

The Gun Rule

by

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Inspired by the Plays of Anton Chekhov

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Cast of Characters

Lori: Late 20s, sarcastic, smart.
Tru: 20s, ambitious, innocent.
Pauline: 50s, world-wise, famous.
Ernie: 50s, intellectual, shrewd.
Drew: 30s, practical, blithe.
Donovan: 20s, unsettled, stony.
Eli: A teenager. Unimpressed.

Scene

Late Summer 2001.

ACT I

Scene 1: a spaceship

Empty space. Bright, narrow light. An inquisition.

ELI is slumped in a chair, exhausted from hours of questioning in a police examination room.

The VOICE which speaks to him is disembodied, vocoded and machine-like. Compassionless.

VOICE

Tell me again.

ELI

Why?

VOICE

I want to hear it again.

ELI

You think I'm crazy? Is that what you think? You think I made it up? WHAT.

VOICE

Tell me again. From the beginning.

ELI

You don't believe me.

(beat)

Right? That's the truth, isn't it?

(beat)

I was in the woods. And not because I was doing drugs. If I had any drugs I would've stayed home. So it's not a drug thing. And it's not a hoax, either. I didn't spend the last two days here for a hoax.

VOICE

Tell me about the woods.

ELI

(sighs)

I was in the woods, and I came out, and there was a clearing. There was a little, I don't know, a meadow. And I can't take you there because I tried taking everyone there yesterday but apparently I can't find it now. But I know it's there, somewhere. I know there was a clearing. Because I came out into it and as soon as I got there I felt this-- the best word is just static electricity. I felt static electricity all over my body. Kind of tickly. Not bad, not good. Just weird.

VOICE

And then?

ELI

Then there were these lights. They came from off on the horizon. I don't know how to explain it, somehow it got very dark all of a sudden-- I felt this presence, like I was being watched, and all of a sudden there were these lights. Hundreds of them. Thousands. And they sparkled, like diamonds.

VOICE

You said like stars before.

ELI

Yeah, but they were closer. And falling, like-- kind of fluttering and floating-- almost on top of me. And --

VOICE

Go ahead.

ELI

Then this sound, like wings. Like thousands and thousands of birds flapping their wings. But right on top of me. The sound was everywhere... and then this spaceship appeared. I couldn't totally see it, but I knew it was there. It was more like seeing-- around it. And it was just hovering there, perfectly still, and as I was looking at it I heard-- it sounded like music.

VOICE

What kind of music?

ELI

Like nothing I've ever heard. Kind of singing. Kind of-- screaming. And then that turned into voices. I thought at first the spaceship was talking to me.

VOICE

What did it say?

ELI

Nothing. The voices turned out to be the police. The next thing I knew there was a flashlight in my eyes, and they took me to the hospital and told me I'd been gone for two days. And everyone's been asking me where I was, and I keep telling them about the spaceship but nobody believes me.

VOICE

In your first statement, you said the spaceship spoke to you. Do you remember what it said?

ELI
I don't think that was the spaceship, anymore. I think it was the police radios or something. I don't think they use language to communicate, the way we do.

VOICE
They?

ELI
The *aliens*.

VOICE
Earlier you said that when the aliens communicated to you, they gave you a code. Do you remember what it was?

ELI
It's stupid.

VOICE
Do you remember the message they gave you, Eli?

ELI
Yes.
(beat)
They said "BRB."

Blackout.

Scene 2: a surprise

In the darkness, a loud BUZZING.

PAULINE
Comingggggg...

She turns on the lights to reveal a SoHo loft.

Spacious, spartan, but impressive: the large wall given over mostly to a massive Warhol or Koontz.

An exit, left, to the kitchen and bedroom. A doorway, right, to the outside world.

Another buzz.

PAULINE
I'm COMING, for fuck's sake.

Pauline enters, hastily pulling her clothes on.

Her age is indeterminate, at best -- she's had so much work done that it's difficult to know where her old face leaves off and the new one begins.

The same can not be said for her breasts, which jut improbably from her small frame and hover motionless in a shirt that reads, simply, "MILF."

She presses a button on a 2-way intercom.

PAULINE

Hey, Lor. Come on up!

She presses another button.

ERNIE enters buckling his pants.

PAULINE

Sweetie-- stay in the bedroom.

ERNIE

Why?

PAULINE

You shouldn't be here while she's loading in.

ERNIE

Why not?

PAULINE

Because. Go hide in the bedroom.

ERNIE

Hide??

PAULINE

I don't mean hide. I mean-- yes, hide. Please.

ERNIE

(realizing)

You haven't told her about us.

PAULINE

I haven't specifically said to her about it, no.

ERNIE

About me, or about us?

PAULINE

Both.

ERNIE

I see.

PAULINE

I'm not keeping you a secret, sweetie. I just want tonight to be about her and not, you know. All of our shit.

ERNIE

What a charming expression for matrimony!

He starts to exit.

PAULINE

Wait! Gimme a cigarette?

ERNIE

You asked me to help you quit.

PAULINE

I know, I know -- but not tonight. Not around Lori and her friends. I need a buffer.

A knock at the door.

ERNIE

Of course, I'm just an outside observer but... might I submit you're giving your daughter this power over you? The same power you're giving the cigarettes? You're choosing to feel this way.

PAULINE

Okay, I don't have space for your shit right now Ern. So gimme a goddamn cigarette or the next time you want me to put my mouth on that thing I swear to Christ I'll bite it off and spit it in your fucking face. Okay? Muffin?

He hastily withdraws a pack of cigarettes.

She pops one between her lips and flip-strikes a match with her other hand.

ERNIE

Pauline Prescott, you truly are the Queen of Punk.

PAULINE

Go!

He shuffles off stage.

She takes a long drag before opening the door.

LORI

Forget your way to the door? Should I be worried?

PAULINE

SO nice to see you, darling!

Lori enters, carrying sound equipment.

LORI

Ugh. You smell like cigarettes. I thought you quit.

PAULINE

I did. But what's the point of rehab if you can't enjoy a smoke every now and again. Right?

She takes a decisive drag.

Donovan enters, with more gear.

LORI

Mom, this is Donovan. Donovan, Mom.

DONOVAN

It's an honor to meet you. I'm a huge fan. I think The Shitty Biscuits is one of the greatest bands ever.

PAULINE

What a perfectly wonderful thing to say! Thank you, love.

LORI

Donovan, give me a hand with this will you?

PAULINE

So, everything all right for tonight then, Lor?

LORI

Don't call me that. Yeah. The place looks nice.

PAULINE

Thank you. I hired a designer from LA.

LORI

Of course.

PAULINE

I started feeling stifled here. Creatively. You know?

DONOVAN

I get that, yeah.

PAULINE

Should I ring down and have the porter bring up the rest?

LORI

You mean the doorman? No, we got it.

PAULINE

Blimey, this takes me back, all right. Hauling gear on the subway, hoping your amp doesn't short out in the rain...

LORI

We took a cab.

PAULINE

Course you did, love. Now. What can I get you to drink?

DONOVAN

Umm-

LORI

Nothing. Thanks.

Lori exits, for another load.

PAULINE

You play too? Danny?

DONOVAN

Donovan. Yeah.

PAULINE

What is it: keys? Bass? Drums! You're a drummer, aren't ya. Sure you are, I can tell by looking at you.

DONOVAN

Guitar.

PAULINE

Ah well. You could play drums. You got the arms for it.

LORI

(off stage)

Donovan! Can you help me with this?

Donovan slips past Pauline.

A moment later Lori appears and holds the door open, as Donovan lugs in a heavy amp.

PAULINE

Would you like to borrow some makeup for tonight, honey?

LORI

No thanks.

PAULINE

You know me, I've got everything but a Korean woman to do your nails.

Donovan sets the amp down.

LORI

NO, Mom.

(to Donovan)

The soundboard.

He nods, executing her command.

Lori closes the door behind him.

She begins to plug in cords and gear.

PAULINE

Ooo, I like him!

LORI

I can tell. You're anglicizing.

PAULINE

Am I?

LORI

You do it every time you're around young guys you like.

PAULINE

I spent a fair bit of time in London when I was young,
I s'pose it comes natural.

LORI

Please don't do it.

PAULINE

He's bloody handsome! Not your usual type at all.

LORI

Mom.

PAULINE

Only that you usually prefer the ugly-sexy type. Which
isn't a bad thing, believe me... as long as they have a
nice physique. Half the time I close my eyes anyway!

LORI

I can't believe you smoke in here.

PAULINE

I like the way the nicotine interacts with my percs.
Anyway: he's adorbs. Reminds me a little of your
father, god rest him. That what you're wearing tonight?

LORI

What's wrong with it?

There is a thump at the door.

PAULINE

I don't know, you look: depressed? Are you depressed?

LORI

No.

PAULINE

In mourning?

LORI

I like wearing black.

Another thump.

PAULINE

Oh, right, the Permanent Black whatever.

LORI

Permanent Black Spots.

PAULINE

You know lots of people get depressed about money. Is it about money?

LORI

I told you: it's not about money.

PAULINE

Darling everything's about money! Unless it's about men?

LORI

I'm not. Depressed.

PAULINE

All right, all right. Trying to get close to my daughter, is all. I haven't seen you in AGES!

Another loud thump, desperate now.

Lori crosses, opens the door.

LORI

Could you put your tits away? It's hard to concentrate.

PAULINE

I have an excellent figure for a woman of forty-two. Why not show it off?

Donovan staggers into the room with a heavy soundboard clutched between his hands.

LORI

Mom, I know how old you are.

PAULINE

Well they weren't exactly cheap.

(beat)

A little lipstick, you know, would make your lips pop--

LORI

Okay! Think I'll have that drink now.

She starts toward the kitchen.

Pauline cuts her off.

PAULINE

Oh no, don't!

LORI

What?

PAULINE

I'll get it for you, love. You two get ready!

LORI

(unusual for her mother to wait on her)

Okayyyyyyyyy...

PAULINE

What would you like? We have-- beer, wine, Scotch--

LORI

Ugh. I hate Scotch.

PAULINE

Oh, me too. But. Nowadays... what can you do?

She flashes a smile and flutters her eyelids -- a tic that indicates she's covering for something.

LORI

Glass of water.

DONOVAN

I'll have a beer.

(off Lori's look)

What?

Pauline exits toward the kitchen.

LORI

Don't get too wasted before the show.

DONOVAN

I won't. She's not nearly as bad as you said.

LORI

Give it time. She'll get worse.

DONOVAN

(playful)

You did.

LORI

Fuck you.

(a beat)

I haven't told her about us, you know.

DONOVAN

You haven't told her I'm your guitar teacher?

LORI

Haha. Oh god, is this a huge mistake? Should I cancel the show?

DONOVAN

I wish you would've asked me that BEFORE I carried that soundboard up here.

LORI

I had this terrible dream last night... I was on a stage, out in the middle of the country. And the set was weird: these torn curtains, and -- it was very post-apocalyptic. Oh and there was a lake behind me, for some reason. And moonlight... my Mom was in the audience, and all these other people I didn't know. They were all talking to her, she was talking to them -- and nobody was even listening to me. They were just telling her how great she was. Pauline Prescott, Queen of Punk! We loved your music, why don't you get the band together again, blah blah shitty blah. I was so embarrassed, in the dream-- I felt like killing myself.

DONOVAN

Don't kill yourself. I tried it, it's no fun.

LORI

Thanks for being here.

He kisses her. Quickly begins groping her breasts.

Pauline returns with the drinks.

Lori pulls away from Donovan.

DONOVAN

I'll get the last load.

He exits.

PAULINE

Happy now? I'm wearing Donna Karan.

LORI

Yes. Thank you.

PAULINE

I hate Donna Karan.

LORI

I know.

PAULINE

So. You're depressed.

LORI

NO!

PAULINE

Oh, come on. Let me in just a little bit. Please?

LORI

GOD. You never change, do you?

PAULINE

I want to know what's going on with you! I miss you!
What's so wrong about that? My daughter, my God.

LORI

I haven't moved! And you know my number. If you missed me so much why wouldn't you-- nevermind. Let's drop it.

PAULINE

Okay, but you're the one shutting down. Notice that.

LORI

Fine. I'm a terrible daughter and a worse communicator.

PAULINE

I didn't say that. But you know Dr. Dorn--

LORI

Ugh. Mom.

PAULINE

Dr. Dorn has a new book out, is all. He says that everyone has some kind of natural talent, and that we should all be using our talents to express a universal

PAULINE
truth. He says we should focus on a single thought, and that the only things that are beautiful-- oh, what was it again?

Ernie has entered from the kitchen.

ERNIE
"Only that which is seriously meant can ever be beautiful."

LORI
What the fuck?

PAULINE
(rolling with it)
Surprise!

LORI
Oh, Christ. You're married again.

PAULINE
Surprise!

ERNIE
Your mother wanted me to wait offstage like some kind of bedroom farce but I thought: "No! Let's get out in front of it. Get some face time." As the politicians say.

PAULINE
Ernie makes movies now!

ERNIE
Yes, I was shooting a film here last year actually and we needed an interior. I remembered your mother's apartment--

PAULINE
I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, honey. I didn't know how things would work out. But we flew to Las Vegas last week and while we were there we decided, hey--

ERNIE
What the heck!

PAULINE
I know this is a lot to take in, Lor. I know you two haven't seen each other in-- is ten years? Sweetie?

ERNIE

Sixteen, muffin.

PAULINE

Anyway, yes. We're married. Again.

ERNIE

(a Bullwinkle impression)

This time for sure!

A beat.

PAULINE

Say something, honey.

LORI

Well. I'm surprised.

Donovan, who has been lingering in the open doorway with the last bits of equipment, enters.

DONOVAN

Hi. I'm Donovan.

ERNIE

(pronounced "yahspers")

Ernie Jaspers. And what do you do, Donovan?

DONOVAN

Little of this, little of that. I teach guitar... I play Xbox. Lori and I hang out a lot.

ERNIE

Sounds rejuvenating!

DONOVAN

I guess it is.

He drains his beer.

PAULINE

He's also a bloody fast drinker! Would you like another, Donovan?

DONOVAN

Sure, thanks!

She exits.

Donovan begins setting up equipment.

ERNIE

So! You've grown into quite a beautiful woman.

LORI

(rolls her eyes)

ERNIE

The last time I saw you, I think, was at that stadium show in Georgia... you must've been... eleven?

LORI

Yep.

ERNIE

And now here you are performing! It's really something, isn't it? The way the world wags on and on? I'm very much looking forward to seeing you play.

LORI

I don't remember inviting you.

An awkward beat.

Pauline returns with drinks, dispenses them under:

PAULINE

I wasn't keeping you a secret, sweetie. Lori and I only see each other once in a great while, I haven't had time to catch her up on everything. Ernie has become very successful, honey.

ERNIE

Well, in my way.

PAULINE

And he's in the program!

She hands him a seltzer, which he grudgingly accepts.

ERNIE

Anyway, it's a funny story: I actually wasn't certain this was the right building, it had been so long. So I buzz the number, and I'm standing outside waiting--

PAULINE

Not a word in sixteen years, suddenly pops in on me! Thankfully I was dressed.

ERNIE

That didn't last long!

LORI

Ugh, gross.

PAULINE

Lori prefers to think of me as asexual. Isn't that right, Lor?

LORI

Please don't call me that.

PAULINE

I tell her all the time, she's repressing something!

LORI

(impersonating Pauline, a little)

Oh yes, mother trained for years as a dime-store psychologist!

PAULINE

Funny! We do have a biting sense of humor in this family. Course my mother was the real Queen Bitch, eh wot Lor?

LORI

Pip-pip, mum. Pip-pip.

A beat.

ERNIE

I know how you must be feeling about all this.

LORI

I'll bet you don't.

ERNIE

You're probably feeling jealous and protective of your mother, which is perfectly natural. And it's also natural that you'd want to express those feelings as frustration and rage.

LORI

You know I'm twenty-seven, right? Not eleven?

PAULINE

Honey, be nice to Ernie. I know you had a tough relationship when you were young, but nowadays I'll bet you two have a lot more in common than you think. You're both artists, for one.

ERNIE

Yes, we were talking about her show before.

DONOVAN
Ha!

PAULINE
Lori usually plays under a different name. The Black--
what?

LORI
Permanent Black Spots.

PAULINE
She doesn't like the association with me, The Shitty
Biscuits, all that baggage. Which I don't understand! I
could put you in touch with so many powerful people.

LORI
No. Thank you. I want to be respected on my own terms.

ERNIE
I can certainly relate to that. This movie I'm working
on, for instance--

PAULINE
He just signed a distribution deal with Sunny Pictures!

ERNIE
Sony. Classics. But yes.

PAULINE
He doesn't call himself a director, even though he is.
He calls himself a *filmmaker*, because-- why again,
sweetie?

ERNIE
A director has certain obligations to the studio. They
have to keep the marketers happy, for instance-- tone
down a scene because it isn't testing well with the
target demo, et cetera. I get all the artistic freedom
I want, but I have to find the resources to do it. So I
am *making* films, not just directing.

PAULINE
Isn't that just, like-- so Punk?

LORI
Yeah you're a real baby-eater Ern.

PAULINE
We recorded *Decadent Trash* in a SoHo basement in 1981.
There was this heater that kept coming on while we were
recording, so Lori's father kept turning his guitar up
to drown it out. Even so, there's still a few songs you
can hear it on!

DONOVAN

I love that album.

PAULINE

Aww, thank you. Lori was around for that one. Remember it, honey? You would have been-- three? Four?

LORI

I was seven.

PAULINE

Oh, well. I spent most of the eighties blacked out!

LORI

And flat on her back.

PAULINE

Don't be vulgar, honey.

LORI

Says the woman wearing a MILF t-shirt!

PAULINE

I put on a sweater didn't I? Donna fucking Karan??

Donovan drains his second beer, burps loudly.

DONOVAN

Sorry.

PAULINE

Anyway honey, the loft will be empty for the next six or seven months so if you want to stay here you'd be more than welcome.

LORI

What? Why?

PAULINE

We're going to LA! Haven't you heard anything I said?

LORI

Sorry, but up until twenty minutes ago I thought Ernie was still your second husband. Why are you going to LA?

PAULINE

Ernie's making his movie! Jackoff, or whatever it's called.

ERNIE

Chekhov.

PAULINE

Right. At first I wasn't going to go because LA is so boring, but then I thought if I stay here I'll just be bored here so I might as well go to LA where it's much more interesting to be bored.

LORI

Could Tru and I stay here together?

PAULINE

Of course, darling! I haven't seen your sister in ages.

LORI

She's not my sister.

PAULINE

Whatever you like. Host another show, throw a party! On second thought, don't throw a party. Too much work.

LORI

All right. I'll think about it. Tru and I are supposed to sign another lease, but-- we haven't yet.

PAULINE

Is she still dating that idiot cop?

LORI

Mom.

PAULINE

Is he not an idiot?

LORI

No, he is. But. She seems to like him. So.

PAULINE

I always thought you two would make a good match.

LORI

Me and Tru?

PAULINE

Don't act so embarrassed, it's a perfectly natural expression of your sexuality. Blimey, when I think of some of the birds I had!

LORI

(to Donovan)

Aaand it's worse. Okay, Mom well we've got to get ready, thanks for introducing me to your new old husband, Ernie it's nice to see you, good luck with the movie, too bad you can't make it to the show tonight--

PAULINE

Hahaha, very funny. Of course we wouldn't miss it for the world. But yes, we'll leave you two alone. Come on, sweetie.

(she takes Ernie, pauses before exiting)

You know I spent most of my life trying to break through my parents' conservative values? Who would've thought I'd give birth to my very own little Reaganite!

Lori shakes her head.

LORI

Sorry about that.

DONOVAN

I think your Mom's awesome.

LORI

Lots of people do. And when she's like this, it's not bad. But I've seen the other side of this too often. As soon as something goes wrong with her and Ernie... she'll be on the phone to me, to pick up the pieces.

DONOVAN

It'd be cool to move in here.

LORI

Would it? Or would it just feel like-- I haven't grown up at all?

Donovan shrugs, heads toward the kitchen.

DONOVAN

Is it cool if I grab another beer?

Blackout.

Scene 3: a song

Lori enters and sits on a stool. There are a couple enthusiastic claps, and we hear Pauline:

PAULINE

(off)

We love you, Lori!

Lori checks her guitar tuning.

LORI

Thanks. This next number... I was thinking a lot about cycles. Millennium cycles, and life cycles...

PAULINE (OFFSTAGE)
Whoooo!

LORI

--and umm, I think there's cycles of love too. Coming together, and breaking apart. It's like the repetition of our lives, that we can't escape. No matter how hard we try. So. Thanks for coming out tonight.

PAULINE

Thank YOU Lor! Whooo!!!

*Lori begins to sing the acoustic heart breaker
"Call Me A Stranger" (words/music by Aaron Rux).*

Midway through the second verse the sound on the microphone goes out, leaving Lori to sing the rest of the song without amplification.

LORI

"Call Me A Stranger"

*You were the one who started to cry
When they dropped the bombs, and burnt our eyes.
And you were the one who held your breath
As I ran for cover, under the tent.*

*And you were the one who said to me,
"This is over before it's begun."
You were the one, you were the one
With your hands raised in the air,
Screaming "Jesus Christ."*

*Call me a stranger, call me a friend
Call me the name you want to hear.
Call me a stranger, call me a friend
And touch me again. Oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh.*

*I was the one who learned to fly
With wings I made from alibis.
These are the screams, these are the sounds
Of a city burning to the ground.*

*And you were the one who said to me,
"This is over before it's begun."
You were the one, you were the one
With your hands raised in the air,
Screaming "Jesus Christ."*

*Call me a stranger, call me a friend
Call me the name you want to hear.
Call me a stranger, call me a friend
And touch me again. Oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh.*

*As the song ends, a sharp note of distortion.
Blackout.*

Scene 4: a proposal

*After the show, the audience slowly dispersing.
Drew and Tru stand apart.*

DREW

I don't understand what the big deal is. We'd both be saving money on rent. It's not like you owe her anything, your lease is up! She can find somewhere else to live. And I think it's a positive move for us.

TRU

I don't disagree.

DREW

Then why all this indecision? Why not just say yes? I understand you're afraid of commitment. And I'm being very patient with you about that. But you have to look at the big picture, here. We've been together five years, we're gonna get married at some point-

TRU

Are we?

DREW

Aren't we? I thought we were just waiting until you got your career going, or started, or whatever.

TRU

My brother is sick. He needs a place to stay--

DREW

And *conveniently* it keeps us from moving in together.

TRU

Conveniently has nothing to do with it!

DREW

Convenience. *Convenience* has nothing to do with it.

TRU

Frankly I think you're being a little unfair.

DREW

I'm being unfair? Am I being unfair? Your brother is constantly--

TRU
This is different.

DREW
This isn't different. Your Mom is over-reacting, as she always does, and your Dad--

TRU
Watch it.

DREW
Your Dad is passing it on to you. This is the same old shit that always happens in your family. So to speak.

TRU
He said he was visited by *aliens*. He said they took him on their ship with them for two days, and that they promised to come back and get him. This shit has *never* happened in my family.

DREW
Tru, your brother. And I hate to be the one, you know, but your brother is crazy. And he's been crazy for a while. I mean, you know that.

TRU
Exactly. And my Mom needs a break. She's burned out! She's been taking care of him his whole life.

DREW
OK. If you ask me-- here it is. I don't think it's healthy for you to bail out your family again.

TRU
It's not about bailing them out. It's about not being so selfish all the time. They need me. And also: it's a sin! I know you think that's stupid, but that's how I was raised. You don't live together before marriage.

DREW
You're not supposed to have sex either!

TRU
Shhh. I know.

DREW
Are we gonna stop doing that?

TRU
Maybe, if you keep pressuring me to move in with you!

Pauline and Ernie enter, standing apart from them.

TRU
Oh my goodness is that Ernie Jaspers?

DREW
Where?

TRU
Don't look! He's right over there.

DREW
Who's Ernie Jaspers?

TRU
He did that movie *Days and Nights*?

DREW
With Tom Cruise?

TRU
That's *Days of Thunder*. Oh and that's Lori's Mom!

DREW
Where?

TRU
Don't look!

DREW
Then quit pointing people out!

TRU
I haven't seen her with the new --
(she gestures "breasts")
Lori's right, they're not even trying to be real.

DREW
Those are fake? That's too bad.

TRU
Seriously?

DREW
(he wasn't)
No! I was joking.

Lori enters. She sees the two groups and tries to slip away unnoticed, but Drew spots her.

DREW
There she is! Lori? You. Were. Great!

Drew hugs her dramatically.

LORI

Sorry about the sound.

Pauline takes Ernie's arm and approaches them.

PAULINE

There's my talented singer-songwriter! You were like Joan Baez meets Patti Smith and Annie Lennox all rolled up in one! Oh, hello! What are we all talking about?

LORI

Not you, Mom.

TRU

Hi, Pauline. Do you remember me?

PAULINE

(recalling the face, but not the name)

Of course I do! I haven't seen you in ages how are you! I'd hug you, but I'm not supposed to put pressure. How long has it been, dear?

TRU

Seven years.

PAULINE

Seven years! I remember when you were just a slip of a thing, and now you're all... Wasn't Lori great? I don't know where she learned to play like that, because I certainly didn't teach her.

ERNIE

Of course, why mediate the raw emotion of music with something as pedantic as technique?

LORI

Thanks. Ironically I owe it all to Donovan. So I guess he gave me something besides the genital warts.

(Tru's face darkens)

What? I'm kidding. I'm kidding!

Donovan staggers toward them from the crowd.

DONOVAN

I taught 'er. 'sgood. Bessstudent.

Lori wraps her arm around him, to keep him vertical. The following dialogue moves briskly.

PAULINE

Do you know my husband? Ernie--

TRU
Jaspers? It is you!

ERNIE
" 'Tis true, 'tis true, 'tis pity. And pity 'tis, 'tis true." And you are?

TRU
Tru.

PAULINE
TRU! Of course. Trudy-Tru. You're so grown up!

TRU
I love your films.

ERNIE
Thank you. You've no idea how flattered I am to be recognized. I think this is only the second time!

TRU
I've seen *Days and Nights* at least a dozen times.

ERNIE
Then you're two up on me.

LORI
Tru and I have known each other since we were kids.

TRU
We're sisters, actually.

PAULINE
Oh, don't be dramatic. You were sisters for a summer! Tru's father spent some time as my husband. How is he?

TRU
Fine, thank you.

PAULINE
Still talking to God?

TRU
He's a deacon. Yes.

DREW
I'm Drew, by the way.

TRU
Oh, yes. My--

DREW
Boyfriend.

ERNIE
Usted es un suerte diablo, señor.

DREW
Si, señor. Actually, I don't speak Spanish.

PAULINE
I would never have guessed!

DONOVAN
No hablaspan yole. I speak Messican.

LORI
Shut up, Donovan.

DREW
I really liked that last song you sang.

LORI
Thanks.

DREW
I really thought it captured this sense, that everybody seems to have right now, that the destruction of the human race is totally inevitable. Like nobody thinks we're gonna make it. Is that what it's about?

LORI
Oh, I don't know. I don't really think of the songs being about anything. Honestly when I play the guitar it's more about-- getting shit out of me that I can't live with anymore. When I finish a song I usually... end up crying.

PAULINE
Hell yeah! That's your punk rock blood, babe.

ERNIE
Or simply the artist's burden: to create and release, again and again.

PAULINE
Art is dead, that's what we always said. Art is dead, rock is dead, music is dead. Punk rock is the next thing. It doesn't give a shit if you like it or not, it gets in your face and spits on you. That's Punk!

DREW
Some of that other stuff reminded me of Jewel. You ever listen to her?

LORI

Jewel.

DREW

Yeah, she did that one? Oh, how did it go...

TRU

Wow. Ernie Jaspers. I can't believe this is happening!

PAULINE

Was the sound off tonight, Lor?

LORI

Don't call me that.

ERNIE

Believe me, I'm just thrilled to be recognized in public. It's only the third time it's happened to me.

PAULINE

It sounded simply dreadful where we were. Didn't it?

DREW

Sounded fine to me. Very clear. Very loud.

DONOVAN

See shirt is bad chiclet.

LORI

What?

DREW

Oh, I got it:

(sings)

You pu-u-u-ut your coat on, and stood in the hallway...

DONOVAN

See shirt is bad chiclet? Gemmer meal?

DREW

(still singing)

You were always lazy like that...

A silence.

ERNIE

"And the angel of silence floated by."

TRU

I know that line. That's from *The Seagull*!

ERNIE

Quite true, Tru. I'm making a movie about Chekhov, I suppose I have his lines floating around my head.

LORI

Oh! Tru's an actress!

TRU

Aspiring actress. Working barista. I do an audition piece from *The Seagull*, that's how I recognized it.

PAULINE

I had no idea you were an actress! Are you in the drama club at school?

TRU

I'm twenty-six.

PAULINE

Oh, dear. I don't want to think about how old that makes me. How old are you, Lor?

LORI

Seriously?

PAULINE

Just save me the math.

LORI

Twenty-seven.

DREW

Jewel is one of my favorite bands of all time.

DONOVAN

She bissick.

ERNIE

When do we get to see you perform?

PAULINE

What was that?

TRU

Oh, I don't know.

ERNIE

How about now? We'd all love to see it.

DONOVAN

She bissick!

LORI

Yes! I want to see it. I haven't seen you act in years.

PAULINE

I think he's saying "Shitty Biscuits!" How sweet.

TRU

I'd be so nervous...

PAULINE

Well, perhaps another time then.

DREW

Come onnn, you can do it! You are the seagull...
Remember?

TRU

Yeah I know the words, Drew. Okay--
*(she drops her head, getting into
character)*

"He doesn't believe in the theatre. He used to laugh at my dreams. And little by little, I lost faith. Then of course there were the concerns of love, the continual fear for our baby... By and by I grew trivial, and soulless, and played my parts without meaning. I never knew what to do with my hands. I could not walk properly or control my voice. To go through a whole play, constantly aware of how badly you're acting! It's indescribable. I am a seagull. No, no-- that's not what I meant to say. Do you remember how you shot a seagull for me once? And that man destroyed it, because there was nothing better to do. That is an idea for a short story, but it is not what I meant to say. What was I saying? Oh, yes, the stage. I have changed now. Now I am a real actress."

(she drops her head again)

So. Thank you. For listening.

LORI

That was great, Tru. Really. Really great.

ERNIE

Lovely.

DREW

Just don't ask her to do nude scenes. She's very self-conscious.

TRU

Drew!

DREW

Aren't you?

PAULINE

So she's crazy then? She thinks she's a bird?

TRU

Yeah. She has a baby with this guy, and he leaves her, and the baby dies, and then, yeah. She goes crazy.

LORI

I would go crazy if someone left me alone with a baby. I hate babies.

DREW

Nobody hates babies!

LORI

I do, I hate babies. They're all shit and screaming.

TRU

But they have itty-bitty hands and feet!

LORI

I don't have the mothering gene, or whatever it is. I think it must be recessive in the Prescott line.

PAULINE

Yes, it's been bred out of us by alcoholic men.

She drinks pointedly at Ernie.

TRU

Did I do all right? It's hard to do on the spot.

ERNIE

It was lovely. But I'm afraid I must disagree with your interpretation, Tru. I don't think she goes crazy. I think she escapes. Of all the characters in the play, she is the only one who finds freedom. You see in Chekhov's plays, the people who are most afraid of suffering, suffer the most. For Chekhov, pain and suffering are not only a part of life, they are essential to living a full life. Look at Kostya-- he lacks the courage to leave the comfort of his mother's farm. He's been cooped up by his own jealousy, caged by his own self-importance! It's not always the outward circumstances of our lives that limit us. Sometimes it is the fear of expressing ourselves which hurts most. The unspoken word festers, you see--like a disease.

PAULINE

That's so true. If only we could always say what we felt, life would be much easier!

ERNIE

Do you think life would be easier that way, Tru?

TRU

Yes. I do.

A moment between them.

PAULINE

Unfortunately there are rules of etiquette. Society requires us to play certain roles. As husband, wife. Whatever.

ERNIE

I thought Punk rejected everything? Especially society!

PAULINE

Punk lives on stage, it doesn't work in practice.

DREW

Exactly. You have to do what makes sense in the long run, not just what you feel like doing today.

DONOVAN

Sass a briefcase.

LORI

What?

DONOVAN

Briefcase!

LORI

All right. You need to sit down.

She walks him over to the couch to sit.

PAULINE

Anyway that speech reminded me of the time I ate acid with Sid Vicious.

DONOVAN

Will oo mare me?

LORI

No.

PAULINE

He spent the whole time talking about angels. He said he could hear them whispering to him and that one day they'd come to take him away from us. Which I guess they did, kind of.

ERNIE

Let me give you my number. If you'd like we'll arrange a formal audition and I'll tape it for the producers.

TRU

Really?

ERNIE

Truly.

He takes out a pen and paper, starts writing.

DONOVAN

Pleeeeeease will oo marry mee?

LORI

No.

PAULINE

You can give her the number at home, if you like.

ERNIE

Oh well. I've already started writing the area code.

DONOVAN

Will. You. Marry me?

He finally says it loudly and clearly, attracting everyone else's attention as they await her reply.

LORI

No, Donovan.

DONOVAN

Why not?

LORI

Because. You're drunk.

ERNIE

My personal cell phone. Guard that closely.

TRU

With my life!

PAULINE

What a talent you have, Tru! It's Lori's night, but everyone's buzzing about you. Such a little tramp!

(a beat)

Scamp! Sorry, I meant scamp.

ERNIE

An actress must be on the look out for every opportunity, muffin.

TRU

Thank you so much, Mr. Jaspers. I honestly can't believe this is happening.

PAULINE

(yawning conspicuously)

Oh dear. I'm suddenly very tired.

ERNIE

Indeed. This night belongs to youth.

LORI

Drew are you driving back to our place?

DREW

I think we were gonna stay at mine tonight. Right?

LORI

Okay. Then do you mind if we leave the gear here, Mom? Donovan's too fucked up to help me get it home.

PAULINE

Whatever you like. You can sleep on the couch.

LORI

Thanks.

PAULINE

Good night everyone!

ERNIE

Farewell, all. Adieu, Tru. A pleasure to meet you.

Pauline doles out hugs, while Ernie offers a quick, smart bow. Then they both exit left.

LORI

What are you two doing.

TRU

I have to open tomorrow, so I guess I'll stay at Drew's. Sorry, I know we haven't done sister night in a while.

LORI
That's all right. We have to figure out about the lease, too.

TRU
Yes, definitely. We'll talk.

DREW
We gotta ferry to catch!

LORI
Oh. All right.

TRU
But thank you so much, you were wonderful! I can't believe your Mom married Ernie Jaspers! And I have his phone number!

DREW
Great show, Lori. Really great.

Drew gives her another hug, then he and Tru exit.

DREW
(singing as they leave)
"Youuth belongs to the city. Youuuth belongs to the night..."

DONOVAN
Sorry. I sorry.

LORI
For what?

DONOVAN
For asking oo marry me.

LORI
It's all right.

She brushes hair from his eyes.

DONOVAN
Joo say yes? Errr no. Cah'member.

LORI
Yes. I said yes.

She begins to cry. He embraces her.

Blackout.

Scene 5: a seduction

A few days later.

Tru sits on a folding chair in one part of the room, facing Ernie and a small video camera.

She holds a script in her hand, uncomfortably.

TRU

Where do I look?

ERNIE

Just look at the camera. Whenever you're ready.

TRU

"All men and beasts! Lions, eagles, and quail... hornéd stags, geese, spiders, silent fish that inhabit the waves, starfish from the sea, and creatures invisible to the eye... in one word: life! All life, which must always come full circle, all life has died at last."

ERNIE

Why did you stop?

TRU

Sorry. I'm just not sure what my character means here.

ERNIE

She's saying everybody's dead.

TRU

I understand, but-- my character's an actress, right?

ERNIE

Aspiring actress. Working farm girl. In this scene you're playing the actress who plays Nina, whom Chekhov falls in love with during rehearsal.

TRU

Is she a good actress?

ERNIE

Are you?

TRU

I don't know, I'm trying my best but I think--

ERNIE

It takes a good actress to play a bad actress. So if you're a good actress, make her a bad actress. But if you're a bad actress, you'd better make her a good one.

TRU

Oh, okay. I'm sorry. I'm just very nervous. Okay, I got it. "All life, which must always come full circle, all life has died at last. A thousand years have passed since living creatures last walked the earth--"

ERNIE

Have you ever been in love, Tru?

TRU

Yes. Why.

ERNIE

Nina has never been in love, but the actress playing her has. That's why she's able to lose yourself in the role, the way Nina loses herself to Trigorin, the way Chekhov loses himself to her. You see? Then it is all the more devastating when Chekhov loses himself to the actress playing Arkadina and leaves her for her.

TRU

Okay, that makes sense. I'm sorry. I feel so nervous, being in the room with you. Okay. Sorry. "A thousand years have passed since living creatures last walked the earth, and the weary moon lights her lamp in vain."

ERNIE

I don't believe you.

TRU

Okay, well--

ERNIE

The earth is LIFELESS! NOTHING remains. Do you know what that must be like? That emptiness? That void??

TRU

No?

ERNIE

Tru I want to give you something. Something very special. It's something I was given years ago. By Pauline, as a matter of fact. At the time I didn't know how to accept it, but I am wiser now. I understand that without knowing or even intending it, she gave me the greatest gift one can ever receive.

TRU

What is it?

ERNIE

I want to break your heart.

TRU

You what?

ERNIE

Listen to me. If you are to play this part, you must know what it is to give yourself to someone completely. To give and give and give, and be rejected.

TRU

Why?

ERNIE

Because that is the journey Nina makes over the course of the play. And when we see her at the end, half-mad and confusing herself with a seagull, we know it is because she's learned to love. She has flown, like Daedalus, too close to the sky and her wings have melted. Everyone else remains the same, but she has become a new creature. Pathetic, yes, but different. Wiser. And a true artist. She says: "I act with delight, with rapture." She has achieved a transcendence that none of the other characters can, because she has lost herself completely to love. I'm offering you that same chance: to lose yourself completely, to me, to learn what love really is.

TRU

I know what love is, Mr. Jaspers.

ERNIE

Do you?

TRU

Yes! I love Drew.

ERNIE

Do you? Or do you simply wear him, like a necklace?

TRU

I love him! We're getting married.

ERNIE

Try this: close your eyes. Now. Picture yourselves looking in the mirror together. His arms around you. Looking into each other's eyes, through the reflection of the mirror. Now, tell me: do you love him? Looking at yourself looking at him? Do you honestly love him?

TRU

Yes! I do, I love him.

ERNIE

Are you like the smoke that curls up in the air around his face? Do you float and sink into his skin that same way? Or do you merely stand next to him.

TRU

I don't know what you're talking about.

ERNIE

There is something deeper than what you think of as love. There is a true, unwavering, real love -- that you are capable of. There is a deep, a feeling deep within you that you already know. And only you can know. Do you feel your heart beating? That's the sound it makes. Do you feel your breath in your mouth? That is how it tastes. It is powerful. Don't you think?

TRU

I think I should go.

ERNIE

Do I make you nervous? Be honest.

TRU

Yes.

ERNIE

Do you feel your heart racing right now?

TRU

Yes.

ERNIE

And as I get closer? Does it get louder?

TRU

Yes.

ERNIE

What is that force? I felt it right away, this energy between you and I. Powerful and invisible, drawing us together like magnets. Or gravity. Something you have felt before, perhaps, but not for Drew. Am I wrong?

TRU

No.

Ernie kisses her.

ERNIE

And how was that.

TRU

Umm--

He kisses her again, releases her.

ERNIE

I want to break your heart.

TRU

Why do you keep saying that?

ERNIE

I don't love you, Trudy, and I'm incapable of loving you. You're too young, too needy, and too desperate.

TRU

Then why did you kiss me! I'm sorry. I'm leaving.

ERNIE

I'm offering to break your heart. I'll seduce you, make love to you, let you fall in love with me and when I lose interest in you I'll break off our relationship completely. You'll have no contact with me at all, once we're done. That's the most humane way I know of breaking a heart -- to do it all at once.

TRU

Please, stop talking! I promise I won't tell anyone. Just please, stop talking like this. About this.

ERNIE

When I leave you, you'll be utterly destroyed. You will wonder what happened. You'll feel empty, completely caved in as if you had no memory of anything before the moment I ripped your heart from you. As you try to piece together what happened, events that seemed trivial in the moment will suddenly take on new meaning. That is when you will experience it.

TRU

What.

ERNIE

Transcendence. You'll feel emotions like you've never felt them before. Like switching from regular TV to high-definition. Every moment will matter so much more, because it will be in sharp relief against the void you feel inside -- an endless void, profound and painful all at once-- and bigger than you can possibly believe.

TRU

I don't know what you want from me, Mr. Jaspers. I really want to work with you but you're scaring me.

ERNIE

In that pain, at the center of it -- and this will be the most confusing of all -- will be your love for me. It will still burn bright and hot as ever, just as Nina's does, and from that flame you will be able to pour forth words and art and music. From that flame you will find your voice, the you that is eternal, the you that exists before the you you know -- that will be the source of everything you do from then on. The drunken rapture that Nina describes will be yours: "The bodies of all living creatures have dropped to dust, but their spirits have flowed together into one, and that great world-soul am I! I understand all, all, all, and each life lives again in me." The greatest gift I can offer you, Tru-- is your own life. All you have to do is ask.

A beat.

TRU

Will you put me in your movie?

ERNIE

Yes.

TRU

You're lying.

She gathers her things. He watches calmly.

She walks directly out the door without pause, but a moment after she's left he calls

ERNIE

Tru!

And after a beat she returns.

She appears defeated.

TRU

You're right about Drew.

ERNIE

I know.

TRU

And about -- my heart. With you.

ERNIE

Set your purse down. Come here.

She hesitates.

TRU

I don't know why you said all those things, before. If you don't feel the same way, I understand. I'm nobody. You're -- who you are. But I--

ERNIE

Shh.

He embraces her and kisses her deeply.

Then just as suddenly, he releases her.

Produces a pen from his jacket. Tenderly, he takes the inside of her wrist and begins to write on it.

ERNIE

Meet me here. Six o'clock. Pauline and I are supposed to fly to LA tonight. She'll keep the flight and I'll stay an extra day. Or more. As many as you'll give me.

He moves to kiss her again.

She stops him.

TRU

I only saw Days and Nights twice. You can lie to me all you want, but I'll never lie to you again. It's a sin.

ERNIE

In your eyes... are all my sins remembered.

He kisses her.

Blackout.

Scene 6: a break-up

Tru and Lori's apartment. Mostly bare, but there are moving boxes everywhere.

Lori sits on one, listening to her mother's voicemail message on her cell phone.

PAULINE (VO)

--and of course I decided to go out and get a dog, so I went outside to flag a cab up to Harlem-- that's where the cheap dogs are, by the way, if you ever wanted to get one. Not that you would, of course! I know how much you value your independence! Not like me, I always like having a man around to--BEEP!

Lori rolls her eyes, presses a key on her phone.

PHONE VOICE (VO)

Message deleted. Next message.

PAULINE (VO)

Hello! Me again. You should ask them if you can get your message time extended, I hardly get a word in before it cuts me off. And now I can't remember what I was saying! Oh yes, the dog. There were no cabs, so--

Lori presses a key on her phone.

PHONE VOICE (VO)

Message deleted. Next message.

PAULINE (VO)

I honestly don't know how you manage with--

Lori presses a key.

PHONE VOICE (VO)

Message deleted. Next message.

PAULINE (VO)

I'll cut my story short, I guess. The point is, you can't get a cab in Harlem if you have a dog with you--

Lori presses.

PHONE VOICE (VO)

Message deleted. Next message.

DONOVAN (VO)

It's Donovan. Sorry about earlier. Really sorry. It was one of those friend things, you know. Obligation thing. But I'm around, so... if you want to grab a beer and--

Lori presses.

PHONE VOICE (VO)

Message deleted. Next message.

PAULINE (VO)

Fuck! Okay, very quickly Ernie and I are staying another week so don't come over to the--

Lori presses.

PHONE VOICE (VO)

Message deleted. End of messages.

Lori shakes her head, puts her phone down.

After a beat, it chirps.

She lifts it up, listens.

PHONE VOICE (VO)

You have-- ONE --new message.

DONOVAN (VO)

Hey, it's me. Just got your message. Messages. Umm. Can we talk? Please? I mean that's a pretty shitty thing to do, to leave a message like that. But. Whatever. I'm turning off my phone or coming over. I haven't decided.

She closes her phone, throws it across the room.

She puts her head in her hands and starts to cry.

Tru emerges from the back room.

TRU

Hey! Why are you sitting in the dark?

Tru turns on the lights as Lori wipes her tears.

Tru is dressed to go out, and looks stunning.

LORI

Hey. Hi. Sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't know you were here. You look amazing.

TRU

Thanks. Is everything all right?

LORI

Yeah. Fine. Everything's--

She starts to cry again.

Tru takes her in her arms.

TRU

Ohh, Lor. My big sis. Tell me what happened.

LORI

It's nothing. It's stupid.

TRU

Does it have anything to do with why these boxes are still here?

LORI

I broke up with Donovan.

TRU

Oh. I'm sorry.

LORI

He was gonna borrow his friend's car, to help me--

TRU

And let me guess-- he forgot.

LORI

He didn't forget. He said his friend's car wasn't working, and he said he felt like he should help him work on it. And at first I said fine, I was fine with that. Because I had to run over to the studio anyway, and whatever. But then I thought about it, and I called him back, and I got his voicemail, and I said-- we're through. Because I can't depend on him! I mean if it was Drew, he'd have been here right on time--

TRU

He'd be five minutes early. It's a cop thing.

LORI

Right. And I know you find that kind of devotion boring, but it's better than the alternative.

TRU

It's not that it's boring... do you think I'm talented? Honestly?

LORI

Yes.

TRU

And-- do I seem like a "real" person, to you? Someone with -- I don't know, with legitimate feelings? Someone who's in touch with her feelings?

LORI

I think you're the most beautiful person I've ever met. I care... so much about you. Truly.

TRU

Because I was noticing, today, how I watch people. I study everyone I see: on the subway, in the park. I watch the way they move, their body language. I try to pick things up about them. I think: "oh, that would be an interesting walk" or "that's a strange way to touch someone's forearm" and I file it away. I store all of these little tidbits in my brain and I think about them later. Sometimes I feel my hand moving in a certain way and I don't understand it, it feels like it's not my body. And I realize "this is that girl from the park."

LORI

You're an actress. That's what you do!

TRU

But it only just occurred to me, today, that not everyone does that. Some people move their hand and they know it's their hand, it doesn't belong to anyone else. And what does that feel like? To be completely yourself, and to feel the world as if-- as if you were just a part of it, and not studying to play a part in it. Does that make sense?

LORI

Of course it does. I love how honest you are. That's what makes you so beautiful, I think. Part of it.

TRU

I don't feel beautiful. I feel ordinary. And selfish. Terribly, terribly selfish.

LORI

Maybe you're scared? Of feeling something... too much?

TRU

No. Something's changed in me, Lor. I think you can't live your life according to what you think you should do. You have to live according to what you *need* to do.

Lori brushes Tru's hair back from her ear.

LORI

Sometimes...

TRU

Will you do me a favor?

LORI

Sure! Anything.

TRU

Sorry, what were you saying?

LORI

Nothing. What's the favor?

TRU

My brother's coming in tonight. Eli. You remember Eli!

LORI

Sure, we used to dress him up in our clothes.

TRU

Well, something's happened to him. I don't know what, exactly. He went missing for a few days, and he finally got picked up by the police but he had this weird story about... something about getting picked up by aliens and taken onboard their ship or something ridiculous. He's crazy, basically.

LORI

Now I feel terrible about the clothes thing.

TRU

My Dad thought it would be good for him to get away, so he sent him out here. And I'm supposed to meet him at the airport tonight, but something's come up. Would you mind meeting him? I know it's last minute.

LORI

Yeah, no, I mean. Yeah, of course. That's what-- I mean, that's what friends are for.

TRU

Sisters.

LORI

Right.

TRU

I'll be out of town for a few days, at this acting workshop. But if you can just-- make sure he's eating. And sleeping. Whatever.

LORI

Oh. Sure.

TRU

Drew can take him some days, too.

LORI

Drew's moving in here?

TRU

Yeah. Okay, gotta run. Thanks, Lor! I owe you one.

Tru kisses her on the cheek and exits.

Lori collects her phone, gently caressing the spot on her cheek where Tru kissed her.

Finally she exits as well.

Lights change.

A moment later Drew enters, carrying a large frame wrapped in brown paper. He unwraps it under:

DREW

Tru? Honey? I got you something! A housewarming gift. I think you'll like it. I hope you will. Anyway. I was on the ferry yesterday, and I looked over and there was this seagull, just hovering there. Suspended. I stood there on the deck watching it for-- I don't know, ten minutes? It was pretty amazing. The wind was really blowing over the water. You could see little waves in it and everything. And this seagull was just hanging there, in space. Surfing on wind currents, I guess. Really something, the way it was staying there. Seemed like it wasn't working at all, at first. But then I realized -- it was making all these tiny little adjustments. All these little changes, constantly moving its wings. But always staying in the same place. Kind of sad, in a way. But I took a few pictures of it. And I blew one up.

And here the package has been unwrapped: a photograph, as he described.

DREW

It's for you! Because of your monologue.

(a beat)

Tru? Honey? Are you here?

Drew exits, leaving the photograph. Lights change.

All is dark on stage save the seagull, suspended.

Blackout.

ACT 2VIDEO: a seagull

The seagull photograph is hung in the center of the stage. It should not be immediately apparent that it is now, in fact, a framed video screen.

Gradual light change. MUSIC begins to play.

The photograph begins to move, gradually giving way to a montage. These are the necessary images:

- * Donovan on the subway, alone.*
- * Ernie waiting at the restaurant, alone.*
- * Tru in the back of a taxi, alone.*
- * Pauline at the loft, alone.*
- * Lori on the subway, alone.*
- * Drew on the ferry, alone.*
- * Pauline takes some pills and whiskey.*
- * Eli waits at the airport, alone.*
- * A pregnancy test slowly develops.*
- * Donovan buzzes Pauline's loft repeatedly.*
- * Tru arrives at the restaurant.*
- * Lori arrives at the airport.*
- * Donovan follows someone else into the building.*
- * The pregnancy test shows positive.*

As the music fades--without having peaked or reached any conclusion--the screen fades to black.

TEXT ON SCREEN: "SIX WEEKS LATER"

Scene 1: a complaint

We open on Ernie's bedroom in LA: much roomier, but clearly designed by the same hand that re-made Pauline's SoHo loft in Act One.

Ernie sits up, reading over a script by lamplight while Pauline tries to sleep beside him.

ERNIE

Muffin?

PAULINE

Mm?

ERNIE

Do you think I'm talented?

PAULINE

Uhm-hmm.

ERNIE

Please, muffin. This is important to me. Do you think I'm talented? Really?

She pretends to be sleeping.

ERNIE

Polly!

He shakes her.

PAULINE

I don't. Have space for this.

And she buries her head in the pillow.

ERNIE

You don't, do you.

PAULINE

Sweetie, you start production on a six million dollar movie next week. What does it matter what I think?

Ernie gets out of bed.

ERNIE

Dammit Polly this is important! Am I talented?

PAULINE

Yes!

She turns off the light.

ERNIE

Thank you. I don't know why you couldn't just say that.

He climbs in beside her, prepares to sleep.

ERNIE

(after a beat)

You think I'm intelligent too, don't you?

PAULINE
Yes.

ERNIE
And attractive?
(beat)
Polly? Do you find me attractive?

PAULINE
Yes of course! You're the most handsome man on Earth.

Ernie turns on the light.

ERNIE
I don't believe you.

PAULINE
UGH.
(sweetly)
Darling, I'm trying to get some sleep. Please turn off
the light.

ERNIE
I'm sorry, I can't. I need to talk about this now. It's
very important to me! And I feel like you're not
hearing me say that.

PAULINE
I'm sorry. All right. Here's the truth. Are you ready?

ERNIE
Yes.

PAULINE
(giving it all she's got)
I think you're one of the most talented, handsomest,
most intelligent men on the planet.

A moment.

ERNIE
Thank you. That means a lot to me.

PAULINE
I'm glad. Good night.

She turns off the light.

A beat.

ERNIE
One of?

He turns on the light.

ERNIE

What do you mean "one of?"

PAULINE

What do you want from me, Ern?

ERNIE

I want the superlative.

PAULINE

The what?

ERNIE

The handsomest. The most talented. The most intelligent.

PAULINE

Well, I'm sorry darling but I just don't have the superlative for ya tonight.

She turns off the light.

Ernie gets out of the bed.

PAULINE

Where are you going?

ERNIE

Out.

PAULINE

Out, where?

ERNIE

Somewhere, I don't know. Maybe a bar?

PAULINE

You don't drink.

ERNIE

I used to. I used to be very good at it.

Ernie goes out.

After a beat Pauline gets up to go after him.

PAULINE

Goddamnit Ern this is really pissing me-- OW!

She catches her toe on the edge of the bed.

PAULINE

Owwwww! Wahahaha...

She collapses to the ground and begins to cry.

Ernie comes rushing back in.

ERNIE

Muffin? Muffin are you all right?

PAULINE

Waaaaahahahaha...

ERNIE

Oh my love. Please. Please stop crying. Here, come here. What's wrong? What's wrong, muffin?

PAULINE

You don't love me anymore!

ERNIE

What? No! That's not true. Not at all. I love you.

PAULINE

What then? What do you want from me! What am I supposed to do for you?

ERNIE

Be honest with me. Please! Just be honest. Do you know what that's worth? That's worth everything. The whole world. If you can be truly honest with another person-- if you can look at them and say, completely honestly, that you adore them? That you respect their work?

PAULINE

Sweetie, what's all this about. Hmm?

ERNIE

You've been out in LA for two weeks, and... you haven't even asked me about the movie.

PAULINE

I'm still recovering. And Donny and I have been busy!

ERNIE

That's another thing, Polly-- why did you bring that boy along? I don't mind sharing the house with him, of course, there's plenty of room. But I hardly see you anymore. You're always out in the garage together.

PAULINE

I'm playing again! And it feels so good, sweetie. I wish I could describe it... to have gone from the pits of despair to the height of happiness!

ERNIE

I suppose it's all my fault, the despair.

PAULINE

Only a little bit sweetie. I'm a creative! We're prone to moods. But thank God Donny was there to see me through it, visiting me in the hospital every day--

ERNIE

We've been over and over this, Polly! I would have come if I could, but Sony has very strict schedules--

PAULINE

I know, I know. You had work! I understand. Of course I understand. It's just-- when it came time to come to LA, I couldn't leave him behind. He's as much a part of the family as Brooklyn is, now.

ERNIE

Do you love him?

PAULINE

Ha! Don't you wish.

ERNIE

And what's that supposed to mean?

PAULINE

I'm not the same fool I was. I know that look. Especially on you.

ERNIE

What look.

PAULINE

(shows him)

That's how you look at her.

ERNIE

Who?

PAULINE

Don't play dumb, dear. It cancels out the enormous investment you make in being smarter than everyone.

ERNIE

If you mean Tru there's nothing between us, I can assure you.

PAULINE

Well "I can assure you" it's not that you haven't tried. But maybe she's a smarter girl than I thought.

ERNIE

Is that what all this is? Jealousy?

PAULINE

Ha! I don't care who you fuck. If you can get her to lie down for your old dick-- if you can get your old dick up in the first place? Then have a good time, honey. By all means. I know you love me. You've always loved me. Just don't get between me and my music. Capiche?

ERNIE

But what about the movie? Aren't you interested in it? Don't you even want to read the script?!

She yanks the script from him, picks up a pair of reading glasses from the nightstand.

PAULINE

(she flips to a page)

"Do you think people will remember us in a hundred years? No, I'll bet they won't." I can't read a hundred pages of that! Sorry Ern. It's like broccoli and classical music -- I know they're supposed to be good for me, but I can't find anything they go with.

ERNIE

Maybe you're just not trying hard enough. When we met, punk rock was not music that I enjoyed listening to. But with practice, I've learned to appreciate it as an aesthetic, and even as a kind of Weltanschauung--

PAULINE

I never asked you to do that! Punk always made me feel good. I never asked why. It just did, and it helped me get out whatever shit I had inside. Then you came along, and analyzed it to death, and now it's not as pure as it used to be. When we were younger I loved you for how smart you were. Nowadays it's exhausting. There's so many better things to be in the world than smart. Life is full of surprises! And you suck all the joy out of life with that big bad brain of yours.

ERNIE

Some people in this world appreciate my brain. Some people think I'm the greatest living filmmaker in the world!

PAULINE

Some people might change their mind if you woke them up at three in the goddamn morning to brag about it.

She climbs back in bed, turns out the light.

Blackout.

Scene 2: a revelation

Tru's bedroom in Ernie's house. Sparsely furnished, with perhaps a few items we recognize as Tru's to indicate she's well-nested here.

Lori and Drew's suitcases are on stage.

The seagull/screen is now at the side of the stage, showing a live feed from a camera mounted to Eli's body. The actor playing Eli must therefore act as a cameraman, moving around the stage as necessary, approaching and withdrawing from characters as appropriate.

(The stage directions indicate moments at which the on-screen framing may take precedent over the stage picture. These are merely suggestions.)

TRU

"You and I, Uncle Vanya, we have to go on living. The days will be slow, and the nights will be long, but we'll take whatever fate sends us. We'll spend the rest of our lives doing other people's work for them, we won't know a minute's rest, and then, when our time comes, we'll die. And when we're dead, we'll say that our lives were full of pain, that we wept and suffered, and God will have pity on us, and then, Uncle, dear Uncle Vanya, we'll see a brand-new life, all shining and beautiful, we'll be happy, and we'll look back on the pain we feel right now and we'll smile... and then we'll rest. I believe that, Uncle. I believe that with all my heart and soul. Then we'll rest. We'll rest! We'll hear the angels singing, and we'll see the diamonds of heaven, and our earthly woes will vanish in a flood of compassion that overwhelms the world!"

(She holds her pose at the end a moment, before dropping into a deep bow.)

LORI

(clapping)

That was great, Tru! Really. Really great.

DREW

Oh! Yes. Sorry, I didn't know if there was something else coming.

He claps, too.

TRU
Those are the last lines of the play. Ernie says it's ironic because they're back where they were before the play started, poor and lonely as ever.

DREW
That's sad.

TRU
Yeah but they're at peace with it. So it's okay.

LORI
This Chekhov sounds like a real light-hearted dude.

TRU
What did you guys think of the gestures? I'm taking this amazing acting class, we just concentrate on gestures. All these different, subtle gestures--
(*demonstrates a few*)
And each one has a specific meaning, you know.

LORI
Oh. Yeah, I mean-- they were good. I didn't notice.

DREW
Yeah, the gestures were great.

TRU
Oh, it's so great out here! I have a different acting class every day. I'm taking voiceover classes, accent classes, Meisner technique... Next week I'm doing a workshop on being "in" the scene. It's really great. Everything is going great out here.

LORI
Well. New York misses you.

TRU
Yeah. How are things there?

DREW
Madness. I'm glad to get away for a few days.

LORI
Me too. My Mom wouldn't let me see her while she was in the hospital, because of course she blames me for her "suicide attempt." Which makes absolutely no sense. How can you blame someone else for your suicide attempt? Anyway now she's feeling better she insisted I come see her... which I've hardly had the chance to do because of Donovan being around all the time.

TRU

Is that like-- so weird for you?

LORI

Yeah. And no. I don't know. It's like your play. After everything that happened, I feel like the play should be over. Or we should be in a new play. Like everything should be different. But it's not, nothing's changed. I have all these complicated feelings for her still, sort of a mixture of love and loathing. For some reason I feel totally responsible for her! But I know I'm not. I realized that when she was in the hospital. I was like: she's her own person. If she wants to self-destruct, she can do it on her own. She doesn't need my shit feeding her fire. And the Donovan thing is-- whatever.

Eli approaches her, "zooming in" on her face.

TRU

Eli, no.

DREW

Hey Eli, remember me?

TRU

It's actually better not to talk to him.

DREW

Really?

TRU

That's what the psychiatrist said. Because it's not that he doesn't want to talk, it's that he can't talk. Some kind of, I don't know, a blockage or something.

LORI

Have you found a place for him yet?

TRU

Maybe. There's this Springhill Valley that looks nice.

DREW

It sounds nice.

TRU

They all sound nice: Evergreen Hills, Springhill Valley, Garden Terrace.

LORI

They sound like Ranch dressing flavors.

DREW

What are they like?

TRU

Oh... little rooms, one tiny window. But I don't know if he needs much, really. He seems so happy to just sit and watch, wherever he is. Oh! That reminds me. Can one of you take care of him again tomorrow?

DREW

Uh, sure.

TRU

Thanks! I'm sorry it's just so hard when I'm running around to make sure that he's eating and everything.

LORI

So you're running more errands tomorrow?

TRU

Yeah. Ernie's helping me with my audition piece and then I'm putting together gift baskets for producers.

DREW

I have an interview at three o'clock, but I can move that around. Probably.

LORI

An interview? With what?

Drew gives Tru a look.

DREW

Uh, with a precinct captain.

LORI

You're moving out here?

DREW

Thinking about it. Talking about it.

TRU

Nothing is set in stone.

LORI

Oh.

DREW

Yeah. So I'll take him.

(a beat)

Excuse me, ladies. I need to urinate.

Drew gets up, exits.

TRU
So what do you think?

LORI
About...?

TRU
Me moving to LA. Or Drew and I moving together.
Whichever one.

LORI
Oh, I guess: congratulations?

TRU
Oh, God. Is it that bad?

LORI
What? No! He's great. He's a good guy. And you should
be in LA. I mean, this is where it all happens.

TRU
We used to be sisters, Lor. I know when you're lying.

LORI
OK, first of all: we were only sisters for a year and a
half. Second of all... second of all, the guy uses the
word "urinate" in every day speech. I mean, come on!
Are you sure this is what you want, Tru?

TRU
No.

LORI
Then why are you doing it?

TRU
I don't know. We get along well.

LORI
But you have dreams. And Drew doesn't have dreams, he
has career goals. Drew isn't a person, he's a puppy
dog. He'll do anything you ask him to.

TRU
I kind of like that!

LORI
For now. But it gets boring, trust me.

TRU
Maybe you need more excitement than I do.

LORI

I don't. I really don't.

TRU

It just it seems like the right thing to do, with my brother and everything. And nothing's permanent, right?

LORI

Everything's permanent! You can't undo a decision, Tru. Your life is like a wallet full of cash, and you don't know how many bills you've got left until one day you reach in and find it's totally empty. You spent it all. Do you love him?

TRU

He loves me, I know that. And I know I need to be loved. I mean, that's what all this acting is about, right? On some subconscious level? And in the end I don't know that love has anything to do with it. We're a unit. We go into battle together. I wait in line and he parks the car. I cook dinner and he does the dishes. I know it sounds crazy, but I don't think I could go back to living alone. I need him. And he needs me, it's not one-sided. Also: I'm pregnant. So there's that too.

LORI

Oh my God! I guess... I don't know what to say.

TRU

There's nothing to say. I'm pregnant. What is there to say? It's not like I'm the first person to get pregnant. Happens all the time. I mean it's the only reason I'm here. Or anyone, of course. I always figured I'd be pregnant. But I guess I thought, when it happened, that I would be ready for it. And I'm not.

LORI

Have you told Drew?

TRU

No. And I'm not sure about that. About telling him.

LORI

You don't have to. I can stay here, and be with you, and we can go together to a clinic--

TRU

No. That's not an option. I was raised to believe, for better or worse, that if you open the door for-- selective abortions-- that you devalue life. You go against the laws of Nature, and you start playing God. I'm not qualified to play God. And I don't want to.

LORI

Yes, but Tru! What about your dreams? Your ambitions? My mother had me, and it ruined her life. She gave up her career, she married a shitty husband who left her pretty much as soon as they cut me out of her-- and you know who's had to take the blame for it her whole life?

TRU

And you know who wouldn't be here if she'd had an abortion? I'm just telling you what I believe. I know it's not a popular opinion. It's definitely not easy. But living a good life isn't easy. It shouldn't be easy. We're creatures who are meant to struggle. And you don't have to call it God, or anything, but you have to have some kind of code. Some system which says, absolutely, this is right and this is wrong. It gives you something to struggle against, and to strive for.

Drew returns, blithe.

DREW

I ever tell you I took theatre in college?

TRU

You took one class.

DREW

Yeah. But I did a *monologue* from *Hamlet*.

TRU

Which one?

DREW

Oh I can't remember the whole thing. I can't even remember how it starts. Let's see... nope. Can't do it.

LORI

Too bad.

DREW

I know it had the line "Neither a borrower nor a lender be" in it, but I can't remember the rest.

LORI

Great story, Drew. More wine, anyone?

They both decline.

Lori finishes the bottle.

TRU

Are you happy, Lor?

LORI

Happy? Who's happy? Is anyone happy? It sure doesn't seem like it. Maybe for a day, or a week if you're lucky. But it passes. It's like a vacation: when it's over you go back to work. You go back to your house. You go back to your husband, back to your wife. You go back to the every day stuff. You wash dishes. You take the garbage out. You eat. You sleep. That's all there is to it.

TRU

But don't you dream? When you're sleeping, don't you dream of the future?

LORI

Not as much, these days. Honestly, right now the future looks more like today than it ever has. I'm almost thirty. I play music, but I think it's less of a career and more of a hobby. If you are what you do, then I'm a bartender. I'm a bartender that's almost thirty, I'm single, and... it's not like you're gonna meet some great guy at a bar! Anyone at a bar by themselves at our age is there for a reason. And believe me, you don't want to find out what it is. So I work, I sleep... and when I dream, if I dream at all, I dream of the past. What might have been different.

TRU

Oh, it's all so difficult! I wish I could know, right now, if I was gonna be a famous actress. If my dreams will really come true!

DREW

They will. All it takes is faith. To say: this is what I want, I'm gonna get it. You just have to know that, and have faith.

TRU

But the future is so uncertain!

DREW

Everything is uncertain. But I believe if you want it badly enough, you'll figure out how to make it happen.

LORI

That's not easy. It's much easier to accept whatever comes your way, and then try to find happiness in that, even if it's not exactly what you want. That's what most people do. God knows that's what I do.

DREW

The path of least resistance.

LORI

Here, here!

Lori takes a big gulp of her fresh wine.

A beat.

Suddenly, Lori grabs Tru and kisses her deeply.

Another beat.

LORI

Sorry about that. I'm drunk.

TRU

That's all right.

LORI

I'm drunk. I'm definitely drunk. I'm gonna go to bed.
I'm sorry.

TRU

It's all right. You want me to walk you home?

She helps Lori up. Lori is suddenly much drunker.

LORI

Upstairs and to the right?

TRU

First door on the right.

LORI

I think I got it. G'night Drew! Night, Tru. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry about that.

TRU

It's all right, Lor. It's not like it meant anything.

Lori is struck sober by this.

LORI

Right. Right. G'night.

She exits.

When she is gone, Drew begins to clean up.

DREW

You know I hate to say this, but. I think Lori has a
little crush on me.

TRU

No.

DREW

You ask me, definite crush. There's a certain type of woman who has a particular type which is similar to me, and to those types of women I am terribly attractive.

TRU

If you say so.

DREW

Listen, I would never. I'm loyal to the end.

TRU

Like a puppy dog.

DREW

Woof, woof!

He starts to nuzzle her like a dog.

Blackout.

Scene 3: a betrayal

Ernie's garage, which has been converted to a makeshift studio. The large garage door is center stage, and must be able to open later in the play.

Various pieces of sound equipment scattered around, Donovan fiddling with them. Lori paces.

Eli drifts around, filming.

An air of impatience pervades.

LORI

My Mom asked me to be here at one. It's 1:45.

DONOVAN

Traffic. Plus she always runs a little late, you know.

LORI

(aggressive sarcasm)

I do know that. Thanks.

DONOVAN

If you need something to do, I could use a hand checking the levels--

LORI

Much as I'd love to help you, Donovan, I actually don't have any idea how to run this equipment.

DONOVAN

Right.

LORI

In case you forgot, you always ran sound for *me*.

A beat.

DONOVAN

You're beautiful when you're impatient. Seriously.

LORI

Drop it.

DONOVAN

Oh, duh! I picked these for you on our hike this morning.

He produces a small bunch of wildflowers from his coat.

LORI

Seriously?

DONOVAN

The last wildflowers of summer.

LORI

Pauline Prescott went on a fucking hike? Outdoors?

DONOVAN

Your Mom's doing really well out here. Ever since her suicide attempt--

LORI

Desperate cry for attention.

DONOVAN

I know it's hard to accept. But your mother tried to take her own life. She's very sick.

LORI

I hate to break it to you, Donovan, but a handful of Valium and a glass of whiskey do *not* a suicide attempt make. She's just using you. I don't know why, yet. To get back at me? Maybe to make Ernie jealous? I don't know. But I promise, the moment she gets bored with you she'll toss you back like all the rest. My mother isn't sick. She's just very, very good at manipulating her

LORI
emotions. Wait until you need something from her-- then be amazed at how quickly she stops being sick and starts withholding. Which I guess is sick. But like psychopathic murder-y sick. Sick like a fox.

DONOVAN
Do you get tired of beating on that drum all day?

LORI
What drum.

DONOVAN
Dr. Astrof says--

LORI
Please don't give me a line from one of my Mom's therapy books. I don't have space for that right now.

DONOVAN
Your mother loves you, Lori.

LORI
What do you get out of it? I was trying to figure out the other day who had the worst end of the deal. You get unlimited access to her friends in the music business, but you have to make love to her weird flabby body with those two bolt-ons hovering in your face--

DONOVAN
Your mother and I have a purely asexual relationship, Lor.

LORI
Please don't call me that.

DONOVAN
It's you who's stuck, dude. Not me. I'm growing up. When you and I were together, I was so confused. I wanted to express myself, but I didn't know how.

LORI
Unless you were drunk. At which point you would just start begging me to marry you.

DONOVAN
Exactly! I'm not an alcoholic, I just use alcohol as a means to an emotional end.

LORI
Oh, really? I thought you drank to escape. It's so hard to keep up with your discoveries.

DONOVAN

Do you have any idea how much I've missed you? Every day I wake up, the first thought on my mind is you. I smell you on my pillow. Every time I'm in the shower, I look at my feet and I see your toes next to mine. I feel you pressing against my back when I play... until I stop playing, or I get out of the shower. Every day you leave me. Every day you leave me a hundred times. Except when I sleep, because then you haunt my dreams. Every dream is you and I versus the world. What was it? The other night I dreamt I was an old man. I lived in a giant house in the country, and the house was filled with people I didn't know. And they all hated me. I slept upstairs, on the very top floor, to stay away from them. But the house was different. Time was like, all screwed up there. We were always eating breakfast at night. We got drunk in the middle of the day. I had a limp? And there was a doctor... and you were there. And you loved me. You were the only one in the house. Everyone else hated me, but not you. You stood by me.

A quiet moment.

Pauline enters.

She has a small dog in her purse.

PAULINE

I'm soooo sorry I'm late, everyone! I had to take little Brooklyn here to the doggie doctor.

(to the dog)

We were vewy vewy sick, weren't we? Yes we were! We were sick! But the doctor cleaned us all up and now we can poop again! Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

LORI

Insert Obama joke here.

PAULINE

Hiiii, Donny.

She cheek-kisses Donovan.

LORI

Donny?

PAULINE

How are you then?

DONOVAN

Good. Lori and I were just working some stuff out.

PAULINE

'Cor, that's nice innit? You see how bloody easy it is to open your heart, once you've started?

LORI

I can't believe this is happening. Somebody shoot me. Seriously. Anyone have a gun?

PAULINE

You shouldn't joke like that around me. I'm still recovering. Is Ernie here?

LORI

He's upstairs. They're working on her monologue.

PAULINE

I'll bet they are.

Pauline slips off an expensive coat, revealing an outfit that is trying too hard to be retro punk.

LORI

I think I prefer the Donna Karan.

PAULINE

Donny, honey are we all tuned up? Do I look all right love? I was keen on finding something edgy-ironic.

LORI

And you went with that?

PAULINE

Yeah, I think it's like-- self-aware, but still feels young? The main thing is, I don't want to come across like an old rocker humping away at my glory days.

LORI

Oh, no! You're not going on tour?

PAULINE

(showing her a flyer)

The Shitty Biscuits Millenium Reunion Show!

LORI

Oh jesus, Mom. How are you paying for all this?

PAULINE

I'm selling the loft! We have to move to Los Angeles anyway, to be close to Ernie's work. It makes sense.

(offering him a camera)

Eli, honey, would you do the honors?

LORI

Mom, you can't ask him to do things. He's--

But Eli seems to understand completely.

He takes the camera and gestures to start.

Scene 4: a theft

PAULINE

Hello, Shitty Biscuits fans! This is the one and only Queen of Punk Pauline Prescott, coming to you from the Sonia Estates Studios in Burbank, California--

LORI

That's a terrible name.

PAULINE

Shut up dear. I'm coming to you from the Sonia Estates Studios and I'm happy to announce that The Shitty Biscuits will be embarking on a brand-new REUNION TOUR this fall, dates and cities to be determined... I know a lot of Biscuits fans have been looking forward to this for a LONG time and I'm happy to make your dreams come true. My lawyers, my agent and manager all said it was a terrible idea but I talked them into it in the end, because I'm all about connecting with YOU, all our loyal fans. Of course we'll be playing our classic hits but there will also be some new ones, and I'm happy to give you a preview of that right now! And-a one, two...

Pauline and Donovan begin to play an upbeat, driving rock song. When Pauline begins to sing we recognize some lyrics from Lori's performance:

PAULINE

"Call Me A Stranger" (rock version)

You were the one who started to cry
When you caught me messin round with another guy
And you were the one wondering where it went
Well it's on your phone, under messages sent

Cause you were the one who said to me
"This is over when it stops being fun."
You were the one, you were the one
So raise your hands up in the air,
And wave goodbye.

Call me a stranger, call me a friend
Call me the name you want to hear.
Call me a stranger, call me a friend
Just don't call me again. Oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh.

I was the fool who gave you my life
 And all I got back was hope and lies.
 Well turn up the music, cause this is the sound
 Of an angry white bitch burning everything down!

Cause you were the one who said to me
 "This is over when it stops being fun."
 You were the one, you were the one
 So raise your hands up in the air,
 And wave goodbye.

Call me a stranger, call me a friend
 Call me the name you want to hear.
 Call me a stranger, call me a friend
 Just don't call me again.

Blackout as soon as the song ends.

In the darkness we hear:

LORI

YOU FUCKING CUNT!!!

*There is a loud CRASH and the sound of a dog
 squealing.*

Scene 5: a wound

That night.

*Ernie's bedroom. Pauline sits on the bed,
 attempting to wrap a long piece of gauze around
 her head. Outside, the sounds of a storm.*

Eli hovers and observes.

PAULINE

Donny? Would you give me a hand with this? You do such
 a lovely job.

DONOVAN

Sure.

He removes the elaborate bandage.

There is the smallest of abrasions on her skull.

DONOVAN

You can probably leave this off, you know.

PAULINE

I'd rather be safe than sorry. Besides, I love the way
 you wrap me up.

DONOVAN

All right.

Donovan begins to wrap her forehead again.

PAULINE

We've become quite a team, haven't we?

DONOVAN

Yeah. I really like playing with you.

PAULINE

Do you?

DONOVAN

Yeah, it's-- a dream come true. I'm really so grateful.

PAULINE

I'm so grateful to you! I feel as if I've been reborn.
Truly, I feel twenty-three again!

DONOVAN

Huh. I wouldn't want to be twenty-three again.

PAULINE

Why not?

DONOVAN

That was the year I tried to kill myself. I did a
piss-poor job of it, thankfully. But then I picked up
the bottle, and I didn't set it down until I met you.

PAULINE

We saved each other's lives.

She takes his hand.

DONOVAN

Life is like-- totally weird. Right?

PAULINE

What do you mean?

DONOVAN

I don't know, like-- it's so weird. The way your life
just goes on and on. All these random things keep
happening to you. It's hard to say what it all means.

PAULINE

Yes.

DONOVAN

Like: I remember the first time I heard The Shitty Biscuits-- my brother gave me a CD for my birthday. He was in a punk band, and he was like "you need to know this."

PAULINE

What album was it?

DONOVAN

I don't know, some kinda Greatest Hits thing.

PAULINE

The Shittiest Album of All Time?

DONOVAN

I thought it was pretty good.

PAULINE

No, the name of the album. Was it *The Shittiest Album of All Time*?

DONOVAN

Oh. Yeah, I think it was.

PAULINE

Did you like it?

DONOVAN

I loved it! That third track... what's it called?

PAULINE

"Stealing morphine."

(she sings a bit of it)

We will always be despised
For our blind and stupid lives
If my life could start again
Would the burning pain remain?

DONOVAN

Fully. Love that track.

PAULINE

How old were you?

DONOVAN

Umm, ten I think? Yeah it was my tenth birthday.

PAULINE

Oh.

A beat.

DONOVAN

Can I ask you a personal question?

PAULINE

Course you can, love. Ask me anyfing.

DONOVAN

What should I do about Lori?

PAULINE

What do you mean?

DONOVAN

I still love her.

PAULINE

But she doesn't love you, dear!

DONOVAN

I know.

PAULINE

So why keep loving someone who can't love you back?

DONOVAN

Because I don't have a choice? She's just so... she knows exactly who she is. She knows where she starts and where she stops. And I love that about her. Nobody's like that, you know?

PAULINE

Has it ever occurred to you that maybe you're giving her a little too much credit?

DONOVAN

No.

PAULINE

Everyone does it. It's because we can't get free of our own minds. We think we're empathizing with somebody but really we're only imagining our brain inside their head. So whatever you're seeing in her, that you think is so amazing-- it's probably really in you.

DONOVAN

Yeah. But when I'm around her, it's like-- even if it's just in my head, I want more of it. It's like a drug.

PAULINE

You have a very "real" quality about you. Anyone ever tell you that? You seem very real.

DONOVAN

Day by day. I've kicked a lot of habits but I can't kick love.

PAULINE

Oh, I love that! I want to write that down.

She gets up to find a paper and pen.

DONOVAN

Ya know, maybe that's the problem! Maybe life is hard because we're obsessed with ourselves all the time. We always think we've got it the worst. And then there's love, too. Like what I had with Lori. Where it's not all about you, it's about the other person. So there's selfishness, and there's love. The two sides of people. And underneath both of em is like, a lonely little heart trying to figure it all out. We're all lonely, selfish people. But we're full of love.

PAULINE

What dear?

DONOVAN

I don't even know. I think I'm still pretty baked.

PAULINE

Would you do my shoulders again?

DONOVAN

Ahh, I should head to bed pretty soon.

PAULINE

Pwetty pwease?

DONOVAN

Awright.

She sits in front of him.

He kneads her shoulders a bit.

She moans excessively.

He coughs uncomfortably.

Suddenly she takes his hand, drawing it to her breast.

PAULINE

Kiss me.

DONOVAN

Uhh--

She's already embracing him, kissing him deeply.

Lori enters, with Donovan's flowers.

LORI

Oh! Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

DONOVAN

I was just saying-- we were talking about addiction.

LORI

Don't say anything. I don't want to-- anything. Tru asked me to find Eli, this is the last place I looked.

PAULINE

He seemed scared of the thunderstorm, so we brought him in here.

LORI

You've always liked putting on a show. Come on, Eli. Let's go back to Tru's room, k?

DONOVAN

I'm sorry. To both of you, I'm sorry to both of you.

LORI

Your fucking flowers! Are making me sneeze.

She throws them at him.

PAULINE

Honey? I know you're angry with me. I understand. But there's no reason to take it out on Donny-

LORI

You can't let me have anything, can you? You can't let me have one thing of my own. Because it's all a competition for you!

DONOVAN

This isn't a competition. Let's all take some breaths.

LORI

You stole my fucking song!

PAULINE

It wasn't his idea, it was mine. I thought you'd be happy.

LORI

Happy??

PAULINE

Yes! You'll get songwriter credit and a percentage of sales, just like a real record deal.

DONOVAN

Sal thinks it should be the first single.

LORI

Oh, Jesus. You put him in touch with Sal?

PAULINE

Of course I did! The boy works an axe like a lumberjack, honey. He needs a good manager.

LORI

All right. All right. Let's just drop it.

PAULINE

Fine, but you're shutting down.

LORI

I can't talk to you with him in the room! I can't-- what is he *doing* in the room? Don't you see? This is the same kind of shit you've pulled my entire life! You didn't want me, fine. I understand. Believe me, I understand. But why do you do this? Why do you put someone between us? You bring these men into your life, man after man after man after man, and you give them ALL your goddamn love and attention, and you don't have any left over for me.

PAULINE

It was you who brought Donovan into my life.

LORI

I brought Donovan into MY life!

DONOVAN

I can be in both your lives.

PAULINE

Dr. Astrof says--

LORI

Godammnit!

PAULINE

Dr. Astrof says that life is like a forest. When you're born, you have a full, lush hillside covered in trees, and you can provide shelter for every creature on the

PAULINE

earth--lions, eagles, quail, geese--but as you grow older, you use up your resources. You hunt the animals for food and burn the wood for warmth. You restrict your possibilities, emotionally, and if you're not careful you run right out of woods.

LORI

By God, you're right, that's exactly my problem! I foolishly let the oil companies drill the shit out of my emotional woodlands. If only I'd known!

PAULINE

Your sarcasm proves how closed off you are. It's sad.

LORI

What's sad is watching your fifty-two year old mother act like a teenager around her new boy-toy.

PAULINE

I am NOT fifty-two!

LORI

I know how old you are!

DONOVAN

Hey hey hey. Everybody calm down, okay? I'm sure your Mom didn't realize--

LORI

Didn't realize I'm a person? No. She never has. I'm an obligation to her. Like a bill.

PAULINE

That's not true!

LORI

Oh yes it is! And if it wasn't for me, you'd still be the lead singer of *The Shitty Biscuits*! You'd still be the Queen of Punk Rock. You wouldn't have to settle for men that cheat on you and take your money. Admit it, Mom. For once, just tell me the truth. You wish you'd never had me, don't you? I'm a mistake! Say it. Say it!! I'm a mistake! I'm a mistake!! I'm a mistake!!!

DONOVAN

Polly, she's totally out of fuel. She just wants to cut your trees down. Don't say anything to her.

PAULINE

You know what Lor? I'm sorry you had a hard life. I really am. And believe me, there are lots of things I would do differently if I could. This may come as a

PAULINE

surprise to you but I didn't know what the fuck I was doing when I was your age. When I got pregnant with you, I was a child. Younger than you. And my parents didn't care, they'd already written me off. I didn't hear a word about you from my mother until your second birthday. She sent a birthday card with a hundred dollars in it. A generic card, because she couldn't remember if you were a boy or a girl. When I got pregnant with you, I was alone. Totally alone. And yes, I know I made some bad choices. But I have never once, not for a moment, regretted having you. In fact you're the only thing that's ever gone right in my life. Everyone I've ever loved has left me. And you never do. You're the only person that ever loved me back.

Tru and Ernie enter.

TRU

Is everything all right? We heard shouting.

DONOVAN

Everything's fine.

TRU

Is Eli okay?

DONOVAN

He's fine. Everyone's fine. Let's concentrate on the positives. We're all still alive!

LORI

How is that a positive?

DONOVAN

We're here together, inside the house. Not outside in the thunderstorm. Life is good!

Drew enters, brandishing a copy of Variety.

DREW

Nobody move!

DONOVAN

Why?

DREW

Trust me, you'll all want to hear this.

(reading)

"Production on *Chekhov*, the latest snobcom from director Ernie Jaspers was suspended indefinitely last week. Rumors of a production beset with financial difficulties spread quickly."

ERNIE

Ah yes, there's-- been a bit of a hiccup with that.

DREW

Wait, it gets better. "The film was scheduled to shoot in August, starring Dmitri Gurov as the title character and Hope Daley as the playwright's young love, Helena."

TRU

Hope Daley?

PAULINE

You can't believe those ragsheets, darlings, it's all a lot of poppycock. Everything's fine. Right sweetie?

ERNIE

Her real name is Hope D'Alario. I suggested "Hope Dawson" but she said it was too teen drama.

TRU

You sonuvabitch!

Tru attacks him, and must be restrained.

ERNIE

I suppose it's time for one of those truth-telling monologues. That's what you're all waiting for, isn't it? Fine. The truth is: I wanted to make this a low budget movie. Try that Danish thing, shoot on cheap cameras with terrible actors. But then Sony Classics got involved. They brought in Gurov, quadrupled our budget, kept telling me to plan more aerial shots-- "I want to see Russian estates! Big wide open spaces!" They were the ones who wanted Hope whats-her-name. And then... a new VP came in. Took an ax to anything his predecessor had touched. The picture business.

TRU

When were you going to tell me?!?

ERNIE

I'll find some way to get it made. I always do. But first I have to find somewhere to live. This house was only rented for the production, and Sony wants it back!

PAULINE

Oh my god, you're-- POOR?

TRU

You never even sent my audition tape did you!

ERNIE

I did. I did send it. I swear to you.

PAULINE

You're fucking POOR!!??

TRU

Liar!

ERNIE

No. No. I'm being honest with you. I never intended to be, it's true. I planned to break your heart, just as I said. But something about your honesty with me, Tru, inspires honesty in me. I've never felt like that before. I've never been totally honest, with anyone. Perhaps even myself. I sent the producers the tape. But the truth is, you're not a very good actress. What makes you so remote and distant and wonderful in real life makes you practically unwatchable on screen.

DREW

What does he mean, break your heart?

TRU

I did everything you asked me to, didn't I? Practiced every line, said it just like you wanted? Didn't I?!

ERNIE

I know. And you must hate me. But there's one more truth you should know. I have been thinking this, I've been considering it-- and now, here, in this moment I must say it aloud: I love you. I love you, Tru. I love you. My God! What a feeling to say it, nothing like when I've said it before. I must have been mad then, out of my mind entirely. It's you I love, it's always been you. For so long I've loved in the abstract. I've been too wary of love's perilous waters to commit myself fully. But you, you've done it. Will you marry me? Please? Will you marry me?

PAULINE

You little tramp!

Pauline attacks Tru and must be restrained.

A beat.

LORI

Well this is pretty fucked up.

Drew pulls a gun from his shoulder holster.

DREW

You sonovabitch!

Ernie's hands shoot up.

DONOVAN

Whoa, whoa, whoa! Let's all chill out a second.
Everyone! Fucking! Chillax!

Drew shoots Donovan in the leg.

He collapses.

DREW

Now. Everyone shut up. Everyone just-- shut the fuck up for a second. You're-- all of you-- you're so selfish. You're so selfish, and confused, all the time. You don't know what you're feeling! You talk and you talk about it, like you're trying to figure it out. And all of that talking, does it work? Do you ever get anywhere with it? No. I know you think I'm an idiot. I know you laugh at me to my face. You make jokes I don't get, stupid little references to shit and that makes you feel smart. It makes you feel like you're better than me but the truth is you're so much worse. I treat people with *respect*. I listen to them. I don't pretend to be something I'm not. I don't go around "processing" every little thing in my life. I work. Every day, I go to the goddamn office and I file reports and I chase down bad guys. Awful, terrible, human beings and yet-- some of them are still a lot nicer than you.

TRU

Drew.

DREW

Don't use that tone with me. I've got a gun here! I've gotta gun and I'm gonna kill every one of you. I'm gonna kill you, too, Tru. I am sick. To death. Of your shit. You know all my life I've been wondering why I was put on earth? And it suddenly occurred to me that I'm here to wipe you motherfuckers out. Haha! Simple, right? How could I not have seen that before?

LORI

We'll do whatever you say. Please. Don't shoot anyone.

He shoots her in the leg.

DREW

Don't interrupt me! Don't fuckin interrupt me. I'm trying to make a point. I was making a fuckin point, a second ago. What was I saying? Tru? Do you remember?

TRU

(sobbing)

Please...

DREW

You think I can believe that? Your tears, you think I can believe that? I can't believe anything you say! That's what all this acting does to you! You get so good at pretending, you can't tell the truth anymore!!

TRU

I'm pregnant!

DREW

You're what?

Ernie takes advantage of Drew's momentary confusion to lunge for the weapon.

But everyone else quickly jumps in the mix. A comical grappling, as everyone tries to seize control. Finally Lori wrenches the gun free and points it at her own skull.

LORI

Please... everyone stop. Just stop this. This is insanity. Everyone step back, please. I want to say something. I want to say something, because I haven't-- it's been hard for me to say it before. And now you're all listening, I need to say this. I have to say this. Tru. I don't care what-- how you feel. I love you. I love you, Tru. I don't know what to do about it. I don't know what it means. I feel it. That's all. I love you. I don't know when it started. I think I've carried it around for years, and I kept thinking, or hoping, that you would notice it. I thought if I hung on to my love, if I kept it close to me, and kept it to myself, that maybe one day the time would be right and I could show it to you. And by then, I thought, it would be a perfect love, made perfect by my years of tending it, my years of keeping it safe. Safe. But I realized... I've held on to my love for you for so long, I've held it in my fist for so long that now I'm afraid to open my hand. Because I'm afraid-- that it might be empty.

She collapses. Another mad scramble for the gun.

Tru secures it, and swings it wildly around.

TRU

Goddamnit! Goddamnit, Lori! Ernie! All of you! All my life people have fallen in love with me. All my life. And it doesn't mean anything to me. I've never

TRU

understood what they mean by it. Why? Because I've never loved anyone. I've never loved anyone, and that's why you all love me. Everyone I meet falls in love with me. But I don't love anyone, and I can't love anyone. I know I'm a beautiful person. I'm a kind, loving, and radiant person, and my entire life I've been worshiped or exploited for it. And I'm sick of it! I deserve more. I deserve to be somebody! I deserve more than staying in one place. I don't want to be the seagull in your picture. I want to fly. You can love me, all of you, but I will never, ever love you back. I'm not the seagull. I won't stay in one place for you. *I'm not the fucking seagull!* I wanted one thing in this world, I've asked God for one thing on my knees every night before bed and it was to be an actress. To be a famous actress. Why? Because if everyone is going to take from me, I want to be recognized for it. I want people to know my name. That's all I care about. So tell me. Who do I have to point this gun at to make that happen? Ernie? Pauline? Donovan? Who?

Scene 6: a return

A bizarre sound, getting steadily louder.

Like the wings of a thousand birds flapping.

TRU

What is that? What the hell is that?

ERNIE

Is it the storm?

DREW

It's coming from out there--

DONOVAN

(shuddering)

I feel so weird-- my skin is crawling...

PAULINE

It's coming from downstairs!

TRU

Somebody make it stop!

Lights begin to play across their faces, growing steadily brighter as the sound continues to rise.

Some singing can be heard among the noise.

Actors continue to ADLIB confusion.

The garage door behind them opens, pouring light across the stage and into the audience.

Lori shields her eyes.

LORI

Oh my god! What is it?

DONOVAN

It's birds! Thousands of them!

PAULINE

Those aren't birds, Donny--

TRU

--they're angels!

Light begins emanating from every corner of the theatre, flooding and filling the audience.

Glitter begins to fall from the sky overhead.

Eli walks into the light and rises high above the stage. As he does, his camera shows the illuminated audience staring back up at him.

Blackout.