

The Red, White, and Blue Process

By Mira Gibson

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Characters:

Ammonia: A woman in her 20's / 30's. A bit scabby and rough around the edges. Her personality flips easily from moments of sweetness to sharp lashes of aggression. She is unpredictable, yet in touch with the dangers that surround her.

Nikoletta: A chemistry teacher, woman, in her 20's / 30's. There is a librarian quality to how she dresses. She is smooth around the edges and calm.

Nico: A man in his 20's / 30's. He is seen on stage only for a moment at the end. Boyfriend to Ammonia.

Setting:

The basement of Ammonia's busted suburban one-story flea bag house. The basement is a converted crystal methamphetamine lab. There are beakers and Bunsen burners on the worktables spread about.

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Ammonia is in the lab alone. She crushes little white pills with a kitchen knife and pushes the dust towards a large pile of white dust on the table. Her movements are jerky, but she manages to stay on task. After a moment, **Nikoletta** enters through the one and only basement door. As soon as the doorknob turns, Ammonia jumps up and swipes her pills into her pocket as though that would hide the business of the basement. Nikoletta is startled to see there is someone there. There is a kind of stand off between them.

Ammonia
You a cop?

Nikoletta
No.

Ammonia
You alone?

Nikoletta
Yeah.

Ammonia
There a reason you're in my fuckin' house?

Nikoletta
Don't shoot.

Ammonia
How the fuck would I shoot you?

Nikoletta
Nico asked me to check out the lab-

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Ammonia

You know him?

Nikoletta

He said no one would be home.

Ammonia

(fired up) This is MY HOUSE.

Nikoletta

I like your hair.

Ammonia

(touches her hair) They fucked it up. *(beat)* You got a name?

Nikoletta

Nikoletta. You're Ammonia?

Ammonia

(smiles) Sure. *(beat)* He didn't tell me you were comin'. *(to herself)* That's Nico for ya. *(beat)* You know what all this is? Come in, shut the door.

Nikoletta enters and shuts the door behind herself.

Ammonia

Do ya? 'Cause I don't have a fuckin' clue. *(beat)* When I come home, after goin' down to the corner to buy a pack...when I walk towards the house, I think about it blowin' up. *(beat)* If I came down here one day, and the iodine was over there instead on this table, I'd be lost.

Nikoletta

What process are you following?

Ammonia

It's Nico's thing.

Nikoletta

You must know something.

Ammonia

I crush up the meds. That's all I do.

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Nikoletta

It's not necessary to crush them.

Ammonia

(lashes out) Are you fucking kidding me?

Nikoletta

The iodine does a good job dissolving them. You know, I don't mind working alone.

Ammonia

What I like about being down here, you gotta be stone cold straight.

Nikoletta

O.K.

As the next portion of dialogue takes place, Nikoletta walks around the lab slowly, she scrutinizes the contents of each table and what it's function might be. It's a bit of a puzzle to her, though, because the science of it is so haphazard and shoddy.

Ammonia

O.K. I'm gonna go back to crushin' these.

Nikoletta

O.K.

Ammonia

You ever do this shit?

Nikoletta

No.

Ammonia

Really?

Nikoletta

Never have.

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Ammonia

You a teacher?

Nikoletta

Yes.

Ammonia

You wanna know how I know?

*Nikoletta looks at Ammonia
expectedly.*

Ammonia

I was gonna insult ya but it doesn't seem fair.

*Nikoletta continues looking
around, as well she picks up
items and stirs beakers of
their contents.*

Ammonia

How is it you never done this shit?

Nikoletta doesn't answer.

Ammonia

I'm tangled in it. Can you tell?

Nikoletta

Your basement is a meth lab.

Ammonia

But can you tell by lookin' at me?

Nikoletta

No. I can't tell by looking at you.

Ammonia

Thanks. *(beat)* Seems complicated.

Nikoletta

(holds up a white pill) It's just turning downers into
uppers. Changing one molecule.

Ammonia

That's it?

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Nikoletta

This is a decent lab.

Ammonia

Thanks. I got a lotta allergy meds crushed if ya wanna start with those.

Nikoletta

(thinking out loud) Allergy meds aren't made with ephedrine anymore. You're isolating pseudo-ephedrine. Why not use ADHD meds and get real meth?

Ammonia hands Nikoletta a handful of crushed white pills.

Ammonia

Look, it's the way we do it here.

Nikoletta

My brother's messed up for this stuff. He likes to take things apart. Television sets. Computer monitors. He can't help himself. When he puts them back together, they don't work.

Ammonia

I been there.

Nikoletta

Why does he do that? It's like, you've already taken our family apart, it will never fit together again. Why do you have to take the t.v. apart? So it doesn't work? Like our family?

Ammonia

He's looking for copper.

Nikoletta

What?

Ammonia

He's stripping it for copper.

Nikoletta

Copper?

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Ammonia

He's probably real hard up for cash.

*Nikoletta stops what she's
doing. She's shocked.*

Nikoletta

I thought it was a metaphor. *(beat)* That can't be true.

Ammonia

Why's that?

Nikoletta

No, that's not him.

Ammonia

I bet it is.

Nikoletta

No.

Ammonia

Don't you give me "no" in my fuckin' house.

Nikoletta

Where's Nico?

Ammonia

He'll be back.

Nikoletta

Where'd he go?

Ammonia

Get a pack a smokes, I don't know.

Nikoletta

How long does that take?

Ammonia

(lashes out) How the fuck should I know? Look, why are you here?

Nikoletta

Nico invited me. He paid me. Isn't that how it works?

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Ammonia

He didn't mention anything to me.

Nikoletta

(snaps at her) That's not my fault.

Ammonia

You better back the fuck off my boyfriend.

Nikoletta

I'm not the fuck on your boyfriend.

Ammonia backs off. Nikoletta returns to looking around.

Ammonia

You figure it out yet?

Nikoletta

It's the Red, White, and Blue Process.

Ammonia

Is it easy to learn?

Nikoletta

It's the simplest.

Ammonia

Red white and blue.

Nikoletta

Each color, red white blue, is a step in the process to isolate methamphetamine.

Ammonia

What's the red?

Nikoletta

Phosphorous. *(beat)* Oh my God. *(picks up laundry detergent)* You're using detergent as a source for Red Phosphorous?

Ammonia

The body's pretty fuckin' strong, man. I smoke that shit. *(shakes her head at the idea)*

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Nikoletta

Do you have any idea how long it takes to cook detergent to reduce it to Red Phosphorous?

Ammonia stares blankly at the question.

Nikoletta

The white is pseudo-ephedrine.

Ammonia

(continues to shake her head) I smoke that shit.

Nikoletta

And the blue is the iodine. When added *(refers to iodine)* creates hydroiodic acid. Because the iodine hydrogenates the ephedrine.

Ammonia

I can't believe I smoke that shit.

Nikoletta

You don't have to, you know.

Ammonia

Look, I gotta handle on it.

Nikoletta

Of course you do.

Ammonia

But you think, maybe, we shouldn't use detergent?

Nikoletta

You could use the tip of a match, in fact, if you like crushing things, just scrape the tips of matches into a pile - that's literally Red Phosphorous.

Ammonia

Naw, flammable, I don't wanna blow the place up.

Nikoletta

The smallest, new element... if it doesn't agree with the components... will cause an explosion.

Ammonia

Well, let's avoid it.

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Nikoletta

You can do everything exactly the same, day after day,
and then one day the Ph of your hands could be
different because you switched soap brands,
and...BOOM.

*Nikoletta begins to tinker,
actually beginning to do the
first step in the process by
adding iodine to the crushed
white pills.*

Ammonia

That's Nico for ya. But nothin' bad ever happens to
him.

Nikoletta

Is that right.

*The pills begin to fizz from
the iodine.*

Ammonia

Whoa!

Nikoletta

(overlapping with Ammonia's next line) Not yet not yet
not yet.

*Nikoletta takes the pills off
the Bunsen burner.*

Ammonia

That supposedta be fizzing?

Nikoletta

No.

Ammonia

So what? What do we do?

Nikoletta

Nothing. Wait.

Ammonia

Should I open a window?

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Nikoletta

NO!

It stops fizzing.

Ammonia

Phew! *(laughs)*

With Ammonia's following monologue, she talks quickly in run-on sentences, as though it's all on one breath.

Ammonia

So with Nico, the other night, he's got a run an' he packs the bike an's got the crystals in his backpack. Now he always puts the virgin Mary in his left shoe under his ankle, so when he's shifting on his right foot it's not in the way. But for whatever reason he gets to his bike an' realizes he forgot to put the virgin Mary in his left shoe, so he's not sure about's where ta put her so he puts her in his mouth, an' takes off on the bike.

Nikoletta

Are you okay?

Ammonia

I'm getting' chatty, it comes and goes.

Nikoletta

O.K.

Ammonia

Nico gets ta tha house an' makes his deal - not a big one but they get all the crystals he had. Far gone that house an' Nico's not sayin much on accountta the virgin Mary's in his mouth which is good 'cause don't matter what you say ta that house they're gonna take it wrong. So he gets back on the rode an' not a moment he's drivin' an' the cops are pullin' him over.

Nikoletta

WAS HE ARRESTED?!

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Ammonia

He already made the deal. So he's pulled over an' there's two cops, an' they know what they're doin' an' they're not wrong about it, an' Nico's not talkin' straight on accountta tha virgin an' just as they're getting' fed up, Nico begins chokin' an' chokin' serious.

Nikoletta

IS HE OKAY?

Ammonia

What's with you? HE'S FINE. That's just it. Back ta normal with the virgin Mary in his left shoe.

Nikoletta

He should be getting back soon, right?

Ammonia

He'll be back.

Nikoletta

When will he be back?

Ammonia

Fuck if I know. What's your problem?

Nikoletta

I don't have a problem!

Ammonia

Your button-up shirt an' your lookin' at me sideways with your questions. *(beat)* I wanna know how to do this. I wanna learn. I wanna be down here more, all the time. *(refers to the next step in her process)* You're a teacher, teach!

Nikoletta

Crystal meth is the product of hydrogenating the hydroxyl group of the ephedrine molecule.

Ammonia

You know what? Talk like a normal person.

Nikoletta

O.K., you want to think of this process as placing three different things in the same pot. You got your

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pseudo-ephedrine, your iodine, and your red phosphorous. They are each complex. Pseudo-ephedrine is made of many molecules, red phosphorous is made of many molecules, and likewise iodine. But you put them all in the same pot. Add heat. And each thing breaks apart. Then each molecule, once it's free of the thing it originated from, re-attaches to other molecules in the pot.

Ammonia

Like when you put a buncha couples in a room at a Swingers party.

Nikoletta

Ammonia, what you've just said is actually smart.

Ammonia

Live and learn, right Teach?

Nikoletta

Okay, so, in this process you want to think of it as boiling everything down, to reduce each thing to its purest form. And the re-attaching that occurs is literally the formation of the crystals. The first step in the reduction process occurs by use of the iodine, the Blue - hydrogenation of the hydroxyl group in the molecule. When added it makes hydroiodic acid. But in order to make a crystal, you need a liquid, a mutable solid, and a vapor.

Ammonia

(interjecting, overlapping) Whoa, you're losing me...mutable?

Nikoletta

(overlapping) That's the dangerous part - the vapor. Phosphorous with sodium hydroxide produces a poisonous phosphate gas when the red element is added.

Ammonia

(interjecting, overlapping) Slow down...

Nikoletta

(overlapping) Let me finish the thought. The gas is the result of this heater.

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Ammonia

(interjecting, overlapping) What for? I don't get it.

Nikoletta

(overlapping) You've got to heat it, but too little and you won't change the chemical compound. Too much and you'll blow the place up.

Ammonia

I'ma 'bout ready to punch ya in the face.

Nikoletta

There's no way to dumb it down when you get into the chemistry of it.

Ammonia

(offended) Um, "dumb it down"? *(beat)* You know what, just do it. I learn better from watchin'.

*Nikoletta resumes her work,
Ammonia follows her around
the lab and observes.*

Ammonia

I like the "Red, White, and Blue". I like that part. National Anthem in grade school. Holdin' my heart an' getting' all fired up about who mighta just pinched my ass. I miss being a kid. Hell of a thing this shit. You got every reason not to do it but you do it just the same. *(beat)* I love the mornin's. I get up an' I get down here as soon as I can, I'm straight. As long as I'm in this room, I gotta be straight, I really believe that. More an' more Nico's been down here high. Just teach me how ta make it, O.K.?

Nikoletta

Ammonia, have you ever watched a person decompose, right in front of you? Watch their teeth rot and fall out of their head?

Ammonia

It's happening to me. I gotta stay in this room, stay straight.

Nikoletta

My brother is decomposing. At the level of his cells. At the level of the molecules in his being.

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Ammonia

Sometimes my mouth is so dry my lips are like sand paper against my gums.

Nikoletta

I have this image of him, I can't get out of my head. He's at my front door and he's smiling through the screen and he's trying hard to pay attention to what I'm saying, but I can see behind his eyes he can't focus, he's just waiting for me to finish talking so he can ask me for money. But he's smiling, like he's trying to show me that he's interested in what I'm saying and still a sweetheart and still my brother, but I can see behind his eyes he's dead. And as I'm talking all I can think is, his teeth are black. It's heartbreaking.

Nikoletta cooks to make a vapor gas that slowly fills the room midway through her monologue that follows. Ammonia does not notice the gas at all as she becomes obsessively fixated on crushing the white pills with her kitchen knife.

Nikoletta

My brother and I used to love to ride bicycles when we were kids. A moment I'll never forget was when we were at the top of a very high hill. The street was freshly paved. I remember thinking, we're gonna fly down that thing. The SPEED we could hit if we headed down, could be lethal. *(quietly)* I don't want to go down it. *(louder)* I don't want to go down it. *(louder)* I don't want to go down it! *(louder)* I DON'T WANT TO GO DOWN IT! *(louder)* I DON'T WANT TO GO DOWN IT! *(loudest)* I DON'T WANT TO GO DOWN IT!!! He went down. I didn't. He caught such speed. In those days he held the virgin in his right hand.

Ammonia

Nico?

Ammonia notices the gas filling the room.

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Ammonia

What the fuck!

Nikoletta

I'm not like other people. *(beat)* I can't continue to feel like I'm at the top of the hill holding my breath that he doesn't get destroyed!

Ammonia

What the fuck are ya doin'?

Nikoletta

Filing the room with phosphine gas.

Ammonia

Just let me go.

Nikoletta

You had your chance to leave.

*Ammonia crosses to the door
as if she's about to leave.*

Nikoletta

Open that door and you'll change the pressure of the room, this place will blow up.

Ammonia

ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR FUCKING MIND?!

*Nico enters the upstairs of
the house, he is offstage but
his entrance there is heard.*

Nico

(off stage) Ammonia? I'm home!

Nikoletta

(to herself) Nico?

Ammonia

(yells) Nico! Stay where you are! Stay where you are and-

Nikoletta

YOU THINK HE'LL LISTEN TO YOU? HE'S ALREADY DEAD!

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Ammonia

-don't come downstairs! DON'T come down!

Nico

(off stage, just outside the lab door) Ammonia - have you seen my virgin Mary?

Ammonia

STAY WHERE YOU ARE - DON'T MOVE!

Nico

(off stage just outside the lab door) Huh? *(opens the lab door, enters)* I lost her -

One beat after Nico opens the door, BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY