

HORROR ACADEMY

An Anthology for Stage

2 Acts (3 Scenes and 5 monologues)

Featuring an all female cast

by

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HORROR ACADEMY

(Overview)

"Horror Academy" is a collection of three stand-alone one-act plays with connecting monologues. The plays explore classic horror and thriller archetypes while retaining their own unique flavor. Though meant to be "crowd-pleasures," these plays are not intended for the timid theatergoer.

This play includes some stage combat.

ACT 1

Red Message 1
Three Lines
Red Message 2
Everything's Different Here
Red Message 3

ACT 2

Red Message 4
Where Is the Breakdown?
Red Message 5

RED MESSAGE 1

Lights rise on a woman.

WOMAN

I was the first girl in my town with a morning paper route. This was, well, way back, when they let girls ride bicycles around sleepy villages without fear they'd turn up headless. So, I'm up at five AM, dressed in warm clothes, and my father kisses me and he says, "Go to work." I'm thirteen. I peddle my banana-seat red bike to the distributor's house. It's a woman named August who loads my saddle bag full of warm morning editions, and says, "This is how I started, too, only *I* did the evenings. Made my first dollar and spent it at the candy shop." She pats my butt as I start to pull away lopsided. I've got the route *here* -- in my head. Studied it the past three afternoons after school. I know every turn. Only now things are different. Well, 'cos it's dark. And there are sounds I've never heard before. Insects and wind. But not like daytime wind. Morning wind is different.

(Deep breath)

A car pulls up beside me with its headlights on. A man sticks his head out the window. "You're not gonna like this," he says, "but I think I'm gonna need you to drive." He puts his right hand out the window, and...it's not there. Instead, it's bleeding like crazy and he's missing everything below the wrist. "I've had an accident," he says, fairly calm, considering. "I thought I could make it to the clinic but I can't. I need you to drive."

(Pause)

"I can't *drive!*" I shout, way more panicked about driving than I am of his bleeding stump. "Sure. You can. Hop in." He opens his door and scoots to the passenger side. The whole seat is covered in his blood -- I can see it glimmering and it's dripping onto the road. So I just take off, fast as I can on my bike. Half a mile away, I ditch the papers to get up speed, until I'm all the way home. And I tell my father I don't want to sell papers anymore. "Why not?" he asks as I put on my school uniform. But I never tell him. Still haven't.

Lights fade.

THREE LINES

THE CHARACTERS

STEFANIE WEST, *a young woman*

LULA LONDON, *an older woman*

SISSY WEST, *a young woman*

MRS. COSGROVE, *an older woman*

CARMEN WEST, *a young woman*

THE SETTING

The present, any city.

THE SCENE

The prep room of a blood repository.

THE STAGE

A tall storage freezer is placed against the far wall. Nearby, rests a medium-sized desk. On the desk are a telephone, a stack of manila file folders, and a set of big-handled knives, cased in a wood holder and tied with a bright red bow.

There is one door.

A telephone rings once.

Lights rise on the telephone.

Enter STEFANIE WEST from the far door, crossing to the desk where the telephone sits.

She doesn't pick it up.

She wears a white medical smock covered in blood.

Two more rings.

Then stops.

STEFANIE seems a bit stunned. She looks to her bloody smock.

Enter LULA LONDON.

STEFANIE

(In quick explanation)

A bag exploded.

LULA is, at first, relieved, then seems to realize that a lost bag, too, is a problem.

LULA

That's one more lost.

STEFANIE removes her bloody smock and places it into the desk drawer. She retrieves a clean smock and re-dresses.

LULA

Where's that fat detective?

STEFANIE

I don't know.

STEFANIE sits at the desk and shuffles paperwork.

LULA

I don't think he was finished. But I suppose it is nearly sun-up. We kept him two-and-a-half hours. Do you think he left?

STEFANIE

I don't know.

LULA

Aren't you curious?

STEFANIE

No.

LULA

Is he with your sister?

STEFANIE

She's with the skinny one.

LULA

Do you think the fat one's jealous?

(Pause)

And how do you know she's with the skinny one?

STEFANIE

I looked out the window. Ten minutes ago. I saw Sissy walking with him near the cemetery gates. I lost them in the fog.

LULA

Your sister has a way with men. Doesn't she?

STEFANIE

Only the weak ones.

STEFANIE stops her work.

STEFANIE (Continued)

Lula. If I asked you to do something, would you do it?

LULA

Sure, Stef.

STEFANIE

Go home.

LULA

Home?

STEFANIE

I have a bad feeling. It's making me sick. I might throw up.

LULA

Then it's you who should go home. Go ahead. I'll cover your last hour. Sissy and I can take care of the shift change. And Carmen will be here soon for the morning draws.

STEFANIE

I never leave work early. Lula...I'm not kidding. You should just go. I'll tell them you had a headache.

LULA

(Suspicious)

But I don't.

STEFANIE

Please. I have a bad feeling.

LULA

Do you think they'll come back?

STEFANIE

No, no, it's not that.

(Changing tactics)

Yes, they're coming back. You should go.

LULA

I like that you try to protect me. I've always considered you like a big sister.

STEFANIE

I'm younger than you.

LULA

No matter. I spend my days taking care of people. I like that you take care of me at night.

STEFANIE returns to working, trying to occupy her hands and her mind.

LULA tries to help. She bumps the phone.

STEFANIE gives her a look.

STEFANIE

You know I don't want you to get hurt. I'm not kidding. You should go. I don't get these feelings very often.

LULA

Can't. Mrs. Cosgrove is on her way.

STEFANIE

Oh no.

LULA

I'm sure she'll want to speak with us. With Sissy, too. She'll be dressed down for flirting. Oh, and Carmen.

STEFANIE

What about Carmen?

LULA

She'll be questioned, too.

STEFANIE

She wasn't even *here* at the time.

LULA

She disappeared when she saw the detectives.

STEFANIE

Carmen had to go to the druggist before her shift.

LULA

The fat one took an interest in her, too, didn't he?
You're lucky to all be so attractive. Men don't look at me
twice. I sometimes wish I were from your genetics.

STEFANIE

No. You don't.

LULA

I wouldn't mind being related to the West sisters. My
family's very plain.

STEFANIE

Well, you know what they say...you can pick your friends...

LULA

(Conspiratorially)

I can tell the detectives are being more thorough this
time. Careless before and look where it's gotten them --
another robbery.

STEFANIE

Mrs. Cosgrove is coming here? This morning? You sure?
Hmmm. Well, maybe...maybe everyone will behave a bit. And
I may have missed a few rings.

LULA, distracted, brushes the handles
of the knives on the desk.

LULA

What was that? What about rings? I like rings.

LULA shows off her rings.

LULA (Continued)

(Gesturing to the knives)

A present?

STEFANIE

(Trying to ignore)

For our mother.

LULA

I should check the temperature.

LULA goes to the freezer and opens it.
It is filled with hanging blood bags.

LULA (Continued)

The thieves stole twenty-seven bags tonight from storage. It's a record. It'll cripple us for the week. We'll have to canvas if we're going to make quota. Doctor Rodriguez won't be happy. Mrs. Cosgrove will have to make certain apologies, and she'll come down harder on us, I imagine.

STEFANIE

Why should she care about us?

LULA

(Low)

I heard the detectives speaking...inside job. It's true. Who robs the same blood bank three times, no trace, no evidence, no clues? It doesn't make any sense.

There is a shuffling noise outside the door.

LULA (Continued)

(Whispering)

Is that your sister?

STEFANIE

Probably the outer door. Carmen. Maybe Jeff, come to remove the wasp's nest.

LULA

Wasp's nest?

STEFANIE

Outside the door. Just started in the last few days and now it's as fat as that detective.

LULA

Oh, I hate wasps. Why haven't I seen them?

STEFANIE

They sleep at night. Just like humans.

LULA checks her watch.

LULA

It's too early for Carmen to be back from the drug store.

More bumps.

LULA (Continued)

It must be Mrs. Cosgrove. I'll go and let her in.

LULA exits.

Pause.

The telephone rings.

Again.

Three times.

STEFANIE reaches for it and it stops.

Pause.

Enter Sissy West. She is in a pure white smock worn tight to her body. She is panting.

STEFANIE

Was that you at the door?

SISSY

What?

STEFANIE

Lula and I heard noises.

SISSY

I heard that, too. I came in through the rear entrance.

STEFANIE

Where's your detective?

SISSY

I left him in the cemetery. *Frustrated.*

STEFANIE

Have you seen Carmen?

SISSY shakes her head.

STEFANIE (Continued)

The phone rang.

SISSY

How many times?

STEFANIE does not answer.

SISSY (Continued)

I couldn't see the corner phone booth in the fog. Or, or I would know. Maybe it's a prank. Was that the first telephone call?

STEFANIE

Second. I'm hoping it's a mistake. Sissy. Look at me. It's a mistake. Isn't it?

SISSY

Of course. A mistake.

STEFANIE

Mrs. Cosgrove's come to see us.

SISSY

Mrs. Cosgrove? Well, she's an important person. That's probably a good thing.

STEFANIE

Straighten your dress. And where's your brassiere?

SISSY

Oh. I must have forgotten it on a headstone.

SISSY ambles to the desk and tugs at the bow wrapping the knives.

SISSY (Continued)

I like your bow.

SISSY removes the bow and sticks it to her chest, as decoration.

STEFANIE

Put that back. You're undoing my work.

SISSY

Work. Work. Work. Stefanie loves her work. Are you invested, is that it? Again. I said: are you invested. You do that. Every time. Why?

STEFANIE

I'm going to die. Sissy. I'm going to die. One day. You know? And every day I think about that. I think—

SISSY

You're not going to *die*.

STEFANIE

Yes I am. You probably don't think about it. You're too busy fumbling for your clothes. But this whole world is full of death. You know that as well as the rest of us. And every day there's this teeny-tiny sliver of thought... in the back of my mind...saying, "You are going to die." And you know what shuts it up?

SISSY

Work.

STEFANIE

Work... So leave me alone.

STEFANIE stands and checks the freezer,
reads a number on a bag.

SISSY

You can be soooo depressing.

STEFANIE ignores here, continues
silently to work.

STEFANIE

I tried to get Lula to leave. She refused.

SISSY

How hard did you try?

STEFANIE

Don't- I *tried*.

SISSY

Look, Stef. Maybe it's not happening? Maybe-

STEFANIE

You know, two days ago Lula told me that she's broke. She's been spending every cent on Jack's treatments. When Jack's dead, her daughter will need her to be alive and safe and working here. After what she went through with her son, I-

SISSY

Stefanie. Stop. You can't- You know you can't get so close. Keep it light.

STEFANIE

I can't keep doing this!

Pause. SISSY sits at the desk.

SISSY

(Weaker)

Keep it light.

(Pause)

Anyone come round to donate? Greater numbers might help.
Before the police arrived, I saw three men in the alley.

STEFANIE

The detectives scared them away with questions. Drunks
and--

Enter LULA with MRS. COSGROVE.

LULA

(In introduction)

The West sisters, Ma'am. Stefanie and Sissy.

MRS. COSGROVE

I know who they are.

LULA

My apologies, Mrs. Cosgrove. Would you like a chair?

LULA gestures that STEFANIE should
surrender her desk chair, which she
does, though a bit slowly.

MRS. COSGROVE

(To STEFANIE)

You draw the blood.

STEFANIE

I mind the freezer.

MRS. COSGROVE

(To SISSY)

Then you draw the blood. What's the stupid thing on your
bosom?

(Points to the bow)

Take it off. Only your name pin should adorn your uniform.
And where has *that* gone, young lady?

SISSY

I lost it. Somewhere outside.

(Winks to STEFANIE)

I'll have Lula make another before my shift tomorrow.
Mine's just ended.

MRS. COSGROVE

There will be no *leaving*. Not until I've spoken with each
of you. What time will the daygirl arrive?

STEFANIE

That's Carmen. Our oldest sister.

MRS. COSGROVE

I didn't ask her name and genealogy; I asked her arrival.

LULA

She should be here very soon. She's gone out for medicine.
She was in early this morning. The drugstore down the
corner has just opened.

The phone rings.

It rings again.

No one moves.

MRS. COSGROVE

Isn't someone going to answer that?

STEFANIE and SISSY pass a look.

STEFANIE

We've been getting prank calls.

MRS. COSGROVE

Answer it!

A third ring. STEFANIE's hand goes
out, hovers. No more rings.

STEFANIE

(To phone)

Stop it! Stop calling us!

MRS. COSGROVE

(Taken aback)

Well. That's one way.

STEFANIE

I'm sorry. Is anyone else outside?

MRS. COSGROVE

Outside the building?

STEFANIE

(Pacing)

Yes. Did you see anyone?

MRS. COSGROVE

(Simply)

Jeff. That maintenance man.

SISSY

(Sad, to STEFANIE)

The wasp's nest.

MRS. COSGROVE

Yes. He told me when I entered that he had come to remove it.

(To SISSY)

Take off that red bow, you *silly* creature.

SISSY removes the bow and drops it onto the desk near the knives.

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)

Now. I have come down here for one reason only: to find our *robber*. You can't count on the police. *No*. Not in *this* city. They couldn't find the union hall with a map and ten card-carrying machinists. Three Lines has been robbed three times more than it should have ever been, so I am here -- in person -- to do my digging. As managing director, it is only fair that I come down and get my *hands* dirty. If you have plans, you must cancel them. We are

(MORE)

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)
staying until I have a criminal in irons.
(Pause, then to LULA with a point)
How many?

LULA
Twenty-seven.

MRS. COSGROVE
What's that to date?

LULA
Sixty-four.

MRS. COSGROVE
(Disgusted)
Sixty-four! Sixty-four bags of blood. *Stolen*. From this
clinic over four months. All different types, I assume.

LULA
That's true.

MRS. COSGROVE
What's yours?

LULA
My blood type? "A" positive.

MRS. COSGROVE
(To STEFANIE)
What's yours?

STEFANIE
"O" negative.

MRS. COSGROVE
(Appreciative)
The rarest and most universal for transfusions.

MRS. COSGROVE points to SISSY.

SISSY
"O" negative.

MRS. COSGROVE

Hmm. Two in one family. A bit odd.
(Judgmentally)
I noticed you are missing your brassiere.

SISSY

The clasp broke.

MRS. COSGROVE

Well use a pin! *Impro-vised*. You can't have donors peering at your toys while you *stick* them with a needle. Make them doubly faint, I suppose, make all the blood rush south.

SISSY crosses her arms.

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)

Get me a glass of water. I feel a cough coming on.

LULA

The fountain is down the corridor.

MRS. COSGROVE

(Walking her fingers)

Then, dear girl, go down the corridor and fetch it. And no paper cup. I want a glass.

LULA exits.

MRS. COSGROVE stares at the two WEST sisters.

MRS. COSGROVE

So we have an infestation problem at Three Lines. I am allergic to bees.

SISSY

(Confused)

But they're wasps.

MRS. COSGROVE

Shut up, dear girl, shut up! Don't contradict me!
(MORE)

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)

(Pause)

What have you witnessed?

(Pause)

Has Lula London been stealing from the supply? Quick, tell me yes or no before she returns.

STEFANIE

I--

MRS. COSGROVE

Anything at all. Tell me. She's eager to please -- was when I hired her two years ago. She bothers me terribly.

SISSY

Don't you like her?

MRS. COSGROVE

Of course I like her. I hired her. And I'll be the one to fire her if she's so much as stolen a single *drop* of blood from this depository. What have you *witnessed*? She won't be long now, no no, not long now. Tick tock, tick tock.

STEFANIE

Nothing!

MRS. COSGROVE

You spend ten hours in her company six days a week and you've witnessed nothing? Overheard nothing?

SISSY

Nothing.

MRS. COSGROVE

Does she have too many children, too many babies to feed? Does she have ill-feelings towards Three Lines as a place, as a company, as a *family*? Does she resent my power?

STEFANIE

The detectives asked these questions already to all of us.

MRS. COSGROVE

They don't know how to read a face. They were distracted. They were men; you are women. Their skills cannot be trusted. Where are they anyhow? They've already gone for

(MORE)

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)
clichéd donuts. We must stop this thing *here, now.*

(Pause)

Now...about Ms. London...I suppose the easiest thing to do is to release her from employment, and see if the incidents continue.

STEFANIE

(Strong)

There's no need to dismiss Lula.

MRS. COSGROVE

Or maybe one of you? Hmmm? Three sisters is probably two too many.

STEFANIE

Is that why you came here this morning?

(Pause)

You suspect all three of us, don't you? You want to get rid of us?

MRS. COSGROVE

Why shouldn't I? One sister could easily cover for another. Three Lines' blood supplies have to stop vanishing. We've lost nearly 1/3 of the week's intake in tonight's little incident.

STEFANIE pulls out a file from the desk, rifling through it until she finds several sheets of paper. She shoves them out for MRS. COSGROVE.

STEFANIE

My letters of recommendation. One's from a vice-president. I've been a good employee, Mrs. Cosgrove. No matter what's happened or whose at fault I want you to know that I try my best. I really do.

MRS. COSGROVE

Yes, of course, I understand completely. You are a young woman who likes to preserve her reputation. I can appreciate that.

SISSY

And I don't give a hoot what the police think. I *like* working with my sisters. We've always worked very *well* together. When you needed three workers, we answered. We did. And this summer we've been your most dependable employees. Haven't we? Haven't we?

MRS. COSGROVE

This summer's when all the trouble started.

The three hold stares.

LULA enters with a glass of water,
hands it to MRS. COSGROVE.

LULA

The glass was a bit hard to find. We live by our paper cups.

(Noticing)

What's wrong?

SISSY

(To MRS. COSGROVE)

Ask her. Ask her anything you like.

MRS. COSGROVE

(To LULA)

I hear... that Carmen West has a chronic illness.

LULA

You heard that?

MRS. COSGROVE drinks.

MRS. COSGROVE

I have. That she takes a lot of pills throughout the day.

LULA

She does, yes.

MRS. COSGROVE

She makes a trip to the drugstore every morning and comes back with white bags under her arms. But... there's nothing noted in her files. Tell me. What's her affliction?

LULA

I don't know. She says it's private.

STEFANIE

It is.

MRS. COSGROVE

Not from me. If she needs money to pay her doctors, then--

STEFANIE

Why don't you ask Carmen yourself?

SOUND: Bumps outside, footsteps.

STEFANIE (Continued)

She's here.

Enter CARMEN WEST. She is very striking. She carries two white paper bags.

CARMEN is startled by the presence of MRS. COSGROVE in the chair. She seems to be summing her up.

CARMEN

Sissy, come help me put away my pills.

SISSY follows CARMEN out again.

MRS. COSGROVE is stunned, speechless at first.

MRS. COSGROVE

Heh! Why does she need help? She runs the whole office each and every day, but can't put away a few pills? Lula, get them back here. You should have stopped them.

LULA

I—

MRS. COSGROVE

Why are you standing around?

LULA

All right...Mrs. Cosgrove.

LULA exits.

STEFANIE

(Whispering)

The wrong tree, Mrs. Cosgrove. The wrong tree.

MRS. COSGROVE

I don't think I like your tone.

STEFANIE

Listen. Just some advice. You are asking questions that have unpleasant answers. And unpleasant emotions. We're a sensitive group. This is the only thing that matters. Go home and sleep. It's early and you look tired.

MRS. COSGROVE

Of course I'm tired! Woken up by, by...

LULA, SISSY, and CARMEN re-enter.

CARMEN slowly takes off her coat. In her hand is a single bottle of pills.

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)

...police. Workers often pilfer the stocks. Bandages for their children, needles for their morphia-addicted boyfriends, blankets for the *deadbeat* on their stoop. But sixty-four bags of blood sounds like the black market.

MRS. COSGROVE stands.

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)

(To CARMEN)

Over here. Sit.

CARMEN slowly sits in the lone chair.

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)

Show me that bottle.

CARMEN holds, then opens the pill bottle. She devours a handful without water. Then, at last, she tosses the bottle to MRS. COSGROVE, who catches it clumsily.

MRS. COSGROVE (Continued)

Darling. What on *earth* requires so many pills? I have a medical background and I believe that this many *little* tablets will give you a heart condition, an ulcer, or both. Who is your doctor? And the expense, the damned expense of these must be...

CARMEN

I have a genetic disorder. And I'm perfectly capable of handling my pills.

MRS. COSGROVE

Name the affliction.

SISSY

She shouldn't have to.

CARMEN

(Dead serious)

It's all right, Sissy. It doesn't matter now.

SISSY

I know it doesn't matter--

CARMEN

It's called haimapagia.

STEFANIE

(Pleading)

Let's just go, Carmen. Please.

MRS. COSGROVE

You're making that up.

CARMEN

No. I'm not. It was discovered nearly two hundred years ago. The combination of those pills is the only known treatment. Without them...you'd notice the discoloration of the skin. The disfiguration of the teeth. I'd become sensitive to light. But there is one symptom it cannot help alleviate.

MRS. COSGROVE

I've... I've never heard of such symptoms.

CARMEN

As you said, I'm making them up.

MRS. COSGROVE

Well, which is it dear girl? Are you a liar, or--

CARMEN

I'm a liar. But you already know that.

STEFANIE

Please, Carmen, let's just leave.

(Pointing)

Lula has a daughter. Her husband, he's in debt and needs, he, he needs his--

MRS. COSGROVE

(Sharp, to STEFANIE)

You said you didn't know anything about Miss London's circumstance.

CARMEN

It *doesn't* MATTER!

LULA

(Overlapping)

What's going on?

MRS. COSGROVE

(To CARMEN)

You ARE a liar! I placed a call to Saint James. Their night man told me *everything*. Saint James got off light. Twenty-one bags.

CARMEN

Stupid of you to come here this morning. You really are quite dumb. Do you think you're a stone, or are you really frightened underneath? I bet when you get really scared you toughen up. You bristle like a porcupine and hope that protects you. I know your type. And it won't do you any good here.

MRS. COSGROVE

This isn't the first time you've been confronted with your thievery. You may be a very capable daygirl, but you're *through* here at Three Lines. Those two detectives are waiting outside. With Jeff. To haul you away if you'd only confess it. I asked for fifteen minutes and they granted it. Now, I just need to know the extent that your sisters have helped you and--

SISSY

(To MRS. COSGROVE)

She's sick. You're provoking her. Stop it!

MRS. COSGROVE

You've been stealing blood and selling it on the black market. Confess and we can be done with this and I can re-staff Three Lines with more respectable employees. You must face it: you have no escape.

CARMEN

No, you're wrong.

MRS. COSGROVE

(Shouting as a frustrated child)

Confess!

Long pause.

CARMEN rushes MRS. COSGROVE and tackles her onto the desk. CARMEN snatches a knife from the holder and stabs MRS. COSGROVE repeatedly until dead.

LULA is frozen.

SISSY and STEFANIE look upon the inevitable.

Still on top of her victim, CARMEN dives into MRS. COSGROVE's neck, sucking on it like a vampire. Done, she comes up with blood smeared on her lips and face.

LULA covers her mouth, horrified.

LULA

Oh, God.

STEFANIE

(To LULA)

Just go, just go...

CARMEN, animal-like, leaps off MRS. COSGROVE's body and pins LULA to the wall.

STEFANIE (Continued)

Don't!

CARMEN holds.

STEFANIE (Continued)

(Pleading)

Carmen. I love you. Sissy loves you. We've done everything you've asked. Everything you needed. Things were going so good. We were happy, weren't we? We were happy for once! For just a little while?

SISSY

We did these things so you didn't have to...didn't have to...

STEFANIE

Do you really need more? Do you really need her?

(Points to LULA)

Please she's my friend.

CARMEN

I'm not to blame. I was born this way. Do you hear me?

STEFANIE

(Desperate)

You're not to blame. I know, I know.

CARMEN

I'M PROTECTING US!

STEFANIE

(Soft)

No. You're not.

LULA

The men. Outside.

STEFANIE

Three rings means a kill.

Pause.

CARMEN goes in for LULA's neck.

LULA winces at the first bite.

LULA

(Crying)

I liked you. You were my friends.

CARMEN kills LULA.

When it's over, LULA slides to the floor.

CARMEN turns, at first embarrassed then strengthened, straightening, almost prideful.

Slow fadeout.

RED MESSAGE 2

Lights rise on a woman.

WOMAN

She had two children and drowned them both in the bathroom sink. I bet you think that's horrible. She had drowned them twice already, but they kept...coming...back.

(Lightly)

She told me this at a cocktail party. I thought she was drunk. Too many martinis. She had no party date, no husband, and was a bit old for that sort of business. Certainly the oldest bird at the party. And to describe her hands: fragile baby hands. They could hardly hold the stem of her glass. Those were not the hands of a drowner. "You don't know how many times," she confessed, "I wished they would just leave me alone -- my little darlings." I assumed she was joking. "How old are they," I baited her and, and looked past her for lighter company. She put her pinkie finger into her gin. "Five and six." "Five and six."

(Pause)

She disappears just after nine o'clock. I laugh in the corner with Holly, who works with me selling pharmaceuticals to hospitals. I ask, "Who was *that*? That, that loony of the party?" My friend is confused. I describe the woman's face, her hair, her features, and point to where she sat that whole hour, cornering me with her drink and her awful, awful story. "That chair was empty all night..." says my friend.

(Pause)

So I confiscate the last of the red wine and I get...very drunk. And the party is down to two guests -- me and Holly, who passes out in the bathroom on a mix of sample-box Valium, cigarettes, and champagne.

(Pause)

I stand in front of the chair. "I didn't mean to drown them," says the woman as she finishes her sad little drink.

Lights fade.

EVERYTHING'S DIFFERENT HERE

THE CHARACTERS

GEORGIA OWENS, *a young woman*

MAUREEN VESPI, *a young woman*

GWEN BYTES, *an older woman*

CLAUDIA, *a woman*

ANN, *a young woman*

THE SETTING

A remote part of Louisiana.

THE SCENE

A small clinic.

THE STAGE

There is one desk with a center drawer.

There is one door.

SOUND: Powerful noise, loud but then fading.

Lights rise on a clinic.

GEORGIA OWENS and MAUREEN VESPI
scramble to brace the door.

MAUREEN
The chair. Under the handle.

They try the chair. Too short.

GEORGIA
The desk.

They start to move the desk as the
drums slow and stop.

The two women are, at first, relieved.

Then, slowly, they go to the walls.

GEORGIA (Continued)
They're still out there.

MAUREEN
But they're quieter.

GEORGIA
They're waiting.

There is a sudden burst of knocks at
the door.

With renewed energy, they drag the desk
toward the door--

GWEN
(Through door)
Are you in there?

They stop.

GWEN (Continued)
Let me in. Georgia? Maureen? It's Gwen.

GEORGIA goes to the door.

MAUREEN
Don't open it!

GEORGIA considers, then quickly throws open the door to GWEN, an older woman with a wary calm.

GWEN enters and gently shuts the door behind her.

MAUREEN
Are they out there?

GWEN
Yes.

GEORGIA
What happens next?

GWEN
They come through like a stampede and leave.

MAUREEN
Where are the others?

GWEN
Safe. Claudia and Ann are both safe in the other station.

GEORGIA
What now?

MAUREEN

I'm getting to the airport, I can tell ya that.

GWEN

Not today. The sun's gone down.

MAUREEN

But the Jeep--

GWEN

Not at night.

GEORGIA

Have we got any weapons?

GWEN

They won't cause trouble. I promise. They blow through like a bad storm.

MAUREEN

A bad storm? A bad storm? That's not what it feels like. I've never been so scared in my life.

GEORGIA

How many do you think there are?

GWEN

Not as many as last time.

MAUREEN

Last time!

GWEN

Six months ago they were double in numbers.

MAUREEN

Well maybe the other half is waiting outside that door! You think about that? The Jeep at night doesn't sound like such a bad plan.

GWEN

How can you remember the roads? Only Ann, Claudia and I know these parts at night. You don't even know them during the day. Though one day you might. How do you expect to

(MORE)

GWEN (Continued)

find a single, dusty trail in a decade-old army Jeep with only one working headlamp? We learned long ago that waiting in the stations is the best strategy.

MAUREEN

Oh, you're all so experienced, then? We know nothing.

GWEN

You two. Fresh faces.

(Making fun)

Georgia Owens from Dayton, Ohio. Maureen from the Bronx. Silly, fresh girls straight off the line. You think Ann wasn't just *like* you when she arrived a year ago. She was. And you don't hear *her* asking for the Jeep.

The three drift. GEORGIA tries again fruitlessly to prop the chair against the door.

MAUREEN

I want to go home.

GWEN

You get used to their occasional visits.

MAUREEN

I don't want to get used to it. I want to go home.

GWEN

You've both been here less than six hours.

MAUREEN

And look what's happened! I'm bad luck. I seem to be. I was bad luck in New York and I'm bad luck in the middle of the Louisiana backwoods. You all should stay clear.

GWEN

I should think you're safer here than New York. And you're not a jinx. It's just that we are so remote that it hardly feels like the United States anymore. The Bayou locals are mutts, a mix of ten nationalities. Many don't even speak your language. Not even French. Everything's different here. Everything.

MAUREEN

It sure is. How can you take it?

GWEN

You adapt.

MAUREEN

The bugs. The flies. Oh, Christ, the flies. And the smells.

GWEN

Didn't they *prepare* you for all this before they gave you your tickets? Weren't you trained? Did they just hand you a brochure and say, "Here, dumb-dumb, get on a plane and fly to the heart of the swamp and good luck?" I know they prepared *me*. Ten years ago there was *training*. Lots of training. Claudia and I--

GEORGIA

(Defensive)

We were *trained*. I know how to stick a needle. But they also said we'd be safe. That there would be *protection*. I expected to arrive at a camp with fencing and a few guards with guns.

GWEN goes to the desk and pulls out a kit. She opens it up and reveals needles and vials.

GWEN

Here. Show me your training.

(Pointing to each vial)

This is muscle relaxer. This is for sleep. Oh, and this is to wake you up. Diphtheria. Influenza. And this vial is quinine. In small doses, it prevents malaria. In larger, it can kill you. If you really want to cash your chips, though, I recommend the curare. We're well stocked. Even some...recreational supplies. Inject some of these and you will think you're back in your childhood bedroom, listening to your parents fight through walls.

GEORGIA

You know nothing about me.

GWEN

Don't I? Haven't I seen *ten* girls before you get gobbled up? Girls come and leave frightened to death. They run off. To Africa. To South America. All the way to Paris, if they're lucky. We lose girls by the twos every year. Ann's braver than any of you spoiled lot. She's stuck it out. She's changed her perspective.

GEORGIA

You may be the experienced volunteer here, but you're not my boss. Let it go, *Miss Gwendolyn Bytes from Omaha, Nebraska*. Yes, I've read your file, too. You know nothing about me.

GEORGIA steps to the kit.

GEORGIA (Continued)

What else you got in here? Anything that can be used as a weapon. Any darts for the curare?

GWEN

A weapon? Haven't you been listening? They won't *bother us*. They'll move across the swamp in a little while.

MAUREEN

Those people were not normal people. The noise. The paint. And they were looking straight at us. I saw something weird in their *faces*. They wanted something. What were they doing?

GWEN

Performing a ritual.

GEORGIA

Sending a message. I may be green, but I can detect when I'm being sized up. So, Gwen...is there anything in *here* that can be used as a *weapon*?

MAUREEN

Yeah, we should know if we can defend ourselves. Just in case.

GWEN

If you must know. There is one pistol.

GEORGIA

Where?

GWEN

In the top desk drawer.

GEORGIA opens the drawer and looks inside.

GEORGIA

I don't see any pistol.

GWEN

The very back.

GWEN sits on the edge of the desk while GEORGIA sifts through the drawer. GEORGIA pulls out a small box and drops it onto the desk. She opens the box and dumps the contents -- bullets.

GEORGIA

Ammunition at least.

GWEN

Maybe the pistol's slipped behind the drawer. If the desk is moved, things inside tend to go a bit cocky.

GEORGIA digs. Frustrated, she pulls out the drawer and lays it aside. She stares into the belly of the desk.

GEORGIA

I see the handle.

GEORGIA sticks her hand deep inside the desk.

GEORGIA (Continued)

I've almost got it.

MAUREEN

A pistol. That's good fortune.

GWEN

Not really. You'd only get six before they'd get you. It would probably irritate them more than stop them.

GEORGIA

(To GWEN)

Would you mind standing up? I think you're buckling the top.

Rolling eyes, GWEN moves off the desk.

After another try, GEORGIA becomes stuck in the desk.

GEORGIA (Continued)

Ah. Um.

MAUREEN

Whatsa matter?

GEORGIA

My hand.

MAUREEN

Are you stuck?

GEORGIA tugs her arm.

GEORGIA

Yes.

MAUREEN

(To GWEN)

Help.

MAUREEN tries pulling GEORGIA's body free.

GWEN does not help.

MAUREEN (Continued)
Wow. You're really stuck.

GWEN
(Frustrated)
Oh *Lord*.

GWEN helps. GEORGIA remains stuck.

GWEN (Continued)
(Snapping fingers)
I know just the thing. Maureen, I need you to go outside--

MAUREEN
I'm not going outside.

GWEN
Yes, you are. Go and knock on Station 3. Gather up Ann and Claudia. We have an oil drum. It's nearly empty, but will still take the three of you to move it.

GEORGIA
An oil drum?

MAUREEN
Yeah, why would we need that?

GWEN
We'll grease her up like a pig.

MAUREEN
Why can't you go?

GWEN
My oil-drum carrying days are behind me. A privilege that comes with time in the field.

MAUREEN, resigned, steps to the door.

MAUREEN

(To GEORGIA)

If I get abducted and scalped, I'll--

MAUREEN exits.

GWEN sits back down on the desk.
GEORGIA grimaces a bit, her space becoming a bit tighter, but she does not complain. She is clearly embarrassed.

GWEN (Continued)

Scalped. She thinks this is the Wild West. It's far worse. But I love it more than I've ever loved Omaha. In Omaha, the greatest danger is becoming docile. I'll tell you the greatest danger here. Being eaten. You've not seen anything until you've seen cannibals.

GEORGIA

(Disbelieving)

Cannibals.

GWEN

My first two weeks here, I was crossing the swamp to immunize some local children. I got lost. I passed a group of women baking bread in a stone oven. Flesh smells like no other ingredient. Then I saw the body behind the brush. They were baking bread all right. Baking *human* bread.

GEORGIA

D-did you eat it?

GWEN

(Smiling)

Cannibalism is a very old practice. We've evolved over the millennia to be immune to brain damage caused by eating our own. Nature is pretty sharp, isn't it? It knows when things are necessary.

GEORGIA

I asked: did you eat it?

GWEN

No. But I was nervous they were going to eat me. For a little while.

(Pause)

Now's your chance, Georgia.

GEORGIA

What do you mean?

GWEN

You said I know nothing about you.

GEORGIA

I don't want to talk about it.

GWEN

It will take them a bit to haul that drum around. You might as well pass the time. I'd like to get to know you, actually. You're smarter than Maureen.

GEORGIA

I'm the one with my arm stuck in a desk.

GWEN

Well. That aside.

GEORGIA considers.

GEORGIA

I escaped. Why else come to this Godforsaken place?

GWEN

Is Dayton, Ohio that bad?

GEORGIA

For me it is.

GWEN

Dreams of bigger and better?

GEORGIA

No. Nightmares of lower and darker.

GWEN

Oh, now you have my attention. Tell me something that wasn't in your pretty little file.

GEORGIA

Engaged to be married. Oh--I see that look. No, he didn't run out on me. He died. In a car accident.

GWEN

Drunk?

GEORGIA

(Defensive)

It was bad weather. Last winter.

GWEN

(Singsong)

There's more.

GEORGIA

I was pregnant.

(Pause)

I lost that, too.

GWEN

I wish I could say I hadn't heard a story like that before. But I have. In ten years, I have. You've got a curse on you. And Maureen's a jinx.

GEORGIA

It's no curse.

GWEN

Oh, it is.

GWEN pulls a vial from the kit and loads a needle.

GEORGIA

What are you doing?

GWEN jabs GEORGIA with the needle. GEORGIA jumps, knocking the bullets over the desk and onto the floor.

Satisfied, GWEN stands and tosses the spent needle away.

GEORGIA (Continued)
That better be the goddamn *muscle* relaxer.

GEORGIA struggles against the desk.

GEORGIA (Continued)
You bitch! What did you just give me?

GEORGIA struggles more.

GEORGIA (Continued)
Pray I don't get out of here. I can feel the trigger of the pistol and I will SHOOT YOU DEAD!

GWEN
Oh, don't do that.

The noises outside grow louder.

SOUNDS outside the door. Enter MAUREEN with two others -- ANN and CLAUDIA.

MAUREEN
The drum's outside. Just like you asked.

ANN
(Excited)
Are we getting started?

GWEN
Yes, I've decided.

CLAUDIA
Who's it gonna be?

GWEN
Would you help Ann bring in the drum?

ANN and CLAUDIA exit, leaving the door open.

GEORGIA

(To MAUREEN)

She stuck me with a goddamn needle!

MAUREEN

A needle? What's wrong with you people?

ANN and CLAUDIA bring in the oil drum.

GWEN

Ann, what did I teach you the first day you each arrived?

ANN

Adapt.

GWEN

Exactly. Adapt. You won't last a day in these parts holding onto your past habits.

(To ANN and CLAUDIA, indicating MAUREEN)

Put her in the drum.

MAUREEN

What?

ANN and CLAUDIA hold MAUREEN tight and, against her kicks, lift her into the drum.

GWEN

Would you mind crouching down so we can put the lid on?

MAUREEN

What! No!

ANN and CLAUDIA force MAUREEN's head down and then seal the drum.

GEORGIA

Stop! Stop!

ANN

They always come. The locals. Whenever we have new arrivals.

CLAUDIA

Someone's always got to go.

GWEN

They'd eat us all if we didn't offer up at least one.

GEORGIA

Please! NO! Let her out, let her out now.

GWEN

It's an arrangement. And it works. We can wander about and do our good. But we lose a recruit now and then. I had debated which of you it would be. But. Even though you're trapped in that desk, I simply like you better.

MAUREEN

(From inside drum)

Get me out! I can't breath! Please!

GWEN

(To the oil drum)

Pale, New York city skin is a great delicacy in these parts. And they like the way women taste.

ANN

I have to say I prefer it.

CLAUDIA

I like both sexes. I think it depends on the cook.

GEORGIA

WHAT DID YOU GIVE ME?

GWEN

It's nothing. A sedative. You'll be asleep soon.

(Approaching, resigned)

Georgia. We're going to leave you here for now. I don't

(MORE)

GWEN (Continued)

think you'd be any good to us at the exchange. You might make trouble. When we get back, we'll have a little chat. I think it's important that you understand our position. And, you'll probably be famished. We'll save some of Maureen for you.

Gwen turns to go.

The pistol goes off from inside the desk and GWEN falls, holding a bleeding leg.

GWEN (Continued)

(In pain)

What did you do that for?

GEORGIA

(To ANN and CLAUDIA)

Get Maureen out of the drum! Or I'll shoot Gwen in the head. I may be in a desk, but I can aim.

Neither woman moves until...

ANN comes forward and undoes the clasps.

MAUREEN springs out, crying, pointing a finger at GEORGIA.

MAUREEN

Eat her! Eat HER! Not me. Don't eat me. Eat HER.

CLAUDIA lunges at the desk.

GEORGIA seems to be trying to fire the pistol again, but nothing's happening. GEORGIA sweeps the floor for bullets.

CLAUDIA kicks the box away, but not before GEORGIA gets a hold of a few stray bullets.

GEORGIA stands and pulls the desk with her into a corner. She uses the desk as a barricade.

During the fight, ANN has picked up the dropped kit and filled a needle from a vial. She stabs MAUREEN who immediately sinks down into the drum.

CLAUDIA

Ann!

ANN

What?

CLAUDIA

What did you give her? That was a full dose!

ANN checks the vial and realizes...

ANN

(Mad at herself)

Shoot. The quinine!

CLAUDIA

You KNOW that ruins the taste!

GEORGIA is finally free from the desk and she quickly loads bullets into the revolver, pointing it at all three women. GEORGIA is starting to feel the effects of the sedative. She wavers.

GWEN, in pain, sits up on the floor.

GWEN

Georgia. Put down the pistol.

(Pause)

If you put it down, we won't-

GEORGIA
Bring me the kit.

No one moves.

GEORGIA shoots CLAUDIA dead.

GEORGIA
Now BRING ME THE KIT!

ANN brings the kit over.

With her free hand, GEORGIA rifles the kit, finds a dose, and self-administers. She begins to wake up.

She makes a second dose from another vial and hands the needle back to ANN.

GEORGIA (Continued)
(To ANN)
Inject it.

ANN
What is it?

GEORGIA
Better than what you gave Maureen.

Hesitant, but resigned, ANN shoots herself up, then collapses.

GEORGIA (Continued)
(To GWEN)
I told you they trained us well. She'll be out for a day. I'll need her to drive me back to the main road.
(Pause)
You. You I don't need. Miss Gwendolyn Bytes from Omaha, Nebraska.

SOUND: Noise in the distance, an approaching menace.

GEORGIA (Continued)

But you might make a good meal for our friends out there.

GWEN

No. You wouldn't.

GEORGIA

I'll tell them to eat around the bullet. How do they prefer you? Alive or dead.

GWEN, in shock, doesn't know how to react.

GEORGIA (Continued)

Well I know how *I* prefer you.

GEORGIA aims the pistol at GWEN.

GWEN

You can't. I. You can't. Please. Please. I've been here ten years. You don't think I was like you. Disgusted? It's a fragile arrangement. You don't put such things out of balance. You bitter woman. You child. You baby little girl. You know nothing about this. There are places like this everywhere and when you find yourself in one of them...you... I did what I did to survive.

GEORGIA

Exactly what I'm doing now.

GWEN

I don't want to be eaten. How can you... You're right...I don't know you. I was wrong to...

GEORGIA

(Yelling)

You're right, you WERE! This is horrible! I just wanted to help people.

The noises are very loud now.

Both women look to the door.

GWEN (Continued)

I can't be someone's dinner.

GEORGIA

(Cold)

Want my advice? Adapt.

GEORGIA advances to aim.

Hesitates.

Repositions the gun.

She turns her back. Goes to the kit.

Preparing a needle, she's crying,
wiping at her eyes with the gun.

She does not hear GWEN slowly crawling
towards her.

GEORGIA (Continued)

(Hysterical)

I'm putting you to sleep. It'll have to be them that gets
you.

Just as the needle is ready, GWEN grabs
GEORGIA's leg and trips her to the
floor. The gun drops out of GEORGIA's
hand.

GWEN bites on GEORGIA's leg and Georgia
screams.

GWEN comes away with her mouth bloody.

GEORGIA in seconds reaches the gun and shoots GWEN as they both struggle on the floor.

GWEN is barely alive...

The noise outside is very loud now.

GWEN

(Soft)
They'll eat you. They'll eat us all.

She dies, eyes open.

GEORGIA, still crying, pushes GWEN off. She stands. Slowly, she approaches the door. The noise is unbearable. She looks to the gun.

The door opens, she fire, screams--

Blackout.

RED MESSAGE 3

Lights rise on a woman.

WOMAN

Sixteen of us signed up. Eight walked away. Exactly half. Young girl, young girl, young girl, three died from the side impact of the crash. I was seated next to them. One flopped over into my lap and I covered her with my arms. I was wearing my blue and yellow sweater and I got blood all over my monogram. You know, it's strange being in a crash. Have you ever been in one? In a plane? Little plane, not a big one. I think it would have been easier in a big one. Has to be. I had just turned thirty-eight and my present to myself was a ten-dollar plane ride to the island -- the one across the bay. They put me in with all these high school cheerleaders on a field trip. After the engines stopped working, we made it to dry land, but I think water would have been better because it was probably softer. The girl beside me was named...Jennifer, I think. Or Jessica. She shook my hand. Twenty minutes later her fingers were torn down the middle by her seat belt. I walked away. I was one of the eight. We waited on the beach for the rescue boat. By the time they landed, two more cheerleaders had bled to death.

(Pause)

I just turned forty-one. Last Wednesday. I...hired a boat. I went back to the spot. Two things were surprising to me. *One.* That there were still parts of the little white plane strewn about. No one had cleaned them up. Too heavy to transport back to the mainland, I suppose. *Two.* Jennifer...or was it Jessica? She said, "Tell my mom hello..."

(Distraught)

"And tell her that it really, really *hurts* to be dead."

Curtain. End of Act.

RED MESSAGE 4

Lights rise on a woman.

Loud music plays in the background.

WOMAN

(Shouting)

THE MUSIC WAS THIS LOUD! SWEAR! BUT I DIDN'T CARE! I JUST KEPT LAUGHING AND FLIRTING AND I DON'T BACK DOWN, I DON'T. I SEE SOMETHING I JUST GO FOR IT. AND HE WAS THERE, WITHOUT HER, AND FINALLY, FINALLY *FINALLY* I COULD GET HIM ALONE AWAY FROM THAT CRAZY-ASS DJ...

Music becomes muffled.

WOMAN (Continued)

So we sneak into the bathroom. And he gives me, no, no, you won't believe this, he gives me a kiss, here on the cheek, like he's kissing his sister. Well, that's not good enough for me. And I really kiss him. Really. For real. And it's, like, a minute or so -- where I'm over the moon happy -- and I...I start to feel something inside his mouth. "Manuel, what is *that*?" He starts to kiss my neck and it kinda feels good, but also kind of scratchy. "You need to shave." And he pulls back enough so I see he is *clean-shaven*, like I remembered. Like a baby. Like a soft little baby. And we kiss again -- mouths open, and I think, "This is a little weird." Then, swear ta God, I feel that same scratchy thing on my tongue and I'm kinda getting freaked out, so I pull back and -- It's Manuel. Beautiful boy Manuel. Sexy boy Manuel. "What's in your mouth?" I ask him. He won't open up. "Come on, come on, what's in your mouth?" I'm tryin' to make a joke out of it, but he's got this look on his face. So I leave and go back out into the club.

Loud music returns.

WOMAN (Continued)

(Shouting)

I MEAN WHAT THE HELL IS THAT? WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S INSIDE
HIS MOUTH? HE WON'T SHOW ME! WHY WON'T HE SHOW ME! WHY
WON'T HE TELL ME! AND NOW EVERY TIME I SEE HIM IT'S LIKE
HE WANTS TO GET ME ALONE AGAIN TO SHUT ME UP!

Music cuts.

Blackout.

WHERE IS THE BREAKDOWN?

THE CHARACTERS

OPHELIA JARVIS, *a young woman*

DOCTOR WEISS, *an older woman*

NURSE FOX, *a woman*

MOLLY MONK, *a young woman*

MRS. JARVIS (MOM), *an older woman*

THE SETTING

The present, any city.

THE SCENE

A hospital.

THE STAGE

There is a flat table, front and center, large enough to hold a person.

A wheelchair is placed downstage.

A small cart lines the wall -- on it, a set of surgical knives.

There is one door.

Lights rise on a hospital room.

In the center, unconscious on a table, lies OPHELIA JARVIS. Straps restrain her across her chest, but not across her legs.

Enter DOCTOR WEISS and NURSE FOX, both in white.

The NURSE carries a clipboard.

The DOCTOR and NURSE circle the table and stop -- the DOCTOR at OPHELIA's feet, the NURSE at OPHELIA's head.

DOCTOR
How long has it been?

NURSE
Two hours.

The DOCTOR checks her watch.

DOCTOR
Be exact.

The NURSE nervously checks her watch, then her clipboard.

NURSE
Two hours and...eleven minutes.

DOCTOR
That gives us twenty-six minutes more.
(Pause)
You look frightened.

NURSE
I can't help it.

DOCTOR

You can.

NURSE

Experience doesn't make it easier.

(Pause)

Cases like this, I --

(Pause)

I never feel prepared. When the phone rang, I nearly didn't come.

(Pause)

I have a daughter to think about.

DOCTOR

Think of the patient. *She's* someone's daughter.

NURSE

(Sympathetic)

Yes, I know.

(Pause)

I was caught in the middle once. You -- You've probably been lucky to be above those troubles, haven't you, Doctor Weiss? To not be in the details.

DOCTOR

No, not lucky. There are always...complications. At every level.

(Pause)

But not today, you understand? This is a new approach. I believe it's the correct one. The men botched their chance and --

NURSE

They sure did.

(Realizing)

Sorry.

DOCTOR

...And I plan to try again. It's all right to ask questions. We're humans in a human circumstance. But don't contradict me. I know what I'm doing.

The NURSE nods and begins to prepare the room.

The DOCTOR checks OPHELIA's pulse. The DOCTOR's hand quivers. To stop these nerves, she presses her fingers to her own chest with the palm of the other hand. The NURSE notices.

NURSE

(Surprised)

You're frightened, too?

DOCTOR

No. Not me. I'm focused. And very aware of the time.

The NURSE knows this is a deflection, but lets it go by.

NURSE

Would you like gloves, Doctor?

DOCTOR

You know that doesn't matter.

The NURSE nods and then continues other work.

NURSE

Isn't this a terrible risk?

DOCTOR

It's always a risk telling someone bad news, even in lesser cases -- heart disease, cancer, brain tumor. But it's important the patient knows what we're trying to achieve. Is everything secure outside?

NURSE

Everyone's off the floor except the other patient -- Molly Monk.

(Pause)

Not that I *like* that fact.

DOCTOR

Oh, so *here's* the problem. You don't trust me. You think I've made a mistake cutting us off from help. Nurse, a whole army is just a floor away.

(Gesturing)

And there are the cameras.

NURSE

(A bit defiant)

If it were *me* next door...and something went wrong...you couldn't pay me a million dollars to enter this floor. No matter *what* I saw on the cameras.

DOCTOR

(Snapping)

Nothing will go wrong!

The two circle the table and switch positions, the DOCTOR at the head.

The DOCTOR cranes over OPHELIA's eyes.

DOCTOR (Continued)

(Not looking up)

I'm beginning to regret my choice of nurse.

(Pause)

Her restraints are firm?

NURSE

I think so.

DOCTOR

Double-check.

The NURSE inspects the straps.

DOCTOR (Continued)

(Smiling)

Let's hope she's not descended from Harry Houdini.

NURSE

(Nervous)

Yes. Let's.

The DOCTOR leans closer.

Suddenly, OPHELIA's eyes open,
startling the DOCTOR and NURSE.
OPHELIA's head darts back and forth,
confused.

OPHELIA

Where am I? Wh-who are you?

She struggles.

OPHELIA (Continued)

Why -- why am I...Where's my car?

DOCTOR

Don't you remember?

OPHELIA

No.

(Pause)

Wait.

(Hesitant)

No.

DOCTOR

You don't remember anything at all?

Pause.

OPHELIA

I remember running. And starting my car.

DOCTOR

Just that? Not the rest?

OPHELIA struggles more.

OPHELIA

(Noticing)

My legs. I can't move them.

DOCTOR

(Soothing)

What other sensations do you have, Miss Jarvis?

OPHELIA

Get me up.

DOCTOR

Recite something. Lyrics. A poem.

OPHELIA

What are you? My teacher? Get me up!

DOCTOR

Settle...

(Pause)

Settle.

(Pause)

This is important.

OPHELIA notices the cart of surgical knives.

OPHELIA

What are those?

The nurse moves in front of the cart, blocking OPHELIA's view, but it's too late.

OPHELIA struggles more but soon subsides.

The DOCTOR feels OPHELIA's head, as if for fever.

DOCTOR (Continued)

We'll note that. You wake with a lapse in memory.

The NURSE makes a note on a chart.

OPHELIA

Tell me. I want to remember.

DOCTOR

Your spine has compressed due to a severe injury. The injury also numbs you from the pain. You know your legs are there. You just can't move them.

OPHELIA

Where's. My. Car!

DOCTOR

You were thrown from your vehicle. The rest of you landed *intacto*. But the spine...we've had time for X-Rays...

(Eyes to NURSE FOX)

...other tests.

(Eyes returning to OPHELIA)

Surgery would do you no good. You have paraplegia.

OPHELIA

It's a joke.

DOCTOR

I'm afraid it isn't. The highway can be murderously cruel. Especially to those going as fast as you.

(Pause)

Do you remember *why* you were going so fast?

OPHELIA

(Angry)

Why am I strapped *down*?

NURSE

Answer your doctor's question.

OPHELIA

I...I told you I don't remember anything.

The DOCTOR bends into OPHELIA,
examining.

DOCTOR

Miss *Ophelia* Jarvis...your name will become historic after today. You should help contribute to the details of the account while you're still able to do so.

The DOCTOR does not notice that her hair is dangling over OPHELIA's fingers.

In a sudden action, OPHELIA grabs the DOCTOR's hair, rolls towards the audience, and tips the table sideways.

She lands, still strapped, holding the screaming DOCTOR. The DOCTOR falls with her, belly across the upturned table.

The NURSE stands helpless.

OPHELIA

Unstrap me!

DOCTOR

I've...I've broken a rib.

OPHELIA

Unstrap me!

Nothing.

OPHELIA pulls the DOCTOR's head towards her mouth, to bite the DOCTOR's cheek.

DOCTOR

(In pain, to NURSE)
The buckles.

NURSE
But doctor.

DOCTOR
Do it!

The NURSE undoes the straps on the bottom of the table.

OPHELIA rolls off the slab, still holding the DOCTOR's hair. She points to the surgical knives.

OPHELIA
(To NURSE)
Get me one of those.

The NURSE does not move.

OPHELIA (Continued)
Get me one or I'll rip her *scalp* off!

The NURSE goes to the table and picks up a small knife.

OPHELIA (Continued)
One of the big ones!

The NURSE, frightened, pulls a long knife from the table.

OPHELIA (Continued)
Give it to me.

OPHELIA stretches out her free hand.

The NURSE drops the knife on the floor, just out of OPHELIA's reach.

OPHELIA lunges for the knife. In order to make the distance, she has to let go of the DOCTOR.

NURSE FOX scurries away.

OPHELIA has the knife.

The DOCTOR stands, breathless, rubbing her scalp and ribs.

The NURSE and DOCTOR watch OPHELIA pull her body along, legs not working, the knife biting into the floor for traction, until she reaches the far corner of the room.

DOCTOR

Even without legs you're the most dangerous thing in the room.

OPHELIA

I'm not a thing.

DOCTOR

You will become one.

OPHELIA

What's *that* supposed to mean?

DOCTOR

You really don't remember?

(Winded)

Nurse -- read the report for Miss Jarvis.

NURSE

(Reading)

"Patient name: Ophelia June Jarvis, age twenty-six. At one o'clock the afternoon of this report, Miss Jarvis was seen in an altercation with Miss Molly Monk, age twenty-seven."

OPHELIA

The bitch.

NURSE

"After a short fistfight, Miss Jarvis fled in her vehicle. Miss Monk pursued Miss Jarvis in *her own* vehicle. The two drove at high speed to the city highway, resulting in the crash of Miss Jarvis and the subsequent arrest of Miss Monk."

(Aside, to the DOCTOR)

Then there's--

DOCTOR

(Determined)

Nurse Fox: the next line of the report.

NURSE

(Disliking the task)

"Miss Jarvis...having been thrown from her vehicle...was pronounced dead at the scene."

Long pause.

OPHELIA

(Soft)

I remember running.

DOCTOR

That's probably you running to your car -- after the fight, before the crash.

(Pause)

When they were about to put you in a bag, you sat up.

(Pointing)

It's in the report.

OPHELIA

Forget the report! I can't be *killed* and then get up!

It's ridiculous.

(Unsure)

It's ridiculous.

DOCTOR

Think. Remember. Then check your pulse.

OPHELIA hedges then checks her wrist. Slowly, she takes her fingers away.

OPHELIA

I want my mom. Where's my mom?

DOCTOR

She's here. At the hospital.

OPHELIA

I want to see her.

DOCTOR

She's not sure she wants to see you.

OPHELIA

(Hurt)

What? Of course she does. She's my mom.

The DOCTOR kneels close to OPHELIA,
aware of the outstretched knife.

DOCTOR

My name...is Doctor Cassandra Weiss. Probably doesn't ring a bell. I lecture, I publish, my name is known, and, therefore, I have power at this hospital. Enough to get a bit of privacy with you, Ophelia.

(Pause)

I do *not* specialize in car crashes. Or paralysis. My study...is *infectious disease*.

OPHELIA

Oh, I bet you were *raking* in the money a few years back, you greedy bitch.

DOCTOR

I was. *Very* busy. And I'm about to get a lot busier.

OPHELIA

(Frightened)

What are you talking about?

DOCTOR

It's the same virus. The one that killed all the men. All our brothers, husbands, fathers, sons, and boyfriends. It's the *same* plague. Only now it's jumped to women.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (Continued)

You're the first case.

(Pause)

Even though your lower spine is a bit of crushed crackers, and your death strangled the oxygen right out of your brain, you're able to move, think, and speak. You're in the second phase. Viral limbo.

NURSE

You've got your wits and color back a bit, but that's the calm before the storm.

DOCTOR

Luckily, we got a needle in you and put you to sleep. That bought us some time to get you into isolation.

(Eyes up, to cameras)

We're making a recording of this.

(To NURSE)

How much time left?

NURSE

(Checking time)

Not long.

DOCTOR

In about fifteen minutes, you'll be able to walk again. Every part of your brain will become *intensely* active -- particularly the violent part. Then you'll try to kill everyone in sight. Whether you want to or not. Like you tried to kill me just now. Only without a conscious strategy for survival.

The DOCTOR stands.

DOCTOR (Continued)

You know these symptoms, though, don't you?

OPHELIA

The men.

DOCTOR

Yes. Now you remember, don't you?

(Frowning)

Just like all of the men.

OPHELIA hides her face and then starts to cry. She lowers the knife.

NURSE

(Panicked)

We've got to get her back in the straps.

The NURSE uprights the table.

DOCTOR

You have to help us get you back onto the table, Ophelia. We need to find out *where is the breakdown?* It may be different in a woman than a man and the sooner we know the timing the better we can react to other cases. And, and maybe there's hope. The men didn't have a documented lapse of memory. Maybe this *won't* come true.

The DOCTOR moves to lift OPHELIA back onto the table.

DOCTOR (Continued)

Help us know this, Ophelia. You can save the lives of millions of women.

OPHELIA closes her eyes then nods.

The DOCTOR puts her hands under OPHELIA's arms.

In a quick motion, OPHELIA drags the DOCTOR down beside her, picks up the knife and again has a prisoner.

OPHELIA

(To NURSE)

Get my mom! GET MY MOM!

The NURSE runs out.

DOCTOR

(Struggling under the knife)

Don't.

OPHELIA

Hold still. I won't hurt you if you hold still. I'm not a thing. I want to see my mom. I'm not infected. I wasn't around any buried bodies or anything that could have caused this.

DOCTOR

You know that doesn't matter. You could have been infected months ago and it doesn't show until you're dead.

OPHELIA

I'm not dead. This is a mistake.

DOCTOR

It's not. There could be *thousands* of other time-bomb cases throughout the city, waiting to go off when a person *dies*.

OPHELIA

You've *drugged* me! You think I'd trust any *doctors* after these last few years.

(Loudly)

You didn't do *ANYthing*! *Everyone* died!

DOCTOR

I tried. Ophelia. I tried.

OPHELIA

I remember running. I don't remember *dying*. I won't *kill ANYBODY*!

DOCTOR

(Soft)

You will.

The NURSE enters with MRS. JARVIS.

MRS. JARVIS begins to weep.

NURSE

(To DOCTOR)

I told them she had gotten loose.

DOCTOR

Are they standing by?

NURSE

Yes. No. I'm not sure.

MRS. JARVIS

Ophelia. Ophelia.

OPHELIA

It isn't true, mom. It isn't.

Hushed, MRS. JARVIS enters further.

MRS. JARVIS

Don't hurt anyone. Just let the doctor...just let her go--

OPHELIA

You're safe. I'm nothing.

MRS. JARVIS

Yes, of course. Of *course*, Ophelia.

OPHELIA

I won't kill any-!

(Stopping, growing quiet)

Sit down.

MRS. JARVIS

Where?

OPHELIA

Here. Next to me. The chair.

MRS. JARVIS

(Hesitant)

Next to you?

OPHELIA

(Emotional)

Mom. Mom, please tell me you're not scared of me, too.
Please.

MRS. JARVIS

I'm not, I--

OPHELIA

Don't make me hate you. Please. Don't disappoint me
one...more...time. I won't hurt you. I'm your daughter.
You don't have to be *scared* of me, Mom.

(Pause)

Please!

DOCTOR

(To MRS. JARVIS)

I think you should sit down.

MRS. JARVIS slowly takes the chair.

MRS. JARVIS

That *girl* is here. Molly Monk. She keeps asking for you.
We can hear her. On the cameras. She says it's not over
between the two of you. She knows we're next door.

NURSE

Miss Monk only knows Miss Jarvis survived the crash. She
doesn't know about the virus.

MRS. JARVIS

Oh, the virus, the virus.

OPHELIA

I don't *have* the virus, Mom. I don't even have a cold.

MRS. JARVIS

It makes sense, it makes sense. You must have had this all
your life. You must have been...susceptible. All the
fighting with Molly Monk on the schoolyard, in those bars
when you were older, with your brothers -

OPHELIA

Mom. I was just pissed off. I'm pissed off *now*. Can't I get mad?

MRS. JARVIS

No. Not like that. You've always been a *vicious* child. You have, you know you have. You started out good and turned rotten. Every boy in the neighborhood was scared of you. Your teachers --

OPHELIA

Sometimes hitting is required.

MRS. JARVIS

No it isn't. I've never hurt another soul.

NURSE

If this virus has crossed to women, you will.

Pause.

MRS. JARVIS

(Emotional)

Can't you *do* something? There must be a, a, a...

DOCTOR

There's nothing. You know that. Unless the pattern changes. We're only here...to observe.

Pause.

MRS. JARVIS

When? When does she change?

NURSE

Soon.

MRS. JARVIS

(To OPHELIA)

Look at you now...

(Points to the DOCTOR)

Please put the *knife* down. Let these people help you.

OPHELIA

I feel fine. It's all lies.

MRS. JARVIS

Don't, Ophelia.

OPHELIA

It's all LIES! You're all *lying* to me. This is just like that school you sent me to. You lied to me then about where I was going. You put me in a car and drove me there and left me with strangers. Were you that *frightened* of me? That you put me out like the cat. So I have *claws*, mom! I'm not unhappy with them! You want to file me down until I disappear. You're doing it now. I swear to God, mom, I swear, I'm good. I am. I'm good.

MRS. JARVIS stands.

MRS. JARVIS

Please, Ophelia! Your last words to me I -- I can't hear them!

(Covers her ears)

It's the same bile! That same meanness.

(Uncovers her ears, now angry)

If you're about to go beyond my reach, into this madness, do something KIND to me before they take you forever. FOR me. Tell me I'm not to *blame*.

OPHELIA

If it's my last minutes, *do something* FOR ME!

MRS. JARVIS

What do you want?

OPHELIA

Kiss my cheek.

MRS. JARVIS doesn't move.

OPHELIA (Continued)

Kiss my cheek. I'm dead. I've died. I'm a corpse in a coffin. I can't hurt you now.

MRS. JARVIS

Let go of the doctor.

OPHELIA thinks on this.

At last, she releases DOCTOR WEISS, who scrambles away and to her feet.

OPHELIA

Kiss me.

MRS. JARVIS remains still.

OPHELIA (Continued)

(Righteous)

Oh, now, don't tell me. You're backing out. Don't tell me you -- I'm a CRIPPLE, mom, at the very least, where's your, where's your --

OPHELIA turns her face away, hiding tears.

MRS. JARVIS moves forward. She leans in. She kisses her daughter on the cheek. Then, she slowly backs away, returning to her same position.

OPHELIA turns to face her mother.

OPHELIA (Continued)

That wasn't so bad, was it?

MRS. JARVIS

I haven't done that in a long time.

OPHELIA

You haven't.

(Pause)

Will you do it again?

MRS. JARVIS clearly does not want to.

But she starts to move forward once more.

SOUND: Banging outside, then --

The door bursts open.

Enter MOLLY MONK.

OPHELIA

(Adversarial)

Molly Monk.

DOCTOR

You can't be in here. How did you-?

MOLLY

I'm here to see the patient. To pay my respects to the sick.

MOLLY slams the door.

DOCTOR

Get out.

NURSE

You have to leave.

MOLLY

I'm not going anywhere. Took me a long time to pick that tricky lock. It's not everyday I put the Molly Monk fingers to action, but this girl, oh, this girl - Offffffffffffelia. She'd gotten on my *last* nerve.

DOCTOR

You don't understand. This is a dangerous place to be.

MOLLY

It is now.

MOLLY stares down those in the room and approaches OPHELIA, who still holds a knife.

OPHELIA

Molly, you may want to listen to doctor's advice.

MOLLY

It isn't every girl who gets up after a run off the road using the patented Molly Monk nudge. There were helicopters and I'm sure we were on television. Darling, Cozy -- my gang. Bet they were watching the whole thing and guessing how many bones you'd broken. But you walked away from that scene, too, didn't you coward? Didn't you?

(Pause)

Get up.

(Pause)

I said get up.

MOLLY kicks OPHELIA in the leg.

MOLLY (Continued)

(Over her shoulder)

What's wrong with her legs?

DOCTOR

She's injured her spine. She's paralyzed.

MOLLY laughs.

MOLLY

That's hysterical.

(To OPHELIA)

Oh you poor baby.

(Singsong)

Never gonna walk agaaaain.

OPHELIA

(Smiling)

Apparently...that's not true.

NURSE

(Frightened)

We have to get her onto the *table*.

DOCTOR

Ophelia. *Please*. There isn't much time.

(Pause)

At least give me the knife. Give it to me while you're in your right mind.

OPHELIA

I can't. Molly's here.

DOCTOR

(Shoving MOLLY)

Get out, get out! Now! This is important. You're in great *danger*.

MOLLY slugs the DOCTOR and the DOCTOR goes down.

The NURSE rushes to the DOCTOR's aide.

Then, OPHELIA's face changes.

MOLLY

(To OPHELIA)

You look like a coiled snake. Snake gonna bite?

MRS. JARVIS begins to cry.

MOLLY (Continued)

Snake gonna flick its tongue like it did when it was bein' choked during recess?

MRS. JARVIS intercedes.

MRS. JARVIS

You're cruel! No wonder Ophelia hates you.

MOLLY

She should love me! I made her what she is! She was my favorite punching bag until she started punching back. Then things got interesting. Now if I'm going to jail for attempted murder, well it might as well be a better attempt than that highway business.

MRS. JARVIS

(Bitter)

You took away everything. I couldn't protect my own *daughter* from a grade school bully and now look what's happened! How do you stay in our LIFE like this!

MOLLY turns on MRS. JARVIS.

MOLLY

How do you stay in mine? I was on cloud nine when half your family died. I hate the sight of *all* of you. Happy Little *Family*. Why didn't you MOVE AWAY!

MOLLY comes forward.

MRS. JARVIS

Get away from me.

MOLLY taunts MRS. JARVIS, who uses the wheelchair as a barricade.

DOCTOR WEISS and NURSE FOX rise.

MRS. JARVIS

Your mother was insane! She was! The whole neighborhood knew it. And your father was worse!

MOLLY

You won't hurt me by going after my mother. I hate the bitch, too. And my dad -- he's better with the worms.

MOLLY snares MRS. JARVIS.

Triumphant, MOLLY turns with MRS. JARVIS, as if holding a prize, to see...

OPHELIA, standing against the wall.

Everyone grows quiet.

OPHELIA looks down at her legs. She, too, is surprised at this inevitability.)

OPHELIA

(Helpless)

Mom?

MOLLY releases MRS. JARVIS.

OPHELIA looks to her knife.

MOLLY now sees the cart of surgical equipment. From it, she grabs a second knife.

The NURSE and DOCTOR cross quickly, eye MOLLY and MRS. JARVIS, and grab their own knives.

Slowly, looking to each of the four, MRS. JARVIS takes the last knife.

OPHELIA (Continued)

(Helpless)

I feel better now.

(Pause)

I do. I feel better now.

(Pause)

I won't hurt you. I won't hurt any of you.

DOCTOR

Then put down the knife, Ophelia.

OPHELIA looks at the weapon.

OPHELIA

I can't.

(Crying)

Oh, God, I can't. I can't.

OPHELIA, torn, covers her eyes and bends at the waist, distraught with the decision.

When she comes back up, she is different.

She kills the DOCTOR.

She kills the NURSE.

She kills MOLLY.

She stands above her mother.

MRS. JARVIS

I'm sorry. I'm --

OPHELIA kills her mother.

She looks to the four dead bodies.

She exits.

Long pause.

Breaking the silence, the DOCTOR bolts upright, reanimated, back from the dead.

The NURSE, MOLLY, and MRS. JARVIS soon follow.

Blackout.

RED MESSAGE 5

Lights rise on an old woman.

OLD WOMAN

Why does this horrible thing have to happen to me? Awfulness piled high as hay bails in October. After all, dear girl, *most* of us are innocent. What are we, but *foot-soldiers*, sent to fight battles started by bankers? Eighty-one years I've been swept up in that storm. Our fate is not our own. Flies with wings plucked off. Flies.

(Pause)

Remember this, if nothing else. The most horrible thing in your head is only the forgotten memories of you as a child. Deep in your head are the worst, most violent times. But there's ways they can't touch you. When I was little, I used to hide in caves for a giggle. But they've been bricked up. Where can we hide out nowadays?

(Points to temple)

The cave up here. They can't touch you. This is the castle and this

(Touches tongue)

the moat. I shut it.

(Pause)

Nothing in or out.

(Pause)

I'm dying. To some I'm already dead. I've always talked in circles...but lately...I'm a racetrack. A trottin' horse got loose and can't put it back in the barn. That idea keeps circling and circling. I forgive everyone *everything*. In Japanese ghost stories, it's the ghost that always wins. You remember that. You haven't got a hope in *Hell*.

Final Curtain.