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REMEMBER THE LADIES: EXPLORING FEMININE ARCHETYPES IN THREE PLAYS

Pamela Denise Hinson

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REMEMBER THE LADIES:
EXPLORING FEMININE ARCHETYPES IN THREE PLAYS

by

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REMEMBER THE LADIES:
Exploring Feminine Archetypes in Three Plays

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I will summarize my growth and learning in this MFA program. I will use a theoretical framework of archetypal and feminist research to analyze my own work, including: Lilith, Darling, Shared Misery, and Angels All Die. This essay will help to organize and apply my theories on feminine archetypes, identify methods for continuing growth in my artistic range, and define my role as a scholar-artist. The archetypes that will be addressed will include the dual Goddess, the Madwoman, and the Trickster.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT................................................................................................................... ii
INTRODUCTION............................................................................................................. 1
BEING A SCHOLAR-ARTIST:
PRACTICE AS RESEARCH .......................................................................................... 4
LILITH, DARLING:
THE IMPORTANCE OF RED SHOES .......................................................................... 6
SHARED MISERY:
RELEASING THE MADWOMAN ............................................................................... 13
ANGELS ALL DIE:
THE POSTMODERN FEMALE TRICKSTER .............................................................. 18
CONCLUSION .............................................................................................................. 26
WORKS CITED ............................................................................................................ 29
THE WORKS:
LILITH, DARLING.................................................................................................... 32
SHARED MISERY....................................................................................................... 100
ANGELS ALL DIE..................................................................................................... 159
INTRODUCTION

1982: I am sitting in the back of a yellow school bus, diesel fumes seeping through a floor so old and worn thin I catch glimpses of the highway racing beneath us. It’s dark and very late. I’m huddled under a jacket, legs drawn up against the seat in front of me, and I’m terrified—thrillingly, deeply, and deliciously scared out of my wits.

The one doing the terrifying is a fellow classmate and team member. We are returning from a softball tournament in Espanola, all of us dirty and tired, but Vangie’s story will not let us sleep. Softly, just her voice and the hum of the bus in the dark, she tells us a story about her uncle’s friend’s brother who dared to insult an elder of the tribe and then paid the price while driving home alone in the dead of night on the Bisti Highway south of Farmington, New Mexico. Vangie describes how this young man found himself being pursued by a Skinwalker, a man capable of transforming into an animal. The Skinwalker chased the young man for twenty miles before he was able to escape the creature. It is said, Vangie tells us, that the young man was never the same, and he suffered terrible nightmares until the end of his short life.

This was only one of the many stories I heard on those long bus rides. Other stories of ghosts, La Llorona, omens, and demons were common amongst my teammates, and I told my fair share, too. After all, I was the daughter of a woman who filled my childhood with tales of haints and bogeymen populating the woods behind her grandmother’s house in rural Alabama.
The small town I grew up in was twenty miles from the nearest movie theater. Live theater was non-existent, and the library was a bookmobile that parked at the end of the street once a month for two hours. I was allowed to check out three books, a number sorely insufficient for my appetite, so I supplemented by creating my own stories. Many of these stories were retellings of the ones I heard from my mother and classmates, but others came from the books I read. I also fancied myself a fine director, assembling the neighborhood kids in what was part mime, part karaoke events as we acted out my brother’s many Spiderman story albums.

Years later, I attended New Mexico State University to study theater. I did not complete the program, but the time spent there fed that hunger for storytelling that has never subsided. Several years and two children later, I completed my bachelor’s degree and began teaching high school and college-level courses in Language Arts, Composition, and Literature. I attempted to channel my storytelling demon into the classroom and community theater, yet the urge to tell my own stories remained strong within me. I completed a master’s degree in Humanities, struggling to bridge the disconnect I felt between teaching and writing.

It was during this time I found myself drawn to study of the feminine. My dissertation dealt with defining the female tragic hero in dramatic works and literature. In the process, I discovered a passion for research that almost paralleled my desire to write creatively. After a few more years in the classroom, restless and burned out, I took serious stock of my life and realized that I was not going to be satisfied until I gave
myself the room and time for my own writing. I quit my teaching job, sold my house, and moved to Albuquerque. Several months later, I was fortunate enough to be accepted into UNM’s MFA in Dramatic Writing program, where I began a three-year odyssey that has led to an increased appreciation of the writing process and introduced me to several colleagues who have become friends and mentors.
BEING A SCHOLAR-ARTIST:
PRACTICE AS RESEARCH

For me, the exploration of the feminine has been a most satisfying yet incomplete pursuit over the past decade. I realized at the end of the second year of the Dramatic Writing program I have exhausted neither the research nor the creative examination I wish to undertake concerning feminine archetypes and mythology. This realization came in large part while completing the class Critical Issues in the Performing Arts. This course not only reawakened in me my love of research but finally bridged the chasm I had experienced for years between my “scholar” self and my “artist” self. There was a way to bring the two together.

In his introduction to Practice as Research in the Arts, Robin Nelson calls for a “pedagogy in which ‘professional practice’ and ‘academic theory’ are not separated” (18). Nelson’s praxis approach is “theory imbricated within practice” (5) or, “an iterative, dialogic engagement of doing-thinking” (18). His use of the word *imbricated*, a botany term describing the overlapping arrangement of petals or scales, provides a vision of how the academic and creative can exist together as a “third species” (Haseman, qtd. In Nelson, 22) of knowledge. Practice as Research has changed my way of thinking about my current and future writing in exciting ways. I am more engaged with the artistic process, both mine and others. I think about my writing more deeply, am more willing to experiment-- and fail if need be-- as I explore the archetypes, imagery, and themes I feel drawn towards. Writing has stopped being a hobby and has become a conversation,
a means of attempting to define my world, to make more conscious decisions and attempts to unravel the knots in my brain.

In this paper, I will attempt to approach my work with this “third species” of knowledge. Integrating research from mythology, women’s studies, and playwriting, I will begin by discussing my script *Lilith, Darling* and the role of a pair of red high-heeled shoes. Then, I will move to my teleplay *Shared Misery* and the archetype of the Madwoman. For my third work, *Angels All Die*, I will discuss how a casual question from high school students led to practice as research, my own creative research inquiry into the archetype of the female Trickster.
LILITH, DARLING:
THE IMPORTANCE OF RED SHOES

In the fall of 2014, I attended a four-day workshop centered on creating and performing a solo piece. Over that weekend and beyond, I began drafting several short monologues I hoped would become a one-woman show at a later date. Most of these monologues are autobiographical, and all deal with the feminine experience. As part of the ongoing process, I was required to send drafts to the director. This is when I ran into trouble. No matter how much I worked on the drafts, they fell flat. The monologues were unbending, cold, and one-dimensional, as if that lone woman onstage was trying to be too many people and not effectively portraying any. The director dutifully pushed me to continue. I dutifully pushed on, feeling like every word was a stone I had to drag into place. The solution for me was to abandon the format of the one-woman show and approach the work as a duet. That is when it began to spark. I already had several other short pieces written throughout my time in the program, so I began assembling the various pieces into a whole. This collection of vignettes about the feminine experience became Lilith, Darling. The play originally consists of twenty-one separate stories with two actors portraying all the characters. It is the Everywoman at different stages of her life and a single unifying image-- a pair of red high-heeled shoes. These shoes, the first and final image of the play, symbolize the two sides of a woman’s experience, good and bad.
The archetype of red shoes carries both positive and negative connotation. Hans Christian Anderson gives us the cautionary tale of Karina, whose vanity and refusal to act like a lady is expressed in her obsession with a pair of red shoes. These shoes lead to her downfall and the subsequent amputation of her feet, rendering her crippled, but humble, forever. Jungian psychoanalyst and artist Clarissa Pinkola Estes relates that her aunt told the story of the red shoes often, always beginning it by warning, “Look at your shoes and be thankful they are plain… for one has to live very carefully if one’s shoes are too red” (231). Estes goes on to argue that yes, the story is a cautionary tale, but not one meant to teach little girls the proper way to behave. Rather:

The psychological truth in “The Red Shoes” is that a woman’s meaningful life can be pried, threatened, robbed, or seduced away from her unless she holds onto or retrieves her basic joy and wild worth. The tale calls our attention to traps and poisons we too easily take onto ourselves when we are caught in a famine of wild soul. Without a firm participation with the wild nature, a woman starves and falls into an obsession of “feel betters,” “leave me alones,” and “love me—please”. (236).

Estes likens the red shoes to obsessive behavior that leads to emotional destruction, addictions that lead to physical destruction, and anguish that leads to psychic destruction. The red shoes are not a prize for which one should yearn. They are a warning to look away from what on the surface seems to satisfy but ultimately wrecks
us. The red shoes we should wear, says Estes, are the ones of our own making and not the making of someone who has not our best interests in mind.

On the other hand, more contemporary mythology connotes red shoes as a symbol of independence, of a woman carrying herself places formally refused to her. In the movie version of *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy realizes she had the power to return home within herself all along, and clicks the heels of her red slippers to complete her journey. Director-Writer Guillermo del Toro borrows on the symbol of red shoes in two of his films: *Pan’s Labyrinth* and *Pacific Rim*. In the first, the protagonist is a young girl named Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) who lives with her pregnant mother and stepfather, the Fascist Captain Vidal (Sergi Lopez). Set in the ending days of the Spanish Civil War, Ofelia is secluded and alone and in danger for her life from her stepfather. At the film’s end, Vidal shoots and kills the young girl. Del Toro closes the film with a scene that holds powerful symbolic imagery. Ofelia enters her real father’s kingdom wearing not only a red coat (a nod to Little Red Riding Hood) but red shoes. Yvonne Gavala-Ramos, scholar of film and media culture in contemporary Spanish youth narratives, believes that Ofelia, “Like Dorothy… can finally return home and restore her true identity as Princess Moana, recovering her place in her father’s kingdom” (10). Likewise, the character of Mako (Rinko Kikuchi) in *Pacific Rim* must confront the kaiju who destroyed her family when she was a little girl. Before the final battle, her adopted father, Commander Stacker Pentecost (Idris Elba), presents her with a relic from her childhood, a single red

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1 The kaiju are giant amphibious monsters, the best-known being Godzilla.
shoe. As she takes the shoe from his hands Mako takes her destiny back, no longer in need of rescuing. She helps to defeat the monsters that took so much from her and thus stakes a claim on her future.

The high-heeled red shoes in *Lilith, Darling* symbolize the contrast of the feminine experiences expressed in the play. For many women, to slip on a pair of stilettoes is to enter an uneasy duality of power and oppression. Author Elin Schoen Brockman states that high heels “inspire simultaneous fantasies of vulnerability (who can run in them?) and of the heel as weapon. They are a gal’s version of a guy thing: the female power tool” (2). Likewise, Megan Garber, writer for *The Atlantic*, asserts, “Stilettos are Lady Shoes. And, as such, they carry, along with an actual lady, the baggage of hundreds of years of freighted femininity. It’s easy to see them and all their contradictions—bold and teetering, leg-lengthening and stride-impairing, empowering and constraining” (6). In my script both the color and heel serve as a visual reminder of the paradoxes women face throughout their lives as they navigate a world that runs on the fuel of patriarchy. The shoes in the play empower at times, such as when a woman strides into a gallery to confront her ex-husband’s new lover. At other times, the shoes constrain. One story finds the women playing racquetball, no small feat in high heels. I attempted to create times when the audience might not notice the shoes at all, and other times when the image was humorous, yet uncomfortable to watch.
Like the red shoes, the title of the play is a nod to the duality of the feminine. *Lilith, Darling* comes from a monologue in the center of the piece. Lilith is a young woman reminiscing about her father, saying:

My daddy, he’s beautiful. Momma says she fell in love with his eyes first. Gray-green eyes that could melt you down right where you stood. Yeah. He’s beautiful. But he couldn’t hold onto a dime. As quick as money touched his palm, it was gone. Momma would beg her beautiful man to try harder, just work a little harder, and he would promise. (Hinson 27)

Lilith’s mother tells her, “Lilith Darling, you are the only promise that hasn’t let me down” (28). Lilith vows she will not be like her mother, but neither will she be like her father—Lilith keeps her promises. At the end of the monologue she relates, “Once, a lover accused me of being a serial monogamist. I thought it was the nicest thing anyone had ever said to me” (28). Lilith is self-aware, self-possessed, and in control of her own sexuality.

The monologue runs just under five hundred words, enough to give some insight into the young woman on stage, but not enough to truly know her. She is slippery, at once ingénue and femme fatale. She is powerful, yet calculating, like her namesake from mythology. The ancient Lilith has been both goddess and demon. As the story goes:

It is said in some quarters that the first man, Adam, grew tired of coupling with the beasts of the garden in the manner that lonesome shepherds
would so often adopt at later times, so Yahweh created a woman to dwell with Adam in the garden. Yahweh made this woman out of the clay of the earth, just as he had made Adam, and she was called Lilith. They luxuriated in life, ate well from the garden’s bounty, and came to know all of the garden’s creatures—its sustaining plants and its spirited animals. (Leeming and Page 112)

It should be mentioned, here, that obviously Lilith must have been fashioned from tainted soil, which no doubt explains the next sequence of events:

All was well between them until Adam, noting his greater size, commanded Lilith to lie on the ground while he, on top, would couple with her.

“Why,” she remonstrated, “should I lie beneath you? We are both made from dust. We are equals.”

Adam had no answer for this, except to assert his superior physical size and strength. Incensed, Lilith rose up and flew away to the wilderness near the Red Sea. (Leeming and Page 112)

Thus ended the first marriage of Adam. Besides this myth, Lilith has been portrayed both as a goddess of the Fertile Crescent, alongside Ishtar and Astarte (Eisler 7), and a she-demon “belonging to a vampire or incubi-succubae class” (Patai 221). In some tales, she is the consort of God himself or of Samael, prince of all demons. An exploration of
the mythological Lilith is not the focus of this paper, but it illustrates what I attempted
to capture in *Lilith, Darling*— the goddess who has been erased, belittled, or slandered
for asserting her own will.

*Lilith, Darling* received a staged reading production in the Linnell Festival of New
Plays in April 2015. Overall, I was pleased with the relationship between the two
characters but realized that the play will benefit from judicious and generous cutting.
Several times the script wandered into a poetic forest and stayed lost in sentimentality.
This was the result of my padding the script with pieces that did not serve the greater
message, but instead threatened to drown it. The experience has taught me that a short
story long is not good storytelling, nor is heavy-handed didacticism. I have worked on
the script since this reading, shaving fifteen pages from the original, and would like to
develop it in the future.
SHARED MISERY:
RELEASING THE MADWOMAN

Over the past couple of years I have become excited about the work being done on television as well as the odd, exhilarating storytelling space the Internet has opened. Providers such as Netflix, HBO, and FX are creating experiences that greatly intrigue me. What I find most appealing is the idea that stories can take their time to develop. Some of my favorite shows, including Sons of Anarchy, Orphan Black, and Game of Thrones are more traditional, developing a story that takes several seasons to tell, but others such as House of Cards, American Horror Story, and True Detective follow a different drummer. Ultimately, what I enjoy about these shows is that the writing is fabulous and language is valued. I find it a pleasant surprise to watch a television show like True Detective and listen to a character deliver a monologue that is no doubt as least a page long.

Well-written shows are not new, certainly, but the way content is being delivered is unique to our postmodern, Internet-driven era. Many shows are now released not an episode at a time, but a season at a time. This has led to the twenty-first century phenomenon of binge watching. The current renaissance in small screen storytelling is markedly different than a decade ago in large part because of the way content is delivered, but also because, as Mike Civille, Chair of the New York Film Academy says, “Today’s dramas veer closer to American literature than traditional TV, with characters developing in tangential, deeper, or more complicated ways... These shows have become 21st Century page-turners.” Civille’s comparison of these stories to American literature explains a lot of my preference for writing for the small screen over
feature-length scripts. I find in this genre the time and space to tell a story very much like my favorite novels and short stories do. It is also quite satisfying to me as I am a big-picture thinker and enjoy the puzzle of breaking the large world down to smaller details. Thus, I find I have two loves, the small screen and the stage. I write in both realms concurrently, which is exhilarating, and each influences the other. For example, in my screenwriting endeavors I play with language, discovering ways to use it without letting it detract from the visual world. Likewise, I have begun incorporating specific visual elements in my stage plays, experimenting with more non-verbal means of storytelling.

Several years ago, I came across a black and white photograph from the 1920s. In it, several women are attired in plain dresses, wearing small but satisfied smiles and holding up a mattress that looks to be marked by a huge blood stain. When an idea for a script comes to me, it usually comes as a fragment—a character, a phrase, or in this case, a picture. That image so captivated me that it became the basis for *Shared Misery*, my teleplay about three women trying to get away with murder. The pilot, titled “All You Had to Do,” introduces the characters and their scheme to get back at a cheating husband. Things go very wrong and the husband ends up dead, buried in the garden. The remainder of the series follows the women as they deal with each other as well as the unexpected presence of a dangerous man who is looking for money the dead husband owes him.

While the script calls for an ensemble cast, the lead is the dead husband’s wife, Trinnie. She begins the series as a woman beaten by life. She raises her three children,
cleans house, and suffers the indignities of her husband’s infidelities. However, when
she catches him with the young clerk in his hardware store, she’s finally had enough.
Enlisting the help of her sister, Trinnie decides to confront the other woman.

"Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned/ Nor hell a fury like a woman
scorned," says Zara, a captive queen, in William Congreve’s play *The Mourning Bride*
(3.8). Trinnie’s decision is not unique nor unexpected. Many stories exist about the
retaliation of a woman wronged. Psychotherapist and Jungian Analyst Linda Schierse
Leonard calls this the “Rejected Lover,” and writes:

A Rejected Lover is easily trapped in negative behavior and psychological
patterns of victimization, where she can believe herself to be a tragic
heroine. But underneath that dark, romantic, often depressed image,
rejection tends to release rage in its victims, rage at being betrayed, for
betrayal is one the greatest of women’s fears. When it occurs, the
Madwoman can burst through the Rejected Lover’s surface, in spite of
her attempts to cover up her pain and pretense of coping, disrupting life
and work and soul. (138)

While the purpose of Leonard’s work is to counsel women through the dangers of the
archetype, it makes for a much more interesting story to turn the Madwoman loose and see what happens.
She is not the one to wield the murder weapon, but Trinnie quickly decides to take advantage of a bad situation. She finds herself in an uneasy alliance with Emmi, her husband’s lover, and must convince Emmi to keep it together if they are to remain free from the consequences of the event. Trinnie tells her:

What’re you going to do Emmi? Spend the rest of your life afraid? Look at you. Sitting in this trailer, a little mouse waiting for the hawk to rip her to pieces. When’s it enough? When do you say to these men, I’m not here for you to push around anymore! I’m not here to be beaten or cheated or used up like-- like a napkin you use to wipe the taco grease off your face. Look. You made a decision that changed all our lives. We can’t go back and fix it. We can’t. But maybe we can-- use it to our advantage. I mean, why spend the rest our lives afraid? (Hinson 48)

Trinnie’s primary concern is for her children, and she will do what she must to stay out of prison and protect them. However, as the series continues, the Madwoman consumes the Mother. Trinnie lets her anger get the best of her. Her rage blinds her to the harm she wreaks on her family, and as she devolves, her children pay the price.

Trinnie is inspired in part by Bertolt Brecht’s Mother Courage. I attempted to borrow from the absurdity of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. In the play, Mother Courage gives lip service to protecting her children, but her focus is clearly on financial success. She fights to keep her son out of the army, yet is willingly taking all of them into war rather than away from it, declaring to the Sergeant who has stopped her, “We need
to get moving, there isn’t a war every day of the week” (1.1). Trinnie declares war on her husband and then on the man pursuing her for his money. While she insists her actions are about rebuilding a world for her children, somewhere along the line Trinnie’s efforts stop being about them at all and become about her own motivations. The Madwoman is in full flush, representing the feminine power to both create and destroy.

*Shared Misery* is intended to be a twelve-episode miniseries. I wanted to create a story that actors would want to play. But I also wanted to subvert the traditional trajectory of the wronged woman finding her power to create a feminine anti-hero. The ongoing challenge, as I work through each episode, is to form a Madwoman we will want to take the journey with, a character like Mother Courage who can raise our aversion, yet whom we cannot stop watching.
ANGELS ALL DIE:
THE POSTMODERN FEMALE TRICKSTER

While completing the final year of the program, I have been also teaching English at New Mexico School for the Arts, in Santa Fe. One morning last fall I was lecturing the high school freshmen on mythology, specifically the Trickster archetype. Tricksters, the cunning characters who defy cultural norms, are found in every society on earth and frequently serve to teach a lesson or impart morals. I covered several world tricksters such as Coyote, Anansi, Loki, and the leshy, and discussed several characteristics of the Trickster, including their intelligence, that they are often smaller, less aggressive animals or people, can be malicious, and are usually male. This last characteristic impelled several students to raise their hands. Are Tricksters always male? I explained that usually, yes, that is the case. The question prompted me to ask them if they could identify a female trickster, but we were not successful in naming any that day. There are, of course, several female tricksters, including Egyptian mythology’s Isis and Shakespeare’s Viola. However, our struggle to readily name them in class gave me much to think about.

Tricksters use wit, cunning, and intelligence to gain control of a situation. In literature and mythology, it is more common to see female characters use their sexuality rather than their intelligence as the means to an end. This creates the distinction between the femme fatale and the female Trickster. The femme fatale uses sex appeal to seduce and often destroy the man she has ensnared for her own purpose, whatever her desire might be. Tricksters, conversely, “preside over moments of
passage, rupture, and transformation” (Tannen 7). They take advantage of the culture they are a part of to subvert the rules for their own gain. Lewis Hyde explains the Trickster thus:

The trickster myth derives creative intelligence from appetite. It begins with a being whose main concern is being fed and it ends with the same being grown mentally swift, adept at creating and unmasking deceit, proficient at hiding his tracks and at seeing through the devices used by others to hide theirs. Trickster starts out hungry, but before long he is master of the kind of creative deception that, according to tradition, is a prerequisite of art.

Hyde’s description of the Trickster as “he” is not misogynistic; he is describing the traditional form of the archetype. However, the masculine pronoun reveals the resistance of the archetype to wear a feminine face.

Lori Landay asserts that the “advantages of masculinity [including] mobility, autonomy, power, [and] safety” means we must look not at the customary public spheres the Trickster haunts but instead look to the “centers of women’s space—the parlors, kitchens, and in bedrooms of domesticity” (2-3). There, we will find the female Trickster such as Lucy Ricardo, Scheherazade, and even Mae West. These three embody masterful “creative deception,” taking their trickery to artistic levels. However, they all do so within realms considered feminine space—the kitchen, the living room, the bedroom. None venture out into the world at large, instead remaining in a small sphere
of authority and influence. Joseph Campbell wrote that, “Many of the difficulties that women face today follow from the fact that they are moving into a field of action in the world that was formerly reserved for the male and for which there were no female mythological models” (xiii). Without a strong feminine mythological legacy, women were conscripted to tailoring the masculine Trickster mythology into an ill-fitting suit they were never completely comfortable wearing.

Times, though, are a-changing. Ricki Steffanie Tannen believes that the postmodern female Trickster is bound by no such fetters. She writes, “The most significant difference [between the postmodern female and traditional male Tricksters] can be seen in the postmodern embodiment of the archetypal Trickster energy in a female body with psychological authority, physical agency, and bodily autonomy” (8). It is worth noting that Tannen uses the term “energy” rather than “form”. Simply acting like the male Trickster does not a female trickster make. The postmodern female Trickster is expressing the dynamism of the archetype through the unique ethos of femininity, creating a distinct and vital mythological legacy. This is not the old Trickster in drag, but a separate and powerful being all her own. Tannen continues her definition of the postmodern female Trickster as one who uses humor and irony to deploy “strategic subversive and transformational devices aimed at revolution and not just revolt,” and who works to construct an identity that “refuses to be a victim” (8). The postmodern female Trickster is leaving the kitchen behind for a larger stage.
The exploration of the female Trickster and her evolution gave me the inspiration to create her in my own work. Not to discover the female archetype as I did in *Lilith, Darling* and *Shared Misery*, but instead purposefully apply the archetype to a work in progress. I wanted to see if I could create the postmodern female Trickster, what she would look like, and what an audience’s reaction would be to her. I already had the work to which I could apply the theories of Tannen—*Angels All Die*. Therefore, I set out to revise the sole female character in the script to form her as a Trickster and to see what it would do to the story overall.

*Angels All Die* is a three-character play set in the hair and makeup room of a soap opera. Frank Abbott is the new makeup artist for Petra Walls, the young star of the show. Frank doesn’t arrive to his new job alone, however—he is accompanied by the ghost of James Dean, whom he acquired when he stole a lighter once belonging to Dean. When we meet Frank and James, they have been together for a couple of years and have settled into a strange partnership. When Frank meets Petra, he realizes that having a ghost constantly around can be detrimental to forming a relationship with a living person. He therefore decides to return the lighter, and thus James, to Indiana. However, Petra has plans of her own and takes the lighter, disappearing during the night with James to pursue her Hollywood dream.

Over several revisions, Petra has grown into her role as Trickster. Using Tannen’s definition of the postmodern Trickster, I first attempted to develop Petra’s agency. When we meet her, Petra is an image on a promotional poster, an over-sexualized, one-
dimensional figure meant to fulfill a stereotypical role. In early drafts, she was a flat character who did little more than represent the audience and ask the questions that moved the story along. Keeping in mind Tannen’s assertion that “previously, a female body, by definition, excluded the possibilities of movement which was one of the defining characteristics of Trickster,” (8) Petra has now grown larger in many ways than either Frank or James. Her world is by far bigger than the men’s. Upon returning to the studio several months after stealing the lighter, she says of the makeup room, “This place has... shrunk. Or something. It’s—like a closet, isn’t it” (Hinson 104). Of course, the room hasn’t shrunk; Petra has grown. She is no longer restrained by the confines of the room, her reliance on James Dean, or her fear of being alone. Like the traditional Trickster, this postmodern female Trickster commands her own way.

Tannen’s second element of the new Trickster is her ability to use humor and irony to subvert the status quo. Hyde writes that “One mark of the trickster’s mind... is that it exploits and frustrates opportunity.” The Trickster pounces on her own opportunities while vexing the opportunities of those she encounters. In this way, she deftly maneuvers herself to a position of power. For the female Trickster as well as the traditional Trickster, both of whom are often the smallest or most oppressed individuals in the story, this requires strength equal to the physical superiority of the characters who hold the gold, as it were. This strength comes in the female Trickster’s ability to wield humor. Petra disarms Frank with her quirky nature. Whether she is going on a diatribe about yoga or describing a dream about a whale smiling at her, Petra reels
Frank in step by step through humor rather than relying on sex appeal. In her first meeting with him, her quick nature overwhelms him:

   PETRA: Why are you in my dressing room?
   FRANK: Right. Sorry. I’m your new hair and makeup... guy.
   PETRA: What happened to Lillian?
   FRANK: I-- I don’t know Lillian.
   PETRA: Lillian. Lillian! Oh for criminy’s sake. Why didn’t she tell me she was leaving?
   FRANK: I don’t know--
   PETRA: It’s so damned stressful, starting over. I mean, I thought we were getting along just fine--
   FRANK: Maybe she just took another job?
   PETRA: Why?
   FRANK: I don’t... have any idea?
   PETRA: Then why would you say that?
   FRANK: Making a guess?
   PETRA: But you don’t know.
   FRANK: No.
   PETRA: For all you know, she left because of me.
   FRANK: Oh, I don’t think--
   PETRA: She could’ve just walked out to hurt me--
   FRANK: Why would she do that?
   PETRA: People do that, Frank. They hurt other people. That’s what they do.
   (Hinson 11-12)

Petra’s manner of fast talk is humorous, but she recognizes the landscape and selects the best tool to exploit the opportunity that presents itself, in this case keeping Frank off balance until she knows who he is.
Finally, Tannen writes, the postmodern female Trickster refuses to be a victim. Ever proactive, the Trickster does not waste time in a subordinate role. Petra tells Frank a story of becoming pregnant when she is sixteen by an older man she believed loved her. Frank, in turn, tells her his own secret, that he is haunted by James Dean. Petra does not respond, only walks out. Later, however, when Frank tries to reassure her that he will keep her secret, she responds, “Well, actually... I made it up” (Hinson 57). Whether the original story of the pregnancy is the truth or the denial is, Petra refuses to be a victim for Frank’s sympathy. In various feedback sessions, responders and readers have told me that when she abruptly tells Frank she lied, they lose sympathy for her character. While I understand this, I believe it is an essential moment in the Trickster’s game. Frank temporarily gains the upper hand by having the better story, but Petra turns the tables and upsets his equilibrium. She frustrates his opportunity to be the keeper of her secret, which would make them equals, and thus topples the expectation to her own benefit.

Restructuring Petra as the Trickster enabled me to find depth and subtext to work with in the script. Giving Petra more agency and desire brought the cast into a more equitable ensemble and allowed me to work with the humor without resorting to cheap jokes. In many ways, the Trickster has set the bar higher, requiring me to return to Frank and James for more character development. I suppose that is the Trickster’s job, though—to remind us that the world without the Trickster grows stagnant and ossified (Voth 94).
Approaching *Angels All Die* in this manner, experimenting with creating an archetypal character, was a very different process for me compared to other works. As I revised Petra, I had to constantly refer back to my research to make a decision about what she would say or do. I had to be more conscious of how her character would react in situations without becoming too heavy-handed in what I was trying to accomplish. I found that having the constraints of the Trickster archetype actually allowed me more freedom in her development. I was better able to keep her narrative arc consistent, as I knew what the rules were I had set out for myself. Whether I would repeat this kind of experiment in a future work or in revising a current one I’m not sure, but I do feel it was a successful way to switch things up for myself as a writer.
CONCLUSION

Upon beginning the Dramatic Writing program, I could not identify my style or recurring themes. I had never before analyzed my work as a whole—I simply wrote the stories as they came. This program has disciplined me to take my writing more seriously, to examine my work with the critical eye I do others’ writing. Now, reflecting on my work over the past three years while in the program I can see the impact of my upbringing and earlier adulthood at play in my writing. Some common threads include family dynamics, fantasy, ghosts, characters on the edge (of society or sanity), and the feminine. Every piece I write has a line or a phrase or a character inspired by an event in my life, much like the signature a painter puts at the bottom of her work.

*Angels All Die* has been (so far) my favorite script to work on. Taking the time to focus solely on the story for a few months coupled with the opportunity to integrate another great love of mine, the study of archetypes, has opened me to the possibility of being both a writer and a scholar. I have spent many years believing I could not do both, but the Dramatic Writing program has shown me it is possible. The chance to dig into my own work to see how feminine archetypes play out has helped me see my work from a different perspective and has given me insight on revision. As I come to the end of the program, I can look forward to sitting down with the scripts and getting to work.

As an educator, I am a highly disciplined individual. I’ve had to be—there are a lot of balls to keep up in the air at once. I never felt I had the same self-control with my own writing. At a recent professional development session we shared our response to
the question, “What’s your medicine?” When it came my turn, before I had time to
think, I blurted out, “My writing.” I couldn’t say what happened after that, because I was
lost in my own thoughts—writing is truly my medicine. It keeps me sane, keeps me
whole, and keeps me moving forward. Yet, until I made the decision to apply for the
Dramatic Writing program, I consistently put the writing last, after everything else I
needed to do. And after everything I didn’t need to do. This is no longer the case. I can
finally call myself a writer and not feel the need to tag it onto the end of my “real” job,
and I am very selfish with my writing time. It has taken its proper place in my life.

The past three years has also given me insight on who I am as a writer. I have
spent time trying on different styles and emulating who I thought I was supposed to be
like. I struggled to write the Great American Epic, and failed more than once. Many
times, what I wrote felt like concrete shoes—clunky, gray, and not very good for
dancing—but being in the program has taught me that mistakes are a form of creativity.
As Anne Bogart writes, “Errors, accidents and chaos can be creative partners, even
guides, informing and assisting the creative process” (40). It wasn’t until I relaxed my
grip and decided to have some fun that I discovered my own voice. I found that not only
did dark humor come easily to me, I took great joy in writing it. While I had a period of
time in which I believed that anything that enjoyable and easy to write couldn’t be
“real” writing, thus any good, I realize now I have found my unique voice. My goal now
is to continue developing that voice as well as my examination of the feminine
archetypes that inform much of my work. Whatever is next, I am ready to move forward as a scholar, writer, and storyteller.
Works Cited


---. *Lilith, Darling*. Play. 2015.

---. *Shared Misery*. Teleplay. 2015.


LILITH, DARLING

Lights come up tight on a pair of red stilettos. Silence.

Lights come up on Woman 2, opposite.

WOMAN 2
ONCE upon a time there was little girl, pretty and dainty. But in summer time she was obliged to go barefooted because she was poor, and in winter she had to wear large wooden shoes.

In the middle of the village lived an old shoemaker's wife; she sat down and made, as well as she could, a pair of little shoes out of some old pieces of red cloth. They were clumsy, but she meant well, for they were intended for the little girl.

WOMAN 1 walks up behind the heels. She stays just out of the tight light shining on those shoes.

Beautiful Child

WOMAN 1
I was a beautiful child. Everyone said so. I would run through the halls, talk too much in class, come home from play with sticks in my hair and my clothes covered in dirt. And still everyone would laugh at me, tell me how beautiful I was, how full of life I was. "Girly, you have a fire in you," my grandmother used to say. But then I got older. I stopped being beautiful. Oh, everyone still said I was beautiful, but suddenly-- I talked too much, was too rough, wasn't acting like a lady.

She steps into the shoes. Lights come up to reveal her. She remains in the shoes for the entire performance.

WOMAN 2
They should warn us.

WOMAN 1
Who?

WOMAN 2
Our mothers. Other women. Someone.
WOMAN 1
Would we listen?

WOMAN 2
Maybe?

Probably not.

WOMAN 1
Are you in one of those moods again?

WOMAN 2
Guess so.

WOMAN 1
You've been doing that a lot lately.

WOMAN 2
Have I?

WOMAN 1
More than usual.

WOMAN 2
Alright.

WOMAN 1
The little girl received the shoes and wore them for the first time on the day of her mother's funeral. They were certainly not suitable for mourning; but she had no others, and so she put her bare feet into them and walked behind the humble coffin.

GHOST

WOMAN 2
When I was a little girl, my sister and I would dress up and play tea party. We would wrap tea towels around our shoulders as furs, and wear the cheap plastic jewelry we got every birthday and Christmas. We would talk for hours about what it would be like when we were grown. Who we would marry. What we would name our children. Our beautiful, bright-eyed children who would be perfect in every way.

WOMAN 1
So much depends on a name.
Projection: Maybe "Thelma and Louise". Or any kind of film that involves the open road. Or even just that cheesy stock footage of scenery that represents what's behind the car.

Music: Pick a great, upbeat song about driving or freedom or escaping.

The women take chairs, set them in the lights, take their seats.

Woman 2 is "driving," Woman 1 looking out the passenger-side window and bobbing her head to the music. They drive awhile, enjoying the day. Then they both look forward, concerned. Woman 1 turns the music "off."

**WOMAN 2**
What the hell!

**WOMAN 1**
What'd you do?

**WOMAN 2**
I didn't do anything!

**WOMAN 1**
I told you. Didn't I tell you?

**WOMAN 2**
You told me.

**WOMAN 1**
I told you. Get that check engine light looked at. Did I not?

**WOMAN 2**
You did.

**WOMAN 1**
And did you?

**WOMAN 2**
I did not.
WOMAN 1
You did not. And here we are, twenty-three miles outside of nowhere, no cell towers, no traffic--

WOMAN 2
Okay. To be fair, I told you we shouldn't have taken that left.

WOMAN 1
When did you tell me that?

WOMAN 2
When you made me take it.

WOMAN 1
I don't recall that.

WOMAN 2
Of course you don't. You only recall my fuck-ups. Never your own.

WOMAN 1
I find that hard to believe.

WOMAN 2
Believe. I keep track.

WOMAN 1
What?

Woman 2 produces a small notebook.

WOMAN 2
I keep track.

WOMAN 1
You can't be serious--

WOMAN 2
Would you like to read it?

WOMAN 1
No.
Long pause, then Woman 1 grabs the notebook from Woman 2's hand. Reads it.

WOMAN 1
You've written down everything? Every conversation we've had! How did I not notice this?

WOMAN 2
There's a lot you don't notice.

WOMAN 1
This is ridiculous--

WOMAN 2
I knew you'd say that.

WOMAN 1
What?

WOMAN 2
Ridiculous.

Jerks the notebook away from Woman 1, flips through the pages.

WOMAN 2
I have approximately fifty-two entries on things you find ridiculous. That's like-- one a week.

WOMAN 1
You do not--

WOMAN 2
October 23rd-- "Why are you wearing those pants? They look ridiculous!"

February 4th-- "I think it's ridiculous that you spend so much money on organic food."

July 15th-- "He's a ridiculous fool. You can do better."

WOMAN 1
I stand by that one.
WOMAN 2
Don't do that.

WOMAN 1
Do what?

WOMAN 2
That. That... forget it.

WOMAN 1
Why didn't you just tell me it was bothering you?

WOMAN 2
You wouldn't have listened. You've always been so... Ugh! You know what? Just forget it. Forget I even showed it to you.

Pause.

WOMAN 1
Want to tell me what you're mad about?

WOMAN 2
The car!

WOMAN 1
Come on.

WOMAN 2
Doesn't matter.

WOMAN 1
Well, looks like we're stuck here, so you might as well fess up.

WOMAN 2
You don't want to hear it.

WOMAN 1
No. I don't. But I will... Go ahead.

WOMAN 2
I just feel like you've always thought you're smarter than me.
WOMAN 1
I'm not... You're smart.

WOMAN 2
I know I am. But you think I'm not as smart as you.

WOMAN 1
I've never said that.

WOMAN 2
You don't have to.

WOMAN 1
Really.

WOMAN 2
You know, things can be said without ever being said.

WOMAN 1
Uh huh.

WOMAN 2
See? You're acting like that again-- that "Oh boy here she goes again."

WOMAN 1
Didn't say a thing.

WOMAN 2
Don't you get it?

WOMAN 1
You've always been too sensitive.

WOMAN 2
That's another thing-- just because mom always said that doesn't mean it's true--

WOMAN 1
Of course it's true!

WOMAN 2
No it's not!
Woman 1 gets "out" of the car.

WOMAN 2
Where are you going?

Woman 1 leans back in the "window."

WOMAN 1
All I'm saying is, I told you.

She stands, looking around. Long pause. Woman 2 stares straight ahead.

WOMAN 2
You told me.

Just then a large carriage came by, and in it sat an old lady; she looked at the little girl, and taking pity on her, said to the clergyman-- Look here, if you will give me the little girl, I will take care of her.

The Cyberlife for Me

Woman 2 and her cell phone.

WOMAN 2
Guess who sent me an email this morning-- Ellis. I've been thinking about you so much lately. Can't get you off my mind. I still don't really understand what happened between us...

What happened between us? Please! Here's what happened. I thought we were doing fine, just really hitting it off--

Looks at her profile.

WOMAN 2
Oh my god. Gonna have to thump another cougar hunter on the nose. Listen to this: You are the hottest older woman I've ever seen-- okay, first? Not scoring points calling me an older woman-- By the way, my profile says I'm 45. But I'm really 32. Oh good. And you're a liar. I have always wanted to hook up with an older woman--

Delete.
Anyway, Ellis seemed like the perfect guy, which should've been my first clue something was wrong. I really didn't think anything about it, you know, his never staying the night--

Oh, look at this! Hilarious!

Projection: Some ridiculous meme.

WOMAN 2
Do you think it was wrong for me to sort of lie to this guy I was talking to-- we only met a couple of times, and it just wasn't feeling right, so I told him I was getting back with my ex. I probably should've told him over the phone... well, technically, I did. I texted him.

Oh my WORD she drives me nuts! She's always posting, I mean non-stop. And most of it is so stupid! Gah. Get off the computer, dumb ass! Read a book or something!

I'm thinking about closing my Facebook for a while. It just makes me crazy, seeing all these posts from people who think I care about their politics or religion or frakking vegan recipes.

Well, I won't admit it to him, but I kinda cyberstalked him. I was scrolling through his page and saw this photo he was tagged in. So I open it, and it's a photo of him and this woman. And someone posts *You two are so adorable!* And it wasn't like-- an old post. It was just a couple of days before.

Mm hmm. I get it. I'm the booty call. But I didn't want him to know I knew, so I told him, you should never try lying to a woman. We're going to figure it out. Our intuition is better than the FBI. Then I blocked him so he couldn't answer. Let him sit on that for awhile.

Oh-- look at this one-- he's pretty cute! Flirt!

_Sylvia_


Lights up tight on a mirror, with Woman 1 and Woman 2 facing it. The audience should be able to see them as well as themselves. They are putting on heavy stage make-up.
WOMAN 1

(Singing)
"I've never been a sinner, I've never sinned, I've got a friend in Jesus" --

WOMAN 2
Need to try to have-- have to make one final swing by Walmart. The dogs are counting on me.

WOMAN 1
"So you know when I die, it's gonna set me up with the spirit in the sky" --

WOMAN 2
I've learned that you can't assume that what's in one is in another.

WOMAN 1
"Oh, set me up with the spirit in the sky, that's where I'm gonna go when I die" --

WOMAN 2
I didn't do my inventory and ran out.

WOMAN 1
"When I die and they lay me to rest, I'm gonna go to the place that's the best" --

WOMAN 2
Now I'm getting the doe eyes.

Woman 2 puts down her eye liner and inspects her face up close to the mirror.

WOMAN 1
"Set me up with the spirit in the sky"--

WOMAN 2
I could sure go for a bagel.

Did I tell you about Sylvia?

WOMAN 1
Who?
WOMAN 2
Sylvia. My rat?

WOMAN 1
Help me out?

Woman 1 lifts a large wig and begins working it onto her head.

WOMAN 1
Careful with the--

WOMAN 2
Sylvia was so sweet. She would run up my arm and sit on my shoulder--

WOMAN 1
Aww--

WOMAN 2
But she was a lazy shit. She would hide her food under her exercise wheel!

WOMAN 1
Exercise wheels are just... like-- little hamster treadmills.

WOMAN 2
I had to give her away when I got here. I gave her to a woman I worked with. She called me a couple of days ago and told me Sylvia died.

WOMAN 1
Aww!

WOMAN 2
She had a heart attack. She said Sylvia was in pain the night before, and she said, I didn't know what to do! So I gave her 'shrooms --

WOMAN 1
She gave the rat mushrooms?

WOMAN 2
Yeah! It was so funny! She said, I didn't know how to help her, so I gave her 'shrooms, and the next morning she was dead!
WOMAN 1
Wait-- poisonous mushrooms, or... oh! She gave the rat 'shrooms!

WOMAN 2
'Shrooms.

WOMAN 1
How does a rat act on 'schrooms?

WOMAN 2
I don't know!

WOMAN 1
That's funny! "Oooh, look at the pretty colors!"

WOMAN 2
It was sad. But rats... they don't live very long. At least she went out happy.

WOMAN 1
A stoned rat.

WOMAN 2
A fat stoned rat.

Woman 2 and Woman 1 are ready for performance.

WOMAN 1
Well. Shall we?

Woman 2 holds her stomach.

WOMAN 2
I'm just going to stay here.

Woman 1 goes to Woman 2, hugging her. She pulls Woman 2 back at arm's length.

WOMAN 1
Don't throw up.

WOMAN 2
I never get over this, you know? How do you do it?
WOMAN 1
Think you can walk around two more hours? Think you can do that? Hey-- (Sings) "They tried to make me go to rehab, but I said no, no, no"--

Woman 1 turns Woman 2 to face the mirror. They smile at their reflection.

WOMAN 1
Check this out. We are such miracles.

Does Not Play Well With Others

WOMAN 1
Does not play well with others. That's me. All my report cards said so, every year-- *Your daughter does not play well with others.*

Alright, I was a bit... argumentative. I would argue over everything. Most of the time I thought it was warranted... But other times, I did it just because... it filled me with some sense of life. Like I was vital and strong. But then, somewhere along the way, I finally stopped. I came to realize no one wanted to hear what I had to say.

And then once, I went with some friends to a symphony. It was led by a woman conductor-- A conductor who happened to be a woman. She had hair the color of flames-- red and gold and cropped short. She wore a black dress that came to a V in the back. Her arms were so graceful as she directed the musicians, and the entire stage was- - bathed in this golden light that like flowed from her. I was mesmerized. After the concert I just had to meet her, so I waited outside the dressing rooms until she came out. I was surprised-- shocked. She was a very tiny, petite woman who barely reached my shoulders. I had thought her a giant on the stage. But she was friendly, and seemed genuinely moved by my... gushing... compliments.

After the concert, my friends and I went out for drinks. I just kept going on and on about the woman, how remarkable she was, what a beautiful experience it was. Then I realized no one was answering. Everyone at the table was staring at me like I was a mad woman. *What?* I asked. *Well,* said one, *Don't you think you're overreacting a bit?* And another said, *I found it to be a bit over the top.* Then the third said, *A gimmick.* *That's all.* *A gimmick.*

I couldn't understand how they could feel that way. A gimmick! For me... well, I felt like I had experienced the birth of the universe. But I didn't argue. They didn't want to hear it.

I feel bad about that now. Like I should've argued. I should've stood up for her.
I imagine myself as that woman, conducting the symphony. Standing before the most talented musicians, the gleaming instruments, all eyes on me as I raise my arm to signal-

**Final Girl**


WOMAN 2
Look at this! Lane sent me a picture of the movie we're watching tonight-- damn I hate this movie!

Projection: Justin Long's character Darry in the film “Jeepers Creepers.” The one without his eyes.

WOMAN 2
It's his favorite. We must watch it once a month.

Lights up on Woman 1, opposite.

WOMAN 1
Don't talk about clothes or try to describe your new dress to your man-- please and flatter him by talking about the things he wants to talk about.

WOMAN 2
I've even started seeing all these mistakes-- like, there's a scene where the monster has his back to the police? And you can see the zipper for the costume! It's stupid.

WOMAN 1
Don't be too familiar with other men-- the man you're with deserves your entire attention.

WOMAN 2
Don't get me wrong-- I love a good horror flick. My all-time absolute favorite is "Halloween."

Projection: Jamie Lee Curtis in full Scream Queen Mode. Michael Myers kicking through doors.
WOMAN 1
Don't try to get him to say something he doesn't want to by playing on his emotions. Men don't like tears, especially in public.

WOMAN 2
For my birthday once, Lane gave me balloons and flowers, and I was like, eh, but then he gave me my real gift-- tickets to a retrospective of all the old horror movies like "Halloween" and "Nightmare on Elm Street"-- all the classics. It. Was. Awesome. After it ended-- I guess we were scared...

WOMAN 1
Don't drink too much. You should remain in control at all times.

WOMAN 2
We got in the car and he started it... And then when he turned on the heater, the air made the balloons like--- smash into the back of our heads. I may have peed my pants.

WOMAN 1
If you don't want to be harassed, don't wear short skirts. Dress like a lady.

WOMAN 2
Lane likes slasher films. I keep telling him, gore's got nothing on Hitchcock. I can't believe he's never even watched "Psycho"--

Projection: A smiling Norman Bates. Woman 2 imitates the slashing-the-shower scene with her cell phone.

WOMAN 2
REEK REEK REEK!

WOMAN 1
When someone catcalls you on the street, he's trying to pay you a compliment.

WOMAN 2
You know what, though-- if those movies were real life, I'd be like the first one killed!

WOMAN 1
After all, boys will be boys.

WOMAN 2
Seriously! I'd be dead in the first ten minutes. It's always the goody-two-shoes chick who survives.
WOMAN 1
Never-- never be a tease.

WOMAN 2
It's never the bad-ass girl who doesn't take shit from anyone.

WOMAN 1
And don't look like an easy target.

WOMAN 2
Why is that?

WOMAN 1
The little girl believed the old lady loved her on account of the red shoes, but the old lady thought them hideous, and so they were burnt. The girl herself was dressed very neatly and cleanly; she was taught to read and to sew, and people said that she was so very pretty.

Olivion

The women play racquetball.

WOMAN 1
What did you do this weekend?

WOMAN 1
The cat threw up.

WOMAN 2
Okay. Eew.

WOMAN 1
So I scrubbed the carpet.

WOMAN 2
That's it?

WOMAN 1
Pretty much.

WOMAN 2
Damn. Must've been a massive hairball.
WOMAN 1
I think he was upset.

WOMAN 2
I hate cats. Don't know why you have one.

WOMAN 1
I don't blame him. I mean, his litterbox was a mess, we forgot to give him water, and the fighting-- he's just had enough.

WOMAN 2
Wait-- what fighting?

WOMAN 1
Right after Stephan walked out, he just-- upchucked. The cat. Not Stephen. Right in the middle of the floor.

Projection: a large cat, staring impassively. You know the look.
Like the world owes him.

WOMAN 1
I ran the water until it was too hot-- so hot I couldn't hardly touch it.

Added some dish soap.

Scrubbed that spot until every trace of vomit was gone. And then-- I kept scrubbing. Just worked in a circle around that first spot, round and round and round. I scrubbed every inch of that floor.

And when I finished the carpet, I started on the couch. Then the love seat. His crappy recliner I've asked him to get rid of for years. Then-- I traded the scrub brush for a rag and washed every window inside and out. There wasn't a streak left. I scrubbed until I had washed him into... oblivion. Every molecule.

Wiped out.

The projection cat wanders off, indifferent.

WOMAN 1
And then I went to the Farmer's Market. Got some great cherries.
WOMAN 2
Cats, man. Give me a dog any day.

WOMAN 1
I dreamt about Oliver last night.

WOMAN 2
Oliver?

WOMAN 1
My first lover.

WOMAN 2
Really!

WOMAN 1
I thought he was so worldly, so... exotic.

WOMAN 2
You've never told me about him.

WOMAN 1
He was an older man. My professor.

WOMAN 2
Scandalous!

WOMAN 1
Well, he couldn't have been more than ten years older than me. But I did learn a lot from him. I learned quite well.

WOMAN 2
Hubba hubba!

WOMAN 1
And then I met Stephen, and the rest is history.

WOMAN 2
Maybe you should look Oliver up?

WOMAN 1
No. That ship... It's in another harbor.
WOMAN 2
What'll you do now?

WOMAN 1
I don't know...

But I do know I'm not cooking anymore. I hate cooking.

WOMAN 2
Oh, I really enjoy it. Relaxes me.

WOMAN 1
I'll live on popcorn. And Cheerios.

WOMAN 2
And cherries.

WOMAN 1
And cherries.

_Starry Night_

WOMAN 2
Oh my god, would you look at that sky?
I'd forgotten what those stars look like.
The stars are shattering above me and
I can feel them from here. Every breath
They take, I take. Like this rush of heat
Melting me down.
Maybe I'm drunk.

WOMAN 1
Down by the river, down by the sea
Johnny broke a bottle and blamed it on me.
I told ma, ma told pa
Johnny got a spanking
So ha ha ha!

So many nights spent burning that
Precious energy
Why can't you just stay home?
Oh daddy, there's too much to do
And not a thing to do
And my skin is splitting from all the fire
Inside.
Don't you remember what it was like,  
That infinite energy that demands  
You to just go  
Go  
Go.  

Not last night but the night before  
Twenty-four robbers came knocking  
on my door  
As I ran out, they ran in.  
Hit me over the head with rolling pin.  
They stole my watch and they stole my ring  
And then those robbers began to sing--

Maybe I'm drunk.  
Or maybe I'm a god.  
I could be riding a tall white horse,  
Galloping across the sky, crashing through  
The dark glass and  
Sending the shards flying like falling stars  
Burning up before they hit the ground.  
Ask me your questions.  
I'm the oracle.  
I'm the Goddess of Laussel  
The Venus Of Lespugue  
Queen of Willendorf.  
I'm the paint on the cave walls,  
Mary birthing the world,  
Boudica leading the rebellion.  
Rebellion.  

Hell on wheels.  
Hot stuff.  
Huff and puff.  
In a huffle.  
Staying alive.  
Deadline.  
Crossword.  

Hellion.  
Hot wheels.  
Puff-n-stuff.  
Hufflepuff.  
Staying in.  
Dead or alive.  
Cross the line.
Mark my word.

Marco!

Polo!

My eyes gulp down the sun all day
And send it out like lasers at night,
Just lighting up the world and sometimes
I spin and spin and make myself dizzy
Then stop and watch the stars lurch by
And it makes me laugh.
How can I stay home when the stars are
Burning and I might miss one blinking out
For eternity?

One night I held the hand of a boy while we
Walked through town, these same stars above us.
I thought I loved him.
Maybe I did.
I did.
But he left and time passed and one day

I read he had died.

And all I could think about was the warmth
Of his hand in mine.

I don't like to think about the past.
It fills me with smoke and I can't breathe.
I'd rather watch the stars explode
And breathe in their dust
Then the dust of the past.
Maybe I'm drunk.

WOMAN 1
One day the Queen was travelling through that part of the country, and had her little
daughter, who was a princess, with her. All the people, amongst them the little girl,
streamed towards the castle, where the little princess, in fine white clothes, stood
before the window and allowed herself to be stared at. She wore neither a train nor a
golden crown, but beautiful red morocco shoes.
They were indeed much finer than those which the shoemaker's wife had sewn for the little girl. There is really nothing in the world that can be compared to red shoes!

*Ghost, Part II*

WOMAN 1
So much depends on a name. If you don't believe that, try going any time without being called by your name. You become invisible. You become a ghost people can see but have forgotten. Forgotten, even when you're right there.

That's when I knew my marriage was over-- when he stopped saying my name. It was as if he was erasing me from his existence. He took my name and threw it to the dogs to be mauled and buried. Some mornings I would stand before the mirror and say my name to the reflection, over and over. It kept me from vanishing.

WOMAN 2
The girl was now old enough to be confirmed; she received some new clothes, and she was also to have some new shoes. The rich shoemaker in the town took the measure of her little foot in his own room, in which there stood great glass cases full of pretty shoes and white slippers. Amongst the shoes stood a pair of red ones, like those which the princess had worn.

"Oh how they do shine," Said the girl. They fit her, and were bought.

*Bloody Ladies*

Woman 1 faces the audience, turning her head from side to side, studying something.

Woman 2 walks up next to her.

WOMAN 2
Isn't this one fabulous? It's called "Bloody Ladies." The artist is Diana Mattock--

WOMAN 1
I don't see blood. Or ladies. Am I suppose to see ladies?

WOMAN 2
No. It's not a realistic form. It's an abstract. It's inspired by the story of--
WOMAN 1
It's quite loud--

WOMAN 2
We certainly have a few pieces to choose from. I bet we can find something that fits you perfectly--

WOMAN 1
I didn't say it didn't fit me.

WOMAN 2
Well... No. You didn't, did you? *(Extends her hand)* Welcome to The Ryken Gallery--

Woman 1 doesn't shake Woman 2's hand, instead continues studying the painting.

WOMAN 2
Were you looking for something in particular?

WOMAN 1
I like to see what excites me. "As if the top of my head were taken off"--

WOMAN 2
Certainly. Why don't you look around... if you have any questions, I'll be more than happy to answer them.

Woman 2 takes her leave of Woman 1, who stares at the painting. Just before Woman 2 exits, Woman 1 stops her.

WOMAN 1
You have no idea.

WOMAN 2
Excuse me?

Woman 1 looks to Woman 2, then turns to her.

WOMAN 1
You have no idea who I was quoting... "As if the top of my head were taken off."

WOMAN 2
Ma'am, is there something wrong?
WOMAN 1
I look around at these paintings, and I realize I've wandered into... What? A pop gallery. Filled with...

WOMAN 2
The most exciting up-and-coming artists of our generation.

WOMAN 1
Is that another way of saying 'We cater to the psuedo-sophisticated thirty-something who wants to pretend she understands what makes good art, but can't identify a single classical artist' --

WOMAN 2
'If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way?'

Emily Dickinson.

Long silence.

WOMAN 1
Well, good for you. Sounds like you learned something while in school. That's heartening. When was that, exactly? Last week?

WOMAN 2
Have I done something to offend you?

WOMAN 1
Why do you ask?

WOMAN 2
If you don't like the art we have, there are other galleries--

WOMAN 1
Did I say I didn't like the art?

WOMAN 2
Yes.

WOMAN 1
When did I say that?
WOMAN 2
When you insulted it as pop art. And insulted me for no good reason other than I happen to be of a different generation than you. I interpret that as you don't like it. Or maybe it's just me you don't like.

WOMAN 1
Or maybe you're feeling a little defensive--

WOMAN 2
No, I'm feeling a little confused. What can I do for you?

WOMAN 1
Well, the more I look at this one-- this "Bloody Ladies-- the more I like it.

Long silence. Woman 2 studies Woman 1 closely.

WOMAN 2
Oh.

WOMAN 1
Yes. It's me.

WOMAN 2
Stephen's ex-wife--

WOMAN 1
Not yet.

WOMAN 2
What can I do for you?

WOMAN 1
Do? I don't think there's a thing you can do for me.

WOMAN 2
Then why are you here? To confront me? To--

WOMAN 1
Confront you! Why would I do that?

WOMAN 2
Because I'm dating your ex-husband--
WOMAN 1
We are not divorced yet.

WOMAN 2
Is that what this is about? That Stephen is dating me before your divorce is final? I was under the impression the divorce was a mutual decision.

WOMAN 1
That's my understanding, too. I've heard often enough that it was. Even my lawyer insists on it. I'm unclear anymore if that is, in fact, true. But everyone involved keeps saying it was a mutual decision, so there we have it. Guess I must go with majority rule.

WOMAN 2
I see. (Beat) What would you like me to say?

WOMAN 1
Nothing, of course. You don't owe me an explanation... I'm sure I was expecting something else--

WOMAN 2
Something else?

WOMAN 1
When I found out Stephen was dating someone so much younger, I assumed...

WOMAN 2
Assumed what?

WOMAN 1
I think you can imagine-

WOMAN 2
That I was some kind of bimbo? Looking for a sugar daddy?

WOMAN 1
Yes, actually. I'm so glad you understand. Why else would you be dating Guy...

WOMAN 2
I'm not comfortable talking with you about this--

WOMAN 1
How did you meet him?
WOMAN 2
I think it would be better if you leave--

WOMAN 1
I deserve some answers and I'm certainly not getting them from him.

    Pause.

WOMAN 2
I met him through my father--

WOMAN 1
Your father!

WOMAN 2
Yes. They know each other from their gym--

WOMAN 1
Your father introduced you to a man the same age as himself?

WOMAN 2
My father has always said I was an old soul.

WOMAN 1
Just what kind of family were you raised in! Old soul? That's ridiculous. You're-- what--thirty?

WOMAN 2
Thirty-three.

WOMAN 1
Thirty-three. You shouldn't be dating an old man--

WOMAN 2
Stephen isn't old.

WOMAN 1
Believe me. He's old.

WOMAN 2
I guess we don't see him the same way.
WOMAN 1
How do you see him?

WOMAN 2
Mature. Steady. Past the drama and chaos and jealousy that-- that men my age need to feel alive. He's... You're still in love with him, then?

WOMAN 1
Love? I haven't thought about that. Oh, you've been reading the wrong romance novels, young lady.

WOMAN 2
What does that mean?

WOMAN 1
You think this is about love.

I think the bigger question is why are you dating someone so much older than you! What can he possibly offer you? In the long term?

WOMAN 2
I don't read romance novels.

WOMAN 1
Well, then, that explains your problem. How can you speak with any authority if you aren't a well-rounded reader?

WOMAN 2
Are you serious--

WOMAN 1
No.

I have a-- a friend who's a romance writer. She tried to make it as a serious novelist, but couldn't make any money from it. So she decided... as a joke, really... to try writing a romance novel. And wouldn't you know, it worked. She makes a pretty healthy living off of them. And the ironic part is, she's been divorced three times! I'm not sure if that makes her an authority on romance. Or perhaps it makes her the premier authority--

WOMAN 2
Why are you telling me this?
WOMAN 1
Because she calls me every night, trying to be a good friend, filling my ear with trite like
There are plenty of fish in the sea, and Today is the first day of your life, and Sixty is the
new thirty. That last one is bullshit, by the way. I think she must have a book of cliche on
her coffee table she just-- opens to any page before she calls me up. Are you considering
marring him?

WOMAN 2
What? We've only been dating for a few weeks--

WOMAN 1
How long do you have to date to know if it's serious?

WOMAN 2
What do you want? Now you've seen me. You've talked to me. What else? Do you feel
better?

WOMAN 1
About what?

WOMAN 2
Come on! You obviously need some kind of... reassurance... that Stephen is making a
terrible mistake. That he's completely lost his mind, or he would never have agreed to a
divorce--

WOMAN 1
It was his idea. I remember that now. There was no mutual decision about it. He insisted
on it.

WOMAN 2
I'm sorry--

WOMAN 1
Did you know him then? Were you seeing him while we were--

WOMAN 2
No! Absolutely not.

Silence.

WOMAN 1
I don't know what to do with all of this... I just can't figure out what happened--
WOMAN 2
It feels like your arm's been cut off and you can't open the pickle jar anymore.

WOMAN 1
What?

WOMAN 2
That's what my mom said when she and my father divorced.

WOMAN 1
That it feels like you can't open a jar of pickles?

WOMAN 2
You know, like something really important is missing, and you don't know how to do the simplest things anymore. (Defensively) She was a housewife their entire marriage. Her metaphors are domestic.

WOMAN 1
I see. Well, it's not like that for me. For me, it's like... Oh my god. I'm not going to discuss this with my husband's girlfriend. His thirty-three year-old girlfriend.

WOMAN 2
Yes. I'm thirty-three. And in two months I'll be thirty-four. There's not a thing I can do about that. I'm well aware of the fact that my chances of getting married at this point are slim to none. And having children-- well, forget that. If I can conceive, there's the whole spectrum of worrying about miscarriages and birth defects and being mistaken for my child's grandmother rather than his mother. And don't think you have to point out that my insistence on dating older men who are emotionally unavailable and have no interest in marrying or having any more children because they've already got grown kids only serves to widen that statistical gap with every year that goes by--

WOMAN 1
Oh please. Do you think I'm going to stand here and tell you marriage isn't all that great, that you aren't really missing anything? Well, I for one loved being married. I was born to be married. Or maybe I'm suppose to reassure you that you're still young, that it's not too late. Forgive me for not having the energy to make this about you. You have your entire life ahead of you--

WOMAN 2
And so do you. Look, I'm sorry you and Stephen are getting divorced. I've never been through it, so I can't say I know how you feel. But you're still young. You can do anything--
WOMAN 1
That's something else you've never been through. You don't know what it means to grow old. Do you have any idea-- no. Of course not. How could you? Have you even met an old person--

WOMAN 2
Don't be ridiculous--

WOMAN 1
Oh, that's right. You're dating one. You realize, don't you, he's old enough to be your father. I'm old enough to be your mother--

WOMAN 2
But you're not.

WOMAN 1
No. I'm not. I'm no one's mother. Well. There's that.

Long silence.

WOMAN 1
I guess I was hoping that if I met you, I'd see you were this... ridiculous fling... and I'd feel better about myself. But instead, you're this beautiful young woman who obviously has her ducks in a row.

WOMAN 2
I'm not the problem.

WOMAN 1
So what was the problem? I'm left with... with what? The rest of my life and a cat that keeps throwing up on my carpet. What do I do with that?

WOMAN 2
For what it's worth, I think you're a beautiful and obviously intelligent woman.

WOMAN 1
That's very... patronizing.

WOMAN 2
Sorry.
WOMAN 1
But thank you. (Sighs, looks at the painting) Oh, my kingdom for the magic potion to make it all beautiful again.

WOMAN 2
Well, you could bathe in the blood of virgins.

WOMAN 1
What?

WOMAN 2
Blood. Virgins. Fill your tub up, and at the magical hour of 4 a.m., slide on in and be restored.

WOMAN 1
Is this suppose to make me feel better?

WOMAN 2
That's the story behind this painting. Countess Elizabeth Bathory was a Slovakian woman who had been very beautiful in her youth, and was distressed to find how time ravaged her features. Her handmaiden, Dorka, told her that if she were to bathe in the blood of virgins, her beauty would be restored. She tried it.

But it didn't work. So Dorka told the countess she needed to torture the young virgins and let their blood splash on her face for it to work. Bathory and Dorka abducted and killed some eighty young girls before getting caught. Thus, they are known as the Bloody Ladies.

Woman 1 stares at Woman 2, then at the painting.

WOMAN 1
That is the worst story I've ever heard.

WOMAN 2
Perhaps. But it's all true.

WOMAN 1
Is it?

WOMAN 2
Absolutely.
WOMAN 1
So the moral of the story is we must learn to live where we are? Or that we shouldn't get caught?

WOMAN 2
I don't know if there's a moral or not. It's just the story that inspired the artist in the painting. I personally love the strength of the piece. I think Mattock has captured strength and chaos wonderfully.

WOMAN 1
You know, I can see it. Look-- there-- that would be the countess. And there-- is Dorka, holding a young girl... And that could be knife, couldn't it?

WOMAN 2
It could.

   Pause.

WOMAN 1
Do you think it would work?

WOMAN 2
What?

WOMAN 1
The blood of virgins--

WOMAN 2
What?

WOMAN 1
Technology has come a long way. Medicine. Genetic research. Who knows the possibilities.

I'm just saying-- I'm not saying, of course, that I agree with their tactics, but you've got to respect their drive.

WOMAN 2
I don't think brutality is the answer--

WOMAN 1
That's because you aren't standing where I'm standing.
WOMAN 2
You'll forgive me if I don't partner with you on this one, won't you?

WOMAN 1
I wouldn't expect you to. We're not friends.

WOMAN 2
No.

WOMAN 1
Don't for a moment think we are.

WOMAN 2
I wouldn't dare.

Silence.

WOMAN 1
Well, I guess you're right. It wouldn't work... You know, this one--

Points to the painting, then makes a motion with her hands symbolizing the top of her head exploding.

WOMAN 1
I'll hang it where our wedding picture was.

WOMAN 2
Okay. Shall I write up the ticket for you? I don't think you'll regret it for a moment--

WOMAN 1
Well, even if I do, it's my regret then, isn't it? All mine to make.

Woman 2 nods and exits. Woman 1 stands in front of her painting.

WOMAN 1
On the following Sunday was the girl's confirmation. The girl looked first at her sensible black shoes, then at the red ones—looked at the red ones again, and put them on.

At the church door stood an old crippled soldier leaning on a crutch; he had a wonderfully long beard, more red than white, and he bowed down to the ground and
asked the old lady whether he might wipe her shoes. Then the girl put out her little foot too.

"Dear me, what pretty dancing-shoes!" Said the soldier.

The old lady gave the soldier some money and then went with the girl into the church.

Incrimination

Woman 1 enters to find Woman 2 already seated at the table. She stops. The air is dangerous. Woman 1 smiles, buying time.

Woman 2 doesn't smile back. She reaches to the center of the table with a pencil and uses it to pick up a pair of lacy panties. Holds them up for Woman 1 to see.

There is a long pause, just the women and that pair of lacy panties. In that pause, the entire argument plays out without a word--the denial, the shame, the repentance.

Then Woman 2 drops them back onto the table. She rises slowly. The women stare at each other.

Woman 2 exits. Woman 1 is left alone with those panties.

Lilith, Darling

All we see is the silhouette of Woman 2 sitting in one of the chairs. She is smoking a cigar. Smoke rises. Silence. The lights rise just a little, just on Woman 2, so we see her face.

WOMAN 2
My momma always told me, Baby Girl... Lilith Darling... remember this: life is too short to dance with ugly men.

Smoke rises.

WOMAN 2
She was half-right. Life is too short to dance with ugly men.

Unless they have money.
Then, I can dance with 'em all night and into the morning.

Silence. Smoke.

WOMAN 2
Momma didn't dance with ugly men. My daddy, he's beautiful. Momma says she fell in love with his eyes first. Gray-green eyes that could melt you down right where you stood. Yeah. He's beautiful. But he couldn't hold onto a dime. As quick as money touched his palm, it was gone. Momma would beg her beautiful man to try harder, just work a little harder, and he would promise.

Would whisper all sorts of pretty pledges into her ear late at night until she fell asleep dreaming of a life outside the trailer park, without cars parked on cinder blocks, a life with real foundations and quiet nights, painted stucco and sprinklers on timers, a life without the wind pushing through the cracks in the metal siding and slicing us open with cold fingers in winter.

Smoke.

WOMAN 2
A life without bills that come in the mail with bright red letters announcing DISCONNECT NOTICE so all the neighbors know-- but most of them got one just like it, so no one says anything. But everyone knows.

Come morning, though, that putrid gray light would shine through the dirty windows and chase the promises out to the garbage trucks rumbling by.

No. My momma didn't dance with ugly men. But she forgot that beauty by itself is an empty plate. I won't make that mistake.

Smoke. She inspects her cigar.

Projection: Very faint, a picture of a woman and daughter.

WOMAN 2
I have a photo of my mother and me. I'm a little girl, a toddler, staring into the camera, looking all kinds of confused. Momma is smiling at me. Oh, how she loved me. I can remember that moment. I can tell you exactly what she said right before the shot was taken. "Lilith Darling, you are the only promise that hasn't let me down."

Smoke.
WOMAN 2
All those broken promises ate their way into my momma. Wormed into every cell until they poisoned her blood. She disappeared a little every day, bit by bit, until there was nothing left but the husk. On the last day, I wiped away a tear from her face. I was amazed she had any left. Mine had dried up a long time before. I held that tear on the end of my finger, and I could see myself reflected in it. Then I put it on the end of my tongue. There wasn't any salt in it.

Once, a lover accused me of being a serial monogamist. I thought it was the nicest thing anyone had ever said to me. He told me--

WOMAN 1
Lilith, darling-- I didn't mean it as a compliment.

WOMAN 2
And I just nodded my head, kissed his cheek, and said, I know.

WOMAN 1
Everybody looked at the girl's feet and the whole of the way from the church door to the choir it seemed to her as if even the ancient figures on the monuments, in their stiff collars and long black robes, had their eyes fixed on her red shoes.

A Real Job


Woman 2 waiting on the crate, holding out a daisy.

Woman 1 enters, talking on her cell phone. Lights come up. She glances at Woman 2 as she passes, throwing her a quick smile.

WOMAN 2
A story for you today? Perhaps a line of poetry? A portrait?

Woman 1 shakes her head "no," continuing talking. However, several feet past Woman 2 she stops, turns, and looks at her again. She is still holding out the daisy, bowing slightly.

WOMAN 1
Let me call you right back... I'm sorry, what did you say?
WOMAN 2
May I offer you a song?

WOMAN 1
I don't think so. Why are you talking like that?

WOMAN 2
Like?

WOMAN 1
Like... all weird.

WOMAN 2
A line of poetry, then?

WOMAN 1
Here's an idea-- get a real job.

WOMAN 2
Define 'real job.'

WOMAN 1
It's where you do work for money instead of asking strangers to give you money.

WOMAN 2
I didn't ask for something. I asked to give something.

WOMAN 1
Ah... Wait... You're going to tell me the end of the world is coming.

WOMAN 2
We have today, and in this moment resides eternity.

WOMAN 1
Right...

WOMAN 2
I could paint a portrait of you, the way the light falls on your face--

WOMAN 1
I have to go to work. I have a boss who expects me to show up and do my job.
WOMAN 2
Exchange your energy for money.

WOMAN 1
Exactly.

WOMAN 2
I ask to exchange my energy for your energy.

WOMAN 1
What is it you want to give me?

Woman 2 lifts the flower again, offering it to Woman 1.

WOMAN 1
A weed.

WOMAN 2
Bellis perennis. Perhaps you would like better a bouquet of Osteospermum? A garland of Rhodanthemum? No. For you-- a circlet of Chrysanthemum coronarium.

WOMAN 1
Why not a rose? A lily?

WOMAN 2
"There is a certain majesty in simplicity which is far above all the quaintness of wit."

WOMAN 1
Well, aren't you clever. So let's say I accept your flower. You'll want something in return?

WOMAN 2
Of course--

WOMAN 1
I knew it!

WOMAN 2
An open heart. A child's curiosity. A soul that remembers how to dream.

Woman 2 smiles, once again offering the daisy. Woman 1 hesitates.
She crosses the short distance between them and reaches up for the flower. As she touches it, they freeze for a long beat.

Woman 2 then smiles, releasing the flower and standing straight. Woman 1 holds the flower in the same position a beat longer before finally returning to her present.

WOMAN 2
"He who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise."

Woman 1 turns away from Woman 2 and makes her way offstage, bringing the daisy to her nose as she exits.

Woman 2 reaches into her pocket and brings out another daisy. She strikes the familiar pose, offering the flower.

WOMAN 2
May I sing you a song?

Mirror, Mirror

Woman 1 stares into the mirror. Leans in, stares. Leans back.

WOMAN 1
Lena.
Lena.
Lena.
Lena.

WOMAN 2
It was only of the red shoes the girl thought about when the clergyman laid his hand upon her head and spoke of the holy baptism, of the covenant with God, and told her that she was now to be a grown-up Christian. The organ pealed forth solemnly, and the sweet children's voices mingled with that of their old leader; but the girl thought only of her red shoes.

And all the people inside looked at the girl's red shoes, and all the figures gazed at them; when she knelt before the altar and put the golden goblet to her mouth, she thought only of the red shoes.
Woman 1 takes a chair, takes up the glass of scotch.

Woman 2 enters. She is wearing a huge hoop skirt with layers of petticoats. She goes to sit in the second chair, next to Woman 1, but the hoop doesn’t cooperate. The front pops up, sending petticoats flying.

WOMAN 2
Mother fucker fuckey fuck!

Woman 1 sips. Woman 2 finally maneuvers the skirt so she can sit. They stare ahead.

Woman 1 passes the glass to Woman 2, who takes a drink and returns it.

WOMAN 2
Is that the last of it?

WOMAN 1
Yep.

WOMAN 2
Even the contingency?

WOMAN 1
What contingency--

WOMAN 2
Come on, momma-- you always have a contingency.

WOMAN 1
How do you know--

WOMAN 2
The black lacquer box in the back of your closet, under the old tent and behind the box of tax returns.

Woman 1 gives her a long stare.
WOMAN 2
I was looking for Christmas presents.

WOMAN 1
I don't hide Christmas presents in my closet. Too predictable.

WOMAN 2
Just your liquor.

WOMAN 1
Well. This is it. Broke out the last bottle when Peter started his speech and it turned into a story about his ex-wife getting pregnant by the dwarf stripper at her bachelorette party.

WOMAN 2
And that is why you don't post a picture of your party on Facebook. What happens in Vegas...

Woman 2 holds out her hand for the scotch. Takes a gulping drink.

WOMAN 1
Hey! Come on--

WOMAN 2
What?

WOMAN 1
Why are you treating it like it's a soda? Swirl it in the glass-- like this... Slower... Coat the sides of the glass... good. Now-- sniff it. Stop. Wait.... Sniff it again. Okay? Take a sip... Give it a chance to find its way over every taste bud...

What do you taste?

WOMAN 2
It's like...

WOMAN 1
Like?

WOMAN 2
It reminds me of campfires. A little smoke, the wood--
WOMAN 1
See? When you take the time?

WOMAN 2
Yeah.

Both lean back, sigh. Silence.

WOMAN 2
Who taught you to drink?

WOMAN 1
My grandma.

WOMAN 2
Really?

WOMAN 1
Yeah.

WOMAN 2
She hide her booze in the closet too?

WOMAN 1
Underwear drawer.

Easy silence.

WOMAN 1
Charlie Chaplin told his daughter, Your naked body should only belong to those who fall in love with your naked soul.

WOMAN 2
What?

WOMAN 1
Just something I read this morning.

WOMAN 2
That's weird.
WOMAN 1
I was going to use it in a toast at the reception, but I thought it might embarrass Felicia.

WOMAN 2
Good call.

WOMAN 1
It's a nice sentiment, though. I'd like to believe it.

WOMAN 2
But you don't?

WOMAN 1
Believe that someone said it, or that it's possible?

WOMAN 2
Hmm.

I can't wait to be naked from this hideous dress.

WOMAN 1
Do me a favor. When you get married, elope. That dress cost a fortune.

WOMAN 2
What was Felicia thinking!

WOMAN 1
Well, you never have to wear it again. And it made your sister happy, so I guess we could all be uncomfortable for a few hours to give her the wedding she wanted.

WOMAN 2
Easy for you to say. You got to pick out your own dress.

WOMAN 1
The perks of being the mother of the bride instead of the sister.

Pause.

WOMAN 2
I can't wait to get married.
WOMAN 1
Wait a while, please--

WOMAN 2
Oh, don't worry. I won't get married until I find a man who knows how to drink scotch.

She raises the glass.

WOMAN 2
Now every one came out of church, and the old lady stepped into her carriage. But just as the girl was lifting up her foot to get in too, the old soldier said--

"Dear me, what pretty dancing shoes!"

And the girl could not help it, she was obliged to dance a few steps; and when she had once begun, her legs continued to dance. It seemed as if the shoes had got power over them. She danced round the church corner, for she could not stop; the coachman had to run after her and seize her.

At home the shoes were put into the cupboard, but the girl could not help looking at them.

Retail Therapy

WOMAN 1
And then she started yelling at all of us like we were kids or something. Kept us a half hour over just so she could go through all our lockers. I'm telling you. If I could get a job at the mall, I'd tell her to shove this one up her fat-- Hi! Ready to check out? The mall would be nice, wouldn't it? Smaller store to keep up, more customers, a food court for lunch-- This is so cute, isn't it? Did you see the purple ones hanging next to it? You know, it's buy one, get one fifty percent off-- No more packing a lunch or dealing with that nasty microwave. I can just pop out to Dog on a Stick anytime I want. That will be a fine day. Will you be using your Barker's Store card today? Would you like to apply-- it only takes a couple of minutes-- okay. I didn't even get my lunch on time. It was so crazy-- Would you like your receipt with you or in the bag? There you go-- thanks! Every time Stella asks me to cover it's because-- what's that little girl-- the brunette one. The one who drives that sports car. No, the brunette one. Did you want to try those on? The second room is open. She's always coming in late. If you or I did that, we'd get fired. I don't know why they keep her on. Here-- I'll take those. Did any of these work for you? Okay. Alexis. That's her name. Maybe I should talk to her. I don't know how much guidance she gets, you know? She seems a bit flighty. She could benefit from my experience. I've been around the block a time or two. Is this all for you? Was someone helping you? Girls need guidance. I didn't have anyone to guide me when I was young.
Had to figure out things myself, and I made a lot of mistakes along the way. If someone had told me this or that, things might’ve been easier. Are you going to use your Barker's Store card today? Would you like to apply? Sure-- just fill out this top part. But then again, I wasn’t one to listen. Probably would’ve just done whatever came into my hard head anyway. Great-- can I see your license? Comes from growing up the way I did. When I was a kid, people said I was nuts. Crazy. There you-- I'll give that back to you. It'll just take a minute. Family would tell strangers, "Don't upset her. She's crazy. She'll just get all up on you." What no one ever talked about was why I was always so angry. My mom took off and left me and my younger sister behind to fend for ourselves. I'm sorry-- is that an e or a c? Okay. My dad was gone to work, and when he was home he was drunk. No one thought to help out two little girls. Sometimes, we had to go to school with nothing to eat. Lunch time would come around and I'd find my little sister sitting in a corner crying, so I'd take her outside, as far from the school as we could get, and I would tell her stories I made up to distract her from how hungry she was. Other times... I swiped other kid’s lunches to feed her. So yeah. I probably had anger issues. Besides, if anyone was crazy, it was my mom. She left us two or three times for her boyfriends. Alright-- it approved you! Yep. Would like to put this on you new card? You get ten percent off your total purchase for opening a new account. She did love men. Except her husband. I think it broke his heart, seeing her run off. He believed alcohol can make you forget things. So, then, a lot of alcohol can make you forget a lot of things. Receipt with you or in the bag? There you go-- thanks for stopping in! One day, he was driving while he was drinking and hit another car with a pregnant woman in it. Killed her and the baby. Courts ran him out of the state. That's when my sister and I went to live with my grandmother. Best thing that ever happened to us. Anyway, it's important Alexis get some guidance. I'd feel really bad if I just stood back and watched, you know? I mean, it's my responsibility as her elder, right?

**Wake**

WOMAN 2
Hi--

WOMAN 1
Hi.

WOMAN 2
Are you-- I'm sorry.

WOMAN 1
No-- go ahead?
WOMAN 2
I just thought. You must be related. You look just like her.

WOMAN 1
She's my aunt.

WOMAN 2
Mine too! I mean-- she was married to my uncle.

WOMAN 1
Oh! Larry?

WOMAN 2
No--

WOMAN 1
Sorry. Thomas--

WOMAN 2
No--

WOMAN 1/WOMAN 2
Buck.

Awkward silence.

WOMAN 2
I'm Laura... She was always really nice to me.

WOMAN 1
Sandra.

WOMAN 2
I remember you. Sorry for your loss.

WOMAN 1
Thank you. You too.

Long pause.

WOMAN 2
Funerals have a way of reminding you about priorities, right?
WOMAN 1
All I can think about right now is how tight these panty-hose are.

WOMAN 2
Oh.

WOMAN 1
But yeah...

I think I remember you.

WOMAN 2
Really?

WOMAN 1
You were at the house a lot when we were little.

WOMAN 2
Was I?

WOMAN 1
There was this little hole in the closet door in our hallway. You could maybe stick a pencil in it. So I stuck your finger in it.

WOMAN 2
Oh my god I remember that! That was you?

WOMAN 1
Fire department had to come cut you loose.

WOMAN 2
Yeah.

Pause.

WOMAN 1
Sorry about that.

WOMAN 2
It's okay.

It was a nice service.
WOMAN 1
Except the preacher--

WOMAN 2
I thought he was good--

WOMAN 1
He didn't know her name.

WOMAN 2
Well, I think he's--

WOMAN 1
When I die, I don't want anyone speaking about me who doesn't know my nickname.

WOMAN 2
What's-- what's your nickname?

WOMAN 1
I don't know what the plan is--

WOMAN 2
Plan?

WOMAN 1
For her body.

WOMAN 2
Won't-- they'll bury her, right?

WOMAN 1
Where?

WOMAN 2
I don't know.

WOMAN 1
I mean, are they going to take her back to the family plot?

WOMAN 2
I don't know. Didn't you talk to your cousin?
WOMAN 1
Don't think it's my place.

WOMAN 2
Where's the family plot?

WOMAN 1
Alabama.

WOMAN 2
Ah. Well. Shouldn't they bury her here? I mean? Not here, here, but this general... geographically speaking. This general area. Where she lived.

WOMAN 1
I would think so.

WOMAN 2
Yeah--

WOMAN 1
But it's not my call, is it.

WOMAN 2
Guess not.

WOMAN 1
So, what have you been doing since. Since forever.

WOMAN 2
I live about twenty miles from here. I... It's been kinda tough for me.

WOMAN 1
Yeah?

WOMAN 2
I was married. Great guy. But I just left him. Don't know why. Then I had a breakdown, so I was institutionalized for awhile. But I'm better.

WOMAN 1
Good to hear.
WOMAN 2
Yeah. I work at a golf course. In the pro shop.

WOMAN 1
Oh. You golf?

WOMAN 2
No... Where's-- your mom's not here?

WOMAN 1
She died. About ten years ago.

WOMAN 2
I didn't know-- I'm so sorry.

WOMAN 1
Thank you.

WOMAN 2
So you've been through this--

WOMAN 1
Yeah.

WOMAN 2
My mom's still alive. I don't know what I'd do without her.

WOMAN 1
Good. That's good.

WOMAN 2
Yeah. Did-- I haven't gone up to look at her.

WOMAN 1
You don't have to if you don't want.

WOMAN 2
I don't want to be rude.

WOMAN 1
It's not rude.
WOMAN 2
You don't think so?

WOMAN 1
It's not for everyone.

WOMAN 2
Thank you for understanding.

WOMAN 1
Listen, I should go talk to--

WOMAN 2
Yeah-- sorry.

WOMAN 1
No problem. Are you going to the house? After?

WOMAN 2
Think that'd be okay?

WOMAN 1
Sure. There'll be a ton of food.

WOMAN 2
I am hungry.

WOMAN 1
Okay. See you there.

Woman 1 walks away.

WOMAN 2
Okay.

WOMAN 1
Now the old lady fell ill, and it was said that she would not rise from her bed again. She had to be nursed and waited upon, and this was no one's duty more than the girl's. But there was a grand ball in the town, and she was invited. She looked at the red shoes, saying to herself that there was no sin in doing that; she put the red shoes on, thinking there was no harm in that either; and then she went to the ball; and commenced to dance.
**Damaged People**


WOMAN 1
One morning on my way to work, I saw this couple. Walking alongside the road. It was barely getting light, so I couldn't see them really well until I was almost on top of them. Then I realized-- they were fighting. Couldn't hear what they were saying, but man, they were going at it. Poking each other, screaming, walking away and then turning back around. I slowed way down in case one of them pushed the other one in front of my car.

Not really. I just wanted to watch.

Projection fades.

I do that when I'm driving... I mean, home or the store or wherever-- I watch people. I watch them standing in parking lots and on the side of the road with their signs begging for money... Or sitting in their cars taking them to jobs so they can earn money to make the payments on the car taking them to their jobs...

I watch all those little stick figure pictures on the back window-- One dad, one mom, big brother, little sister, the dog, the cat... A neat little row of stick figure people living their little stick lives. Once I saw a stick figure family with a big "X" through the dad. Doesn't take much to figure out how that fairy tale ended.

Another time, I watched this man crossing the street. He was-- crippled-- on one side. He would take a step with his right foot, pull his left side up. Step. Pull. All the way across. My heart broke at how fragile he looked. I thought... Hey-- see there? You are so lucky to be who you are. To be sitting in this car, watching that poor man.

So many people are hurt and broken and they're scared because everything that used to be simple is now impossible. It's like life has carved off little pieces of them-- just a little piece at a time so they don't notice until one day they look around and realize how much is missing. And then it's too late to fight back.

It's all relative, isn't it? My problems are bigger than yours, but his problems are bigger than both of us. Your stick figure dad is gone but you've got the minivan. And I might go home alone at night, but I'm not standing on the side of the road at dawn duking it out with anyone. And neither of us is trying to drag a broken leg across the street before the lights change and someone honks and calls us names for no reason other than they're scared of damaged people.
But see-- that's the funny part. We're all damaged.

*The Madness in Great Ones*

The women play a game of chess.

WOMAN 2
Tomorrow. Are you ready?

WOMAN 1
If I say no?

WOMAN 2
You're still getting kicked out of here.

WOMAN 1
Then there's no need to ask if I'm ready.

WOMAN 2
You're ready.

They play on in silence.

WOMAN 2
Dr. Castleberry isn't speaking to me.

WOMAN 1
No?

WOMAN 2
Nope. He's still mad at me for pushing it.

WOMAN 1
He thinks I should stay here.

WOMAN 2
He thinks wrong.

WOMAN 1
I don't want to be the cause of your fight.
WOMAN 2
There's no fight. He isn't in charge. He likes to think he is, but he's not.

WOMAN 1
He's looked out for me for a long time.

WOMAN 2
It's my opinion that if he were really interested in what's best for you, you would have been out of here ten years ago.

    No response. Silence. They play.

WOMAN 2
You can do this.

    Pause.

WOMAN 1
When I was a teenager, my uncle gave me a horse. He refused to jump over anything. He'd gallop right up to it, then at the last second he'd just... swerve around it. So that's what I called him-- Swerve.

WOMAN 2
Afraid?

WOMAN 1
I don't think it was fear. More like... A decision he made. I got thrown off that horse so many times until I learned his tricks. But I did. I learned. One day, he swerved, and was he surprised when I stayed in the saddle.

WOMAN 2
I bet he was.

WOMAN 1
After that, we were best friends. We understood each other's weaknesses, and we were okay with it.

    Woman 1 makes several moves, taking a couple of Woman 2's pawns. Woman 2 studies the board for a moment.

WOMAN 2
I always wanted a horse.
WOMAN 1
I miss him.

WOMAN 2
Swerve. That's a great name.

WOMAN 1
I think I'll get a horse. When I leave.

WOMAN 2
That sounds like a splendid idea.

Woman 2 pushes away from the table, no longer interested in the game.

WOMAN 2
And you're kicking my ass again.

WOMAN 1
You're distracted.

WOMAN 2
No, you're just good.

WOMAN 1
I've had more practice. Years of it.

WOMAN 2
You're nervous, aren't you?

WOMAN 1
I am.

WOMAN 2
You're going to be fine.

WOMAN 1
I don't know. I haven't got a clue how to live-- outside.

WOMAN 2
You're smart and talented and you're going to live a wonderful life.
WOMAN 1
I'm too old.

WOMAN 2
For what?

WOMAN 1
Life.

WOMAN 2
How old are you.

WOMAN 1
Fifty--

WOMAN 2
Fifty. That's nothing! You're entering the prime time.

WOMAN 1
With no experience to help me-- out-- there.

WOMAN 2
Lots of women have found themselves right where you are. Maybe they haven't been in a-- a-- place like this--

WOMAN 1
Call it what it is.

WOMAN 2
Hospital.

WOMAN 1
Institution.

WOMAN 2
The point is, they're starting over just like you. They have no idea where they're headed, but they're going to take the first step and see where it takes them. You're not the only woman who's ever been stuck in the interval.

WOMAN 1
I'm not really looking for a pep talk.
WOMAN 2
Okay. I'm just telling you, when you leave here you can do whatever you want. Or nothing at all. The choice is yours.

Woman 1 moves pieces around the board, playing both sides.

WOMAN 1
And what if I'm still crazy?

WOMAN 2
Of course you are.

All the great ones are mad.

WOMAN 2
But when she wanted to go to the right, the shoes danced to the left, and when she wanted to dance up the room, the shoes danced down the room, down the stairs through the street, and out through the gates of the town. She danced, and was obliged to dance, far out into the dark wood. She danced and was obliged to go on dancing over field and meadow, in rain and sunshine, by night and by day.

She danced out into the open churchyard; but the dead there did not dance. They had something better to do than that.

Silence

Woman 1 sits in a chair, staring ahead.

WOMAN 1
There's no such thing as silence. There's no true absence of sound. Stop up your ears--you will still hear the sound of your own blood, the low buzz of energy radiating from your body. The quiet hush of your lungs pushing breath in and out. Sit in your silent house and hear the refrigerator, the floors settling, the passing of cars. The heater clicks on. Firewood pops. If you listen very carefully, you can even make out the hum of electricity within your walls.

There's no escaping sound. Maybe in space. I'm told there's an absence of sound in space because there's no atmosphere to carry the sound waves.
I accept that. But even then, we can't experience that silence. The only silence I have to look forward to is the silence of death. When I die, don't cremate me. I don't want to be a part of the noise of earth.

No. Bury me. Seal me in a box, wrap me in a shroud, I don't care. But bury me deep so that when the final shovel of dirt is tamped down on my grave I will be swallowed up by silence that cannot be broken.

*The Hardest Conversation*

Woman 2 hovers over Woman 1.

**WOMAN 2**
Are you thirsty?

**WOMAN 1**
I'm fine.

**WOMAN 2**
Hungry?

**WOMAN 1**
No.

**WOMAN 2**
You need to eat, mom.

**WOMAN 1**
It's not going to happen. I'll just throw it up.

**WOMAN 2**
But you have to keep your strength up.

**WOMAN 1**
I'll try to eat later.

**WOMAN 2**
The doctor said--

**WOMAN 1**
Honey. You have to calm down. You're stressing me out.
WOMAN 2
I can't help it.

WOMAN 1
I know. Just. Come sit by me.

WOMAN 2
Don't you want to go lie down?

WOMAN 1
In a bit. Sit by me.

Pause. Woman 2 takes the other chair. Woman 1 takes her hand.

WOMAN 1
Better. What a nice evening.

WOMAN 2
It is.

WOMAN 1
I'm glad it's warm. I was so afraid I would die when the ground was frozen--

WOMAN 2
Mom!

WOMAN 1
What? I was!

WOMAN 2
Don't talk like that.

WOMAN 1
Like what?

WOMAN 2
I can't...

WOMAN 1
Honey. Not talking about it isn't going to change that it's happening.

WOMAN 2
I know. I'm sorry. It's just really hard. Not a conversation I ever thought I'd have to have.

Maybe the lights change a little. Or it is only in the bodies of the women.

Woman 1 rises, begins pacing in anger. Woman 2 slumps, sullen.

**WOMAN 1**
You're not explaining yourself very well.

**WOMAN 2**
I'm trying--

**WOMAN 1**
Just tell me why--

**WOMAN 2**
I'm trying! Tommy wanted to go to Hastings to buy a CD--

**WOMAN 1**
Who buys CDs anymore?

**WOMAN 2**
What?

**WOMAN 1**
CDs. Everyone downloads.

**WOMAN 2**
Not everyone.

**WOMAN 1**
Everyone in your generation.

**WOMAN 2**
You know what everyone in my generation does--

**WOMAN 1**
Don't get smart with me.

**WOMAN 2**
It's a legitimate question!
WOMAN 1
All I'm saying is that it's hard for me to see how a trip to Hastings--

WOMAN 2
I'm trying to explain.

WOMAN 1
Then explain.

WOMAN 2
You keep interrupting me!

WOMAN 1
I'm tired. Okay? It's three a.m. I have to get up and go to work in four hours. Just skip all the CD stuff and explain to me how you ended up in the parking lot of the Catholic school with the head of a pirate in your back seat.

WOMAN 2
I wanted the purple cow, but we couldn't break it loose.

WOMAN 1
You're not funny.

WOMAN 2
Not trying to be.

WOMAN 1
Are you drunk?

WOMAN 2
Why else would I have a pirate's head?

Lights shift again. Or just the women.

Woman 1 is focused on something else when Woman 2, now eight years old, pounces.

WOMAN 2
Did you know there's three kinds of anthrax?

WOMAN 1
Wha--
WOMAN 2
There's the intestinal kind, that you get from eating meat and then there's the skin kind that gets in like a cut or sore and then the-- the--

WOMAN 1
Have you been on my computer?

WOMAN 2
Pulmonary one that you get when you breathe it in--

WOMAN 1
What?

WOMAN 2
Mom! Aren't you listening? The intestinal kind--

WOMAN 1
No-- the last one--

WOMAN 2
Pulmonary.

WOMAN 1
You know the word pulmonary?

WOMAN 2
I looked it up. It means carried on by the lungs... Breathed in.

WOMAN 1
How long have you been awake?

WOMAN 2
Since six. You told me not to wake you up.

WOMAN 1
Why is it I can't get you out of bed on school days, but come the weekend you're up at the crack of dawn?

WOMAN 2
I had to look up anthrax.
WOMAN 1
Why can't you watch cartoons, like other kids?

WOMAN 2
What?

WOMAN 1
Never mind. Did you eat breakfast?

WOMAN 2
I had cereal.

WOMAN 1
Oh good. Sugar to start the day.

WOMAN 2
I made you coffee.

WOMAN 1
You did? Well. You've been a busy kid, haven't you?

WOMAN 2
I don't know how much to put in, so it might be too strong.

WOMAN 1
I bet it'll be just fine. And why are you researching anthrax?

WOMAN 2
Because in Science class yesterday I asked Mrs. Hatch what anthrax was because it was in the news and she said *There you go again, asking the wrong questions* cause we are studying cells and that I should look it up for myself so I found it on the Internet.

Pause. Woman 1 stares at Woman 2.

WOMAN 1
She said that to you? That you're asking the wrong questions?

WOMAN 2
We're studying cells. Not anthrax.

WOMAN 1
Okay, but she said that to you?
WOMAN 2
So it was the wrong question.

    Woman 1 grabs Woman 2 and pulls her into a hug.

WOMAN 1
Baby, promise me you'll keep asking the wrong questions, okay? You keep asking, and I'll help you find all the answers.

WOMAN 2
And as she danced past the open church door she saw an angel there in long white robes, with wings reaching from his shoulders down to the earth; his face was stern and grave, and in his hand he held a broad shining sword.

"Dance you shall," said he, "dance in your red shoes till you are pale and cold, till your skin shrivels up and you are a skeleton! Dance you shall, dance—!"

WOMAN 1
Blah, blah, blah.

WOMAN 2
Wait--

    Woman 1 sits, begins removing the red shoes. She mumbles under her breath.

WOMAN 2
What are you doing?

WOMAN 1
Until you're pale and cold and shriveled and--

WOMAN 2
You can't just--

WOMAN 1
What?

WOMAN 2
The story-- you have to--

WOMAN 1
Have to do what?

WOMAN 2
You have to-- finish. Finish the story.

WOMAN 1
THAT story? I don't think so.

WOMAN 2
I don't understand-- I thought we were telling-- everyone is listening--

WOMAN 1
I changed my mind. Woman's prerogative and all that.

WOMAN 2
Can you do that?

WOMAN 1
Done.

WOMAN 2
But how does it end?

WOMAN 1
THAT story?

WOMAN 2
Uh-- yes, THAT story!

WOMAN 1
The girl's feet are cut off, she's fitted with wooden shoes, eventually repents her wicked ways, and dies.

Pause

WOMAN 2
Damn.

WOMAN 1
Right?

WOMAN 2
I don't like that story.

WOMAN 1
Me either.

They stare at the red shoes.

WOMAN 1
I say, she should've stuck with the red shoes. She should tell that angel, "Why yes, thank you, I'll keep right on dancing."

WOMAN 2
Shake your booty!

WOMAN 1
Swing those hips!

WOMAN 2
Don't be telling me I can't dance!

WOMAN 1
I'm gonna dance my way all over the world!

WOMAN 2
Oh, that sounds much more fun than clumping around in wooden shoes. And dying.

WOMAN 1
Imagine what you could've seen. What she would have to tell us then! THAT's the story I want to hear.

WOMAN 2
Yeah. Yeah. She should've stuck with the red shoes.

Lights fade until they are only on the shoes. Then

Blackout.

End.

"The Red Shoes" by Hans Christian Anderson.

"Rehab." Written and recorded by Amy Winehouse, 2006.
Shared Misery

COLD OPENING

INT. LEDBETTER HOME -- NIGHT

Late evening. The kitchen is quiet, the only light coming from a bulb over the sink.

It is a tidy but old space. Worn cabinets, terrible wallpaper, linoleum floors.

The soft click click click of a clock on the wall.

Then the sound of heavy breathing. Grunts. Odd thumps. Shuffling. The sounds grow louder.

Three WOMEN enter the kitchen. Two look very much alike, but the third, whose face and shirt are smeared with something, is smaller and more fragile looking. And she’s been crying.

The women struggle to the center of the room, fighting to move a large object that looks much like a BODY wrapped in a bedspread. They bump into the table, knock over a chair.

Suddenly, the muffled yet unmistakable sound of MUSIC. Not only is the music jarring, it’s annoying as hell.

The women freeze.

Then all three panic. They drop the package and begin pulling on the bedspread as they try to find the source.

Finally, one of the women gives a whoop of victory as she holds up a CELL PHONE in the air. It stops with the maddening ringtone.

All three women, ruffled and out of breath, stare at it in her hand. Then one of the women jerks open a drawer, pulls out a MEAT TENDERIZER. She grabs the phone from the other woman, slams it onto the counter, and beats the crap out of it with the meat tenderizer. The other two don’t interrupt.

When she is finished, she throws the mangled phone back onto the bedspread. Without a word, the three women pick up where they left off.

END COLD OPENING
EXT. LEDBETTER HOUSE - DAY

The Ledbetter home on a late spring day. A two-story Victorian, the house could use a little attention.

In the large back yard is a grill. Patio furniture bought from Target. A small garden. A swing set, some toys scattered about.

LEGEND: “ONE WEEK EARLIER”

In the garden stands TRINNIE LEDBETTER, 35. She is the meat tenderizer-wielding woman from the teaser. Attractive, but washed-out, with sad eyes, an unsmiling demeanor, a blue-jeans-and-tee-shirt kind of woman. Trinnie is watering her tomatoes. The plants are unhealthy looking, and the few small green orbs hanging on the vines hold no promise.

Trinnie reaches over and pinches a brown leaf from a tomato plant.

INT. LEDBETTER HOME - DAY

Trinnie continues through her day. She checks on CHACE (3), who watches one of those obnoxious children’s programs.

With the sound of the insufferable television program in the background, Trinnie walks from room to room, gathering laundry.

She enters the BOYS’ room. Trinnie gathers the laundry, then stops, looking around. Sniffing. Something is definitely rotten in Denmark.

Digging around, Trinnie climbs into the closet, moving shoes and toys on the floor. Then she finds it-- an old Easter egg. She recoils from it, sitting back on her heels.

Trinnie pulls the neck of her shirt up over her nose and stares into the closet.

INT. LEDBETTER HARDWARE STORE- OFFICE - DAY

The office wall could use fresh paint, or at least some heavy-duty soap and water. It has numerous nail holes and yellowed pieces of tape where pictures once hung.

The only decoration present now is a calender, displaying a glossy photograph of a country landscape, a gift from the local bank.
Suddenly JIMMY LEDBETTER (38) is slammed against the wall, knocking the calender down. He grimaces in pain, grasping the large hands of

OSBORNE FORNES, 45, a silver-back gorilla of a man who towers over Jimmy. Osborne is the kind of man who makes “Have a nice day” sound like a threat.

JIMMY
Shit! Come on, man, take it easy!

OSBORNE
You’ve been saying that for weeks, Jimmy. You think I’m not taking it easy? Huh? Should I show you just how easy I’ve been taking it?

JIMMY
I get it! Lemme go. Let’s talk.

OSBORNE
That’s all we do, Jimmy. I think it’s time for a little walk in that talk, know what I mean?

JIMMY
Oz--Osborne-- look. I know you’ve been a patient man. I appreciate that--

OSBORNE
--It’s not appreciation I want.

Osborne slams Jimmy again, holds him against the wall for a beat. Then he lets Jimmy go, who crumbles to the floor.

Osborne steps away from him and sits down in a chair at Jimmy’s desk. He begins opening desk drawers, rifling the contents.

He’s not looking for anything-- he just enjoys making a mess.

JIMMY
If you could give me just a little longer--

OSBORNE
See, that’s the thing, Jimmy. I’ve given you longer. Longer than longer. I’ve given you miles of longer, haven’t I? But there comes a point when longer starts looking a whole lot like “Fuck you, Osborne”.

JIMMY
I’m not sure what you expect me to do--
OSBORNE
If memory serves me right, it was you that came to me to form this partnership--

JIMMY
I thought it would be--

OSBORNE
--I’m still talking. You came to me with a proposition, an equal distribution of labor.

JIMMY
You don’t understand how it is! I have to... to make things look right. Fix the inventory. Move the money around. That takes time!

Osborne stands up and moves from behind the desk.

OSBORNE
The truck will be here this afternoon-

JIMMY
I’m not comfortable with taking more... inventory... right now--

OSBORNE
And I’m not comfortable with the position you’ve put me in. The truck will be here this afternoon.

Osborne pushes his way out of the office.

INT. LEDBETTER HARDWARE STORE- MAIN STORE - CONT.

Jimmy follows him into the store, putting on a fake smile for his employees.

JIMMY
Okay, Oz, it was great seeing you! Have a great afternoon!

Osborne doesn’t answer. Jimmy combs back his hair and turns back to the employees. He doesn’t look at them as he returns to the office, shutting the door.

INT. LEDBETTER HOME - CONT.

Trinnie is in the kitchen, making lunch for Chace. He sits in his booster chair, playing cars on the table.
Trinnie turns to him with a plate. She sweeps the cars away from him, and they land near a pile of mail. A couple of pieces have been opened, ones with FINAL NOTICE and DISCONNECT NOTICE printed in large red letters at the top.

Trinnie’s cell phone is also on the table, near Chace. It rings, the display lighting up. Before Trinnie can pick it up, Chace does, putting it to his ear.

CHACE
Hello!

Trinnie tries to take it from him, but he twists away, fighting her.

TRINNIE
Give me the phone--

Chace isn’t going to give it up. They tussle, and when he thinks he’s lost, he does the only sensible thing a kid can do-- drops it into Trinnie’s coffee cup.

Trinnie stares at the phone submerged in coffee. Chace laughs--this is great fun.

INT. LEDBETTER HARDWARE STORE- OFFICE CONT.

Jimmy slumps at his desk, his expression dark. After a moment, he pushes back and grabs a box of files, which he dumps onto the desk.

He crosses to a small SAFE sitting on the floor, covered in piles of papers and objects.

Jimmy opens the door. Inside is money. A lot of money. Jimmy begins pulling it out, shoving it into the box.

After he has emptied the safe, he seals the box with packing tape and sets it under his desk. He exits the office.

INT. LEDBETTER HARDWARE STORE- CONT.

Jimmy looks around until he sees EMMI NICHOLS, 23. Emmi, who we met in the teaser, is a tiny woman, a porcelain doll. She smiles at Jimmy. He combs his hair back again and walks over to her.

EXT. HOLLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - AFTERNOON
Trinnie sits in her car, watching as children pour out of the elementary school. Finally, all the children have left the building, but there is no sign of DALTON (9).

INT. HOLLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CONT.

Trinnie enters the school with Chace on her hip. She enters the office and finds Dalton sitting in a chair, staring at the ground.

TRINNIE
What are you doing? What’s wrong?

PRINCIPLE AVERY steps out of the office, placing a hand on Dalton’s shoulder.

AVERY
Mrs. Ledbetter-- thank you for coming in. I wasn’t sure you’d get my message--

TRINNIE
I didn’t-- what-- message?

AVERY
Oh. I-- called your house, but the number is disconnected--

TRINNIE
Yeah. We decided-- we didn’t need a land line... you know... with cell phones--

AVERY
I did leave a message on your cell phone--

TRINNIE
Okay. Is there a problem?

AVERY
Come on in.

Avery steps back into the office. Trinnie glares at Dalton, silently mouthing “What did you do?” Dalton shrugs and looks back down. Trinnie sets Chace in the chair next to him.

INT. HOLLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - OFFICE - CONT.

Avery attempts to smile, but it isn’t a very convincing one.
AVERY
Please have a seat.

TRINNIE
I’m fine. We really have to get to the high school to pick up my daughter--

AVERY
Mrs. Ledbetter, this is important. Please.

Trinnie grudgingly takes the seat.
AVERY
There was an incident with Dalton. Apparently, he didn’t study for his math test today.

TRINNIE
I’m sorry-- he didn’t-- study? So you kept him after school?

AVERY
The test was scheduled after morning recess. Dalton took the tests from the teacher’s desk while everyone was outside, carried them to the back of the playground... and set them on fire.

TRINNIE
Oh my God--

AVERY
--Unfortunately, the fire spread to the grass. And then to the apple tree on the lot that borders the school. The homeowner, luckily, was able to keep the fire contained until the fire department arrived.

TRINNIE
Fire department?

EXT. HOLLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CONT.

Trinnie, Avery, Chace, and Dalton stand before the scene of the crime. There are burn marks on the ground that cover at least a 30 foot radius.
In the middle of the black ground is a large gap where a wood fence once stood, and behind it, the black and smoking remains of the apple tree.

INT. VEHICLE - LATER

Trinnie slaps the steering wheel for emphasis as she yells at Dalton.
TRINNIE
I want to understand this, Dalton. What-- You woke up this morning and thought, “Hey, I think I’ll burn someone’s house down today”? It was a math test, Dalton! You’ve flunked plenty of them in the past. What made this one so special, huh?

The passenger door opens and ELIZABETH (15), Trinnie’s oldest child, jumps into the car.

TRINNIE
Give me your phone--

Elizabeth pulls the phone from her back pocket. Trinnie dials.

INT. LEDBETTER HARDWARE STORE- OFFICE CONT.

Jimmy has Emmi pressed up against the wall, making out with her. He has rounded second and is headed for home.

Jimmy’s cell phone begins buzzing in his back pocket. In what looks like a very practiced move, Jimmy takes the phone out, presses the mute button, and tosses the phone onto a chair, all without a single glance at the screen.

INT. VEHICLE - CONT.

Trinnie has the phone to her ear, listening to Jimmy’s voice mail message. She slams the phone into the cup holder between the seats.

Elizabeth retrieves her phone and returns it to her pocket.

ELIZABETH
What’s wrong?

TRINNIE
Your brother tried to burn down a house.

Elizabeth turns around to look at Dalton, who is now crying.

ELIZABETH
You burned down a house?

DALTON
IT WASN’T A HOUSE, MOM! IT WAS A TREE! JUST A TREE!
ELIZABETH
You’re just a little pyromaniac, aren’t ya?

TRINNIE
Elizabeth--

ELIZABETH
Well, he is! The shed last summer, now someone’s tree--

TRINNIE
--The shed was an accident!

Elizabeth looks back at Trinnie, who stares at Dalton in the rearview mirror.

ELIZABETH
Where’d you get the lighter?

DALTON
Leave me alone--

ELIZABETH
--Or did you use dad’s blowtorch again? Rub two sticks together?

DALTON
Shut up!

Elizabeth reaches back and takes Chace’s hand.

ELIZABETH
Hope your pajamas are flame retardant, little dude--

DALTON
SHUT UP!

ELIZABETH
You shut up!

TRINNIE
Both of you shut up.

Dalton and Elizabeth, mercifully, shut up. For a moment.
ELIZABETH
Can I drive?

Trinnie doesn’t even look at her. Elizabeth shrugs and looks out the window, a mirror of Dalton in the back seat. Trinnie pulls away from the curb.

INT. LEDBETTER HARDWARE STORE- OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Jimmy and Emmi are finished with their... meeting. They are both struggling to find discarded clothing and get dressed.

The front door jangles, letting them know someone has entered the store. Jimmy ignores it. Emmi gives him a shove.

EMMI
Someone’s in the store!

JIMMY
Let Sam take care of them--

EMMI
-- Sam left early. No one’s out there.

Jimmy curses. Straightening his shirt, he exits the office to find Trinnie standing in the aisle, a hand holding Dalton in front of her.

JIMMY
Hey guys! Hey there, Dal-- what--

Trinnie pushes Dalton towards Jimmy. At the same moment, Emmi exits the office, straightening her hair. She sees Trinnie and freezes. She and Trinnie stare at each other.

She’s busted and she knows it.

Jimmy pretends not to notice.

Emmi slinks away.

JIMMY
Dalton? What’s wrong, pal?
Trinnie brings her attention back to her husband, her face a blank mask.

TRINNIE
Your son set another fire.

INT. LEDBETTER HOME - LATER

The kitchen table is covered with a cloth on which rests various paints and brushes. Trinnie is painting a bird house, something that looks like a Swiss Chalet.

AUBREY(“SISSY” to Trinnie), 35, her fraternal twin, leans against the counter. They resemble each other, but Aubrey looks younger. She is well-dressed, cool in a wrap dress, her hair, nails, and make-up done.

AUBREY
Just be glad he didn’t burn himself-

TRINNIE
What’s it cost to replace a fence?

AUBREY
You own a hardware store.

TRINNIE
What if they want a new tree?

AUBREY
They’re not going to ask for a tree-

TRINNIE
Or they want us to pay for the apples that would’ve grown for the next forty years?

AUBREY
No one’s going to make you pay for apples--

TRINNIE
We can’t afford this-- we haven’t even rebuilt the shed.

AUBREY
Take a breath--
TRINNIE
And then-- I go to the store and find-- I mean, what is he thinking? That girl can’t be seventeen years old!

AUBREY
Again?

TRINNIE
Five minutes sooner--

AUBREY
What did you do?

TRINNIE
Nothing. I had Dalton with me. Besides, he would’ve just said the same thing he always says. “Oh, now Trinnie, you’re overreacting. You always think the worst of me!”

AUBREY
That’s because he’s always up to his worst.

TRINNIE
Not helping, Sissy.

AUBREY
Sorry.

TRINNIE
He’s always kept his crap quiet. Now he just flaunts it in front of everyone.

AUBREY
You and the kids could come stay with me--

TRINNIE
I have three kids. Three kids and no job, no prospects, no money--

AUBREY
You deserve better, Trinnie. You’re a good woman. There’s good men out there, you know?

TRINNIE
The last thing I want is another man.
Trinnie continues painting in silence.

TRINNIE
Besides... Why should I leave... leave my house, put my kids in turmoil--

AUBREY
Well, yeah--

TRINNIE
Do you know I actually thought he was over all this? I mean, it’s been awhile since he stepped out. Since... well, since--

    Aubrey doesn’t answer, but her body language speaks for her. Volumes.

TRINNIE
What?

AUBREY
What?

TRINNIE
What do you know?

AUBREY
Nothing!

TRINNIE
Don’t even-- just-- what?

AUBREY
Let it go, Trinnie.

TRINNIE
Sissy. Just say it.

AUBREY
Will it change your mind about staying?

    Trinnie waits, paint brush poised over the bird house.

AUBREY
Gina.
Trinnie stares at her sister for a beat.

TRINNIE
Gina?

AUBREY
Gina.

TRINNIE
Our cousin? That Gina?

AUBREY
That one.

Trinnie covers her face with her hands, shaking.

AUBREY
Oh, honey, don’t cry!

But Trinnie isn’t crying. She is laughing hysterically. She has finally reached the end of her rope.

AUBREY
Are you okay?

TRINNIE
Momma always said “Marry a family man.” Don’t think this is what she meant.

Trinnie stands up and starts closing her paints.

TRINNIE
Come on.

AUBREY
Where?

Trinnie doesn’t answer, only yells out the kitchen door to her daughter.

TRINNIE
Elizabeth! Watch your brothers. Sissy and I’ll be back in a little bit.

EXT./ INT. WAYFAIR TRAILER PARK - EVENING.
The Wayfair Trailer Park is a quiet place, older mobile homes sitting side-by-side, separated by short chain-link fences. Some yards are bare of landscaping, piles of junk here and there, but others are full of grass and climbing honeysuckle.

Space 23 is one of the nicer yards. The trailer is old, built in the 70’s, with a bank of windows at the end of the green home.

This is Emmi’s trailer. INSIDE is a magical place, a life-sized doll house.

Down the long hallway tiny lights hang from the ceiling and walls. Garage sale and dollar store finds, the white and gold twinkle reflects on the second-hand furniture.

From the kitchen we hear the sounds of pots and pans and water.

OUTSIDE, LOU (28), Emmi’s live-in boyfriend, pulls into the driveway. He gets out of his truck. He isn’t exactly sober. He leans against the truck, then crashes through the gate, up the deck steps, and into the front door.

IN THE KITCHEN, Emmi freezes, listening to Lou come into the house. She throws her dish towel onto the counter in anger.

She goes to the LIVING ROOM where Lou has collapsed onto the couch, one dirty boot on the arm of the sofa.

Taking a deep breath, Emmi gently pushes his leg so he will take it off the couch.

EMMI
Lou.

LOU
What?

EMMI
Your boots are dirty.

LOU
What the fuck, woman.

EMMI
Come on. I made dinner.
LOU
I’m tired.

EMMI
You’re drunk.

Lou pulls himself up, glaring at Emmi.

LOU
I really don’t want to listen to your shit. I had a crap day at work-

EMMI
You always have a crap day. Maybe you should look for another job.

LOU
Look for another job, huh? Sure. Maybe I’ll go work at the bank. I’d like to wear a nice suit and tie--

EMMI
Forget it--

LOU
--I come home after working my ass off to pay your bills and what do I get?

EMMI
My bills? You live here, too!

LOU
Just shut up, huh? Bring me a beer.

EMMI
There isn’t any.

LOU
Shut the fuck up. I just bought a case.

EMMI
Last weekend. And you drank it.

LOU
Bullshit.
EMMI
Go look for yourself.

LOU
I bought a case, and there should be beer in the fridge.

Emmi shrugs, goes to exit back to the kitchen.

LOU
What did you do with my beer, Emmi?

EMMI
Give me a break--

LOU
Bring me. A beer.

Emmi speaks sweetly, trying to diffuse the situation.

EMMI
I’ll go pick you some up after dinner. Okay? Let’s eat.

Emmi exits the living room, leaving Lou on the couch. He doesn’t get up, but is growing into a rage.

He reaches over and picks up a bowl of candy sitting on the coffee table and flings it across the room, striking the wall and scattering the candy.

Emmi runs back into the living room.

LOU
You think I don’t know?

EMMI
What’d you do that for!

LOU
You think I can’t see what’s going on around here?

EMMI
Come on, Lou--
LOU
“Come on, Lou. Come on, Lou--” You think I’m so stupid.

Lou rises from the couch, and little unsteady, but terrifying. Emmi retreats, moving down the hall.

LOU
You think I don’t know about your boyfriends--

EMMI
What’re you talking about, honey?

LOU
I know all about them. The-- the-- you have guys over here all the time when I’m not around--

EMMI
-- That’s not true.

LOU
-- They come in the back door while I’m headed out the front. But you think I don’t know nothing about it. They’re fucking you in my bed and DRINKING MY BEER.

Emmi has reached the end of the hall, trapped in the Christmas lights. Lou advances on her, then stops. He looks at the lights, then reaches up and grabs a strand, jerking it from the ceiling.

Emmi screams before she can stop herself.

Lou regards her for a moment, then reaches up and jerks down another strand.

LOU
White trash decorations. Just like you.

Lou advances on Emmi, trashing the lights as he goes.

As he reaches Emmi, she tries to run past him, but he grabs her and shoves her to the ground.

Emmi is crying, trying to crawl away, but there is nowhere to go.
EXT. EMMI’S TRAILER - LATER

Aubrey’s car drives slowly past Space 23.

INT. AUBREY’S CAR - CONT.

Aubrey and Trinnie are looking at the trailer, trying to see into the bank of windows. Everything looks dark. Lou’s truck is gone.

AUBREY
Are you sure that’s it?

TRINNIE
Go around the block again.

AUBREY
It’s a trailer park. There’s no blocks.

TRINNIE
Yes there is. Look-- the row ends down there. Intersects with another street. Block. Go.

Aubrey drives. The women remain silent.

AUBREY
Are we going to stop, or keep cruising her trailer?

TRINNIE
We’ll stop. Just give me a minute.

AUBREY
Take all the time you need.

TRINNIE
It’s not like I’ve ever done this before, Sissy. I mean, what’s the proper etiquette for confronting a woman sleeping with your husband?

Uncomfortable pause.

The women have arrived back at Emmi’s house. Aubrey pulls into the driveway before Trinnie can change her mind. She puts the car into park and turns off the headlights.
AUBREY
Let’s get this over with.

The women exit the car and go into the yard. They don’t notice the neighbor
next door watching them.

As they get to the deck, they see the metal chairs overturned, and a potted plant
on its side. The women stop where they are.

The porch light comes on, startling the women. Emmi stands at the front door, a
dark shape hard to make out.

The women stare at each other, no one moving.

EMMI
I thought you were Lou.

AUBREY
No.

EMMI
What do you want?

TRINNIE
I think we have something to talk about.

EMMI
Mrs. Ledbetter, this isn’t a good time--

TRINNIE
-- You can let us in, or I can say what I have to say from right here. Really loudly.

Emmi finally steps back, motioning for the women to enter. They pick their way
across the deck and enter the house.

The house has been ransacked. There is a hole in the wall. The television lies
face-down on the ground. Broken glass, wires, even an old bike laying on the
floor.

The women take in the scene, then look at Emmi. She has a rising bruise on her
face, red marks on her neck, and her shirt is ripped. Bruises are appearing on her
arms.
AUBREY
What the hell happened?

EMMI
Could we-- possibly do this later?

Aubrey is looking around the mess, hands on hips. She heads into the kitchen.

AUBREY
I think we need coffee. Do you have coffee?

Emmi starts to follow Aubrey into her kitchen.

EMMI
I can get it--

AUBREY (O.C.)
-- No, no, I’ll get it. You two just... Lovely-- you’ve already made a pot. I got this.

Emmi turns back to a glaring Trinnie. They regard each other.

EMMI
What do you want me to say?

TRINNIE
...

EMMI
Do you want to kick my ass too? Because I don’t know if I can take that right now.

TRINNIE
Don’t be dramatic. I came here to--

EMMI
--I’m sorry, okay? I really am. I have no idea what you want me to do, but... don’t just stand there. Say something.

TRINNIE
You’re not even going to try and deny it.

EMMI
I... didn’t know I could.
Aubrey sticks her head into the room.

AUBREY
Cream? Sugar?

Emmi looks over her shoulder at Aubrey.

EMMI
Thank you. (To Trinnie) I wish I could say something that would make everything go away.

TRINNIE
Yeah, that would be convenient for you, wouldn’t it.

Aubrey comes in with three full cups of hot coffee.

AUBREY
Here you go-- Emmi, I don’t know how you like to fix yours--

EMMI
-- This is fine. Thank you.

AUBREY
Come on. Sit down.

The women follow Aubrey’s lead and sit facing each other. Trinnie stares at Emmi, who cannot meet her gaze.

Three women sitting in silence, surrounded by the clutter of the ransacked room.

Finally:

AUBREY
This isn’t bad coffee, Emmi-- where do you buy it?

TRINNIE
Shut up about the coffee, Sissy.

AUBREY
Just making conversation!

TRINNIE
We’re not here for conversation... How OLD are you?
EMMI
Twenty-three--

AUBREY
Wow! You look a lot younger--

TRINNIE
Sissy, for God’s sake!

AUBREY
You’re going to be so glad for that in another ten years...

A long pause.

EMMI
You’re sisters?

AUBREY
Twins, actually.

EMMI
Really? You don’t-- I mean, you look like sisters, but you don’t look like--

AUBREY
Fraternal.

EMMI
Ah.

Trinnie makes a noise of disgust, but Aubrey chooses to ignore her.

AUBREY
So what happened here tonight?

Emmi stares at Aubrey, mouth open, and then bursts into tears. As she tries to compose herself, Aubrey and Trinnie make no move to comfort her, instead looking at each other, unsure what to do.

Trinnie stands, ready to leave.

TRINNIE
Let’s go.
AUBREY
We can’t just leave her like this!

TRINNIE
Watch me.

Trinnie heads to the door. As she opens it, Aubrey continues.

AUBREY
I don’t even know why we came in the first place, but we can’t--

TRINNIE
If you’re not coming, can I have the keys?

EMMI
No-- no. Your sister has every right... I screwed up. Again. I’m sorry, Mrs. Ledbetter. I wish I could make you understand that. But I just have a problem--

TRINNIE
-- Sleeping with other women’s husbands is a problem, yes.

EMMI
There’s something inside of me that’s like-- a porch light-- but instead of moths I attract bad men. Terry-- We got married at eighteen. He promised to take me to Tampa so I could see the Atlantic Ocean. I’ve always wanted to see the Atlantic Ocean. We stopped at a little gas station on the way and Terry told me to wait in the car. He robbed that store. It’s our honeymoon, and he robs a store. I guess I didn’t realize what he’d done until we got stopped the next day. I never did get to the ocean.

Then my second husband... Aaron... he upped and left when the circus came through. Ran off with a bare-back rider called Colette. Personally, I think she made that up. Who calls their kid Colette? And Lou-- well, he’s good at three things. Installing satellites, fixing cars, and beating me up. I think you know what I mean, don’t you, Mrs. Ledbetter?

TRINNIE
No, I don’t--

EMMI
About drawing the bad men? Cause you married a bad guy, too. What can we do?

TRINNIE
...
Later, I found out-- Tampa isn't even next to the Atlantic Ocean... Serves me right, I suppose.

EXT. LEDBETTER HOME - NIGHT

Jimmy gets out of his truck. The sound of a car stopping at the end of his driveway makes him turn around.

The driver side window rolls down and Osborne gives Jimmy a long look.

Osborne gives a nod, then rolls up the window and drives away.

Jimmy looks into the truck. The box of money sets on the seat. He reaches in, finds a jacket, and covers the box.

EXT. EMMI'S TRAILER - DECK - NIGHT

The deck has been set aright. The women sit in the three chairs side-by-side, staring into to the dark. No one speaks for awhile. Finally:

EMMI
Thank you. For helping me clean up.

Another silence.

AUBREY
It’s quiet here.

EMMI
Until Lou gets home.

AUBREY
Seems to me you’d be a lot better off without him.

EMMI
Yeah. Or learn to keep my mouth shut.

TRINNIE
That doesn’t make anything better.

Aubrey and Emmi turn their heads to regard Trinnie.
TRINNIE
You keep your mouth shut, pretend everything’s okay, pretend if your hope is just strong enough, things will get better. And then your husband sleeps with your sister. Emmi’s head snaps to Aubrey, who has stiffened.

Emmi leans towards Aubrey.

EMMI
You slept with Jimmy?

TRINNIE
And our cousin. Waitresses and neighbors and strangers and God only knows who else. Did you think you were special?

EMMI
I-- no--

TRINNIE
Cause you’re not. Jimmy’s never been good to me. Even Sissy says so. And she should know--

EMMI
You slept with your sister’s husband--

AUBREY
Do we have to talk about this now?

TRINNIE
No. We don’t. Let’s talk about something else...(Shakes her head) Crazy... But-- I’ve been thinking about something...

The shot pulls away from the deck, revealing the trailer and yard and the quiet night.

INT. LEDBETTER HOME - LATER

Trinnie enters the house, finds Jimmy and Elizabeth watching television. He looks up as she enters.

JIMMY
Where you been?
Trinnie holds up a new cell phone.

TRINNIE
Had to get a new phone--

JIMMY
Shit, Trinnie, we can’t keep buying new phones! You know business isn’t so hot right now--

TRINNIE
I have to have a phone, Jimmy. How else the school going to call me?

Jimmy gives her a long look, then finally nods and returns to his television show.

Trinnie watches them for a moment, then exits.

INT. LEDBETTER HARDWARE STORE- DAY

Emmi is working at the counter, filling out paper work. There is a steady stream of customers and the sound of conversations and the register.

Emmi does not look up, intent on her work. She doesn’t see the man who walks up to her, his back to us, until he speaks.

OSBORNE
Excuse me, miss--

EMMI
Oh! So sorry! You scared me-- sorry. Didn’t know you were standing there. Can I help you?

OSBORNE
(looks at her name tag)
Emmi--

EMMI
Yes--

OSBORNE
Yes. Is Mr. Ledbetter in his office?

EMMI
No, I’m sorry, he’s not coming in today.
OSBORNE
Really. That’s too bad. I was hoping to visit with him. Not coming in at all, huh?

EMMI
I’m afraid not. He went to Caborn. Should be in tomorrow, though-- or you could call him on his cell.

OSBORNE
I’ll do that.

Pauses, looking around the store.

OSBORNE
How long have you worked for Mr. Ledbetter, Emmi?

EMMI
Awhile... two years, maybe?

OSBORNE
Is that right? I guess he knows a good thing when he sees it.

Emmi can no longer meet Osborne’s intense gaze.

OSBORNE
Aww, what’s wrong? Did I embarrass you? I’m sorry. It’s just, you’re so pretty, you know? I’m sure lots of guys have told you that. Right?

EMMI
Thank you.

OSBORNE
You are so cute when you blush! Okay. I’ll stop. What’re you doing there?

EMMI
Just some paperwork for Mr. Ledbetter.

OSBORNE
Is that right?

EMMI
He’s been teaching me for the past few weeks. I add up payroll for him, um... pay the vendors, stuff like that.
OSBORNE
Well, beautiful and smart. Look at that.

    Osborne leans in, holding Emmi with his gaze.

EMMI
That’s really nice of you, Mr.--

OSBORNE
Oh how rude of me. Call me Oz.

EMMI
Oz.

OSBORNE
Your boss and me, we go way back. Years. Even before he was married to-- oh my gosh. Her name just slipped out of my mind!

EMMI
Trinnie?

OSBORNE
Trinnie. That’s it. Trinnie. Anyway, Jimmy and I actually went into business together. Did you know that?

EMMI
No--

OSBORNE
Sure enough. But business can cloudy the friendship waters, you know what I mean? We decided it best we separate business from fun.

Remember that, Emmi. Don’t go into business with friends. It just complicates things.

EMMI
I’ll keep that in mind.

OSBORNE
Well, look at me, taking up your time. I’ll let you get back to your work. But I have to say, I really enjoyed talking with you, Emmi. I hope we can visit again.

EMMI
That would be nice. Would you like me to tell Mr. Ledbetter you were here?
OSBORNE
No, don’t worry about it. I’ll give him a call. He’ll be back tomorrow, you say?

EMMI
He thought so.

OSBORNE
Maybe I’ll stop by again.

Osborne gives Emmi a warm smile. She’s melting under his attention.

Osborne reaches out, places two fingers beneath her chin, and lifts Emmi’s face. He looks at her bruises, hidden by make-up.

He finally releases her. His look is intense. For a moment, we’re not sure if he’s going to scream or kiss her.

OSBORNE
Bruises do not become you.

He turns and walks away. At the door, he gives her one more look, then exits.

INT. LEDBETTER HOME - EVENING

The kitchen sits empty, a note propped against a candle on the table. The sound of the front door opening and closing is heard.

JIMMY (O.C.)
Trinnie!

Jimmy enters the kitchen, sees the note and reads it. He places the note back and goes to the oven, opens it, and finds his dinner.

Jimmy takes the plate out and sets it on the table. He stares at it for a moment, then picks the plate back up, carries it to the trash can, and dumps the contents in.

In a high cabinet, Jimmy retrieves a bottle of vodka, pours a liberal amount in a glass, then goes to the refrigerator for tomato juice. He drinks down his scaled-down Bloody Mary, leaning against the counter.

INT. AUBREY’S CAR - CONT.
Aubrey pulls into the Ledbetter driveway, parks, turns off the car. She sits quietly, watching the house. She lifts a bottle of wine and take a long drink. A little liquid courage.

AUBREY
This is insane--

From the backseat we hear Trinnie’s voice, although we can’t see her.

TRINNIE
We’re just going to teach him a little lesson. Go on.

Aubrey sighs, takes another drink, opens the car door.

INT. LEDBETTER HOME - CONT.

Jimmy hears Aubrey’s car, and his posture reveals his fear. Is it Osborne? Jimmy sets his glass down.

Looking around, he grabs a hammer from a drawer and exits the kitchen. Jimmy goes to the front door, holding the hammer like a caveman clutching his club.

JIMMY
Who’s out there?

AUBREY (O.C.)
Hey handsome. Whatcha doing?

Jimmy exhales, relieved. Opens the door to Aubrey.

JIMMY
What are you doing here?

AUBREY
I stopped by my mom’s house to check on her, and Trinnie was there. So, I thought if Trinnie was there, you were here... all alone... What’s with the hammer?

JIMMY
I thought you were coming to rob me.
Jimmy pulls Aubrey in and to himself. They begin to kiss, and Jimmy pushes Aubrey towards a small bedroom at the end of the hall.

Aubrey and Jimmy continue kissing, working their way across the small room. Aubrey pushes Jimmy to the bed, standing over him.

AUBREY
Yeah? Well--

AUBREY
Give me that... Don’t want you getting any kinky ideas... Now you get comfortable, baby. I’ll be right back.

JIMMY
Where you going? You can’t just leave me here all alone! Aww, Sissy, don’t be that way--

Aubrey sets the hammer on a dresser, a bit forcefully.

AUBREY
Don’t call me Sissy.

She throws Jimmy her best seductive smile and disappears around the corner.

Once in the hall, Aubrey leans against the wall, stressed over what she’s doing.

Jimmy jumps up and strips, lying back on the bed. He’s no fool-- he’s hit the jackpot.

Silence. Jimmy remains still, eyes closed. He hears a sound at the door and smiles, not opening his eyes.

JIMMY
I’m ready for my surprise, baby--

TRINNIE
I bet you are, baby.

Jimmy opens his eyes and sits up with a start.

The small room is now crowded with Trinnie, Aubrey, and Emmi taking up the space around the bed.
JIMMY
What the hell!

TRINNIE
What’s the matter, Jimmy? Weren’t expecting me home so soon?

JIMMY
Trinnie-- Now come on, ladies, what is this? Okay. Ha ha, you got me--

TRINNIE
Shut up, Jimmy. Shut up and listen.

Jimmy pulls a blanket around himself.

TRINNIE
Seems you’ve been a very busy boy. So I thought I’d arrange this reunion just for you.

Trinnie turns to Emmi and nods. Emmi takes a long look at Jimmy, then smiles while reaching behind her back.

She slowly brings her arm forward again, revealing a small pocket knife. The case is hot pink with a zebra stripe pattern.

Trinnie and Aubrey look at the knife and then to each other, astounded.

AUBREY
What is that?

EMMI
What?

AUBREY
We said bring a knife!

EMMI
It IS a knife, see?

Pulls the short blade out and waves it menacingly at Jimmy. Trinnie reaches out and snatches the knife away.

TRINNIE
What are you going to do with that, huh? Nick him to death?
JIMMY
What? Trinnie, you can't be serious-

TRINNIE
(Hands the knife back to Emmi). I can’t believe this. You had one job-

EMMI
It’s okay, Trinnie, I’ll just go in the kitchen and get one--

TRINNIE
No you won’t! I cut my kids’ food with those knives!

AUBREY
You can’t donate one to the cause?

Jimmy is sweating and swallowing hard.

JIMMY
Girls, this isn’t funny anymore.

AUBREY
Shut up, Jimmy! (Turns to Trinnie) I’ll buy you a new knife.

TRINNIE
I think you’re missing the point--

AUBREY
It’s a knife, for God’s sake!

TRINNIE
It’s not about the knife, Sissy! It’s-- it’s the whole damned thing!

Trinnie stops, looking around herself in amazement. Now that she’s in it, the idea just doesn’t seem like such a good one.

TRINNIE
I’m standing in a bedroom with you and her and-- my naked husband, and--and... this won’t change a thing! I’m married to a sorry son-of-a-bitch. I just have to accept that and move on--

JIMMY
This is crazy! Come on-- You’re over-reacting! All of you! You can’t be serious. What’re
you going to do?

AUBREY
We’re going to kill you, Jimmy.

This stops Jimmy cold. Beat. Then he begins to laugh.

JIMMY
Okay. Okay. So... I’ve been a bad guy. I admit it. I’m a worthless son-of-a-bitch. There. Now can we stop this ridiculous circus?

AUBREY
You don’t get it, do you?

JIMMY
This is between me and my wife... Trinnie-- I get it. I’m sorry, okay? Come on. This has gone far enough. Let’s talk things out!

TRINNIE
I’m really, really tired of talking. Tired to the bone.

JIMMY
And what will killing me get you, huh? So you stick a knife in me, and then what?

TRINNIE
Then I’m gonna feel a whole lot better.

JIMMY
What?

TRINNIE
You think we haven’t thought this through?

AUBREY
We have a plan, Jimmy. It’s all taken care of.

JIMMY
You think so? Trinnie, you won’t get away with this. You’ll go to prison. What about the kids? What about the store? You can’t even take care of the store!

EMMI
I can. I mean, I already do-- take care of things while you’re out running around. You like that. Even had me learn how to sign your name so I could take care of the bills and
orders and everything. I’m really good at it, remember? That’s what you said—“Emmi, you have a talent”—

Jimmy suddenly leaps from the bed, grabs his pants and slips them on, then stands before the women, insolent.

JIMMY
Ladies, I have had enough. You’ve had a laugh at my expense, now get the fuck out of my way.

When the women don’t move, Jimmy becomes angry and moves purposefully towards them. Trinnie holds up a hand to stop him.

TRINNIE
All you had to do was be good to me, Jimmy.

JIMMY
I get that. Now move—

Jimmy waves Trinnie away, and again moves to push past the women. Trinnie plants herself firmly in front of Jimmy, who stops to regard her.

Then, like a cornered animal, Jimmy lunges at Trinnie.

He strikes her, more out of desperation than intent. He reaches for her throat while Aubrey grabs at him, trying to pull him away from Trinnie.

POV- We see only Emmi. The sound of ringing begins to rise, slowly shutting out any other sound. The ringing rises in intensity for several seconds.

We close in until we see nothing but the fear in Emmi’s eyes until:

The sound of a heavy body hitting the floor. Jimmy has fallen to his knees, cursing. He falls over to his side, clutching at the blood pouring out of his head, an incredulous look on his face.

JIMMY
Shit— you--

When his body slumps to the ground, we see Aubrey and Trinnie, on the floor pushed against the wall, speechless. They look up at Emmi.
Emmi looks at the hammer she now clutches, the claw end covered in blood and strands of hair. She looks at Jimmy and the women.

Jimmy attempts to rise, but can’t get to his feet. He drags himself towards the door.

JIMMY
Help me-- Trinnie--

The women don’t move. As Jimmy gets to the door, however, Trinnie reaches over and pushes it shut. Jimmy tries to look at her, but he can only moan.

Aubrey is growing hysterical.

AUBREY
What do we do?

TRINNIE
Wait--

AUBREY
What do we do? He’s--

TRINNIE
SHUT IT!

Aubrey clamps her hands over her mouth, her eyes huge. Emmi drops the hammer and begins to dry heave.

After a few moments, Jimmy grows quiet. Aubrey leans forward, gives him a nudge, then suddenly jumps back away from him.

AUBREY
Is he? -- Oh my god! Trinnie! He’s really dead, isn’t he... There’s a dead body in your house—

TRINNIE
I see that, Sissy.

Emmi steps over Jimmy to the women, crying. She slumps down on the floor with them.
They stare at the body.

EXT. LEDBETTER HOME - A LITTLE LATER.

Osborne sits in his dark car, watching the house. Lights come on and off, but he can’t see anything through the windows.

He pulls out his cell phone. Dials.

INT. LEDBETTER HOUSE - CONT.

The three women are attempting to navigate Jimmy’s body, now wrapped in the comforter from the bed. They’ve made it to the kitchen.

Suddenly, the vibrating sound of Jimmy’s phone can be heard. The women freeze, panicked. Then all three begin quickly trying to find the phone. This involves arguing and negotiating unwrapping the corpse.

Finally, Aubrey is able to reach into Jimmy’s back pocket and pull out the phone, which has stopped buzzing. All three women, ruffled and out of breath, stare at it in her hand.

EXT. LEDBETTER HOUSE - CONT.

Osborne slams the steering wheel. Jimmy’s voice mail message is playing. At the beep-

OSBORNE
I know you’re in there you puny piece of dog shit. You have until noon tomorrow to call me back. Don’t make me involve your pretty little family.

Osborne ends the call and throws his phone into the passenger seat. He leans forward, watching the house. If he could only see into the back yard he would know that Jimmy is otherwise preoccupied.

EXT. LEDBETTER HOUSE - LATER

Aubrey and Trinnie are digging. They don’t speak. Emmi watches, looking a bit unhinged.

TRINNIE
Watch the tomatoes--
There is no more conversation, only the sound of the shovels in the dark.

EXT. LEDBETTER HOME - DAY

The morning is beautiful. Birds sing. A dog barks. Bees buzz. We see the garden--there is no sign of the night’s activity.

INT. LEDBETTER HOUSE - CONT.

Trinnie sits in the kitchen, head in hands. She looks like hell. She pulls her hands away and looks at her palms, lined with fresh blisters.

The house suddenly explodes with sound-- the kids are home. Dalton runs past the kitchen, throwing out a greeting as he goes. Elizabeth enters with DOTTIE (60), Trinnie’s mother. Dottie carries Chace.

Elizabeth has gone straight to the pantry, pulling out a cereal box. She pours herself a bowl of cereal, then goes to the refrigerator.

DOTTIE
Good morning!

TRINNIE
Hey.

Dottie sets Chace down, who runs to his mother. Trinnie pulls him into her lap, kissing his head.

Elizabeth is still standing at the refrigerator. Finally--

ELIZABETH
There’s no milk.

No response. She stands for a moment longer, as if expecting the milk to suddenly appear.

ELIZABETH
Mom? There’s no milk.

Continued silence. Elizabeth finally turns and looks at her mother.

ELIZABETH
Mom--
TRINNIE
There’s no milk--

ELIZABETH
Whoa! What’s wrong with you?

TRINNIE
Nothing.

ELIZABETH
Did you and Aunt Aubrey get drunk last night?

TRINNIE
What?

ELIZABETH
You look hung over--

DOTTIE
You told me you were going to the movies--

TRINNIE
I’m not hung over--

ELIZABETH
Sure looks like a hang over to me--

TRINNIE
And how would you know what that looks like?

ELIZABETH
Seriously?

Trinnie shakes her head, puts her face back in her hands.

ELIZABETH
So... do you want me to drive to the store and pick up some milk?

Trinnie lifts her head to look at her daughter.

TRINNIE
...

...
Trinnie sets Chace down.

TRINNIE
Go watch your little brothers.

ELIZABETH
I’m hungry!

DOTTIE
Go!

Elizabeth slumps out of the kitchen the way teenagers are so good at doing.

Dottie stares at Trinnie.

DOTTIE
You do look bad--

TRINNIE
I’m fine mom--

DOTTIE
Where’s Jimmy?

TRINNIE
He’s not here.

DOTTIE
His truck’s in the driveway--

Trinnie jumps as if Dottie has just poked her with a hot stick. Shit-- the truck!

TRINNIE
I -- I don’t know. Must be out in the shop--

DOTTIE
Huh. Okay. Want me to run to the store for milk?

TRINNIE
No-- I’ll go in a little while. No one’s going to starve.

Trinnie rises and kisses Dottie.
TRINNIE
Thanks for keeping them last night. I appreciate it.

Dottie exits, calling to the kids to come tell her goodbye. Trinnie waits until she hears the door shut, then grabs up her cell phone.

INT. EMPTY HOUSE- CONT.

Aubrey is showing MICHAEL WRAY, 45, around an empty house. Michael is a good-looking man, but a little untidy. He could use a haircut and a new shirt. Or maybe an iron would do the trick.

Michael studies his copy of the listing.

AUBREY
The kitchen was just redone last year--

Her ringing phone interrupts. Aubrey looks, sees Trinnie’s name, and hits the mute button.

AUBREY
Sorry about that... So let’s go in. I think you’ll love the cabinets--

MICHAEL
I’m-- um... Cabinets?

AUBREY
They’re cherry wood. And the floor is handscraped--

MICHAEL
Is cherry wood a good thing?

AUBREY
It is if you like it--

The phone goes off again. Again, it’s Trinnie. Aubrey mutes.

MICHAEL
Do you need to take that?

AUBREY
No! No-- it’s fine. I’ll call them back when we’re done. Why don’t we look at the back yard--
Aubrey and Michael stand on the patio. Michael looks around, nodding his head.

MICHAEL
It’s a nice back yard--

AUBREY
It is. Lots of room.

MICHAEL
Room is good.

AUBREY
Room is good, yes.

They continue to look at the expanse of yard. Aubrey watches Michael for a moment.

AUBREY
Have you-- have you ever bought a house before?

MICHAEL
No. I mean, yes, but-- my wife basically did everything-- she found the one she wanted, I just showed up and signed the papers.

AUBREY
I see. Your wife-- couldn’t join us?

MICHAEL
We’re divorced.

AUBREY
Ah. Sorry.

MICHAEL
Yeah. No-- don’t be. It’s fine. It’s just-- I let her take care of certain things, and I took care of other things, and now I gotta learn how to take care of all the things--

AUBREY
Well, we’ll get you through this, okay?
The phone alerts her to a text message. Aubrey doesn’t acknowledge it, continuing to smile at Michael. He nods, turns to re-enter the home.

As he leaves, she steals a quick look at the message, from Trinnie: ANSWER YOUR PHONE!

Aubrey follows Michael into the house.

EXT. EMPTY HOUSE- LATER

Aubrey and Michael have finished their tour of the house. They stand at their cars.

MICHAEL
I really like it--

AUBREY
It’s a great house.

MICHAEL
Yeah.

AUBREY
So-- shall we keep looking, or do you want to make an offer?

MICHAEL
I don’t honestly think I can look at one more house-- Oh-- I mean, you’ve been great, it’s not that-- I just... I’ll take it.

AUBREY
Well, that’s great! Why don’t you come back to the office and we’ll write up an offer?

The phone rings. Again. Aubrey doesn’t even have to look at it.

MICHAEL
That sounds fine. Okay. I need to-- can we meet in the morning? About nine?

AUBREY
Perfect. Okay--

MICHAEL
Okay--
AUBREY
Til tomorrow--

Michael nods, gets into his car and leaves. Aubrey waits for him to leave, waving as he pulls away. Then she dials. Waits for Trinnie to answer.

AUBREY
I’m exhausted. What--

TRINNIE (O.C.)
You need to get over here.

AUBREY
I told you I would come by later--

TRINNIE (O.C.)
We forgot the frigging truck!

Aubrey’s face moves from incomprehension to realization.

INT. LEDBETTER HARDWARE STORE- DAY

Emmi isn’t looking much better than Trinnie. She sits at the computer, staring at the screen but not working.

Flashbacks cut into the scene:
-- The hammer hitting Jimmy,
-- The image of Jimmy falling to the ground,
-- The sight of blood flowing,
-- The comfort-wrapped body lying in a too-short hole,
-- Trinnie and Aubrey, covered in blood, cleaning the floor of the room where Jimmy died,
-- The slow fall of a hammer landing on the body lying in the hole.
Faintly, and then louder, someone is calling Emmi’s name. She comes back to the presence, and finds SAM, another employee of the store, standing in front of her.

SAM
Is he?

EMMI
Who?
SAM
Mr. Ledbetter--

EMMI
Is he what?

SAM
Is he coming in today?

EMMI
I don’t-- think so...

SAM
That guy keeps coming in... You know-- the big guy--

EMMI
Osborne?

SAM
Yeah-- He’s probably gonna come back in this afternoon. What should I tell him?

EMMI
I don’t really care, Sam. Make something up.

Emmi quickly exits, going into Jimmy’s office. She closes the door, leans against it, and begins sobbing.

INT. OSBORNE’S CAR - EVENING

Osborne drives slowly, looking out as he passes the Ledbetter house. Jimmy’s truck is gone.

Osborne speeds up, simultaneously dialing his cell phone. Jimmy’s voice mail message comes on. Osborne ends the call. He stares straight ahead. The expression on his face leaves no doubt--

This is a dangerous man.

EXT. LEDBETTER HOUSE (SHOP) - CONT.

Trinnie and Aubrey are in Jimmy’s large shop. The truck is parked inside. --They are loading the bed with various items-- cinder blocks, pieces of metal, etc.
-- They are tying a tarp over the bed.

From outside, we watch the large door raise, but there is no light. Silence. Then the truck starts and pulls out from the shop.

Aubrey closes the shop door and gets into her own car.

EXT. LAKE -- LATER

Trinnie and Aubrey have found the right spot to send the truck into the water. They push it until gravity takes over, then watch the truck crash into the water. With the added weight, it doesn’t take long for the truck to disappear into the blackness.

The women stare out at the lake, not speaking. Aubrey is nervous, glancing at Trinnie occasionally.

Trinnie, on the other hand isn’t a bit nervous. In fact, she has a look we haven’t seen before. Composed. Determined.

Aubrey finally breaks the silence.

AUBREY
This is a nightmare--

TRINNIE
Not how I expected things to turn out, but we’ll make do--

AUBREY
Make do! Trinnie, we killed Jimmy--

TRINNIE
Emmi killed Jimmy.

AUBREY
And we’re covering it up!

TRINNIE
It’s going to be fine--

AUBREY
Are you listening to yourself?
Trinnie stays quiet, still staring across the lake.

**TRINNIE**

For the first time.

    Another pause. Aubrey takes a deep breath.

**AUBREY**

This is all my fault. Trinnie-- I’m sorry-- please-- let’s-- this is all because of one stupid, stupid, drunken--

**TRINNIE**

Like I told Emmi-- you aren’t special, Sissy.

**AUBREY**

Stop it. Yell at me. Punch me in the face. Call me every name you can think of. Scream. I’m ready for any of it. But this-- This whatever you’re doing-- I can’t take it.

**TRINNIE**

If I start screaming, I’ll never stop. I’ve got enough scream in me to last the rest of my life... You and I-- we had a shared misery. But he’s gone now. Let’s just be quiet.

Silence.

    Two sisters, side-by-side. One’s pain is evident, the other is composed, her eyes cold.

**TRINNIE**

Let’s go deal with her.

**INT. EMMI’S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - LATER**

    Trinnie is staring out the front window while Aubrey stares into her coffee. Emmi is curled up on a chair, removed from the other two.

    For a moment, each woman is in her own world. Then Trinnie pulls herself up and turns back to the women.

**TRINNIE**

We’ve to get it together. It’s done. There’s nothing we can do--

**EMMI**

I don’t know how to act--
TRINNIE
You act like you haven't a care in the world. You act like today is no different than yesterday, or last week, or next week.

EMMI
It's not that easy--

TRINNIE
It IS that easy. It’s that easy because if you don’t do it, we’re all going down a path we don’t want. I’m not going down that path.

EMMI
You think I’m not trying, Trinnie? You think? I can’t sleep... I can’t eat... All I see is Jimmy--

TRINNIE
Stop whining--

AUBREY
Trinnie, try to be--

TRINNIE
No. There’s no room for-- we don’t have the luxury of patting each other on the back and saying ‘There, there’-- we have to keep things going.

EMMI
But I’m the one who--

TRINNIE
I am not going to prison, Emmi. Do you hear me? I’m not. All the shit that man put me through-- that’s not happening. You have two choices. You can pack up and leave, never look back. Or you can stay on and keep things going at the store.

EMMI
It’s not going to work--

TRINNIE
It will work. No one’s looking for Jimmy. We just keep things normal-- You can keep the store going--

EMMI
For how long? How long before someone does come looking?
TRINNIE
What’re you going to do Emmi? Spend the rest of your life afraid? Look at you. Sitting in this trailer, a little mouse waiting for the hawk to rip her to pieces. When’s it enough? When do you say to these men, I’m not here for you to push around anymore! I’m not here to be beaten or cheated or used up like-- like a napkin you use to wipe the taco grease off your face. Look. You made a decision that changed all our lives. We can’t go back and change it. We can’t. But maybe we can-- use it to our advantage. I mean, why spend the rest our lives afraid?

Aubrey isn’t sure how to react to this new Trinnie. There’s a little light returning to Emmi.

TRINNIE
We just need a little time. I’ll come up with something.

EMMI
I can try. I’ll-- try, okay?

TRINNIE
Do better than try. Decide you will. We can do this. Together. But you... You’ve got this chance to change your life. Our momma always says when opportunity knocks, don’t miss it trying to fix your hair.

Emmi pushes her hair out of her eyes.

EMMI
I can. I can do it, Trinnie-- I promise.

Trinnie gives Emmi and smile and turns back to the window. She doesn’t look convinced.

EXT. LAKE -- NIGHT.

Trinnie stands at the lake edge, looking out where the truck went into the water. She doesn’t look as strong as she did when standing here with Aubrey.

INT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE - MORNING

Aubrey is at work at her desk, not listening to the conversation around her. She knocks over her coffee.

As she cleans up the mess she doesn’t look up when someone approaches her desk.
MICHAEL
Aubrey?

AUBREY
Oh! Michael-- how are you?

MICHAEL
Good. I was just--

AUBREY
Is everything okay?

MICHAEL
I was going to ask you that--

AUBREY
Oh-- I’m just-- A klutz today.

Aubrey finishes mopping up the coffee, realizes Michael is staring at her.

AUBREY
Did we-- have an appointment?

MICHAEL
To sign an offer?

AUBREY
Oh! Oh my god-- yes-- sorry. I... Didn’t sleep so well last night-- not thinking straight--

MICHAEL
I can come back--

AUBREY
No! We’re good. Let me-- why don’t we use a different computer--

MICHAEL
Hold on-- take a breath. Why don’t you and I go get a cup of coffee-- I mean, if you’d like--

Aubrey stands still for a moment. She looks at the mess on her desk.

AUBREY
Why not. Maybe I’ll actually get to drink the next cup.
INT. LEDBETTER HOME - CONT.

Trinnie stands at the door of Chace’s room. He is asleep, a sweet little boy clutching a truck. Trinnie smiles at her son and exits.

She enters her bedroom, opens the closet door, and stands for a moment, surveying the clothes.

Trinnie takes one of Jimmy’s shirts from a hanger and brings it to her face. She sits on the edge of the bed, inhaling Jimmy’s scent.

Her body begins to shakes as she cries, silently. This goes on for a moment, and then we see her grow still. She rises, using the shirt to wipe her nose.

Trinnie begins pulling out Jimmy’s shirts and pants, making a pile on the bed.

INT. EMMI’S TRAILER - CONT.

Emmi is throwing items in boxes. We can’t see what she’s packing.

EXT. LEDBETTER HOME - LATER

Trinnie stands in front of a fire. She stares into the flames, occasionally tossing in one of Jimmy’s shirts or underwear, keeping the fire going, but small.

EXT. BUSYNESS CAFE - CONT.

Through the window we see Aubrey and Michael, facing each other over their coffee. They look like they are enjoying each other’s company.

INT. ICE CREAM PARLOR-- AFTERNOON

Chace is enjoying his ice cream. It’s melting down his hands, which he wipes on his shirt. No one seems to notice.

Elizabeth and Dalton, on the other hand, aren’t eating their ice cream. They are both staring at Trinnie, shocked expressions.

TRINNIE
So that’s... that’s what I needed to tell you.

ELIZABETH
But when?
TRINNIE
Well, a few days ago... we decided a few days ago... but he came for his stuff this--
earlier--

ELIZABETH
And he leaves just like that? Doesn’t even say goodbye?

TRINNIE
Well, honey, it was-- we decided it was best if he didn’t make a scene.

ELIZABETH
Telling your kids goodbye is making a scene?

TRINNIE
You know what I mean. He wanted... he didn’t want to upset you guys.

ELIZABETH
So when’s he coming back?

TRINNIE
I-- don’t know.

DALTON
But he’s coming back, right?

TRINNIE
Oh, I’m sure he will, honey--

DALTON
Can I call him?

TRINNIE
Um... sure. You can call when we get home--

Elizabeth has leaned back, leaving the ice cream untouched. She crosses her
arms and watches her mother.

DALTON
He said we’d go to the skate park this weekend. He’s coming back for that, right?

TRINNIE
Dalton, I can’t promise anything--
DALTON
But he promised--

TRINNIE
Let’s see how things go, huh? Look-- I know it’s hard for you guys to understand, but sometimes parents just need... a break... from each other.

Trinnie is getting emotional. She looks around for an escape. Sees the mess Chace has made.

TRINNIE
Oh my word, look at you, little man- let me go get something to clean you up with--

Trinnie jumps up and quickly exits. She enters the bathroom, goes into a stall, and throws up. Sobs. Throws up some more.

After a few moments, she exits the stall, goes to the sink, and grasps the counter with both hands. Her head is down and she takes deep breaths.

Reflected in the mirror a teenager who works at the ice cream shop stands behind her. She looks at Trinnie for a moment.

TEENAGER
Lady? Are you okay?

Trinnie looks up into the mirror, regarding the teenager in the reflection. She looks more than a little creepy in that light, pale and tousled.

TEENAGER
Do you-- should I go get your daughter?

Trinnie’s stare has fuck off written all over it. The teenager is uncomfortable now, unsure whether to leave or go into a stall, or just stand there.

She escapes to a stall. Trinnie wets several paper towels and exits.

When Trinnie returns to the table, Dalton is gone.

TRINNIE
Where’s your brother?
ELIZABETH
I sent him to play a video game--

    Trinnie busies herself cleaning up Chace. Elizabeth waits a few moments.

ELIZABETH
Mom-- I know.

    Trinnie’s head shoots up as she looks at her daughter. She holds Chace’s hand above his head.

ELIZABETH
I know. About everything.

    Trinnie still doesn’t respond. She still holds Chace’s hand above his head.

ELIZABETH
It’s okay, mom. Really.

    Trinnie is panicking, but somehow manages to lower Chace’s hand and wash his face.

TRINNIE
I’m not sure what you--

ELIZABETH
I know about dad and... his girlfriend.

    Trinnie manages to hide her absolute relief. In fact, she’s getting pretty good at this hiding-black-secrets thing.

TRINNIE
How would you know that?

ELIZABETH
I heard you and Aunt Aubrey talking.

TRINNIE
You were eavesdropping--

ELIZABETH
 Seriously, mom, no one has to eavesdrop when you two are talking. Anyway, I know
about dad, and I know he’s done it before, so--

TRINNIE
You shouldn’t listen to Sissy and me... It’s-- complicated--

ELIZABETH
I get it. Don’t worry, okay?

    Elizabeth reaches over, grabs Trinnie’s hand.

ELIZABETH
We’re going to be fine. I just want- you to be happy, okay? I mean it.

    Trinnie can only nod. This is getting to be too much. Trinnie holds up a finger--
    hold that thought. She gets up from the table and returns to the rest room.

    Elizabeth and Chace regard each other.

ELIZABETH
Gimme five--

    She holds up her hand to Chace. He gives her a solid slap, palm to palm.

ELIZABETH
Good job! (Looks at her palm) Eew. Sticky.

EXT. EMMI’S TRAILER - NIGHT.

    Lou pulls up to the trailer. Through the windshield, in the headlights, we see a
    pile of boxes. They are stuffed with Lou’s possessions. Emmi didn’t take the time
to pack them neatly.

    Clipped to the front of one of the boxes is a large note that reads Take your shit
and don’t come back.

    Lou leans back on the seat, cursing, then gets out of the truck and begins
gathering the boxes.

    He looks over and sees the neighbor peering out a window at him. He flips the
neighbor the bird.

    As he gets back in the truck, he yells at the trailer.
LOU
We’re not done, bitch-- don’t kid yourself.

INT. EMMI’S TRAILER - CONT.

Emmi sits in the hallway, pressed against the wall, listening. She looks terrified.
We pan down and see she is clutching a large knife.

EXT. LEDBETTER HOUSE - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: “One Month Later”

It is a hot summer day. Trinnie comes out the back door, carrying the bird house
she was painting earlier. She goes to a tree with low branches and hangs the
birdhouse.

Next to the tree, the tomatoes are in full bloom, heavy with large fruit and green
leaves.

Trinnie gets up from her chair, dropping the hose to the ground. She goes to a
vine and picks a large tomato, wiping the water from it.

She takes a large bite, letting the juices run down her wrist. She watches the red
juice for a moment, then smiles.

TRINNIE
Well I’ll be damned, Jimmy. You’re finally doing good by me.

The idyllic scene is suddenly interrupted by the deep voice of a man behind
Trinnie. She whirls around to find:

OSBORNE
Mrs. Ledbetter. Sorry to bother you. I’m looking for your husband. Is he home?

This man scares Trinnie, but she gives him that blank expression she’s so good at.

TRINNIE
No, I’m sorry. He’s out of town.

OSBORNE
That’s what they told me at the store. He’s been gone a while. When do you expect him
back?
TRINNIE
I... I’m not sure. We had... a bit of a misunderstanding and he left. A cooling off period... you know.

OSBORNE
I’m sorry to hear that. Hope things work out between you two.

TRINNIE
Thank you.

OSBORNE
Unfortunately, your husband and I have some unfinished business, and I’m afraid I cannot put this off any longer. It is very important I talk with him. Now.

TRINNIE
I really don’t know where he is. Did you try calling his cell phone?

OSBORNE
I think we both know the answer to that. And we both know why I’m here. Your husband owes me and my... associates... a lot of money. We would like our money. So I am asking you again, when can I expect him to return?

TRINNIE
I don’t know. I wish I could help you--

Osborne stares at Trinnie for a moment, deciding whether he believes her or not.

OSBORNE
Mrs. Ledbetter, if you know something you’re not telling me, I would caution you that it is not worth covering for Jimmy.

TRINNIE
I assure you, Mr... I am not covering for my husband. In fact, I wish you luck in finding him.

They are at a stand-off. Osborne finally relents. He takes a deep breath, looking over the garden.

OSBORNE
I miss having a garden. I find it very centering to put my hands in the dirt, bury little seeds, watch the plants grow... just the act of watering is almost-- spiritual. I guess you
could say.

He pauses, spending a moment looking at the birdhouses before looking at Trinnie again. Now he smiles, and it almost looks genuine.

OSBORNE
I will be going, then. See you soon.

Osborne nods and leaves. Trinnie watches him walk away, afraid to take her eyes off him.

FADE TO BLACK.
ANGELS ALL DIE

Cast:
Francis (Frank) Abbot
Petra Walls
James Dean

Setting: A hair and makeup room for “The Edge of Forever”.

ACT I
SCENE 1

FRANCIS (FRANK) ABBOT, 34, is setting up the tools of his trade. In the makeup chair, feet propped on the table, head down, is JAMES DEAN, forever 24.

Frank works around James for awhile, but finally must push his feet off the counter.

JAMES
Hey!

FRANK
You’re in my way.

JAMES
Taking a nap, here--

FRANK
Take it somewhere else.

James gets up, begins wandering around the space, picking up items, examining things, basically getting into everything.

FRANK
Can you stop that?

JAMES
I’m just lookin’ around--

FRANK
This isn’t your stuff.

JAMES
What’re you so antsy about?
FRANK
You’re making a mess.

JAMES
When are we going out there?

FRANK
How many times are you going to ask me--

JAMES
Come on! Let’s just take a look around!

FRANK
We’re not going anywhere. My job is to be in here, not getting in the way out there--

JAMES
Just for a minute, huh?

FRANK
No--

JAMES
Why not!

FRANK
You want to get me fired on my first day?

JAMES
You’re not going to get fired--

FRANK
This isn’t like the barber shop. We’ve got to be-- we’ve got to behave.

JAMES
I haven’t seen a set in... a long time.

FRANK
It’s just a-- a-- soap opera. What’s the big deal.

JAMES
The deal is, we’re on our way, Frankie! This is a big step. We’re headed for the big time!
FRANK
I’m the hair and makeup guy. There’s no big time to be had.

JAMES
Why can’t you do this little thing for me?

FRANK
I’m trying to get everything set up before she gets here.

JAMES
Ugh!

FRANK
It’s called professionalism.

JAMES
You telling me you’re not nervous?

FRANK
I’m not nervous.

JAMES
Okay.

FRANK
I’m not.

JAMES
Whatever you say.

FRANK
I say I’m not nervous.

JAMES
Then why you keep rearranging those bottles? Huh?

FRANK
---

JAMES
Exactly.
FRANK
Okay... I’m not nervous, alright? I just feel like I should-- you know. Step up. My game. I should step up my game.

JAMES
How exactly does one step up one’s hair game, Frankie? Special comb?

FRANK
You started this--

JAMES
You’re right-- you’re right-- Okay. You wanna step up your game, I’m all for it. Got your back.

James goes to Frank’s tools and begins playing with a flat iron, making it into a puppet.

He slips into a west Texas accent, quoting from Giant.

JAMES
You want to know something, Frankie? If I live to ninety I will never figure you out--

FRANK
Stop--

James chases Frank with the flat iron.

JAMES
You sure do look pretty, Francis. Pert nigh good enough to eat!

FRANK
Come on! Enough!

James and Frank bump around the room a time or two before Frank takes a stand.

FRANK
Enough!

James laughs. Takes one more chomp at Frank with the flat iron before returning it to the counter.

JAMES
You’re nervous as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs. Just admit it.
FRANK
God your jokes are old. Let’s pretend this is just another job.

JAMES
Yeah, yeah. It’s just another barber shop. With makeup.

FRANK
Exactly.

JAMES
I mean, just cause she’s a television star--

FRANK
She puts her pants on one leg at a time, just like... me.

JAMES
A job on a hit television series-

FRANK
Soap opera.

JAMES
I did television, you know--

FRANK
I know.

JAMES
You ever see my commercial--

FRANK
Saw it--

JAMES
“Take it easy driving”--

FRANK
I know--

JAMES
“The life you save might be mine.”
FRANK
She’s nothing to get worked up over. Take a breath.

Frank turns back to his tools. James wanders over to inspect the promotional poster on the back wall.

JAMES
This her?

Points to a character on the poster. Frank glances over.

FRANK
Yeah. That’s her.

JAMES
Uh huh. Well, she is certainly--

FRANK
Don’t be--

JAMES
I’m not! I’m just saying she looks--

FRANK
Jimmy--

JAMES
She’s pretty. Okay? She’s pretty.

FRANK
Just leave it at that, huh?

JAMES
You’re so touchy.

FRANK
I need you to be quiet for a little while, okay--

JAMES
Okay.

FRANK
So I can think.
JAMES
Alright.

FRANK
Alright.

JAMES
Yep.

FRANK
Thank you.

JAMES
You bet.

James takes a rope from his back pocket and begins playing with it, spinning it in the cramped space.

There is silence for a few moments, then James begins singing low-- it increases as he sings.

JAMES
Up to mighty London
Came an Irishman one day.
As the streets are paved with gold
Sure, everyone was gay,
Singing songs of Piccadilly,
Strand and Leicester Square,
Till Paddy got excited,
Then he shouted to them there:

FRANK
Jimmy-- that’s not being quiet.
James continues singing, more loudly.

JAMES
It’s a long way to Tipperary,
It’s a long way to go.
It’s a long way to Tipperary---

FRANK
I’m serious... Come on!
James continues singing as he lassoes Frank with his rope. Frank tries to remove it, but James pulls it tighter, enjoying his game.

FRANK
Son of a bitch!

Just then, PETRA WALLS, 30, enters. She is the girl from the poster. She stops, startled.

PETRA
Who--

FRANK
I’m sorry--

Frank wrestles to get free of the rope, which looks like some postmodern dance move. Petra steps back.

PETRA
I can have security in--

FRANK
No-- No-- I’m so sorry-- I’m Frank--

PETRA
You shouldn’t be in here--

FRANK
I’m Frank Abbot-- the new--

Petra yells down the hall.

PETRA
Can I get some help!

FRANK
I’m the new hair and makeup guy!

Petra studies him, unsure whether to believe him. She looks at his tools on the counter, decides he’s not a serial killer.

PETRA
Never mind-- Everything’s fine!
Who are you?

FRANK
Frank Abbot. Sorry. Didn’t mean to scare you.

PETRA
What are you doing?

FRANK
I’m just-- setting up my stuff--

PETRA
Were you dancing?

FRANK
What?

PETRA
Yoga? Oh god. Are you one of those?

FRANK
Those--

PETRA
Yoga freaks. I’m going to tell you right now, I am not interested in doing yoga--

FRANK
Oh, I’m not--

PETRA
I mean, to each their own and all that, but I don’t want to do it. And I don’t want to hear about it. I don’t care what kind of benefits it offers, or how good your hot yoga session was or anything else. Hot yoga? Seriously. Stupid. All you get is sweaty. And before you say it, yes, I’ve tried it. I tried it and I hated it. And I even tried it a couple of different places and I hated it at both places. I mean, what is the point? Besides, isn’t yoga suppose to be like-- a religion or something? Instead, everyone just uses it as an excuse to prance around and feel holier-than-thou because their downward-facing dog... form... is perfect or something.

FRANK
... Okay
PETRA
Okay.

What was your name?

FRANK
Frank. Abbot.

PETRA
Frank. Okay. I’m--

FRANK
You’re Sunni Divine... I mean, you play Sunni Divine, you’re not Sunni Divine, because Sunni Divine is a character, not a real person, you’re Petra Walls--

JAMES
And he’s not nervous. Not one bit.

PETRA
Why are you in my dressing room?

FRANK
Right. Sorry. I’m your new hair and makeup... guy.

PETRA
What happened to Lillian?

FRANK
I-- I don’t know Lillian.

PETRA
Lillian. Lillian! Oh for criminy’s sake. Why didn’t she tell me she was leaving?

FRANK
I don’t know--

PETRA
It’s so damned stressful, starting over. I mean, I thought we were getting along just fine--

FRANK
Maybe she just took another job?
PETRA
Why?

FRANK
I don’t... have any idea?

PETRA
Then why would you say that?

FRANK
Making a guess?

PETRA
But you don’t know.

FRANK
No.

PETRA
For all you know, she left because of me.

FRANK
Oh, I don’t think--

PETRA
She could’ve just walked out to hurt me--

FRANK
Why would she do that?

PETRA
People do that, Frank. They hurt other people. That’s what they do.

James begins laughing. Frank shoots him a warning look. Petra doesn’t seem to notice he’s there.

FRANK
I don’t know why Lillian left, Ms. Walls, but--

PETRA
And I’m suppose to just-- let some stranger touch my hair?
FRANK
Oh, I’m very-- I’m a professional, Ms. Walls... you don’t have to worry about that. I’ve got have references--

PETRA
I don’t know about this. Why wasn’t I told? Just how long have you been doing hair and makeup?

FRANK
Since I was six.

PETRA
Six?

FRANK
Yes-- I mean. My father was a barber back home. When I was growing up--

Behind Frank, James begins playing a harmonica. All the dirty looks can’t stop him. The faster Frank talks, the louder James plays.

FRANK
He had a -- barber shop. We lived upstairs. I used to watch him all day, cutting hair and listening to all the stories the men would tell each other. It looked like so much fun I made my own barber shop in the back and started cutting my friends’ hair for them for a nickel or a baseball card or whatever they had that I wanted.

Their mothers kept complaining to my dad about it and making him fix their kids’ hair for free, so one day he said to me, “Frank, if you’re gonna cut these boys’ hair, you better learn to do it right.” So he taught me the basics, enough to keep me out of trouble. And it just-- went from there.

PETRA
What are you doing!

FRANK
What?

PETRA
Do you-- have like-- what’s that thing?

FRANK
I’m sorry?
PETRA
That thing-- that condition that makes you twitch-- tourniquets?

FRANK
... I think it’s called Tourettes?

PETRA
Yes!

FRANK
No.

PETRA
You can admit it to me. I am very open-minded. I’m not going to judge.

FRANK
I don’t have Tourettes.

PETRA
Then why do you keep making that face?

FRANK
I’m sorry--

PETRA
I’m going to go find out what happened to Lillian.

Petra blows out of the room, leaving silence behind. James twirls his rope.

JAMES
She’s something.

FRANK
Yeah.

JAMES
A bit... high-spirited.

FRANK
She seems nice.

JAMES
Oh sure-- you bet.
FRANK
Why’d you have to--

JAMES
What’d I do!

FRANK
She thinks I have Tourettes.

JAMES
Well... Better than thinking you do yoga.

SCENE 2
Petra is in the chair. Frank works on her hair. James leans against a wall, watching.

PETRA
Then the boom mic just-- smacked her right on the head! Thump! I tried not to laugh, but it was just such perfect timing. I mean, I’m not going to say he did it on purpose, but it just seems way beyond a coincidence.

FRANK
What did she say?

PETRA
Oh, you know Claudia. “Phillip, I cannot stand for this! Are you hearing me? I will be calling my agent.” Phillip just ignored her, like he always does.

FRANK
I wouldn’t want to be a director. Dealing with all those personalities.

PETRA
Oh Claudia’s just a bitch. She thinks because she’s been on the show since it started she’s the queen. Huh. She’s just turning into an old hag. “Phillip, I cannot stand for this!” Like we care. Like we aren’t all working extra hours to make up for the strike. Like she’s the only one who feels tired and a little mistreated.

FRANK
You have been putting in a lot of time--

PETRA
I’m used to it. You’d think Claudia would be used to it. I mean, come on. It’s a steady acting gig. Her name is listed first. She’s the star of the show. What does she have to complain about!
FRANK
Beats me.

PETRA
Anyway. That was my day.

FRANK
Sounds eventful. Oh-- bought some more of that conditioner you like--

Petra squeals, a bit too excited for conditioner.

PETRA
Thank you! This stuff-- is a miracle. My hair has never been in such good shape.

FRANK
You’re welcome.

PETRA
I mean it. I wasn’t so sure about you at first, I admit. But you-- and this magic elixir have definitely won me over.

FRANK
That’s nice of you to say.

PETRA
Oh, I’m not nice. I mean, I’m not just being nice. How’d you get so smart about hair?

JAMES
Smart about hair? Did she just ask you--

FRANK
Lots of practice.

PETRA
People love it! It’s even got it’s own hashtag! (Lifts her cell phone) There’s like-- two hundred tweets. That’s even more than when Sunni shot Gonzo last season... Listen-- “Lovin’ Sunni’s new do” #sunnishair. “Girl’s looking hot” #sunnishair... And this one-- this one’s my favorite!

She shows Frank the phone. He looks at it, puzzled.

FRANK
I don’t know what that is... Thumb up... sun...s... rabbit?
PETRA
Get it? Thumbs up, Sunni’s...

FRANK
Sunni’s rabbit?

JAMES
Hare, dumb-dumb.

FRANK
Hare! Ha! I get it... Thumbs up Sunni’s hair!

JAMES
Wow.

PETRA
My fans are so clever.

FRANK
I’m glad it’s working out.

PETRA
Lillian would never try ANYTHING new. Just always the same ol’ thing blah blah blah. You are a genius.

JAMES
Ho! You hear that, Frankie Boy? You’re a GENIUS.

PETRA
You know, I never really thought about it, but you’re kind of... like a scientist, aren’t you? I mean, you have to know exactly what chemicals to combine, how to treat my hair so it won’t dry out and break off--

FRANK
Well, it can be intimidating. I’m sure Lillian was just afraid--

PETRA
I’m glad she’s gone. Good riddance. Marsha wants you to do her.

FRANK
I’m... what?
PETRA
Her color?

FRANK
Oh... Which-- which one is Marsha?

PETRA
Faith Worthington.

FRANK
---

PETRA
The one married to Marco Worthington? Their baby was kidnapped by the Polish mafia?

FRANK
Oh! Right-- the one who died in the car wreck, but the doctor tried an experimental treatment that brought her back to life right before the funeral home was pushing her body into--

PETRA
Yes. Anyway. She wants to know if you’ll do her color.

FRANK
Well... I don’t know about that. I mean-- I’m your hair guy.

PETRA
You are, but it would be okay with me.

FRANK
I wouldn’t feel right, you know? I mean, what about Dixie?

PETRA
I don’t know what a Dixie is.

FRANK
Dixie does Marsha’s hair. And Allen’s. And Tilly.

PETRA
Is this some kind of hairdresser code?

FRANK
No, but it’s just... I wouldn’t like it if Dixie came in here and started doing your hair.
PETRA
Fine. Actually, I’m glad you’re saying no. Marsha hasn’t exactly been friendly to me since she got here.

FRANK
Let me fix your eyes.

Frank turns her around, begins working on her eyes. James saunters over, leans in to watch.

JAMES
I don’t know, Frankie. It just don’t seem right, a man doing a woman’s makeup--

FRANK
It’s like painting a picture--

PETRA
What is?

FRANK
Doing your makeup.

James pushes Frank to get to Petra’s face.

JAMES
Let me try--

Frank pushes back. Petra opens her eyes to look at what he’s doing. He smiles, motions for her to close them again. He glares at James, who laughs.

Frank returns to Petra’s eyes.

FRANK
I just find the best parts and bring them out.

PETRA
That’s so sweet--

JAMES
Steady hand like that, you could’ve been a mechanic. A surgeon. Something manly.

PETRA
I don’t even know how to put my own makeup on.
FRANK
I’m happy to do it.

PETRA
I’ve always had someone to do my makeup, so I never learned.

FRANK
I can teach you.

JAMES
Frank. You’re offering to teach a woman how to put on makeup. Does this not seem odd to you?

FRANK
I have always considered women to be a work of art.

JAMES
Oh, that’s good.

Frank turns Petra back around, arranges her hair. She looks into the mirror, inspecting his work.

PETRA
You should open your own salon.

FRANK
That’s nice of you to say.

PETRA
Don’t you want to?

FRANK
I don’t know. I have a great job right here.

PETRA
Come on! Surely you’ve dreamed about it--

FRANK
Never had much in the way of dreams.

PETRA
Everyone has dreams--
FRANK
I just set out to make a living, and look where I am now. From cutting the neighborhood kids’ hair to a string of barbershops and finally a hair and makeup... artist. Didn’t really plan it, just took the next step when I saw the opportunity.

PETRA
I have plans. I have big plans. I’m not going to be like Claudia, working on a soap for twenty years. I’m going to be in the movies.

FRANK
Yeah?

PETRA
Damn right. Look out, Hollywood, here comes Petra Walls!

FRANK
You’ll be great.

PETRA
Thank you. I just need to find the right script, and I’m outta here. Just need that one script.

FRANK
What kind of script?

PETRA
The-- the right one. The one that when I read it I just know. You know?

FRANK
I hope you find the right one soon.

PETRA
Did you know I’ve been on this show for fourteen years? Only Claudia has been here longer. Some days, I just want to scream because I want out of here so bad.

JAMES
Badly.

Frank waves James away.

JAMES
No excuse for bad grammar.
FRANK
Well, you’ve got a great job-- the show’s pretty popular--

PETRA
I want to be in the city, with the lights and the energy and the buzz.

FRANK
It’ll happen.

PETRA
It will. I believe that.

Hey-- when I go, I’m taking you with me.

FRANK
What?

PETRA
Yeah!

FRANK
Really?

PETRA
Sure! I’m going to insist you are my hair guy on every film. We’ll travel the world! Wouldn’t that be a blast?

FRANK
Sure-- that’s...

PETRA
It’s going to happen. Mark my words. Okay-- gotta get on the set.

Petra gives Frank a quick kiss on the cheek before exiting. Frank begins organizing his tools.

JAMES
That girl.

FRANK
That girl.
Silence. James takes the chair. Frank continues working.

JAMES
She ain’t going to make it to Hollywood.

FRANK
Why do you say that!

JAMES
Just an observation.

FRANK
Don’t talk like that. She’s talented. She’s going to make it.

JAMES
You can’t make it if you never try.

FRANK
You heard her. She’s waiting for the right script.

JAMES
Which is code for being too chicken-shit to audition for anything.

FRANK
Why are you saying that-

JAMES
All I’m saying is, if she doesn’t get out there, she’s going to be just like Claudia. Claudia the hag.

FRANK
She will. She just needs...

JAMES
But hey. The longer she stays here, the longer you’ll have a job, right?

FRANK
You heard her. When she leaves, I’m going with her.

James doesn’t answer, just nods his head.

FRANK
What? You don’t believe her?
JAMES
Oh, of course I do.

FRANK
You don’t believe her.

JAMES
Frankie... I was a part of that whole-- machine. I know how it works.

FRANK
That was a long time ago.

JAMES
Some things never change.

FRANK
Well... It’s no sweat off my brow. I wasn’t looking for a job when this one came along, and I’ll be fine if this one goes away.

JAMES
Sure. Whatever you say, Frankie. Yippee! Let’s all go to Cali!

SCENE 3
Now Frank is sitting in the chair, reading a magazine. James works his rope. As he talks, he performs several rope tricks, maybe some body spins, flat spins, and at least one Famous Skip.

JAMES
It’s a dance, is what it is. You gotta be sweet to your partner. Give her enough freedom to let her shake those pretty hips, but keep her close enough so no one else steps in on your dance. Gotta let the loop have most of the rope-- can’t be stingy. And each time you spin the rope, roll it between your thumb and your finger. Keeps it from twisting up. Like this.

You watching?

Takes practice, but then you can just dance without watching your feet. You can throw the rope without thinking about it cause your body knows just what to do.

You listening?
Frank seems absorbed in his magazine, so James drops the rope, slowly begins winding it.

JAMES
Let’s go do something.

I’m bored.

Let’s get out of this room already.

Why you ignoring me?

FRANK
I could never ignore you, Jimmy.

JAMES
Then talk to me.

FRANK
I don’t know anything about rope tricks.

JAMES
I can teach you. Come on--

FRANK
I’m not much interested--

JAMES
You’re just afraid of looking the fool--

FRANK
No. I just don’t want to.

JAMES
Then what do you want to do!

FRANK
Would you settle down?

JAMES
They told you to leave for the day--
FRANK
She’s still filming--

JAMES
She don’t need you.

FRANK
What if her hair gets messed up in a take?

JAMES
Oh my god.

FRANK
I just think it good to wait.

JAMES
It’s late. Let’s go-- let’s go get a drink at that bar over in--

FRANK
I don’t want to drink.

JAMES
Then don’t. Just let me hang out there for awhile.

FRANK
Jimmy. I’m not going to the bar. As soon as they finish shooting, I’m going home. Frank takes up his cell phone, looks at the screen. He melts into a rather silly grin.

JAMES
What is wrong with you!

FRANK
She sent me a text.

JAMES
---

FRANK
What! It’s nice--

JAMES
--
FRANK
Stop it.

JAMES
You’re getting moon-eyed, you know that?

FRANK
Don’t be ridiculous. I just don’t want to--

Frank and James haven’t noticed Petra standing at the door. Frank freezes, hoping she didn’t hear them arguing.

She did.

PETRA
What are you doing?

FRANK
Nothing--

PETRA
Who are you talking to?

FRANK
I wasn’t-- no one. Just talking to myself.

PETRA
You’re arguing with yourself.

FRANK
Yeah. I was just-- nothing.

PETRA
Phillip told you to go home hours ago.

JAMES
Right? And yet, here he is.

FRANK
I know. I just... I had some work to finish up. Ordering supplies. Stuff.

PETRA
It’s late.
FRANK
Yeah. I’ll-- I guess if you’re all done, I’ll head out--

JAMES
Finally!

FRANK
Are you--

PETRA
No. No-- got rewrites for tomorrow, so I’m going to stick around a bit longer and work on those.

FRANK
Oh. Do you-- do you need help?

JAMES
No, Frank! That’s not the proper response--

PETRA
You don’t have to do that--

JAMES
The answer we’re looking for is “Okay, see you tomorrow, bye bye!”

FRANK
I don’t mind-- what can I do?

JAMES
Shit.

PETRA
Well, if you really want to help, could you run the lines with me?

FRANK
You mean-- read them?

JAMES
Argh! Please, Frankie--

PETRA
You don’t have to.
FRANK
No-- I’ll do it. Just--

Petra hands him the script. He looks the page over.

PETRA
Ready?

FRANK
Yeah-- from--

PETRA
The top of the page--

FRANK
Great. Okay. Go ahead.

PETRA
Billy-- I have something to tell you.

FRANK
What is it?

PETRA
I’ve-- I’ve been seeing another man.

FRANK
Oh is that right do you think I’m a total fool I had an investigator following you for the past two weeks I know everything every meeting you’ve had every hotel room you’ve been in just tell me why why when I’ve given you everything you could ever want I’ve been good to you--

James cannot help but laugh, causing Frank to stop. Petra is wide-eyed, trying to be kind.

PETRA
Well. That was--

FRANK
I’m sorry. I’m not an actor--

JAMES
You can say that again.
FRANK
Maybe you should get--

PETRA
It’s okay! You were fine!

JAMES
That was terrible, man. Where’d you learn to act?

FRANK
I never learned to act.

JAMES
Come on-- let me give you some pointers.

PETRA
Oh, don’t worry. Why don’t we just--

She reaches for the script, but Frank doesn’t release it.

JAMES
Try it again. But listen to me. Do what I do.

FRANK
I can try it again--

PETRA
You don’t have to--

FRANK
I can do better. Let’s do it again.

PETRA
... Okay. But let’s-- move to the next page. That’s where the rewrites are. Ready?

FRANK
Yeah. Okay.

PETRA
You know I love you, but you’re just no good for me, Billy.

JAMES
Don’t talk like that, sweetheart--
Motions to Frank to do it the same way.

FRANK
Don’t talk like that, sweetheart--

JAMES
I’ll give you the world on a silver platter.

FRANK
I’ll give you the world on a silver platter.

Petra seems surprised. Frank smiles.

PETRA
It just won’t work, I tell you-- we’re doomed--

JAMES
We’re soul mates, baby.

FRANK
We’re soul mates, baby--

JAMES
And nothing in heaven or hell can keep us apart--

FRANK
And nothing in heaven or hell can keep us apart.

PETRA
It’s just no good, Billy. You have to let me go.

JAMES
Never.

FRANK
Never!

PETRA
Wallace, he’s a good man. A fine man.

JAMES
You don’t love Wallace. You love me.
FRANK
You don’t love Wallace. You love me.

JAMES
Go to her--

FRANK
Go to her--

James smacks Frank and he realizes James is directing him.

FRANK
Sorry-- I meant--

JAMES
In this whole wide world, there’s only one person for me, baby--

FRANK
In this whole wide world, there’s only one person for me, baby--

JAMES
And I know you feel the same--

FRANK
You feel the same.

JAMES
So I’m here to tell you, no matter how many times you push me away, I’m gonna stand right here. I’ll--

FRANK
I’ll be standing right here, day and night, never leaving your side again.

Frank pulls Petra closer.

FRANK
It took me losing you to realize-- you are the most spectacular person on this planet, and I’m a better man by just being near you.

Closer.

FRANK
You say we’re oil and water. I say we’re fire and ice. And you know what happens when
fire meets ice...

Closer still.

FRANK
It makes a flood that sweeps away everything in its path. It’s an unstoppable force...

Pause. Petra might be swept off her feet. Or she might be a little freaked out.

PETRA
That-- that was really good, Frank.

Frank releases her, embarrassed.

FRANK
Sorry. Got a little carried away--

PETRA
No! No-- that was... wow. I didn’t know you could act.

FRANK
I didn’t either.

PETRA
Bravo! You are full of surprises, aren’t you?

JAMES
He’s full of something, alright.

FRANK
You make it easy, I guess.

PETRA
Well thank you... So... I guess we should call it a night.

FRANK
Yeah-- sure. It’s late.

PETRA
It is. Six a.m. call is going to come early.
FRANK
Okay then.

Petra goes to the door, stops.

PETRA
Frank?

FRANK
Yeah?

PETRA
I know I’ve only known you for a few weeks and all, but I just thought... I really trust you.

FRANK
Thank you?

PETRA
I know that sounds funny, but... In this world, you really can’t-- turn your back on anyone. Know what I mean?

FRANK
Sure.

PETRA
But you-- you’re not like everyone else. You do your own thing. You’re your own person. I like that.

FRANK
Well, I think you’re your own person, too.

PETRA
I am. When I’m with you. In this room. I like that.

FRANK
Good.

PETRA
So... I just wanted to say that. That I trust you.

FRANK
I’m glad.
Pause.

PETRA
What about you?

FRANK
What?

PETRA
Do you trust me?

FRANK
Of-- of course! I trust you.

PETRA
Really, really?

FRANK
Really really.

PETRA
Don’t say it just because I did--

FRANK
No, nope. I trust you.

PETRA
Maybe we should do a secret pact.

FRANK
A-- what?

PETRA
You know. Like when you’re a kid, and you make a pact with your friends--

FRANK
Do I have to spit in my palm? Or-- like-- draw blood--

PETRA
No. Nothing like that. We’ll just... How about this-- we’ll share a secret with each other that we haven’t told anyone else.
FRANK
Oh-- I don’t know--

PETRA
But you said you trust me!

FRANK
I do, but this--

PETRA
I’ll go first.

Petra walks back to Frank, takes his hands in hers. Deep breath.

PETRA
When I was sixteen, right after I started the show, I fell in love with... someone on the show. He was so kind to me, and helped me learn the ropes. Would talk to me when I got scared, always told me I could do it. No one had ever been that-- focused on me. I thought he was the best thing to ever happen to me. I spent all my time with him. My mother, she kept telling me I needed to stay away from him, but I didn’t listen. She was wrong. I knew she was wrong.

Then I found out I was pregnant. Sixteen and pregnant. I didn’t know what I was going to do. I told him. I thought he would fix everything, would soothe me like all the times he did before. Instead, he-- he became someone else. Someone ugly. Screamed at me, called me awful names, told me if I told anyone else he’d ruin me. Ruin me! I was terrified. But more than that? I was sad. I really thought he loved me.

So. I had... I... got rid of the... I never told anyone. Not even my mom. No one. Until you.

Long pause.

PETRA
Okay. Your turn.

Frank continues holding Petra’s hands, looking into her eyes. Finally:

FRANK
I’m haunted by the ghost of James Dean.

Another long pause. Petra stares at Frank.
Then she suddenly drops his hands, turns, and storms out of the room.

Silence.

JAMES
Frankie, haven’t you learned anything? Never have a better story to tell than the woman. Never.

Act II
SCENE 1

Petra is the one sitting in the chair, now. Alone. It is very quiet. She waits. After a moment, Frank and James enter. Frank stops—he’s surprised to see Petra. He crosses, sets his stuff down. No one speaks while he does this, but he finally turns to her.

FRANK
Good morning--

Long pause. Petra crosses her arms, glaring at Frank.

JAMES
Guess she’s still pissed, huh?

FRANK
Petra--

PETRA
Where have you been?

FRANK
What?

PETRA
You haven’t been here for two days.

FRANK
YOU haven’t been here for a week. I was-- I thought maybe I’d been--

PETRA
I’ve been here.
FRANK
I mean-- here, here.

PETRA
I’ve been here. I let that woman-- what’s her name--

FRANK
... Dixie?

PETRA
Dixie. I’ve been letting Dixie take care of-- would you look at this!

Bends her head towards Frank, showing him her hair.

FRANK
Oh--

PETRA
She’s ruined me, Frank. Ruined me!

FRANK
No-- I don’t think it’s--

JAMES
I don’t know, Frankie. It does look like it could use some deep moisturizing-- oh my god!

FRANK
It’s not that bad--

PETRA
I’m a wreck!

JAMES
Listen to me! I’m becoming a hairdresser!

FRANK
Don’t worry-- I can get it in shape in no time--

PETRA
You left me!

FRANK
I-- I didn’t leave you. I waited for days--
PETRA
And then you left!

FRANK
I thought maybe you didn’t want to see me anymore, so I took a couple of days off--

PETRA
You didn’t tell me you were taking time off--

FRANK
I’m-- confused--

JAMES
She’s going for the attack, Frankie--

FRANK
You haven’t spoken to me in a week--

JAMES
Don’t show fear--

FRANK
I really thought I was going to be fired--

JAMES
She’ll have you for breakfast--

PETRA
Did I say you were fired?

FRANK
No--

PETRA
You’ve got to do something--

FRANK
I just assumed--

PETRA
What are you going to do with this mess!
Frank stops.

JAMES
Yeah, Frankie-- what are you going to do with this mess?

PETRA
I can’t show my face like this. And I certainly can’t go to my audition looking like a broom. Does James Dean really haunt you?

Pause.

FRANK
Wait-- you-- you have an audition!

PETRA
Yes.

FRANK
That’s-- well, that’s great! Where?

PETRA
Is he here?

FRANK
What?

PETRA
Is he here-- in this room?

FRANK
Oh, it’s... we don’t have to--

PETRA
Like-- what is he doing?

FRANK
I shouldn’t have said anything--

James and Frank are looking at each other. Petra looks in the direction of Frank’s gaze.

PETRA
Over here? Is he--
FRANK
Tell me about your audition--

PETRA
Is he?

FRANK
---

PETRA
I knew it. You were lying to me--

FRANK
No!

PETRA
I told you something I’ve never told anyone before/ and what do you?

FRANK
/I know

PETRA
You make fun of me. Oh my god I’m SUCH an idiot!

FRANK
I would never make fun of you--

PETRA
Then tell me the truth!

Pause. Frank looks to James, who shrugs his shoulders.

JAMES
Guess you better tell the lady the truth.

FRANK
Yes.

PETRA
Liar.

FRANK
What?
PETRA
You’re a liar.

FRANK
I’m not.

PETRA
You’re haunted by James Dean.

FRANK
Yes.

PETRA
THE James Dean.

JAMES
The one and only.

FRANK
Yes.

Pause.

PETRA
Prove it.

FRANK
I can’t-- I--

PETRA
If he’s really here, tell him to do something.

JAMES
I’m dead. Not deaf.

FRANK
He can hear you.

PETRA
Okay... Okay. If you’re really here, do something!

JAMES
Like what?
FRANK
He wants to know what.

PETRA
I don’t know. Something.

JAMES
That’s not very clear.

FRANK
He-- doesn’t know what you want.

Petra grabs a water bottle, sets it on a counter.

PETRA
Tell him to knock it off--

FRANK
Oh, he doesn’t--

PETRA
If you’re really here, knock this over--

JAMES
I’m no one’s circus monkey, lady.

FRANK
Don’t be that way.

PETRA
What?

FRANK
Not you.

JAMES
I don’t have to do a damn thing. Tell her that.

FRANK
He says... He doesn’t do that. Things. Like that.

PETRA
Then how am I suppose to believe he’s here?
FRANK
I guess you just have to take my word for it.

JAMES
Knock over a water bottle. This is what--

FRANK
She didn’t mean anything by it--

PETRA
Who-- me?

JAMES
What does she think? I’m just going to perform--

FRANK
She just wants to-- you know-- communicate--

PETRA
Oh! You’re talking to him--

FRANK
You don’t have to whisper-

JAMES
This girl is getting on my last nerve.

PETRA
I’ve never seen a ghost.

FRANK
Well, there’s no way for me to--

PETRA
When I was a kid, I would go to my grandma’s house to stay the night. There was this one room, upstairs. I hated going in there. I’d get all creeped out.

JAMES
What’s she going on about now?

PETRA
Is it like that?
JAMES
Is it like that, Frankie? Do I creep you out?

FRANK
No. It’s more like... I’ve gotten use to him. Like a stray dog you didn’t want, but it won’t go away--

JAMES
A stray dog? Who are you calling a stray dog!

Frank begins laughing. James isn’t amused. He storms off. Which, in the cramped space, isn’t too far.

PETRA
What?

FRANK
He’s mad.

JAMES
Damn right I’m mad!

FRANK
He doesn’t like being called a stray dog.

PETRA
That’s not very nice.

FRANK
I’m just kidding...

I feel sorry for him, really.

JAMES
Why don’t you just shut up now--

FRANK
It can’t be any fun, being attached to me.

JAMES
Damn right.
FRANK
Cause I don’t... There’s just not much to my life. He’s James Dean. He should be... You know. He should be on some kind of great adventure. Not. Hanging out in my apartment.

PETRA
I bet you go on all kinds of adventures.

FRANK
Not really.

PETRA
Sure you do. I mean, you must. That’s why he’s-- why--

FRANK
Why he’s with me?

PETRA
Sure.

FRANK
I think it’s because he has no choice.

JAMES
Stray dog. I’m a stray dog.

FRANK
I said I was kidding... He’s still mad at me.

PETRA
Why doesn’t he have a choice?

FRANK
... I think it’s the way I--

What would you call it?

JAMES
You mean the way you acquired me?

FRANK
Don’t be like that--
JAMES
Annexed--

FRANK
I said I was sorry--

JAMES
Attained. You like attained?

PETRA
You look absolutely nuts, talking to no one.

FRANK
Yeah. I get that.

JAMES
Maybe you are nuts, Frankie. Maybe I’m not here at all. Just a figment of your imagination.

FRANK
You going to be a jerk all day?

JAMES
Yep.

FRANK
Good to know.

Petra goes to the center of the room, looks up as she speaks loudly. James shakes his head and walks away, leans against the door frame.

PETRA
Mr. Dean-- My name is Petra... I’m a big fan of yours. Huge. I’m glad you’re here-- I just want you to know, I think you were the finest actor of your generation. Even better than Marlon Brando.

FRANK
You don’t have to-- he hears you just fine. You don’t have to yell.

PETRA
What’s he saying now?
FRANK
Nothing. For once.

PETRA
He doesn’t like me.

FRANK
That’s not true--

PETRA
Then why won’t he talk to me?

FRANK
It doesn’t work like that.

PETRA
Then how? How did you get him?

JAMES
Get him. Huh.

Frank goes to a drawer, digs around. Produces a silver lighter. He holds it up for Petra to look at. James looks over at it for a long while before turning away.

PETRA
Is that--
FRANK
I think it was his.

PETRA
Wow. Where did you find it?

FRANK
I may have... accidently...

PETRA
You stole James Dean’s lighter?

FRANK
I didn’t know it was his. I went to this big-- what do you call them--
JAMES
Festival.

FRANK
Festival they had in Fairmont. A big festival all about James Dean. I thought it was kinda hokey, you know?

JAMES
Cause you’re such a continental gentleman and all, doing women’s makeup.

FRANK
I went to the museum, and they have all this stuff about him.

PETRA
And you stole his lighter.

JAMES
Yep.

FRANK
No! I was in the lobby, and there was a lighter, and I just picked it up--

PETRA
You stole it.

JAMES
Yep.

FRANK
No. I didn’t think it was valuable. I mean, why was it just laying there?

PETRA
So you stole it.

FRANK
I didn’t know it was his!

JAMES
Cause the monogram wasn’t a clue?

James storms over to him, points at the lighter.
Frank closes the lighter in his hand and turns away from James.

FRANK
Okay! Anyway, I forgot all about it until later, when I was in my hotel room and he--showed up.

PETRA
He followed you to your hotel room?

FRANK
I guess he’d been following me all day. But it was the James Dean Festival, and they have these--look-alike contests, and tons of people dressed up like him, so there were James Deans all over the place. I mean, everywhere. So--I didn’t notice him until I was alone. I thought he was some random strange guy at first. Maybe trying to rob me.

PETRA
You really took him away? From the museum?

FRANK
I didn’t mean to.

PETRA
No. Of course not. Who would do that on purpose?

Pause.

FRANK
That was a couple of years ago. He’s been with me ever since.

JAMES
Stray dog, just following you around--

FRANK
Would you stop it!

PETRA
I wish you wouldn’t do that--

FRANK
What?
PETRA
It freaks me out.

FRANK
Sorry.

PETRA
Just-- you know. Warn me or something when you’re going to talk to... him.

FRANK
Yeah. Sure. Sorry.

PETRA
Thank you.

Pause. Petra looks around the room, searching.

FRANK
Do you-- do you believe me?

PETRA
Why wouldn’t I?

FRANK
Well, it’s a pretty far-fetched story--

PETRA
I consider myself very open-minded. If you say that lighter belonged to James Dean, and that he’s in the room with us right this second, then I believe you.

FRANK
I’m so glad--

PETRA
It’s either that, or you’re crazy.

FRANK
I’m not--

PETRA
But you know, if James Dean really is haunting you, that makes you probably the coolest guy I’ve ever known.
FRANK
Well-- thank you.

JAMES
Don’t let it go to your head, Frankie. You’re only cool by proxy.

PETRA
But even if you are crazy, that’s still okay, cause you are a wizard with my hair. So can we do something with this-- this wreck?

FRANK
Sure... Sure.

Listen... Petra--I just want you to know-- your secret is safe with me. I promise.

PETRA
My-- oh!

FRANK
I’d never, ever betray your trust.

PETRA
Well, actually... I made it up.

FRANK
What?

PETRA
Are you angry?

FRANK
Why?

PETRA
I was acting! An actor needs to practice her craft every chance she gets. You really bought it, huh? That’s good! Means I did a good job, right? I thought maybe it was a bit too much. It wasn’t too much?

JAMES
She’s crazy. Tell her that.

FRANK
No. I... I really bought it. You’re good.
PETRA
Aww, that’s so sweet of you to say. Well. Let’s get on with it, shall we?

FRANK
Yeah. Okay.

James tries to say more, but Franks waves him away. He begins combing Petra’s hair.

SCENE 2

James is educating Frank again. Frank is ignoring him again.

JAMES
What most folks don’t realize is it’s all about the speed. You gotta be fast, really quick so momentum just-- watch--

He grabs a broom from the corner to demonstrate as he talks.

JAMES
You know, most pole vaulters that are any good... They’re over six foot tall. Tall guys are better. Ha! Didn’t stop me... Cause I’m patient. Gotta be patient. And smart. I learned everything I could. And I learned... the trick is, don’t slow down. Most guys, they get everything right, hold the pole just right, place it just right in the box, but right before they do, they slow down. Get a little scared. And that is where they screw up. Shouldn’t slow down-- gotta go faster. Simple physics--

Petra bursts into the room, clearly unhappy.

PETRA
FRANK!

James lowers the broom, clearly annoyed.

FRANK
What’s wrong--

PETRA
It was terrible!

FRANK
What--
PETRA
I felt like a complete fool!

FRANK
No--

PETRA
Yes! I thought I had done such a great job, and you know what he said to me?

FRANK
No--

PETRA
He said-- he said-- that’ll be all.

FRANK
What?

PETRA
That’ll be all!

FRANK
That’s-- what he said?

PETRA
And thank you.

FRANK
Well--

PETRA
THAT WILL BE ALL!

FRANK
Okay--

He guides her to the seat, gently pushes her into it.

FRANK
Calm down. Tell me what happened.

PETRA
I’m a failure!
FRANK
You’re not a failure--

PETRA
I am! I am! He said so himself--

FRANK
He told you you’re a failure?

PETRA
He said THAT WILL BE ALL!

JAMES
Do we have to do this right now?

FRANK
That doesn’t mean you failed. Huh? It just means--

PETRA
He hated me.

FRANK
No he didn’t.

PETRA
He did. I don’t think he even watched. He was too busy writing on his... stupid yellow pad.

FRANK
Maybe he was taking notes--

PETRA
He was writing down how terrible I am.

FRANK
You’re not terrible. Petra. Come on-- don’t you think you’re overreacting?

PETRA
What am I going to do, Frank?

FRANK
You’re going keep auditioning.
PETRA
Oh no. I can’t do that again.

FRANK
It was your first one! You can’t expect--

PETRA
What if I’m no good?

FRANK
You know that’s not true. It was one bad audition. You just gotta-- do the next one.

PETRA
I don’t know if I can--

FRANK
You can. You will. You’re good, Petra-- you just have to remember that--

PETRA
You think so?

FRANK
Yes.

Pause. Petra tries to pull herself together.

JAMES
She better toughen up.

FRANK
Don’t do that. She’s upset.

PETRA
What?

FRANK
Nothing.

PETRA
What did he say?

JAMES
Tell her.
FRANK
He’s just--

JAMES
Tell her.

FRANK
He says you need to have more confidence in yourself.

James throws his arms into the air, exasperated.

JAMES
You’re not doing her any favors--

FRANK
He thinks you need to believe in yourself.

PETRA
Yeah?

FRANK
Yeah. Now. Forget that guy, and think about the next one. When is it?

PETRA
Tomorrow--

FRANK
Okay. What part?

PETRA
The killer---

FRANK
Oh! That one-- you’d be so good--

JAMES
But can she play a drunk?

FRANK
What?

JAMES
A drunk. That was my first role--
James shows his skills as a stumbling drunk.

FRANK
We’re talking about her, not you.

PETRA
No-- what’s he saying? Does he have advice for me? Mr. Dean? Would you please give me some pointers?

FRANK
He’s being--

PETRA
I mean, I know what talent I have can’t compare to yours, but I would be so grateful if you’d just-- just some advice?

Pause. Frank watches James, who watches Petra. Finally, James nods. He puts the broom away.

JAMES
Tell her to show me her piece.

James takes a seat on the counter.

FRANK
Thank you. He wants to see your audition.

PETRA
Really? Oh my god-- really? He’ll help me?

JAMES
Could we get this over with?

FRANK
Why don’t you-- go on.


JAMES
What’s she doing?

FRANK
I think-- warming up. Right?
PETRA
Yes. I read that warm-ups are good to do.

JAMES
It’s acting. Not tennis. Tell her to just get on with it.

FRANK
He wants you to just-- jump in.

PETRA
Oh... I get it. Spontaneous movement, let the character just happen--

FRANK
Yeah. Like that.

PETRA
Okay. Should I-- do I need to explain the context?

JAMES
Dear god just--

FRANK
No, we’ll get it.

Petra nods, looks at the ground, grows still. Then she raises her head, a dangerous look on her face.

PETRA
You thought you were smarter than me. That you’d won. You thought wrong. And now, I’m the last face you’re ever going to see. Isn’t that a bitch?

She pauses, looking at Frank for encouragement.

FRANK
Great! Go on--

PETRA
That’s... That’s all I’ve got.

FRANK
Oh!
PETRA
So? What does he say?

FRANK
Jimmy?

JAMES
Yeah. Great.

FRANK
Come on-- give her something--

JAMES
Just seems like a lot of talking.

FRANK
What? That’s kind of the point, right? Isn’t that acting?

JAMES
Sure. But if you’re going to kill someone, do you really want to take the time to say all that?

PETRA
What’s he saying?

FRANK
Well, she has to say something, right?

PETRA
He doesn’t like it?

FRANK
Hold on--

JAMES
If I was going kill someone, I’d just walk up to them, say SURPRISE and shoot ‘em. Or stab them or whatever.

PETRA
What’s he saying!

FRANK
He thinks you’re talking too much--
JAMES
Unless you’re going strangle them.

PETRA
What does that mean, I’m talking too much?

JAMES
Then, you don’t want to say anything at all. Just sneak up behind them, catch ‘em off guard.

FRANK
Not you-- you’re not talking too much. He just-- what is it you want her to do?

JAMES
I don’t want her to do anything. I’m just saying, if it were me, I wouldn’t say a word. They want a killer? I’d come in like a killer.

FRANK
You can’t do those kinds of things now--

PETRA
What? What kinds of things?

FRANK
She goes in with a gun she’ll get herself killed--

PETRA
A gun!

JAMES
I didn’t say go in with a gun. Man, don’t you listen?

PETRA
I don’t have a gun. Do I need a gun?

FRANK
Then what are you saying!

PETRA
I think I can get one--

JAMES
I’m saying, you have to go in there and give ‘em something no one else has. Break the
rules.

PETRA
What’s he saying!

FRANK
How does she do that?

PETRA
Do what!

JAMES
That’s the whole point-- she’s gotta make whatever she does her own.

FRANK
He says-- you have to make it your own.

PETRA
It?

FRANK
It... It. You know-- the character.

PETRA
But the script-- oh... I get it. I have to be-- I have to be a... rebel.

JAMES
She had to go there.

FRANK
Well, I think it’s more you need to show the--

PETRA
No-- I understand. I just have to walk in there, break all the rules--

FRANK
I’d be careful about that--

PETRA
It’s perfect. Thank you-- THANK YOU--

FRANK
He’s... you really don’t have to yell.
PETRA
Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Dean... Can I-- do you think it would be okay to call him James?

James shakes his head, no.

FRANK
Yes. He says that’s just fine.

James is not amused.

FRANK
In fact, he says you should call him Jimmy. His closest friends call him Jimmy.

PETRA
Jimmy. Wow. He really said that?

JAMES
No, I did not--

FRANK
He really likes you.

JAMES
You sorry--

FRANK
He thinks you’re a very talented actor, and that you have a bright future in film--

JAMES
Enjoying yourself?

PETRA
Really? Oh my god. That means-- wow. I can’t believe James Dean thinks I have talent! Mr.-- Jimmy-- thank you for your help. I really think this time, it’s going be very different.

JAMES
You think this is funny?

FRANK
Oh no, Jimmy. It’s all you.

JAMES
Bastard.
FRANK
Yeah, yeah I agree. He says he thinks you’re going to be a star.

PETRA
A star! That sounds really good. But I have to get through the audition first... Wait... I-- okay, you’re going to think this is crazy, but-- Jimmy? Would you go with me?

JAMES
What?

FRANK
What?

PETRA
To my audition-- give me some moral support, you know? Just knowing you’re there would give me so much confidence--

JAMES
Is she kidding?

FRANK
I don’t think he can do that.

PETRA
Why not?

FRANK
Well, because he’s-- he’s attached to me.

PETRA
So, just give me the lighter.

FRANK
... No.

PETRA
Why not!

JAMES
Yeah, Frank, why not? I’m just getting in your way, like an old stray dog--

Pause. Petra is giving Frank her best pleading look.
Frank finally opens a drawer, removes the lighter, and hands it to her.

FRANK
Here.

Petra stares at the lighter as if it’s a religious icon. She puts it against her heart, closes her eyes.

PETRA
I can feel him--

JAMES
Whoa.

Petra opens her eyes, looks around.

FRANK
Can you--

PETRA
Wait--

Pause.

Petra walks away from James, stops at a point in the room. She reaches out with her free hand.

PETRA
He’s right here--

JAMES
Well now, this is hilarious.

PETRA
Hello. I’m so honored to meet you.

FRANK
Petra--

JAMES
Shh!
PETRA
I just want you to know, I’ve always had an... affinity for you. Ever since I saw you in East of Eden. I mean, everyone else talks about Rebel Without a Cause, but I thought Cal was your greatest role--

FRANK
Petra--

PETRA
When I was a teenager I had a poster of you in my room-- the one... You know, the one where you’re wearing the black-- sweater, and you’re pulling on it, like this--

JAMES
I like that one.

PETRA
I used to pretend you were looking at me. Like I was someone special. And now-- you’re really here, aren’t you?

FRANK
Petra, I don’t think--

JAMES
I thought you wanted to help her?

Pause.

FRANK
Okay.

PETRA
Thank you so much! I promise, I’ll take good care of it, and he’ll be back tomorrow. I have a good feeling about this!

Petra runs to Frank, gives him a kiss, and runs out of the room.

Frank is frozen in place. James goes to the door and looks out, then turns back to Frank.

JAMES
She really thinks I’m with her.

FRANK
Maybe it’ll help her. It’s not-- it’s harmless, right?
JAMES
Sure! Sure thing, Frankie. A little lie never hurt anyone.

FRANK
You think I should’ve told her?

JAMES
Not at all. Like you said. Maybe it’ll give her some confidence.

Pause. James continues watching down the hall.

JAMES
I kinda wish I was going with her.

FRANK
Really?

JAMES
I miss it.

FRANK
Auditioning?

JAMES
All of it. Auditions. The set. Turning myself into another human...

I was good.

FRANK
Yeah. You were.

JAMES
It just all went so fast. So fast. One second you’re on top of the world, everything you worked for just about to... And then--

Snaps his fingers.

FRANK
I’m sorry it worked out that way.

James shudders, pulls himself back into the present.
JAMES
I went out in a blaze of glory, didn’t I.

FRANK
Sure.

Pause.

FRANK
Listen, Jimmy-- I think we should talk about... things.

JAMES
What things.

FRANK
I’m going back.

JAMES
Back where?

FRANK
Fairmont.

JAMES
... Why would you do that?

FRANK
To-- to take the lighter back.

JAMES
And why would you do that?

FRANK
Because it’s not fair. You belong in your world--

JAMES
What world would that be?

FRANK
Your world. Surrounded by the your things. And the people. All the people who come to see you, to remember you.
JAMES
A museum. You think I should go back to a dusty old room--

FRANK
She’s right. I had no right to take the lighter. To take you. I mean, what kind of life... existence... is this? You’re stuck in this room. In the middle of nowhere. With me.

JAMES
I ain’t complaining.

FRANK
I know.

JAMES
Why you all of sudden feeling guilty?

FRANK
Just thinking.

JAMES
Well stop thinking. I don’t want to go back there.

FRANK
I’ve made up my mind.

JAMES
Without talking to me about it?

FRANK
It’s not your choice to make.

JAMES
Like hell it ain’t! I have as much right to decide where I want to be as you do!

FRANK
You ever consider that it isn’t... right? Being out here, with me? Maybe you have to face that--

JAMES
Don’t be telling me what’s right. I’m not going back. I’m not going back. Just get that thought outta your head now.
FRANK
Okay.

JAMES
Okay.

James goes back to staring down the hallway. Frank stares ahead. Silence.

SCENE 3

Frank is sweeping the floor. James plays with bottles on the counter.

FRANK
Don’t mix those up.

JAMES
That woman changes her hair color like--- well, I was going to say like we changes our shirts. Like you change your shirts.

James laughs, but Frank doesn’t.

FRANK
She just wants something new.

Silence.

Petra enters, her usual bolt of lightning self.

PETRA
Good morning, love! Say good morning, Jimmy--

FRANK
Hi there. You’re in a good mood today.

PETRA
I am.

FRANK
Any-- reason?

PETRA
Do I need a reason to be in a good mood?
FRANK
No, of course not. I thought maybe the audition--

PETRA
I just woke up this morning and realized how wonderful life is, you know?

JAMES
She slipping something into her coffee?

PETRA
When I think about how good I have it, I just have to be thankful.

FRANK
Of course.

PETRA
Don’t you think so?

FRANK
Sure. I mean, if I were a star on a hit television series--

PETRA
Well, there’s that. But I’m talking about bigger things. Much bigger things.

FRANK
Okay.

PETRA
You have a lot to be thankful for too, Frank.

FRANK
Oh, I know. I am.

PETRA
Are you, really?

FRANK
Yeah. Of course.

PETRA
Really?
PETRA
Tell me what you’re thankful for.

FRANK
... Um. My job. I am really thankful for my job.

PETRA
What else?

FRANK
Well... You. I’m thankful I got to meet you, and got to know you.

PETRA
Don’t you think you’re missing the most important thing?

FRANK
No?

PETRA
Yes.

FRANK
Yes?

Petra produces the lighter.

PETRA
Jimmy, Frank! For Pete’s sake, how can you not be thankful for Jimmy!

JAMES
Yeah, Frank. What’s up with that?

FRANK
I am SO thankful for Jimmy.

JAMES
I detect sarcasm in your voice--

FRANK
That’s right.
PETRA
Exactly! I mean, look what he’s done for us!

FRANK
... What has he done for us?

PETRA
Frank! I think you’re trying to be a jerk!

JAMES
Don’t let him fool you, honey-- he doesn’t have to try. He’s a natural.

PETRA
How many people in this world can say that they have the ghost of James Dean with them, helping them?

FRANK
I’m not sure--

PETRA
One.

FRANK
Probably.

PETRA
One.

FRANK
Okay. One.

PETRA
See? That makes you special! And for that, you should be very very thankful.

Petra hands the lighter over to Frank.

FRANK
You’re right. Jimmy, I am very thankful to have you with me.

JAMES
Shut up.
Frank opens the drawer, tosses in the lighter. Then he busies himself with the bottles.

FRANK
Are you ready?

PETRA
Let’s do this.

Frank begins. He places a cape over her shoulders, begins coloring her hair as she talks.

PETRA
I had the strangest dream last night. I was in a boat-- just floating along. Then I realized I was in the ocean. I mean, just water everywhere. And I suddenly didn’t have any oars or any way to guide the boat. I was at the mercy of the waves. I was starting to get scared, you know, like really worried that I was maybe going to die out there all by myself. Then I saw this-- black fin coming towards me. SHARK! I thought, and started panicking.

Okay, okay, Petra, calm yourself down, I kept saying over and over and that fin kept coming closer and closer and then-- this whale... thing... not really a whale, but like one, only not as big-- comes up out of the water. Rises up like a giant. I thought oh shit, he’s going to just flop over the boat and crush me flat. I’m going to drown. This is how I’m going to die!

But then he doesn’t. He just stands over me, staring at me, not saying anything. So I kinda wave, like this-- and say hello, and wonder if he can even understand me, and then he smiles. I kid you not. He smiles at me, and these-- little-- fish fall from between his teeth and land in the water, all plop, plop, plop... Now I’m thinking maybe this isn’t going to be so bad. I mean, he seems friendly. And you know, I think I get it. I think I know what the dream was trying to tell me.

FRANK
Yeah?

PETRA
I think it was trying to tell me to push off. To-- to make the leap.

FRANK
Or it could’ve just been a weird dream--

PETRA
I’m going do it, Frank.
FRANK
What’s that?

PETRA
I’m going to quit the show.

FRANK
... I don’t think that’s a good idea--

PETRA
It’s time.

FRANK
It’s not a good idea to base career decisions on a dream about a smiling whale.

PETRA
But it wasn’t a whale, can’t you see that? It was him! It was Jimmy!

JAMES
Oh no-- I’ve never played a whale--

FRANK
No, Petra, it wasn’t--

PETRA
It was! I know it was. I can feel him everywhere. In my dreams, in this room. Knowing he’s there makes me feel invincible. Like I can do anything.

FRANK
That’s good. It is. I just think you should wait until you have another job before--

PETRA
You don’t think I can make it.

FRANK
I didn’t say that.

PETRA
Then why aren’t you excited for me? I thought you’d be excited for me.

FRANK
I AM excited, Petra, I’m just... I worry about you, okay?
PETRA
Why? Because you think I’m not good enough to make it in the movies?

FRANK
No! Of course not!

PETRA
Jimmy thinks I’m good enough. Jimmy believes in me.

JAMES
Jimmy doesn’t want to be involved--

FRANK
Come on-- don’t put words in my mouth. I never said I didn’t believe in you. In fact, I believe in you a lot! I mean, wasn’t I the one who told you to audition?

PETRA
Well, yeah--

FRANK
Well yeah. It was me.

PETRA
Then why are you trying to talk me out of it now?

FRANK
I’m just saying you have to be careful.

PETRA
I don’t want to be careful! I want to live like Jimmy did--

FRANK
You know how that turned out for him, right?

JAMES
Hey!

FRANK
You could lose everything you’ve worked for if you’re not careful.

PETRA
Then I guess it’s good that I have a job waiting for me.
Pause.

FRANK
Wait... Wait. You-- job?

PETRA
Yep. I got the part!

FRANK
You got the part?

PETRA
I got the part!

JAMES
She got the part.

FRANK
Oh my-- that’s so fantastic!

PETRA
I know, right! I’m so excited! I move out next week--

FRANK
When-- I mean, how--

PETRA
I got the call this morning! Right after the dream. I don’t think that’s a coincidence, do you?

FRANK
What about--

PETRA
I’m telling Phillip this afternoon.

FRANK
Seriously?

PETRA
Bam!
Frank pulls Petra up from the chair, giving her a tight hug.

FRANK
I’m so proud of you--

He stops. Steps back.

FRANK
I’m sorry--

PETRA
What’s wrong?

FRANK
I shouldn’t have-- I’m sorry.

Frank returns to the bottles, rearranging them. Petra watches him.

PETRA
Frank?

FRANK
Let’s get your hair done.

PETRA
Frank.

JAMES
What’s wrong with you?

FRANK
If we don’t get going you won’t be ready for call-

He returns to working on her hair.

Silence.

PETRA
I haven’t forgotten, Frank. I told you. When I get in the movies, I’m taking you with me.

FRANK
Oh, we were just having fun. I never--
PETRA
I wouldn’t have done any of this without you. And Jimmy. I know that. You’re my angels.
I can’t do it alone--

FRANK
Of course you can!

PETRA
No. I’m... I’m too scared. I need you and Jimmy.

FRANK
Listen to me. You are a talented, beautiful woman.

PETRA
I’m just like all the other girls trying to make it. But I’ve got a secret weapon. Jimmy.
He’s my good luck charm. And you, of course. I mean, it’s not like I can talk to him
without you, but I hope you’ll let me borrow him from time to time--

FRANK
I’m taking him back.

PETRA
Of course! It’s your lighter--

JAMES
No-- we talked about this--

FRANK
I didn’t say I wouldn’t--

PETRA
What?

JAMES
I’m not going back to Fairmont.

FRANK
It’s the right thing, Jimmy--

PETRA
Oh! You’re talking--
FRANK  
I should never have done it.

JAMES  
But you did, and there’s no reason to go back--

FRANK  
It’s where you belong!

PETRA  
Wait-- you mean-- no, no, no, you can’t take him back there--

JAMES  
You want to leave me for -- however long it’ll be--

PETRA  
Let’s talk about this, huh?

JAMES  
Please, Frankie-- listen to me. Please. I get it. Okay? I can be a jerk. I get in your way. I keep you awake at night and make you look like a fool sometimes. But man, you can’t take me back there--

FRANK  
It’s not a punishment, Jimmy. I’m not trying to punish him. I’m--

PETRA  
I need him!

FRANK  
No you don’t. That’s what I’m trying to show you--

JAMES  
Would you want to spend your eternity watching people dress up as you and parade around your hometown--

FRANK  
Petra. If you want me to go with you, I will. I’ll leave everything right now and follow you wherever you want. But Jimmy doesn’t come with us.

Silence.
FRANK
Petra?

PETRA
Give me a sec-- I can’t... I don’t understand any of this.

JAMES
That makes two of us--

FRANK
We do this on our own. Win or lose, it’s all us.

PETRA
I don’t know if I can--

FRANK
You can.

PETRA
I can’t.

FRANK
You did! You did it, Petra-- all by yourself.

PETRA
No. It was Jimmy--

FRANK
Jimmy wasn't there.

PETRA
Yes he was... I had the lighter with me--

FRANK
I know. But he was with me.

PETRA
But you said-- the lighter--

FRANK
I know.
PETRA
You let me-- you mean you knew I couldn't see him?

FRANK
I just wanted you to have the confidence--

PETRA
Hold on... Can we just stop for a moment--

FRANK
Petra, you don’t understand what it’s like, having someone... attached to you. It’s not--

PETRA
It’s James Dean! Who wouldn’t want that!

FRANK
And what about him? It’s not right. Jimmy-- you have to go on. You can’t stay here--

JAMES
You think taking me back to Fairmont is going to fix that?

FRANK
Maybe you just need to...

JAMES
Need to what?

FRANK
Let go? Walk into the light or whatever?

JAMES
Walk into the light?

FRANK
Whatever it is you should’ve done!

JAMES
Fine. You don’t want to be around me? Take me back. Maybe someone else will appreciate my expertise and experience.

PETRA
What does Jimmy have to say about this?
FRANK
I think he understands--

JAMES
Like hell! Stop doing that! Tell her what I’m really saying, you coward--

PETRA
I’m sorry, but I don’t.

Petra rises, pulling off the cape.

FRANK
Where are you going?

PETRA
I can’t-- I need to think.

FRANK
But I haven’t finished your hair!

Petra grabs up the bowl of dye.

PETRA
I’ll get Dixie to finish.

Petra makes it to the door before Frank stops her.

FRANK
Petra-- I know you’re upset, but this is the best thing. For all of us. We can do this, okay? You and me. Trust me.

Pause. Petra stares at Frank, finally nods her head. Exits.

Frank looks at James, who turns his back on him.

FRANK
I’m sorry, Jimmy--

JAMES
Save it for someone who cares.

FRANK
I never thought I’d see myself with someone like her. I... I can see the future with her,
you know? I can see myself in that future.

JAMES
And there’s no room for a third wheel.

FRANK
I couldn’t have dreamed someone like Petra would want to be with me. This is... I’m sorry, Jimmy, but this is my time. My life. I have to do this.

Frank goes to clean up the counter. James finally takes the chair, crossing his arms and staring into space.

JAMES
Yeah. You can-- can-- spend your life fixing her hair and teaching her how to put on makeup. That sounds like a great life.

FRANK
It sounds just fine to me.

Pause.

JAMES
It’s not fair. I had the whole world right here-- right in these two hands! Making movies, living the dream. I was a star. There was nothing I couldn’t do. But one guy not paying attention takes a left turn in front of me and... It’s all gone. Why?

FRANK
When summer ends and winter comes,
And flowers fade by and by,
When God calls us one by one
Even angels all must die.

JAMES
---

FRANK
Something my mom used to...

JAMES
Is it suppose to make me feel better?
FRANK
I don’t know.

JAMES
Because I have to tell you, it’s not--

FRANK
What am I suppose to say? We all die, Jimmy. All of us.

JAMES
I NEEDED MORE TIME. I had things to do.

Silence.

JAMES
How long?

FRANK
Soon.

James gets up, begins playing with his rope again. Frank finishes putting stuff away.

JAMES
You’re going miss me.

FRANK
I don’t doubt that.

JAMES
I’m a pretty great guy to have around.

FRANK
Yes.

JAMES
I could be useful in Hollywood. A tour guide.

FRANK
A lot has changed since you... since you were there.

JAMES
Hey-- I hear there’s this big mural painted on the side of a building of me. You ever hear
that?

FRANK
Yeah?

JAMES
Yeah. Imagine. Me up on that building, twenty feet tall.

FRANK
I’ll be sure to look for it.

JAMES
Do that, okay? Make sure you see it. For me.

FRANK
Sure. I can do that.

James nods, returns to his rope. He winds it slowly, not in the mood for doing tricks.

FRANK
Hey. You want to... maybe show me how to do that?

JAMES
You ain’t much interested.

FRANK
Sure I am. Show me that one-- what did you call it--

JAMES
You’re just trying to make me feel better.

FRANK
Please?

James doesn’t look at Frank, just keeps winding the rope. Finally,

JAMES
Takes practice.

FRANK
Alright.
JAMES
Can’t expect to pick it up without work.

FRANK
I hear you.

James nods, finally hands the rope over to Frank.

JAMES
Well then, you better learn the body spin first.

Act III
SCENE 1
The room is dark. Silence.

Suddenly, Frank bursts through the door, looking like he’s just rolled out of bed. He stands in the center of the room, looking around, breathing heavily.

FRANK
Jimmy?

Silence. He reaches over and turns on the light.

FRANK
Jimmy-- come on. I know you’re in here. Stop playing with me.

He begins searching the room, finding nothing.

FRANK
It’s not funny... Come on. I thought we had this settled... Why are you doing this... Not funny... Come on. Let’s talk... Jimmy! Come on!

Frank jerks open the drawer where he kept the lighter. Rummages. Finally takes the drawer out and dumps it out on the counter.

When he finishes, he looks around as if Jimmy will jump out and yell SURPRISE. It is quiet.

Frank finally slumps into the chair. Stares ahead.

Jimmy appears at the door, also looking frantic.
JAMES
Frankie! Frank. Can you hear me?

James goes to Frank, who doesn’t look at him.

JAMES
You gotta get out there! She’s packing her things into her car-- Come on! Just-- get up, go look. You have to stop her. Don’t let her leave without you, Frankie!

I keep trying to tell her, she’s gotta come get you, okay? But she won’t listen to me. She’s... Damn she likes to talk. Yak yak yak. I mean, she knows you know she stole it from you, and that makes things awkward and all, but she can’t do this.

Frank? Please hear me. If you would just go out there and talk to her... Just-- come on!

James looks over his shoulder, out the hallway.

JAMES
She’s leaving. You know what that means? She’s leaving and I have to go with her and oh god this is going be a long drive. Frankie? I’m... I’m sorry. I wish I could... That’s not... this isn’t how it’s suppose to happen.

He is forced to exit. Silence. Frank looks towards the door.

SCENE 2
Frank is attempting some rope tricks. He’s not any good at it.

Frank tosses the rope aside and paces the small room. Rearranges the bottles. Stops. Grabs the trash can and begins throwing them in. Then throws a couple at the poster.

Time passes.

Frank is attempting the rope tricks again. When he successfully completes the trick, he gives a loud whoop and laughs in victory.

Then he realizes there’s no one to celebrate with him. He throws the rope on the counter.

Frank takes out a deck of cards, begins playing Solitaire. He plays for a moment, but can’t stop looking at the rope.
Finally, he puts down the cards and picks up the rope again.

Time passes.

Frank is damn good, now. The rope spins.

SCENE 3

One year later.

The room looks perfect—bottles are lined up, makeup cases neat, everything is in its place.

At the back of the room, her back to us, Petra studies the poster with the residual hair color splashed on it.

James sulks in a corner.

PETRA
That hair! My boobs are falling out. Why did I ever agree to that?

No response.

PETRA
You have to admit, I’ve come a long way, Jimmy.

JAMES
Don’t call me that.

Petra turns and looks at James, who turns away from her.

Petra crosses, dropping her bag on a counter and taking a chair. She does look much different than the poster. Now, she looks like a movie star.

She begins rearranging the items on the table.

JAMES
Leave his stuff alone.

PETRA
Are you talking to me?
JAMES
He doesn’t like it when people mess with his tools--

PETRA
Because I mean, you haven’t spoken to me in what-- three weeks--

JAMES
Leave it alone.

PETRA
Three weeks without a word from you--

JAMES
He has a system--

PETRA
Okay, Jimmy--

JAMES
Don’t call me that.

PETRA
That’s right. Only your friends get to call you Jimmy. And I’m not your friend.

JAMES
Drop it.

PETRA
God, what are we doing here? This was a mistake. Let’s go--

JAMES
We wait for Frankie.

PETRA
This place has... shrunk. Or something. It’s-- like a closet, isn’t it... Wow. Seems like so long ago already. Feel like I’ve been gone for years...

I grew up in this room, you know. On that set... Lots of memories.

JAMES
And we’re going to relive them?
PETRA
No... I guess not... Better to live in the present, right?

Petra pulls out her cell phone, sends off a few text messages. James goes to the door, looks down the hall.

JAMES
Where is he?

PETRA
I don’t know, but I told Mimi I’d be on the road by two--

JAMES
We’re waiting for him--

PETRA
I have a plane to catch--

JAMES
I’m not leaving until he gets here.

Petra gives James a long look. He slams his palm on the door frame and walks away.

PETRA
I’ll wait as long as I can. But I’m not missing that plane.

No response. Petra finishes her texting, puts the phone down. Looks around the room again.

JAMES
Maybe he’s on set?

PETRA
I’m not going out there. Phillip doesn’t know I’m here. He would’ve had me banned from the lot if he knew I was coming.

JAMES
What did you expect, just up and leaving like that in the middle of--

PETRA
When opportunity knocks, you answer--
JAMES
Unprofessional--

PETRA
It was my big break, Jim-- James. Don’t pretend you wouldn’t have done the same.

JAMES
Don’t pretend to know me.

PETRA
Like it or not, you and I are just alike.

Frankie enters, stops at the door.

Petra tries to give him a smile, but he doesn’t return it.

JAMES
There he is! Hey Frankie Boy! Long time no see!

FRANK
What are you doing here?

JAMES
We came to see you!

PETRA
He’s talking to me. Remember? He can’t see you anymore.

Frank reacts-- looks around the room for James, walking right past him.

FRANK
Jimmy? Hey buddy-- how’ve you been?

PETRA
How’s he been? He’s been an ass is how’s he been. But I’m doing great, thanks for asking.

FRANK
Why are you here?

PETRA
I... we just wanted to stop by. Say hi.
Pause. She stands between the two men, who have both crossed their arms.

PETRA
Can’t an old friend say hi?

JAMES
Tell him--

FRANK
Friend? Is that what you’re calling yourself these days?

JAMES
Tell him I made you bring me back. It was all my idea.

PETRA
Frank, come on-- don’t be this way-- I never meant for any of this to hurt you.

FRANK
Of course not.

PETRA
Why would I do that?

FRANK
Because people hurt other people. That’s what they do.

PETRA
That’s not fair. You’re the one who told me I could do it. I could be in the movies. You encouraged me!

FRANK
Yes. I did.

PETRA
And I’m doing really good, Frank--

JAMES
Well. WELL. You’re doing--

PETRA
Real good. Just finished filming, and I have a couple offers--
FRANK
That’s great, Petra. Now, if you don’t mind, I have work to do.

PETRA
I want you to understand--

FRANK
Don’t. I’m doing fine, okay? Everyone here is-- You can go back to Hollywood, do your thing, no hard feelings.

PETRA
Really? Because that would be so great--

JAMES
You are so stupid--

PETRA
Don’t you dare call me stupid--

JAMES
Would you prefer ignorant?

FRANK
I didn’t call you anything--

JAMES
Maybe foolish. Short-sighted--

PETRA
You know what? I liked it better when you weren’t speaking to me--

FRANK
Oh. You’re talking to him.

PETRA
Yes, him. That insufferable, arrogant, cocky--

JAMES
Don’t forget talented. Oh wait... you wouldn’t know that word.

PETRA
Agh! I can’t take it anymore! Frank-- he’s all yours.
FRANK
What?

PETRA
James. I brought him back.

JAMES
Please, Frankie, you gotta--

PETRA
You have to take him.

FRANK
I can’t just--

PETRA
You don’t know what it’s like, living with him--

JAMES
You don’t know what it like living with her!

FRANK
Actually. Yes. Remember? I lived with him before you stole the lighter from me.

PETRA
I know-- that was wrong. That was really wrong, and I accept that responsibility, I do. On a scale of one to ten, ten being the worst thing I could do and one being just, you know, like a minor thing, taking the lighter is definitely a seven.

FRANK
Seriously?

PETRA
Okay-- an eight. But not a nine. I didn’t hurt anyone. Physically. And I certainly didn’t kill anyone, so a ten is really off the mark. But I accept an eight.

Petra goes to her bag, pulls the lighter out. She returns to Frank, thrusting the lighter at him.

PETRA
So here, I’m sorry, I did wrong, he’s all yours, now everyone can live happily ever after.
FRANK
It doesn't work that way--

PETRA
Take it.

FRANK
Petra--

PETRA
Take it--

FRANK
You have to listen to me--

PETRA
TAKE IT TAKE IT TAKE IT!

She puts the lighter into his hand, steps away and holds up her hands.

Pause.

FRANK
Can you still see him?

PETRA
No.

JAMES
Idiot.

Petra slumps.

PETRA
Just shut up!

FRANK
See? I told you. It doesn’t work that way.

He hands back the lighter.

PETRA
Frank, please, you gotta help me--
FRANK
Last time I helped you, you stole something from me. Something I valued quite a bit.

JAMES
Aww, that’s nice of you to say, Frankie.

PETRA
And, I’m trying to return it--

FRANK
Actually, what I’d like is for you to leave, before Marsha comes in here--

PETRA
Marsha! You’re doing Marsha?

FRANK
I’m doing her hair. Yes.

PETRA
But you said you wouldn’t do that-- wouldn’t step in on Dixie, or whatever that hairdresser... law... thing.

FRANK
I didn’t step in on Dixie. You left. I was reassigned.

PETRA
Okay. But-- Marsha?

FRANK
Why are we having this conversation?

JAMES
I ask that every single day.

PETRA
That’s why! That-- man. Ghost. Whatever you want to call him. He’s making me crazy.

JAMES
I’m making you crazy? Oh, that’s rich--

PETRA
Why don’t you go back to ignoring me for awhile, huh?
FRANK
Petra, please leave. I don’t need your drama.

PETRA
I need your help.

FRANK
Since you’re here, tell me this... Did you ever say one thing to me that was the truth?
Did you ever intend to take me with you? Did you mean any of it?

PETRA

FRANK
Then you should feel right at home.

Petra returns the lighter to her bag, buying a moment before answering.

PETRA
I just wanted to make it, you know? All my life, my only dream was to be in the movies.
See myself on that silver screen. And I thought, with James Dean there telling me what
to do, what to say, how to just knock their socks off in auditions, I’ve got it made. But he
wouldn’t do it. He wouldn’t help me. So. I’m stuck in LA, don’t know a soul, and I have to
work it all out for myself.

FRANK
Maybe you shouldn’t be treating him like some kind of magic genie.

JAMES
Thank you. See? He gets it.

PETRA
Don’t think I haven’t figured it out. It wasn’t even him helping me all that time, giving
me advice. It was you.

FRANK
Doesn’t matter.

PETRA
It does. Maybe-- okay. Leaving without saying goodbye was an eight. But not seeing that
you were the one helping me-- that’s a nine.
FRANK
I got over it.

PETRA
Fine. You know what? I don’t need either of you. I’m doing it on my own. Me. Not you, not James. I’m grateful for your confidence and all, it gave me a boost when I needed it, but now, I want to do this alone. ALONE.

FRANK
You’ll never be alone with Jimmy around.

PETRA
I took him back. To Fairmont. That’s right. Just so you know-- it doesn’t work. I drove all the way to Indiana to leave that lighter there so I could finally have some peace and quiet. But no, it doesn’t work. No one would take the damn thing! Everyone there is so nice, so quick to chase me down, “Miss! Miss! You forgot your lighter, miss!” It was terrible!

FRANK
Looks like the lighter has to be stolen if you want to be rid of him.

PETRA
So what do I do? I can’t live with him. I can’t.

FRANK
Then let someone steal it.

JAMES
Oh hold on---

FRANK
But don’t ask someone to steal it. Maybe just... I don’t know- brag about the lighter a lot so that someone just... takes it.

JAMES
That is a seriously terrible plan.

PETRA
You think that would work?

JAMES
No! Who knows what kind of-- has either of you considered what kind of weirdo I could end up with?
FRANK
I guess it’s worth a try.

JAMES
Do I get any say-so in this?

PETRA
No. You don’t.

FRANK
He doesn’t like my idea?

JAMES
No, I do not like your idea! Come on! Surely you two can work this out--

PETRA
Steal it back!

FRANK
What?

PETRA
Do it. I won’t look. See? I’ll turn my back, pretend I’m--

FRANK
You just don’t listen, do you.

PETRA
Why not! It worked for you!

JAMES
Oh no--

FRANK
What worked for me?

JAMES
Don’t--

PETRA
Leaving it out so I could steal it!
JAMES
Damn it.

FRANK
What are you talking about?

PETRA
You left the lighter for me to find, which was kind of like turning your back... Of course you did, remember? That night after we--

She stops. She and Frank seem to realize the truth at the same time.

Petra slowly turns to face James. Frank does too, although he’s not looking in quite the right spot.

PETRA
You.

JAMES
It wasn’t--

PETRA
You left the lighter.

JAMES
You were suppose to take Frankie with us!

PETRA
You tricked me into stealing the lighter, and then tortured me for weeks?

JAMES
He was going to take me back to Fairmont. Which, now I know wouldn’t have mattered, but I didn’t know it then! I thought... I figured if we got him to California, he’d realize that he didn’t need to get rid of me. He might even have liked it there so much he would thank me for doing it--

FRANK
He took the lighter?

JAMES
I was trying to help, Frankie--
FRANK
He really did that?

JAMES
Tell him. Tell him I’m sorry and I should never have done it. I didn’t mean for him to get left behind. I just wanted to--

PETRA
He says he was bored with you.

JAMES
No no no!

FRANK
Oh. Well. Ha! How’d that work out for you, Jimmy?

JAMES
She’s lying!

FRANK
I guess... You know what? I’m glad he’s gone. He was just -- a stray dog. Everywhere I went, there he was. Making a wreck out of my life. Embarrassing me. Making me look like a fool every chance he got.

I’ve got it good, now. Marsha doesn’t play games. She appreciates me, appreciates my work. And it’s nice, not having to hide or lie. I like it this way. Good riddance.

JAMES
Please, Petra, tell him the truth!

PETRA
Let it go--

JAMES
You can’t do this. You cannot just go around destroying people’s lives--

PETRA
You don’t HAVE a life!

FRANK
Me?
PETRA
You, James, it doesn’t matter! Neither of you have a life! But me-- I do, and I’d like to get on with it!

FRANK
Then by all means--

James sweeps his arm across a counter, sending bottles flying.
Frank is frightened, looking at the mess that has flown off the counter.

JAMES
I HAVE A LIFE! I had a life-- a good one. One I want back more than anything... But I can’t. THIS is my life now, and I’ll tell you what-- I’d rather spend eternity locked in this room with someone like Frank than one more second with you, no matter how many movies you make. I--

FRANK
Both of you just-- get out of my life and leave me alone.

Frank crosses to his supplies, grabs up bottles.

FRANK
Here. To show there’s no hard feelings... A gift from me. Conditioner... some of my best hair spray... how about some gel, huh? Anything else you want?

He shoves bottles into her bag. Petra crosses, takes the bag off the counter.

PETRA
Obviously, you don’t want to talk. So I’ll be leaving... I guess I’ll go to the airport and try to get robbed.

FRANK
I wish you luck in getting robbed.

PETRA
I miss you, Frank. I really do.

FRANK
Have a great flight.

PETRA
I’ll text you, okay?
FRANK
No.

Petra isn’t sure what to say, so she busies herself with the bottles.

PETRA
Hey, I appreciate the-- You always knew how to take such good care of my hair. I still think you should open your own salon.

Well.

Okay. I’ll be leaving.

Petra moves as if she’ll give Frank a kiss on the cheek, but his look stops her. She nods, exits.

JAMES
I’m sorry. Sorry for all of it. I never meant no harm. I just—wish I could tell you that.

We had some good times, too, right? I hope you remember those someday. James follows her to the door, then stops. Waits. Seems confused.

Frank stands, hands in his pockets, smiling. James turns back to him.

JAMES
What’s— why can’t I... What did you do.

Frank pulls his hand out of his pocket, lifting the lighter for James to see. James lets out a whoop.

JAMES
You son-of-a-gun! I never knew you were a pickpocket!

FRANK
I am a man of many talents.

JAMES
You can hear me! Oh glorious day— Man, I can’t thank you enough— I thought I was stuck with her forever!

FRANK
Can’t have that, now can we?
James begins circling the room, touching everything.

JAMES
I never dreamed I would be so happy to be here. Hello. Hello. Nice to see you... I like what you’ve done with the place!

FRANK
Why thank you. I like to think it reflects my personality. Casual, but professional. Playful, but with a certain gravity.

JAMES
Yeah, yeah-- I get that.

Listen... what she said, about me being bored with you--

FRANK
Don’t worry about it.

JAMES
It’s not what I said, okay? I didn’t... But the whole-- the lighter. I’m sorry. Can I ever make it up to you?

FRANK
Jimmy. There’s not a thing I could do that would punish you more than spending time with Petra.

JAMES
So we’re... we’re okay?

FRANK
Sure. The whole-- bottle-- thing? Very dramatic.

JAMES
Well, when you started saying that stuff about me, about not wanting me around anymore, I gotta tell you--

FRANK
What’d you think? I’m turning into a pretty good actor if I say so myself.

JAMES
Impressive.
FRANK
That’s nothing.

Frank takes out the rope, shows James his work. James nods.

JAMES
You’ve been busy in my absence, haven’t you.

FRANK
Had some time on my hands. Figured I might as well learn some new skills.

JAMES
Oh it is good to be back.

James takes another look out the door.

JAMES
You think she’s going to come back, when she figures out--

FRANK
You know what? I do believe she’s had enough of your company.

JAMES
Suits me just fine. Ah. Home sweet home.

James goes to the chair, sits, props his feet up on the counter. He casually tips over a bottle with his foot. Smiles.

Frank sets the bottle back up, begins cleaning up the mess.

FRANK
You’re a real jerk, you know that?

JAMES
That’s right. That’s right. And I’m cute, too.

Lights down.

End play.

Rebel Without a Cause (Dir. Nicholas Ray, 1955)