

**FAT ACTOR / UGLY MODEL
AND OTHER DESTRUCTIVE
LABELS FOR WOMEN**

**By
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FAT ACTOR/UGLY MODEL AND OTHER DESTRUCTIVE LABELS FOR WOMEN

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For all the girls who deserved the role but were never cast.

FAT ACTOR/UGLY MODEL AND OTHER DESTRUCTIVE LABELS FOR WOMEN

CHARACTERS.

- **DAPHNE** – F, late 20s. An ex-binge eater. Curvy. Any race.
- **JESS** – F, 20s. Anorexic. The actor should be thin and made to appear thinner with makeup. The part does not glorify anorexia but exists as an exploration of those who struggle with this disease. Any race.
- **SAM** – M, early 30s. Daphne's fiancé. Non-white.
- **JOHNNY** – M, late 20s. Jess's boyfriend. Tall and gorgeous. A runner. White.
- **DR. RYKERT** – F or NB. 30s-40s, Jess's Psychiatrist. Any race.
- **SALLY DEEBES** – F or NB, 30s-40s, a casting director. Should be played by the same actor playing Dr. Rykert.

SETTING. Much of the action in the play happens in Daphne and Sam's apartment in New York City. Other scenes take place in a psychiatrist's office, the office of a theatrical agent, one scene in a restaurant, and one in a cafeteria.

SUMMARY. When former binge-eater Daphne notices she's gained weight, her internal panic deepens when she lands a lucrative acting role as a fat character. Meanwhile, her best friend Jess, battling anorexia, faces her own casting dilemma: she's been chosen for a major print ad, but only because of her dangerously thin appearance. As both women grapple with the harsh realities of an industry obsessed with body image, they're forced to confront a defining choice—embrace the roles that exploit their insecurities for the sake of their careers—or reject the commercial machine all together.

NOTES. It is important that Daphne not be objectively fat, but also not objectively thin. She must be a curvy, attractive woman. I suggest casting someone who is about a US women's size 12-14.

Text in brackets [sic] may or may not be said. It is up to each production/creative team. This text can also be switched out for something more timely or culturally appropriate.

If there is an em-dash at the end of a line (—), the subsequent line should overlap with/cut off the last word of that line.

PRODUCTION HISTORY. A much earlier version of *Fat Actor/Ugly Model: And Other Destructive Labels for Women* was a finalist for the Woodward/Newman Drama award under a different name. It was given a workshop at Manhattan Repertory Theatre in 2010, directed by Maureen Stanley. The cast was as follows:

DAPHNE.....	Bella Poynton
SAM.....	Craig Newman
JESS.....	Alison Yates
JOHNNY.....	Paul Cereghino
DR. RYKERT/SALLY DEEBS.....	Pëtra Denison

RUNTIME. 90 minutes with no intermission

FAT ACTOR / UGLY MODEL AND OTHER DESTRUCTIVE LABELS FOR WOMEN

SCENE 1

Lights up on DAPHNE and SAM'S apartment. Small and homey. Sam is a bulky attractive man in his early 30s. Daphne is a dark haired, pretty woman in her late 20s. She is not thin, but not fat. Sam wears gym shorts and a T-shirt. He is scrolling through his phone while also looking at old take-out menus.

SAM. I am being accosted by hunger.

DAPHNE. What?

SAM. Receptors in my brain have noticed that nutrient levels in the bloodstream are low.

DAPHNE. Oh, God.

SAM. They're currently sending a message to the stomach to bombard my senses with the unpleasant sensation of hunger.

DAPHNE. Listen, nerd—

SAM. Chinese!

DAPHNE. The languages?

SAM. The food.

DAPHNE. What about it?

SAM. High sodium levels—at least in take-out. Veggies. Rice. Perfect. I want it.

DAPHNE. Like, to eat?

SAM. No, to throw at traffic. What time is it? Let's order. I'm starving.

(Sam takes out his phone starts to an place an order.)

DAPHNE. To the contrary...

SAM. Really? I'm hungry. It's a normal human thing. Happens three times a day. Sometimes more. Come on, tell me what you want. *(Sam hands Daphne an old take-out menu.)*

DAPHNE. I don't want any.

SAM. Pssshhh...

DAPHNE. Chinese food is like Nilla wafers. Next thing you know, you've eaten the whole box.

SAM. That's a myth. That's never happened to me. I am completely satiated with Chinese food. For hours.

DAPHNE. I wouldn't know.

SAM. Should I pick it up or Door Dash?

DAPHNE. Neither. Stay. I'll make you something.

SAM. Oh God, please, no. I love you, but please don't make me anything.

DAPHNE. Sam, this is mutiny. I make fantastic Ramen, Tuna Sandwiches, Grilled Cheese—things considered delicacies in other countries. Look, how about this, I'll make something Chinese-y. We have rice and I think there's some broccoli in the freezer.

SAM. Are you implying that if you put broccoli in something it somehow becomes Chinese food? Daphne, you could be cancelled for this!

DAPHNE. Stop. I just mean that if I make some rice and then make some broccoli and put the broccoli in the rice...

SAM. That's not Chinese food.

DAPHNE. Okay, fine. Go get your food, but don't waste money on Door Dash and don't get hit by a car.

SAM. No, really, what do you want? Shrimp fried rice? Sweet and Sour chicken? Eggrolls?

DAPHNE. No.

SAM. Dim Sum? Coconut shrimp? Lemon chicken?

DAPHNE. I said, no.

SAM. Lo Mein? General Tso's? Mmmm...*Crab Rangoon?*

DAPHNE. Stop! Nothing! I don't want anything! I don't fucking want it. Leave me alone about the fucking Chinese food! *(Pause.)*

SAM. O—kay.

DAPHNE. Sorry, I just—the thought of it is grossing me out.

SAM. Since when?

DAPHNE. Since forever.

SAM. Bullshit. You love Chinese take-out. People order it because it tastes good and it's easy. What are you going to eat instead?

DAPHNE. A salad.

SAM. You hate salad. You've always hated salad. I can't remember the last time I saw you eat a salad. Are you on drugs?

DAPHNE. All women love salad. Look it up. Women are always smiling and laughing while eating salad in advertisements.

SAM. That's—kind of true. But also, weird.

DAPHNE. When I was a little girl, I used to think only women could eat salad. And that men were allergic to it or something.

SAM. What?

DAPHNE. My father hated salad. But my sister and mother loved it, so mom would always make a big bowl with dinner every night. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, feta—but dad never ate it. So, I just thought men couldn't. Maybe it was poisonous to them or something.

SAM. All men?

DAPHNE. I was like 3.

SAM. This has nothing to do with anything and I'm still dying of hunger.

DAPHNE. Listen, I love salad. Women are supposed to love salad.

SAM. You don't and they're not. You don't ever have to eat salad again if you don't want to. What the hell is going on?

DAPHNE. You're the one freaking out about Chinese take-out. I just said I

wanted a salad.

SAM. Something happened. I know when shit happens. This is classic “something happened” behavior.

DAPHNE. (*Daphne turns and speaks to the audience.*) So, hi. I’m Daphne. I’m a former binger and eating-disorder-haver. Yeah, yeah, I know. You’ve heard it all before. Who doesn’t have one, right? Looking at me, you wouldn’t think I had food issues, right? (*She gestures to her body.*) Well, I used to be thinner. A lot thinner. I puked all the time, and it started to fuck with the lining of my esophagus. I developed stomach ulcers—it was a whole thing. Anyway, I got better. Kinda. For a while. But life’s tough. Jobs and work and failure and rejection and then more failure, you know? So, here I am, fighting with my fiancée, Sam, about Chinese food. He’s cute. He’s nice. I like him. He’s been around for a long time. Comfortable, you know? Anyway, this is the part in the story where I’m supposed to lie to him. I tell him I want a side of white rice and pretend to pick at it while he chows down two boxes of chicken and Lo-Mein without consequence. Or rather, some consequence, but he’s got good genetics, so he can get away with it. But I’m not going to do that this time. I’m not going to lie to you, or him. I’m going to tell the truth. I’m going to tell you exactly what happened, because I’m just so exhausted at pretending like everything is okay all the time. (*Daphne turns back to Sam.*)

DAPHNE. I can’t fit into my tens.

SAM. Your tens?

DAPHNE. My tens.

SAM. What the hell does that mean? (*Pause.*) I don’t know what that means!

DAPHNE. Fuck you, Sam.

SAM. You’re not supposed to pay attention to those kinds of things anymore, remember? I don’t care. Size ten. Size twenty. Whatever.

DAPHNE. What a shit faced lie! You’re a lying-faced-liar, you know that?

SAM. I've seen you a lot of ways, Daph. I've seen you more ways that I thought a person could be seen. And I don't care about pant size.

DAPHNE. You've never seen me in a wedding dress.

SAM. That's a different conversation.

DAPHNE. One you always manage to avoid.

SAM. Do you realize we're arguing over takeout Chinese take-out?

DAPHNE. I told you that three minutes ago. So, go. Go get your food.

SAM. Daph, I really don't mind, you know? It's just more cushin' for my pushin, baby.

DAPHNE. (*Rolling her eyes.*) Oh my God, you pig.

SAM. What? You're upset because I just said I like to have sex with you? What do you want, Daph, you're not made to be small.

DAPHNE. What?

SAM. You know what I mean.

DAPHNE. No, no, I really don't.

SAM. You're not fat or skinny. You're you.

DAPHNE. I fucking *hate* comments like that. That's the kind of bullshit they tell ugly girls. "You're not fat, you're beautiful!" "You're curvy!" "You have pretty hair and a great fucking personality!" They're all just lies because people are too scared to tell the truth. I'm supposed to be working on becoming a serious actress. You're supposed to be supportive.

SAM. I'm not supportive? You live here, free of charge. And I'm not supportive?

DAPHNE. I don't live here because you're supportive. I live here because we're a couple.

SAM. And again, I'm not supportive? How?

DAPHNE. All I ask is that you don't indulge me, okay? Stop telling me I'm beautiful and then scrolling through OnlyFans.

SAM. Oh please, it's like once a month when you're busy!

DAPHNE. You just renewed. I saw the charge on your statement.

SAM. Sure. For those longer bathroom visits and times of extreme stress!

DAPHNE. You masturbate while you're taking a shit?

SAM. No—No!—It's—

DAPHNE. Get yourself out of this one, Sam, I dare you.

SAM. This is about something else. Not me looking up hot vintage chicks a few times a year. I don't know what it is, but you're taking it out on me and it's not fair.

DAPHNE. I'm not.

SAM. Now, who's the liar?

DAPHNE. Look, I'm sorry. I'll get over the tens things. It's stupid.

Nothing else happened.

SAM. Sure.

DAPHNE. (*Daphne turns to the audience.*) But that was the part where I lied.

SCENE 2

Lights up on SALLY and Daphne, sitting together in Sally's office.

SALLY. We're so happy you're interested in the part.

DAPHNE. Of course, I am!

SALLY. It's a wonderful play, isn't it?

DAPHNE. It really is.

SALLY. The director said you were excellent at the audition.

DAPHNE. Thank you. I haven't been cast in anything in a long time so I'm really excite—

SALLY. Why don't we just keep that information between you and me, all right?

DAPHNE. O—kay.

SALLY. So, there have been some revisions to the script, but that's how it

is sometimes with these new plays. Did you receive the updates?

DAPHNE. I don't think so, no.

SALLY. Oh, I'm so sorry. We do have an extra copy if you'd like to look over it? *(Sally hands Daphne a thick script.)* Please sign right here when you're ready. It's \$1,008 a week for the run, and \$895 a week for four weeks of rehearsal. The festival runs from April 9 to November 15th, and they need you there starting three weeks from today. *(As Sally is speaking, Daphne looks at the new script. She stops on the second page.)*

DAPHNE. Wait a minute.

SALLY. I just air dropped you the DocuSign.

DAPHNE. Whoa, hold on.

SALLY. You can use your finger to sign.

DAPHNE. The character description is different.

SALLY. Well, yes, it's a new play.

DAPHNE. But it's just my part that's different. The character description changed.

SALLY. Changes are made to new scripts every day.

DAPHNE. But I was never—I mean—when I read for it, nothing was ever said about—

SALLY. I'm sorry, what's the problem?

DAPHNE. She's fat. She's a fat girl. She wasn't fat before. And now she is. The description says, Sara: the overweight, cute, but nerdy intern. Sara loves her food and swallows everything life throws at her without a fight.

SALLY. Daphne, I'm not the writer. These are artistic matters. Now if you wouldn't mind just signing the contract so we can—

DAPHNE. I don't think I can do that.

SALLY. Sorry?

DAPHNE. I'm not a fat girl.

SALLY. Well, I'm not sure that's exactly what the writer meant. In the description, I mean.

DAPHNE. Then why did he write it? Why did he change it to say: “Sara, the overweight, cute, nerdy intern”?

SALLY. Maybe you could discuss this with the director when you get to the festival?

DAPHNE. But I am not a fat girl. I’m not even really a heavy girl. I need to think about this.

SALLY. We really don’t have much time for negotiations.

DAPHNE. No. Not negotiations, just—a few days to think? I mean—why would they say... I don’t understand. I mean... do *you* think I’m a fat girl?

SALLY. Well, no, honey, but you certainly aren’t skinny. (*Blackout.*)

SCENE 3

Lights come up on JESS sitting with her psychiatrist, DR. RYKERT. Rykert is in their 30s or 40s, extremely buttoned up and professional. Jess is exceptionally thin, in oversized clothes with dirty hair. She sits with her feet curled up under her body on the couch.

DR. RYKERT. How long have you been living with Daphne and Sam, now?

JESS. I’ve always lived with Daph. I mean, not always, but off and on since I left college. I had an apartment on my own like twice, but it never worked out.

DR. RYKERT. I’ve heard you talk about Daphne a lot, but tell me more about Sam.

JESS. They’ve been together for years. He’s a lawyer. Made partner young. He’s got a lot of money, so it’s no skin off his ass to let me stay there while I get my shit together, you know?

DR. RYKERT. Daphne must be very important to you.

JESS. Yeah. She’s the only person who doesn’t constantly feel bad for me.

She's fat, but I mean, I'd rather live with a fat person than someone more beautiful than me.

DR. RYKERT. Why's that?

JESS. It's about competition. If I live with a bigger girl, I can relax.

DR. RYKERT. Do you think if Daphne heard you calling her a bigger girl, her feelings would be hurt?

JESS. Uh. Yeah, but she's not here, and I'm supposed to talk about whatever the fuck I want to talk about, right?

DR. RYKERT. Of course. I'm sorry. Go on.

JESS. I mean, she's not obese or anything. She wears a size 8 or 10 or something. But she's gained a few pounds lately. It's like, "Jess, let's binge [*Yellowjackets*]" and then she eats a whole sleeve of chips ahoy. It's gross.

DR. RYKERT. Does that make you think less of her?

JESS. No. I mean, not like, as a person. But like, as a—

DR. RYKERT. As a what?

JESS. I don't know. As a—in terms of value. Like, I'm obviously prettier than her.

DR. RYKERT. Because you're thinner?

JESS. Well, yeah. She's fine and everything, but if I were her I would be crawling out of my skin.

DR. RYKERT. Do you think she should be more like you?

JESS. Come on Doc, I'm not stupid. I know your questions are rhetorical. She's a binger. Which is actually a lot more dangerous than what I do, or so I've read. It's more intense. Starving is slow, but puking and binging? You can burn a hole in your esophagus real quick.

DR. RYKERT. That's probably the most rational thing you've said in a while.

JESS. She's also an actor, so she needs to be beautiful.

DR. RYKERT. Actresses have to be beautiful?

JESS. Seriously? Let's not fuck around. Actors absolutely have to be

beautiful.

DR. RYKERT. I haven't heard you use that word before.

JESS. What—beautiful? Am I not allowed or something?

DR. RYKERT. No, I think it's great. Why don't we talk about what beautiful is?

JESS. Well, here's the thing—what is it to me? Or what is it to you? Because I clearly have no idea what it is to you. Or what it is to the editor of Vogue? And if you want to know what it is to her, just scroll through fashion Instagram. I'm personally more interested in you and me. We obviously have different ideas of beauty. (*Jess gestures to Dr. Rykert.*) But how did our views become different, you know? What billboard affected you, that didn't affect me, and vice versa?

DR. RYKERT. This is good, Jess. We've pinpointed an interest. You clearly like to think about things. Have you considered going back to school? Getting a degree in gender studies or something? (*Pause.*)

JESS. Sure. I'll make tons of money with a degree in Gender Studies.

DR. RYKERT. It's not really about the money. It's about taking on a new endeavor and using your brain in a new—

JESS. Are you fucking kidding me?

DR. RYKERT. Why would I be kidding?

JESS. I can't even get myself up in the morning and brush my teeth, let alone go to class, write papers, and actually achieve things.

DR. RYKERT. But this is something you're interested in.

JESS. I'm interested in lots of things. I'm interested in Michael B. Jordan naked. Doesn't mean I can get a degree in it.

DR. RYKERT. We'll revisit the idea another time.

JESS. Look—here! Look at this TikTok. Like, look at her. Doesn't it make you feel bad about yourself?

DR. RYKERT. It's probably all filters, isn't it?

JESS. Is it? I don't know if you can filter a body like that.

DR. RYKERT. I'm sure she spends most of her life working on the way she looks. But I have other responsibilities and can't spend my whole life on my appearance. Even if I could, I don't think I'd want to.

JESS. You didn't answer—does it make you feel bad or not?

DR. RYKERT. Not particularly.

JESS. Well, it does for me.

DR. RYKERT. Why? You're just as thin as that model.

JESS. That's not a model. That's Anya Taylor-Joy

DR. RYKERT. An actor?

JESS. Don't pretend you don't know who Anya Taylor-Joy is.

DR. RYKERT. Jess, I'm not sure if this is—

JESS. Look at her hair! My hair has never looked like that. Ever. Even before I started starving. Even when I was 13. Even for one day. And look at how big her eyes are. And her skin glows. And she looks like she's wearing a push up bra, but she's clearly not wearing any bra at all.

DR. RYKERT. Jess, she has a whole team of people making her look like that. It's not real.

JESS. Of course, it's not real. That's not the point.

DR. RYKERT. Then what's the point? History has always had a standard of beauty, in every time period. The standards keep changing. Now it's done with surgery and GLP-1 drugs, and filler and Botox and other treatments. Not to mention the filters—

JESS. But, I don't think it has ever been as bad as it is now, and I want to know why.

DR. RYKERT. The proliferation of technology? Social media at our fingertips? Excessive screentime?

JESS. Yeah, yeah, I know. (*Jess watches the TikTok, thinking.*) Maybe I should get some ribs removed.

DR. RYKERT. Um—

JESS. Oh, don't "um" me. You're missing the big picture See, you have

this idea in your head that what I've chosen to do with my body is wrong, but it's mine to do with as I see fit, right? People can smoke, and take steroids, and eat themselves to death. We allow elective surgeries and anything else people want, so why not this?

DR. RYKERT. I never said it was objectively wrong, but it is destructive. The reason you're here is because many people with your disorder die. And no one wants you to die.

JESS. Gee, thanks.

DR. RYKERT. And we have discovered that with time, therapy and care, it can be treated.

JESS. Is that what you've discovered?

DR. RYKERT. All right...

JESS. Are you really a doctor?

DR. RYKERT. Of course I am.

JESS. And doctors, in general, treat people who are sick, yes?

DR. RYKERT. Jess, remember how we talked about staying on track?

JESS. Just give me the benefit of the doubt for a second, okay? Doctors treat people who are sick, right? So, why is this treated like a sickness? Why all the medical words?

DR. RYKERT. We treat obesity as a sickness, because that's what it is.

JESS. Is it? I mean, it's not the same as the flu, at least give me that.

DR. RYKERT. Well, no, it's not a virus, but—

JESS. If half of the people in this country were suffering from something, would that make it a sickness?

DR. RYKERT. An epidemic.

JESS. Ok, so?

DR. RYKERT. So yes, if everyone in the world died of a disease, it would still be a disease.

JESS. See, I feel like—if it happens to everyone—then it's normal. The people who don't get sick, then they would be the strange ones.

DR. RYKERT. Whether or not something is a disease is not mutually exclusive with normalcy. If everyone had died of Bubonic Plague or COVID, it would still be a disease. You're talking about propensity. A proclivity towards something. And social influences.

JESS. Yes! If something affects everyone, then why do we pretend like it's unusual?

DR. RYKERT. It's not unusual, but it's still a huge issue, Jess!

JESS. Only if you can see it. And because you can see mine, you treat me like I am sick. But everyone else is sick, too. My roommate? Sick! But nobody makes her go to therapy, because she looks like a slightly thinner Beanie Feldstein. It's discrimination. *(An alarm goes off.)*

DR. RYKERT. We're going to have to finish this conversation next time. Our time is almost up. But is there anything else you'd like to tell me before we're done? How's work?

JESS. Good. I booked a print ad yesterday.

DR. RYKERT. That's wonderful! Why didn't you tell me sooner? What's it for?

JESS. Pharmaceuticals. I play someone with some horrible respiratory disease. Because I look sick, I guess.

DR. RYKERT. Isn't there some kind of ruling against that? Some form of political incorrectness?

JESS. It's whatever sells the product, Doc.

DR. RYKERT. Right.

JESS. I'm making like five grand. I'll be able to buy like, I don't know, 5 whole cartons of cigarettes.

DR. RYKERT. Same time Thursday then? *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 4

Lights up on Jess and Daphne in Daphne's apartment. Jess is crushing

crackers with a spoon on a paper towel and then eating the crumbs.

JESS. You're not doing it.

DAPHNE. But the money.

JESS. You're not doing it. Fuck the money.

DAPHNE. I would if that were possible, but I don't think it is.

JESS. I think I'm more infuriated than you are about this.

DAPHNE. Why? What do you care? You're an anorexic.

JESS. Yeah? That's my choice. You shouldn't have to be.

DAPHNE. Shouldn't have to—do you think I'm fat, Jess? Jess? *Jess!*?

JESS. Okay, you're not thin, Daph!

DAPHNE. Yeah, but I'm not fat either. I have boobs. I have shape. I'm normal. Right?

JESS. In whose world?

DAPHNE. There's only one world.

JESS. No. There are infinite worlds. Did Marvel teach you anything?

DAPHNE. Are you cutting a line of cracker with a spoon?

JESS. Yes. Want some?

DAPHNE. No, thanks. I'm on a diet. Maybe I have no concept of who I am or what I look like anymore. Oh God—Jess, what if I'm obese? What if I'm walking around and I'm obese and I don't know that I'm obese, but I am!?

JESS. Ew, stop.

DAPHNE. Jess, will you just talk? Just keep talking. All your intellectual diarrhea of the mouth? You look at stuff differently than I do. You're smart. Tell me what's going on.

JESS. Fine. Are you ready?

DAPHNE. Yes. Go. Talk!

JESS. Okay. Listen. If I were you, I would starve myself. I don't even remember it, but my understanding is that the hunger is only bad for like,

the first week. If you can get through that, you're basically on a roll. But as you are right now? I couldn't stand it. I like being this way. I like the attention. I like the feeling of my, the sad eyes, the jealous looks. I fucking love it, actually. I like taking up the smallest amount of space possible because people look at you with envy. I don't like the feeling of being full. To me, it's like nausea—that feeling right before you vomit. And actually, that vomit feeling is preferable because then at least it's over.

DAPHNE. I'm not sure exactly what—

JESS. Ok, Shhhhh, I'm not done. I recognize that you are not an anorexic. You never have been. You don't have my issues. You shouldn't have to be thin if you don't want to be, but the problem is that you want to be an actor, right?

DAPHNE. Yes.

JESS. Right! Little bump in the road. And all that stuff about it really being about talent? That's all bullshit, and you know it. Not only do you have to be a waif, and be gorgeous, but you also have to have all the right resume credits and shit. It's literally impossible to be a human being these days. So, fat girls walk into these auditions hoping and praying for a shot in hell, but deep down they know that for the sake of American commercialism, the casting directors will hire someone thin..

DAPHNE. I know all of this. This is old news!

JESS. Then why are you surprised?

DAPHNE. Because when it actually happens to you, it fucking sucks.

JESS. Welcome to the world. I just want to be left alone. Don't call me sick, and don't call me ugly.

DAPHNE. Who called you ugly?

JESS. I was cast in a print ad.

DAPHNE. Wait, that's great!

JESS. As someone dying of like, COPD.

DAPHNE. Oh.

JESS. I guess I'm thin enough to be considered almost dead.

DAPHNE. Well, you can't do it.

JESS. I'm doing it.

DAPHNE. Wait, wait, wait, you can do your print ad, but I can't do my show?

JESS. It's a lot of money.

DAPHNE. Mine is, too!

JESS. And I don't have a place to live right now, so it's a different situation.

DAPHNE. It's not! Why do we do this to ourselves? These jobs are going to make us feel like shit.

JESS. I can handle it, Daph. That's the difference. You can't.

DAPHNE. Excuse me? Yes, I can.

JESS. No, you can't. You want to be left alone to be a size ten and enjoy steak and burritos, and even cherry pie sometimes if you want it.

DAPHNE. I don't even like cherry pie.

JESS. Okay, well we all have our things! But you still want to be cast. See, we both want our cake and to eat it too. No pun intended. I don't actually want any cake.

DAPHNE. So, I'm a fat actor.

JESS. Sort of. Kind of. I mean, things are changing, but in some ways, they're also getting worse. You're an unconventional actor. You aren't fat. You aren't thin. You aren't a leading lady, but you aren't wildly quirky either. You aren't an ingénue; you aren't a character actor—

DAPHNE. All right, all right! I get it.

JESS. You're difficult to place.

DAPHNE. Yeah, I got it. Shut up.

JESS. Don't take the part. If you do, you'll be re-enforcing everything we disagree with. The idea that anyone larger than a size 4 is fat and deserves a special description because of it. Acting is supposed to hold the mirror up

to nature, right? Not everyone walking around is 5'11 with a 24-inch waist.

DAPHNE. You're not helping anymore.

JESS. Look, the point is, you can't perpetuate the insanity.

DAPHNE. You *are* the insanity.

JESS. Okay, yeah, but like, I guess I want people to learn from example. If I do this, and sacrifice myself, people will see how ridiculous it is, and finally stop all of this social media nonsense.

DAPHNE. Sacrifice yourself? Jess! This is modern times. There aren't martyrs anymore.

JESS. Who says?

DAPHNE. Me!

JESS. What did the character description originally say?

DAPHNE. Originally, it said: Sara, the nerdy college intern. She is disillusioned with life and swallows everything that comes her way with characteristic dry humor.

JESS. So, you're telling me that they changed the description after they cast you?

DAPHNE. Yes...

JESS. So, you're telling me that this role had a different description, and they liked you so much that they changed the description of the character?

DAPHNE. You make it sound like a compliment.

JESS. It kind of is.

DAPHNE. Jess, they changed it to a fat girl!

JESS. Well maybe they see you as fat! *(Pause.)* I'm not saying you are. I'm not! I mean... you're not. Okay? Just—try to think of it as a compliment? Please? Please? For me? *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 5

Light up on Jess and JOHNNY in a very nice restaurant.

JOHNNY. So why did you become a model?

JESS. Who said I was a model?

JOHNNY. Well, Sam told me. I also saw some print on your Instagram.
(*Pause.*) I'm sorry, I was just trying to make conversation. Is it something you'd rather not talk about?

JESS. No, it's just that I tend to talk a lot when I start on that subject, so—

JOHNNY. Well don't make the decision for me. I'd like to hear. That's what first dates are for, right? So... why did you become a model?

JESS. Because I'm afraid of death.

JOHNNY. What?

JESS. I'm afraid of dying. All artists are, actually. Actors, writers, models. They fear death. So, they go into the business.

JOHNNY. Isn't that kind of a large generalization?

JESS. Yeah, I guess. But it's true.

JOHNNY. Okay, um... Would you care to explain?

JESS. Are you sure?

JOHNNY. I mean, yes? Isn't that what we're here to do?

JESS. All right. Here we go. (*Jess takes a deep breath, preparing her speech.*)

JESS. Human life is no different than other life except for the realization of consciousness, right? We, as a species, are aware of our search for meaning and our eventual demise. But that's just it; the real characteristic of being human is that we *are* searching for meaning. Actors, and all artists really, just make that point over and over again, right? Mortality, lack of meaning, why, mortality, lack of meaning, why. We kind of can't get over it.

JOHNNY. I'm sorry, get over what, exactly?

JESS. That it's the posing of the questions that matters. "Why are we here? What is our purpose?" Not the answers themselves. Artists

illuminate the questions, because we have not yet come to terms with the inevitability of our own deaths.

JOHNNY. And *you* went into modeling? Why not teach at the university level? Philosophy? Metaphysics? Women's Studies or something?

JESS. This keeps coming up.

JOHNNY. What?

JESS. Nothing. I'm not really that smart. The concepts I just conveyed to you are at like a first-year college student level of thinking. And honestly modeling was really all I had to offer society. I went to Brown but didn't finish. Afraid of variables. What the hell are letters doing in math problems anyway, right? Bad ADHD. Unable to get up before 11ish.

JOHNNY. Listen, do you want to go back to my place? It's only a few blocks away, and I haven't seen our server in like 20 minutes. We can get takeout.

JESS. I like it here.

JOHNNY. Yeah, but I mean, it's Cambodian fusion. I don't even know where Cambodia is.

JESS. It's right next to Vietnam. It's a French colony. The food is going to be French/Asian. Probably really good.

JOHNNY. You didn't order anything.

JESS. I ordered a water. Saratoga. Sparkling.

JOHNNY. Like I said, you didn't order anything.

JESS. I just told you I ordered a water. It was [7] dollars.

JOHNNY. Am I missing something here?

JESS. Oh, no! It's ok. I'm sorry. I should have explained. I don't eat.

JOHNNY. Pardon me?

JESS. I don't eat.

JOHNNY. That's ridiculous. You have to eat.

JESS. No. I don't. I mean, I do. But very rarely. And never at restaurants. I only ever eat enough to keep me going for the next five hours or so. Usually, a cracker or some almonds.

JOHNNY. I'm sorry. I'm getting a little freaked out here. If you never eat, why did you agree to come to a restaurant?

JESS. Because that's what people do. They go to restaurants. Have you ever stopped to think about that? That most of our social interactions are entirely based around food? "Oh, what did you do last night?" "Well, I went out for a few drinks with some guys from work," or "whoever and I saw a movie and got slice of pizza down at Bella Italia, or "blah blah blah blah, and we went for a walk and then got ice cream," or some variation of that. All the time, every day. Almost every social interaction we have. Unless we're fucking or sleeping, but sleeping isn't social, so, unless you're fucking.

JOHNNY. Ok, so let me get this straight. You don't eat because you don't want food to dominate your social interactions.

JESS. It's a lifestyle choice, really. Like CrossFit. Or Catholicism.

JOHNNY. But aren't you hungry?

JESS. Oh of course, I'm fucking famished! But humans only need about 500 calories a day to get by, and most people eat that at breakfast. And the less you eat, the less hungry you are. Your stomach is really a remarkable organ. It shrinks down to about half its regular size after only three days of not eating.

JOHNNY. Look, we've gotten off topic. Let's try something different. Are you working right now? Modeling? That's a nice, safe thing to talk about, right?

JESS. I'm doing a print ad for COPD medication.

JOHNNY. Wow, well, um. That's great! Do you have COPD?

JESS. No.

JOHNNY. No. Of course not. Listen, why don't you come back to my place later? We could have some wine and—

JESS. I don't drink wine, thank you.

JOHNNY. Well—um—we could—um—

JESS. See? There isn't much un-food or drink related to offer someone. Unless you just come out and ask me to fuck you.

JOHNNY. I'm sorry, what!?

JESS. Please, it's obvious what you're after.

JOHNNY. What? No! I never said—we don't *have* to sleep together. I just thought maybe you might like to, so—

JESS. Well, that's very nice of you, but I don't. At least not yet.

JOHNNY. Why so hostile? You agreed to have dinner with me, remember? This is the weirdest fucking date I've ever been on.

JESS. Well, I did tell Sam to warn you about me, but he said you seemed okay with it. Did he warn you?

JOHNNY. He said you were a little strange, but this is—

JESS. You shouldn't let it bother you. I have dinner with people all the time.

JOHNNY. And you just sit there?

JESS. Yes, but we've been through his. I agree to have dinner with people for very different reasons than the average woman might. I have dinner with people because I actually like talking to people. I like discussing and debating and possibly sharing ideas. I like having dinner with people, even though I don't actually *eat* dinner.

JOHNNY. So... eating dinner and having dinner are two different things?

JESS. You're learning! This is great. So now, this is the part where I ask you something completely candid. All right?

JOHNNY. Do I have a choice?

JESS. Not really.

JOHNNY. Okay, then.

JESS. Do you only fuck really skinny chicks?

JOHNNY. *(Pause.)* Pardon me?

JESS. *(As if he did not hear her the first time.)* Do you only fuck really skinny chicks? You know, chicks who look like me?

JOHNNY. I'm sorry, I don't think I—

JESS. Do you know what size I wear?

JOHNNY. No. I have no idea.

JESS. I don't wear a size. I have to have size 0's taken in for me.

JOHNNY. I um... I don't really know what that means.

JESS. I'm asking you a question, and I think I'm being pretty clear, but you keep dodging me. Did you, or did you not, only ask me out because we met at Sam's birthday get-together thing, and I'm really skinny, and you don't like to fuck chicks who weigh more than 98 pounds?

JOHNNY. *(Johnny is flustered. He stands.)* I—I'm sorry. I'm going to go. This is a little too much for me. I don't think I deserve to be attacked like this—

JESS. *(Jess grabs Johnny's wrist.)* How have I attacked you?

JOHNNY. Listen—

JESS. Fucking answer me.

JOHNNY. Let go of my wrist. People are looking.

JESS. For the last time, did you, or did you not ask me on a date because I'm as thin as a fucking Olsen twin circa 2010.

JOHNNY. I—I tend to be attracted to more slender women, yes!

JESS. More. Slender. Women?

JOHNNY. What's wrong with that?

JESS. You think I'm "slender"?

JOHNNY. Well, sure.

JESS. Interesting choice of words, you brainwashed masochistic motherfucker.

JOHNNY. What the hell gives you the right to speak to me this way?

JESS. Do you know I have severe Anorexia Nervosa with bouts of bulimia to boot? Of course, you didn't. Because to you, I'm just "slender."

JOHNNY. No, no, I don't think that! I said that to be nice, because I'm a normal person! I think you're very *very* thin. Too thin, actually! Thinner than I am used to.

JESS. You asked me out because I'm a fucking waif, you pig.

(Jess is standing now. They are making a scene.)

JOHNNY. Wait, no. That's not the only reason. Just wait a fucking minute! I'll have you know I have nothing against bigger women. I just find slender women more attractive in some ways, personally speaking.

JESS. Ooooh, well. Well, that does it! That makes it all okay! You have nothing against "bigger women," and this is just your "personal preference" How quaint. How shockingly simple. It excuses everything! Don't you realize its men like you who are *killing* women like me?

JOHNNY. Killing you? Did you just say I was *killing* you?

JESS. That's right, I did, I fucking did! And what are you going to do about it? You're the reason women starve themselves to death! Men like you! You're a Murderer! You heard me, a murderer!

JOHNNY. You're absolutely insane.

(They are both panting, out of breath, and staring at each other with crazy eyes. An uncomfortably long pause.)

JOHNNY. And it's really fucking hot. *(They embrace and kiss passionately. Blackout.)*

SCENE 6

Light up on Dr. Rykert and Jess in Dr. Rykert's office.

JESS. We slept together.

DR. RYKERT. Do you think that was a good decision?

JESS. I don't know. But it was amazing.

DR. RYKERT. Do you like him?

JESS. As much as I hate to admit it, he's actually really nice to me. He's one of those guys where you look at him and you think, Jesus Christ, he's gonna be an asshole. But you still go out with him on the off chance he might have one brain cell. And that sort of thing never happens, right? But this guy? He's really kind. He's no deep intellectual, but I may have pulled off the impossible.

DR. RYKERT. In what ways is he nice?

JESS. Well, he doesn't force me to eat like all the other degenerates in my life. He always asks me what I want to do, even though we usually just screw. He kisses me a lot, which is nice. I haven't been kissed a lot in a long time. I generally don't like things in my mouth, and he's fine with that, and doesn't obsess over blowjobs like a 23-year-old. I think he might be in it for the long haul. Of course, he's a total masochist, but, I mean, look who's talking.

DR. RYKERT. This is good, Jess. I'm glad you've met someone.

JESS. I don't know. I might like him too much, which isn't good.

DR. RYKERT. Why too much?

JESS. Ehhhh. I don't know if you're ready for that, Doc.

DR. RYKERT. Are you getting shy on me?

JESS. What? Fuck no. I'll tell you. It's just kind of weird.

DR. RYKERT. I'm a psychiatrist. I know weird, pretty intimately.

JESS. So, he asked me a few days ago if it was okay to talk dirty when we were—you know. *(Dr. Rykert gives a professional nod of understanding.)* And I said yes.

DR. RYKERT. It's good that he asked, right?

JESS. And then when we were doing it, he called me a skinny slut. And I kind of liked it. *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 7

Lights up on Jess and Daphne sitting in Daphne's apartment.

JESS. I'll get a loan. I'll borrow money from my rich ass stepdad.

DAPHNE. You don't have a rich ass stepdad.

JESS. I'll figure something out.

DAPHNE. You're talking like a legitimate crazy person. You're going to wind up living on the street.

JESS. Actual unhoused people probably make more money than I do. Like just by asking people for change.

DAPHNE. You can stay here as long as you need.

JESS. You're going to be gone for eight months, Daph! Don't you think it'll be weird, with me, staying here alone with Sam?

DAPHNE. Not really.

JESS. You're not like... weirded out by that?

DAPHNE. Why would I be?

JESS. You're not at all worried?

DAPHNE. Worried about what?

JESS. Another woman. Staying in your apartment. For eight months. With your fiancé?

DAPHNE. Should I be worried?

JESS. Ew! Oh! God! No! Ew!

DAPHNE. You mean, am I worried about him? Putting the moves—on you?

JESS. Well, I mean, come on. *(Jess gestures to herself. Pause. Daphne bursts out laughing.)*

DAPHNE. Oh my God. No, Jess. No. I'm not worried about that at all.

JESS. What? Why?

DAPHNE. Because I'm just not worried about that. Trust me, okay? Not with Sam.

JESS. Why not?

DAPHNE. Because he's just not interested, okay?

JESS. But what does that mean?

DAPHNE. It means exactly what I just said. You are not his type.

JESS. You mean he thinks I'm ugly, doesn't he?

DAPHNE. No, no, that's not what I said.

JESS. But it's what you meant.

DAPHNE. No!

JESS. Then what!?

DAPHNE. It means Sam likes girls with boobs, okay?! He really really likes boobs. Like, I know that boobs have sort of wavered in popularity over the past ten years in favor of butts, but this guy? Boobs McGee. Boobs all-round. Boobs Forever. He would get a tattoo of boobs if it was socially acceptable—which it is not. He likes ass and thighs, too, don't get me wrong. But boobs win. Every time. He doesn't even masturbate to skinny girls. It's just how his brain works. That's what. *(Pause.)*

JESS. Fine. I knew he didn't like me. I don't like him either.

DAPHNE. Jess, that's ridiculous. He does so like you. He doesn't want to fuck you, no, but that doesn't mean he doesn't like you as a friend. He's just a little intimidated by you, you know? You're kind of a force. Intellectually and otherwise. If you need to stay a little longer, you can.

JESS. Fine. *(Pause.)*

DAPHNE. So, if you don't have anywhere to live, where were you last night?

JESS. Johnny's.

DAPHNE. Johnny! How's it all going? Why don't you just move in with him?

JESS. It's too early. I think if I do, I'll curse it. And it's so, so good.

Uggghhh.

DAPHNE. Okay, okay, that's enough.

JESS. Well, it is.

DAPHNE. And no one is happier for you than me. I've noticed you've been eating carbs again.

JESS. Not really *eating* carbs. More like nibbling on carbs.

DAPHNE. Still.

JESS. Well, I need the energy.

DAPHNE. Energy?

JESS. Yeah. More cardio lately. What, sex with Sam ain't doing it for you these days?

DAPHNE. No, no. It's great. It's good. It's fine.

JESS. Right. Fine. That's exactly how all men want their girlfriends to describe sex.

DAPHNE. Look, I guess the fiery passionate intense stuff just wares off at around the 5 years mark. Not that you would know... Sorry. I'm not in a great place right now.

JESS. You binged, didn't you?

DAPHNE. *(Pause.)* I did not.

JESS. Oh, fuck off. I can tell. That look of satisfaction mixed with disgust? There's also a box of cosmic brownies in your top dresser drawer. And the toilet seat is up, and Sam hasn't been home since 8 in the morning.

DAPHNE. I keep the brownies in my dresser because Sam will eat them all within a day. And the toilet seat is up because Sam used it this morning and I just happen to have a really strong bladder.

JESS. Really? That's all ya got?

DAPHNE. What the fuck, Jess? What are you doing going through my dresser anyway?

JESS. I will not dignify that question with an answer. Are you pregnant?

DAPHNE. Don't insult me.

JESS. Just checking.

DAPHNE. So, you're actually going to yell at me for doing something that you do every day?

JESS. I don't binge. I don't puke. I just don't eat.

DAPHNE. Logistics. It's the same difference.

JESS. It's not the same at all.

DAPHNE. Long term effects for both disorders. You know what I'm talking about.

JESS. Not really, Daph. Binging is a lot more dangerous.

DAPHNE. Oh, would you just let me breathe?

JESS. No, because your breath smells like vomit.

DAPHNE. Wow. Nice burn. You feel better?

JESS. Listen, I'm not your momma. Puke up your esophageal lining if you want. Does Sam even know about what happened with the part?

DAPHNE. Yeah, he knows.

JESS. What's his take?

DAPHNE. He's pissed. But not about them calling me fat. He doesn't actually give a shit about that. This is all about me leaving. He couldn't care less that I was cast as a fat chick. He's just pissed that his walking pair of boobs will be in Oregon for eight months.

JESS. Pretty predictable reaction for a dude. Nobody has any imagination anymore. You know when I was at the shoot yesterday, there was a production assistant who was telling me how lucky I was to book the role? Forget the horrible dying sickly part. I was just so lucky to have been cast.

DAPHNE. You did the ad?

JESS. Monday, yesterday, and again on Friday. But I don't get the money for like six weeks. So, I'm still broke.

DAPHNE. What the hell is wrong with you? I thought we agreed.

JESS. We didn't agree on anything.

DAPHNE. Does your therapist know you did it?

JESS. Yes.

DAPHNE. And what does she think?

JESS. I think she thinks I'm a lost cause and likes to tell her friends all about what fucking wack job I am.

DAPHNE. Somehow, I don't think so?

JESS. It's just what I imagine is happening. By the way, why aren't *you* in therapy might I ask?

DAPHNE. Because I don't need it.

JESS. Ha! That's funny, Daph. You're about as fucked up as I am times five, I hope you know. And you just binged again after a whole year on the DL. A week or two of eating almost nothing, and then, yesterday, enough food to feed 10 people ten times over, proceeded by vomiting it all up?

DAPHNE. All right, let's not exaggerate. It's a purification process.

JESS. And are you purified? Let's review how fucked up this situation is, shall we? You finally stop binging, and haven't done it in a while, and you think, "maybe I'm on the right track here. Maybe I've actually got my fucking life together!" But then you're offered this sweet gig acting in a play as a fat girl. Of all the things, right? And you cave. Because you're human, and that's some shitty luck. Understandable, of course. You've been psychologically screwed, my friend. Admit it.

DAPHNE. I was not.

JESS. You are.

DAPHNE. I've made peace with it. Someone has to play the fat person, right? Someone has to play those parts. Everything exists on the spectrum of human experience, so, why can't I just be okay with where I fall on that spectrum? So, I'm okay with it. Is being fat really the worst thing we can be in this society?

JESS. Yes.

DAPHNE. No, Jess, no. That's not—that's not the right answer.

JESS. I am nothing if not honest.

DAPHNE. Seriously? Is it the *worst* thing someone can be? Worse than a murderer? Or a Nazi? Or a child molester?

JESS. People thought Evan Peters was hot when he played Jeffrey Dahmer in that Netflix special. They were thirsting over him. People literally don't care if you're a killer.

DAPHNE. Oh my God my life is over.

(Enter Johnny and Sam, sweaty and tired because they've just gone for a run. Sam is winded, but Johnny is not.)

SAM. Water! Get me water! Oh God, I'm gonna puke. *(Daphne goes to help Sam.)*

DAPHNE. What the hell did you do to him?

JOHNNY. We went running.

SAM. Water —please—last rights—my will!—I haven't written my WILL!

DAPHNE. You took Sam running? What are you trying to do, kill him?

SAM. Daph, I bequeath to thee my PS5 and all my cash.

JOHNNY. He said he wanted to go.

DAPHNE. Yeah, and Kate Moss wants more cocaine, but you don't give it her.

JESS. I did.

JOHNNY. What?

JESS. We met once in the bathroom at Gramercy Tavern.

SAM. Ugghhhh. Jesus—are you human, man?

JOHNNY. Yes. But, I'm also top 1%. Otherwise, why go on, you know?

SAM. Look at him! Look at that fucker right there. That fucker didn't even break a sweat. Are you one of those fuckers who don't have sweat glands?

JOHNNY. Takes more than running, your honor.

SAM. Dude! Those people exist.

JOHNNY. Sam, it wasn't an insane run or anything. We only went 5 miles.

SAM. Only? Only!?

JESS. Sam, you need a strong cardiovascular system to run. Gotta build up those lungs. The first ten times you go, it's gonna be excruciating. You seem more like a weightlifting guy to me. It's just physics.

SAM. Physics! Holy shit. I got a model talking to me about Physics.

JESS. Hey! I minored in Physics in college. So, fuck you.

SAM. Oh, stop. You didn't finish.

JESS. True, but not because the physics was hard.

SAM. But really—I—enjoyed—the run—I really—did—I swear!

DAPHNE. Sounds it.

SAM. *(Sam stands up, having finally caught his breath.)* I'm a God, now. My endorphins are off the charts. My testosterone is pumping like a mad man on steroids, and what I'd really like to do is take Miss New York Curves 2025 into that bedroom over there and—*(He playfully chases Daphne across the room, grabs her from behind and holds onto her.)*

DAPHNE. Umm, thank you for the humiliation tactics in front of our company.

SAM. Company? What company? There are children being conceived over there! *(Sam points to Jess and Johnny who are feverishly making out on the nearby couch.)* What do you say, babe? Just a quickie. They won't miss us.

DAPHNE. I'd love to, but I'm busy packing.

JOHNNY. Burn.

JESS. Yeah, No. Don't ever say that again.

JOHNNY. Okay. Sorry. *(They go back to making out.)*

SAM. No, look. It's cool. It's cool that you don't want me. It's cool. I get it. You're just mad—I know you are. You're bitter all the time now

because you got cast as a fat cow! [*Moooo!*] (*A long pause. Daphne turns towards the audience.*)

DAPHNE. This is the part where I turn to my fiancé and slap him square in the mouth. Then, I burst into tears and storm out of the house, swearing I'll never speak to him again. Of course, he follows me, begging my forgiveness, falling to his knees, crying. Sort of like Stanley Kowalski in that scene in *Streetcar Named Desire* where he keeps screaming "Stella!" But none of that happens. I don't do any of that. Instead, in a feat of extreme mental gymnastics, I convince myself that Sam didn't really mean to hurt my feelings. He only said that because he's threatened by my leaving, and he doesn't know what else to do. (*Daphne turns to Sam.*) Thanks, Sam. That was nice of you. You sure do know how to make a girl feel special. (*Exit Daphne. Pause.*)

JESS. You're fucked up, man.

SAM. What? Me? She's leaving *me* for eight months. I've got to show my discontent somehow.

JESS. And that's how you do it? By humiliating her? Or maybe—imagine this—you could just be a man and deal with it, instead of being a fucking dickwad.

SAM. So, wait a minute. Did she really get cast in a fat role? Or is she just saying she did and reading way too far into some little detail in the script?

JESS. No, Sam. She really was cast as a fat girl.

SAM. Like in an objective way.

JESS / JOHNNY. Yes.

SAM. Oh. Fuck.

JESS. Oh fuck is right.

SAM. Do you think she'd stay if we set a date?

JESS. Wait a minute. You haven't set a date for the wedding? Haven't you been engaged for like, years? What the hell is your problem? Why did you ask her to marry you if you didn't actually want to marry her?

SAM. I do!

JESS. Well, it doesn't seem like it.

SAM. I do, I swear—

JESS. But?

SAM. But nothing. No buts. I do.

JESS. Are you one of those weirdos who are afraid of marriage or something? Because that's refreshing.

SAM. No. None of that.

JESS. Then what is it? What are you afraid of?

SAM. I don't know. I guess. I just. I guess it's because—I fear complete and utter evolutionary and cultural irrelevance? *(Pause. Blackout.)*

SCENE 8

Lights up on Jess in Dr. Rykert's office. This time Jess standing instead of sitting on the couch.

JESS. Once, when I was in college, I was at this party at a bar. And a friend of mine brought this date. This woman I'd never met before. She was really, really beautiful. She was tall and bright-eyed and blonde. And thin. Really thin. I was actually pretty jealous of her at the time. I thought... I want to be like that. I'd like to be that woman everyone is looking at. The woman everyone watches when she walks in. I've never been that woman, and I never will be, and she reminded me of that. So, this is what I'm thinking, right? While this beautiful woman sits down next to me and my friend at the bar. And then, she proceeded to say... nothing. Not one fucking thing. To anyone. The whole night. She didn't even introduce herself. She just sat there, with her hands folded in her lap like some kind of character out of a Civil War romance novel, and watched the men drink, and the women laugh, and said *nothing*. I mean, once in a

while, her boyfriend would lean over and say something in her ear and she would smile or giggle and nod, but that was it. And I mean—that was it. And this was like, blowing my mind, right? I was like—is no one else seeing this? Is this not bothering anyone else? So, then, I’m on a mission, right? I was going to make this bitch talk if it was the last thing I did. So, I turn towards her, I look right into her eyes and say, “Hi. My name’s Jess. What’s yours?” And this girl smiles at me and mumbles something I couldn’t hear. I mean, yeah, it was a loud bar, but seriously, come on, speak up. So, I ask her again. And again, same thing. Can’t hear her. It sounded like Vicky maybe? I wasn’t sure. I tried to ask her about her life, how she met my friend, her job, and every time it was the same damn thing. Smile, giggle, mumble something short and completely inaudible. Eventually, I gave up, not out of lack of willpower, but mostly because I was just bored, honestly. But then, later, at the end of the night, she got up and walked off in the direction of the bathrooms. Now, this, I thought, was my opportunity. I bolted up and headed to the bathroom too. Once we were in the privacy of the bathroom, all bets were off. So, I get in there, and there she is, washing her hands, and I blatantly put it out there. “Hey, you’re really quiet, is everything all right? Are you just really shy? Or, new to English maybe?” And to my surprise, this bitch laughs loudly, snorts, and responds with a loud, clear, articulate southern accent, saying, “Oh no, no, honey! I’m just doing all that out there because I’ve only been seeing Tom for two weeks and I don’t want him to think I’m disagreeable!”

(Pause.)

DR. RYKERT. And how does that make you feel?

JESS. Is that all you ever say?

DR. RYKERT. No. We have very elaborate conversations sometimes, and you know that. But this memory seems significant for you. And it’s important that you can articulate for yourself how you feel about it.

JESS. What about this? How does it make *you* feel?

DR. RYKERT. No. This is not about me. This is about you.

JESS. Is it? I think it's about both of us. Once I tell you the story, it's about both of us. That's why I did it. To get your take. I'm paying you, aren't I? So, can you throw me a bone, here? Sometimes that story makes me fucking livid. Other times, I'm so embarrassed I can't even think about it. And then other times it doesn't make me feel anything at all. *(Pause.)* But right now, it's making me wonder—if you think I'm disagreeable?

DR. RYKERT. No, Jess. I don't think you're disagreeable. I think you're funny and smart and stubborn and very very sick. Honestly, I think you have one of the worst cases of this I've ever seen. Mentally, at least.

JESS. What?

DR. RYKERT. There's not much more I can do for you, Jess.

JESS. Wait, what? What are you telling me?

DR. RYKERT. I'm telling you that you need to want to get better before you can get better.

JESS. I do! I do want to get better.

DR. RYKERT. No, you don't.

JESS. What the fuck, yes I do!

DR. RYKERT. No. You don't. Why did you tell me that story just now?

JESS. Because it's something that stuck in my mind.

DR. RYKERT. No but really, why?

JESS. Because I realized that that woman, whoever she was, that she was being quiet to impress that man. And I don't understand why someone would change themselves that drastically, for what? For a date? For some sex? For some fancy dinners? For what? And then, I think, maybe there's something wrong with me... because I don't understand it. Because the whole system seems to make sense to everyone but me.

DR. RYKERT. This has nothing to do with your anorexia, Jess.

JESS. I'm sorry! It's what's on my mind! I can't veer off topic from time to time?

DR. RYKERT. Do you believe you're sick?

JESS. I told you, I think everyone is sick—

DR. RYKERT. You keep doing that. You keep diverting the subject away from yourself. Jesus, you're so smart, Jess. You're much smarter than me, but you have to stop doing this. You're manipulative—you know how to confuse and confound people when you want to. And you're entertaining, too, but I have to put an end to this.

JESS. To what?

DR. RYKERT. To you avoiding the problem. With me, you're just going to keep avoiding it, and I'm going to need to refer you to someone else. I can't let you continue to waste this kind of time. Because honestly, you don't have it.

JESS. Have what?

DR. RYKERT. The time. *(Pause.)* Now, I'll ask you again. Do you believe that you're sick?

JESS. Yes.

DR. RYKERT. Do you believe that you are perhaps sicker than most other people?

JESS. Yes.

DR. RYKERT. Do you want to live?

JESS. I meeeeeeean...

DR. RYKERT. Jess! Why have you accepted this? It's not as if it's out of despair. You're pacing around my office telling stories like a stand-up comedian. It's not that you *can't* get better. It's that you don't *want* to. You get off on it or something—you enjoy it.

JESS. We all do!

DR. RYKERT. And this is why it's so dangerous. You don't realize that someday soon you're going to have a heart attack or—

JESS. No, I do. I do realize. You said it yourself, I'm not dumb.

DR. RYKERT. I know this is a little macabre, but would you rather gain a

little weight and live a nice, cynical life with all the wild, wonderful conversations you want, or die at, what, 30? 32?

JESS. I'd rather not die *that* soon.

DR. RYKERT. Good, I guess that's a start.

JESS. So, can I still be your patient? I mean, you sorta just went a little nuts on me, here. If you don't like me, I get it. I'll tone it down, I can—

DR. RYKERT. No. It's not that I don't like you. It's that I refuse to keep accepting your payments if we're not actually making progress. That's wrong.

JESS. So, you want me to promise to try harder?

DR. RYKERT. If you wouldn't mind.

JESS. Right. So, really, what you're saying with all of this is that you find me disagreeable? (*Blackout.*)

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