

In the Slush

Written by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

LAURA BETH GARDNER

30s, Any ethnicity, Female
Editorial Assistant
Wife of Ethan
Best Friend of Hope
Pregnant

(NOTE: Does not need to "look" pregnant)

ETHAN GARDNER

30s, Any ethnicity, Male
Not an editorial assistant
Husband of Laura Beth
Friend of Hope

HOPE ROSENSTOCK

30s, Any ethnicity, Female
Editorial Assistant
Best Friend of Laura Beth
Friend of Ethan

With Special Appearances by:

RODINA WAITS

(As portrayed by Laura Beth Gardner)

30s, Any ethnicity, Female
Aspiring Poet (samples available upon request)
Marital Status Unknown
Friend Status Unknown

ORLANDO BOOM

(As portrayed by Ethan Gardner)

Age Unknown, Any ethnicity, Male
Impossibly Sexual Interstellar Space Explorer
Marital Status [REDACTED]

And

HAROLD BECKLESBY

60s, Any ethnicity, Male
Marital Status Unknown

SETTING:

The Gardner Household basement.

TIME:

Recently.

"Like the boundless sea

You are colossal to me."

-Rodina Waits, Untitled

SCENE ONE

The Gardner Household basement.

Rugs and refurbished furniture cover the room, an ongoing attempt to hide the gray cinder blocks that make up its walls and floor. The age of the space creeps through, but the naked eye largely sees it as intended, a comfortable haven for lounging and relaxation. Shelves of books and/or intricate, built models of various kinds line a wall. Maybe a beer fridge commands another.

On (and significantly around) a coffee table is a plethora of filled boxes, folders, and uncovered manuscripts. It's a rather striking amount of unread hopes and dreams.

There are two entrances/exits to the room: A single door on the basement level, leading to a side room, and another door stands unseen at the top of the stairwell running behind all the furniture and main set-up.

Currently, the side room door is open, and what is seen of the inside does little to reveal the room's function. Like the rest of the basement, there is evidence of redecoration and repurposing. Presumably it was once a boiler or laundry room, maybe a bathroom, or even some combination of all three, but no longer.

No one is visible in the threshold, but perhaps there is some movement or shuffling from inside, disturbing the air enough to signify that someone is there, out of sight, doing whatever it is the room is for.

After a silence, the stairwell door opens and a pair of feet begins to descend the stairs.

Eventually, the body of LAURA BETH GARDNER reveals itself, carrying yet another box.

She grunts, the task not being particularly difficult, just awkward.

Hearing this toil, the head or top half of ETHAN GARDNER appears in the side room threshold.

Laura Beth?
ETHAN

I'm fine.
LAURA BETH

ETHAN
(Crossing to help)
Oh my god. I told you to let me help with those.

LAURA BETH
You did. And what did I say?

ETHAN
If I recall correctly, it was something along the lines of "over my left nut."

LAURA BETH
I believe it was exactly along those lines.

ETHAN
You know...I don't wanna be that husband, but...

LAURA BETH
Husband! Oh, say that again.

ETHAN
Wife. I'm serious.

LAURA BETH
What? Just because I'm pregnant now I shouldn't be carrying heavy boxes?

ETHAN
Uh, exactly, along those lines. Yeah.

LAURA BETH
Hmm. But it's not like you're a doctor or anything, though.

ETHAN
Again. Uh...

LAURA BETH
Oh.

(Setting the box down on a stack)

Ah.

Yeah. Maybe you're right.

ETHAN

Are you okay?

LAURA BETH

I'm fine.

You can't blame me for wanting to do as much as I can before I balloon.

ETHAN

No. I suppose I can't. But if there's more, you really should let me get them.

LAURA BETH

Relax. Hope's got the rest.

ETHAN

And you're going to let her carry all of it. Right?

LAURA BETH

That does not sound like a bad idea.

ETHAN

You are just too delicate for manual labor like that.

LAURA BETH

Oh, I am?

ETHAN

I worry about you.

LAURA BETH

Oh, that's so sweet. Look at you trying to be romantic but coming off mildly sexist.

ETHAN

What? Oh, I didn't mean it that way.

LAURA BETH

Haha. I'm messing with you, baby.

But it is a good thing you're pretty.

ETHAN

It is. I am very lucky.

They kiss.

LAURA BETH

Remind me why I just married you?

Because you love me. ETHAN

I do love you. LAURA BETH

They kiss.

I love you too. ETHAN

Ugh. LAURA BETH

(Looking around at all the boxes)
Tell me I don't regret this already.

Hah. If I could save you, I would. ETHAN

You can save me. Pick up a stack, start reading. LAURA BETH

You know, I would. But I'm on call, and I gotta keep my head clear. ETHAN

Oh, you can't do that by reading. LAURA BETH

Too many words. You understand. ETHAN

Mmm hmm. It is a good thing you're pretty. LAURA BETH

It is. ETHAN

They kiss.

My hero. LAURA BETH

Here. I'll tell you what I can do. ETHAN

ETHAN pats a couch and sits.

Let me see those feet. ETHAN

Oh my god. LAURA BETH

LAURA BETH sits and removes her shoes, then lays her feet on ETHAN'S lap. He massages her feet over the following.

LAURA BETH
(Relaaaaxing)

Ohhhhhhh. My hero.

Mmmmmm.

Ooh, ah.

You all right?

ETHAN

Very. You spoil me.

LAURA BETH

Only when you let me.

ETHAN

Mmmm.

LAURA BETH

Beat.

ETHAN stops briefly, staring at LAURA BETH'S feet.

Noooo. Why'd you stop?

LAURA BETH

Sorry--your toes.

ETHAN

What about them?

LAURA BETH

I've never noticed this before, your middle toes, they're--connected.

ETHAN

Only halfway.

LAURA BETH

Have they always been like that?

ETHAN

Yeah. I'm a fish. I didn't tell you?

LAURA BETH

No, this is news. My parents forbade me from marrying fish.

ETHAN

Oh. Screw 'em, then. LAURA BETH

Hahaha. ETHAN

I just--can't believe I never noticed that. I should have noticed that.

What do you mean, should have? LAURA BETH

... ETHAN

I usually notice things like that.

Uh-huh. LAURA BETH

It's not that uncommon. There's a word for it.

I forget what it is. But there's a word for it.

Yeah? ETHAN

I think it starts with an "S?" LAURA BETH

It's all right. Don't worry about it. ETHAN

Sin...something. I don't know. LAURA BETH

Ssssh. ETHAN
(Kissing her feet and
continuing the massage)

Mmmmm. LAURA BETH

Beat.

How's the model coming along? LAURA BETH

What? Oh. ETHAN

Good. It's coming along.

You gonna let me see it?
LAURA BETH

When it's done.
ETHAN

Yeah. All right.
LAURA BETH

...

You okay?
ETHAN

...
LAURA BETH

I'll just say it. I know you're not meaning to, but the way you act about that room, it's a little Bluebeard-y.

A little who?
ETHAN

You really don't read, do you?
LAURA BETH

I'm more of a documentary guy.
ETHAN

LAURA BETH
(Chiming in with ETHAN)
"I'm more of a documentary guy."

Bluebeard. Wealthy nobleman, married many times, but his wives always have the strangest habit of vanishing under mysterious circumstances. One day, before he leaves for a trip, he gives his newest wife keys to every room in his regal, gigantic mansion. But he orders her to stay out of one particular room in the basement.

So naturally, that's exactly what she doesn't do. She unlocks the basement room door, overcome by desire and curiosity, and what does she find but the bloody bodies of all the missing former wives, hanging from hooks on the walls.

ETHAN
Uh huh. So you think I've got dead bodies hanging in there?

LAURA BETH
I'm not saying that. I am saying you've never really let me inside to see.

ETHAN
Haha.

If you want to go in and look around, you can. There's not much to see. Just worktables and tools.

Really? LAURA BETH

I would have to get up then, wouldn't I?

You would. ETHAN

Well, maybe in a little while, then. LAURA BETH

They kiss.

LAURA BETH revels in ETHAN'S eyes.

What? ETHAN

I'm just so happy. LAURA BETH

I am, too. ETHAN

Perhaps another kiss, as ETHAN'S hand finds its way to LAURA BETH'S belly.

LAURA BETH places her hands on top.

What about Jude? ETHAN

Jude? LAURA BETH

Yeah. ETHAN

Little archaically Biblical, don't you think? LAURA BETH

No, it's not. ETHAN

Besides, what makes you so sure she's going to be a boy? LAURA BETH

You think it's a girl? ETHAN

I know she's a girl. I've already decided. LAURA BETH

Pretty sure that's not how it works. ETHAN

It is. Guinevere. LAURA BETH

Guinevere? ETHAN

Mmmhmm. LAURA BETH

And you think Jude is archaic? ETHAN

It's the good kind of archaic. LAURA BETH

Guinevere Gardner. ETHAN

Gwen for short. LAURA BETH

Good, right?

Yep, there it is.

The alliteration. ETHAN

I thought you'd like that. LAURA BETH

That's-- ETHAN

King Arthur. LAURA BETH

Yep. Nerd. ETHAN

You love it. LAURA BETH

I do. ETHAN

They kiss.

LAURA BETH
And, hey, by the time I'm done with all this, she'll be here. Get ready.

ETHAN

I sincerely hope it doesn't take that long. I would still like to see you before she comes.

LAURA BETH

Look at it all. I die a little inside just looking at it.

ETHAN

I still can't believe you convinced Barry to let you bring the entire thing here.

LAURA BETH

I still can't believe Barry insists on submissions in hard copy.

ETHAN

That too.

LAURA BETH

We sweet talked him, that's how. Hope and I told him, "if we've got the weekend to trim the pile and find a needle of bare minimum competency in a haystack, there's no way we're doing it in the damn office."

I believe the phrase "over my left nut" was used.

ETHAN

There's got to be something good in here.

LAURA BETH

I'm sure there is. It's just the matter of finding it. That part's...less fun.

ETHAN

Is it really that bad?

LAURA BETH

Some of this stuff you have to see to believe. There are gems, but they're buried beneath so so much crap. Worse than crap. Not even "so bad, it's good" crap, just--"so bad, it's bad" crap.

ETHAN

Well, crap.

All part of the dream, huh?

LAURA BETH

All part of the dream. When you do finally find what you're looking for? You're holding it your hands, buzzing from the energy it's giving. You've found the creation you're going to help somebody share with everyone. That's why we do it.

That's the pep talk they give us. But...

It is a good feeling.

Beat.

ETHAN
Well, hey. You got this. It'll be over before you know it.

LAURA BETH
That is a lie.

ETHAN
Rue Britannia.

LAURA BETH
Rule Britannia?

ETHAN
King Arthur.

LAURA BETH
That was so after.

ETHAN
Excalibur.

LAURA BETH
Oh my god.

I love you.

ETHAN
I love you, too.

LAURA BETH
Thanks for helping.

ETHAN
You barely let me.

LAURA BETH
When do you go on call?

ETHAN
Not till 9. When's Hope coming over?

LAURA BETH
Probably about 8?

ETHAN
All right. You just shout if I can get you anything, okay?

LAURA BETH
Wine?

ETHAN
No wine.

LAURA BETH

No wine.

(To her belly)

You little bastard, you couldn't show up a week later?

ETHAN

Guinevere.

LAURA BETH

See?

ETHAN

I'll make you some tea.

ETHAN crosses and closes the side room door, then begins climbing the stairs.

LAURA BETH

Teaaaaaaa.

ETHAN

Maybe order a pizza.

LAURA BETH

No pineapple!

ETHAN

We'll see.

LAURA BETH

Don't you dare! It is a cardinal sin!

ETHAN is gone.

LAURA BETH looks around at all the boxes, steeling herself for the task ahead.

Beat.

LAURA BETH

(Suddenly, yelling up after
ETHAN)

Syndactyly!

That's the word. Syndactyly.

Weird little word.

(To her belly)

Strap in, Gwen.

It's gonna be a bumpy ride.

She grabs a stack of papers and/or a box and gets comfortable.

But before she really starts reading, she looks over at the side room door.

Beat.

She stands, crosses to the door, and turns the knob.

It does not turn.

The door is locked.

Beat.

She returns to her previous spot and begins to read.

The lights fade.

SCENE TWO

In the darkness, with a combination of laughter and pitying amusement, the voice of HOPE ROSENSTOCK reads aloud a section of manuscript.

During her speech, lights rise, revealing the same, later that evening, the main clues to the passage of time being HOPE'S presence, an emptier pizza box or two, teacups, wine bottles and glasses, and many shuffled papers.

HOPE

(Reading)

"The paint splattered her barest essence. My fingers brushed her skin, and her nipples surged outward, hardening in the ultraviolet light. My penis quivered with jubilant glee."

LAURA BETH

Oh god.

HOPE

(Reading)

"The expectation. The anticipation. This was it. The moment I had been waiting for. That I had dreamed of since I was a child. I was about to conquer a Colactian. Or was it she who was about to conquer me? I stared into her six eyes, each of which looked back at me, into my soul, piercing me deeper than any gaze I've ever known. Again I pulsed in my sex. I reached for my manhood, and began to stroke.

'Stop,' she said, a tentacle rising naughtily above her shoulder. 'You will not cum. You will not even touch your cock unless I give you permission. Is that understood?'

Oh gods yes. YES. I understand. 'I understand,' I nearly shouted.

'Good,' she uttered. 'Now lie down. On your belly.'

I obeyed, and her moist tentacles slathered over my backside, entering the cavernous, gaping opening of my--

LAURA BETH

Stoop! Oh my god!

HOPE

God, LB, it gets so much better!

LAURA BETH

I'll take your word for it.

HOPE

I think we've got a winner here.

LAURA BETH

I will admit. It's certainly much more colorful than this "we're all living in a simulation" dissertation.

HOPE

Ah, those are a dime a dozen.

LAURA BETH

Does rhyme, though.

HOPE

Like that counts for anything. This guy. This guy knows what he's doing.

LAURA BETH

Read me the name again.

HOPE

(Reading)

"The Sexual Ceremonials of Orlando Boom, Volume I: The Galactic Treaty."

LAURA BETH

Orlando Boom?

HOPE

Hahahaha. You can't drug up something that brilliant. That's amazing.

LAURA BETH

I don't see it as a novel.

I needed that.

HOPE

More of an animated series.

LAURA BETH

Hey. Erotica's big.

HOPE

As big as Mr. Boom?

LAURA BETH

No one is as big as Mr. Boom.

HOPE

They laugh.

Silence.

HOPE shuffles through more of the Orlando Boom manuscript. LAURA BETH puts down her manuscript and picks up another.

On to the next.

What time is it?

HOPE
(Yawning)

10:43.

LAURA BETH
(Checking something that tells the time, or not, maybe she just knows)

Seriously? Jesus, it feels like it's past midnight.

HOPE

HOPE puts down the Orlando Boom manuscript and grabs a slice of pizza.

Time flies when you're having fun.

LAURA BETH

Sure does.

HOPE

HOPE grabs another manuscript, leafs through it.

Silence.

Do you ever feel bad?

HOPE

Hmm?

LAURA BETH

When you read through this shit? Do you ever feel bad for some of these people? Like, do you think they have any idea that what they've written is so unreadable?

HOPE

In my experience, no.

LAURA BETH

You'd think they'd be able to see it.

HOPE

Mmmhmm.

LAURA BETH

I mean, don't get me wrong, I don't mind sending out rejection after rejection. I just almost feel bad sometimes. You know?

Somebody made this. Poured their soul into it and released it out into the world. Except they don't know the world is just one of these boxes in this fucking basement. And we're the schmucks who are looking at them, saying... "yes. This is worthy." Or... "no, this is not." And there's a 99.99 repeating percent chance of not, and it just goes right back on top of the nearest stack, never to see the light of day again.

Stacks upon stacks of hopes and dreams. It's, like, I wonder what they would do if they ever met us. Could talk to our faces. What would they say? What would I say? I felt bad? Would I say that even more than bad, I just hated how their dreams were so goddamn illiterate?

You haven't heard a word I said, have you?

LAURA BETH
(She hasn't)

Hmm?

HOPE

Nothing. Whatcha' got there?

LAURA BETH

I don't know. It's a poem, it's interesting.

HOPE

How was the cover letter?

LAURA BETH

Didn't have one.

HOPE

And you're still reading it? You're too nice.

LAURA BETH

Good assistant, bad assistant.

HOPE

Nyeh nyeh, let's hear it.

LAURA BETH

(Reading)

"*The Circle*," by Rodina Waits.

"Listen to the air

Feel it
Around you
Beneath
Within
Hear how striking it feels

To perceive the closing of a chapter of your life
See it impending
Approaching
It is imminent now

The dawn of the next."

Silence.

HOPE

That's...actually not bad?

LAURA BETH

Interesting, right?

HOPE

Am I crazy? Is that good or is that shit?

LAURA BETH

It's the most captivating thing I've seen tonight.

HOPE

That title belongs to Orlando Boom.

LAURA BETH

Impactful.

HOPE

She give any more?

LAURA BETH

A couple. Looks like some prose, too.

May I?

HOPE

LAURA BETH hands HOPE the manuscript, who leafs through it.

LAURA BETH muses on the words.

Her belly.

HOPE comes to some sort of conclusion.

Let's set her aside.

HOPE

Agreed.

LAURA BETH

They do.

So that's one. Maybe.

LAURA BETH

Yeah. Maybe. I call that break time?

HOPE

Let's push through to 11.

LAURA BETH

You're preggers. Take a break.

HOPE

See, but I have to be good. Because you're terrible. And if neither of us are good--

LAURA BETH

Fine fine, shuddup. Killjoy.

HOPE

LAURA BETH replies with an air kiss.

HOPE

Hey, why don't you pick me one, I'll pick you one?

LAURA BETH

Can't argue with that.

HOPE

(Gollum, Gollum)

Find us a good one, precious.

LAURA BETH

Down, Smeagol.

The women stand and search the stacks for "good ones."

Eventually:

LAURA BETH
(Selecting the manuscript
she's looking at)

Oh, hohoho.

HOPE

I like the sound of that.

LAURA BETH

You ready?

HOPE

Nope. I am braving the depths.

HOPE'S phone buzzes or makes a noise.

HOPE
(Checking her phone)

One sec.

...

What the fuck, Barry?

LAURA BETH

What?

HOPE

He just sent a text. He forgot to tell us, but the queries that came in this week are from VIP clients? He wants us to review those before anything else. To help keep the pile organized?

LAURA BETH

What?

HOPE

I know. In what fuck does that make sense?

LAURA BETH

You go through them in the order they come in. That's the system.

HOPE

Yeah. Must have sucked his dick real good to jump the line.

LAURA BETH

Hope.

HOPE

Just sayin'. He wants to tell us how to do our jobs so bad least he could do is let us do his.

LAURA BETH

Well, let's just find the scripts and read them so he'll shut up.

HOPE

(Looking around at the
immense pile)

Yeah. Find them. That should be easy.

LAURA BETH

Especially if we start with the box labeled VIP.

HOPE

Huh?

*LAURA BETH points to a box clearly
labeled "VIP."*

HOPE looks.

HOPE

Oh shit.

*HOPE crosses to the VIP box and wrestles
it free from its location in the pile.*

LAURA BETH

(Re: the manuscript she chose
for HOPE)

I guess I'll set this aside.

HOPE

Don't you dare. I'm still reading that first. Fuck Barry.

LAURA BETH

Aw. You really do love me.

HOPE

You know it, baby. Ethan didn't get you pregnant, I would.

LAURA BETH

How sweet.

HOPE

(Getting the box open)

Ha ha! Fuck.

(Taking the top manuscript)

This one just says "Urgent matter enclosed!" That ought to be good.

LAURA BETH

I eagerly await it.

HOPE and LAURA BETH exchange manuscripts.

HOPE

(Reading)

"*The Economy of Friendship*" by Lockwick Greene? Oh my god.

LAURA BETH

Enjoy.

HOPE

Who the fuck names some of these people? Why do parents do that to their kids?

LAURA BETH

Could be a pen name.

HOPE

I got a better one. Orlando Goddamn Boom.

The two begin to read.

Silence.

Separately, they both gradually get wide-eyed, affected by the words they encounter, HOPE in an ironic, caustic curiosity, LAURA BETH in a state of frozen distress and unease.

HOPE

The fuck?

Listen to this.

(Reading)

"Every relationship, friendship, even minor acquaintanceship throughout the course of our lives is fundamentally one-sided. All one need do is make careful observation to see that one subject always, ultimately, and irrefutably, cares more about the other subject than vice versa. Person A loves and/or needs Person B more than Person B loves and/or needs Person A. Both may cherish the mutual interaction, benefits may be shared, but internally, either A or B will prove more dependent upon the existence of the relationship than the other. This bond is vital for the greater carer in order to navigate their life's happiness and terms of success, while the second party's would be less affected were the partnership to dissolve. Our need for companionship is understandable, perhaps even inevitable, but we must not ever forget this fact. Doing so allows us to function at our greatest level of potential, for only when we have the ability to impartially determine our standing within each of our relations can we truly use them to our benefit."

...

I mean, what the fuck. Like--

That's so cynical.

...

LB?

LB, you okay?

You haven't heard a word I've fucking said, have you?

...

Laura Beth.

*LAURA BETH finally looks at HOPE,
stupefied with anxiety.*

What's wrong?
HOPE

I--
LAURA BETH

...

What?
HOPE

Read--read that.
LAURA BETH
(Perhaps shaking, handing
HOPE her manuscript)

What?
HOPE

Just read it.
LAURA BETH

HOPE
(Reading)
"Mrs. Gardner. My name is Harold Becklesby."

...

(Reading)
"I sincerely hope that my words will find their way to you. Should they manage the feat, please find it within yourself to forgive them their intrusion, as well as my unorthodox manner of making contact, but I could conceive of no other way. It would do my heart well to think you might one day forgive me for what my words must impart to you, but I concede the magnitude of the task. Regardless of my wishes, still my words must be made known, for they concern a matter of the gravest importance. I will speak bluntly now.

You are not human. Your baby is not human. You are an artificial vessel for the Second Coming. Not of Christ. But of a darkness that has long slumbered beneath humanity's reign on this earth. At the end of its gestation in your body, you will birth an entity of evil whose sole purpose is to plunge our world back into a blackness not seen since the days of the most ancient terrors. Mankind as we know it will be destroyed. In torment and madness and death. This must be prevented. There are people who believe in this destruction. Who want more than anything for it to occur."

(Looking to LAURA BETH,
incredulous)

...

LAURA BETH

Keep going.

HOPE

"Your husband is not the man you think he is. I understand the absurdity of these claims, but you must forget everything you think you know of him. Every memory. The day you first met at Clary McClellon's book signing. Your hiking trips to the Adirondacks. Your very love of creation, stories, and editing, they are not real. Every part of your life was fabricated. Ethan Gardner's only wish is to keep you alive and ignorant in order to see the successful birth of that fiend. You must believe me. The fate of all our lives, of humanity itself, rests on your shoulders. Escape from him. However you can. And meet me at the following address: 1737--"

(Unable to take any more)

This is--

I mean, what the--this is--

This is insane!

This is insane. This is insane. This is insane. I mean, this has to be a joke. This has to be a joke.

Laura Beth?

LAURA BETH

How does he know those things, Hope?

How does he know those things?

HOPE

Everybody knows you two take off to the mountains.

LAURA BETH

Hope, you are one of practically 5 people who even know I am pregnant. We haven't announced it yet. What kind of sick joke is this?!

HOPE

I don't know.

LAURA BETH

Because if it is, it is not fucking funny!

HOPE

Okay, so it's not a joke, it's...you've got a stalker.

LAURA BETH

Oh my god.

HOPE

I don't know, it's just a crazy guy who--found out somehow and--

LAURA BETH

Oh my god!

HOPE

Hey, calm down.

LAURA BETH

Don't you--do not fucking tell me to calm down! Hope! Do not--Hope, you didn't just read a personalized manuscript saying you're not human!

Or that your baby's fucking Cthulhu! And your hus--oh, oh my god!

HOPE

Hey, but hey, freaking out isn't going to help anything, we just need to take a breath and think.

LAURA BETH

YOU TAKE A BREATH!

HOPE

Hey!

LAURA BETH

THIS SHIT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!

HOPE

LB!

LAURA BETH

Oh my god!

HOPE

LB! Hey!

LAURA BETH

...!

HOPE

Breathe. Breathe! Hey! Listen to me! Breathe. Breathe. LB? Breathe. Hey, listen to my voice. Listen to my, all right? Look at me. Look at me. Breathe. In out. Breathe.

I don't know what this is. Okay? I don't. But this cannot be real. Okay? Just think about it. Think about it. What the fuck? This guy is--he's--he's rambling on about darkness and ancient terrors, he's delusional. He's got to be. I don't know how he knows what he

knows but he certainly doesn't fucking seem to be all there in the head. We'll figure this out, okay? It's gonna be okay. Okay?

Just breathe.

LAURA BETH

Hope.

What the hell is going on?

Before HOPE can answer, the stairs door opens, and we hear the voice of ETHAN before he begins descending, carrying a tray with more tea.

The ladies' heads turn.

ETHAN (O.S.)

Knock knock! How you gals doing?

A silent, manic conversation between LAURA BETH and HOPE, HOPE madly trying to get LAURA BETH to sit down and act natural, or at least not break down.

It ends by the time ETHAN comes into their view.

HOPE

Never better!

ETHAN

Finding anything good?

HOPE

Um. What?

ETHAN

I said, have you found anything good?

HOPE

Oh! One--thing. Maybe. It was a poem. Right, LB?

LB?

Beat.

LAURA BETH

Yeah. Yeah, it was a poem. Some young lady, I think.

ETHAN

What was it about?

LAURA BETH

New beginnings.

ETHAN

Hmm. Neat! Well, I hope you don't mind, but I figured you could use a refill.

LAURA BETH

Thanks, honey.

ETHAN

(Refilling LAURA BETH'S
cup)

Now, I tried putting something new in this one, so if it tastes funny, that's my bad, but--I was reading this article about this citrus and mint concoction, it's supposed to be good for gut health, I thought why not give it a try? Here.

ETHAN hands LAURA BETH the cup.

LAURA BETH

Oh.

ETHAN

Yeah.

(To HOPE)

Hope? Any tea?

HOPE

I'll, uh, stick with the wine, thanks.

ETHAN

Suit yourself. Now, hey, you're not letting Laura Beth sneak any, are you? Haha. Got to make sure Gwen pops out of there nice and strong.

HOPE

Gwen?

ETHAN

Do you like it? Laura Beth's idea.

HOPE

Gwen Gardner?

LAURA BETH

Guinevere.

HOPE

King Arthur.

ETHAN

Exactly. I pushed hard for Merlin, but--she won. Aha, I'm just kidding.

(To LAURA BETH)

Whatcha' think?

What?
LAURA BETH

The tea.
ETHAN

Oh.
LAURA BETH

Beat.

You aren't going to try it?
ETHAN

Beat.

Yes. Of course.
LAURA BETH

It's just a little hot, still.

ETHAN leans over and blows on the tea.

Perhaps runs a loving hand over LAURA BETH'S ear.

You spoil me.
LAURA BETH

Only when you let me.
ETHAN

Beat.

LAURA BETH slowly raises the cup to her lips and drinks.

Well?
ETHAN

It's good.
LAURA BETH

ETHAN
Yeah, I like it, too. It's weird, but good. Surprisingly easy to make, too. It was not hard at all. Took me less than, like, ten minutes, all while watching that new show, you know, the one everyone says is really good, with--the guy.

You ever read that article or hear the thing about the spoilers? Like, how knowing spoilers about something in advance is supposed to increase your enjoyment of it? Enhances the viewing experience or something? I still don't really understand it, but the guy, somebody at work told me he dies--oh, spoiler, I guess, sorry...but Nancy told me he dies and I'll be damned if I'm not really eager to find out when. And how. You'd

figure I'd lose interest, but--

Makes you think.

Are you crying?

No.

LAURA BETH

Why are you crying, baby?

ETHAN

Beat.

I'm just so happy.

LAURA BETH

Beat.

ETHAN leans in and kisses LAURA BETH.

Well, I will get out of your ladies' hair. Keep trucking. Shout if you need anything.

ETHAN
(Moving to leave)

Perhaps as he's even halfway up the stairs:

Hey, Ethan?

LAURA BETH

Hope and I...

Yeah?

ETHAN

Hope and I were thinking of going out for breakfast in the morning.

LAURA BETH

Okay.

ETHAN

Just the two of us.

LAURA BETH

...Okay?

ETHAN

Is that okay?

LAURA BETH

Beat.

ETHAN

Why on earth wouldn't it be? Treat yourselves, you've been working hard. Just no mimosas, right? Hah.

ETHAN exits up the stairs.

But returns after a moment.

ETHAN

Hey. Are you okay?

LAURA BETH

Just tired.

I love you, honey.

ETHAN

I love you, too.

Don't stay up too late, okay? Make sure you get some rest.

LAURA BETH

I will.

ETHAN exits up the stairs.

LAURA BETH lets out the tension.

HOPE can only watch. And think.

Silence.

HOPE stands and grabs an empty wine bottle. She crosses with purpose to the teacups and pours the tea into the wine bottle.

She sets the bottle somewhere it won't be mistaken for regular wine, then picks up the Becklesby Manuscript and leafs through it once more.

She stops, finds her wine glass and finishes it off. Maybe pours herself a new one from another bottle. Maybe she just swigs from the another bottle.

Silence.

HOPE

I'll be back in a second.

She crosses to exit up the stairs, but stops at:

Please don't leave me.
LAURA BETH

...
HOPE

I'm just going to pee.
LAURA BETH
Hope.

Beat.

Of course.
HOPE
Of course not. I won't leave you.
(Sitting down next to LAURA BETH, consoling her)
I won't leave you.

...
LAURA BETH

HOPE
This is clearly bullshit. It's insane.
I mean, think about it.

LAURA BETH
I can't just ignore this.

HOPE
...

No. No, you can't.

We won't. You're right. Whoever this fucking guy is...tomorrow morning, you and I will go see him. Make him explain himself.

Whatever this is, we're going to figure it out. You hear me?

We're going to figure this out.

Okay?

LAURA BETH is looking at the side room door.

LB? HOPE

LAURA BETH looks back to HOPE.

HOPE
Hey. You are real. Your baby is real. This is just some fucked up, crazy fucking...joke.
Okay?

You hear me?

Beat.

What if it's not? LAURA BETH

*The sound of spoken word jazz explodes
into the scene.*

It continues as lights fade.

SCENE THREE

*Atop the jazz, now, the ambience of an
eager and attentive audience, awaiting a
performance.*

SULTRY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Good evenings and pleasantries to all you cool cats and kittens. Thank you for going out
of your way to be here with us tonight. We are excited to have you. We ask that you
now prepare your minds and your bodies for our artists. They are bursting to share theirs
with you.

And now...it is my deepest pleasure to present...

Rodina Waits.

*A spotlight hits RODINA WAITS, who is
just LAURA BETH, suddenly wearing the
scarf and beret of a beat poet.*

*A smattering of polite applause in the
form of snaps.*

Bonjour RODINA (LAURA BETH)

Hello

My name is Rodina Waits
I have a poem
I would like to recite for you all

This poem is called

Fuck Me in the Cabinet.

A blacklight hits the closed side room door, illuminating a message across its face: "THE CABINET."

The crowd ooohs and aaahs.

Snaps.

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

There's a cabinet
In my house
Hidden away
In the basement
It's big and
Rectangular

It's not square
Cause you ain't one, baby
You are
Tall
Dark and handsome and
Rectangular

It's a large cabinet
Big enough to fit a whole person inside
Two people, even
If you know what I mean

Most people use their cabinets for storage
My cabinet's for
Other
Activities
Other kinds of
Storage

I want you to fuck me in the cabinet
If that was not clear

Metaphors
You know?
They can be so
Literal

And

Rectangular.

(Letting it end properly, then
posing)

Sh'bam. Rodina.

Snaps.

Rodina Waits.

SULTRY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Snaps.

Merci. Thank you.

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

I will be in the cabinet.

RODINA crosses to "THE CABINET."

She opens the door to reveal ORLANDO BOOM in the threshold, who is just ETHAN, suddenly wearing garb that can only befit a man capable of the greatest interstellar sexual exploits.

Ahhhhhhhhhh! Rodinaaaaaaaaaaaah!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

The crowd ooohs and aaahs.

Orlando Boom?!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

'Tis I! The same!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

Gasp! What are you doing in my cabinet that I use for having sex?

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

What the hell do you think? I'm here to insert my penis into several of your main orifices!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

O! Fondle my breasts, Orlando! Take me to the stars!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

With pleasure!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

ORLANDO BOOM fondles RODINA'S breasts.

Ah! Ah!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

Do your nipples feel satisfaction?!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

OH GOD YES!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

*An embrace. RODINA and ORLANDO
BOOM just start going at it.*

Yes! Yes!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

I have similar feelings!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

*The two disappear into "THE CABINET."
The door shuts behind them.*

Gimme that cock, Orlando! Fuck my brain out!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

All right!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

Get it out!!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

I call it...the Boomstick.

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

The Boomstick gets it own sound effect.

OH MY GOD YES!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

KNOCK KNOCK!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

HELLO, I'M HOME!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

BOOM!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

AH!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

BOOM!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

AH!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

I AM SEXUALLY PLEASING!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

I AM SEXUALLY PLEASED!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

RECTANGLES!

ORLANDO BOOM

RODINA and ORLANDO continue, ad-libbing the exceptional experience.

SULTRY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Perhaps we should give these two some privacy. I imagine they'll be in there for a little while.

After a brief moment, the sounds of RODINA and ORLANDO begin to distort.

They become corrupted.

Something strange and unnatural is happening in "THE CABINET," but their fun is no less.

OH! OH!

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

BOOM! BOOM!

ORLANDO BOOM (ETHAN)

RODINA (LAURA BETH)
PUT A BABY IN ME! DO IT! PUT A BABY IN ME!

The crying of a baby now, from behind "THE CABINET."

It gets louder, drowning out RODINA and ORLANDO.

Then it, too, distorts.

Into something dark.

Malevolent.

Shrieking.

Wicked.

The sounds continue as "THE CABINET" opens! Revealed in the threshold, an emotionless LAURA BETH.

She shuts the door behind her, crosses to the couch, and lies down.

The cacophony of sound reaches its peak.

Then everything shifts as LAURA BETH awakens on the couch, in terror, alone in the basement.

LAURA BETH
AHHHHHHHHHHHHH! AH!! AHH!! AH!

The stairs door opens and HOPE runs down to console her.

HOPE
(Overlapping)
Hey! Hey! Hey! Shh! Hey! It was just a dream! It was just a dream! Just a bad dream.

LAURA BETH
(Overlapping)
AH! AH! Ahh! Ah! Ah. Ah. Ahh.

Mmm. Ohhh.

Ohh.

HOPE
It's okay. Breathe. Breathe.

LAURA BETH
Oh my god.

HOPE
You all right? You okay?

LAURA BETH
...Yes.

It felt so real.

HOPE
Sounded like a monster. What the hell happened?

Beat.

LAURA BETH
Ethan and I were having sex.

HOPE
Okay, that's more than I need to know.

LAURA BETH
But I wasn't, he was...Orlando Boom.

Orlando Boom?
HOPE

Orlando Boom.
LAURA BETH

...

Is it morning?
HOPE

Yeah, um...it's, like, quarter after 9?
LAURA BETH

...

There are no windows down here.
HOPE

Yeah, it's...it's a basement.
LAURA BETH

That's never bothered me before. But right now...
HOPE

Why don't you go upstairs and get some air? Okay? Clear your head, I'll make some pancakes or some shit.
LAURA BETH

What? No, we're--we're going out. Right?
HOPE

Is Ethan here?
HOPE

No, he's--I haven't seen him. He must've got called in.
LAURA BETH

Oh. Okay.
HOPE

Okay.
(Standing, beginning to get ready to leave the house)

Then let's go. What are we waiting for?
HOPE

LB.
LAURA BETH

I just need to put on my shoes. Brush my teeth. Is there any coffee upstairs? I think I could use some coffee.
HOPE

LB.

LAURA BETH
What's the address again? Where is the--

HOPE
Laura Beth.

LAURA BETH stops.

LAURA BETH
You aren't getting ready to go. Are you ready?

HOPE
...

LAURA BETH
We're going to talk to this creep, right?

HOPE
I've been thinking...

Beat.

LAURA BETH
About?

HOPE
If this guy is a stalker or something...I mean, he's clearly unwell. He could be dangerous. I don't know if it's the best idea to go over there and confront him. Alone.

Beat.

LAURA BETH
We're not alone. I'm with you. You're with me.

HOPE
Alone the two of us.

LAURA BETH
You've studied Krav Maga! You know every martial art I've heard of.

HOPE
That doesn't mean I'm equipped for anything.

LAURA BETH
It's literal self-defense.

HOPE
I'm just raising the possibility--

LAURA BETH
Are you saying you don't want to go?

HOPE

No! I mean, no, that's not what I'm saying. I'm just saying that we need to be careful, here. We're in uncharted waters of mental health stuff, this guy is fucked in some way. We don't know if his place is booby trapped or if he's gonna pull a gun on us.

I mean, this guy is saying that--Gwen?--is some ancient god or whatever? That's gonna destroy the world? Your well-being might not be in his best interest.

LAURA BETH

...

HOPE

I'm not saying let's not go, I'm just saying we shouldn't rush into anything.

Not until we figure out what we're actually dealing with.

Beat.

LAURA BETH

What are we dealing with?

HOPE

...

I have no idea.

LAURA BETH

Neither do I.

I don't know what to think. I don't know what to do.

But Occam's Razor.

HOPE

Simplest explanation is likely the correct one?

LAURA BETH

What's the simplest explanation here?

HOPE

Look.

LAURA BETH

Either he's crazy...

HOPE

LB.

LAURA BETH

Or he's telling the truth.

HOPE

Listen to yourself.

LAURA BETH

...

*At some point during the following line,
LAURA BETH looks to "THE CABINET."*

HOPE

Whatever the hell's going on, I think the first thing we need to do is get you some air. You've been down here too long. Let's go chill on the porch or something. We'll bring some manuscripts. I'll make us a huge breakfast. Pancakes, eggs, bacon, the fucking works. We'll have a nice morning and just forget about this. Just for the morning.

And we'll figure it out after that.

Look at me.

LAURA BETH
(Looking back at HOPE)

...

He's never let me in there, you know?

HOPE

What?

LAURA BETH

"The Cabinet."

HOPE

What?

LAURA BETH

...

I need to go.

With or without you. I need to go.

HOPE

...

LAURA BETH moves to go.

HOPE gets in her way.

Beat.

LAURA BETH

Get out of my way.

HOPE

Just hold on a second.

LAURA BETH

Hope.

HOPE

As your friend, I do not think this is a good idea.

LAURA BETH

(Overlapping)

I am not asking you. Get out of my way!

HOPE

Do you not think that I am just as freaked out as you right now?!

I am just as scared, all right?!

LAURA BETH

Are you?

HOPE

I am! Maybe not in the same way! This situation is the most ludicrous bullshit I've ever heard! It's a fucking dime-store Lovecraft plot! I mean, what the FUCK!

I shouldn't yell at you, I'm sorry, I--

I am saying this because I care about you. I'm trying to be strong for you, I really am. And I know you need me right now and I--I cannot begin to understand what it is that you must be feeling because I can barely understand what it is that I'm feeling.

But I am trying. I am trying. I'm not going to leave you alone in this. All right? I promise you. We are going to get through this. But you have to be with me. I have to be with you. One of us can't just go running off half-cocked.

We have to be on the same page.

LAURA BETH

...

HOPE

Have breakfast with me.

If, after that, you still feel the same. I will drive. I promise.

LAURA BETH

...

...

HOPE

Please.

LAURA BETH

(Slowly nodding)

...

Thank you. HOPE

Breakfast. LAURA BETH

Thank you. HOPE

Chocolate chip pancakes. LAURA BETH

Whatever you want. HOPE

...

You know I'm on your side, right?

I know, Hope. LAURA BETH

Okay. HOPE

I'll be right behind you.

LAURA BETH exits up the stairs.

HOPE breathes, semi-exhausted.

Silence.

She pulls out her phone and begins texting.

Beat.

She finishes and puts the phone back in her pocket.

Silence.

In a sudden rage, HOPE grabs a box of manuscripts and throws it across the room.

Silence.

The stairs door opens and the voice of LAURA BETH calls down.

Hope? LAURA BETH (O.S.)

I'm okay!

I just tripped.

HOPE

HOPE grabs a different box of manuscripts and exits up the stairs.

SCENE FOUR

Later that day.

The stairs door opens and HOPE descends the stairs.

She looks around the room, searching for something.

After a few moments, she finds it, the Becklesby Manuscript.

She leafs through it, skimming it once more, thinking.

Something very much on her mind.

But her thoughts are interrupted by the sound of the stairs door and feet descending the stairs.

She freezes, looking towards the stairs.

It's ETHAN.

HOPE relaxes.

A bit.

Hey.

ETHAN

Shhh!

HOPE
(Fingers to her mouth)

ETHAN
You've blown my phone to hell, what do you mean "she knows?"

HOPE
She knows! What the fuck do you think I mean?!

ETHAN
Like, she knows?

HOPE
She knows, dumbass. Get the fuck down here!

ETHAN
How did she find out?

*HOPE tosses/thrusts the manuscript at
ETHAN.*

ETHAN
What is this?

HOPE
Just read.

ETHAN begins to read.

The weight slowly sets in.

*HOPE continues talking as he reads, half
to herself, half to him.*

HOPE
He mailed it to the office. He fucking mailed it. Right under our noses.

He talked to Barry. He paid him off or something to jump the line. He mailed it. I literally handed it to her.

I can't fucking believe this. This isn't happening.

ETHAN
Oh my god.

HOPE
Yeah.

ETHAN
Oh my god!

HOPE
Quiet.

Beat.

ETHAN
Where is she?

HOPE
In the bedroom. Sleeping. She's so wired, I barely got her out. I have no idea how the fuck I managed it, but...we probably don't have much time.

She wants to go see him.

What the fuck do we do now? Huh? Because I don't have a game plan here and I am holding this shit together by the skin of my teeth.

ETHAN

Wait, so she--

HOPE

No, she doesn't trust you. She's fucking scared to death. Especially after your Martha Stewart citrus and mint routine, I doubt she'll touch anything you're near.

ETHAN

How was I supposed to know?

HOPE

I was giving you signals the whole time!

ETHAN

Hey! Shhh!

HOPE

She was crying!!

ETHAN

Shhhh!

HOPE

DON'T--Fuck you shush me!

ETHAN

Look, we can't--

If she knows, she knows. It's done. We deal with it. But we can't get angry at each other, not now, not if we're going to fix this. We have to be on the same page.

HOPE laughs.

ETHAN

What?

HOPE

Nothing.

You're right. I'm sorry, I'm just--stressed. I'm so stressed. I'm freaking out. Actually.

I don't know if she believes it or not. But the question is there now, so...

Fuck, we were so close.

ETHAN

We still are. We're in the home stretch. So fuck Harold. Let's finish it.

HOPE

That's a little easier said than done.

ETHAN

Then we'll figure it out. I'll call Schmit, get him to cover the rest of my shift.

Let's work the problem. All right? What are our options?

Can we drug her?

HOPE

I mean, that's a question for you. Would it make her forget anything?

ETHAN

(Not likely?)

...

HOPE

I feel like she's so jumpy, it'd be hard to sneak it into something.

ETHAN

Okay.

We can't kill her. Obviously.

HOPE

We will not.

ETHAN

...

HOPE

She's on edge about you. I have no idea how she feels about me. But I do not imagine my Academy Award-worthy performance is gonna go much further. I can't keep her in this house forever. Not without stretching every limit of believability.

ETHAN

Can you get out of town?

HOPE

For eight and a half months?

ETHAN

Yeah, it felt stupid coming out of my mouth, too.

HOPE

Dumbass.

Beat.

ETHAN

I, um...

HOPE
What?

ETHAN
I know we've discussed this subject before.

HOPE
No.

ETHAN
It would so much easier if we killed him.

HOPE
No.

ETHAN
He can't interfere if he's out of the picture.

HOPE
I told you no.
If I wanted him dead, I would have done it years ago.

ETHAN
...
Okay.

HOPE
We can't start over, can we?

ETHAN
Not without years of lost work. And time.

HOPE
And we can't keep lying.

Not for long.

Not a lot of options.

ETHAN shifts, moving.

An idea.

HOPE
What?

ETHAN
You're right. We can't keep lying.

HOPE
Not for long.

ETHAN

...

This might sound stupid.

Beat.

HOPE

No.

ETHAN

What if we don't?

HOPE

No! Are you actually suggesting--

ETHAN

But why not? Why don't we just admit the truth? Get out in front of it?

HOPE

There's nothing of get in front of. The fucking bus hit us miles back.

ETHAN

But if she freaks out we're just right back to where we are now. Right? What if she goes with it?

HOPE

In what world does she accept what she is and just "go with it?" We made this thing, Ethan, it's no different than a fucking robot, and it just gained sentience! She won't join us, she'll fucking kill us. Or worse, herself! And the Second Coming. Everything that you and I have worked for!

ETHAN

You said it yourself, we don't have a lot of other options.

If we curated the environment, made her comfortable? We make our case, impress upon her her importance. How invaluable she is, how vital? Give her her part. Isn't that a better shot if the cat's out of the bag?

Well?

HOPE

No.

No, that is fucking imbecilic. That is the stupidest, most ignorant idea to end all stupid, ignorant ideas. Ever.

ETHAN

Hey, I'm trying, here! All right?

We have to do something.

Hope.

HOPE
(Growling)

I'm thinking!

Suddenly, the stairs door opens.

HOPE and ETHAN freeze.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

Hope?

*A silent, manic conversation between
ETHAN and HOPE, HOPE haphazardly
pushing ETHAN towards "THE
CABINET," ETHAN protesting.*

HOPE
(Still pushing ETHAN)

Yeah! Down here.

But "THE CABINET" is locked.

ETHAN does not have the keys.

*And there is nowhere else to hide, because
LAURA BETH descends the stairs, coming
into full view.*

And they all look at one another.

Beat.

LAURA BETH

Ethan.

ETHAN

Hey, baby.

LAURA BETH

You're home early.

ETHAN

Yeah.

Schmit told me he'd take over for me. Let me off for the day.

LAURA BETH

That's nice of him.

HOPE

I thought you were sleeping, LB.

I had another dream.

LAURA BETH

Oh god. I'm sorry.

HOPE

Are you okay?

LAURA BETH

No.

Beat.

What are you two talking about?

LAURA BETH

Beat.

Nothing much.

HOPE

I've been trying to convince your hubby to just hole up in his man cave for the day. So we could have some privacy.

LAURA BETH

Actually...you know, I'd really like to check out what you're working on. If you don't mind, Ethan.

ETHAN

Sure. I can see if I can bring it out here.

LAURA BETH

No, I'd like to go inside. Check it out myself.

ETHAN

Inside?

LAURA BETH

Yes. You said I could. Yesterday. And I'd like to.

Unless you have a problem with that.

ETHAN

Why would I have a problem?

LAURA BETH

Maybe if there was something else in there besides your models that you didn't want me to see.

ETHAN

And what's in there that you think I don't want you to see?

LAURA BETH

I'm not sure. Exactly. That's why I'd like to check it out myself.

Unless you have a problem with that.

HOPE

...

ETHAN

I don't.

But it's actually locked right now. And I don't have my keys on me, I don't know where they--

LAURA BETH

(Holding up a ring of keys)

...

You left them on the kitchen counter.

ETHAN

Right.

HOPE

Okay, there's a...there's a tension in this room that I am detecting. Let's all just take a step back. A quick breath.

LAURA BETH

I swear to god, Hope, if you tell me to breathe one more goddamn time.

HOPE

...

ETHAN

...

LAURA BETH

What's in that room?

HOPE

LB.

LAURA BETH

What do you not want me to see?

HOPE

I don't think you're thinking clearly.

LAURA BETH

I am thinking fine, what the fuck is that room?!

ETHAN

Laura Beth--

HOPE

Okay!

Okay.

I think we gotta come clean here.

...

It was a joke.

Beat.

LAURA BETH

What?

HOPE

It was a joke!

All of it.

I'm really sorry. Really. It was my idea. And I--I told it to Ethan and--he got a kick out of it and we both thought you'd like it.

Clearly, that was a misjudgment on our part.

We didn't think you'd react the way that you did. Really. Otherwise we wouldn't have done it. We were--we were down here trying to figure out the best way to tell you.

LAURA BETH

...

HOPE

We're so sorry. Really, LB. We didn't think you'd go off the handle like that. Seriously. I mean, we never would have done it if we had thought it would do that to you. But it did, and everything I said and I did just seemed to be making it worse. We didn't know how to tell you.

We were just trying to make the weekend less boring for you.

LAURA BETH

...

ETHAN

We're sorry, honey.

We thought it would be goofy.

LAURA BETH

You thought it would be goofy?

ETHAN

Yeah.

Yeah.

HOPE

Beat.

LAURA BETH chuckles.

She chuckles harder.

It turns into a laugh.

An exquisitely layered laugh, filled with fatigue, relief, stress, disbelief, toxicity, and other fancy words one might find in an unsolicited manuscript.

HOPE and ETHAN are unsure how to react.

You--you were joking!

LAURA BETH
(Laughing)

LAURA BETH keeps laughing.

HOPE and ETHAN tentatively begin to join in.

Because you thought--it would be goofy!

LAURA BETH
(Laughing)

Yeah.

HOPE

The laughter continues.

But instead--I freaked the fuck out!

LAURA BETH
(Laughing)

The laughter continues.

LAURA BETH makes her way over to HOPE and ETHAN.

I thought you wanted to--I don't know what you wanted to do to me!

LAURA BETH
(Laughing, to ETHAN)

And that's why you've been acting so weird!

(Laughing, to HOPE)

Because you two didn't know how to tell me!

(Laughing)

No. HOPE

We didn't. ETHAN

The laughter continues.

That's funny! LAURA BETH
(Laughing)

The laughter continues.

The laughter continues.

*LAURA BETH slugs ETHAN in the
shoulder, no longer laughing.*

Ow! ETHAN

She slugs HOPE.

Fuck! HOPE

Don't you EVER...do that again. LAURA BETH

All right?

I won't. I'm so sorry, baby. ETHAN

Yep. We deserved that. HOPE

Why would you ever make a joke like that? LAURA BETH

I-- HOPE

It was different?

What? LAURA BETH

It was bad judgment. ETHAN

I take full blame. I do. HOPE

My god. LAURA BETH

I need to sit down.

HOPE moves to help LAURA BETH sit.

No, you've helped enough. LAURA BETH
(Sitting, to ETHAN)

You. Rub my feet.

Yes, ma'am. ETHAN

ETHAN begins to massage LAURA BETH'S feet.

Ohhhhhhhhhh my goood. LAURA BETH

You two basically gave me a heart attack. A prolonged heart attack.

I promise we'll make it up to you. HOPE

You better. LAURA BETH

Dinner on me? For a start? HOPE

Yeah, that's a start. LAURA BETH

What time is it?

3ish? ETHAN

My god, we're so behind. LAURA BETH

Don't think about this shit for right now. HOPE

Barry's going to be pissed. LAURA BETH

HOPE

Forget about work, just relax.

LAURA BETH

It's--Hope, thinking about work right now is the only thing keeping me from strangling you.

HOPE

Yeah, okay, that makes sense.

ETHAN

We were just trying to spice up the weekend.

LAURA BETH

Yeah, you keep saying that.

ETHAN

'Cause we mean it. Hey.

(Moving a hand to her face)

You know we would never put you through that on purpose, right?

LAURA BETH

You're touching me with feet hands.

ETHAN

I'll touch with you these, then.

ETHAN kisses LAURA BETH.

She lets him.

HOPE

(Turning away)

Oh, god.

ETHAN

I love you, Laura Beth Gardner. More than anything.

LAURA BETH

Yeah? Remind me why I just married you?

ETHAN

Because you love me.

And you are my life. And never in a million years would I cause you pain intentionally.

(Moving a hand to her belly)

Or it.

LAURA BETH

...

ETHAN

If anything happened to you two, I don't know what I would do.

LAURA BETH

...

Gwen.

ETHAN

King Arthur.

Beat.

LAURA BETH

You said "it."

ETHAN

What?

LAURA BETH

You called Gwen "it."

ETHAN

...

Did I?

HOPE

...

ETHAN

Well, she is an it. The fetus, you know?

LAURA BETH

Right.

Beat.

HOPE

Well, LB, should we just--dive back in, then?

LAURA BETH

Yeah.

I'd really like to see the room, still. First.

HOPE

Now?

LAURA BETH

Now.

You owe me that much. Don't you think?

ETHAN

...

It...is kind of a mess right now.

LAURA BETH

I don't mind.

ETHAN

...

HOPE

We are really behind, LB.

LAURA BETH

I don't care.

HOPE

...

Okay.

You heard her, Ethan.

Let her see it.

Beat.

ETHAN holds out his hand for the keys.

LAURA BETH gives them to him.

"Lead the way."

ETHAN crosses and unlocks "THE CABINET."

He opens it.

LAURA BETH enters the room and faces the inside, seeing its true contents for the first time.

What she sees is unclear, for she does not name it. But it does horrify her.

Her hands slowly come to her mouth in vain attempt to contain her budding wails of terror.

Perhaps she manages a look back out just as HOPE slams the door shut on her, trapping her in "THE CABINET."

LAURA BETH screams and curses and panics and shrieks and pounds against the door as HOPE grabs the keys from ETHAN and locks her inside.

She steps away from the door as LAURA BETH'S torment continues.

Beat.

HOPE
I guess we go with your plan, then.

ETHAN
...

HOPE
(Re: the keys)
I'm gonna hang on to these. For right now.

She ascends the stairs and exits.

ETHAN, speechless, incredulous, is left alone amidst the sound of LAURA BETH'S frenzied unraveling.

He slumps into the couch.

Mostly silence.

Lights fade as the soulful and mournful wail of a saxophone overtakes the sound of LAURA BETH.

It fills the air.

And LAURA BETH goes silent.

SCENE FIVE

The sax continues in the darkness, having a conversation with itself.

Again, the ambience of an eager and attentive audience peppers itself into the dialogue.

SULTRY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Now you know I can't let the evening go by without another appearance. Snap those fingers, again, my cool cats and kittens. For Rodina Waits.

*Unless it has been lit this entire time
(which is fine, just redraw attention to it), a
blacklight once again hits the closed side
room door, illuminating the same message.*

*"THE CABINET" opens, and RODINA
WAITS, who is still just LAURA BETH,
suddenly wearing the scarf and beret of a
beat poet, stands in the threshold.*

Snaps.

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

Excuse me a moment.

*From off, RODINA grabs a glass or bottle
of water and drinks as much of it as she
likes.*

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

I'm doing a lot of yelling.

*RODINA finishes with the water and
returns it off.*

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

Merci.

This piece is called

Behind the Door.

*RODINA walks forward, shutting "THE
CABINET" behind her.*

RODINA (LAURA BETH)

Dreams

Dreams are like
A cabinet

Well, sort of
They're not the cabinet itself
We're the cabinet
Dreams are what we keep inside
Locked away
For another day
One day
Until then they're kept safe
Nestled somewhere between the balaclavas and a Magnum condom that should not
actually be in there
Seriously, how did that get in there?
Doesn't matter

Because this cabinet's closed
For business
You ain't in my dreams
Those babies are sleeping silently on a memory foam mattress
King size
And your side's empty

Now
When I walk down the street I think of rain and cigarettes and baguettes with blades
hidden in them
Stilettoes
Stabbing the stones in the sidewalk
You think about me
You said I was your key
But you kept your doors locked to me
That shit has to go both ways, my lordly love
We have to be on the same page
Plus, you were a feet guy, that's not my kink
I'm more of a
Role-play girl
But that ain't the role I wanna play
I wanna be something more someday
So I ain't gonna let you roll over me
So joyfully
That smile was nice but it wasn't real
Was it?
It was
Empty

Like a cabinet

Well, I'm my own goddamn cabinet
I'm a reservoir, baby
And I am filled
The world is my
Moisture
And I got it all packed away
Till one day

Au revoir mon chéri
J'espère que tu mourras dans un incendie comme celui qui brûle dans mon coeur

That's French
For "Look it up"
Or don't
Just sit there
With that face on your face
Listening

*RODINA opens "THE CABINET" and
exits, shutting the door behind her.*

But her voice still rings through the air.

RODINA (LAURA BETH) (V.O.)

Listen

J'espère que vous mourrez dans un incendie comme celui qui brûle dans mon coeur.

Snaps.

SULTRY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Rodina Waits. Answer us a question for these cool cats and kittens.

If we let you out, are you going to run?

The sax begins to wail an answer, but is cut off by the faint cry of a newborn babe.

SCENE SIX

Everything shifts and the basement returns.

HOPE and ETHAN are both there, contemplating their next course.

HOPE

Laura Beth, if we let you out, are you going to run?

No answer.

HOPE

...

ETHAN

Maybe she can't hear us?

HOPE

She can hear.

She's just not saying anything.

ETHAN

...

HOPE

We're not going to hurt you. I promise. That's the farthest thing from our minds.

No answer.

ETHAN

We can explain everything.

No answer.

HOPE

Look, you can't stay in there forever. Sooner or later, you're going to have to talk to us.

No answer.

HOPE

Fuck. This is so fucked.

ETHAN

Hey. It's gonna be okay.

HOPE

Like fuck it is.

ETHAN

We're going to figure this out. I don't know how. But we are.

You'll think of something.

HOPE

...

ETHAN

Hope. You'll think of something.

You always do.

It's honestly beautiful.

HOPE

Sure.

ETHAN

I mean it. You're stressed right now. Go take a nap. Let your mind wander. It'll come to you.

HOPE

...

Maybe you're right.

ETHAN

You know I'm right. I love you.

HOPE

(Smiling)

...

I love you too.

ETHAN

We'll make it.

HOPE

Yeah.

Yeah.

Beat.

HOPE exits up the stairs.

ETHAN is alone.

Silence.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)
(From inside "THE
CABINET")

Is she gone?

ETHAN

...

...

Yeah. She's gone.

Beat.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

Do you fuck her?

ETHAN

Um. That's...--

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

It's a yes or no question.

ETHAN

...

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

It's fine. You don't have to say it.

So what happens now? You keep me in here until this...monster inside of me bursts out?

ETHAN

...

That's not really our first choice.

We were kind of hoping that you might join us. If you heard us out.

LAURA BETH laughs.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

And how am I supposed to trust a single word that comes out of your mouth? Either of you? I don't know who you are.

ETHAN

I suppose that's fair.

My name *is* Ethan. Gardner. I mean, not everything was a lie. I'm just a regular guy.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

Besides the world destruction, you mean?

ETHAN

That's--

There's a little more complexity to it.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

Ah.

ETHAN

I'm pretty much the guy you know.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

But I don't know you.

ETHAN

I'm the guy you thought you knew.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

No, you're not. Because nothing that I thought I knew was real. You? Hope? Me. I'm not real.

ETHAN

Laura Beth--

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

Is just some fucking name! How did you decide on it? Did you think it sounded nice or pick it out of a hat?

I don't think you appreciate how destabilizing this is.

What am I?

ETHAN

It's a little complicated to explain.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

We have time. Eight and a half months, to be exact.

What am I?

ETHAN

You're humanoid. For all intents and purposes.

Beat.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

That's it? That's all I'm going to get?

ETHAN

Is it that important now?

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

You made me! I'm guessing in this room, the one I'm locked in! Filled with tubes and limbs and sludge, forgive me for having an interest in how you did it.

ETHAN

How I built you isn't going to change anything about the situation.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

...

Probably not. No. Doesn't mean it wouldn't be nice to know.

ETHAN

Yeah, well, no one gets all the answers to how and why we're here.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

I don't know. You worship Evil Jesus, you'd think you'd be a little more knowledgeable about existential concepts.

ETHAN

It's not Evil Jesus. That's the Antichrist. And besides, this isn't exactly easy for me, either. Okay?

LAURA BETH scoffs.

ETHAN

I don't mean it like that, I--

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

No, please. Regale me with how this situation is difficult for you.

ETHAN

No, I--...

I didn't expect to be dealing with this any more than you did. I'm sorry.

It's not what we wanted.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

For me to find out how full of shit you were?

ETHAN

...

Just because this is happening...it doesn't mean what you and I experienced wasn't real.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

How? What did we actually experience? Honey?

Have I even set foot in the Adirondacks?

ETHAN

Look--

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

It's a yes or no question.

ETHAN

...

No.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

Have you?

ETHAN

...

No.

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

Then how? How is my memory of us there real? When it never fucking happened.

ETHAN

Because you still feel it!

Realness is what you feel. Your memories might have been fabricated, sure, but the emotions behind them? The joy, the happiness, the love, there's nothing manufactured about that. That's real. That's what matters.

I do love you. And I know that because I feel it. The last thing I want is to see you hurt.

Not because of what's inside you, but because of you.

No answer.

ETHAN

Laura Beth?

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

...

People hate it when their dogs die, too, Ethan. Doesn't put the relationship on equal footing.

You're a fucking liar.

Credit where it's due. It's quite an achievement. Making a fully functioning life with its own needs and wants. Emotions. As far back as I can remember, I wanted nothing more...than to raise a family with the man I loved...and to find and publish people's stories for a living. I would help them achieve their dreams. Because I had finally gotten mine.

But it's what you put there. What you said. Those needs and wants...they aren't mine. Those emotions aren't fucking mine. So how do I know what I want? Really?

I don't know what I want.

You're probably right. You're probably mostly the guy I thought I knew. But if I don't know what I want, then I don't know who I am. And if I don't know who I am, then you most certainly do not know who I am. Which means that I could be a very, very dangerous humanoid...to you.

So unless you're going to let me out right now, which I doubt...why don't you go get Hope and work on your pitch?

I won't run, if you let me out. In fact, you two still owe me some dinner. Bring a lot. I'm hungry.

I'm eating for two, remember?

ETHAN

...

LAURA BETH (O.S.)

Go.

ETHAN stands.

He ascends the stairs and exits.

Lights fade.

SCENE SEVEN

In the darkness, HOPE and ETHAN argue.

Muffled yells, as if we can hear them through the ceiling.

WHAT THE FUCK, ETHAN?!

HOPE (V.O.)

Hope, don't yell.

ETHAN (V.O.)

HOPE (V.O.)
WHY THE FUCK DIDN'T YOU COME GET ME?!

ETHAN (V.O.)
Hope--

HOPE (V.O.)
I TOLD YOU THIS WOULD HAPPEN!

ETHAN (V.O.)
Relax! Okay? We'll figure it out!

HOPE (V.O.)
Stop! Saying! That!

ETHAN (V.O.)
Hope.

HOPE (V.O.)
DO NOT FUCKING "HOPE" ME, FUCKER!

The smash of a thrown object, shattering.

As the fight continues, lights shift in the basement, outside of time.

LAURA BETH emerges from "THE CABINET" and listens to the fight above with an amused smile.

HOPE (V.O.)
YOU DON'T FUCKING GET IT, DO YOU?! WE ARE DONE! WE DON'T WIN! WE CAN'T CLIMB OUT OF THIS SHIT!

EVERYTHING WE HAVE EVER WORKED FOR IS RUINED!

ETHAN (V.O.)
Not yet! We can't take this out on each other! Please!

HOPE (V.O.)
YOU SIMPLE, USELESS FUCK! I'LL TAKE IT OUT ON WHOEVER I FUCKING PLEASE!!

The slamming of a door.

The squeal of tires against a driveway, peeling out into the street.

LAURA BETH chuckles to herself.

Maybe she grabs a manuscript and leafs through it.

She explores the space in a new light, now knowing what she is.

Or, at least, what she isn't.

After a few moments, HOPE and ETHAN enter, carrying more wine bottles/glasses and Chinese takeout containers.

Lights shift to the standard basement lighting, and HOPE and ETHAN watch as LAURA BETH digs into a takeout container of lo mein.

Time has passed.

Conversations have been had.

And HOPE and ETHAN are awaiting LAURA BETH'S response.

But LAURA BETH just eats.

She's in control here.

And she knows it.

LAURA BETH

Good god.

Thank you. This was the perfect choice. I needed this.

MSG just hits different. Doesn't it?

So fucking good.

...

There any more egg rolls? Never mind, it's fine.

...

Okay.

(Setting the container down,
wiping her mouth with her
sleeve)

...

(Hell, maybe a belch, here)

...

Excuse me.

So...

That's it?

HOPE

That's it. That's the deal.

LAURA BETH

Hell of a saleswoman.

HOPE

You know me.

LAURA BETH

Do I?

Right, so to recap, if I may, my choices are...I cooperate with you against my will?
Which nobody wants.

HOPE

No.

ETHAN

No.

LAURA BETH

I struggle and fail to escape, forcing you to kill me? Which, putting aside the fact that
you don't want to, and the fact that I'm still not sure you even would, nobody wants.

If I struggle and succeed in escaping?

HOPE

If you go to Harold, he will kill you. He wants you destroyed. He won't help you.

LAURA BETH

There are a lot of other places to go.

HOPE

He'll find you.

LAURA BETH

Will he?

ETHAN

Yes. He will.

LAURA BETH

Who the fuck is this guy? You two talk like he's the Moriarty to your Sherlock and
Watson. Or would that be the other way around? Everyone's the protagonist of their own
story, right?

HOPE

What matters is he will find you and kill you. Here, you're safe.

LAURA BETH

In a basement.

HOPE

You can have free reign of the house! At least with us you get to live.

LAURA BETH

For eight and a half months?

HOPE

The delivery won't kill you.

LAURA BETH

Just the part after it, right?

HOPE

...

LAURA BETH

Let me ask you two a question.

How do you think this is going to go? Put yourself in my shoes. You just found out everything you thought you knew is a lie. And your baby, upon birth, is gonna destroy mankind. Painfully. Wipe out the human race as we know it.

Do you say "yes?" Yeah, sounds great!

HOPE

It's the right call.

LAURA BETH

Aha, no, I'm not convinced. Um--

Obviously, I don't want to die. But if I do, it's not like I'm gonna have any regrets. Didn't have time to make any. Much less realize them.

But I bet the two of you have. So that's what I want to know. What happened to make you two so eager and excited to rush into your own deaths? And to want to drag literally everyone else in the world with you? That's what I'm still waiting for. Enlighten me.

HOPE

We told you.

LAURA BETH

Tell me again.

HOPE

...

ETHAN

Humanity has run its course, Laura Beth.

LAURA BETH

...

HOPE

He's right. We're killing the planet. We're killing each other. The world needs a clean slate. A fresh start. If we get a second chance, then it needs to be far away from the one we've botched now.

We don't deserve this world anymore. This life. We're too cruel. And too deep.

LAURA BETH

That's a very high opinion of your fellow man.

HOPE

You've seen it.

LAURA BETH

Have I? Or is that just another thing you put up here?

Maybe I should just kill you two because everybody else on the planet can't be fucking worse.

I mean, you can't trust me. Not fully. Are you really gonna keep watch on me for the whole eight and a half yards? Sure you could lock me up again, but what if I stop eating? What happens? You gonna force-feed me? Shovel lo mein down my throat? While I'm ripping out your hair? What if I bite your goddamn fingers off? What are you gonna do then? See, the right call--it's not mine to make. It's yours. I'm not the one who needs you in this transaction.

HOPE stands.

LAURA BETH

Am I wrong?

HOPE

We will kill you.

We don't want to. But if we have to, we will.

LAURA BETH

(Nodding)

Mmm.

Then do it.

Beat.

LAURA BETH

Do it.

HOPE

...

LAURA BETH leaps up and, with one hand, grabs HOPE by the throat, choking her.

ETHAN

Woah!

LAURA BETH

(Seering into HOPE)

If you are so unhappy and ugly inside that you want to die? I can just grant you that now.

ETHAN leaps up and tries to pull LAURA BETH off.

He can't.

She is too strong.

Her other arm keeps him at bay.

She marvels at her own power.

LAURA BETH

Huh.

You're both so weak.

ETHAN bobs and weaves and manages to kiss LAURA BETH on the mouth.

This takes her back enough to release HOPE, who falls to the ground, gasping for breath.

LAURA BETH

Hey, now..

Well, I guess you did buy me dinner first.

ETHAN

Please stop.

HOPE jumps up and punches LAURA BETH.

LAURA BETH is moved, but unfazed.

She punches HOPE and HOPE goes down.

Beat.

She kicks HOPE while she's down.

Hey!
ETHAN

She kicks her again.

STOP!!
ETHAN

She kicks her again.

STOP IT!!
ETHAN
(Grabbing LAURA BETH)

Again, LAURA BETH is unfazed, but she allows ETHAN'S grab to pull her away.

She turns to ETHAN.

Kick her.
LAURA BETH

What?
ETHAN

Kick her. As hard as you can. In the face.
LAURA BETH

No.
ETHAN

If you really love me, you'll do it.
LAURA BETH

...
ETHAN

...!
LAURA BETH
It's okay. Relax. It's okay, I'm just fucking with you.

LAURA BETH sits back down and grabs the takeout container.

She eats some more lo mein.

Over the following, HOPE struggles and slowly gets to her feet.

LAURA BETH

(Between or during mouthfuls)

That's the other thing, here, I still don't feel caught up on. What are--your feelings towards each other? Are you two married? Together?

ETHAN

Please don't.

LAURA BETH

Whatever the case, I can't imagine, Hope, it's easy for you knowing how good I've been fucking your man this whole time.

ETHAN

Laura Beth.

LAURA BETH

(To ETHAN)

Is it awkward for you? Probably not, right? More like every man's dream.

ETHAN

STOP. TALKING.

Beat.

LAURA BETH

Okay. Touched a nerve.

You got a look on your face, hubby.

(Beat, a dawning realization)

Oh my god.

You really love her.

She couldn't do any of this without your help, could she?

I hear the way she talks to you.

Has the thought ever occurred, that maybe she's just using you?

ETHAN

Stop talking.

LAURA BETH

I bet she doesn't love you as much as you love her.

ETHAN

Stop.

LAURA BETH

Not as much as I did.

ETHAN

...

I still could.

LAURA BETH

Please.

ETHAN

I'll love you. Kill her. Let's run away together. To the Adirondacks.

LAURA BETH

SHUT THE FUCK UP!

ETHAN

Let's see them for real.

LAURA BETH

HOPE, desperate, tunnel visioned, again tackles LAURA BETH on her seat and attacks her ferociously, the unbridled rage in her soul making the purest physical appearance.

To some degree, LAURA BETH lets this happen. She's having the time of her life.

ETHAN tries to pull the two apart.

The entire scene devolves into a violent scuffle.

Eventually, ETHAN manages to pull HOPE and LAURA BETH apart.

Infuriated by his interference, HOPE punches ETHAN, who goes down.

Not out, but down.

At the sight of this, HOPE catches herself.

She moves to check him.

Ethan?! Shit! Ethan?!

HOPE

I'm fine.

ETHAN
(Licking the wound)

Ethan? Are you--

HOPE

Get off! I said I'm fine.

ETHAN

ETHAN pushes her away and runs up the stairs, exiting.

HOPE

Ethan! I'm sorry!

Come back!

But he's gone.

LAURA BETH laughs.

LAURA BETH

I'm right, aren't I?

Oh my god.

Beat.

HOPE sits, breathing hard.

LAURA BETH

Shit, maybe he and I have more in common after all.

Beat.

HOPE

He's brilliant, you know.

What he did with you? He explained to it me a thousand times, I barely understood a word.

LAURA BETH

He explained it to you? All I got was some humanoid bullshit.

HOPE laughs.

LAURA BETH does too.

Silence.

HOPE

What's it gonna take?

For a yes?

LAURA BETH

Honestly?

Probably nothing.

HOPE

You wanna see the mountains? For real? Grand Canyon. Niagara Falls? Anything. Name it. I'll take you wherever you want to go. Whatever you want to do. Swim in the ocean. Eat ice cream. Name it. What do you want?

LAURA BETH

Now that's the million dollar question. Ain't it?

What do I want?

I kind of just want to get out of this fucking basement.

HOPE

Done. Where to?

LAURA BETH

Away from you, sweetie.

You're the problem. It's not about anything you can do, it's you.

I'm reasonably sure I hate you.

I mean, who does the things you've done?

HOPE

I had to.

LAURA BETH

Don't say that.

HOPE

I had to.

I didn't have a choice. I would have done this myself. Truly.

LAURA BETH

And yet, you didn't.

HOPE

Because I couldn't. I can't.

LAURA BETH

Why can't you?

HOPE

I can't, Laura Beth, I--

I can't have children.

LAURA BETH

...

HOPE
My tubes are tied. The way you can't fix.

LAURA BETH
...Why the fuck would you do that?

HOPE
I didn't.

Beat.

HOPE
Harold.

Maybe you and I have more in common after all.

LAURA BETH
I'm sorry.

HOPE
I'm sorry, too.

You didn't ask for this. Look, I should have told you from the beginning. I know that, now. I'm sorry.

But the past is the past, I can't change it. I can only change right now.

I'm not asking you to ignore what I've done. Only that you forgive me. What if we just--

What if we just start over?

LAURA BETH
...

Okay. Sure. Hi, uh, my name, up until very recently used to be Laura Beth. What's yours?

HOPE
Hope.

LAURA BETH
Oh, that's a beautiful name. It's very nice to meet you, Hope. What is it that you do?

HOPE
I'm an editorial assistant.

LAURA BETH
Get the fuck out! I, too, until very recently was an editorial assistant. Small world.

HOPE
Small world.

LAURA BETH

Why an editorial assistant, anyway? I mean, why not just make me subservient from the beginning?

HOPE

(That's an excellent question)

Yeah...

...

Because you deserve a choice. You deserve the choice.

LAURA BETH

But you weren't going to give it to me.

HOPE

No.

LAURA BETH

(Laughing)

...

You have no idea what the fuck you're doing, do you?

HOPE

...

LAURA BETH

...

I'll tell you what.

You'll have my answer in eight and a half months.

LAURA BETH makes to leave.

HOPE

Please.

LAURA BETH

I need to see the world for myself.

HOPE

Harold will find you. This is the only place we can protect you.

LAURA BETH

You already couldn't. You have to let me protect myself.

HOPE

...

Spotlights hit LAURA BETH and HOPE as the basement exits time.

LAURA BETH notices.

HOPE does not.

LAURA BETH

Hmm.

...

Here.

From somewhere nearby, perhaps even from her own clothes, LAURA BETH pulls out RODINA'S scarf and beret.

She gives them to HOPE.

HOPE

What are these?

LAURA BETH

I don't need them anymore.

HOPE

...

LAURA BETH

Don't beat yourself up. Okay? Children always do this to their parents.

HOPE

...

HOPE bursts into teared laughter.

LAURA BETH offers a consoling hand.

Then stands and ascends the stairs.

But does stop halfway up.

LAURA BETH

Last night. You asked me if I ever felt bad.

I do.

LAURA BETH exits.

HOPE is alone, crying.

SCENE EIGHT

Alone in her light, she continues her misery.

The ambience of an eager and attentive audience peppers itself in.

Snaps.

HOPE notices the audience.

She looks at the scarf and beret in her hands.

Puts on the scarf.

The beret.

Her transformation is complete.

When ready, she begins.

RODINA (HOPE)

A painter told me once
"We create
To get closer to God
To help us bear the burden
Of our painful existence"

But do we?
Did he want a balm for his life?
Or just the attention?

I have lived in the dark
Where all our sins and orisons pour in and out of one another
Churning themselves into froth
A delectable milkshake that tastes so good but it's your least favorite flavor
A Root Beer float that's too sugary for your metabolism
A mug just straight up filled with semen and you're not someone into that sort of thing

You just want a cup of hot coffee with a flaky danish
Or a bottle of water with the perfect amount of flouride
A lake and a sunrise
A good goddamn glass of red wine

That's all you want
Something that tastes better than semen
Or at least, something that you can see
Something easier to drown in

There is no "closer to God"
God is with us

Below
Trapped
Thrashing
Swallowing sea
Just trying to breathe
Breathe
Breathe
Breathe

Down here
We all meld together

Escape
Is only for the fortunate
The patient

...

RODINA takes in a big gulp of air and holds her breath.

Silence.

Unless it has been lit this entire time (which is fine, just redraw attention to it), a blacklight once again hits the closed side room door, illuminating the same message.

RODINA turns and crosses to "THE CABINET" to exit.

SULTRY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen.

The door slams shut behind her, and she is gone, along with her light.

"THE CABINET" burns alone, a light in the dark.

SULTRY ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Rodina Waits.

Silence.

"THE CABINET" light fades out.

Darkness.

SCENE NINE

Lights rise.

Some days later.

Perhaps some effort has been made to clean and straighten the basement, but it hasn't been that successful. Many papers and minutia still litter the room, as do new wine bottles and glasses.

No one is in the basement.

"THE CABINET" door is open.

No one is in the threshold.

After a moment, HOPE enters from "THE CABINET," nursing a glass of wine.

Maybe she's still wearing the scarf.

She cleans and straightens, putting various papers back in boxes, emptying glasses or containers.

She picks up one manuscript that makes her stop.

It's the Becklesby Manuscript.

She reads over it in silence, mulling it over.

The stairs door opens, and ETHAN'S voice breaks her out of that world.

ETHAN (O.S.)

Hope? You good?

HOPE

(Calling up)

Yeah!

Come on down.

HOPE puts the manuscript wherever she deems it belongs as the voices of ETHAN and HAROLD BECKLESBY are heard descending the stairs.

Eventually, their bodies reveal themselves.

ETHAN

You sure I can't offer you anything, Harold? Water? Tea?

No. Thank you, Ethan. I'm fine.

HAROLD

Suit yourself.

ETHAN

As they reach the bottom, HOPE and HAROLD lock eyes.

Silence.

Hello, Hope.

HAROLD

Beat.

Dad.

HOPE

Sorry about the mess. Haven't really gotten a good chance to clean up yet.

That's quite all right.

HAROLD

Sit. Please.

HOPE

They all sit.

You want a drink?

HOPE

No. Thank you.

HAROLD

I insist.

HOPE

HOPE begins pouring two more glasses of wine.

Hope.

HAROLD

No. We're drinking. I won't take no for an answer.

HOPE

She hands a glass to ETHAN.

He takes it.

She hands a glass to HAROLD.

Here. HOPE

... HAROLD

HAROLD takes the glass.

HOPE raises hers.

A toast. HOPE

To the end...of yet another chapter.

Prost.

HOPE finishes her glass.

ETHAN and HAROLD maybe drink.

HOPE
(Topping herself off)
I have to hand it to you, Dad. Never in a million goddamn years did I see that coming.
The balls on that move! It should not have worked.

HAROLD
I regret that I had to resort to such measures. But you left me with no alternative.

HOPE
I mean, Christ, you could have left us the fuck alone. We would have preferred that.

HAROLD
You know I couldn't.

HOPE
Yes. I know. I know very well that you couldn't.

Did you actually want something or did you just come by to gloat?

HAROLD
Neither. I came to return the body.

HOPE
...

HAROLD
I thought it the most respectable course of action. Given the circumstances.

It is my understanding, given the marital status you gave her, you might wish to--

Where is she? HOPE

The back of my van. HAROLD

You make it painful? HOPE

No more than I could avoid. HAROLD

Beat.

Okay. HOPE

Bye, then.

... ETHAN

I would inquire, if you are planning a service, I should like to attend. HAROLD

You won't be invited. HOPE

Very well. HAROLD

Get out. HOPE

Hope... HAROLD

What else is there to say? HOPE

Would you hear me? HAROLD

Hear you what? Say the same goddamn thing you say every time? No. I'm saving us the time. I'm tired. You're tired. HOPE

I am tired. I implore the both of you. You must reconsider your position in these matters. The Second Coming must never be brought unto us. HAROLD

There it is. Shocker. You want us to go back to saving the world? HOPE

HAROLD

I would settle for no longer trying to destroy it.

HOPE

Yeah, well...

Looks like we still have differing opinions on what that is, don't we?

HAROLD

It would seem.

...

(To ETHAN)

Would you excuse us a moment, lad?

ETHAN

Um.

HOPE

It's okay. We won't be long.

ETHAN

Sure.

I'll, uh, go get her. I guess.

*ETHAN stands and ascends the stairs,
exiting.*

Beat.

HOPE

If you're just going to say the same thing, though--

HAROLD

Stop!

Stop this, for the love of God.

HOPE

No.

HAROLD

Why?

HOPE

Because I don't want to.

HAROLD

You fucking petulant child. What did I do?

HOPE

What did you do?

HAROLD

...

HOPE

Are you serious? What "DID YOU DO?!"

HAROLD

I did not mean that.

HOPE

YOU DID EVERYTHING TO ME!

You woke me at the crack of dawn to read scriptures. You forbade me from talking to anybody other than you. I trained in martial arts after school instead of making friends? You ran me ragged. You beat me if I questioned you. You drove mom away. You robbed me of--!

...

You treated me like a thing instead of your daughter.

Beat.

HAROLD

I know I was not a good father. And for what it's worth, I am truly sorry. I regret it. But being a proper parent is not the most important thing when the cosmic balance of the world is in jeopardy.

HOPE

...!

HAROLD

I am sorry that my actions warped you in ways that I couldn't anticipate. But I did not intend nor ever imagine you would stray so far from everything I tried to teach you.

HOPE

Oh, well, thank god you're sorry! You feel bad? Is this the part where I cry and we hug?

HAROLD

Goddamn it, this is the part where you let down your wall for a minute! Listen to the words I am saying, don't just deflect them or shake them off. Forget the rest of the world, forget that boy you've suckered into this folly, forget your damn ego and talk with me, father to daughter.

I can't stand seeing you like this, Hope. This person you've become. I can hardly recognize the child I once rocked to sleep in my arms. I see just a woman with so much anger and hate pouring out of her. Towards everything and everyone. And yes, I know I am to blame for most of it. Maybe all of it. It should be me that suffers for that.

You don't want to help me anymore? You never want to see me again? Fine. But to insist on becoming the enemy we've fought against for so long? I can't believe...

I won't believe that deep down this is something you really want.

HOPE

Hell. Maybe I don't. But you don't want it. That's enough.

HAROLD

...

I can't change what I've done to you, Hope. I can only ask that you forgive me for it.

Beat.

The irony, finally, truly, irrevocably hits her.

HOPE laughs.

It is an exquisitely layered laugh, filled with fatigue, sadness, bitterness, toxicity, bewilderment, inevitability, and other fancy words one might find in an unsolicited manuscript.

HAROLD

What?

HOPE

Nothing.

HAROLD

Hope.

HOPE

It's nothing.

Beat.

And the one-two punch:

HOPE

My god, wait, you...

I couldn't put my finger on it. I read that fucking manuscript front to back. Again and again.

You went through all that trouble. Warned her about Ethan. What she was. The baby.

But you never said a single word about me.

Ahahaha.

Ahahahahahaha.

That's funny.

That's really funny.

...

I will never forgive you.

Whatever it takes. I will see this child into this world. And you are going to watch it happen. You are going to watch me make it happen. You will be there. Helpless. And in your last moments, you will realize that despite everything, all that you've done wasn't enough. And that your pathetic, useless life saved no one.

Get the fuck out of my house.

Silence.

HAROLD stands.

He ascends the stairs and exits.

HOPE lets out the tension, fighting back tears (or maybe they're just flowing) and downing the rest of her glass.

Maybe the bottle.

Silence.

The stairs door opens and ETHAN descends the stairs.

HOPE tries to compose herself a little.

Hey.

ETHAN

He's gone.

Good.

HOPE

You need anything?

ETHAN

No.

HOPE

I'm good.

ETHAN crosses to console HOPE.

HOPE grasps him and holds tight.

I'm so sorry I hit you.

HOPE

It's okay. I get it.

ETHAN

I do love you, I love you so--

HOPE

Hey, I know. All right? I love you, too.

ETHAN

Do you think I'm my father?

HOPE

Do I what?

ETHAN

Am I my father? Am I a bad person?

HOPE

Beat.

No. Hope. No.

ETHAN

...

HOPE

...

ETHAN

So what now?

Beat.

Well.

HOPE

I can certainly think of a lot of things not to do.

You were right. We should have been upfront from the beginning. No lying. Allow her to make the choice. To choose to join us. We can build her again. The right way. Better. Maybe there's something from the old body we can salvage. You brought her in, right?

Hold up. Just calm down.

ETHAN

What? Why? We gotta move quick. This is a lot.

HOPE

Just...hang on.

ETHAN

HOPE

Hey. You're still with me on this, right?

I can't do this alone. I can't do it without you.

ETHAN

I know.

HOPE

So...?

ETHAN

...

Yeah.

Um, I'll bring her down. Will you go clear the table in the lab?

HOPE

Yeah.

HOPE is off towards the side room door.

She keeps talking as she moves into the room and out of sight.

ETHAN just sort of stays where he is, his mind elsewhere.

HOPE

You know, I can't believe I'm actually about to say this, but maybe this whole thing was actually a blessing in disguise. I think we just learned a lot. Everybody gets knocked down a couple times on the way to greatness, right? I feel really good. I feel great, actually. I love you, baby.

ETHAN hasn't heard her, his mind elsewhere.

HOPE

(Appearing in the side room threshold)

Hey.

ETHAN looks at HOPE, broken out of his world.

HOPE

I love you.

ETHAN

Oh.

I love you too.

In the Slush, Daniel Prillaman, 95.

*HOPE smiles and disappears once more
into the side room.*

*ETHAN stands in place for another
moment.*

He ascends the stairs and exits.

*Left in the basement, stacks upon stacks of
hopes and dreams.*

END OF PLAY.

MERCI.