

GUILTY PLEASURE

Written by
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Morpho is trying to savour every moment of her final day with Maria, until a karaoke session forces her to remember all that she cannot bear to part with and both girls find they can no longer hold back from their true feelings.

*A guest writer piece based on characters from THE CHANGELING by
Mikey Cao and Angie Orbeta.*

THE CHANGELING
An animated short film by Studio Adore
@studio_adore

OVER BLACK.

The sound of thick laminated pages being flicked through, at a pace.

MORPHO (V.O.)
(teasing)
You're kidding.

Someone flicks a switch that is swiftly followed by rough static.

MARIA (V.O.)
(teasing)
Oh, I never kid about something as serious as this.

A button is pressed, followed by the gentle swoosh of something opening. Plastic upon plastic is heard and then the closing of whatever was opened.

MORPHO (V.O.)
(nervous)
Come on, I don't even know this one!

One final click is followed by silence. We are ready to begin.

MARIA (V.O.)
(acting confident)
Well, you're in luck then. Because I do.

CLOSE UP

An opening instrumental with accompanying vocalisations begins with a crackle after a brightly painted fingernail presses play on a cassette karaoke machine.

CLOSE UP

Someone's long fingers curl tightly around a wireless microphone, the nails plain and short. Our singer is not alone...

CLOSE UP

The lower half of a young woman's face, she takes a deep yet unsteady breath as she raises her microphone to her mouth and begins to sing:

MARIA
Learned it on the internet.

INT. PRIVATE KARAOKE ROOM. EVENING.

MARIA (O.S.)
Wheels turning in my head.

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
Wheels turning in my head.

A florescent pink and blue MTV logo appears upon the screen embedded into the wall, soon followed by the staticky beginnings of a music video featuring an energetic woman with thick red curls and dressed as a large pink butterfly against a bright blue sky.

MARIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Think back to what you said,
and I turn red, I'm turning
red.

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
Think back to what you said,
and I turn red, I'm turning
red.

The private karaoke room is a small space, the walls covered in posters featuring singers and pop groups from all across Asia and America. Tall, yet empty, glasses sit alongside a variety of half-eaten snacks. The ceiling fan spins a lazy circle, moving the thick air about the room.

EXT. STREETS OF CHINATOWN. SEATTLE. CONTINUOUS.

It is a warm summer evening that is taking place in Seattle and settling upon the inhabitants of the streets of Chinatown.

MARIA (V.O.)
Wild thoughts that make me
melt. A good hit below the
belt.

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
Wild thoughts that make me
melt. A good hit below the
belt.

The city is still alive with life despite the hour, cars and motorbikes navigating the busy roads. Groups of young revellers crowd the sidewalks, laughing and making gentle fools of themselves beneath swinging rows of red paper lanterns.

MARIA (V.O.)
Sometimes, I scare myself,
but I can't help what I can't
help.

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
Sometimes, I scare myself,
but I can't help what I can't
help.

Young couples stop at street vendors, the smoke and sizzle of food serving an irresistible accompaniment to the glowing shopfronts and signs in many languages. Some people are simply enjoying the night, sitting under trees bedecked with golden lights, while others hurry past, homeward bound.

INT. PRIVATE KARAOKE ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

The silhouette of our unknown singer still stands before the screen, her back turned towards us as she nervously builds up to the chorus. She is holding tight to her cane, but as we close in on her she begins to gain confidence...

<p>MARIA</p> <p>So shame on me and shame on you, I fantasize what we would do. And how would it taste? And the way you move.</p>	<p>CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)</p> <p>So shame on me and shame on you, I fantasize what we would do. And how would it taste? And the way you move.</p>
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Turning around to face us, the singer is revealed to have the sweet face of MARIA, with sparkles in her eyes and a wide but cautious smile. She appears haloed and maybe that's the glow of the screen or perhaps it is simply how she is seen from the point of view of...

CLOSE UP

MORPHO, in awe of what is before her, watches on in stunned silence, her own microphone slack in her hand.

MARIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Oh, some good girls do bad things
too...

FLASHBACK.

A montage of moments from Maria's and Morpho's brief time together accompanies Maria's singing.

<p>MARIA (V.O.)</p> <p>I want this like a cigarette, can we drag it out and never quit?</p>	<p>CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)</p> <p>I want this like a cigarette, can we drag it out and never quit?</p>
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We see the first time Morpho saw Maria, a rocky encounter that slowly begins to grow into something more familiar as Maria teaches Morpho how to operate the register and properly measure out customer's orders at Maria's family's boarding house and community store. Morpho seems initially angered by Maria laughing at her shortcomings, but she is slowly recognising them as affectionate the more time they spend together.

<p>MARIA (V.O.)</p> <p>And oh my god, you are Heaven sent, with your dirty mind, yeah you're perverted.</p>	<p>CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)</p> <p>And oh my god, you are Heaven sent, with your dirty mind, yeah you're perverted.</p>
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Playing host, Maria introduces Morpho to her hometown, guiding her through the streets of Seattle and Chinatown, enjoying Morpho's amazement at something so human and yet unaware of Morpho's ever returning attention to her ever smiling self.

INT. PRIVATE KARAOKE ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

<p>MARIA</p> <p>You give me guilty, guilty pleasure. You give me guilty, guilty pleasure--</p>	<p>CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)</p> <p>You give me guilty, guilty pleasure. You give me guilty, guilty pleasure.</p>
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Morpho is still watching Maria with an unnerving level of intensity, causing Maria to blush as she breaks off her singing and the music dies down into a under beat of synth instrumental.

Is it bass guitar or is it a nervous heartbeat?

Maria walks towards Morpho and removes her hand from her cane, extending her palm. Unsure, Morpho hesitates, but Maria sees her initial move forward and reaches across the divide to close the gap, pulling Morpho in close to her and closer to the screen.

As the instrumental continues Morpho looks embarrassed and unsure but Maria steps back, determinedly indicating that her turn is over. Morpho swallows, clenching her free hand into a fist but slowly she raises her microphone, squeezing her eyes shut.

FLASHBACK.

The montage from earlier continues, but there's a growing intimacy and attraction between Maria and Morpho now.

<p>MORPHO (V.O.)</p> <p>Feels like pornography, watching you try on jeans.</p>	<p>CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)</p> <p>Feels like pornography, watching you try on jeans.</p>
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Maria sits in an alley beside her family's boarding house and community store, hot and sweating and surrounded by cardboard boxes. She looks up to find Morpho watching her, holding her gaze.

<p>MORPHO (V.O.)</p> <p>You're a pothead, you're a cinophile.</p>	<p>CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)</p> <p>You're a pothead, you're a cinophile.</p>
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Morpho and Maria stand close together in between busy street market stalls, admiring the food on offer.

Suddenly Maria is roughly shoved by the passing crowd, causing her to fall...but Morpho catches her, holding her close to her chest.

MORPHO (V.O.)
It's been a while since you
turned up the dial.

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
It's been a while since you
turned up the dial.

Morpho changes out of her work uniform, the door to her room ajar as Maria walks past. Maria finds herself slowing down, watching the rolling bare shoulders of Morpho, then blushing as she realises what she is doing and hurrying away before anyone can catch her.

INT. PRIVATE KARAOKE ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

MORPHO
So shame on me and shame on
you, I fantasize what we
would do. And how would it
taste? And the way you
move...

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
Shame on me. Shame on you.
What we would do.

Still standing to the side, Maria has forgotten to join in, watching Morpho with her own expression of awe and unbridled desire. Morpho has assumed a more relaxed pose now, but her eyes are still shut as she leans into the song. Once again the music is fading as the two girls become lost in the moment.

Suddenly, Morpho turns her gaze upon the unsuspecting Maria.

MORPHO (CONT'D)
Some good girls do bad things too.

The line echoes across the sudden silence as the two stare at one another. Though she is carrying herself with more confidence than before, Morpho still appears somewhat hesitant, as if she has proposed a dangerous question that she is waiting for Maria to answer.

Maria raises her microphone.

MARIA
I want this like a cigarette, can
we drag this out and never quit?

The music is returning, slowly but surely.

MORPHO
And oh my god, you are Heaven sent.

Morpho grins and Maria mirrors her affection.

MARIA
 With your dirty mind, yeah you're
 perverted!

Maria suddenly launches herself at Morpho as she jumps into the chorus, Morpho catching both her and her enthusiasm as the music returns in full.

MARIA (CONT'D)	MORPHO
You give me guilty, guilty	You give me guilty, guilty
pleasure. You give me guilty,	pleasure. You give me guilty,
guilty pleasure.	guilty pleasure.

As if they have reverted to silly exuberant teenagers, Maria and Morpho begin to jump and dance around the small karaoke room, hosting a mock concert in tandem with the singing butterfly woman in the MTV music video.

MONTAGE.

Flashbacks intertwine with the enthused karaoke duet in accompaniment to the song's bridge and vocalisations:

- Morpho helps Maria's mother cook dinner while Maria watches on lovingly.
- Morpho marvels as Maria engages in some energetic air guitar with her cane.
- Maria finds a present on her bed, the tag signed by Morpho. It is a delicate and unique necklace.
- Morpho serenades Maria on one knee with grandiose exaggeration. Maria can hardly contain her laughter.
- Maria and Morpho sit in a darkened cinema, their hands inching closer and closer together...

CLOSE UP

The two microphones have been discarded upon the table, the end of the bridge unable to disguise the sound of a door shutting and feet quickly receding beyond. The karaoke room is now empty except for the continuing music video, the majestic pink butterfly singing joyously to camera.

INT. STREETS OF CHINATOWN. SEATTLE. CONTINUOUS.

Maria and Morpho run hand in hand, taking it in turns to lead one another in their romantic haste. Morpho is supporting Maria in place of her cane.

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
 You give me guilty, guilty
 pleasure. You give me guilty,
 guilty pleasure.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE. CONTINUOUS.

Unable to control themselves, Maria and Morpho fall through the back door while messily entangled with one another, kissing and pulling at each others clothes.

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
 You give me guilty, guilty
 pleasure. You give me guilty,
 guilty pleasure.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE STAIRWELL. CONTINUOUS.

They pause at various moments, pressed up against walls and banisters, laughing and lusty and full of life. Finally, Maria and Morpho reach the door to Morpho's bedroom, swiftly falling through as symptom to their enthusiasm.

CHAPPELL ROAN (V.O.)
 Pleasure!
 Pleasure!
 Pleasure!

The door slams shut and the song ends with Chappell's voice, an angelic echo against the abrupt silence.

TITLES: GUILTY PLEASURE