

This is a pen.

My Play and My Process

An Honors Thesis for the Department of Drama and Dance

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Introduction

I have always been astounded by people. We have so many emotions, we have so many desires, we have so many thoughts, and we have an abundance of imagination. I have always believed that a play is one of the greatest odes to human beings. Through a play, we are able to display people created of imagination and who mimic true humanity at heightened stakes. We are then allowed to watch real people try and be imitations of people right in front of us, live.

So, for my senior thesis I wrote a play. What you will read in the upcoming pages is a little insight into what I went through to create it. My process eventually led to a staged reading

on April 28th, 2011, complete with a full cast and a director. After the year's journey is the text that was used for the reading, the current version of my one-act play. A reflection follows, looking back at the choices I made and my goals and approaches to the process.

I would like to consider my play my own ode to the human condition. My play is about people, their faults and their beauty. But, then again, what play is not. It is a ridiculous story full of ridiculous characters, but I hope you can find some connection with them, for they are a very sincere bunch of people who just want to make some friends. I suppose all I can say now is to sit back and enjoy. If anything, I hope to entertain you.

Beginnings

I began with a single goal: To create a work of my own. As mostly a performer, I feel I have had very little opportunity to have a piece of art that I can call entirely mine. While collaboration and ensemble work have always been some of my favorite parts of doing theatre, I have always longed to see what I could contribute to theatre on my own

Playwriting was the most interesting way for me to do this. I had taken the playwriting class in the spring of my sophomore year and enjoyed it. Finding voices for people and creating dialogue excite me. I also felt that in writing a play I could use everything I learned about drama, theatre history, play analysis, character building, comedy, and what makes good theatre. Thus a play would be the perfect culmination to my four years of undergraduate dedication to the dramatic arts. I admit that this was an unorthodox beginning to a creative project—in life, one should begin a play with an idea, or a particular inspiration to write one. But a beginning is still a beginning.

Planning

In my proposed plan to the Department of Drama and Dance in the spring of 2010, I wrote the following:

“For my senior thesis, I would like to write a play. I have been interested in playwriting since taking the playwriting class last spring and I would like to take time to dedicate myself and focus my energy on writing a full-length one. I hope to research and write the majority of it over the summer, spend Fall Semester [2010] workshopping it, and spend Spring Semester [2011] working to perform either scenes from the play or the whole play, depending on the length, during the thesis performance slot [on April 28th, 2011]. If possible, I would not want to direct it—rather experience how collaboration can work between a playwright and director. I am not completely sure exactly how my play will unfold, but I will probably continue one I have already begun writing, which has to do with the myths from Asian countries, faith, reality vs. fantasy, and storytelling.”

As with most plans for creative projects, my year did not go exactly as I laid out. But in the long run, I did cover the main goals of my proposal.

The play that I referenced above was a theatrical adaptation of a Japanese graphic novel that I had always thought would work great for the stage. The story dealt with wishing, dreaming, and consequences, as well as with creatures from ancient Japanese myths. I had written the first scene of it on my own and planned to continue to adapt it while potentially weaving in other myths from other cultures.

Over the summer, I attempted to continue the story, but I found I did not have the time that I hoped. I also could not find the same amount of excitement and motivation with the play as I thought I would have. In the meantime, I tried to think of something else to write about. I watched a lot of plays in New York and read a lot to see if any of them inspired me. But when I did, I would only want to write a play like the one I just saw or read. As I mulled over my ideas,

the Japanese story kept coming back to me, so I knew it was important that I keep it as an option. But another idea kept popping into my head as well.

For my final in my playwriting class, I had written a play called *Welcome to My...* The protagonist was an odd girl named Merlu who was incredibly innocent and knew very little about the world around her. Re-reading the play, I realized this made little sense considering how much she had interacted with people all her life, and one inherently learns about the world through interaction. But I really connected with her innocence and wished to explore a similar character further and expand on it. I saw her in a completely different situation—trapped in a room with three other strangers and the hilarity that may ensue. At the same time someone told me a true story about a girl who married the Eiffel Tower because she was truly and honestly attracted to it. I latched onto that idea as well and knew I wanted to use something about that notion of being attracted to inanimate objects in my play. Taking these ideas that hooked me, I started to envision an entire new play, but had little confidence in following through with it.

I had decided that I would be much more motivated to work in the academic environment. Thus, when I came back to school in September, I knew I had to choose between the two stories that were more prominently floating in my mind and just write it. I worriedly talked to my advisors about how I had not written a play yet. They assured me that as playwriting can be an uncontrollable process, it is understandable that I would have difficulty beginning. They told me, however, that I did need to get started. There was not enough time now to put on a full production of my play at the end of the year as I would probably still be editing it and holding workshops of it in the Spring Semester. But I could still have a staged reading my work instead.

Soon after the school year began, I had dinner with fellow drama-performance-thesis writers, Hilary Asare, '11, and Claire Redfield, '11. I told them of my two ideas. I had expected them to say that the adaptation would be the stronger choice, mostly because I thought I had to choose it. In truth, it seemed less daunting to me. The story was already written; I did not have to create one. Plus, I somehow believed that in the academic setting, it is necessary to do lot of research for a creative thesis and the adaptation would require an in depth look at world mythology. I told them this idea and they nodded, saying that it sounded interesting.

I went on to tell them about my second idea—which at the time was something in the vein of, “a comedy involving four crazy people trapped in an apartment.” But before I even finished telling them the idea, one of them pointed out, “You can’t even stop smiling for a second while you’re telling this story! I think you want to write this one.” And I realized that if I was going to write something, I needed to write something I truly enjoyed. While the idea of creating a whole new play and whole new characters still terrified me, I needed to do what made me more excited. And that meant I had to write a comedy.

Comedy Tonight

I love comedy and have been performing comedy and writing sketches throughout all of college. But when it came to writing a comedic play, for some reason, I avoided it. I somehow believed that for a play to be accepted as good work, it must be dramatic. I avoided it first during playwriting class. It was not until my final for the class that I started to open up to comedy—I think my playwright voice became more developed through that play because I was so much more excited about it. The same thing seemed to happen when I chose my thesis play. I did not

think comedy would be a valid option even though I absolutely connected and felt more comfortable with the genre.

Comedy is, in my humble opinion, one of the most beautiful creations of the mind. It is a genre of media whose entire purpose is to make people laugh and by proxy make people happy. The amount of thought, diligence, practice, and intelligence comedy demands is perhaps as much as a Declaration of War, but comedy has the intent of putting people at rest. When we laugh, we are in a mindless state of bliss. Nothing is in our heads except the hilarity that just ensued. We clutch our stomachs; we rock back and forth; we have trouble breathing. Physically, we react similar to the way we react to a convulsion. But, on the contrary, we are in high spirits. For this reason I find comedy to be incredibly powerful. Laughter both entertains and clears the slate for every person the humor touches. It also lets the audience's guard down, thus allowing for the story to hit them in a raw and genuine way. Comedy is a great medicine through which one can touch the heart and dig deep down in the gentlest way possible.

There is something incredibly human about comedy that is never properly accredited. Humor is such an essential, day-to-day experience we all have, one through which we can connect with each other. This notion is probably the reason why the play ended up the way it did. I remember originally trying to write just a regular, old piece of slapstick comedy. But I could not ignore the characters and their honest selves. I wanted to humanize them through the comedy and force people to understand them. Comedy became a vehicle for me to explore their darkest emotions while still keeping the tone light-hearted and fun.

Development

Comedy. Heart. Friendship. Feelings. Connection. Innocence. These were the ideas that swam around my head as I developed my play. I knew that I had always been fascinated by people's dual desire to relate to people and to shun them. I already had two characters who did not interact with people well—Merlu, who became Mersha, and someone with object sexuality, who became Larrito. I then decided to add a married couple, for irony, as well as for a display of a different level of intimacy. Tammy would be cruel and abrasive and Dylan would be chill and bulimic. I do not know why I was so hung up on having a bulimic man. I just felt it such a rare occurrence that I wanted to add him to the pile of crazies.

I liked going with the idea of watching four characters, all socially inept, forced to do what they feel they are incapable of. Thus, I gave them the character descriptions I did with a phrase starting with “Doesn't [Verb],” the verb being whatever each character is unable to do with other people. Having four people who suck at interaction does not provide a story, however. It was not until the idea for the Old Lady—a character inspired by my grandfather— came about that I suddenly felt a structure, a storyline, and a goal.

I decided not to do much research while writing my thesis. I did not see too many subjects in my play that required it in the first place. And as I wanted to stretch most of the characters and situations to the extreme, I did not want to place these characters in the reality of our world. I did do a little research into object sexuality, however. But as there is so little material on the subject currently, a lot of Larrito was up to my own imagination. In a similar vein,

I decided not to look to other plays for inspiration, contrary to what many people advised me to do. I believed that as this was my first real attempt at writing a play, I needed to use it to find my own voice, instead of copying others. Needless to say, I was certainly influenced by certain writers just because they were in the back of my brain and I had read them so much.

What I loved most was giving voices to my characters. Mersha, Larrito, Tammy, and the Old Lady's voices all came very naturally to me. Dylan was the most difficult because I purposefully gave him a passive personality. I loved speaking as him, but it was difficult to stay consistent as his passivity gives such little room for action unless he is pushed to that limit. Finding his voice would be a key struggle as I would move through my drafts. I had several—I counted, and if you include the one in this thesis, I had sixteen—drafts, but I like to break them into four major ones.

Drafts and Drafts and Drafts

I had a first draft done at the beginning of November. I had a second major draft done at the end of January. My workshops began from that second draft. By the end of March, I had a third draft. And then I consider my fourth to be the one that grew out of the rehearsal process and would be used for the final staged reading.

My first draft was, as one of my thesis advisors, Ken Urban, said, “meandering.” I had so much fun with my characters and finding the humor in it all that the first draft was exactly that: A lot of characters just talking and a lot of slapstick-y humor. It attempted to have a climax and a conclusion, but it did not feel like a play. It was not a story. It was ideas and characters floating around. Still, it had a place to build a play off of and it also had an absurdist, whimsical tone.

During this time, I found a director for my staged reading. As I said in my proposal, I did not want to direct it because I wanted to experience what another could do with my work. I also did not have any director training and did not want to present my material in any way that would take away from my actual play. I asked Jeewon Kim, '11, because he had taken both of Tufts's directing classes and in the previous spring, he had directed a full production of a student-written play—he was one of few at Tufts familiar with author-director collaboration.

The second major draft had a much better sense of a plot and of actions. In it, I introduced the objective that the four characters have to come up with their own ideas to get the Old Lady to become their friend. The characters also had much clearer motivations, though still not entirely solidified. There was still a lot of dead air, however. At this point in the process, I had begun workshopping my play and also finding a cast.

In the third major draft, everything started coming together. The action had a much better through-line and not all but a good chunk of the dead air was moved around. The relationships between the characters also became clearer, which was probably a product of the constant character conversations I was having with my actors, as I will describe below. This would also be the draft I would send out for the rehearsals leading up to the staged reading, which then morphed into the fourth draft.

Casting

The casting process was difficult. I knew that I wanted talented actors who I trusted as I did not want the reading to be deterred by bad acting choices. I did not want to audition—I had not let my baby grow that far away from me yet that I could see “anyone” take on the part. I

asked actors that I was personally close with, as I wanted to be able to comfortably discuss with them my thoughts on the characters as well as their own. In addition, I needed them to be available for most of April. But I was actually able to find Mersha, Tammy, and Dylan fairly quickly. Larrito took longer, but it was only because Tufts has a shortage of male actors. I did, however, face a problem with Old Lady.

Old Lady was difficult because I am essentially the only female Asian actor in our community and I could not play her for the purpose of the staged reading. I struggled for a long time, wondering if maintaining the race of the character was so important that I should call on someone who had no acting experience, or if the strength of the actor was more important. In the end, I realized that for the purpose of the staged reading, I, and the audience, just needed to hear the words as they would be read and the race of the actor would not be taken so much into account. She is already described in the stage directions and the stage directions would be read. Also, she is such a comic character; I needed someone who had brilliant comic timing.

Because I wanted to know how actors would take on the characters, for the rest of the spring, I would continue to have individual character meetings with them. I wanted to know what they took away from the characters from the lines they were given and what they would like to know more about or see more of. The meetings would prove to be incredibly useful in the development of my characters over the course of the next drafts. For example, in my character meeting with the actress playing Tammy, we discovered more of a solidified background for her and together found the reason why she became the way she is. For the first time I considered her values and morals as a person, so I adjusted her lines accordingly. Additionally, it was not until I started talking with the actor playing Larrito and watched him play the part that I discovered how

much Larrito could emerge as a leader. His personality grew to be much more assertive than I intended it to be, and dramatically I think his larger presence makes much more sense.

Rehearsals and a Director

Rehearsals began April 14th, 2011. To me, two weeks seemed to be enough to rehearse simple movement for a show that did not require memorization. Before they began, director Kim and I discussed exactly what I wanted out of this staged reading. I had said that while it would be a staged reading, I wanted there to be movement involved. Because there are so many moments of physical comedy written in the script, somehow I thought a sense of the play would be lost without having that aspect displayed. I gave him the freedom of moving around with the scripts or music stands—whatever he thought would best represent the physical action of it all.

I also requested a costume coordinator. It may seem odd for the costumes to be the only tech element. I wanted them because I felt my characters were distinct, unique and not of this world and I feel like that would be instantly visually represented were it a full production. The set and the costumes and the props would define the crazy tone of the show to the audience. I wanted the audience of the staged reading to get a sense of the visual whimsy in some way, and I felt that costumes would be the easiest. I asked specifically for a costume coordinator—not a designer. All I wanted was some elements represented in the characters that would establish them as unique beings.

Then, rehearsals began. Kim did a lot of ensemble-building exercises with the cast at first, because he realized the ensemble nature of the story and felt that their comfort and connections with each other would enhance even the staged reading of the play. He then proceeded to start blocking the script. Characters moved around with a relative sense of the set

and space. They entered and exited the stage when they did so in the text and they brought their music stands wherever they went. By the end of the first week, fifty of the eighty pages had been blocked.

On the last day of the first week, my other thesis advisor, Sheriden Thomas, came to look at a rehearsal. After she saw it, she pulled me and Kim aside and told us that while she understood what we wanted to do with the staged reading, the extra movements were detracting and distracting from the words of the play. Keeping in mind that the goal of the staged reading is to *hear* my work, the movements subtracted from the purpose. She knew we had worked hard to get to where we were, but it was crucial that we change the format or the pace would be broken up and the audience will not have time to appreciate the text.

We completely understood what Professor Thomas said. Kim had just been doing what he thought I wanted and while it crossed my mind that there was too much movement, I had been too afraid to change my desires because he had been working so hard. We decided to take the second and last full week of rehearsal to re-block the whole play with the actors standing in place and clean upper-body movement only when necessary. In fact the reduced, minimized movements actually added more to the quirks and the hilarity of the play than the bigger ones had. Even though we had less time to actually run the play, the changes were definitely worth it. And because the actors had been so well-acquainted with the characters for the past semester, the changes barely threw anyone off.

Last Draft...For Now

A lot of my work during the rehearsal process was changing the play. There were several lines that I never realized were awkward or excessive or un-characteristic until I saw them on their feet. I adjusted and cut several lines throughout the first week and also paid attention to specific word choices that I had been making.

Additionally, the ending had never quite clicked for me since draft one. Climaxes and conflict are always difficult for me to write, and so the bulimia scene never settled for me. Dylan had also always been a sticking point. I never could fully decide on his motivations and inner conflict. Seeing actors work with the text, however, gave me inspiration on a slightly more solid ending. So in addition to changing the staging, I also sent out a new script with a different last twenty pages for the last week of rehearsal. I changed Tammy and Dylan's fight and I inserted a conclusion to the Dr. Herzerban and Old Lady storyline, which everyone who read the play always felt confused about. The version you will see here is the final version used for the staged reading.

We did a full six-hour tech in which we ran the show twice. In fact, tech rehearsal was the first time I had ever heard the whole play acted straight through. I felt good about what was there. While I could already see problems to fix in the future, the play I had was still solid and closer to what I wanted out of the play than I had ever had. It was funny but tender and the actors were doing brilliantly. I was ready to show my play to the world.

Author's Note

For the program of my staged reading, I wrote an author's note in which I briefly introduced the ideas behind my play:

“One hot day in Japan, where I spend most of my summers, my mother and I came back to my grandparents' house after grocery shopping. My grandmother greeted us in a grave, hush tone, ‘The Yajimas came over while you were gone. They want to see you both.’

‘Oh no!’ My mother replied in aggravation. As I changed into comfy clothing and unloaded the groceries, I listened to my mother and her mother discuss the situation at hand.

‘I told them I’d call them when you got back.’

‘Why would you do that? You should’ve lied and said we’d left on a trip for the weekend.’

‘They know you visited Tokyo a couple of days ago. We can’t put this off much longer, they’ve been asking for weeks.’

‘Maybe we can “forget” to call. And then call in the evening and say that we were busy.’

‘We have to call. And they probably saw you on your way in.’

‘What can we tell them?’

‘Well I told them you might be exhausted from the grocery trip...’

If you heard the conversation and didn’t understand the language, it would have sounded similar to the emergency meeting that would be held at the Capitol if Sarah Palin ever got elected to be President of our country. (Not that it would ever happen. I just couldn’t think of a better ‘worst case scenario’.)

My grandparents and the Yajimas are by no means on bad terms. They have lived alongside each other for several years and our families are very close. They give us a watermelon every August.

‘So, what’s the problem exactly?’ I asked them.

‘The problem? The problem is that they are coming over! We have to present ourselves to them,’ my mother answered, ‘I don’t want to put on real clothes now, do you? If they come, we have to invite them in, which means we have to clean the table and clean the dining room and put out food to eat—and then we have to TALK to them. *Obaachan* is

old and she doesn't want to do all that. I don't want to do all that. And you don't want to sit still for two hours.' Well, I guess that's true.

'Dealing with people is very difficult.'

My mother is going to maim me for telling you this story. Regardless, I tell you this not just to say that people are crazy—I mean, they are, but we can forgive ourselves for that. More importantly, here we are complaining that Facebook and emailing and texting are destroying our abilities to interact with each other. But my parents and their parents are people of an older generation and they still have trouble with communication. It seems like humans have had an aversion to face-to-face contact since long ago. I found the amount of complex thought put into how to, and how not to, interact with other people highly amusing.

And still, somehow people cannot survive without connecting with each other.

The characters in my play are not real people. For each of them, I took a string from the personality of a real person, stretched it out very far, and then attached a human form to the other end. But their hearts are very real—they all struggle with a paradoxical desire to distance themselves from others and to also gain their acceptance and relate to them.

If anything, I hope that I can make you laugh a little at the ridiculous displays of how underneath the complexities of the human mind lies simplicity in its truest, loneliest form. A heart can be as simple as the sentence, "This is a pen."

(An addendum: When I asked my grandfather what he thought of the situation, he replied, "Well, I will keep on sitting here in my underwear whether or not they come. So I don't really care." To each his own.)

- Julia Izumi, April 2011"

And thus began the first ever rehearsed presentation of my play.

The Play

This Is a Pen

By Julia Izumi

MERSHA (*Mrr-shah*) – early 20s. Doesn't Know. Blank. She doesn't do anything. She likes Jellybeans. And Birds.

LARRITO – mid-20s. Doesn't Understand. Logical. Clerk at a box company. He likes stuff.

TAMMY – mid 30s. Doesn't Trust. Blunt. Senior manager of a bank. She likes chocolate smoothies from Smoothie King. "But if you tell someone that, I'll pound you to the floor so you become shorter and then ship you to a diamond mine in Sierra Leone with the words 'Extra help' on the box."

DYLAN – mid 30s. Doesn't Engage With. Tired. Paper-napkin maker. He likes Tammy.

OLD LADY – 99. Doesn't Care. Forgetful. She likes friends. Japanese.

The staged reading of the play took place on April 28, 2011 in the Balch Arena Theater at Tufts University. The cast was as follows:

Mersha.....Lily Berthold-Bond
Larrito.....Cole von Glahn
Tammy.....Alexa Chryssos
Dylan.....Jon Sasenick
Old Lady.....Melis Aker
Stage Directions.....Lina Stolyar

Production staff:

Director.....Jeewon Kim
Stage Manager.....Abbie Hill
Costume Coordinator.....Alyssa Skiba

Time: Around now.

Place: An apartment.

A living room. A long couch with a coffee table in front of it sits center. There is a door to the apartment on one side. There is a door to a bedroom and a small hallway on the other side. An open kitchen is in the back with two windows, one with a fire escape outside it, on the back wall. There is a plate of cookies on the kitchen counter.

The room is decorated with an eclectic assortment of objects. Near the door is a clown-figurine collection lined with different-sized and different colored rubber duckies. There is a gigantic blow-up hamburger near the bedroom door. The walls have pictures focused on people's left cheeks, among other colorful paintings. A Swiffer Wet Jet is leaned against the couch. Orange fur is on the floor. Everywhere.

Good luck.

Lights up on Mersha sitting in the middle of the couch. She looks from side to side slightly peering at the objects around her but not wanting to stare too long. She sits for a while.

There is a knock on the door and Mersha looks. Pause. Mersha looks to the other side as if expecting someone to get the door. There is another knock. Then she remembers that she is capable of

opening the door too. She gets up, then thinks about it, gets scared and sits back down.

The door is then unlocked and Larrito enters slowly and cautiously, carrying a small duffle bag. When he sees the room fully, he jumps. Pause. Then he sees Mersha.

LARRITO

Oh!

MERSHA

Hello.

LARRITO

Hello!

MERSHA

How are you?

LARRITO

I'm fine I just...um, never mind—how are you?

MERSHA

I'm pleasant.

LARRITO

Great!

Pause.

MERHSA

Are there many birds outside there?

LARRITO

Oh, not today. I saw a pigeon or two.

MERSHA

That's lovely!

LARRITO

You do like birds.

MERSHA

And jellybeans.

LARRITO

And jellybeans. Two things we decided that you love.

MERSHA

That I *like*. I have yet to progress to love.

LARRITO

Right.

MERSHA

Thank you so much for your help with that, Larrito.

LARRITO

You're very welcome, Mersha. You know, I keep telling you, you can call me "Larry," like most others. It's a lot easier to say.

MERSHA

Yes, I know. But I would like to call you by your name. And "Larrito" is your name.

LARRITO

Right, but some people are called by nicknames.

MERSHA

I suppose. But I've never done it before. It makes me a little nervous.

LARRITO

Haven't you ever been called by a nickname? I mean, I guess "Mersha" is a short enough name already. But maybe like a pet-name, or some sort of derivation.

MERSHA

No.

LARRITO

(laughs a little.) Well, maybe by the end of today, I'll be able to come up with a good nickname for you.

MERSHA

Oh! Oh, well that would be very nice! I'd be so honored!

LARRITO

Haha!

They smile. Silence.

LARRITO

So...this is a...an interesting room.

MERSHA

Yes, it's quite unique. I don't think I've ever seen one similar to it before.

LARRITO

Wait...it isn't...yours?

MERSHA

No.

LARRITO

So then whose apartment are we in?

MERSHA

I don't know the answer to that question.

LARRITO

Oh...uh...

MERSHA

Dr. Herzerban just told me to come to this address for our third meeting and gave me a key.

LARRITO

Me too!

MERSHA

He's unlike any man I have ever seen before.

LARRITO

Yeah, I don't think I'll ever get over how short he is—

MERSHA

Or his oddly tall, orange hair—

LARRITO

And no left pinky—

MERSHA

With a large scar on his right cheek—

BOTH

The shape of Brazil.

MERSHA

But a wonderful therapist. I wonder if this place is his?

LARRITO

Maybe. I guess that would make the most sense. Sort of.

Mersha smiles. Pause. Larrito gets up and looks around him. He then sees the kitchen behind him and immediately rushes back to Mersha.

MERSHA

Is something not right?

LARRITO

Oh, I just saw a spider, nothing to worry about—um so...I don't know what Dr. Herzerban has said to you, but he told me that since we've met for a third time we should discuss, you know, business.

MERSHA

Oh. Yes, he spoke to me too.

LARRITO

Well, and it makes sense, I mean, the past two meetings we've gotten to know each other pretty well—ish—right? Like I know that...you like birds and jellybeans!

MERSHA

And I know that when you were five, you picked up a pebble, named it Penny and then told people you picked up a penny and showed them a pebble.

LARRITO

Right—I can't believe you remember that—the point is we're no longer strangers, and we're both pretty...clean I guess, right?

MERSHA

Oh, yes, that is important.

LARRITO

Yeah. So we should really start talking about why we were brought together in the first place...

MERSHA

Yes. I guess this would be a good time.

LARRITO

So...

MERSHA

So.

LARRITO

Let's discuss why you want to carry my baby.

MERSHA

(Simultaneous as above.) Let us discuss the upcoming sexual intercourse.

Pause.

BOTH

Sorry?

MERSHA

What did you say? I'm sorry I couldn't hear you.

LARRITO

Wait, wait, what? Did I hear you say...I mean I thought I heard...did you just say...s-s-sexual intercourse?

MERSHA

Oh yes.

LARRITO

With...me?

MERSHA

I believe so.

LARRITO

Oh, no, I'm so sorry; I think there's been a terrible misunderstanding. You see, I want you to have my baby but through...other ways...

Pause as this takes a while to register.

MERSHA

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh my goodness, I couldn't birth a child right now!

LARRITO

Oh, no, I didn't mean—

MERSHA

And I have no intention of having a child! I have already spoken to Dr. Herzeban about all the risks but he seemed to imply that I wouldn't have to worry about that with you—and—

LARRITO

So...you aren't here because you offered to be the carrier of my baby.

MERSHA

No.

LARRITO

You're here...to...to...sleep with me?

MERSHA

Well yes. And have sex.

LARRITO

Okay. Okay. Well, then I'm really sorry, but I just couldn't do that.

MERSHA

(Very sincere.) Is your body unable to perform such functions?

LARRITO

No, no! I mean, I think—or maybe I—No, no, I mean I can't sleep with you because I have...well I...I'm married.

MERSHA

Oh. And your spouse doesn't want children.

LARRITO

No it's not that she doesn't want them, she just...can't... You know what? Let's drop it. Something was clearly messed up in the doctor's mind. Let's just leave.

MERSHA

Oh but...that isn't right. You helped me to discover that I like birds and jellybeans. It's only fair that I help you out in some way. I just thought our goals were the same.

LARRITO

Well do you want to have my baby?

MERSHA

Dr. Herzeban specifically told me not to...

LARRITO

Then there's clearly no point to this. I'm sorry to have bothered you. You seem to be a nice girl, Mersha, I'm sorry you've been forced into this mess.

MERSHA

Oh, no, no, but I—

Larrito heads towards the door.

MERSHA

Wait, please!

She runs to the door.

LARRITO

What is it?

MERSHA

Oh—I'm sorry—I didn't mean to—huh. I don't know.

LARRITO

Okay...um...listen. I really want to have a child.

MERSHA

Yes. That is really lovely, by the way.

LARRITO

Thanks...And you would like...s-s-sex.

MERSHA

Unfortunately so.

LARRITO

Ok. If I have sex with you...will you promise to have my baby?

MERSHA

Huh. Well, I suppose that's a fair solution. (*Thinks a little.*) Yes. All right. I will make this promise.

LARRITO

Really?

MERSHA

Yes! I will birth the baby, so long as we have sex. It's a promise. Yes?

LARRITO

Of course! Oh, wow, Mersha, thank you!

MERSHA

I mean, who knows. Maybe it will be exciting!

LARRITO

Sure!

Mersha starts to head for the bedroom.

LARRITO

Wait, what are you do—

MERSHA

Sex is often held in the bedroom, isn't it?

LARRITO

Wait! Mersha! Shouldn't we wait until you're, like, I dunno, in the right time of month or something?

Larrito runs after Mersha into the bedroom. Pause.

An Old Lady, dressed in a giant bright pink gown that puffs out in a wide circle, a shower cap, and sunglasses climbs up the fire escape. She opens the window and jumps into the room. She goes into the kitchen and opens the refrigerator. She stares at the fridge for a long time. Silence.

OLD LADY

Milk.

She proceeds to go back out down the fire escape. Pause.

Tammy can be heard rambling from the outside of the apartment. Tammy and Dylan enter the room.

TAMMY

(As she holds a cellphone to her ear.) Really, really? A lobster with half a brain could've remembered to bring his own bags up the stairs. Oh My God this room is orange and furry, where the fuck have you forced me to come. *(Into the phone.)* Do not close this deal yet, Sam, we did not come this far to make rookie mistakes.

DYLAN

(As he carries a very heavy suitcase into the room.) Yuh-huh.

TAMMY

Now our other suitcase, full of important things that can be sold illegally on the black market, is just sitting outside where some sad little hobo man has probably swiped it. *(Into the phone.)* I don't care if Taylor is forced to tell falsities in front of a bloody Jesus statue, make him get those numbers out of them!

DYLAN

Sorry—

TAMMY

The only reason I am here is because of that stupid bet you made with your crazy therapist, Dr. Hermaphrodite—

DYLAN

Herzerban.

TAMMY

—whatever, that stupid bet that he would actually pay us back the money you've spent on sessions if I could spend a weekend away from my house or work. So I am very within my right to make you be in charge of the bags if you can even be mentally capable of doing so. (*Into the phone.*) Sam I don't think—hello? Hello? (*To Dylan.*) If you've forced me to spend a weekend in a shithole that doesn't even get service, I'm gonna slice a knife down your left butt cheek.

DYLAN

Whoa, a giant hamburger!

TAMMY

Well, I guess now I'm gonna go get the other suitcase.

DYLAN

Aww, it's okay. I can—

TAMMY

No, Dylan, I don't think you can do anything anymore.

DYLAN

Don't worry about it.

He starts to exit.

TAMMY

It's probably not there anyway and you know I have more balls to figure out a way to get it back.

She follows.

(Offstage.) LEAVE IT, DYLAN!

Pause. Mersha and Larrito come out from the bedroom slowly and stunned.

LARRITO

...Interesting...

MERSHA

That was...truly something I've never experienced before.

LARRITO

I can't believe that just happened...

MERSHA

I had never seen a real live one before...so up close...it was...well I cannot quite describe...

LARRITO

Well it's not very often that you find one dead body in a room, let alone twenty-three.

MERSHA

And each of them preserved so well in those cases...

LARRITO

Yeah you were...taking a long time inspecting them.

MERSHA

I wanted to know if they were real, didn't you?

LARRITO

I mean, it just all stunned me, I don't know.

MERSHA

Should we report this...state to someone?

LARRITO

Well we don't even know whose place this is or if we're actually allowed to be here. I think our best option right now is to leave quietly and pretend this never happened.

MERSHA

Yes...yes...I suppose so...But what about your promise—

Noise of Tammy's rambling approaching the front door from offstage and she and Dylan start to open the door. Mersha and Larrito dive low in front of the coffee table. Dylan and Tammy enter the room.

TAMMY

Yes, the bag was downstairs, but it's more than the bag being down there, Dylan. Someone could have put a bomb, or drugs, or an endangered species, or a very small man in there while we were gone, we don't know, we have to open it carefully or report it to an authority.

DYLAN

I wonder what weird things are the bedroom...

TAMMY

I mean, I wonder if you can even remember anything else. Like how about my name? Or how about yours? What's your name? WHAT'S YOUR NAME, DYLAN?

Tammy follows Dylan into the bedroom. Mersha and Larrito look at each other, give a signal and they stealthily head towards the door. Before they can leave, screams are heard from the bedroom, causing Larrito and Mersha to jump and move frantically. Tammy and Dylan run out of the bedroom and see Larrito and Mersha. The four scream out in shock until:

TAMMY

What the hell is going on and who the fuck are you?

DYLAN

(overlapping.) I'm sorry we came into your apartment but we don't really know how all this happened!

LARRITO

(overlapping.) We don't really know anything either! We don't live here, we were just told to come here.

TAMMY

(overlapping.) Why are there dead people in there?!

DYLAN

Wait, we were told to come here too.

LARRITO

By a therapist?

DYLAN

Named Dr. Herzerban?

LARRITO

This really short man—

DYLAN

With oddly tall, orange hair—

LARRITO

And no left pinky—

DYLAN

With a large scar on his right cheek—

BOTH

The shape of Brazil!

TAMMY

Oh God, what is this? Is this a joke? What the hell is this?!

LARRITO

Wait, we don't have time for this! We need to all leave quietly without attracting attention.

MERSHA

Hello, I am Mersha and this is Larrito. To answer your question from a while back.

All pause for the weirdness. Suddenly the window opens and in enters the same Old Lady. The other four freeze, but she walks in steadily and enters the room without acknowledging them. She walks to the kitchen and opens the fridge. She stares inside it for a while. Then, suddenly:

OLD LADY

Milk.

Pause. Everyone is still frigid. Then Old Lady turns to the four. She points to the pen in her front pocket.

OLD LADY

This is a pen. This is my house. What are you all doing in my house?

Pause. The four look at each other. They begin to stutter out things.

LARRITO

I'm sorry we were sort of told to—

TAMMY

We didn't mean to intrude, but my husband sees this therapist and—

MERSHA

It's difficult to explain quickly—

DYLAN

We were all given keys—

OLD LADY

Shut up please. You have trespassed on private property.

She reaches and un-tapes something from underneath her giant dress and takes it out. It's a rifle.

This is a pen. This is a gun. I must shoot you as you have done wrong and I am upset.

DYLAN

Woah, there lady!

TAMMY

There's really no need to get violent! We were, well I was, kinda forced here. We didn't mean to disturb you.

OLD LADY

So? This is a pen. I am still upset. When I am upset with people, I kill them.

MERSHA

That doesn't seem nice.

TAMMY

Seem?!

LARRITO

Ma'am all we ask is that you hear us out.

OLD LADY

But I don't want to. I want to kill you. Now.

LARRITO

Okay...well...that's just...uh...well then...um...here we go...HYAHHHHHH!!!!

Larrito tries to snatch the gun out of her hands but Old Lady smacks him to the ground. Larrito recoils back in pain and Mersha rushes to his side. Tammy then attacks but Old Lady licks her face and she moves back in utter disgust. During all this, Dylan has been creeping behind her. He jumps on her back and tries to grab the gun but she throws him over, keeps him to the ground, and pulls out handcuffs from underneath her skirt and handcuffs Dylan to the table.

DYLAN

Woah!

Old Lady points the gun at Dylan's head.

OLD LADY

Why do you do this? What is your purpose?

DYLAN

Like, in life? I don't know, maybe making paper napkins that change the wo—

TAMMY

DYLAN!!!

OLD LADY

Do you hate me? Are you here to torment me? Are you here to make fun of me?

MERSHA

Oh no, of course not!

TAMMY

Listen, lady, we don't even know you!

OLD LADY

Tell me why now. Or I will shoot this pale man's face.

TAMMY

Wait—

LARRITO

I mean, we don't know you—

Old Lady cocks her gun.

But! But! We would like to!

OLD LADY

Why?

LARRITO

Because...because...we...wanted to be your friends?

Old Lady starts to retreat.

OLD LADY

Friends?

LARRITO

Yes.

Pause. Nobody moves.

And we—

OLD LADY

Okay.

Old Lady stands up straight. Everyone is still afraid to move.

I understand. I will make you a deal. If at least one of you can become my friend by the end of the day, I will not kill you. If, after your attempts, I have no friends, I will kill you.

But first I must buy milk. You all must stay. If I come back and you are all gone, I will kill my little neighbors instead. This is wrong too. But I will do it. UNDERSTAND?

They all nod.

Okay. See you later.

She exits down the fire escape. When she disappears, the four panic.

TAMMY

She licked me! What if I have rabies or cholera?

LARRITO

Is that woman serious?

DYLAN

You call that a woman? Are we sure that was a she?

MERSHA

She seemed very sincere.

LARRITO

What are we going to do?

TAMMY

(To Dylan.) This is all your fault!

DYLAN

Okay fine I'll take the blame but can you help me out from here?

LARRITO

Wait, why did Dr. Herzerban send *you* here?

DYLAN

He said it might help with our marriage.

TAMMY

No, Dylan, he said it might help *you* with *your* problems with *your* marriage, which happens to be with me. AND THANK YOU FOR TELLING EVERYONE OUR PROBLEMS.

DYLAN

Isn't that why you guys are here?

MERSHA

No, we're here because Larrito wanted a—

LARRITO

That's not really important right now. We really need to focus on how to be her friends.

MERSHA

Would that dear old lady really end our lives if we can't?

TAMMY

She certainly didn't hesitate with those dead bodies in the bedroom!

DYLAN

...A little help? Maybe?

TAMMY

All right, let's leave. Now.

MERSHA

But what about the neighbors—

TAMMY

We don't actually know if she's going to kill them. Plus, if she kills them, that's not our fault.

DYLAN

(sings.) I'm attached to a table—

LARRITO

But she—

TAMMY

That may be the condition she gave us, but we have nothing to do with those neighbors. Their lives are not our responsibility. Plus, it's an old building, it's probably full of old people who are going to die soon anyway.

DYLAN

Maybe I'll die here...uh oh...uh...

MERSHA

(overlapping.) I don't know. I do not think I would feel good afterwards.

TAMMY

This woman is a sociopath. We are in grave danger and we need to get ourselves out of here. Maybe after we'll leave, she'll kill others, but considering she carries a rifle in her vagina, that threat that will always exist with her.

MERSHA

Well I suppose...but what if—

DYLAN

Hey could one of you hand me a...

TAMMY

(overlapping) We don't have time to discuss this! If you want to stay, stay, but I am getting out of here.

LARRITO

All right...

TAMMY

I'll grab our bags.

Tammy exits.

LARRITO

We'll get our things.

DYLAN

Hey is there like food around?

LARRITO

A plate of cookies?

DYLAN

Could you, like, hand me one?

LARRITO

Uh...Or we can help you out from under there.

DYLAN

Aww, hey. That's cool, but I mean, if you can...

Mersha and Larrito go over to the table and lift it up together.

DYLAN

Thanks! You guys are so nice!

MERSHA

You're welcome! And thank you!

Dylan promptly walks over to the cookies in the kitchen and takes one while Mersha and Larrito gather their things. As Dylan munches on a cookie he notices something outside the window. Tammy comes back in with the suitcases.

DYLAN

Hey, when that old lady said "my little neighbors," she didn't mean the orphanage next door...did she?

All four look at each other. There is a moment of recognition.

ALL

Oh...

Larrito and Mersha hang up their coats. Tammy is reluctant to move, but Dylan gives her a look, and she begrudgingly sits on the couch.

LARRITO

So how do you befriend a crazy old lady?

DYLAN

Take her to a bar?

TAMMY

That idea sucks.

DYLAN

...Yeah...

LARRITO

I really think in situations like these, we have to go along with the way the lady wants it to go. All we have to do is to get her to accept at least one of us as her friend. That really shouldn't be too hard.

MERSHA

The poor orphans next door...

TAMMY

(mumbles.) AUGH! They're not getting parents anyway! Save them the misery.

DYLAN

Tammy...

TAMMY

(mumbles) I will kill them all myself...

LARRITO

Let's focus. So how are we going to make friends with this lady?

Pause. No one responds.

Okay...*(to Dylan.)* How do you make friends normally?

DYLAN

Why are you asking me?

LARRITO

Because you seem like you'd know?

TAMMY

He doesn't have friends.

DYLAN

I do too!

TAMMY

People at your work don't count, you have to work with them. Name one person you could call right now to hang out with.

DYLAN

Well there's...I mean I know there's...shut up, I have friends.

TAMMY

Then think about how you made friends with them.

DYLAN

I don't know I just hang around them and if they ever go out as a group I go and...

TAMMY

He doesn't have friends.

DYLAN

(Upset.) Fine... *(to Larrito.)* How about you do you remember how you made friends with your friends?

LARRITO

I—uh—no, but I have observed that proximity and frequency of inhabiting the same space directly correlates to how likely one is to be friends with another. Most people are thus most likely to become friends with their roommates, co-workers, classmates, etc.

TAMMY

Thanks, professor. Any information that could actually help us?

LARRITO

Well, most of the friendships I watch develop happen gradually. I'm not quite sure how to become a friend by the end of the day.

MERSHA

It is a very difficult situation.

LARRITO

(He knows it's probably futile but...) Mersha...do you know how to make friends in a situation like this?

MERSHA

No.

LARRITO

Great.

MERSHA

But in kindergarten a boy asked me to play in his sandbox once and called me a “friend.”

LARRITO

Wait, we could do that!

MERSHA

Is there a sandbox in her house?

LARRITO

No, but let’s each try suggesting things to do that friends usually do. We’ll keep trying until she warms up to somebody. Like playing a game or something.

TAMMY

Fine. Let’s search the house for things we can use to possibly connect with her. That hallway seems to lead to a back room, Dylan and I will search there, you people—what are your names again?

LARRITO

Larry.

MERSHA

(simultaneous as above.) Larrito.

TAMMY

Huh?

LARRITO

My name is Larrito but most people call me Larry.

TAMMY

Larrito? Is that foreign?

LARRITO

No, my mom was just racist.

MERSHA

And my name is Mersha.

TAMMY

I'm sorry, you mumbled the end of your sentence.

MERSHA

My name is Mersha.

TAMMY

Speak up, dear!

MERSHA

MY NAME IS MERSHA.

TAMMY

Marsha?

LARRITO

MERSHA!

TAMMY

Is it foreign?

MERSHA

No.

TAMMY

Mersha.

LARRITO

YES.

TAMMY

Oh dear God.

DYLAN

What she's trying to say is, "What a unique name!" This is Tammy and I'm Dylan. Larry and Mersha, you can search around this stuff? And also keep an eye on the...fire escape...

LARRITO

Yes.

Tammy and Dylan exit to the back room. Larrito and Mersha start examining the items in the main room.

MERSHA

What fascinating trinkets.

LARRITO

I know. She has such odd taste in objects.

MERSHA

Is there anything particular we should be looking for?

LARRITO

Oh, I don't know. Maybe something that she seems to have a lot of?

MERSHA

Hmm...

Mersha and Larrito look up, down and around the room.

She has many pictures of cheeks. I have cheeks. You have cheeks too. Can we discuss that with her?

LARRITO

...Maybe we should find something a little bit more meaningful for you to talk about. Maybe there's some object around that she seems to love a lot. Something well-worn or well-kept.

MERSHA

Like what?

LARRITO

Oh, uh, I dunno. Well, what is a possession you have that represents something really emotionally close to you?

MERSHA

Me? I, oh...I don't...I don't know. I've never quite thought of it before...I guess.

LARRITO

Come on, there's gotta be something. Maybe an old pillow or stuffed animal or something?

MERSHA

Um, well, uh...oh, well this watch that I have on. I wear it every day.

LARRITO

Oh really? Why is it important to you?

MERSHA

I wear it every day.

LARRITO

...And?

MERSHA

Well, it always tells me the time. And I like knowing what time it is.

LARRITO

I guess we can go with that.

MERSHA

That's a difficult question, what about you? What would you pick?

LARRITO

Oh I could think of... a handful...

MERSHA

Really?

LARRITO

Yeah. Well, there's this handkerchief that belonged to my mother. She died when I was young and it's all I have to really remember her. It's...it's very close to my heart. Oh and —uh—I—never mind.

MERSHA

Is something not right?

LARRITO

No I just...I've never told anyone that before.

MERSHA

It's very wonderful! That's truly touching that you have something that mean so much to you.

LARRITO

Oh...thank you. You really are very sweet.

MERSHA

(Embarrassed.) Haha. *(Pause.)* I'm not sure any of these things would be meaningful so much. Shall we try the kitchen?

LARRITO

(Clears his throat.) Uh, I'll still check around down here. You can look around the kitchen though.

Mersha heads towards the kitchen.

MERSHA

So after we complete this business with the lady in the shower cap...we'll "seal our deal" as I think they say?

LARRITO

Oh—oh—oh, yeah. But we should be careful, you know. And obviously we should talk about what to do if you don't get pregnant after we, you know, *do*.

MERSHA

I mean, I suppose we could just continue meeting and talking.

LARRITO

No I mean how to get you pregnant through other ways.

MERSHA

But I thought I was only having the baby if I get pregnant from our sex.

LARRITO

Wait, that's not exactly what I agreed to...

MERSHA

Oh but I am really not fond of the idea of having a child...and you promised to—

LARRITO

Maybe this is just getting too complicated. Maybe we should just drop—

DYLAN

A bomb in her closet.

Dylan walks back in.

LARRITO

What?

DYLAN

She has a bomb in one of her closets. It's just sitting there in the middle of her closet. It's kinda cool actually. But kinda creepy too. Like, why would you have a bomb...in your closet? I would store it in the basement or somewhere no one would go. Bury it maybe. Or stuff it down a manhole...maybe that will hit someone in the head...and explode...and all the water will burst up...ooh, we could have geysers...like hot springs...or maybe it'll just explode...here...hmm...nah...

LARRITO

(whispers to Mersha.) Let's not bring our situation up in front of the others. Especially that guy.

MERSHA

Okay...

Dylan goes to the kitchen and starts eating the cookies again.

LARRITO

You know, you seem to be fairly calm in this situation. Why?

DYLAN

(Chewing.) Whaddaya mean?

LARRITO

I mean, you don't seem particularly stressed that there is a potential for you to die via rifle shot...or bomb...

DYLAN

I dunno. 'Cause...we're not gonna die?

LARRITO

How do you know?

DYLAN

Because. Things like that don't happen. We're not gonna die 'cause some old lady shot us because she didn't think we were her friends.

LARRITO

But how can you be sure?

DYLAN

‘Cause. People are just like that. They’re way more normal than that.

LARRITO

But what if she does shoot us and we all die?

DYLAN

We won’t! That’s idiotic! No one’s that crazy.

Tammy returns with some stuff in her hands.

TAMMY

Here’s some poker equipment, some paper and a pen , and some pictures of people she was keeping.

LARRITO

Great! If we’re lucky we’ll keep her busy enough that she won’t even remember that she wants to kill us!

Gunshot through the window. They all scream.

DYLAN

What the hell was that?

LARRITO

I think she’s coming!

TAMMY

You think?

DYLAN

Quick we gotta figure out how to—

*Old Lady comes through the fire escape carrying her rifle.
Old Lady goes to the kitchen and opens the fridge. She
stares at the inside for a while. Then:*

OLD LADY

Milk. I forgot to buy milk.

They all stare immobile.

This is a pen. This is my house. Now. Who are you? (*Points gun at them*) Why are you here?

LARRITO

Wait, don't you remember us?

OLD LADY

No.

TAMMY

Seriously??

OLD LADY

Who sent you here?

DYLAN

We were told by our therapist to come!

OLD LADY

What therapist?

DYLAN

Doctor Herzerban.

OLD LADY

I never heard of him.

LARRITO

Well, even if you don't know his name, you'd know him by sight. He's this really short man—

MERSHA

With oddly tall, orange hair—

DYLAN

And no left pinky—

MERSHA

With a large scar on his right cheek—

MERSHA, DYLAN and LARRITO

The shape of Brazil!

TAMMY

(Mockingly.) And a big ol' pink bow in his hair!

DYLAN

How'd you know?

TAMMY

You're kidding.

OLD LADY

I do not know this man. I only know of a really short man with oddly tall, orange hair and no left pinky with a large scar on his right cheek the shape of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

TAMMY

Yeah, that's probably him.

OLD LADY

No. All of you lie. Brazil is not the Democratic Republic of the Congo. You are all here to hurt me. Now you all must die.

LARRITO

W-w-wait! We were sent by him to try and be your friends! Remember? We want to be your friends!

Pause.

OLD LADY

Oh. Yeah. Now I remember. (*Laughs. A lot.*) That was so funny. Sorry.

LARRITO

Th-that's okay—

TAMMY

(*underneath*) No it's not I was about to have a heart attack—

LARRITO

(*overlapping.*) That's what friends do

OLD LADY

Hmm.

TAMMY

So...Let's get this straight. You only need one of us to become friends with you and you will let us all go?

OLD LADY

Yes.

DYLAN

How do we know when we've become friends?

OLD LADY

We will know. Friends always know. Understand?

The four shake their heads yes. Pause.

Do not just stand there. Befriend me.

LARRITO

Oh! Okay-okay! As my attempt to be your friend, I thought we'd all play a game.

OLD LADY

Friends play games. What game?

LARRITO

Uh, how about charades?

OLD LADY

I know that game.

DYLAN

How? Do they have that game in, like, the country that you come from—or like that you don't necessarily come from but like your parents or ancestors—some Asian-ish country maybe—or it doesn't have to be Asian—

TAMMY

Just end the sentence. End it.

OLD LADY

Bobby taught me how to play.

MERSHA

Who is Bobby?

OLD LADY

My son.

TAMMY

You have offspring?

LARRITO

How old is he?

OLD LADY

He should be fifty-two now.

LARRITO

And where does he live?

OLD LADY

He's in my room.

The other four take a quick, audible gasp in. Silence.

LARRITO

Uh, why don't you be on a team with Tammy and Dylan, and Mersha and I will be on a team.

OLD LADY

Okay.

TAMMY

Oh, oh, oh, no. Actually, you know, Dylan and I have been married for so long...it's really not fair for us to have a third person. You should be on Larry and Mermaid's team.

OLD LADY

Okay.

LARRITO

You know, that's really nice of you to be so fair, Tammy, but I—I—really think that you should play with this dear lady because she probably hasn't played it in a while and should be with an experienced pair like yourselves.

OLD LADY

Okay.

TAMMY

You know, I don't think Dylan or I have played charades in ages. Also, as the one who suggested the game in the first place, shouldn't we assume that you are in fact the most experienced at it?

DYLAN

Win.

Tammy and Dylan do a small and quick high five.

OLD LADY

Okay.

LARRITO

But don't you think—

OLD LADY

Wait! I feel tossed around. Do you not like me? (*Pulls out gun.*) Do you hate me?

DYLAN

No! No! They were just playing games with each other!

LARRITO

We like you a lot, ma'am, or we think we do, we just were fighting over who would get to know you first?

OLD LADY

(*Thinks for a second.*) Okay.

LARRITO

You can...join me and Mersha for now.

OLD LADY

Okay.

LARRITO

Tammy, Dylan, why don't you guys start.

DYLAN

Great! I wanna guess first!

Tammy hits him a little.

LARRITO

I'll time it for you guys. And—go!

Tammy gestures.

DYLAN

Movie. Sounds like chest. "Best. " ...*The Best Years of Our Lives?*

TAMMY

Lucky guess.

DYLAN

You watched it last Sunday.

TAMMY

Shut up and move.

Dylan gestures.

TAMMY

Movie. *Snakes on a Plane.*

DYLAN

Dammit.

Tammy gestures.

Book. Cents? *Sense and Sensibility.*

TAMMY

Fuck you!

LARRITO

You guys know...that you're not playing AGAINST each other, right? Like you're on the same team? Like...you're doing really well? (*They're busy trying to outdo each other to respond.*) Okay then...

MERSHA

They are so in synch, it's fascinating.

OLD LADY

I like this game.

Tammy and Dylan continue gesturing and getting it immediately over the above and continue until:

LARRITO

Oh, time! How many did you get?

TAMMY and DYLAN

S/He only got four.

LARRITO

Wow, eight! Our turn, ma'am. Ready? I'll start with the gestures.

OLD LADY

Yay.

MERSHA

All right!

Larrito begins to gesture.

A book!...First word...Confident?—I am confident?—I am swaggery?—Man?—Crown?—Eggplant?—King?—Emperor! The emperor has a...abdominal pain? No, belonging to the emperor? The Emperor's? Yes! Okay, "The Emperor's..."—Third word?—Myself?—Touching my—touching my body—sleeves waving in the wind?—Shoulder?—Dancing oddly?—A jacket?—Clothes! Clothes!—close? "The Emperor's [Blank] Clothes"? Not clothes? Not even close? Beggar? What? OHHHHHH!!! *In Which Otto Prohaska, Hero of the Habsburg Empire, Has an Interesting Time While Not Quite Managing to Avert the First World War!!*

LARRITO

That's right!!!

Old Lady claps loudly.

DYLAN

That was so not what I was thinking.

LARRITO

How did you know? I picked the book and then I realized later that this was probably going to take a very long time!

MERSHA

It was a book I read before! It's odd, I just remembered from your clues!

LARRITO

It's one of my favorite books! That's amazing! Really amazing!!

OLD LADY

My turn.

Old Lady begins a series of movements so other worldly that they cannot be described in stage directions. When she is "done"...

MERSHA

A...fruit basket?

OLD LADY

Yes.

DYLAN

That made me feel like someone just took a photo of a pooping monkey and plastered it all over my room.

TAMMY

The world is so deprived of your insightful similes.

MERSHA

My turn, I guess?

Mersha begins to gesture.

LARRITO

Okay, first word. Eye? I. I. I...X—No?—Not—Can't—Don't—Don't! So "I Don't"... sounds like...ghost? Creepy? Wandering creepily? Ghosts walking, that's—Oh haunt! Sounds like haunt.

OLD LADY

Salad dressing.

LARRITO

No!...Gaunt—Taunt—Mont—Jaunt—Want—oh, want? "I Don't Want." What? Oh, fifth word. Patting? Dancing? Walking funny? Wait I don't really get—OH! Baby? "I Don't Want [Something] Baby"...I don't want a baby...Is that a book or a movie or a TV show?

MERSHA

Oh...is that what it's supposed to be? I thought I was supposed to be relaying my thoughts...

LARRITO

No...

TAMMY

Why...don't you want a baby...?

DYLAN

Is someone making you have a baby. (*Looks at Larrito and gasps.*) Is he making you have his baby?

LARRITO

Oh, no, it's not—I mean it's not like that at all!

MERSHA

Oh no! He's not making me do anything at all. We have a deal.

TAMMY

A deal?

LARRITO

Mersha!

TAMMY

You're a terrible bastard.

MERSHA

It's all right, I don't want his baby, I just would like to have sex with him.

TAMMY

What?

LARRITO

Mersha, please! I told you I didn't want to discuss this with other people.

MERSHA

But they're therapist is the same as ours! Maybe he brought them together just like he did with us! And they can advise us!

TAMMY

Jesus, he's only Dylan's therapist! I don't know any man with orange hair! And if I did, I'd slap him because he's probably a Muppet and that is scary!

DYLAN

Wait, I thought you two were, like, together.

LARRITO

Today's only the third day we've met.

DYLAN

Whoa.

TAMMY

(To Mersha.) Are you seriously that horny? That you'd want to have sex with this guy? You could've pretty much asked any guy on the street.

MERSHA

Oh it isn't like having sex was my intention and goal all along. It was just the conclusion Dr. Herzerban and I came to that best suited the situation.

TAMMY

How?

MERSHA

Well, everyone seems to always be talking about other people having sex. It sounds like a very exciting activity, one which causes a stir for everyone involved.

TAMMY

It's really not that exciting.

DYLAN

And it doesn't really cause a stir...But then, how does that help you?

MERSHA

Well, I've lived just inside my house for most of my life. I mean, I just was afraid...for a very long time...So I haven't really interacted with many people or experienced things like other people. And then, I realized one day, that for a week, my horoscope had been the same. "Get out and do something, get out and do something." I thought maybe that was a sign for me to try and experience things. Later, I realized I had been reading the same exact paper for many days. But by then I had already started seeing Dr. Herzerban so it was too late.

TAMMY

Huh. (*To Larrito.*) So, are you sure you want to bear child with this girl?

LARRITO

Oh, it's not that I want one specifically with her! It's just my wife can't have children.

DYLAN

Dude, be careful with kids. I couldn't really handle our daughter when she was little.

LARRITO

You guys have a child?

TAMMY

It wasn't intentional.

LARRITO

What?

TAMMY

I mean it's not...*ours*. She's from...someone else—Really it doesn't matter. She's a lame baby.

DYLAN

You know she's sixteen.

TAMMY

A lame teen then.

DYLAN

Tammy, come on. You can't say that about her.

TAMMY

Well, is she here? What are you gonna do, "tell on me"?

DYLAN

Tam...you can't call her "lame."

TAMMY

Well her hand is deformed! What else do you call it?

LARRITO

What?

TAMMY

She dropped a hot and heavy tray of lasagna on her own hand when she was nine. Really not the brightest child if you ask me, my daughter.

DYLAN

Just...don't...never mind....*(To Larrito.)* Anyway, dude, raising a person is really hard, okay?

TAMMY

Also does your wife know that you're going to cheat on her to do this?

LARRITO

Listen, please. I would just like to drop this subject for now. It's very complicated and not for everyone to discuss. Thank you for your advice, I do appreciate it. But I really would like to deal with this privately and not here. I mean we...have been forgetting about our lovely host! Right, ma'am? *(She doesn't respond.)* Ma'am? *(She's asleep. He tries to wake her.)* Ma'am!

Old Lady wakes.

OLD LADY

Hello.

LARRITO

Uh, hello.

OLD LADY

Who are you? *(Starts to reach for her gun.)*

LARRITO

(Quickly.) We're trying to be your friends!

OLD LADY

Right. So?

LARRITO

Well, uh, are we friends yet?

OLD LADY

No.

LARRITO

Oh...okay.

The four look at each other.

OLD LADY

What happened to the game?

LARRITO

You know what, why don't we play something new. Like...poker?

OLD LADY

Okay.

TAMMY

Yeah we have a poker set right here.

OLD LADY

Okay.

MERSHA

Where do we get the smoke?

DYLAN

What?

MERSHA

We need smoke to play poker, isn't that right? And then we use the cards to fan it away?

TAMMY

You know what Merly and I will sit this one out. You guys play.

LARRITO

Good idea.

MERSHA

Okay.

*Tammy and Mersha stand in a corner while Larrito, Dylan
and Old Lady play poker.*

Awkward silence between the two girls. Then:

TAMMY

So...really? You haven't left your house all your life? This isn't just some ploy to get that
guy?

MERHSA

Ploy? Like the fish?

TAMMY

Never mind.

MERSHA

I know...it sounds very foolish.

TAMMY

Foolish? It's impossible!

MERSHA

Why?

TAMMY

Because you can't live that way. You are forced to be surrounded by people in the outside world. The trick is how to get the world to serve you.

MERSHA

How does one do that?

TAMMY

Let me tell you a little something Mer-thing. People suck. It's the best piece of advice I could ever give. They only really care about themselves. And they should. You only really know what *you* feel, so why bother? The best thing to do is worry about what you want and get it. Don't worry about anybody else.

MERSHA

But even so...can you still feel things? And experience things?

TAMMY

I mean you are still gonna be doing things.

MERSHA

But what about with other people? Can you feel good things with other people?

TAMMY

I mean, sorta. If you want. I mean I feel good about my situation with Dylan. I don't really give a fuck what Dylan feels, but he was able to raise my daughter so I could work. And now his income helps pay for things too. But whatever he feels, this is the exact situation I wanted.

MERSHA

But what if you don't...know...what you want...because it's been so long...and you're afraid...of what you want...

TAMMY

Huh? Is this about the weird baby for sex thing? Isn't that what you want?

MERSHA

Well that's what Dr. Herzerban said I should do to feel—

TAMMY

Fuck the crazy therapist. Do you want it?

MERSHA

I—I—I don't know—

TAMMY

What do you mean you don't know? It's a very simple question. Do you want it or don't you?

MERSHA

I-I-I just don't know. Have you ever felt nothing? Not just as in "lack of reaction." As in feeling literally like you have no thoughts or feelings whatsoever. This state of emptiness in your heart.

TAMMY

No.

MERSHA

Oh. Well I felt it. I felt it every day in my house. The seasons would change, the view would change, but I felt the same thing every day. Morning after morning. I suppose you could call it utter neutrality. When one is in a state where nothing can affect them. It's

very peaceful. And one feels okay because one is not causing any pain. Or receiving it either. (*To Tammy.*) But I shouldn't live that way, right?

TAMMY

I'm sorry I zoned out for most of that monologue. But my final point is that you should make sure to get sex and not give him any room to make you have a baby.

MERSHA

Oh, but I *promised* to—

TAMMY

Don't compromise. You get what you want out of Larry, got it?

MERSHA

Yes...I suppose...I—

Dylan walks over.

DYLAN

Games over. We're still not friends.

TAMMY

Christ! What's it gonna take?

DYLAN

She's really good. Oh, by the way, her son was totally a drug dealer.

TAMMY

Huh?

DYLAN

So we should probably move away from games. Let me try. (*Loud and clear.*) Listen, ma'am, friends eat together. So let's eat!

TAMMY

Dylan!

DYLAN

What? It's about lunchtime! I think we're all a little hungry. We'll help you prepare the food, no worries!

TAMMY

Dylan...

DYLAN

What? It's fine!

OLD LADY

Okay. Come help me wash salad.

She heads towards the kitchen.

LARRITO

Oh, I, uh, I have a rash on my hands, I can't really get them near water.

DYLAN

And I'll keep you company while the girls prepare food. Four can't fit in that kitchen anyway.

Tammy flicks him as she goes up to the kitchen. The ladies prepare a salad in the kitchen. Dylan and Larrito sit on the couch. Dylan can't stop tapping his foot.

DYLAN

(Noticing Larrito's discomfort.) Don't worry, we're gonna be fine.

LARRITO

You keep saying that. Is this how you can take all that badmouthing from your wife? You just *know* that somehow it's going to be all right in the end.

DYLAN

What? I dunno. I guess.

LARRITO

How do you let her talk to you like that? All the time?

DYLAN

She's just going through a thing, or something. She's really not like this, you know.

LARRITO

But—

DYLAN

I mean, yeah, it sucks sometimes. I mean a lot of times. Well except with our daughter. She's worlds different with her.

LARRITO

But didn't she call her "lame"?

DYLAN

Yeah, behind her back. All the time. But to her face, it's all smiles and hugs. I dunno why...

LARRITO

Really? Huh. Maybe your daughter is the only one who really understands your wife...

DYLAN

I dunno. They're weird.

LARRITO

So, you love her?

DYLAN

Tammy? Duh. Why?

LARRITO

And does she love you?

DYLAN

Yeah. I mean...she married me, right? She picked me...right? I dunno. People just do things. You know? Let them until they calm down. Or something.

LARRITO

I mean...I don't know if people are that...nice...

DYLAN

Eh. Tammy'll get over it.

LARRITO

But—

DYLAN

She will.

Pause. Mersha approaches Larrito with some nudging from Tammy.

MERSHA

Umm...Larrito...I—I want to have sex with you. Without a baby. Will you—

TAMMY

(underneath.) No questions...

MERSHA

You will do that!

LARRITO

Uh—that—I don't think that—that doesn't get me anything.

MERSHA

Um, well, I suppose that's true—

TAMMY

Well you get sex.

LARRITO

Yes, but I don't—this is ridiculous, the deal is off if there is no way—

OLD LADY

(Loud and from behind like an announcement.) I think I will heat up some frozen lasagna.

DYLAN

Aww...*frozen* lasagna?

OLD LADY

You do not like lasagna? *(She picks up her gun.)*

DYLAN

I LOVE LASAGNA!!

OLD LADY

Good. I will heat it up in the microwave.

LARRITO

Wha—wha—don't you have an oven?

OLD LADY

No.

LARRITO

Uh, actually I think I'll go to the bathroom.

DYLAN

How long do we have to heat it if it's frozen? Like fifteen minutes?

LARRITO

Hah...

MERSHA

What did you say, Larrito?

LARRITO

Um, does it have to be heated?

DYLAN

What?

LARRITO

Like, you can eat it cold. It's already been cooked and everything, right?

OLD LADY

But it's frozen.

LARRITO

Maybe it tastes good frozen?

OLD LADY

But I want to eat it hot.

LARRITO

Don't know until you give it a try!

TAMMY

But it's rock-solid frozen.

LARRITO

Fine, heat it if you really have to, but wait until I go into another room and then make sure it's off when I come back.

DYLAN

Dude, what's gotten into you?

LARRITO

Nothing.

MERSHA

Do you have fears that microwave waves will come penetrate your skin and devour your soul? Because I've checked and it is not the truth.

TAMMY

Or...are you a little more normal and think microwaves are harmful? Because that actually isn't true. The waves are very weak.

LARRITO

No—it's just—I—have a problem with...that...microwave—

DYLAN

(overlapping.) Woah, are you radioactive or something? 'Cause that's awesome.

TAMMY

(overlapping.) Oh my god, did a microwave drop on your pet? I know someone who lost her cat that way.

LARRITO

(overlapping.) No—really—it's fine—it's really just fine—I just will leave for a bit—

MERSHA

(overlapping.) Do you have a fear of buttons that open doors? I hear that comes up sometimes.

TAMMY

(overlapping.) Oh please don't tell me you put someone in a microwave once. That's just gross.

DYLAN

(overlapping.) Oooh, a nasty experience involving marshmallows? Have you ever put a marshmallow in a microwave? It's amazing.

Larrito tries to leave and Tammy blocks him.

OLD LADY

Tell us what is wrong.

LARRITO

No! No! It's not any of that! Please, let it go, all of you!

TAMMY

We're probably not gonna let it go until you tell us. Don't worry. We won't judge.

DYLAN

We is excluding Tammy. It's like the opposite of a Royal We.

MERSHA

I would like to know if you are comfortable with telling us...

LARRITO

Mersha I...

Larrito looks at Mersha. Something changes when he sees her face. Then he takes a deep breath.

LARRITO

Okay. Fine. The reason...the reason that I don't want to use that microwave is... because...I...I...I think that microwave is really attractive.

Pause. Wait just little bit longer...

DYLAN

Like...how attractive?

LARRITO

I just find it very, very attractive and if you turn it on I don't—I don't know if I can... control myself.

Pause.

TAMMY

I feel like my mind has been raped by a fourteen-foot banana boat.

DYLAN

No...no...it's fine...it's just...that's cool, dude, that's okay. Take your time. Really. If that's what happens, that's what happens. But, uh, we can still warm the food up, right?

LARRITO

Well I just...I mean, if you are going to heat up anything, I would much rather have it be with my toaster oven.

TAMMY

I'm sorry...your toaster oven?

LARRITO

Yes, my...let me just get it.

Larrito goes to his bag, opens it, and pulls out a toaster oven.

LARRITO

This is my toaster oven.

DYLAN

And this one is not attractive?

LARRITO

Oh, God, no! It is the most beautiful appliance I have ever seen in my life!

DYLAN

So...why can we use it?

LARRITO

It's...it's my wife.

TAMMY

Ohh?

LARRITO

So you see, I didn't want to use the microwave for fear of being horridly unfaithful to my wife.

TAMMY

Huh.

DYLAN

Okay then...

Pause. Then suddenly Tammy, Dylan, and even Old Lady burst out into laughter.

LARRITO

See, this is exactly what I thought was going to happen. It's okay. Forget it. Never mind. You guys just don't understand. Fine. I'll just go...sit in the other room then.

OLD LADY

No. Stay.

DYLAN

Wait, wait, so you're actually serious?

LARRITO

Yes. I have object sexuality. It happens to people every so often. I'm not the only one in the world.

TAMMY

Oh. I just thought it was a really well-planned out joke.

LARRITO

Of course people did. People think it's this hilarious thing—and they never take it seriously.

DYLAN

Look, buddy, I'm sorry.

LARRITO

Don't call me buddy! Whatever. This has happened before, it will happen again, I'll just have my oven toast for comfort—it's okay. Forget it.

DYLAN

Hey, Larry—

LARRITO

Please let's stop talking about this—

MERSHA

I don't think it's funny. I think it's very touching.

LARRITO

...You do?

MERSHA

Yes. To care about anything...to love something, even if it is an object, so much that you want to stay faithful to it...it's very noble. I understand.

LARRITO

Thank you...do you understand now why I really would like a child.

MERSHA

Yes. I suppose it would be difficult for a toaster oven to birth a baby.

LARRITO

Right. And I could finally have a real family...it could be, like, proof that I'm not just crazy.

MERSHA

I suppose...I could help you...I can have your child.

LARRITO

Really?

MERSHA

Yes. If it will help you. I would like to help you.

LARRITO

Are you sure?

MERSHA

Yes.

TAMMY

Oh come on, seriously? Do you really want to do this?

MERSHA

Want? What do I want...I...

LARRITO

Thank you so much, Mersha! That means so much to me.

MERSHA

Oh...that's so nice...

TAMMY

Oh Jesus...

LARRITO

I'm sorry I acted up, everyone. I guess you could use the microwave, if you'd like.

OLD LADY

No. We will use your toaster oven. I am sorry if I made you feel bad. That was not nice.

TAMMY

(quietly.) Neither is threatening to kill a bunch of people.

They proceed to heat up their food and eat underneath the following conversation. Dylan should get seconds and thirds.

OLD LADY

So we eat food together. Then what?

DYLAN

Well, do you feel like we're friends yet?

OLD LADY

No.

DYLAN

Aww.

TAMMY

Well, you know what most people do when they're friends? They just sit around and talk. We can do that while we eat.

OLD LADY

Okay. What do we talk about?

TAMMY

About anything! Anything you want. We can...ask each other questions. Get to know each other...I guess.

OLD LADY

Okay. Ask me questions.

LARRITO

Great idea. Uh, so what's your favorite game?

OLD LADY

Red Duck, Green Duck, Blue Duck, Yellow Duck.

DYLAN

A what-what?

OLD LADY

Red Duck, Green Duck, Blue Duck, Yellow Duck.

LARRITO

How do you play...?

MERSHA

When the bell rings, all the players try and say, “Red Duck, Green Duck, Blue Duck, Yellow Duck” as fast as you can and whoever is fastest wins.

DYLAN

Woah, how’d you know?

MERSHA

Oh I used to play this game with my brother often. I am fairly good at the game.

LARRITO

You have a brother?

TAMMY

You’ve played this game before?

LARRITO

How old is your brother?

MERSHA

Six.

LARRITO

Oh, wow, that’s young.

MERSHA

Well, he was six when he died. I suppose now he's...twenty-three?

LARRITO

Oh gosh, I'm so sorry.

MERSHA

It's all right, it was a long time ago.

DYLAN

How'd he die?

TAMMY

It's called tact, Dylan. Go out and find some.

DYLAN

What? He was just really young!

MERSHA

Oh, it's all right. He died because I was angry with him so I told him he couldn't buy the peanut-shaped marshmallows that he liked so much and instead that we had to buy jellybeans, which I like. And then he got mad at me, so he ran off into the grocery store, and broke a bag of peanuts and started to eat them. Except, he had a peanut allergy and he ate real peanuts. And then he died.

TAMMY

So...your brother died because...you wanted jellybeans?

MERSHA

No! I mean...Yes but I... I wanted the jellybeans...but I didn't want him to...and I wanted them...and then...I felt he...

DYLAN

But...it's okay...because you didn't mean to hurt him. (*To Tammy.*) It's not really her fault because she didn't really mean to hurt her brother...right?

LARRITO

Oh, Mersha...I'm so sorry...

Pause.

OLD LADY

Ehem.

LARRITO

Uh, let's move on to more questions. Like...where are you from?

OLD LADY

I am from Japan.

LARRITO

Oh! Wow! See I didn't even know that!

Pause.

TAMMY

I've got a question ma'am—why do you always say “This is a pen”?

OLD LADY

It is the first sentence I learned in English. This is a pen.

TAMMY

Yes...?

OLD LADY

Yes.

TAMMY

I mean, why do you say it over and over?

OLD LADY

I say it because it is the first sentence I learned in English.

TAMMY

Okay then.

OLD LADY

The second sentence I learned is, "This is a banana, isn't it?"

TAMMY

Huh.

DYLAN

So, when did you move to America?

OLD LADY

When I was nine.

MERSHA

Me too!

LARRITO

You moved to America when you were nine?

MERSHA

Oh...no. But I was nine once...I...*(This is the first time she's truly embarrassed because she's understood she's said something that is not normal.)* Never mind...

TAMMY

Well, at least you're starting to learn what awkward feels like.

DYLAN

(To Old Lady.) So did you move with your parents or something?

OLD LADY

No. I was a very small and curious child. I got separated from my parents often. One day I was looking for them and I got sidetracked by a cannon and I followed it to the cargo hold of a ship. I ended up falling asleep on the ship while playing with cannons. When I woke up I was on a journey to America. Once we reached land, I got out of the ship and went up to a couple and asked them if they were my parents. *(Starts laughing.)* I thought my parents were so shocked that I had been gone for so long that color drained out of them and they had become white.

The other four join in on the laughter.

I didn't even realize that a bomb had killed them both.

Old Lady continues to laugh but the other four suddenly get awkwardly silent.

MERSHA

Did that not make you feel sad?

OLD LADY

Oh yes. Soon, I realized I was very sad.

MERSHA

What did you do?

OLD LADY

I wasn't sure. But there was a clown on the sidewalk and I asked him what to do when I was sad. And he said, "Cry. Cry until you can't cry anymore." So I did. I cried for eleven days. And then I wasn't sad anymore.

MERSHA

But then after that. What happened after that?

OLD LADY

(Thinks.) I don't remember.

TAMMY

Let's move on, shall we?

LARRITO

Is there anything you would like to ask of us, ma'am?

OLD LADY

No.

TAMMY

Really? Nothing? You have a guy who's in love with a toaster oven and a girl who hasn't been outside in years.

OLD LADY

Why are you mean?

TAMMY

I'm not mean, I just like to speak my mind.

OLD LADY

No, you are mean.

TAMMY

Look, it's not a question of whether or not you're mean. It's just a question of honesty. Telling the truth.

OLD LADY

You tell the truth and then be mean?

TAMMY

I'M NOT MEAN.

MERSHA

I don't think you're mean.

TAMMY

Thank you, Merjunk.

LARRITO

That's mean.

TAMMY

What, it's not my fault she has a name that's hard to place.

LARRITO

You still shouldn't make up the end so it's "junk."

TAMMY

Oh, I'm sorry, does that make you uncomfortable because part of her name becomes an inanimate object?

LARRITO

All right, see now that's uncalled for.

TAMMY

I was just asking! I don't know what this thing you have is! I don't know what "turns you on" or whatever.

LARRITO

Hey, look, you defy the boundaries of common courtesy with everything you say. That's why even the old lady here thinks you're mean and you really should stop and consider what other people are thinking for once.

TAMMY

Oh, you want to talk to me about consideration when you almost forced this girl to have a baby?

MERSHA

Oh that's all right...

LARRITO

(overlapping.) I made an agreement with her. She is a grown person, she can make her own decisions. I didn't force her to do anything.

TAMMY

(overlapping.) You know, it's men like you in the world that think they can just coax a girl into doing whatever they want and then totally drop all responsibility. You guys don't understand the position you can put us women in. Right, Mersh?

MERSHA

Oh...um...I don't know...

LARRITO

(overlapping.) Woah, woah, hold it with the blanket statements on the sexism of men, okay? We're not all like that! Not all of us are heartless, cruel human beings! What were you like, like, hurt by someone before? Did someone tear your little heart out and that's why you're this mean? Or maybe you deserved it! I didn't hear you saying you had any friends? Maybe people avoid you, or leave you because you deserve it!

OLD LADY

Oooh...

Larrito smiles oddly. He's never won an argument before...

DYLAN

Uh...dude...uh...you shouldn't...uh...

TAMMY

You know what. I may just report you to the authorities because I think what you're doing to this stupid girl here is the same as taking advantage of her.

LARRITO

Woah, woah woah! What do you know about Mersha? I've known her for three days, you just met her today.

MERSHA

Uh...it's not...I...please stop...

TAMMY

(overlapping.) This is not a question of how well I know her. This is a question of what she wants to do and what you're making her think she wants to do.

MERSHA

Please...stop...I don't....

Dylan notices her discomfort.

LARRITO

(overlapping.) You know what sucks is people like you who think they are being helpful and understanding, when really you can only think a certain way and are not open to understanding people different from you.

TAMMY

(overlapping.) It's not the kind of—

DYLAN

Hey, HEY! Guys, cool it! Calm down a bit, okay! We're trying to be friends! Friends don't argue. They sit and talk and eat *pleasantly*. Now let's all get some more food!

MERSHA

(To Dylan, quietly.) Thank you?

DYLAN

(He has never been thanked before...) Oh...uh...you're welcome? I just wanted to eat...

Dylan goes to grab another piece.

TAMMY

(Under her breath.) Oh really...

Pause.

OLD LADY

This is a pen. I have to go potty.

MERSHA

Have we become your friends yet?

OLD LADY

No.

MERSHA

Oh...

Old Lady exits.

TAMMY

We're never getting out of here...*(hits Dylan.)* And it's all you're fault!

DYLAN

Ow.

LARRITO

(Grunts) Okay, what if we help her with something?

DYLAN

Help her with what?

LARRITO

I dunno, we can just try asking her. I mean, people like people who help them, right? Maybe then she'll think we're friends.

MERSHA

Like how you helped me discover that I like birds?

LARRITO

Uh, well, sure.

TAMMY

Really though? This lady is old. She could ask us to spoon-feed her or clean her butthole or something. She's like a hundred!

OLD LADY

(Upon entering.) I am ninety-nine years old.

DYLAN

Wow that was fast!

OLD LADY

Thank you. This is a pen. I wanted to tell you how old I was.

LARRITO

Um, so ma'am, do you need help with anything? Is there anything we can do for you? I mean you are ninety-nine and we're...not. We can help you with ...spring cleaning... moving some boxes...

DYLAN

Disposing of the dead bodies...

OLD LADY

What?

DYLAN

Like...you know...dispose of the dead bodies...to destroy the evidence?

OLD LADY

You know about Charlie and Dingbut and the others?

TAMMY

Are those the names of the peoples you killed?

OLD LADY

Yes.

DYLAN

I call Dingbut!

LARRITO

Wait, hold on, so you did kill them.

OLD LADY

Yes.

MERSHA

Why?

LARRITO

Mersha!

OLD LADY

I did not like them anymore.

MERSHA

Why?

OLD LADY

I was angry with them.

MERSHA

But, why?

OLD LADY

(Shrugs.) They did not want to be my friends. They did not like me. So I did not like them. And then I shot them.

MERSHA

I see...

OLD LADY

Oh. But with four of you, I can air the bodies out easier. You can help me with that.

LARRITO

Do...what?

OLD LADY

The dead bodies. This is a pen. I do not want them to be bored. So every month, I take them out of my room, and dance with them.

TAMMY

You...dance...with dead people...

OLD LADY

Yes. Will you help me?

LARRITO

Um...could you give us a moment?

OLD LADY

Okay.

The four huddle and we hear some mutterings from them. We may hear snippets here and there. Particularly Tammy saying, "I draw the line at mingling with rotten flesh!" Then they all get out of the huddle.

LARRITO

Ma'am...we think...or rather, we feel...that we would be very uncomfortable...doing that...so...we cannot help you...in this particular...situation...but—

OLD LADY

What do you mean?

LARRITO

It's nothing against you, it's just we can't fulfill that particular request...?

OLD LADY

Why won't you help me? You do not like me anymore?

DYLAN

It's not you! At all! It's the bodies, really. I mean, we're a live, and they're dead. We don't really have much in common with them. And, you know, we don't really think it's safe for us to touch them.

OLD LADY

I touch them. I'm fine.

DYLAN

Well you're...like...superhuman...

OLD LADY

What does that mean? Do you think I'm different? Do you not want to be my friends anymore? Do you hate me now?

LARRITO

No, we promise, we don't feel—

OLD LADY

THEN WHY WON'T YOU HELP ME?

She gets ready her gun.

TAMMY

Okay! Never mind what we said! We'll do it! We'll do it!

OLD LADY

Oh. Okay!

The four look at each other and then reluctantly go into the bedroom. A little bit of bickering can be heard from offstage, but eventually all four are back in the room with dead bodies too. They start "dancing" with them.

LARRITO

Is there...anything you want us to specifically...do...with them?

OLD LADY

This is a pen. This is good.

LARRITO

Great.

They do this for a little bit.

DYLAN

(To Mersha, quietly.) Hey, this isn't too bad. It's kinda fun to give them personalities. Try talking like yours.

MERSHA

Sorry?

DYLAN

Like, here's mine: "Hey, how's it goin' dude. It's been so long since we've been mobile."

MERSHA

Oh, I see! Um... "Life is good. Oh no, I mean death is good."

DYLAN

Haha! "Hey! How many days until your deathday?"

MERSHA

"It's coming up soon! I'm having a party! Please come!"

DYLAN

"Wouldn't miss it!"

LARRITO

(Somehow starts to find this amusing.) "Hey, did I hear you say party?"

DYLAN

"It's for Charlie's deathday!"

LARRITO

"Wow, no way! Happy Deathday! What will we do at the party?"

MERSHA

"Well, I thought we'd lie around for a little bit."

LARRITO

“Great idea!”

DYLAN

“Oh then can we lie around some more!”

MERSHA

“Of course!”

LARRITO

“Oooh, ooh! I have a great idea! After that, maybe we can roll over!”

Mersha, Larrito and Dylan chuckle as their dead bodies.

TAMMY

“Hey, deadweights. Stop being lame.”

DYLAN

“Aww man, now Dingbut’s here. He’s such a joykill.”

TAMMY

“Hey now. It’s hard being named a combination of onomatopoeia and a piece of fat.”

All of them laugh. Old Lady interrupts.

OLD LADY

STOP.

LARRITO

What?

OLD LADY

Stop. Please.

DYLAN

Do you want us to put them back or—

OLD LADY

No. Just leave them. Leave them be.

Old Lady sits, looking very somber and pensive. The other four place the bodies on the floor. Tammy suddenly notices something about her body.

TAMMY

Hey, this body has a scar on his cheek in the shape of Australia.

They all come look.

DYLAN

That's not Australia—

DYLAN, MERSHA and LARRITO

That's Brazil!

All four look at each other.

ALL FOUR

Or the Democratic Republic of the Congo...

They all look at Old Lady.

DYLAN

Wait, but this body is bald, Dr. Herzerban had tall orange hair...

They all look around the floor at the orange fur.

ALL FOUR

Oh?

TAMMY

(Whispers.) What does this mean? Does this mean she killed him?

LARRITO

(Whispers.) Maybe? But what can we do about it?

TAMMY

(Whispers.) This can be our ticket out! You guys know this man, we can totally use it against her. Say we've heard him speak of her or threaten to turn her in or something!

LARRITO

(Whispers.) All right, let's see... *(Full voice.)* Uh, ma'am? Would you mind telling us a little bit about this body?

OLD LADY

(Still very somber.) That is Mandy. He was my friend.

LARRITO

Did you...kill him too?

OLD LADY

Yes.

MERSHA

Why?

OLD LADY

He stopped visiting me. Other people would come into my house instead of him. People I did not know. People who were not my friends. If you are not my friend, you hurt me. You hate me. So I kill them instead. I wanted my friend to come. Then he finally did. He told me that he sent the others. I was so shocked, I let him leave. I thought he betrayed me. And then I was angry with him. When he came to visit me again, he said he had more people coming. And I killed him. Because I was angry.

Pause. None of the others know quite what to say.

MERSHA

Ma'am...are you...all right?

OLD LADY

No. I am not all right. This is a pen. I am very sad. But I cannot cry. I do not know why.

TAMMY

Well, if you're sad...maybe we should leave you—

OLD LADY

You all have more fun with dead bodies than with me.

DYLAN

Well, I mean, the dead bodies don't have rifles—

TAMMY

Dylan!

OLD LADY

And dead bodies have more fun when they are dead than when they are alive with me.

LARRITO

Sorry, ma'am, we were just playing around—

OLD LADY

And I miss my friend. I do not think I will have another friend.

Old Lady lifts up her gun. All four start panicking again.

LARRITO

Ma'am, we will do our best! Please don't give up on us—

OLD LADY

I think I shall shoot myself.

Old Lady points the rifle towards her own head.

MERSHA

No!

They all try to grab the gun out of her hands. It shoots off once. Then again as they wrestle with the gun. Mersha bites the Old Lady's arm and she drops the gun.

LARRITO

Gun down!

DYLAN

DOGPILE!

They all jump on top of each other, all on top of Old Lady. They continue to speak, well, shout, rather, while piled on top of her.

LARRITO

Oh no, what if her killed her with our weight!

TAMMY

Uh, she's definitely still writhing!

LARRITO

Oh, great! So maybe just all of her bones have been broken. But her heart's still pumpin' just fine!

DYLAN

Dudes, I don't know how long we can hold this! She is crazy strong for a ninety-nine-year old.

MERSHA

(Trying desperately to get the Old Lady's attention.) Ma'am? Ma'am?

TAMMY

Wait a minute! WAIT A MINUTE! Why are we trying to save this woman?

LARRITO

She's trying to kill herself!

TAMMY

Yeah? Well she was trying to kill us fifteen minutes ago! We've been trying to figure out how to get outta here this whole time! This is it!

LARRITO

I think it would be even worse for us to be potentially responsible for a death. Our fingerprints are everywhere around here either way! We could get arrested!

TAMMY

Okay, no one has noticed her kill twenty-three other people! Including your therapist! She also clearly wants to do this! She's ninety-nine! Let her do what she wants!

DYLAN

(Struggling.) Oh God...

LARRITO

I just think there are better ways to handle this that doesn't involve suicide and us being liable for that!

TAMMY

Let's put it to a majority!

LARRITO

Fine! Mersha, what do you think we should do?

MERSHA

(Having issues struggling with Old Lady.) I think—I don't think—we shouldn't—

TAMMY

Mersha doesn't have thoughts or feelings or pansies or wants or whatever! Dylan decides!

DYLAN

Woah, hey, what?

TAMMY

Are you siding with him or me?

DYLAN

Uh—

TAMMY

Don't be your stupid-ass self, Dylan! Just say we'll put this woman out of her misery!

DYLAN

Look, I don't think—this woman clearly has—

TAMMY

Seriously? I thought you were dumb, but this is lowest of low. Why is your brain the size of a pecan?

DYLAN

Oh God...

TAMMY

Do you think I am asking for much when I want you to pay attention to things? I don't think so. Jesus Christ Super Star, why did I agree to even come here? I should have known that anything that is associated with you is just going to turn into a rotten piece of shit.

LARRITO

Look, guys, this isn't the time for—

DYLAN

I can't do this! I need—

Dylan gets up and tries to head towards the kitchen, but Tammy grabs his leg.

LARRITO

Ohh, great. Really?

TAMMY

Dylan! DYLAN! What do you think you are doing?

DYLAN

I just need food, okay? I need—strength to keep doing that!

LARRITO

Okay, I guess we're taking shifts now.

TAMMY

Dylan, don't—

DYLAN

Just a little and I'll come back!

MERSHA

(to Old Lady.) Ma'am would you like some food? It'll make you feel better?

DYLAN

It'll make me feel better!

LARRITO

Seriously, Dylan, just get back here we need you!

TAMMY

No, Dylan, no, do not do this today. Do not show the world you are a fucktard.

DYLAN

Jesus, calm down! I'll be right back!

Dylan frees himself from Tammy and runs towards the kitchen. Tammy runs up too and grabs the plate of lasagna before him.

LARRITO

Oh, come on guys!

DYLAN

Tammy, don't freak out. They need us over there!

LARRITO

Mersha, are you ready to hold down the fort?

MERSHA

Fort being held!

They in synch push themselves up and then sit on the Old Lady, who has lost a lot of energy at this point.

TAMMY

Stop this!

DYLAN

Stop what?

TAMMY

Oh don't pretend like it doesn't exist, Dylan, really. You are so gigantically clumsy you can't hide anything.

DYLAN

Tam, don't do this now.

TAMMY

All I want to know why.

DYLAN

Why what?!

TAMMY

Why are you bulimic, Dylan?

DYLAN

What? I'm not bulimic!

TAMMY

Don't try to deny it! You eat everything! You just keep stuffing your face every meal with any bit of food. And all the puking recently? It's disgusting and I want it to stop.

DYLAN

Tammy, sometimes, I eat too much, okay? I like food, I love food. It happens. Now just let me—

TAMMY

Don't give me that bullshit. You do it on purpose.

DYLAN

I don't! I've eaten a lot since I was a kid. That's a thing with me, got it? Just give me that
—

TAMMY

BULLSHIT.

LARRITO

Hey, guys could you maybe...

DYLAN

(overlapping.) Oh come on!

TAMMY

BULLSHIT. Just tell me why! Just admit it! Tell me.

DYLAN

Admit? What do I have to admit?

TAMMY

Whatever! I don't know! YOU KNOW. You know more than anyone! Is it another woman? Is it a man? Did you steal money from me? Kill my father or something?

DYLAN

God, stop this! Stop talking like that! I swear I didn't—It's not—

TAMMY

You had to have done something or else you wouldn't be gorging your eyes out every day—

DYLAN

Stop this! Please! This isn't you and you know—

TAMMY

Just why? Why? That's all I want to know! So I can figure out a way to keep your sloppy ass a little less so.

DYLAN

Just stop it, just stop it for now, I can't do this right now, I just need to eat—

TAMMY

What is wrong with you? Are you incapable of forming sentences now? I thought you were dumb, but this is really—

DYLAN

I did it. I hurt her.

Pause.

TAMMY

What? Hurt who?

DYLAN

I...I dropped the tray of lasagna on her. On...our daughter. That's why her hand is like that.

TAMMY

You dropped the tray of lasagna on my daughter?

DYLAN

See that's—that! That's it! Why is she never my daughter too! I've been with you guys for ten years! What is it that keeps me from being a part of your family, Tammy? What is it? I've been good, I've stayed, I take all your shit-talk. But sometimes it drives me insane! And I tell myself it's gonna be okay and I tell myself you're gonna be the amazing person I know you are. Because I see it! I see it towards our daughter! You show her all this love and affection—but then you make horrible jokes about her behind her back, so maybe it's not real—No, but it is! And I look at you two and I think...Oh God I think the worst...And she HATES me! She loves you! She'd rather be with you any day than with me! Even though you say things when she's not listening. Even though I do everything for you and for her because that's what you're supposed to do! But you talk to her like a goddess and you talk to me like shit. And then that day I made her lasagna and I was bringing over the tray and I had it over her and I thought just once, "Oh god what if I drop it on her." But I knew I shouldn't but then it fell and it crashed and she was hurt and now her hand is fucked up. And I felt awful, I felt disgusting, because that means I am an awful person who hates his daughter and hurts her. And then I stress out and I eat because I'm jealous of our daughter! Because I think maybe you love her because you still love that other guy, her real dad, even now! But I'M HERE! I'M HERE FOR YOU! I'M BETTER THAN HIM!

TAMMY

So that was you that whole time? You are the reason my daughter has a fucked up hand? I can't believe you, you stupid asshole, I can't believe you would be that cruel—

DYLAN

And then you're mean to me! You're still mean to me! And yeah, I did something awful, and maybe I deserve it, but I've done all this, and I hate going through this and I hate waiting for you to change and I'm scared I hate my daughter and I think I actually do and I hate who I am and then I hate...you. (*realizes*) I hate you. I HATE YOU.

Pause. Tammy stares at Dylan.

TAMMY

Well. I guess that just makes everything better then.

DYLAN

No, I'm sorry, Tammy, I didn't mean that. I mean I'm afraid of hating you, I love you, I want to love you, I've waited so long, I can't—I can't—but I don't know what love is anymore and I don't know if I can feel love anymore and I...

TAMMY

I guess it's a good thing we came here then. Now I'll just pack up my things take *my* daughter and leave you and your disgusting self.

DYLAN

What? No, Tammy, I didn't mean—I'm sorry, I—

TAMMY

I can't believe I even—

DYLAN

Please, Tammy I love you, I didn't mean to—

TAMMY

How dare you.

DYLAN

Look, I didn't! I love you, Tammy. I love you and only you!

TAMMY

DON'T TOUCH ME! GET AWAY FROM ME!

At this point, Old Lady has snuck her hand over the gun.

DYLAN

No, Tammy please don't leave me, I—

TAMMY

I didn't leave you either, you know. All that time. All I wanted was for you to prove me wrong. About people. You couldn't even prove me wrong you ASSHOLE!

At the exact same moment, Old Lady tries to shoot the gun and Tammy throws the plate in her hand at Dylan. Mersha catches the gun on time and points it elsewhere, but bullet hits the toaster oven and the plate hits Dylan. Larrito runs to his toaster.

LARRITO

MY TOASTER OVEN!

Mersha follows Larrito with the gun in her hand.

Dylan starts picking at the lasagna and eating it

TAMMY

FOR CHRIST'S SAKE STOP EATING!!

DYLAN

(overlapping) I'm sorry, Tammy, I'm sorry I...

LARRITO

(overlapping.) Shhhh!!

TAMMY

(overlapping) Oh God, it's JUST A TOASTSTER OVEN.

MERSHA

(overlapping) Oh Larrito!

LARRITO

(overlapping) Don't say that! It's not!

TAMMY

(overlapping) Just stop eating! Stop pushing all those things into your mouth!

MERSHA

(overlapping) It's okay, Larrito.

Dylan proceeds to eat and Tammy throws things.

LARRITO

Shut up you people I'm trying to...

MERSHA

Does it look like it will be okay?

Mersha tries to care for the toaster oven.

LARRITO

DON'T TOUCH HER! I hate people! This is what's wrong with people! All of this! You're dishonest and you've got too many emotions and hate! And you never understand anyone else but you!

MERSHA

I'm sorry...

LARRITO

WHY DID YOU DO THAT?

MERSHA

I didn't mean to—

LARRITO

I'm not sure what to do if she doesn't make it. What am I going to do?

MERSHA

Well, maybe, maybe you can get the mechanic to fix it—

LARRITO

No! I'm not gonna let some other person futz around with it!

MERSHA

Or maybe you can find another one—

LARRITO

Get another one? No! No! You don't get it! My toaster oven is not a regular toaster oven to me! I can't "get a new one" like you can! She's not like a person, either, I have feelings for it as an oven toaster it's not—it's not—Christ, you people will never understand! No person is going to understand!

MERSHA

Well maybe...maybe...maybe...we could...have sex now?

LARRITO

WHAT?

MERSHA

I hear it makes people feel better sometimes.

LARRITO

No! No!

MERSHA

But you said if I had your baby—

LARRITO

No! Stop it! You don't get it! You don't understand! You don't even understand what sex really is, you just—ugh—I can't—no, you will never understand! I get it, okay, I'm different, like you, but at least I try to live in this world with these people so I can live my own life! I worked hard to get where I am. And I CAN'T have sex with you! I CAN'T! I am not ATTRACTED to you! I mean, I'm sorry, you're very nice and all, but I can't and I don't want to! I was just being nice to you because all I want is a kid. That's all I need from you! A kid I could raise my own and teach him to understand me! So at least someone will.

MERSHA

(All the shouting gets to her.) Oh...I...I'm sorry...I

LARRITO

Just GO AWAY! And leave me alone with my wife!

Mersha moves away.

DYLAN

Ohhh I don't feel well...

TAMMY

Stop it! God...

Mersha stands deep in thought. Larrito fiddles with his toaster, Dylan leans his head up against the wall and groans. Tammy stands wither her head in her hands. Old Lady lies on the couch exhausted. Pause. Then, Mersha stands up on the other side of the couch. She takes the gun and aims it at Larrito. She tries to fire but it misses horribly.

TAMMY

What the fuck?!

DYLAN

Woah! Woah!

Mersha then points the gun at the ceiling and fires multiple shots in a row. The others yell and take cover. She finally runs out of bullets.

LARRITO

...Mersha?

MERSHA

I think I was supposed to try and kill you.

LARRITO

Huh?

MERSHA

But I don't think Old Lady was right. I think I felt bad, but I didn't want to kill you. So instead I shot at the ceiling.

TAMMY

Honey, let go of the gun...

Old Lady yanks the gun out of Mersha's hand.

OLD LADY

This is a pen. This is not nice. Very bad, Mersha. Very bad.

MERSHA

But you said—

OLD LADY

I kill because I want to do it. You do not do it unless you want to do it.

MERSHA

But I don't know what I want to do! I don't know what I feel. You all are feeling so many things, so many bad things. But you know what to do, you know what you want. I think I feel something, or an inkling, but I don't know what it means—or what I want from feeling these things—but I don't want to—but I want to—but when I want it ends up badly...and Larrito helped me find jellybeans, and he said he'd find a nickname for me—he was so nice and I—But then he told me to go away and then...and then...

I wanted to know what it was like to feel like a person. But I don't know what that means.

Mersha begins to cry. The others watch for a little bit.

TAMMY

Wow. You're real. I'm so sorry I said those things earlier. You really are...genuine. You don't know anything. You're dumb as fuck. (*laughs*) All you want is simple emotion. Just to find out people are too fucked up for that.

She walks over to her.

It's okay. Just keep breathing.

MERSHA

(*In tears.*) I am not feeling good feelings...

TAMMY

I know. That's because you like Larrito. A little. And you didn't know because, well, you're not used to it. And he just hurt you. A little. When he said he didn't like you. And

it's hard when people hurt ...when you get hurt it's hard to deal with...even people like me don't know what to do when they're hurt. Even when it's hurt from a long time ago... so long, maybe it shouldn't matter anymore.

Dylan looks up.

MERSHA

(Still in tears.) No I don't...I don't...

TAMMY

It doesn't always have to feel like this you know. It'll feel nicer. You just have to keep trying, Mer...Merr...Merr—

LARRITO

Merry.

MERSHA

What?

LARRITO

That could be your nickname. Merry.

Mersha nods her head.

LARRITO

I...I'm so sorry for what I said, Merry. I really didn't mean to hurt you so badly... Will you forgive me and be my friend?

MERSHA

I don't know yet...but I think I will want to eventually...

LARRITO

...That's fair.

Larrito smiles. Then Mersha moves over to the Old Lady who is resting on the couch.

MERSHA

You said you were sad but could not cry. I still don't know if I am sad. Can I cry for you? Can I cry because you're sad?

OLD LADY

No. But thank you, Mersha. You are a good friend.

LARRITO

You mean we won? Mersha's your friend?

OLD LADY

Yes. Now, I need to get some milk.

TAMMY

What do you keep needing the milk for?

OLD LADY

To make cookies for my friend.

Old Lady chuckles. Then, she suddenly collapses limp on the couch. The four rush to her. Larrito takes her pulse.

LARRITO

She's dead.

TAMMY

What?

DYLAN

Just like that.

MERSHA

Oh dear. And I never got the opportunity...

LARRITO

What?

MERSHA

I never asked her what her name was. That was going to be my attempt to become her friend.

TAMMY

We don't even know her name...

DYLAN

Some friends we are.

The four look at each other.

Blackout.

End of play.

Afterwards

Looking back, I think the process went well overall. I wrote a one-act play, and I was able to gather a director and some actors to successfully pull off a staged reading of it. And people seemed to enjoy it for the most part.

As I went through the process, I think my goal definitely evolved into something more specific. As I became more and more invested in my play, I think the goal became, “to create a play with a follow-able plot and endearing characters that makes the audience laugh so hard they cry.” What started with a mere attempt of self-assertion became an investment in the characters I was creating and the comedy I was building. The process no longer became about me but about telling the stories of the five people I had conceived, making sure their voices were heard, and also making sure that their absurdities could be on display. I needed to make sure I could show the world they were real.

One of the wonderful parts of creating the staged reading was working with a director. The collaboration was not as difficult as I had projected it to be. It was, in fact, comforting to have someone on my side, in a way. He saw the play from a similar perspective to my own, but could use his directing skills to actually act upon the perspectives and create a cohesive piece. He also saw things in my work that I had never thought I put in, and was able to bring them out of the actors in a refreshing way.

Kim was a respectful director. He never commented on the play itself or its quality. Instead, he treated it as a done script, like text from any other published play, and he made the actors do so as well, especially after we changed the blocking. I generally agreed with most of his choices. But if we ever disagreed about the way something was staged, he would let me explain my position and then would explain his reasoning so I could see the director's point of view.

Sometimes, I would see his point and agree with him, as he is a director and can see the play as a whole performance piece, whereas I just see text. For example, I wanted to leave in Larrito's longer charade moment as I felt it a necessary contribution to the flow of the game. But Kim pointed out that because it is a staged reading, all the crazy physical humor the moment would involve would slow down the scene. There was also not enough time to block the charades fully and make it seem clean and consistent with the rest of the play. I eventually understood what he meant, and while in the script, that moment stays the same, the staged reading had a simplified version. And I think the moment became stronger for the way it was presented.

Other times, if I wanted something enough, he would find a way to make my desires work. On another occasion, I had a specific vision of Old Lady not appearing on stage in her robe until her entrance in the play, regardless of our method of staging. He thought her entrance did not have enough weight for it to be different and thought the consistency of the reading would be broken if she had to take the time to enter for her first entrance and then sit and stand for the rest of them. In the end, I did not budge as I really wanted the audience to go through the change from her lack of presence in the play to a sudden burst of presence. As Kim predicted, it

did still feel a little inconsistent with the rest of the reading. But I was happy with leaving it in but for the bewilderment I watched the audience experience on her entrance.

While I know ours was not a regular director-playwright relationship, I do not think I would have gone back and changed anything about our collaboration.

The other really surprisingly wonderful part about the process was witnessing the actors fall more and more in love with their characters and really do their best to embody them. They really made an effort to understand them the more discussions and readings and rehearsals we had. And it was fun to watch them play around with different acting choices. It was an oddly satisfying and touching feeling, first of all, that they would care so much about my “children”, and second of all, that I could write characters that were exciting to play. I am also glad I chose to have so many character meetings with them. I think their excellence in the performance and their faithful representation of the characters were due to the amount of time spent discussing and exploring the characters’ pathos and neuroses as well as the simple facts about their lives. The play was fun to watch because the people in them were having so much fun presenting it. I could not have asked for a better bunch of people to work with.

There are many changes I would make were I to do this whole experience again. First of all, I wish I had been more confident in my comedic abilities so that I may have been able to write my play sooner. But, then again, overcoming writer’s block is always a learning experience. I do wish I had more workshops because there were a lot of things that I did not realize sounded weird in a person’s mouth until after I had heard them a few times. Obviously, this mostly had to do with a difficulty of scheduling busy, theatrical college students. I suppose to sum it all up my main qualm about my own process would be the timing of it. I wish I had

more of my play earlier and probably should have set firmer and more frequent deadlines for major drafts throughout the year so I could plan workshops and rehearsals more in advance. I had my own deadlines, but I should have given them to my advisors and had them force me to adhere to them. But, then again, the creative process is unexpected. Perhaps even if I had done so, I would have come to the same place at the same time.

I do also wish I had decided to start rehearsals sooner or at least had more time to work on the new staged reading format we had during the second week. I really just should have wanted a plain, standing staged reading from the beginning, but I was a little too ambitious and wanted to see more of my play than my play was ready for. I do not regret what we did in the first week—the physicality and the investment of the actors definitely developed then. But it still would have been useful to have more time to clean up the choreographed movement so it was super sharp.

What I Learned and Moving Forward

The performance was incredibly enlightening. I think the best moments I took away from it were the laughter. By that point in the process, I had spent so much time with the script and zoned in so much on the characters that I never quite realized how funny it was. I did fear at one point that nobody would laugh. It seems such a silly fear now considering the eruptions of laughter in the theatre that night. The laughs made me feel accomplished—especially in the moments where I did not expect any giggles. I learned that I should trust my comedic instincts.

As I have least experience with writing dramatic moments, I was also worried about the more serious moments of the play and worried they were out of place. I am still not a hundred

percent sure if all of them belong, but there were definitely moments that clicked with the audience. I felt the audience tighten when Dylan yelled “I hate you.” The audience literally stopped laughing when Old Lady yelled “Stop” after the dead bodies dance. And there were one or two gasps of sadness when the Old Lady died. People were definitely invested in the humanity of the characters. While the tragic part of the tragicomedy still needs a lot of work, I think it did earn its place in my play.

The staged reading also brought to light problems with the play as well. I felt the most major one was pace and length. I actually knew that problem going in—the play being too long is a critique I got from Professor Urban for every draft. But I never felt like I was quite ready to cut it. First of all, because hearing the whole play and reading it are two different things, I knew I would not feel the actual pacing of the play until I saw a run or two of the staged reading. I did not want to tamper with the pacing until I knew exactly where the problems were. More importantly, however, is that I felt I did not earn cutting and shortening my work quite yet. My reluctance to cut was not so much my attachment to my babies but more about not wanting to take moments out until everything I ever wanted to be in the play was there. And I did not feel everything was there until that fourth draft. Now, having seen the staged reading, I get a much better sense of where the play drags, where it feels long, which scenes seem superfluous, what information is repeated too often, etc. My future revisions will probably involve a lot of slicing.

In moving forward, I would specifically go back to my play and change the following:

- Take out the dead air in the scenes where the Old Lady is not in the room.
- Condense the conversations between two people as they tend to run long and are wordy.

- Track the gun and be more wary of its presence and power.
- Do not make the end seem too much like a series of reveals that change relationships.
- Solidify Dylan's story throughout the play. His story has always been unclear to me, but now that I see what works, I would work more on weaving through a story of his guilt and passivity against his active emotions and instead of his long explosion perhaps explore his self-hatred.
- Work on the organization, placement, and stories of character monologues, especially Mersha's.
- Bring back a comedic tone to the ending.

Obviously my thesis is not perfect. There would be a handful of things I would change about both the play itself and my journey in creating it. Despite these concerns, considering how excellently the staged reading went for me, I do not think the changes would have made too much of a difference, save, perhaps, for the quality of the script. There still would have been the electricity in the air, the comedic timing, the heart of the characters, and the audience would still have had fun. While the play still needs to be polished further, I think the overriding fact is that I wrote a play in less than a year and got people to listen to it and enjoy it. I made something and shared it with the world.

Conclusion

I had started the year with the goal of “to create a work of my own.” But I think the best thing I took away from my process is that I cannot create something purely of my own. The work was as much of me as it was the people who helped me, inspired me, and encouraged me to create it. And those moments were the most thrilling. The feeling of support around me, the creative energy flowing from the actors, the dedication of my director, stage manager, and costume coordinator, the suggestions and the comments of my readers and advisors—all of those moments felt incredible and my play was made better because of them. It just goes to show exactly what my own play discussed. People cannot live alone, especially in theatre. And just as I had thought before, the teamwork involved and the relationship between the play and the audience are what make theatre come to life.

I am quite satisfied with my play. It is not final and I plan to improve it in the future. But in its current state, every plot and character development is present, the comedy that I wanted is there, and I think all the heart made its way there too. The feedback was generally positive, and the staged reading as a whole gave me enough to know what to work on for the future. My hope is that in some number of years, I will get to witness a full production of it. Seeing the staged reading, however, made me feel immensely accomplished. Something that was born from my voice could hold an audience’s attention for eighty minutes. It was the perfect end to my theatre-filled college career.