

Chinese Spaghetti

By
Tan Prace Collier

CHINESE SPAGHETTI

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CHINESE SPAGHETTI

*For Sherry and Clarence Hough, Achali and David Lee-Painter, Kelly
Quinnett, Jef Petersen, Bradley Thompson, Rayanna Skalicky,
Taylor Telford, and Scouten Christensen.
This wouldn't have been possible without you.*

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CHARACTERS

JEAN — 55. A local.

ROD — 56. Jean's ex-husband.

BOBBY — 38. Server at the Chinese Palace.

AMBER — 36. Jean and Rod's daughter.

CASEY — 33. Amber's fiancé.

PLACE

Green River, Wyoming. The Chinese Palace. The side of Wyoming State Highway 530.

TIME

December of 2022.

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NOTES

This play smells like cigarettes and tastes like Chinese food that's so *bad*, it's good. Snow falls throughout the duration of the play. The side of the highway should be quite simple and does not need anything special other than some snow, dirt, and sagebrush. The Chinese Palace is a completely Americanized Chinese restaurant in the heart of downtown Green River. A very dead and uneventful downtown. Lots of neon beer signs. Shitty booths with rips and cushioning coming out of them. No need to get crazy with the decorations, but old worn-out Christmas items are encouraged. Christmas music is absolutely NOT encouraged. Rod and Bobby both have the softest of Southern Wyoming accents. Please avoid making them over the top. Many times during the play you will see (*Beat.*) within stage directions. This denotes a brief pause, moment of silence, or a moment of thought. Slashes "/" indicate overlapping dialogue. Lastly, and most importantly, this play must be read selflessly. There are truths that belong to the individuals that inspired this play that I chose to honor wholeheartedly as their storyteller. Even if those truths are difficult to comprehend, they are in fact the *truth*. Personal impositions on this play are dangerous.

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CHINESE SPAGHETTI received its first staged reading at the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Region 7 at the Spokane Convention Center Theater in Spokane, Washington, on February 23, 2023. It was the recipient of the regional excellence award from the National Partners of American Theatre (NAPAT). The cast list was as follows:

JEAN Kelly Quinnett
ROD Jef Petersen
BOBBY Rayanna Skalicky
AMBER Scouten Christenen
CASEY..... Bradley Thompson
NARRATION Achali Lee-Painter

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**ACT ONE: PICTURESQUE
SCENE ONE**

Nighttime. The side of Wyoming State Highway 530. It's snowing. It is eerily quiet other than the wind. A car passes. We hear the crunching of winter boots in dirt and gravel. A cold light comes up on JEAN. She is dressed for the extremely cold weather. She looks out into the audience like they are the canyons of Green River. She inhales deeply. She exhales. Her head falls. She notices some sagebrush. She bends over and pulls as much sage as she can with her gloved hand. She rolls and crushes the sage leaves in her hands. She opens her hands like a book to herself. She puts her hands to her face and inhales the aroma of the sage as the crushed leaves tumble down her chin and coat. She cries. She removes her hands revealing a face covered in crushed sage and tears. She looks up into the light.*

JEAN. *(Quietly.)*beautiful night. *(Gust of wind. Lights down.)*

SCENE TWO

Lights up on a very empty Chinese Palace. A booth. ROD sits with several empty beer pints around him on the table. He is drunk. BOBBY comes by with a tray. She has a short bistro apron on with some state college logo on it. She stops and looks at him. He slowly looks up like a sad puppy.

BOBBY. Doin' okay, Rod?

ROD. ...would you care?

* Wyoming State Highway 530 runs directly through the center of the City of Green River. The perspective of this location facing northeast looks down onto the canyons and city lights of Green River.

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BOBBY. Yes.

ROD. *(Beat.)* No one cares how I'm doin' anymore.

BOBBY. That's not true.

ROD. Yes, it is. *(Beat.)* Can I get another?

BOBBY. Ya still gotta walk home and it's snowin.'

ROD. *(Painfully.)* Please?

BOBBY. *(Beat.)* One, more. And I'm bringin' ya food. *(Bobby exits to the kitchen. Moments pass by. Rod grabs a near empty glass and downs it. Jean enters. She dusts the snow off her hat and coat. She finds an empty booth near Rod without noticing him and sits. He notices her and begins to stare. She opens a menu and buries her face in it. Rod rolls up a straw wrapper and tosses it at her. He misses.)*

ROD. Jean. *(No response.)* Jean! *(Jean, startled, puts down her menu and looks at him.)*

JEAN. Didn't see you.

ROD. No one sees me.

JEAN. *(A feeling she knows well.)* I know the feeling.

ROD. Can I come sit with you? *(Beat.)* You don't have to say yes.

JEAN. Are you drunk?

ROD. Yeah.

JEAN. I think you should stay over there.

ROD. You been cryin'?

JEAN. No.

ROD. You're always cryin.'

JEAN. You're always drunk. *(Silence. They stare at each other as they share in their pain with one another once again. They've done this before and they're not getting any better at it.)*

ROD. *(With deep shame.)* I'm sorry.

JEAN. You don't have to say that anymore.

ROD. Feel like I should. *(Beat.)* Got plans for Christmas?

JEAN. Haven't celebrated in years.

ROD. I put up some lights.

JEAN. You were always good at that.

ROD. Didn't have much, but I found a box in the garage. Had some other stuff in it.

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(Beat.) Some pictures of the girls. I could— *(Bobby interrupts them by placing a plate and beer in front of Rod.)*

BOBBY. I don't wanna see ya leave until that plate's empty, understand? *(He turns away from Jean and faces forward towards his food. He pushes the beer away.)*

ROD. I don't need it. *(Bobby makes eye contact with Jean. Without saying anything, Bobby picks up the pint.)*

JEAN. I'll take it.

ROD. You don't drink anymore.

JEAN. I do during Christmas. I'll take it. *(Bobby carefully and quietly transfers the pint from Rod's table to Jean's. She pulls out her check pad. Rod has started eating.)*

BOBBY. *(To Jean.)* Usual?

JEAN. Extra shrimp.

BOBBY. *(To her pad as she writes like servers do.)* Ex..tra...shrimp. Anything else, Jean?

JEAN. That's all. *(Bobby begins to turn around. Jean stops her.)* Bobby? *(Bobby turns back to the table. Jean leans in for a private word.)* Keep an eye on him. I've seen him pass out in his dinner too many times to count. *(Bobby nods and exits. Rod eats drunkenly. Jean sits in silence. She breaks the silence timidly and gently.)* Got a letter in the mail today.

ROD. No one sends me letters anymore.

JEAN. Wasn't really a letter. More of a pamphlet. Big font that said "Do You Believe?" with a picture of Jesus on it. Made me think.

ROD. God don't care about us.

JEAN. Don't say that.

ROD. Not about you, not about me.

JEAN. Oh shut up.

ROD. He doesn't exist.

JEAN. You don't believe that. *(Beat.)* I wouldn't still be here if there wasn't a God.

ROD. Yeah, you're *still* here.

JEAN. Eat your food.

ROD. Still comin' to the Chinese Palace.

JEAN. *Eat,* Rod.

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ROD. Still orderin' the *same* thing.

JEAN. Cut it out!

ROD. Why're you stickin' around?

JEAN. I have nowhere else to go, no one else to see, and I like that.

ROD. You don't like that, you love people.

JEAN. I used to.

ROD. You've always liked people. You're the same.

JEAN. (*Explosive.*) I AM NOT! (*Long quiet beat.*) ...you don't know me anymore...

ROD. Jean.

JEAN. (*Quietly and painfully.*) You *don't*...know me anymore.

ROD. I still love you.

JEAN. I know.

ROD. Do you still love me? (*She doesn't respond, just stares.*) Do you still love Amber? (*This question stops her dead in her tracks.*)

JEAN. Stop.

ROD. She asked me to ask you.

JEAN. What?! (*Rod looks around to make sure Bobby isn't near because he didn't finish his dinner. He stands up and puts on his coat which is camouflage with hints of neon orange. He puts on his beanie. He reaches into his pocket and digs out a bunch of crushed various dollar bills and throws them on the table among the food and empty beer pints. He turns to Jean. She looks at him almost too scared to ask.*) You talked to her?

ROD. Gotta get home. It's snowin.'

JEAN. When?

ROD. Last week.

JEAN. And?

ROD. She's comin' home. (*Jean's face changes. Almost into a light panic. Her eyes fall to the table. She lifts the beer and starts drinking it a little too fast as it spills down her chin. She stops and burps. She wipes her mouth. She looks up at him.*) You are different. (*He exits into the snow. Jean sits there for a moment staring at nothing in particular. Lights down, but we should still see the windows with the snow falling perfectly for just a moment like in the winter when the lights are off inside the house, but the snow still makes it feel light outside.*)

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SCENE THREE

The side of Wyoming State Highway 530. It's snowing still. We hear a car decelerating and coming to a stop. This scene is lit by the headlights of the car. A door opens and closes. AMBER comes into the light from the headlights. She stares out into the audience. Another car door opening and closing. CASEY stands next to her. They're shivering intensely.

CASEY. Cold.

AMBER. Yeah.

CASEY. I don't remember it being this cold in Green River.

AMBER. I don't remember it looking so dark down there.

CASEY. Gotta be like fifteen degrees out.

AMBER. Never used to be that dark.

CASEY. *(Pulling out his phone.)* I was wrong, it's fourteen degrees.

AMBER. Jesus. *(He puts away his phone and they stare out again. Moments pass by in silence.)*

CASEY. This is a bad idea.

AMBER. Cold feet?

CASEY. Cold everything. *(She bends over and pulls some sage from a bush nearby. She stands and crushes it in her gloves. She holds it out to him.)* Sage?

AMBER. Smell it.

CASEY. I know what it smells—

AMBER. Just do it. *(He steps forward and takes her hands in his. He leans down and inhales the sage. He exhales. They make eye contact.)* It's gonna be okay.

CASEY. Too many people have said that for me to believe it anymore.

AMBER. Trust me.

CASEY. *(Beat.)* Should we go to Cream King when we get in? *(No response, beat.)* You okay?

AMBER. *(Exhaling deeply.)* How cold did you say it was out here?

CASEY. Fourteen degrees.

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AMBER. Huh.

CASEY. What?

AMBER. I guess when you're a kid you don't notice how painful the cold can be. *(Casey turns and looks at her without saying anything.)*

CASEY. *(Turning back to the audience.)* Yeah. Weird.

AMBER. Strange. *(Gust of wind. Lights down.)*

SCENE FOUR

The absolutely hammered walk home. Rod stumbles through the snow. There are dim Christmas lights somewhere in the distance. A car passes. The wind howls. Music plays in Rod's head. Something like "Red Right Hand" by Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds.[†] He stops. He bends down and picks up a cigarette butt. He examines it and dusts the snow off from it. He puts it in his mouth and pulls out a lighter. He struggles as the used cigarette won't light. Eventually, he throws it on the ground. He wears the crown of defeat as he looks up into the night sky. He looks down and sees something small in the snow. He bends down and picks it up. He stands and holds the little baggie up and stares at it. He slips it into his jacket pocket. After a solid moment:

ROD. *(Quietly.)*beautiful night. *(Gust of wind. Lights down.)*

SCENE FIVE

Lights up on the Chinese Palace. Jean is sipping her soup. On the table is a bottle of soy sauce and ketchup. Paper placemats with the Chinese zodiac on them. She stares into space thinking of nothing at all. Her back is to the door. Moments pass. She takes a bite of food. Suddenly, the door opens and jingles. Jean doesn't turn around. Casey and Amber enter and dust the snow off from their jackets. As they take off their coats, they make

[†] See copyright note on page 2.

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their way to the booth directly behind Jean. They sit down. Jean uninterested, but sort of interested, listens to their conversation casually.

AMBER. This place hasn't changed.

CASEY. Yeah.

AMBER. Same beer signs. Same placemats.

CASEY. Yeah it's the same.

AMBER. *(Looking at the menu.)* What're you gonna get?

CASEY. I don't know.

AMBER. I know *exactly* what I'm going to get.

CASEY. *(Quietly.)* Hey...is that guy looking at us?

AMBER. What guy?

CASEY. *(Pointing subtly into the audience.)* Him.

AMBER. *(Looking into the audience.)* He's watching the game.

CASEY. Hmm.

AMBER. Would you loosen up?

CASEY. I'm uncomfortable.

AMBER. We don't know anyone here.

CASEY. You don't know that! We should've gone to Cream King!

AMBER. Jesus, lower your voice. *(Beat.)* Do you need a drink?

CASEY. Can we just go back to the motel and order a pizza?

AMBER. No, I want an egg roll.

CASEY. *(He sighs and looks down at his placemat.)* What's your zodiac sign?

AMBER. Leo.

CASEY. *(Pointing to the placemat.)* Your Chinese zodiac.

AMBER. Tiger. 1986. *(Jean's eyes dart up. She knows this person. She listens even closer.)*

CASEY. I'm the *snake*.

AMBER. Scary. I gotta pee. Be right back. *(Amber gets up and exits. Casey sits there tapping his hands on the table. He notices Jean. He leans in.)*

CASEY. Excuse me? *(No response.)* Excuse me, Miss?

JEAN. *(Without turning around.)* ...yes?

CASEY. Is there a vape shop anywhere in town? [OBJ]

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JEAN. I wouldn't know.

CASEY. A smoke shop?

JEAN. I don't smoke.

CASEY. But do you know of one?

JEAN. Try the gas station.

CASEY. *(Almost offended at her response.)* They don't have vape juice.

JEAN. I don't know what to tell you.

CASEY. Sheesh. You could at least turn around look at me.

JEAN. Sorry. *(Casey leans back in his seat. Amber reenters. She sits. She doesn't notice Jean.)*

AMBER. Decide?

CASEY. I'm out of vape juice.

AMBER. There's probably a vape shop in town, it's *Wyoming*.

CASEY. What's that supposed to mean? *(She shrugs and looks at her menu. Casey stares at the back of Jean's head and she can feel it.)*

AMBER. You want soup?

CASEY. *(With his full attention on Jean.)* Yeah.

AMBER. What kind?

CASEY. *(Coming back to Amber.)* Sorry, what?

AMBER. Which one do you want?

CASEY. Of what?

AMBER. Have you been listening to anything I've said?

CASEY. I'm distracted. Sorry. You have my full attention. Amber wants an egg roll.

AMBER. Whatever, I'm getting the Chinese Spaghetti. *(“Amber wants an egg roll” has hit Jean and it should be visible. A pain that has long haunted her. She turns her head to look behind her but catches herself and stops. Bobby Approaches and stops by Jean's table with two waters in her hands.)*

BOBBY. Still doin' good, Jean? *(“Still doin' good, Jean?” hits Amber immediately. She stops looking at her menu. Amber and Jean are back-to-back in opposite booths. As if they are mirroring each other, their body language shifts with the tension.)* Jean? *(No response.)* Need a box? *(No response.)* Ready for the check? *(Jean nods very quietly trying to make as little noise as possible. Bobby gives her a look of confusion. Amber is*

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trying to listen in.) Be right back with that. (She moves to the next table and sets water down in front of Amber and Casey. She takes out her serving pad.) How you two doin?’ Can I get some drinks started for ya?

CASEY. I’ll take whatever IPA is on tap.

AMBER. Riesling?

BOBBY. Chardonnay okay?

AMBER. *(Disappointed.)* Sure.

BOBBY. *(To Casey.)* Can I take a peek at your ID? *(Jean takes her opportunity. She hurriedly searches through her purse with urgency. She finds money, counts it, and then throws it on the table. Bobby takes his ID. She examines it. Jean takes her scarf and wraps it around her head so it covers her mouth and the majority of her face. Amber holds her ID out to Bobby. She gives Casey’s back to him.)* Thank you.

(She takes Amber’s ID. Jean gets her jacket on and runs for the front door. Casey sees this and stares at her as she bolts. Bobby looks at the ID for longer than usual.)

AMBER. Is there a problem?

BOBBY. Umm... *(She turns around and sees an empty table as Jean has fled. She turns back to Amber handing her the ID.)* No. No problem at all. Amber, right? And Casey?

AMBER. Yeah?

BOBBY. *(With an air of anger.)* Sorry...I knew I recognized you two. We went ta Elmore together. I was just a few years ahead of ya.

CASEY. What’s your name?

BOBBY. Bobby. *(Beat.)* Hines. Bobby Hines?

CASEY. Sorry, it’s not ringing a bell.

BOBBY. Don’t be sorry. Why should *you* remember *me*? It was like twenty-six years/ ago.

CASEY. Hey, Bonnie—

AMBER. It’s *Bobby*.

CASEY. Betty, sorry, but hey, at the table right there. Who was that?

BOBBY. Here?

CASEY. Yeah, who is she?

BOBBY. Just a regular.

CASEY. But *who* is she?

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BOBBY. (*Firm and sharp.*) A regular.

CASEY. You can't tell me her name?

BOBBY. (*She says this intently and with eye contact.*) I don't give out names. (*To the point, not overly friendly anymore.*) Dinner?

AMBER. (*Feeling uncomfortably threatened.*) The Chinese Spaghetti...please...

BOBBY. (*To Casey, rudely.*) What do ya want?

CASEY. (*Sharp.*) Nothing. Thanks.

BOBBY. (*Taking their menus semi-passive aggressively.*) Yeah. (*Bobby exits to the kitchen.*)

AMBER. Was that weird?

CASEY. She recognized us.

AMBER. You said her name wrong. *Twice.*

CASEY. Everyone is looking at us.

AMBER. No, they aren't, calm down.

CASEY. They know who we are.

AMBER. *Casey. Chill.* It's been nearly thirty years. No one is looking at us and you're driving me nuts.

CASEY. You don't feel uneasy?

AMBER. Should I? Is that how you want me to feel when we come here?

CASEY. I swear I knew that woman sitting behind you.

AMBER. (*Brushing him off.*) Doubt it.

CASEY. She wouldn't look at me when I was talking to her.

AMBER. She probably wasn't feeling chatty.

CASEY. You know who I think it was?

AMBER. (*Uneasy beat.*) It wasn't her.

CASEY. Waiter called her Jean. I saw your face when she said it. I know it crossed your mind. Had to have crossed your mind.

AMBER. Jean is a common name.

CASEY. If it *was* her—

AMBER. (*Sharp.*) It *wasn't*.

CASEY. How 'bout we pretend it *was* for just a second. (*Beat.*) What would you have said?

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AMBER. *(After a long tension filled moment, she shrugs.)* Hi, Mom.
(Lights down, but we should still see the windows with the snow falling...and then...total blackout.)

SCENE SIX

The next morning. Lights rise on a very closed Chinese Palace. No one is around. We can only hear the gentle hum of the beer cooler. Snow falls outside. We hear the subtle jingling of keys as the front door is unlocked. Bobby enters. She dusts the snow off her jacket. She flicks the overhead lights on with a switch on the wall. She hangs her jacket up on a hook near the front door. As she moves behind the bar and around the restaurant, she turns on the beer signs and ties her apron. Behind her, Rod enters and dusts the snow off his jacket. Hearing him, she whips around and looks at him. He smiles at her like a little kid asking to get ice cream.

BOBBY. We ain't open yet, Rod.

ROD. That's fine, just gonna take a seat at the bar.

BOBBY. It is ten-thirty in the mornin.'

ROD. Early bird gets the worm. And I wanted breakfast.

BOBBY. You're not feelin' like shit after all you drank last night?

ROD. *(Sitting down at the bar.)* Iron liver. *(She turns from him and fills a water glass and puts a menu down in front of him.)*

BOBBY. You never come in for breakfast.

ROD. Didn't have eggs at home.

BOBBY. No one comes in here for breakfast. Everything okay?

ROD. *(Beat.)* I like it here. No one cares when I'm here and you're nice to me. *(Silence. Bobby smiles as they share a tender moment together.)*

BOBBY. Orange juice?

ROD. Irish Death?

BOBBY. Come on, Rod. That can't be your breakfast.

ROD. Why not?

BOBBY. The day ain't even started and ya wanna get drunk?

ROD. I got nothin' else to do and I'm not payin' for it.

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BOBBY. Who's payin?'

ROD. Disability.

BOBBY. How the *hell* did *you* get disability?

ROD. I got high blood pressure.

BOBBY. That's all it takes??

ROD. *(He says this with the weight of the world.)* I mean...hasn't my entire *existence* been disabled? *(She stares at him as sympathy floods her veins.)*

BOBBY. ...I wanted ta tell you just so you're prepared...but, uh...you're not gonna believe this, but Amber came in.

ROD. *(Completely unsurprised.)* That's nice.

BOBBY. *(Stunned.)* That doesn't—You're not?...

ROD. I knew she was comin.'

BOBBY. And ya don't care?

ROD. I care. Just tryin' not to hold my breath.

BOBBY. If my daughter sent me ta prison and she came back around...I think I'd be losin' it.

ROD. *(Quietly, but confidently.)* Get your life taken away and you've already seen the worst of it. Nothin' to be afraid of losin' anymore...and beer don't sound so bad for breakfast. *(She exhales in sad agreement. She turns around and pulls out a chilled pint and a shitty light beer from the beer cooler.)*

BOBBY. We're startin' light today, alright?

ROD. *(Cracking it and pouring.)* Cheers. *(The front door bursts open as Jean comes running in. She sees Rod.)*

JEAN. Hey! *(Rod turns around to see Jean as she stomps her way toward him.)*

ROD. Mornin.'

JEAN. I've been outside your apartment looking for you! Since when do you get up and come here this early?!

ROD. It was nice out. Thought I'd get a head start on the day.

JEAN. Why didn't you tell me she was going to be here last night?

ROD. Who?

JEAN. *Who.* Amber!

ROD. I did tell you.

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JEAN. You said she was coming home! You didn't say it was gonna be *minutes* after you said that!

ROD. Bobby said she was here.

BOBBY. Yeah, she was here.

JEAN. I know she was here! That's why I left!

ROD. Why?

JEAN. What was I gonna do? Turn around and talk to her?!

ROD. I would've.

JEAN. I have *nothing* to say to her. (*Silence. The atmosphere is cold and dead.*) Stop looking at me like that.

ROD. (*Turning away from her.*) Sorry.

JEAN. And you're drinking?

ROD. (*Taking a sip.*) Yep. (*Jean turns to Bobby who is shamefully trying to not make eye contact.*)

JEAN. You might as well pour me one too. (*Jean sits down next to Rod. Bobby puts a chilled pint in front of her. She exits to the kitchen. They sit there for a moment. Jean cracks her beer and pours.*) I don't know why I ran.

ROD. You're always runnin.'

JEAN. I know.

ROD. Runnin' from me. (*Beat.*) Runnin' from everything. (*Beat.*) You could just talk to her.

JEAN. No.

ROD. Why not?

JEAN. I have nothing to say.

ROD. Wish you'd say *some*thin.'

JEAN. Don't hold your breath.

ROD. You better get outta here then.

JEAN. (*With a beer foam mustache.*) What?

ROD. She's meetin' me for breakfast.

JEAN. Here?!

ROD. I'm here, aren't I?

JEAN. (*Putting her beanie on as panic sets in.*) Oh Jesus. Oh SHIT! I have to get out of here.

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ROD. Don't panic, you have time to run away again. *(Jean whips her eyes to him fiercely.)*

JEAN. Did she say when she was coming? *(Rod takes out his flip phone. Yes, a flip phone. He looks through his messages briefly.)*

ROD. She said she'll be here in half an hour.

JEAN. *(With relief.)* Oh christ. Thank god.

ROD. Oh. That was forty minutes ago.

JEAN. *What?!*

ROD. Stop panicking.

JEAN. Shut up, Rod! *(We hear a tiny ding or some kind of ringtone. Rod looks at his phone.)*

ROD. That's her. She said she just pulled up.

JEAN. Fuck! *(Bobby enters from the kitchen as Jean starts looking desperately for a place to hide. She ducks under the bar and curls into a ball next to the beer cooler.)*

BOBBY. Ya can't be behind the bar, Jean.

JEAN. SHHHH!! *(A jingle from the door. Amber enters quietly and stops where she is at the entrance. Rod turns around. Bobby looks at Amber. Jean holds her breath. Rod and Amber make intense eye contact. It's been years and years and years. Complete unnerving silence, until...)*

AMBER. *(Like stepping back into her ten-year-old shoes.)* Hi, Daddy. *(Rod doesn't say anything. He takes a careful step forward. And then another. Amber does the same. The space between them gets smaller as Rod reaches for her. They embrace. Rod pulls away. He looks at her with tears in his eyes.)*

ROD. You went and grew up.

AMBER. Couldn't help it. *(Rod doesn't respond. He just stares at her.)* Dad?

ROD. Just let me look at you for a second. *(He takes her head in his hands and their foreheads connect. Beat. They pull away.)* Hungry?

AMBER. Starving.

ROD. *(Turning to Bobby.)* We'll grab a table. *(Back to Amber.)* Lots to catch up on.

AMBER. *(Inquisitive, but careful.)* Is...? Is Mom coming?

ROD. Uhhh...

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AMBER. She's not.

ROD. Well...your Mother is...she don't go out much anymore.

AMBER. Oh.

ROD. But that's okay. It'll just be you and me. Daddy daughter date. *(Rod turns around and walks over to the bar. Bobby is still standing above a huddled Jean.)* Can we get a round of mimosas, Bobby? *(Amber takes off her jacket and sits down in a booth. Rod settles in. They quietly talk as the moment is now between Jean and Bobby. Bobby quickly turns on the radio. Typical country music you'd hear on a Wyoming radio station. Bobby ducks down to Jean's level. Jean has her hands over her mouth and nose as her breathing gets heavier and rapid. We can see everyone onstage, but at this moment, we only hear Jean and Bobby with Rod and Amber continuing on in the background.)*

BOBBY. *(A loud whisper.)* Jean? *(No response.)* Ya gotta say somethin.'

JEAN. *(A loud whisper through labored breaths.)* I'm...having...a panic...attack.

BOBBY. What do ya want me ta do?

JEAN. Get...me...out...of here. *(Bobby looks at Jean and then over the bar just a little to see if Amber or Rod are looking. She ducks back down.)*

BOBBY. I'm gonna get them some mimosas and I'll be right back. Hold tight.

JEAN. *What?!*

BOBBY. Just stay right here, I'll be quick. *(As Bobby starts preparing a pitcher and a bottle of champagne, the attention of the scene moves back to Amber and Rod at their table. We can now hear them talking as Bobby and Jean are quiet.)*

AMBER. So...

ROD. Wow.

AMBER. What?

ROD. Look at you. You're just... *(Beat.)* Where did the time go? *(The time. Amber knows where it went. Her eyes sink to the table in shame.)* [OB]

AMBER. I wish someone would write a book...or a step by step "how to" on this kinda thing. I don't know what to say. I'm sorry, Dad.

ROD. How long has it been?

AMBER. Since what?

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ROD. When was the last time I saw you?

AMBER. It was... (*Painful beat.*) 1996 if you want to be *exact*.
(*Extremely painful beat.*) '96.

ROD. It was hot that summer. (*Beat.*) What's got you comin' around Green River?

AMBER. My partner has a job interview in the next town over...and I wanted to see you and Mom. (*Bobby interrupts by stopping by their table with a small pitcher of orange juice and an open bottle of very cheap champagne. The kind that gives you awful headaches.*)

BOBBY. Hey you two, long time no see. Couple a MoMo's. Some glasses.

AMBER. MoMo's?

BOBBY. Mimosas.

ROD. Champagne and OJ?

AMBER. It's a little early for me, I'm okay. Thank you.

BOBBY. Be right back. (*Bobby leaves taking Amber's glass with her.*)

ROD. So, you're datin'?

AMBER. I wouldn't say *dating*. We've been together a long time.

ROD. And he's lookin' for a job near Green River? What's he wanna do, make bakin' soda?‡

AMBER. Well, we'd be living in Rock Springs, but he's from here too.

ROD. I know him?

AMBER. (*She knows he knows him, but he doesn't.*) We both went to Elmore.

ROD. He got a name?

AMBER. Casey.

ROD. Glad to hear you're happy. You're happy, aren't ya?

AMBER. I am. I'm really happy. (*Beat.*) Are you? (*Before an answer can be given, the attention shifts to Bobby comforting Jean behind the bar. Jean is breathing heavily, but trying to muffle the sound with her hand.*)

BOBBY. Jean? Ya gotta work with me here. Look at me. Jean? (*Jean makes eye contact. She tries to control her breathing.*) This is the plan. I'm

‡ Green River is located in Sweetwater County which is known as the "Trona Capital of the World." Trona is a natural-occurring raw material used in manufacturing chemicals such as sodium bicarbonate, more commonly known as baking soda.

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gonna walk back over there ta take their order. I'll stand in front of Amber, alright? I'll stand in front of her and ya can slip out, but be quiet, okay?

(She sees Jean's fear and pain.) I'm so sorry this is happenin' ta you.

(Bobby stands and looks over to Amber and Rod. We can now hear them talking as the attention is on the entire space.)

ROD. I mean...I'm happy I'm seein' you.

AMBER. Even...even after /everything?

ROD. Even after everything.

AMBER. What about Mom?

ROD. Well...she's just.../she's—

BOBBY. Alright you two. We wanna get some breakfast started?

AMBER. You actually do breakfast here?

BOBBY. It ain't popular or nothin,' but we got it. *(Jean peeks over the bar. She moves to the edge of the bar entrance.)*

AMBER. What do you normally get?

ROD. I don't come in for breakfast really.

AMBER. *(To Bobby.)* Any recommendations?

BOBBY. I like the egg-in-a-hole.

AMBER. What's that?

BOBBY. Piece a toast with an egg in it. *(As this conversation continues, Jean rises slowly and extremely carefully. Bobby looks to see if Jean has made it out as Amber looks down at a menu.)*

AMBER. Do you have any scrambles? *(Jean moves from the bar as quietly and as fast as she can. As she tries to get to the front door, she runs into a chair knocking it and herself over. This stops everything. Amber looks behind Bobby. She sees Jean. Her menu falls from her hands. On the floor, Jean looks up.)* ...Mom? *(Jean stands and her breathing continues to get worse as she makes eye contact with Amber.)*

BOBBY. Shit.

AMBER. Mom, what're you— *(To Rod.)* Did you know— *(Amber begins to stand. Jean continues to back up until she's against the wall.)* Mom?

JEAN. *(Struggling to speak.)* I—I—I—I— *(Extreme.)* I CAN'T! *(Jean grabs the door and swings it open as she runs out. A very brief moment passes. We hear someone slip and fall on ice. Rod immediately stands up.)*

ROD. Goddammit, Jean.

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AMBER. Did you know she was here?! *(Rod ignores the question as he runs outside after her. Bobby and Amber stay there. They look at each other and then awkwardly look away. Rod bursts back into the restaurant.)*

ROD. Bobby, I need your help, get out here!

BOBBY. What happened??

ROD. She slipped and cracked her head open! Just get out here!

AMBER. Should I call an ambulance??

BOBBY. She wouldn't want that. *(Bobby exits outside with urgency. Amber stays where she is not knowing how she can be of help. Lights down.)*

SCENE SEVEN

Lights rise. Maybe thirty or so minutes after the excitement has died down. Amber is sitting at a table across from Jean who has her eyes closed. Rod sits at the bar sipping a beer not facing them. Bobby is wrapping Jean's head in gauze. A lot of gauze. There's blood all down one side of Jean's face. Preferably the side that faces the audience when the lights come up. It's deathly quiet.

AMBER. *(Breaking the silence quietly.)* You need to go to the hospital.

JEAN. *(Gently.)* I'm fine.

AMBER. There's blood coming out of your head.

JEAN. So?

AMBER. This is serious.

JEAN. I can't afford the hospital.

AMBER. Do you not have insurance?

JEAN. No.

AMBER. Why don't you have health insurance? Where do you work?

JEAN. Telford Dental.

AMBER. And they don't give you insurance??

JEAN. Never wanted it, don't need it. Was hoping if something bad happened I'd just die.

AMBER. Mom, that's awful.

JEAN. Is it?

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AMBER. *(Standing frustratedly.)* Stop contradicting me! *(Like a Mother bear, Bobby whips her attention to Amber.)*

BOBBY. Hey! Don't yell at your Mom! She's been havin' ta contradict everything you've ever said just ta convince people that she was a good Mom! Ya don't need ta be tellin' her how ta live her life when ya took hers away from her! So sit your pretty little ass down and drink some water!

(Amber and Bobby stare at each other. Amber slowly slips back down into her seat. Bobby continues wrapping Jean's head. We should see a splotch of blood under the gauze getting slightly bigger where she hit her head.)

AMBER. *(Gently.)* Mom? *(Jean doesn't respond. Amber's head falls. She feels for something in her jacket pocket. She pulls out a small bundle of sage leaves and puts them on the table in front of Jean.)* I brought you something. *(Jean opens her blood-soaked eye. She looks down at the sage. She looks at Amber.)*

JEAN. Okay?

AMBER. It's sage.

JEAN. I can see that.

AMBER. Remember? When we would go sage hunting?

JEAN. Barely.

AMBER. A bad day at school always meant sage hunting. You don't remember that? You don't remember crushing it and making me smell it? *(Jean shrugs.)* "A whiff of this and your worries are a world away." You don't remember saying that?

JEAN. I guess not.

AMBER. *(Ever so slightly sharp.)* Don't be cruel.

JEAN. *(Ferociously.)* You fucking scare me.

ROD. *(Turning around.)* Jean...

JEAN. I mean it. You're not my little girl.

ROD. Jean!

JEAN. If I could do it all over again, I wouldn't want to be your Mother.

ROD. Jesus Christ! Knock it off!

JEAN. *(Beat.)* I'm just being honest.

AMBER. That's...foul. That was really fucking foul and *mean* what you just said.

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JEAN. It's the truth...but what's the use in having a conversation about truth with *you*?

ROD. That's enough! (*Long silent beat.*) That's enough. (*To Amber and Bobby.*)

Why don't you two give me a minute. (*Amber gets up and walks to the bar. Bobby follows. Rod sits down across from Jean.*) You know it don't gotta be like this.

JEAN. Why is everyone just talking at me? You sound like Skalicky.[§]

ROD. (*Quick burst of anger.*) Don't! — (*A beat to collect himself.*) Don't say that.

JEAN. Didn't think you still had all that anger.

ROD. I'm not mad, just don't say that.

JEAN. Why am I being interrogated?

ROD. You're not!

JEAN. Sure feels like it.

ROD. No one wants you to feel that way. (*Beat.*) 'Specially me.

JEAN. How is it you want me to feel? My head's split open. I have blood ruining my favorite sweater and I don't even care because I hope this head wound takes me out.

ROD. Jean—

JEAN. Don't. Don't tell me I shouldn't say that. Don't tell me what I need. Don't tell me that I should just talk to her. Stop telling me things I should and shouldn't do. You exhaust me. (*The attention of the scene shifts to Amber and Bobby at the bar. Bobby is polishing glassware from a blue glass rack trying not to make too much eye contact with Amber.*)

AMBER. That was her last night, wasn't it?

BOBBY. (*Looking up briefly.*) Who?

AMBER. My mom. She was sitting behind me, wasn't she?

BOBBY. Does it matter?

AMBER. Well, if it was a different woman named Jean who comes here, which I highly doubt, I wouldn't care, but if it *was* her...she ran away from me.

BOBBY. Twice. (*Beat.*) Wouldn't ya have done the same?

[§] Pronounced [skaa lih skee].

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AMBER. Never. I wouldn't run. *(Bobby stops polishing and stares at her. She steps forward and leans toward Amber as if she's going to tell her a secret.)*

BOBBY. You and your Mom are very different. I'd be scared ta be your Mom too. I don't mean that ta be rude. *(Bobby turns from Amber and starts putting glasses away.)*

AMBER. How's your Mother? *(Bobby stops dead in her tracks. She turns.)* Sherry, right? Sherry Hines? *(Beat, genuine.)* I apologize for how my partner spoke to you last night. It was completely unacceptable. I knew who you were the moment you told me you went to Elmore. I remembered you from the news. You were a kid /like me.

BOBBY. *(Sharp and quick.)* Twelve.

AMBER. What?

BOBBY. I was twelve. *(Amber doesn't know what to say.)* You said partner? *(Amber swallows. Her mouth is becoming desert dry. She continues to say nothing.)*

I had a feelin.' Wasn't for sure, but...goddamn. *Him?*

AMBER. Life is kinda funny like that, right?

BOBBY. *(Like a razor-sharp blade.)* No. It's not funny. You're perfect for each other. *(The attention of the scene shifts back to Rod and Jean.)*

ROD. I know I'm a lot.

JEAN. You are.

ROD. I just care is /all.

JEAN. Then stop. Stop caring about me. We're divorced, you don't have to care about me anymore. We're done. *(Beat.)* Stop caring.

ROD. Someone's gotta care.

JEAN. No one cares about us. You even said so.

ROD. I said *God* didn't care about us. But who needs him /anyway?

JEAN. I did.

ROD. *(Beat.)* You didn't need me?

JEAN. I always needed you.

ROD. But you don't anymore?

JEAN. We just— *(Jean begins to cry. Snot drips down her bloody nose and mouth.)*

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We just fell apart. You know? We could just never get back to that place where we had so much to look forward to. It's not our fault. (*Rod pulls a napkin from the holder and leans in. He gets her visual approval and then wipes the snot running down her chin.*) I mean...maybe it was our fault. Maybe we didn't love her enough.

ROD. That's not /true.

JEAN. Maybe it *is* my fault. I certainly don't love her anymore.

ROD. You can't be sayin' things like that.

JEAN. Why can't I? Is it so wrong of me to feel this way? Is it a crime?

ROD. No, it's—

JEAN. Is everything I *do* a crime? (*This is just like that moment from the second scene. Remember when I said they've done this before?*) Because all I did was love her. All I did was shower her in affection and kisses and hugs and beach days at the river and memories that just seem dead now. I used to wake up every morning and look forward to picking up my baby so I could just hold her against my chest and listen to her breathe. I gave and gave and gave and nothing else and what happened, Rod? What happened to *us*? Where'd we go, huh? You remember. It's why you're always drinking, is it not? I know it was rough for you in there. It was rough for me too, but if I learned anything from going to hell and crawling my way back to this shit sack town, it's that I would rather die than repeat the last twenty-six years. (*Beat.*) So please, don't make me feel like my feelings are a crime. (*We stay here for just a moment in silence and then the attention of the scene shifts back to Amber and Bobby.*)

AMBER. *Perfect* for each other?

BOBBY. Did I stutter?

AMBER. Wow. You know, Bobby, you're kind of a bitch.

BOBBY. This ain't me bein' a bitch, ya wanna see *that* we can go out ta the parkin' lot, *little girl*. Looks like you just got those nails done and we ain't got no good nail salons around here so don't come walkin' in my house callin' me a bitch.

AMBER. Your house? Bobby's Chinese Palace? This hole of a restaurant that serves some bullshit called *Chinese Spaghetti*? This—this is *your* house?

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BOBBY. Talkin' shit on Chinese Spaghetti? Thought it was your favorite. *(No response.)* Always been easy for kids ta eat because it's a plate a *bullshit*. Ain't Chinese and it ain't Italian, but kids won't know a lie when they see one, right? Tell 'em it's a real thing and they'll believe ya. Kids'll eat anything if ya make 'em think it's special. Kids'll *do* anything if ya make 'em believe a *bullshit* lie like *Chinese Spaghetti*. *(Beat.)* Never even had ta be force fed, did ya? You ate every last goddamn bite. Can probably still taste it. *(Turning away from Amber.)* Jean's never been able ta get that taste out her mouth and I don't think she ever will.

AMBER. What is your problem with me?

BOBBY. I don't have a problem with you. Yeah, maybe I think it's a little fucked up that you're comin' in here all smiles and actin' like everyone moved on like /you did.

AMBER. I don't think everyone moved on, and I don't expect that.

BOBBY. What *did* you expect? *(Beat.)* Might get what you're lookin' for from Rod, but your *Mom*? Don't hold your breath. *(As Bobby turns around to keep putting away glasses, Amber stares at her. The little girl within Amber that was taught how to hurt people from a very young age becomes present on her face. She tries to be as mean as possible.)*

AMBER. So how long have you worked in this dump?

BOBBY. *(Completely unaffected with a slight grin.)* Twenty-two years. *(Kinda like "right back at cha.")* Where's your *boyfriend*?

AMBER. At a very important job interview.

BOBBY. I bet. Future starter, huh?

AMBER. *(Quiet, but explosive.)* Why're you— *(Amber stops and breathes. She collects herself and returns to who she is as an adult.)* It's hard for me to communicate when I'm met with combative energy. I'm sorry.

BOBBY. You're the one who called me a bitch.

AMBER. Sorry. I didn't mean it.

BOBBY. I really don't have a problem with you. *Emphasis on you.* *(Immediately, Amber's phone starts ringing.)*

AMBER. *(Answering and to the phone.)* Hey, baby...talking to Bobby...our server from last night...doesn't matter, how was the interview?...Yeah, yeah I can. *(Looking over to Jean and Rod.)* Okay, I'll

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be right there...love you too. (*Amber hangs up and puts her phone in her pocket. Her and Bobby make eye contact.*)

BOBBY. Love...strong word.

AMBER. I need to go.

BOBBY. Don't forget your jacket.

AMBER. (*Beat.*) When I get back, I'm taking her to the hospital.

BOBBY. Good luck. (*Amber turns from Bobby and walks over to the booth where Jean and Rod are. They stop talking and look at her.*)

AMBER. I gotta pick up Casey.

ROD. Did he get the job?

AMBER. He just got done, Daddy. We'll find out later.

JEAN. "Daddy?" Yuck. (*Amber leans down and grabs her jacket.*)

AMBER. When I come back, I am taking you to the hospital. No exceptions.

JEAN. Guess I'll just have to die before you get back.

AMBER. (*Frustrated.*) Just!...stay here, alright? (*She turns and exits the restaurant. Bobby stays behind the bar. Jean and Rod sit in silence.*)

BOBBY. (*From the bar.*) Y'all need anything?

ROD. We're okay. (*Bobby exits to the kitchen. After a beat of silence:*)
I'm sorry for how today went.

JEAN. It's not even noon.

ROD. I'm sorry for how the last three decades went. (*Beat.*) A Mother's love ain't a crime. And I don't wanna make you feel like you're bad for feelin' one way over another.

JEAN. Thank you. (*Silence. Rod leans back and puts his hands in his jacket pockets. He feels the baggie from last night in there. He pulls it out onto the booth seat, but Jean can't see it.*)

ROD. Ya know, what if we— (*He stops. Jean looks up.*)

JEAN. What if *what*?

ROD. Nothin.' It's...nothin.'

JEAN. (*Suspicious.*) What is it?

ROD. I was just thinkin'...what if we just had a day together?

JEAN. A day? Like hangout?

ROD. I just wanna have a day with you. We can pretend we're married again—

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JEAN. Rod.

ROD. Okay, we don't gotta do that. But— *(Beat.)* Let me just take you out today to have some fun. Get your mind off Amber.

JEAN. I don't want to go drinking with you.

ROD. That's not—I wasn't invitin' you to drink with me. *(Rod puts the baggie on the table in front of her. He slides it to her. She looks down at it and then up at him.)*

JEAN. What's that?

ROD. You know.

JEAN. Where did you get that?

ROD. Let's just say I was in the right place at the /right time.

JEAN. *Where'd you get it?*

ROD. Does it matter?

JEAN. Yes it /matters.

ROD. Come on, I'm trying to do something nice for us.

JEAN. *Us?* *(Rod's face is painted in disappointment. Jean puts her hand over the baggie and slides it back to him.)* We can't. We're not teenagers anymore and that shit'll kill us.

ROD. Can't because we're too old? You act like you don't want to and I know you do.

JEAN. *(Beat.)* Maybe deep down I do.

ROD. Consider it a Christmas present. *(He pushes the baggie back across the table. Jean stares down at it. She looks back at him.)*

JEAN. *(Considering it...)* We haven't done it since before the girls were born.

ROD. We're not parents anymore. I mean we *are*, but we're not Mom and Dad anymore. Seems like you don't wanna be a Mom anyway.

JEAN. That's not—

ROD. I didn't mean that in a harsh way. I just mean that you and Amber...you know. *(After a moment, Jean slowly reaches out and grasps the baggie with her hand on the table. Rod places his hand on top of hers. He squeezes her hand lightly. This eye contact they make is extremely*

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intimate.) Let's pretend it's 1984 and we're back in Rock Springs** at Scouten's and I just had the bartender send over a cheap beer to the prettiest girl in the whole place and she sent it back because she thought I looked too much like a candyass cowboy and cheap beer tastes like piss. *(Jean, remembering their past, smiles through her pain.)*

JEAN. No candyass cowboy would be as bold as you were. *(They share a small laugh together.)*

ROD. I always wished I had a second chance to show you that I never forgot about us.

JEAN. I've never thought that. I think it was me who forgot us.

ROD. Then let's remember. Let's go back to us for just one whole day, or until you bleed out.

JEAN. *(Laughing gently.)* I don't think I'm that lucky.

ROD. I wanna forget the last twenty-six years with you because I love you and I will love you until my breathin' stops. Maybe this is wrong of me. It probably is, but isn't it okay for us to indulge in *somehin?* *(Beat.)* Isn't it okay for me to wanna spend a day with you and remember a time when the whole town didn't think us and twenty-seven other parents were rapists in the biggest child sex ring this place has ever seen? *(Beat.)* Jean? *(Jean's face should say it all. She stares at him for a good moment. And then...)*

JEAN. Okay. *(Abrupt blackout. Strong gust of wind.)*

END OF ACT ONE

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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** Rock Springs is a city 18.3 miles east of Green River. It is the largest and most populous city in Sweetwater County and the fifth most populous city in the state of Wyoming according to the 2020 Census.