

Sweet

by Schatzie Schaefer

SWEET

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SWEET was originally produced in February of 2010 at Out North in Anchorage, Alaska by Off the Rocks, a drama therapy program for women in recovery supported by Akeela House. Directed by Tami Lubitsh, featuring the following cast:

JACKIE/THE COUNTESS
KARLA/FIXCO
ANITA/BUCKET GIRL
BETSY
PAM/THURZO
MILLER/VIRGIN
DIO
SETH

Sarah MacMillan
Christina Church
Shannon Page
Jamie Pauley
Jill Sowerwine
Madeline Klever
Sheila Sweet-Gore
Judy Eastwood

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Characters & Suggested Cast Breakdown:

2009 A trailer home near Sweet Home, Oregon

JACKIE	(F, 29) A crystal meth user, dealer, and manufacturer. A caregiver.
KARLA	(F, 30's) Jackie's best friend & landlady. Meth user.
ANITA	(F, 20's-50's) Friend of Jackie's. A former meth user who has suffered some brain damage.
BETSY	(F, 40's-50's) Friend of Jackie's. Born-again Christian. Always giddy and upbeat.
PAM	(F, 30's-40's) Friend of Jackie's. A heavy meth user.
MILLER	(F, 17) A high-school girl. Not a meth user.

1609 Castle Csejthe, Northwest Hungary

THE COUNTESS	(F) A Hungarian Countess. Played by Jackie.
FIXCO	(M) The Countess' favorite slave and personal advisor. A dwarf. Played by Karla.
DIO & SETH	(F) The Countess' cats. Spoiled and mean. Played by Pam & Betsy.
BUCKET GIRL	(F) A slave girl. Bright and observant. Played by Anita.
VIRGIN	(F) A young noblewoman from the town. Played by Miller.
THURZO	(M) The Prime Minister of Hungary. Played by Pam.

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ACT I
SCENE 1

A few days before Christmas, 1609. Lights up on a receiving room in the interior of the castle of the Countess. The sound of female voices moaning and occasionally wailing in pain can be heard from offstage. FIXCO tidies up the room while a slave girl assists him.

FIXCO. And it's absolutely imperative that you pay compliments to her highness at every turn.

BUCKET GIRL. Yes, sir.

FIXCO. And use your imagination.

BUCKET GIRL. Imagination, sir?

FIXCO. Your creativity. Don't just spew the same old flattery everyone else tosses her way or she'll see right through it.

BUCKET GIRL. Yes, sir.

FIXCO. This is a very important distinction.

BUCKET GIRL. Between what and what, sir?

FIXCO. Between, my dear, seemingly spontaneous praise brought on by the sheer magnificence of the Countess' beauty, and unimaginative drivel borrowed from one of Shakespeare's sonnets. Or worse, his plays.

BUCKET GIRL. Her majesty dislikes Shakespeare?

FIXCO. Abhors him. Were it up to her, she'd have him torn limb from limb. But really, she hates all manner of Brits, so Master Shakespeare needn't take it personally.

BUCKET GIRL. Don't say she favors Hungarian poets. What few we have are dreadful and certainly not in the least bit romantic.

FIXCO. Such a bright peasant you are. It may have put you in her majesty's favor, but tread carefully, dear.

BUCKET GIRL. I don't understand why she's chosen me. To be her... what am I, exactly?

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FIXCO. There's no name for it. But I suppose Lady-in-Waiting is as fitting a title as any.

BUCKET GIRL. Waiting for what?

FIXCO. For her majesty's death to arrive, my child.

BUCKET GIRL. Her death? Is it imminent?

FIXCO. Death is always imminent, isn't it?

BUCKET GIRL. I mean is she ill? Is she expected to pass soon?

FIXCO. Expected, no. But these are wicked times we live in. One never knows.

BUCKET GIRL. Why am I awaiting her death?

FIXCO. Because it's the only way you'll ever leave here again. (*Bucket Girl begins to weep.*) Oh, for St. Anthony's sake. Never cry in her majesty's presence. It will be your death knell.

BUCKET GIRL. I miss my sisters. My family. I'm sure they're wondering what's become of me.

FIXCO. Stop that sobbing, stupid girl! Have you any idea how fortunate you are?

BUCKET GIRL. Fortunate? You must be mad.

FIXCO. Listen. (*Pause.*) What do you hear?

BUCKET GIRL. W-women.

FIXCO. And?

BUCKET GIRL. Girls.

FIXCO. Doing what?

BUCKET GIRL. S-suffering.

FIXCO. That's right. Writhing in agony in the dungeon. Some of them bloated beyond belief from the beatings. Some lying next to the corpses of women who came before them. And here you are, lazily wiping up dust in the Countess' receiving room. Every one of your appendages still secure. La-ti-da, la-ti-da. Fortunate, yes.

BUCKET GIRL. Yes, sir. (*SETH and DIO come tearing into the room, one chasing the other. They hiss and howl, knocking things over in their path. Bucket Girl jumps up onto a chair.*)

FIXCO. Out! Out, you beasts! (*The cats scrap on the floor another moment, then race out of the room through another exit. To Bucket Girl:*)

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Get down from there! For your own good, don't let the Countess see that you're frightened of those two.

BUCKET GIRL. They're the meanest cats I've ever encountered. I think one of them is foaming at the mouth.

FIXCO. That's Dio. The one not foaming at the mouth is Seth, but don't be fooled. She's twice as mean as her sister. You'd better get to know their names; her highness thinks they possess the power to carry out her dark spells. She adores them.

BUCKET GIRL. Dio and Seth.

FIXCO. Don't say their names too loudly, they'll come tearing back in here. The savages.

BUCKET GIRL. So... Don't be frightened of the cats, pay her sincere compliments, and wait for her majesty to expire. This will guarantee my survival?

FIXCO. Don't get snotty with me, Peasant. You're lucky to get my advice.

BUCKET GIRL. Yes, sir. But how did you...

FIXCO. What?

BUCKET GIRL. How did you come to escape the Countess' wrath? How have you earned your stature?

FIXCO. Her highness finds me unattractive, same as you. Her appetites are quite specific. And her penchant is really only limited to the fairer sex, with few exceptions.

BUCKET GIRL. She finds me unattractive?

FIXCO. Oh, does that harm your feelings?

BUCKET GIRL. I'm just trying to figure out where it is I stand.

FIXCO. You stand in her majesty's receiving room. And if you're cautious and wise, you may keep that position. Make yourself indispensable to her.

BUCKET GIRL. But how?

FIXCO. Give her not only praise, but concern and care. Her husband, the Count, almost never makes an appearance—only flowery, adoring letters which I daresay he doesn't pen himself.

BUCKET GIRL. Isn't the Count away at war?

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FIXCO. The Turks do keep him busy, yes. Still, the man could make the occasional visit to his own castle, couldn't he? But he only comes during fair weather and never for very long. Her majesty would never admit it, but it devastates her. She does love her husband.

COUNTESS. *(off)* Dio! Seth! Kitties! Where are my babies? *(Fixco and Bucket Girl fall to their knees as the Countess enters.)* Oh, get up. Get up. *(They do.)* Fixco, have you seen my little babies?

FIXCO. They passed through a few moments earlier.

BUCKET GIRL. Headed off that way, together. Dio and Seth did.

COUNTESS. Oh, that's a relief. I'll need them for rituals later. I was afraid they'd escaped again. I can't bear to think what could happen to them out there.

FIXCO. Yes, it's a dangerous world, Your Highness.

COUNTESS. You'll never guess what I've discovered. It's the most marvelous thing.

BUCKET GIRL. What's that, Your Majesty? And may I say how radiant you look today. But soft, what... radiant skin you have.

COUNTESS. Then you can see it as well?

BUCKET GIRL. Um... yes, Your Grace.

COUNTESS. This cheek, this spot right here. It looks ten years younger, doesn't it?

BUCKET GIRL. Twenty years younger!

COUNTESS. Twenty years? How old do you think I am, Girl?

FIXCO. *(Saving it:)* Infinitely younger, Your Highness! Luminescent!

COUNTESS. Yes, and can you guess the reason?

BUCKET GIRL. Is it a spell?

COUNTESS. No, not a spell, you cockroach!

FIXCO. I know. You've perfected the ointment.

COUNTESS. Without even trying! After all these years of experimenting on slave widows with various concoctions and potions, acids, and oils... I've finally found it. And by sheer accident! There I was in the dungeon, branding the new one, that silly noble girl you mistook for a peasant—

FIXCO. The noble girl, you branded her?

COUNTESS. Yes, of course. You brought her in. Is it my fault she's not a peasant?

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FIXCO. She was in costume! How was I to know the difference? I mean, getting her into the carriage wasn't even a bit of a struggle, and I assumed—

COUNTESS. Silence!

BUCKET GIRL. Please, Your Highness. Go on with the story.

COUNTESS. Thank you, dear. *(Pause.)* Where was I?

BUCKET GIRL. Branding the silly noble girl.

COUNTESS. Yes, and she would not stay still, that one. Twisting and trying to avoid the inevitable. And the brand came out terribly, you can barely make out my family's crest at all. So, I tossed the iron aside and smacked the girl, hard as I could, about the ear. One of my rings must have caught her, as her blood splattered, leaving fresh wet spots across my cheek, here. Well, at once, I ran to my chamber to wipe clean my cheek. I did so and looked into the mirror to take assessment of my visage. There, where the blood had been, was the softest, fairest skin known to mankind. Or womankind, for that matter. This, this taut, soft flesh you see now. It was made so by her blood.

FIXCO. Virginal blood! That must be it, Your Majesty! You've discovered the secret to eternal life in the blood of a virgin.

COUNTESS. Don't be silly, Fixco, I've been doused with virgin blood before. Nothing special there.

FIXCO. What then?

BUCKET GIRL. Was the virgin menstruating?

COUNTESS. No, don't you see? It's so obvious. The girl was of noble blood. Noble blood, Fixco.

FIXCO. Of course!

BUCKET GIRL. I don't understand.

FIXCO. In order for a woman of such high nobility as Her Highness to obtain eternal youth and beauty... *maintain* eternal youth and beauty, she must bathe in the blood of a virgin of nobility. Hard to believe no one has thought of this before. Sheer genius, Your Highness.

COUNTESS. And Csejthe seems to be running out of female peasants anyway, so it all works out. *(To Bucket Girl:)* You'll need a bucket.

BUCKET GIRL. A... what for?

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COUNTESS. What for? To collect her blood, you numbskull. She's in the dungeon now. She's wearing nothing, has a bloody ear, and a fresh, mangled branding mark on her left buttock. You can't miss her. Fixco, find her a bucket.

FIXCO. Yes, Your Grace. (*Fixco exits.*)

COUNTESS. All you need do to get started is to cut off each of her fingers.

BUCKET GIRL. (*Wozy*) Her fingers?

COUNTESS. Right, then slice them up the vein. That ought to get her going. And have that bucket ready. The dungeon's a mess as it is, and I don't want to waste a drop. She's a pretty one. And save me her tongue separately.

BUCKET GIRL. But... Your Highness...

COUNTESS. Is something wrong, dear?

BUCKET GIRL. It's just that I... c-can't do it. I c-can't do what you're as-asking.

COUNTESS. You can't? You're incapable? What is it, dear? What prevents you? Is it... the measles?

BUCKET GIRL. No, Your Highness.

COUNTESS. The ague? The bloody flux? Yellow fever? The plague? The red plague? Lepry? Beri Beri? Cholera? Tuberculosis? Gonorrhea? Syphilis? Scurvy? Childbed Fever? St. Anthony's Fire?

BUCKET GIRL. No! I mean... No, Your Grace.

FIXCO. (*Enters, quickly kneeling.*) Here's a bucket, Your Majesty.

COUNTESS. Perfect. Give it to your assistant, Fixco. In fact, I think she needs a name, don't you?

FIXCO. Yes, Your Majesty.

COUNTESS. Take the bucket, girl. (*She does.*) Oh, I like that. Bucket Girl.

FIXCO. An excellent moniker, Your Grace.

BUCKET GIRL. But, Your Majesty, what you're asking me to do, I just—

COUNTESS. There was a girl before you, you know. And one before her, and one before her. But none who held a bucket with such charm and such purpose as you. I'll never forget the one three or four girls back. What was

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her name, Fixco? (*The Countess retrieves a small ledger and begins to flip through it.*)

FIXCO. I don't recall, Your Highness.

COUNTESS. Oh, it's on the tip of my tongue. It started with an R...

Well, I'll never forget her because of the way she left us. It was several Christmases ago. She crossed me... Or perhaps I just grew weary of her. Well, whichever it was, I decided to dispose of her so I wrote to my husband to ask his advice on how best to do it. You see, until that time I only did my best work in the spring and summer. Bee season, of course. Why, it was very simple. I'd pour honey all over the young thing, set her out, and watch the proceedings from my chamber window. It was a lovely ritual and quite satisfying, but what to do with a worthless slave in the dead of winter? Well, my husband wrote back to me with some absolutely splendid ideas, but of course I didn't receive those letters until long after the poor girl had expired. I've always been a bit impatient. I had in the meantime turned to Thurzo for advice.

BUCKET GIRL. Thurzo? The Prime Minister?

COUNTESS. Of course, he is my cousin, after all. And a brilliant sadist. He said, *'Take the girl out into the snow on the chilliest night. Pour ice cold water on her naked body until she is no longer able to move.'* Oh, it was joyous fun to watch! I never knew a person could actually shatter.

(*The Countess sighs, reveling in the memory. Meanwhile, Seth and Dio come crashing back in, still chasing each other and hissing. Bucket Girl does her best to mask her fear of them.*) Here are my babies! (*The cats rush to each side of the Countess, competing for her affection.*) Are you hungry? Do you want mommy to give you dinner? Huh?

FIXCO. That corpse near the stairwell is fairly fresh.

COUNTESS. Oh, no. I think I'll keep them off of peasant for a while. It seems to give them the runs, which turns their litter chamber into a nightmare. That reminds me, you'll need to go into town to get a new one.

FIXCO. A new one?

COUNTESS. A fresh noble girl for the Christmas feast. At least one. I'm having company over and I want to share my new secrets with them.

FIXCO. But, Your Highness, I abducted the first noble girl purely by mistake.

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COUNTESS. Yes, and you'll obtain this new one with purpose, won't you? Come on, kitties. Come with Mommy. *(To Bucket Girl:)* I expect my bath at exactly four 'o clock in the morning. *(The Countess exits, the cats following her.)*

FIXCO. You'd better get down there.

BUCKET GIRL. Do it for me, please?

FIXCO. No!

BUCKET GIRL. Why? Are you afraid as well?

FIXCO. I could slaughter that girl with my eyes closed. And place her tongue on a silver platter. Anything to keep the Countess happy.

BUCKET GIRL. Then why don't you? We can both say it was me. We just have to agree—

FIXCO. There are witnesses all over this castle. All over the dungeon itself. And loyalty means nothing within these walls. She could easily find out the truth and we'd both end up with needles in our rectums.

BUCKET GIRL. Oh, dear God.

FIXCO. Besides, you heard the Countess, I have a job to do as well. Dammit! I thought this was going to be a relaxing holiday season for once. But here we go.

BUCKET GIRL. What if... What if I get down there and I... I can't?

FIXCO. Do you want to become an ice sculpture?

BUCKET GIRL. The girl is a noble, Fixco. I'm only a peasant. If anyone were to find out I could be hanged or worse for conspiracy. The Countess could blame me entirely for it! And if the King were ever to catch the Countess, I would be—

FIXCO. Catch her? My poor dear Bucket Girl, there is no catching the Countess. She is the wife of the greatest warrior in all of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and beyond. She is the cousin of kings and princes, bishops and cardinals. There is a reason this castle sits high on a cliff, looming over Csejthe and its people. She nursed from the breast of cruelty and relentlessness. She will never be stopped. *(Fixco pulls out a pair of shears and hands them to Bucket Girl.)* You'll need these to get started. *(The lights and set change to reveal Jackie's living room.)*

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SCENE 2

Sweet Home, Oregon. A few days before Christmas, 2009. A battered, broken Christmas tree is surrounded by smashed gift boxes. ANITA sits on the sofa, completely engrossed in the activity of trying to fix a broken string of Christmas lights. She uses a pair of shears to slice up the wire. Meanwhile, BETSY is styling Anita's hair and humming a tune.

BETSY. You should try humming, Anita. It's really relaxing. My sponsor taught me. She said any time you start to feel anxious, just start humming. And it really works. It's very therapeutic. I've been humming so much lately that sometimes I'll start to hum a tune, and I recognize the tune, but I can't quite place it. It's like these songs that are stuck way in the back of my head, songs I haven't heard in a long time, but they come out when I'm humming. Then I get focused on trying to remember what the name of the song is. And that's relaxing, too. It's like my own little game of 'Name that Tune.' *(Betsy goes back to humming. The phone rings. Anita doesn't notice. Betsy doesn't want to stop working on Anita's hair, but after a couple of rings, she sighs, steps away and answers the phone.)*

Hello? *(Pause.)* Yes, this is Jackie's house, but she's sleeping right now. Want me to take a message? *(Pause.)* Really? *(Pause.)* Gosh, I didn't even know she had a sister. Where are you? *(Pause.)* No kidding? *(Pause.)* Oh, I'm sorry, I'm Betsy. *(Pause.)* Yeah, I've known Jackie a real long time now. I mean, we knew each other for a long time, then I had to go away for a while, but now I'm back so I'm staying with her. Just for a little bit. Just 'til I get my beautician's license. *(Pause.)* Yes, Ma'am! I'm gonna be a beautician. *(Pause.)* Well, I haven't started taking classes yet. But I will. Right after Christmas I'm gonna go sign up. What about you, what are you up to? *(Pause.)* Oh, yeah? Well, shit, Honey, you should come over. *(Pause.)* Of course! I'm sure Jackie'd love to see you. *(Pause.)* Well, you're her sister! I'd do anything to see my sister. I've got a twin but she disappeared a long time ago. *(Pause.)* No, I'm serious. *(Pause.)* Well, I figure if Jesus wants me to see her, he's gonna make it happen. You know? How everything happens for a reason? Do you believe that? *(Long pause.)* Well, that's true. But you really should come over. Do you have a ride?

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(Pause.) Okay, well lemme give you directions, it's a little hard to explain how to get here. (Pause.) Nah, we'll surprise her. (Pause.) Absolutely, she'll be so happy to see you, I just know it! Okay, you got a pen and paper? (Pause.) Okay. Where are you at now? (Pause.) Okay, okay. Once you get into Sweet Home you'll just want to get onto Main Street and start heading east. Then you're gonna go up to Wiley Creek Road and make a right. It only goes to the right, actually. Then you're gonna just drive and drive until you get to Whiskey Butt Road. (Pause.) Well, it's actually Whiskey Butte Road but I like to call it Whiskey Butt road! (Laughs. Pause.) Well, I don't know, four miles, maybe. Then you take a left. (Pause.) Yes, on Whiskey Butt. Then it's another four miles or so until you come to a place where the road goes in three different directions. (Pause.) Well, you're not gonna go on any of those roads because right there's the driveway. It'll be on your right, just before where the road splits up. It's a dirt driveway. Well, muddy right now. Do you have four-wheel drive, by any chance? (Pause.) Nah, you'll probably be okay. Just take it easy through there. It's gonna seem like you're in the middle of nowhere but I swear, you'll find us! Okay, so after a while you're gonna come to a house, but that's not Jackie's, that's Karl and Karla's place. (Pause.) Yep, Karl and Karla, that's really their names! They both spell it with a 'K', too. Isn't that a riot? So, anyway, don't stop there 'cause Karla gets real suspicious of visitors she isn't expecting. Just drive past that first house and go about another quarter mile past the horses, then there's a barn. Then the driveway's gonna take a couple twists and turns until you get to a trailer at the end. And that's us! Okay, did you get all that? (Pause.) Yep, just one house, a barn, then the trailer. Well, there's actually another trailer sort of behind the property with a blue tarp on top. But Jackie's is the one right there at the end of the driveway. (Pause.) Oh, wow, I can't wait to meet you! This is going to be so fun. Can you spend Christmas with us? (Pause.) Well, I'm sure she'll want you to. (Pause.) Okay, call again if you get lost. I'll see you soon! B-bye. *(Betsy hangs up the phone and goes back to humming and doing Anita's hair. Anita has paid no attention whatsoever to the phone call or to what's happening with her hair. She is fully absorbed in fixing the Christmas lights. JACKIE enters, just having woken*

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up, and clearly in pain. Her ribs, her back, and her head are throbbing. She does her best to downplay it, though.)

JACKIE. Think you could make a little more noise out here?

BETSY. How's our girl feeling today?

JACKIE. I just had the weirdest dream.

BETSY. Were your teeth falling out? I had that dream once.

JACKIE. No, no teeth falling out. *(Jackie starts to make an icepack for her head.)*

BETSY. How was it weird, then?

JACKIE. I don't know. I was in it, but I wasn't me, you know what I mean?

BETSY. I had a dream I was Cher once. Was it like that? Were you a movie star?

JACKIE. No, but... It's funny you should say that, because it kind of felt like a movie. Like watching a movie. I was in it, but I was watching it at the same time. And it felt more real than any dream I've ever had. It was brutal.

BETSY. Well, that's what you get for falling asleep with the History Channel on. Those Hitler shows give me nightmares, too.

JACKIE. Yeah, I guess it would qualify as a nightmare. Except there was one part where I started to wake up. I guess I heard a noise or something. But I made myself fall back asleep, like I wanted to go back. Like I wanted to keep watching the movie, even though it was so... twisted.

BETSY. *(To Anita:)* Lemme see those shears a second, would ya, hon?
(Anita stops, hesitates, then hands the shears to Betsy.)

JACKIE. What are you doing?

BETSY. I'm just gonna give her a little trim. Right here. See, where it's uneven?

JACKIE. Well, don't. You can play with her hair all you want, but don't cut it.

BETSY. Why not?

JACKIE. Because you need to go to school first. Get your beautician's license, then you can cut hair.

BETSY. It's just a trim.

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JACKIE. Give me those! (*Jackie snatches the shears from Betsy, and winces at the pain of the effort. She hands the shears back to Anita, who has been sitting and staring at the string of Christmas lights, puzzled.*) You shouldn't cut hair with those, anyway, B.

BETSY. Okay, but it's not gonna look even. You don't have to go to beauty college to tell the difference between even and uneven.

KARLA. (*Entering from outside. She wears a light winter jacket and muddy boots.*) Where's your truck?

BETSY. Hi Karla!

KARLA. (*Sees the Christmas tree disaster.*) Jesus. What happened?

JACKIE. Another fight. He got me pretty good but the tree took the worst of it.

KARLA. What was the fight about?

JACKIE. Does it matter?

KARLA. I don't get this guy. He's got this girlfriend who risks her own ass by sending him dope in jail—

JACKIE. Watercolors.

KARLA. It was still dope. He gets all that plus a free getaway car and this is how he thanks you?

JACKIE. He smashed all the presents, too.

KARLA. I see that. (*Karla pulls a smashed box off the floor and examines it.*) There's broken glass in here.

JACKIE. I made etchings for everybody this year. (*Karla notices the card on a certain box.*)

KARLA. Hey, was this mine?

BETSY. No fair looking. It's not Christmas yet.

JACKIE. I did these little abstract designs and etched your names onto shot glasses. Merry Christmas.

BETSY. I wish he didn't smash all your etchings, Jackie. You do such nice work.

KARLA. Okay, that's it. I'm waking that fucker up. We're gonna have words. (*Karla storms off toward Jackie's bedroom. Calmly, Jackie lies on the sofa next to where Anita is sitting and places the icepack on her head. Betsy resumes humming.*)

JACKIE. He's not here.

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KARLA. *(Off stage.)* What the fuck is that smell? Ray? Ray? *(She returns.)* Where is he?

JACKIE. He left.

KARLA. Where did he go?

JACKIE. He didn't leave a forwarding address.

KARLA. Jack, what happened?

JACKIE. We got in a fight, he got me with a two by four, then I heard him taking off in my truck. He cleaned out my lab, too.

KARLA. Bullshit.

JACKIE. Go take a look. *(Karla runs out of the house. Jackie calls after her.)* You think I'm making this up?

BETSY. I mean it, I love your etchings, Jackie.

JACKIE. Yours was an ornament. A dove with a little twig in its mouth.

BETSY. Oh, it must have been so pretty!

JACKIE. I'll make you a new one later, okay?

BETSY. Or you could paint me one of those watercolors

JACKIE. That's not really my medium.

BETSY. Your what?

JACKIE. I was just making those for Ray. You know, paint the watercolor, let it dry. Dip it in liquid meth, let that dry. Voila, meth art.

BETSY. Well, you just think of the neatest things, Jackie. Maybe watercolors should be your medium. Ray can't break those, can he?

JACKIE. He'd find a way. *(Pause.)* B, I need you to do me a little favor.

BETSY. Sure. Whatcha need, Hon?

JACKIE. Don't mention anything to Karla about... about how the fight started. Don't tell her I hit him, okay?

BETSY. How come? She'd probably give you a medal.

JACKIE. It's just that... Something just snapped, you know? I'm not ready to explain that. I hardly understand it myself.

BETSY. No, I won't breathe a word, Jackie. If she asks, I'll just say I didn't see anything. I'll say I was in the bathroom, or taking a walk or something.

JACKIE. Don't say you were taking a walk.

BETSY. Right. I'll just— *(Karla comes back in. Betsy starts humming again.)*

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KARLA. Unbelievable. He took everything out of there. Even Karl's shit.

JACKIE. I told you.

KARLA. He's in your truck, Jack. If he gets caught, you're toast.

JACKIE. I realize that. And I have a plan.

KARLA. Beg the judge for mercy?

JACKIE. I have to go find him.

KARLA. *(To Betsy:)* Do you mind? *(Betsy stops humming and exits to the back. To Jackie:)* How you gonna pull that off with no car and no money?

JACKIE. I'm gonna cook night and day. Make a huge batch. *(Pause.)*

Look, we were talking about going to Mexico. But first he wanted to see his parents in Portland. He wanted to spend the holidays with them before we split.

KARLA. You were just gonna leave the country? Did you plan on telling me?

JACKIE. We were only talking about it. It wasn't like a set in stone thing. But I think there's a good chance that's where he went, Portland. So as long as I can get there before New Year's I think I can catch him.

KARLA. And then what? Run away to Mexico?

JACKIE. No, I'm gonna drag his ass back here and tell him to hide like he's supposed to. And get my lab back in the process. You see, that's what pisses me off more than anything. He may be bigger and he can sure hit a lot harder, but the one thing I always had over him was my lab. Because it was my lab. I could always win every fight by driving away with my lab. But he turned the fucking tables on me. The bruises are nothing compared to how much that burns me.

KARLA. And you still want him around. You amaze me.

JACKIE. Like Karl's such a prize.

KARLA. At least he doesn't hit me.

JACKIE. No, he's his own special brand of lazy asshole.

KARLA. Like I got any other options.

JACKIE. Of course you have options.

KARLA. Really? Name one.

JACKIE. *(Beat.)* It's a free country.

KARLA. One option. Specifically.

SWEET

JACKIE. *(Pause.)* What do you want me to say? *(The tension breaks when Betsy wanders back in, busying herself with something.)* Can you go to the farm supply today?

KARLA. I wasn't planning on it.

JACKIE. I need iodine.

KARLA. Fuck.

JACKIE. Fine, let me take your Bronco and I'll go get it myself.

KARLA. No fucking way. For all we know, they might be after you too by now.

JACKIE. No one's after me.

KARLA. What makes you so sure?

JACKIE. I'm in the phone book. Jackie Lawrence. Not exactly hard to find. If they wanted me, they would have been here by now.

KARLA. I'm not even sure I trust you to come back.

JACKIE. Hey...

BETSY. I can go get it for you. I mean, in the Bronco.

KARLA. You're not driving my Bronco. And you shouldn't even be here. You're putting yourself at risk, you know?

BETSY. I'll be on my own soon pretty soon. Right, Jackie? I'm going to beauty school.

KARLA. Well woopy ding.

JACKIE. Look, we can get everything else from Fred Meyer. But I gotta have the iodine.

KARLA. Got any money?

JACKIE. Nope.

KARLA. He took all your money, too?

JACKIE. No, he burned my money. In the bathtub.

BETSY. Is that what that smell is?

KARLA. Okay. Just... How much is this gonna cost? You already owe me for like, eight or nine—

JACKIE. Eight months rents. I know, I'm sorry. I was gonna be able to pay you back with this batch. It wasn't even done drying yet.

KARLA. And you broke him out just in time to come along and fuck things up again.

JACKIE. Just go.

SWEET

KARLA. Are you barking orders at me now?

JACKIE. The sooner you go, the sooner I can start cooking.

BETSY. I can probably fix the tree. Ya got any super glue? (*Betsy exits to the back.*)

KARLA. (*She starts to leave but turns back to address Jackie.*) Why you'd risk your neck for somebody that treats you like this I'll never understand.

JACKIE. I don't want to end up alone.

KARLA. You're not alone. I'm always here, right?

JACKIE. It's not the same thing. (*Karla leaves. Betsy returns and starts picking up the broken gift boxes.*) I better get up. What a mess.

BETSY. (*Helping Jackie to her feet.*) Nothing you can do until Karla gets back. Just make your way down that hall and back to bed. I mean it; I'll clean up and make it look brand spanking new again.

JACKIE. Thanks. You can just throw everything out, B. It's really not worth trying to save the tree.

BETSY. Let me worry about the tree. You just get your beauty sleep, Sweetie. (*Jackie exits to her bedroom. Lights and set change back to the Castle.*)

SCENE 3

Bucket Girl is alone, mopping the floor, her trusty bucket nearby. She is distraught, rattled, and traumatized by what she has done. Suddenly Seth runs through the room, nearly running directly into Bucket Girl. Seth hisses, snarls, and raises one 'paw,' threatening with her extended claws. Bucket Girl is terrified but tries to hold her ground. Seth swipes at and scratches Bucket Girl, who screams. Seth runs out of the room. Bucket Girl begins to sob. After a beat or two, THURZO enters.

THURZO. Pardon me, Miss.

BUCKET GIRL. (*Startled. She does her best to cover her tears. Then remembers to drop to her knees.*) Good my Lord, my apologies.

THURZO. No harm done, dear. Is my cousin about?

BUCKET GIRL. Your cousin...?

SWEET

THURZO. The Countess.

BUCKET GIRL. Oh. *(Beat.)* Oh! You're the prime minister. Sir. My Lord. I...

THURZO. The Countess?

BUCKET GIRL. Yes! Sorry. She's just had her... bath... and—

THURZO. Would you please send for her?

BUCKET GIRL. Of course. Right away, my Lord. *(Bucket Girl curtsies to Thurzo. and starts to exit until the Countess enters, carrying a small hand mirror. She checks her appearance frequently throughout the scene.)*

COUNTESS. Thurzo! Darling, it's so wonderful to see you.

THURZO. Hello, Elizabeth. You're looking well.

COUNTESS. Yes, I know. *(Referring to Bucket Girl:)* All thanks to this young lady right here.

THURZO. This one? She doesn't look like she's been to your dungeon yet.

COUNTESS. This, dear cousin, is my new best friend. I've named her Bucket Girl.

THURZO. Bucket Girl.

BUCKET GIRL. How do you do, my Lord?

COUNTESS. Isn't she marvelous? And talented.

THURZO. Did you finally rid yourself of that dreadful warthog?

COUNTESS. Fixco? Fixco is practically family. He's... shopping in town at the moment. Picking up a few things.

THURZO. Yes, I would wager he is. *(To Bucket Girl:)* It's lovely to meet you. But I must have a private word with Her Highness.

BUCKET GIRL. Of course. I beg your pardon, my Lord. *(Bucket Girl curtsies, then begins to exit again.)*

COUNTESS. Come back here. *(Bucket Girl returns.)* Have you been crying?

BUCKET GIRL. No, my Lady. Just... tired.

COUNTESS. Well, you were up all night, weren't you? *(The Countess pats Bucket Girl lightly on the cheek.)* There, there. You go rest now. Just get your beauty sleep, Sweet Girl. *(Another curtsy, and Bucket Girl exits.)* Not that it'll do much good. Poor, awful thing.

THURZO. I have important matters to speak upon, cousin.

SWEET

COUNTESS. But first you must answer a question.

THURZO. Yes?

COUNTESS. Do you notice anything different about me?

THURZO. Have you been fasting?

COUNTESS. No. *(Pause.)* Do you think I need to fast? Is my gown too tight?

THURZO. No, Elizabeth. I didn't mean—

COUNTESS. Are you quite sure? I've often wondered if this headpiece makes my posterior look too large...

THURZO. You look splendid.

COUNTESS. Yes! And do you know why?

THURZO. You've discovered the secret to eternal youth and beauty.

COUNTESS. Did Fixco tell you? Why, that little weasel...

THURZO. I haven't spoken to Fixco.

COUNTESS. Then how did you guess?

THURZO. Oh, I don't know, Elizabeth. Perhaps it's because you're obsessed with the subject.

COUNTESS. Well, the time I've invested is paying off, isn't it? How do I look? Be honest.

THURZO. Younger than ever. It's quite shocking.

COUNTESS. *(Delighted.)* Oh, you see? You see?

THURZO. So, how did you do it?

COUNTESS. I'll never tell. Or at least, not until my Christmas party. You will be here, of course?

THURZO. No, cousin.

COUNTESS. But it's only a few days away. And it will be a bash—everyone will talk of it!

THURZO. That is what I fear most.

COUNTESS. I liked you better before you were prime minister. You're too serious now.

THURZO. And you? You couldn't be bothered to attend the masquerade ball for All Hallows' Eve.

COUNTESS. I was under the weather, Thurzo. You know that.

THURZO. Yes... But still I could swear I saw one of your carriages nearby.

SWEET

COUNTESS. Near the party?

THURZO. Yes.

COUNTESS. Well, that's strange.

THURZO. Isn't it?

COUNTESS. These carriages all look alike, though, don't they?

THURZO. But I did see our family crest painted onto the wheel caps. Just as you have on all your carriages.

COUNTESS. What are you getting at, Thurzo?

THURZO. There was a noble girl who disappeared that night. She had been attending the ball with her parents, Lord & Lady Majorova. She was last seen going out for a bit of air.

COUNTESS. Fascinating story. Do go on.

THURZO. There are those who... think the young lady may have found her way here.

COUNTESS. Here? Why would she come here?

THURZO. Cousin, your proclivities are well-known amongst the people of Cjesthe.

COUNTESS. Yes, well...

THURZO. I saw your carriage. The night the girl disappeared.

COUNTESS. A coincidence.

THURZO. Tell the truth. You took her, didn't you?

COUNTESS. Of course not.

THURZO. Elizabeth...

COUNTESS. Why would I need her? I have a dungeon full of trollops and hags.

THURZO. I can always tell when you're trying to deceive me.

COUNTESS. Don't play psychological games with me, Thurzo. It never worked when we were children and it certainly won't work now.

THURZO. Did you take the noble girl?

COUNTESS. Never.

THURZO. Fixco took her.

COUNTESS. (*Coyly.*) Maybe.

THURZO. Cousin, you didn't...

SWEET

COUNTESS. Well, according to Fixco, it took no coaxing whatsoever. The poor silly thing was so far into her cups that she nearly leapt into the carriage upon invitation! (*Giggles.*)

THURZO. Oh, dear...

COUNTESS. It was an honest mistake.

THURZO. A mistake?

COUNTESS. The girl was dressed as a shepherdess, for St. Anthony's sake!

THURZO. He didn't notice the lack of sheep?

COUNTESS. (*Giggling.*) Apparently not!

THURZO. So... What became of Helena?

COUNTESS. Who?

THURZO. Helena. The girl. Lord Majorova's daughter.

COUNTESS. (*Pause.*) Perhaps we should establish a don't-ask-don't-tell policy.

THURZO. Oh, I'll be sick.

COUNTESS. The girl was intoxicated, Thurzo. She was asking for trouble.

THURZO. Wonderful. Would you like me to tell that to her parents?

COUNTESS. I don't care what you tell them. We come from ancient royal bloodlines, my cousin. We are above any ordinary law.

THURZO. Don't you understand? Peasants are one thing. They have no power, no recourse. But you start in with noble families and you'll stir up fury like you've never seen.

COUNTESS. Oh, I'm quaking.

THURZO. Things have changed since we were children. The parents of this age, they're so...concerned. It's the strangest thing.

COUNTESS. Very strange.

THURZO. Not much we can do about changing times, I'm afraid. You must promise never to do it again.

COUNTESS. I wouldn't dream of it.

THURZO. Don't fool me, Elizabeth. I'll protect you but only so far.

COUNTESS. Such loyalty.

THURZO. Promise me? No more noble girls?

COUNTESS. On one condition.

SWEET

THURZO. Name it.

COUNTESS. You must come to my Christmas party. Pleeeeeeeeeaaaaaaase.

THURZO. Elizabeth, really. I have more pressing matters to deal with today.

COUNTESS. Well, I would think so. Surely the Prime Minister of Hungary has more important things to do than to spy on his cousin?

THURZO. I shall return later to continue this discussion. Meanwhile, please show some restraint, Elizabeth. Good day to you. *(Thurzo exits. The Countess takes a moment to examine her face in the hand mirror. Then she tries to see her rear end. Fixco enters, from a different entrance than Thurzo used, and drops to his knees to greet the Countess.)*

FIXCO. Your beauty is unmatched, your highness.

COUNTESS. Oh, Fixco! Darling, I was beginning to worry about you.

FIXCO. Not easy to find stray virgins of nobility wandering about town this time of year. Most are at home enjoying holiday gatherings.

COUNTESS. *(Proud of him.)* But you knew better than to return empty-handed, didn't you?

FIXCO. As ever, Madam. Your new prize awaits you in your chamber.

COUNTESS. Ooh! How old is she?

FIXCO. No more than seventeen, I'd swear on it.

COUNTESS. Yet untouched?

FIXCO. Pure as the driven snow. Naïve.

COUNTESS. Perfect. How did you lure her into the carriage?

FIXCO. Easily. I struck up a conversation with her at the market—my stature and overall appearance are really quite disarming with strangers—and in no time she confessed she was heartbroken not to have yet been asked for her hand in marriage. She said her sisters had all been married off, and with handsome dowries, but that she—

COUNTESS. Is she ugly?

FIXCO. Not in the least. Quite beautiful. Exotically so. For a child, I mean.

COUNTESS. Because her blood will not work if the girl is ugly.

FIXCO. I assure you the girl awaiting you in your bedchamber is not the least bit ugly. Petite, with smooth skin and raven's hair.

COUNTESS. Just like me in every way!

SWEET

FIXCO. We got to talking, and soon I convinced her that I knew just the person to school her in the ways of being a lady. That once she had been properly mentored, she would have numerous suitors and a new problem of simply trying to choose one who was up to *her* standards. She liked that.

COUNTESS. You're brilliant.

FIXCO. The poor dumb thing has no idea she's been kidnapped! Think of the fun you'll have.

COUNTESS. Yes! I must away to my chamber. How do I look?

FIXCO. The very model of modern Hungarian Royalty.

COUNTESS. Oh, Fixco! How shall I ever thank you? You've made my holiday season. Ta ta! *(The Countess begins to exit.)*

FIXCO. I beg your pardon, your highness. *(The Countess returns.)*

COUNTESS. Yes?

FIXCO. I thought I saw Thurzo's carriage down below.

COUNTESS. Indeed. What of it?

FIXCO. It seemed an unusually short visit. Anything important?

COUNTESS. On the contrary. Thurzo likes to think he's important. And as his loving cousin, I've long since learned to play along. *(The Countess exits, looking at herself in the mirror the whole time. She also hums a little tune as she goes.)*

FIXCO. *(Quietly, to himself.)* As we all have, Madam. *(Lights and set change back to Jackie's trailer.)*

SCENE 4

The Christmas tree is held together with duct tape, and the mess is gone. Anita still sits on the sofa, working on the string of Christmas lights. No one else is in the living room. PAM enters.

PAM. Hey, Anita. *(Anita stops and looks up at Pam with a blank expression.)* Oh, right. You don't say much these days, do ya? Um... is Jackie around? *(A long pause. No response from Anita, who just stares at her.)* Can you just nod yes, or shake your head no? *(Anita goes back to working on the Christmas lights.)* Great. Okay, so... *(Shouts:)* Jackie! *(There is no immediate response.)* Jackie! You back there? *(Still no response from Jackie, but Betsy enters.)*

SWEET

BETSY. Shh!!! She's sleeping.

PAM. Right now?

BETSY. She needs her beauty sleep. You want to wait out here 'til she wakes up? I'm just finishing up some laundry.

PAM. I don't really have time. (*Shouts:*) Jackie!!

BETSY. Well, geez Louise. Hang on a second. I'll get her. (*Betsy exits. Pam turns to Anita again.*)

PAM. Look, do you know if she's got anything right now? She's supposed to have something. How come she's sleeping? (*Anita again looks up from her work to give Pam the blank stare.*) Right. You don't have anything, do you? You know... anything? (*Anita goes back to working on the lights.*) Right. Okay. (*Jackie enters, clearly just having woken up. She is still exhausted.*)

JACKIE. Hello, Pam.

PAM. Sorry, did I wake you up?

JACKIE. Whatever gave you that idea?

PAM. Sorry. So, you got anything?

JACKIE. Nope. Nada.

PAM. It's not ready yet?

JACKIE. No, it's just gone. Long story. I'll have more in a couple days.

PAM. Did you sell it already? Why didn't you call me?

JACKIE. I didn't sell anything. Look, I'll be able to help you out before Christmas, hopefully. Okay?

PAM. I'm sick, Jackie. And I gotta work tomorrow. I'm only gonna get worse.

JACKIE. I've got this ginger tea I can make you. It'll settle your stomach.

PAM. Do you have a metal grate?

JACKIE. For what?

PAM. My brother told me that if you spray Black Flag on a metal grate and heat it up—

JACKIE. No way. I'm not cooking up junkie meth.

PAM. I might be able to borrow the grate off my neighbor's Hibachi.

JACKIE. No wonder you're having withdrawals. How many times have I told you never to use other people's—

PAM. I feel shitty enough, Jackie, God.

SWEET

JACKIE. Well, smoke some weed or something.

PAM. You got any?

JACKIE. Uh, no, actually. *(Betsy enters from the back, humming. She has a basket full of clean laundry ready to be folded.)*

PAM. Betsy, you got anything?

JACKIE. Pam, she's clean.

BETSY. *(Betsy points at a pin on her shirt.)* Sixteen months. Thank you, Jesus!

PAM. Shit.

BETSY. Did you get a good nap?

JACKIE. I guess. I mean I slept a long time but it wasn't good sleep.

BETSY. Bad dreams again?

JACKIE. Yeah.

BETSY. What were they about this time?

JACKIE. It was the same. It's like, medieval or something.

BETSY. Dangit, girl! I'm gonna go in that bedroom and yank that TV right out of there.

JACKIE. I didn't even turn it on, I swear.

BETSY. So it's a recurring dream?

JACKIE. Sort of. I mean not the same things happening, but the same world.

BETSY. They say dreams are God's way of trying to tell you something.

PAM. That's horse shit. Dreams are just bits and pieces of data swimming around in your brain, and when you sleep, they rearrange themselves. It's like a computer defragging.

JACKIE. Well, believe me, these people, this... castle... they're not swimming around in my brain. I've never seen these people before. Not on The History Channel or anywhere else. And it's not God talking, either. The devil, maybe...

BETSY. No. Why would you say that?

JACKIE. I think this chick is some kind of vampire.

PAM. Really? Cool.

BETSY. You're right, that's probably not God. God would never appear as a vampire in a dream. At least I don't think so.

SWEET

PAM. *(To Jackie:)* Hey, maybe you could come into town with me? You know, just go to some places and ask around for me.

JACKIE. No, I can't.

PAM. Come on, Jackie.

JACKIE. As soon as Karla gets back with supplies I have to work on a new batch.

PAM. You know I can't go anywhere myself.

BETSY. Ray could always come back with your dope, Jackie. You never know.

PAM. Ray? What the hell?

JACKIE. Thanks, Betsy.

PAM. Ray's out? Since when?

JACKIE. Since a few days ago.

BETSY. He wanted to be with Jackie for Christmas.

JACKIE. *(To Betsy:)* Will you go play in the road or something?

PAM. Jackie, you didn't.

BETSY. She did. I told her it was a bad idea, but you know how women are when they're in love.

PAM. Jackie!

JACKIE. I didn't do anything! He jumped in the car and said, '*Drive.*' What was I supposed to do, kick him out and tell him to climb back over the fence?

PAM. He literally climbed over the prison fence?

JACKIE. No, an ordinary fence. He wrote me a letter and told me to park down the road from where he was doing work detail. I thought I was just bringing him cigarettes.

PAM. Bullshit.

BETSY. I couldn't believe it was so easy, either. Of course, I never tried to break out, myself.

PAM. Jackie, this is bad. I mean bad. Oh fuck.

JACKIE. Well, I don't hear helicopters swooping down on the place, do you?

BETSY. I don't, but my hearing is shabby.

PAM. Can't you just come with me? Just for like an hour?

JACKIE. Pam...

SWEET

PAM. *(To Betsy:)* What about you? It's only been sixteen months. You must still know some places to go, huh?

JACKIE. Pam.

BETSY. Well, I think I know where this one crack dealer lives, but—

PAM. Sure, crack's good. Let's go.

JACKIE. Pam. Chill.

PAM. You want me to cook up Black Flag?

JACKIE. You don't ask somebody on the wagon to go looking for dope with you.

PAM. I'll do it, Jackie. Somebody's gotta help me, or I'm gonna do it. I know right where that Hibachi is.

JACKIE. Okay, fine. If it keeps you off the insect repellent, I'll go.

BETSY. You can't go.

JACKIE. It's okay, I know a place where we can get something. It's not exactly gourmet shit, but it beats the alternative. We'll be there and back in thirty. Forty-five tops.

BETSY. No, I mean you can't leave.

JACKIE. If Karla asks, tell her I went for groceries.

PAM. Cool. Let's go.

BETSY. No, you have to stay, Jackie.

JACKIE. Why?

BETSY. It's...a surprise.

PAM. It can wait. Let's go.

BETSY. No, it's—

JACKIE. The sooner we go, the sooner we'll be back.

BETSY. But you might—

JACKIE. And don't cut Anita's hair, I mean it.

BETSY. I won't. But... *(Betsy has no control over the situation. Jackie has put on her coat and shoes and is exiting with Pam. She blurts out:)*
Your sister's coming to visit!

JACKIE. *(Jackie returns.)* You...did not...just say that.

BETSY. *(Sheepishly:)* Surprise.

JACKIE. No. No no no no.

PAM. *(Pam re-enters.)* What now?

JACKIE. What are you telling me, B?

SWEET

BETSY. Your sister called.

JACKIE. When?

BETSY. This morning.

JACKIE. From where?

PAM. I didn't know you had a sister.

JACKIE. Stepsister. *(To Betsy:)* Where was she calling from?

BETSY. Eugene.

JACKIE. Eugene? Shit! What's she doing there?

BETSY. She's with some friends, I think. She said she was going to have them drop her off.

JACKIE. Why? Why would she do that?

BETSY. Well, gosh. She wants to see you, Jackie.

JACKIE. And you gave her directions?

BETSY. She's your sister. I'd do anything to see my sister.

JACKIE. We're not even related. She's my stepdad's daughter, she hates me, and we haven't talked in like ten years. Why the hell would she want to come all the way out to Sweet Home and get dropped off at my house?

BETSY. She doesn't hate you.

JACKIE. Yes, she does. The last time I saw her she told me never to come near her family again.

PAM. Good, then we can go, right?

BETSY. Well, she doesn't sound mad now.

JACKIE. You don't know Nicole. She's fourteen years older than me and she lords everything over me. Nothing I did was ever good enough. She was always at me.

PAM. She sounds like a bitch. Let's go.

JACKIE. And the thing she'll never let go of... The thing that... Oh, fuck. She's gonna be here any minute. Fuck. *(Jackie starts to physically panic, racing around the room, looking under couch cushions, etc.)*

BETSY. I'm sorry, Jackie. She just sounded so sweet over the phone.

JACKIE. That's Nicole for you. Always comes off to everybody like she's so reasonable and such a saint. But it's all bullshit.

PAM. Then let's leave so you don't have to see her.

JACKIE. No way. I can't let her see this, this—I gotta make sure everything's out of here.

SWEET

BETSY. What do you mean?

JACKIE. The dope. Every sign of it.

PAM. I thought you said Ray took it all. Are you holding out on me?

JACKIE. Matches, vials, flasks, all that shit. We gotta comb this place for paraphernalia.

PAM. Why? We can just leave, and Betsy can tell her to get lost.

BETSY. I'm not telling anyone that.

JACKIE. No, I gotta deal with this. If I run away from my own home, that means she wins.

PAM. The Black Flag is calling. Or, you know, waving.

JACKIE. Don't do that, Pam. Be stronger than that. You can hold out a day or two. At least until my bitchy, bossy—why the fuck is she coming here??

BETSY. Maybe she wants to make amends.

JACKIE. Yeah, well maybe I don't.

BETSY. Did you have a falling out?

JACKIE. You could call it that. She thought I stole some money from her when I was fifteen.

PAM. So did you?

JACKIE. No! Her husband played poker all the time; he probably took it. I don't know. But she called me a thief and a liar and never talked to me again. End of story.

PAM. I already don't like this person. I'll tell her to get lost for you, Jackie.

JACKIE. No. I'll deal with it. Just please go home and I'll call you when I've got something, okay? *(Pam picks up a black t-shirt from the laundry basket and waves it like a flag.)* Pam....

PAM. I'll do what I have to do, I guess. *(She exits.)*

BETSY. Do you really think she's gonna steal her neighbor's Hibachi?

JACKIE. *(Preoccupied.)* Let's see... I don't see any reason why Nicole would want to go out to the other trailer, so... Well, just to be safe, I better go out there with some boxes and...Shit, I don't have any boxes. Well, I'll have to use Hefty bags to gather up all the equipment. I can hide it all down at the stable, or something.

BETSY. Can I help?

SWEET

JACKIE. No, don't go near the trailer. Just being in there could give you a dirty UA. I mean sixteen months, you're doing great. I'm proud of you.

BETSY. You ever thought about quitting, Jackie?

KARLA. *(Entering with a heavy five-gallon bucket with a lid on it.)* Jesus! Tell Pam to slow down in the driveway. She just about hit me head-on.

JACKIE. Oh my God! Get that out of here.

KARLA. Why? Everything else is in Bronco.

BETSY. Her sister's coming.

KARLA. You have a sister?

JACKIE. Stepsister. The wicked kind.

KARLA. And she's coming here?

JACKIE. Long story.

BETSY. *(To Karla:)* You missed a lot of information.

JACKIE. I need your help cleaning up.

KARLA. Wait a minute. What's going on?

JACKIE. I'm not gonna be able to cook up the new batch yet. My sister's coming for a surprise visit and she's not cool at all.

KARLA. What, is she staying the night?

JACKIE. God, I hope not.

KARLA. You never even mentioned her. Like, the whole time I've known you.

JACKIE. Uptight, Christian, hypocritical, self-righteous soccer mom. Get the picture?

KARLA. Whoa.

JACKIE. Look, do you have any boxes? I want to get everything out of the lab and hide it in the barn.

KARLA. Why?

JACKIE. It's the last place she'd look.

KARLA. Why would she be looking at all? Are you telling me the truth?

BETSY. It's my fault. I gave her directions. She didn't sound like a bitchy soccer mom on the phone, I swear.

JACKIE. Must be that shabby hearing.

KARLA. Well, if she gave the directions, I seriously doubt she'll be able to find the place.

BETSY. What does that mean?

SWEET

JACKIE. Will you take the bucket out of here, please?

KARLA. I'll take the bucket. And don't worry about the trailer, I'll take care of it.

JACKIE. We need alibis.

BETSY. Alibis?

JACKIE. You know, jobs. We need to pretend we all have jobs so she doesn't start to wonder how we're supporting ourselves. I definitely don't want her thinking I'm unemployed. I'll never hear the end of it.

BETSY. I know! I'll say I'm a hairdresser. Like freelance.

JACKIE. What about me, what can I say?

BETSY. You could tell her you're still selling rippies down at the Thirsty Duck.

JACKIE. Yeah, that's real respectable.

BETSY. You could say you work for a lawyer. That sounds good, right?

JACKIE. Like a paralegal?

BETSY. Ooh, good one. What about Anita? *(They all look at Anita, who is still deeply engrossed in fixing the Christmas tree lights.)*

KARLA. Door-to-door Christmas tree light repairman?

JACKIE. You're not helping.

KARLA. Well, obviously you can't hide her condition.

JACKIE. My sister doesn't need to know how she got that way.

BETSY. I've got it! Instead of saying you work for a lawyer, you could say you work for a doctor. Like a nurse or something. And you can say that she was a patient who had a stroke and needed home care, and she didn't have anybody to look after her, and you couldn't stand to see her in some state hospital, so you took her in. And now you take care of her. It's almost the truth.

JACKIE. Almost.

BETSY. Okay, so you're a nurse, I'm a hairdresser, and Anita's a stroke victim. What's Karla gonna be?

KARLA. Leaving. I'll be the unfriendly landlady who never visits. See ya.
(Karla exits with the bucket.)

BETSY. She could have been more creative.

KARLA. *(Dashes back into the house.)* She's here, Jack.

JACKIE. Are you sure?

SWEET

KARLA. There's a car coming down the driveway and I don't recognize it.

JACKIE. Take the bucket to my bedroom. Put it in the closet.

KARLA. Do you really think she'll know what it's for? I mean, we've got horses.

JACKIE. Please! I don't want to risk it.

KARLA. Okay, okay. I'm on it. *(She exits to the bedroom.)*

BETSY. I'll go greet her in the driveway. *(Betsy exits. Jackie is panicked but realizes there's nothing more she can do. She is terrified at the looming encounter. She tries sitting casually on the sofa. Feels ridiculous. Tries to look busy, like she's dusting or something. Karla enters.)*

KARLA. What's happening?

JACKIE. Betsy's stalling. Did you hide it? Like really good?

KARLA. Yes, will you calm down? Jesus.

JACKIE. This could not be happening to me at a worse time.

BETSY. *(Entering, carrying a suitcase. She has a stunned look on her face. To Jackie:)* Well... Say hello to your sister. *(Miller enters right behind Betsy, carrying a duffel bag. Clearly, this teenage girl is no soccer mom.)*

MILLER. Hi, Jackie.

JACKIE. Who the fuck are you? *(Lights down.)*

END ACT I

SWEET

ACT II
SCENE 1

Lights up on the castle. The Countess sits at a table across from the VIRGIN. The Countess is laying out tarot cards. Seth and Dio are asleep at her feet.

VIRGIN. Do you see anything?

COUNTESS. Of course. I see everything.

VIRGIN. What do they say about me?

COUNTESS. *(Turns a card.)* Ah, the seven of rods. That's a good card.

VIRGIN. Is it? In what way, your Highness?

COUNTESS. It means you have yet to realize your full potential. And that great things are ahead for you.

VIRGIN. Does it really mean that?

COUNTESS. Your cards, the placement of them, they indicate a promising future. One where you will contribute wholeheartedly to the greater good.

VIRGIN. Oh? How so?

COUNTESS. Well, that remains to be seen. But I can tell you that my personal observations about you confirm what the cards are saying. You will serve a great purpose, my Sweet.

VIRGIN. A noble purpose?

COUNTESS. Indeed.

VIRGIN. Then I will follow in my father's footsteps! Oh, this is great news, your Highness.

COUNTESS. Your father, he is Lord...?

VIRGIN. Lord Turazi.

COUNTESS. Oh, yes. Turazi. Your father is a great humanitarian, is he not?

VIRGIN. He is. So kind, generous, and loving. To follow in his path is the best future I can hope for!

COUNTESS. He sounds like a true bleeding heart.

VIRGIN. I suppose so, yes.

COUNTESS. How perfect.

SWEET

VIRGIN. What is, your Highness?

COUNTESS. Oh, this card. It's the four of cups and it is upside down, as you can see. It means you have much to offer.

VIRGIN. Offer? You mean to a husband?

COUNTESS. Heavens, no! I should hope you'd have higher aspirations than mere marriage, my child.

VIRGIN. Well, it is the natural course of things, isn't it?

COUNTESS. Hogwash. Hardly natural at all.

VIRGIN. But, your Highness, you are married.

COUNTESS. Yes, but my life is mine own. I decided how I would live my life and then I chose my suitor accordingly. To marry first and *then* attempt to determine your future...why it's... pathetic. Don't you think?

VIRGIN. What else do the cards say?

COUNTESS. Something about... well, I'm not sure. There are contradictory statements here.

VIRGIN. Contradictory? Such as what?

COUNTESS. Well, I hate to be so frank, my dear girl...

VIRGIN. No, go on. What is it?

COUNTESS. May I ask you a question of a somewhat personal nature?

VIRGIN. Yes, I've nothing to hide.

COUNTESS. Of course you haven't. But it's something I must be clear about before your tutelage can go any further.

VIRGIN. Yes, Your Highness?

COUNTESS. The cards. They call into question your... purity.

VIRGIN. My purity? What do you mean?

COUNTESS. My sweet girl, I must ask. Have you ever been... touched?

VIRGIN. I don't think so. Touched?

COUNTESS. By a man.

VIRGIN. A man? Never! Except, of course, my father—

COUNTESS. Your father? You've been touched by your father? The saint? How extraordinary!

VIRGIN. No! I mean to say that he is the only man who has ever embraced me. He tucked me into bed as a child. Petted my head when I was ill. Nothing... as you say...

COUNTESS. So you are indeed pure?

SWEET

VIRGIN. (*Embarrassed.*) Yes. Of course.

COUNTESS. Untouched by your father or any other man?

VIRGIN. Yes.

COUNTESS. No sneaking off to the stables with peasant boys? No dirty secrets? And don't lie—the cards will know.

VIRGIN. Countess, you embarrass me terribly. Never have I done such a thing. Nor will I.

COUNTESS. You mean to suggest that at the tender and ripe age of seventeen you have had absolutely no relations, no temptations, no... desires? You forget I was once your age.

VIRGIN. Well...

COUNTESS. Confess, my child. The cards tell me you are hiding something.

VIRGIN. I have had... temptations.

COUNTESS. Ah.

VIRGIN. But only... privately. I mean, silently. Thoughts. Only thoughts. Is it wrong to have thoughts, even if one never acts upon them? Oh, I'm so ashamed!

COUNTESS. There, there, my sweet. To have temptations is normal. Something would have to be terribly wrong with a girl your age if she didn't have... curiosities. Besides, what husband would want a sexless creature for a wife?

VIRGIN. I thought you said I shouldn't want a husband.

COUNTESS. No, dear. You miss my point. Husbands are essential. They are like a cloak we wear that tells the outside world that we are ordinary, dutiful women of nobility. But the man must be chosen carefully and only if he will both strengthen your social status and not get in the way of your own... activities.

VIRGIN. Activities?

FIXCO. (*Entering, then dropping to his knees in front of the Countess.*) Madam, your tea is ready.

COUNTESS. Ah, wonderful. (*To the Virgin:*) Let's have supper. Come along, kitties. (*Dio and Seth awaken and stretch.*)

VIRGIN. Thank you, your Highness. I would be delighted to join you. (*The Virgin, the Countess, and Seth exit. But Dio lingers a moment. Fixco*

SWEET

begins to put away the Countess' tarot cards. Dio swats at Fixco and hisses, scaring the crap out of him.)

FIXCO. Out, you beast! *(Dio exits.)*

BUCKET GIRL. *(Entering.)* Delighted! Did you hear that?

FIXCO. My God! You frightened me!

BUCKET GIRL. And apparently Dio did as well. I thought you said I shouldn't be afraid of them.

FIXCO: No, you should absolutely be afraid of them. They're diseased, evil rodents. I simply said you mustn't let the Countess see your fear. And that applies to any situation. By the way, were you eavesdropping on the Countess?

BUCKET GIRL. Sort of. Yes.

FIXCO. Was it riveting?

BUCKET GIRL. Not half as much as what I heard yesterday.

FIXCO. You mean when Thurzo was visiting? I wondered what his agenda might be. Do tell.

BUCKET GIRL. It's the noble girl.

FIXCO. What? This new one?

BUCKET GIRL. No, the other. The one I...

FIXCO. Drained.

BUCKET GIRL. Oh...oh... *(She gets dizzy and finds her way to a chair. Her breathing is difficult, her hands shake a little.)*

FIXCO. For St. Anthony's sake, you'll have to get used to this. You're in the sunshine of the Countess' love. If you want to stay in that warm, safe place you simply can't let on that it's bothering you. Pull yourself together.

BUCKET GIRL. Yes. It's hard to breathe.

FIXCO. Now tell me about Thurzo.

BUCKET GIRL. The noble girl, her parents are distraught at her disappearance. He knows you took her, Fixco. He thinks he saw you on All Hallow's Eve.

FIXCO. And did she confess?

BUCKET GIRL. She did. But she also shared false words with her cousin when she told him that she would no longer seek noble girls for her rituals. You were seeking one at that very moment!

SWEET

FIXCO. I can't imagine how he saw me. There was no one else on the street when I coaxed the drunken noble girl into the carriage. Where was he?

BUCKET GIRL. He saw one of the Countess' carriages traveling in the area. Yet she herself was not in attendance at the party.

FIXCO. Well, what of it?

BUCKET GIRL. How can you be so unconcerned, Fixco? We could both be hanged for what... happened to that girl.

FIXCO. We can't turn back the clock, though, can we? What's done is done.

BUCKET GIRL. But we must prevent the Countess from killing the new Virgin! *(Fixco laughs.)* Why is that of humor to you?

FIXCO. How exactly do you propose we accomplish this task?

BUCKET GIRL. Well...

FIXCO. Yes?

BUCKET GIRL. We warn her, of course. We tell her she must send the child back to avoid catching any more of Thurzo's attention. It's not too late, the girl doesn't even know why she's—

FIXCO. Tell the Countess what to do? Bark orders at her highness? At Christmas? That sort of willful behavior will get you killed. You may count on it.

BUCKET GIRL. No, we would merely warn her. She may appreciate our wise counsel.

FIXCO. Are we talking about the same Countess?

BUCKET GIRL. *(Pause.)* So we... do nothing.

FIXCO. No, we do our jobs. We do all that the Countess asks, praise her, and play the game as she wishes.

BUCKET GIRL. The game?

FIXCO. Do you see these cards? The meanings she assigns to them are arbitrary—completely invented to please her highness' whims. That is how the game is played.

BUCKET GIRL. I don't follow you.

FIXCO. Yes, that is apparent. Remember that you do not have the luxury of options. Wise up, Dear. *(Lights and set change back to Jackie's house.)*

SWEET

SCENE 2

Anita is asleep on the sofa. Jackie and MILLER are playing cards. They play while they talk.

MILLER. This is great. None of my friends will play Spades with me.

JACKIE. Why not?

MILLER. I don't know. Some of my friends play Texas Hold 'em, but I don't like playing cards for actual money. Since I don't really have any money to play with. But nobody I know likes to just play regular cards games. This is cool.

JACKIE. Out.

MILLER. Shit.

JACKIE. Sorry.

MILLER. Go again?

JACKIE. I'm getting sleepy, aren't you?

MILLER. Not really. I'm kind of a night owl.

JACKIE. I noticed. Look, the thing is...

MILLER. Uh-oh. Am I wearing out my welcome already?

JACKIE. No, it's just... you showed up here yesterday, out of the blue, and it happens to be kind of a crazy time in my life and—

MILLER. You really never knew about me before?

JACKIE. No.

MILLER. How is that possible?

JACKIE. Well, I haven't talked to... him... in a really long time.

MILLER. Dad, you mean?

JACKIE. Um, right.

MILLER. But you must have talked to somebody. I mean somebody, like some relative, must have told you that you had a baby sister.

JACKIE. No, nobody did.

MILLER. But you knew he got married, right? You knew he met my mom and got married. Didn't you?

JACKIE. Look, after we moved out... Nobody saw him anymore. It was just me, my mom, and my aunts and nobody kept in contact with him or his family or anything.

SWEET

MILLER. Why?

JACKIE. I don't know, Miller. That's just what happens when people get divorced. The thing is, I'm not... I'm glad you looked me up. I'm glad to know I have a sister. And, no offense, but you're a kid. You're still in school. And I've got a lot going on in my life right now—

MILLER. Like what?

JACKIE. All kinds of things. And the thing with me and your dad is that—

MILLER. Our dad.

JACKIE. Our dad... it's complicated. And if he even knew you were here—

MILLER. He knows I'm here.

JACKIE. Really?

MILLER. Of course. I called my mom—after I talked to Betsy on the phone the other day— and said I was spending Christmas with you.

JACKIE. (*Skeptical.*) And everyone was okay with that?

MILLER. Yeah. Why wouldn't they be?

JACKIE. Like I said, it's complicated.

MILLER. The truth is there's some stuff going on with my parents right now. And it's probably better if I'm not around.

JACKIE. What kind of stuff?

MILLER. I think they might get a divorce. That's one of the reasons I wanted to come see you. You've been through it.

JACKIE. Yeah, it sucks. I'm sorry, Miller.

MILLER. (*A sudden realization.*) Is that why your mom left him? He was cheating? Oh my God, I hope it wasn't with my mom!

JACKIE. No, Miller. I'm sure that was not the case. And the thing is, I was nine. I didn't really understand what was going on. So, I can't really, you know, offer any insight.

MILLER. I've been wanting to meet you for years. Dad's always talking about you.

JACKIE. He talks about me?

MILLER. Yeah, all the time. When I'm scared of something or whatever, he always says, '*Jackie was tough. Jackie could take it.*' That sort of thing.

SWEET

Or '*Jackie was never afraid to ride the dune buggies.*' He says I'm too girly. (*Jackie snickers.*)

JACKIE. Nothing, just... The dune buggies. I forgot all about that.

MILLER. Well, he misses you, Jackie.

JACKIE. Could have fooled me.

MILLER. How would you know how he feels?

JACKIE. I wouldn't. I don't know anything about the guy.

MILLER. You could have called him. You didn't have to turn your back on him just because of your mom.

JACKIE. I'm not the one who turned their back.

MILLER. I'm sorry. But that's how he feels about it. You left Coos Bay and forgot all about him.

JACKIE. I was there for him. I was the only one who stuck around for him.

MILLER. If you stuck around, you would have met me a long fucking time ago.

JACKIE. (*Pause.*) He said he never wanted to see me again.

MILLER. What?

JACKIE. He told my mom, '*She's dead to me.*'

MILLER. Dad would never say that.

JACKIE. Look, you can stay here tonight. But in the morning, why don't we call your friends and have them come get you?

MILLER. They're gone. They drove up to Seattle for Christmas. They're not coming back for me until New Year's.

JACKIE. Then maybe Karla can drive you back.

MILLER. No! Why are you getting rid of me?

JACKIE. You can come back and visit some other time. I'm just in a crisis right now.

MILLER. I can help. Just tell me what you need.

JACKIE. No, Miller. It's not... You might not be safe here.

MILLER. Why not?

JACKIE. Because my boyfriend is very mad at me.

MILLER. So?

JACKIE. So he might try to hurt me. Or anyone here.

MILLER. Why would he do that?

SWEET

JACKIE. Because I... I did something bad. I hit him.

MILLER. And then he hit you back and left. I know, Betsy told me.

JACKIE. Dammit.

MILLER. I'm sure he got it out of his system. Why would he come back?

JACKIE. We're talking about a guy who would rather burn my money in the bathtub than just steal it like a normal person. He's not exactly rational.

MILLER. *(Pause.)* Oh, I see what you're doing. You're trying to scare me into leaving.

JACKIE. You should be scared. I should be scared.

MILLER. You don't look scared.

JACKIE. Only because I'm so tired.

MILLER. Everybody in this house is tired. What's up with that? You sleep constantly, like cats.

JACKIE. We can't all be seventeen. Let's talk more in the morning, okay? I need to go to bed.

MILLER. I think you need a personality assessment.

JACKIE. Excuse me?

MILLER. It's like a game. I need paper. *(She looks for a pad of paper and a pen.)*

JACKIE. I'm too tired to play any more games. I'm fried.

MILLER. That's the perfect state of mind. That way you won't think too much about your answers. They'll just come naturally.

JACKIE. Miller...

MILLER. Come on, it'll take two minutes. And it will be fun, I promise.

JACKIE. Then can I go to sleep?

MILLER. *(Miller writes something on the paper.)* Okay, first question. What is your favorite color?

JACKIE. *(Shrugs.)* Green, I guess.

MILLER. *(Taking notes.)* Okay... name three words that describe green.

JACKIE. Describe green?

MILLER. Adjectives.

JACKIE. All right... Alive, cheerful, and... real.

MILLER. And...what's your favorite animal?

JACKIE. I don't really have a favorite.

MILLER. So pick one that you like.

SWEET

JACKIE. Okay, cats. Since you say I sleep like one.

MILLER. Name three things to describe what you like about cats.

JACKIE. They're soft. Um... they're aloof. Easy to housetrain. (*An afterthought:*) My mom had cats.

MILLER. Good. Now, what's your favorite body of water?

JACKIE. Um... a hot tub sounds nice right about now.

MILLER. That's a weird answer, but okay. Now give me three adjectives to describe a hot tub.

JACKIE. Hot, sweaty, and... populated.

MILLER. Populated?

JACKIE. I thought you wanted my unedited thoughts. Let them come naturally, you said.

MILLER. No, no, it's fine. It's good, actually. Okay, one more. You're in a white room. Nothing but white all around. How does this make you feel?

JACKIE. Cold...alone...empty.

MILLER. (*Reviewing the notes.*) Wow. Okay.

JACKIE. Am I done? Can I go to bed now?

MILLER. Don't you even want to know the results?

JACKIE. Sorry, kiddo. I need to hit the sack.

MILLER. Your favorite color reveals how you want others to see you. Which in your case is alive, cheerful, and real.

JACKIE. Uh-huh.

MILLER. Your favorite animal indicates how you see yourself. So, you see yourself as soft, aloof, and easy to housetrain.

JACKIE. That may be true, actually.

MILLER. The body of water is how you think of sex. So apparently you like it hot, sweaty, and populated.

JACKIE. No comment. What's the white room?

MILLER. The white room is... how you see your death.

JACKIE. Cold. Alone. Empty. (*She suddenly looks uneasy.*)

MILLER. Jackie?

JACKIE. You uh... You should try that on Betsy sometime. She'll get a kick out of it.

MILLER. Hey, are you okay? You look funny.

SWEET

JACKIE. No, I'm fine. Just...um... sleeping with my eyes open. You sure you don't want my bed?

MILLER. No, I'll use my rollup thing again. The floor is totally fine with me.

JACKIE. 'Kay then. Good night. *(She turns to leave.)*

MILLER. Jackie?

JACKIE. Yeah.

MILLER. I just want to know you better.

JACKIE. *(Pause.)* I know. Me, too. Good night, Miller. *(Jackie exits. Lights change back to the castle.)*

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