

THE PROFESSION

by

Marcia Eppich-Harris

THE PROFESSION

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THE PROFESSION

To Aric, Will, and Kai for their enduring support.

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The Profession was originally produced at the Fonseca Theatre in Indianapolis, IN, by Southbank Theatre Company, directed by Elisabeth Speckman and featuring the following cast:

ValerieBecky Schlomann
MarinaPatricia Blanchfield
MarkBrad Staggs
PaulBrian Boyd
JillJeri Jackson
Lucy.....Lola Lavacious
Flint.....Tom Smith

CAST: 4 Women, 3 Men

| | |
|---------------|--|
| VALERIE HARDY | 40s, assistant professor of English |
| MARINA DEKKER | 20s, a student |
| MARK TOWNSEND | 50s-60s, a dean |
| PAUL STOCKTON | 40s, an associate professor of Theology |
| JILL CARTER | 50s-60s, the chair of the English Department |
| LUCY | 30s-40s, a sex worker who has seen it all |
| FLINT | 50s-60s, the manager of the Cat Nip Club |

TIME: 2019

PLACE: A college town in the Midwest, home of St. Sebastian University.

TEXT NOTE: When / is used, it indicates overlapping speech.

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

Lights up on VALERIE's Shakespeare class. Valerie stands beside a white board with casters for easy movement. Notes on the board read "Troilus and Cressida (~1601), Rape of Lucrece (1594), Tarquin's desire? TROJAN WAR, intertextuality, heroes?"; Valerie is teaching the play Troilus and Cressida.

VALERIE. The men are not particularly heroic figures in this play. Instead, Shakespeare portrays them with candid disillusionment. Now, it's interesting to compare the roles of the men and the women. While the Greek and Trojan men are free to philosophize and argue, as they do in Acts 1 and 2, the women, particularly Helen of Troy and Cressida, can never escape their roles as handmaidens to masculine pleasure. (*Enter MARK.*) Can I help you, Dr. Townsend?

MARK. Just here to observe. Please, continue.

VALERIE. Okay. . . Where was I? (*To audience as if they're students.*) Women may be the center of the universe in the Trojan War, but what that also means is that they're surrounded. Shakespeare infects *Troilus and Cressida* with the feverish realization that, for women, the Trojan War has never really ended. Who controls women's bodies? And who controls women's destinies? Even today, these questions are all too relevant. (*Valerie looks at her watch.*) So we'll be thinking about all that for next time. We'll make some connections to Lucretia as well, so review your notes on the ekphrastic portion of *The Rape of Lucrece*. Make sure you read the rest of *Troilus and Cressida* on break. We'll have an in-class writing assignment when we come back on Monday. All right? Have a good break.

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MARK. (*Approaching Valerie with a slow clap.*) Fascinating class.

VALERIE. Thanks, Mark. Hey, I've been meaning to drop by.

MARK. I thought you'd ignored my email.

VALERIE. No, no. I was hoping we could get together during spring break.

MARK. When your boss tells you to come to his office, you come.

VALERIE. You said, "Pop by when you have a moment," so I didn't think it was an emergency.

MARK. Well – spring break is contract time for me.

VALERIE. Yes. And I have a lot of papers to grade.

MARK. We're always so busy anymore. I was lucky – I got into academia before it went to hell.

VALERIE. Hell is where all the fun people live. But anyway, I have a student meeting that I need to get to, so do you want / to talk later?

MARK. / I'll be brief. I've been running numbers for the Humanities division, and there has been quite a downturn in major enrollment over the last five years.

VALERIE. Really? We just got that report from the provost that undergraduate enrollment has gone up 26%.

MARK. Most of those are science and math students on scholarship. Tuition is fairly stagnant.

VALERIE. Are we in trouble?

MARK. No—not yet, anyway. But. . . the number of young people is falling nationwide. That will certainly impact our budgets, so we need to think of ways to save money.

VALERIE. Okay. . .

MARK. The number of English majors is down 7%.

VALERIE. That can't be right. The number of English majors has increased in the years that I've been here.

MARK. I'm talking nationwide – down 7% nationwide. The trend lines are down, expectations are down, the number of majors is down, the generated student credit hours are down. And we can't count on enrollment improving, so we're having to consider numbers when evaluating tenure applications.

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VALERIE. National numbers weren't a part of the application criteria. I just had to report on my scholarship, teaching, and service.

MARK. And you were unanimously supported by the Promotion and Tenure committee based on your strengths as a faculty member. But based on the second criteria in the handbook, which is the "needs and conditions of the department," the Board, with the recommendation of the President and the Provost, decided that there wasn't a need – not a sufficient need – for another tenured faculty member in English.

VALERIE. Are you telling me that I'm being denied tenure?

MARK. Yes. I have a letter here for you from the president. (*Mark hands Valerie an envelope.*)

VALERIE. I don't understand how this is possible. I exceeded expectations in all areas. You wrote a letter of recommendation for me!

MARK. Look, the board wants to know why we're supporting a product line that has a declining market and we can't make much money on.

VALERIE. Why should you support the *English* department? To support the mission of the institution! We're a liberal arts college.

MARK. I hear that. But undergraduate enrollment only accounts for 30% of our income at this point, and there's no graduate degree in English.

VALERIE. We've been talking about creating one.

MARK. But there isn't one now. We have to make decisions based on the information we have today.

VALERIE. What about retirements? All our tenured faculty are due to retire in the next five to ten years.

MARK. But they never *have* to retire, and we're not allowed to ask them when they will.

VALERIE. I know Jill is retiring soon. She's talked about it for years – ever since I was hired, in fact.

MARK. If we had had that information, maybe it would have made some difference, but I can't guarantee it.

VALERIE. Listen, tenure denial is a huge red flag. When I was teaching part-time, I saw this happen to people, and they never got academic jobs again. You *know* this is going to ruin my career.

MARK. That's not necessarily true. We'll write recommendations for you.

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VALERIE. Nobody is going to believe them. Academia is a small world, Mark. I've never heard of anyone being denied tenure because of national statistics in a major. People are going to know something else is behind this.

MARK. It's just numbers. We can get two adjuncts to teach your classes for a quarter of what you make in salary and benefits.

VALERIE. With that rationale, the university doesn't need any full-time professors at all.

MARK. I'm just the messenger, okay? You'll be given a terminal contract, so you can still teach next year. That will give you time to apply for other jobs.

VALERIE. It took me *five years* of applications to get *this* job.

MARK. There's nothing I can do. Sorry.

VALERIE. This is about what happened last fall, isn't it?

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

VALERIE. Oh, come on.

MARK. Don't you have a student meeting you need to get to?

VALERIE. How am I supposed to meet with a student when I've just been told I'm getting fired?

MARK. I'm sorry. Next time you get an email from your boss, maybe come by sooner, so you don't have to worry about that. (*Exit Mark.*)

SCENE 2

Valerie starts to walk to her office. PAUL enters and starts fiddling with the copy machine. He notices her.

PAUL. Hey, Val. Everything okay?

VALERIE. Not really. Is the copier jammed again?

PAUL. Yeah. I got through a few copies before it crapped out, as usual.

VALERIE. Let me look at it. If anything worked around here, I don't know what I'd do.

PAUL. So what's wrong?

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VALERIE. Well, I just had a meeting with Mark. He came to my Shakespeare class to corner me.

PAUL. Oh no. Why?

VALERIE. I'm being denied tenure.

PAUL. What?

VALERIE. Yeah. I'm furious. I don't know what's gotten into this place.

PAUL. Data and money.

VALERIE. It's always money.

PAUL. But now they have data to back up their arguments.

VALERIE. Higher ed has become some kind of capitalist hellscape. Our president doesn't even have a doctorate. He's a corporate goon! All he cares about is the college-to-job pipeline. Nobody gives a damn about literature anymore. Or art, music – anything that doesn't fit on a number line.

PAUL. There's no value in reading or writing, is there?

VALERIE. What can we expect when *football* is our best recruitment tool?

PAUL. You're not a fan of the St. Sebastian Arrows?

VALERIE. Didn't arrows kill St. Sebastian?

PAUL. He survived the arrows. He was beaten to death.

VALERIE. Sounds like football. Sports might bring in a lot of money, but they don't bring in a lot of English majors.

PAUL. Or Theology majors. I know.

VALERIE. At least Catholic schools can't get rid of Theology professors.

PAUL. You'd think that. But I had a meeting with Mark a few days ago, too. They made me a buyout offer.

VALERIE. Seriously? Didn't you just get promoted last spring?

PAUL. Yeah.

VALERIE. How does that feel? "Here's a promotion, and by the way, we want you to leave!"

PAUL. It doesn't feel great.

VALERIE. What are you going to do?

PAUL. I'm not sure. They said it's optional, whatever that means.

VALERIE. It means they're prolonging the inevitable.

PAUL. It's tempting. They offered me three years' salary.

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VALERIE. Three years? Jesus, you'd think they could keep me if they're throwing around that kind of money.

PAUL. It's enough to send my kids to college, which is the main reason I've stayed in the profession – the free tuition thing.

VALERIE. Yeah, I'll be losing that, too. My poor kids. I've been too busy paying off my own college to save for theirs.

PAUL. I'm shocked you haven't moved to another university.

VALERIE. The job market is completely dried up.

PAUL. It isn't great in Theology either.

VALERIE. (*Closes up the copier*) Here. Try it now.

PAUL. (*It works.*) Oh great. Thanks.

VALERIE. What's with the pink? Is it breast cancer awareness month or something?

PAUL. No, this is for campus ministry's pro-life event coming up after break. The students would have to pay for copies, so I said I'd make them.

VALERIE. In the future, give the students a temporary code and let them do their own dirty work.

PAUL. Thanks for your help.

VALERIE. You're *kind of* welcome. (*Enter MARINA.*)

MARINA. Hi, Dr. Hardy. Oh. Sorry to interrupt.

VALERIE. Oh Marina. I'm so sorry – I'm totally running late to meet with you.

MARINA. It's okay. Should we reschedule?

VALERIE. No, no. It's fine.

PAUL. Hey, Marina. You're in class with me *and* Dr. Hardy this semester? You poor kid.

MARINA. I decided to take the Milton class. Taking Shakespeare with Dr. Hardy got me hooked on the Renaissance.

PAUL. What are you reading now?

MARINA. *Paradise Lost*. I love it. It's about Adam and Eve and Satan and all these devils. And man, the language. Oh my God, it's . . . mouthwatering.

PAUL. You must be doing a good job, Val, to inspire such passion for the fall of man.

VALERIE. I try.

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PAUL. Well, I'd better get these copies sorted out. Some of these aren't mine.

VALERIE. See you later, Paul. (*Valerie and Marina move toward Valerie's office.*)

MARINA. (*To Valerie.*) So last night, I was thinking, "What if *Paradise Lost* is a satire about God being an asshole?"

PAUL. (*Overhears Marina and laughs.*) Yeah, she's your student.

MARINA. (*Aside*) Oh shit . . .

VALERIE. Have a good spring break if I don't see you before, Paul.

PAUL. You, too, Val. (*Paul gathers his copies and exits.*)

SCENE 3

Valerie and Marina sit opposite each other at a desk.

MARINA. I always love coming to your office. You have so many books.

VALERIE. There are twice this many at home. Part of being a scholar is building your own library.

MARINA. I don't know if I'll ever be a *scholar*.

VALERIE. Writers have to be just as analytical as they are creative. And you asked a good analytical question in the hallway.

MARINA. I can't believe I said that in front of my *Theology* professor!

VALERIE. "Is God an asshole?" is an excellent scholarly question. You had to have read *Paradise Lost* – and understood it – to have asked.

MARINA. I'm sorry if that offended you.

VALERIE. Heavens no, I'm not a religious person. Paul is probably less skeptical, being a *Theology* professor and all.

MARINA. I just I feel like, a lot of times, God is screwing with people. (*In character as an "asshole God"*) "Here's this amazing tree, but don't eat from it! . . . Oh, Abraham, if you're *really* loyal to me, you'll cut off your foreskin. . . Nah, not good enough. Now you have to kill your son! . . . Just kidding!"

VALERIE. You're making a compelling case for "God's an asshole."

MARINA. I'm surprised I like this book so much. I'm not religious at all.

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VALERIE. (*Indicating her large Shakespeare anthology*) Shakespeare is my Bible. Every now and then, I just open it up and see what he's got to say to me. (*Valerie opens her Shakespeare book randomly, smirks, and reads aloud.*) "The time of miracles is past. . ." See? Even Shakespeare doesn't recommend religion.

MARINA. (*Laughs, then digs copies out of her bag.*) By the way, I have those copies for you. (*Hands over papers.*) I also have some library books you asked me to pick up. (*Hands over books.*)

VALERIE. Oh great. I've been waiting for this one! My new book is about Shakespeare's subversion of the Bible.

MARINA. I would love to read that.

VALERIE. You and two other people in the world.

MARINA. No, seriously. That would be incredible.

VALERIE. You could take a look at my book proposal if you want.

MARINA. Really? I would love that.

VALERIE. I'll be here every day during spring break if you want to talk about it.

MARINA. Well, I'm hoping to work at my other job a lot. I'm short on my final tuition bill of the year, so I really need the cash.

VALERIE. Oh boy.

MARINA. Yeah, but I work nights, so I could come by in the morning sometime.

VALERIE. Okay. Shoot me some times that you think will work.

MARINA. I will. Thanks, Dr. Hardy. (*Marina moves away from the desk but stays on stage. Exit Valerie.*)

SCENE 4

Enter FLINT, who goes to the copier. Marina approaches him. We are now at the Cat Nip Gentlemen's Club.

MARINA. Hey, Flint. You wanted to see me?

FLINT. Hey, kid, yeah.

MARINA. Everything okay?

FLINT. Yeah. It's just – goddamn this copier. It's always stuck.

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MARINA. Want me to look at it?

FLINT. If you think you can fix it.

MARINA. (*Pulls paper out.*) Is this the copy of the schedule?

FLINT. Yeah, for next week. It's a mess.

MARINA. Why?

FLINT. Spring break is next week.

MARINA. Yeah. I was hoping to be here every day, if that's okay.

FLINT. Problem is, this town empties out during spring break. There's no money in it.

MARINA. Oh.

FLINT. You ain't been here long enough to know how it goes – the college empties out, and there goes half the money.

MARINA. There's always the regulars.

FLINT. There ain't enough to spread around.

MARINA. Look, Flint, I really need to make money next week. I'm short about two thousand dollars for tuition.

FLINT. You thought you were going to make two grand during the driest week of the year? You'd have to do *a lot more* than shake your ass for that. Of course, there's always that possibility.

MARINA. (*Presses button, and the copier works.*) Well, the copier works anyway.

FLINT. (*Hands her a photocopy of the schedule.*) Monday and Thursday, got it?

MARINA. Nothing on the weekend?

FLINT. You always work weekends. Give the other girls a chance.

MARINA. None of them work harder than me.

FLINT. Work hard? Shit.

MARINA. Come on, Flint. You can't afford to lose me, right?

FLINT. Sure I can. There'll always be desperate girls banging down my door.

MARINA. Flint, really, I'll do anything.

FLINT. No, you won't. And that's the problem. (*Exit Flint. Marina transitions to the dressing room.*)

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LUCY enters and starts freshening her makeup, as Marina watches. We are now in the dressing room of the Cat Nip.

LUCY. Aren't you supposed to be on stage soon?

MARINA. Hey, Lucy. I got held up talking to Flint.

LUCY. Schedule?

MARINA. Yeah.

LUCY. Spring break. The worst week of the year.

MARINA. I thought it would be just the opposite!

LUCY. This motherfucker is a ghost town on spring break – with the exception of a few professors who *only* come in on breaks. But I've been doing this for fifteen years, and yeah, spring break is shit.

MARINA. Fifteen years?

LUCY. Mm hm.

MARINA. I don't know that my knees would last that long.

LUCY. That's why they play the music loud. So they can't hear our creaky knees.

MARINA. Lucy?

LUCY. Yeah?

MARINA. What do you do when it's slow?

LUCY. Prioritize.

MARINA. I can't really cut any more corners.

LUCY. There are other ways to make money.

MARINA. I need a lot all at once. I have rent, tuition /

LUCY. / Honey, you're not the only girl who needs to pay bills around here. Some of us have more pressing things to pay for than tuition.

MARINA. Yeah, right.

LUCY. Baby formula. Diapers. Clothes for growing kids. Adult expenses. Sometimes drugs. I'm surprised a good girl like you can do a job like this without being fucked up.

MARINA. I feel like I need to be pretty aware of what I'm doing when I'm here. I wouldn't feel safe if I didn't.

LUCY. That's what bouncers are for.

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MARINA. Do you think anyone would trade me shifts so I could get a weekend night?

LUCY. I doubt it. Just give up some of that schoolgirl booty, and you'll make your money.

MARINA. I don't know.

LUCY. Look, a lot of girls can't see themselves stripping. But everybody has sex. It's way easier fucking somebody than dancing in front of them. Just think of it as a one-night stand that you get paid for.

MARINA. But – I kinda think it would do something to me.

LUCY. Shit. If you were really worried about that, you never would have started working here. *(Exit Lucy)*

MARINA. I'd better get ready. *(Marina starts to change clothes, then stops and crosses to look off stage to watch Lucy do her routine.)* God. Fifteen years. *(Enter Flint.)*

FLINT. *(Indicating Marina watching Lucy)* You taking notes or something?

MARINA. Lucy's really good.

FLINT. She should be running the joint – *(indicating schedule)* then I wouldn't have to deal with this bullshit. Are you taking Monday and Thursday or not?

MARINA. Yeah, if that's all you have.

FLINT. Don't sweat it. Business'll pick back up.

MARINA. I hope so.

FLINT. Better get on stage, babe. Make some money while you can. *(Flint exits. Marina finishes getting dressed, and heads to the stage.)*

SCENE 6

Paul enters and sits near the dance stage, watching Marina. She starts her dance routine, taking off layers of clothing, one piece at a time. Paul watches Marina. They recognize each other. Marina hesitates, until he holds out money. She moves toward him, and he tips her. Emboldened, Marina continues her routine without shame. Once finished, Marina exits. Paul exits after her.

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SCENE 7

Enter Jill and Valerie.

JILL. No. Enrollment was never considered in tenure before, let alone national figures.

VALERIE. I feel like I've been blindsided. How am I supposed to do anything about data outside St. Sebastian?

JILL. You can't really.

VALERIE. Jill, you're my chair. Isn't there anything you can do?

JILL. Well, let me think on it, but if the administration has decided against you, I'm not sure there's anything I can say to change their minds.

VALERIE. You know, when I was hired six years ago, you said you were going to retire in 2016. That was three years ago.

JILL. Who can afford to retire?

VALERIE. It's just. . . if the administration knew that you were leaving, it might help me. You and Karen have been talking about retirement for a long time.

JILL. I'm too old to fall on my sword, Val. I don't have anyone to take care of me. You at least have a husband.

VALERIE. Frank is a freelancer. We never know what his income is going to be month to month. My job provides our health insurance.

JILL. You could always teach high school.

VALERIE. Is that what you would do?

JILL. No, of course not. Look, get on Obamacare. Teach a couple of writing classes at the community college. Rebuild your reputation. In a couple of years, maybe some jobs will open up.

VALERIE. Nothing opens up if tenured professors refuse to retire.

JILL. Well, I guess you should have thought about that before you publicly criticized the administration last fall.

VALERIE. They changed the entire structure of the colleges without consulting the faculty. I was standing up for Humanities.

JILL. That's not your place. If I so much as rolled my eyes in the late '80s, I would have been denied tenure. I know you think you're special

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and that your ideals are more important than being a team player. But I can tell you this: You don't play the game? You don't stay in the game.

VALERIE. Games don't belong in a university. We're supposed to have the ability to debate and criticize without fear of retaliation.

JILL. And how do you think I got to where I am? Healthy debate? Jesus.

VALERIE. I just want to do my job and do what's best for our students.

JILL. What's best for the students? Why didn't I think of that?

VALERIE. I didn't see any tenured faculty speaking up.

JILL. The rest of us know which way the winds blow. Your attempts to save the Humanities, albeit noble, were misguided. The provost wouldn't even know you existed if you hadn't called out Mark. You could have skated through here with half your accomplishments. But what did you do? You went outside the hierarchy, went outside the norms. You called your dean incompetent –

VALERIE. I didn't use the word "incompetent."

JILL. You didn't have to.

VALERIE. But you agreed with me!

JILL. Yeah, sure. Privately. But if you wanted tenure, you should have kept your mouth shut.

VALERIE. And then what? Just keep my mouth shut like you and all the other tenured faculty?

JILL. You think tenure protects people from retaliation?

VALERIE. I think someone who has the courage to tell the truth can stand up against retaliation.

JILL. Well, one of us has a permanent job, and one of us doesn't. Which do you think is better? (*Exit Jill. Valerie remains.*)

SCENE 8

Enter Paul, distracted.

VALERIE. How's your break going?

PAUL. Good. Good enough anyway.

VALERIE. I'm finally caught up on grading.

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PAUL. I wish I were. But, hey, I got some news yesterday.

VALERIE. Oh? What's that?

PAUL. I've been offered a visiting professorship at (*making fun of "the"*) "the" Ohio State University.

VALERIE. You're going from associate professor to visiting professor?

PAUL. It's being offered as a trial. If they like me, they'll keep me on at associate rank the following year.

VALERIE. And if they don't like you?

PAUL. Then, I guess I'll find something else.

VALERIE. Don't be like one of those Catholic priests who hopscotch from parish to parish, Paul. People will start to talk.

PAUL. I've done all the good I can do here.

VALERIE. Are Laura and the kids excited?

PAUL. They. . . well, they aren't coming.

VALERIE. Oh, Paul.

PAUL. Maybe a break will do us some good.

VALERIE. (*About his family.*) I'm so sorry, Paul. (*Enter Marina.*) Oh, hi, Marina. Did you need to see Dr. Stockton?

MARINA. Oh, I just thought I'd say hi. How's it going?

PAUL. (*Affected.*) Good! You?

MARINA. (*Affected.*) Great!

PAUL. Great! Well. . .

MARINA. Actually, Dr. Hardy, did you want to talk about that book proposal?

VALERIE. Yes! I have time if you do. (*To Paul.*) Let me know if you need anything.

PAUL. If the copier busts, I know who to call. (*Valerie and Marina move toward her office, as Paul exits.*)

SCENE 9

MARINA. So how is your break going?

VALERIE. Good. Let me pull up this proposal for you.

MARINA. Yeah, I'd love to see it.

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VALERIE. (*Pulls a laptop out of her bag, opens it, and starts looking through documents.*) So usually, you start out with the statement of aims, which essentially is where you share your goals and clearly outline your argument. Here's a little bit from the intro. (*Hands over the laptop to Marina.*)

MARINA. (*Reading aloud*) "When Shakespeare uses the prodigal son parable as a metaphor, he makes clear that those who sin can be forgiven, but their faults will most certainly not be forgotten." Do you really think that?

VALERIE. In Shakespeare's history plays, absolutely.

MARINA. What about in real life?

VALERIE. Recently, I've felt like people remember your sins more than your merits.

MARINA. Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe it all works out in the end. Milton makes the fall of man beautiful – a fortunate fall.

VALERIE. Yeah, I know.

MARINA. Is *Milton* wrong?

VALERIE. It would be nice if we didn't have to be damned in order to be saved.

MARINA. I don't know. *Paradise Lost* gives me a lot of hope.

VALERIE. That's part of the point of studying literature. There isn't a lot of fairness and justice in life, but in literature, we can see a world of possibilities.

MARINA. I'm not sure what my possibilities are going to be after St. Sebastian.

VALERIE. You mean, in terms of a job?

MARINA. Well, yeah.

VALERIE. It used to be that college wasn't about *job training*. Not unless you were going to be a nurse or accountant – or something else that led to a very specific profession. I wish students could see the value of learning for learning's sake.

MARINA. The value is \$60,000 a year. So I'd better get a job after this.

VALERIE. Of course you'll get a job. You just might have to have a few terrible jobs before you find the right one.

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MARINA. Don't college graduates make more money and have more success than people who don't go to college?

VALERIE. There are studies that make that argument, sure.

MARINA. So isn't college a good *strategy* for my eventual career?

VALERIE. Strategy – not the same as an education. If you want to be a writer, you need to be far more interested in asking questions – /like –

MARINA. Like, whether you're better off being a *sinner* or a *saint*? I *am* interested in that question.

VALERIE. In what way?

MARINA. Eve eats the forbidden fruit, but in the end, she's better off.

Without that choice, there would have been no salvation. Even if you don't believe in God, it's got to give you chills.

VALERIE. I guess that depends on how you feel about being subjugated by men.

MARINA. Maybe I subjugate them. Hypothetically speaking. But I get Eve. She risks death for knowledge. I'd much rather know the depths of good and evil than be an innocent nobody.

VALERIE. You've thought about this a lot.

MARINA. Eve's disobedience was inevitable. Humans are too curious to stay ignorant forever. They would have eaten from the tree eventually. If her sin was a catalyst for salvation, that really clarifies the benefits of sinning to me.

VALERIE. Marina, in theory, that's all fine and good. But you should never let *Milton* justify doing something that you *know* is wrong.

MARINA. Noted.

VALERIE. I'm sorry. I shouldn't make any assumptions.

MARINA. It's whatever. (*Beat.*) Anyway, I gotta go. Send me the rest of the proposal, okay? (*Valerie exits. Marina transitions to the Cat Nip.*)

SCENE 10

Marina starts to get ready for her routine. Lucy enters, wearing a silk robe, having just come off the dance floor.

LUCY. Decent tips tonight.

THE PROFESSION

MARINA. Good. I have to pay rent. And tuition. God. . .

LUCY. The guy on the right side of the stage in the blue shirt – look out for him. He tried to put his hand where it didn't belong.

MARINA. Did you tell Flint?

LUCY. He saw it and warned the guy, but still, watch out.

MARINA. Lucy, why did you start working as a dancer?

LUCY. Why does anybody start? Money.

MARINA. Yeah, I guess.

LUCY. I had my son early on. I had to find some way to pay the rent and take care of him. Not like his daddy stuck around to help.

MARINA. I wish my dad hadn't stuck around.

LUCY. We've all got daddy issues, girl. What'd that motherfucker do to you?

MARINA. My folks were mean drunks – always telling me and my sister Helen we'd never be anything but whores. Guess they were right about me.

LUCY. Girl, fuck that. You're going to college.

MARINA. My dad used to make us get on our knees and beg him for money when we needed it. Like, we'd have to kneel between his legs and say, "Please, Daddy, give me what I need."

LUCY. That is *fucked up*.

MARINA. Well. It was good stripper training anyway.

LUCY. Yeah.

MARINA. He . . . he would get hard, and . . . you know. I don't know about my sister – if he ever . . . We never talked about it.

LUCY. Maybe you should.

MARINA. I'm not sure she'd want to. We didn't always get along. My dad used to say she was the pretty one; I was the smart one. They pitted us against each other a lot.

LUCY. What's she doing now? Your sister.

MARINA. She ran away during my sophomore year in high school. Now, she lives about three hours south of here. I can't blame her. I haven't been home in two years.

LUCY. You know, you should ask your sister what happened to her.

MARINA. I'm not sure I want to know.

THE PROFESSION

LUCY. Maybe you *already* know, “smart one.” Being the “pretty one” ain’t all it’s cracked up to be. (*Exit Lucy.*)

SCENE 11

Enter Paul, at the Cat Nip. Marina pulls up a chair to sit next to him.

MARINA. Hey, Paul. How’s your night going?

PAUL. It’s getting better all the time.

MARINA. That’s sweet of you.

PAUL. So do you think Dr. Hardy noticed there was a little moment between us earlier?

MARINA. No, she’d never think anything bad about you.

PAUL. Did she tell you I’ve decided to leave St. Sebastian?

MARINA. Aw. But you *just* started to come see me dance.

PAUL. I was really surprised to see you here.

MARINA. I know. I seem so innocent, don’t I?

PAUL. I just thought I would have heard about it if a student was working here. College towns are full of gossip.

MARINA. You’d think that, but I think the “Bro-code” keeps a lid on it.

PAUL. What do you mean?

MARINA. I see guys from school here all the time, but I guess they don’t want to say anything about me because they’d have to admit they were here, too.

PAUL. Well, I won’t tell. But between the two of us – who comes in? Professors?

MARINA. Sometimes. A lot of students.

PAUL. That’s easy to believe.

MARINA. The guy from financial aid comes in just about every week. Kinda convenient. I don’t have to go to his office and wait in line. Not that it gets me any favors, unfortunately.

PAUL. My boss doesn’t come in does he?

MARINA. What’s he look like? Older guy?

THE PROFESSION

PAUL. Yeah. He's gotta be in his sixties. (*Pulls out a cell phone.*) He's on the website. (*Taps around on the phone, then holds it out to Marina.*)

Yeah, this is him.

MARINA. Oh yeah. I've seen him in here a few times.

PAUL. That guy is such an asshole. I can't believe no one's ratted him out.

MARINA. See? None of the men who come here are going to talk about you. And if I ratted you out, you wouldn't come to see me. That would break my little heart.

PAUL. There are plenty of other guys . . .

MARINA. None like you.

PAUL. You're just saying that.

MARINA. Aw come on, Paul. You're a great professor. You're so passionate about conversion stories. It makes me want to be bad.

PAUL. If only my wife felt that way.

MARINA. Aw. Poor Paul. You deserve to be treated nice.

PAUL. I do, don't I?

MARINA. Wanna get a private dance?

PAUL. How much?

MARINA. Eighty. (*Note – dollar amount can be changed to whatever sounds like a lot for the area of the country where this is being produced.*)

PAUL. That's a lot for just a dance.

MARINA. Maybe I could give you the friends-and-professors discount if you buy two.

PAUL. If I'm gonna buy two, I might as well ask for your *other* rates.

MARINA. Other rates?

PAUL. A lot of these girls have rates for *other* services.

MARINA. Sounds like you've been naughty.

PAUL. I've had to supplement since I'm so neglected at home.

MARINA. What did you have in mind?

PAUL. I've been wondering if you're . . . you know. . . in the oldest profession.

MARINA. Really?

PAUL. You're the full package. . . incredibly hot. Intelligent, luscious. . .

MARINA. Mmmm. I'm so flattered.

THE PROFESSION

PAUL. What do you say? I have money – I can get more if I need to.

MARINA. Uhm. . . Okay. I get off in about an hour.

PAUL. Perfect. I'll stay and watch.

MARINA. Where should we go?

PAUL. I know a place.

MARINA. Mmmm. Can't wait.

PAUL. Me either. *(Marina gives Paul a soft kiss, then exits. Enter Mark, who sees Paul and nods to him. Mark sits next to Paul. They don't look at each other again. Lucy enters and begins a routine as they watch. After a while, Paul, Mark and Lucy exit.)*

SCENE 12

Valerie enters her office. Seconds later, Marina knocks and enters.

MARINA. Hey Dr. Hardy. Any work for me today?

VALERIE. *(Startled)* Oh. Yes. I could use someone to make copies for me. No big rush – today or tomorrow is fine.

MARINA. Sure. I have class with Paul – Dr. Stockton – in a few minutes, but I can do it afterward.

VALERIE. Great. I'll leave some books in your mailbox.

MARINA. Okay. How is your book coming?

VALERIE. It's all right. I've been pretty distracted lately.

MARINA. I was meaning to ask you – I'm thinking about writing my senior paper on Milton next fall, and since that's your class, I wanted to know if you'd be the chair of my thesis committee.

VALERIE. I would. But I don't think I can.

MARINA. Oh. Okay.

VALERIE. I don't know if I'm going to be coming back next year.

MARINA. What? You're kidding.

VALERIE. No, I'm very serious.

MARINA. Why?

VALERIE. Well, I've been denied tenure. That means I'm being fired.

MARINA. No. That's impossible. You have to fight this.

THE PROFESSION

VALERIE. I am. I wrote a very thorough appeal, but I think I just made the administration even more angry.

MARINA. Can I write a letter for your appeal? I'll go talk to people. Whose office do I go to?

VALERIE. I don't really know that you can do anything.

MARINA. Don't just give up. I – *the students* need you.

VALERIE. If it were up to me, I'd stay until I retired, believe me.

MARINA. Can't you sue them?

VALERIE. I talked to a lawyer, but they said it looks pretty grim. They said it's practically impossible to win tenure cases. Judges and juries think that schools are better equipped to make these sorts of decisions than courts.

MARINA. But if they make the wrong decision, what can you do?

VALERIE. Not much.

MARINA. That's completely unfair.

VALERIE. Yeah. I know. (*Enter Mark. He and Marina notice each other. Mark takes a second to compose himself, then enters Valerie's space.*)

MARK. Sorry to interrupt. Could I speak to you, Dr. Hardy?

VALERIE. Sure. Marina, could we talk later?

MARINA. Yeah. Of course. (*Mark and Marina make eye contact, recognition, and Marina exits. Mark clears his throat.*)

MARK. I forwarded your appeal to the provost.

VALERIE. Thanks.

MARK. There's nothing more I can do about it. All the administration cares about is simple data. Charts and graphs don't lie.

VALERIE. Is there a chart for the numbers of lives I've changed?

MARK. There's a chart for how many English majors graduate and get jobs in their field. That's not in your favor.

VALERIE. Some of them go to graduate school.

MARK. So what? You said yourself there aren't any jobs in your field. For twenty years, we've lured students in with the promise of better jobs and higher salaries. But English isn't much of an employment pipeline. You have more graduates working at Starbucks than anything else.

VALERIE. It's not our fault if students can't get jobs immediately.

THE PROFESSION

MARK. Students think it is. And they've wised up. You're never going to have the number of majors you used to have. You can't. So cut your losses, hold your head high, like Paul Stockton, and leave with dignity.

VALERIE. How dignified is it to discuss personnel decisions?

MARK. Paul's made it public that he's leaving. He's taking the buyout.

VALERIE. I guess you made him see the writing on the wall. A Catholic school doesn't create jobs for Theology majors, right?

MARK. Look, I know you have one more year left with your terminal contract, but if I were you, I'd negotiate with the provost to leave at the end of this school year. They might let you have a year's salary and your insurance. It's not unprecedented. Think of how difficult it will be to come to work every day next year, knowing that you're being fired.

VALERIE. My appeal hasn't been decided yet. I'm not talking to the provost until it is.

MARK. You know you're never winning this appeal. You're going to have one more year of teaching, and then you'll be done.

VALERIE. Sounds like you've made up your mind.

MARK. It's not about me. The president wants to clear out deadwood.

VALERIE. Deadwood? Mark, I have given my *soul* to this school.

MARK. You can keep your soul. We didn't ask for it. (*Valerie hesitates for a moment, then exits. Mark remains.*)

SCENE 13

Mark transitions to the Cat Nip. Enter Lucy and Flint. Flint stands to the side to watch over the club, like a bouncer.

LUCY. Hey, handsome. You look like you could use a little company.

MARK. It's been one of those days.

LUCY. Wanna talk about it?

MARK. Not especially.

LUCY. We don't have to talk. I have a nice shoulder you can cry on.

MARK. Do you use your real names here?

LUCY. Not usually.

THE PROFESSION

MARK. What's your name?

LUCY. What do you want it to be?

MARK. Hmm. . . Could I call you "Valerie"?

LUCY. Sure. That's a pretty name.

MARK. All right, Valerie.

LUCY. Should I call you something special?

MARK. Just Dr. Townsend.

LUCY. So, Dr. Townsend – any interest in some special services tonight?

MARK. Actually, I did have something in mind, Valerie.

LUCY. A private dance?

MARK. I'm willing to pay more for something *really* special.

LUCY. Depends on what it is.

MARK. Number 1: I get to say, "Valerie, you are such a fucking bitch" as much as I want.

LUCY. Sounds like you have a problem with a girl named Valerie.

MARK. Number 2: I get to fuck you as hard as I want.

LUCY. Valerie has so much experience being a little bitch. I can take anything you dish out.

MARK. Anything?

LUCY. Anything.

MARK. Valerie, you're such a little slut.

LUCY. You like it, honey.

MARK. Don't fucking tell me what I like, Valerie. I'm the boss.

LUCY. You're the boss, Dr. Townsend. You're the boss.

MARK. Number 3. How much would you charge to let me. . . choke you? For say, 5 seconds?

LUCY. I don't do that.

MARK. How about a thousand dollars?

LUCY. Five seconds?

MARK. Five seconds. Get whoever you want to watch. They can time it. But you're my bitch tonight, and I want you to act like you *love* being my bitch.

LUCY. Being a bitch is my specialty, baby.

MARK. Dr. Townsend, if you don't mind, Valerie, you fucking bitch.

THE PROFESSION

LUCY. (*Lucy signals to Flint, indicating that she wants him to come with them.*) Looks like my bouncer can come along. We can go now – if you want.

MARK. Yeah. Let's go. (*Exit Mark, followed by Lucy and Flint.*)

END OF ACT 1

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