breath and a single ball spinning. A second whistle, far away, as if from another court, or maybe another life.)

But nothing feels consistent:
Not grades, not news, not air.
Not my shirt.
Not even this game.

(The buzz from the hallway seeps into the gym. The ball hits her hands and falls to the floor.)

Coach

Again, Juliana!
Don't flinch!
Hurry!
Focus!
Position, Position!
Consistency!

Juliana

(to self)

Still, I serve,
breathe,
wait.

(There is a long silence. Juliana bends, picks up the ball herself, and slowly hands it back to Coach who catches it.)

Juliana

(loud)

Wait... Was it ICE at our High School

SCENE 5. Threshold

(The stage becomes darker and darker. The red-light flashes slowly but intensely. Juliana stands alone with her backpack slung over one shoulder. Then, behind her on the wall, the projected slides of Chac-Mool pulsing softly with red light.)

Juliana
(to audience)

That statue won't leave me alone.
(signaling the slides)

Is it just me, or
does Chac-Mool look like he's judging us?
It reminds me of ICE,
even though it makes no sense
maybe the monumentality and power.
The way Chac-Mool waits...
and everyone thinks it's asleep
until it isn't.

(The projection flickers: Chac-Mool's eyes seem to shift a fraction, not alive, but subtly changing the form, almost imperceptible.)

Juliana's friend from the team
(Dark light, and she throws the ball to Juliana, and Juliana throws it back to her)

I know the feeling.
Walking down the hallway.
Standing at practice.
Sitting on the bench.
Being here but not totally here
belonging or trying to belong.
Invited and excluded
All at the same time.

(A whistle outside from the audience area overlaps with another whistle inside the stage: two tones, one sharp, one distant. Juliana looks up as if hearing them merge.)

Juliana
What wakes us up?
Fear? Anger?
Someone calling our name?
Or someone forgetting it?

(Juliana steps forward. The Chac-Mool Power point images get larger behind her, first very bright, then they change to softer colors, looking more like shadows.)

END OF PLAY