

Shirley
by
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3A **EXT. HYMAN PORCH - DAY**

3A

Delivery Boy rings the bell. Sees the lumbering figure of Stanley approaching the door. The boy flees.

4 **INT. TRAIN CAR -- DAY**

4

The Vermont countryside, whizzes by.

The cover of THE NEW YORKER.

The magazine is held by, ROSE NEMSER (22) an old soul, watchful, unencumbered by her youthful beauty.

A BUNDT CAKE sits on her lap, she protects it like the Holy Grail.

She turns the pages of the magazine to:

THE LOTTERY by SHIRLEY JACKSON

Beside her fidgets FRED NEMSER, (27) waspy, beaming with the affable confidence of someone who has never known an hour of hardship.

Fred reads in the seat next to Rose. He takes her hand and places it on his thigh.

Without looking up from her reading Rose runs her hand along the inside of his thigh. Fred puts down his book.

Oh, his wife is so beautiful. He kisses her neck, finds her lips. THE OLDER LADY across the aisle coughs her disapproval.

Fred places a hand on Rose's stomach.

FRED
(whispering)
Is it alright?

Rose nods. Fred leads her down the train car.

5 **INT. TRAIN CAR WASHROOM -- CONTINUOUS**

5

Furious FINGERS unbuckle Fred's belt. Diving down his pants.

Fred groans and kisses Rose hard, pressing her flat against the tile-lined walls.

She bites his lip. Then:

In a frenzy he spins her around. Hitches up her skirt.

RIP. Underwear on the floor. He moans with impatience.

Rose grips the tiny sink. Steadying herself. His arm circles around her waist. Panting in her ear.

FRED

Now? Now?

She lurches up on the sink. She's ready.

ROSE

Mmm

Fred's face in the mirror awash in his ecstatic climb. Rose sucks in a long moan.

Seconds later it's done. He pulls away. Tucks in his shirt and buckles his belt. Suddenly embarrassed, he rushes out of the washroom.

In the mirror, Rose alone. A deep exhale. Then:

Rose FLINCHES, wheels around, she's seen something.

She surveys the empty bathroom. Just her imagination. She picks up the torn underwear and throws them in the trash.

6

INT. TRAIN CAR -- DAY

6

Fred leafing through his book. Rose brushes by him, returning to her seat. They share their secret.

Rose holds up the New Yorker.

ROSE

They stone her Fred. The whole town. Including her own children, stone her!

FRED

You reading Shirley's story again? It's so creepy.

ROSE

What do you think she'll be like? I can't even imagine, someone who would, who could, think of something so chilling.

FRED

I'm sure she's perfectly normal. Just like most writers.

Rose clutches the Bundt Cake, her offering to the unknown. He fumbles for her hand.

Rose looks out the window. Farmhouses dot the countryside.

7

EXT. DOWNTOWN BENNINGTON -- DAY

7

Fred carries their two suitcases. Rose walks on the inside of the sidewalk carrying the Bundt Cake.

FRED

Can you believe it?

ROSE

Of course I believe it. Professor Nemser, winner of the Landon English Award for exceptional dissertation. Countless departments across the country clamoring for your talent. Tenured track position at an esteemed college. Hosting salons. You living a life of the mind. How's that sound?

FRED

Sign me up.

She loops her arm in his. They are blissful.

A KIND OLD LADY smiles at them as they pass on the sidewalk. Then:

They pass The BUTCHER SHOP:

A PATRON, holding TWO SKINNED RABBITS watches her pass with a steely stare.

THE BUTCHER behind the counter, assess Rose as if she were livestock on an auction block.

Fred doesn't notice. Rose pulls closer to Fred.

They pass the HARDWARE STORE:

AN ANCIENT MAN, leathery skin hanging loose on his jowls, tracks Rose's every move. Then, slowly almost imperceptibly shakes his head.

Rose looks over her shoulder transfixed. Was that a warning?

A wind kicks up. Rose holds down her dress.

She stares at a PILE OF ROCKS in an unassuming corner of an alley. Shivers. In a flash A GIRL WITH AN EYE-PATCH flits by.

8 **EXT. CEMETERY BEHIND HOUSE / HYMAN-JACKSON HOUSE -- DAY** 8

Rose walks several paces behind Fred, who is straining with the weight of the suitcases. He sets them down.

Fred points to the THE RUN-DOWN VICTORIAN perched on the top of the hill:

FRED

Almost there.

As Rose stares up at it, the sun blinds her eyes.

She wobbles. Sits on a suitcase, faint. Rose tries to steady her breath. She is suddenly chilled. She drops the cake.

The house is SWAYING and STRETCHING.

She looks down at her feet to break the spell. When she looks up again, the house has resumed it's normal proportions.

FRED (CONT'D)

You okay honey?

She nods. They resume their trek.

A curtain in the second story window rustles. Was someone watching them?

9 **EXT. HYMAN-JACKSON HOUSE -- DAY** 9

The front walk is almost entirely obscured by OVERGROWN BUSHES. Fred gives the dilapidated gate a hard shove revealing:

A PARTY IN FULL SWING. The front porch is teeming with faculty and students.

Fred and Rose weren't expecting this.

NORMAN, a disheveled poet, is organizing the FACULTY WIVES in a seed spitting contest.

He holds a handful of cherries.

NORMAN

We're aiming for the gate ladies.
Ya got to really get some air
behind it.

He spits directly down the front walk. PING! The pit hits Rose's cheek and ricochets to the ground.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Moving target, bonus points!

Rose holds her hand up in apology and skips off to the side of the walk running into a DRUNKEN FELLOW.

DRUNKEN FELLOW

Hey there sweetie!-

ROSE

So, sorry...excuse me...beg pardon-

Rose rushes up the front steps, oblivious to the dozens of heads that turn as she goes.

At the end of the porch Stanley is holding court with RALPH, African-American novelist.

RALPH

I am not having this fight with you Hyman. You know I *loaned* those Charlie Parker records to you. *Loaned*.

STANLEY

I think that possession is nine tenths of the law. And I possess a greater appreciation of Yardbird's talent than you do. So ...

His eyes light on Fred pressing through the crowd on the porch.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Welcome to our hallow end of the earth! My boy! Welcome to Bennington!

The levitating Stanley nearly knocks Fred over with his bear-hug and accompanying slap on the back.

He smacks both hands against his cheeks, eyes twinkling.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

And who is this lovely dove?

Fred ushers Rose forward. She extends a gentle hand.

ROSE

Rose Nemser. You must be Professor Hyman.

Stanley goes in for a kiss, one cheek and then the other.

STANLEY

Stanley, Stanley. I profess
nothing.

He claps his hands getting the guests' attention:

Stanley bows before them with a ringmaster's bravado.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Ladies and Gentleman, Hussies and
Cads, may I present to you the
Nemsers, formerly of Philadelphia,
the redoubtable Fred and a varietal
rare indeed, his wife, Rose.

HOOTS AND HOLLERS.

Stanley bows again. Fred and Rose try to cover their
embarrassment with tight smiles.

Stanley takes a swig of a young girl's drink. Then hands it
back. He waves at the Nemsers to follow him.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Come, come. Let's get you watered
down.

10

INT. HYMAN-JACKSON HOUSE -- DAY

10

A cloud of cigarette smoke enshrouds the living room.

Women are fanning themselves. Men in PITTED ROLLED UP SHIRTS.

The walls pulse Bessie Smith's lament:
*Nobody loves you when you're down
and out...*

Rose sees the CARCASSES OF FOUR CHICKENS plucked clean on the
buffet table.

Fred sets the suitcases down at the foot of the stairs.
Stanley tugs him away:

STANLEY

I'll bring him back in one piece,
Rosie.

They disappear through the swinging door into the kitchen.

Rose stands alone.

UPROAR OF LAUGHTER. It is coming from the corner of the
living room. Rose creeps closer.

Peering between the assembled audience enraptured by an unseen presence on the couch.

Rose glimpses: Sensible SCUFFED FLATS. STOCKINGS gathering around a pair of THICK ANKLES. A garishly patterned dress, clinging too tightly to amble hips and waist.

Strong, INK-STAINED HANDS balancing a CIGARETTE between the second and middle finger while palming a tumbler of SCOTCH.

Sloping shoulders. A childish LOCKET around her neck. DISHWATER BLOND HAIR pulled back into an anemic ponytail.

Rose can now discern the voice -- low, intelligent, indomitable.

SHIRLEY (O.S.)

We were out of god-damn coffee.
Which is an unforgiveable
barbarity.

Rose sees her, a mountain of a woman, smudged cat-eye glasses guarding her against the world, hiding the intensity of those steel blue eyes. There's no doubt, THIS IS SHIRLEY JACKSON.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

So I picked up a few things. And I'm trudging back up the god-damn hill. It was fucking hot out. I'm cursing my back, I'm cursing my feet, I'm cursing all of god-damn humanity -- when it hit me. The whole thing. I sat down at my desk. Two hours later there it is. The most reviled story the New Yorker ever printed! And all I could think was, god-damn I forgot to put the ice-cream up. I'm gonna have to face that Satanic hill again.

HOWLS of LAUGHTER flood the room. A tragically DRUNK CAD cozies up on an arm of the couch.

DRUNK CAD

I read it as an anti-Semitic parable... in the tradition of Isaac Babel.

Stanley bursts open the kitchen door, it swings dramatically behind him. He is scowling.

STANLEY

Calling my wife an Anti-Semite are we?

(MORE)

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Well, to be fair, she never hated a single Jew until she married me.

Rim snap. A crescendo of laughter. Shirley ashes into the DRUNK CAD's glass.

The guests part a path between Stanley and Shirley.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

We had a wonderful courtship, didn't we dear?

Picking up her cue:

SHIRLEY

Sure thing, darling.

With a subtle nod, a maestro to his orchestra, Stanley urges her to keep it up.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

He asked me out for cheeseburgers. Who could refuse such romance? And next thing I know he's ripping apart a story of mine. Naturally, I lost my appetite. But he won't let good food go to waste, so he cleans my plate for me. And then he has the gall to tell me he's lost his wallet.

Clucks and head shakes.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

That wallet's been lost for over twenty years.

The room explodes in mirth. They love this.

STANLEY

Mind you that story was the most marvelous story I had ever read.

A hush falls. He means it. The dim outlines of a smile cross Shirley's face.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I knew I was going to marry the woman who wrote it. I was going to hunt her down and make her marry me.

SHIRLEY

Apparently I had little say in the matter.

All eyes dart between Shirley and Stanley, nobody has a story like this.

STANLEY

The fact that she turned out to be a shiksa from California, well, that's a little wrinkle my mother still hasn't ironed out.

Stanley holds up his glass of wine.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

To our suffering, my love...

Shirley inspects the contents of her tumbler.

SHIRLEY

I'm gonna need more Scotch for that one.

They drink. Easy laughter. The show is over.

Then: from the back of the room an unsuspecting GRAD STUDENT lobs --

GRAD STUDENT

So, so Shirley what are you writing now?

The room leans in for her answer. Shirley's eyes dart around. Stanley raises an eyebrow. She's on her own. Cornered prey.

SHIRLEY

A little novella I'm calling None of Your God Damn Business. How 'bout yourself?

Ohhs from the crowd.

GRAD STUDENT

I'm working on my second novel.

Shirley struggles to get on her feet. Rose can't take her eyes off Shirley, watches her lift a bottle of Scotch from the bar

SHIRLEY

You write a novel. Write. Write. You think pushing around sentences is work? Scrubbing toilets.

(MORE)

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Laying bricks. That's actual honest
to god labor. You're fucking around
with words.

Stanley shakes martinis, he SLIPS AN ICE CUBE down the front
of a FACULTY WIFE'S dress.

FACULTY WIFE

Stanley Hyman, you behave yourself.

STANLEY

And why would anyone want to do
that?

The party starts to resume its frothy banter.

Shirley picks her way towards the stair.

The DRUNKEN CAD stands over the buffet spooning potato salad
directly from the serving bowl into his mouth.

TITTING GIRLS running out the front door.

Rose is fixated on the retreating figure of Shirley mounting
the stairs. Gripping the banister and lugging herself up,
step by elephantine step.

Rose rushes after her. From the bottom of the stairs--

ROSE

Excuse me?

Shirley continues her labored assent. Rose skips up the
steps, catching Shirley on the landing.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I'm Rose. Rose Nemser.

Shirley stares blankly at the gnat circling around her. Rose
extends a hand. Shirley doesn't take it.

SHIRLEY

Betty. Debbie. Kathy. All the same
to me.

Rose is blocking Shirley's way.

ROSE

I'm Fred's wife. Fred Nemser. He's
helping Professor Hyman this
semester. We were invited to stay
with you for a few days until--

Shirley remembers.

SHIRLEY

The newlyweds. Ah, you've materialized.

She pushes past Rose.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

(under her breath)

No one said you were pregnant.

Rose blanches. How does she know? She's not showing.

ROSE

We aren't, telling anyone yet--

Shirley raises a hand, she's uninterested. Creak. Creak. The stairs moan under her weight. Shirley pauses at the top to catch her breath. Lights a cigarette.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I read your story.

Shirley wheels around. What's that chirping? Oh, the little wife is still talking. Down there on the landing.

SHIRLEY

I've written several.

ROSE

The Lottery. It's...well--

Shirley Jackson is standing five feet above her.

ROSE (CONT'D)

When I read it. It made me feel so thrillingly horrible. I really liked it. That's what I meant to say.

Shirley inhales on her cigarette. My, my, this one might be different.

SHIRLEY

"Thrillingly horrible."

Shirley nods and resumes her retreat. The glowing orange ember of her cigarette receding down the pitch black hallway.

11 **OMITTED**

11

12 **INT. LECTURE HALL -- DAY**

12

The spinning vinyl:

*What did you bring me?
What did you bring me?
To keep me from the gallows pole?*

Lead Belly begs through the scratchy recording. Stanley stands beside the record player. Head tossed back. Eyes tightly closed. Climbing inside the music.

The lecture hall is packed. Not an empty seat. Girls stand in the back. Girls sit in the aisles. They are practically hanging from the wooden rafters.

Rose squeezes past students to find a seat on an empty step. She sees Fred in the front row.

Stanley's thin finger lifts the needle from the record.

A hush falls over the hall. These students have never heard *the blues*. Stanley savors the moment. A spiritual awakening.

Stanley catches a young co-ed's eye:

STANLEY
That was Lead Belly.

He cocks an eyebrow at the student. Her face immediately flushed. He finds another student, a brunette:

STANLEY (CONT'D)
This is Myth and Folklore.

The Brunette sits frozen, Oh god, he's looking at her.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
And I am Professor Stanley Hyman.

A rapt audience. They hang on his every word.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
Your fearless leader for the next
twelve weeks as we ascend to the
heights of the gods. And stoop to
the very depths of human depravity.
I promise you demons, devils,
ghosts and goblins.

A ripple of excitement jolts through the rows of desks.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
Ladies, look no further, agony and
ecstasy, all there, in your
syllabus.

Murmurs, he said "ecstasy." The ladies can't contain themselves. Fluttering eye-lids. Swoon-ey smiles.

Fred glances around behind him from his perch in the first row. Stanley looks over at Fred and winks.

13

INT. LECTURE HALL -- LATER

13

The class is over. Clusters of girls mill about the room waiting to talk to Stanley.

Fred gathers his notes. He lingers as well, eavesdropping on Stanley's personal exchange with the students.

Rose tries to catch his attention, instead she sees him catch the eye of a STUDENT.

She is KATHERINE (19), this girl is trouble. She has the easy confidence that comes with a life of sated appetites.

Rose watches as Katherine crosses the hall to Fred.

KATHERINE

We've heard all about you Professor Nemser.

Now it's Fred's turn to blush.

FRED

Oh, I highly doubt that--

KATHERINE

What's your sport? Rowing?

Fred goes mute. Stanley clocks it.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

See you on Friday, Professor.

She bustles away, keenly aware of his eyes on her every move.

Stanley claps a hand on Fred's shoulder, startling him back to the present.

STANLEY

I see you're getting familiar with our lovely student body. That Katherine, she's a very precocious one.

Both men admire the tightness of Katherine's skirt as she weaves her way out of the lecture hall.

Rose makes her way down the stairs. A salmon swimming upstream of the students. Fred lights up.

FRED
Ain't he great?

ROSE
I wish the Chaucer class I'm auditing didn't meet at the same time.

STANLEY
There will be other semesters.

Stanley searches around, pained to ask what he's about to ask.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
Might I burden you with a favor?

FRED
What's that?

Stanley lays it on Rose, taking her hands in his.

STANLEY
Shirley gets these bouts. And just can't -- can't keep up with the household. The shopping.

He searches.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
And our last housekeeper just quit. Bad back or lungs. I don't recall. Maybe gout. It would be such a titantic help if you would. Just tidy up a bit. And maybe chip in with the laundry. And the cooking.

Rose stares at Fred.

ROSE
Oh --

STANLEY
No, no. Too much. Don't think I confuse you for a scullery maid. It's just we are in a bind.

ROSE
I'm happy to ... help around classes.

STANLEY

Obviously, room and board on us.

FRED

Oh, no, no. We couldn't.

STANLEY

Of course. I insist. Might you stay just until we're sorted out? Yes?

But he doesn't wait for an answer. Kisses Rosie's hands.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

How's your rump roast? I love hot food in hot weather.

And with that Stanley is hopping off. Leaving Rose and Fred alone.

FRED

We could try it -- just for a week. See if it's... he really seems in a bind. Could be sorta fun?

Rose stares into the seat of empty seats.

ROSE

Mopping and dusting, such a riot.

FRED

Or we say no?

ROSE

No, no. One week. I can do it for a week. Just be home for dinner. I'm making a roast.

FRED

Inspired idea.

She steps away. Looks back over her shoulder. He's smiling at her.

FRED (CONT'D)

Hey?

She turns.

He bounds up the stairs. Kisses her.

FRED (CONT'D)

Thanks sport.

ROSE

You'll get me back.

FRED

I will. I will.

Heat between them.

14 **EXT. QUAD -- DAY** 14

Rose walks through the afternoon sun. She spots a group of girls huddled under a tree.

Her eyes fixate on Katherine. The leader of the pack. Katherine gives her a fake smile. Returns to the girls, whispers something, obviously about Rose. The girls titter.

15 **INT. HALLWAY -- AFTERNOON** 15

Rose creeps down the hall. She stops across from Shirley's room.

The bedroom door is cracked open. Lying on a wrestled mound of sheets, mouth open, hair-matted is Shirley.

Shirley stirs. Kicks at the bedding. Settles. Her nightgown rides up her thigh, exposes her drooping underwear.

Rose silently closes the door.

16 **INT. KITCHEN -- DAY** 16

Rose assesses the foulness. Mammoth stacks of dirty dishes. The stove top, a crime scene. Shelves caked with grease soaked dust. Grimy windows. Stained curtains. The floor a sticky puddle.

She opens the refrigerator. Dark fuzzy mold covers the inside of the crisper drawer. Rose gags at the sight.

17 **OMITTED** 1718 **INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- DAY** 18

The office is empty. Rose carries a tray of coffee and pie. She sets it down near the desk. Is about to leave when she sees a flyer:

MISSING PERSON, PAULA JEAN WELDEN

Riffling through the papers on the desk she finds:

BENNINGTON BANNER: PAULA JEAN WELDEN MISSING!

She scans the newspaper article. Tacked to a nearby bookcase
A MAP OF THE LONG TRAIL.

Rose traces her fingers over the map.

She reads from an open notebook.

**"Athletic build. Quiet. Cafeteria job. Why? Rich father.
Siblings?**

No Thanksgiving visit home. Fight with father? Lover?"

SLAM! A HAND smashes the diary shut!

SHIRLEY (O.S.)

What do you think you're doing?!

Rose is face to face with an angered beast.

ROSE

I-I-I--thought coffee, since you're
just getting up.

Shirley snatches the notebook off the desk.

SHIRLEY

You are not allowed in here.

Rose recoils and CRASHES into the bookcase. She hits her head
-- HARD. Knocks over a dish of BLUE PILLS.

Rose drops to her hands and knees, frantically collecting the
scattered PILLS.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING!

Rose scampers around the desk, cradling the pills in her
cupped palm.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Get out. GET OUT!

Rose clamors to her feet, drops the pills onto the desk and
flies out of the room.

Through the wavy glass of the office's French Doors, Shirley
watches Rose run out the front door.

Alone. Shirley assesses the damage. Stacks the notebooks
neatly. The newspaper article.

She pops a pill. Washes it down with coffee.

A girls voice singing flatly:

*Slack your rope, Hangsaman
O slack it for a while,
I think I see my true love coming,
Coming many a mile...*

Where is that coming from? The room starts to spin. Shirley steadies herself.

Then: in the corner of her eye, Shirley sees A FLASH OF A RED COAT in the mirror. Then a hand comes to perch on her shoulder.

19 **OMITTED** 19

20 **INT. BUTCHER SHOP -- DAY** 20

Rose surveys the meats. Glistening crimson in the freezer.

A hand on her shoulder causes her to jump. The hand belongs to the BUTCHER.

BUTCHER

Something particular for you miss?

He stares at her in an unsettling way.

ROSE

A rump roast I suppose.

He takes his place behind the counter

The entry bell tinkers, MRS. CLASSEN, town gossip saunters in. The butcher papers the roast.

BUTCHER

(nods to Mrs. Classen)

Be right with you Mrs. Classen.

(back on Rose)

Put that on an account then miss?

Why does she feel like she's being studied? Because she is.

ROSE

Oh, yes, Stanley Hyman. Or maybe it's Jackson, I'm not sure which...

The butcher scoffs. Mrs. Classen leaps in.

MRS. CLASSEN

Lost the last girl did they? That didn't take long.

ROSE

'cuse me?

MRS. CLASSEN

Not an agreeable household to hired help.

Clucking.

BUTCHER

You're all set.

He hands Rose the parcel, it's a dismissal.

MRS. CLASSEN

You save me any of those sweet Italian sausages?

BUTCHER

You know I did.

Off Rose: slinking away.

21

INT. SODA SHOP -- DAY

21

A SPOON SPEARS A MOUND OF WHIPPED CREAM, crowning a butterscotch sundae.

Rose sits alone at the soda counter. Savoring every bite of the ice-cream.

The soda jerk, HENRY, a silver-haired man wearing the indignity of his paper cap like a champ, places a glass of water in front of her.

HENRY

Not one of them college girls.

He points to a pack of GIGGLING COLLEGE GIRLS ransacking the nail polish display.

They move like a Greek Chorus. They are BRAZEN, MATURE, RECKLESS in their dress and attitude.

Rose smiles. She is not. One of them.

HENRY (CONT'D)

They think after a semester or two, they own this place. We have families buried up in Queen of Heart that fought in The Revolutionary War.

Henry clucks at the disgrace of it all.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Know what makes that butterscotch
so good?

Rose shakes her head "no."

HENRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Maple syrup.

ROSE

It's delicious.

He's making Rose feel better, despite herself.

ROSE (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Is it dangerous to walk around by
yourself here? All these girls seem
to travel in herds.

HENRY

(offended)

Dangerous? This town? There's no
menace in this town. You hear me?
This is a very friendly, friendly
place.

ROSE

I just heard about that abducted
girl. The college one.

Henry stares her in the face.

HENRY

Abducted? Oh, no, no, no. That
wasn't nobody's fault but her own.
Ask Randy Fisher over at the post
office. He'll tell you. Last one to
see her. And begged her not to go
straying into the woods. Abducted.
Yeah, that's what the parents will
have you believe. Coming swooping
in. Acting like we are a backwater
of rapists and murderers.

ROSE

I didn't mean to offend --

HENRY

There was another girl that went
missing a few years back, before
Paula Welden. Up there on the pass.
They're calling that part of the
woods, the Bennington Triangle.
Folks walk in and never walk out.

HENRY (CONT'D)

But that's just nonsense. Don't believe a word of it. You, miss, are looking so much better than when you saddled up to my counter.

Rose searches her pockets. She's left her purse--

ROSE

I--uh--left my--

One of the college girls, swoops into the stool next to her.

PRISSY COLLEGE GIRL

I got you kiddo. This one's on me.

ROSE

That's really nice of--

PRISSY COLLEGE GIRL

Meaning the next one is on you.

This girl is flirting with her. Overtly. Rose is flustered. Doesn't know how to respond. She flees.

HENRY

Name's Henry, come see me again.

Henry tips his paper cap. Grins at her. Then watches her through the front window. Once's she's out of view, his smile evaporates.

22 **INT. HYMAN HALLWAY -- DAY** 22

Rose stands with the groceries at the foot of the stairs. Hears voices above.

23 **INT. SHIRLEY'S BEDROOM -- DAY** 23

Stanley implores the MOUND OF BLANKETS.

STANLEY

Get dressed for dinner, darling. Please try.

From under the covers:

SHIRLEY

Go. Away.

Stanley peels back the covers. Sits on the side of the bed.

STANLEY

I really think the two of them are going to work out. Did you see our kitchen?

This irks Shirley.

SHIRLEY

A clean house is evidence of mental inferiority.

STANLEY

Well, thank god for the simpletons, how else would we ever have fresh linens?

Shirley dives back under the covers, from this post she reports:

SHIRLEY

You hired some spies, that it? Those grubby hands all over my notebooks.

Stanley throws back the blanket. His patience exhausted.

STANLEY

I'm trying to help you Shirl. Take some of the pressure off. So you can get your work done.

Shirley hides her face in the pillow.

SHIRLEY

I don't want strangers here. I don't like them.

From hallway, Rose listens at the cracked door.

STANLEY

We've already discussed it dear. Fred is going to lighten my class load. So I can be around the house more. Won't you like that? Don't you want to get back to your writing?

An overwhelming wave of shame hits her.

SHIRLEY

(under her breath)
I'm. Trying.

Silence.

Stanley pats her back.

STANLEY

I know you are darling. I know.

Shirley wills back hot tears.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

But you can't expect me to sit by and indulge this can you? Staying in bed all day.

SHIRLEY

The party was too much. It set me back.

STANLEY

You have to get back to your desk. You're putting an undue amount of pressure on me. Fussing over you when I have work to do. You don't want my work to suffer too do you?

SHIRLEY

No. No. Stanley no. I'm going to do better. I promise. Starting tomorrow.

STANLEY

Starting tonight. You are putting on clean clothes. And sitting at the table for a proper meal.

The terror returns.

SHIRLEY

I can't.

Stanley takes her hand.

STANLEY

You will. Besides it's cocktail hour. Up-up-up.

He slides her legs around to the side of the bed. Then kneels down and puts on her slippers.

SHIRLEY

It'll be so dull.

She lights a cigarette.

STANLEY

I didn't ask you to behave at the table.

Stanley takes a drag off her cigarette.

Rose slips down the hall. Out of sight.

Stanley kisses Shirley on the forehead.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I'll bring you a Scotch.

Once he's gone. Shirley flops back down on the bed. The slightest twinkle in her eye.

24

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

24

Stifling heat.

Stanley and Shirley sit at the head and foot respectively. Fred across from Rose's empty chair.

Rose processes into the dining room with an offering -- A POT ROAST. Stanley hoots and claps.

STANLEY

A gorgeous slab of flesh!

Passing of dishes. Stanley fills their glasses. He returns to his seat and sheds his jacket. Sweat beading across his forehead.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Go on, my boy, shed a layer. We aren't formal in this house.

Fred flashes a quick glance at Rose. His jacket stays on.

FRED

I'm okay.

Fred passes a salad. Stanley heaps potatoes onto his plate. An impressive helping.

STANLEY

Suit yourself. I love a good shvitz. Often thought about participating in the Native American ritual of the sweat lodge.

Shirley gulps down her first glass of wine.

SHIRLEY

Often?

STANLEY

Why yes dear, in the middle of our Vermont winters the thought often occurs to me.

Directing the conversation at Rose.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

But then when I learned you have to crawl through a dirt tunnel under the ground--and sit naked buttocks to naked buttocks with a dozen other men while some sha-man stokes a smokey fire maintaining the hundred degree heat and pedals some noxious root tea that inspire hallucinations, well...

Stanely on his feet, re-filling Shirley's glass. She strokes his bare forearm. He flinches and pulls away. She masks the sting.

Rose stares at her plate. Fred is uncomfortable.

SHIRLEY

(recovering)

The image of your hairy, sweaty tuchus is not dinner table conversation. Why don't you tell us what you thought about town, Rose. You go snooping around the village?

Rose bristles, but won't take the bait.

ROSE

It was lovely. Talked to some very friendly folks.

SHIRLEY

A bunch of savages. The whole lot. Best keep your distance.

STANLEY

Darling, your paranoia isn't becoming. Besides, you don't want to scare our newlyweds.

Rose and Fred push food around their plates, it's too hot to eat.

SHIRLEY

So when's the baby due?

Fred looks incredulously at Rose.

FRED

The baby?

SHIRLEY

Oops. Was it supposed to be a surprise?

(to Rose)

You should have told me dear.

Stanley chuckles.

STANLEY

(to Fred)

We're always the last to know, my boy.

FRED

We just weren't say --

SHIRLEY

Sure hope it's yours.

Rose throws her fork down.

ROSE

Of course it's his.

SHIRLEY

And when are you due?

FRED

Uh, December. Right darling?

ROSE

I'd rather not discuss it, if you don't mind.

SHIRLEY

Ah, you're superstitious that it won't stick. There's no need.

Stanley is on his feet, refilling wine glasses.

Rose is staring daggers at her plate.

Silence.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

(on Rose)

December. Huh. Did you tell him you were knocked up before the wedding?

FRED

(covering)

We eloped. Too crazy about each other to wait for wedding planning.

SHIRLEY

By the time that one -- got his hairy paws on me, the kids just shot out BAM, BAM, BAM, BAM, torpedoes over the Pacific. Watch yourself dear.

ROSE

If you don't mind, I'd like to talk about something else.

STANLEY

I fear, my love, stories of our copulations might leave the table without an appetite.

ROSE

That's not what I mean -

STANLEY

Precisely, but that one --
(pointing to Shirley)
does have a sixth sense about babies. Calls it. Girl or a boy. She's never wrong.

(on Shirley)

Is poor Freddie here going to be disappointed?

The phone rings. Stanley returns to his seat. Fred looks between them. Isn't someone going to answer that?

Ring. Ring. Silence.

Shirley sips her wine. Stanley becomes fascinated with his green beans.

Ring. Ring.

Fred pushes back his chair:

FRED

Shall I?

Shirley holds a commanding hand up.

SHIRLEY

Stay put.

Fred freezes. Shirley stares at Stanley.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

You promised to take care of that.

STANLEY

And I kept my promise.

Ring. Ring. It's nerve-wracking.

SHIRLEY

Clean up your mess.

STANLEY

As you wish dear.

The ringing stops.

SHIRLEY

So Rose you were telling us about
your shot gun wedding--

Rose pushes back from the table. Final straw.

ROSE

If you'll excuse me--

She heads up the stairs in a rush. Fred is trapped at the table.

SHIRLEY

Oh, dear, you think it was
something she ate?

FRED

I should see if she's alright.

SHIRLEY

Yes, yes, you should.

Fred clears his and Rose's half-eaten plates.

When he's gone:

Shirley feeds the cat, at her feet, a pat of butter.

STANLEY

We might want to reconsider our conversational style in front of the newlyweds. They seem a sensitive bunch.

SHIRLEY

I thought I was being inquisitive.

Shirley pulls the cat onto her lap, it eats from her plate.

STANLEY

I feel a bit like we're in the Scottish play. I, the Thane of Cawdor with a murderous prophecy over my head and you Lady M. on the verge of madness. What will happen?

SHIRLEY

They'll bore us like everyone else does.

Truth.

STANLEY

I don't know, the little wife has a little pluck to her. Don't you think?

SHIRLEY

I couldn't say, the husband, Master Popinjay, put me to sleep every time he opened his mouth.

She sips from her glass.

STANLEY

Master Popinjay, I like.

SHIRLEY

What's yours?

STANLEY

Boy Wonder. Bit on the nose. Do you have other ideas?

SHIRLEY

I always have ideas.

STANLEY

You do. It's pages you are lacking right now.

SHIRLEY

You're worried about money.

STANLEY

Let's not be those kind of
Socialists that abhor money.

Shirley smokes.

SHIRLEY

Well, I have a title.

STANLEY

Burying the lead are we?

SHIRLEY

Hangsaman. It's about that girl.

STANLEY

Right, *that* girl.

SHIRLEY

The missing one.

STANLEY

The Welden girl?

SHIRLEY

Of course.

(pained)

What do you think?

STANLEY

Well, you haven't said much.

SHIRLEY

It's just an idea. I can try
something else. If you think it's
too --

STANLEY

Disappearing college girls? That
sounds trite and a bit trashy. But
give it a go. I'll read of course.
Before you wade too far in.

The cat is pawing at the gravy dish. Shirley heaps more food
onto her plate.

SHIRLEY

It's going to take time.

STANLEY

Give it to me in a few days.

Shirley struggles to confess.

SHIRLEY

It's a novel.

STANLEY

Oh, no, dear. That's...you're not--
Call Gus, tell him you have a nice
juicy, short story for him to
publish. Give him some crumbs. Get
an advance. Then worry about the
novel later. You're just not up to
it.

SHIRLEY

You're wrong.

STANLEY

Darling, you haven't left the house
in two months. You can barely pull
on a pair of stockings. Ease back.
That's all I'm saying.

SHIRLEY

It's going to be a novel. And it's
going to be brilliant.

STANLEY

One thing at a time, darling. Don't
get ahead of yourself.

Shirley fights back tears. He doesn't believe in her.

SHIRLEY

The next time the phone rings
during dinner, so help me Stanley,
I'm going to deal with it.

STANLEY

I'm well within the bounds of our
agreement.

SHIRLEY

The agreement didn't include your
sluts disturbing my dinner.

STANLEY

I will talk to her. And tell you
everything. As I always do.

SHIRLEY

Dull, duller, dullest. Scraping the
barrel these days.

Stanley jumps up from the table. He puts a record on loud.
Bangs out the front screen door.

Shirley sits alone at the table, shoveling food into her
mouth and feeding the cat from her plate.

25

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

25

Dark bedroom. Rose lies in the bed.

FRED

He's not the problem. Nothing he
said was --

He changes into pajamas.

ROSE

One week. That's enough time. One
week.

Slips into bed and turns out the light.

FRED

Maybe she'll even out. As she gets
better.

ROSE

She's a monster.

FRED

Sh-sh. Don't upset yourself. Talk
about it in the morning.

Rose settles into his chest. Safety.

ROSE

You like the students?

FRED

I like you.

ROSE

Are they smarter? Do you think?
Than my class?

FRED

No, no, just richer.

He kisses her on the lips. Lingers.

26

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

26

A KNIFE scrapes the burnt off a piece of toast.

Bacon sizzles on the stove. Coffee percolates.

An expert hand cracks half a dozen eggs and whips them into submission.

Rose sets down two heaping plates on the kitchen table. She shouts up the stairs.

ROSE
Eggs are ready!
(mutters)
Happy to serve you.

Stanley charges into the kitchen, paper in hand. Fred is steps behind him.

FRED
...I found that article that links
the tonality of the Druid dirges to
the Appalachian mourning ballads in
the second volume of Francis
Child's collection.

STANLEY
That's grand. Just grand.

He is nosing around for coffee. Rose hands him a mug.

ROSE
Milk?

Stanley takes it.

FRED
It's what I was cross-referencing
in Chapter Seven of my dissertation
I'm not sure you had the
opportunity to read that yet--

STANLEY
Good god, son, might I have a cup
of coffee in peace?

Stanley snaps open the paper. Fred is chastised. He pushes around his eggs, then gives up and dumps them in the trash.

Rose is elbow deep in dishes. Fred gives her a perfunctory kiss.

ROSE
Have a good day dear.

She mouths the words, "one week."

Stanley finishes his breakfast, egg in his beard, crumbs on his shirt front.

He bolts back his coffee standing very close to Rose at the sink.

STANLEY

Keep your eye on the Misses for me,
won't you dear?

He gives her a patronizing pat on the shoulder and a kiss on the cheek.

ROSE

Of course Professor.

STANLEY

Now stop that, this instant Mrs. Nemser. Stanley, Stanley, don't make me tell you again. I don't know if you were intending on peaking into a lecture, but if you don't mind, perhaps you could just stay around the house. Shirley J. -- really is in a bad way.

Rose takes it in...

ROSE

A roast chicken sound good for dinner, Stanley?

STANLEY

Quick study your wife is Freddie-boy.

Fred packs up his briefcase and steps out of the kitchen. When they are alone Stanley confides:

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I'm counting on you, Rosie dear.

Stanley winks and strides out. Rosie listens for the front door to SLAM.

Deep exhale. The hurricane has past. Finally, quiet.

Rosie sits at the table, reading over the paper and drinking her coffee. When:

CLANG!

Rose jumps out of her seat. What? Is that sound?

THE METALLIC STACCATO OF TYPEWRITER KEYS.

27 **INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS**

27

Rose creeps into the front hallway outside of Shirley's office.

She watches as Shirley in a fugue, battles the typewriter keys. Then:

Shirley rips the yellow paper out of the typewriter. Balls it up. Defeated.

Rose stands frozen in the hallway, unable to move, the house holding her still.

A moment later Shirley is back on the keys, typing.

Rose, released now, scans the corners of the hallway with new eyes.

Rose slinks away.

28 **INT. PLAYROOM -- DAY**

28

Rose, investigating the house's secrets, cautiously opens the door to the children's nursery. Cob-webs blanket a rocking horse. A shelf of WELL LOVED DOLLS some missing eyes, some booties.

A train track looped in a perpetual figure eight.

She opens the closet. Shelves upon shelves of children's clothes.

She runs her finger over the door frame. Inspects the height notches. She can almost hear the children's laughter.

In the corner sits an empty bassinet. A rocking chair keeping vigil.

Rose sits in the chair, stares out the window as the late morning sun filters through the gossamer curtain.

She sees a stack of identical books. Boxes and boxes of them. Stanley Hyman's THE ARMED VISION.

Crash!

Rose jumps up.

Shirley drops a large box onto the kiddy table.

SHIRLEY

Yeah, poor Stanley. Had to buy back his books from the publisher. He keeps threatening to write another. Where will we put them?

Shirley shoves the box towards Rose.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Open it.

Shirley precariously sits on a kiddy chair.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

There's more where that came from. Up in the attic. But I don't like the bats.

Rose cautiously, reluctantly opens the box. It's filled with baby clothes. Adorable sweaters, booties, a silver baby spoon.

ROSE

They're gorgeous. But I can't. These are too nice.

Rose folds the clothes back up. Shirley takes the silver spoon.

SHIRLEY

My mother, the Great Geraldine. We couldn't afford the hospital bill for my oldest. And what does she do? Sends a fucking silver spoon and a Christening outfit that costs more than the water heater.

ROSE

I never knew what a lobster fork was until my first dinner at Fred's house.

Shirley gives the spoon to Rose.

SHIRLEY

Take 'em. Or the rats will be using them some day for nesting.

ROSE

Seems a little early to be collecting things for the baby.

Rose sets the spoon down. She doesn't want to dream.

SHIRLEY

Follow me.

It's not an invitation, it's a command.

29

INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- DAY

29

Shirley's hands dance over the spines of dozens of books.

SHIRLEY

I know where every single book is
in this house.

Shirley hands Rose a pile of books.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Look for anything with Fertility,
Maternity, Full Moon in the title.

Rose can't tell if she's joking. She stares at her confused.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm a witch. Didn't anyone tell
you?

She keeps piling books into Rose's arms.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Healthy, happy baby. That's the
spell we need.

Shirley stops for a moment, considers--

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Unless you want a spell for the
other thing.

Rose sets the books down.

ROSE

What? No. How could you even think-

Shirley back on the hunt.

SHIRLEY

Don't get your hackles up. The
house knows things. The joys of
motherhood come with a price.

Rose wants to ask, but can't *what does the house know?* But she doesn't. Instead she pulls down a DECK OF TAROT cards from the shelf.

Shirley brightens.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Cut them. Go on.

Rose fumbles with the cards, nervous.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

They won't bite. Just divide the deck three times. However you choose. Or however they choose.

Rose divides the deck three times. Shirley sits on a small chaise. Invites Rose to sit across from her. A side table between them.

Shirley knocks on the table.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Place the deck face down.

Rose does. Shirley precisely peels card after card, impassively placing them into a tarot formation.

Shirley studies the cards. Flashes of one card over and over:

HANGSAMAN -- HANGSAMAN -- HANGSAMAN.

Shirley looks up from the cards and sitting on across from her is:

PAULA WELDEN (20) wearing that RED COAT. Or rather, it's Rose who is Paula as seen from Shirley's imagination.

Shirley blanches.

Rose returns.

ROSE

What did you see?

Shirley stares back at the cards.

Shirley collects the cards back into a deck.

SHIRLEY

You're going to die someday, just like the rest of us. Now leave me alone to work.

Rose gets up. Shaken.

Shirley, soaking neck-deep in the tub. Her arm dangles over the side, clutching a cigarette.

POUNING ON THE DOOR.

No sign of Paula. No bloody night dress.

Shirley tries to stand. Collapses back to the ground.

STANLEY (O.S.)

Shirl? You okay in there? Shirl?

She recognizes the voice. How long has she been here? She rolls over, the room still spinning.

SHIRLEY

Mmm-hmm. I'm fine. Fine.

Stanley tries the door handle. Shirley watches it turn in panic. He rattles it. Locked! Thank god.

STANLEY

You sure?

SHIRLEY

Be right out.

She listens to the footsteps receding down the hall. She props herself back up against the tub.

Shirley lights a cigarette. Droplets of water run down her naked body.

35

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

35

Rose reads in bed. Her movements mirroring Paula's from the previous scene in Shirley's imagination.

Fred fusses getting into pajamas.

FRED

I stopped by the Dean's office today. Just a formality. Welcoming new faculty and all that. He hinted there might be an opening in the English department next fall.

ROSE

That would be nice.

FRED

Yeah, I keep waiting for Stanley to loosen the reins a bit.

ROSE

You're just at the beginning of the semester.

FRED

I know. I know. But I'm not a lackey after all. I have lectures prepared of my own. I don't want to sit on the bench all season.

ROSE

Mmm.

Fred steps on something, yowls.

FRED

The fuck is this?

He holds a spikey NETTLE in his palm. Looks at the foot of the bed.

ROSE

It's a -- nettle.

Fred inspects further. BRANCHES OF NETTLES underneath their bed.

FRED

There's a nest under the bed. I'm getting a broom.

ROSE

No, no, no. Don't touch it. It's a fertility offering.

Fred stares at her in disbelief.

FRED

No-no. You are not getting into that bullshit.

ROSE

I'm not into it. I'm just -- leave it be.

FRED

She did this. Is this some sort of hex?

ROSE

Just leave it be. It's fine. It's not dark magic if you don't believe in it. It's to keep the baby safe.

Fred crawls into bed.

FRED

You don't believe in it?

A pause.

FRED (CONT'D)

Rosie?

ROSE

Not a bit.

FRED

Not one single bit?

ROSE

Stop. I'm tired.

His hands are up her nightdress.

FRED

Not at all? Not even a shred of --

ROSE

Sleep!

Fred stops.

FRED

I don't want her putting strange ideas into your head.

ROSE

She's not. She's lonely. That's all. She wanted to do something nice. For me.

FRED

Should we stay on, a little longer? I can keep working on Stanley? Would you mind?

Rose rolls over and kisses him.

ROSE

Don't get any ideas.

FRED

Not even a small idea. A five minute idea?

Rose shuts off the light.

ROSE

Wake me early.

It's a compromise. Fred accepts. But then, after the lights are out, Rose reaches for him.

She unbuttons his shirt. Kisses his bare skin. Waits for him to catch up to her. Waits until he is begging. Then:

She straddles him fully, her night-gown still covering her. Teases him until he can't take another moment and they climb together.

She rolls off. And snuggles back to her side of the bed.

Fred stares at his wife, stunned. Who is in this bed with him?

36

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

36

The crack under the kitchen door glows brightly. Rose carefully pushes it open.

Shirley's ample behind rummaging through the refrigerator.

ROSE

Same idea. I'm starving.

Shirley grabs a bottle of wine and two glasses. Places them on the table.

SHIRLEY

Had a crazy dream. The fridge was oozing mud. Big worms coming out of the crisper. Size of fingers. Freud would have a field day.

ROSE

I haven't read any--

Rose cuts herself off, too much to say. Shirley lights a cigarette. She looks weary.

SHIRLEY

You regret it?

ROSE

Not reading Freud?

SHIRLEY

That. And dropping out. Smart girl like yourself. From modest means. Must have been on scholarship, a girl like you.

ROSE

I loved school, I'm trying to keep up. Reading what I can. And after the baby, Fred said I can go back.

SHIRLEY

He's allowing you. Well...

ROSE

And my family did fine for ourselves--

SHIRLEY

Yes. I've used the syrup in canned peaches for cakes too. But you only know how to stretch the sugar when you've had to learn.

ROSE

Fred's a good man.

SHIRLEY

So you've said.

ROSE

His parents cut him off when they found out we eloped. He knew they would. Married me anyways.

SHIRLEY

So you're grateful. Need to prove you're worth it. That sounds exhausting.

ROSE

Oh, I don't know.

Shirley smokes.

SHIRLEY

I'm lost Rosie. I'm lost. I don't like being lost.

Rose sees Shirley's determination drained.

ROSE

The book?

SHIRLEY

The girl. She's teasing me.

ROSE

How does someone just disappear?

SHIRLEY

She was only a few years younger than you. How differently things might have turned out. Why didn't they.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

You know how it feels to have a secret?

Rose shakes her head no. But it's unconvincing.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

You feel glances. Hear whispers. You imagine things in people's faces. And see them step aside when you pass. Afraid to brush up against you. Afraid those dark thoughts will infect them.

A darkness descends.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

They talk. In town. About me. Rumors. Gossip. I know what they think. I know their hissings.

Shirley sips her wine.

ROSE

I haven't heard anything.

Rose sips her wine. Shirley heaves herself up.

SHIRLEY

Don't we have anything sweet around here?

Shirley already in an apron.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

A pie I think. You like pie?

ROSE

I love pie.

SHIRLEY

Then I'll make you a pie. And you will find me some bourbon. And you will learn the secrets of the infamous Shirley Jackson butter crust.

Rose watches Shirley, channeling her anxiety now in flour, butter and sugar. Lining up her ingredients like a lieutenant marshalling forces.

36A **INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE - DAY**

36A

Shirley sits at her desk, she takes out a key, hidden in a ceramic cat. She unlocks her desk drawer. Removes a bundle of yellow type-written pages.

She reads.

37 **INT. MAIN STAIRWAY -- DAY**

37

Rose, with a bucket and rag, wipes down the dusty stairs. Shirley stands behind her, unnoticed for a moment.

SHIRLEY

I need you to run an errand for me.

Rose wheels around, surprised. Breathless. Startled.

ROSE

Oh, is the writing going well?

SHIRLEY

Please never ask me that again.

Rose clams up. This woman is impossible.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

I need you to run up to campus.

ROSE

I can send Fred --

SHIRLEY

No, no. This is between us.

ROSE

Stanley doesn't think you should be alone--

SHIRLEY

You don't need to babysit me. I'm fine. I'm working, or I'd do it myself.

ROSE

Okay. But it's a nice walk. And a little fresh air--

SHIRLEY

Forget it. Forget I ever asked. I just thought you'd like a little adventure.

ROSE

No, no, no. I only meant. I'd go with you. If you wanted an outing.

SHIRLEY

An outing? Like a picnic? Gonna make us up some egg-salad sandwiches? Fly a kite while we're at it?

ROSE

(confused)

If you want--

SHIRLEY

I'm. Working.

ROSE

Yes, of course. Whatever you need.

Shirley touches her cheek, the tenderness surprises Rose.

SHIRLEY

It's just.

But Shirley thinks better than trying to explain.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Come see me when you're through with the washing.

ROSE

Sure.

Shirley slips away as quickly as she appeared.

37A **EXT. QUAD / EXT. DEWEY HALL -- DAY**

37A

Rose walks aimlessly in the blinding sun. Everywhere she looks clusters of girls. So many girls. Lounging on the grass. Or scrambling to class.

Rose finds herself in front of Dewey Hall.

A pack of girls spills out the front door. They part around Rose, an obstacle in their path, then regroup.

37B **OMITTED**

37B

37C **OMITTED**

37C

38

INT. NURSE'S OFFICE -- DAY

38

The NURSE (50), excessively dour, presses a stethoscope onto Rose's chest.

The nurse clucks, records notes.

NURSE

All normal. Just a dizzy spell. You are free to go Mrs. Nemser.

The nurse opens a file cabinet, tucks the chart neatly inside.

ROSE

I'm carrying, I get light-headed so easily.

The Nurse is surprised, Rose is hardly showing.

NURSE

Why didn't you say so honey. Now it makes perfect sense.

ROSE

Might I bother you for a coke? If I could just sit here for a minute.

All maternal warmth.

NURSE

You sit tight sweetheart. I got a cola in the break room.

The nurse charges out. As soon as the door is shut:

Rose leaps up from her chair, opens the file cabinet. Thumbs through the files frantically.

She listens for the nurse's return. Digs deeper into the file cabinets. TRIUMPHANT. "Welden, Paula Jean."

Rose slips the file into a bag of groceries. Seconds later, the door opens.

NURSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Now here we go.

Rose takes the cola.

ROSE

Thanks so much.

She flees the office.

38A INT. POST OFFICE -- DAY

38A

Rose dripping wet caught in a fall shower. Rushes into the post office.

Rose steps to the window and takes out a letter.

ROSE
Postage for these and a book of stamps, please.

Randy Fisher, the postal officer (50) long suffering, inspects her return address.

RANDY FISHER
Hyman house, huh?

ROSE
Yes, sir.

RANDY FISHER
Can't get my carriers to deliver up there anymore. She writes stories with cannibalism in 'em. That's what I heard.

Rose laughs a little.

ROSE
I'm not much of a reader.

She digs into her change purse for some coins.

ROSE (CONT'D)
But people love to gossip in this town. Don't they Mr. Fisher. I mean you should know.

The Randy Fisher considers her.

RANDY FISHER
That they do.

ROSE
Up on campus, they still talk. I can't imagine why would any girl do that. Walk into the woods alone. Can you?

RANDY FISHER
Not the slightest idea.

ROSE

Do you often stop and give young girls rides in your postal truck?

RANDY FISHER

I'm not sure I like your questions.

ROSE

Just wondering if this was a habit of yours. Shuttling the college girls along your route.

RANDY FISHER

I'd never seen Paula before in my life. But it was the Samaritan thing to do. She looked half frozen, nothing but thin sneakers on. She wanted to get dropped off at the trail head. I wasn't going to get any further into her business. She said she was going for a hike. And I didn't like that seeing as it was almost sundown. She had no knapsack. No provisions. I assumed she musta been meeting someone.

ROSE

Like who?

RANDY FISHER

Weren't my business to pry.

ROSE

But you dropped her off, just the same.

Randy Fisher stares at her.

ROSE (CONT'D)

It does seem odd, a girl like that. Insisting on being left in the middle of the woods. Isn't that enough of a plea for help?

RANDY FISHER

Everybody in town knows it weren't me that was involved. Came forward right away to the police when I heard she was missing. But you college folk, well, somewhere to shovel your dirt.

Rose gathers up her letters. Randy Fisher eyes her as she leaves.

38B

INT. COLLEGE LIBRARY -- DAY

38B

Rose drops a stack of library books on the check out desk. CAROLINE, (50s) an effortless elegance that comes with a living a life in a quiet college library, greets Rose with a smile.

CAROLINE

Back again Mrs. Nemser, my aren't you a voracious reader. Still on the Chaucer?

ROSE

Stanley Hyman's Myth and Folklore class.

Caroline takes a moment, filling out the sign out slips before emphatically stamping them.

CAROLINE

One of the favorites of the campus. Pity you'll miss his lectures. They are riveting. Like the man himself. But I don't have to tell you that.

ROSE

No. You don't.

CAROLINE

You and Fred should come over to the house. Must be getting rather, dull for young folks like you spending so much time with that -- in that house I mean.

She's referring to Shirley of course.

ROSE

I'm sure Fred would love your invitation, he's so fond of the Dean.

Rose turns to go.

CAROLINE

I heard she never leaves the house these days. Or her bed for that matter. She's gone sick in the head.

Rose looks back, a flash of loyalty.

ROSE

She's working hard. All hours of
the day everyday.

Caroline nods. Sure, sure. A likely story.

CAROLINE

I only get my information from
Stanley, he has the patience of a
saint.

Rose smiles sweetly. Seeing what Shirley is up against.

A hand on Rose's shoulder, Rose jumps. It's PRISSY COLLEGE
GIRL.

PRISSY COLLEGE STUDENT

Butterscotch! You never said you
were married to that little fox
Fred Nemser.

ROSE

I'm sorry, do I --

PRISSY COLLEGE STUDENT

All the girls just about hate you.
You going back to town? Let's walk
together.

And with that Rose is whisked off.

39

INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- DAY

39

A fire crackles, trying to ward off the gloomy rainy
afternoon.

Shirley lies on the rug. Her stockings gathered at her
ankles. Her shirt is stained with coffee. An ash-tray perched
on her chest.

She stares at a tree branch clawing at the window. She
listens to the shushing and hushing of the rain.

Shirley stares past the tree branch. Past the grey menacing
sky. The colors are starting to blur. Blues and greys
swirling together.

Rose stands in the doorway, hesitant to open the door.
Shirley seems far away, in a trance almost. She watches
Shirley, then Shirley senses Rose's presence.

She stares at her -- intensely. Really seeing through her
almost.

ROSE

Shirley, are you alright?

The tree branch SNAPS at the glass pane and shatters it.

Rose rushes into the room to pick up the glass.

Shirley drops her feet from the desk, the ash-tray spills everywhere.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Let me get it. Don't move.

Shirley waves her away from the shards of glass. She sits up.

SHIRLEY

Nevermind all that. Tell me of your adventures.

Rose slaps the medical file on the desk.

Shirley thumbs the file open.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

"Severe menstrual cramps. The last week of November. Too sick to return home for the holiday."

Shirley waits for the assessment.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Meaning?

ROSE

Miscarriage?

SHIRLEY

Then a week later she's missing. Good work, Rosie, good work.

Then, as she flips through the file:

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Oh the poor thing.

But there's a dirge in Shirley's voice. The terror of the events this poor girl endured. The loneliness.

Shirley hugs Rose, exuberant.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

People are so simple. And the post office --

ROSE

Randy Fisher thinks she was meeting someone.

SHIRLEY

Did she say that?

ROSE

No. But that's the impression he had.

SHIRLEY

The timing is perfect. She gets pregnant, won't go home for Thanksgiving. A week goes by and she goes to a rendezvous in the woods.

ROSE

But why there?

SHIRLEY

Someone who she was ashamed to come up to campus.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Or it was someone who didn't want to be seen there.

ROSE

Because other people would recognize him.

SHIRLEY

Someone recognizable on campus.

ROSE

Yes.

SHIRLEY

Yes. He's someone with authority. Meet me at the trail and she does.

ROSE

A professor.

They sit with this.

SHIRLEY

So why does she go? If you were her-

ROSE

If I was her --

SHIRLEY

And a confident, smart,
accomplished man pays attention to
you? When you're a young freshman,
never been away from home. Never
been in love. Would you go?

Rose sits with this. Would she? Of course she would. She has.

ROSE

I feel badly for her.

Shirley nods. Rose understands.

Shirley plants a kiss on Rose's cheek.

SHIRLEY

Closer. Closer.

Shirley spies a bundle of letters in Rosie's hand, she
snatches the bundle. She combs through. Dropping the hate
mail into a canvas bag.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Evil, filth, treachery.

She stops on a letter.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Ah one from dear Mum. What a treat.

Shirley opens the letter reads for a moment. Her face now
ashen.

Shirley flicks her lighter. Lights the letter on fire and
drops it in the fireplace.

Then, forgetting Rose is there, walks out of the office.

As soon as Rose hears the heavy tread on the stairs, she
creeps behind Shirley's desk and starts to read the typed
pages.

40

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

40

CRACK! The spine is severed. A thick blade bisects The pink
pimpled skin of a freshly plucked chicken. Dislocates wings,
thighs, and saws through the breast.

Rose pushing up the sleeves of one of Fred's cardigans.

The sweater slips from her shoulders. She tries to turn
around but someone is pressed against her.

She arches her neck, relaxes into the touch of a hand on her shoulder, now slipping down the back of her dress.

A bearded cheek against her neck. WAIT. IT'S NOT FRED.

Rose whips around. Stanley stands inches away.

STANLEY

Did I startle you? Rosie?

ROSE

I thought...you were--

STANLEY

Just we three for dinner. Oh, wait two. Shirley doesn't want to eat. Fred's up on campus tonight. Advising the Shakespeare Society.

Rose instinctively picks up the butcher knife. Wipes it with a dish towel.

ROSE

I can bring her up a plate.

STANLEY

If she wants to eat, she needs to come to the table.

He stirs his drink with an olive laden toothpick, smirks at her, takes a sip of his cocktail.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

You really ought to keep the mail from her until the end of the day. It's an unnecessary distraction. She insists on reading those letters. I've asked the New Yorker to stop sending them. But regardless. It's an interruption. It derails her. So in the future...

ROSE

She's not a child.

Stanley gulps down the remainder of his martini.

STANLEY

Who's saying she is?

He plucks the olive off the toothpick and offers it to Rose. She refuses it. He pops the olive into his mouth.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

We just have to get her back to her desk. Back into her work.

Defiant anger flashes over Rose.

ROSE

She's working constantly. She barely stops for lunch.

STANLEY

(shocked)

Poor thing, she must really be having a time of it. I haven't seen anything yet.

ROSE

She's got pages and pages of a manuscript. Sitting right on her desk.

STANLEY

You've read it?

ROSE

No, no, of course not!

STANLEY

But you can differentiate a stack of papers from a manuscript? Such a bright girl.

Rose fumes. Dregs a chicken leg in egg, dusts it with flour then drops it into the hot oil. She watches the skin turn crispy golden.

SHIRLEY

Is there any of our pie left?

There stands Shirley, how long has she been there?

STANLEY

Rosie said you've got half a manuscript already. Let's have a look.

SHIRLEY

I wonder why she would say that.

Rose looks stricken.

ROSE

I don't think that's what I said.

STANLEY

So you don't have pages and pages of a manuscript? Just inquiring darling. You're not half-way through a novel you haven't shown me?

It's a stand-off.

SHIRLEY

No. No I don't. Mostly grocery lists.

STANLEY

Well, in that case, I'll pop over to the Dean's before dinner.

SHIRLEY

You do that.

Stanley marches out. When he's gone. Almost an exhale.

ROSE

I swear I didn't --

Shirley spins back on Rose. A pitcher crashes from a shelf. The house is defending Shirley.

She bangs out the back door. Rose stands stunned. She watches Shirley lumbering across the yard, down to the woods...

41

EXT. WOODS -- DAY

41

A BOOTED HEEL is sucked ankle deep in oozing mud. Then another. Rose grabs a hold of a branch overhead to steady her step.

ROSE

Shirley!

The woods are protective of their captive. Rose sees no one.

JUMP TO:

Shirley, alone. She stumbles. Shirley is surveying the darkening woods.

Her heart racing. The canopy of branches closing in on her.

Panic. Terror. Blurred vision. She is drenched in sweat.

From a muffled place she hears:

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Shirley!!!!

Shirley tries to scream. She can't catch her breath. Branches twist to choke her.

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Shirley!

The voice is closer. Shirley collapses. Propped up by a tree.

She waits.

Rose rushes to her.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Shirley!

Rose sits inches away.

ROSE (CONT'D)

You're okay. It's okay. I'll take you home.

SHIRLEY

You're here.

ROSE

Of course I'm here. Let's go home.

Rose gathers Shirley up. Shirley takes a few steps, she's wobbly.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Just rest a second.

Shirley sit on the trunk of a fallen tree. The forest still spinning.

With dirty fingers, Shirley clears the leaves away from the base of a tree trunk. Revealing:

A piece of bark TEEMING WITH MUSHROOMS.

SHIRLEY

The amanita phalloides. My favorite

The name means nothing to Rose.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

The death cap mushroom. The most poisonous of all the fungi. Fatal to humans if ingested.

Rose backs away from the toxic offering. Shirley pries the piece of bark holding the mushrooms. She decapitates a mushroom, holds the cap up for Rose to inspect.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Don't you find it exhilarating?

ROSE

Exhilarating? Terrifying.

Shirley palms the cap and blows away the debris.

SHIRLEY

Most young women find their mortality fascinating. Not you?

ROSE

They shouldn't. The truth is no one cares all that much if you live or if you die.

Shirley pats the ground next to her, sit, sit. Rose is instantly ashamed of her outburst.

Shirley offers her the mushroom.

SHIRLEY

You want to taste?

ROSE

(nervous laugh)
No, no, of course not.

Shirley stays silent.

Shirley drops the mushroom into Rose's palm. Rose stares at the deadly thing, mesmerized.

SHIRLEY

Do you want to split it with me?

Rose sniffs it.

ROSE

It looks so ordinary.

SHIRLEY

It could stop our hearts from beating.

Shirley snatches it away from Rose and PLOPS THE MUSHROOM IN HER MOUTH.

ROSE

Oh god! Shirley! Shirley! Spit it out.

Rose leaps up, runs in circle. Shirley cackles.

SHIRLEY

Shush!

But Rose is tugging at her to stand up.

ROSE

We have to get you to a hospital!
Ohmygod ohmygod. I'm going to get help --

Shirley grabs Rose.

SHIRLEY

It's okay, okay. It's not poisonous.

ROSE

We have to--now--wait? What?

SHIRLEY

It's not going to kill me.

ROSE

But you just said it was the amigla phallap--whatever.

Shirley kicks at some moss under her feet, revealing more mushrooms.

SHIRLEY

These are the death cap.

She plucks more caps from the piece of bark.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

These are straw mushrooms. You had them in your omelette yesterday. Here, try one.

She holds out a straw mushroom for Rose to eat.

Rose places a hand over her mouth. She backs away from Shirley.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

I like you Rosie. I have no reason to want you dead.

Rose is trying not to panic.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Why would I want to harm you?

Rose shrugs. She is terrified.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
You could run, run fast away from
me. But you aren't. Why is that?
Why do you stay here?

Rose drops her hand from her mouth. It's good to feel this
alive. Shirley was right, it's thrilling.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
It's intoxicating? Isn't it? A hand
over the flame?

Rose nods.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Can I trust you Rosie?

Rose nods "yes".

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
You're not hiding anything from me?
You won't harm me? Or betray me?

Rose shakes her head no, no.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Open up.

Shirley waits, the mushroom posed like a communion wafer.

Then Shirley puts a dirty hand on Rose's jaw. Her fingers
parts Rose's lips.

Shirley places the mushroom onto Rose's tongue.

Rose closes her lips. Shirley places a finger to her own
lips.

Shhh. Their secret.

Shirley in bed, exhausted from the escapade, takes more than
a few pills. Washes them down with Scotch.

43

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

43

Rose and Stanley eat alone in the dining room. Each in their customary seats.

Quiet scraping of cutlery. Then:

STANLEY

I heard you were reading your way through my syllabus.

Rose suddenly looks up.

ROSE

How did --

STANLEY

Oh, I have eyes and ears everywhere dear. Are you enjoying it?

ROSE

The selections?

STANLEY

Yes dear, I might have a few lectures typed up -- if you'd like to read those as well. Or you know, you can ask me anything. We can have our own colloquium.

He drains his glass.

ROSE

I wouldn't want to impose, on your time.

Rose doesn't know what to say.

STANLEY

Oh, come now, I won't make you recite your Latin grammar up on my lap. You've a head on you. I'm sure that's why Shirley is so taken.

He pops up for more wine. Gestures to her. Rose gets up.

ROSE

I'm going to fix a tray for Shirley.

44

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

44

Rose asleep with the bedside lamp on. She is startled awake by clattering through the hall.

The door knob turns, Fred, supporting himself in the doorway.

Rose rustles awake. Fred stumbles into the room. Banging into the dresser.

FRED

Owww.

Rose leaps out of bed to keep him from crashing into the bureau.

FRED (CONT'D)

I'm home baby. We were having a celebration.

He plunks down on the bed. Rose loosens his tie. She's crawling on top of him, shimmying his pants off.

ROSE

I missed you tonight. You left me alone with Stanley.

FRED

Whoa, whoa. Should I be worried?

ROSE

What?

FRED

You have a little crush don't you?

Rose laughs. Stares at Fred. He's serious.

FRED (CONT'D)

A tiny little crush. And you like it. Admit it. You like the professors. You like them older.

ROSE

You're drunk. You sound like a jealous housewife.

FRED

Not too drunk. To see what's what.

ROSE

I thought you were advising the Shakespeare Society. Didn't realize they brought booze to that.

FRED

They don't. Don't be stupid. I stopped for drinks.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

At the men's club. That's all. Now
who's the jealous wife?

She takes his face in her hands. Tries to kiss him. But he
turns away.

Rose takes a moment to recover. She lifts her nightgown over
her head. Stands in front of him mostly naked. A tiny bulge
showing.

ROSE

It's because of --

Fred stares at his wife's body. She's right.

FRED

No, no. You're beautiful. I'm
wrecked is all.

He switches off the light. Rose pulls her nightgown back on.
Climbs into bed. Miles between them. Fred stares into the
darkness. A secret brewing.

45

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

45

Rose eavesdrops from the hall.

Stanley sits on the couch in his pajamas. A nest of papers
around him.

Fred, dressed for a morning run holds his ground.

STANLEY

You want to give one of *my*
lectures?

FRED

No, no, I want to give one of *my*
lectures. The Mourning Ballads.

STANLEY

You want to replace my Mourning
Ballads lecture with your own?

FRED

Of course I'm not going to touch
any of the Delta spirituals.

STANLEY

Freddie, Freddie. You've barely
been here two months.

FRED
We're almost half-way through
the semester--

STANLEY (CONT'D)
Let's just let things settle.
Shall we?

FRED
And the other thing--

STANLEY
Oh, joy, there's more.

FRED
(barreling through)
I would like you to read my
dissertation.

STANLEY
Son. Easy. You're under a lot of
pressure. With the baby--

FRED
This isn't about the baby. I'd like
you to recommend my work to your
editor.

Stanley gets to his feet.

STANLEY
I'm not the enemy here. I'm just
trying to look out for you.

Fred nods. The torrent over.

FRED
I know, I know, and like I said. I
don't want to seem ungrateful.

Stanley guides Fred to the front door. Throwing an arm around
him.

STANLEY
Of course I read your dissertation.
Of course I did. How did you think
you got this job?

Fred nods meekly.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
Alright. Good talk. Now run out
that steam. The vigors of youth,
wasted on the young.

Stanley pounds him on the back and shuts the door. Watches
him toggle off. Gives him a salute turn back into the house.

He's livid.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

SHIRL!!!!

Rose emerges from the shadows of the hallway. Troubled.

46

INT. SHIRLEY'S BEDROOM -- DAY

46

Moments later:

Shirley wakes reluctantly. Stanley fuming and clutching a mug of coffee.

STANLEY

That boy who's had everything handed to him. Ivy education. Perfect teeth. We would never behave--

Shirley finds her glasses.

SHIRLEY

Alka-selzer and coffee before you speak another word.

Stanley huffs to the bathroom still monologuing.

STANLEY

We were always the outsiders. Anywhere we went. We fought for every last crumb that was accidentally dropped in our path.

He's back with Alka-selzer.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

But these entitled pricks. Just expect the world to be handed to them. Like it's their divine right.

Shirley gulps down the elixir.

SHIRLEY

Give him a lecture, what's the harm?

STANLEY

I built that class. I built that department. Year upon year. I did that. And he dashes off a mediocre dissertation.

SHIRLEY

Which you didn't read.

STANLEY

I DIDN'T NEED TO!

SHIRLEY

So tell him no.

STANLEY

Oh, no, he's played the system. The Dean is agog with Mr. Sunshine. Mr. Golden Boy. Wants me to get him situated for tenure track. Over my dead body will that boy be getting tenure.

SHIRLEY

Just give him enough rope and you know he'll hang himself.

Stanley is finally calmed.

STANLEY

Good point. You're getting on well with the wifey.

SHIRLEY

She has her moments.

STANLEY

I might say you are smitten with her.

SHIRLEY

I don't smote. I'm incapable of that, you goat.

Shirley takes his coffee from him. Pops a pill. Washes it down.

STANLEY

Little ire, have we? Well that's a spark I yearn to see. Maybe table this one. Start fresh?

He kisses her atop the head, she shoves him away, back under the covers she goes.

SHIRLEY

Maybe go fuck off.

A sorrowful balladeer sings:
Well met, well met, cried he.

Paula hikes deeper into the forest. The path is steep. Paula stops, the path inches from a sheer drop.

FRED (V.O.)
*And the rest. Well it doesn't end
 well for anyone.*

SPLASH!

55 **INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- DAY**

55

Water runs down the side of Shirley's desk. Shirley is jolted back to her surroundings.

A cat sits unapologetically dipping its paw into the puddle.

The map of The Long Trail is drenched. Shirley blots it dry.

56 **INT. LECTURE HALL -- DAY**

56

Fred reaches for the glass of water on the lectern.

A hand shoots up. Fred calls on it before realizing who the hand belongs to, he consults his roster to hide his embarrassment.

KATHERINE
 Katherine. Katherine Wainscott.

FRED
 (blushing)
 Is there a question Ms. Wainscott.

KATHERINE
 No. There's an answer. It's the
 Demon Lover. Isn't it?

She locks eyes with him. Then she looks him over slowly. Shoes to crotch to lips and back down again.

FRED
 Yes, yes. Thank you Ms. Wainscott,
 Katherine.

Recovering.

FRED (CONT'D)
 It would behoove the rest of you to-
 to-to make a note of it. I suspect
 it will be making an appearance on
 your not-so-distant midterms.

More laughter. The class likes him.

Katherine takes in the rest of the class' adoration. It's nice that they want what she will have.

In the far upper balcony of the lecture hall, Stanley surveys the room.

FRED (CONT'D)
Alright, let's head on to the next excerpt...

Stanley creeps out of the lecture hall, he's heard enough.

57

INT. DINING ROOM -- DAY

57

Rose places fresh flowers on the dining room table. She hunts in the sideboard for flatware.

SHIRLEY (O.S.)
Use the good china!

ROSE
I'm looking!

SHIRLEY (O.S.)
And the silver.

Fred and Stanley burst through the front door.

STANLEY
Professor Nemser's home. Ladies. Ladies! Fetch the good professor a cocktail!

ROSE
It went well?

Fred is beaming. Stanley pounds his back before he can answer.

STANLEY
He was a triumph. A triumph I tell you. Had all the gals eating out the palm of his hand.

Stanley makes little nibbling noises. Fred wraps an arm around Rose. Stanley is at the bar pouring drinks.

FRED
I did alright.

STANLEY
Shirley! Get out here! The boy wonder is home!

Stanley sings in his booming tenor:

STANLEY (CONT'D)
*Well met. Well met. My own true
love./ Well met well met cried he.*

Stanley grabs Rose and takes her for a twirl.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
(singing)
*I've just returned from the salt
salt sea/ All for the love of thee*

Stanley plants a kiss on Rose's lips. Dramatic, yet intimate. Rose coils away. Shirley appears wiping her greasy hands.

SHIRLEY
What's all the hollering? We're
busy.

Fred delivers her drink. Bottoms up. Rose shoots a proud grin at Fred.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Alright, alright. Let us get the
pasta on. It's Bolognese and it
waits for no man.

Shirley slams back to the kitchen, Rose in tow.

58

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

58

Stanley, Fred, Rose and Shirley sit around the table eating pasta. Stanley re-fills his glass.

STANLEY
I was reading your dissertation
last night.

Fred perks up.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
I've actually read it twice. Both
times, last night. You were right,
I only skimmed it before. But it
was sufficient to hire you.

Stanley take a healthy gulp of wine, he swirls it around his mouth.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
Lovely minerality. But yes. I read
it thoroughly is what I mean to
say.

FRED
That's excellent.

STANLEY
I'm trying to think of the word,
I'd use to sum it up...

Shirley slurps her noodles. Enjoying Stanley's performance.

FRED
You can use several.

ROSE
I found it very engaging for an
academic--

STANLEY
I've got it. Let's see, it was
...*derivative*. Yes that's the word.

Stanley returns to his pasta. Fred is in shock. Shirley hides her smile.

FRED
In, in, in what ways is it
derivative?

STANLEY
Oh, in the ways that it's all
derived from others work.

Fred is apoplectic.

FRED
I spent years and years, hundreds
of hours of research-- read
everything--

STANLEY
Yes. I'm sure. But you didn't do
any thinking. Just the same old
chattering on. No new ideas. No
positions on any arguments.

FRED
(crushed)
No new ideas? I-I-think you're over-
simplifying--

STANLEY
Oh, don't despair my boy. It'll
come to you.

Shirley pats Fred's arm.

SHIRLEY

Darling, you are hardly the first to hear this lecture.

Salt in the wound.

STANLEY

Originality isn't something one can simply will to manifest. That right my dear?

SHIRLEY

Were it only true...

STANLEY

No, originality is the brilliant alchemy of critical thought and creativity.

Fred wipes his mouth, he looks ill.

ROSE

Oh, but your work is original?

Stanley shrugs.

STANLEY

Who am I to say? But it has been said of me.

ROSE

Is that why you have a stock pile of bought back copies of your book upstairs?

FRED

Honey, you don't have to --

STANLEY

(shrugging Rose off)

I'll say this to you Freddie. I read the thing twice, scouring the pages for one faint whiff of an original idea. And then I realized something that makes me so very envious of you.

Stanley leans in close to confess it.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

You've never *had* an original idea, so you won't have to feel the frustration of missing that experience. Am I correct?

(MORE)

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Have you ever thought about teaching at the high school level? Exceptionally rewarding I imagine.

ROSE

You read a bunch of books by critics and criticized their writing and call that original? If that's not derivative I don't know what is.

Shirley smiles. Stanley nods. Impressive little imp.

STANLEY

Now isn't that a fun little turn of phrase. That's the spirit I'm talking about Fred-o.

FRED

I'm going to -- refresh my --

He clutches his empty wine glass.

SHIRLEY

Grab the pudding while you're up?

Stanley lights a cigarette. Rose follows Fred.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Now you've done it.

Stanley refills his glass.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Was it really that bad?

STANLEY

You know how insulted I am by mediocrity. If it was awful, that would have been exciting. But terrifically competent? There's no excuse for that.

That's her love, right there across the table.

SHIRLEY

None at all.

Fred barrels back in opening a fresh bottle of wine.

Shirley and Stanley are delighted.

FRED

Well, I respect your opinion, I really do. But it's not shared by the Dean. At all.

Stanley nods.

FRED (CONT'D)

Perhaps we can discuss this on Friday. At his faculty party.

Stanley smiles. What a grand idea.

SHIRLEY

Oh, it's that time again, the Dean's party.

Fred lazars in on Stanley. Rose brings the pudding.

FRED

Rose and I are going.

STANLEY

Splendid.

SHIRLEY

This Friday?

STANLEY

No need to bother darling, I know how you abhor the hoi poi.

SHIRLEY

I can make my annual appearance. The least I can do, for your sake darling.

There's something loaded here. Fred and Rose have no idea what.

ROSE

I'll clear the dinner --

She gathers up plates. Shirley stretches up.

SHIRLEY

Might skip the pudding.

Like an iceberg beckoning the Titanic. She relinquishes the table.

A moment later her office door slams shut.

Rose reaches for Stanley's plate. He brushes her away.

STANLEY

I'm going to have seconds darling.

59

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

59

Rose slips out of her dress, let's her hair down, glides out of her stockings. Fred already in bed.

FRED

I have a lead on an apartment we'll be out before the semester break.

ROSE

If that position in the English department opens up. We're going to have to see them. Live in the same town, please take the long view on this.

FRED

You were the one begging to leave. And now I want to and you're --

ROSE

I don't like the way he talks to you any more than you do -- but we need to be smart about this and not let him get under our skin.

FRED

This is about Shirley.

ROSE

What?

FRED

I can see the way she relies on you. How she talks to you. Your secret looks. I don't want you getting involved in any of her schemes.

ROSE

You sound crazy. She's my friend!

FRED

Women like Shirley don't have friends.

ROSE

You don't know the first thing about it.

FRED

Oh please.

ROSE

I'm exhausted. I don't want to fight.

FRED

Fine.

Rose gets into bed. Shuts off her lamp. Fred continues to read, fuming on his side of the bed.

60

INT. HALL / LIVING ROOM / SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

60

Through the wavy glass of the French doors, Shirley is in a mad fugue at the type-writer.

Stanley hovers in the shadows.

He steps to the living room bar to refresh his Scotch and side-winds his way past the doors. A brief pause from the typing as he passes. He seizes his chance.

Shirley fixes him in her sights ready to fire.

SHIRLEY

I'm sure you just forgot to mention it.

STANLEY

I'm sure I mentioned it. But if we're going to be treated to a scene. I, for one, would loved to be fore-warned.

SHIRLEY

I'm not the one for dramatics.

STANLEY

You know how little I care for appearances. But I do concern myself over yours. You don't look up for it my dear.

SHIRLEY

I'm going to the party.

STANLEY

That would require you leaving the house, something that seems difficult for you to manage at this point in time.

SHIRLEY

I am going to that party.

Stanley relinquishes.

STANLEY

We both know that's a horrid little Greek tragedy in the making. But as you wish.

He shuts the door. Shirley stares back at her typewriter. Damn. Damn. Damn.

61

INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- DAY

61

Shirley wakes, lying in front of the long dead fire. She's stiff. She finds a mug of cold coffee. A film of cream stretched across the top.

She digs around for some blue pills. Pops one in her mouth. Downs it with the coffee.

Rose tiptoes into the office with a fresh pot of coffee, sets down a breakfast plate.

ROSE

Morning. I'm going to stop at the butcher's. Pork chops tonight? That sound good?

Shirley doesn't respond.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Alright then, pork chops it is.

Rose nudges the plate closer to Shirley.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Your eggs are getting cold.

Shirley ignores her.

ROSE (CONT'D)

You need to eat.

Shirley picks up the plate and drops it on the rug. Rose is shocked, she bends down to pick it up.

SHIRLEY

LEAVE IT!

Rose scoops the eggs back onto the plate. Drops the plate back on Shirley's desk.

ROSE

The polite thing to do would be to eat it, while the eggs are hot.

SHIRLEY

I will eat when I feel like it. I will bathe when I feel like it. I will sleep when I feel like it. I will shit when I feel like it.

Rose wipes her hands defiantly on her apron.

ROSE

Is the tantrum over?

Shirley looks at the tiny mountain of force in front of her. She wills herself not to cry. She addresses a far corner of the room.

SHIRLEY

I need to go out.

Rose impassive.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

I need to go buy new clothes for this fucking party.

Rose nods.

ROSE

I'll get my coat.

62

EXT. HYMAN-JACKSON HOUSE -- DAY

62

Unforgiving morning sun.

Rose and Shirley stand on the front porch -- inches outside the front door.

Shirley stares at the insurmountable gulf between the porch and the car.

ROSE

We can stay here for a while.

SHIRLEY

No. Don't let me go back.

Rose guides Shirley down the front steps. The grip on her arm is a vice.

Shirley's breathing is shallow. Rose places a steadying arm around Shirley's waist. They are in lock step.

Shirley keeps her eyes in front of her.

They stand at the car.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

You drive.

Rose rushes over to the drivers side.

Shirley stands looking at the house. She's made it outside.

63

INT. CAR -- DAY

63

Shirley and Rose sit in the car, still in the driveway.

Rose doesn't speak. Waits for her next instruction.

SHIRLEY

I never could have done this
without you Rosie. I don't know who
you are. Or who sent you here. But
I'm grateful.

Rose nods. Believing her.

ROSE

Quick confession. I don't really
know how to drive.

Shirley lets out a cackle.

SHIRLEY

Two pedals and a gearshift. Easiest
thing in the world.

64

EXT. CAR -- DAY

64

The car weaves out of town. Past the churches, graveyards,
lumber mills. Sights Shirley hasn't seen in months.

They drive towards the mountains. A canopy of leaves their
cathedral ceiling.

65

EXT/INT. CAR -- DAY

65

A winding two lane highway. The sky streaked with late-autumn
light.

Rose drives with two feet, jerking the Morris Minor.

66

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE DRESSING ROOM -- DAY

66

Three hangers float over the dressing room door. Blouses in an array of colors: blues, crimsons, pinks.

ROSE (O.S.)

They also have it in black. Or a taupe.

Shirley amid a pile of discarded clothes. Her back to the mocking mirror. She grabs at one of the blouses.

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Any of those others working?

Shirley grunts. Lashes into the blouse. Too. Tight. She claws it off. Breathless. Drops onto the chair in the changing room. She is fighting back tears.

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Shirley? Can I get you a different size?

No response.

ROSE (CONT'D)

We can also go to a different --

SHIRLEY

(defeated)

No. No. It doesn't matter.

Rose slips the dressing room curtain open a crack. Hands Shirley a skirt.

ROSE (O.S.)

I thought this would look nice.

Shirley lets the skirt drop on the floor. Rose waits.

ROSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Let me help. With the zipper.

The curtain parts. Rose slides into the dressing room. Sees the distraught Shirley, crumpled in defeat.

Rose, with a maternal patience, unzips the skirt. Places it under Shirley's feet. Lifts them one by one into the skirt.

Then, Rose glides the skirt up over her ankles. Over her calves, under the ragged hem of her slip. Up over her thighs.

Shirley watches herself being dressed. Rose nudges Shirley to her feet. Disappears behind her as she pulls the shirt over Shirley's hips. Then zips her up.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Stunning.

Shirley takes in the smart skirt. Nods. Rose kisses her bare shoulder. Rose fishes under the skirt. Pulls the slip straight. Then smooths the sides of the skirt.

Shirley watching, soaking in the care this girl takes of her body. A marvel really.

67 **INT. CAR -- DAY**

67

The late afternoon sun sporadically blinding Rose as she muscled the Morris Minor over roads plastered in leaves.

A bundle of packages in the back seat. Neither speak. A quiet peace between them.

68 **EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE BACK YARD -- NIGHT**

68

The quad is lit up with competing bonfires. Crowds of students wear GUY FAWKES MASKS.

College boys tend the fire -- building towering teepees, they dunk torches in kerosine and ignite the pyres.

A SCARECROW hangs from a tree above a bonfire.

69 **INT. DEAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT**

69

Shirley sits alone on the couch, dazed eyes. She wears her new skirt. Faculty wives chatter over her head. She is oblivious, as she stares across the room at:

Stanley chatting up their elegant host, Caroline, a sophisticated, restless, jeweled woman. Caroline takes a sip of Stanley's martini. Lingers. Then hands it back.

Rose hovers nearby. Shirley stares out the window as the Scarecrow effigy catches fire on the quad. Bennie Goodman's orchestra an incongruous sound track to the lynching.

The DEAN (60), country-club handsome, approaches Shirley, with a fresh drink.

DEAN

The one. The only. Shirley Jackson.

Shirley takes the drink. She tugs at her skirt. She gulps down the alcohol.

SHIRLEY

Dean Sands.

The Dean searches the room, sees Caroline and waves her over.

DEAN

C'mere Caroline. Shirley's here!

She steps over to the couch.

CAROLINE

What a lovely skirt you have.

SHIRLEY

What a lovely insouciant tone you have.

Caroline is frozen. That was an insult. Right?

DEAN

(laughing)

You're too much Shirley. I never know what you're going to say.

SHIRLEY

Neither do I.

Caroline sees Rose.

CAROLINE

Rose! I wanted to introduce you to some of the other faculty wives, come come darling.

SHIRLEY

Yes, you scurry away little wood sprite.

Rose is dragged away. The Dean, oblivious, nestles close to Shirley on the couch.

DEAN

You terrify me.

Shirley finishes her drink.

DEAN (CONT'D)

I've managed to keep my terror so blissfully buried. But reading your stories. The world doesn't feel the same. The other night I was alone in my office and was petrified of the paperweight on my desk.

(MORE)

DEAN (CONT'D)

What if I simply picked it up and
bashed my skull in? How do you do
that?

Shirley tries to focus on the Dean's face. It doubles then
blurs.

SHIRLEY

They're just stories.

DEAN

No, no they are prophecies.

Shirley inches away from the Dean. The room is buzzing.
Rocking. She searches frantically for something solid to buoy
her.

STANLEY! There he is, Caroline whispers something in his ear,
they both look over to the Shirley on the couch.

Rose runs into the Prissy College Girl from the Soda Shop,
rummaging behind the bar.

PRISSY COLLEGE GIRL

Hey there Butterscotch. What are
you doing at this shindy?

ROSE

My husband --

Prissy College Girl waves her away.

PRISSY COLLEGE GIRL

Yeah, yeah, we know all about your
husband. I'm only here to lift some
hootch for our own little soiree.
Gals only. Tits out. Come come, the
magic's just begun.

Prissy College Girl hands her two bottles of gin. Loads
herself up with four more.

Rose sees Stanley with Caroline and Shirley seeing them.

Rose dumps the bottles on the bar. Pulls away from the Prissy
College Girl.

ROSE

Another time...

The Dean continues to whisper his reverence to Shirley. But
she only hears a garbled stream.

Shirley is staring at the buffet. For there stands Paula, pawing through the sandwiches.

Paula picks one up and drops it on the floor. Giggles.

Now: Rose heads straight to the buffet. She picks up a dropped sandwich off the floor. Something compels her to eat it.

A LOUD BURST OF LAUGHTER. Stanley grabs two dancing partners, a lady draped on both arms. The young men egg him on, the crowd makes room for their dancing.

SHIRLEY

Stanley!

The Dean looks up and applauds the dancing. Rose is trapped behind a wall of spectators.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Stanley E.!

RALPH drops onto the couch with Shirley.

RALPH

You want me to get that lout?
Better off without him. I've been
saying it for years.

SHIRLEY

Oh, Ralph. I just stay with that
man out of stubbornness.

RALPH

When you going to come down and
visit us in the city? Get out of
this craven hellhole? The
sycophants and the harpies. Where's
the joy in any of it?

SHIRLEY

Joy is over-rated.

RALPH

Just think about it will you?

Stanley keeps dancing. Ralph disappears into the party.

A LOUD BOOM. The fireworks have begun. The house empties onto the porch.

Shirley alone in the living room. She tries to get up off the couch, falls back into the cushions.

Shirley sees hanging from the chandelier, a noose around its neck, the Scarecrow effigy.

70

INT. DEAN'S HOUSE HALLWAY -- NIGHT

70

Rose pulls Fred into a corner.

ROSE

Go get Stanley, we have to take her home.

Fred shoots a look at Shirley in the living room sipping her martini on the couch.

FRED

She's fine.

ROSE

Go get him.

FRED

Rosie, he's the life of the party.

ROSE

She can barely stand.

FRED

Neither can half the people here.

ROSE

Then I'll take her myself.

FRED

C'mon, don't go. Just another hour.

She pushes past him. He's useless.

71

INT. DEAN'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

71

A burst of orange outside the window.

Shirley, alone on the couch, unbuttons her blouse. One button, two, three. She sits with her bra exposed.

She tries to sip her martini, spills it on her lap. It looks like she's wet herself. She reaches for a bottle of wine to refill her glass.

She pours it full, fuller, fullest. It flows over the glass like a fondue fountain. It splatters all over her skirt. The Couch. Makes a puddle on the rug.

Caroline flies over to the couch.

CAROLINE

Dab! Dab it! Don't rub it in! Oh heavens!

Caroline is on her hands and knees, pouring seltzer over the couch and Shirley's skirt. Her new skirt, a bloody mess.

Shirley stares at the Effigy swaying from the chandelier.

Shirley holds Caroline's face in her hands.

SHIRLEY

I know what you've done.

CAROLINE

I'm afraid I don't--

SHIRLEY

You will stop calling my house. And you will leave my husband alone.

Caroline shakes herself free.

CAROLINE

I'm not that kind of lady.

Shirley fumes.

SHIRLEY

You would bore him to death in a week.

A flash of anger. How dare this ogress insult her!

CAROLINE

I would *comfort* him.

Shirley takes the jab and hits back.

SHIRLEY

He's an expert at finding a willing pair of legs to open wide. For comfort.

CAROLINE

You'd die without him, he says. That's the only reason he stays.

That stings. Shirley quickly grabs Caroline's arm.

TAP-TAP-TAP. Shirley smacks two fingers against the inside of Caroline's wrist. Mutters something under her breath.

Caroline yanks her arm back as if she's been cut. She stumbles to her feet.

The candles on the buffet extinguish. The Effigy swings madly. (Perhaps the chandelier comes crashing down.)

Caroline flees.

Suddenly, Rose is lifting Shirley off the couch. Guiding her out of the room.

Shirley looks back at the ceiling, flames are licking the Effigy's straw legs.

SHIRLEY

Get me home. Rosie, get me home.

72

EXT. DEAN'S HOUSE BACKYARD -- NIGHT

72

Shirley drapes her arm around Rose's scrawny shoulders.

They make their way through roaring bonfires and revelers with masks worn on the backsides of their faces.

Bottle rockets launch around them, spiral exhausted on the lawn to shrieks of terrified girls.

73

INT. SHIRLEY'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT

73

Shirley assess the damage the night has wrought in the mirror. Then:

She turns and watches across the hall as Rose...

74

INT. SHIRLEY BEDROOM -- NIGHT

74

Rose turns on the bedside lamp. Dims the room to near darkness.

Rose sets out a nightgown on the bed, turns down the covers. She pours a glass of water, drops in some Alka-Seltzer tablets. There, the boudoir is ready.

Shirley softly pads into the room. She tries to light a cigarette. Lighter and cigarette fall to the floor. Rose lights it for her, puts it to Shirley's lips.

Shirley struggles with the skirt.

SHIRLEY

Get this damn thing off.

Rose is on her knees fighting the zipper. She steadies Shirley and has her step out of it.

Shirley flops on the bed, wearing only her slip. She throws her nightgown on the floor.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Stay. Just a minute.

Rose sits on the other side of the bed. Shirley reaches for her hand. Pulls her closer. Rose settles in next to Shirley.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Pray for a boy. The world is too cruel to girls.

Rose unbuttons her blouse and skirt, lays with her belly exposed. Shirley quietly caresses Rose's baby bulge. Outlines the smooth curves. Then drags on her cigarette.

Rose falls asleep first. Then Shirley. The embers of her cigarette drop onto the discarded nightgown lying at the side on the bed.

75 **INT. SHIRLEY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT**

75

A hazy fog covers the room. Shirley wakes with a start. She is disoriented. What bed is she in? Why is Rose there?

She coughs. Then jumps out of bed. Smoke, smoke!

SHIRLEY

Get up! Get up!

Shirley finds some water douses the flaming nightgown. Thick black smoke engulfs the room.

Shirley throws the windows open.

She tries again to wake Rose, no response. She rolls Rose to the other side of the bed and onto the floor.

She grabs Rose by the ankles and hauls her out of the bedroom.

76 **INT. HALL -- NIGHT**

76

Shirley slams the bedroom door shut. Rose groggily comes to.

Rose is coughing horribly, gasping for air. Shirley guides them both downstairs.

77 **EXT. FRONT PORCH -- NIGHT**

77

Shirley and Rose sit in overcoats on the front steps.

SHIRLEY

The house is not happy.

ROSE

(exhausted)

What?

SHIRLEY

The fire.

ROSE

It was just an accident.

SHIRLEY

There's no such thing. The house is
jealous of you.

They stare out at the deserted streets.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

I'll have to appease it a while
longer.

77A

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

77A

Rose arranges a breakfast tray: toast, eggs, preserves, fresh
juice, a little vase with a single flower. Stanley flies in:

STANLEY

She thinks the house is not happy.

ROSE

(exhausted)

What?

STANLEY

The fire.

ROSE

It was just an accident.

STANLEY

She says the house is jealous of
you.

Stanley shrugs, he's not going to get in the middle of it.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I'm sure it'll work itself out.

Stanley sips his coffee and ducks out.

Fred comes stumbling down. Deeply hungover.

ROSE

I wasn't sure you made it in last night.

FRED

Didn't want to wake you. Slept on the couch in Stanley's study. We had a nightcap. Coffee?

Rose points to the counter.

He sidles up to the back of her, kisses her neck. She pulls away, slightly.

ROSE

You smell like a gin bath. I ran out of eggs.

Fred reaches on the tray for some toast.

FRED

This will do --

She smacks his hand away.

ROSE

Spoken for. Grab something up at the commissary.

She's flying out of the kitchen, delivering breakfast in bed to the lady of the house.

Fred grabs the paper, that was strange.

78	<u>OMITTED</u>	78
79	<u>OMITTED</u>	79
80	<u>OMITTED</u>	80
81	<u>EXT. PORCH -- DAY</u>	81

Shirley sits on the front porch swing. She is wrapped in an over-sized flannel hunting jacket.

Her house-slippers drag back and forth along the floorboards. The swing creaks a rhythmic complaint.

Shirley pulls hard on the cigarette, stares into the scrawny branches of the grand maple tree.

Rose rushes up the steps, arms full of groceries, stamping off the chill.

SHIRLEY

What's the news?

Rose is startled. She sets down the bags.

ROSE

It's so cold! Come inside.

SHIRLEY

I needed air. Tell me the gossip.

Rose creeps closer. Hesitant.

ROSE

Nothing, no gossip.

SHIRLEY

Nobody's talking about the fire?
Down in town?

Rose shakes her head. Shirley stares hard at Rose.

ROSE

No one said a word to me.

SHIRLEY

Come here. You're hiding something.
Why are you avoiding me.

ROSE

I'm not. I haven't.

Shirley smiles at the lie. She waits. Rose's hands flutter over her coat, she's flush, she unfastens her coat. Rose presses herself against the porch column. Trying to keep herself steady.

Shirley swings faster, her slippers tucked under the seat. Her knees brush against Rose's dress.

SHIRLEY

I don't believe you.

Shirley's eyes trace over Rose's calves. Strong, lean. The outline of her hips. The dress stretching ever so slightly below the waist. The tiny folds draping around the contours of her pregnant belly.

Rose feels Shirley's stare. She inches closer to the swing.

On the up-swing, Shirley's knee grazes the inside of Rose's thigh. Then is gone. Then is back.

ROSE

Well, it's the truth.

Rose unbuttons the top button of her blouse. She is on fire. She clutches with one hand the chain of the swing. It jerks Shirley from the lulling motion.

Shirley pushes off with her feet. Gaining her cadence again.

SHIRLEY

*Do not go gentle into that good
night*

The swing drives purposefully. Bringing Shirley's knee between Rose's legs.

Rose shrugs out of her coat. The buttons of her blouse straining under the motion.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

*Rage rage against the dying of the
light.*

Rose fishes out her necklace, its links pool in the dip of her clavicle.

An inhalation of breath as Shirley's swings nearer and nearer.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Do you know Dylan Thomas?

Rose shakes her head no. Not trusting her ability to form words.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

He stood right there. Right where
you are standing. And he, he just--

Rose steps closer.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

I don't expect you to believe it,
but it's what happened.

Creak. Creak. Swish. Swish. Rose body sways.

Rose lifts her skirt higher, Shirley brushing back and forth against her.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

There was a great blue February
moon. It was so cold. A party was
raging on. Stanley, ten feet away.

(MORE)

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

And Dylan took my hand. He took my hand and lead me right where you were standing. And he lifted my skirt. And I let him.

Rose is entranced.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

He was besotted with gin. I was besotted with him. The whole party carrying on just on the other side of that front door. The moon casting our shadows. Those shadows griped so tightly, ever so briefly as one beast.

Shirley swings.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

You should thank me for saving your life.

Rose let's go of the chain. With a swift step she is standing over Shirley. She slips her thigh between Shirley's knees, then spreads those knees wide apart so she can stand between them.

Shirley leans back on the swing. Well, well, well, the little Rosie is quite lovely.

Rose leans over and brushes the stray strands of hair from Shirley's forehead, tucks them delicately behind her ear. Rose leans over to whisper into Shirley's ear. Her necklace brushes against Shirley's face.

ROSE

I *should* thank you.

Rose's lips linger near Shirley's neck. Shirley closes her eyes, feels the breath crawl over her skin.

Rose peels off Shirley's glasses. Holds her face in her hands. Presses her lips on Shirley's brow. Inhales the sweet scent.

Shirley's hand hovers centimeters away from Rose's hip.

Then in an instant, Shirley kicks the swing back. Rose sparks to attention. She steps back. Released from a spell. Where is she? What's happened?

SHIRLEY

No gossip?

Rose grabs her coat off the railing. Scoops up the grocery bags. Mumbles:

ROSE
No, I told you.

Shirley swings steady. Eyes still locked on Rose.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I'll bring a tray of lunch to your office.

SHIRLEY
I'm sure you will, dear, I'm sure you will.

Rose rushes into the house.

The porch swing resumes its steady squeak.

82

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

82

A fork spears a THICK POLISH SAUSAGE. Mounds of sauerkraut follow. Shirley drags her meat through a puddle of mustard. Shirley savors the taste.

Rose beams. Watches Shirley take another bite, leaving a dribble of mustard on her chin. Rose reaches out to wipe the drop with her napkin. Then checks herself.

The tension between the women is palpable. Stanley clocks it:

STANLEY
Darling, you're making a mess of your meal.

Shirley directs all her attention on Fred.

SHIRLEY
Did you know what a good cook your wife was before you married her?

FRED
She's a better cook than my mother.

ROSE
Come now. That's not true.

SHIRLEY
Such a rare thing. Someone who doesn't merely feed you, but anticipates day after days how to sate your hunger. Who stokes your appetite.

(MORE)

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

And then leaves you feeling filled.
Truly rare, don't you think
Stanley?

STANLEY

Rare indeed.

Hands on her lap, Rose presses the tinges of her fork into the palm of her hand. Then reaches for some wine.

Oh, god, a foot! It's touching Rose's leg under the table. She flashes a quick glance at Shirley who is only paying attention to Fred.

The foot reaches higher and higher up Rose's skirt. She lets out a short gasp, then covers it with a cough.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

(turning to Fred)

I'd say it's one of the greatest
chimeras perpetuated by Western
Literature. Wouldn't you agree?

Above the table, Rose concentrates on her plate. Fred is talking, but Rose can't focus on the words.

FRED

(imitating Stanley)

"Stanley my boy, you've got it all
mixed up."

Fred strokes his beard a perfect Stanley gesture.

Shirley and Stanley are amused.

SHIRLEY

He's got you down to a T. Stanley
E.

STANLEY

Highest form of flattery, that.

Rose clutches to the tabletop. Steadying herself.

Under the table, the foot again. It picks up Rose's leg, guides it directly onto Fred's lap.

Fred bolts to attention. He stares at Rose, eyes bulging.

Shirley butters a dinner roll. Innocent.

Fred scoots his chair closer to the table. Guides Rose's foot deeper into his lap.

SHIRLEY

Stanley, refill our cook's glass,
she's been on her feet all day.
Slaving away.

ROSE

Oh, no, none for me. I'm suddenly
feeling tired. I'm going to lie
down.

Rose is on her feet, trying to dash away but Shirley snags her arm. Draws her in.

SHIRLEY

You might have a fever, you look
flushed.

Shirley checks Rose's forehead. A surreptitious hand crawls up her thigh. Rose breaks free.

ROSE

I'm just tired. That's all.

SHIRLEY

Fred, you go take your wife to bed
before she faints in the
sauerkraut.

Fred obeys. Rose looks back into the dining room as Shirley slices into a new sausage.

Alone at the table, Stanley studies Shirley.

STANLEY

What are you up to? You're
unusually cheerful.

SHIRLEY

I think the fire has helped us.
Phoenix rising and all that.

STANLEY

You're going to finish the book?

Shirley wears a Cheshire cat grin. She stays quiet.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

So what becomes of your dear
heroine?

SHIRLEY

Oh, what becomes of all those lost girls? They go mad, naturally.

83

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

83

Rose kicks off her shoes. She pulls Fred tightly to her. He's stunned by her urgency.

He tries to lay her down on the bed. But she shoves him against the door frame. She has her blouse unbuttoned. Frees her breast and shoves Fred's mouth onto it.

After a moment:

FRED

The baby?

ROSE

It's good. Good for it.

Rose slips off her underwear. Fred starts to strip off his shirt, Rose stops him. His face in her hands she kisses him hard. Eyes shut.

FLASH: The porch swing. Shirley inches from Rose's chest. Shirley's lips. Her hands on Rose's thigh.

Back in the bedroom, Rose takes Fred's hand and tries to recreate Shirley's touch.

Fred pulls away, fumbles with his pants. He tries to guide her again to the bed.

ROSE (CONT'D)

They'll hear us. The springs.

Rose bites his neck. Her hands dig into his back, presses him tighter to her.

FLASH: Rose against the porch column. Shirley pressed against her. Kissing her neck.

Fred tries to catch up. Rose's eyes shut, her back arched in ecstasy. He's bouncing her against the door frame. His dull grunts force Rose to open her eyes.

She's back in the drab bedroom. Fred's pushing into her. She waits. Staring past him. He gets there and immediately pulls away. And falls onto the bed.

They remain silent. Unsure what just possessed them.

Rose stares down at the puddle forming between her legs.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Fred.

He's spent can't peel himself from the bed.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Fred. It's time.

FRED

What? Oh, oh. No. Now?

The front of Rose's slip is wet.

84 **OMITTED**

84

85 **INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- DAY**

85

Two tumblers of Scotch rap on the glass pane door of the office. Shirley keeps typing. She looks ragged, disheveled, like she hasn't sleep in weeks. Because she hasn't.

The tumblers rap again. Still typing:

SHIRLEY

STANLEY!

Her yell echoes through the house. Stanley opens the door.

STANLEY

You rang madam?

Shirley searches her desk for something to throw at him. He thrusts the scotch at her. She takes it.

SHIRLEY

OUT.

Stanley settles himself in a plush chair, displacing a cat. He picks up a book, thumbs through it noisily.

STANLEY

There are two things on my mind.

SHIRLEY

Not interested. And you can't just stroll in here and ply me with drinks--

STANLEY

We're drinking scotch because you worked straight through dinner dear. As is your habit, apparently, these many many weeks. And I am here to say, I'm sick of it.

(MORE)

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I hate sitting at the table alone. Makes me feel like a windower, or worse, a decrepit feudal lord. What will dear Joe McCarthy have to scribble about me if I don't have a worthy enough dinner companion to spout off my constructive criticism of Marxist theory to? You've left me in a vexing position. Ruminating alone. And don't tell me to ring Bernstein. It's not the same. The children in bed by nine with their little one. Take pity.

Shirley continues to type.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Are we still play-acting as Dashiell Hammett?

SHIRLEY

Stanley E. You worry about your novel and I'll worry about mine.

Shirley continues to type. Stanley pretends to read.

STANLEY

I'm quite hurt my dear. It's true. You've managed to pierce through the old leather binding and make me bleed. Not blood of course. Just sawdust, but still. Won't you let me read it darling?

SHIRLEY

No. It's nothing yet. Who knows if it ever will be.

STANLEY

All the more reason for me to have a peak.

Shirley ignores him.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Has the little wifey read it?

This catches Shirley's attention.

SHIRLEY

Yes, of course, she's a regular William Shawn.

(MORE)

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

We meet every afternoon by the fire and she gives me line edits until she has to scurry back to the kitchen to make supper. Don't be mad.

STANLEY

It's the genre, darling that's stymieing you. It's not your arena. And frankly, it's beneath you.

SHIRLEY

You can keep your theories to yourself.

STANLEY

You didn't know her.

SHIRLEY

Don't tell me I don't know this girl.

STANLEY

I might have walked by her a dozen times on campus, in the commissary, the commons. Various halls. That's the sheer probability of it.

He looks at the Missing Person Poster.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

But that's not a face I ever remember seeing. Who is she to you?

SHIRLEY

There are dozens and dozens of girls just like her littering every college across the country. Lonely girls who can't make the world notice them. Don't tell me I don't know her. Don't you dare.

Stanley is shocked by the outburst.

STANLEY

Oh, so you think it might be that good.

Shirley throws something at him. He ducks and quits while he's ahead.

86

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

86

Rose rocking baby. She reaches for a book on the nightstand. Opens it. Sees the BORROWER'S CARD. It says:

PAULA WELDON.

Rose freezes. Holds the card. The baby wails. She tries to nurse it the baby won't latch.

Shirley comes in. Rose snaps the book closed. Shirley places a cup of tea on the night stand and sits besides Rose on the bed. She takes the baby from her.

ROSE

My mother never let me forget how
colicky I was.

Shirley cooes at the screaming bundle.

SHIRLEY

Well, now little angel, we hear
you.

Shirley dips her finger into the tea cup, moistens the baby's lips.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Merricat, Merricat, what do you
know? Merricat, Merricat, how will
you grow?*

The baby calms, Rose watches.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Now you.

Shirley dips her finger again into the tea-cup. Gently brushes the liquid over Rose's nipple.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

A little sugar water. For
distraction.

Rose reaches for the baby, but Shirley keeps rocking the bundle gently. She holds Rose's breast in one palm strokes it quietly.

Rose waits.

Shirley guides the baby to Rose's breast. Once the baby latches, she places the baby in Rose's arms.

Shirley watches the baby nurse.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
Babies, cats and dogs. My favorite
species.

The women sit in quiet communion.

Rose ventures something on her mind.

ROSE
You need to see this --

Rose opens the book. Hands Shirley the BORROWER'S CARD.

ROSE (CONT'D)
It's on Stanley's syllabus. Paula
was the last name -- she was in his
class -- taking his class at the
time she disappeared.

Shirley inspects the card. It reads:

ROSE NEMSER.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I don't want to keep anything from
you ever. But it's proof.

SHIRLEY
This is your name.

ROSE
It's not --

Rose reaches for the card.

Shirley balls up the card. Calmly pops it into her mouth.

And chews. Rinses it down with a nearby cup of tea.

SHIRLEY
I know who my husband's screwed. Do
you know who yours has?

ROSE
Fred hasn't --

SHIRLEY
There's no such thing as the
Shakespeare Society.

The baby continues to suck.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

That's just how the girls pick
which professor they'd like to
fuck.

ROSE

Shirley! Shirley.

Rose places the baby in it's bassinet.

87 **INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS**

87

Rose rushes down the hall. Shirley SLAMS her bedroom door in her face.

Rose knocks. Wails on the door.

ROSE

Shirley. Open up!

The BABY SCREAMS.

Rose continues to pound on the door.

ROSE (CONT'D)

PLEASE. Please. That's not true.
Tell me that's not true.

88 **INT. SHIRLEY'S BEDROOM / BATHROOM -- DAY**

88

Muffled pounding on the door. Shirley sits wedged in her bathroom.

Stoic and serene. A sense of calm washes over her.

Stanley sits quietly in a reading chair in the bedroom, noiselessly turning pages of a newspaper. Witness to it all.

89 **EXT. QUAD / SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- DAY**

89

Rose, dishevelled and distraught, pushes the baby stroller through the chilly afternoon.

Students dart between buildings strung with Christmas garlands.

The clock tower rings the quarter hour. A few students rush to class late. Rose tunnels baby stroller towards the English Department. Fred is rushing down the steps.

ROSE

FRED!!!!

It's a growl. A hiss. It stops Fred cold. He slowly recovers.

FRED

What are you doing -- everything
alright?

ROSE

What's her name?

Fred blinks an imperceptible admission.

FRED

Honey, I don't know --

ROSE

Her name.

STYLIZED DAYMARE DANCE FROM ROSE'S POV:

Fred standing on the quad kissing Katherine, his arms tight
around her. Katherine's hands pulling him closer. They are a
giddy, love-struck pair.

Shirley at her desk, frozen in a vision:

Fred kissing Katherine. Paula/Rose stare at the violation.

Fred turns around and he is now STANLEY, holding Katherine
around the waist.

He sees Paula/Rose staring:

STANLEY

Paula! Wait!

His hand drops from Katherine's waist.

BACK ON THE QUAD IN REALITY

Rose stares at Fred.

ROSE

How many times?

FRED

Let's talk about this at home.

Rose is speechless, her eyes burning.

ROSE

Once? Twice? A week? How many times
did you fuck her?

Fred takes a few steps to try and catch her. She moves away.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I have never lied to you. Ever.

Fred stares hard past his wife.

FRED

Once. Never again. Never ever again. I knew right away it was the worst mistake. I have felt horrible for months. Sick --

ROSE

Don't come near me.

Rose grabs the baby out of the stroller and is sprinting away.

FRED

Please.

ROSE

Stay the hell away from me.

90

EXT. BENNINGTON MAIN STREET / INT. BUTCHER SHOP/OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN -- DAY 90

Rose pants in a daze through downtown Bennington.

Inside the Butcher Shop, Mrs. Claussen chats up the Butcher.

MRS. CLAUSEN

Well you know how stubborn my old man can be. Never wanting any to-dos, but if we can't mark 32 years with that company with a little celebratory meatloaf. Then I don't know what.

Rose passes the Butcher shop window.

Time cut:

Rose trudging along the road on the outskirts of town.

The Morris Minor pulls up to the curb. Shirley lowers the window.

SHIRLEY

Get in the car.

ROSE

I'm not going back.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

You'll freeze to death.

Shirley watches the red dot of Rose's coat enveloped in the woods. She trudges on.

The woods thicken, Shirley swats back branches.

The sky is suddenly overcast.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Rose!

Shirley is disoriented. She steps up the path a few feet, realizes it's the wrong direction.

The Rowan berries lie trampled on the trail, leaving a bloody a track. Yes! This is the right path.

Shirley is sprinting down the trail, becoming winded. She scans the woods for Rose.

The brush, STRETCHES AND CLAWS, like reflections in a fun-house mirror.

In the distance lurking behind tree trunks is the man with the fedora. He stares at her and then vanishes.

The flurries kick up, now falling in sheets of white.

From far off the sing-song tune of a carousel calliope.

The music grows stronger as Shirley hikes down the trail.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

(hoarse)

Rose! Come back.

Shirley is running full tilt. She trips and skids down the trail, kicks up mud. It cakes her coat, hair and glasses. The baby is unscathed.

A clearing on the trail. Vast vista of the Glastenbury Mountains. A sheer drop below. The mid-morning sun casting an iridescent veil over the tree-line.

Rose stands a few feet from the drop-off.

Rose inches towards the edge, unbuttons her coat. She feels an intoxicating rush of the winter wind.

Rose stares down at her feet. Nearly cemented in the slushy mud.

SHIRLEY (O.S.)

Step away.

Shirley extends her hand.

ROSE

Just a hop really. Slide the right foot forward--

She slides her foot to the very edge.

ROSE (CONT'D)

You're right. Barely any energy at all. One hop. One quick jerk. It all would be over.

Shirley is inches from her, ready to grab her coat.

Rose is frozen with fear and ecstasy of the possibility.

SHIRLEY

You think it was the baby that ruined you? It wasn't. He was weak. He'll always be weak. But you won't ever again have to feel what this first time feels like. That Rose is dead to you now.

Rose jumps. Her body catapults in slow motion down the side of the mountain. Her coat flapping like a useless parachute.

Now her body is thrashing through tree branches, skidding down a rocky ravine. Until:

Her lifeless body settles, flat on her back, under a canopy of pines.

Shirley stands at the cliff edge. She smiles up at the heavens.

95

EXT. HYMAN-JACKSON HOUSE -- DAY

95

Fred loads suitcases into an idling taxi.

Stanley watches the progress.

STANLEY

Ah, my boy. I'm sorry things have taken such a turn. But you two are young -- you'll figure it out.

(MORE)

STANLEY (CONT'D)

A spell at the mother-in-law's.
Always a good penance.

FRED

Yes, quite.

STANLEY

And I'm sure some other position
will pop up soon. Always does.

Rose strides from the house.

Stanley moves to hug her, she shuns him and huddles into the
cab. Doors slam.

Stanley stands on the porch and waves the taxi farewell.

96

INT. TAXI BACKSEAT -- CONTINUOUS

96

Fred sits up front with the driver, banished from his wife's
side.

Rose, baby swaddled close to her chest.

FRED

You'll feel better again, in no
time.

ROSE

I feel fine now.

FRED

You know what I mean. A little
rest. A little time away.
Everything will be back to normal.
Don't worry Rosie.

ROSE

No, no. I'm never going back to
that. Little wifey. Little Rosie.
That was madness.

She turns, looks out the back window at Stanley standing
sentinel on the porch.

Then: from an up-stairs window, a curtain rustles,

SHIRLEY PEERS DOWN

Rose watches as the Shirley's figure grows smaller and
smaller in the window until she wonders if it was ever there
at all.

BLACK OUT

TIME PASSES

TINNY JANGLE OF TYPE-WRITER KEYS

97 **INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- DAY** 97

Shirley pounds on the typewriter, possessed.

Stanley delivers a drink. He watches her work.

STANLEY

Almost?

She keeps typing. Stanley beams with pride. He closes the door quietly behind him.

98 **INT. FRONT HALL / DINING ROOM -- NIGHT** 98

The table set for dinner. She glances through the French doors of her office.

Stanley, in the office, Shirley's manuscript in his lap. He is hyper-focused. A pencil posed.

A cat upsets a jar of pens on the desk. Stanley doesn't notice.

Shirley paces. Smokes. Pours two drinks.

99 **INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE -- NIGHT** 99

Shirley delivers a drink to Stanley. He doesn't touch it. She stands over him.

Shirley flops into her desk chair.

SHIRLEY

Just tell me one thing--

Stanley doesn't look up from the pages.

He makes a mark on the manuscript, licks his thumb and turns over a new page.

STANLEY

Go. Away.

Shirley stares at him. Trying to read his thoughts. After a moment. Stanley shoos her away with the flick of his wrist.

Shirley storms out.

SHIRLEY

Fine! Fine! FINE!

100

INT. DINING ROOM -- LATER

100

A roasted chicken adorns the table. Candles lit. Wine poured. Shirley picks at a plate of potatoes.

Stanley emerges from the office. He sits in his chair. Sips his wine. Shirley smokes.

They stare at each other in silence until:

STANLEY

Your book is brilliant, darling.

Huge sigh of relief from Shirley.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Fucking gorgeous. I don't know how you did it.

Shirley is too overwhelmed to speak.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I have some notes of course.

SHIRLEY

Of course.

STANLEY

This is going to be the one. Don't lose sight of that.

SHIRLEY

(verge of tears)

It hurts. This one. It hurts more than the others.

Stanley is on his feet. He hunts for a record.

STANLEY

But you've done it. My bride. My horrifically talented bride.

He scoops her out of her chair. She holds his bearded face in her hands.

SHIRLEY

I missed you. I missed you so much.

They kiss. Then kiss again.

Stanley breaks away to start the record. Lady Day croons:

*You go to my head
And you linger like a haunting refrain
And I find you spinning round in my brain
Like the bubbles in a glass of champagne*

They dance. Stanley leans in winking...

STANLEY

Your book, really is, quite good.

Shirley folds herself closer to him.

SHIRLEY

What would I do without you? What
would I do?

They keep dancing.

THE END