

XXX, MOM

by

Rodney Ross

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Always for GWC

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CAST: Four Men, Three Women (with doubling as indicated below)

WILMA COOPER is portrayed by three actors at different points in her life:

WILLOW CUPPERS	22 YEARS-OLD ALWAYS RESOURCEFUL AND NEVER STUPID.
BILLIE COOPER	LATE-30'S A STRUGGLING SINGLE MOM.
WILMA COOPER	71 YEARS-OLD SHE IS OLD AND SHE IS ILL.
BART COOPER	LATE-40'S WILMA'S SON ABRUPT, ANXIOUS, ANGRY.
MR. HILLIARD	EARLY 60'S FUNERAL HOME DIRECTOR, OBSEQUIOUS, YET ECCENTRIC
NICOLAS	LATE 30'S HEAVILY BEARDED SELF-STYLED WEBSITE MANAGER READY WITH TOO MUCH INFORMATION.
DUANE	MID-20's NEW YORK CITY PORN ACTOR/BOYFRIEND WHAT YOU'D EXPECT.

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VOICE OF BRIAN (BRI-BRI).	(VOICE DOUBLED by the actor portraying DUANE) GAY POST-HIGH SCHOOL FRIEND OF WILMA.
MALE PRODUCER VOICES.	(VOICE DOUBLED by the actors portraying BILLIE and WILMA.)
TICKET BUYER DUDE	(VOICE DOUBLED by the actor portraying MR. HILLIARD.)
42nd STREET CATCALLERS	(DOUBLED by the actors portraying DUANE and MR. HILLIARD.)
LOUANNA GIMPEL	(DOUBLED by the actor portraying BILLIE.) MAKE-UP ARTIST A SOUTHERNER IN NYC.
MALE SUITOR VOICES	(VOICE DOUBLED by the actors portraying DUANE and MR. HILLIARD.)
FBI INTERVIEWER	(DOUBLED by the actor portraying DUANE) MOBILITY-CHALLENGED, PROFESSIONAL AND CALM.
AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER	(VOICE DOUBLED by the actor portraying MR. HILLIARD.) HOST OF MANHATTAN CABLE'S 'MIDNIGHT BLUE'.
ONCOLOGY NURSE	(DOUBLED by the actor portraying WILLOW.) CONVERSATIONAL CAREGIVER.
SHUTTLE DRIVER	(DOUBLED by the actor portraying BILLIE.) PERSONABLE.

'XXX, Mom' is performed without an intermission.

Time: The present.

Place: The interior and exterior of
Hilliard & Son Funeral Home.

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A spray of gladioli is next to a minimum 70" wall-mounted monitor displaying an attractive older woman in her early 70's: honey-streaked brunette hair, stopping at her neck. She is WILMA 'BILLIE' COOPER, calligraphy reads. Beneath: May 3, 1952 – September 19, current year. This monitor will dissolve to other images, as indicated throughout. The convention of the 4th wall doesn't exist in 'XXX, Mom'. The three variants of one woman – Willow Cupper, Billie Cooper and Wilma Cooper -- will interact with one another, other characters or elaborate on a statement that's been made. This is indicated by parenthetical (to audience) or (to character name). Immersiveness is welcomed by the playwright, who also acknowledges space limitations. There are no rules of participation between the living, the dead or a flashback. Bart even verbally engages with stage management. Because past and present perspectives comingle, all three actors (Willow, Billie and Wilma) are isolated from one another in a box, compartment-like design which can ultimately be collapsible, perhaps hinged. They are free to, and do, emerge. The practicalities of these three spaces are best left to the creative team, but a final, empowering coup de Théâtre will be reliant on these three components. A cement bench is DOWNSTAGE.

Something from composer Ennio Morricone's 'Days of Heaven' film soundtrack – specifically, 'The Return' track -- is playing, and gradually fades. Slowly up, from black.

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BART COOPER, in a blue pinstripe suit, enters and pauses at the Hilliard & Son monitor. He touches his mother's face on it.

BART. Wilma Cooper is my mother. I am her only child, Bart. She's being buried today. (*From his jacket pocket he withdraws an amber vial and swallows two, without water, of whatever it contains.*) I love you, Mom. I can feel you near.

SPACE #1

Through a worn sheer, a brittle movie klieg pink light is snapped on to reveal WILLOW on a red upholstered barstool. Phrases like ADULTS ONLY, CHECK OUT OUR BUDDY BOOTHS! and 2ND XXX FEATURE stenciled among graffiti but most prominent is

Before Mom Was Mom.

To say she is endowed is putting it mildly. The exposed cleavage will warrant the actress wearing a prosthetic bustline – a 'breastplate', like drag queens use.

In a wig cap, she readies herself, in a too-tight, too-short white nurse's uniform and white hosiery, with visible garters; and thick white nurse shoes. She dons a red pageboy wig, then secures a nurse's cap.

Should this STAGING be impractical, a garish pink light and a stained cement sidewalk might suffice.

WILLOW. (*She looks up from fussing with her garters.*) Because I am. I love you, too, honey.

BART. I hope the service was okay. Turnout wasn't great.

SPACE #2

In a kitchen in need of an update, BILLIE casts open the curtains above a sink. Morning sun streams in.

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*Her brunette 1980's-hairstyle is achieved with hot rollers or a curling wand. In a pastel pantsuit she, too, is evidently well-endowed. A framed wall poster of daisies and butterflies bear a back door tells you this is **Mom, In The Middle.** Coffee is made as she folds from a laundry basket on a round kitchen table. She will continue to fold laundry, turn on an oscillating fan in a corner, take bagged refuse off-stage through the backdoor, check her purse or rinse dishes, busying herself. Should this STAGING be impractical, a sunny, yellow light and a linoleum floor might suffice.)*

BILLIE. I thought it was nice. It felt about right.

SPACE #3

*LIGHTS UP on a window as aluminum white mini-blinds are being raised, looking into an antiseptic white room. The black lettering on the back wall alerts us that this is 'Strasberg Oncology' and that this is also **Mom, At The End.***

WILMA is 71 years-old. Her turban, caftan and waxen pallor suggests poor health. She's like a living X-ray. Her large woven purse rests on a metal side table.

In her shaky hand, she holds an iPhone. From her occasional nod and tentative tapping, it is evident she is playing a game of some sort.

Should this STAGING be impractical, a silver/grey light and a veined marble floor might suffice.

BART. You weren't much of a joiner.

WILMA. *(She dons plastic reading glasses.)* We have that in common. You're not much of a people person neither. *(She removes the readers, breathes on them, wipes them with her sleeve, looks around.)* Readers from the Dollar Store. They were one dollar-fifty. Everything's blurry.

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Who's got Windex? *(The funeral home director, MR. HILLIARD, in a black suit, enters from stage right to confer with Bart.)*

MR. HILLIARD. We'll proceed to the cemetery in about an hour. Has everything been to your satisfaction?

BART. What's your Returns policy?

MR. HILLIARD. Begging your pardon?

BART. That was a miserable attempt at funeral home levity.

MR. HILLIARD. Humor can be full-body armor.

BART. I mix mine up a little with a button-fly.

MR. HILLIARD. See? Laughter heals.

BART. You didn't laugh.

MR. HILLIARD. It doesn't have to be out loud. *(He pauses.)* I just like to hear feedback personally.

BART. And not on Yelp.

MR. HILLIARD. You're being funny again, but you'd be surprised. People are harsh.

BART. The minister mangled her name.

MR. HILLIARD. Your mother wasn't a churchgoer. He didn't have a personal frame-of-reference.

BART. *(He taps the monitor.)* Wi-lma Coo-per isn't complicated. It's written out as you walk in. How did he manage to turn it into Wilhemina Cokie?

MR. HILLIARD. I apologize.

BILLIE. *(to audience.)* Reverend McIntosh takes too many pills. But so does my son.

MR. HILLIARD. For example: the music. Was the volume good? We downloaded it special. Ms. Cooper said it was from her favorite movie.

BART. It was *my* favorite movie. 'Days of Heaven'. Ennio Morricone.

WILMA. *(to Bart)* See? I paid attention.

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MR. HILLIARD. Ms. Cooper was very organized. Details could be handled by phone, I told her, but she wanted to see the casket models in-person.

WILMA. *(to audience.)* The catalog made them look like new, compact cars.

MR. HILLIARD. The mandates were long over, but she wore a mask. So did I, of course.

BART. She was susceptible to anything.

MR. HILLIARD. So her appearance suited you? She'd lost weight since we sat together.

BART. The wig came very close to her own hair.

MR. HILLIARD. Our cosmetologist loaned us that when you decided on an open viewing.

BART. Loaned? Is it taken back when you close the lid?

MR. HILLIARD. It will be replaced with the headwrap your mother's body came in with. Donnalee is a freelancer. Miss Cooper didn't account for hair replacement. I can ask about reimbursing Donalee for the wig.

WILMA. I took it for granted hair was included, like footies.

MR. HILLIARD. I'll call Donnalee about the wig oversight. Since it will only be you, if you want to go home and tend to things, there's time. A town car will take you and bring you back.

BART. There's plenty to do. Mom had some hoarder tendencies.

MR. HILLIARD. That happens.

BART. I mean, don't get me wrong. There are places to sit down.

WILMA. *(to Bart.)* I *admired* certain things!

BART. *(to Wilma.)* Like empty perfume bottles. You refilled them with colored water and lined them up in every windowsill.

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WILMA. Those are my suncatchers!

BART. *(to Wilma.)* I foresee several trips to Goodwill.

MR. HILLIARD. As they say, one man's trash is another man's --

BART. *(interjects.)* -- fire hazard. Reality show. Mardi Gras costume. *(Suddenly, from somewhere, the loud and repetitive sound of something mechanical: jackhammer, nail gun. Bart is quite startled.)* Holy shit, what's that?!?!

MR. HILLIARD. Construction, I'd say.

BART. *(He pats his forehead and temples as he shakes his head.)* Sorry.

MR. HILLIARD. How about I go find you some water?

WILMA. It's on every table. Bottled water is the new funeral Kleenex. Did I pay for that? *(Mr. Hilliard returns with two bottled waters and hands one to Bart, then uncaps his own.)*

MR. HILLIARD. Did you serve in the military? That noise seemed like a trigger.

BART. *(He swigs the water.)* Like you said...*today's* the trigger. A burial doesn't bury everything. 'fact, it seems to have dug up a lot of --

MR. HILLIARD. *(interjects.)* -- *stuff.* The passing of a mother, for many, is tougher than a spouse. It's primal, that connectedness.

BART. I realized that, with no father to lose, today is kinda it.

MR. HILLIARD. Ms. Cooper left him off her pre-planning checklist, but she never said if her ex-husband was still with us.

BART. My father wasn't an ex. I don't know if he's deceased.

WILMA. *(to audience.)* Sometimes I referred to him as that. It was tidier. *(As Mr. Hilliard observes Bart inhale and exhale deeply, the loud construction noise continues.)*

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MR. HILLIARD. Your mother drove my daughter Chloe's school bus. That would have been...1997. She'd wave as she passed. Sometimes I could see her laughing. *(Billie simulates pressing down on a steering wheel horn. Sound effect: the blast of a horn, of lower pitch than that of a smaller vehicle.)*

BILLIE. *(She waves.)* There's Mr. Hilliard, out having coffee in his yard. Everybody wave!

MR. HILLIARD. *(He turns to wave at Billie.)* Good morning, Ms. Cooper!

BILLIE. Oh, my goodness! His robe just flapped open! That was more than a quick peek! Poor Mrs. Hilliard.

MR. HILLIARD. How she maintained any semblance of order, I don't know.

BART. She could turn that yellow bus on a dime.

MR. HILLIARD. You're welcome to pass the time here. We have a Keurig. Not 'Starbucks'...it's 'Dunkin Donuts'.

BART. I'm jumpy enough.

MR. HILLIARD. I think we have a cheese plate in the fridge.

BART. I don't do dairy.

MR. HILLIARD. There might be some salami cut up among it.

BART. You don't have to feed me. I'll just wait.

MR. HILLIARD. You can talk to the straggler still inside.

BART. People loiter at these things?

MR. HILLIARD. He approached me about meeting with you. He didn't want to intrude on your grief. It's the man with the long beard.

BART. Ah, I noticed. He stuck out.

MR. HILLIARD. He's not a local.

BART. Looked like ZZ Top. Or a January 6th Republican.

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MR. HILLIARD. (*flinches.*) We try to keep this a politics-free zone. He has a briefcase.

BART. Did he identify himself?

MR. HILLIARD. If he did, I didn't catch it. I'm bad with names...major no-no, given my line of work.

BART. The Beard didn't say what he wanted?

MR. HILLIARD. Just your time, which wasn't mine to offer. He's probably waiting to go out to the cemetery, which I know you want to keep private.

BART. No pallbearers, no looky-loos, only *me*.

MR. HILLIARD. Why don't I just direct this Beard to the side door so there's no contact with you?

BART. It's okay. I'm intrigued. Send him out. (*Mr. Hilliard exits stage right. Bart-to audience.*) So who else here *had* or *has* a complicated mother? Show of hands. (*He counts.*) Okay. I still bet mine was *more* complicated. (*The funeral image of Wilma 'Billie' Cooper PIXILATES into a soft-focus Willow Cuppers, moist lips parted, topless but discreetly cropped at the deep cleavage.*) How many of you can say that tens of thousands of men -- and, to be fair, women, too -- have rubbed one out to an image of your Mom? (*He smirks.*) I win. Mom was prodigiously-endowed. Unaugmented, God-given huuuuuuuge 48 Double D breasts, disproportionate to her little size 2 frame. She'd hang her brassiere on a door hook and it damn near dragged the floor.

WILLOW. It was like chain link with lace.

BART. (*to stage management.*) That's enough. They get the point. Change it back. (*The soft-focus Willow Cuppers returns to the image of Wilma 'Billie' Cooper.*) Thank you. I am very cognizant that *your* mothers are not remembered by their measurements. From kindergarten. I was no artist, but it was pretty accurate. (*He points to the funeral monitor, now a child's crayon-drawing of a woman with a bustline that shoots straight out, like a*

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shelf.) Now you're shifting uncomfortably. 'Seriously, what kind of issues is this dude dealing with?' (*He gestures.*) We can lose the crayon rendering. (*The monitor returns to the image of Wilma 'Billie' Cooper.*) Long ago I compartmentalized it. Had to. Whether you've seen it, or won't admit to having seen it, you've probably heard of it: *Head Nurse Marla*, a hard-core film from 1974, introducing my 22 year-old mother as Marla. The red wig came from existing props, the nurse costume from a medical supply store. And her *nom de porn*, Willow Cuppers, was given to her by a woman on the set.

WILLOW. I didn't feel like a Willow...and I sure wasn't shaped like one, but anything was better than Wilma. I heard enough 'Hey, Flintstone!' growing up. Cooper got transformed into Cuppers, like in -- (*and she grabs her own breasts.*) -- *cup hers.*

BART. I never knew the woman billed as Willow. Given the way she was brought up, no family photos, trimmed all up with pinking shears, existed. Nothing documented girl to woman. *Head Nurse Marla* had to pass for a home movie...shared with America...actually, worldwide. You all got to see Willow Cuppers before she was my Mom. (*Willow stands in profile, then forward.*) Go ahead.

Whistle. Snicker. Once you stick your eyeballs back in their sockets, bear in mind she also was a poor girl so self-conscious she didn't even try out for cheerleader.

WILLOW. People in small towns rarely smile but boy can they laugh. These didn't sprout gradually, so everyone could get used to them. Went to bed at 13... woke up with two pillows strapped on me. There was no binding them down.

BART. *Head Nurse Marla* was shot in mid-town Manhattan. Mom's melons provide the friction for much titty fucking and, in a bizarre scene clearly written under the influence, weapons trained in the martial arts.

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WILLOW. Spoiler alert: At the end, I motorboat the evil doctor and smother him to death.

BART. She was a bored girl with a bouncing, bodacious bosom in a two-stoplight town...a ton of freckles, a lazy eye --

WILLOW. (*interjects.*) -- only noticeable at night when I was tired!

BART. (*overlaps.*) She left New York City and severed every connection to *Head Nurse Marla* and Willow Cuppers.

BILLIE. I told people to call me Billie.

BART. She struggled to get by, raising me on her own. She was in motel housekeeping. She was a restaurant hostess. She temped, where she got brought on full-time.

BILLIE. (*She simulates typing on a keyboard at her kitchen table. She looks up, at the audience.*) I was so proud. Who knew I'd landed in a different kind of peep show, one that had elevators and its own cafeteria? Naive to think a professional office building would make me immune from remarks that always had a double meaning. I won't even go into the 'oops! 'scuse me!' *accidental* collisions, *always* with male supervisors, *always* in hallways that weren't in the least bit cramped. Because I didn't want to come across as cheap, I wouldn't even wear an open-toed shoe on 'Casual Friday.' Like it mattered. I was the airhead in the bullpen with jugs out to here. The other females resented me. Invitations to 'Girls Night Out' never got to my desk. (*She turns her head.*) 'Thanks for including me, bitches!' (*Back to the audience.*) Spare me how women look out for each other. They didn't back then and the 'sisterhood' ain't much different now.

BART. She wound up at the front desk of a veterinary clinic. When that closed, she drove a school bus part-time.

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BILLIE. Until I qualified for Social Security and Medicare.

BART. The oncology staff knew her as Wilma from her charts. She was a tough old bird but sick as a dog. She was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma five years ago. That's about the survival rate. Even at Stage 4 she still stood out in front of her apartment building to hop on what she called 'My Cancer Van'.

WILMA. *(to audience.)* My chemo team dashes in and it's 'Hey, how are you, Miss Wilma?' I go 'Oh, pretty fair, given that it's metastasized to my spinal cord.' I *hate* the soothing music here. Like it's a spa. Bracing myself for another three days of puking. Sitting across from a child with hollow eyes who won't make it to 10. They ought to pipe in the theme from *Psycho*.

BART. *(He sniffs the spray of gladioli.)* Flowers never quite cover the smell of formaldehyde. *(NICOLAS KELLER, in Dockers and a sport jacket that has seen better days, enters STAGE-RIGHT.)*

NICOLAS. I appreciate you taking the time to see me, Mr. Cooper. My condolences on your loss.

WILMA. This is going to be interesting.

NICOLAS. *(He rests the black tote bag he's carrying on the floor. Bart studies it suspiciously.)* I'm Nicolas, no H, Keller. *(Nicolas extends a hand to shake, which Bart pointedly ignores.)*

BART. You can call me Bart, Mr. Keller. I'm extremely busy mourning. Exactly how were you acquainted with my mother?

NICOLAS. We never met. And I go by Nic.

BART. Still no H.

NICOLAS. No H.

BART. Because then you'd be a Niche, except with no E.

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NICOLAS. The apple didn't fall far from the tree. Your mother made sport of it, too.

BART. The woman you never met.

NICOLAS. Technically, no.

BART. Technically. We're inching toward something, Nic. Something that needs inched toward never ends well. Have we met, and I don't remember?

NICOLAS. No.

BART. So you're representing your parents, or a family member, who somehow had a connection with her?

NICOLAS. We never met, yet I knew your mother. I'm heartbroken that today was the first day I ever laid eyes on Wilma Cooper.

BART. Where are you from, Nic? I can't place your accent.

NICOLAS. Boston area.

BART. You flew all that way for someone you wouldn't have recognized if she came to your front door?

NICOLAS. I would have known her voice.

BART. Am I to keep guessing?

NICOLAS. Maybe it might be more relaxed if we talk somewhere other than here. I saw a pub down the street.

BART. I don't go into bars.

NICOLAS. I respect that.

BART. Oh, I drink. I just don't go into bars.

NICOLAS. There's a bench outside.

BART. I'll follow you. *(They come to the bench. Nicolas brushes fallen leaves from the surface with the palm of his hand. Bart removes his jacket.)*

NICOLAS. Fall's coming early here. *(He runs his hand over the bench.)* Polished smooth by the many tears I'm sure have been shed out here.

BART. *(He sits.)* Let's skip the word pictures. Say what you need to say.

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NICOLAS. Very to-the-point, like Billie.

BART. From Miss Cooper to Wilma to Billie and, still... I don't know what we have to talk about.

NICOLAS. *(He withdraws an Android tablet from his black tote bag.)* It will be easier to show you than tell you.

BART. *(He's alarmed.)* Are you from a newspaper or the media in some way?

NICOLAS. I'm not a reporter. Media...that's a real catch-all. What *isn't* considered media? With your permission I'll get this fired up and all your questions will be answered.

BART. Permission *not* granted. Before we get to your little show 'n tell, I need to know what this is even about.

NICOLAS. Long story short --

BART. *(interjects.)* Starting with that just made it three words longer. Does my mother owe you money? I'm the executor of her estate, but anything's possible. She didn't have any.

NICOLAS. I owe *her* money. Now, you, as her heir. Your mother and I were collaborating.

BART. On what?

NICOLAS. Selling autographed *Head Nurse Marla* photos on a Willow Cuppers website.

BART. *(He stands.)* Oh, hell no! We're done here, sir!

NICOLAS. If you'd just take a look.

BART. Stop talking. *(He looks around angrily.)* I can have you escorted off of the premises.

NICOLAS. It won't change the reality. She had to know you'd find out.

BART. So this is your preemptive strike?

NICOLAS. More to find a way forward.

BART. There is no *forward*.

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NICOLAS. If your answer is no, the Willow Cuppers website will be taken off-line and outstanding orders canceled.

BART. No no no no no! There's five of 'em. Does that work? Or should I file for a cease-and-desist?

NICOLAS. She never hinted she had this side gig?

BART. (*incredulous.*) Not. One. Word.

NICOLAS. Maybe she was afraid of your disapproval.

BART. Who said I'd disapprove?

BILLIE. (*to Bart.*) Your response has hardly been a ringing endorsement.

BART. These photos she allegedly signed, are they explicit?

NICOLAS. (*He proceeds carefully.*) Some.

BART. My mother didn't object to these pictures?

NICOLAS. Whatever her reservations, she never complained. I explained it was the best we had. There was no big stash of publicity poses; *Head Nurse Marla* wasn't a Warner Brothers production. Our web guy grabbed frames from the movie and sharpened 'em up.

BART. Which sell better?

NICOLAS. (*He hesitates.*) The action shots.

BART. Call them what they are: the wet and pink stuff.

NICOLAS. I'm choosing my words respectfully.

BART. Respectfully? How serendipitous that you glommed onto an old woman at her most vulnerable!

NICOLAS. I didn't glom. She never mentioned a health challenge.

BART. This feels like elder abuse.

NICOLAS. Our only contact was by mail or phone. How do you abuse someone you've never been in the same room with?

BART. Then you probably abused yourself over Willow Cuppers. Is that cum in your hillbilly beard?

WILMA. (*to Bart, frantically.*) Don't be like this!

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NICOLAS. That's putrid, Mr. Cooper. We're talking about your mother.

BART. Jesus Christ, what's putrid is that we *are* talking about my mother! You didn't need her participation in your scheme. You're so honorable you had to have her sanction?

NICOLAS. I honor *her*. Technically, I only sought to deal with the Willow Cuppers brand.

BART. *Technically* still my mother.

NICOLAS. *Head Nurse Marla* holds a minor place in cinematic history.

BART. Like it's *Citizen Kane*.

NICOLAS. 'The sexual, frequent-comical hierarchy between physicians and their nurses.' That's from The Rialto Report. It's an academic website. The era even had a name: 'Porno Chic'.

BART. That it was projected on a screen doesn't change the fact that it was pornography.

NICOLAS. Porn is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. East Coast skin flicks were being shot on 35 mm with an actual plot, multiple angles, and original music.

BART. Don't forget needle marks and pimply ass cheeks. Would you be here if this was a normal movie?

NICOLAS. Define normal.

BART. No gynecology.

NICOLAS. Mainstream Hollywood productions are quite raw now.

BART. (*He takes a swig of water.*) Not the same. There's sensitivity training. An intimacy coach is off-camera.

NICOLAS. You're doing what a lot of people do: demonizing sex performers --

BART. (*interjects.*) -- you're the demon!

NICOLAS. (*overlapping.*) -- and maybe they went into it for bad reasons, but every person in porn came from a

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family, then probably had their own when they left porn, or when porn left them. Carol Connors, she even has an actor daughter, Thora Burch, who did a nude scene in *American Beauty*. It won Best Picture.

BART. You couldn't leave my mother, who had reinvented herself, alone. You blackmailed or browbeat her into playing along by threatening to tell the world about her embarrassing past.

NICOLAS. None of that is true.

BART. I should take your word. How did you even know she'd passed?

NICOLAS. I didn't suspect she was unwell until the voice mail apologizing for falling behind on signing the merch. She didn't have the energy, she said. She always texted back promptly, even if it was with one word. When she didn't, I got a bad feeling. I went to your local obituaries.

BART. Merch? You said pictures.

NICOLAS. *Head Nurse Marla* was restored and remastered from the original negative in 4K for Blu-ray DVD or download, totally uncut. For completists used to an incomplete 3rd generation bootleg, it's a big deal. (*The DVD artwork of 'Head Nurse Marla' fades in on the funeral home monitor.*) I purchase them wholesale from the distributor. Billie would personally inscribe each keeppcase insert. We sell more of the autographed glossies, though.

BART. How does anyone even *know* about the website?

NICOLAS. Covid was a big part: the world, stuck at home scrolling, looking up things they'd never thought to look up. We were hamstrung because we couldn't legally use any footage from *Head Nurse Marla*, not even a 1-minute sizzle reel, but we did social media, IG, TikTok, pop-up ads on sites dedicated to 70's porn. You can't

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imagine the number of hits on TheWillowCuppers.com when it debuted.

BART. *(He removes his tie and loosens the collar of his white shirt.)* Old pervs.

NICOLAS. It's not all geezers. Some. But quite a few are young-ish and nostalgic for when women weren't inflated. *(He defines.)* Plastic tits.

BART. Like you?

NICOLAS. It was Willow Cuppers' screen presence that made the impression.

BART. *(He gurgles into the water bottle.)* Screen presence. I almost snorted water outta my nose.

NICOLAS. An uncle of a friend had it on VHS in one of those big plastic cases. It got popped in while the grown-ups were at a New Year's Eve party. *(pauses.)* My face is probably red.

BART. I don't know what color it normally is, Willie Nelson.

BILLIE. *(angrily.)* How many times did we talk about that smart mouth of yours, kiddo?!

NICOLAS. Could you maybe slow down with the insults?

BART. Then don't provoke me! You may get off on the fact that you had some kind of power over her, but you don't hold the same power over me.

NICOLAS. I don't want power, unless it's the power of an alliance *with* you.

BART. Is this in writing somewhere, or was it just verbal?

NICOLAS. I have a copy of our partnership MOU. Hers will be among her papers, I imagine.

BART. Those are all neatly bundled. Something like co-owning a stag movie website would have jumped out. Maybe I'll find it when I clean out her sock drawer.

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NICOLAS. You're welcome to mine. It's dated three years ago. (*Nicolas slides a single sheet to Bart, who inspects it in slight disbelief.*)

BART. Your cut is what?

NICOLAS. 10% of profits. The website guy gets 5% for hosting, making sure payments gets processed, updates, etcetera. The rest was hers.

BART. (*He slides the document back to Nicolas.*) My mother left this all behind in New York. She would have given anything to rewind the time she spent there.

NICOLAS. She stayed in New York long enough for you to be born.

BART. You're obsessed! How would you know that?!

NICOLAS. Obsessed isn't the right word.

BART. What, then? Bewitched? Mesmerized? You transcend creepy. (*He counts on his fingers.*)

Brainwashed. Crazy. Deranged.

NICOLAS. You teachers and your adjectives. Let's split the difference and go with fascinated.

BART. My mother told you I taught?

NICOLAS. Fifth grade, Chicago suburb. We discussed a teacher's role model baggage and if your employer would object that she was in a pornographic film. She said you were an out gay man and her past had nothing to do with your classroom proficiency.

BART. My mother didn't know a word like proficiency.

WILMA. (*She spells it irritably.*) P-r-o-f-i-c-i-e-n-c-y! I did so!

NICOLAS. I'm paraphrasing. As trust developed, Billie would offer details, some unsolicited. You were about seven months old when she came to Ohio in 1974.

BART. That's more than chit-chat.

NICOLAS. I sensed that she was exhausted by the distance between past and present.

XXX, MOM

BART. That's all very profound, but introspective my mother was not.

WILMA. (*shouting.*) Thanks!

BART. Don't tell me how my mother thought. New York was the mistake of a lifetime, she said. I used to beg for details about what living there had been like.

NICOLAS. There are movies that perfectly capture New York back then. *Midnight Cowboy. Taxi Driver. Looking for Mr. Goodbar.*

WILLOW. (*to the audience.*) Too late to be a flower child. Too early for Studio 54.

BART. She had to be in the right mood to talk about it. She'd show me her matchbook cover collection. (*Bart steps into Billie's kitchen. Bart does not affect the voice of a child as he talks to his mother.*)

BILLIE. (*to audience.*) Plenty got skipped over. I stuck to funny stuff.

BART. (*to Billie.*) Why New York in the first place?

BILLIE. (*to Bart.*) Because of your grandmother Juditha. At 16 her parents abandoned her and went off to run a dog track in Arkansas. Then her own husband chose to ride the rails like a bum over his two little girls, me and my big sister Dolores, who I called Dody. Juditha was one bitter Kentucky boozier. She arrived at my graduation smashed. Fell, broke teeth.

WILMA. (*to audience.*) Juditha was probably bipolar.

BILLIE. Eviction notices were how I learned to read. Dody – she's the aunt you never knew – strung together old wine bottle corks to make me jump ropes. Juditha drove us both away. Then Dody took off for Florida.

BART. What became of Dody down there?

BILLIE. (*to audience.*) Florida? Could be anything. Sinkhole. Alien abduction. The Villages. (*to Bart.*) I was full of hate. I hated Dody for not taking me, too. I hated working with Dirty Neck Michelle at Royale Dry

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Cleaners. I hated everyone who stared when I wore a sweater.

WILLOW. *(to audience.)* I hated myself. My cherry was popped at 15 on a ping-pong table by a guy with a glass eye. I got around.

BILLIE. *(to audience.)* There's a phrase you don't hear anymore. Like 'hot to trot.' Or 'easy lay'. *(Willow rises from her barstool and glides, as though skating, through and around Nicolas, Bart and Billie, who watch.)*

WILLOW. Brian, who I called Bri-Bri, was my girly boy friend. We smoked pot and then we'd roller skate. We ran into curbs and fell a lot. *(at audience laughter.)* Shut up! It was fun! *(She stops to simulate holding up dresses.)* If I was scheduled to close Royale, I'd let Bri-Bri in and lock the doors. I'd try on the fancy stuff after hours, scratchy wools, cool silks. All the hems were even and buttons matched. Bri-Bri had me walk between the clothing conveyors. The Royale Runway. *(Willow saunters as BRI-BRI directs.)*

BRI-BRI. *(off-stage.)* Shimmy! Play the harp! That's it! Now freeze!

WILLOW. He yelled out poses and took pictures. *(Sound effect: the unmistakable sound of a Polaroid One-Step clicking and ejecting photographs.)* Feeling admired was nice. Bri-Bri started bringing a tape player and music.

BRI-BRI. *(off-stage.)* Get that right arm up over your head! You're at the rodeo! Act like you're trying to lasso something! *(Music of the era is audible but not intrusive.)* Now dip! Curtsy! You're in the presence of the Queen!

WILLOW. He gasped when my breasts were exposed as I changed.

BRI-BRI. *(off-stage.)* Your nippies are like maraschino cherries! You cannot waste those moneymakers!

WILLOW. This couldn't be it: wearing other people's clothes, things you'd never own, pretending you lived

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their lives? We hatched us a plan. Bri-Bri put into my head I could go into fashion in New York City. He'd be my manager. This chest didn't make me a model size but he figured that, from the Polaroids, I could get 'specialty work'. We boarded the bus on a Friday with one thousand, one hundred and thirty-seven bucks that I stole from Juditha. (*Now on the funeral home monitor: the godawful exterior of Port Authority, circa 1973.*)

BART. You weren't worried she'd call the cops?

BILLIE. She wouldn't know I was gone until she sobered up. Dody pulled the same stunt, left with close to fifteen-hundred she took out of a jewelry box with a false bottom. After that, Juditha used an old orange purse in the back of her closet as her savings account. It occurred to me later that the money was intentionally put there as a pay-off to be rid of us both. I swore I'd never lay eyes on her again, and I didn't.

BART. What happened to Grandma?

BILLIE. Don't call her that. She was never that to you. I found out she died in 1986. She'd been born again...but too late to reverse the cirrhosis.

WILLOW. (*to the audience.*) Bri-Bri lost the Polaroids somewhere.

BRI-BRI. (*off-stage.*) I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!

WILLOW. (*to the audience.*) And then *he* got lost up in Harlem when he decided he was into black guys. Never heard from him again. 'Bye-bye, Bri-Bri!' I lived one entire week on Slim Jims and Kool-Aid. I wound up as counter help at Pizza Hut. From Martinizing to mozzarella. Hard to pretend you're a rising star in a red plaid apron. (*An aerial view of Times Square in the early 1970's appears on the funeral monitor.*) This customer offered me a twenty-dollar bill to just hold my breasts in the ladies' room. He gave me another twenty to take them out so he could lick them.

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WILMA. *(to the audience.)* I was too young to be cynical but old enough to be practical.

WILLOW. *(to the audience.)* I did nothing back, not even a kiss on the cheek. *(She slaps at the air.)* I warned you. No hickies! *(Bart steps downstage to re-join NICOLAS.)*

BART. We never ordered delivery from Pizza Hut.

WILLOW. *(to the audience.)* He told buddies, and so on, and so on. In one day I made more than I would in a month. I got wrote up for taking too many bathroom breaks. I said I had a bladder condition. When I didn't bring in a doctor's excuse, the manager fired me.

BART. The older I got, the more vivid the stories.

WILLOW. One of the sucklers was a busker for the Bryant Theater, open around the clock. *Sound effects: inner city traffic, honking, screamed epithets, boomboxes. A smeared plexiglass window with a small mouth-level cut-out lowers through which Willow speaks as she simulates issuing tickets.)* He got me a job in the box office window. The owner, a Greek woman named Chelly, made me wear a camisole. It was better than dodging the goons with their pants around their ankles to clean up puke in Row Twelve.

CATCALLER #1. *(off-stage.)* I'll buy a ticket if you tear it with your tits!

CATCALLER #2. *(off-stage, singing.)* 'These boobs are made for gawking!'

CATCALLER #3. *(off-stage.)* Hey, looky, it's The Pizza Slut! *(More griminess of a 1970's 42nd Street appears on the funeral monitor.)*

WILLOW. The shit I heard and saw.

NICOLAS. Before the Disney goodie-goodies latched on and ruined everything.

WILLOW. *(She frowns.)* It's way easy to rewrite how grim it was. From the hands being stuck out everywhere,

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you'd think 42nd was the friendliest street in the USA. But they was pickin' pockets, palming dope, exchanging weapons. Pudgy hookers slapped and chased each other into traffic. Young boys peddled themselves to the chickenhawks at *Playland*.

TICKET BUYER DUDE. (*off-stage*) You should star in one of these movies, chickie!

WILLOW. I got to know some of these gross low-lives, which is how I wound up in some mini-orgy films. No one even asked if I was over 18. I don't know if they had titles.

NICOLAS. Peepshow loops. Most are considered lost now. (*The plexiglass window retreats.*)

WILLOW. Someone threw down sheets. Someone put out tequila. Someone gave me crabs; someone else gave me pinkeye. I was told about a full-length adult movie I should try out for. 'Big-time budget', on the up-and-up. I walked to this nice building a few blocks up. (*On the funeral home monitor: a handmade sign thumbtacked to a hallway wall that reads 'Glorioso Pictures', with an arrow pointing left. Willow moves to center-stage.*) The apartment was loaned to them by the owner on the condition he could watch auditions: ten women over eight hours...all men at two folding tables covered with cigarettes and snacks.

Now on the monitor: a green glass ashtray overflowing with spent and mashed cigarettes. Billie and Wilma affect The varied coarse and disrespectful MALE VOICES of assembled investors, producers and crew as they question, criticize and direct Willow's audition.

WILMA/MALE VOICE. Strip down for us.

WILLOW. Like in a teasing way?

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. Just get your clothes off.

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WILLOW. *(to audience.)* It wasn't to check out piercings and tattoos. This was before all that. They wanted to see the goods. *(She simulates unfastening her bra, lowering her panties over her ankles, then off.)* I don't want to look at them looking at me. I focused on the table and what was on it: Slim Jims, a tub of french-onion dip, tumblers of alcohol, all watery from the cubes melting.

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. Turn in a circle.

WILLOW. *(to audience.)* My thighs felt fat.

WILMA/MALE VOICE. You're how old?

WILLOW. 22.

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. What's up with the heart-shaped beaver?

WILLOW. *(She places her hands modestly over her crotch.)* I trimmed my pubic hair special for today.

WILMA/MALE VOICE. Men like a full bush.

WILLOW. *(to audience.)* Someone said they'd have to cover a birthmark that looked like an apple on my lower back. Didn't know I had it. Ladies: always remember, even at the physical best you'll probably ever be, a man will find something wrong with your body.

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. Down on all fours.

WILMA/MALE VOICE. We need to see every angle the camera will pick up. *(Willow complies.)*

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. Want to make sure no holes are prolapsed. What a turn-off. Some women are so blown-out they got loose meat up in there.

WILLOW. *(to audience.)* Like I'm something in a butcher shop window.

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. How quick could you lose ten pounds?

WILLOW. *(to audience.)* That would have meant ten more. I didn't get to eat that often. I thought my blood sugar was low. I asked them if I could have some Red Vines off their table. Maybe they didn't hear me.

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BILLIE/MALE VOICE. Everything looks good.

(Willow stands again, her eyes wet and sad.)

WILMA/MALE VOICE. Now we're gonna have you read some things back to us. The script is by a Broadway writer who's going by a pseudonym.

WILLOW. What's a pseudonym?

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. A fake name.

WILLOW. *(She pantomimes accepting cards.)* A coked-up guy with chest hair climbing out of his shirt handed me green index cards. Mind you, I am still stark naked.

WILMA/MALE VOICE. Read those out loud.

WILLOW. *(She reads from the cards.)* 'Doctor, my staff has complained about your tongue lashings'...'The lab needs a semen sample. I'm here to help'...'I've never wrapped a tourniquet *there* before'...'Sorry I'm late. I was breast-feeding the daddies in the maternity ward.' Everyone laughed. Somebody said I was 'deadpan'. I thought they said 'bedpan'. Maybe they did. I didn't know that there was an actual enema scene yet.

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. Stay where you are.

WILLOW. Still, I'm not told I can get dressed. It's like I'm a hall tree waiting for someone to throw a coat on it. They're talking about the woman right before me, who had --

WILMA/MALE VOICE. *(interjects.)* -- areole like sliced baloney. I was very distracted.

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. You're makin' me hungry! Hand me the motherfuckin' Pringles.

WILLOW. *(She looks around and slowly walks toward Nicolas and Bart.)* Do you mean me?

BILLIE/MALE VOICE. Do I mean *you*?! Har-de-har-har-har. I meant one of these assholes needs to share the potato chips. You're funny! That's it. We're done.

WILLOW. *(She pantomimes gathering her clothing from the floor, then turns as an afterthought to the audience.)* I

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wasn't tricked or forced. No one touched me. That doesn't make it OK. It wasn't. Should I have hated those crude men?

WILMA. Hating someone only gives them more power.

WILLOW. They didn't degrade me any more than I'd devalued myself. All this #MeToo rigmarole? I was the opposite. 'Where do I sign up? Can you include *me, too?*'

BILLIE. Times were different. Men had the final word.

WILMA. By the way: they still do.

WILLOW. And they never gave me *one* Red Vine. *(She pauses.)* The decision-maker called a day later. I had the part. The girl they wanted didn't have the boobs to fill out the nurse outfit they'd already bought. *(In the kitchen Billie has produced what appears to be a fishing tackle box. She's now LOUANNA, the film's make-up technician, and Willow goes onstage to join her at the round table.)*

A really nice gal named Louanna Gimpel -- she had a ton of moles -- from Alabama did my body make-up and what-not. She helped me go over my lines as she got me ready. I just copied how she said them. *(Louanna/Billie occasionally dabs with a sponge, reading to Willow from a script in a strong, lilting Southern accent.)*

LOUANNA/BILLIE. At least I don't have to paint in your cleavage, like some. Yours practically hooks on to your smile. I mean that in the best way, darlin'. *(reads)* 'No, sir, your lunch order of Salisbury Steak does not include a side of pussy.'

WILLOW. 'No, sir, your Salisbury Steak does not include a side of pussy.'

LOUANNA/BILLIE. '...*lunch order of...*'

WILLOW. 'No, sir, your *lunch order of* Salisbury Steak does not include a side of pussy.'

LOUANNA/BILLIE. *(She lifts Willow's sleeve.)* This bruise matches the one on your other arm. Who grabbed

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you? (*awaits an answer that doesn't come.*) And the one above your tailbone? Did a mule kick you?

WILLOW. That's my birthmark.

LOUANNA/BILLIE. A man who handles a woman is no man.

WILLOW. I fell sideways.

LOUANNA/BILLIE. I've covered up enough shiners and split lips to know better.

WILLOW. No, really. The place where I sleep is like Port Authority. A lot of people are there temporarily. One guy fell asleep with a cigarette in his mouth and set his sleeping bag on fire. No one ever picks up. We all trip over each other's stuff.

LOUANNA/BILLIE. Be watchful. The city is full of flakes and this business boils those down to the worst crumbs. I followed someone here from Tuscaloosa and boy oh boy were my eyes opened.

WILLOW. Are you still with him?

LOUANNA/BILLIE. It was a her, and no. She lost her mind. I got into this for extra loot and now I've powdered every scrotum and behind in midtown Manhattan.

WILLOW. I think they're mad I wouldn't dye my pussy hair the color of Frech dressing.

LOUANNA/BILLIE. (*She adjusts Willow's nurse's cap, then smooths her red bangs.*) That's a man thing, wanting the carpet to match the drapes. Linda Lovelace had no pubes at all. Should she have been bald-headed? (*briskly.*) Show me your nails, hon. They'll be in close-up a lot, tuggin', jerkin'. (*She inspects, and buffs.*) Have you decided if you're going to go by something else?

WILLOW. What do you mean?

LOUANNA/BILLIE. A lot of the girls worry their kin will see them nekkid so they change their name.

WILLOW. I don't care.

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LOUANNA/BILLIE. Say that now. You may have to live this down later in life. Let's fix on calling you something else, little girl.

WILLOW. Like a pseudonym? *(to the audience.)* I felt so smart.

LOUANNA/BILLIE. *(confused.)* Is that Latin? I meant an easy name. What can we spin Wilma off into?...

WILLOW. Can't I use my nickname: Billie?

LOUANNA/BILLIE. Give me your other hand. Billie's too tomboy. We'll both think on it. Let's go to your next line, when you're talking to the new hires.

WILLOW. 'Patients must be totally bathed and sanitary! Wash that tallywacker 'til it stands up straight and says thanks!'

LOUANNA/BILLIE. If whoever wrote this actually ends up with a Broadway hit I'll be a monkey's uncle. What's next?

WILLOW. 'Dr. Priapism, that's not your stethoscope!'

LOUANNA/BILLIE. Emphasize '*not*' in that sentence.

WILLOW. 'Dr. Priapism, that's *not* your stethoscope!'

LOUANNA/BILLIE. Perfect.

WILLOW. Can someone my age even be in charge of a hospital nursing staff?

LOUANNA/BILLIE. I wouldn't study on that too much.

WILLOW. Can I do my own lips?

LOUANNA/BILLIE. Pick a color. I'll line, you fill 'em in. *(Louanna/Billie offers her the valise to choose lipstick.)*

WILLOW. *(to audience.)* A guy who worked with the microphones heard how we'd come up with Willow. He told me he liked it. 'It's a pseudonym!' Me, being all smart again. He backed up and said 'You're a *whut*?' *(The women remain in Billie's kitchen.)*

NICOLAS. Explains how the Pennsylvania girl had the can't-tell-where-it's-from Southern twang.

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BART. *(to Nicolas.)* Some of her anecdotes raised more questions than they answered, like how I came into the picture.

WILLOW. *(to audience.)* The movie wasn't out yet. A bunch of us, men, women, lived together to save money. Some of us were getting it on, mainly for warmth. Everyone was so rundown when one was sick, we all were. A spiteful druggie girl with the dirtiest toenails I have ever seen ripped us off and high-tailed it out of there. *(to Bart.)* She stole shoes, the toaster, light bulbs...and my birth control pills. She probably thought they were acid. I didn't get them refilled in time. She's the reason you're here on earth.

BART. Plus someone's sperm.

WILLOW. *(to audience.)* My periods were like clockwork. I knew I was pregnant. You could get an abortion easier then. I didn't have the money or know-how and it seemed dangerous, like my guts would fall out with the fetus. With a baby on the way, all I could do was the shorter-type movies -- them loops that were talked about. They used me from the chest up. My water broke as I walked around piles of garbage *by myself* to Saint Clare's Hospital. I practically gave birth in the emergency room. They wheeled someone in with a hunting knife in his forehead. If that doesn't induce labor, I don't know what would. A nurse told me I'd never remember the pain and I'd want more children. I yelled that I would never forget the pain and one kid was one too many.

BART. *(to Nicolas.)* The one too many was me, who she named Bart. Bart isn't short for Robert, or Barton, or Barthelme. It had no connection to whoever fathered me. Bart's kind of a big-mustache-and-slender-polyester-hips name. *(to Billie.)* Tell how it came to be, Mom.

BILLIE. *(from the kitchen.)* You kept squalling, so I goofed around and wrote down 'Brat'. It upset the

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maternity nurse, who called every birth ‘a blessed event.’ She made me re-do the paperwork.

BART. I also got no middle name.

BILLIE. It was this little tiny line. There wasn’t room.

(On the funeral monitor: the interior of a decrepit NYC efficiency, furnished by things abandoned curbside...crooked lampshade, grime-encrusted cooktop.)

WILLOW. This is stuff he don’t need to hear. *(Billie rushes downstage to clap her hands over Bart’s ears.)* We found a room to rent on 40th and 10th. It was infested with cockroaches so brave they didn’t even scatter when the lights came on. *(as if she’s pushing a vacuum.)* I borrowed a sweeper from the lady across the hall to run over them. We could hear them being sucked up off the linoleum into the bag, *ticka-ticka-ticka!* *(pauses.)* ‘We’ was me and Duane, the guy I was screwing regular. He did adult films, too, but got ‘stage fright’ too much. This was before Viagra. Spanish Fly gave him a UTI. He did some nude modeling for art classes and would go gay for pay to dance at these ‘sausage fest’ parties. *(SOUND EFFECT: a toilet, not quite finishing a flush cycle.)*

DUANE. *(off-stage.)* Toilet won’t flush down. *(Into the kitchen comes a sweaty DUANE, in a tank top and cut-off denim. His long-ish feathered hair is unwashed.)*

WILLOW. Kitchen still has running water. It’s probably another dead rat in the sewer line. Go down to that nasty bodega and get some *Drano*. *(to audience.)* When he suggested I turn tricks until I lost all the baby weight, I split. *(to Duane.)* Who would watch Bart? Don’t say you.

DUANE. We know people.

WILLOW. Anyone we know would sell the baby. Or worse.

DUANE. You’re full of milk. Certain types will pay extra for that.

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WILLOW. Doing a porno didn't make me a prostitute. That wasn't me.

DUANE. Looked like you. Sounded like you.

WILLOW. I pretend to be someone else.

DUANE. (*His laugh is cruel.*) Listen to yourself. The leading lady, discovered in the box office of a scuzzy porn palace. Suddenly, she's an actress?

WILLOW. I'm your basic food stamp mom whose baby sleeps in a drawer, maybe. I ain't a hooker. But apparently you've become a pimp.

DUANE. Never suggested you walk the streets. I have contacts.

WILLOW. Yeah. *All* the big wheels in town. Go make contact with some Drano.

DUANE. (*raging.*) It always smells like shit around here.

WILLOW. Then get some *Glade* air freshener too. And a *Sprite*. And a can of *Right Guard*. You're as ripe as a subway car. Pee-yoo!

DUANE. With what money?

WILLOW. Shoplift a pacifier, too, while you're at it.

DUANE. What's your problem?! You squeezed your hogtits together and banged every guy they stuck in front of the camera. If you can pretend you're someone else for a room full of strangers, you can do the same thing, one-on-one, in private.

WILLOW. You're not bringin' in anything! Go sell *your* ass! You had no trouble taking it up the pooper in that 'all-male' movie. You could probably use some Drano, too.

DUANE. You're a useless cunt!

WILLOW. Sssshhhhhh! I laid Bart down!

DUANE. I don't even believe he's mine.

WILLOW. From the get-go I told you he probably isn't. I laid there in Hell's Kitchen yelling and gave birth *on my*

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own. I don't see *you* lactating every time a cab honks. It's *my* body with the stretch marks. Bart is *mine*.

DUANE. Go back where you fucking came from!

WILLOW. Only when you go back to New Jersey, if your family will even let you in the front door!

DUANE. Get over here! (*Duane hurtles toward Willow and begins to shake her violently. An infant off-stage begins to scream. We've seen enough. To black, long enough for Duane to exit, then up again on Willow. The off-stage infant continues to wail.*)

WILLOW. Everyone in New York seemed to be a visitor who stayed too long. I wasn't going to be one of them. I couldn't even keep a geranium alive on a window sill, so how was that gonna work with a little baby? (*The baby's cries subside.*) I left with a diaper bag, a *I Heart NY* mug -- that's what the geranium had been in -- and five hundred dollars I never told Duane about. It came from a money order guaranteeing me for the next movie, called *Car Lot Harlot*.

NICOLAS. She said she never went back to Pennsylvania.

WILLOW. Couldn't. Imagine the 'Welcome Home' headline: '*Local tramp returns after fucking entire major city*'.

BILLIE. (*With a flourish, she removes her hands from her son's head and returns to her kitchen.*) And that's how I landed in Ohio. (*She pours coffee into a faded 'I Heart NY' mug. She sips as Nicolas and Bart talk.*)

NICOLAS. My fascination with Willow Cuppers was renewed when I read that the AVN Awards -- that stands for 'Adult Video News', it's a publication -- wanted to induct her into their Hall of Fame. It's like the Oscars of porn.

BART. What do they hand out, brass dildoes?

XXX, MOM

NICOLAS. Close. A gold-plated man and woman, copulating. No one could track down Willow Cuppers. The director was murdered in 1993. The actor who played the doctor died of melanoma in 2010. The Mafia produced it but sold off the rights when some of the family wanted nothing to do with it. The AVN people dropped the idea, but I love a mystery. *(He produces his cellphone, punches in a number, stands and begins to pace.)* I put on my deerstalker hat and chased down clues. *(Wilma's cellphone rings. She regards it with curiosity, but answers curtly. Nicolas and Wilma now have a phone conversation. During this, Bart takes more pills with his bottled water.)*

NICOLAS. Is this Wilma Cooper?

WILMA. Speaking.

NICOLAS. My name is Nicolas Keller. No H.

WILMA. Do I need to know that? Is there a test later?

NICOLAS. *(He stammers.)* No, there's not a test --

WILMA. Did you misplace the H or is it gone for good?

NICOLAS. The spelling is Biblical.

WILMA. You're working off a bum telemarketing list. I'm not buying a Bible.

NICOLAS. I'm not selling one.

WILMA. So: if the H *was* in there, would it be at the end, like *goulash*?

NICOLAS. You're fooling with me.

WILMA. Just sparing us both your sales spiel to sign me up for some scam.

NICOLAS. Have I also reached Willow Cuppers?

WILMA. *(after a long pause.)* I should hang up on you, but I'm too tired to be cagey and you'll call back and I can't remember how to block. Yes, no H, you reached *her*, too.

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NICOLAS. I'm not looking to cause trouble, Miss Cooper. I'm on a fact-finding mission. (*He clears his throat.*) I'm a little spooked.

WILMA. Imagine how I feel.

NICOLAS. I'm not going to blow your cover.

WILMA. It *has* been blown. I just expected it way before now. So you're in the driver's seat. Talk fast before I hang up on you.

NICOLAS. (*to Bart.*) I explained there was a worshipful fanbase for her peers, including several appreciation pages for Willow Cuppers (*to Wilma.*) Bambi Woods, who was in *Debbie Does Dallas*, poof! up and disappeared from the public eye, just like you.

WILMA. All I know about Bambi is that a hunter up and shot his mother.

NICOLAS. Linda Lovelace, Marilyn Chambers, Kitten Natividad, God rest their souls, all gone now, too— they capitalized on it. Some did sequels. Gloria Leonard started *High Society* magazine. Andrea True had a disco hit, *More More More*. (*He sings.*) 'Just get the cameras rollin', get the action goin' ...more, more more', remember that?

WILMA. Vaguely. (*Now on the funeral home monitor: street protests from the 1970's/1980's, women rallied to picket against pornography.*)

NICOLAS. Some of the others became feminist advocates for sex workers or protested the misogyny of the porn industry.

WILMA. Jamie Gillis bragged to me how it was only fair he got paid more because men have to keep an erection and ejaculate on cue. Women, they could just lay there and moan. Hellooooo?! I'm Marla. I don't see the doctor's name in the title.

NICOLAS. How much did *you* make?

XXX, MOM

WILMA. \$125 a day. So much for a big-time movie. I worked eight days. I even had to buy my own lunch, usually at Orange Julius.

NICOLAS. In hindsight, a mistake can be an opportunity.

WILMA. And vice versa. *Spontaneous* is a word designed to take the sting out of being stupid.

NICOLAS. I meant those private sex tapes that made Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian millions. No repercussions, all forward momentum.

WILMA. Plus that girl from ‘*Baywatch*’. She got nominated for acting in something.

NICOLAS. Look at the cast of ‘*Gilligan’s Island*’. Every day a rerun. They made nothing. The ‘*Friends*’ cast is set for life. There weren’t things like residuals back then. Why should strangers profit from your likeness?

WILMA. Are they?

NICOLAS. Years ago, there was a wall poster of you at ‘*Spencer’s Gifts*’. They gave Nurse Marla blue eyes.

WILMA. I always wanted blue eyes.

NICOLAS. *(to Bart.)* And don’t get me started on how AI can generate a deepfake likeness to simulate sex acts without the person’s permission. *(to Wilma.)* So you’re not aware of Willow Cuppers on the Internet?

WILMA. I don’t own a PC. My boy set up my iPhone to play gambling games but I’m not an app swiper. *(slyly, to the audience.)* That was a fib. Of course I had looked...enough to make me mad. I found my face on a chicken wings ad in Houston. I’ve never been to Texas, wings are messy and who the hell is enticed by a nurse in a restaurant ad? Like she’s on the premises in case of salmonella?

BART. *(to the audience.)* Rule-of-thumb: never get liquored-up and Google your Mom’s porn name. I swore off typing Willow Cuppers into the Search tab after I

XXX, MOM

found a double-penetration clip. You don't unsee that. Now you're all reaching for your phones. Stop.

NICOLAS. *(to Wilma.)* What I propose is an authorized Willow Cuppers website to sell autographs. For a commission, I would guide its creation and see to its maintenance. *(to Bart.)* It was a lot for her to take in. I asked if I could stay in touch.

WILMA. It's a free country. No guarantee I'll answer. *(After a very brief dip to black, up again as a new call is initiated.)*

NICOLAS. *(to Bart.)* But she did. She greeted me by name. *(to Wilma.)* Good afternoon, Miss Cooper. Is this a good time for you to talk?

WILMA. You can call me Billie, Nicolas, no H. Never call me Willow. Ever. Don't even try it thinking you're being funny.

NICOLAS. I won't. Call me Nic. How are you today?

WILMA. I feel more crappy than snappy, Nic.

NICOLAS. *(to Bart.)* I didn't pry into what crappy meant.

WILMA. What do you need from me to get started?

NICOLAS. *(to Bart.)* I put it in terms she could understand, that she'd be like a silent partner. *(to Wilma.)* I'll even get your alias trademarked for you.

WILMA. I hope you're not looking to get rich. What do you do for a real living?

NICOLAS. I'm a regional financial analyst for *Trader Joe's*, if you know that store.

WILMA. I like that monthly flyer but it's not a store you can do your grocery shoppin' at. I was going to bake something for my son's birthday and they don't carry cake frosting.

NICOLAS. I don't have a say in that. In fairness, we're not in competition with general supermarkets.

(to Bart.) I didn't go into granular detail about the website, but I could hear her taking notes. She got very

XXX, MOM

specific. If she said yes, her identity was never to be compromised. No scrutiny. That meant no adult expos, no Cameo. She put the kibosh on posting any current photograph. Bettie Page was like that, too.

WILMA. Let's not give them buyer's remorse. They can remember me as I looked.

NICOLAS. *(to Bart.)* She wouldn't even participate in a *Where Are They Now?* podcast, which could have been done over the phone, with Seka and Georgina Spelvin.

WILMA. I don't sound the same, not since I got this damn partial.

BART. What would she have talked about? She wore a laminated name tag at a job a lot of her life. She wasn't remarkable in any way.

BILLIE. *(to Bart.)* The compliments just keep comin'.

WILMA. Send me a picture. I wanna see who I'm dealing with and what no H looks like.

NICOLAS. *(to Bart.)* I offered to FaceTime. She refused. So I texted back a selfie. She replied that I looked like something out of 'Duck Dynasty'. Assumed that was *not* a compliment. I got started immediately. Take a look. *(Bart produces his cellphone to access the website; Nicolas scoots the tablet toward him.)* Please. Here. It's not optimized for mobile. We can work on that.

BART. *We* assumes I'm on your team. I'm not. *(He studies the tablet.)* Is that a baby bottle she's holding in her cleavage? Was that *my* baby bottle?

WILLOW. It was taken before you were born.

BART. You have 'Got Milk?' popping up from her mouth in a dialogue bubble. With a *blurp!* sound effect.

NICOLAS. The Home Page can be toned down any way you want.

BART. Who came up with these animated factoids?

NICOLAS. Me.

XXX, MOM

BART. *(He reads a few.)* ‘Color hospital exterior shots were borrowed, from healthcare journals’. ‘The film’s medical equipment was rented from the ABC daytime drama *General Hospital*.’ ‘*Head Nurse Marla*’ opened at the Capri Cinema, 8th Avenue at 46th Street, on April 22nd, 1974. *(He taps the screen.)* What’s this? ‘Click here for an exclusive interview with Willow Cuppers’. You said Mom wouldn’t participate.

NICOLAS. The webmaster said we needed more site content. We started digging and found this compilation of vintage interviews transferred from old 3/4” videotape. In it were massage parlor escorts, live sex acts from ‘Show World’...and adult film stars promoting their newest release, including Willow Cuppers. *(Willow’s pornbooth scrim is occasionally made jittery by rolling and tracking issues, suggesting a videotape fragile with time.)*

BART. Where was this shown?

NICOLAS. A public access station in New York. It was called Manhattan Cable Channel J. Sexually-themed programming aired late at night. ‘ya ever heard of ‘The Robin Byrd Show’?

BART. Vaguely. Crocheted bikini, right? Actually...I may have been introduced to her once on Fire Island. Mom knew about this?

NICOLAS. I told her. I sent her a link. She refused to look at it. *(The ‘Midnight Blue’ logo appears on the funeral home monitor.)*

WILMA. *(to Nicolas.)* The producers said I needed to help push the movie. I can’t believe the damn thing even still exists! *(to audience.)* I’m a *total* fibber. Of course I watched it...the girl in a nurse costume making nice with a scumbag.

NICOLAS. Do you want to see?

BART. Will I have to watch through my fingers?

XXX, MOM

NICOLAS. There's no nudity. The control toggle is at the very bottom of the screen. Just hit the arrow to start it. I'm going to duck over here and vape. (*Nicolas recedes off-stage. If feasible, the impact of this would be heightened if Willow's interview could also be displayed real-time on the funeral home monitor, but this production element isn't essential.*)

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. I never heard of you 'til *Head Nurse Marla*, Willow Cuppers. How old are you?

WILLOW. 23 for a few more months.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. That your real name?

WILLOW. Maybe.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. Whatever you go by, baby, where have you been all my life?

WILLOW. Not in New York. I moved here and did *Marla* about a year ago.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. Besides breakin' 'Screw' magazine's 'Peter Meter', *Head Nurse Marla's* got a sense of humor. I laughed myself stiff.

WILLOW. (*brightening.*) I cracked up my friends, teachers, too, back then, but they said I disrupted class. I liked doing the joke-y stuff.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. Like when Nurse Marla conducts the physicals for Army recruits by checking their testicles with her mouth. Do that part for me when you told them to 'cough'.

WILLOW. (*choking/gagging like her mouth's full.*)
Uhmahhhhaaacccckkk.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. Did chewing on all those balls turn you on?

WILLOW. Sure.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. I couldn't take my eyes off those beautiful Macy's Parade blimps. You're not like Chesty Morgan. It takes a fuckin' harness to hold up her

XXX, MOM

73” udders. You’re more along the lines of Candy Samples or Uschi Digard.

WILLOW. I don’t know who those women are.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. You’d be a millionaire if all those pearl necklaces left on you were real.

WILLOW. (*apprehensively.*) What kind of TV show allows this racy talk?

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. The best kind. Do men groove on fucking your tits or pussy?

WILLOW. (*again, startled.*) You’d have to ask them.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. Maybe I should get a couple demonstrations, then I give the pros and cons. Your old man won’t mind. Lovelace sucked me off cross-eyed after I interviewed her. It was his idea -- her manager or boyfriend or whatever Chuck is. ‘Screw’ magazine’s review made ‘Deep Throat’ a hit and Linda a star.

WILLOW. (*defensively.*) They say our movie’s pretty big.

AL GOLDSTEIN VOICEOVER. *They who?* It’s playing two rat traps in midtown. That ain’t gonna move the needle. It needs a full US roll-out. Johnny Carson is making jokes about Lovelace and *she* fucked a German Shepherd on film when she was a nobody. Now she’s all legit. That could be you. Would that cross a line for you? Would you ever do it with a dog?

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