

With Bated Breath

Based on true events- until it's not.

By Mark-Eugene Garcia

WITH BATED BREATH

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For Jeff Thomson

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CHARACTERS

MAYOR FRANKIE- (Mid 30s) Sufferer of severe social anxiety and feelings of inadequacy brought on by his feeling responsible for his town's financial failings. His physical symptoms are often represented in stammering and sweating. He's most nervous around people of authority and women he's attracted to. Every day is an ordeal for this ultimate middleman.

DR. CORAZON DE LA FUENTE- (Mid 30s) Strong liberal Latine from Queens. Put herself through Medical School in Kentucky. She triumphed in spite of the many male obstacles in her way and will make sure you remember. Science has the answers for everything, and she has little patience for those who think otherwise.

PASTOR JOHNSON- (Late 40s/ Early 50s) Rules by dictatorship disguised as faith. With an overwhelming persona, he runs every aspect of the town, from police to communications to finances. His outlandish personality is Frankenfurter filtered through Fargo. Years ago, he lost his wife in an unfortunate love making accident.

WHAT'S HER FACE (LOLA LORILEE LURIE)- (Mid 40's) Owner of the struggling Yogurt Conastogurt, her motivations revolve around being around the adopted mother of MONA as well as holding an undying secret love for PASTOR JOHNSON. Physically slighter, she is often overlooked by those around her.

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MONA LURIE- (Late 20s) Eternally optimistic, she finds the good in everyone and everything. She is quite tall and large shouldered, bigger than most of the men around her, built like a midwestern Brienne of Tarth. She is loyal to her best friend Frankie but is not attracted to him. Her type of man is frail and small because it reminds her of her mother.

OLIVER COX- (Early 30s) Mexican American from Seattle. Loves venti coffees. He never knew his father and works so hard to appease his very unappreciative stepfather. He likes his woman like he likes his dreams- larger than him.

RANDY JOHNSON- (Late 20s) With his all American good looks and charm, he is sexy and he knows it. If the town had a football team, he'd be the captain. If it had a magazine, he'd be the cover. So sexy, in fact, he has no Midwestern accent. Under his father's watchful eye, he is a devout example of their faith's rules. When his father isn't looking it's a whole other story.

ULAF ANDERSON - (Early 30s) Desperate for a job, Ulaf is willing and ready to work at the factory outside of town. Formerly a fan manufacturer and fisherman, he is ready for this next chapter in life. Recent events have begun to make him question his loyalty to the town.

GUNNER WARNER- (Late 30s) Also looking for work, but like Ulaf, his knowledge revolves around making fans. What does his next chapter include? He can only hope that it includes Blondie.

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BLONDIE PETERSON -(Mid 30s) Former schoolteacher, but then the poor woman got kicked in the head by a mad cow at the previous years Merry Meat Raffle. Now, she repeats the last word of the last person who spoke.

OLD LADY WARNER- Our narrator. A bit Rose Nylund and bit your own grandmother. She knows the story because she's lived the story. She 's telling you a bedtime story as much as she's selling you an empty bottle for 70 -ish dollars.

PLACE and TIME

Virgin, Minnesota- Present Day

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ACT 1

SCENE 1

WARNER'S CORNER STORE
and THE TOWN SQUARE

Lights rise on OLD LADY WARNER, our Narrator. She will sit and watch the entire story, filling us in, reacting, offering commentary. She sits with a cat on her lap, sitting out front of her small corner store. A wooden sign hangs above her head reading: WARNER'S CORNER STORE.

OLD LADY WARNER. Smell that air! That mix of chilled north wind, forest leaves, and cows.
(*Pets cat.*) What a morning it is! Sun blazing, breeze blowin' out over the lake and stuff. It's the kind of morning for storytelling. Then again...(Smiles at us.) Isn't it always? Welcome to Warner's Corner Store. You can call me Old Lady Warner... Everyone else does. (*Pets cat again. Maybe coughs.*) Tall tales. Pecos Bill. Paul Bunyon. Yah, the Midwest is full of them. My favorite is the fantastical tale of Virgin Minnesota and its air of mystery. Air of mystery, you ask? (*Looks lovingly at the cat.*) What could that be, pussycat? That's what "mystery" means... But since you asked. I have it right here. Our specialty. A one of a kind bottle of air. (*She pulls out an empty bottle and turns to us again.*) Air? Why would a woman be selling a bottle of air? Well, my tart little tangerines, that's the topic of our tall tale ...(Lights rise on a large trailer. Inside. **MAYOR FRANKIE** is staring in the mirror, giving himself a

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pep talk. He is a shy man, a mediocre mayor and an eternal middle man.)

OLD LADY WARNER. *(Aside)* It begins with our lovable Mayor Frankie. Who is preparing--

FRANKIE. Okay Frankie. Take deep breaths.

OLD LADY WARNER. *(Aside)* To talk to someone special on this beautiful Sunday Morning.

FRANKIE. You already talked to her once. There's no reason to be scared, ya know.

OLD LADY WARNER. *(Aside)* But this Sunday was going to be different.

FRANKIE. No one cares if you sweat or if you stammer. Just breathe. *(He practices his question.)* Hey there, I'm headed to the Yogurt Conastogurt for a scoop. Wanna come with? *(He shakes a bit. But recovers.)* That's it. Just like the book said, social anxiety is just that. Anxiety. You got this. *(Lights shift as FRANKIE enters the town square. We see the Town Square of Virgin, Minnesota. In the center of town is the silhouette of a church. In front of the church is a LARGE METAL LAWN CROSS. In the distance is the dark form of a large factory smokestack. Times have been tough on this small town. At the center is a table with a sign that says "JOB FAIR" written above. FRANKIE sees his townspeople filling out forms and smiles to himself. Behind the table a Scientist, DR. CORAZON DE LA FUENTE hands out hiring forms. ULAF, and GUNNER are filling out applications. RANDY JOHNSON stands in the distance, watching.)*

CORA. Please take only one of each! One application and one W-4 per person.

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ULAF. Oh for sure! But... if I submit more than one does it increase my chances?

CORA. It's a job application. Not a raffle.

GUNNER. (*Looking up from a stack of paper.*) Omigosh. I probably shouldn't have started fillin' out all of these... (*Now that the men have gathered their applications. They step aside.*)

ULAF. Okay everybody! Step aside. It's time for the women now.

OLD LADY WARNER. (*Aside*) Oh yah, Virgin is just like the town you'd call home. Where all the single men and the single women remain a respectful social distance out of fear of giving into the *hormonal primal impulses* that pulse through our veins every moment of the day! Now, back to our friends in town. (*The short and frail WHAT'S HER FACE enters as well as her daughter - and complete physical opposite- the tall, broad shouldered MONA. They are followed by BLONDIE, who is blonde. From this point on, unless stated otherwise, the men and women of town will remain a respectful distance from each other.*)

MONA. Oh Momma! I've been waiting for this job fair all week!

WHAT'S HER FACE. Oh yah! But we don't even know what the factory makes.

MONA. It's a job! (*To CORA*) Oh hello! So if I fill out two or three of these, what does that do for my chances?

CORA. (*Calling off into the distance.*) Mr. Cox! I need more applications! (*Her factory manager, OLIVER COX comes running over, carrying a new batch of forms.*)

OLIVER. Right here. And I said it before. You can call me Oliver.

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CORA. And I previously stated that I believe in formalities, Mr. Cox.

FRANKIE. (*Approaching, he sees Cora and feels his confidence diminish.*) Wow! Look at this turnout.

CORA. If you require an application, please take one from the table.

FRANKIE. Dr. Corazon....It's, uh, me. I toured you through town last week, remember?

CORA. (*Brushing him off.*) The table.

FRANKIE. Mayor... Frankie?

CORA. (*Looking up.*) Oh! Apologies. Honestly... Mr. Mayor, I'd forgotten what you look like.

FRANKIE. Yah. It happens. People say I have common features. (*Looks around.*) So how's the hiring?

CORA. It's been five people with numerous errors. In your bid to bring this company here to Virgin, you stated that your "tiny hidden town--"

FRANKIE. Yah! So small we're not on most of the maps!

CORA. Appropriately. In your emails you claimed to contain a highly skilled, trainable, work force. My observations make me question your assessment.

FRANKIE. Well, what they lack in skills, they sure make up in heart!

CORA. Hmmm. Heart. Mr. Mayor, heart will not reimburse our company's expenses. Closing our factory in Mexico and re-opening in your old fan factory was a cumbersome feat. We are depending on your workers.

FRANKIE. And we're grateful! But give us a little leeway here. We all inherited our jobs from our parents. And their parents before them. And before them. This whole *applying*

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thing is new to us. But I, uh, I give you my word. They will be focused.

BLONDIE. Focused!

FRANKIE. Not her. Blondie --

BLONDIE. Blondie!

FRANKIE. Yah, Blondie. She used to be a school teacher but she hasn't been the same since she got kicked in the head by a mad cow during last summer's Merry Meat Raffle.

BLONDIE. Meat Raffle!

CORA. So she just... repeats the last words she heard?

FRANKIE. Sometimes sounds too! But aside from that, we have a great team here. There's Ulaf and Gunner and... That's What's Her Face -over there - without the blond hair .

CORA. You call the blond woman Blondie and other woman What's her face? How dare you! That's offensive! (*Motions at What's Her Face*) She is a living, breathing, woman. She has a name. I am appalled that you would degrade her to a term --

WHAT'S HER FACE. My name's Lola Lorelei Lurie.

CORA. Oh.

WHAT'S HER FACE. And you?

CORA. Dr. Corazón De La Fuente. (*Everyone stammers trying to pronounce it.*)

WHAT'S HER FACE. Maybe she should be "what's her face."

CORA. If you have trouble with the name, you may call me Dr. Cora.

GUNNER. (*Advancing on Oliver.*) Hey Ulaf! Look how skinny this guy is!

OLIVER. (*Looking to Cora for help.*) Dr. Cora?

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CORA. You are all very problematic. (*Pulling Oliver away from Gunner.*) This is my factory manager--

OLIVER. Oliver Cox.

GUNNER. Whoa! Aren't ya standing a little bit close together. For a man and a woman. (*Dr. Cora and Oliver look around and notice how far apart the men and women are.*)

OLIVER. Tengo miedo, Doctora.

ULAF. Hey! Whoa! What's that? Where are you from? (*Suddenly concerned.*) Mexico?

OLIVER. My parents are. (*Gasps from Townspeople.*) But I'm from Seattle. (*There's an awkward tension here. MONA steps forward and breaks it.*)

MONA. Well, nice to meet you Oliver and Dr. Cortisone Hella Plenty.

CORA. Again, Dr. Cora is just fine.

FRANKIE (*To Cora*) Oh yah! I didn't introduce Mona! She's been my best friend forever. (*They mime-high-five from a few feet apart.*)

MONA. Yah! I'm so excited to have a job that I don't even care what it is!

ULAF. Oh yah? Me too!

GUNNER. Me three!

WHAT'S HER FACE. Me four!

BLONDIE. Me four! (*Cora stares at Frankie, her point proven.*)

FRANKIE. But what they lack in skills--

CORA. --they sure make up in heart. I know. I know.

MONA. So... What are we gonna be making at the factory? Is it fans again? (*Cora doesn't get to answer because the church*

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bells begin ringing. All of the townspeople stop and turn in unison.)

WHAT'S HER FACE. Oh! There go the bells! Time to head to church!

CORA. But your applications. The Factory.

FRANKIE. They can't work today anyway. It's Sunday!

MONA. Grape juice and crackers day!

FRANKIE. Communion, Mona. Communion! *(The townspeople all head to church. Frankie is the last to leave. He stares a moment at Dr. Cora. She looks up and sees him staring. It's a moment. Shyly, Frankie exits. Without the townspeople, the mood shifts from the somewhat heightened reality of Virgin, to a more realistic air. Alone, Dr. Cora and OLIVER take a breath.)*

OLIVER. Hijole... Qué grupo tan loco. So what do you think doctor?

CORA. Quite the query, isn't it. We have placed everything we have into this relocation. No other town has an open factory with a distribution line that meets our requirements. Virgin is the only place that works. Do you think I really wanted to move here? It's equivalent to time travel.

OLIVER. No 7-11. No McDonalds. No Starbucks. It's like they don't believe in coffee. As a Seattleite that goes against my heritage. I bet they're flat earthers too.

CORA. I wouldn't doubt it. Unfortunately, there is nothing we can do. We can't change the world.

OLIVER. Especially if it's flat.

CORA. Accurate. We'll just have to become much more acquainted with... uncomplicated minds. Furthermore, this is my only opportunity to mass produce my -now proven- theory

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that Anti-Anxiety medication with the correct combination of Epimedium and Tribulus extracts and NADH can affect a person's--

OLIVER. But Doctor, what do you *think*? Which one of them is it?

CORA. I'm uncertain. After last night's events--

OLIVER. Hard to believe.

CORA. Yet still factual, Mr. Cox. We need to solve this mystery before any more shipments go missing or any more of our equipment gets damaged.

OLIVER. They all seem so nice.

CORA. One of them is not. One of them is capable of sabotage. But whom?

OLD LADY WARNER. (*Lights fade on Cora and Oliver.*) Sabotage. Now there's a word ya don't hear too often 'round these parts. It's French, ya know? But it's spelled in a way that confuses English speakers. Like rendezvous or faux. And confusing the English speakers... is also French.

SCENE 2

THE CHURCH OF VIRGIN

PASTOR JOHNSON steps up to the pulpit to deliver his sermon. His son, Randy Johnson stands nearby. The rest of the townspeople face him, sitting in the pews, separated Men on one side of the aisle. Women on other. There is a doorway stage left leading to the Pastor's Quarters. At stage right there is a large doorway that leads outside.

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PASTOR JOHNSON. Virgin, Minnesota. Our wonderful town. What does Virgin mean to you? Pure? Untouched? Unused? Un... Exploited? Yah know, I've been putting a whole lot of thought into that, myself. Our tiny hidden town, hidden from the dangers...

BLONDIE. Dangers!

PASTOR JOHNSON. Oh yah, the dangers of the outside world. A world where people are different. And differences can bring something terrible to the town.

RANDY. What is it dad?

PASTOR JOHNSON. It could bring...(almost a whisper.) Change. (*He continues a bit louder*) Change! (*Loud. To all.*) Chaaaaaaaaaange! From our innocent ways. That outside world with their druggies, their tattoos, their homosexuals, their Liberals, their Latinos--

MONA. Why Latinos?

PASTOR JOHNSON. The ones who took your jobs in the first place!

RANDY. (*Quietly*) Dad, that's a little rough. Maybe reel it in on the "Latino" stuff.

PASTOR JOHNSON. (*To the townspeople*) We lost--

RANDY. (*Quietly*) And the gay stuff...

PASTOR JOHNSON. (*To the townspeople*) We lost--

RANDY. (*Quietly*) The other stuff's fine cause- you know- choices. But not race or sexuality...

PASTOR JOHNSON. (*To Randy*) Are you done? (*To the townspeople*) We lost everything when our beloved fan factory, the factory built with the blood of your families, moved to Mexico!

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FRANKIE. But was that the Latinos? Or was it global commerce, US taxes, market competition, and reduced costs?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Who's talking?

FRANKIE. Besides, I think I have an answer.

PASTOR JOHNSON. No really. Who said that?

FRANKIE. Me. Sir. Mayor Frankie.

PASTOR JOHNSON. Oh, I didn't recognize you. You sort of, kind of, blend into the background, there.

FRANKIE. It happens. I've been told I have blank features.

PASTOR JOHNSON. I'm eager to hear your solution.

FRANKIE. One night, after prayers, I was looking online for a way to solve our town's problem and I found a government website.

MONA. Ooh. Government!

GUNNER. ...I don't trust 'em.

FRANKIE. I applied for a program that brought a company *up* from Mexico. The government paid them to come up here and use our old factory and hire our town's workforce. It's a win-win for everyone. Two of their executives came up to run the place--

ULAF. Mayor Frankie got us jobs!

GUNNER. Mayor Frankie saved us all!

PASTOR JOHNSON. Oh Frankie. Poor dear Frankie. Don't you realize what you've done?

FRANKIE. Well, as Mayor, I'm trying to make a difference.

PASTOR JOHNSON. A difference? What's a simile for difference? (*Silence from the crowd.*)

Change! Change will come and turn you into them! With their tattoos!

EVERYONE. Them!

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PASTOR JOHNSON. And drugs!

EVERYONE. Them!

PASTOR JOHNSON. And homo– (*Looks at Randy*)...unmarried sexual deviances. The kind I have forbidden here in town, yah know.

EVERYONE. Them!

PASTOR JOHNSON. It is said that a good shepherd never forces himself upon his sheep. Yet, over these years, in your best interest, I forced something upon mine. Seclusion, for safety and preservation of our way of life. But look to the north! (*Everyone looks around, confused.*) No! When you're outside, look to the north. Our factory smokestack! It casts a shadow on our town. And what does that shadow foreshadow for us?

RANDY. What, dad?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Sex! For I *also* have looked for things on the internet! (*Gasps from crowd.*)

RANDY. Dad! Gross!

PASTOR JOHNSON. What? No! No. I wasn't looking for sex. I misspoke. Last night, I looked up this company that is moving into our old factory. (*To Frankie*) Frankie, did you even research what kind of manufacturing you're bringing to us?

FRANKIE. Honestly, I just pushed a button that said "apply."

PASTOR JOHNSON. They're producing... pills.

GUNNER. Like aspirin?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Worse!

GUNNER. Aleve?!

PASTOR JOHNSON. Oh for crying out loud! A pill for sexual dysfunction. A pill that encourages sex. And

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furthermore, today, I have made another discovery. And this one breaks my heart. My son tells me that he saw you all applying to work at this factory.

WHAT'S HER FACE. But we didn't know! It's not a sin if we didn't know!

GUNNER. Mayor Frankie wants us to go to Hell!

FRANKIE. Hell? (*Frankie sits back down.*)

PASTOR JOHNSON. Darn tootin', Frankie! (*With complete seriousness.*) Darn tootin'.

(*To all.*) Look at us. Look how well we've done. Men there. Women there. Safely single. Safely... Abstinent. No hurt feelings. No sexual deviances. No... danger. We've worked so hard. What do you think this pill will do to us? Seduction brings about destruction!

GUNNER. So what do we do?

PASTOR JOHNSON. I urge you all-- No. I demand -- that you forget about those factory jobs. God will provide.

FRANKIE. But, uh, what if this is the opportunity that God is providing?

PASTOR JOHNSON. I understand we're in a bit of a slump. So today's prayer is one of hope for the future, for God's help, and for financial blessings. (*He lowers his head. As do the others.*) Dear Lord, we all know, taking part in a revel leads straight to the devil. Amen. Now have a wonderful Sunday, and go in peace.

OLD LADY WARNER (*Aside.*) Oh yah, my keen little kiwis. In our tiny hidden town, up in northern Minnesota, things are about to get very interesting.

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SCENE 3
THE TOWN SQUARE

Cora is packing up the supplies from the fair. Mona walks up, with her application.

MONA. Here you go, Doctor.

CORA. Mona, correct? You didn't complete your application.

MONA. I know... I really wanted to too.

CORA. Who's stopping you?

MONA. You guys. You're making sex pills.

CORA. That's a very broad definition. *(The other townspeople have begun arriving. They slowly and sadly turn in their unfinished applications.)* Why are you turning in unfinished applications? Even if you don't want the job, that's not how job applications work!

GUNNER. I don't want to get a tattoo.

WHAT'S HER FACE. I don't want to be a liberal.

ULAF. I don't want to be a sexual deviant.

CORA. You are not making any sense.

FRANKIE. *(Running over.)* Uh, we seem to be in a bit of a kerfuffle here. The Pastor has forbidden them from working in the factory.

CORA. He has no jurisdiction here. Tell them.

FRANKIE. Tell them what?

CORA. Mr. Mayor, you're the mayor.

FRANKIE. Yah, but he's the Pastor.

CORA. You're. The. Mayor.

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FRANKIE. *(Same inflection as before.)* Yah, but he's the Pastor. *(PASTOR JOHNSON exits the church and overhears the conversation.)*

CORA. There is a spiritual and a secular world. We reside in the secular. *(She turns to the crowd.)* Sensible people reside in the secular world! So let me ask you this— *(The Pastor pulls the GIANT METAL CROSS from the ground and slams its base onto the ground to make a point.)*

PASTOR JOHNSON. You. Shall. Not. Ask! *(He snaps his fingers, and the men and women separate even more, parting like the red sea. He crosses through the center and stares down DR. CORA.)* And anyone associated with this factory is precariously positioned on the precipice of the perilous pathway to Hell! You must understand, miss...

CORA. *Doctor.* Dr. Corazon De La Fuente. And I'd wager that you're the one who is sabotaging my factory!

PASTOR JOHNSON. I don't know what you're talking about. Hmmm a doctor? In what... the arts?

CORA. Doctor as in medical. Perhaps I can examine the head injury that allows you to believe your fantasies about the world... There could be a cure.

PASTOR JOHNSON. Blasphemy! I'll show you a head injury! *(Pastor Johnson swings his cross. Cora ducks then races away.)* That'll teach her. Hopefully that will scare her back to the big cities. *(Pastor Johnson replants the cross in the lawn and exits.)*

ULAF. Ah geez!

WHAT'S HER FACE. Holy cross!

MONA. Literally.

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WHAT'S HER FACE . Mona, we better make sure she's okay. Let's you and me and Blondie search the square. Ulaf, Gunner, go keep an eye on the Pastor. Okay, perfect. That's literally every one of us. Okay. Go! (*Ulaf and Gunner head into the church. Mona, What's Her Face, and Blondie exit. Frankie is once again alone.*)

FRANKIE. What the heck, people?

OLD LADY WARNER. (*Aside.*) Oh yah, my blissful little beans. This left Mayor Frankie in a conundrum. His idea to bring jobs to the town is failing miserably and he has no idea what to do.

FRANKIE. Omigosh! Omigosh! What should I do?

OLD LADY WARNER. (*Aside.*) One thing he did know is that he can't do this alone.

FRANKIE. One thing I know is that I can't do this alone! (*Picks up his phone, dials, and speaks.*) Hello? Is this the factory? Oh Mr. Cox. This is Mr. Frankie! I met you today... no not Ulaf or Gunner. No, I wasn't one of the women! Yah, we've met! Listen to me!!! I need your help. Dr. Cora? She needs help. Pastor Johnson tried to... horrible. All because... because of what your factory makes. Ya see... He's despised anything to do with sex... Ever since his wife, Sharon... died.

OLD LADY WARNER. (*Aside.*) Oh yah, my gorgeous little garbanzos. Died. DIED. In a horrible... (*Air Quotes*)

"...accident" which involved...well.... More on that later. As for now, we need to check in on Dr. Cora, who has been brought to What's Her face's Yogurt Conastogurt.

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SCENE 4

THE YOGURT CONASTOGURT

Lights rise on the back room of THE YOGURT

CONASTOGURT. Mona, Blondie and What's Her Face lead Cora in.

WHAT'S HER FACE. Thank God we found you! Don't worry, no one will come looking for you here. Yogurt's not a hot commodity.

MONA. That's right! People don't realize that yogurt -while tasting great -can also bring stability to the stomach, greatness to the gut, and comfort to the colon.

CORA. What is wrong with this town? He just swung a cross at me. *(Realizing.)* Pause a moment. That's proof. I bet he slammed that cross into my machines!

MONA. You should probably stay inside, especially if the Pastor is stalking about.

CORA. You don't understand. Someone has been sabotaging my factory. It has to be him!

MONA. Momma! She's getting kinda ornery.

CORA. Ornery? I'm furious!

WHAT'S HER FACE. That must be some of that out-of-town violence the Pastor Johnson was talking about!

MONA. Horrible.

WHAT'S HER FACE. Yeah. Drugs and sex and such.

MONA. Drugs and sex and such.

CORA. Pause a moment. I understand the fear of drugs. But sex? You have a daughter! You've obviously--

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WHAT'S HER FACE. Oh no! She is not my real daughter. Not biologically. I just raised her. I'm as much a Virgin virgin as she is. Mona was abandoned!

MONA. Abandoned!

BLONDIE. Abandoned.

CORA. Abandoned?

MONA. Abandoned!

BLONDIE. Abandoned.

WHAT'S HER FACE. See, a long time ago. I was trying out a brand new flavor at the Conastogurt.

MONA. "Minnesota Ice." It tastes like real snow.

WHAT'S HER FACE. I was working so hard. Well, one night, I went outside, barely awake, and nearly tripped over a baby on my doorstep.

MONA. That was me!

WHAT'S HER FACE. That's right. Someone left this poor little baby. And what could I do? I'd always wanted a child.

MONA. And I'd always wanted a Momma!

WHAT'S HER FACE. I didn't know what to do. That's when I saw him. My savior.

CORA. Who?

WHAT'S HER FACE. The Pastor. He came over and lifted the baby into my arms. Then said a quick prayer. And then... just like that he was gone!

CORA. Let's process this. How do you know he didn't place the baby there himself?

WHAT'S HER FACE. Because he was there for me! He comforted me. That feeling never went away. That protection. That love.

MONA. Yeah. Momma loves him. But he don't know it.

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CORA. The man who tried to hit me?

WHAT'S HER FACE. He did it out of love... For the town.

CORA. (*Getting up.*) You can confess your love when he's in jail.

WHAT'S HER FACE. Oh, you can't arrest the Pastor.

CORA. You are all so delusional! Being the pastor does not mean he is above the police.

MONA. Oh we don't have those. If someone is bad, the Pastor just takes care of it. (*Mimics a cross swing.*) Whoosh!

CORA. That doesn't seem problematic?

WHAT'S HER FACE. We just call it love. Oh, if I had the courage, I would tell him that I have that same love. For him.

MONA. I spend my mornings coaching my Momma on what she should say to the Pastor.

WHAT'S HER FACE. Maybe tonight will be the night I do it. When he— (*Cora's phone rings. Cora gets it by the third ring. She looks at it and answers.*)

CORA. Hello? Mr. Cox? (*We hear the phone ring again. Except we realize it's just Blondie repeating the ringing noise.*) No. No. I'm fine. Yes, he tried to hit me with a giant cross. I'm fine. I'm losing you. No. I'm okay. There's no need for you to... Mr. Cox? (*She puts her phone away.*) He's going to the church. He thinks I'm in trouble. He couldn't hear me. The cell service is terrible.

WHAT'S HER FACE. Oh yah. The Pastor knocked down the cell tower with his metal cross. He said it causes cancer.

MONA. And Satan.

CORA. I need to get to that church before Mr. Cox gets in trouble with that cross wielding psychopath. (*She exits.*)

WITH BATED BREATH

WHAT'S HER FACE. Mona. You better go with. Make sure she doesn't harm my man.

MONA. Sure thing, Momma.

BLONDIE. Momma! (*Mona exits.*)

OLD LADY WARNER (*Aside*) Well, my zealous little zucchinis, the day is coming to a close on this wonderful Sunday. Our lovely young heroine, Cora, is out for blood. Meanwhile, inside of the church....

SCENE 5

THE CHURCH OF VIRGIN

Pastor Johnson, Ulaf, and Gunner are putting away the hymnals and resetting the church after the earlier meeting. FRANKIE watches nervously.

FRANKIE. Okay Pastor, what's the endgame here?

PASTOR JOHNSON. I had to do something!

FRANKIE. Do something? You just assaulted a woman!

PASTOR JOHNSON. Assaulted? No! I merely... Cross examined her?

FRANKIE. You can't just hit people that don't agree with you!

PASTOR JOHNSON. The end justifies the means.

FRANKIE. Pastor Johnson! I'm pretty sure that earthly laws and biblical laws say the same thing about assault!

PASTOR JOHNSON. "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called."

WITH BATED BREATH

FRANKIE. “Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (*Pastor Johnson is stunned.*) I can quote too.

PASTOR JOHNSON. Yes, you can, Frankie. Yes, you can. And I am glad to hear because you need to have every tool available to you in the fight up ahead.

FRANKIE. Fight?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Satan is a suitor and one we must neuter. In the war of good and evil, the stakes have been raised. I need you to be my ally in what may be the most heinous-

GUNNER. Eeeeew!

PASTOR JOHNSON. -heinous spectacles this town or the world has ever seen. These pills... these capsules of sex will--

FRANKIE. But, uh, we don't have to take the pills, we just have to make the pills.

PASTOR JOHNSON. Making us, what? Satan's biggest tool?

FRANKIE. But Dr. Cora says--

PASTOR JOHNSON (*Imitating him.*) But Dr. Cora says...(*Beat.*) I hope that these protests are truly about the town and not that you are enamored with that woman.

FRANKIE. No! I mean... Yes. I mean... Dr. Cora is rather beautiful but she also makes some very interesting points.

PASTOR JOHNSON. So you do think she is attractive!

FRANKIE. No! I mean... She has a beautiful smile.

PASTOR JOHNSON. Careful, Frankie. Satan only smiles through willing mouths.

ULAF. I've heard that!

PASTOR JOHNSON. Stop. Listen. Take a breath. Close your eyes. (*They do.*) Feel the electricity in the air? Feel the chill down your spine? That is Satan approaching. Making his way

WITH BATED BREATH

from that building in the north. Tip toeing or shall we say... clip clawing. Cause he has those claws, ya know. But maybe they're hidden. *(The others gasp.)* In shoes. Or boots or what not. So you don't know. Maybe even stilettos.

GUNNER. Isn't that when you bleed out of your palms?

PASTOR JOHNSON. That's stigmata you moron! Now listen! I love this town. Like I love my only son. Randy. I keep us safe in his name. And in yours. And in yours and yours! And God's! And in his name we must stop this pill. We cannot let the rabble dabble with it!

ULAF. But how?

PASTOR JOHNSON. We must march on the factory and take it back! Now pray! *(Frankie, Ulaf, Gunner all duck into prayer fearfully.)* Oh Lord, I'm pleading that you bless our warriors as we march on that factory. Even if we have to spill blood!

FRANKIE. Blood?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Any minute now. Any minute now. New terrors could come knocking at our church doors!

GUNNER. But Pastor! If he's wearing boots or shoes or trying to trick us... How will we know?

PASTOR JOHNSON. You'll know because something will be different! Maybe in his build. Maybe in his skin. Maybe in his—
(There are three loud knocks. They all freeze. Slowly the door opens. Light floods the room, lighting a silhouette around the man at the door. The men tremble with fear. Oliver Cox enters from the light.)

OLIVER. Hello? I'm Oliver Cox, I'm looking for my coworker--

GUNNER. It's him!

ULAF. It is him!

WITH BATED BREATH

PASTOR JOHNSON. It's the devil!

OLIVER. The what?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Get him boys! (*Ulaf, Gunner, and the Pastor Johnson close in on the horrified Oliver*)

SCENE 6
THE TOWN SQUARE

Cora and Mona walk past the LARGE METAL CROSS, which has been planted back in the ground. MONA has been talking a while.

MONA. ...But then I finally ate all the kale and broccoli. And that's how Momma used high fiber foods to help me pass the thumb tacks.

CORA. That was a terrible story, Mona.

MONA. Hey, wanna know something else? Last winter, I licked Pastor Johnson's cross right there, and got my tongue stuck. There's still a little bit left there. See? Pastor says that there is a little bit of me with God at all times.

CORA. Yeah? Well, your Pastor's a nutcase. He has you all thinking that sex is terrible.

MONA. Not terrible. Just dangerous. That's why it's forbidden.

CORA. Forbidden?

MONA. Of course! You can't be too careful. Pastor's late wife, Sharon, did die in a lovemaking accident. (*Beat.*) At least that's the rumor. (*Cora has no words.*) All we know is that it involved a hammer.

WITH BATED BREATH

CORA. A hammer? And you want this nutbag to hook up with your mother? (*MONA stares back at her.*) I'm sorry that wasn't a technical term. Psychopath. Better? Why are you staring at me? Oh, you're going to tell me another story, aren't you?

MONA. All my life, I've dreamed of one thing. A great big family. I see us sitting around the table playing Mexican Train. You ever played it? Its dominoes. It's more fun than a bushel of monkeys. I don't know why they call it "Mexican Train." I don't think it's making fun of Mexicans. Maybe it is... I hope not... Anyway I can see it. Papa handing out the dominoes. Momma is smiling. I'd also have a husband to cuddle in my lap. And my sister would make one of her wise cracks.

CORA. You have a sister?

MONA. No. In my *dream*... Afterward we head over to the fireplace. Papa tells us stories. Momma hands out frozen yogurt. Sister shows us her crazy dance moves. Husband curls up at my feet.

CORA. Do you want a husband or a cat?

MONA. I like my men *tiny*.

CORA. I'm not going to kink shame you, Mona.

MONA. But don't you see it? If Momma can go and win the Pastor's love, then I'll be one step closer to the family I've always wanted. Oh! And now you're here! You could be the sister I've always wanted! It's like fate!

CORA. Uh huh.

MONA. Just imagine! Papa sending us off to bed. We sisters cuddle. And husband joins us--

CORA. What?!?

WITH BATED BREATH

MONA. And in the other room we hear our parents say goodnight. Then the soft sounds of the hammer being lifted from the shelf--

CORA. What is with you and-- *(There is a commotion from the church.)* Mona! Quiet! Do you hear that? *(Suddenly Pastor Johnson exits the church. Cora pulls Mona out of sight. Pastor Johnson picks up his LARGE METAL CROSS and enters the church again. From inside we hear Oliver scream then a thud.)* Oh no! We have to see what happened! *(Cora exits into the church. Mona stares ahead. Still in her daydreams.)*

MONA. Coming sis! *(Mona races after Cora.)*

SCENE 7

PASTOR JOHNSON'S CHAMBERS

Cora and Mona run into the Pastor Johnson's chambers and find Frankie freaking out.

FRANKIE. Omigosh! Omigosh! Pastor Johnson! Cross! Oh God... Blood! Blood!

CORA. Mr. Mayor, there you are! What happened? What did the Pastor do?

FRANKIE. Omigosh! Cora! You're okay! And so beautiful.

CORA. Listen to me! What happened here?

FRANKIE. Cox! Pastor hit him with the cross. Just like he tried to do to you! He dragged him down into the cellar, over there! *(Pastor Johnson reappears from the basement, with Ulaf and Gunner.)*

PASTOR JOHNSON. Well, well. Look what the cat dragged in.

WITH BATED BREATH

CORA. What did you do with Mr. Cox?

PASTOR JOHNSON. He is deep, deep, deep below the church and closer to Hell. Where he belongs. Now as for you all...

FRANKIE. Us? Why me?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Because you're blinded by lust for this... this... My only option is to hold you here for cleansing and Bible study. Ulaf! Gunner! Seize them! (*Ulaf and Gunner come forward grabbing Cora and Frankie. Mona stares, scared.*)

CORA. Let go of me. You can't hold us here!

PASTOR JOHNSON. It looks like I can. (*Calls offstage.*)
Randy?

CORA. Holding us hostage the same way you are holding this town hostage?

PASTOR JOHNSON. You will all benefit from a night of Bible study and worship. Hell, an exorcism may even be necessary. Luckily, tonight, my son Randy will be leading. You should learn from his example. He is of good Christian mind. (*He calls offstage again.*) Randy! (*Randy enters.*) Ah there you are son. We need you to lead an intense cleansing tonight.

RANDY. Whoa, a new girl.

PASTOR JOHNSON. Are you up to the task?

RANDY. You betcha, Dad!

PASTOR JOHNSON. Ulaf! Gunner! It's nearing seven PM. Go make sure that the town curfew is in effect.

ULAF. Gunner can handle that alone.

GUNNER. Hey!

ULAF. I wanna stay and help with the cleansing.

WITH BATED BREATH

PASTOR JOHNSON. Go! Both of you! Let no one be outside! (*Ulaf and Gunner exit.*)

RANDY. What about you, Dad?

PASTOR JOHNSON. I have some business to attend to. We're locking the doors behind us. You have the keys, Randy. Cure them all by morning. (*To all.*) God bless you and goodnight. (*Pastor Johnson exits dramatically. There is a harsh sound of the large doors being locked.*)

CORA. Randy, correct? Listen. Hostage situations are never an appropriate solution. Mr. Cox and I work for the government.

RANDY. (*Looking out the window.*) He's gone, right?

CORA. Yes. But--

RANDY. Yeah! Let's get this party started! Let's get into that wine cupboard.

FRANKIE. The wine cupboard?

RANDY. So what's a sweet thing like you doing in a town like this?

CORA . Sweet thing? You may call me Doctor--

RANDY. (*Breaking into the wine cupboard.*) Got it! (*Pulling out the bottle.*) Jesus-Juice, anyone?

CORA AND FRANKIE. What?

RANDY. You're from outta town. You know how to party, right?

CORA. I'm not one to *party*.

RANDY. But you're so hot. I'd love to get to know you.

CORA. Okay. We're both sexual beings. I understand. But I'm here to rescue my employee.

FRANKIE. Yeah!

RANDY. Sure. Bring him up here. The more the merrier. The cellar door's just down the hall, make a right and look for a

WITH BATED BREATH

door that says “Forbidden.” (*Frankie, Mona, and Cora start to head for the cellar. Cora walks by. Randy stops her with his words.*)

RANDY. Or. Or.... Frankie and Mona can go get him while you and I can get to know each other.

CORA. (*Stopping.*) Oh? (*She looks him up and down. He is hot.*) Perhaps Mr. Mayor and Mona can get him.

FRANKIE. (*Seeing what's happening here.*) Mona can get him.

MONA. Fine! I'll get him. (*Mona stomps off to the cellar. RANDY offers some wine. Cora takes it.*)

CORA. It's surprising that you don't have an accent.

RANDY. I'm too hot for accents. May I touch your shoulder?

CORA. Sorry?

RANDY. Do I have consent to touch your shoulder?

CORA. You're asking... consent to touch my--

RANDY. What kind of man would I be if I didn't?

CORA. That may be the most arousing comment anyone has ever said to me. Yes.

RANDY. (*Taking a step forward and touching her shoulder.*)

It's hard being a man like me in a town like this. I'm Strong. Attractive. Built. But tempted. It must be similar to your situation. Being the new person in town... You must feel so alone. Feel me?

CORA. Sorry?

RANDY. You understand me?

CORA. ...Yes

RANDY. Do I have consent to lightly run my fingers up your down your arm and touch your hand.

CORA. (*Intrigued. Attracted.*) Yes. You have consent.

WITH BATED BREATH

RANDY. Sometimes I wish I had someone to hold me close. In those times I feel vulnerable. Trembling. Like a titmouse alone in the dark woods. Starving. Like a timid infant needing encouragement from a supple mother. You feelin' Randy yet?

CORA. I...

RANDY. Consent for hand holding?

CORA. Given.

RANDY. Sometimes loneliness is a physical chill. Sliding down the spine, unappealing -yet appealing. Can we touch toes - my right and your left foot?

CORA. Odd. But I'll allow it.

RANDY. The tension. Wrapping around the waist. Feel it down your back and crack--

CORA. Excuse me?

RANDY. -a smile. Tension's funny that way. Now can you imagine if I said all of that with an accent?

CORA. Wow. You know, in Spanish, my name means heart.

FRANKIE. In English, my name means Free Land-owner. In French, it means Frenchmen. (*The others stare.*) I just wanted to remind you that I'm still here.

CORA (*Back to Randy.*) I've always been led more by my head than my heart. But you- I can tell- are led by your heart. It's in your words.

RANDY. Word.

CORA. I can't comprehend how someone like you could have come from a town such as this. With all of these rules and restrictions. Obviously you know that sex and lust are just natural parts of the human body.

RANDY. A bone's a bone.

CORA. Not according to your father.

WITH BATED BREATH

RANDY. Yeah, my dad can be a bit much.

CORA. If there was ever a case for someone requiring the comfort of coitus...

RANDY. The man needs to get laid. *(They both laugh.)*

CORA. Oh! Pause a moment. Ponder this query, Randy. What if he did?

RANDY. Dad's not like that.

CORA. One dose of my pills and he could be.

RANDY. You want to drug my dad?

CORA. He's holding this town hostage. Plus, he did try to hit me with a cross. And hit my employee. It's for the greater good, really.

RANDY. A minute ago, we were flirting.

CORA. This could solve all of our problems. If he gives in to temptation, the people in this town will be free to act as they wish. Furthermore, my employees will no longer be in danger. Unlock the door, Randy, all my pills are at the factory.

RANDY. We can party all we want here. But dad will kill me if I let you out.

CORA. Okay. Okay. How about this.? The factory is somewhere that you and I can be... alone.

RANDY. Alone?

CORA. Consent to be alone with you?

RANDY. I...

CORA. Consent to touch your shoulder? *(He nods. She does.)*
Consent to hold your waist? *(He nods. She does.)* Consent to look deeply in your eyes? *(He nods. She does.)*

RANDY. Oh Damn. Oh damn! Okay. Okay! Let's go.

CORA. Let's go! *(RANDY pulls the key from his pocket and they exit.)*

WITH BATED BREATH

FRANKIE. Not without me!!!! (*Frankie races after them.*)

OLD LADY WARNER. So, my lovely little lingonberries, with a plan in motion. Dr. Cora, and Randy race to the factory, with the Mayor Frankie in tow. Meanwhile throughout town, people begin to meet in pairs. And as the Pastor says, when two people are in close proximity, there is twice the opportunity for trouble.

SCENE 8

THE CHURCH BASEMENT

MONA. (*Sneaking down the dark cellar stairs.*) Hello? Anyone? Mr. Cox? Are you down here? Is anyone down here? (*She sees Oliver Cox handcuffed to the cellar wall. His face is covered by a BDSM leather zipper mask and his mouth is blocked by a large ball gag. He strains to yell through it. She races forward and helps him get the ball gag off.*) Oh my! Let me help you with that.

OLIVER. Gracias.

MONA. Dr. Cora sent me down here. Hold still, let me take this mask off. (*She does. She sees him up close.*) Oh!

OLIVER. Is Dr. Cora safe? Good. Do you have the keys? (*MONA is still staring.*) Why are you staring?

MONA. I was just startled... Seeing you up close... You're so.... (*They hear sounds of a Jeep driving away.*) Oh no! That sounds like Randy's jeep. He has the keys!

OLIVER. Hijole...

MONA. (*She goes to the cuffs.*) Why does the Pastor even have these handcuffs?

OLIVER. I don't want to imagine.

WITH BATED BREATH

MONA. I'm surprised these can keep you contained. You're so... slight. The cuffs look like they should just slide right off. *(She stares at him again.)* Wow.

OLIVER. What?

MONA. It's just... You're like a real person.... But with smaller... borders. Oh God. I'm sorry! That's the wrong word to use. Are you offended?

OLIVER. I feel like I should be.

MONA. The proximity of you is so confusing.

OLIVER . You're not using that word correctly. Proximity means the closeness of two things, like me and this wall. *(She says nothing.)* For example, it can mean the region around two things, like over there, around that hammer and that baby oil.

MONA. Oh! The baby oil! We can use it to slide your wrists through the cuffs! *(Mona grabs the oil and begins to rub it on Óliver's arm.)* I don't think it's working.

OLIVER. Thank you for trying. And... *(He stares at her.)*

MONA. *(Blushing.)* What? *(They both stare for a moment. There is an attraction here.)*

OLIVER. There is another definition for proximity... Events that are near to one another -in space or time - are perceived as belonging together as a unit. Like you...and me...

MONA. I wish I was able to get you out of here.

OLIVER. Me too. *(Mona scoots closer to him.)*

MONA. So uh... what other kinda things do you wish for?

OLIVER. Other than being released from this cellar? I guess. Respect.

MONA. Racism is real, yo.

OLIVER. It is. But a more personal respect. Back home. My stepfather. You know what he called me?

WITH BATED BREATH

MONA. What?

OLIVER. Tiny Cox... I'm the smallest in the family. So, Tiny Cox. He started it. Then everyone else joined in. Family. Friends. At home. On the playground... Never in the locker room.

MONA. Oh, how awful.

OLIVER. I think that's why I've been obsessed with--

MONA. Tiny cox?

OLIVER. What? No! Things that were... bigger. The first factory that I managed was a family business that he ran.

MONA. Tortillas?

OLIVER. Racism is real, yo. No. Ironically it was... apple pies. Small frozen apple pies.

MONA. My momma and I make frozen treats too!

OLIVER. He left me in charge one night and I looked at the frozen pies and thought to myself. No! Break the mold. Make them as big as they want to be! Create something better. Something bigger! That's when it happened.

MONA. There was a spill?

OLIVER. No. An explosion. The insurance premiums were so high that we had to sell the business. My Stepfather eventually jumped to pharmaceutical manufacturing and that's how I got here. He says this is my last chance.

MONA. Well, I guess we have to wait for Randy to come back with that key.

OLIVER. You can take the time and tell me about yourself.
(She scoots even closer. The tension between them builds.)

MONA. Yeah? I can? Well, something about me. I don't like bigger things. I like things small. Like shrimp. And their proximity.

WITH BATED BREATH

OLIVER. No. That's still not right. *(They stare at each other, with love in their eyes.)*

SCENE 9
THE TOWN SQUARE

Ulaf and Gunner patrol the town as curfew sets in.

GUNNER. Looks like everyone's in early tonight. Ten minutes before curfew, even.

ULAF. People usually behave the day that Pastor swings the cross. Though today was a little awkward.

GUNNER. Oh yah.

ULAF. Yah.

GUNNER. Cause he swung at a woman.

ULAF. I was raised to believe that a man should never hit a woman, ya know.

GUNNER. I know! But we're not allowed to question the Pastor.

ULAF. Not even. So we're in agreement that it's totally wrong. Right?

GUNNER. Right. Wrong. Right?

ULAF. Right.

GUNNER. But, like I said... we can't ask questions.

ULAF. Not a one.

GUNNER. Not a one. *(They patrol for a moment in silence.)*

ULAF. Well... While we're not questioning *that*. J'ever... not question other stuff?

GUNNER. Ulaf...

WITH BATED BREATH

ULAF. Like for example... is our lifestyle even sustainable? We're forbidden from sex outside of marriage. But single men and women in town can't get close enough to form relationships anyhow. How will our population survive?

GUNNER. I think when the Pastor made that decree, twenty years ago, it wasn't a permanent decision. Just till a new rule came along, ya know.

ULAF. Oh yah. But I mean... Come on. Twenty years.

GUNNER. I know! Good grief.

ULAF. And you haven't broken the rule.

GUNNER. Nope.

ULAF. What about before the rule?

GUNNER. Once. I was a teenager. High School. You?

ULAF. No. I was too young when the rule started. (*They patrol in silence again. Ulaf builds up some courage, then...*) But, ya know, if you could now. Who would it be?

GUNNER. Ulaf! This is dangerous talk.

ULAF. Just asking... Just harmless chatter! Just to pass the time while we search for people breaking curfew. I mean, just a name. No harm in that. A name. Could be anyone--

GUNNER. Blondie.

ULAF. What? Really?

GUNNER. Yeah. I mean. It's not about the sex. Before the no-sex thing. Before the head kicking thing. We kinda had something going. Back then.

ULAF. Wow. I didn't know.

GUNNER. Yah.

ULAF. Yah.

WITH BATED BREATH

GUNNER. Yah... So what about you? (*Ulaf nods and goes back to patrolling. He has no intention of revealing his own secrets.*)

ULAF. What?

GUNNER. If you could. Who would it be?

ULAF. Yah know. You're right. It's dangerous talk.

GUNNER. Ah for crying out loud, Ulaf! I told you mine!

ULAF. It's hard to say. It's uh... someone from town.

GUNNER. Ulaf!

ULAF. ...Someone from church.

GUNNER. We're all in the church! Come on, tell me!

ULAF. It doesn't matter.

GUNNER. Ulaf! Look at me. I want you to tell me.

ULAF. This... person. Probably doesn't even notice me.

GUNNER. "This person." Ulaf, you're so funny. You can just say that it's not a woman.

ULAF. No. That's not what I meant.

GUNNER. Ulaf.

ULAF. Okay. That's exactly what I meant. But... How did you know?

GUNNER. Ulaf, you've been my best friend for years. I know things about you. I know you don't like Perry Como. And you get oddly excited about the gym. And I also know that under your mattress is your DVD copy of *Depth of a Salesman*.

ULAF. You found that? Oh God!

GUNNER. You do you. Literally, in that sense, I guess. What I'm trying to tell you is that our friendship is A-Okay. Also, if you really think about it. The law states that men and women must be separated. So you're in luck. You can still try to spend

WITH BATED BREATH

time with your special someone. You just can't act on it. (*This hits Ulaf hard.*)

ULAF, Right. Because that's wrong.

GUNNER. No. Because it's the law. Same law as for me.

ULAF. Yah... Right....

GUNNER. Right... Yah...

BOTH. (*Sighing.*) Right.

SCENE 10

THE YOGURT CONASTOGURT

The Conastogurt is dark. Moonlight shines through the window. What's Her Face races in, just making curfew. She enters. Pastor Johnson has been sitting inside in the dark.

PASTOR JOHNSON. Whatsy.

WHAT'S HER FACE. (*She jumps.*) Oh! You're here.

PASTOR JOHNSON. For our regular Sunday night meeting. I let myself in. Look at you. You're sweating. It glistens in the moonlight like a nude swimmer in a secluded lake.

WHAT'S HER FACE. (*She turns on the lights.*) Poetry, Pastor Johnson. I just had a... workout. (*Heads to the freezers.*) Can I fix you a scoop?

PASTOR JOHNSON. It's too late tonight. I was waiting.

WHAT'S HER FACE. Maybe tomorrow? I was thinking of having a picnic. Want to come with?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Whatsy...

WHAT'S HER FACE. I love when you call me that.

PASTOR JOHNSON. We can't be seen out in public together. It wouldn't be good... for anyone.

WITH BATED BREATH

WHAT'S HER FACE. I don't understand why it has to be a secret.

PASTOR JOHNSON. It's for the town, Whatsy. It's for the town.

OLD LADY WARNER. Like I said. Proximity. And speaking of people in close proximity, let's check on the Mayor and the Doctor.

SCENE 11 THE FACTORY

A lock is heard disengaged. Lights rise as Cora enters the control room. And flips on the lights. Frankie nervously follows, nervously sweating. In the far left corner, resting against some machinery is THE GIANT METAL CROSS. Neither notice it, as Cora goes to the nearby shelves.

FRANKIE. I thought you were going to bring Randy in here with you.

CORA. Negative. He's pursuing one thing. If I brought him in here then I'd feel obliged to appease him.

FRANKIE. Oh thank God. I thought he'd wooed you. I hate that he's so confident. I'm never confident.

CORA. That's an abundance of sweat, Frankie. Are you feeling okay?

FRANKIE. Just generalized social anxiety.

CORA. How bad?

FRANKIE It started when everyone lost their jobs. They all looked to me for a solution, and I had nothing. Every time someone would ask what I was doing to change things... I

WITH BATED BREATH

would just... lose it. My heart would race. The sweat would pour. I would feel like I was going to explode... and I would run away. It got to the point that I was terrified to leave my trailer.

CORA. I'm sorry to hear that.

FRANKIE. Mona's the one who got me out. She even drove me over to the city to see a doctor who prescribed me the medication. It wasn't even that spendy. But I never picked it up.

CORA. Why?

FRANKIE. I was scared. Ya know, I wish I could have Randy's confidence. What was all that consent stuff he was talking about anyway?

CORA. Really? It's when someone asks someone for their permission to make an advance.

FRANKIE. Omigosh! You mean ... A guy can just ask a girl directly what he wants to do?

CORA. Directness is the highest form of communication.

FRANKIE. Is that a saying from your country?

CORA. I'm from Queens.

FRANKIE. I'm sorry. I didn't mean... Queens? That sounds... tough.

CORA. Excuse me? Med school was tough. My residency was tough. Being a woman in a profession dominated by men is tough. Queens wasn't tough. Queens was preparation. Queens made me who I am. It's not like I grew up on a farm.

FRANKIE. Oh for cripes sake! I didn't grow up on a farm! I grew up in a trailer!

CORA. Sorry.

FRANKIE. Ya know, that college elitist talk is the kind of thing we hate so much about the outside world. We're not

WITH BATED BREATH

stupid. We're desperate. We were the top producer of fans in the United States. Centrifugal. Cross-flow... Ceiling. Look around, Cora! We even infused them into this building. This is the best ventilated building in America!

OLD LADY WARNER (*Aside.*) Sorry to interrupt. But that's interesting, right? Frankie said that it is the best ventilated building in America! Interesting, right? But what was also interesting was the way the lights were shining on him in that moment as he said it. While there was only one of him, he is oddly casting four shadows. I just thought I'd point that out. The thing about this being *the best ventilated building in America* and also the *four-shadowing* that he was doing at the time.

FRANKIE. (*Takes a breath, then...*) Onlyfans.

CORA. Excuse me?

FRANKIE. Our old factory name. Onlyfans.

CORA. I don't think you can use that name anymore. Why didn't you move somewhere else? When the jobs dried up?

FRANKIE. Where would we go? This is our home. (*He's run out of words. So has she.*)

CORA. Yeah. So.... (*Beat. She pulls a bottle from the shelf.*) Here we are. The strongest potency.

FRANKIE. Do you really think it's ethical to drug someone?

CORA. The end will justify the means. I... (*There is a rumble in another room.*) What the hell was that?

FRANKIE. Is the factory machinery running?

CORA. Mr. Cox and I were certain to turn everything off before we left for the job fair. Additionally, the building has an excellent cooling unit. All those fans you mentioned--

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VOICE. *(Automated ringing out in alarm.)* Danger. Danger. Cooling Unit Failure. Cooling unit failure. Danger. Danger.

CORA. Oh no! We have to get out of here! *(Cora pulls Frankie through the door.)*

SCENE 12
THE CHURCH BASEMENT

Mona and Oliver are still staring into each other's eyes. They lean in to kiss, and it is so adorable. But suddenly they are knocked to the floor by the sound of a large explosion.

OLIVER. Oh God! That explosion sounded like it came from my factory!

MONA. Oh my gosh! Just like you're last one!

OLIVER. Nooooooooooooooooooooo!

MONA. I have to see if everyone is okay. *(She starts for the door. We hear the voice of Pastor Johnson.)*

PASTOR JOHNSON. *(From outside)* Cox! What have you done!

OLIVER. Mona! He's coming! Hide. *(Mona hides. Pastor Johnson storms in.)*

PASTOR JOHNSON. Cox! How did you get that ball gag out? Never mind! Did you hear that sound? Your Pantheon of Perversion has exploded!

OLIVER. But how?

PASTOR JOHNSON. Obviously God, in his infinite wisdom, has struck it down. *(He finds a leash from his toys, attaches it to Oliver and begins to uncuff him from the wall.)*

OLIVER. What are you doing?

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PASTOR JOHNSON. We're going to witness the destruction. Then... I'm going to make an example of you. The townspeople will see what happens when you cross me, er, God. (*Pastor Johnson drags Oliver upstairs.*)

SCENE 13 **RANDY'S JEEP**

Around Randy's Jeep is the rubble of the factory smokestack. Cora and Frankie open the drivers and passengers side doors and slide in.

CORA. Are you okay?

FRANKIE. Yah. I think so. (*He looks out the windows.*)
Where's Randy?

CORA. I don't know. He was supposed to stay in the jeep. (*She looks at the wreckage.*) The smokestack is completely destroyed. I don't understand what happened. We made sure to turn off production. There is no way the machines were still running unless...

FRANKIE. Unless what?

CORA. Mr. Mayor, last night somebody snuck onto the premises and stole some of our shipment and damaged our machinery. They may have come back and done more damage.

FRANKIE. What are you saying?

CORA . Someone must have turned everything on. And also shut down the cooling system. (*Mist forms around the Jeep.*)

FRANKIE. Omigosh! What is that?

CORA. It's some kind of cloud of fumes. Look!

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FRANKIE. It's headed down the hill, through the forest...
Right toward the town!

CORA. Hurry. Roll up the windows! (*They roll up the windows. More mist starts to form around them. RANDY stumbles in.*)

RANDY. What's happening? I feel funny.

CORA. (*Yelling from inside.*) Randy, have you been breathing those fumes? They're from the pills!

RANDY. They make me feel warm inside.

FRANKIE. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! Cora, what did we do?
Do we let him in?

RANDY. What's happening to me? I feel so. I feel so.... so....
Neeeeeeeeeeed!

FRANKIE. He's infected! What's it doing to him? (*It is strongly affecting Randy. He wipes away sweat. Drool. Can't stop touching his own arms and chest.*)

CORA. Well, the drug is a combination of sexual enhancement and anti-anxiety.

FRANKIE. Wait. What? Why?

CORA. Because not all sexual dysfunction is physical. Often anxieties affect one's sexual pleasure and ability. People think too much about what they are doing, what they are touching or the act itself. Essentially, the drug helps those get over those internal objections. He probably feels like he can do or be anything. (*Randy rips his shirt open.*)

CORA. Focus groups reported feelings such as heat, euphoria and salivation.

FRANKIE. He needs salvation!

CORA. Salivation. The act of producing excess saliva.

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RANDY. Neeeed. Neeeed! (*He approaches Frankie and CORA. He is ready to hit the windows. But he is fighting so hard.*)

CORA. Pause a moment. While the drug has these effects, there is no proof, no study, showing that inhaling them will have the same result.

FRANKIE. I think we're seeing that proof now.

CORA. Astounding. Though unbelievable. But I'm willing to test it. It will obviously have to be documented.

FRANKIE. And stopped. (*Cora isn't listening.*) You're going to stop it right?

CORA. Randy. Can you hear me?

RANDY. Neeeeeeeed.

CORA. Intriguing. Randy. What do you require? (*Randy stumbles forward, reaching toward Frankie and Cora.*)

RANDY. Neeeeeeeeeed.

FRANKIE. Oooooh! He's a zombie! Lock the doors.

CORA. Absurd assumption. There is no such thing as zombies.

RANDY. (*Unbuckling belt.*) Neeeed. Lust... Thrust... Bust... (*RANDY tries to open doors.*)

FRANKIE. Uh oh.

RANDY. Neeeeeeeeeeeed!

CORA. (*Firm.*) Randy. No. Randy. Stop. (*He stops. He's fighting it.*) You don't have *permission*.

(*RANDY is fighting so hard. He just wants to reach out and grab them. But he's doing his best. Finally he races away.*)

CORA. He's strong. But I don't think he'll be able to fight it forever.

FRANKIE. Well I hope everyone else is stronger than him. Look!

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CORA. Interesting. The fumes are going to overtake the town any minute.

FRANKIE. We have to warn them! (*Frankie starts the Jeep. Lights rise on Old Lady Warner.*)

OLD LADY WARNER. (*Aside*) Oh yah, my optimistic little okras. The fumes are snaking toward the town. Hearing the noise of the explosion, the townspeople head to town square.

SCENE 14 THE TOWN SQUARE

Blondie, What's Her Face, Gunner and Ulaf race into the Town Square.

GUNNER. Did you hear that? The factory just exploded. Ya know!

ULAF. You Betcha! What do you think it means? What happened?

GUNNER. What should we do? Do you know anything?

WHAT'S HER FACE. No. (*Pause.*) I was... at home... (*Looking up.*) What is that? A cloud?

BLONDIE. Cloud! (*A mist begins forming all around them.*)

WHAT'S HER FACE. I feel warm.

GUNNER. I feel hot.

ULAF. My skin is sizzling like a hot dish.

WHAT'S HER FACE. Oh! Gunner, back in church, I never noticed how tight your pants were.

GUNNER. Yah. I'm fizzin' like a pop!

ULAF. I feel... free.

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WHAT'S HER FACE. *(Takes a sniff.)* I'm craving...
neeeeeeeeeed!

ULAF. *(Takes a sniff.)* Neeeeeed!

GUNNER. *(Takes a sniff.)* Neeeeeed! *(They all look hungrily at each other.)*

BLONDIE. *(Takes a sniff.)* Oh wow. What a scent. It's so...
sensual. So sensational... Oh my gosh. I'm talking!

OLD LADY WARNER. *(Aside.)* Oh yeah, my plump little
peaches. Isn't that interesting? Something in the fumes allows
Blondie to overcome her repetitiveness. It's a miracle. It's--

BLONDIE. Hey, why are you looking at me like that... *(Takes
another sniff.)* Oh! Ohhh! Need need! *(The townspeople all
close in on BLONDIE. Blackout.)*

END OF ACT ONE

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –
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