

## PUT ME IN YOUR NOVEL: A ONE-ACT PLAY

*Robert Con Davis-Undiano*

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

Rudolfo Anaya	Chicano writer
Patricia Anaya	Rudolfo's wife
Coatlicue	Aztec goddess of life and death
Coatlicue2	Duplicate of Coatlicue
Coatlicue3	Duplicate of Coatlicue
Young Boy	Enacts scene in Coatlicue's play
Two young girls	Enact scene in Coatlicue's play

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**SETTING:** Rudolfo's office in his home. There are a messy desk, a coffee table, three chairs, a recliner, a table with a typewriter on it, and a Virgin of Guadalupe statue on the desk.

**TIME:** The year is 1969, middle of the night.

### RUDOLFO

*(He is sitting at his typewriter. His left wrist is in sling and pulley contraption suspended over the keyboard so that he can type with a partially functional hand.)*

Oh, Dios mío!

*(He abruptly slams his typewriter.)*

Who am I kidding! None of this is going anywhere.

*(He rises and yells at the typewriter.)*

I just want to throw you away! Can you understand even a little bit of that?

*(He sits down at his typewriter again.)*

Lots of good stuff, and it would be great in a few short stories.

*(He rises and stomps with anger around the middle of the room.)*

Maybe I should forget this.

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

*(Dressed in a robe, she knocks once and enters.)*

Rudy, are you okay? I heard yelling. What is it?

**RUDOLFO**

I've hit a wall. I can't write this damn thing!

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

What are you talking about?

**RUDOLFO**

I have nothing to show. NOTHING, absolutely NOTHING has worked!

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

Maybe you need to get away for a fresh perspective.

**RUDOLFO**

I've already tried that.

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

Maybe it will come with more time.

**RUDOLFO**

But it needs to be in this lifetime, Pat. Why did I think that I could write a novel?

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

*(She stands and moves downstage very near the audience.)*

Because you can. Come here for a moment.

**RUDOLFO**

*(He joins her looking out at the audience.)*

Now what?

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

Look out there and tell me what you see.

**RUDOLFO**

I see faces, lots and lots of faces, and...

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

And, and...

**RUDOLFO**

Well, stories. The two over there...

*(He points out toward the audience.)*

are about to get in a fight, and the ones over here are getting close and supporting each other, maybe too close—they've done this before. So what? Usual stuff.

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

No. Scads of other people would look out this same window and see only clouds—no stories, no faces, just clouds.

**RUDOLFO**

I know, I know. This is so frustrating.

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

You see the world through stories, and you have a gift. You are the best writer I know. I've seen that in your stories, and your work is rare and powerful.

**RUDOLFO**

I thought I knew how to write a novel, but there are so many little parts that don't add up.

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

You can do this.

**RUDOLFO**

I'm not so sure anymore. My confidence is wearing pretty thin.

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

I can also tell that it's going to be a great novel, a classic. Come to bed soon and work on it when you're fresh in the morning.

**RUDOLFO**

Yeah, probably. Give me a few minutes.

*(They embrace.)*

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

Wake me so that I know you've come to bed.

**RUDOLFO**

*(He sits down at the typewriter.)*

Good night. Te amo.

*(She exits, and he leans over on his typewriter.)*

Oh, Dios mío, I hate this!

**COATLICUE**

*(She enters from the side, not through the door. Her face is painted white in the calavera style showing two snake heads with their noses meeting in the middle of her face. She is wearing a black top and black leggings.)*

It is Coatlicue, the one who loves writers, and I bring solutions!

*(She walks closer to slumped-over Rudy. She speaks in a sweet and precious voice.)*

Someone is here to help the one who writes so many purposeful words.

*(He stays slumped over the typewriter and periodically pounds the table with his fists.)*

Yoohoo!

*(She waits a couple of seconds.)*

Hmm. Okay, I'll try another way and see you in a minute...  
*(She exits to the side, and quickly there's knocking at the door.)*

**RUDOLFO**

*(He raises up.)*

Pat, I'm coming now...

*(There's more knocking at the door.)*

Querida, I'm on my way...

*(He goes to the door, opens it, and stands facing Coatlicue.)*

What the hell?

**COATLICUE**

You are a writer in need of solutions, right?

**RUDOLFO**

What on earth are you talking about!

**COATLICUE**

Well, I talk about a great many things, but tonight I'm here to help with your...

*(Brief pause.)*

naaw-vil.

**RUDOLFO**

Please get out of here right now, or I'll call the police.

**COATLICUE**

As I always say, take your cookies when they are passed. I'm the when-good-fortune-comes-knocking lady.

**RUDOLFO**

Are you crazy?

**COATLICUE**

Okay, look—I'm coming in, and I'll explain along the way.

**RUDOLFO**

Along the way to what?

**COATLICUE**

I'm the last person you'll need to talk to about finishing your novel.

**RUDOLFO**

What do you know about my writing?

**COATLICUE**

*(She speaks slowly with condescension.)*

You're writing a novel. It isn't going well...

**RUDOLFO**

How do you know that?

**COATLICUE**

I just do, and I am la ultima persona that you'll need to talk to before you finish your novel.

**RUDOLFO**

What makes you think that you are la ultima?

**COATLICUE**

Because it's true, and you won't need more than what I can show you. Sabes?

**RUDOLFO**

Well, I am having a little trouble with my manuscript...

**COATLICUE**

Of course you are, and you are a sweet little man. In a word, you need to put me in your book.

**RUDOLFO**

I don't see... Why would I do that?

**COATLICUE**

It's simple. You won't have a novel without me.

**RUDOLFO**

Put you as a character in my book? That makes no sense.

**COATLICUE**

*(In exasperation.)*

Okay, try this: I am going to show what I mean so that we can solve your problem.

*(She looks around.)*

Get me three chairs.

*(He hesitates.)*

Geeet them!

*(Rudolfo brings three chairs from his office.)*

Here—right in front of the window.

*(He places the three chairs in a row facing the audience.)*

Now, I need your help. Say my name—kwat—lee—quay—three times slowly.

**RUDOLFO**

Why?

**COATLICUE**

Just say it.

**RUDOLFO**

Okay, okay. Coat-li-cue... .Coat-li-cue... .

*(As he says these names the lights flicker.)*

Coat-li-cue...

*(As he says it the last time, the stage lights go dark for several seconds.)*

**COATLICUE**

*(As the lights return, there are three identical Coatlicues sitting in the chairs facing the audience. The one on the far left stands and speaks.)*

Alright—this is strange for me, too, but it should work...

**RUDOLFO**

Why are there three of you now?

**COATLICUE**

For one incredibly important reason. If you are going to put me in your novel, you need to know who I am, and there are three sides to me.

**RUDOLFO**

You're la ultima persona ... .

**COATLICUE**

Yes, yes. good. I am la ultima persona, but I want you to know about life, death, and new, revitalized life.

*(She looks at Rudolfo, but he does not respond.)*

Okay, here's what we are going to do.

*(She comes down stage near the audience rubbing her hands.)*

I'm going to show you two little scenes, like scenes in a play, and then an overall sense of me to see how I fit into your work.

*(She moves in close to Rudolfo.)*

You good with that?

**RUDOLFO**

I don't know if this makes any...

**COATLICUE**

It does make sense. Just go with it. Okay—since I'm the Aztec goddess of life, death, and new life, we'll hear from the three parts of me separately—bing, bing, bing. Let's start with a new sense of life and vitality that you need in your book.

*(She leans her head back and pinches the bridge of her nose as she thinks.)*

I'm... I'm seeing a time when your character is a little boy, and I'm coming to live with your family.

**RUDOLFO**

So this should be an actual scene in the novel?



**COATLICUE**

Definitely, an early, actual scene. Now just watch. So in this scene...

*(As she speaks, the lights dim on center stage and come up down stage right. Revealed there are a small boy [6-8 years old] and two sisters a little older.)*

**FIRST SISTER**

Antonio, be polite, and call her “la grande.”

**SECOND SISTER**

Don’t offer your hand until she does...

**COATLICUE3**

*(Coatlicue3 rises, joins the scene with the children, and stands in front of the boy.)*

Buenos días, Antonio.

**BOY**

*(He holds out his hand.)*

Buenos días, Ultima. I’m glad that you are here.

*(As they are shaking hands, the boy and Coatlicue3 freeze in place.)*

**COATLICUE**

*(She steps down stage to address the audience.)*

When he holds her hand, he connects in very powerful ways with the life force all around him.

*(She pauses to look back at them.)*

He feels... he feels that something like an electrical charge is flowing through his arms

and into his body from every direction possible.

*(She looks around again.)*

Everyone still with me?

*(She waits for a reply.)*

He felt and saw the beauty of the earth, the sky, and all living things as if for the first time. He stands at the center of the four directions and a fifth that is his own perspective.

*(As she says these lines, the light on down-stage right brightens even more.)*

It is a powerful, rare moment!

*(As she says the previous line, down-stage right lights go dark, and Coatlicue3 returns to her chair.)*

**RUDOLFO**

So I need a spectacular sense of life in my novel—to convey great vitality.

**COATLICUE**

You do, for starters—but that’s only part of what I’m showing you.

**RUDOLFO**

I, I... I don’t know.

**COATLICUE**

There’s more. Hold on.

*(She approaches the audience and addresses it again.)*

There’s no sense of life if death isn’t there, too. They define each other.

**RUDOLFO**

So, should I have more characters die?

**COATLICUE**

That’s one way to do it. Sure. In a book teeming with life, there could be six, seven times that we pause for death, until finally...

*(Coatlicue2 goes to down-stage right, where the lights come up on a cot—or small bed— that she lies on. Lights dim on center stage.)*

there should be an irrefutable sense of death as a condition of all life.

**COATLICUE2**

Antonio, my time has come. I lived as fully as I could and blessed all that came my way.

**YOUNG BOY**

*(He is fighting back tears.)*

But I need you here. I’m not ready to live without you.

**COATLICUE**

She has shown Antonio a unique and powerful view of the world. That was her gift to him.

**RUDOLFO**

But she shouldn't discourage him by showing too much of the world's pain and unhappiness.

**COATLICUE2**

*(She takes one of his hands.)*

Antonio, my death will be part of righting the balance for you and others.

**YOUNG BOY**

You can't leave me. I need you...

**COATLICUE2**

I feel gratitude for all of the beauty in my life, and my death now makes me full. I embrace this moment, too.

**COATLICUE**

*(COATLICUE2 returns to her seat.)*

This death will validate the moments in your novel when life emerges as a precious triumph of beauty and power.

**RUDOLFO**

So death needs to be a big part of my novel.

**COATLICUE**

Exactly—along with great vitality. That's the Coatlicue Effect. What I still have to show you is the beauty of life and death circling around each other in a kind of eternal dance.

**RUDOLFO**

How can I show that?

**COATLICUE**

That's where I come in again. Vitality isn't an idea, an image. It's something becoming something else.

**RUDOLFO**

But if I can't make it part of the story...

**COATLICUE**

Everything that changes and grows in your book will show what I am about.

**RUDOLFO**

I don't understand.

**COATLICUE**

I'm talking about the experience of the novel itself.

*(She looks at him and sees that he doesn't follow.)*

Mira, put me in your novel, and it will glow with its own life force.

**RUDOLFO**

How does that happen?

**COATLICUE**

One experience ending and leading into another, on and on.

**RUDOLFO**

So you come into my book as new possibility...

**COATLICUE**

Yes. Your readers will hold your novel and see not words but a ball of light in their hands.

**RUDOLFO**

You are talking about a mounting sense of re-invigoration!

**COATLICUE**

I am. Do the things that I have described to make this novel truthful and powerful, and you'll be putting me in it. Yes.

**RUDOLFO**

And if I don't put you in this novel?

**COATLICUE**

It won't work, no matter what you do. It's who you are as a writer.

*(She pauses to tilt her head back and pinch the bridge of her nose for a second or two.)*

Hold on for just a moment. Say my name three times again.

*(The stage lights go dark for several seconds, and when they return, there is only one Coatlicue left on stage.)*

There...

*(She stretches and pulls her shoulders forward and backward.)*

—this feels better.

**RUDOLFO**

But I didn't have time to say your name three times.

**COATLICUE**

Doesn't matter. That's not really a thing. I was just having fun with you.

**RUDOLFO**

Oh, okay. I will try what you've given me and see what difference it makes.

**COATLICUE**

*(She starts backing away.)*

It will work. Glad that I could help. I do love writers.

*(She is exiting on the side.)*

Didn't mean to overstay. Give my best to the missus. Hasta.

**RUDOLFO**

Gracias, Ultima. I will never forget you.

**PATRICIA ANAYA**

*(She enters through the door.)*

Did I hear you talking to someone? What's going on?

[SCENE GOES DARK]

[END OF PLAY]