Appearances

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of English

2017
Abstract:

*Appearances* is a one-act memory play with a focus on temporality, language deficiencies, and allegorical depictions of the ambiguous relationships between men and women. Using dramatic techniques this autobiographically based play is a complex blend of doubled actors, stage directions, and surrealistic depictions of time reflecting the characteristics of absurdist plays. Using such devices creates a pastiche of female degradation, effacement, and feelings of worthlessness inspired by realistic depictions of male harassment. Elements such as the inadequacy of language, the role of autobiography, and the Cubist depiction of temporality performed with non-verbal motifs and recursive tendencies reveal a woman’s existential woes and eventual escape from a literal and metaphorical prison. Lydia Davis, Walter Benjamin, Lina Perkins Wilder, and other critics, along with playwrights including Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller provide theory, criticism, and inspiration to warrant this story’s irrefutable reliance on stage action for adequate portrayal and impact. Depictions of the frustrations, fears, absurdities, and deceptions that are acted out in *Appearances* disclose a quest for acceptance and authenticity in the characters’ relationships. *Appearances* strives to highlight the multitude of issues that arise from problems facing women, youth, and on a larger meta-theatrical level, the inadequacy of human dependence on language as a means of communicating these problems among one another and to a larger audience.
“Do you know what Daddy said to Mommy?”

Appearances, Asphyxiations, and Awakenings in a Memory Play

Playwright Eugene O’Neill said that he would not allow his autobiographical play *Long Day’s Journey Into the Night* to be published or read by anyone until after he and his entire family, who were the inspiration for the characters in the play, had passed away. This decision was made as an effort to avoid offense that they might take from this rendering of them. O’Neill’s dedication laments, “[I] face my dead at last and write this play—write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness” (9). If I were to write a similar disclaimer to my play, I might quote the late songwriter Kurt Cobain, who coined “thank you for the tragedy, I need it for my art.”

*Appearances* is about a girl’s relationship to men: her father, her therapist, her boss, villainous doctors with pernicious intentions, and how they all fit into her romantic life, culminating in a pregnancy. The Girl is never named and should instead serve as a representation of the adult female product of a tumultuous upbringing, trudging through a male-dominated society. Even into adulthood, Girl remains a child who did not and could not receive adequate mentoring and love from her father. Instead, she was left with her mother, who offers skewed worldviews and advice.

*Appearances* is a one-act play made up of five scenes featuring episodes containing the deceptive, dishonest, and secretive behaviors of the people in Girl’s life. These scenes are deliberately out of order to portray a compilation of events in Girl’s life and represent the nature of recollection. These behaviors are dramatically rearranged to highlight the alcoholism, the mental illness, the problems of adult children of alcoholics, and the hopeful nature of young parents through the perspective and memory of Girl, one of two daughters born to parents
struggling with their addictions and maladjustments. It is important to note that *Appearances* does not have a resolved ending, as it is not supposed to end or have a conclusion, but rather indicate a cycle.

Girl’s story is not unique and instead she should represent a demographic of women who have experienced life without fathers, life without positive male or female role models, and life under the influence of men in positions of power. This play is not solely autobiographical; instead the characters, plot, and family dynamics are loosely based on the members of my family, my experience with men in professional and personal relationships, my experience growing up in a household without a father figure, and a young-adult life spent longing for direction and adequate mentorship. The characters, setting, and ethos of the scenes in this play are inspired by my memories of the past and how they have shaped my realities today. It is important to note that these scenes are stories: some conversations are transcribed verbatim as I, or other people I know, have experienced them and others are simply inspired by regrettably familiar situations and dynamics, while others are completely fictional. Fellow playwrights, literary critics, and authors of autobiography along with my own experiences have influenced this process of transforming memories into an autobiographical play.

One of these influences is fiction writer, literary critic, and translator Lydia Davis. Davis discusses the process of transforming memories into art in her forewords to Marcel Proust’s autobiographical novel *Swann’s Way* and to Lucia Berlin’s collection of autobiographical short stories, *A Manual for Cleaning Women*, both providing insight that has heavily influenced my project and my choice to express my ideas in the dramatic form. These individual works have also inspired many details of my play: *A Manual for Cleaning Women* chronicles Berlin’s troubled experience in her family and personal life through a non-linear compilation of short
stories, and Proust’s *Swann’s Way* is one of the original autobiographical novels inspired by memory. In her introduction to *Swann’s Way*, Davis describes the author’s role in rearranging personal experience in order to fashion a work of art with an intentional message, “for only in recollection does an experience become fully significant, as we arrange it in a meaningful pattern… the importance of the role of the artist in transforming reality according to a particular inner vision” (xi). I would argue that the form of a memory play is particularly suited to rearranging personal experiences. In her study of memory plays, Lina Perkins Wilder notes that, “for the purposes of the memory arts, theater is defined by its ability to make the internal external” (161). My goal with *Appearances* is to make the internal external on stage. Drama and memory plays specifically work to make personal and emotional change visible, and this play aims to display Girl’s transformation along with the struggles that women, the mentally ill, and the victims of alcoholism and drug addiction endure. The transformations that Girl experiences as she trudges through adolescence and early adulthood, according to my “particular inner vision” are demonstrated through offstage voices, visual memories, the re-telling of dreams, and the exaggerated grotesque behaviors of people in her life. Most importantly, by doubling the actors playing the male and females characters I intend to symbolize male/female relationships. Additionally, the experience that an adult child of an alcoholic endures going through life without proper parenting and male influence is staccato, overwhelming, frightening, and dark. Thus the mood I aimed to create with the random scenes and abrupt transitions in *Appearances*. The transitions between scenes and the sequence of events are intended to mimic the scattered tempo of the process of remembering. *Appearances* opens with a scene that concludes with Girl telling her therapist she is pregnant. At the end of this ominous scene and the glimpse of a new life, we are slung back to the start of this troubled girl’s life and introduced to
her parents in Scene Two. After this scene set in infancy, we are shown scenes of Girl’s adolescent and young adult experiences, eventually circling back to the present, where we get to see her optimism about her pregnancy.

Memory plays, one of the many subgenres in the dramatic canon, are some of the most intriguing onstage displays of memory—as seen in plays such as Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* and Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. Williams and Miller both seamlessly transfer between the present onstage moment and past memory, providing an insight into the characters’ past and present lives. This technique functions not only to show what came before what the audience is presently seeing on the stage, but more importantly to see how the past is integrated into the present. In my play, this integration allows viewers to see the implications of bad parenting. In her article, “Toward a Shakespearean ‘Memory Theater’: Romeo, the Apothecary, and the Performance of Memory,” Lina Perkins Wilder discusses the function of memory scenes:

> they give background and expand the work’s narrative frame beyond its immediate physical and temporal borders… stage memory belongs to a register of experience separate from that of represented action. In addition to tying events from the play’s or character’s past to those in the acted present, and to momentarily relaxing the pace of a play … in which narrative drive is otherwise relentless. (157)

Relaxing the narrative drive is important to the process of writing about members of my family and people in my life. There has to be more than the represented action and that is what I tried to accomplish in scenes such as Scene Two, where the silent, infant Girl watches as her parents tragically plan how to raise her. Similarly, on the expression of time in memory plays, Valerie Barnes Lipscomb wrote in her essay, “Age in *M. Butterfly*: Unquestioned Performance”:

> the goal of memory plays not just as a reversal of linearity but also as ‘an identity with time’… Regarding age, this fluidity tends to manifest as a performing body that ages second by second onstage, while the actor performs ten, twenty, forty years of age difference without any perceptible change. As noted above, the memory play’s typical
presentation of age as a continuum could challenge contemporary Western culture’s binary construction of pitting youth against old age, calling attention to all ages as performative. (195)

In this one-act play, my scheme to portray Lipscomb’s age continuum begins with Girl’s memories of her parent’s actions in Scene Two, transitions into her young adult relationship with her mother in Scene Three, and culminates with Girl as an adult and expectant mother in the first and the final scene. My choice to include the events and personalities that shape Girl allows the audience an opportunity to watch the abusive developments over the course of many years. This theatrical set-up concretizes my intention to give the audience the ability to understand the effects that a childhood like this one can potentially have on a woman’s life. The five scenes that make up this play are sewn together by mysterious endings, creating a pastiche of female degradation, effacement, and feelings of worthlessness inspired by realistic depictions of male harassment.

The destructive results of the male influence in *Appearances* are not only evident in Girl’s character, but also seen in Mother and Sister and their apparent, but not so explicit suffering. Sister has suffered physical abuse, as Mother says in Scene Three when Sister arrives home bloody, beaten up, with her clothes ripped off:

MOTHER(*exhaling smoke*). …what time’d she get home last night?  
GIRL. Last night? Try this morning, about an hour ago.  
MOTHER. Heh. I’m surprised she made it. Look at her face, somebody really did a number on her.  
GIRL. You should have seen it when I found her.  
MOTHER. Don’t be so fucking hard on her. (53-54)

Mother has clearly suffered in her relationships, evidenced by her resentments toward Girl’s escape from the home and also Girl’s assessment: “Those frou-frou women probably couldn’t relax around you because they knew you were talking to their husbands about them!” (45)
By putting together this collection of memories and events in Girl’s life, I am able to assemble a story that I hope gives me the opportunity to portray bad parenting, sexual harassment, and social maladjustments. If given a chance to tell their story, the characters that inspired Mother, Father, Sister, and others would likely arrange the incidents told in *Appearances* differently. Denial and repression are other common traits of the mentally ill and addicted and therefore, these people would likely emphasize other ideas, incidents, and interpretations of the events I have dramatized. For example, Mother’s advice to sleep with a married man for money, Father’s violence, and Sister’s warped priorities are based on my interpretation of real-life actions. This conflict in perceptions primarily noted by Eugene O’Neill reinforces some of the critical theories of autobiographical fiction that have helped delineate this process for me.

Walter Benjamin’s criticism of Proust in *Illuminations* provides yet another principle about authorial memory that helps to explain my intentions. Benjamin reinforces my comments on my family members’ perceptions of my childhood and experience when he remarks, “we know that in his work Proust did not describe a life as it actually was, but a life as it was remembered by the one who had lived it” (202). Benjamin provides detail and insight into Proust’s repressed memory and how his involuntary recollections have shaped his work. Likening these memories to a tapestry, Benjamin comments on the transformation of memory into art, “the intermittence of author and plot is only the reverse of the continuum of memory, the pattern on the back side of the tapestry” (203). The delicate weaving of memories that Benjamin refers to is the creative pursuit that has inspired my own work. To continue with the tapestry metaphor, I would reiterate that these memories could only be portrayed visually and onstage. Benjamin confirms the importance of visual images in terms of recreating memories, in regards
to Proust’s recollections: “most memories that we search for come to us as visual images. Even the free-floating forms of ‘memoire involontaire’ are still in large part isolated, though enigmatically present, visual images” (214). In *Appearances*, staging infant Girl (played by an adult actress) in front of the mother and father as they debate how to raise their child instead of having two arguing adults on stage is an attempt to transform a memory into a scene on stage that is dramatically successful. The choice to have Girl verbally absent but physical present reflects the play’s unrelenting focus on temporality and infancy.

Benjamin comments on temporality and memory by describing a remembered event as infinite with possibilities, “an experienced event is finite—at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it” (202). I attempt to have my techniques mirror Benjamin’s formulation of infinite memory as almost every scene in *Appearances* refers to a past event. The characters in *Appearances* are not only acting out the present moment in the selected scene, but they are constantly referring to their own calamitous pasts. On the off-stage pasts, Wilder confirms the successful way that drama portrays the past and memories by calling upon what happens beyond the stage, “…memory theater, while placing memory in a narrative context, also uses memory to break the frame of that narrative, to gesture toward what the play does not show… the space and time outside the boundaries of the ‘two hours’ traffic of our stage’” (174). This gesture toward the time outside of the play can be seen in the final scene of *Appearances*, where Girl has her first glimmer of hope for the future, hence the absence of active male influence. In line with some of the surrealistic properties of this play, the character of the Guard symbolizes a vacant male presence. My attempt is to have Guard stand ready to penetrate himself into the scene, but
mostly absent, accentuated by Girl and Sister’s whispered voices in fear of Guard’s potential power over them.

This complex blend of doubled actors, stage directions, and surrealist depiction of time reflects the characteristics of absurdist plays by Samuel Beckett, which Martin Esslin describes in *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Although my play does not incorporate all of the characteristics of the theater of the absurd, I am inspired by and attempt to emulate some of the surrealistic components of Beckett’s absurdist theater in *Appearances*. Elements such as the inadequacy of language, the role of autobiography, and the Cubist depiction of temporality echo Benjamin’s observations, allowing me to apply them to *Appearances*. In *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin discusses the relationship between the inadequacy of language and theater, adding that this type of depiction has an existential and philosophical value:

> on the stage, language can be put into a contrapuntal relationship with action, the facts behind the language can be revealed… Beckett’s use of the stage is an attempt to reduce the gap between the limitations of language and the intuition of being, the sense of the human situation he seeks to express in spite of his strong feeling that words are inadequate to formulate it. The concreteness and three dimensional nature of the stage can be used to add new resources to language as an instrument of thought and exploration of being. (86)

This concept aids in my decision to use drama to tell this story, for example, in a scene like Scene One. If I wrote a novel, a short story, or a news article about the experience that Girl has with her therapist, it would be expository or, even worse, clinical and psychoanalytical. Conversely, when the audience gets to experience the conversations, actions, and ominous tone in Scene One, they have the distinct advantage of understanding and experiencing the grim discomfort that Girl and other girls in similar situations have experienced. Perhaps even better, the audience is able to apply their own perceptions and personal experiences to the situation. Therapist’s touching, sleeping, and relentless distraction along with Father’s mimed shooting up
in Scene Two are essential, non-verbal motifs introduced to help illustrate the absurdity of the situations.

There are several repeated dramatic motifs in *Appearances*. There are dreams to represent the troubled mind of Girl, smoking to help portray the delinquent Mother, Father, and Sister characters. Other motifs such as drowning, coughing, sleeping, pregnancy, and yelling are all used with the intention of conveying a dense personal struggle. Particularly the repeated drowning in Girl’s dreams is representative of frustration and lack of control in her life. The coughing, drowning, and smoking are components that fit into a larger motif and comment on a lack of self-preservation, intended to be representative of a sort of situational and existential asphyxia. Additionally, the masochistic actions of Girl’s family should contrast those of Girl as she is desperately trying to save herself. This is evidenced by Girl’s move to another town, her seeking out therapy, and her drowning nightmares. Therapist, Father, Mother, and Sister’s coughing and excessive cigarette smoking oppose Girl’s purification as she is often seen exercising, cleaning, and waking up gasping for air.

Sleep and dreams are additional repeated themes in *Appearances*. Sister is passed out in a drunken slumber and Father is passed out in a drug-induced slumber, leaving Mother, the only parent who is awake to care for Girl and Sister. Most notably, Therapist consistently falls asleep during his conversation with Girl, conveying his lack of attention and care for what Girl is seeking help with. This tableau is one of the most important moments of the play as it confirms one of Girl’s subconscious fears that her thoughts and feelings are inadequate. Waking one another up by yelling is another repeated action, or as seen in Scene Three, Girl yells at Boss, who is not sleeping, but Girl is trying to get her point across to him. Women are ironically and consistently yelling at men to either wake them up or force them to understand something, while
Sister is allowed to sleep off a rough night in Scene Three. When Girl is asleep she is tormented by horrible dreams and faced with her fears of attack, death, and most importantly, either not being accepted by the men in her life or being overcome by them. In Girl’s waking life, the men around her are not accepting her either, as seen in Scene Two when Girl is seen desperately trying to wake her father up from his drug-induced sleep.

The dreaming world’s role in this play is important, as the dream is very similar to the memory. Girl experiences a vivid dream-life, which she describes to Therapist and is performed in a later scene, when Girl dreams of a terrific hospital experience from which she is not rescued by hospital staff, nor comforted by her boyfriend upon awakening. Additionally, in Scene Two, Father alludes to sleep as an escape from responsibility with his conclusion, “And if you decide that you’re too tired that day to take care of the animals, instead you’d rather go back to bed, you can do that, too” (36), foreshadowing his own exhaustion and unwillingness to care for those dependent upon him. In his discussion on dramatic Beckettian memory, Esslin provides a description of the visual function in theater with a discussion on personal awareness and authorial intention in terms of the dream and memory reciprocity: “visual images, what we actually see and what appears to us in dreams and memories and the non-verbal consciousness of pure emotion… are as vital constituents of our awareness of ourselves as words are – the words which run in an endless stream through our minds and which can be perceived as a sort of endless story we tell ourselves about ourselves” (Esslin 89). My attempt to add a meta-theatrical component to this project comes in the form of dreams and the re-telling of memories, via the device of “a play within a play” as yet another form of “non-verbal consciousness:”

GIRL (desperate to MOTHER). It’s a complete delusion! He is in love with me and I sit there and I just feel like I can’t speak, like I’m underwater and drowning, and I can’t tell him to…

GIRL brings her face close to frozen BOSS’s face.
(to BOSS). Please leave me alone and…

Pause.

GIRL. …stop touching me.

MOTHER lights a cigarette and studies BOSS.

MOTHER (to GIRL). Do you want to live a life like I have? Do you want to

struggle every single day to raise kids and fix a house and a shitty

old car?

MOTHER freezes.

BOSS (to GIRL). Really? You have student loan debt?

GIRL. I sure do. I’ll be paying it off my entire life!

BOSS. How much is it?” (65-66)

Esslin’s statement about stories we tell ourselves, echoes the autobiographical nature

of *Appearances* and reverberates Davis’ comments on the arrangement of memories while also

confirming the ideas and attempts to construct these stories into an allegorical depiction of the

modern male/female relationship. My suggested directions for casting fulfill this intention.

The suggestion for casting in order to have the male and female characters doubled is

representative of a strongly perceived male/female polarity. The allusion that Girl is homosexual

in several scenes highlights my opposition to this male/female dichotomy, but also suggests that

Girl has not given up on romantic relationships and has instead found fulfillment in other

ways. The doubling of actors echoes the unclear distinction between memories and dreams in

Girl’s life, particularly in Scene Four, where my intention is to show that the male takes many

forms in Girl’s life, but has ultimately one authoritative and overpowering role. This doubling is

not only essential to the male position in this play, but also to the female, as I intend on Girl

being malleable in her representations. As noted earlier, the same female actress plays a teen in

therapy, an infant witnessing her parents’ horrid plans, and a pregnant adult about to govern a

new life. In Lipscomb’s study of memory plays, she argues that the physical characteristics of

the actors play an important role in the ethos of the play. Referring to age, she says that the age

of the actress functions to indicate levels of experience, wisdom, and ambiguity:
…older actors are more believable when playing younger characters because it is clear that the older have been younger, that they have had the extent of life experience that they portray. Casting an older actor ‘jumpstarts’ the audience into believing that the older self is wiser than the younger. Conversely, playing an older character is always a question of ‘passing’ for what one has not been. (205)

This notion of “passing” is imperative to the final scene in *Appearances*. Girl never got the treatment that she should have from her parents as a child and is perpetually the infant Girl inside the character on stage. Girl’s pregnancy should provoke an image of adulthood, a reminder of her innocence, and a disturbance, as the audience recognizes the possibility that the pregnancy is the result of a non-consensual encounter, questions Girl’s parenting abilities, and is also provided with a glimmer of hope as Girl sits in a better position than Sister and hints at creating a life for her child that was better than the one she had.

As *Appearances* is largely autobiographical, based on people who are still experiencing their story, I struggled in writing a conclusive ending, but was reminded of the abstract nature of this play and inspired by Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. The final speech indicates cycles and repetition:

> VLADIMIR. Well? Shall we go?
> ESTRAGON. Yes, let’s go.

*They do not move.* (61)

The final scene of *Appearances* attempts to emulate the recursive qualities of *Godot* in the suggestion that the story of these women will continue: their self-deprecating comments and pernicious, coquettish suggestions for bribery with the prison guard are all born of their mother’s influences. Additionally, Girl’s pregnancy is supposed to raise a paternity question and echo the notion of “passing,” referred to earlier. Did Girl fall for a man in an authority position who could give her better direction than her father? Or perhaps the happy ending refers to the homoeroticism and Girl is in a relationship with a woman. The end of *Appearances* is not a
resolution as much as it presents a final contrast of the two daughters: Sister ends up destined to follow the trajectories of her parents, made clear by her imprisonment, her obsession with her appearance, and her body image. There is little hope for her future. Conversely, Girl sits on the other side of the prison visitation divider and hints at an auto-didactic lifestyle outside of the prison: “Well, I taught myself” (71) she explains. Although Girl maintains some of the same values as Sister and her parents, she insists that there is hope because she will finally gain control of a relationship—the one with her unborn child. Although Girl gets lured into talking about female appearances (hence the title of the play) and can’t avoid a sexual perspective of the man in the room, she and the new baby get to walk out of the literal and metaphorical prison at the end of the scene. This prospect continues when Girl declares responsibility over her child and that the child will survive, as she has.

At this stage of the play, which I expect to revise, I attempt to present a surreal ricochet between ideas, themes, and relationships. In Theater of the Absurd, Esslin confirms my intentions with this project in the way that the ambiguities and uncertainties reminiscent of language deficiencies are imperative to a play’s impact:

the form, structure, and mood of an artistic statement cannot be separated from its meaning, its conceptual content; simply because the work of art as a whole is its meaning, what is said in it is indissolubly linked with the manner in which it is said, and cannot be said in any other way. Libraries have been filled with attempts to reduce the meaning of a play like Hamlet to a few short and simple lines, yet the play itself remains the clearest and most concise statement of its meaning and message, precisely because its uncertainties and irreducible ambiguities are an essential element of its total impact.

Explaining one meaning, ending or conclusive point would diminish the story told in Appearances. Appearances strives to highlight the multitude of issues that arise from problems facing women, youth, and on a larger meta-theatrical level, the inadequacy of human dependence on language as a means of communicating these problems among one another and to a larger
audience. In a dramatic context, Esslin comments on Beckett’s success with portraying stories and relationships of an autobiographical nature through theater:

the experience expressed in Beckett’s plays is of a far more profound and fundamental nature than mere autobiography. They reveal his experience of temporality and evanescence; his sense of the tragic difficulty of becoming aware of one’s own self in the merciless process of renovation and destruction that occurs with change in time; of the difficulty of communication between human beings; of the unending quest for reality in a world in which everything is uncertain and the borderline between dream and waking is ever shifting; of the tragic nature of all love relationships. (70)

The difficulty Girl faces in communicating with the various men and equally afflicted women in her life is expressed best through what Esslin highlights: miscommunication, deceptive dialogue, and therefore a reliance on stage action for an adequate portrayal. I attempt to express this through a scene in the beginning of the play:

GIRL. I remember now. The person trapped in the car was Anne and she was dead when I got back in the car. So now I’m crying harder and scared and driving as fast as I could and that’s when the lights came up behind me.

THERAPIST is now right behind GIRL smelling HER hair and looking over HER shoulder at HER body. GIRL is too engrossed in HER story to notice HIS proximity and that HE is not responding.

GIRL. So I pulled over and this cop screamed at me. I mean he screamed so loud and so hard, I thought his hat was going to pop off his head. Spit was flying out of his mouth and hitting me in the eye, the forehead.

Pause. THERAPIST is visibly aroused by this and adjusts himself while looking up with pleasure at the ceiling.

GIRL. He told me that I am a bad citizen.
THERAPIST (salacious whispering). What did you say?” (31)

Depictions of the frustrations, fears, absurdities, and deceptions that are heard in these characters’ conversations, seen in Girl’s dreams, and demonstrated through faulty dynamics are meant to be perplexing and mirror Girl’s quest for acceptance and authenticity in her relationships.
The self-awareness that Esslin refers to reflects the poignant purgative effect that came along with writing and staging this play. Lydia Davis comments on the alteration of the truth to create a story that is entertaining and also worth telling: “‘somehow there must occur the most imperceptible alteration of reality. A transformation, not a distortion of the truth. The story itself becomes the truth, not just for the writer but for the reader… it is not an identification with a situation, but this recognition of truth that is thrilling’”(xix). *Appearances* is my best attempt to externalize the multitude of internal struggles that I have faced, along with other women. Or, as Wilder says the audience “is witnessing an essentially private act made uncomfortably public, but for the rememberer himself or herself, for whom memory becomes not a tool for retaining information but a means by which forgotten or overlooked information is unexpectedly recovered or even ‘discovered,’ seemingly for the first time” (159). I hope that an audience will take the rendering of this story and use it to help in their understandings of uncomfortably familiar and common situations similar to Girl’s. I include myself in that audience as someone who while experiencing this play discovered new realities, old memories, and hopeful futures. Lastly, this story has taken on a new significance in light of recent events of women coming forward about the sexual misconduct and power by men in today’s society.
Works Cited


Appearances

A one-act play

By Samantha Loesch
Cast of Characters

GIRL: Early twenties.

THERAPIST: Late fifties.

MOTHER: Late fifties.

FATHER: Late fifties.

BOSS: Late fifties.

SISTER: Teenaged.

DOCTOR: Late fifties.

GUARD: Late fifties.

NURSE 1: Early twenties or teenaged.

NURSE 2: Teenaged or late fifties.

OFFSTAGE VOICES

Place
Various locations in American suburbia.

Time
The late 1990s into the early 2000s.

Author’s Note:
I suggest doubling all male and female characters in whatever way you see fit.
Scene One

CAST:

GIRL
THERAPIST

SETTING:

A therapist’s office with two chairs that sit facing the audience. The therapist’s chair should sit behind the patient’s. The chairs are staggered in order for the audience to see both of them clearly, but they cannot see each other.

TIME:

Three or four months ago.

AT RISE:

THERAPIST is reclined in a chair with HIS feet up on the chair in front of HIM. HE is intently scrolling through pages on a smart-phone and smoking a cigarette while GIRL finishes HER offstage speech. THERAPIST should cock HIS head one way and turn the phone another way, as if HE is studying images.

GIRL (offstage)

Hello?

Pause.

For Christ’s sake, Paul! This is every Sunday night with you!

Pause.

What? You turned your phone off to relax? Give me a–

Pause.

Yes. I remember.

Pause.

No, no, no, no. Every week you do this! I’m done; I’m not doing this anymore.

Pause.
GIRL (cont.)

My period? Seriously? No. No, no, no, no, no. You are not allowed to have this conversation with me.

Pause.

You’re just calling because she left for the week again; I’m not an idiot.

Pause.

Yes, I remember.

Pause.

It said, “You’re beautiful.”

Pause.

Yes, I do.

Pause and more calm now.

I know that about you.

Pause. Reluctantly.

Nine-thirty.

Pause and GIRL sighs. There is a sound of modest knocking on the door. THERAPIST is startled and drops HIS phone on the floor. THERAPIST should glance at HIS watch and then take HIS time straightening his bowtie, cleaning off HIS glasses, and rearranging the chairs a bit.

THERAPIST

Com—

Pause and interrupted by violent coughing.

Come in!

Enter GIRL from stage left. THERAPIST’s eyes follow HER for a brief and subtle moment, maybe not yet noticeable by the audience. THERAPIST quickly sits and the GIRL quickly sits after HIM. THERAPIST’s phone should stay on HIS lap and although not in the stage directions, HE should intermittently check it.
Good evening.

Evening.

How was your day?

It was not good. This is the beginning of the bad week.

Bad week?

You know what I noticed?

I counted and I get exactly twelve days of sanity during my cycle.

Ah. It is sane, but if you spend it cleaning up the mess from the days prior, then you’re left with what, seven? Eight?

Ha.

But we’re in the bad week now, huh?
GIRL

It is a truly awful plight.

THERAPIST

Well, all women have to go through it.

GIRL

I literally turn into a different person.

THERAPIST

It may seem that way to you—

GIRL (*interrupting*)

No. It’s real. Yesterday I told my cousin to never speak to me again. I mean, I screamed it into the phone.

THERAPIST

Well, knowing what I do about your family, that may not have been the worst decision.

GIRL

I screamed, though.

*Pause.*

And you know what’s crazy?

*Pause.*

I fell asleep crying just hours earlier, the night before.

THERAPIST

What made you cry?

GIRL

Oh, I was thinking about mortality and funerals and eulogies.
THERAPIST
Whose death?

GIRL
Everyone from my childhood dog…to David Bowie…to my great grandmother.

*THERAPIST starts to hum a David Bowie song.*

GIRL
And then I woke up in the morning, I went for a long run, came back feeling elated, and ten minutes later I was screaming into the phone.

THERAPIST
So…you notice that this is a pattern?

GIRL
Yeah. Every…what did we say? Eight days.

THERAPIST
What I mean is, is there a cycle to the three emotions? Do you start angry? And then feel elated? And then self-loathe?

GIRL
No.

THERAPIST
So it’s random?

GIRL
Not entirely. I am happiest when I get texts from the different men in my life. Sometimes my boss, sometimes my ex, sometimes…this morning it was John. Do you remember John?

THERAPIST
You heard from John, huh?
GIRL

Yes!

THERAPIST

Yeah, I remember.

GIRL

But, then—

THERAPIST

Did you…see him again?

GIRL

Yes. But I’ll get to that later.

*Pause.*

Then. I had to have a meeting with the wedding coordinators at work and…how is it that the wedding coordinators are beautiful and sweet? Like, if I were casting a film and I had to cast the actress to play the wedding coordinator, this is the girl who I would pick. Actually, she’s better than who I would pick. She’s stunning. And calm. And careful.

THERAPIST

Sounds like someone has a little bit of a crush on this wedding coordinator!

GIRL

Oh, I’m not gay.

THERAPIST

Uh-huh.

GIRL

No, trust me, I’ve considered it. But, you know my Daddy-issues will always lead me to men for unattainable love!

*THERAPIST and GIRL laugh.*
THERAPIST
There you go again, doing my job for me.

GIRL *(smiles)*
Yes.

THERAPIST
So what was she wearing?

GIRL
I-I-I-I don’t know…it was…ugh, it was a white lacy dress. You know, weddings.

*Beat.*

So, it was right after John texted, I was feeling on top of the world! I wasn’t nervous about the meeting, but even if I had been nervous about it, it would have been overshadowed by my excitement.

THERAPIST
Pretty powerful guy.

GIRL
I couldn’t speak.

THERAPIST
Do you find it’s easier to speak to men than women?

GIRL
Yes.

*Pause.*

But, I couldn’t speak. She spoke so eloquently. Eloquent and attentive. The kind of person who has nothing else on their mind while they are listening to you. I mean she was really listening.

*Pause.*
GIRL (cont.)
And she was genuinely interested. I mean genuinely, one hundred percent interested in the conversation. I, on the other hand, crumbled into a little pile of broken pieces of my fake smile.

GIRL is suddenly vulnerable and crosses HER arms. THERAPIST’s eyes and head slowly start to fall asleep. While GIRL is speaking, THERAPIST should be theatrically slouching over to the side.

GIRL
But, I don’t think I am genuine. I am not as good at anything as this coordinator is. I am not as sweet and I can’t show true interest because I don’t even know what my own interests are! My interests mold and shape into the interests of those around me. I can’t be asked my opinion on something. I don’t even know who I am!

The phone in THERAPIST’s hand should hit the floor and startle GIRL. GIRL jumps and startles THERAPIST awake.

GIRL
Did I tell you about the time John asked me who I am?

THERAPIST (taps his forehead)
John, John, John, John…

GIRL
Oh, Christ! I meant Peter. Did I tell you about when Peter asked me who I am?

THERAPIST (taps his forehead)
Peter, Peter, Peter…no, no I don’t think you did.

THERAPIST immediately begins to nod out again.

GIRL (theatrically narrating)
One night after we were done…you know…he looked at me and he said,

Pause. GIRL puts HER face in HER hand and leans over HER knees, asking the audience:
“What are you?”

*Pause. THERAPIST is now fast asleep. Maybe slumped over HIS knees, maybe slumped over to the side.*

GIRL
And I said, “what?” To which he said, “what are you?” So, I thought for a second. I thought for a couple more seconds and I said, “well, what are you?” He answered with, “I am an artist.”

*Pause. GIRL sits back in HER chair more relaxed and smiling.*

GIRL
Well, how the fuck am I supposed to answer that? What are you if you are not an artist?

*THERAPIST snores for the first time. GIRL intends to glance over HER shoulder and then realizes that the THERAPIST is asleep. GIRL looks back at the audience confused and quickly gets up and walks over to HIM. She should get very close to HIM and analyze HIM, as if to confirm that HE is actually asleep. On HER way back to HER chair SHE pretends to trip over it and kicks it, startling the THERAPIST awake. GIRL sits.*

GIRL
I might sound righteous and confident now, as I often do in here, which is weird, because it doesn’t happen anywhere else. But, that was wrong, right? Should I have an answer to that, like—

THERAPIST
Like what?

GIRL
Like…an ex-girlfriend? A daughter? An orphan? A sister? A sociopath? Why don’t I have an answer to the “who are you” question? Why can’t I commit to an interest or a hobby? Why can’t I be in a relationship that lasts more than two weeks? Why do I lie to my friends? Why do I panic at the idea of having a conversation with anyone? Why is it hard for me to genuinely enjoy something?
THERAPIST
Oh. Do you panic before you talk to me?

THERAPIST slowly and quietly moves HIS chair an inch closer to GIRL’s chair. GIRL does not notice.

GIRL
Well, not as badly as I used to.

THERAPIST
Try this. Why don’t you think back to the last time you were really happy.

GIRL
I laughed at a movie the other night. You know that kind of genuine, uncontrollable laughter?

THERAPIST (leans forward)
Something you couldn’t contain and had to just give into?

GIRL
Like there was nothing else on my mind.

THERAPIST slowly reaches HIS hand forward to touch a strand of HER hair. THERAPIST leans forward and audibly inhales. GIRL raises HER eyebrows at the sound of HIS inhale, but is not aware of THERAPIST’s touch.

THERAPIST
Like nothing could get in between you and that moment.

GIRL
Elation.

THERAPIST lets out a climactic sigh.
GIRL
But, that small moment, that I assume happens to most people countless times per day, has stuck with me as this incredibly sad reminder.

THERAPIST
It sounds like you were enjoying yourself...why is this a sad reminder?

GIRL
Because it was rare and it was fleeting. I don’t ever have moments like that. I don’t ever get lost in “elation.”

Pause. GIRL looks over HER shoulder to make sure THERAPIST is not sleeping. GIRL now notices how close THERAPIST is to HER.

GIRL
I spoke to my mother the other day.

THERAPIST
Why would you do that?

GIRL
I had to ask her something about Daddy.

THERAPIST
Daddy?

GIRL
Yes.

THERAPIST
You know I should be the only one you are consulting about matters like that. You don’t need to be overwhelmed with different voices in your head.

THERAPIST should look down at HIS phone, scroll once and tilt HIS head again, adjust HIS glasses, and try to make out a picture.
GIRL
Well, I had this dream that I was pulled over.

THERAPIST
You were? When?

GIRL
No. I wasn’t actually pulled over. It was a dream.

THERAPIST
What were you pulled over for?

GIRL
Speeding.

*Pause.*

It was pitch black out and my headlights weren’t working and I lost control and hit an embankment and the car flipped over onto its roof.

*THERAPIST picks up HIS phone again, leans back, spreads HIS legs open wide, and rests one foot on the back of GIRL’s chair. The GIRL continues unaware of THERAPIST’s movement.*

GIRL
So I’m on the side of the road screaming at the top of my lungs for help, there may have been someone trapped in the car, I can’t remember. I was screaming over the sound of the car horn that was stuck on from the impact and as I was pushing the other side of the car, trying to flip it back over I kept hearing sounds coming from the woods behind me.

*THERAPIST looks up from HIS phone and is suddenly intrigued by the story.*

GIRL
And these people were trying to get to me. I couldn’t see them, but I could feel them coming and I knew what they wanted.
THERAPIST (interrupting)

What did they want?

GIRL
They were going to rape me if I didn’t get out of there. So I kept pushing and crying and pushing and crying and I finally flipped the car back over and drove away as fast as I could.

THERAPIST inches closer, sitting on the very edge of HIS seat.

THERAPIST
How did you know they were going to rape you?

GIRL
I remember now. The person trapped in the car was Annie and she was dead when I got back in the car. So now I’m crying harder and scared and driving as fast as I could and that’s when the lights came up behind me.

THERAPIST is now right behind GIRL smelling HER hair and looking over HER shoulder at HER body. GIRL is too engrossed in HER story to notice HIS proximity and that HE is not responding.

GIRL
So I pulled over and this cop screamed at me. I mean he screamed so loud and so hard, I thought his hat was going to pop off his head. Spit was flying out of his mouth and hitting me in the eye, the forehead.

Pause. THERAPIST is visibly aroused by this and adjusts himself while looking up with pleasure at the ceiling.

GIRL
He told me that I am a bad citizen.

THERAPIST (salacious whispering)
What did you say?
GIRL
I started crying and told him I was sorry. I told him I wasn’t paying attention and didn’t know the speed limit. I was trying to hide her dead legs that were propped over the glove compartment from the back seat and hoping he wouldn’t notice the smashed windshield.

THERAPIST *(returns to HIS chair)*
Is that true? That you weren’t paying attention?

GIRL
No it wasn’t true. I was trying to escape the rapists.

THERAPIST
Do you think it was a good idea to lie to him?

GIRL
No, I think it made it worse. People can tell when I’m lying. They can tell when I’m scared and unsure.

THERAPIST
Vulnerable.

GIRL *(sarcastically)*
Oh, that’s a good one!

*Pause.*

Anyway.

THERAPIST
Authority…especially in uniform…

*THERAPIST pauses to adjust himself.*

...should always be respected, always.

*THERAPIST abruptly reaches forward and grazes the back of GIRL’s ear with HIS hand.*
THERAPIST (cont.)
I don’t expect you to know that yet. I can see the wetness behind your ears from here.

*THERAPIST smells HIS hand and then wipes it on the front of HIS shirt.*

GIRL
And the cop was my dad. He was my dad when he was much younger.

THERAPIST
The cop? Oh the cop.

GIRL
So I called my mom and she asked me if he was wearing a wedding ring. I think she was wondering if my dad was cheating on her in the dream.

THERAPIST
Did you notice whether or not he was wearing a wedding ring?

GIRL
I always notice wedding rings.

THERAPIST
And?

GIRL
He was wearing a black shiny band on the ring finger of his left hand.

THERAPIST
Was that a wedding ring?

GIRL
I don’t know.
THERAPIST
What did your mother say?

GIRL
She said if he wasn’t married, then he was probably yelling at me because he found me attractive.

Pause and now mockingly:
He’s just picking on you because he likes you.

THERAPIST
And if he was married?

GIRL
We didn’t get that far, but she said that I should have convinced him to let me go.

THERAPIST (suddenly clinical)
You said you cried.

GIRL
He told me I was a bad citizen.

Now mockingly.
That I put people’s lives at risk, that I put my own life at risk, he didn’t understand that I was in danger, but he was in charge.

THERAPIST begins to inch closer.

THERAPIST
Who is in charge?

GIRL
Well, you’re in charge here.
THERAPIST leans forward and begins to rub GIRL’s shoulder. GIRL gazes out at the audience.

THERAPIST
If you feel uncomfortable, just tell me and I’ll stop.

Pause. GIRL reaches HER hand up to meet THERAPIST’s hand on HER shoulder. THERAPIST’s next few lines become surreal and unbelievable as the lights dim. These are becoming the UNIDENTIFIED VOICES in the next scene.

THERAPIST
You’re skin is so beautiful.

GIRL
I’m preg—

Blackout.

End of Scene 1.
Scene Two

CAST: GIRL
      MOTHER
      FATHER
      OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE

TIME: Twenty years earlier.

NOTES: There are specific stage directions for lighting cigarettes, but MOTHER and FATHER should light up regularly, as they see fit.

SETTING: MOTHER and FATHER sit in two chairs facing the audience, while GIRL sits in a chair with her back to the audience.

AT RISE: Blackout. The silhouettes of MOTHER, FATHER, and GIRL are visible. MOTHER and FATHER are facing the audience, on either side of GIRL. The following voices should continue individually, but eventually begin to overlap, becoming more rapid as they go on. Some of the phrases should seem to be answering some of the questions, but the answers should not make sense.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICES (offstage)
Hey, when are we going out?

You can come, but you have to wear those pants.

I remember the first time you wore that red dress.

Why don’t you come in here and shut the door?

You do want to come, don’t you?
UNIDENTIFIED VOICES (offstage cont.)

I really want you to come.

Why don’t you take that off?

Do you have some student loan debt?

You should come with me to this conference; that article you wrote is so relevant.

Why don’t you book at this hotel? It’s where I am staying.

I can really be a dog.

Smile for me.

You must play sports.

I think you are beautiful.

I respect you.

How about a selfie?

Just touch it.

I missed you.

Why are you so shy?

Oh, you’re a prude!
UNIDENTIFIED VOICES (offstage cont.)

Let me take you out.

She’s not really my girlfriend.

Did I ruin you?

You know that I love you, right?

Don’t be scared.

You’re too tall.

She’s too skinny.

Crater-face.

You are so smart.

Pause.

Congratulations, it’s a girl.

The lights should come on with the final line, illuminating GIRL. As soon as MOTHER speaks the lights should be on MOTHER and FATHER only for the remainder of the scene. GIRL should be dimly visible.

MOTHER

We’ll call her Jessica.

FATHER

No, Mary.
Who is Mary?

Mary was my aunt.

My aunt’s name was Norma.

Norma is no name for a baby.

Well, she’s gonna have to grow up eventually.

Norma reminds me of Marilyn.

Monroe?

Yes. What is your name again?

Pause.

Mary reminds me of Mary Magdelene.

What about Shannon?

Shannon is my son’s name.
Christ. What about Catherine?

FATHER

What are you, a Catholic?

MOTHER

Yes. What are you?

FATHER

I am definitely not a Catholic. YOU are definitely NOT a Catholic.

MOTHER

You can bet your ass I am a Catholic.

FATHER

_lights a cigarette. MOTHER reaches for FATHER’s arm to expose the inner side._

MOTHER

Uh-huh. What’s the Bible say about prison time and track marks, Daddy?

FATHER

A good Catholic upbringing will surely lead it down a right path. It won’t make the same mistakes I did.

MOTHER

A good, normal name will lead it down the high-school hallway without being picked on.

FATHER

It won’t get picked on…it’s beautiful.

Beat.

And even if it does get picked on, it will have the confidence and security of its home to rest on.
_FATHER leans forward and gestures to give the GIRL something to eat or maybe something to play with (mimed). GIRL starts to lean forward to accept it and MOTHER immediately slaps FATHER’s hand away._

FATHER (cont.)

What! What are you doing!

MOTHER

Stop it!

FATHER

It’s hungry. It wants our attention.

MOTHER

One of the most important things we teach it is how to wait.

FATHER

Why?

MOTHER

It’s the most important of all the relationship games.

FATHER (scoffs)

That’s not what you did in this here relationship, Mommy.

MOTHER

If you give it what it wants right away then it becomes used to getting what it wants and it will eventually stop wanting you.

_MOTHER turns HER chair around, now facing upstage and taps HER foot or twirls HER hair._

FATHER

No, we’re in control of that.
MOTHER
Oh come on, Mr. Catholic! It has to suffer. You must know what I’m getting at.

   *Pause. MOTHER lights a cigarette.*

Redemptive…whatever you call it.

   *Pause.*

You pretend that you’re not interested, that you can’t hear it cry, and it becomes more interested and if you stick to that, it will never stop wanting you. It will never lose its appetite or become picky.

FATHER
You couldn’t wait. You couldn’t keep your disgusting, slimy hands off of me.

MOTHER
Oh I’m the one who couldn’t keep my hands off of you? As soon as your brother started talking to me you jumped on me like an animal claiming its territory.

FATHER
Two times, dear. We fucked two times and now…

   *FATHER gestures at GIRL.*

…this.

MOTHER
Oh, please. You know this wasn’t the first one.

FATHER
Wasn’t the first what? Your first time? Ha. You made that clear.

MOTHER
This isn’t the first child.
FATHER

What the hell are you talking about?

MOTHER

Of course you don’t remember.

*MOTHER should feign romance and move closer to FATHER. Maybe SHE cabaret-style moves around HIM and touches HIM, or maybe SHE sits on HIS lap and caresses HIS face. FATHER should appear disgusted by HER behavior, while GIRL’s head should track MOTHER’s movements.*

MOTHER

Oh you remember don’t you? It was a beautiful fall afternoon and we went for a ride on your big, tough motorcycle.

*MOTHER straddles FATHER. FATHER quickly pushes HER off.*

MOTHER

You were so angry and driving so fast because that man at the gas station looked at me. You took me home and when you laid me down I said, “Ah. Ah. Ah.”

*MOTHER wags her pointer-finger.*

MOTHER

“We better use some kind of protection here.”

*FATHER starts to search his pants pockets, shirt pockets, socks.*

MOTHER

But, no, you were too big and strong for that.

*MOTHER sheds the sexy act and sits back in HER chair, facing GIRL.*

MOTHER

And a month later I told you I was pregnant. Do you remember what you said?
Beat. MOTHER looks at GIRL.

MOTHER (cont.)
Do you know what Daddy said to Mommy?

FATHER
This—

_FATHER sternly points his finger at GIRL and then turns to MOTHER and points HIS finger in HER face. As HE continues, HIS finger reaches toward HER face and SHE leans back avoiding it, almost falling out of HER chair._

FATHER
…is the only time you have been pregnant.

MOTHER (sitting upright again)
Oh, honey.

_Pause._

This…

_MOTHER points her finger at GIRL and then at FATHER’s face and slowly lifts the remaining four fingers to demonstrate the number five._

MOTHER
…is the _fifth_ time I have been pregnant.

_FATHER abruptly gets up and moves toward stage left._

FATHER
Disgust—

MOTHER (loudly)
To which…

44
Beat.

MOTHER (cont.)
…you responded, “you’re not pregnant, you’re just trying to trap me.”

FATHER shakes his head in denial and lights a cigarette.

FATHER (to GIRL)
I never said anything like that.

MOTHER
To which, my response was: abortion number-three.

FATHER kneels down and appears to be praying.

FATHER
You can burn in hell, slut!

MOTHER stands and as SHE approaches GIRL, GIRL squirms away while MOTHER rushes to adjust GIRL’s hair, apply some kind of make-up, adjust HER cleavage, shorten HER skirt (or pant-hem), etc. GIRL should be distressed and upset, but remains silent. While MOTHER primp's HER, FATHER returns to HIS seat and rolls up HIS shirtsleeve, searching HIS arm for a vein. In between lines of the song, HE mimes prepping a needle and eventually injecting HIS arm.

FATHER (in slurred voice)
Hush-a-bye, don’t you cry,

FATHER taps a vein near the top of HIS arm.

Go to sleep my little baby,

FATHER primes a needle, flicking the end of it.

When you wake you shall have,
FATHER mimes wrapping a tourniquet around HIS mid-arm.

FATHER (cont.)

All the pretty little horses,

FATHER slowly injects HIS arm.

Black and bays, dapples, grays,

FATHER’s eyes start to close and HIS head begins to fall. FATHER pronounces the following word as “WHORES.”

All the pretty little horses—

FATHER’s lyrics fade off as HE nods off into sleep. FATHER’s head should hang to one side as HIS arms fall to each side.

MOTHER (returning to chair)

Ah, good idea, Daddy, horses.

FATHER looks up, half-awake, and mumbling.

FATHER (nearly unintelligible)

We should give it lots of horses and lessons. Riding lessons…

MOTHER (louder, attempting to wake FATHER)

You will never be able to afford to give it riding lessons.

FATHER

You got horses.

MOTHER

Horses are how I put food on our table. They are not by choice.
Pause.

MOTHER (cont.)
But, horses will teach it about anxiety and it needs to learn about anxiety for protection.

FATHER
Anxiety for protection?

MOTHER
Yeah. They’re constantly alert.

FATHER
Yours are because you don’t show them the love and attention they need. They are consistently unsure of themselves and their place in your life. You treat them only as things to be taken care of, but you don’t show them love.

MOTHER
Oh don’t even try that. Yours are on constant alert because they never know when the next whipping is coming.

FATHER
You shut—

MOTHER (interrupting, gestures toward GIRL)
It will need to be aware of that, as well.

MOTHER (to GIRL)
You need to watch out for your father, you know. He won’t be around often, but when he is, he has a temper that could send you flying.

FATHER (to GIRL)
There you go, sweetheart, spend your whole life scared and preparing for the worst! Just wait, like your mother said, wait for something horrible to happen.
MOTHER
They never learn to get rid of their fear. You can only trick them for a short period of time and they remember. They live with it forever.

Pause.

FATHER (aside, a memory, drifting off to sleep)
If you’re uncomfortable, I’ll stop. Just tell me and I’ll stop. But you’ll get used to it.

Pause.

FATHER shakes his head awake.

FATHER
It ought to join a sports team and learn teamwork and practice.

FATHER lights a cigarette.

MOTHER
It just needs to learn a trade.

MOTHER stands and mimes farming: SHE tills the dirt, pulls weeds, and plants seeds. Each one of these acts should be drawn out and after each separate act; SHE shows GIRL and motions to get the GIRL to do it. GIRL’s head should track MOTHER’s movements again, but SHE should not move or attempt to imitate.

FATHER
No. Those people don’t enjoy what they do! They’re practically slaves…tilling the land, give me a break!

Pause.

Maybe I’ll teach it falconry.

MOTHER (mimes wiping sweat off HER brow)
Oh, I was wondering which one of your lost hobbies you would choose. Will you teach it only half of the trade? And then abandon it when something better comes along? Or maybe when it
MOTHER (cont.)
gets really difficult... that’s when you’ll give it up. Or perhaps it will do it wrong and you can throw it down the stairs or punch it in its face.

_FATHER abruptly gets up and throws HIS chair across the stage. GIRL should startle._

FATHER
Are you out of your mind talking to me like that? I oughta kill you!

_GIRL holds HER hands over HER ears and hunches. MOTHER cowers toward the ground. FATHER sits back down and moves closer to GIRL. MOTHER moves upstage._

MOTHER
Don’t feed it!

_FATHER gets up from HIS seat again and raises a fist toward MOTHER._

FATHER
Get the ffff...out of here!!

_Exit MOTHER crawling to stage left. FATHER sits and leans toward GIRL. GIRL is still hunched over and breathing heavily._

FATHER (to GIRL)
We’ll get you out of here, darling, don’t you worry.

_FATHER starts to search HIS other arm for a vein._

FATHER
We’re gonna have a big beautiful house in the country. There will be ponies in the yard and…

_GIRL starts to sit back upright in HER chair._
FATHER
…a pond that you can swim in. We’ll have a tennis court, if you want to play tennis…an art studio, if you want to paint.

FATHER takes off HIS shirt and starts to search for a vein on HIS upper-arm.

FATHER (cont.)
We will rescue all of the suffering animals. All the orphaned fawns, wingless owls, and injured doves. They will all have a home at our house.

FATHER starts to carefully finger HIS neck. The lights should dim a bit, signifying nighttime.

FATHER
And our house will be at the end of a street called “Trouble’s End Road.” It will be the trouble’s end for everybody.

FATHER gives up trying to find a vein and lights a cigarette. HE looks up as if HE is gazing at the stars.

FATHER
Our bedrooms will all be upstairs and there will be two staircases that come up from the dining room and join together at a top balcony. In the morning, you’ll wake up at the smell of pancakes, bacon, and eggs coming from the kitchen. When you and your little sisters get up, you’ll look down over the balcony and see the breakfast spread on the table. You’ll come running down, still in your nightgowns, and we’ll have orange juice and a big breakfast before we go out to feed the animals.

FATHER crosses HIS arms across HIS chest and HIS ankles and closes HIS eyes.

FATHER
And if you decide that you’re too tired that day to take care of the animals, instead you’d rather go back to bed, you can do that, too.

FATHER falls asleep and GIRL stands and approaches HIM, trying desperately to wake HIM up. GIRL should shake HIS arm, maybe slap HIS face, become almost hysterical and start to pace around the stage.
End of Scene 2.
Scene Three

CAST:
MOTHER
GIRL
SISTER
BOSS

SETTING:
A living room area. One extra chair and a table should be brought out for this scene. The four chairs should be set around a table.

TIME:
Twenty years later.

AT RISE:
GIRL continues to frantically pace around the stage, SHE mimes picking things up and throwing them into corners. SHE should noisily rearrange the furniture, wipe off the table, and mime dusting. BOSS is asleep in a chair upstage. SISTER is asleep on the floor with HER back to the audience.

GIRL (to self)
This place is disgusting.

MOTHER (offstage)
What the hell is all the noise down there?

GIRL
I’m trying to clean this place up! It’s a disaster!

MOTHER
What for? Who are you cleaning up for? What are you doing here? What time is it?

GIRL continues to throw things around the room.

MOTHER
You having somebody over here?
GIRL pauses in disbelief, staring at the direction of MOTHER’s voice.

GIRL
What? MOTHER! Don’t you remember he is coming today? Every third Wednesday.

Enter MOTHER. Smoking.

MOTHER
Wh—

GIRL leaps toward MOTHER to grab the cigarette from HER hand. MOTHER quickly turns away.

GIRL
Why are you smoking in the house?

MOTHER
Oh mind your business and get out of my face. This is my house. Now, who are you getting all spiffy for?

MOTHER picks at GIRL’s shirtsleeve.

MOTHER
You introducing us to someone?

MOTHER looks over sleeping SISTER.

GIRL
You don’t remem—

MOTHER (exhaling smoke)
…what time’d she get home last night?
GIRL
Last night? Try this morning, about an hour ago.

MOTHER
Heh. I’m surprised she made it. Look at her face; somebody really did a number on her.

GIRL
You should have seen it when I found her.

MOTHER
Worse?

GIRL
I had to throw away the clothes she was in. Well, the shirt she was in. Looks like she lost her pants and shoes and she only made it halfway through the front door. Watch your step, I poured bleach all over the hallway there.

Beat.

Like I’m cleaning up a goddamned murder.

MOTHER
Don’t be so fucking hard on her.

GIRL
Me? Hard on her?

MOTHER
Yes, you. You come in here unannounced, all dolled up, criticizing my home. You better just relax, this is bad fucking karma, you know?

MOTHER gets up and looks over SISTER before exiting.

GIRL (to SISTER)
Are you gonna be O.K.? 
GIRL lightly touches SISTER’s face. MOTHER re-enters with a glass.

MOTHER (burps)
Whoops. Excuse me. Hate to do that in Your Highness’s presence.

GIRL
It’s ten a.m.

MOTHER
It’s orange juice.

MOTHER takes a sip and wrinkles HER face indicating to the audience that what SHE is drinking is definitely not orange juice.

GIRL (gasps for air)
I’m stressed out. Excuse me.

MOTHER
Oh, here we go.

Exit GIRL to the backstage corner where SHE mimes riding an exercise bike or running. During this time, MOTHER should sit at the table nearest the audience and finish HER drink in one gulp. When SHE finishes HER drink, SHE should exit and return to the table with a large bottle and refill HER glass. This should last as long as the director sees fit and then GIRL should return and sit at the table with MOTHER.

MOTHER
You know, you really should take it easy with all that exercise.

GIRL
Why on earth would you advise something like that?

MOTHER
It’s gonna make you flat as a board.
GIRL

Flat?

MOTHER

You’re going to lose your boobs and any sort of ass you may have had.

GIRL

That’s what most women want, isn’t it?

MOTHER

Well most men want, you know, something to hold on to.

GIRL

Oh my god. I don’t care what any men want to hold on to.

MOTHER

Yes, you do. You always have! Ever since you were a little girl you’ve had crushes and been so shy around boys. What is it now? You’re a fancy manager so you’re too good for crushes, too?

*Pause. GIRL looks at MOTHER intently and then looks around the room.*

MOTHER

Oh, god. You’re a lesbian aren’t you? That is who is coming over today? You were too embarrassed to show up with her and wanted to wait to see how I would take it first, huh?

GIRL

Oh yes, Mom. And you know what else? She’s black. My black, lesbian girlfriend is coming to dinner and should be here any minute now.

MOTHER

Really? You’re gonna decide you’re gay now?

GIRL

Oh my god!! People don’t decide that they’re gay.
MOTHER

Oh really? What happens then?

GIRL

If they finally get the courage to reveal themselves, they do so and then you know what happens? Their parents make comments like “and then she decided she was gay!”

MOTHER

Is she really black?

GIRL

No. No, there is no black girlfriend. Even if there were, I wouldn’t bring her here.

MOTHER

Mmm. Would you marry her?

GIRL

I’ll never be able to afford a wedding.

MOTHER

I have no idea why anyone gets married these days.

GIRL

Love?

*MOTHER scoffs.*

Children?

*MOTHER scoffs.*

It’s cheaper?
MOTHER
You save a little bit of money on taxes, but you lose it all when you get divorced!

GIRL
Not everyone gets divorced?

MOTHER
To maintain an image, that’s the only reason.

GIRL
An image of what?

MOTHER
Look around here and think about the families you grew up with. None of those husbands were happy. They were always complaining about their nagging and bitching wives.

GIRL
They were complaining to you?

MOTHER
Of course!

GIRL
Weren’t you friends with their wives?

MOTHER
I am so much more easygoing than those frou-frou women around here. None of them could take a joke or relax.

*MOTHER lights a cigarette. GIRL reaches for it, MOTHER backs away.*

GIRL
Those frou-frou women probably couldn’t relax around YOU because they knew you were talking to their husbands about them!
MOTHER
You’re just naive. People settle and that’s all it is. You girls in your early twenties see other people getting married and you panic and you pick the first somewhat eligible bachelor. Men feel the pressure and they buy a ring and then, mark my words; you give it one or two years until they’re fucking their hot, young co-worker in the bathroom.

GIRL
What about Jess and Andrew?

MOTHER
Who?

GIRL
Jess and Andrew. The wedding we went to last year?

MOTHER
The one when the ambulance had to come get your father? Ha-ha. The imbecile.

GIRL *(rolls her eyes)*
Yes, that one.

MOTHER
They’re too young to know. He loves her big, giant boobs and she loves his rigid jaw line and blue eyes. She might be the first one to cheat in that case! The lust wears off…it always wears off.

GIRL
What about you and Daddy?

MOTHER
I don’t want to talk about Daddy.

*SISTER should change positions and drift off back to sleep.*

GIRL
Cheating is rampant back in my town.
MOTHER
Are you surprised? In boring little Salem? North Salem? East…wherever the hell you took off to. Of course they’re all fucking in the bathrooms! Things have to be kept exciting, no?

GIRL
South Salem.

MOTHER
Mmm.

GIRL
It’s like an epidemic of infidelities.

MOTHER
How do you know?

GIRL
Because they’re all trying to do it with me!

MOTHER
Ha-ha! You go, girl!

GIRL
No. What? It’s awful.

MOTHER (lights a cigarette)
Tell me about these men.

GIRL
One is my boss.

BOSS gets up out of HIS seat and sits in a chair at the table, facing away from the audience. MOTHER may have to shift HER chair out of the way.
In order to maximize attention on BOSS, MOTHER should stay still and silent during the following scene. If MOTHER’s cigarette is still lit, SHE should put it out when BOSS starts to talk.

MOTHER
Your boss, huh? How rich!

BOSS
Hey can you come into my office?

GIRL
Sure.

GIRL gets up, stands behind BOSS, and clears HER throat.

BOSS
Ahem. Come in!

GIRL walks around BOSS, toward the chair opposite HIM.

BOSS
Oh, please shut the door.

GIRL mimes doing so and then sits in the chair opposite BOSS, facing the audience.

BOSS
Nice skirt.

GIRL
Thank-you.

BOSS
Can you grab that file over there?
BOSS points to corner behind GIRL. GIRL gets up and peruses the corner where BOSS pointed.

GIRL

Over here?

BOSS stretches his neck and exaggerates tracking her every movement.

BOSS

Oh, uh, yeah. Down a little bit.

GIRL follows HIS directions, bends down, and looks over HER shoulder at BOSS.

GIRL

Here?

BOSS reaches for GIRL’s lower back and sighs.

BOSS

Uh huh. Yeah, right there.

GIRL (pauses and stands up abruptly)

Got it.

GIRL returns to HER seat and mimes passing the file to BOSS.

BOSS

Here you go.

BOSS mimes tossing the item to the side and sits, staring intently at GIRL.

BOSS

So I saw that someone has a birthday coming up.
GIRL
Darn H-R! You know, I hate attention on my birthday.

BOSS
Mm-hmm. What are you doing next Friday night?

GIRL
Well, I, um, nothing. I don’t have any plans.

BOSS
Let me take you out to dinner.

GIRL
Ohhh no, no, no, you don’t have to do that.

BOSS
Come on, we can go wherever you want.

*BOSS puts HIS hand on GIRL’s hand. BOSS freezes and GIRL stays in place.*

GIRL (to MOTHER)
Earlier that day he was on the phone and he walked by my office and looked right at me when he said…

BOSS
Laura’s gone this weekend.

MOTHER (laughing and clapping)
This is wonderful! Tell me more!

GIRL
Wonderful?

MOTHER
Oh, honey. Trust me, you’re not the first and you won’t be the last in cases like this. Just go for
MOTHER (cont.)
it. He’s rich right? You could bribe him...have him pay you to be quiet! This is brilliant!

GIRL (looking at BOSS)
I know I’m not the first.

MOTHER freezes.

BOSS
We’re separating.

GIRL
Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.

BOSS
It’s fine. I just don’t know how to tell the kids.

BOSS reaches over the table to retrieve the bottle and glass that MOTHER was drinking from.

GIRL
Well I really hope everything works out.

BOSS pours two glasses from the bottle.

BOSS
You do?

BOSS moves a glass toward GIRL and then freezes.

GIRL (to MOTHER)
I feel guilty and responsible.
MOTHER
What does he look like, is he tall? Dark? Handsome? I’m picturing a young James Stewart.

GIRL
Overweight…and about sixty-five years old.

MOTHER
Of course he is. Oh, he probably loves you!

BOSS pushes the glass again, closer to GIRL.

BOSS
Here you go, Happy Thursday.

GIRL
What! Here? I’m still on the clock! What if someone comes in?

BOSS
No one’s coming in here. If they are what are they gonna do? You can lock the door that might make you more comfortable…

GIRL laughs, shyly.

GIRL (to MOTHER)
That was the day he tried to kiss me.

MOTHER (mimes fanning herself)
Wow-wee! In the workplace!

GIRL
It was awful.

MOTHER freezes. GIRL abruptly moves HER seat backward and stands. BOSS stands and faces HER across the table.
BOSS

I-I-I-I’m sorry. That was inappropriate.

GIRL

It’s okay.

_GIRL stands._

BOSS

I know. Please, sit. Don’t go.

GIRL

I think I hear my phone ringing.

BOSS

It’s O.K. I can excuse you.

_GIRL sits in the chair and straightens HER back. BOSS freezes._

MOTHER

You’d be crazy not to go for this! Don’t give up on this opportunity!

GIRL

He’s married with a family! What are you talking about?

MOTHER

So? You didn’t go after him he went after you. It’s on him.

BOSS

You know, whatever happens, I just want you to know you’re very special.

_GIRL (desperate to MOTHER)_

It’s a complete delusion! He is in love with me and I sit there and I just feel like I can’t speak, like I’m underwater and drowning, and I can’t tell him to…
GIRL brings her face close to frozen BOSS’s face.

GIRL (cont. to BOSS)
Please leave me alone and—

Pause.

Stop touching me.

MOTHER lights a cigarette and studies BOSS.

MOTHER (to GIRL)
Do you want to live a life like I have? Do you want to struggle every single day to raise kids, barely keep a roof over your head, and drive a shitty old car the rest of your life?

MOTHER freezes.

BOSS (to GIRL)
Really? You have some student loan debt?

GIRL
I sure do. I’ll be paying it off my entire life!

BOSS
How much is it?

GIRL
Oh, I don’t even know the number these days.

BOSS
Hmm…let me know. I can help you with that, you know?

GIRL
Thank-you. I better get going now. My phone…
I love having you here.

GIRL
I know.

BOSS
Next Friday. I’ll pick you up at 7.

GIRL stands, walks past BOSS and back to HER seat by MOTHER. BOSS should follow HER movements and when SHE sits, HE stands and EXITS. Before GIRL sits, SISTER starts to violently cough and startles MOTHER and GIRL.

MOTHER
Well, well, well! Good morning, Sunshine!

SISTER sits up for a moment before holding HER head and immediately returning to HER horizontal position.

SISTER
What the… Where’s Ryan?

SISTER (to GIRL)
What are you doing here?

GIRL
You don’t remember, do you?

MOTHER
Remember what?

SISTER
Remember what?

SISTER
Where are my—
GIRL
You came home without your pants and your shoes, just so you know…if that’s what you’re
looking for.

MOTHER
Would you give her a break, please? She just woke up.

SISTER searches the ground around HER.

SISTER
Where are my damn cigarettes? Mom, can I have one?

MOTHER tosses HER cigarette pack and lighter to SISTER.

Thanks.

SISTER lights a cigarette.

GIRL
Oh my god! You guys have got to stop smoking in this house!! Welfare services will be here in
ten minutes!

Exit MOTHER and GIRL. SISTER lies back down.

Blackout.

End of Scene 3.
Scene Four

CAST: GIRL
NURSE 1
NURSE 2
DOCTOR

SETTING: Modestly arranged to allow for flexibility in changing scenes. The “hospital bed” should be just two chairs facing each other, in order for GIRL to put her legs up to appear to be lying down.

TIME: The next day.

AT RISE: GIRL is lying on the two chairs (hospital bed), asleep. The NURSES and the DOCTOR are standing around GIRL, dramatically examining HER. THEY should lift HER limbs, pick at HER clothing, touch HER face, etc. THEY should occasionally look up toward the ceiling, as if THEY are being watched.

NURSE 1
There’s been a lot of activity.

NURSE 2
Twitching her fingers.

NURSE 1
Furrowing her brows.

NURSE 2
Intense teeth grinding.

NURSE 1
Moaning.
Awful stomach growling.

Ah, there, her toes are curling.

*DOCTOR points to GIRL’s fingernails.*

What’s this?

Ah. Of course, she’s pulling and ripping at hangnails.

Can you please clean that up? There’s blood everywhere.

*DOCTOR lifts his feet up and checks the bottoms of his shoes, as if blood has pooled on the floor.*

She said something earlier.

She was awake?

No, no, no. Fast asleep.

You didn’t hear her, Doctor?

I’m surprised, as well. She was screaming.
O.K., O.K., O.K., what was it?

It was awful; I don’t want to repeat it.

*DOCTOR is preoccupied, carefully studying HIS cell phone, turning it from side to side, cocking HIS head to see images.*

Will you please drop the emotional shit?

*DOCTOR lights a cigarette.*

I’m leaving. I can’t bear to hear it again.

*EXIT NURSE 1. NURSE 2 sits.*

First it was awful, awful shrieking.

*DOCTOR (continuing to examine GIRL)*

Mm-hmm.

Followed by…

*GIRL*

No, no, no, no, no.

*DOCTOR*

O.K.
She started to sob and said…

GIRL

Please, please, don’t…

NURSE 2

She started to writhe around…

_GIRL begins writhing on bench and protecting HER groin area with HER hands._

NURSE 2

And yelled…

GIRL

Help! Help me! Please, somebody help me! He’s coming! Oh god, please! Please help me! He’s coming!

DOCTOR

Did she wake afterward?

_ENTER NURSE 1 hurriedly. NURSE 1 rushes to GIRL’s side._

NURSE 2

No. We restrained her and she calmed down, but didn’t wake up.

_NURSE 2 holds GIRL’s hands at HER side while NURSE 1 pets HER forehead._

DOCTOR

Mm-hmm. Next time let her finish, please.

NURSE 2

It would have been cruel and unusual to “let her finish.”
Let her finish.

*DOCTOR*

Where was she found?

*NURSE 1*

All the way out in Chester. By the lake.

When?

*NURSE 1*

Tuesday.

Uh-huh. Was she conscious, at the time she was picked up?

*NURSE 2*

She was conscious, but panicked and incoherent. EMTs said she was complaining of chest pains and said that she thought she was having a heart attack.

*DOCTOR begins to take pictures of GIRL with HIS cell phone. DOCTOR should mime lifting up a blanket, HE should take close-ups of HER face, move HER limbs around, etc.*

Did she know her name? The year?

*NURSE 1*

She answered all those questions correctly, but she was very confused.
NURSE 2
Didn’t know how she got there, where she was, she said the last thing she could remember was…

GIRL (remaining still with HER eyes closed)
…driving home from a meeting. I was going to meet someone, I don’t know who I was meeting, but I was nervous. I must have been going on a date. Yes! A date. Then, my arms and legs started to tingle the way they do and the next thing I knew, I was upside down.

DOCTOR
Upside down?

NURSE 1
The car had flipped.

GIRL
There was blood everywhere; it was pouring out of my nose and my ears. I tried to stop it, but it was rushing out of me. The horn was stuck on and it was this terrible, blaring that felt like it was pulsing. I finally got my seat belt undone and came crashing down onto the broken glass…My back…my back is cut.

DOCTOR
That was it?

NURSE 1 NURSE 2
No. No.

GIRL
I’m lying there on the street, my back is cut and I can hear them coming.

DOCTOR
Who?

GIRL (groans)
I don’t know. I don’t know them or what they want, but I know that they want something awful.
DOCTOR

Give me a minute with her.

_NURSE 1 and NURSE 2 look at each other and EXIT to opposite sides of the stage. DOCTOR should be examining GIRL more closely, HE may get close to HER face and smell it, HE should seem aroused. Suddenly, GIRL should wake up and gasp for air._

GIRL

Oh, thank god. Oh my god, thank-you.

_GIRL reaches out to embrace DOCTOR._

Thank-you, thank-you, thank-you.

_DOCTOR pulls away._

DOCTOR

Nurse!

_Enter NURSE 1 and NURSE 2._

DOCTOR (to NURSE 1)

Get her legs, please.

GIRL

What? What are you doing?

_NURSE 1 holds GIRL’s legs down while NURSE 2 holds GIRL’s arms down and DOCTOR moves toward GIRL’s head._

GIRL

What are you doing? You’re supposed to be helping me!
The lights should go black and ALL EXIT, but GIRL. When the lights are back on GIRL should be lying asleep. ENTER DOCTOR in different clothes. DOCTOR sits on the edge of the bed and lightly touches GIRL’s foot.

DOCTOR

Honey?

GIRL reaches for DOCTOR.

GIRL

Oh thank god.

DOCTOR

Are you all right?

DOCTOR hands GIRL mug, GIRL sits up.

GIRL

Thanks. No. That was a really bad one.

DOCTOR

Yeah…I could tell…

GIRL

It was awful. I was stuck on the side of the road…and then I thought I was being helped…and then it turned out the nurses and doctors were trying to attack me or something.

DOCTOR (looking toward the ground)

Mmm.

GIRL

Before they were trying to kill me they were all taking pictures of me and I was so self-conscious. I was like, asleep when they were taking photos, but I was like, watching myself, it was weird.

Pause.
GIRL (cont.)
Where were you? I woke up and you weren’t here. I missed you.

*GIRL motions to touch DOCTOR’s shoulder, but DOCTOR turns away.*

DOCTOR
Sorry, I just couldn’t listen anymore.

GIRL
I was being that loud, huh?

DOCTOR
It was your teeth. You were grinding them so hard. In fact here…

*DOCTOR grabs GIRL’s mouth with his hand pressed hard into her chin and cheeks.*

GIRL
Ow! You’re hurting me.

DOCTOR
You’re lucky you didn’t break your goddamn teeth.

*DOCTOR pushes GIRL’s face away and looks down at HIS hands.*

DOCTOR
Go wash your face; it’s always so dirty in the morning from your sweat.

GIRL
Why are you so angry?

DOCTOR
I can’t do this anymore.
GIRL
What? O.k., I’ll get up. I’ll wash my face and put my make-up on. I’m sorry.

DOCTOR
Seriously, it’s not just the blood-curdling screams and teeth-grinding in the middle of the night…you can hardly function and people notice.

*GIRL lies back down. DOCTOR exits.*

DOCTOR (offstage)
You’re too tall.
You’re not funny.
You’re not smart.

*The lights begin to dim.*

DOCTOR (offstage)
You’re ugly.
You’re too thin.

*GIRL holds HER hands over HER ears.*

DOCTOR (offstage)
Come with me.
Why are you so shy?
Why don’t you book at this hotel?
You gained a little weight, didn’t you?

*DOCTOR continues as the lights dim.*

Blackout.

*End of Scene 4.*
Scene Five

CAST:   GIRL
         SISTER
         GUARD
         OFFSTAGE VOICE

SETTING:   A jail visitation room.

TIME:   Present.

AT RISE:   GIRL sits across from SISTER. There is an empty seat next to GIRL. GUARD is seated in a chair upstage and throughout the scene HE should go from sitting erect and facing forward, to falling asleep, and waking up and sitting up straight again. GIRL and SISTER speak in loud whispers, to avoid waking the GUARD.

SISTER
I’ve gained twenty-five pounds.

GIRL
Twenty-five?

SISTER
It’s disgusting. All they feed us is crap. It’s garbage.

GIRL
Can you exercise?

SISTER
A little.

GIRL
You think you look fat? Look at me.
SISTER
You have a reason to be fat. I don’t.

GIRL
Well, you have time to change it. I’m going to be ruined forever.

SISTER
People bounce back. Look at Mom, how many times was she pregnant?

GIRL
Right. I just have to take up crack cocaine.

SISTER
Careful, don’t say that in here. You’ll get everyone excited.

GIRL
Maybe they need some excitement. That guy needs some excitement.

GIRL motions to GUARD.

SISTER
I already tried.

GIRL
Tried what?

SISTER
You know, a favor for a favor.

GIRL
And he said no?

SISTER
Yep.
GIRL
O.K., maybe you’re right about losing weight!

SISTER
I do. I’ve seen the way he looks and acts toward some of the skinnier girls. It’s killing me.

GIRL
Isn’t there a way to like, make make-up?

SISTER
The other day a girl siphoned ink from a pen and tried to use it like eyeliner.

GIRL
Exactly!

SISTER
I can try, I guess, but you know, you have to be careful in here.

SISTER leans in and whispers.
All of the girls are lesbians.

GIRL
Well, not that much longer, right?

SISTER lights a cigarette.

SISTER
Twenty-nine months, two weeks, and four days.

GIRL
Plenty of time to lose twenty-five pounds!
SISTER
If I don’t die in here before then. It sucks I’m not gonna be able to meet this one.

*SISTER motions toward GIRL’s pregnant belly.*

GIRL
It’ll be there when you get out.

SISTER
I bet it won’t be able to wait to meet its fat aunt.

GIRL
Well, at least your hair looks nice.

SISTER
They had a hairdresser come in last week and do it for us. Yours looks good, what is that? A French, fishtail, Japanese braid?

GIRL (*laughs*)
Yeah.

SISTER
I always wanted to be able to do that. How’d you get it? Really, how did you do it?

GIRL
I had to teach myself.

*Pause.*

But really…your hair…it looks cute at that length.

SISTER
I hate it. Mom always used to say, “you never want to be fat and have short hair.” Look at me now.
GIRL
I thought she used to say, “you never want to be fat and short”?

SISTER
No, it was short hair.

GIRL
I guess you’re right.

SISTER
What are you gonna do about that one?

*SISTER motions toward GIRL’s pregnant belly.*

SISTER
Isn’t Dave like five-three?

GIRL
How do you know that?

SISTER
Mom told me. She said, “I don’t know what’s worse: if it grows up to be a short girl or a short boy.”

GIRL
She has no idea. This isn’t Dave—well, I certainly won’t let it get fat.

SISTER
Well, if it’s a risk you could just get rid of it, right?

GIRL
Are you talking about like the baby boxes at firehouses?

SISTER
Yeah, exactly.
No, I’m in charge of this now!

*Pause. Lights dim.*

Congratulations, it’s a girl.

*OFFSTAGE VOICE*

*End of play.*