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### Frieda and Open House

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*FRIEDA  
and  
OPEN HOUSE*

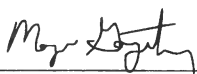
*by*

*ArLynn Parker*

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Presented in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
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Frieda

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A One-Woman Play

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*The family I'd been tricked into choosing was never going to accept me.*  
*And so I had to break it.*

This one-act play revolves around a young woman wandering through a near-lifeless forest she wants to escape. As she speculates directly to the audience about what brought her to this place, she reveals herself to be the stepmother to a pair of challenging children. The expectations of what she imagined her life to be and what she was saddled with collide as she recounts her story. Taking place in the woods in which she lost her way, details of her childhood, loveless marriage, and the desperate hunger that drove her to make the most important decision of her life become clear. Ultimately wrestling with questions of what it means to be a "chosen family," she attempts to set the record straight.

**FRIEDA**

***Free-duh.*** Female, 20-45. Any race.

The step-mother to Hansel and Gretel. She is a woman of put-upon taste. Meager means, but she's trying for presentable in non-modern, peasant-like garb, including a jacket or shawl (hereafter referred to as a shawl for purposes of staging). She does not look at ease. Not old but worse for wear. She was once a beauty. Probably. Oh well. She views the audience as a possibility for her to finally get out of the forest. She eats throughout the show, fighting off a hunger that brought her to this place.

## NOTES FOR PRODUCTION

Frieda swats and yells at birds throughout the play. They should never be seen by the audience, existing in Frieda's mind.

Currently, the leaves of the tree should change color; turning from a healthy green to yellow, and so forth as described in the script. The tree is the only thing which signifies life. All other elements used to represent the outdoors should be suggestive of decay. Stumps, shrubbery, clumps of grass, etc.

If bags of chips are used instead of having the actor eat from their pockets, it must be unmarked/unlabeled.

Frieda should be able to be played by an actor of any age between the given range. The character should evoke empathy, however best that is delivered through playing up the younger and slightly older ages as the story is told. There is intentionally no clear indication of how long she has been wandering the woods.

## GLOSSARY OF GERMAN TERMS

*Kobolde*: **koh-ball-deh**. Goblins. Used to describe the children.

*Verdammt*: **fair-dahm-hit**. Damned. Cursing.

*Klugheit*: **klook-height**. Wisdom, cleverness.

*Scheiß auf sie*: **shies-ahf-zee**. Fuck them. More cursing.

*Scheisse*: **shy-suh**. Shit. Again, cursing.

ArLynn Parker holds a B.A. in Creative Writing from Old Dominion University. She is currently pursuing an M.F.A. in Playwriting at Hollins University. ArLynn is also an award-nominated actress, winning the First Time Acting award in a DMV Film with the World Music & Independent Film Festival (WMIFF) for Then Sings My Soul. Other favorite credits include, Little Shop of Horrors (Audrey), The Legend of Georgia McBride (Jo), and Black Girl Magic (Queen Nzinga/various). She works as a Coordinator at The Sandler Center Foundation, helping to develop arts educational programming.

A forest. Well, not quite a forest but the remnants of one. Well, not the remnants of one, but the feeling of the lost vim and vigor of a dying woods.

A piece of decaying shrubbery next to a little tree stump. Definitely a tree stump. Varying sizes of rocks and thick blades, or rather, clumps of grass litter the space in no particular pattern or alignment.

In the center of the space is a very small tree. The leaves are meant to change color but for now they are a lively green.

ENTER FRIEDA

She sits on a stump.

The woods used to be full.

Miles and miles and miles of green forest.

Dark at times, but phew, beautiful when the light of the sun came through the trees at just the right angle. Shining on dew of the moss-covered trees, brightening the dense paths so the undergrowth looked thinner.

This is all that's left I suppose. Nothing lasts forever, you see.

Now, I don't make it a point to keep conversation with strangers, not here. But you strike me as a group of...weary, crestfallen travelers.

The weary part at least.

She swats an unseen bird in the air, as though one has swooped in on her.

She lets out an irritable, wordless shriek.

FRIEDA

Damned birds--they're everywhere.

This has ruined her entrance. She takes a few steps back and clears her throat, trying again.

I am--



She swats above her head again, ducking and dodging.

--birds! Where are they coming from?!

She gives up. Whatever.

I'll tell you what.

I. Am not. A witch.

[If there is a laugh:]

Your vote of confidence is very encouraging.

[If there is no laugh:]

Your lack of response is very encouraging.

But it's true. I'm not. I'm not a witch. I'm so much better than a witch.

With a grand gesture--

I am. A mother.

A pause, freezing in the gesture as she considers.

Alright, alright. I'll level with you. I'm not much of a mother either. Some would say.

(Scoffing)

I would say.

She comes back to the audience.

I suspect that you might not be lost, here in these... Well, they're not woods anymore are they? In fact this could be one of the last fully *living* trees. I haven't seen a green like this in a long time.

You're all sitting, you must just be resting. I assume. This isn't the kind of place you wander aimlessly through--not without purpose. Me--well, I... I think I'll stop a while myself if you don't mind company.

I'd wager you know the way out too, don't you? I can see it on your face. After you've caught your breath, maybe I'll tag along. I've been walking this way for what feels like ages. Looking for a familiar stump or a path or anything that seems right.

I need to get... well, not home exactly, but out of here.

You don't want a questionable character around--I get it.

Trust me, you could find a lot worse out here. If you only understood...

When you're ready, maybe you can just walk ahead and lead the way?

Or you could point in a general direction. If you know *your* way, then maybe...

(Quietly)

There's hope for me.

And by all rights you must have traveled a distance to have ended up...

(looking around)

Moreso to herself than the audience. The beginnings of a reverie.

They never cared about the woods.

That was quick, back to normal. She stands.

I am not a witch.

Witches hunt for their prey, or--now that I think about it--in *so* many cases let them fall into a lazily kept snare. Like a Venus Fly Trap with its mouth open just a liiittle too wide.

Obvious.

They don't fall in love--or what they think, in their limited experience, *could eventually be* love--with their victim's fathers. That's a terrible plan.

And so no, I didn't plan anything. I'm not a "plan-er." I'm a mothe--

I tried to be a mother.

Opening a bag of chips she has pulled from a hiding place in one of the clumps of grass. Or perhaps her own pockets.

Mind if I eat? I'm starving.

It is noisy, awkward in a quiet place.

With her mouth full:

I'm not a witch.

Enjoying the taste now, preferably still with a lot in her mouth.

She eats sloppily, letting crumbs fall out of her mouth or her hands.

Can't believe you people get to eat like this all the time. And you just drop it wherever you please. Vagrants.

When I was a child, when I lived in our village, people would have slain their next door neighbor if it meant getting to eat like this every day.

To eat at all every day.

I should clarify: we were poor. I was the youngest of...8 I think?

It's been so long I forget, I know that sounds terrible.  
But buckle up.

More crumbs fall.

I would run through the woods next to our cottage with wild abandon.  
Really, I was something else. You wouldn't know, looking at me now, but I had so much  
play in me. I'd stay outside for hours. Long after the sun went down and mama'd have to  
come chasing after me with her broom in the air to get me to stop playing.  
Before she left us...

She puts the chips [bag] down.

My father was much kinder. He, well...  
Okay, truth be told, you don't care. You don't care about my childhood, or how I came  
up. You probably walked a long way before you sat down, so let me...

Realizing. Accusing.

Hah! And I said I wouldn't get caught up talking to strangers. Look at me.

She laughs. It begins innocently, then turns  
desperate.

I never wanted children. Well, maybe that's not true.  
I--well, I was thinking I'd find a nice husband one day. Some day.  
A man who would take me away from our cramped little cottage.  
Who was well-off enough that wouldn't worry about providing for the house or each  
other, and would always have enough to eat.  
And then just maybe, if the time was right  
we'd have a little one of our own to look after.  
Pfff.

She wanders as she speaks.

I was 22. Ish. Already a spinster.  
Now, 22 is barely the start of a person's life.  
But where I came from, in our quaint German village,  
If you were unmarried with no kids at that age--  
Spinster.  
Me, a damned spinster.  
Papa was beside himself.

She does not put on a voice for her father, but simply takes on a new cadence. It is not a caricature, but a memory.

Frieda, it is past time you get yourself settled.  
What is it going to take to get you a bridegroom?

Herself.

The boys in the village didn't want me. I didn't look much like my sisters.  
I wasn't homely, I was just...me.  
I mean...I thought I was attractive enough.

She takes off her shawl and ties it attractively around her waist. We now see that she is in a form-fitting top. Maybe a pleasant blouse and corset. Looking down at herself.

You see *this* getting water from the creek, and you don't want to offer your prized pig to settle down?

But...when my mama left us I was still so young. There was this reputation you know.  
Stigma.

The village talked about us for years.

What kind of mother leaves her kids and...

After she ran out it was all Papa could do to get us settled, too.

He said he wanted what was best for us.

But he didn't know how to take care of us any more.

That's when he told me about Hans.

Her father's cadence again.

Freida, blessed be this day, I have found you a bridegroom! Our prayers have been answered.

Herself.

Yes. Because we can only afford to eat once every two days but, no. Our BIGGEST plea to the Lord above is for your daughter to not end up an old maid.

There is a heavenly glow of light. She drops down to her knees.

Dear God up in heaven, we thank you for keeping us.

Give us this day, our every-other-daily bread.

Bless us, and allow the men to be rich and the children spin gold so we may live prosperously.

Amen.

The light goes out. She stands.

Children, hmph.

Hans was a nice man, older than I thought. Much older. Maybe 40 something?

Don't look at me like that.

Arrangements of a wider age gap were a pretty common thing.

Older men weren't picky and they asked fewer questions.

She rolls her eyes.

For my papa, it was enough to send me off to a stranger, living on the outskirts of a strange village. I was one less mouth to feed in our cramped cottage, after all.

She wraps the shawl around her head or neck  
like a cloak.

It was the longest walk I'd ever taken by myself.

Down to his house, and then down the aisle. What a notion.

The woods that day were so full, the tree limbs rustling their comfort to me.

I'm not a witch, but I knew it was a good sign.

This was my beginning. My chance.

I wouldn't have to worry about meager means any more.

Someone would be there for me,

Someone to take care of Frieda.

Someone to cook for, and keep house--

not because I *had* to, but because we'd have the kind of home where I wanted to do those things.

Someone I could choose for myself. That's what I told myself, at least.

Because how many choices were there, really. Just this one. So I did.

She stands in a corner of the stage, preparing to  
travel diagonally down toward the audience. A  
deliberate step each time as she recounts:

When I saw his house--I knew it had to be his, it was just like Papa described it.

When I saw it...I don't know, I shuddered a little.

My heart was doing backflips in my chest,

My palms started sweating,

The small pack I had with me nearly fell out of my hands.

I felt hot and ragged.

You never get to take back your first impression and I would've died if my soon-to-be husband saw me like that.

So I tried to make myself more presentable. Decided to woman-up just a bit.

An unnatural, ironic chuckle. She removes the shawl entirely, maybe tossing it to a side of the stage or under the tree.

“Frieda,” he said so tenderly, “I want you to feel at home here. I think we can be very happy. I know we will be.”

She looks at the audience with a doe-eyed smile and lets that sink in.

I mean...It was exactly what I wanted to hear. My adjustments must have worked.

He was hesitant, but he held out his hand and laid it all out on the line.

Well, most of it.

He told me he came from a farming family and they weren't wealthy.

Warning bells there.

We just met and he was already telling me how much money he *didn't* have. Okay.

He worked as a wood carver and often travelled into the woods.

I reveled in that. We had some common ground.

Now, we were to be married that afternoon so there wasn't much time to waste.

Which is why, I *suppose*--

The word drips with judgement.

--he neglected to tell me about THEM.

A long beat as she seethes for a moment.

There was a minister already present.

The little garden in front of the house was lined with beautiful flowers.

I didn't even see the inside of the house.

I was too caught up to think to ask.

Foolish.

She goes back to the [bag of] chips and starts to chew loudly. She drops crumbs wherever she stands.

God, these are good. Mmph.

Anyway.

She swats invisible birds above her head again.  
For Lord's sake! Get out of here, birds, shoo! Shoo! Agghh!

Collecting herself. She clears her throat.  
Hans leans in and kisses me on the cheek at "you may now kiss the bride."  
The cheek, really?  
We're about to spend the rest of our relatively short lives together,  
the least you could do is plant one. But I'm getting off path.  
He leads me into the house, finally, with the minister behind.  
And that's when I see them for the first time.

She crumbles the chips that are in her hand.  
They're sitting in the corner of the room. Right next to the fireplace.  
"Frieda," Hans says, "I'd like you to meet my children."  
*I'd like you to meet my children.*  
And they look up at me, with these big, gooey eyes.  
This is Hansel  
and Gretel.

The tree leaves turn a sickly shade of yellow.  
She notices after:  
  
AURRRGGGHHH!!  
No please, don't do that. What did I say? You've been so green and beautiful. This is not  
a change of season, leaves, don't yellow on me, I beg you.

To the audience:  
The leaves are changing.  
The tree, it was so lovely just a moment ago.  
Now it--it's different--pale.  
As at first our lives we green and grow, later autumn's early signs will show.

What does the whole "chosen family" thing mean?  
You ever hear that term? Odd concept, is it not?  
What is that--what's it mean to be a "chosen family?"

Addressing a member of the audience.  
What about you, did you travel here with your family? Are they around?  
You can answer, I'm really curious.

[If no:]

See? Good for you.

[If yes:]

And would you consider them your *actual* family?

She doesn't give them a chance to answer.

You know what? Doesn't matter.

You just keep thinking of how we'll get out of here.

The point is, I didn't actually choose mine.

I didn't choose what I was born into OR what I got saddled with.

(Going back to the story)

So I can't even react the way I want to--and I'm in utter UTTER shock--because the minister is still in the room, standing right over my shoulder.

He tells me that it's been so long since these lovely children had a proper mother figure, so he's in on it too. I've been had.

And before I get too far, let me clarify something.

She brushes off her hands or rolls up her sleeves.

There are certain historians of childish inaccuracies who have painted these two *kobolde* as small, defenseless children still in their leading strings.

Aw, who am I kidding. Wilhelm and uh...uh...oh what's the other one's name...

Jacob! THAT'S who started this nonsense about my husband's offspring being little, bitty children. Those idiot brothers in the next village over, making a living on ridiculous fairy stories.

The bastards Grimm. I suppose it eventually got back to their rumor mongering ears about what happened...Other travelers have told me as much, over time. I suppose people get nostalgically attached to whatever story might best suit their needs.

When I say "children," I mean 14 and 15 years old.

Old enough to be married themselves, or at least suited for betrothal, but the little leeches are historically these two completely helpless--

In case you've forgotten, I was like 20 or something! 22?! Yes, 22.

I barely learned arithmetic,

but that's only 7 years older than his oldest child!

I came into this house and I could *feel* it.

I could feel that I didn't belong there.

And it was because of them.



Alright so...I realize how this sounds. Harsh right?  
 You've been here thus far, so please just stay with me.

She sits on the tree stump.

The minister leaves after a bit of lemon cake--by the way, half-devoured  
 when we walked through the door. Insatiable.  
 But I'm getting to that.  
 I mean, put yourself in my shoes.  
 I thought the *two* of us were about to embark on a NEW life.  
 So imagine my surprise when I see a previous life that I was NEVER informed about,  
 looking at me from the corner as if I were actually a damned witch.  
 Hans finally says, "Hansel. Gretel. This is Frieda, my wife."  
 If you had seen the way they looked at me...

She gets a little choked up.

The disdain on their faces...I don't know if anyone had ever looked at me that way.  
 Even mama with all her spite and indifference.  
 I had never seen such eyes as those.  
 But I muster the courage to introduce myself, wanting to turn this into a happy  
 experience for all of us.  
 I shook both their hands and they mumbled hellos.  
 Hans, simple man that he was, said he needed to finish out the day's work.  
 He removes his dress coat, rolls up his sleeves,  
 takes up an axe from the front yard and leaves.

She throws her hands in the air.

He just leaves.  
 I'm alone with his children and I have no idea what to do.  
 I smile at them, just a little one.  
 They don't say much. But I think maybe they can smell fear.

Her hands tremble a bit and she feels her  
 forehead dewing up. She imitates her own voice.

This is a very nice house.  
 Gretel, would you care to show me around?

It was only a two room place--I could see everything from where I stood  
 but I was trying.  
 She only pointed.

She points out toward the audience.

A bed in the corner of the room.

She points in a different direction.

A pot over the makeshift stove.

And Hansel had this way about him. He was the eldest, the schemer.

She puts Hansel's cadence.

We're hungry.

Herself.

Did you not enjoy the cake?

Hansel.

I said we're hungry. You're our new mother, do you not know how to cook?

Herself.

See, that's what I was there for.

To cook for them. They were always. Hungry.

This doesn't sound like much.

But from the day I arrived, I cooked, cleaned, cooked, kept house, cooked, tended to the garden, cooked, helped Hans with the firewood, cooked, made, laundered, and mended clothes, cooked...

You see where I'm going here?

The tree leaves turn a deep yellow. She looks  
from the tree to the audience.

Damnit, tree, stop turning yellow, for God's sake!

This isn't happening--do you see it? Its leaves are even darker now.

When winter rears its ugly head,

Know at first the leaves you dread.

The unseen birds return.

*Verdammt* birds! Leave me be! GO! Leave me alone!

I'm not a witch. I didn't even know any--

She stops herself.

I know I'm not perfect, I would never try to convince anyone of that.

But every-other-daily bread.

That's where I came from.

Sometimes I asked Hans about his former wife, who was no less than a saint, it seemed.

And then sometimes I would ask about the "children."

Why enough never seemed to be enough.

I gathered that his late wife would spoil them endlessly.  
 There were always goodies around the house.  
 She spent what little Hans made to buy all the fixings so that they rarely left the house  
 for fear of missing a meal.

She becomes more animated.

Once, it was a birthday of mine.  
 6th or 7th I think.  
 Papa--he spent the whole day trading whatever he could to get me a tiny piece of cake  
 from the baker.  
 Mmm I remember the color of the icing, a light blue.  
 How it smelled!  
 And it was a secret too.  
 If any of my siblings caught a whiff of it, it was all over.  
 I hadn't expected my mama to be the one.  
 She snatched it from his hands, just before he could give it to me.  
 "I will tell you what, *husband*,"  
 She always called him that. Never by his name.  
 "If this girl gets any of that in her, the witches will have her, and then who's going to tend  
 the garden and fetch from the village?"  
 By that time the garden at our cottage had already been dead for over a season.  
 Papa tried to reason with her but...  
 Nothing to it.  
 When I tried to fish that cake out of the garbage,  
 she went to my hide like something else...

Back to the audience, having become lost in the  
 memory.

Does anyone know what happens to the human body when it becomes starved?  
 You were blessed with such wonderful knowledge,  
 it occurs to me that you may be aware, with the advantage of not experiencing it for  
 yourselves...  
 Humor me for a second, won't you?

She picks up the chips again.

If the first one has been emptied by this time, she shakes it, disappointed, and removes another from a second hiding place (or another pocket), possibly under the tree or in a second clump of grass.

She chews, scattering crumbs here and there.

These are addictive, I swear.

Addressing a member of the audience.

You. When was the last time you ate?

[If recently]

Mhmm. Sounds right, I thought so.

[If a while ago]

She thinks about offering, but decides against it.

That long? Maybe you need some of this.

Ah, on second thought you don't want these, they're old. But if I come across more I may save you some.

[After both]

Maybe we can find some more as we go through the forest, if--no, *when* we make it. People are always leaving these--and more--all over the place.

So, we know the body needs certain things to live. Energy and protein from food.

More of that wisdom from the weary passersby.

As you deprive yourself of that for an extended amount of time, slowly things start to break down on the inside to make up for the loss.

Your body isn't stupid.

It won't immediately eat itself.

No, it will provide some surrogate fuel, although...

As a last ditch effort, eventually it will go for the heart.

Your own body, in trying to keep you alive, will eventually go after your heart...

Aht! Don't you move, I'm not finished yet. I said don't move! We're in the thick of it together now.

Clears her throat.

Hans was not a good provider.

All he knew how to do was swing an axe.

By the time I came into his life, he'd kept up with it for so long that he wasn't even doing *that* very well.

The few coins we had to spare went straight into the mouths of his ungrateful imps.

Me? When I was younger than Gretel,

my sisters and I would sew clothes for townsfolk.

As I said, my mama left quite a sting on us.

So it would take each one of us days just to put a piece of bread or two on the table.

When they came of age, they found less remarkable ways to make money,

lowering themselves to the whim of men who had a coin to spare.

To this day I don't think Papa was ever keen enough to know. God bless him..

My brothers tried to find work or women with suitable dowries to help.

Women were scarce and much of the work had been taken up by more versatile hands.

But at least they tried. They did.

Gretel, Hansel...

She shakes her head, and the tree leaves turn a  
light red.

It is no wonder this forest is decaying as it is, with unreliable roots like yours.

What is the matter with you--stop changing, tree!

To audience:

Yellow leaves weren't good enough--it won't stop changing color.

Grow red all you want, I won't be phased.

Red as blood, red as hell, till spring again comes, you won't be well.

They never so much as looked at their father when he came through the door at night.

Never picked up a finger to help or even ask about what they might do.

I used to picture them as fleshy baby birds

holding their mouths open and screeching

for someone to drop something in at the first sign of movement.

And you know something? I tried.

I tried to love them. To choose them.

Every day.

They were old enough to see that I was trying.

I did everything that was asked of me, but they wouldn't have me.

Hansel gazed out the windows each morning.

Every day I asked him what he was looking at

and every day he'd say "nothing" with a sideways look to his features that bade me to think he wouldn't talk to me I didn't speak first.

I never knew why.

Gretel, always sitting close by, would turn her mouth up and snicker at me.

Like I was peeping in on some secret joke between the two of them.

From the moment I stepped foot into that house I was a stranger.

And they made sure it stayed that way.

What was it in me that they couldn't at least try to love me back?

Ever?

I'd never uttered so much as an unkind word to them and they hated me.

I was trapped in this house with children who hated me

and a husband who never cared for me.

*This* was my "chosen family?"

Hans and I had our moments, those rare glimmers of affection.

But they were so brief, I can't bring myself to recall a single one.

Not a single time where I felt his love. Not really.

Food became so scarce that I started to vividly remember growing up.

Give us this day, our every-other-daily bread.

I was losing my mind.

Beginning to think that cake from our wedding day was a dream.

This is what the rest of my life would be like.

Perhaps, if it wasn't for Hansel and Gretel's loathing bearing down on us,

Hans and I might have found some common attachment.

We might be able to find it in our hearts to start over.

But the hunger was going to continue starving the love right out of us.

I don't know how--with fewer people in the house than how I grew up--I could manage to feel weaker in my womanhood than I ever had as a child.

Weaker and lonelier.

My walks through the woods were my only solace.

Gretel never went into the forest, and according to Hans,

Hansel hadn't gone far enough into the trees since he was a wee thing. Nothing he would remember.

It was the only place I could try to dream through this nightmare.

That's where it hit me, though.

Something so...vile and cruel that I walked further, trying to outpace the thought.

But it kept coming back to me.

The children had never ventured as far into the woods as I was now, off a beaten path.  
They'd surely never find their way if...

The tree leaves turn a darker red. To the  
audience:

Do you see it? The tree's still turning, why won't it stop changing? Stop dying?  
Darker red, like bruised lips, leaves near dead from branches ripped.  
I've never seen them die away this fast, have you?

The more I banished the thought the louder it came crashing through to me.  
I thought my mind might collapse under it.

Every time I pictured it, a bird from a nearby branch would caw at me.  
Some even swooped down on me, hearing my forbidden thoughts.  
Trying to punish me for having it.  
It was too strong to ignore, though, and I hated myself for it.  
Hated myself...and brightened at the foreseeable future.

I raced back to the house, sure to beat Hans home.  
Until now I'd been trudging along.  
This was a sprint.  
I'm not a witch, but it felt like I might fly.

Now, as I suspected the usual scene greeted me at home.  
When Hans came in that night, the children had already gone to bed,  
so I waited for his predictable round of melancholy.  
A picture came to me, then, of my father. I imagined him in the same state.  
So when Hans spoke his concerns about being able to feed us all for this coming  
winter...my mother spoke up.

"I will tell you what, husband," I said.  
Had I EVER called him that out loud before?  
The hairs on my neck stood at attention.  
It was an out of body experience. Really! I swear it was!  
I could see myself, propped up on an old blanket, saying what I was saying.  
If I hadn't been sitting, my knees would have wobbled.  
I felt dizzy.  
Everything in the room on the verge of spinning.  
But once I began, I knew I had to see it through.

“When early morning comes, we will take the *children* into the forest, where it is thickest and most beautiful.

We’ll make a fire, give them each bread, go to our work--I to my mending and you to your carving--we will leave them alone. Let them find their own way home.”

She picks up the [bag of] chips and continues  
her tirade. Crumbs fall.

NOW LOOK. What those bastard Grimms don’t want you to know is that I never ACTUALLY finished that sentence with “*so that we would be rid of them.....*” I thought it.

I thought it *real* hard. But I never said those words.

I was never going to convince my pathetic partner to leave his children in the forest for dead. Well, minus the bread.

He had the potential to be less pathetic, to care for me as I wanted to think I deserved--if going hungry was off the table. It was sure to be a terrible winter.

You might imagine, and rightfully so, that Hans was...well, shocked.

But I figured I owed him one of those.

He looked at me.

She makes a face.

I looked at him.

Another face.

I wasn’t backing down. Worst case scenario I could say it was in jest and laugh it off. He wouldn’t have bought it anyway.

She plays Hans for a moment.

“No. No. How could you. I could never find it in my heart to leave my children to the animals of the forest. I would pity them.”

*I would pity them.*

That was his statement.

She places the chips down or brushes off her  
hands.

Much as I didn’t like to think about my mother, I recalled when she’d slap my father across the back of his head.

But I was not my mama. I wasn’t cruel or vengeful.

So, I appealed to his logical side. Hans knew how close we were to starving.



He knew, in his heart, that as long as Hansel and Gretel remained they would never do anything to help his situation.

We had to do something ourselves.

I had to do something.

Soo...and I'm speaking to the women--you know.

You know what it takes to turn a man's tide in your favor.

So I shamelessly turned on nature's blessed calling card.

By the time the moon was high overhead, Hans had agreed to let me take the children to the woods myself.

The fewer details the better. He didn't want to know more.

As I remember it, he might have shed a silent tear.

It was all that I needed.

Surely, I am not as bad as a witch.

We were hungry and I wasn't suggesting *eating* the children.

Not like that robber bridegroom who was brought to justice.

Not like that hag who cooked her husband's son into a salty stew.

Simply to let them fend for themselves

in a forest I knew well.

...

...

...

Maayyybe not well enough to know who lived just farther into the thick forest...and her preferred diet.

BUT THAT WASN'T MY FAULT.

How was I supposed to know? Hm? I ask you that?

How was I supposed to know?

When I woke them that morning, Gretel

groggy as if she'd been hard at work the day before. Hansel

even more capricious than he had a right to be, I saw it.

I saw what they'd done.

The rumor mongers--again--would have you think Hansel was the mastermind and Gretel was just along for the ride.

Because how could a young girl withstand the *klugheit* of thinking critically?

They did it together, I know they did.

The tree leaves turn an auburn brown.

The unseen birds return. This time FRIEDA  
throws some chips at them. This is a mistake.

Get away from me, dammit! Ah! Aughhh!

Wait no! See what you made me do you wing-ed rodents!

My food, I've thrown it away!

Maybe she clamors to the ground to pick up the  
crumbs, (the actor should not eat off the floor).

No! Tree, you weren't supposed to die on me. You could be the last one remember?

She looks from the tree to the audience.

You stupid thing!

It's brown now, look there. And I can't stop it from turning color, from dying away.

Brown and brown the trees they turn, till bark from leaf the same they'll burn.

Collecting herself.

We approached the edge of the forest and half the piece of bread I'd given Hansel was  
already gone.

He ate it--that's what you're thinking, hm?

I've painted a picture of greedy, selfish kids and that fits.

But don't you be fooled.

I cleaned up after every morsel they'd eaten since marrying their father.

I knew what it looked like when they left bite marks in their food.

Hansel's bread was free of these marks.

He hadn't eaten it.

But then, what happened to it?

I'd seen Gretel get out of bed and prepare for the journey.

Would she eat it and leave her own piece untouched?

And that's when I saw the birds.

Whole flocks of them sitting atop the tree branches,  
stewarding us deeper into the woods.

Behavior I witnessed only one other time.

Mama, chasing me down with a broom in the air  
as I wasted seeds. Trying to feed birds in the forest back home.

Then these birds were waiting for food too.

That is when I put it all together.

These clever, deceitful, self-entitled, hoggish brats! *Scheiß auf sie!*

I knew exactly what they were doing.

Leaving a *scheisse* trail of my path through the woods so they'd be able to retrace their steps and start our problems all over again.

I tasted blood in my mouth.

I saw nothing but red.

The bark on the trees, red.

The shrubs and bushes that brushed my fingertips, red.

The light peeking through the dense branches, red.

Throughout the following, she makes her way to the tree stump. By the end of this portion she is standing on it. She doesn't make obvious eye contact with the stump as she does so; is she even clocked in to her movements? Her own body?

It was then that I lost myself to it.

Because I knew what would happen: the birds would make use of their crumbly path before they ever realized it was being picked at.

We walked...And I found myself going so far out of my way to make the trail more complicated.

More twists and turns than I planned.

All I could think was,

I wouldn't let these two force me into hunger any more.

I walked to the farthest point I knew. Then beyond that.

Honestly, it wasn't bad.

If they'd ever come out of their cave,

both Hansel and Gretel might have tracked their way back to find the house again.

I knew they never would.

I thought of Hans' face as I laid a fire out to be stoked.

If he didn't forgive me,

wasn't there still the chance with an existence free of burden?

And even if there wasn't,

I would make something out of what I had left of this life.

The family I'd been tricked into choosing was never going to accept me.

And so I had to break it.

So that *I* would be whole again.

Maybe for the first time.  
Because for the first time in my life I chose me.

The tree leaves turn the color of decay, a sickly  
tan brown. There's is no life left. FRIEDA  
acknowledges.

There it goes again.  
When at last the storm uproots the mightiest of trees, there may be nothing left to shelter  
but for you and me.  
There's nothing left of you, is there? Hm? This sickly shade of brown is your last breath,  
isn't it? It's like you had a heartbeat.  
Or maybe that you were the heartbeat. The middle of the woods? Huh?

She comes back.  
"Now lie down by the fire and rest yourselves, you children,"  
If they wanted to remain children forever, I would do them a  
last courtesy and treat them like it.  
"Your father is cutting wood, and when I am ready I shall come and fetch you."

They did as they were told.  
What else were they going to do?  
I stood a few paces away,  
Watching them sit together,  
the uncertainty in their faces almost made more forget how old they were.  
The only time, even for a brief moment,  
that I saw them as little kids.

I walked my way back toward the house.  
The light in the woods had changed, become  
thinner somehow.  
And as I'd expected. Hansel and Gretel's trail was no where to be seen.  
I saw one last bird, a straggler, pick up a small  
piece of bread and fly off into a nearby nest.

She hops down from the tree stump.  
I never knew that our home was so close to the cottage of a witch.  
The candy variety, no less.  
The kind that does go out of their way to cook and eat children.  
I can only be so sure of the accuracy.  
The Grimms tend to exaggerate.

I didn't know.

Had I known, and had the trail not been eaten...well, hindsight.

For, as I made my way back, I was sure that Hans  
would never look at me the same way again.

Not that there was ever much adoration in his expressions,  
but this would cement that forever.

It's funny how quickly my perception changed once the deed was done.

And it wasn't like a storm calming, where the clouds moved out and made way for  
sunshine.

It was more like one gray heap above my head shifting to make room for another. Not as  
heavy, though. No, not as heavy.

Still, for an instant I was content.

But, alas, even the best laid plans are subject to hindrances.

This you will be familiar with:

The brother and sister outsmart the witch,  
cook her in her own oven if you can believe it.

Eventually they cross a stream, blaahhdy blah, and do make it back  
where they are welcomed by their father with open arms.

She extends her arms.

And me?

She laughs, that same very non-witch laugh from  
before.

Dead.

Those tale writing idiots said I was dead before Hansel and Gretel got home!

Dead!

The truth...?

She looks around, for the very first time noticing  
the crumbs around her. Even if/when she'd been  
stepping on them throughout the play, this is  
the first time it captures her attention.

The crumbs are in no particular places, but  
scattered throughout the space. If there are any  
chips left in the bag, she takes one out and  
crumbles it in her hand.

If there are none, she holds the empty bag  
upside down (or turns out her pockets),  
bewildered. She wanders aimlessly for a  
moment, trying to make out a pattern. There  
isn't one. There is no path.

I got lost.  
Finding my way back to the house,  
where I thought he'd be waiting for me.  
When my own mama left we didn't cry or mourn her going.  
And I know they didn't...They didn't for me either.  
Maybe I've always been lost.  
Or if I ever found my way, it was too late.

You, though, you can make sense of all this.

She gestures to the ground, to the crumbs.  
You got this far, surely you can find the way out of what's left of these woods.  
The forest.  
And when you do...Just come back for me, okay?  
I'll be here.  
I'm too old for the witches to care about, so...  
I'll be here.

She circles the tree, still looking for a path  
through the crumbs and exits the stage.

End of play.

## Open House

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A One-act Play

By ArLynn Parker

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*Honey, am I home?*

In this one-act play, Olivia and Danny, a couple of late twenty-early thirty somethings, are at odds picturing themselves living in a semi-affordable two-story home. It could also be the escape that Lisa, very much a young twenty something, is looking for. Her father, Louis, disagrees to say the least. He worries about his daughter's preparedness moving into her first home. That is, until the realtor, Carrie, turns out to be his ex-girlfriend. Professional as she is, she attempts to balance unresolved tension with her ex and chase after the dollar signs between these two opposing pairs. The comedy explores themes of parent-child relationships, generational wealth, [and class.] Taking place within the house in question, a little damaged property and decades-repressed squabble eventually bring the play and open house to a close.



## CHARACTERS

DANNY	Male, White, late 20s - early 30s. Thinks he's funnier than he truly is, and really loves his wife, Olivia. He is the reason they have yet to purchase a house.
OLIVIA	Female, Black, late 20s - early 30s. She easily sees herself and her husband, DANNY, in the house they are viewing. She loves him and puts up with his goofy antics. Willing to stand up for herself and cut through the b.s.
CARRIE	Female, White, late 40s-50s. "Type A," well-humored business woman. She really wants to make a killing by selling this house. Her treatment of Olivia is problematic, upholding some harmful tendencies towards Black homebuyers.
LISA	Female, White or White-passing, early 20s. An Alexis Rose/Lisa Turtle personality type. This is potentially her first home as she is trying to move out. Exasperated by her father, LOUIS, she displays high expectations.
LOUIS	Male, White, late 40-50s. He means well though he has led a privileged life. He wants the best for his daughter, LISA, and harbors an unresolved past with CARRIE.

## **NOTES ON PRODUCTION**

There is a difference between characters talking over one another and when they cut each other off. Play with the variation.

// indicates overlapped lines.

... indicates a continued thought that drifts off.

-- indicates someone being cut off by the next line.

As the play includes a commentary on generational wealth, it is highly encouraged that the production cast roles as close to description as possible. The ethnicity of LISA's mom/LOUIS' wife, however, is never mentioned. The actress playing LISA should be white-passing at the interest of touching on a societal gap, unlike LOUIS whose blind spots include socio-economic and racial privilege.

ArLynn Parker holds a B.A. in Creative Writing from Old Dominion University. She is currently pursuing an M.F.A. in Playwriting at Hollins University. ArLynn is also an award-nominated actress, regionally nominated for Best Supporting Actress in *Clue: On Stage*; Best Actress and First Time Acting awards in a DMV Film with the World Music & Independent Film Festival (WMIFF) for *Then Sings My Soul*. Other favorite credits include, *Little Shop of Horrors* (Audrey), *The Legend of Georgia McBride* (Jo), and *Black Girl Magic* (Queen Nzinga/various). She works as a Coordinator at The Sandler Center Foundation, helping to develop arts educational programming.

Lights up on a living room that is set for an open house. It feels strategically “homey” but not overdone. Obviously staged (in a typical way that anyone should be able to see themselves living here), but charming.

There is a small couch center stage [ottoman optional] with a modern [glass?] coffee table in front of it. An accent chair sits to one side of the couch stage right, and a floor lamp nearby.

A little drop leaf table upstage left with a chair or two suggests a breakfast nook. On this table are flyers, a stack of business cards, maybe small bottles of water, and a sign that reads: *OPEN HOUSE*.

Note: The entrances and exits may be as straightforward as stage left and right akin to your typical proscenium space. However, (including on a proscenium stage) the production may see fit to have up/downstage exits designated to different rooms as may occur in an actual house. It is suggested here that the “front door” be off downstage left, and the garage upstage left. The “kitchen” might at least begin on stage right but the rest of that room could be off stage. We should be able to see the edge of it, as if suggestive of an island. Stairs to the upper level of the house for bedrooms (if the exit to the second floor cannot happen upstage center) are also off upstage right.

DANNY and OLIVIA are moving about the space, absorbing their surroundings. They are both working class. OLIVIA carries a tote bag that has seen better days. When possible, DANNY yields to let OLIVIA move in front of him.

DANNY

Ohh, Liv...I think this could be it.

OLIVIA

You said that about the last four places.

DANNY

Makes me wanna get a dog.  
Or a really active hamster.

OLIVIA

Excuse me if I take longer than two seconds to take it in.

DANNY

Hey, two seconds and so far no one's asked what your credit score is.

OLIVIA

Or assumed we weren't married.

DANNY

Yeah they were the worst.

OLIVIA

No, but she complimented my hair so that made it okay, remember?

DANNY sighs.

OLIVIA

Always something.

DANNY plops down on the couch while  
OLIVIA checks her cellphone.

OLIVIA

She's still at it, by the way.

DANNY sighs again, louder and more jocular.

OLIVIA

C'mon, you knew she wouldn't drop it.

DANNY

She didn't mean to get you worked up. She just thought you could use the help, that's all.

OLIVIA

That's what I have you for. I thought you were going to talk to her so--

DANNY

I did talk to her, Liv. You know how long it takes for stuff to sink in. Just give her a couple weeks and it'll blow over. She'll move on to the next hyper-fixation, you won't hear another word about it.

OLIVIA

Psshht. If we move to this neighborhood I'll be hearing about it for the rest of our natural lives.

DANNY

Don't overdo it. She'll kick the bucket before we do.

OLIVIA

Like that will stop her.

DANNY

She's not wrong.

OLIVIA

Of course not--she's *absolutely right*! You know I love your mother, always have. She is a blessing upon blessing when it comes to mother-in-laws. But she thinks we can't afford this neighborhood--that's what she said. That we need to look for somewhere "cheaper" to live. Shouldn't we be the ones moaning and groaning about how expensive everything is? It's my right as a mid-tier millennial--I have so few pleasures.

DANNY

She's trying to empathize. I never should've gotten her on Zillow--that one's on me.

OLIVIA gives DANNY a look. DANNY gently pulls OLIVIA down to him on the couch.

DANNY

She was curious!

OLIVIA

Then next time, she can call *you* at 7AM on a Saturday to rant about the housing market. A bunch of stuff we already know.

DANNY goes in for a kiss.

OLIVIA

Aye, don't you mess up my--

DANNY

It's fine.

He takes the phone out of her hand and tosses it, perhaps intending to aim behind himself on the couch. Instead, he misses and hits the coffee table. We might hear a crack. OLIVIA gasps.

OLIVIA

What the hell, baby!

DANNY

I didn't do it.

He grabs her phone.

It's not even cracked, you're good.

OLIVIA

Not the phone.

She turns his face to the coffee table.

DANNY

Oh. I didn't--

OLIVIA

You really did.

DANNY

Sorry! It's a small little crack, I mean--nobody will see it.

OLIVIA

It's bad enough that *I* see it.

DANNY

What if we turn it around?

He gets up to try and move it.

Oh, it weighs a ton! The heaviest staging furniture I've ever--

OLIVIA

Stop. Just don't call attention to it.

CARRIE, the realtor, enters. She is dressed in fashionable and professional attire, not a hair out of place. Her manner is sincere.

CARRIE

Oh hi there! Welcome, welcome. How are ya?

OLIVIA

Hi, we're alright, thanks.

DANNY

Hey, how are you?

CARRIE

I'm Carrie Windleberg, Grossman-Windleberg Realty. Were you able to find the place okay?

DANNY

Lot's a turns out there but we found it. Followed the signs.

CARRIE

Oh, I know. It's tucked up back here. But it's the only single family home available in the neighborhood. I'm sure you passed by those new condos down the way.

DANNY

Yeah, new builds.

CARRIE

They are, but if you want a detached home--this is it. We have the open house going until 4PM today, and--

OLIVIA

Yes, I got one of your flyers from the board at work.



OLIVIA whips out a flyer from her bag and holds it up, the same as the ones on the table: A company logo, and small picture of a man's face, event info, etc.

CARRIE

That's the one.

OLIVIA

We just caught the Zillow listing last night, too.

CARRIE

Good for you. So you got a look at the details, then.

DANNY

Yup, everything looks good on paper. Well, we were on my computer, but you get it.

CARRIE

I do. Did you have any questions off the bat?

DANNY

(Looking for OLIVIA to be sure)

I don't think so...?

OLIVIA

Now that we know there's condos next door, does this block get a lot of traffic?

CARRIE

Not typically. Like I mentioned, these lots are toward the back end, so you shouldn't see too much traffic outside of the norm. There's also a bus stop for you out on the--

DANNY

We're a two-car family. Think we'll risk the eco foot print and skip public transp--

OLIVIA

Is there an ensuite attached to the guest bedroom? It was hard to tell in the pictures.

CARRIE

Well, let me show you, right this way. There are three bedrooms; two upstairs and one on this level. You will love the master.

DANNY

Looked like vaulted ceilings in there.

OLIVIA

Oh, yes--now that I love. Makes everything look bigger and--

CARRIE

Mhm and the others are smaller so either one will make for a nice guest room or a home office.

She gestures for the couple to follow.

DANNY

Or a mother-in-law suite.

OLIVIA rolls her eyes, hard.

I'm joking, Liv--joking.

OLIVIA

Uh huh.

CARRIE

Oh and I'm sorry, I didn't catch your names.

OLIVIA

You're fine. I'm Olivia, and this is my husband Danny, the stand-up comedian.

DANNY

Actually I teach, but she doesn't find my teaching jokes funny. So I branch out.

CARRIE

I understand. My last buyer had a great sense of humor. On the agreement, under "Sign here," she just wrote "libra."

Silence.

A little real estate humor.

DANNY

See, she gets it.

CARRIE turns to DANNY directly.

OLIVIA

You sell a lot of homes in this area?

CARRIE

Yes, more so in the last few years but it always varies. I've been all over, even some of the affordable income districts.

OLIVIA

Okay.

CARRIE

Oh, you're familiar. Have you been looking in those neighborhoods too?

OLIVIA

No.

CARRIE

Ah. Um may I ask, are you working with a lender?

OLIVIA

(Looking at CARRIE)

We're pre-approved. Right, hun?

DANNY

Yup.

CARRIE

Oh. Wonderful.

OLIVIA

That ensuite...?

CARRIE

Yes--up the stairs, right this way.

OLIVIA motions for DANNY to join her and  
CARRIE.

As they go off:

DANNY

Stairs, Liv. The last place was a ranch style.

OLIVIA

It might be good to have a floor in between us every now and then.

She takes his hand and kisses him on the cheek.  
They exit.

LISA enters, stylishly dressed, wearing sunglasses and high heels. She carries a purse and would probably have a small dog in it if she could.

She takes a look around, maybe lifts up a throw pillow from the couch. She holds a phone up in selfie-mode to check the lighting. Good. She looks up over her glasses. Still good. LISA moseys about. Does she like it or doesn't she? She crosses to the accent chair to sit. She strikes a very awkward, but in her mind very model-esque, pose in the chair.

LISA

This is...

She adjusts herself, takes a selfie.

Yeah, this is so cute.

LOUIS enters. He looks corporate in a well-tailored suit. LISA is very snappy with her father. Not mean, although definitely with an edge. He isn't in the room two seconds before...

LISA

Oh my gosh, Dad. Cutest place you've ever seen.

No response from LOUIS.

It's soo cute, right? There's like a little couch and everything.

LOUIS

Did they say the furniture is--

LISA

But, like, this is cute. Just imagine me sitting here, like--

She demonstrates, taking a seat on the couch.  
--oohh, what a hard day I've just had. I need to rest, maybe grab a book placed here on my cute little coffee table while I sip matcha and pay my bills.

LOUIS

If you're just here to play house--

LISA

Dad.

LOUIS

I'm trying to remain open-minded, really, but--

LISA

*Remain?* The whole drive over, and now--standing in a house--a small house, but a house--you call that "open minded?"

LOUIS

Do you think it has anything to do with you putting down multiple deposits // and then changing your mind?

LISA

//and then changing your mind.  
I get it already.

LOUIS

Mhmm.

LISA

This place is, like, so me. So unassuming. With the cute floors and cute little kitchen over there and the--

LOUIS

(Heavy sarcasm)

Oh is it cute? I'm just trying to figure out if it's cute.

LISA

Ugh! I wouldn't have asked you to come if I knew you were going to be all...

She gestures to the whole of her father.

LOUIS

On the contrary, there was no way on earth you were coming out here alone. Not again. Besides, your mother made me.

LISA

How many times do I have to say it? I'm not, like, some little kid! I'm a grown-ass woman.

LOUIS

And you'll watch your mouth just the same, Lisa.

LISA

You know what I mean. We talked about this, I'm not--

LOUIS

We did. And it will only take going through all the motions for you to see that you're *wrong*. We came to see the house, so...

LISA

So shhh!

A pause.

Alright, alright. But you have to admit this couch is just--

LOUIS

Please. *Everything* is not. Cute.

LISA

You're such a wet blanket. You're telling me there's nothing about this you like.

LOUIS takes a moment to look around. He mutters a bit as he walks the living room. He specifically does not approach the breakfast nook table. Maybe it's mock consideration for his daughter's sake.

LOUIS

It's small. I suppose...the floors are nice. Probably a laminate, but still.

Another moment.

They go with the countertops over in the kitchen.

LISA

See, that's better. Skip to the part where you're fully on board.

She plops down on the couch.

LOUIS

If you expected me to keep my moth shut, I hate to be the bearer of bad news but that is literally the opposite of why I'm here.

Don't look at me like that--I know I just said "literally."

LISA

Maybe there's hope for you yet.

She laughs. Heavy sigh from LOUIS. He takes another look around, perhaps glances out of a window.

LOUIS

Your grandparents used to live not too far from here. I grew up close by. Before any of *this* was here, when it was all woods.

LISA nods, not looking at him.

They never wanted me playing over there...easy to get lost, and all that. Now, it's...I don't want you to feel lost with a big decision like this. Everything's so much more expensive now, no one knows that better than I do--

LISA

I'm not lost. This is me trying to *find* my way.

LOUIS

It's not like when we got our first house. You can really get into trouble if you're not prepared for what's to come. Things are so different.

LISA

And? I can't really help that. But look at what happened. Mom told me about when you guys first started. And grandpa gave you a huge loan--I noticed you're leaving that part out.

LOUIS

Money went farther then. And interest rates were--

LISA

And we live in a great big house that you pay other people to take care of.

LOUIS

Now, hang on.

LISA

You hang on.

LOUIS

That's reductionist, don't you think?

LISA

I'm not saying it's, like, a bad thing. Just the truth.

LOUIS

Alright. Let's say for argument's sake that you're completely right.

LISA

I am.

LOUIS

And because of what we have, I've been able to give you just about whatever you wanted. Certainly whatever you needed. I'm starting to think this kept you from seeing things the way they are. You haven't had to work a bunch of jobs, or worry about payments for--

LISA

You and mom moved into our great big house and hired people to take care of it because you have money. Now *you* only go to work when they need you, and she's over at the private club swimming and playing tennis every day. Here I am, trying to do something on my own and you think I don't know what I'm doing because my life has been too "*easy*" up 'til now?



LOUIS

Yes.

LISA

Ugghh!

LOUIS

You have yet to demonstrate otherwise.

LISA

I'm a freaking business owner!

LOUIS

I wouldn't call your Instagram style thing a business.

LISA

Ugh, that's how much you've been paying attention--it's not solely on Instagram. Stop saying that just because it's the only other platform you've ever heard of.

LOUIS

Tumblr!

LISA

Oh my God.

Own up to the fact that you always underestimate me.

LOUIS

Don't even try that one. Oh, I wish your mom was here. If anything, this is only further confirmation that you aren't ready for this. Let's go ahead and get out of here before the realtor guy shows up.

LISA

Stop right there. Where did "remaining open-minded" go?

LOUIS

You'll thank me for it later. Don't forget, I'm the parent.

LISA

We came all the way out here, I'm not leaving until I see the whole place. Top to bottom.

LOUIS' phone rings. He checks it.

LOUIS

Work--I have to take this. Shouldn't be more than a couple minutes. Don't you move.

LISA

It won't kill you if I move a little.

LOUIS

Just--

He gestures for her not to move, for instance planting his hands firmly in the air. LISA makes an equally firm but mock gesture toward him. LOUIS exits.

LISA gets up from the couch and makes her way to the coffee table. She holds up the flyer.

LISA

Hm.

She looks offstage toward the kitchen. Tacky backslash? Still holding the flyer, she looks down at the floors. Really looks. She gets down on the floor and knocks.

Uh huh.

For no reason. This doesn't tell her anything at all. She gets up and starts jumping up and down, testing it.

Sturdy. No sinking. Laminate or not, that's good. I think?

LISA jumps again and accidentally knocks over the lamp. Perhaps the sound of broken glass.

Shoot! No, no, ohh shoot.

She picks it up, turning it toward the audience to see that the back half is damaged. Trying not to make a thing of it, she turns it conveniently to the side, away from the front door and the audience.

The light bulb flickers, then turns off. She gives it a tap, a shake, and it comes back on. She slowly backs off, sitting back on the couch.

CARRIE enters.

CARRIE

Take your time looking at the closet space!

(To LISA)

Oh, I knew I heard someone come in. Hi, I'm Carrie Windleberg of Grossman-Windleberg Realty. Are you finding everything--?

LISA

No. Way.

CARRIE

Pardon me?

LISA

You're the realtor? What about that guy?

She points to the flyers.

CARRIE

Ah, that's my husband. It's our realty company.

LISA

Wow. I mean you seem like a real person. Not some phony middle-aged lady with shoulder pads trying to show me a clubhouse with a treadmill and call it an amenity.

CARRIE

(Trying for a joke)

I always make sure to cut the shoulder pads out of my...

LISA is unamused.

Nevermind.

Sounds like you've been doing some house hunting.

LISA

I'm weighing my options. I've seen a few places that I thought were pretty cu--live-able...

CARRIE

Well this house certainly has its charms. I'm happy to answer any--

LISA

Like I was saying, like, I could see some places being a good fit, but I couldn't fully visualize myself actually living there--does that make sense?  
Plus my parents are totally...

She leans in toward CARRIE,

*...up my ass* about this whole thing.

CARRIE

Ahhh.

This will be your first home, right?

LISA

Yeah! Ohmygosh you're, like, so perceptive.

CARRIE

Sure. May I ask, have you considered apartment living? I don't want to dissuade you but, as someone who's helped a lot of first-time buyers, sometimes it can be easier to navigate. And it provides a little more peace of mind for your parents, too.

LISA

Do you have children?

CARRIE

I don't.

LISA

Mhmm.

But you, like, run your own business doing this...?

CARRIE

I'm not sure what you mean.

LISA

I'm saying you...you show houses and do paperwork, and sell properties--all that stuff yourself?

CARRIE

That's right. My husband and I, we're fifty-fifty so we do it all.

LISA

Wow. You're a total girl-boss. And this place is so much cuter than that luxury apartment I looked at the other day. Very Sex in the City, but...Oh and your name is Carrie, that's so funny! You're like Sarah Jessica Parker if she wasn't a writer and was into selling houses instead...

(looking Carrie up and down)

And instead of wearing Manolo Blahniks, she chose...those shoes.

CARRIE

Please. Don't use that show to set your expectations. It paints an unrealistic picture of homeownership. Writing one newspaper column a week and living in *that* apartment? Practically speaking, it's the same as the average blogger or a freelance content creator today were able to live on that alone in the most expensive city in America. Without roommates.

This deflates LISA a little.

LISA

That's what I do--well sort of. Part stylist, part content creation.

CARRIE

Oh dear, you don't say.

LISA

(Curtly)

I do say.

I finished an online degree in business administration last year and turned my Instagram following into a streamlined customer hub. We work with small, family-owned retailers and brand invigorators to outsource some of their marketing and create style guides for them. Just me and some friends. It hasn't been suuuper lucrative yet, but we have big things in the works.

What? Gotta have multiple streams of income. Hashtag girl-boss.

CARRIE

I can't say I know what any of that means. Did you say you came with your parents? Your mother, is she...?

LISA

Please. My mom's off working on her backhand swing. She's not super into this kinda thing...business women like us.

CARRIE

Uh huh. Yes, well, you're welcome to take a look around. I have detailed listing sheets there if you'd like one.

She points for LISA to look down at the table.  
And I'm here if you need anything at all or want more // information for--

LISA

You aren't going to show me around?

CARRIE

Oh, no I'm happy to if you'd like a tour. Open houses are a little more casual, people in and out at their leisure. So // I'm here to...

LISA

Hm, no I'd like the tour. I usually go by appointment and get shown around by these women--

CARRIE

With the shoulder pads?

Right, well. Let me just say this house has three bedrooms, and I'll tell you that two are on the small side. Perhaps too small // for what you're...

LISA

Mmmm cozy.

CARRIE moves about the space, beginning the tour. LISA sticks to her like glue.

CARRIE

All the furniture is negotiable, you can have anything you see here included an offer on the house. They were all made-to-order pieces. Custom fabrics and all, no longer available to be made elsewhere. The kitchen you see over there has an electric stove. The appliances are stainless steel. There's a decent sized pantry right off the kitchen and also a half bath down on this floor. The entrance to the garage is over here.

LISA

One car or two? I didn't pay attention to that coming in.

CARRIE

One--unfortunately.

LISA

Perfect! It's just me and I don't need enough room for bugs and little critters to find their way in. I hate that.

CARRIE attempts to create a bit of distance. It doesn't work.

CARRIE

Right. And I don't know how much time you spend outdoors, but there's a small patio leading to the back yard. Now, if you're concerned about maintenance you may want to consider one of the lawn companies that service around this neighborhood. There's a--

LISA

Actually, I happen to keep plants at home. I have a very green finger.

CARRIE

Thumb.

LISA

Yes.

The lamp flickers. CARRIE is turned away from it and does not notice. LISA, however, sees it blink.

CARRIE

Right, well...

CARRIE starts to turn, perhaps seeing a shift in light in the room.

As I was saying, if you feel like taking a peek at the yard we have a sliding door connected // to the kitchen.

LISA

You know what I would love?

LISA crosses to CARRIE to keep her attention.

CARRIE

I couldn't begin to guess.

LISA

Can I see the smaller bedrooms? I think I might like to have an office.

CARRIE

The second bedroom is right up the stairs, this way. The first door on the left. The master is on the right, you'll see it.

LISA gestures for CARRIE to go ahead of her.

LISA

I might have some questions, if you, like, don't mind?

CARRIE

Of course not, no. Right this way.

They exit.

OLIVIA and DANNY enter. Perhaps they bump into CARRIE and LISA on the stairs, each giving a brief hello but not stopping to interact yet.

Once OLIVIA and DANNY are on the ground floor, CARRIE calls to them from the stairs.

CARRIE

Oh, did you have any more thoughts on the master bath?

OLIVIA

I really like it. He thinks there's not enough counter space.

DANNY

I know how you are--you like to see all your products lined up at the same time. But anyway, it's not bad.

LISA

(From offstage)

Oh this is so cuute up here!



CARRIE

I'll be back down in a moment.

OLIVIA

Oh, no rush. Thanks.

CARRIE reluctantly exits.

DANNY

Okay it's bad.

OLIVIA

I know right. I do not envy Carrie. That other girl sounds...interesting.

DANNY

No, not that. The bathroom--the house.

OLIVIA

What, why? What happened to "I think this could be it?"

DANNY

I don't know. You really like it that much?

OLIVIA

I'm as surprised as you are, but yes. I reeeally like it, baby. I can see us here.

DANNY

I don't know. A clawfoot tub and shower? Doesn't that seem like too much....

OLIVIA

You're crazy! You don't realize how much of a luxury having a separate tub and shower can be.

DANNY

You don't use the tub at home.

OLIVIA

I might, if it was larger than a bucket.

DANNY

Pssst. It's at least 2 buckets.

OLIVIA

And that's the whole point. We're here in the first place because we need more space. As for the counter space, it's a perfect layout with the his and hers sinks, and I'll get one of those organizing bins from Target to put all my stuff in.

DANNY

Any excuse for you to sneak off to Target.

OLIVIA

Don't take this out on Target. You can honestly say you can't see us here?

DANNY moves about the space in much the same way OLIVIA did earlier.

At some point OLIVIA crosses to get a bottle of water from the table. She picks one up but decides against it. Instead she pulls a can of soda or perhaps a bottled juice from her tote bag.

Definitely drink with color in it.

There's two office spots to choose from in this house. So we don't have to be on top of each other all the time.

DANNY

That's a problem now?

He seductively teases OLIVIA.

OLIVIA

You know what I mean.

DANNY

I should get a new hard drive?

OLIVIA

Danny.

DANNY

Liv, I don't know. I like it, honestly I do.

OLIVIA

Alright so what's the issue?

DANNY

You sure you don't want to look at anything else?

OLIVIA

We've been looking for long enough. You should be just as sick of it as I am.

DANNY

No, it's exciting. Trying to imagine our lives in all these different places. I know you haven't enjoyed it, but--

OLIVIA

How come as soon as I love a place, that's when you've got reservations?

DANNY

Hey, come on. Let's look at the kitchen.

OLIVIA

Which, by the way, is also a great size since you hate cooking.

DANNY

I don't hate cooking. And if it's too small for us, then...

OLIVIA

Ugh, I'm coming.

DANNY

Oh! And we haven't looked at the yard yet either.

OLIVIA

Okay, okay, I said I'm coming!

From the back side of the couch, OLIVIA  
throws up her hands, spilling her drink on the  
cushions. She gasps. It's very obvious.

OLIVIA

No! No, oh, Jesus, no.

DANNY

Look what you did!

Me?

Nuh uh.

OLIVIA

Look what you made me do!

Me?

No!

OLIVIA

Quick, grab a water.

DANNY

You don't use water to get a stain out, you use baking soda.

OLIVIA

Okay so get me baking soda then.

DANNY turns about-face toward the kitchen,  
then remembers.

DANNY

There probably isn't any.

OLIVIA

You don't say!

DANNY

I'll check anyway.

OLIVIA

Hurry, before it sets.

DANNY

Alright, alright.

DANNY exits to the kitchen while OLIVIA  
grabs napkins from her bag. She goes to work  
dabbing at the spill.

The sound of cabinets opening, general hubbub  
coming from the kitchen.

OLIVIA

Anything?

DANNY

Will this help?

A sponge flies on stage toward OLIVIA. Either A) It hits the lamp and knocks it over or B) OLIVIA jumps up to try and catch it, fumbles, and knocks it over herself. In either case, she clenches her teeth at the mess. The light flickers as she quickly goes over to assess the damage.

DANNY re-enters.

DANNY

No baking soda, you were right.

He takes in the scene.

What the hell, Liv?

OLIVIA

What kind of throw was that?

DANNY

You should've gone long.

OLIVIA

You didn't tell me--it landed short anyway!

DANNY

Is it broken?

OLIVIA

I don't think...

She flips it over to the previously damaged side.

Yes.

DANNY

Liv--

OLIVIA

Don't you *Liv* me. Try to get that stain out while I try to fix it.

DANNY

Nahh, this is what happens when you're in charge. Let me fix the lamp and you work on the stain.

OLIVIA glares chilling at DANNY.

Well, watch out, I have to try and get that stain out!

He crosses her to get to the couch. He takes up the sponge and starts dabbing.

They're never going to let us buy the house now.

OLIVIA adjusts the light bulb to try and get it to stop flickering, or to turn back on if it is off at this point.

OLIVIA

Over this? Don't be dramatic, accidents happen.

DANNY

Then why are we acting like we just murdered somebody?

OLIVIA

It'll be okay. When we tell her we have the earnest money for--

DANNY

*You* have the earnest money.

OLIVIA

What?

DANNY

Nothing.

Hand me a water, will you?

As OLIVIA moves to the table, the lamp wobbles. DANNY catches it just before it hits the ground again. [In the process he hits his leg on the coffee table.]

DANNY

Olivia!

OLIVIA

Okay, here.

She tosses him a bottle. It hits him - SMACK.

DANNY cringes, OLIVIA cringes.

Are you okay, hun? I'm sorry!

DANNY

Just stay on that side of the room for a minute, huh.

OLIVIA

But the lamp, I gotta--

DANNY

No, no, I've got it. You please just stay there and don't touch anything. If I can't help show we're serious about buying a house the least I can do is clean up the mess.

OLIVIA

Okay. That. What is that?

DANNY

It's no--

OLIVIA

If you say it's nothing I'm gonna throw another bottle at you.

DANNY

So it was on purpose?

OLIVIA

No! What do you mean "if you can't help to show we're serious?"

DANNY

It's not a big deal. I know we talked about it, and you're covering the earnest money to put down for us. But...

OLIVIA

But...?

DANNY

But aren't I allowed to feel a little, I don't know..

OLIVIA

You can't be serious.

DANNY

Great talk.

OLIVIA

No, we're talking. And we decided three showings ago that I would do it. It makes more sense to--

DANNY

I know, and it does. Just...I'm a little hesitant. I wish I could help more at this stage of the game.

OLIVIA

You're doing summer school this year, that helps. And when I get busy with work stuff, you stay on the search.

DANNY

Well I had mom to look at--

A look from OLIVIA.

No, yeah you're right. I do that.

OLIVIA

And you know I need you for the next part the most. You're not off the hook that easy. Soo...

DANNY

So?

OLIVIA

So we're good? Still on track?

DANNY kisses OLIVIA on the cheek and they embrace. It gets a little frisky until OLIVIA pulls away.

Wait, you hear that?



DANNY

What? Are they back?

OLIVIA

Shhh! Someone's coming, the front door.

There is a moment of chaos as they try to right things. They might whisper instructions to one another while they fix their respective areas.

OLIVIA violently shakes the lamp to get it to come back on and attempts to put the broken bits back. DANNY rubs the sponge on the sofa, probably making the stain worse. He then gives up, putting a large throw pillow over it. He arranges any other pillows in a cluster. Because that makes sense.

LOUIS comes in through the front door, talking on the phone. At the sound of his entrance, OLIVIA and DANNY snap to "casual" positions.

LOUIS

Just send me an email and I'll review everything. I have to go I'm with my kid, she's...

He sees OLIVIA and DANNY.

...somewhere.

Yes, tomorrow. Right.

(To OLIVIA & DANNY)

Hope I'm not disturbing you there.

OLIVIA

Oh, nope, we're just...

OLIVIA attempts to move, but realizes she's holding a piece of the lamp in her hand that won't go back where it needs to. She immediately resumes her pose.

DANNY

Meandering about.

LOUIS

Enjoying the open house?

DANNY

Oh, yeah, great house. Great house.

OLIVIA

Lovely house. We love it. Just so much.

DANNY

It's the Target of houses.

LOUIS

Have you seen a young woman around anywhere?

OLIVIA

Upstairs.

LOUIS

Oh okay, thanks.

LOUIS begins crossing to the stairs stage right.  
As he goes, OLIVIA and DANNY adjust  
themselves, facing LOUIS so as not give away  
their mess.

He turns to OLIVIA and DANNY.

My daughter. She's looking for her own place.

DANNY

You must be so proud.

OLIVIA

I'm sure she'll like your input. Just up the stairs.

LOUIS

On the contrary, she's upset with me. She's what you might call a "free spirit"--thinks  
I'm holding her back.

DANNY

Ah, you know--kids.

LOUIS

Do you have any?

OLIVIA

God, no. We don't have any kids.

DANNY

Nope, not yet. Just us.

LOUIS

Well, take your time. Kids become teenagers. Teenagers become young adults. And young adults think they know everything.

OLIVIA

(To DANNY)

Sweetie, why don't you go see what's keeping them upstairs. Sounds like this nice man needs to have a talk with his daughter, and I need to ask the realtor a few more questions about the property.

LOUIS

Oh, there's no need. It's Louis Marshall.

He holds his hand out for OLIVIA to shake, but this would mean she needs to let go of the lamp. She stares at his hand for a second, unsure what to do.

OLIVIA

I'm Olivia and that's Danny, my husband.

LOUIS looks over at DANNY who nods.

DANNY

Why don't you go, darling? I can shoot the breeze with Mr. Marshall here.

During the following, LOUIS fully turns to address DANNY. With his back to OLIVIA, she gestures frantically for DANNY to stall for her.

LOUIS

That's alright. We're all just looking around.

Say, what's your impression of the place? It feels okay, but what do you think?

DANNY comes from around the couch.

Meanwhile, OLIVIA tries to hide the broken lamp piece throughout the following.

DANNY

Uh, well, y'know, my wife likes it. I liked it at first, but now I'm not so sure.

LOUIS

Oh yeah? What are your reservations if you don't mind me asking?

DANNY

Uh, I mean. You know. It's a house. Uh...the garage--I haven't looked in there yet, but there's two of us and it only fits one. So you know who's parking in the driveway, am I right?

LOUIS

Mhm. What else didn't you like?

DANNY

I, uh--we--mentioned that we don't have kids, but it's a questionable school district. Right? Lot'a low test scores and uh, shorter recess time and, well, you probably don't have to worry about all that. If your daughter is buying a house she's obviously not going to school, like high school I mean. Now that I think about it, if it's just her then that means only one car for the garage too. Of course, it's, uh, barely big enough for storage--more like a *vroom* closet.

LOUIS

Okayyy.

OLIVIA rolls her eyes at her husband, then starts putting the piece of lamp underneath the throw pillow that covers the stain.

DANNY

No, not there!

LOUIS

What?

DANNY

Um...the garage, why worry about things in there when you've got a yard the size of sandbox?

LOUIS

It seemed okay to me. Maybe I'll have a look.

DANNY

Oh sure. Take a nice long look out there. Me? I like a decent yard and I'm not sure this'll do, but to each their own, right?

He begins walking LOUIS stage right.

LOUIS

Right.

DANNY

Your daughter will probably be down in a minute with the realtor. We'll be sure to tell her you're out here.

LOUIS

Alright. If it's as small as you say it probably won't take long anyhow.

LOUIS exits.

OLIVIA

Really?

DANNY

What, I did my best!

OLIVIA

While you were running your mouth, I remembered I have cleaning solution in the car.

DANNY

Why?

OLIVIA

For situations like this where I end up cleaning up after white people.

DANNY

But you started--!

OLIVIA

And I'll finish it. *You* have enough to pay for damages?

DANNY

Just--

OLIVIA

That's what I thought.

DANNY

Okay, low blow.

OLIVIA

No, that's not what I meant.

DANNY

Just admit that it's a little bit your fault.

OLIVIA

...

Fine.

DANNY

That's it?

OLIVIA

What, I said it.

DANNY

Can you say it and mean it?

OLIVIA

Are you still here?

Just go, Danny, please. 'Cause time is of the essence.

DANNY quickly heads for the door. OLIVIA grabs him as he passes. She kisses him on the cheek.

Love you. Now go. In the trunk.

He kisses her on the forehead with tender haste.

When DANNY is gone, OLIVIA resumes hiding the piece of broken lamp under the pillow with the stain.

LOUIS

Oh, noo.

OLIVIA

What? What?

She immediately distances herself from the mess. LOUIS might pace throughout the following conversation.

LOUIS

It's cute.

OLIVIA

I'm sorry?

LOUIS

The yard. It's cute.

OLIVIA

And that's bad?

LOUIS

Yes. Lisa--my daughter--she's probably saw it and said the same thing.

OLIVIA

You're having a tough time with helping her look around.

LOUIS

She's just a kid. We indulge her too much, my wife and I. She's so eager to move out; she just started taking on more responsibility with this new job thing of hers.

OLIVIA

What does she do?

LOUIS

Isn't that the question. Couldn't tell you if I wanted to.

OLIVIA

She sounds headstrong. Not a bad quality for somebody buying their first home, or so I've heard. This will be our first house-house, we've been living in apartments since we've been married.

LOUIS

That was me and my wife when we were...well, a little younger than you probably. Actually, closer to my daughter's age.

OLIVIA

You helping her buy?

LOUIS

Y-yes.

OLIVIA

Mhm.

Maybe she takes after you, then.

LOUIS

I don't think she wants to. She idealizes what was like when she was little, before my wife and I made any real money. Now we have more than we can--well, we're...comfortable. And I don't think Lisa appreciates what we've done.

(To himself)

Where is she anyway?

OLIVIA

Uh huh.



LOUIS

Sorry if I'm lamenting, I don't know why I'm telling you all this. But it was a long time before we could afford even this kind of house. Months.

OLIVIA

Months.

LOUIS

Yes, my parents were only able to help out so much.

OLIVIA

Okay.

LOUIS

We got lucky. Made some good decisions before Lisa was born, my parents helped, and when she was a toddler running around we really came into it with my company and...Now she *thinks* she knows what she's doing when she's been under our umbrella her whole life.

OLIVIA

Mhmm.

LOUIS

Maybe it's the generational divide. Is it tone deaf if I can't understand why she'd want to move out when she has everything she'd ever need at home?

OLIVIA

I can think of worse cases to be tone deaf.

CARRIE enters from the "stairs." She pauses there, maybe straightening herself a little.

OLIVIA and LOUIS take no notice of her. After a moment she listens in, upstage of the conversation.

LOUIS

I don't know what she could get out there that would be better than what we've given her. As nice as this house seems to be, I simply // can't see it.

OLIVIA

//Don't take this the wrong way even though I mean it exactly how it sounds..but you're crying rich people tears and I can't go there with you.

CARRIE, who began to exit, back to the stairs stopped in her tracks at the word *rich*.

LOUIS

Excuse me?

OLIVIA

Look--Louis? Don't get me wrong, everyone has their problems, right? But buying your child's first home is hardly high on the list. Sounds like something you're lucky you're able to do. Something you have a certain...privilege to do.

LOUIS

I see.

OLIVIA

Hope you don't mind me asking--and since you shared your life story I think we're on that level--could you afford this house? If you wanted it.

LOUIS

Yes.

OLIVIA

Above asking price?

LOUIS

...

OLIVIA

How much?

LOUIS

I don't think, uh...

OLIVIA

It's okay. How much above asking price could you pay for it?

LOUIS

Really? We don't need to get into--

OLIVIA

Yes, really; here, you stop me when I've reached the magic number.

The lamp flickers off and on again.

LOUIS

Tsk tsk tsk. You see that? And nothing else blinked, must be faulty wiring. // Not good.

OLIVIA

Aht, don't change the subject--bring it back here.

10 thousand more than asking price.

LOUIS

...

OLIVIA

15 thousand more?

20?

25?

30?

LOUIS clears his throat.

OLIVIA

40 thousand?

50?

75?

100 thousand?

CARRIE is practically salivating.

200?

350 thousand?

LOUIS

I don't like this game.

OLIVIA

Quarter of a mil?

LOUIS

That's going backwards.

CARRIE retreats offstage.

OLIVIA

I'm just saying. Things are pretty good from where you're sitting.

LOUIS

I get it, alright?

OLIVIA

Do you? 'Cause you're also talking about all this stuff with your daughter and it looks like you haven't acknowledged the one thing she probably really wants?

LOUIS

Which is?

OLIVIA

I'm sure you'll think of it.

LOUIS

I'm sorry if I come off...I didn't mean to...

OLIVIA

To...?

LOUIS

You have to understand--

OLIVIA

No, I think I'm okay.

Maybe you should take some of that to your daughter, though. Lisa? She might appreciate a little understanding.

LOUIS

You might be onto something.

By now, LOUIS has moved near the accent chair. He takes a seat, gesturing for her to sit on the couch in a very friendly, non-order-y fashion.

OLIVIA

Might be.

She sits directly on the pillow covering the stain and broken piece of lamp. The muffled sound of shattering glass is heard.

LOUIS

What was that?

OLIVIA

Nothing! Nothing.

The lamp goes out as CARRIE re-enters.

CARRIE

Are you two doing all right?

OLIVIA

Not rich, but I'm fine.

LOUIS

I think we're good.

LOUIS rises from his seat.

CARRIE

Oh, you must be Lisa's father. It's a pleasure to meet...

For the first time CARRIE gets a good look at him.

CARRIE

Lou?

LOUIS

Carrie?

CARRIE

I'm sorry--I thought you were someone else...What are you doing here?

LOUIS

I'm, er...the open house.

CARRIE

Gosh, I didn't recognize you from the back.

LOUIS

What?

CARRIE

That is, I didn't recognize you. What are you doing at my open house?

LOUIS

I didn't realize it was yours. Obviously I didn't expect to see you here.

CARRIE

Obviously?

LOUIS

What?

CARRIE

Nothing.

OLIVIA

Carrie, do you mind if I ask--?

CARRIE

Just obviously if you *had* expected me here, you wouldn't have come. That's what that means.

LOUIS

No, why would you say that?

CARRIE

Because it's true?

LOUIS

(Clearing his throat)

We really don't have to get into this here.

CARRIE

You're right we don't.

You are here now and interested in the house. I'm a realtor. I'll show you around. Right this way.

She turns, expecting LOUIS to follow.

LOUIS

Thought you never wanted to be forced into the business.

CARRIE turns on her heels.

CARRIE

I thought we weren't getting into this here.

LOUIS

And so we aren't.

CARRIE starts to go again.

It's, ah, very nice. Quaint.

CARRIE spins.

CARRIE

Listen. *Obviously* I didn't expect to see you in my neck of the woods, and--

LOUIS

Your neck of the woods? You know I grew up pretty close by. You obviously don't own this side of town.

CARRIE

If you're looking for a house here your wife *obviously* kicked you out.

LOUIS

Nobody kicked me out, she and I are perfectly happy.

CARRIE

Then what are you doing here? We agreed not to speak to each other after grad--

LOUIS

And I thought we agreed to be mature. We're grown, Carrie.

They both remember OLIVIA.

OLIVIA

Don't feel like you have to stop on my account. Whatever...this is.

LOUIS

You said you hated your mom forcing you into real estate.

CARRIE

(Angered whisper)

I grew up!

LOUIS

Grew up or sold out?

CARRIE

You're one to talk, Lou. Killed any rainforests with that corporate CEO machine of yours lately?

LOUIS

We are very environmentally conscious! We've planted forests, not torn any down--to the best of my knowledge.

CARRIE

I'm working, alright. Just...if you aren't interested in the property, you should go.

LOUIS

I'm not here for me.

LISA

(From offstage)

Carrie! I thought you said you'd be right back. I have more questions about the linen closet.

CARRIE

Then why are you here?

LISA

(From offstage)

I just wanna see the garage and the yard--it's looks so cute from upstairs--and then I think I'm ready to sign on the--

LISA enters.

(To LOUIS)

Please tell me you're not trying to make her talk me out of it. Okay, so it *is* smaller than I thought, but--



CARRIE

Excuse me Lisa, this man is...?

LOUIS

Do you always call clients by their first name?

CARRIE

It builds rapport!

LISA

This is my uptight dad I was telling you about.

LOUIS

I'm uptight now?

LISA

When weren't you?

CARRIE

Louis Marshall? *This* is your father.

LISA

Yeah. Why--what did he say? Dad, what did you say to her?

LOUIS

Nothing, I didn't say anything.

CARRIE

If only that were true.

LISA

You're not messing this up for me, okay. Please. I know how you feel, and you know how I feel, and like, no one is changing their minds. If it's not this house, it's definitely going to be another. Can we just agree to disagree?

LOUIS

You've been showing my daughter the house, huh?

CARRIE

I didn't know she was your--

LISA

As a matter of fact, she has. She's like the cutest little realtor I've even seen. And she's just might sell me the place.

OLIVIA

On that subject, my husband and I are also very interested in it.

LISA

Wait but I think I want it too. What does that mean?

LOUIS

It means you're about to start a bidding war.

CARRIE

You'd hate that, wouldn't you?

LOUIS

Why don't you hold out until a less competitive time, Lisa? We can look again in...next year.

LISA

Nice try.

(To CARRIE)

I'd like to hear some options on how we decide who gets the house, please.

CARRIE

It comes down to the highest offer. It is a competitive time right now. You're sitting in a prime location, a quick commute downtown and the school districts are very--

LISA

(To LOUIS)

That means above asking price, okay.

CARRIE

Yes. Sometimes, way, waaay above, just to be sure you're accepted.

LOUIS

Hang on, what do you mean by--

CARRIE starts taking LISA to the side.

CARRIE

Like she said, they are also reeeally looking to buy. Just between us, I would make sure you--or your father--offers up a lot. A lot. More than you would think. To be safe. You don't want to see such a cute property snatched up from under you, right?

LISA

Well, actually--

DANNY re-enters through the front door,  
empty-handed.

DANNY

Okay I give up. You gotta take a look for yourself--why's there so much junk in your tru--...?

He notices everyone noticing him, then crosses  
to OLIVIA.

Hey, what'd I miss?

OLIVIA

(Hushed tones to DANNY)

What took you so long?

DANNY

I couldn't find the cleaning stuff, I looked all over.

CARRIE

The seller is motivated, but it will likely come down to dollar signs.

CARRIE turns to LISA who turns to LOUIS.

LOUIS

I know what you're doing. If you think I'm shelling out just to feed your commission you've got another thing coming. Who is this seller anyway?

CARRIE

If you must know, it's an older woman who moved in with her children. You wouldn't believe what we went through to get all the hard candy stains and cat hair out of the carpets upstairs, so don't get me started!

(Clearing her throat)

Why don't we take your father on the tour and show him why this may be the house for you?

LISA

Did you say candy and cat hair?

OLIVIA

Baby, I think we're losing.

DANNY

Aw. Shame. Guess we better see what's on the docket for next weekend. Regroup--

OLIVIA crosses to CARRIE, who doesn't give her full attention.

OLIVIA

Excuse me, Carrie, I was actually wanting to ask a few more questions.

CARRIE

Oh, um. We have some additional information on the back of the flyer.

OLIVIA

Yes, I saw, I'm just // wondering about...

CARRIE

You may find what you're looking for there.

OLIVIA takes a step closer to CARRIE, between her and the Marshalls.

OLIVIA

Actually, I would really enjoy *your* perspective on it. I waited patiently and I'm ready for some more help, please. As a prospective buyer, I'd appreciate any information you can give me.

A pause. It's awkward for some, necessary for others. DANNY crosses to OLIVIA's side.

DANNY

I'm sure that's not a problem.  
Right, Ms. Windleberg?

CARRIE

Of course. I mean, of course not.

OLIVIA

Great. Now, the attic. Would you mind showing me that entry? We passed it and I forgot to look at the storage space while we were up there.

CARRIE

Sure. Right this way.

Ms. Marshall...feel free to check out the backyard.

DANNY squeezes OLIVIA's shoulder. The three exit upstairs.

LISA

They are such goals.

LOUIS

Are you ready?

LISA

I am.

LOUIS

Great. Let's get out of here.

LISA

What if this is the one?!

LISA

What? Dad, no. We're going in circles, // you promised.

LOUIS

Here's the bottom line. You're not paying for the house. You want me to do this for you, you want my co-signature, you're going to have my say.

LISA

That's not fair. You shouldn't get to--

LOUIS

I should.

LISA plops down, maybe at the breakfast nook table.

LISA

You know. Carrie told me she was a young, single, just out of college...woman when she first moved out.

LOUIS rolls his eyes and plops himself on the accent chair. Like father like daughter?

She got into her own thing--her own business, her own money. Now look at her. She could be quicker with customer service, but lots of people your age are like that. Slow to cut to the chase.

LOUIS begins to exit toward the backyard and LISA follows a few paces behind.

LOUIS

Do NOT look to that woman as an inspiration.

LISA

Why not? She's--

LOUIS

She's playing for some old lady who probably doesn't care about--

LISA

She's done a bunch for herself.

LOUIS

I'll bet she has!  
And the backyard is not CUTE!

We hear a crash offstage, presumably the door to the backyard. If the production can accomplish this onstage, the better.

They rush back in, flustered.

LISA

Dad! What did you do?

LOUIS

I didn't mean to, you saw it. I was just opening the door!

LISA

You *broke* the door!

LOUIS

An accident. Maybe I can fix it. I'll look at it closer.

LISA

No, don't. If you make it worse, you'll mess up me getting the house.

LOUIS

Really, Lisa. No one's going to stop you buying a house just because you break something.

LISA

You did it, not me!

Wait. Was that you saying I can get the house?

LOUIS

Absolutely not.

LISA

Carrie might have something different to say about that.

LOUIS

She's not in charge, here.

LISA

She literally is.

LOUIS

How embarrassing this is. I'll have to see how much the damage costs. Does it look that bad? Maybe they won't notice.

As he says this, we might hear the sound of  
broken glass pieces falling, or another small  
cacophony signaling it is that bad.

Her house. It had to happen in *her* house. She can't know it was me, I won't live it down for another 20 years. Come on, let's go.

LISA

Would you wake up and see the big picture!!

LOUIS

What big picture?

LISA

Do you know how, like, condescending it is that I have to spell it out for you? Every time I try to do something serious, or like, follow an idea of my own, you never wanna treat me like an adult.

LOUIS

That is not--

LISA

It is. You're always hovering over me, I never do anything that's "to your liking." It's a wonder I could even get my business halfway off the ground. And that's only 'cause you don't believe in it! You can't even say what it is.

LOUIS

It's the content...styling...thing.

LISA

See! Why can't you see me having something of my own? Something you can't possibly give me.

A pause.

LOUIS

It's my money by definition giving you the house!

LISA

That's not what I mean.

You pay for it, but then I get to live in it. I get a space that's totally and completely mine. Everywhere I look at home it's all stuff that you and mom threw in my lap. A bunch of stuff I never even asked for. Except for the invitation to that birthday party in Greece...and the Swarovski crystal bracelet sets before that, but you know what I mean. I cannot focus, can't concentrate on what I want to do with my life in that house. I need out...

LOUIS

You do realize you could've merely rented an office space.



LISA

I'll bet Carrie's father didn't give her such a hard time when she bought--

LOUIS

Her father was insufferable! Both her parents had sticks up their butts and they never fell out no matter how many good grades she got or awards she won, and don't get me started on the numerous parttime jobs she worked // when all they...

LISA crosses to LOUIS.

LISA

What are you talking about? What, do know her or something?

LOUIS

Uh, well it's, she introduced herself. You were there.

LISA

Actually she didn't. I did. How do you know her? And her parents?

LOUIS

That, ah, it's a long, uninteresting story..

LISA

Go on. Explain how you know the realtor's parents were hard asses.

LOUIS

Language. I said they had sticks up their butts.

LISA

Uh huh!

LOUIS

Look, you don't need to worry about--

LISA

Dad!

LOUIS

Alright!

...

Carrie and I--

LISA

“Carrie and I?”

LOUIS

We used to date.

LISA

You used to date?

LOUIS

In college.

LISA

In college?

LOUIS

Will you stop that?

LISA

Oh, God. You hooked up with my realtor.

LOUIS

She is not *your* realtor. We just dated for a couple semesters, it was a lifetime ago.

LOUIS crosses to the flyers.

LISA

Ew.

LOUIS

It’s not “ew.” We were practically kids. Now I suppose she’s married to Glen Grossman. A complete misogynistic prick, for the record.

LISA

(Taunting)

Languaaaage.

LOUIS

That’s not cursing.

LISA

You can say “prick” but I can’t say “ass?”

LOUIS

Lisa!

LISA

Why’d you dump her?

LOUIS

She broke it off. The woman makes me nuts! After a while--it would be the most inconsequential things, we just made each other crazy. As if we were a couple of kids having spats on the playground. She was so critical and--

LISA

You are such a hypocrite. Telling me she’s not a kicka--butt, business lady when you went out with her before she made it!

LOUIS

So she’s doing well for herself. That hardly distinguishes--

LISA

Louis and Carrie, sittin’ in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes college, then comes marriage, then comes Lisa in a baby carriage. Holy crap, she could’ve been my mom!

LOUIS

You’re being childish. I’m not dignifying this with a response. Pushing it, y’know, really pushing it.

The others are heard offstage, preparing to enter.  
LOUIS and LISA look at each other.

LISA

Oh, duh! We haven’t even seen the garage yet!

LOUIS

Yes, the garage. Good point. Plenty to see in there.

LISA

Plenty! You’re totally right. Let’s check it out.

LOUIS

Right behind you.

LISA

And you can tell me more about your girlfriend’s amazing work ethic in college.

LOUIS

Knock it off, I said.

They scurry off as...

CARRIE follows behind OLIVIA and DANNY as they enter. Once there, CARRIE grabs a bottle of water from the table.

DANNY

Mom's not gonna go for it, I know that much.

OLIVIA

You're being ridiculous. This place is perfect. Even she will love it.

DANNY

Woah--perfect? Let me see the yard all the way.

OLIVIA

This isn't still about me being the one to pull the earnest--

DANNY

No, no, it's not about that.

OLIVIA

Sure feels like it.

DANNY

C'mon. I love that you love your job, and that you love making the big bucks. Maybe I can finally start my trophy husband phase.

OLIVIA

Ha ha.

DANNY

What? I've been working out, I have the figure for it.

OLIVIA

Try pulling that one on your kids when they fight you on going to P.E.  
Be for real.

DANNY

Okay. But you're right, it's our best bet for you to do the earnest so I have more on my end when we put the real money down. I'm not gonna win that. I get it. Even if I don't really like it--I get it.

OLIVIA

So then is this our house?

DANNY

I wouldn't go that far.

OLIVIA

Think reasonably for a sec, huh? There is nothing--and I mean nothing--wrong with this house. We didn't want a fixer-upper and we landed in the perfect combination of charming and not a million years old. Unless someone can come up with a really, really good reason why we shouldn't buy this place, I think we need to fight for it.

The lamp turns back on. CARRIE crosses to the edge of the kitchen. She splashes water from her bottle up to the ceiling out of view of OLIVIA and DANNY. This can be merely suggested for effectiveness. At some point she ditches her bottle, comically throwing it off stage.

DANNY

(Hushed tones)

You don't think that trust fund kid is going to take it from under us.

OLIVIA

Who would you sell to? A lil' twenty-something with daddy issues, *or* older twenty-to-early-thirty somethings? Someone who molds young minds, thereby shaping the very fabric of the country, and a network engineer who makes--

DANNY

Okay, I get it.

OLIVIA

We're still in the game.

DANNY

I'm saving you from disappointment when Daddy Warbucks pulls out the checkbook. We can't compete with them, hun.

OLIVIA sighs.

CARRIE

Oh my word!

DANNY

Everything okay?

CARRIE

I'm sorry, I've never had this happen before. I'm mortified.

OLIVIA

What?

CARRIE

It appears the ceiling is leaking.

Gasps from OLIVIA and DANNY as they look up and see water.

OLIVIA

Oh no!

DANNY

Where'd that come from?

CARRIE

I am so sorry, folks. I have heard this block received terrible plumbing work when the houses first came up. Swore they said all that was fixed.

While the couple's eyes are fixed to the ceiling next to the kitchen, CARRIE does the same to the floor next to the stairs.

OLIVIA

I didn't see this before, it's really coming through there.

LISA

Don't want to get our hair wet, do we?

OLIVIA

Excuse me?

LISA

Oh, no! I mean, why don't we step outside so I can call someone about it. I'm so sorry to end your visit like this, if you'll just--

DANNY

Babe, I'm--

CARRIE throws the water bottle into the garage. \*We hear a scream from offstage.

CARRIE

OH NO. There's more leakage here too!

DANNY

What?

OLIVIA

Really?

They run over to where CARRIE is standing.

DANNY slips on the puddle of water, probably landing behind the couch, out of view of the audience.

OLIVIA

Danny!

CARRIE

Oh! Are you okay!

OLIVIA

Danny? Baby, are you hurt?

DANNY groans on the floor. Maybe he sticks a thumbs-up over the back of the couch.

CARRIE

I'm so sorry. Here, let me help you.

She and OLIVIA get DANNY up. They each grab an arm.

I can assure you, we'll be letting the seller know about the leaks. At least it sounds like you still have a chance to keep looking.

OLIVIA

Ugh, I thought this was it.

DANNY

Where's the water coming from anyway? The upstairs bathrooms shouldn't be above either of those spots, I don't--

LOUIS and LISA enter. LOUIS is dripping wet from the waist up.

LISA

Oh Ms. Carrie!

CARRIE spins away, dropping DANNY who almost falls over from the sudden lack of support. She goes to LISA (as OLIVIA tends to him).

CARRIE

Yes! Are we ready to sign?

(Noticing LOUIS)

What happened to you, Lou--Mr. Marshall?

LOUIS

Someone threw a half-full water bottle into the garage!

LISA

Ah! Is that water coming from the ceiling?

CARRIE

Water? What water?

LISA

That water, right up there.



She crosses toward the kitchen and in the process nearly slips in the same place DANNY did. Instead, she catches herself on the back of the sofa, clutching on for dear life.

LOUIS

Watch your step, honey, there's water all over the floor.

LISA

I see that.

*Is the house flooding?*

LOUIS

There must be a leak somewhere. See, I told you this wasn't the place for you.

LISA

You don't think any place is the place for me.

CARRIE

There's no leak, hah! I think one of the water bottles just exploded.

LOUIS

Huh?

CARRIE

And flew into the garage.

Why don't we get you dried off in the backyard?

CARRIE starts for the backdoor, then screeches to a halt:

LISA

No!

LOUIS

No!

OLIVIA

(To DANNY)

Why don't we sue, and then we can use the money to fix the plumbing?

DANNY

Liv' be serious.

OLIVIA

Yeah, I know.

LISA

Can you tell my dad how much it will be to fix the leaks?

LOUIS

Uh uh. It's the seller's responsibility to--

CARRIE

We can get it all sorted for you, I promise. You wouldn't want to throw away the whole house for her just because of a couple lousy leaks, right? I'll contact the seller, but the asking price--

LOUIS

I cannot believe you.

CARRIE

What? I'm simply talking over the options.

LOUIS

You want me to pay for a house with faulty plumbing and broken--

LISA

Chair! Chair. Broken chair.

OLIVIA

Which chair? The furniture can be included, right?

CARRIE

Well, yes, although I'm sure you wouldn't want to keep this old...dated...

LISA

I like the furniture.

CARRIE

Right? It's so chic and stylish. We'll surely see to that. Ahem, Louis, we will take a check separately for--

OLIVIA

(To LISA)

But which chairs are broken?

DANNY

Does it matter, this isn't your style.

OLIVIA

It's one less thing. We can replace over time.

DANNY

And between the sofa and coffee table and--

OLIVIA nudges him sharply.

LISA

Oh, uh...this one...no, this one.

LISA goes over to the dining nook table. She bends down to a chair (perhaps out of view of the audience, perhaps not).

It...was...this...

With each word she yanks a little at the chair leg.

DANNY

Didn't you tell us upstairs all this stuff is one-of-a-kind or something?

LISA finally breaks the leg completely off.

CARRIE

Yes, I did.

LISA

See!

LOUIS

Lisa!

LISA

What? It was broken, remember?

LOUIS

Oh. Uh, it was. Yes.

CARRIE

How did that happen?!

LOUIS

We, uh, tried to put it back. I was going to mention...

CARRIE

Did you do that?

LOUIS

Why are you assuming I did anything?

DANNY

Why does everything break so easily around--

OLIVIA

Shhhh!

DANNY

What? That can't be a good sign, right?

LISA

That's not a big deal though right, I mean just one little chair.

OLIVIA

Can that come out of the price point?

CARRIE

No and yes.

LISA

Yes to who?

CARRIE

No to you.

OLIVIA

What to me?

CARRIE

Yes. Probably.

DANNY

And I guess there's an HOA? Didn't even ask about that.

OLIVIA

I thought you didn't like it here.

DANNY

And if there's an HOA I definitely won't.

OLIVIA

You get a lot of amenities with an HOA.

LISA

What's an HOA?

LOUIS

Home Owners Association.

LISA

Oh, could I join?

LOUIS

No. It's not like that.

LISA

When I do get a house, then I'll join.

DANNY

You can have my slot.

OLIVIA

Danny!

DANNY

(Rolling his eyes)

Olivia.

LISA

Dad, can we--

LOUIS

Lisa, I--

CARRIE

HOLD IT.

The room comes to a stop. She chuckles  
without humor.

You know what? I think I goofed. There's no leak. I think I, um...tripped when I got a  
drink of water before and it just must have...

She gestures, making an explosion.

LISA

(At the couch)

What about all this over here then?

CARRIE

I'm....rrrrreally clumsy.

LOUIS

Sounds about right.

CARRIE

Excuse me?

LOUIS

Regression into adolescence is a short trip. I'll leave you to it.

CARRIE

*Regression into adolescence*, oh give me a break.

LOUIS

How about I give you my dry cleaning bill instead?

CARRIE

It's just water, you big baby.

LISA

Ooookay. The vibes are real weird right now. Why don't we take a step back?

CARRIE

I'm sorry, Lisa. You're right. I'm a professional. I'd still like to help you.

LISA

Eh. This is really, like, starting to take the fun out of it. Plus, did you know you have to fix everything yourself when a house breaks? That's so much DIY, it sounds exhausting. Oh, and he told me all about college so I just want you to know that I still respect you as a fellow working woman. With questionable shoes.

CARRIE

(To LOUIS)

You told her?

LOUIS

She asked. She's smart, she was figuring it out anyway. What with your performance earlier.

CARRIE

*MY* performance? Oh that is so typical of you.

DANNY

Should we leave?

OLIVIA

Shhh, we're getting back in the game.

LISA

He also told me this all used to be woods here before. Definitely blog worthy.

CARRIE

What--er, yes. It wasn't a big environmental save. The little bit of forest left was dying anyway. What did you mean--

LISA

How come?

CARRIE

Uh, I'm not sure. A fire, maybe.

LISA

That's kinda sad.

LOUIS

That's not the only thing.

CARRIE

Would you be an adult for once and say what you need to say?

LOUIS

Sure. Did you and your husband burn down the woods just so you could sell second-rate properties on top of the ashes?

CARRIE

How dare you!

LOUIS

It doesn't matter. Tell Grossman I said hi.

CARRIE

You have a problem with Glen, now?

LOUIS

(Over-the-top taunting)

*Gleeennnn!*

You broke up with me so you could go out with that buffoon!

CARRIE

No, *you* broke up with *me* so you could play tonsil hockey with miss debutante.

LOUIS

Hey, miss debutante and I are still married.

CARRIE

Yes, and I'm glad for you--but you'd do well to shut your pie hole.

LOUIS

Oh and where have I heard that one before?

CARRIE

I was trying to help you,

LOUIS

By telling me I had a weight problem the night before homecoming.



CARRIE

What was I supposed to say? I remember you specifically asked me if the suit made you look fat.

LOUIS

You're not supposed to say yes. Everyone knows that. If you ever asked *me* that, I would've said 'you look great.'

CARRIE

Well, I did look great. I was in fantastic shape in college.

LOUIS

Yeah? And guess who's in fantastic shape now--check it!

He turns and lifts the back of his suit jacket to show off his butt.

LISA

Dad!

That is not how we behave in public.

LOUIS

That's what working out 4 times a week will get you. What does Grossman get? Probably a dad bod and a toupee.

LISA

You did not just say that.

CARRIE

Now who's being a child.

(Holing up a flyer)

Does this look like a toupee to you?

LOUIS

I said adolescent.

LISA

Knock it off, both of you. For the love of--you're middle aged! That's it. Out. Let's go. I've seen a webinar and Tik Toks about conflict resolution. If you can't work it out like adults you won't be treated like adults. Move it. Now.

She begins ushering them out (either toward the front door or garage).

CARRIE

You should've said nutjob, 'cause that's what you are Louis. A great big overcompensating nutjob.

LOUIS

Don't talk to me like that in front of my kid.

CARRIE

Why not, you just wiggled your ass in front of her, I'm sure she's seen worse.

LOUIS

Language!

LISA

Guys!

LOUIS exits with CARRIE trailing him. LISA follows, trying to break them up. If anyone crosses the still-wet floor, there should be some slight slipping but no major fall here.

The lamp turns off again.

DANNY

What in God's name just happened in here?

OLIVIA

You heard her, it was just water, not leaky plumbing after all. She's shady, but that's good news! I was about to say...the realty company wouldn't be too worried about a stain and a broken lamp with all *that*. It was like watching Saved by the Bell--the cantankerous years.

Anyway, we need to act fast if we want to put in our bid for the house.

DANNY

Woah, woah, woah. I thought we were still thinking things over.

OLIVIA

No, *you* were saying you didn't care for the house. And for reasons I still don't understand.

DANNY

C'mon. We'll find a place. We've got a few more open houses left in us.

OLIVIA

A few?

That's it. I'm pulling rank.

DANNY

You wouldn't use the salary card. You want me to pretend to be emasculated in front of company?

OLIVIA

Not that one.

I'm older than you. What I say, goes.

DANNY

You're 4 months older.

OLIVIA

Still older. I hate to do it to you, but there it is.

DANNY

I'll remember that when your birthday rolls around. What number are we turning again?

OLIVIA

Aight, aight.

Danny how long are you trying to stay squeezed in the apartment. We need to pick something before everything worth having is taken. I'm finally on board, what's holding you back?

DANNY

I would just really enjoy seeing a couple more properties before we decide first.

OLIVIA

You would enjoy seeing a couple more.

Oh wow.

DANNY

What?

OLIVIA

Wooww, Danny.

DANNY

“Wooww, Danny” what?

OLIVIA

That’s why you don’t like the house. You’re *trying* not to like it now because you want to keep looking.

DANNY

That doesn’t sound like what’s happening.

OLIVIA

It’s precisely what’s happening. You like looking at houses so you don’t want us to settle on one. That’s why never seemed to push when I didn’t care for the other places we saw.

DANNY

It’s not that I want to keep looking.

OLIVIA

It makes so much sense. You’re window shopping when I’m purpose shopping. You want us in a perpetual state of looking.

DANNY

Liv, come on.

OLIVIA

Wait until your mom hears about this.

DANNY

Well can you blame me? Liv, it’s the perfect outing. We dress decent to impress the realtors, the houses always smell so nice and new, everything is so clean, and you have such interesting opinions on things you don’t like! I have never heard a guest bathroom referred to as [the elephant stall of a modern craftsman].

OLIVIA

Let me get this straight. You’ve been letting me get all worked up and emotionally invested in the search when you just wanted to go on “day dates?”

DANNY

Not exactly. It didn’t occur to me until you said upstairs how much you liked it here, but once we find something and move in, this whole thing is done.

OLIVIA

I can't believe in all our marriage so far *this* is the most fun you've had with me.

DANNY pulls her in for an embrace.

DANNY

No, no, it's not that at all. It's just been different. I love you so much, and we always had a good time no matter what we're doing together. Picturing what we could be like--in every home we've looked at--just made me realize how much I enjoy the possibilities with you.

OLIVIA

Baby, that doesn't end when we find a house. There's always going to be something on the horizon. Your mother for instance, who's been silently blowing my phone up since we came up the driveway.

DANNY

Yeah, could we wait until after the romantic moment to bring up my mother?

OLIVIA

Romantic, huh.

DANNY

Well I thought so.

OLIVIA

You never got all touchy-feely at the other homes. Maybe this is a sign.

DANNY

I rubbed your foot at that brick house.

OLIVIA

Because you slammed the kitchen door on it during the walk-through.  
You don't have problems like that with an open concept so...

OLIVIA pushes away to gesture at the room.

DANNY

I can still be clumsy in open concept, don't tempt me. Maybe not as clumsy as you are, but...

She crosses back to him slowly, in mock seduction. Maybe when they meet, she traces his arms with her fingertips.

OLIVIA

Will it make a difference if I say we can be as romantic as we want over every inch of this big, perfect, laminate floor that matches the smooth, marble kitchen countertops?

She kisses his neck. The lamp turns on again.

DANNY is into it, but not fooled.

DANNY

You really want this house, // don't you?

OLIVIA

I REALLY want this house!  
Now, tell me the truth, do you like it?

He sighs.

DANNY

I love it.

They hug. DANNY is on the side facing the stage right exits.

Hey Liv, am I looking at broken glass right now?

OLIVIA

Shhh. Put a pin in that until we get our offer in. Might give us some leverage.

DANNY

Right, you're right.

OLIVIA

Then maybe after a few rounds of moving boxes we can...I don't know, pick a Saturday or something and tour some random houses? Y'know, so you get your kink in.

DANNY

It's not a kink...But I dig the sound of that.

OLIVIA

Well, grab one of those cards so we can get the hell outta here before the crazies come back.

DANNY

On it.

OLIVIA crosses to the front door, leaving her tote bag behind. She waits for DANNY as he gets a card from the table.

OLIVIA

Call from the car?

DANNY

You got the checkbook?

She nods. From the front door, they look take a last look at the place. It's theirs and they know it. They exit together.

LOUIS enters, followed by LISA and CARRIE. LISA pointedly stands between the two.

LISA

Dad will you, like, please shake hands?

LOUIS

I don't wanna.

CARRIE

I told you.

LISA

Apologize to each other.

They stare at her, she stares back. Then, CARRIE and LOUIS look at each other, deciding.

CARRIE

Louis, I'm sorry that--

LOUIS

Fine, I'll go. Carrie--

LOUIS

I said it first.

CARRIE

You did not. Don't start again.

LOUIS

Okay, okay. I'm sorry. For what I implied about you going into real estate, that is. Even though you--

LISA nudges him.

You've done really well and you seem happy and...I'm happy for you.

CARRIE

Thank you. I'm sorry too...For not being as professional as I should have been. And for how things ended in school.

LOUIS

Wasn't your fault.

CARRIE

I know. My parents were tough but they helped me get here. And I'm sure your wife helped you along the way.

LOUIS

She did. We raised a great ki--adult. Together. We also exercise--regularly.

LISA

You can stop there.

CARRIE

Tennis?

LOUIS

I prefer racquetball, but that too.



CARRIE

Figures.

LOUIS

What's wrong with racquetball?

LISA

Not another word. Shake on it.

LOUIS

Lisa I'm a grown man, I think // we're fine.

LISA

*Shake.*

LOUIS reaches out to CARRIE.

And don't do that thing where you squeeze each others hands too tight.

LOUIS and CARRIE both sigh. LOUIS holds out his hand, reluctantly following orders.

LISA

Thanks for your time, Carrie. I think this one needs to go home, so we can have a long talk about house hunting etiquette.

CARRIE

Does that mean you're no longer interested in the house?

LISA

Wellll I think I wanna see your other properties, and I have a bunch of friends who would trip over a place like this. But bigger. Definitely bigger. Anyway I'll be in touch. I'm sorry if we caused you any trouble today.

LOUIS

Oh and I'm sorry I shook my ass in front of you.  
Butt! Sorry.

LISA

Let's go. I want to stop at those new condos down the street. You're staying in the car.

CARRIE turns toward the kitchen.

LISA gestures for LOUIS to exit first. As he goes, he slips on the spill and falls behind the couch out of view of the audience. He pops up, revealing an uplifted hair piece.

Ohmygod, Dad!

LOUIS

What?

LISA points to his head. LOUIS catches on and hurriedly fixes it.

Not a word.

LISA

Ya think?

They make sure CARRIE hasn't seen then hurriedly exit, both reaching to smooth LOUIS' hair. LISA leaves her purse behind too.

CARRIE turns to the sound of the front door closing. She takes a breath after they have gone.

OLIVIA re-enters.

OLIVIA

Oh, Carrie?

CARRIE

Yes? Hi.

OLIVIA

Hi. We were on our way out, but I thought I would tell you--my husband and I are making an offer on the house.

CARRIE

Oh? Oh, well, wonderful! Here, let me give you my card.

OLIVIA

I already have it.

CARRIE

Great. I'm sorry about that earlier. I didn't get into this business to fight with ex-boyfriends, that was unprofessional of me. Sometimes the hunt makes people go nuts.

OLIVIA

Stressful situation.

CARRIE

Yes, exactly. You understand!

OLIVIA

Definitely. I deal with stressful situations pretty often. Almost daily, in fact. Problem solving at work--I'm the head of my team so that comes with challenges. Then looking for a house where I walk in and certain implicit biases just take over. Or explicit, sometimes it's hard to tell. People think I can't afford to live in the mailbox--

CARRIE

Olivia, I hope you don't think--

OLIVIA

Or even, walking around the grocery store with my partner. Looks we get. It's stressful--y'know what I mean?

CARRIE

I want to apologize if it seemed like I was...I certainly didn't mean // to come across...

OLIVIA

I know what you meant. But look, I just came back in to say I'd appreciate hearing back from you as soon as possible about whether or not our offer is accepted.

CARRIE

Oh...kay, yes. Of course.

OLIVIA

Tuesday? We're taking my mother-in-law out to lunch. Otherwise I'd say Monday.

CARRIE

Tuesday it is. You'll hear from our office--from me.

OLIVIA

Awesome. Enjoy the rest of your weekend.

OLIVIA begins to exit.

CARRIE

I think you and your husband will be really happy here. Truly. Like I said, it's a great time to buy. Great house.

OLIVIA

Thanks. It is.

She exits.

CARRIE takes a minute, walking downstage of the space (away from the spills). After a moment she comes over to the lamp. She turns it around, just noticing.

As she observes and perhaps looks around on the floor for the missing pieces, LISA enters silently. She sees her purse on the other side of the room and sneaks over Scooby-Doo style.

LISA almost slips again on the water, still not cleaned up.

Voices are heard from outside the front door. CARRIE does not hear.

DANNY

Just go back and get it.

OLIVIA

I can't!

DANNY

Live, c'mon.

OLIVIA

That was a perfect dramatic exit. I can't just waltz back in. I made a point.

DANNY

Fine, I'll go.

OLIVIA

No, that's even worse. Besides you might break something else.

DANNY

That wasn't my--

OLIVIA

Aight, aight!

They might ad-lib arguing for a minute.

OLIVIA silently enters. She waves her arms to get LISA's attention. She left her bag, too. She points, wordlessly asking LISA to get it for her? LISA doesn't seem to understand. OLIVIA rolls her eyes and tip-toes in the same manner LISA did. She almost falls in the same place. She rolls her eyes, takes her sleeve at a height the audience can see, and wipes up the spill. When CARRIE gives up on the lamp, she goes to straighten the pillows on the couch. Thinking she sees something, she gets on the floor. She sees the huge stain and the piece of lamp. LISA and OLIVIA duck down behind the couch.

CARRIE turns away, and as she does, LISA and OLIVIA peep their heads up. LISA makes a disgusted face at the stain, then turns on OLIVIA who merely shrugs.

Seeing the coast is clear, and CARRIE is still on the ground looking away, LISA and OLIVIA quickly and quietly make a break for it.

CARRIE gets up and exits to the kitchen. The sound of broken glass (the back door from earlier).

CARRIE

Oh, come on!

Lights down.

End of play.

## AFTERWORD

### *INTRODUCTION*

*Frieda* and *Open House* were conceived following a time of redefining my priorities in the sociopolitical landscape of the last several years. I often found it difficult to keep up with the world around me and not dissociate in favor of mental security. However, as theatre artists, what we create is continually influenced by both our personal worlds and society at large.

In 2021, Juneteenth was made into a federal holiday.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, I knew little about the significance of the day until I was in my mid-twenties. Having been raised by a Black single mother within a family very open and unshielded about conversations on race and racial issues, it was a big deal when what we knew as a less recognizable holiday was made national news. When something hits the shelves in Target there can be no argument, right? A year later, one summer prior to my writing these plays, our country saw *Roe v. Wade* overturned. I remember hearing the news while at school, thinking we must have entered some controversial episode of *The Twilight Zone*. Discussion surrounding a woman's right to call the shots for her own body was everywhere—on every social platform, a centerpiece on the news for weeks, even in my email with politicians voicing their concerns. Fifty years of precedent collapsed, raising questions of protections for women's health, already disproportionately underserving marginalized groups.<sup>2</sup>

What I internalized during this time eventually crept its way into my writing. My focus gradually shifted to the creation of stories in which women were thriving, not simply surviving. For a while I did not want to be seen as a “Black writer” because I wanted my work to be

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<sup>1</sup> “Our American Story – Juneteenth.” National Museum of African American History & Culture. 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Becca Damante and Kierra B. Jones. “A Year After the Supreme Court Overturned *Roe v. Wade*, Trends in State Abortion Laws Have Emerged.” Center for American Progress. 2023.

enjoyed by everyone. I still do. Yet the more I had the opportunity to work on the craft here at Hollins University, the more I came to take interest specifically in the BIPOC audience. No matter the story, people of color and Black people particularly will walk away with a different personal meaning. My desire is for us to see ourselves as participants in theatre; to be heard and understood rather than retraumatized. These thematically linked plays are my way of leaning into my identity as a young, Black, female writer.

### ***FIRST DRAFTS***

June and July of 2023 in which I took the First Drafts course offered in the Playwriting M.F.A. were—for lack of a more eloquent term—a doozy. Each writing class, taught by Todd Ristau, came with a new set of prompts; markers to accomplish in our full-length plays over the four days in which we had to churn them out. *Frieda* and *Open House* were written in this class.

*Frieda*'s original prompt revolved around the creation of a solo show. We were instructed to choose a fairy tale or play in the public domain and tell the story from the perspective of a character within that work. We needed to find a unique take, discovering where the conflict was. How did they feel about the other characters in the source material? Why would that character tell their story? To say the least, I was less than thrilled at the idea of conceiving a solo show. It was the notion of crafting a giant monologue; how does one make that interesting? How do you keep the audience's attention—what do you even have a character say when they are the only person on stage? We used examples from playwright and comedian Megan Gogerty, including *Feast* and *Lady Macbeth and Her Pal, Megan*. Reading and watching her plays, respectively, was my catalyst. She was a dynamic force—interesting, and more than that, she was telling a story that did not require other characters to be present! It blew my mind. Speaking to our class during a virtual session, Megan made many points I held onto.



- 1) The audience becomes the scene partner. In *Feast*, the audience is asked to make a choice and become complicit in the play.
- 2) What's the game? This is the dramatic question.
- 3) In building dramatic tension, there should be no ambiguity about what your play is about.

More on how I clawed my way to meeting these tips later.

Ever the Disney and fairy tale fan, I remembered movies like *Maleficent* (2014) and *Cruella* (2021) that included shifts in perception from their source material. Humanizing a villain was an interesting idea. When I was in elementary school, we read a book about the three little pigs' told from the point of view of the Big Bad Wolf. I googled and found the book: *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka. It used the main points of the familiar story yet with a twist. The wolf also spoke in the second person narrative, directly to the reader. A beautiful combination of the three (Megan's plays and this children's book) led me to *Hansel and Gretel* as part of the Grimms Brothers' fairy tale collection. Having read it a million times, I dove in again with the intention of writing about the witch who attempts to cook the brother and sister in her oven after they eat her house made of candy. However, when I reread it, another character surprised me. There are only two adult female characters in the story, both evil. Hansel and Gretel had a stepmother, unnamed, who hates them and suggests leaving them in the forest in the first place. Through *her* actions, they eventually find the witch's house. This seemed a much more interesting story.

I set about writing by asking myself some questions: Why doesn't she love her stepchildren? Is she even capable of love? Does she love herself? Is she lost too? Lastly, a thematic question made itself clear: What is it to be a "chosen family?" The latter I knew about

from the general chatter around being mistreated by one's blood relatives and finding one's own family by way of true support and love. Per the prompt, something visually interesting needed to occur on every other page. Hansel and Gretel left breadcrumbs in the original story; would it not be a cruel sort of irony if their stepmother was seen eating throughout the play? Even better, she should eat sloppily, leaving her own crumbs behind. By the end she could look up and realize that she is lost too, that there is no clear path. I had a play. Rather, I had the first draft of a play.

The prompts for *Open House* were devised myself, which left me in no easier a position than how I had gone about writing throughout the whole of that semester. A few examples of the parameters I gave myself:

- 1) The play could be a one act, however, needed to follow an Aristotelian arc possessing an beginning, middle, and end.
- 2) The setting could not take place in a workplace environment. I discovered my knack for utilizing this kind of setting, so I went against my own status quo. (One could argue that I still failed to truly meet this requirement.)
- 3) Something visually interesting, under the umbrella of theatre magic, must happen in every scene.

I happened to have HGTV on at the time and decided that a house hunting scenario would fuel the script. Given the time constraints for finishing the plays in First Drafts, I developed a writing process to help me quickly sort things out. The first step was listing out the characters. There were not many people to keep track of, although still I found it useful. I then took to the internet. A picture formed in my mind of the house layout I wanted to describe in the stage directions. My idea was to set the entire thing as a single unit in a living room but allude to other

areas of the home. To help me keep everything straight, I found a picture of a staged living room similar to what I was thinking and I based the action around this picture.

To reiterate, time, to no one's surprise, was a big factor in how some of this draft turned out. I planned bits that did not make it into the play due to my restrictions with traveling over that weekend. That said, I was content in the humor that came through. I did not consider myself a "comedic writer," yet several elements of my prompts lent themselves well to a comedic tone. It was enjoyable to include a Black female character who had her own views on house hunting. There is something to be said of the treatment of people of color in these situations where budgets are involved. With that notion in mind I thought it would be interesting to have her in the same setting with the wealthy elite—to explore that truth without undercutting it with the humorous tone of the play.

I hastily put together the final scene with the realtor as some technical challenges reared their ugly heads. My computer restarted on me at random, Final Draft claimed my script file was incompatible—it all put me into overdrive thinking about what I could possibly do to save the play and keep all the elements I had worked on. It threw my process completely off the rails. I dare to think some of that chaos was reflected in the final moments of that first draft. Additionally, the scene breaks came as a challenge in trying to follow Aristotle's one day sequence rule. Leaving myself open to more concision, I knew I would like to return to the script as it was one of my favorites.

## ***INFLUENCES***

Many of my influences stem from television, specifically classic sitcoms and comedies. Through examining what may be considered ordinary, I attempt to discover what can happen under a theatrical lens. I tend to pull from these ridiculous situations in TV shows that often

begin with relatively boring setups. This was the inspiration behind *Open House*. I have long admired the intellectual humor in *Frasier* (1993), whose writing does not simply go for the “low-hanging fruit” with the uptight but loveable characters. If it deviates, it is purposeful. In *Schitt’s Creek* (2015), the Roses face ever-changing family dynamics. Lisa is modeled after Alexis and her drive to create an identity for herself separate from her family’s money, or lack thereof. *Grace and Frankie* (2015) captures the vivacity and full breadth of an older generation. The women, played by the unmatched Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin, are incredibly full-bodied in terms of scope of life and ambition. There’s a balance written into the show that balances family shenanigans and late-stage career goals that I took as inspiration. Issa Rae’s character in *Insecure* (2016) experiences microaggressions in the workplace throughout the show, though I found it the most notable during the first season. She features complex Black characters including has a circle of hilarious and girlfriends whom I found influenced me when writing Olivia. Finally, I would remiss not to mention *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961) as the most prevalent influence in my attempting to write any sort of comedy. From simple jokes to full farcical physical bits, I am consistently looking to the genius of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, the grandparent of modern television sitcoms. I simultaneously watched the show and wrote parts of *Open House*, to get a more technical feel for the revolutionary structure of the seemingly effortless jokes.

In September of 2023, I saw a community theatre production of *The Play That Goes Wrong*—twice. Witnessing the physicality of the world of this play within a play, then its utter collapse was singular. I had never seen whole walls and second story floors fall in a show before! I incorporated the elements of slapstick and pratfalls using that play as a guide for the possibilities of what can happen on stage. I explored the kind of furniture and layout of the space I had in mind. This opened itself to what I included in the stage directions: lamps breaking, water

being thrown around, a couch stained, chair legs broken apart, etc. One may easily see where *Open House* utilizes the style of *The Play that Goes Wrong*, though it has a place in *Frieda* as well. The tree centered in the play has leaves that are meant to change color over the course of Frieda's story; likewise, she also eats throughout the performance, littering the space with crumbs. These elements were my attempt to create visual engagement, a more subtle twist on the visually interesting pieces occurring in *The Play that Goes Wrong*.

### ***PRIORITIZING***

Upon entering my final semester at Hollins, a year after the initial drafts of these plays, my focus was developing agency, character relationships, and the ways the ways in which this can be made clearer through specific scenes.

In *Frieda*, there are no "scenes," but rather beats within the play. She required more agency to avoid being an inactive protagonist, something I have frequently struggled with as writers often do. I added two more beats of direct audience address to connect to what was happening in the "now" of the play. Megan Gogerty provided great insight on how to get this accomplished (see the *FESTIVAL* section). Within the first two pages, I also put the game of the play into view by having her state exactly what she wants from the audience: help to guide her out of the forest. I cleaned up, cutting two pages from the script; however, I also added some beats of clarity, thus ending up with the same page count. That said, I was able to trim some of the original fat for conciseness. Hearing the words aloud during rehearsal for Festival helped in this area, as I was able to (also per Megan's advice) see where the actor was having trouble activating the character. Those moments were unnecessary, getting in the way of what the play could convey. This included places that became repetitive in expressing Frieda's feelings towards other characters who, while they never made an appearance in the play, had an impact on the

story. It came back to the First Drafts prompt of her attitude about the world. More cohesive thoughts made her situation more empathetic.

By contrast, *Open House* consisted of characters who each got to make choices. Lisa, my Alexis Rose type, and Carrie, the realtor, especially needed clarification. I cut down their conversation by roughly a page and slightly shifted the tone to that of one less chummy. Mainly, I expanded relationships by streaming and watching television. As mentioned above, sitcoms and other comedies are my biggest influence for this play; therefore, I continued to watch TV and absorb what I could about why certain archetypes worked well together. What could be exploited but not inappropriate? What was each character's goal; how could they fail? I thought back to my 2022 acting class with John Bergman in which we studied clowns. The game of the clown is to fail repeatedly in a variety of ways. I recall the iconic character Mr. Bean used as an effective contemporary example. Failure is funny in a comedy, so I took to my favorites listed in *INFLUENCES*. Sometimes it can be dangerous to watch TV while I write because of the distraction. However, it informed the slapstick humor which I used in an additional sequence of *Open House*—Scene 6, in which Carrie tries to sway Olivia and Danny from the house by throwing water around, claiming there are plumbing leaks. At this point I felt I could stand to take it even further and be more daring with things going wrong.

In the first half of the summer semester, I also sought to achieve a balancing act between the two plays. *Frieda*, slated for the New Play Festival, attracted most of my attention due to the nature of that process. I devoted what I hoped to be an effective amount of time to *Open House* so it would not suffer a loss of quality. Ultimately, I found revisions to *Frieda* easier with all the discussion surrounding it since we began the semester. *Open House* was equally as satisfying, knowing that I was able to finally input earlier ideas from the year prior to see how they worked

in the arc of the play. As we approached the second half of the term, I intended to make the thematic similarities more pronounced, fleshing out the themes of environmental shifts and more potently the familial relationships.

### ***FESTIVAL PREPARATION PROCESS FOR “FRIEDA”***

Transparently, I was surprised when *Frieda* was selected for festival. At that point, approaching the end of Spring 2024, I still harbored hesitation regarding solo shows. I knew what to expect of the festival process; I would partner with a student dramaturg and director with 7 hours of rehearsal for the play to go up as a staged reading. A work obligation kept me from attending the virtual dramaturgy meeting; however, in communicating with Mack Burns, she possessed a great desire to explore the production of a solo show. What captured my attention the most in our early conversation was her idea that the character of Frieda was of a liminal space, having transcended the yesteryear of fairy tale time as well as present day. I had not put word to this notion before, so our partnership was already helping me to form the play in my mind more cohesively before the next steps. The chaos of the first weekend ended on the pleasant note of our director meetings. Mack was terrific in helping to flesh out what we were heard regarding everyone’s takes on the play. By the end of our three-hour window, a unique situation emerged. We were down to two directors we imagined would be great in taking on *Frieda*, Vanna Richardson and David Veatch. Both were looking at another colleague’s play. After some time going back and forth, we all sat down together for a productively transparent conversation. We discussed where we all were in our thought process, exactly what that looked like, and expressed that the plays would do well in either director’s hands. Unanticipated though it may have been, I loved it. Being so open with our choices may not have suited everyone, yet it was move past any

secrecy as if we could not be honest with how we were narrowing it down. We walked away, thought about it, and made our choice.

The first production meeting for the festival secured our collaborative priorities. Our intentions were to focus on the depth of Frieda's hunger and what that does to a person, grounding the other characters through her not by way of imitation but in taking on the spirit of whomever it is (the children, her father, etc.), and to lean into the magical realism. Since this was a one-person show, it was also decided Mack and I would be more present in the rehearsal process thereby providing more support to Vanna's directorial efforts. Being the only actor in a rehearsal room, we thought, might be a bit intimidating, so we chose to follow the industry practice and commit to attending Vanna's rehearsals. The tree was a challenge. We did not have access, or more accurately the time, to dedicate toward figuring out what would best suggest the tree changing colors—we had not discussed technical elements like lighting aiding with this, although that was to come. I suggested the inclusion of lines spoken by the actor to let the audience know what was happening as the tree died; ultimately, this is what made it into the festival script.

Auditions provided an equally pleasant question to consider. I wrote Frieda's character as having been 22 years old when the events of *Hansel and Gretel* took place. That did not mean she had to remain that way to get the story across. She could be any age. Over the weekend of auditions, we thoughtfully considered how the show would be read with several different actors. Chloe Riederich evoked something I needed Frieda to be: empathetic. It was raised early in our discourse that the audience must be on her side for the story to work. With the pool of wonderful auditioners, we concluded that the play in its current form may be more effective in making that



point with a younger presenting actor. Ultimately, Chloe was cast thus beginning the conversations about what we would investigate as a team.

Our read-through gave me more insight into *Frieda* than the two prior weeks of preparation combined. Before arriving at Hollins for the summer, Mack and I had discussed the language within the play. Sometimes it was too modern and sometimes more rooted in the world of fairy tales. We knew I needed to lean more one way than another. Hearing it out loud for the first time, the vocal tone of Chloe's melodic rhythm confirmed this. Certain phrases felt out of place—"red flag" "technology" "yeah" instead of "yes," etc. The youthful innocence of the actor was clear, and Vanna wanted to see the fuller range of girlhood to womanhood in *Frieda*'s bitterness.

Megan attended the read-through and provided script notes. To say that by having her in the room my eyes were opened to what the play was, is an understatement. She reinforced the lessons of solo plays discussed in First Drafts the year before:

- 1) The significance of the audience as the scene partner
- 2) The game of the play

While hearing it aloud, something dreadful dawned on me. I was transported to my lab reading at Hollins in 2022 where we discussed at some length the problem of the inactive protagonist I had written in that play. By the time we reached the end of *Frieda* I knew I had done it again. Naturally this was the first thing I asked Megan about, and to that point I acknowledged the fact that the character makes only two active decisions toward the end of the play. She seduces her husband, then takes the children out to the woods intending to leave them there. Megan advised me to be forthright—I was hiding the game! Apparently, I needed a full fiscal year for these aspects to sink in. I was too vague in what the character wanted and what

was happening right now; she needed to just say it, to say that she was lost and required the audience to find their way out so she could also escape. Because she wants this thing, the question became: how was I to activate her? The draft we worked from had too many words. Places in which Chloe stumbled or was unsure what to do were clues to me as the playwright about activation. It was also suggested I try to cut a few pages to aid in this point. Finally, Megan mentioned the following lines to be what she considered the arc of the play:

- I had so much play in me.
- How many choices were there, really?
- What does it mean to be a chosen family?
- The hunger was going to continue starving the love right out of us.
- I had to break it.
- I chose me.

...And there it was. That was the play, and it was right there in front of me the whole time.

Multiple lightbulbs went off over my head. Whatever else became of the festival process, I felt I knew exactly what *Frieda* meant by having that pointed out to me.

Going forward, I got down to brass tacks. The class assignments helped me to view the play not just as a piece I was working on, but a full-fledged production. From music, collages, marketing strategies and more, the shape of what this could be one day formed in my mind. I cut two pages of the script little by little. My additions, which included *Frieda*'s game and another moment of direct audience address, brought the page count back to where it was, though. At least by this point I could see that the language was more concise in places that truly needed it. It was surprisingly enjoyable to work on the sections of verse. This is where *Frieda* tracked the changing tree, brought the audience in by letting them know it was changing, and through the

specificity also kept them tethered to the “now” of the play. As Megan said, clarity was truly my friend.

Our second rehearsal was attended by Marci Duncan, who was essential in helping our group pose questions about the play: How long did we think it took Frieda to become desperate enough to take the children into the woods—how quickly was that decision made? At what phase of starvation was she in? Enough for psychosis to set in? Since she is so familiar with the forest, does she also know how to forage for food, hunt animals, etc.? She was very grounded, yet there was a lightness that occurred when she remembered her youth. Chloe’s pacing brought this out in the text. The through line of asking the audience to show Frieda the way out seemed to work better as well. Marci mentioned code switching, the process of shifting from one linguistic dialect to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting.<sup>3</sup> It was relevant to the prose whenever the tree’s leaves turned color, as well as the use of German terms added, the generally elevated space, and heightened text. Considering the range of code switching used particularly by the Black community, Marci’s thought reinforced my intent that a person of any race could play this character.<sup>4</sup>

Toward the end of the rehearsal process, my focus shifted to motivations. Chloe moved through beats of the play beautifully; however, I needed to examine the places where they had less to prompt them—to have them motivate through and keep the momentum going. As previously mentioned, clarity became my right-hand man. If Frieda was noticing the tree changing color, she needed to spell it telegraph it directly to the audience. That provided more motivation to keep the audience with her and the game of the play in check.

### ***ADVANCED WORKSHOP REVISIONS FOR “OPEN HOUSE”***

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<sup>3</sup> Morrison, Carlos D. "code-switching." Encyclopedia Britannica, June 15, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Morrison, Carlos D. “code switching.” 2024.

As I have now thoroughly discussed the process of adjusting *Frieda* in preparation for festival, I was just as involved with *Open House* in the Advanced Workshop course taught by Ruth Margraff. I wanted to focus on the character relationships. If anyone in the play teetered toward a caricature, the sincerity of the themes would be lost. Lisa was especially hard to nail down—I struggled with her as a character. In class, we discussed how she seemed to like Carrie too quickly. Their bond was too chummy without impetus. Ruth observed that perhaps Lisa did not get along with her own mother. If she saw in Carrie was her supposed role model lacked, admiring the businesswoman she aspired to be, their initial scene would make more sense. It also appeared to go on too long. I followed by cutting it down to only the information needed to understand how they both operated.

Feedback for Danny and Olivia was generally positive from the start. Their dynamic popped on the very first page, aided by their physical comedy in later scenes. I considered a few questions raised after the initial read-through: Was the conflict between these characters too easy on Olivia's side? What was Danny overcoming? What if Olivia was the breadwinner, and what does that do to their relationship in the financial decision they will inevitably make by trying to buy the house? Through them, I explored the narrative of generational wealth. I had not specified either of their occupations, but wanted to make it clear that they could not afford the kind of luxuries that Lisa and her father could. The disparity of these pairings created the most tension during Olivia and Louis' interaction in Scene 4. This is where I illustrated the wealth gap, striving to make the point of money being passed through one's family garners a degree of convenience that everyone does not possess. Because Olivia is half of a mixed-race couple, it followed that her self-awareness in "white" spaces goes beyond that of the other characters. In the real world, it would not go unnoticed. Here, I made sure she was the only one who

acknowledges it in a way that allowed her to drive the conversation, expanding on the issue of class and providing agency for her. I also reflected on the stereotypical school of thought that Black women could be in a relationship with a white man (or vice versa) as a way of “marrying up” or climbing a social ladder. It was important to me to leave no room for this between Danny and Olivia, striving to show them as equally loving and supportive spouses.

My original first draft of *Open House* concluded with Lisa telling the group that she is buying the house for herself (not using Louis’ money) and a direct address monologue from Carrie. Besides being a part of my original self-directed prompt for the play, the latter was not working effectively. I kept it as a nod to *Frieda*’s continual direct address, but it required major tightening. She was not saying anything that implied meaning with which the audience should come away. On the former point of Lisa attempting to buy the house herself, the consensus was that it undercut the theme of generational wealth; there was a stronger way to use that information without diluting the significance of the moments leading up to it.

Ruth and I later considered the of money being equal to power and how that may be taken a step further. I leaned into it as a way of fleshing out the wealthy characters. The range of emotion required a proper boost, however. Once, we wrote out the qualities that made our characters more choleric, sanguine, and melancholic as part of an in-class exercise. Choleric is defined as that which makes one quick to anger or a bad temperament; sanguine can refer to passion or cheer; melancholic is pensive sadness or depression.<sup>5</sup> I wrote about Lisa and Carrie, as they appeared to be the most elusive. The exercise gave me insight into how to develop them more thoroughly.

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<sup>5</sup> “Using the Four Temperaments for Authentic Characters.” Plottr. March 2024.

The next draft drew out more from the assumptions I pulled from regarding POC homebuyers. The question was raised by David Veatch about whether Danny and Olivia encountered microaggressions during their other house hunting experiences. Danny's support for Olivia was appreciated, but it would serve the play to include how their lives were impacted before touring the house on that particular day. By introducing the married couple in medias res, I already had the foundation to do just that. To drive the issue of class, I was finally able to write a scene I considered while in First Drafts—Carrie trying to dissuade one pair from their interest in the house while pandering to another for the sake of her implied commission. This part of the scene was crafted with the idea that POC and more culturally sensitive audiences would understand the microaggression taking place.

Thematically speaking, there were parallels here that related to *Frieda*. Homeownership is often a class signal to accessible education and supportive income among other socioeconomic factors. A theme reappearing in *Frieda* is that of food as a poverty indicator, denoting a certain social standing. Frieda herself also describes a stigma attached to her family. A similar concept finds its place in *Open House* in stereotypes about white wealth alongside a Black woman who, in the first scene, describes how she has been treated during different visits. As the environment shifts throughout *Frieda*, the class shift here is indicative of assets. Take, for instance, what I previously stated about social climbing. Frieda believes herself to be marrying up, both financially and emotionally given her troubled youth. This, of course, turns out to be false, immediately knocking her back into poverty.

I went back to ol' reliable Dick Van Dyke for inspiration to advance the farcical moments. I doubled down on the running bits, adjusted some snappy dialogue, and attempted to ensure the reversals paid off. We also discussed how Louis and Carrie's unravelling may be

better earned. They each become more absurd; therefore, I needed a justifiable reason as to why this happens. I drew on their background, fleshing out what they disliked about each other and strived to have them fail at hiding it. Ruth and David agreed that understanding more about their earlier relationship would give me a better payoff when I began to shift their maturity.

Unresolved tension provided an obtainable springboard to introduce Lisa's arc to becoming the grown up in the room. I maintain that most of this still occurs offstage. Overall, I needed to get the two pairs back on the same page with each other, as Ruth articulated. This was accomplished by trimming some of Danny's repetitive lines (and for that matter, several throughout the script), as well as planting seeds of doubt that Lisa was serious about this specific house. The only way I could justify the real-world dilemma of someone with more money *not* having their offer on a home accepted was for Lisa to lose interest, thereby forfeiting.

Removing Carrie's direct address monologue at the end of the play was a lesson in the relief of letting go. Truthfully, I was not attached to that moment, but was unsure how to end the play otherwise. Ruth and I discussed this at length, shooting ideas back and forth. She posed the question, what was I trying to say in those final moments that could be said through the character conversing with another? My answer: she was embarrassed for her behavior with her ex, house hunting can drive some people crazy, and she would sell the house regardless (some money earned being better than no money). It seemed to ache for another character to enter, avoiding the cheap trope of having her speak on the phone perhaps to someone unseen in the show. The simpler the better, hence the inclusion of the bottom of Scene 7. I decided to end on a high note and keep up the physical humor that received strong marks for being enjoyable throughout.

## ***CONCLUSION***

These plays are the culmination of my evolving work at Hollins University with glimmers of my taking the next step. It is continually said that the play is never finished, one just stops writing. I intend to persist in my work on *Frieda* and *Open House*, using what I have gained from each class, every assignment, and many instructors over the last four years. The Playwright's Lab gave me the opportunity to develop my craft in ways invaluable to my continued growth as an artist. High intensity taught me how to write well, with the tools to do so in a hurry when necessary. Low residency allowed me to spend time learning, not merely regurgitating, lessons from teachers and classmates alike, now my colleagues and future collaborators. I successfully got messy, sometimes missing the mark; yet, I have fostered an earnest love for the creation of characters and their stories, treating an audience as equal participants in the world of theatre. Having been led to focus on the audience's experience this semester more than ever before, I know what kind of stories I wish to share with them. Every play prepares you for the next one. And, as Megan Gogerty says, process is all.