

# **NEW YORK CITY 523**

**By  
JOSEPH GALLO**

## NEW YORK CITY 523

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### TIME

Not that long ago.

### PLACE

New York City

Athens County, Ohio

**NEW YORK CITY 523** includes 14 characters played by four actors; the distribution of parts is indicated by the groupings below.

### CHARACTERS

**JOY** - Early 20s, recent college grad. **CHLOE'S** daughter. A dancer.

**CHLOE** - 40-something, Ohio native.

**VOICE #1**

**TEACHER**

**THE GHOST OF MARTHA GRAHAM**

**ALLEN** - Early 30s, native New Yorker.

**VOICE #2**

**TV ANNOUNCER**

**VICKY PAGE**

**PIONEER**

**DJ'S VOICE**

**ROMAN** - Early 40s, European.

**BALLET TEACHER**

**VOICE #3**

**DETECTIVE**

**BORIS LERMONTOV**

**CHOREOGRAPHER'S VOICE**

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*New York City 523* was produced in a workshop production at the Writers Theatre of New Jersey in December 2019. The production was directed by John Pietrowski; Stage Manager, Danielle Constance; and featured the following cast:

Joy.....Annette Hammond

Chloe/Voice 1/Teacher

Ghost of Martha Graham.....Dena Tyler

Allen/Voice 2/TV Announcer

Vicky Page/Pioneer/DJ's Voice.....Andrew Baldwin

Roman/Ballet Teacher/Voice 3

Detective/Boris Lermontov

Choreographer's Voice.....Dan Domingues

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## PROLOGUE

*We hear a familiar ballet number on piano, mixed with a cityscape - traffic, voices, footsteps, etc. They fall into an uncertain rhythm. Lights rise, we see: JOY, her left hand on a ballet barre, her right hand covering her stomach; CHLOE, on a bench, wearing a purple shawl and red top, straining against her clothes like Martha Graham in Lamentation; ROMAN, under harsh lighting, seated behind a metal table; ALLEN, dressed in a vintage costume from the late 1800s; the same clothes he will wear throughout the play - top hat, red daffodil in his lapel, etc. In his bloody hand, he holds a cell phone.*

**JOY.** A scream.

**ROMAN.** A struggle.

**JOY.** A murder.

**JOY/ALLEN.** A scream.

**ROMAN.** A struggle.

**JOY.** A murder.

**JOY/ALLEN/CHLOE.** A scream.

**ROMAN.** A struggle.

**JOY.** A murder.

**JOY/ALLEN/CHLOE.** A scream.

**ROMAN.** A struggle.

**JOY.** A murder.

**ALL.** A scream.

A struggle.

A murder.

A scream.

A struggle.

A murder.

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A scream.  
A struggle.  
A murder.

**JOY.** *(Pause. The faint sound of police sirens starts to rise. To the AUDIENCE.)* New York City. *(Pause.)* I'm in this place where...everything stops. *(Pause.)* I'm on my way. *(Pause.)* I've been murdered. Right here on the Lower East Side. But if I can, I want to back up to the beginning...before everyone starts drawing conclusions. Fact: I came to New York City to make it as a dancer. I know when people talk, they'll say, "You know the reason she went there was to meet a man. She needed the attention." But that's not true...it's not...New York has plenty of eligible bachelors, boys I would never have met back in Ohio, but they were secondary. They were not the driving force. And that's the reality. I came here because I wanted to dance. I wanted to study at Martha Graham...work for good choreographers...build my resume. I wanted a big, established company behind my name. *(Pause.)* I wanted to be the white girl in Alvin Ailey.....okay...I guess I did want the attention. *(Pause.)* And now? *(Pause.)* My dream was coming to an end. *(Joy executes a port de bras, reveals an expanding pond of red blood across her stomach. The police sirens reach a deafening din. Blackout.)*

### **ACT ONE** **SCENE 1**

*A backyard in Southern Ohio. A banner unfurls on a nearby tree: Chloe's 16th Annual Fourth of July Corn Boil. Chloe stands at a green picnic table and peels corn. We hear the random sound of distant bottle rockets. Even further off - the faint strains of Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow." Joy enters, joins Chloe...begins to shuck.*

**CHLOE.** Are your hands clean?

**JOY.** Yes.

**CHLOE.** You have to have clean hands to shuck.

**JOY.** I know.

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**CHLOE.** My hands were wet and dirty...I dried them...now they're clean.  
This way I can grip the husks.

**JOY.** *(To herself.)* Grip the husks.

**CHLOE.** Are your hands clean...?

**JOY.** My hands are clean.

**CHLOE.** And don't be so delicate.

**JOY.** You know it's not like I haven't been there before.

**CHLOE.** That is so funny.

**JOY.** What?

**CHLOE.** My heart just stopped.

**JOY.** You can't picture me living in New York?

**CHLOE.** Where are you going to live in New York?

**JOY.** I'll stay in a hostel until I can find my own place.

**CHLOE.** You're going to stay in a hostel?

**JOY.** Yes.

**CHLOE.** And what do you know about staying in a hostel?

**JOY.** What do you know?

**CHLOE.** I know if a place is meant to be warm and welcoming you don't call it "hostel."

**JOY.** Mom...

**CHLOE.** ...maybe I am not making myself perfectly clear here, Joy..., I can't picture you living there, girl. Now I am not giving you, my blessing. How many times do we have to go over this? *(A pause. Joy grabs the peeled corn, starts breaking off the ends.)*

**CHLOE.** Could you not break off the ends?

**JOY.** What?

**CHLOE.** I don't like it when you break off the ends.

**JOY.** Why?

**CHLOE.** Because I like leaving a handle.

**JOY.** It's corn, Mom...you stick the little things in the end, and when you're done...you take them back out again.

**CHLOE.** Oh, my Jesus...Joy...

**JOY.** ...*what?*

**CHLOE.** I have always encouraged you to try new things...

**JOY.** *(Overlap.)* I'm going to New York.

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**CHLOE.** ...but I'm worried that something might happen to you!

**JOY.** Mom...I'm sorry...you gave me wings...you did your job. Now it's up to me to take the risk. *(Pause.)* Don't you trust me?

**CHLOE.** It's not about trust...it's about your well-being, Joy. New York is not for the timid. Now what if something were to happen to you...? You'll be all by yourself out there. We know Ohio is safe. We know it's safe. But New York...? *(Pause.)* I am not giving you, my blessing. *(She goes back to peeling corn.)*

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* A month later...? *(Pause.)* I was in New York.

**SCENE 2**

*The Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance - New York. We hear Aaron Copeland's Appalachian Spring on the piano. Joy stands at the barre, struggles through several ronde de jambe exercises.*

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* Back in Ohio I had seen the Martha Graham Company when I was still in junior high. They did Appalachian Spring. It was.....incredible. And so, when I got to New York I enrolled at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance. And my experience there was fucked up. I was miserable. It was crazy. Everyday girls crying on the stairway.

**BALLET TEACHER.** *(Enters, roams around the class.)* ...remember you want to be rotated from your hips as opposed to your knees. *Don't neglect first position.* It's the base from which we do everything. You always come back to first position.

**VOICE #1.** You're fat!

**VOICE #2.** You're ugly!

**VOICE #1.** You're terrible!

**VOICE #2.** You should stop dancing *right now.*

**BALLET TEACHER.** *(Stops in front of Joy, speaks to her directly...out of earshot of the other dancers.)* I know what you're thinking..., "Why am I doing this...? I'm a *modern dancer!* I don't want to be a *ballet dancer!*"



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Is that what you're thinking...? Because if all you care about is being in some YouTube video then maybe you're right...you don't need to be here. But remember...once your looks go...and they will go...it will mean the end of your career. You'll walk into some audition, and it will be clear that you have never invested any time in ballet class. And that day will be one of the most embarrassing of your life. Guaranteed. No one said this was going to be fun. It's not supposed to be fun. It's difficult, tedious work. It requires discipline. *(Pause.)* And don't grip the barre like it were your last sandwich. *(He turns away.)*

**VOICE #1.** You're a hayseed!

**VOICE #2.** You're not getting it!

**VOICE #1.** You're not strong enough!

**VOICE #2.** You should stop dancing *right now!*

**BALLET TEACHER.** And ladies...don't come to class unless you put on a little makeup...*please.* *(Joy stops dancing, gathers her things - exits. Blackout.)*

### SCENE 3

*The sound of a cityscape rises. We hear barking dogs, fragments of Spanish, muffled, hip-hop bass lines blasting through blown-out car speakers, etc. Lights rise on a large railroad apartment on the Lower East Side. Joy stands in the doorway. Allen, dressed in his vintage costume from the late 1800s, top hat, red daffodil in his lapel, etc. stands alongside her.*

**JOY.** I like this place...it's.....*interesting.*

**ALLEN.** Did you know that this was Emma Goldman's building?

**JOY.** Emma who?

**ALLEN.** Emma Goldman...?

**JOY.** Should I know her?

**ALLEN.** I think you should.

**JOY.** Is she a singer?

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**ALLEN.** No. She was an early feminist...anarchist...rebel woman. She lived here. This was her building.

**JOY.** Oh. *(Pause.)* I never heard of her.

**ALLEN.** She was kind of an important person.

**JOY.** I'll Google her as soon as I leave.

**ALLEN.** *(Laughs.)* Sounds good.

**JOY.** Thank you for the information.

**ALLEN.** Emma Goldman.

**JOY.** I know...she lives here...thank you.

**ALLEN.** Nonono...she doesn't live here anymore...she's dead...she's been dead for close to 85 years.

**JOY.** Oh, yeah. Okay. Uh-huh. That's a long time ago...

**ALLEN.** ...just some fun facts...I thought I'd...

**JOY.** ...I'll Google her as soon...

**ALLEN.** ...no. You don't have to do that...*at all*...I'm just...

**JOY.** ...nonono. I'm intrigued. I will...later.....after I leave.

**ALLEN.** Where do you live again?

**JOY.** In this hostel in Chelsea.

**ALLEN.** A hostel?

**JOY.** "Where there are no strangers...just friends you have not met, yet!"  
*(Pause.)* I share a room with eight other girls...one bathroom.

**ALLEN.** How long have you been there?

**JOY.** A couple of months.

**ALLEN.** A hostel is a place where you stay for a few nights...not a couple of months. It sounds like you're in foster care.

**JOY.** And I could take being in foster care. I could even take having a rat run across my bed on two consecutive nights. But what I can't take is when I come out of the shower, and I find another girl going through my bags. That I can't take. That's obnoxious. That says, "Time to go."

**ALLEN.** Do you know how you have to deal with people in this town?

**JOY.** How?

**ALLEN.** Everyone here is crazy until proven otherwise.

**JOY.** Why does everyone have to be crazy?

**ALLEN.** Because trying to maintain a life here can make you crazy...if it doesn't kill you.

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**JOY.** What does that make you?

**ALLEN.** *(Smiles.)* Crazy.

**JOY.** Is that why you're dressed like that?

**ALLEN.** I'm dressed like this because after you leave, I have to go to work.

**JOY.** And what is it that you do?

**ALLEN.** I'm a costumed interpreter.

**JOY.** A what?

**ALLEN.** I'm actually getting my master's at the New School. Social Studies. My thesis is on "Re-Imagining New York: Effects of the New Immigration." It's about the way people make his or her own way here...

**JOY.** ...it sounds interesting...

**ALLEN.** ...but I make ends meet...working for this company that does walking tours of Manhattan.

**JOY.** I thought maybe you were...*styling*.

**ALLEN.** No...no...the thing about being a guide is...*you walk*. You show a tour group around a neighborhood. You point out a building. They stare at it for maybe 30 seconds. Then they stare at you until you tell them to look at something else. The costume is something to help them keep focus. These are my 19th Century Lower East Side tenement clothes. Right now, I'm Harry Horowitz - Polish/Jew.

**JOY.** You go to work *in* costume?

**ALLEN.** I go to work in costume so that I'm not tempted to go out *after* work for drinks. *(Pause.)* The only problem is I almost always go out after work for drinks.

**JOY.** O-kay.

**ALLEN.** And what about you?

**JOY.** I'm a dancer. *(Pause.)* You're not going to ask me if I'm a stripper?

**ALLEN.** Are you?

**JOY.** No.

**ALLEN.** *(Pause.)* I didn't think you were.

**JOY.** Most men hear dancer and think either stripper or ballerina. It's like they can't even conceive that there could be something else like...*modern dancer*.

**ALLEN.** Are you working?

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**JOY.** I *was* studying at Martha Graham...full, full-time, but I recently left and now I'm finding myself as a dancer.

**ALLEN.** Do you have a boyfriend?

**JOY.** No.

**ALLEN.** I'm only asking, because I'm not renting this room out to two people. I'm renting it out to one person...

**JOY.** ...a roommate...

**ALLEN.** ...someone who can pay the rent *on-time*...every month...*a roommate*.

**JOY.** Do you have a girlfriend?

**ALLEN.** I did.....past tense.

**JOY.** Did she live here with you?

**ALLEN.** Yes.

**JOY.** And she moved out?

**ALLEN.** She moved back to Virginia.

**JOY.** What happened?

**ALLEN.** You mean *besides* her skipping out on the rent?

**JOY.** I'm sorry.

**ALLEN.** Don't be sorry. If you have questions...by all means...ask away. If I don't have an answer for you, I'll make up something entertaining.

**JOY.** I think I'm good.

**ALLEN.** Okay.....then...like I said the apartment is rent controlled you pay two-thirds of it plus we split the utilities.

**JOY.** *(Pause.)* Why do I pay two-thirds of the rent?

**ALLEN.** Because it's my apartment...*it's rent controlled*...and this is New York. Look, I'm not negotiating here. If you've been shopping around, you know that it's a great deal for the price. I'm being honest so that we don't have any problems later on. *(Pause.)* How do you think I can afford grad school?

**JOY.** I'm Joy by the way. *(She extends her hand.)*

**ALLEN.** *(Pause.)* Allen. *(They shake.)*

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**SCENE 4**

*STEPS on Broadway. A piano plays, a dance class. Joy stands at the barre, works through an exercise.*

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* Second position is my favorite of all the positions. In second position you're turned out again, but your heels are apart...you have a wider stance. There's room to move here. You can expand to your full extremities. Your hands...reaching out...every part of you...so that you are wide open. *(She continues to drill, begins crunching numbers in her head.)*

**VOICE #1/VOICE #2/VOICE #3.** *(The marching sound of a cash register mashes into the sound mix. The following is recited in staggered order, each Voice begins after the preceding one has read "\$90.")* \$18 a class X 5 classes a week = \$90. \$6 a visit for a gym membership X 3 times a week = \$18. \$20 for yoga on Saturdays. Equals \$128 a week X 4 weeks. Equals \$512 a month to train. \$18 a class X 5 classes a week = \$90 + \$6 a visit for a gym membership X 3 times a week = \$18 + \$20 for yoga on Saturdays = \$128 a week X 4 weeks = \$512 a month to train. *(Pause.)*

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* I needed a job. *(Blackout)*

**SCENE 5**

*A restaurant in lower Manhattan. Roman, well dressed, stands behind a table and takes out a pocketknife. He stabs open a cardboard box, begins removing rotten tomatoes. Joy stands, watches.*

**ROMAN.** And you *have* experience...?

**JOY.** Yes.

**ROMAN.** Waitressing?

**JOY.** Uh-huh.

**ROMAN.** You're not going to lie to me, are you?

**JOY.** What makes you think I'm going to lie?

**ROMAN.** Because everyone lies to get their first job in this town.

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**JOY.** Anything I need to learn I can learn.

**ROMAN.** Let me see your resume.

**JOY.** I don't have one.

**ROMAN.** You see that's bad.

**JOY.** I didn't think I needed a resume for a restaurant job.

**ROMAN.** You come in here for a job, you should have a piece of paper with your contact numbers.

**JOY.** Can't you give me a chance...?

**ROMAN.** *(He stabs a tomato with his knife, holds it up in the air.)* You see this?

**JOY.** Yes.

**ROMAN.** I've been getting a lot of rotten tomatoes lately. A rotten tomato is no good. It's garbage. This company we buy from...? They've been taking rotten tomatoes and hiding them in the middle of their boxes. They put the nice ones on the top, and then they put the rotten ones on the bottom where you can't see them. Now when the core of the box is made up of rotten tomatoes then the box is garbage. I have to say, I'm not going to pay for this...

**JOY.** ...I understand...I do...I completely understand your position. Rotten tomatoes...no good.

**ROMAN.** *(Pause.)* Are you an actress?

**JOY.** Dancer.

**ROMAN.** And is this job going to be your livelihood?

**JOY.** Yes.

**ROMAN.** Am I going to get phone calls five minutes before your shift..., "I have an audition...I have a call back...I have rehearsal..."

**JOY.** No...no phone calls...no.

**ROMAN.** Because your career outside this restaurant has nothing to do with my business.

**JOY.** I know.

**ROMAN.** I did not come over to this country to say..., Oh, my God! I'm going out of business!

**JOY.** Obviously.

**ROMAN.** This store is doing very, very well for me, and it's important that it *continues* to do very well.

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**JOY.** Of course.

**ROMAN.** That's why I want someone who is going to be there for me.

**JOY.** I'll do whatever you want me to do.

**ROMAN.** I want you to be there for me.

**JOY.** I'll be there for you.

**ROMAN.** *(Pause.)* Do you know why you're still standing here?

**JOY.** Why?

**ROMAN.** Because you're cute.

**JOY.** I'm cute?

**ROMAN.** You're cute. The only thing that transcends experience is cute. I can teach you to wait tables...but I can't teach you to be cute. *(Blackout)*

**SCENE 6**

*Lights rise abruptly on a room in the Hotel Empire - New York City. Chloe sits at a table, cuts a prescription pill in half with a sharp knife. A DETECTIVE stands across the room. We hear the evening news.*

**TV ANNOUNCER.** *(Voiceover)* ...and now for your news at 11. An aspiring Broadway dancer was found stabbed to death on the Lower East Side. Police said a 25-year-old waitress from Athens County, Ohio, was discovered on the floor of her bedroom, face down in a pool of blood. From the Lower East Side...an On-The-Scene News reporter is live with more.

**CHLOE.** The doctor said I should take one, half-pill at a time of pento barbital...*no alcohol.* *(She downs the pill with a glass of red wine.)*

**DETECTIVE.** Chloe...?

**CHLOE.** What is it that you want, Detective?

**DETECTIVE.** Can you tell me what happened between you and your daughter?

**CHLOE.** As you can see...I'm not really up for talking right now...

**DETECTIVE.** ...Chloe, I know this is hard for you, but I *need* to ask you some questions. *(Pause.)* I'm a father myself so I can't even imagine what you're going through.

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**CHLOE.** Go.

**DETECTIVE.** Can you tell me *why* you came to New York?

**CHLOE.** I received a phone call.

**DETECTIVE.** From Joy?

**CHLOE.** No.

**DETECTIVE.** From whom?

**CHLOE.** I am *not* a bad mother, Detective.

**DETECTIVE.** No one is saying that you are.

**CHLOE.** I know that I should have pressed the issue with her...

**DETECTIVE.** (*Overlap.*) What issue?

**CHLOE.** ...but I was just trying to hold onto a little blissful ignorance. *I can't let myself feel guilty.* I did what I thought I was supposed to do.

**DETECTIVE.** What *did* you do?

**JOY.** (*Appears in ghost light.*) I can't believe you came all the way up here.

**CHLOE.** (*To Joy.*) What kind of life were you leading, girl?

**JOY.** I'm not having this conversation right now.

**CHLOE.** Joy...

**JOY.** ...as you can see, I'm perfectly okay. (*Pause.*) *I'm perfectly okay.*  
(*The ghost light on Joy fades.*)

**DETECTIVE.** Chloe? (*Pause.*) Did I lose you?

**CHLOE.** (*To herself.*) My God.

**DETECTIVE.** Are you all right?

**CHLOE.** She was standing right there.

**DETECTIVE.** She was in this room?

**CHLOE.** What happens to me now?

**DETECTIVE.** (*Pause.*) Right now, I think it's best that you stay in New York until we know all the details.

**CHLOE.** Are you charging me with a crime...? (*Blackout*)

**SCENE 7**

*We hear a quick shout and then the loud, fast, atomic guitar sound of the Ramones' "Sheena Is a Punk Rocker." Lights up on a line dance - Joy, Allen, Roman, Chloe. Step, step, step, touch. Step, step, step, touch. To*



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*the rhythm. That is until the music's manic tempo gives way to choreographed chaos - jumping, head banging, twisting. Stylized. Energized. All elbow gestures and jabs. It's cathartic, joyous, and fun! A dance filled with all the energy and spirit of New York City. As the music fades, Roman and Chloe – exit. The East Village - 11:55 p.m. The roof of their apartment building. Joy and Allen lean on a ledge, sip wine. The sounds of New York are now but a heartbeat on the streets below.*

**JOY.** Where was CBGB's...?

**ALLEN.** Right... (*Locates and points.*) ...there.

**JOY.** (*To herself.*) In-credible.

**ALLEN.** Second and Bowery.

**JOY.** Do you want to know why I moved here?

**ALLEN.** Why?

**JOY.** Because of the Ramones.

**ALLEN.** I *love* the Ramones.

**JOY.** When I was back in Ohio...? I used to listen to the Ramones all the time. I'd jump in my car...drive around, and just listen to them all night long. It was empowering. It was like...*being in the know*. Their music would fill me with this great romanticized image of New York City that I would blow all out of proportion. Me walking down Broadway with my dance bag. (*Pause.*) The Ramones made me feel like I could move here.

**ALLEN.** And you did move here.

**JOY.** And I did move here.....*I did.* (*Pause.*) Could I have some more wine?

**ALLEN.** You could have some of mine. (*He goes to pour her some from his glass.*)

**JOY.** No...no...we have a whole bottle still.

**ALLEN.** Oh.

**JOY.** (*She bends down, picks up a bottle.*) I reject your wine!

**ALLEN.** You're so independent!

**JOY.** Yes, I am! (*She pours.*)

**ALLEN.** So.

**JOY.** Yeah.

**ALLEN.** Now is that a view or is that a view?

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**JOY.** That is a view.

**ALLEN.** Have you ever watched the lights go out on the Empire State Building?

**JOY.** You know...I did, actually...yeah...last weekend. I was in midtown. I was looking at it...and then I looked at it again, and... they were off...

**ALLEN.** ...but you didn't see it in the moment...

**JOY.** ...I didn't see it in the moment...

**ALLEN.** ...ah...

**JOY.** ...I always thought they were on all night long.

**ALLEN.** You didn't realize that they go dark at midnight?

**JOY.** I had no idea.

**ALLEN.** You have to look at the building at exactly 12, because that's when the lights shut off...you can't look away, not even for a second.

**JOY.** Or you might miss it...

**ALLEN.** ...you have to hang in there. It's like a big birthday candle. You're supposed to look at it and make a wish.

**JOY.** I was there, but...I missed it...

**ALLEN.** ...then tonight we're going to try it again. *But you can't look away.*

**JOY.** What time is it?

**ALLEN.** We have about three minutes to go.

**JOY.** Then I'm not going to look away.

**ALLEN.** You have to focus on the task at hand.

**JOY.** I am not looking away. *(They stare at the building.)*

**ALLEN.** *(Pause.)* Do you know the only time the lights aren't on at all is during migration season?

**JOY.** I thought you said...

**ALLEN.** ...except during migration season. The birds are drawn to the lights. And during the fall they fly in high numbers toward the building. They shut the lights so that they won't kill themselves.

**JOY.** They worry about the birds. *(Pause.)* This takes discipline.

**ALLEN.** It does take discipline.

**JOY.** Because...you know...it is...distracting.

**ALLEN.** It is distracting...yeah...everywhere...look.....New York is beautiful.

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**JOY.** Yeah. *(Pause.)* New York is beautiful. *(Pause.)* How much time is left?

**ALLEN.** I think we're about... *(Checks his pocket watch.)* ...a minute away? *(Pause.)* You focused?

**JOY.** I have my wish.

**ALLEN.** Don't even sneeze.

**JOY.** It is like a big old birthday candle, isn't it?

**ALLEN.** It is like a big old birthday candle.

**JOY.** I love the Empire State Building!

**ALLEN.** I've seen it I don't know how many times, and I never get tired of looking at it...it is *the* symbol of New York. *(Pause.)* We have less than a minute. *(Pause.)* Don't look away.

**JOY.** I am not looking away.....I have the discipline of a samurai. *(They smile. And then... The lights go out on the Empire State Building.)*

**ALLEN.** Did you see it?

**JOY.** *I saw the lights go out on the Empire State Building.*

**ALLEN.** That means your wish will come true. It's like blowing out the candles.

**JOY.** Are you going to tell me yours?

**ALLEN.** No.

**JOY.** *(Laughs.)* Okay.

**ALLEN.** You're not supposed to tell your wish.

**JOY.** Okay.

**ALLEN.** That's the rule.

**JOY.** And rules are rules, right?

**ALLEN.** Yes. *(Pause.)* What was your wish? *(Joy looks at Allen; then leans in and kisses him. She kisses him again. Slow fade to black.)*

**SCENE 8**

*STEPS on Broadway. The sound of a piano comes from down the hall. Outside a dance class, Joy sits on a bench, cools down, massages her ankle.*

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**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* Third position is not even used really. It's a beginner's position. It's what you teach little girls before you teach them fifth.

**TEACHER.** *(Passes by an unlit cigarette in her hand, nods at her injury.)*  
Everybody has different things.

**JOY.** It feels like I need to oil it...

**TEACHER.** ...Advil...glass of wine.

**JOY.** Thanks for class.

**TEACHER.** That's what I'm here for.

**JOY.** What's the secret?

**TEACHER.** *(Stops.)* Excuse me?

**JOY.** How do you do it?

**TEACHER.** Self-confidence.

**JOY.** Because I don't know why I'm staying here.

**TEACHER.** Then why don't you leave?

**JOY.** I wouldn't know where else to go.

**TEACHER.** Then let me put it to you another way..., Why do you want to dance?

**JOY.** *(Melodramatic.)* "Why do you live?"

**TEACHER.** *(Aside, to the Audience.)* The Red Shoes. *(The lights change dramatically; underscore, overly theatrical music.)*

**BORIS LERMONTOV.** *(From the film.)* "When we first met...you asked me a question to which I gave a stupid answer, you asked me whether I wanted to live, and I said, 'Yes.' Actually, Miss Page, I want more, much more. I want to create, to make something big out of something little - to make a great dancer out of you. But first, I must ask you the same question..., What do you want from life? To live?"

**VICKY PAGE.** *(From the film.)* "To dance."

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* The story of The Red Shoes revolves around a dancer torn between two men. One is a powerful, brilliant, ruthless, arrogant, and cruel impresario of his own ballet company...

**BORIS LERMONTOV.** *(To the Audience.)* ...she left out..., "attractive brute"...

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* ...who offers her the once in a lifetime chance to live out her artistic dreams.

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**VICKY PAGE.** *(To the Audience.)* The other is a vulnerable, proud, impetuous, passionate, and talented composer who offers her...love. She can't decide.

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* Growing up *The Red Shoes* just sort of popped up in our house. And since I was taking class virtually *every day*, I needed some inspiration. And I saw it...

**TEACHER.** 79.

**VICKY PAGE.** 86

**BORIS LERMONTOV.** 93.

**ALL.** 100 times!

**JOY.** And every time I did see it, I would go straight back into class, and I would achieve these moments of satisfying beauty. They were satisfying to me, and they looked beautiful in the mirror. *(She smiles at the memory.) I danced. (Pause.)* And that made me very happy. *(Pause.)* Martin Scorsese called *The Red Shoes* the greatest ballet film *ever*.

**BORIS LERMONTOV.** *(To the Audience, with reverence.)* *Martin Scorsese.*

**TEACHER.** *(The lights abruptly re-calibrate; the sound of piano resumes. We're back outside a dance class - STEPS on Broadway.)* The line is..., "Why do you *want* to live?"

**JOY.** What?

**TEACHER.** The Red Shoes?

**JOY.** Yes. *(Melodramatic.)* "Why do you dance? Why do you live?"

**TEACHER.** The question is..., "Why do you *want* to dance?" And the answer is..., "Why do you *want* to live?" Your memory of it is different than the actual line. It's less melodramatic than the way you're saying it...

**JOY.** ...oh.

**TEACHER.** The Red Shoes isn't camp, it's drama. It deals with artistic dedication even unto death.

**JOY.** Is *that* the secret?

**TEACHER.** The secret lies in the question..., *Why do you want to dance?*

**JOY.** I love the challenge?

**TEACHER.** You don't sound like you love the challenge.

**JOY.** I...

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**TEACHER.** ...because this is the challenge...right here...you're doing it right now.

**JOY.** I don't know what I'm doing.

**TEACHER.** Keep taking class. (*The Teacher exits. Joy ponders. Blackout.*)

**SCENE 9**

*The restaurant's office. A claustrophobic room. The door is closed. Low-key lighting. Very film 'noir. Joy sits at a desk and counts out her bank. She sips a shot of Jameson. Roman puffs on a cigarette, smoke fills the air.*

**ROMAN.** How bad did we do?

**JOY.** Are you waiting for me?

**ROMAN.** I can't leave until I count out your money.

**JOY.** Am I the last one?

**ROMAN.** As soon as you finish, I can lock the doors.

**JOY.** Can I ask you something?

**ROMAN.** Yes.

**JOY.** Is this typical for the new people?

**ROMAN.** Is what typical?

**JOY.** That they don't make enough money to pay their rent?

**ROMAN.** Yes...I mean.....it happens.

**JOY.** Do you know how much I made this week?

**ROMAN.** When you're new to a place that's part of the game.

**JOY.** But if I can't figure out how to pay my rent my roommate will kill me.

**ROMAN.** Are you and this roommate having problems?

**JOY.** It's not that we're having problems.....not yet anyway...it's just that the last woman he lived with cheated him out of the rent money.

**ROMAN.** Can't you talk to him?

**JOY.** No.

**ROMAN.** Why not?

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**JOY.** *(Pause.)* Because we're sleeping together.

**ROMAN.** You're roommates.

**JOY.** I know.

**ROMAN.** That's bad.

**JOY.** I know. *(Pause.)* What am I going to do?

**ROMAN.** He's your roommate. You break it off with him. That's not going to work.

**JOY.** I mean about the rent!

**ROMAN.** You get him his money.

**JOY.** How?

**ROMAN.** You're going to ask your parents.

**JOY.** Do you want to make me cry?

**ROMAN.** *(To himself.)* It's always the same old story.

**JOY.** Can you help me?

**ROMAN.** I'm not a bank.

**JOY.** You won't help me?

**ROMAN.** Would you go into Chase and order a Bloody Mary? *(Pause.)*  
You know what you could do?

**JOY.** What?

**ROMAN.** You could do something for both of us. *(Pause.) Start selling.*  
*(Stands.)* Do you want another drink?

**JOY.** No.

**ROMAN.** Have another drink.

**JOY.** I have to get up tomorrow.

**ROMAN.** Can't you say, fuck it?

**JOY.** I have class.

**ROMAN.** One drink.

**JOY.** One drink?

**ROMAN.** You work your ass off you deserve a drink.

**JOY.** I need to get up for class.

**ROMAN.** And too much discipline is not a good thing. *(Pause.)* Are you afraid to spend time with me?

**JOY.** No.

**ROMAN.** You can't make it up?

**JOY.** *(Pause.)* I suppose I could take a yoga class later.

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**ROMAN.** So, you *could* make it up...

**JOY.** ...but I need to...

**ROMAN.** ...and if you don't take class is that bad?

**JOY.** I want a successful career.

**ROMAN.** But you said you could take a yoga class.

**JOY.** You have no understanding of what I do.

**ROMAN.** Why do you say that?

**JOY.** Because it *does* take discipline, which means going to class even if you don't want to go to class.

**ROMAN.** And you think because I own a restaurant, I don't understand that?

**JOY.** Do you?

**ROMAN.** You and I are very much alike.

**JOY.** How?

**ROMAN.** We're both pursuing what we love. We both have the same dream of success. We both work hard.

**JOY.** I don't work that hard.

**ROMAN.** One drink...it's on me. *(Pause.)* What good is moving to New York if you can't reap the rewards? *(Pause.)* One drink.

**JOY.** *(Pause.)* Okay. *(Pause.)* One drink. *(Roman, takes her glass - exits. Joy's cell phone beeps...she picks it up off the desk...looks at a text message - sighs.)*

**SCENE 10**

*Spotlight on Joy - downstage.*

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* If you don't mind, I would like to pause here and ask you all for a little favor. Please. If it's applicable...I'd like you to remember what it was like when *you* first came to New York. To be young. To be in love with the city. And how everything *you did* was a bit...crazy. Will you remember that time for me please? *(Pause.)* Thank you. *(Pause.)* We're back in my apartment on the Lower East Side. *(Joy's cell phone begins to ring. Lights up on Joy's bed, someone lies under the covers. She answers the phone.)* Hello.



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**CHLOE.** (*In her kitchen, on her cell phone.*) Good of you to answer.

**JOY.** Mom...?

**CHLOE.** It's seven o'clock in the morning, Joy.

**JOY.** Is it?

**CHLOE.** Shouldn't you be getting ready for class?

**JOY.** I got home late.

**CHLOE.** Because you went there to dance.

**JOY.** And I appreciate all your support, Mom.

**CHLOE.** Is that why I haven't talked to you recently...?

**JOY.** What?

**CHLOE.** You don't call me, do you?

**JOY.** I call you.

**CHLOE.** Everyday?

**JOY.** No.

**CHLOE.** I call you every day.

**JOY.** And you should stop yourself from...

**CHLOE.** ...I call to say, Hey! How are you?

**JOY.** And you need to force yourself *not* to call me every day.

**CHLOE.** I like to make sure that you're okay.

**JOY.** If you don't hear from me in a week...then call me.

**CHLOE.** It's been *over* a week.

**JOY.** And I'm perfectly okay.

**CHLOE.** But I don't know that until I hear from you!

**JOY.** Can we talk about this later?

**CHLOE.** (*Pause.*) Do you have a boy there?

**JOY.** What?

**CHLOE.** Do you have a boy there?

**JOY.** Do I?

**CHLOE.** You should know better than I.

**JOY.** No.

**CHLOE.** Yeah...?

**JOY.** Yeah.

**CHLOE.** Yeah?

**JOY.** No.

**CHLOE.** No?

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**JOY.** No. No. No. There is no boy here! (*Allen rises from the bed naked - exits.*)

**CHLOE.** Do you know who I saw in church last Sunday?

**JOY.** Who?

**CHLOE.** Jason.

**JOY.** What about him?

**CHLOE.** He gave me his phone number...he wants you to call him.

**JOY.** Mom...

**CHLOE.** ...as I recall you were always crazy about Jason. You two have known each other since you were kids. You'd come home from school, and say, "Jason is going to be my husband."

**JOY.** *And Jason grew up to be a douche bag.*

**CHLOE.** Watch your mouth young lady!

**JOY.** I can't believe that you would approve of my being with Jason, but that you *still* don't approve of my being in New York. I mean you must have known I was going to end up here?

**CHLOE.** It was never *predetermined* that you were going to New York. My understanding was that you would take a different course. Stay close to home. Do the local Christmas shows...state dance competitions...

**JOY.** ...an Athens County version...

**CHLOE.** ...yes...

**JOY.** ...so, you could buy into my dream if you could control it?

**CHLOE.** Joy...

**JOY.** ...if you're that worried about me, Mom..., Why don't you come out here and see for yourself how I'm doing?

**CHLOE.** Because you already told me how you were living...what your place looks like. You said I wouldn't like it there and that's why I'm not coming.

**JOY.** Fine...

**CHLOE.** ...if it's going to further upset me...

**JOY.** ...fine...

**CHLOE.** ...I'll probably end up saying something I shouldn't so...

**JOY.** ...fine!

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**CHLOE.** You told me...*specifically*...you didn't want me to visit until after you were more settled. You asked me to wait until you knew the city better and had a good dance job.

**JOY.** Well...

**CHLOE.** ...what?

**JOY.** *(Pause.)* I don't know when that's going to be. *(Blackout.)*

**SCENE 11**

*A large theatre. Joy walks on-stage into a spotlight - alone. She wears micro-shorts and a sports bra.*

**CHOREOGRAPHER.** *(A voice from the theatre.)* Number forty-four.

**JOY.** *(Walks straight toward the lip of the stage, stops.)* My name is Joy...um...I'm from Ohio...Athens County.

**CHOREOGRAPHER.** Turn around...walk away, please. *(Joy spins around, walks back; then stops and turns back toward the house.)* Thank you very much.

**JOY.** *(Pause.)* You're cutting me before ballet barre? *(Pause.)* You're typing me out...?

**CHOREOGRAPHER.** Yes. *(Pause.)* Thank you.

**JOY.** You want me to leave? *(Pause.)* Because of the way I walked?

**CHOREOGRAPHER.** *Because of the way you're dressed.* If you're gonna wear that outfit...? You might wanna suck in your stomach...I mean *really*...stomach, stomach, stomach.

**JOY.** You don't have to be abusive.

**CHOREOGRAPHER.** Stomach, stomach, stomach.

**JOY.** Can I have my head shot back?

**VOICES 1, 2 & 3.** Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach. Stomach.

**CHOREOGRAPHER.** And your ass is way too big! *(Joy exits. The sound of a door slamming. Blackout.)*

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**SCENE 12**

*The Lower East Side. The city's lights rise on Allen. He stands on a street corner...addresses a tour group.*

**ALLEN.** The Lower East Side. Once the gateway to America. And for generations of Jews, Germans, Italians, Eastern Europeans, Russians, Greeks, Chinese, and Latinos...it represented the future. An urban frontier where artists, Bohemians, and radicals helped to shape world culture. But idealism, creativity, and the struggling masses of the newly arrived, have recently been replaced by money, greed, and the value of real estate. The Lower East Side as we know it has been changed. Permanently. The middle-class community that once resided here has been pushed to the outer boroughs, and a new class of immigrants have officially arrived. Stockbrokers. Bankers. Lawyers. And with their arrival comes the slow death of diversity at the hands of gentrification. Condos have replaced landmark buildings. Mom and Pop stores have been turned into chic shops. Artist studios have given way to trendy bistros. And where people once looked to the Lower East Side for its influence on American culture and politics, they now look to this neighborhood to see where culture once was. Gaze up and down these streets my friends and take a long look. Because soon...even once was will be gone. And as years pass the Lower East Side will become increasingly more like a museum. And more people will visit using an avatar than they will in the flesh. New York City and all its culture will officially be dead. And all that will remain...will be in the history books. *(Pause.)* Have a good day. *(Pause.)* Oh...and if you're hungry...we're in the heart of the pickle district. I recommend Guss's. Their full sour's are to die for. Thanks again for coming.

**JOY.** *(Enters.)* Allen.

**ALLEN.** *(Surprised.)* Hey!

**JOY.** How are you doing...?

**ALLEN.** Okay.

**JOY.** Good.

**ALLEN.** What's up?

**JOY.** I...um.....I stopped by to...uh...

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**ALLEN.** ...yes...? (*He smiles at her.*)

**JOY.** Allen...

**ALLEN.** ...what?

**JOY.** Don't do that...

**ALLEN.** ...do what?

**JOY.** I know that look.

**ALLEN.** What look?

**JOY.** This is not a good idea, Allen.

**ALLEN.** What?

**JOY.** That look.

**ALLEN.** What look?

**JOY.** I like you, Allen...

**ALLEN.** ...and I like you...

**JOY.** ...but as a friend.

**ALLEN.** (*Pause.*) I see.

**JOY.** And what I'd really like is for us to have a...roommate situation...not a love affair.

**ALLEN.** Are you breaking up with me?

**JOY.** I am breaking up with you.

**ALLEN.** I didn't know we were a couple.

**JOY.** We're not?

**ALLEN.** Are we?

**JOY.** Well...we're not anymore...I'm breaking up with you.

**ALLEN.** (*Pause.*) This is so familiar and so strange.

**JOY.** What's so familiar?

**ALLEN.** Did you have an audition today?

**JOY.** What does that have to do with anything?

**ALLEN.** How did it go?

**JOY.** (*Pause.*) It was humiliating.....like nothing I'd ever experienced before in my life.

**ALLEN.** I'm sorry.

**JOY.** I mean I know I'm not the best...self-esteem is.....it's hard for me. But this was.....horrible. It was *really* bad. Having to walk out of that room in front of all those other dancers...? Bad...bad...

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**ALLEN.** ...you can't take it personally, Joy. Not being chosen is a natural part of the process. It's part of the education. It prepares you to move on to the next experience.

**JOY.** And that's what I need to do...I need to focus on the next experience. I'm trying to do the sensible thing here. I do *not* need to come home...

**ALLEN.** ...but your audition had nothing to do with me...

**JOY.** ...Allen...don't make this any...

**ALLEN.** ...how do you feel about me, Joy?

**JOY.** What?

**ALLEN.** Can you tell me that?

**JOY.** How do I feel about you?

**ALLEN.** How do you feel about me? Forget about your audition for one second. How do you feel about *me*? (*Pause.*) You don't care about me?

**JOY.** I do admit there are feelings there.

**ALLEN.** Then why would you want to break up with me?

**JOY.** Because I don't need to come home to any more additional drama in my life!

**ALLEN.** Are you going to find another place?

**JOY.** No.

**ALLEN.** So, what do you want?

**JOY.** I want us to be roommates...friends...

**ALLEN.** ...and since when do friends go down on each other?

**JOY.** Allen.

**ALLEN.** Or maybe that's what friends are for?

**JOY.** Stop that!

**ALLEN.** Stop what?

**JOY.** YOU'RE NOT BEING NICE!

**ALLEN.** (*Pause.*) I'm sorry...I.....I broke my rule.

**JOY.** What rule?

**ALLEN.** Never live with a female roommate who's attractive.

**JOY.** Me?

**ALLEN.** Yes. (*Pause.*) So that's it?

**JOY.** If we're in agreement here.

**ALLEN.** I guess it's reasonable. If we're going to live together...

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**JOY.** ...we should just be roommates.

**ALLEN.** *(Pause.)* You're not going to skip out on the rent, are you?

**JOY.** I told you; I'm not leaving.

**ALLEN.** You're not moving out?

**JOY.** No. *(Pause.)* Are you mad...?

**ALLEN.** Not if you don't stiff me on the rent...I'm not mad.

**JOY.** Then you're okay with this?

**ALLEN.** I'm okay.

**JOY.** Good.

**ALLEN.** We'll be roommates.

**JOY.** We'll be roommates. *(Pause. They both seem at a loss for words; then, suddenly, they turn, and walk off in opposite directions.)*

**SCENE 13**

*Lincoln Center's iconic plaza fountain. The sound of splashing water; a crowd mingles outside. Joy sits with Roman on the fountain's black granite rim.*

**ROMAN.** ...one of my vendors offered me the tickets. I said, "Tickets to the New York City Ballet...?" He said, "I know someone who works in the ticket office." And I said, "Why not...?" And then I asked myself..., "Who do I know that likes dance?" And that's when I started thinking about you...

**JOY.** ...I appreciate the gesture...

**ROMAN.** ...and I knew that you'd been having a hard time financially...

**JOY.** ...I'm happy that you called...

**ROMAN.** ...and since I got lucky with the tickets...

**JOY.** ...thank you...really...

**ROMAN.** ...I thought..., For once let me be there for her.

**JOY.** *(Pause.)* Is this business for you or pleasure?

**ROMAN.** Can't it be pleasure?

**JOY.** I don't know you really.

**ROMAN.** What do you want to know?

**JOY.** I'd like to hear your story.

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**ROMAN.** My story is that I've worked in restaurants my entire life. That's who I am. It's my family's business. I started working as a kid, and now I've worked long enough to have done every job you can imagine. I've worked all over Europe. But I knew that I always wanted to come here, and like you I followed my dream, which I've never given up. I wanted a restaurant in New York, and now I have a restaurant in New York. And that's all I do...work.

**JOY.** You don't have a girlfriend?

**ROMAN.** No. *(Pause.)* I'm divorced...two times.

**JOY.** *You're twice divorced...?*

**ROMAN.** Me and a few million other people.

**JOY.** *(Pause.)* My parents are divorced.

**ROMAN.** You see. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry. *(Pause.)* How's dancing going?

**JOY.** *(Tries to make herself laugh.)* You know sometimes I think dancer makes actor look like a good career choice.

**ROMAN.** So?

**JOY.** Do you know how many good dancers there are in New York?

**ROMAN.** You knew that when you moved here. *(Pause.)* It's competitive so what?

**JOY.** Yeah...yeah...I know...

**ROMAN.** ...are you a quitter?

**JOY.** No. But...

**ROMAN.** ...but what?

**JOY.** Right now, I can't even get a teacher to say thank you.

**ROMAN.** Why do you need a teacher to say thank you?

**JOY.** Because that would mean that they took notice of my work. That I gave them something...

**ROMAN.** ...okay...

**JOY.** ...that I was doing things right...

**ROMAN.** ...that you could be successful...

**JOY.** ...yes...yes...it's all about being noticed. *I'm training to be a performer.*

**ROMAN.** *(Pause.)* Okay.

**JOY.** I don't need to pass this on to you.

**ROMAN.** I don't mind...



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**JOY.** ...no...

**ROMAN.** ...I don't mind...

**JOY.** ...I don't need to spread my misery on to you. I'd rather...I'd rather work it out for myself...

**ROMAN.** ...but you don't have to...

**JOY.** ...I...

**ROMAN.** ...I'm here for you. *(Pause.)* The same way you're there for me. *(He reaches over and takes Joy's hand. She forces a smile. Music rises; then slowly, magically, Lincoln Center's fountain comes to life. Vibrant columns of water illuminated by white beams of light dance upwards into the electric blue skyline of New York. Roman pulls Joy to her feet and they begin to waltz around the fountain's edge, ending in a big, dramatic dip. It's marvelous.)*

**JOY.** *(To the Audience.)* And so, we went to the ballet and afterwards he took me to dinner. *(She is joined by Roman, Allen, and Chloe.)*

**ROMAN.** NY Dancer Killed

NY Dancer

NY Killed

Dancer

**JOY.** And I realized..., I *needed* to be taken out to dinner. I didn't make much money. I needed to be taken care of! How else could I live in New York? And the next day at work when someone asked me what I did the night before, I said, "Nothing."

**ALLEN.** NY Dancer Killed

NY Dancer

NY Killed

Dancer

**JOY.** And since I was still living with Allen, we kept it a secret. Allen wasn't my boyfriend anymore, but I still cared about him, and so it was understood, I would go to Roman's, and our clothes would come off and the next thing I knew we would be back at work as if nothing ever happened.

**CHLOE.** NY Dancer Killed

NY Dancer

NY Killed

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Dancer

**JOY.** Why did I do it? Because I was human...once.

**ROMAN/ALLEN/CHLOE.** NY Dancer Killed

NY Dancer

NY Killed

Dancer (*Blackout*)

**END OF ACT ONE**

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