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BONDS OF RUBBER AND IRON: OBSERVING GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH PLAYWRITING

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BONDS OF RUBBER AND IRON: OBSERVING GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH PLAYWRITING

By

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors

University of California, Riverside

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ABSTRACT

This creative project, a full-length playscript, follows Mira, a young woman who has struggled with addiction and abuse at her lowest: in jail, awaiting a trial for the murder of her boyfriend and drug trafficking. We follow her story as her lawyer, Pierce, asks her questions about why Mira made certain decisions and how she got to this point. Throughout the story, we learn about her past with addiction, how she was trying to get back on the right path, how she felt smothered by her mom, and ultimately ended up back with her ex in order to maintain some tie to the past. Themes of addiction, abuse, fear of change, family, and allyship are at the core of this piece as it delves into the cyclical nature of abuse and how generational trauma maintains this cycle. We learn that there is more to people than victimhood, that accepting love can help up heal and move forward, and that change, is necessary but looks different to everyone. This project culminated into a table read and a filmed interview about the process.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has gone through many changes and an immense amount of development throughout the past year. The script and table read has been developed and supported by many faculty and students from UCR. This includes Professor Erith Jaffe-Berg from the Theatre, Film and Digital Production Department, who chose a scene from this work to display at the 2023 UCR Playworks festival as a staged reading and those who made the scene come together: Amanda Hong, the director, and actors Allison Moon and Karissa-Michelle Lagunte who also added much needed input in its development. I'd also like to thank those that contributed to the table reading portion of this and made the script come alive: Por Tupsamphan, Kali Chittapuram, Rachel Barrett, Thomas Cazneau-Mercado, Ethan Dizon, and Sabrina Liu. Ruth Madrid, a graduate student mentor to the Latinx Play Project also helped in the table read's set up and exposure.

I'd like to pay extra thanks to Professor Annika Speer, my faculty mentor, who has been the main support of this project's progression through her support, motivation, and constructive criticism. When I came to her about this project, she fully encouraged me, even though I was new to playwriting she believed in me and my work ethic. This support coming from her was a major motivator that drove me to continue, even during times where I had major writer's block or just unmotivated. She consistently gave me extra material as reference, asked important questions that shaped the work, and guided me throughout this process artistically, academically, and mentally. Without her help, this script would not be where it is today and I wouldn't have the same understanding of storytelling without her incredible insight. Through her diligent guidance, I have learned so much and will use what she taught me in all my future writing.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, a street interview from SCREENSHOT showcasing multiple women saying that in a hypothetical situation they would choose to be alone in the woods with a bear over a man has gone viral over Tik Tok and has struck discourse over the violence many women have faced and its repercussions. While at first glance, this idea may be absurd, when considering that millions of women each year are subject to intimate partner violence, their decision makes more sense. Previously known as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or IPV, refers to any kind of physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological method to control or torment a partner. The CDC, in the article entitled “Fast Facts: Preventing Intimate Partner Violence,” says that “. . . 41% of women have encountered some form of intimate partner violence in their lives,” making it an issue that almost half of women have dealt with or will deal with in the future.

The discourse of man versus bear continues in the comment section of the video, with people like @lauraashley555 saying “Bear, because if I got attacked by a bear people would believe me” which has 1,763 likes and @deeteelin saying “you have some chance of scaring a bear away, a man knows he can hurt you” with 2,212 likes. It is videos, discussions, and comments such as these that reflect a much wider issue than just a hypothetical, that women are constantly in danger of violence from even the ones they love the most.

Before transferring to UCR, I was able to be a journalist for my college’s newspaper. For one of the stories I covered, I attended a 40 hour Domestic Violence Advocacy Certification Program funded by the Domestic Violence shelter Laura’s House. I learned so much about the cycles of abuse that many go through and heard many different stories about how people had been affected by IPV. Shortly after I finished the program myself, I ended up within one of these cycles myself. I wondered, after taking all that time to learn the defenses against abusers, after

understanding these dynamics, how did I fall for the same tricks? As someone who writes as a form of healing, I realized once I got into the Honors Program that I wanted to serve the people and community affected by this violence through storytelling in a different way than I had with the article I wrote for the paper. My intention was to 1) accurately represent the nuance and complexity of IPV 2) Create a character that was 3-dimensional and had more to them than their victimhood 3) Tell a compelling story that would draw attention to the issue. After taking Professor Speer's Women in Theatre class, I was inspired by the plays we had read that were written by other women and addressed issues such as violence in an impactful way. This led to my decision to create this story in play format and to embark on a journey that has led to the playscript I have today.

PLOT SUMMARY

This play follows Mira, a troubled young woman who has been taken into custody after being involved in the murder of her boyfriend, Erik. Her lawyer, Pierce, asks her about her side of the story in order to accurately represent her in court. Through their discussions, we come to find out how Mira and her mother Nadine have fallen into this dire situation. We find out how Mira has had recurrences with the law and that her mother has become controlling to compensate. They also uncover Mira's relationship with Erik and how it mirrors Nadine's relationship with Mira's father. The script delves into Mira's relationships: the one with her mother, Erik, and different substances. While Pierce and Mira butt heads throughout this story, they eventually come to understand one another and even work together to put together Mira's case. This story ends with Mira getting time in jail but finally being able to shed the feelings of guilt and self-blame for the abuse she experienced. Throughout, this script asks can cycles be broken or are they destined to repeat themselves?

DIFFICULTIES

Having only written screenplays previous to this, the formatting and understanding the difference between stage and screen had a bit of a learning curve. I was gifted a book on playwriting from Professor Robin Russin. This book, entitled *Naked Playwriting: The Art, the Craft, and the Life Laid Bare* by William Downs and Robin Russin was imperative to my understanding of correct play formatting and ultimately what was needed when creating a play. It was a logistic tool kit that I used to understand this difference and to ultimately be able to address this obstacle swiftly in order to focus on the story.

The other obstacle I found was writer's block. I was weaving a very intricate story with a lot of elements to it. I incorporated drug addiction and abuse, IPV, and many other subjects across mainly five different characters. As the story grew, it became difficult to find ways to tie up all elements in a satisfying way without making it feel overwhelming. I ended up brainstorming more than writing, which put pressure on me to produce pages. The pressure of deadlines did end up helping me produce this play but the main thing that helped to get the story to where it is now was when Professor Speer told me that the relationship I wanted to focus on more, wasn't coming out enough. This sent me down a completely different path in which I almost completely rewrote the script. I realized I was creating a situation without focusing on the characters and their relationships. By prioritizing characters, I was able to piece together a new version of the script that I felt infinitely better about.

The biggest obstacle I faced while writing this script was my emotional energy. This story comes from my own truth, as well as the truth of others. Holding the weight of all that, it did take a toll on my emotional and mental health. I had no choice but to take breaks away from the intensity of the subject matter in order to be able to finish the project. However, if I was not

actually writing the script, I was going over it in my head: how the death scene would occur, how Mira would react to different situations and what kinds of jokes she would make. The story took up the energy I had left after school and extra-curriculars, which gave me little time in my own head to process what I was writing. I would not say that I have completely overcome this obstacle as of yet, but I have been able to cope with the support I have from the people in my life and through prioritizing my mental health by going to therapy.

RESEARCH

I focused on two types of research during this process. This included a literary review, in which I read different plays to incite inspiration and learn about crafting scripts from great writers who have done award-winning work. The other half of this research was based on intimate partner violence and generational trauma, as these are the themes of this play and I wanted to be as informed as possible in order to do work that is aware, sensitive, and accurate. In trying to research the effects of intimate partner violence and generational trauma, I can use examples in my writing to showcase the real difficulties that people face with these issues.

In my artistic research for my own play, I was inspired by many different works. Some of them being *How I learned to Drive* by Paula Vogel, *Man of God* by Anna Oeyang Moench, and *The Conduct of Life* by Maria Irene Fornes. While these three plays use different formats, devices, and tones, they are tied by their female writers and their themes of sexual violence. During my time since I started the Capstone, I have read many plays that have influenced my own work; however, these three were most relevant and are in conversation with this specific piece due to their display of violence, from least to most graphic, their conversation around that violence, and how characters' friends or family react and are either dismissive or helpful to those in need.

Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*, uses a feminist perspective to tell a story that centers around generational trauma, sexual harassment and incest. At its core, this is a story about a family that doesn't understand boundaries and how this has developed into the justification and protection of pedophilia and misogyny that has been strewn across generations. My script focuses specifically on a mother and daughter relationship that has been strained by Intimate Partner violence and how each character has been affected by it. Vogel's piece inspired the

conversation between mother and daughter about their different perspectives and how they dealt with that trauma. It also helped to see how the main character's relationship to her abuser centers around more than just the abuse, but the complicated relationship that has developed within other parts of her life due to the abuser's grooming. Additionally, the way it jumps through different time periods in the main character's life also helped inspire the snapshot effect exhibited in my own script.

While Vogel's piece displays the abuse between the main character and her abuser, Anna Oeyang Moench's, *Man of God*, uses her characters' different perspectives to showcase their abuser and doesn't reveal his actual persona until the final few pages. It is about four girls that go on a mission trip and find a camera in their bathroom, which they realize belongs to the Pastor that brought them. This play takes place all in one setting and goes beyond just the abuse by developing the characters and their varying relationships with each other. Each character also gets their own revenge scene in which that character imagines killing the Pastor in their own way. This play brings up conversations surrounding sexual harassment, pedophilic incest, and body image that doesn't feel out of place or forced. We get these tough discussions through teenage girls, which reflects their naivety in such subjects. Engaging with this script inspired me by being a great template in how to add comedy to such a dark play. I also found it important how the playwright uses conversation versus on stage action to demonstrate just how impactful sexual violence is to each of the characters. With my own writing, I realized I didn't want to display the abuse my characters faced or was facing but also wanted it to be present throughout the script.

Maria Irene Fornes is a Latina playwright and director who comments on violence against women during war in her play *The Conduct of Life*. While I do not agree with the way Fornes

approaches the graphic content in her play, I still believe that her message about how women are affected by war and the violence is an important message and her writing remains a true statement to the cause that she is writing about. Fornes graphically depicts onstage rape and violent IPV. While some view this as a way to demonstrate the reality of the issues, this is an incredibly jarring experience for the audience and can be triggering to those affected by these issues. After reading the play, I felt really uneasy and unsettled by just imagining these graphic scenes onstage. What I did appreciate was how Fornes included a lot of detail about the set, the costumes, and the lighting. It helps create a full picture that can be taken by designers and made into a fully made project. I tried to keep in mind that the ultimate goal of writing a script for theatre is to have it performed live so I tried to imagine how everything would come together onstage.

Along with these three plays, I read *Naked Playwriting: The Art, the Craft, and the Life Laid Bare* by William Downs and Robin Russin. I used this as an introduction to playwriting, its formatting, what my story needed, and what makes a play. I had previously only written screenplays so writing a play, especially with the different formatting was a bit of a learning curve. The main difference is considering what you could get away with regarding film versus stage. Logistically, it can be difficult for a play to be set in many different locations. You have to consider when, where and how your characters enter and exit the stage, you also have to consider the significance of every single item and whether it is worth all the trouble for one moment. These were all things I had not considered prior, so reframing my mindset in order to imagine the work on stage helped in this play's development.

While I had the tools to write the story I wanted, I needed to back up the story with the truth: that abuse doesn't look one way, it could mean a lot of things to a lot of different people. I had

my own personal understanding from first-hand experience, but I wanted to have a more researched understanding as an ally and as a writer who is representing such a large and diverse group of people who have gone through similar things. The CDC includes behavior that would be considered IPV as “Physical violence... Sexual Violence... Stalking... [and] Psychological aggression” (CDC, 2022). This distinction displays how abuse can take place in a variety of ways that may not be completely obvious at first glance. It’s important to understand these categories in order to get even more information on those who are affected by IPV because they may not know what qualifies as such. With a narrow understanding, one may think that if they aren’t being physically hurt, that their partner is not abusing them, leading to inaccurate data and the survivor to continue on in the abusive state. The issue of IPV was already scarily present as evidenced by the CDC’s statistics that state how “About 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men report having experienced severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime” (CDC, 2022) but this is only considering those that did report their abuse.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of IPV became even more clear as many were forced to be in quarantine with their abusers. The uptick of cases, along with struggling programs trying to overcome the struggles of quarantine prompted a joint hearing from the subcommittee on civil rights and human services. They noted in the hearing that “Evidence suggests that in this pandemic ridden environment stress, due to work, school, substance abuse and financial struggles have added to more violence in the home. Especially hard hit appear to be rural areas, where job opportunities can be hard to find.” (House Hearing, 2021). I incorporated practically all of these stressors into my play in some form or another. For the story I wanted to tell, it wouldn’t make sense if Mira was upper class, did not fail out of school, and was not reliant on substances. I wanted to create a storm that led Mira to this direction. I wanted to create this world

in which Mira, interacting with her past would lead to her downfall. This includes the memories of her father, another abuser to both Mira and her mom. Ultimately, the hearing asks for money to help these programs succeed. I chose to place this story in a town that didn't have too much infrastructure to expose the lack of escape routes and lack of funding. This leads to Mira's defeatist attitude and to her not taking the trial seriously.

This cycle of abuse has exasperated the effects of IPV on people and has lead not only to physical pain when the survivor is with the abuser, but long after. IPV can affect one's mental, financial, and physical state, as evidenced by the Choksi article. They mention how "The well-researched link between traumatic exposures and poor health and developmental outcomes across the lifespan (Anda et al.,2006) has been a call to action for healthcare institutions to incorporate the science of adversity and trauma into routine clinical practice" (Choksi, 1). I try to incorporate these effects and showcase how Nadine is trying to erase the effects but is ultimately failing in doing so because Mira is unable to move forward. Choksi also delves into a way in order to help families avoid passing on trauma and mentions how "Participant acceptance of the GTC is a critical first step in the further utilization and evaluation of this tool" (Choksi, 468). While those willing to accept help may not always be able to receive the support they need due to infrastructure, their willingness to cooperate makes it easier to advocate for them. That was an obstacle I decided to have for Mira, her disdain for help and her defeatist attitude. Ultimately, I used the resources I found to showcase multiple aspects of abuse, support, and healing in order to represent this complex issue.

Bonds of Rubber and Iron

written by

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CHARACTERS

MIRA: Mid 20's. Uses humor to compensate with everything. Tries to turn her life around but ends up in the same cycles.

NADINE: Mid 20's. Uses humor to compensate with everything. Tries to turn her life around but ends up in the same cycles.

PIERCE: 40's. Always worried. Can be controlling. Thinks she knows what is best..

ERIK: Mid 20's. Sleazy. Cunning. Will turn on a dime.

RITA: 60's. Mira's boss. Money driven.

JUDGE: The judge looking over the case. Recommended to be double cast with Rita.

Location: A cold interrogation room, the front of Nadine and Mira's house, a diner, a court room.

Time: Any time that has phones.

SCENE 1

(We are in a dingy holding cell. MIRA is in orange. She is fidgeting with a rubber band, stretching it every which way. She starts aiming at everything in her cell.)

We hear a door open and close. PIERCE strides in; he's on a mission. MIRA is startled and accidentally lets go of the rubber band, which ends up hitting PIERCE. They both look at the rubber band on the ground and then at each other.)

MIRA

Pierce?

PIERCE

Mira.

MIRA

...

PIERCE

Nadine asked for me...

MIRA

...

PIERCE

...to represent you.

MIRA

Of course she did. You know we don't have money.

PIERCE

I'm doing this pro bono. You scared everyone else away, so I decided to step in.

MIRA

Oh good for you. Such a saint.

PIERCE

Alright Mira, I don't have a lot of time with you so we need to get down to it.

MIRA

I killed him in cold blood. The murder weapon was a can opener and yes, it was premeditated.

PIERCE

Shut it! They could be listening.

MIRA

I checked, the audio doesn't work on this one. Geez, can't you take a joke? A can opener? So impractical. I'd rather use a potato peeler.

PIERCE

This isn't a joke! You could get life in prison you know!

MIRA

So could my mom, why aren't you representing her?

PIERCE

She refused.

MIRA

Is she stupid?

PIERCE

Really? She's doing all this to protect her only daughter and you call her stupid?

(MIRA starts laughing hysterically.)

PIERCE

What?! You know, you really don't deserve all that she does for you.

(MIRA keeps laughing.)

PIERCE

What happened to you? I thought you were getting your life together. Weren't *you* trying to go to law school?

MIRA

I decided to learn more about the legal system from within. You know, inside and out.

PIERCE

After this, the only courtroom you'll see will be for your trial.

MIRA

You know what's really sad? You not acknowledging how funny all of this is.

PIERCE

Oh I'm sorry, you're right! dead bodies, drug dealing and life in prison is absolutely hysterical!

MIRA

Please! It's far more complicated than that.

PIERCE

Really?

MIRA

You should know better than anyone how much I hate predictability.

PIERCE

You may not want to admit it, but you need me if you don't want to stay behind bars forever.

MIRA

Pierce, you're wasting your time. No one is going to believe me. Look, this is exactly how it's going to go:

(Prosecutor voice)

The defendant seems to be quite well rounded. You're previous charges include most recently a DUI, destruction of private property, several counts of drug possession. Oh and how could anyone forget, at only ten years old, she took her father's own pistol and —

PIERCE

Nadine says you're innocent! That's why I'm here.

MIRA

Doesn't matter, I'm not getting out of this! Just draft the plea deal.

PIERCE

She told me that if you did that she would do the same.

MIRA

For fuck's sake!

PIERCE

Mira, just tell me what happened. I can't help either of you if you're both going to sit silent. The investigators are going to want to lock you up regardless of the what the evidence actually says.

MIRA

Exactly! What's the point of trying?

PIERCE

Come on, you can't give up. You promised all of us, including this court that you were going to change. I am not going to let you throw your life away on something you didn't do.

MIRA

This shit is always going to follow me. So you can all stop pitying me and just leave me alone.

PIERCE

If not for you, then at least for your mom. She is trying to help you sweetheart.

(She rolls her eyes at "sweetheart.")

MIRA

You think I don't know that? That's all she does. I swear, when I get locked up she's not going to have anything else to do.

(MIRA turns away from him.)

PIERCE

Listen, this one isn't going to be easy, but we all want to try for you Mira. We haven't given up and neither should you.

MIRA

You lawyers really love a challenge. It feeds your egos, huh?

PIERCE

You're not wrong, but this one is beyond ego.

MIRA

I'm sure it is... Hey, if I'm actually going to waste the energy on a lost cause, I need a favor.

PIERCE

I feel like I'm already doing you a pretty big favor.

MIRA

You know I've never been an easy client.

PIERCE

Alright, I'll bite. What are your demands.

MIRA

1. You can't pity me.

PIERCE

I can do that.

MIRA

2. I control my story.

PIERCE

Understood.

MIRA

3 is the most important, okay?

PIERCE

Okay?

MIRA

You gotta get me some sugar in here.

PIERCE

Really?

MIRA

I'm still going through withdrawals! I need some kind of stimulant or I will go absolutely nuts in here. You want me in fighting spirit I need something that'll make me feel a little less dead.

PIERCE

I can try, but—

(Mira gives him a look.)

PIERCE

I'll do my best.

MIRA

Oh, I got one more thing, but I can't tell you till I'm finished.

PIERCE

Jesus! I need to know what I am getting myself into. You can't just expect me make a blind promise. I'm a fucking lawyer!

MIRA

Do you ever just chill the fuck out?

PIERCE

Can we just start?! We just need to get into this if we're going to win.

MIRA

I'm not saying shit 'till I get your word. This isn't about winning.

PIERCE

That's what court is sweetheart.

MIRA

(coldly)

Don't call me that.

PIERCE

Alright, whatever. Let's just please get started.

MIRA

Sorry, I forgot how little time a geezer like you has. You ready?

(PIERCE nods.)

PIERCE

Alright, go ahead.

(PIERCE pulls up a seat.)

SCENE 2

(The holding cell fades away. the lights come up on the outside of a house that looks like someone tried to use paint to distract from the failing foundation.

There is a garden out in front and there we find NADINE pulling out weeds aggressively and humming.

MIRA enters from the front door onto the front porch. She's wearing her work uniform.)

NADINE

There you are.

MIRA

Uh yeah. Why didn't you wake me up?

NADINE

Are you kidding? I tried! You kept saying you had a headache and to leave you alone.

MIRA

Yeah, ya know, my head still really hurts. Maybe I just shouldn't go.

(NADINE isn't amused.)

MIRA

Kidding.

NADINE

You know, maybe if. . . Never mind.

MIRA

No, what? Maybe if what?

NADINE

Drop it. I'm trying to be nice.

MIRA

Come on, it's on the tip of your tongue.

NADINE

Well since you asked, maybe you should actually listen to the doctor and the regiment they made specifically for you.

MIRA

Ah, there it is.

NADINE

Well you asked.

MIRA

The crash was like, an eternity ago! My head should be better by now. I'm telling you, we just overpay these quacks to tell us to drink water and sleep more.

(MIRA observes a thermos on one of the porch steps. She takes a big swig.)

NADINE

That's coffee Mira! You're not supposed to have caffeine!

MIRA

Jesus, I took one sip. I'm gonna need it if I'm going to work at all.

NADINE

I swear, if you get fired—

MIRA

I'm not going to get fired.

NADINE

Rita said that you are on your third warning.

MIRA

(to herself)

Wow, third is generous.

NADINE

This is serious Mira. You can't afford to lose this job.

MIRA

I'll take care of it.

NADINE

Sure you will. Just like you take care of everything else, huh?

MIRA

You are not giving me nearly enough credit! I did everything you wanted. I got a job, I'm sober, I'm almost done with my GED tests.

NADINE

And you are still the same!

MIRA

What else do you want?

NADINE

I want to know that you can do all that without me.

MIRA

I did.

NADINE

Are you kidding? Who reminded you of all the deadlines? Who talked to Rita about getting you that job? Who drove you to all those AA meetings?

MIRA

I still woulda done it. You just didn't give me the chance to.

NADINE

You've got to be kidding me! I did so! You gave me no choice but to step in. What am I supposed to do? Just sit back and watch you hurt yourself?

MIRA

Well yeah, I know I still live here but I'm not exactly a kid anymore.

(NADINE observes something on MIRA's face and wipes it away with her shirt. MIRA swats her away.)

NADINE

If you're going to pull the adult card, then maybe start acting like one.

MIRA

Don't you see that no matter what I do, you're never going to trust me? I swear, I'm going to have dentures by the time you leave me alone.

NADINE

As if you could survive without the sacrifices I made.

MIRA

Well I'm not going to survive much longer with you, I could tell you that much.

NADINE

I'm serious Mira, who else is going to look after you if I'm not here? Who's going to remind you of your regiment? Or your mantras? Or make sure you get to work on time.

MIRA

Listen, I know I'm not the perfect daughter you wanted but I'm doing the best I can.

NADINE

Oh please, you—

MIRA

No, you got to say your piece. I'm doing the best I can given the circumstances. You and dad weren't exactly the best role models.

NADINE

I share my pain so you don't make the same mistakes I did. Not so you can throw it in my face. By the way, You are probably the last one that should talk, all those boys you've brought home have made me sick to my stomach.

MIRA

I'm just following in your footsteps then.

(We see how much this hurts NADINE. MIRA realizes she hit a sore spot.)

MIRA

I-I didn't mean that.

NADINE

No, it's ok. You're not wrong.

(NADINE starts to walk away, MIRA quickly gets up to stop her.)

MIRA

No, I'm sorry. I've just been, antsy lately, I don't know what it is.

NADINE

Have you been taking your pills? The correct amount?

MIRA

I only feel okay when I do take them.

NADINE

Maybe it's just you getting used to things being... normal.

MIRA

What?

NADINE

I mean, you're life has changed a lot. It probably doesn't feel... comfortable.

MIRA

I guess.

NADINE

I'd at least like to think that things were different.

MIRA

They are. I have an actual job, I'm not running from the cops, I'm paying taxes and all that. It's fucking awful.

(She shivers.)

NADINE

I know this transition has been hard but I'm sure you'll feel better about it later on. Mira, you got something that a lot of people don't get, a second chance.

MIRA

But I just feel so, cloudy. Like every minute that passes by gets more blurry, each day bleeds into the next. Is this how you feel?

NADINE

Sometimes, but then I remember to focus on this.

(NADINE gestures to everything, MIRA included.)

NADINE

It may not be shiny or new, but I wouldn't give it up for anything. We have to remember that neither the past nor the future is everything. Remember? I am here. I am present. And that is—

MIRA

—And that is enough. I know, I know.

(MIRA grabs NADINE's wrist to check her watch.)

MIRA

Aw shit, I gotta leave now. I'm really going to be late.

(MIRA runs offstage.)

NADINE

(To MIRA)

Don't get fired!

(To herself)

She thinks she's all grown up, huh?

(She starts humming to herself again.)

SCENE 3

(We are in a run down diner. RITA sits at the counter, reading a magazine. MIRA runs back onstage, she tries to catch her breath. RITA doesn't look up from her magazine.)

RITA

New record! Only ten minutes late this time.

(MIRA is still breathing heavily.)

MIRA

Come on, you know how far I have to come. Besides, there's no one even here.

RITA

That's not an excuse. Anyone can come in at any—

(We hear a bell ring.)

RITA

Hi, welcome!

(No one enters. There's an awkward pause.)

RITA

Those damn raccoons. They're toying with me.

MIRA

You're right, they don't have anything better to do than to fuck with you.

RITA

Twelve minutes now.

MIRA

(under her breath)

Dammit.

(MIRA rushes to clock in behind the counter.)

MIRA

Why are we even open this early on Sundays. Everyone's either sleeping in or going to church.

(MIRA reenters while tying a half apron around her waist.)

RITA

No one's forcing you to be here you know. I could always find someone else.

(MIRA starts laughing hysterically.)

RITA

You're not the only one who needs money these days.

MIRA

No, but I'm the only one who would come all the way out here. The only people that know we're here aren't even people, they're raccoons!

RITA

We just have a very niche customer base.

MIRA

Oh come on Rita, who could replace this girl?

RITA

Maybe someone who's actually on time and respects their boss.

MIRA

Aw, what would you do without me? Die of boredom?

(RITA smirks and turns her back to MIRA to grab a rag. MIRA brings a hand up to her head. She takes out a pill bottle and attempts to sneakily take a couple pills.)

RITA

You know you really have to start showing up earlier, I'm going to have to put my foot down about—

(MIRA's been caught as she swallows.)

RITA

This.

(MIRA tosses the bottle away from her. RITA looks pitifully at her.)

RITA

Really? I thought you were done with that.

MIRA

They're prescription.

RITA

Right.

MIRA

No, they are.

(MIRA goes to grab them. She shows them to RITA. RITA takes a breath of relief.)

MIRA

Sorry, I guess I'm just used to being afraid of getting caught.

RITA

It's okay, just please. I'm asking as a friend, not your boss. Don't start again. Okay kiddo?

MIRA

I won't. That's behind me now.

RITA

It better be.

(The bell rings again.)

RITA

Welcome in!

(No one enters.)

RITA

Damn raccoons!

(RITA runs offstage. MIRA looks down at her pill bottle, opens it and takes out a couple pills into her hand.)

RITA

(from offstage)

Mira! Grab something and help me!

MIRA

Coming!

(MIRA takes the pills and stuffs the bottle into her apron. She grabs a pan and runs offstage.)

(ERIK enters he looks around the diner until he gets to *his* seat. He chuckles and sits down. He looks around in his seat for anyone to serve him. He gives up and starts looking at his menu, which covers his face.)

MIRA reenters, followed by RITA in a huff. They pass right by Erik back toward the counter.)

RITA

I told you, we need to show them who's boss or else they'll keep bullying us like this. I'm not going to let these critters overrun us!

(While RITA is ranting, MIRA notices ERIK sitting in his seat. She tries to get RITA's attention but it doesn't work.)

RITA

You know what animal control told me? If they are not disturbing the business or causing harm then there is nothing they can do, we just have to live with them! I don't know about you Mira, but this is causing me mental and emotional harm!

(MIRA finally gets RITA's attention.)

RITA

My God! What are you doing kiddo? I don't pay you to observe the customers! Go get 'em! And don't forget about the special!

(RITA shoves MIRA in his direction.)

MIRA

Uh... Welcome? Would you... oh yeah! Would you like to try our special? It's two slices of french toast with...

(ERIK puts down his menu. She can't decide if he is real or not.)

ERIK

Wow Miragold, such a warm welcome, they must pay you a fortune here.

MIRA

No fucking way, Erik Faulkner?

(RITA realizes who this is as well. And rushes over to them, pulling ERIK out of his chair.)

RITA

Oh no no no. I don't care how slow it is here, you are banned! B-A-N-N-E-D!

MIRA

What a shame, I already started taking his order.

(MIRA pulls ERIK back into the seat and takes her notepad out, pretending to write down ERIK's order.)

MIRA

He wanted the special with a side of bacon and extra french toast.

RITA

Erik! I will give you ten seconds to get out of here peacefully. If not, I have plenty of knives that need a good sharpening.

ERIK

Please Rita, Mira's an old friend of mine. Just give me a few minutes and I will be out of your hair.

RITA

Oh don't try to sweet talk me mister! Do you think I would just forget all the pain and suffer—

(ERIK takes out cash from his wallet. He quickly gives it to RITA. She stops in her tracks.)

ERIK

Ten minutes tops.

(RITA snatches the cash from him. She counts it and is shocked by how much it is.)

RITA

Alright, but I will be doing inventory right after you leave. If I find so much as a fork missing, I will be getting the police involved.

ERIK

Oh I believe it. Nice to see you again too. I'll take that order to go.

(RITA grumbles as she walks away. She gives one last threatening look at him.)

RITA

Keep an eye on this one Mira.

(She exits.)

MIRA

I take it you two have met.

ERIK

You could say that.

MIRA

Erik, I can't believe you're actually here. Last time I saw you, your hair was to your shoulders.

(RITA peers out from offstage.)

MIRA

I got it Rita.

(RITA slowly exits again.)

ERIK

It really has been a while then. I haven't been able to grow out my hair in years.

MIRA

Losing it already?

ERIK

Nah. Work, it uh, gets in the way.

MIRA

It always has. remember when you got it stuck in our science fair project?

ERIK

How could I forget? I never went near another glue bottle. Or anything that reminded me of the solar system after that.

MIRA

Well ghost of Christmas past, whatcha doing back in this hell hole? I thought you were too good for us.

ERIK

Er, well I intended to just pass through. Although, hell tends to hold its visitors.

MIRA

You're right, which is why you should escape while Cerberus is sleeping.

ERIK

I don't know, I think I have an excuse to stay.

MIRA

Don't do this. I don't want to get attached again.

ERIK

Mira, you know I didn't have a choice.

MIRA

I'm sorry, I missed the part where you were forced into breaking into Miss Stanley's home or to steal that police car, or scamming the school out of \$1,800.

ERIK

Come on, I was like a vigilante. I gave that money to the needy!

(MIRA scoffs.)

ERIK

What? You know I needed that \$1,800.

MIRA

Look, it was nice catching up, but I actually have to do my job before I get fired. Now what would you like to drink?

(ERIK gets up quickly.)

ERIK

I'll ask you the same question. Maybe I pick you up around 8? Do you still live at your mom's? Maybe we could go down to Reggi's for old times sake. It'll be weird that we can legally sit at the bar, but still.

MIRA

We got coffee, orange juice, milk, nonfat, two percent, no soy, apple juice—

ERIK

—Mira, I'm sorry. You know I never wanted to hurt you.

MIRA

I'll grab that coffee for you sir.

(MIRA starts to walk away. ERIK grabs her wrist firmly. MIRA turns back at him with a look of surprise and fear. He looks desperately at her.)

ERIK

What if, what if I took you with me this time?

(MIRA looks back at him.)

ERIK

Listen, I won't be here long but I really want to try us again. If by the time I leave you aren't convinced to come with me, I'll leave you alone, for good.

(MIRA looks away from ERIK.)

MIRA

I don't think you understand how much you are asking of me.

ERIK

Please, can we just try?

MIRA

I just—

ERIK

—Just a drink. Come on Miragold. I've honestly changed, please.

MIRA

I guess one night couldn't hurt. But I am sober.

ERIK

No way! You?!

MIRA

A year and 15 days.

ERIK

That's incredible! I'm really proud of you Miragold! See, another reason to celebrate! But, I'll still see you?

(MIRA nods. ERIK explodes with excitement. He almost dances offstage.)

ERIK

I'll see ya at 8 Miragold!

(He quickly comes back and puts some money in MIRA's hand.)

ERIK

For your troubles.

(ERIK exits. RITA comes back onstage holding a to-go bag.)

RITA

Damn, I had to actually use the grill for once and like that, he's already gone.

(MIRA opens the bag and starts eating the bacon.)

RITA

How do you know that, that devil?

MIRA

He's my, uh old friend.

RITA

That didn't seem like friends.

MIRA

Alright, we may have... been slightly more than friends— but that was a while ago.

RITA

Be careful with that one Mira. Him being here gave me goose bumps. Not even the raccoons do that.

(RITA starts cleaning the table and examining it for any damage.)

MIRA

Please let this time be different.

RITA

What was that?

MIRA

Nothing.

RITA

Alright, well don't just stand there.

(MIRA snaps out of it and starts helping RITA.)

SCENE 4

(We're back in front of the house. NADINE is enjoying a book on the porch. As she does, she starts falling asleep. As her head starts to hang forward, MIRA steps out, ready for a date.

Slowly, she tries to walk past NADINE but, being rusty with heels, trips. This makes NADINE jolt awake.)

NADINE

My God! Holy sh—

MIRA

S-sorry! Sorry, I didn't mean to.

NADINE

Woah. Wait, what are you doing out here so late?

MIRA

Oh uh, just getting some fresh air!

NADINE

Always going out. You know it's cold out there; where's your coat?

MIRA

I'll be fine.

NADINE

If you get sick—

MIRA

I won't.

(MIRA starts fixing her hair. She reaches into a purse to bring out a compact mirror. NADINE is shocked by this.)

NADINE

Who's the guy?

MIRA

What? Guy? No guy. Not at all.

NADINE

Last time I saw you wear heels was for, I couldn't even tell you. I always beg you to wear those and he gets you to just like that? Who is he?

MIRA

Just an old friend. Just two buds hanging out.

NADINE

Hmmmm.

MIRA

Mom. He's just a friend. I don't even know why it matters anyways.

NADINE

Well I need to know if I should give you pepper spray or a tazer or—

MIRA

—Oh my god, mom, it's just Erik.

NADINE

Oh, good to know. What time is he coming? Hopefully I have enough time to get you bear repellent.

MIRA

Erik is a good guy. He's only passing through town anyways.

NADINE

Ha! You mean he's here doing another scam. That boy has always been trouble and now he's going to reel you into it!

MIRA

I can handle him.

NADINE

Where are you going with him? I need to know so I can tell the police the last place I saw you.

MIRA

Oh my Gooood, it's just Reggi's!

NADINE

Already, getting you a drink. Does he know you quit? You just got that one year chip. They aren't just going to give you another one. That would be a whole other year!

MIRA

Mom! I'll drink a virgin... something I don't know. But all that bad boy Erik stuff was years ago. When he left he really did change.

(NADINE scoffs.)

MIRA

I can feel it; he's different. He's got a job and is making money and—

NADINE

—Do you really think money changes a man? In my experience it only makes them worse. More cocky and makes them think they are God's gift to mankind.

MIRA

Just because Dad was an asshole doesn't mean that every man is. Look at Pierce.

NADINE

MR. Pierce is a man of the law, of order. You're comparing apples and oranges. Now if you look at him and your father, there's some uncanny resemblance there.

MIRA

You're really going to compare that maniac to Erik? After everything he put us through?

NADINE

I'm just saying, they both give me the same knot in my stomach.

MIRA

Erik wouldn't do what Dad did to me.

NADINE

That's what I thought. He wasn't always like that, until he was.

MIRA

Well I'm sure about Erik.

NADINE

I just don't want him to take you away from me. Your father cut it far too close.

(NADINE reaches her hand out to touch MIRA.
MIRA evades this.)

MIRA

Well I have to leave at some point.

NADINE

Maybe so, but that isn't right now. You still got a lot of learning to do, which is evidenced by you going out with Faulkner again.

MIRA

He's not a kid mom. This isn't going to be like last time. I'm different too.

NADINE

Now Mira, I know I can be hard on you at times, but—

MIRA

—At times?!

(NADINE grabs MIRA's shoulders.)

NADINE

I will always be here for you. No matter who you are dating, where you are working, what you're doing, I'm going to be here. But I'm not just going to stay silent over here. I wish I would've listened to your grandma's advice.

MIRA

About not going to the gas station on second street 'cus their pumps aren't accurate?

(NADINE playfully smacks her.)

NADINE

Don't go giving a man everything because they give you the bare minimum.

MIRA

Mom, please, can you trust me?

(NADINE gives her a look.)

MIRA

Please?

NADINE

Mira, you've wrung me dry of all the trust I could give you. Remember, I had to watch those fire fighters pull you out of that car crash.

MIRA

Ugh, I know, you tell me all the time.

NADINE

I still get the nightmares.

MIRA

Still?

(NADINE nods.)

MIRA

I just woke up in the hospital with my head hurting like a bitch. I don't remember the crash.

NADINE

I won't ever forget it.

(A moment of recognition.)

MIRA

I'm sorry.

NADINE

It's hard watching you in pain.

MIRA

It's tough being in pain.

NADINE

Then stop putting yourself in harm's way and maybe you'll save us both a lot of trouble.

MIRA

I have! They took my license, I haven't seen the inside of a car in months! I don't drink, I don't—

NADINE

—I'm not just talking about the crash. I had never seen you as sad as when *he* left. I know that I can't keep you two apart, you two are like rubber bands, the further you pull them apart, the faster they come back together. But Mira, please, be careful.

MIRA

I will. If he's just as stupid as he was in high school then he shouldn't be a problem. But mom, I'm just testing it out, okay. I feel like this will give both of us some closure. And if he is just as much of an asshole, I will know for sure and be done with him. Okay?

(A concerned pause.)

NADINE

Okay, if you think you know what you are doing. Hold on, just one thing though.

(NADINE uses her scarf to wipe something off of MIRA's face.)

MIRA

Aw, mooom! Oh wait, I see him! I'll be back later. Love you!

NADINE

Love you too. Are you sure you don't need bear repellent?

(MIRA laughs and exits. A second later, she comes back and runs past NADINE into the house. She comes back out with a coat and kisses NADINE's cheek.)

MIRA

You were right!

(MIRA exits again.)

NADINE

I know... Dammit Faulkner, had to be you, huh?

(Nadine exits back into the house.)

SCENE 5

(Lights shift to show how much later it is. MIRA and ERIK enter.)

ERIK

I'm glad we got to do this again Miragold.

MIRA

Me too. It's just like the old days.

ERIK

Exactly. You are just as incredible as when I left.

MIRA

Definitely not. I'm boring now. I can't believe I ordered a virgin anything at Reggi's. That's so fucking embarrassing! You're the one with all the cool stories. I still can't believe you've been to so many places. It's kind of ironic actually.

ERIK

Yeah?

MIRA

Yeah, so many people had money on you staying in juvie for a loooong time.

ERIK

Ouch. I mean, fair, but still—ouch.

MIRA

But, look at you now! Traveling the world! Meeting all these cool people. Making money. You're really living.

ERIK

Yeah, it's good to keep busy...

MIRA

What's wrong?

ERIK

It gets lonely.

MIRA

Oh. I just thought you'd be distracted from all that. I really envy that... freedom.

ERIK

Yeah, it's definitely better than the alternative.

(Erik gestures to her.)

MIRA

Ouch.

(He gives her a playful smile.)

ERIK

I've done some really great things and been to some really great places. But it can be tough being a one man act. I get so stressed with everything they have me doing, it would be nice to have a partner.

MIRA

I'm still confused about what you do exactly.

ERIK

I'm a — a salesman.

(MIRA knows what's up.)

MIRA

Really? And what do you sell exactly?

ERIK

I sell whatever my bosses tell me. Sometimes it's art, sometimes it's time shares, and sometimes, on special occasions, it's other things...

MIRA

Other things?

ERIK

Doesn't matter. All I know is that I'm so glad I'm here. That I finally got to see you again. I really fucking missed you.

MIRA

I missed you too... just remember, my life is different now. I can't afford to get involved in — all that.

(She gestures to all of him.)

ERIK

In all what? You already went on a date with me—

MIRA

This was not a date. It was old friends reconnecting.

ERIK

Oh come on. You got all dressed up, we went out for drinks— or I guess I got a drink but— I paid!

MIRA

Take me to dinner and then we'll talk.

ERIK

Okay fine, I'll take you to dinner then.

MIRA

You don't get it! I was so hurt when you left. I finally started doing better and moving on and then you come back around. I won't let you mess me up again.

ERIK

Mira, I love you too much to do that to you.

MIRA

What?

ERIK

You heard me. Ever since I left I couldn't stop thinking about you. That's the real reason I came back. My bosses wanted me to go somewhere in Mississippi. Mississippi for Christ sake! But, I just felt it; I needed to come back to you.

MIRA

I— you only just came back today.

ERIK

You can't tell me you don't feel the same.

MIRA

I can tell you I feel a lot of things right now.

ERIK

Like?

MIRA

I'm excited that you're back. But, I'm also scared. And I'm mad still that you just left me here.

ERIK

How many times do I have to say it? It wasn't my fault! It wasn't my choice to go, they just took me.

MIRA

Well it still hurt.

ERIK

I know, I know. I'm sorry. I want to make things right. Please let me make things right. We had such a good time and we're different people now.

MIRA

You're going to make me look stupid.

ERIK

I would never!

MIRA

You did!

ERIK

Well, I'm sorry, I won't anymore. Scout's honor!

MIRA

How can I believe you?

ERIK

Aw, how could you not believe this face?

(ERIK gives her puppy eyes. MIRA giggles.)

MIRA

It is quite a convincing face.

ERIK

I know, a blessing and a curse. Does that mean I can see you tomorrow?

MIRA

Maybe.

(ERIK smirks.)

ERIK

Same 'ole Miragold, really making me work for it.

MIRA

This is just a trial period, okay?

ERIK

That's good enough for me!

MIRA

Alright, don't fuck it up Faulkner. I don't want to see that the feds are hunting you down in Mexico on the news.

ERIK

Come on, if I learned anything, it was how not to get caught. Are you busy tomorrow?

MIRA

I guess I could pencil you in after 7.

ERIK

Perfect! I will see you then! Thank you for this Miragold, I won't let you regret it!

(ERIK starts to walk away. MIRA grabs his arm and pulls him back. She kisses his cheek. They lock eyes. They pull each other in for a kiss. MIRA finally pulls herself away.)

ERIK

Well now I really gotta thank you! Have a goodnight.

MIRA

Good night Erik.

(Erik exits. Mira whirls around giddily and enters the house.)

SCENE 6

(We're back with PIERCE and MIRA. MIRA is sitting on a chair now, enjoying her candy. PIERCE is writing down some kind of notes.)

PIERCE

When did you go into business with him?

MIRA

A week and a half after he came, I think?

PIERCE

Why'd you decide to do it?

(MIRA shrugs.)

PIERCE

Mira?

MIRA

He had a short deadline and I needed money.

PIERCE

What did you need the money for?

MIRA

Be fucking for real, everyone needs it. Anyone would do what I did in this situation.

PIERCE

The reason why we are here is because many wouldn't actually do what you did sweetheart.

MIRA

I told you not to call me that. Anyway, you're asking a lot of questions. Can't I just tell the story? I have quite a way with words if I do say so myself.

PIERCE

This is my job. I really just need stuff I can use for your defense.

MIRA

You're smart. Isn't my incredible personality and tragic upbringing all you need? Here, watch—

(almost sobbing)

I just grew up this way your honor— I saw my daddy hit my mommy and, and I haven't been the same since. I had to do something to cope and that was the drugs. That's why I'm like this; I didn't even realize what I was doing.

(MIRA continues to fake cry. She composes herself abruptly.)

MIRA

And, scene.

PIERCE

You're right. All we have to do is put you on the stand, have you apologize and everything will be alright. Except no, it isn't alright and I would severely advise against having you say anything more than yes or no during you're trial. I don't get how everything is a joke to you. Nothing about any of this is as funny as you're trying to make it Mira. You know what juries and judges like? Sincerity. I advise you get some, or at least some acting classes and then maybe I can let you talk. Now, why did you need the money?

MIRA

Are you really going to ask me that question in this economy?

PIERCE

It's like pulling teeth with you.

MIRA

All these questions... You ask them so objectively too. It's like a physical.

(imitating Pierce)

What did you do at this time with this person? What color was your underwear on Tuesday. When and where did Erik jerk his di—

PIERCE

—My job is to find the truth so justice can be served appropriately.

MIRA

Your job is to manipulate the truth to win.

PIERCE

Which I can't do if you don't tell me anything.

MIRA

So you admit it.

PIERCE

I will not admit to anything unless under oath.

MIRA

You are such a square, you know that?

PIERCE

You won't stop telling me.

MIRA

Well good, you should know.

PIERCE

Mira, I'm just trying to get a clearer picture. We don't have a ton of time.

MIRA

Fine, fine. I failed my last GED test.

PIERCE

Oh, I'm sorry. But couldn't you have just retaken it?

MIRA

See, that's what I was going to do. But my mom... she was just so... disappointed. She tried to keep a straight face but I could see it. She always tries to hide how she's feeling but she forgets that your eyes have to smile with the rest of your face. I saw her fake smile and felt like a complete failure, like I couldn't do what everyone hoped for me and that I was just lying to myself by thinking I could. You know, everyone loves a feel good, bad guy turned good story. Like when those people who went to prison come out and have just such a great outlook on life and then go on to become millionaires. It gives people hope I guess. Well that's what I was trying to do and I just realized that the likelihood of that actually happening was damn near zero. So I went to Erik and I— I alluded to the possibility that I may have some connections to the people that gave me my "prescription" pills. From there, we just started working.

PIERCE

And who were these connections?

MIRA

Ah fuck that, you know I'm not a fucking snitch.

PIERCE

If you take the target off of your back we can put it on somebody else's.

MIRA

Do you hear yourself?! I got caught Pierce, this is my shit, not anyone else's.

PIERCE

I'm just trying to think of options.

MIRA

That's what I'm trying to tell you, there aren't any. This is a waste of everyone's time.

PIERCE

We have one of the best things in the world, a witness that can't speak! I just need to find the loose ends to sort them out.

(Even MIRA is appalled.)

PIERCE

I'm sorry. I forget that this is still a traumatic—

MIRA

Do you think I wanted him dead?

PIERCE

Well of course no—

MIRA

Do you think I wanted him dead?

PIERCE

From what I could tell he wasn't treating you too well when he was alive.

MIRA

Who is telling you that?

PIERCE

Mira, I can see the bruises.

(MIRA pulls her sleeve down.)

MIRA

That doesn't mean I wanted him dead. Maybe I wished he would be off on his way but... I just can't believe this happened... *again*.

PIERCE

I know, but this wasn't your fault.

(MIRA scoffs.)

PIERCE

So it was? Because I need to know if—

MIRA

I just shouldn't have gotten involved with him. That's all. I should've listened, and I didn't. And now— we're here.

PIERCE

Hey, I told you I was going to get you out of this.

MIRA

You know, at this point I'm just curious to see how this goes.

PIERCE

Alright, How much did Erik say he was going to give you?

MIRA

25%

PIERCE

Does that reflect how involved you were?

MIRA

I wouldn't say so. I did the negotiating, I got the deals together, I was the one that showed him how to make the fake prescription labels.

PIERCE

So why do you think he didn't offer a bigger cut?

MIRA

Because he's a greedy bastard. I didn't know what percentage he was going to give me until much later. I threw such a fit. And then it may have escalated a bit—

PIERCE

So you two were getting aggressive with each other.

MIRA

We had— disagreements about things. Plus the stress of not getting caught.

PIERCE

Did Nadine know about what was going on?

MIRA

Not while it was happening. If she did, Erik would have been gone a lot earlier.

PIERCE

Can anyone actually pin you to the drugs.

MIRA

As a— partaker, probably. As a seller... likely not.

PIERCE

Are you sure?

MIRA

Hey, I'm not a snitch, and my people, or I guess most of them, aren't either. Got it?

PIERCE

Understood. You know you really don't give yourself enough credit.

MIRA

What?

PIERCE

Making those kinds of relationships with people is a skill. I don't think I could say that my colleagues would have that kind of loyalty.

MIRA

You know, I would help you out if you needed it.

PIERCE

Yeah?

MIRA

Uh huh. I know I joke around but you've really stuck through it for me. So I would do the same.

PIERCE

Well, thanks.

MIRA

I can't take all the credit. You know my mom. She taught me to take care of those that you care about. Look at what she's doing for me. Plus, you followed number 3, the most important ask.

(She takes a bite of the candy.)

PIERCE

Well, I hope you don't crash from all the sugar because we still got a lot of work to do.

MIRA

Fine.

(MIRA gets comfortable as the lights fade.)

SCENE 7

(NADINE is gardening. Pruning, pulling weeds.
She's humming.)

NADINE

MIRA! COME HELP ME! MIRA?

MIRA (O.S.)

I'M COMING!

NADINE

MIRA!

MIRA (O.S)

I SAID I'M COMING!

NADINE

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

MIRA

GIVE ME A SEC!!

(MIRA comes from the house.)

MIRA

My God woman. Gonna make me lose my voice.

NADINE

Oh finally. Come help me with this.

MIRA

Aw mom, it's so hot today. Do we really got to do this now?

NADINE

I want them to be watered and weeded before the evening.

(NADINE shoves a watering can into MIRA's arms. She points to where she wants her to water. MIRA does it reluctantly.)

MIRA

What even is this?

NADINE

Bell Peppers.

MIRA

Ugh, I hate bell peppers.

NADINE

Well I don't.

MIRA

You'd think that if you were going to put so much effort into something it would be something we could both enjoy.

NADINE

You asked what I do besides worrying about you. This is it. So sorry I didn't accommodate my hobby for your palette.

(MIRA goes back to watering.)

NADINE

How are things going with your studies.

MIRA

Just as good as they were yesterday. And the day before and the day before.

NADINE

You can do it, I believe in you.

MIRA

Well I don't.

NADINE

So you're just going to give up?

MIRA

No, but can't I just take a break?

NADINE

Mira, a break is not what you need right now. You'll forget everything you studied.

MIRA

Some people take time away from school to travel or to start a business.

NADINE

That's great but you haven't started school and you don't have a business. You're catching up on what you should've been doing.

MIRA

Yeah, I know that. But I've been working really hard. I've been going at it nonstop.

NADINE

That's good. You could get everything done faster.

MIRA

I'm burnt out mom. I don't think I can.

NADINE

You are so close! Please, just do this for me.

MIRA

I'm really trying but it's hard.

NADINE

Well of course it is. That's life.

MIRA

Please, just a short break.

NADINE

Oh so you can mess around with your boyfriend. I see.

MIRA

This isn't about him!

NADINE

Then why do you need a break? You've been doing so well until—

MIRA

I'm not used to all this.

NADINE

Not used to what?

MIRA

Being responsible.

NADINE

Trust me, I know.

MIRA

Well, that's what it is. I didn't learn any of this shit about money or how to get an actual job or whatever. I barely know anything.

NADINE

That's partially my fault. I shouldn't have been as soft on you when you were younger.

MIRA

To be fair, I wouldn't have listened either way.

NADINE

I know but that's my job. I'm supposed to push you in the right direction.

MIRA

I am in the right direction now. And I still will be. I just need a second to recover.

NADINE

No no no. You're not getting out of this.

MIRA

I'm not trying to get out of it.

NADINE

I know you. You say "I'm just going to take a break" and then you never go back. Remember the soccer team, or that law club you were part of? Oh, what about when you wanted to be a girl scout?

MIRA

Hey, I was not girl scout material and you know it!

NADINE

We all knew, you were the reason they didn't have Thin Mints for a whole season. But the point is, you don't stick with things long enough. You can't get good at anything if you do that. Look at this garden.

MIRA

Oh boy.

NADINE

Hey! Look around you. You think this became like this overnight?

(MIRA yawns. NADINE throws a gardening glove at her.)

NADINE

Huh? You think?

MIRA

No ma'am.

NADINE

It took time. A lot of time. Years to get it to where it is now. Remember what it looked like when you were little?

MIRA

It was just weeds.

NADINE

Exactly. But once I finally got out here and put in the work, I was able to see improvement. If I had quit along the way, none of this would be here, right?

MIRA

Right.

NADINE

Look now. I'm actually growing things in here! I didn't always have this green thumb.

MIRA

You could say that again. Remember those daisies you brought in?

NADINE

They were very nice flowers.

MIRA

Yeah, until I started seeing maggots in vase.

NADINE

Oh God, I'm going to throw up again just thinking about it.

(NADINE gets the chills. Her and MIRA start laughing. They speak while still laughing.)

MIRA

Remember how you made me take it out?

NADINE

I wasn't going to touch it!

MIRA

You're the one who brought 'em in!

NADINE

I didn't mean to, trust me! It would have saved us both our lunches if I hadn't.

(Their laughing starts easing up.)

NADINE

But you know what, I learned a lot from that experience. And that's what matters. I haven't had a maggot infested vase since!

MIRA

That you know of, we haven't used a see through vase since.

(MIRA starts tickling her like there's bugs crawling up her arms. NADINE fights her off.)

NADINE

Do you see the point I'm trying to make here or not?

MIRA

Yeah yeah, practice makes perfect, don't give up, you live and you learn, blah blah. Other inspirational stuff.

NADINE

I know you may not see it, but I am proud of you.

MIRA

Sorry, I didn't catch that.

NADINE

I'm proud of you Mira, always.

MIRA

One more time?

NADINE

I'm proud— oh I see what you're doing!

(MIRA laughs.)

NADINE

You and your grandmother have the same sense of humor. It would drive me crazy when you two were in the same room. I don't get the two of you.

MIRA

Well you're an important part of the dynamic. We're the ones who were fun, and you were the one who was the complete buzz kill.

NADINE

I'm fun!

MIRA

Mmhmm.

NADINE

I was fun! I snuck out, I drank, I liked boys with motorcycles.

MIRA

YOU?! Like, actually?

NADINE

That's enough about me. Here, dig these weeds up.

(NADINE shoves a shovel into MIRA's hands.
She starts digging up weeds.)

NADINE

You got this. I know you can do it, you just need to apply yourself and get rid of any distractions.

MIRA

Oh, so I can take time off work.

NADINE

No, that is not what I meant. Work will help you get the funds you need for college.

MIRA

Yeah yeah.

NADINE

Law school is expensive.

MIRA

I know, I don't even know if I want to do it anymore.

NADINE

Well maybe talk to Mr. Pierce and see what it's like being a lawyer.

MIRA

I just don't think I can—

NADINE

You can! That's what I'm trying to get through your thick head! You can, you just need to get up and do it!

MIRA

Okay, okay!

(MIRA wrestles with one last weed. NADINE sees this and goes to help her. They shovel it out but both fall to the ground. They start laughing again.)

MIRA

We really do make a good team.

NADINE

Nothing says team work more than us ending up on our asses together.

(MIRA gets up and helps NADINE.)

MIRA

Why don't you go inside and rest? I can finish the rest.

NADINE

Really? Well you don't have to tell me twice. Thanks dear.

(NADINE ruffles MIRA's hair and heads inside.)

SCENE 8

(MIRA and ERIK are in the diner. MIRA is aggressively cleaning up tables. Erik is enjoying some bacon.)

MIRA

I can't believe this. She already knows you. Why does she want to "meet" you.

ERIK

Because she's a mom. They tend to worry about who their children are with.

(RITA pops in.)

RITA

Say it again Faulkner. If you were dating my daughter— actually no, you would never date my daughter.

MIRA

But it's not like we're doing anything bad. We're just hanging out. We haven't even gone above the speed limit for Christ sake.

ERIK

Mira, stop worrying. Everything will be fine.

RITA

Not if you're involved Faulkner.

ERIK

Do you mind? We're kind of trying to talk here.

RITA

In my diner. I won't risk the integrity of my tables again boy. You've tried me enough.

ERIK

Can't we just put the past behind us?

RITA

Over my dead body.

ERIK

(to himself)

We won't have to wait too long for that.

(MIRA, who was drinking some water, starts choking.)

ERIK

Listen Rita, we're not going to get anywhere if we don't start exercising trust.

RITA

Exercising what?

ERIK

I am willing to do all that I can to earn that trust back. I have done my time and I have grown as a person so I sincerely apologize for all the trouble I caused you.

RITA

(mocking)

Oh, you sincerely apologize— KISS MY ASS FAULKNER!

(ERIK sighs. He pulls out his wallet and starts pulling out bills. He gets up and hands it to her. She hesitantly grabs it and starts counting.)

RITA

Eh.

(ERIK goes back to his wallet, grabs a few more bills and hands it to her.)

RITA

Hm. Yeah that looks fine—for now. Mira, watch the place while I'm gone. I'll be out getting more mouse traps.

(ERIK starts frantically wiping his tongue with a napkin.)

MIRA

That's all it took?

RITA

I'll be back in 30 minutes. Watch that clock. I will do a complete, *thorough* look over when I get back.

ERIK

Pleasure doing business with you Rita.

RITA

The pleasure is completely yours.

(ERIK waves at her. She gives him a "I'm watching you motion" and exits.)

ERIK

And just like that, she likes me. Hey, you don't suppose your mom would be the same way?

MIRA

Fuck no. She's only gotten worse over the years.

ERIK

Oh yeah? Been raising hell as always here, huh Miragold?

MIRA

You know me.

ERIK

Well, either way, she'll like me. I know it.

MIRA

You're acting as if it'll be easy.

ERIK

Hey, the fact that she wants me in her house is crazy. Maybe she's turned over a new leaf.

MIRA

You don't know her like I do. I don't feel good about this.

(MIRA takes a couple of pills.)

ERIK

What are those?

MIRA

Uh, my anxiety meds. They're prescrip--

(ERIK snatches the bottle from MIRA.)

MIRA

Yeah, no problem. You can take a look.

ERIK

Sorry, it's just. Mira, these are incredible. How did you make the label so realistic?

MIRA

I don't know what you're talking about.

ERIK

Come on. You and I both know this isn't real.

MIRA

Shh! Please. No one can find out.

ERIK

Mira, you gotta tell me how you did this.

MIRA

It's really not that hard. Photoshop is a thing. And you can get the bottles at a medical supply store. Just please, keep your voice down.

ERIK

Would you be able to make another one. Or more like another hundred?

MIRA

What?! Are you still using too?

ERIK

No. I'm not. But...

MIRA

So that's what you're selling?! Fucking drugs?

ERIK

Sh. Sh. Sh. No. Well... Ok. I am. Turns out, drugs are an excellent career path.

MIRA

I'm an idiot! I actually thought you changed.

(MIRA snatches the pill bottle back from ERIK.)

ERIK

Okay, be mad all you want, but don't act like you're any better.

MIRA

Unlike you, I at least tried to turn my life around.

ERIK

Don't use that self-righteous shit on me Mira. You know people like us don't really change.

(pause)

I was out of jail, sober, and working for a year and I was still miserable. Everything just felt—

MIRA

Blurry.

ERIK

Exactly. So I started pick pocketing again and the rush I got from that! It was like everything was in 4K!

MIRA

I did actually... try to stop. But my head. These barely do anything anymore.

ERIK

That's what everyone wants. For us to just be robotic little machines that do whatever they want. They don't realize that this world isn't made for people like us. They act like we're...

MIRA

Broken.

ERIK

Yeah, broken. But we're not! We just know that following the rules doesn't do us any good. It's their way of using *us* for *their* benefit!

(MIRA still sits there, not convinced.)

ERIK

Mira. I don't plan on doing this forever. This was actually supposed to be my last job. They were going to let me off and even pay me this time, as long as I can connect them to a market that will be self-sufficient.

MIRA

So that's why you came here?

ERIK

I didn't realize so many people moved away though. Even Marty is gone. Man, I could always count on that guy. But now, I have you. People will pay just for the bottles. Now we just need a clientele.

MIRA

We? Who said I was going to help you?

ERIK

We're a team. We help each other out.

MIRA

Yeah but, I just...

ERIK

It's okay, I'll be with you every step of the way. Just like old times.

MIRA

What are you even selling? Is it an upper or a downer?

ERIK

Upper. It's brand new. It's like nothing I've ever tried before.

MIRA

I thought you said you weren't using.

ERIK

Well you gotta try the product you're selling. Here, you should try some.

(ERIK pulls out a plastic bag full of yellow pills.)

MIRA

Hell no! I'm not trying your highlighter pills! Especially not at work you psycho!

ERIK

Highlighter pills. I kinda like that. See Miragold, you're a natural!

MIRA

(flattered)

Oh stop, I'm just...

(pause)

Wait, this doesn't mean I'm going to help you!

ERIK

What's stopping you? I haven't even told you how much you'll make. I'll even bring you in at forty percent.

MIRA

Oh please, forty percent of your like ten percent can't be--

(ERIK whispers into MIRA's ear.)

MIRA

Holy shit...

(MIRA looks like she's going to faint. She takes a seat.)

ERIK

Yup. Now are you on board?

MIRA

How many do you need?

ERIK

Really? Thanks Miragold! I knew you wou--

MIRA

How many do you need?

ERIK

We could start with fifteen. We would also need buyers.

MIRA

I got some people in mind.

ERIK

Perfect. You think you could make a deal with them?

MIRA

Yup, they're who I get these guys from.

(She shakes her pill bottle.)

ERIK

This could work. This could actually work! And if it does, we'll be set for life! We could do whatever the fuck we wanted!

MIRA

I could actually leave?

ERIK

You could do more than just leave. You could actually live your life.

MIRA

Wow. That's crazy. I never thought... Oh fuck.

ERIK

What? What's wrong?

MIRA

What about my mom? She's still on our asses.

ERIK

Let's just go to this dinner. She'll see what a good boy I am and bingo, we'll open up shop.

MIRA

Will that really work?

ERIK

I'll be on my best behavior. Scout's honor.

MIRA

Alright. Well you better dress nice and remember all those manners we learned in Cotillion class.

ERIK

Yeah yeah, wear a tie, fancy salad fork, I got it.

(pause)

Are you sure you don't want to try it Mira? It's good to know what you're selling.

MIRA

Um. I'm good.

ERIK

Ok, no problem. Just please don't worry, everything will be fine.

MIRA

Sure, sure.

ERIK

We can do this Mira. Together.

MIRA

Yeah. Together.

(They exit.)

SCENE 9

(We are back with PIERCE and MIRA.)

PIERCE

So there's a chance they're still in your system, right?

MIRA

I won't say no. But... yeah I really have no idea. Wait, I already did a drug test.

PIERCE

The results were inconclusive, they're going to test you again.

MIRA

Oh great, the 3 things I hate the most: pissing in front of people, having my hair ripped out, and seeing blood outside of my body.

PIERCE

I'm sorry but this could be a good thing. We just need to flush out your system.

MIRA

?

(PIERCE pulls out a gallon's worth of water bottles.)

PIERCE

Hope you're thirsty.

MIRA

Oh hell no.

PIERCE

It's really not that bad.

MIRA

Is this pay back?

PIERCE

I won't say that it isn't

(MIRA starts drinking the water.)

PIERCE

I'm still confused. If you and Erik weren't getting along, why did you keep working with him?

(MIRA starts drinking faster.)

PIERCE

I can wait.

MIRA

That doesn't mean I'll answer.

PIERCE

It appears we're at an impasse.

MIRA

Can't you ask me anything else?

PIERCE

That's the question I need answered more than anything right now.

MIRA

Why?

PIERCE

Erik was a sleazy guy. No one could deny that. Once he got his freedom back he almost immediately returned to criminal activity. You on the other hand were trying to get better, you were doing everything you were supposed to until he shows up, finds your vulnerabilities and traps you back in the cycle you were trying to run away from.

MIRA

Okay, but that's not exactly—

PIERCE

Did he force you to do anything you didn't want to?

MIRA

Uh, no.

PIERCE

Really? He didn't hit you, throw anything at you, threaten you?

MIRA

He didn't, alright?

PIERCE

Mira, remember I am on your side. I always have been. Did you feel like you had to agree with Erik? That he would get violent if you didn't? This could really help you.

MIRA

(small)

Help me?

PIERCE

Yeah, if you felt scared of Erik, if he was hurting you, it would justify why you helped him for so long.

MIRA

Versus if I wasn't? I need to have been hit in order to justify my actions.

PIERCE

That's not what I'm trying to—

MIRA

Well you are!

PIERCE

Woah woah woah, let's take a step back sweetheart, my intention wasn't—

(MIRA throws her water bottle on the floor.)

MIRA

For Christ sake, stop calling me that! Why won't anyone fucking listen to me!?

PIERCE

Mira I'm—

MIRA

I don't want to be called sweetheart, I don't want to be pitied and I just want all of this to be over!
Why can't anyone understand that!??

PIERCE

I'm sorry! I didn't mean to—

MIRA

Ow ow ow!

(MIRA's hands go to her head.)

MIRA

—God Pierce, I can't do this. I really just can't!

PIERCE

You don't have to do anything you don't want to.

MIRA

But I do. I HAVE to get my GED. I HAVE to go to AA meetings. I HAVE to choose the right guy that isn't like my dad and I HAVE to stay the fuck out of jail or else my life is ruined.

PIERCE

I just want to hear your side.

MIRA

No, you want to make me out to be this stupid victim that didn't know any better. Well that's not what happened. You said I had control over my own story.

PIERCE

Of course you do, but this *is* your story Mira. Erik manipulated you and put you in a messed up situation.

MIRA

And what would you know about that?

PIERCE

Nothing.

MIRA

See, nothing!

PIERCE

That's why I'm trying to listen to you Mira.

MIRA

Well you're doing a shit job at it! All these stupid fucking questions!

PIERCE

I have to, It's how we're going to win this!

MIRA

I couldn't give a fuck about winning! My God why can't you get that through your head?! The only reason I'm talking to you is because of my mom. I put myself here. I did my part. This is my fault!

PIERCE

Mira, if you hadn't met Erik again, would any of this have happened?

MIRA

Probably! Maybe not like this but I was bound to do something. Nothing was fucking working or me so I gave up trying to be good for everyone.

PIERCE

Well the reality is that Erik was here and he was the driving force of all of this. I don't know why you want to finally take responsibility after being mistreated and abused by him

MIRA

Okay I've had enough! If you aren't going to listen to me then I think this is where we stop. I want a different lawyer.

PIERCE

Like I said, there's not a lot of people, actually, there really isn't anyone willing to take this case.

MIRA

Well I don't give a fuck! You said you'd believe me.

PIERCE

I want to, but I'm not going to believe the story Erik Faulkner made you believe. You don't have to justify why you stayed with him. A lot of people stay with their abusers.

MIRA

Yeah, exactly. That's what my mom did, and so did my grandma and probably other family members. We stay with our abusers because that's all we know how to do! 'Cus that's all we are to you. We aren't people, we're fucking victims! That's all you see us as, right? We want to stay because we wouldn't know any better. We actually like staying with them and we will until we're dead! And oh, of course on the off chance that we do leave then we're gonna go back because that's what the statistics say. And what if we do ask for help? Huh Pierce? No one will fucking believe us!! No one will care! That's the only thing us "victims" have in common. No one fucking cares and no one will fucking help!! I'm not going to let you think for one moment that all I am is a victim because I took my fate into my own hands. You know what happens when people hurt me or the people I care about? THEY end up dead.

Look at my Dad! Look at Erik! So do you get it now?

HUH!?! YOU GOT THAT PIERCE?!

I AM NOT A FUCKING VICTIM!

(MIRA grabs a chair, raises it above her head and throws it at the wall of the cell.)

MIRA

Get out Pierce. We're done here.

(PIERCE slowly backs away. He looks like he's about to say something but bites his tongue. He exits.

MIRA slides against the wall to sit on the floor, she holds her head in her hands.)

MIRA

(almost mumbling)

I am here, I am present... I am here, I am present, I am here, I am present, I am here, I am here, I am here, I am present...

ACT 2

SCENE 1

(MIRA and ERIK stroll up to the front of the house. We can see how tense MIRA is about everything. There is also a dining table outside the house now with 3 chairs.)

MIRA

Whatever you do, do not mention anything about juvie.

ERIK

What if she brings it up?

MIRA

Say how much you learned from it and then change the subject as soon as possible.

ERIK

What do I do if she asks about my job?

MIRA

I thought we went over this.

ERIK

We did, I just wasn't paying attention.

MIRA

Erik! You can't be anything less than perfect. My mom won't let us within a mile of each other if you aren't.

ERIK

I'm sorry, it's just a lot to remember. Especially since I can't talk about.. practically all of my life.

MIRA

What is so difficult? I broke it down into three parts. Don't mention juvie, don't talk about drugs, and above all, don't be honest.

ERIK

That's a lot of don't. What can I do?

MIRA

You could keep your mouth shut.

ERIK

That kind of defeats the purpose of all this, don't you think?

MIRA

The point of this is to let my mom see how much you've changed, and staying quiet would show major growth on your part.

ERIK

Alright, I guess.

MIRA

Trust me, the less you say the better. You ready?

ERIK

Ready as I'll ever be. Are you? You're breathing pretty heavily over there.

MIRA

Good enough.

(MIRA is practically hyperventilating.)

ERIK

Here.

(ERIK pulls out the yellow pills.)

MIRA

Are you crazy!?

ERIK

Just one. I promise, It'll work.

MIRA

I— I, um... Fine. Just one.

(MIRA takes one. Just as she does, the door opens. NADINE steps out. MIRA gets startled and starts choking. She tries to cover it up but it only makes it worse.)

NADINE

I thought I heard you two out here. You should've knocked...

(As NADINE is speaking, MIRA is still coughing.)

NADINE

Oh no Mira, I hope you're not getting sick. I always tell you to bring a jacket, but noooo.

(MIRA gives one last big cough and stands up straight.)

MIRA

Just — had something— in my throat. Darn... pollen? Always gets in the most inconvenient places.

NADINE

Oh wow, you're tongue is even yellow! Oh well good thing I made some tea, it'll wash it down.

MIRA

Right, thanks mom. Oh uh, this is Erik. I mean, you already know him, but here's uh new Erik, present Erik, I guess.

(MIRA laughs awkwardly.)

ERIK

Thanks for having us.

NADINE

Of course, Mira has been saying how much you've changed. I thought it'd only be fair to give you a second chance.

ERIK

Well thank you, I have to say, walking on the straight and narrow has been both straight and narrow.

(Awkward pause. MIRA is embarrassed. NADINE starts laughing.)

NADINE

This is going to be fun. Erik, do you think you can help me bring some things out here? It's so nice out, I thought we'd make the most of it.

ERIK

Absolutely! It's the least I could do.

(NADINE walks back inside. MIRA shoots ERIK a look.)

ERIK

What?

MIRA

She is going to eat you alive.

ERIK

Oh come on Miragold. Have a little faith.

(ERIK steps inside. MIRA starts pacing back and forth outside. She brings her hand up to her face like she can't feel it.)

MIRA

No fucking way. Already? Shit. I can't believe I let him give me those.

(She starts contorting her face around even more. ERIK and NADINE start bringing out different dishes.)

ERIK

—And I was telling him, "you can't put that in the microwave, it'll explode! I thought I got through to him until I heard the bang in the kitchen and the fire department— Mira? Are you okay?

(MIRA stands there frozen for a second. She fixes her face.)

MIRA

Yeah, just my sinuses are acting up. This pollen is really getting to me.

(NADINE puts her dishes on the table, she puts the back of her hand against MIRA's forehead.)

NADINE

Well, good thing is you don't have a fever. But I don't know, should we reschedule?

MIRA

No, no, no, no. We are not wasting aaaall this food you made! You're right, it's such a nice day, it would be such a shame to waste it!

(MIRA pulls NADINE into one of the chairs and starts setting the table rapidly. She practically runs inside, comes back out with silverware and continues her rapid pace in setting everything up. She pulls Erik up from his seat and reseats him. She starts quickly putting food on dishes to the point that it's incredibly sloppy. She aggressively grabs ERIK and NADINE's hands.)

MIRA

(quickly)

LORD! We thank you for this food in front of us. For this day. For my mom, for Erik. For bringing us together on this beautiful day and for all of our blessings. You're actually being pretty nice to us right now, so keep it up! Amen!

ERIK

I didn't know you guys were religious.

NADINE

We're not.

(NADINE looks at MIRA, confused. She tries to let it go.)

NADINE

So, Erik. It's been quite a while, what brought you back here?

ERIK

Oh well I just--

(MIRA stomps on ERIK's foot.)

MIRA

He just got homesick.

NADINE

Really? From what I remember, you always hated it here.

ERIK

Well yeah, but—

(MIRA kicks Erik.)

MIRA

You know that saying, distance makes the heart grow fonder.

NADINE

I can see that. I mean, all you've done here so far is distract my daughter.

ERIK

I mean, she is an adult. She doesn't need her mommy--

(MIRA elbows ERIK.)

MIRA

What he means to say is that most people have moved away. When he saw that I was still here he wanted to make sure he at least mended things with me.

NADINE

Huh, I would've thought you'd stay away from Erik, especially after the circumstances in which he left.

MIRA

Mom.

ERIK

No, it's ok Mira, she's right. I didn't leave on the best of terms with a lot of people. But part of the reason why I wanted to come back was to repair those relationships.

NADINE

Well that's quite mature of you.

ERIK

It's the least I could do. I came here for work but I couldn't not say anything.

NADINE

Ah yes, what kind of work are you doing now?

(MIRA looks petrified.)

ERIK

Well, I've been picking up different jobs here and there.

NADINE

Oh really, like what?

ERIK

All kind of things. I've bought and sold art pieces for museums in Asia, I've set up trading depots in the Congo. I've done workshops on gardening all across the U.S.

MIRA

Oh. My. God. Did my mom tell you she loves gardening?

ERIK

She didn't have to. The one you have out here is gorgeous. Is that all you?

NADINE

Well, Mira helps from time to time, but you should have seen it a couple of years ago. Absolutely horrid.

MIRA

The neighbors wouldn't stop laughing about how hideous it was! But my momma fixed it up and now look! Beeeeeauuuutiful!

ERIK

It really is. Are those bell peppers?

NADINE

Yes.

ERIK

I love bell peppers! And yours look incredible!

NADINE

Oh well make sure you take a few before you leave! I know this one won't eat any.

(ERIK gives MIRA a boastful look.)

NADINE

But that's quite a lot of traveling Erik. Where are you planning to go next?

ERIK

Oh, I guess I don't really have a plan exactly. I guess I just go with the flow.

NADINE

And you're making a stable living from

(imitating)

Going with the flow?

ERIK

Really good actually. That's why I want Mira to come with—

(MIRA elbows him again, even harder.)

NADINE

Is that the plan? Mira you're planning on leaving with- with him?

MIRA

Mom, mom, mamma, mother. There is no such plan. Erik just has these big ole dreams.

(to him)

Sometimes he doesn't know what he's saying.

NADINE

I think he can speak for himself Mira. So Erik, when are you planning to take her away from me? You know she still needs her GED.

ERIK

That's okay. I still need mine too. I never thought school was for me. Or really for anybody.

(MIRA puts her head in her hands.)

NADINE

Well, you know what—

MIRA

(faking)

—Oh my goodness. I am so sorry mom, I completely forgot! Erik and I got tickets to this movie downtown, it's supposed to start in, like, half an hour.

NADINE

Oh, really? Leaving before dessert?

ERIK

Dessert?!

NADINE

Well yeah, it's those lemon bars that you two used to love.

ERIK

Oh come on Mira, we won't be late.

(whispering to her)

I've had dreams of those lemon bars. Please!

MIRA

I guess we can grab a couple. But after, we are off.

NADINE

Alright then.

(NADINE exits to grab the lemon bars. MIRA
massages her temples.)

MIRA

I thought we agreed that we would be in and out.

ERIK

Well look at us, outside. So technically we'll be out and out. I don't see the harm. She seems to like me now.

MIRA

Oh really? You think that went well?

ERIK

Relax, will you. You hear her asking about my travels?

MIRA

She was trying to be condescending.

ERIK

Well that's not how I heard it.

MIRA

Well she's not your mom.

(NADINE comes back with a plate of lemon bars.)

ERIK

Thank you ma'am.

NADINE

You can call me Nadine.

(ERIK gives MIRA a satisfied look. She glares at him in response.)

MIRA

Thanks for everything mom. We do have to go now.

NADINE

What a shame. Well you kids have fun. And Erik, bring her back by midnight.

MIRA

Really?

NADINE

Yes really. Just because we did this doesn't mean you get to do whatever you want.

(MIRA groans.)

ERIK

Don't worry Nadine. She'll be back at 11:50 on the dot!

(MIRA rolls her eyes. NADINE goes back in the house. ERIK grabs another lemon bar and waves to NADINE as she leaves.)

(NADINE slowly waves at him.)

MIRA

That could've gone a lot better.

ERIK

Oh come on. We did great. Even if she is suspicious, what could she say, he was over-enthusiastic about the lemon bars?

MIRA

Alright, alright.

(MIRA starts giggling.)

MIRA

I guess you did okaaaay.

(MIRA giggles some more.)

MIRA

Now that that's done, I feel a whole lot better. Like my head is clearer.

ERIK

Clearer, huh?

(ERIK starts laughing. MIRA starts laughing too.)

MIRA

Why are we laughing?

ERIK

Miragold. Do you like the feeling of the highlighter pills?

MIRA

Whaaaa? Is that what this is? I only took one.

ERIK

Yup. They're great, aren't they? It had you really buggin' throughout that whole thing.

MIRA

Oh my God, do you think she noticed?

ERIK

No, no. The praying was a little weird, but you're fine.

MIRA

Shit, I bet she fucking knows!

ERIK

Aw, Miragold, it wasn't that bad. Let's just think about something else, how are you feeling right now?

MIRA

I feel light and like, like, focused. Like that 4k feeling!

ERIK

Yup, you think your connections are going to like them?

MIRA

Do I? They'll take everything you got!

ERIK

Perfect.

MIRA

Were those flowers always that bright?

(ERIK laughs.)

ERIK

Come on Miragold, we gotta lot of work to do.

(They exit.)

SCENE 2

(We are back in the diner. RITA is bustling about.
PIERCE enters.)

PIERCE

Rita.

RITA

Pierce! Long time no see! I'll get your usual ready.

PIERCE

Thanks Rita. Actually, could you make it extra strong today?

(RITA starts making the coffee.)

RITA

Ah, it's going to be a long one, huh?

PIERCE

You have no idea.

RITA

See, you always say that. But what if I wanted to have an idea?

PIERCE

It's uh, kind of, official business. Not really something to gossip about.

RITA

Please, who am I going to tell? The freaking raccoons?

(PIERCE laughs.)

PIERCE

Well I hope not, I don't trust those buggers.

RITA

You joke, but these critters are running my customers away.

PIERCE

I'll try to get animal control out here for you.

RITA

Thank you. See, now I told you something, it's only fair you do the same.

PIERCE

Ah, well. I guess. It's uh...

(PIERCE looks around.)

RITA

Trust me dear, there's not anyone coming 'round here.

PIERCE

Well. I'm representing Mira.

RITA

Wow, again, huh? I shoulda known. You don't get your coffee really strong unless you're working with that one.

PIERCE

She is a lot. But, I messed up. I pushed her too hard.

RITA

Not surprised.

PIERCE

Huh?

RITA

Well, let's face it Pierce, you can be a little... cold sometimes.

PIERCE

Cold?

RITA

It's always about business with you. I am not surprised in the least that she pushed back. She's always been like that. You talk about getting things done, you tell her what she can and can't do, and she's off in a huff. That's why I like that girl, she's got spunk. I still can't believe what happened.

PIERCE

Me neither. Honestly, I'm still trying to piece it together.

RITA

How do you mean?

PIERCE

I've said too much. But uh, my coffee?

(A look of realization on RITA's face. She runs to get it. She comes back and he takes a sip.)

PIERCE

Damn, that is strong.

RITA

Thought you needed it.

PIERCE

I really do. She's completely hardened up. I can't ask a simple question without her cussing me out. I just, I'm obviously doing this all wrong, but I just don't get her. Maybe I am in over my head.

RITA

Oh, don't be so hard on yourself. You know she's not exactly a peach herself. You'd think you could blame the parents, but Nadine's always been quiet and polite.

PIERCE

Her father was a nightmare though. Always drunk, always yelling, swore like a sailor. He's probably where she gets her vocabulary from.

RITA

Ugh, don't even bring him up in here. That whole situation still gives me chills.

PIERCE

Same here. By far the worst case I've ever done.

RITA

I can't even imagine. Had all of us stunned for weeks, no months. I mean, it's all the local news would talk about. Every channel I flipped on in here had that "13 year old girl shoots abusive father" headline.

PIERCE

All those news vans were a pain in the ass. We never get traffic over here, but for that first month, everywhere was in deadlock.

RITA

Are those assholes still doing that bus tour that passes by their house?

PIERCE

Not anymore, business slowed down a while ago. It's like they realized that that's the only interesting thing about his place. Like it all just faded away.

RITA

Well yeah, for anyone outside of here. This town has felt hazy since it happened. And how dare you? The only interesting thing? This diner has been here for generations!

PIERCE

But that doesn't interest tourists anymore. They care about cities, and celebrities, and really fucked up story. Do you know how many true crime podcasts there are? I wouldn't be surprised if there was one on Mira's case.

RITA

I looked it up, there's 3.

PIERCE

?

RITA

You can't blame me for being curious. I also wanted to see if I was mentioned.

PIERCE

Besides that news fiasco, was this town ever busy?

RITA

A long time ago.

PIERCE

Yeah?

RITA

Yeah, the mayor was actually putting money into this place. Wanted us to be the new New York. But everyone realized that that wasn't going to happen and it just started falling apart.

PIERCE

I'll say. Besides Mira's, I have a full case load of other kids. All drug related charges.

RITA

If I have to hear about another 20 something that OD'ed on a new something or other... It's just so disheartening.

PIERCE

I guess that's why I have a soft spot for Mira. You can tell she doesn't want this to be her life.

RITA

Yeah, but honestly, last time I saw her, she didn't have that fire anymore.

PIERCE

How do you mean?

RITA

She just seemed so out of it but also... scared? I hate to say it, but I wouldn't be surprised if Faulkner stole all that spunk I love.

PIERCE

Did you ever see anything concerning between the two of them?

RITA

Once.

PIERCE

Once would be enough Rita! Do you think you could help our case?

RITA

Oh, I don't know, I really don't think I could go up in front of all those people, and the news is going to be there, and who would watch the diner!

PIERCE

Please. Mira refuses to say anything herself and I don't want her to if she doesn't have to. Please Rita, you'd be doing her, Nadine and I a huge favor.

RITA

Is she going to be okay with that?

PIERCE

I can try to get her on board.

(She considers this.)

RITA

I suppose. I just want to do the right thing by her, ya know?

PIERCE

We all do Rita. Trust me. This isn't just about winning, this is about helping her see that she deserves a good life.

(PIERCE reflects on what he just said.)

PIERCE

Holy shit! I get it! I get it!

RITA

Um, maybe I made it a little too strong.

PIERCE

No, Rita, thank you. I was an absolute idiot! I was approaching this all wrong! She doesn't need a lawyer right now.

RITA

Um, I'm sorry, I think she really does actually. With this case, she REALLY needs a lawyer right now.

PIERCE

No I mean, when I talk to her. You're right, she's not like me, she's not procedural or even cares about winning her case. She just wants a bit of hope, some reassurance. Wow Rita! Thank you so much, you have no idea how much this means to me!

(PIERCE chugs the rest of his coffee, and starts to exit. He runs back and leaves a tip on the counter.)

PIERCE

I'll talk to you soon Rita about being on the stand. You're incredible! Have a nice day.

RITA

Um, okay? You too!

(PIERCE zips out of there. RITA goes to count her tip.)

RITA

New oven!

SCENE 3

(MIRA is at the diner. Completely out of it. She starts to fall asleep standing up. RITA enters.)

RITA

Mira. Mira. MIRA!

(MIRA wakes up.)

RITA

It's bad enough you almost missed your entire shift, now you're here and you're still missing it.

(MIRA massages her temples.)

MIRA

I told you Rita, I had a family emergency.

RITA

I know, but it's not just that darling, you look rough. Who put ya through the woodchipper?

MIRA

No one, but I wish someone would.

RITA

Mira. I don't want to use this card, but if you continue with this back-talk I am going to have to fire you.

MIRA

Aw, come on. You know that's how I am, witty and slightly bitchy. It's my brand.

RITA

Well when you're here, you are part of *my* brand. And I don't have room for entitled brats. So get your duties done or get out!

MIRA

You don't really mean it.

(RITA points at MIRA's apron and extends her hand out, a gesture that says "give it." MIRA hugs herself.)

MIRA

Alright, alright. I'll get it all done.

RITA

Thank you. I really don't know what's been going on with you Mira. You're not taking anything you shouldn't be, right?

MIRA

I'm just... tired. Yeah.

RITA

Oh, wait, I know. It's boy troubles, isn't it?

MIRA

Uuuuh...

RITA

Well he is a valuable customer. Stay positive with that one.

MIRA

I thought you hated his guts.

RITA

What do you think I mean when I say valuable customer?

(She rubs her fingers together — money.)

RITA

I was in love once. His name was Harry. He owned a dollar store downtown. Ah, Harry.

MIRA

Wow, that sounds—

RITA

—he was a true gentleman. Always opened doors for me, always walked on the outside when we were on the sidewalk, he even gave me an allowance.

MIRA

That's great, but—

RITA

—But one day, I found out that he wasn't just a gentleman to me. No, no, he was a gentleman to several other women. I just wish I would've married him.

MIRA

Huh?

RITA

Turns out, when he died, he was worth over 5 million. Try to marry into money Mira. It'll save you a lot of trouble and stress when you're my age.

MIRA

I'll try my hardest. But, if I have a rich husband, wouldn't that mean that I would stop working here?

RITA

Oh I still expect you come in, and on time. Actually even more so. He'll have a nice car to drive you here to your shifts. Like the one Faulkner has. Nice BMW.

(MIRA laughs. Her phone starts ringing.)

RITA

Really? I told you, you don't need your phone here.

MIRA

I know, I'm sor—

(She sees who is calling.)

MIRA

Hey um, Rita, do you think I could call my mom real quick? It's really important.

RITA

I guess. I don't know why you can't wait till your shift is done. You already missed most of it.

MIRA

Thanks Rita. I can even clock out while I take it.

RITA

Wow, must be really important then. I guess, since there's no any customers. But if that bell rings, I expect you to be on it. Whether it's raccoons or people.

MIRA

Will do!

(RITA exits. MIRA scrambles for her phone. She has to call them back.)

MIRA

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm at work.

(pause)

Did it go okay?

(pause)

How many?

(pause)

Woah. That's good, right?

(pause)

Okay, I can try—

(pause)

Alright, alright, damn. By the way, when do you think I can get another... sample?

(pause)

No I can't go right now! I was there all this morning. I missed most of my shift! You are so lucky I didn't get fired.

(pause)

Ugh, fine. I can find more but I need a little something. I'm dying here. Plus money for all the hours I lost

(pause)

Fine, half is fine I guess.

MIRA

Hey Rita! I gotta go home early!

(RITA rushes back onstage.)

RITA

You just got here and you're leaving already?!

MIRA

I have a... family matter that needs to be taken care of.

RITA

Fine. I guess I could use that money from your paycheck for help wanted posters.

MIRA

Rita, I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you, I swear! I'll work on my day off Sunday!

RITA

Fine, just go take care of it. And say hi to your mother for me!

MIRA

Okay, thank you so much!

SCENE 4

(Back with current MIRA. She's curled up in the corner of her cell. PIERCE enters.)

MIRA

Ugh, so there really is no one else to represent me?

PIERCE

Nope!

(MIRA is caught off guard by his sudden energetic appearance.)

PIERCE

Lot of coffee.

MIRA

Ah.

PIERCE

I have to tell you a couple of things.

MIRA

I told you, I'm done with this.

PIERCE

They found your mom not guilty.

(We can see the relief wash over MIRA.)

MIRA

Thanks for letting me know.

PIERCE

It's the least I could do. But, I did have more Mira. Please. Hear me out. Let me apologize properly.

MIRA

Thanks for letting me know. Will you please go now?

(MIRA turns away from him.)

MIRA

I told you, I don't—

PIERCE

I'm a leathery, old uptight jerk.

(MIRA slowly turns back around with a confused face.)

PIERCE

You're right. I am a square. I wasn't listening to you. Just to the facts, which are important, but you're here and I ignored you to get to the facts. That isn't right.

MIRA

Not bad.

PIERCE

You were right, I judged you based off statistics. The reality is that, I couldn't possibly know what you are going through now or then because I never went through anything like that. I'm not trying to understand what you're feeling because it's impossible. So I want you to tell your story how you do because it is sincere. I am willing to follow your rules. 1. I can't pity you. 2. You control your own story. And 3, the most important, is the candy. I've known you for a while Mira and I thought because of that we would be able to just down to business. But this isn't business, this is your life and you are more than this case or the others. I can't call myself a good lawyer if I only see you or others as a case number so thank you for reminding me the reason why I do this. But, I know I crossed a line so if you want another lawyer... I'll get you one.

MIRA

... Pierce?

PIERCE

Yes?

MIRA

I'm scared.

PIERCE

Of course, this is all really scary.

MIRA

I feel so bad. This is all my fault.

PIERCE

I really wish you would stop thinking that. Nadine doesn't blame you and neither do I. No one could have predicted this.

MIRA

It's really hard not to think that though. I decided to see Erik again, I decided to help him. I stayed. He hit me but I hit him back—

(An uneasy pause.)

PIERCE

He shouldn't have done that to you. There's no excuse.

MIRA

But I—

PIERCE

There's no excuse. Just, do me a favor and remember that. Not just for now.

(MIRA starts to tear up.)

MIRA

Fine, I can do that.

PIERCE

Thank you, now I know you're feeling a lot right now. Do you want me to come back later?

MIRA

No, no. I can keep going.

PIERCE

Great, now tell me, from where we left off, what happened?

SCENE 5

(ERIK is outside of the house pacing back and forth, checking his watch. MIRA enters but Erik doesn't notice. She's giddy. She puts her hands over Erik's eyes.)

MIRA

Guess who.

(ERIK is startled. He shoves MIRA's hands off of him.)

ERIK

Dammit Mira.

MIRA

Good guess.

ERIK

You told me 3.

MIRA

Relax, it's only 3:15.

ERIK

Whatever, did you get it?

MIRA

I don't know, did I?

ERIK

Mira.

MIRA

Of course I did. Come on grouchy bones, I'm just playing with you.

ERIK

Well we don't have time to "play" Mira. You got that? These people don't "play" with their money.

MIRA

And I got them a deal. Can we just celebrate already?

ERIK

This is not a game. When you say you'll be here at 3 then you need to be here at 3. Got it?

MIRA

(sarcastically)

Okay, boss.

ERIK

How many did you take?

MIRA

Liiiiike 4.

ERIK

What! You can't be taking that much in one day! God, when I brought you into this I thought you would take it more seriously.

MIRA

I am. That doesn't mean we can't have a little fun now and again. Damn, I guess you really did change.

ERIK

This isn't like the shit we pulled in high school. This is the big leagues and the big leagues pay big bucks.

MIRA

You keep saying that but how big could it really be?

ERIK

Are you questioning my word? I always stay true to my deals. And just so you know, it's far more than you could ever make on your own, that's how much. So you're welcome.

MIRA

Hey, you wouldn't have been able to do any of this without me.

ERIK

And you wouldn't have known about this without me. You would think that all I've done for you would mean something.

MIRA

Done *for* me?

ERIK

Come on, who covered you all of those times?

MIRA

And who gave me reasons to be covered all those times?

ERIK

I'm being real 'bout this one Miragold. It's good money, and if everything goes well, they could recruit us for even bigger jobs. Don't you want to get out of this place?

(MIRA is silent.)

ERIK

Huh? You do want to leave, don't you?

MIRA

Well yeah, I just never thought I would actually be able to.

ERIK

Well you never will with that mentality.

MIRA

Let's just get through this one first and we'll go from there.

ERIK

You don't want to come with me?

MIRA

I do, but I still have to think about it. It's a lot.

ERIK

What is there to think about? I'm giving you a new life on a silver platter and you're just going to give it away? Don't start acting stupid with me.

MIRA

Woah, I just. Just give me some time. I've spent my whole life here.

(ERIK grabs her arms.)

ERIK

Mira. There is NOTHING for you here. You really think you could get into law school? You can't even finish your GED. The world isn't made for people like us.

MIRA

Hey! I just have to retake it.

ERIK

Mira. You don't think they'll drug test you at any job? You're lucky you even have this one. Usually they don't let drug addicts sell product.

MIRA

Hey, I can stop anytime.

ERIK

So I don't need to give you your sample?

MIRA

It's just that— you promised.

ERIK

See? Listen, it's okay to dream big but you're forgetting who you are. Who you are always going to be.

MIRA

Can you not? I don't understand why you're talking to me like this.

ERIK

Maybe because I can't talk to you when you're all loopy on this shit Mira. You really need to get your shit together. This is a business, remember?

MIRA

I got you your shit asshole! The least you can do is say thank y—

(ERIK raises his hand like he's about to slap her. He catches himself and puts his arm down. MIRA has to recalibrate.)

ERIK

Don't fucking talk to me like that. You're lucky I need you. Otherwise I wouldn't be so nice.

(She's too stunned to speak.)

ERIK

We'll be out of here in no time. Once you see your share, you'll be good as gone from this trash heap.

(ERIK'S phone starts ringing. He quickly let's go of MIRA. He checks it.)

ERIK

Thank God. I'm gonna tell them the good news.

(ERIK exits, MIRA is left on stage.)

PIERCE (O.S.)

That's... Listen, we're going to get you out of this. I'm not going to let what Erik did ruin your life.

SCENE 6

(The garden has a sign with fancy handwriting on it saying "Nadine and Mira's garden." NADINE exits the house first, she pulls and guides MIRA, who is blindfolded.)

MIRA

Mom, really, what is it?

NADINE

You'll see, we're almost there, just watch your step.

MIRA

Um...

NADINE

Or just step carefully? It's okay, I got you.

(She positions MIRA and takes off her blindfold.)

MIRA

Oh my God! Mom, you did all this?

NADINE

Mhm!

MIRA

But, this is your garden.

NADINE

You help me a lot.

MIRA

Maybe sometimes. Wait, what is this for?

NADINE

You've just been helping a lot, and working and... yeah you've been doing the work. I think you're right about your break.

MIRA

Okay where's the catch? The but? Where's the lecture?

NADINE

No, no if's, and's, or but's. You're right. You can just take your last test when you're ready. You are young, you deserve it. I can see how much you've changed Mira, and that is not easy for anybody.

MIRA

What have you done with my mom?

NADINE

Mira, You're doing really well. I realized that we should celebrate your wins more. Maybe we could go out for dinner tonight?

MIRA

I don't know, I had something a little different in mind.

NADINE

Yeah, like what?

MIRA

I don't know... Maybe we can start with a parade float in my honor and go from there.

(They both laugh.)

NADINE

Well I don't know about that, this town doesn't even have parades.

MIRA

Alright. Can we get enchiladas then?

NADINE

Yup.

MIRA

Oh my God, my mouth is already watering! Thanks! Really.

(NADINE gets up and moves to the door.)

NADINE

Alright, well let me get my purse and —

ERIK (O.S.)

MIRA! WHAT THE FUCK?!

NADINE

What the hell!?

(ERIK sees NADINE and changes his tone.)

ERIK

Good evening Nadine. Can I speak to Mira for a second?

NADINE

Um, what's going o—

ERIK

Why don't you go inside. I just need a moment with her.

NADINE

I don't think that's.

ERIK

Sorry, just got a little excited. Everything's good here. Just give us one moment.

MIRA

Mom, it's okay.

(NADINE hesitantly starts walking towards the house.)

NADINE

Mira. Call out for me if you need anything.

(He grabs MIRA's arm and pulls her off to the side.)

MIRA

Erik! What the fuck? You know you can't be doing all that in front of my mom! In front of our house!

ERIK

Me what the fuck!?! What about you Mira!?! How could you fucking do this to me!?

MIRA

Do what to you Erik? I have no idea what you're talking—

ERIK

—You fucking sold me out! I thought we were a team!

(MIRA starts laughing.)

ERIK

You are NOT laughing right now Mira. You screwed me over and you're fucking laughing!

(MIRA's laughter continues. ERIK's anger continues to rise. MIRA finally settles down.)

MIRA

I'm sorry, oh I'm sorry. It's just the idea of me selling anyone out is really funny to me.

ERIK

Are you fucking kidding me?

MIRA

What are you talking about?

ERIK

One of your "connections" is a fucking pig!

MIRA

Yeah right.

ERIK

Cop cars have been following me everywhere! I haven't been able to sell shit!

MIRA

You know this town isn't big. It's probably coincidence.

ERIK

They probably know what we're doing. And you're either helping them or being hunted with me.

MIRA

I can't believe you don't trust—

ERIK

Mira, I don't trust anyone anymore. How else would they know exactly where I am?

MIRA

I don't know exactly. But think about it Erik, you don't have the best reputation here. Everyone's been on edge since you've been back.

ERIK

That still doesn't answer my question Mira. Did you know your connections were pigs?

MIRA

No! We don't even know if they are or if you're just being paranoid!

ERIK

Well how could I fucking believe you! I shoulda known I couldn't trust you!

MIRA

You're acting insane right now.

ERIK

I'm acting insane because you are going to kill both of us Mira! We get caught and we're good as dead!

MIRA

Oh please, in jail, maybe but it's not that serious. If we just lay low for—

ERIK

HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU?! THIS IS FUCKING DIFFERENT!!

MIRA

Erik, you're really scaring me.

ERIK

This isn't like high school!

MIRA

Well let me fix this. I'm sure we could just—

ERIK

I shoulda fucking known you'd be the exact same. You never left this shit fucking town!

MIRA

I'm not the same! I did change you bastard!

(ERIK goes up to her and harshly pulls MIRA by her arm towards him. His grip is bone-crushing.)

ERIK

Really? Because you're still the same scared little girl who needed me to bail her out all the time.

(ERIK shoves her away from him. MIRA falls backwards and lands on the sign, making it fall down. ERIK starts to leave. MIRA gets up and starts fixing the sign.)

MIRA

Well you're just as fucking delusional and narcissistic as you've always been!

Actually, no. You are right, you have changed. You're an even bigger asshole than before! I HOPE YOU GET CAUGHT! IN FACT, I'LL CALL THE POLICE MYSELF!!! MOM CALL THE—

(ERIK is like a bull seeing red.)

(ERIK charges at MIRA// They end up in the garden//They are mostly hidden by the fence.)

MIRA

MO—

(He starts strangling her.)

ERIK

WHAT THE FUCK IS SHE GOING TO DO?!

(NADINE comes back out to see what's happening//She rushes towards them//She tries to pull him off but he pushes her off of him// she gets up and goes to the garden// she grabs a shovel// she runs over and uses the handle to ring his neck//This works but not enough// NADINE lets go but ERIK is still on top of MIRA// NADINE hits him with the shovel// He falls to the ground//NADINE and MIRA are frozen, until...)

MIRA

OH MY GOD! WHAT DID YOU DO?

NADINE

I-I

MIRA

Oh my God! Holy shit!

NADINE

I-i-s he okay?

MIRA

Does he look okay to you?! He's bleeding out! Get something!

(NADINE takes a second. Nothing is registering.)

NADINE

Uh uh.

MIRA

MOM!

(NADINE takes off a piece of clothing. We can't see ERIK but we can see MIRA and NADINE trying to stop the bleeding.)

NADINE

I just wanted to get him off of you. I didn't mean to — we need to call an ambulance!

MIRA

Then go! To the phone! I can't move!

NADINE

Oh, oh, right!

(NADINE, covered in blood, falters all the way up to the house. She makes it to the door. Her hands are shaking so much she can't turn the handle. MIRA takes his pulse.)

MIRA

It's too late.

NADINE

N-no, no, no. I'll go call them right now. It can't be too late!

MIRA

Mom! An ambulance won't be here for another 10 minutes at least. He's already gone!

(to Erik's body)

Fuck you! You — you... I don't even have the words right now. But when I do!

(NADINE falls to her knees. She can't breathe.
MIRA exits the garden. We can see the blood on
her as well.)

MIRA

Mom, please just chill out.

NADINE

How can I "chill out" I when that boy is in there, dead, because of me?!

(pause)

I have no clue how long I held him there for. I don't even know how that happened.

(NADINE looks down at her hands.)

NADINE

My hands are numb. Was I really holding on that tight?

MIRA

I don't know mom. Everything just happened so fast.

NADINE

A-are you alright?

(MIRA clears her throat.)

MIRA

Better than that bastard. God, my head is about to explode. Where are my pills?

(MIRA rummages through her pockets. It's not
there. She looks around the garden.)

NADINE

Your throat!

MIRA

It's fine it's fine! It's just a little sore.

(She clears her throat.)

NADINE

How are you so calm right now?!

MIRA

Maybe I'm just used to it by now.

NADINE

Please don't say that! This is death. You shouldn't—

MIRA

—I said I'm fine!

NADINE

I might need a few also. My heart won't stop pounding.

(MIRA stops in her tracks.)

MIRA

Trust me, you're better off without them.

NADINE

I can't move. Can you call the police?

MIRA

The police?

NADINE

For the dead body.

MIRA

Not until I get my pills. It's not like it's time sensitive now.

(MIRA finds the pills but has a hard time opening the bottle. There's none there.)

MIRA

FUCK!

(MIRA throws the pill bottle across the stage.)

NADINE

It's ok. You're supposed to get your refill soon, aren't you?

MIRA

(pained)

Yeah.

NADINE

I just need this to be over.

MIRA

Can you please just give me a second to think right now?

NADINE

To think? Do you mean to process?

MIRA

Uh, yeeaaaah.

(pause)

I need a quiet moment to uh, process these very... traumatic events. Before we get all the police here.

(She over-dramatically shudders.)

NADINE

Yeah, I could use one too.

(MIRA paces back and forth. NADINE sits down and dissociates. Her eyes glaze over to the shovel.)

NADINE

OH GOD!

MIRA

Mom, I need you to pull yourself together. What's done is done.

NADINE

You're right. I guess I should have known something like this would happen.

MIRA

What's that supposed to mean?

NADINE

Well I didn't expect... definitely not — this. But, something. You knew better than anyone how Erik... was.

MIRA

What the fuck are you saying right now!?

NADINE

Mira, I support you either way but you can't tell me I'm crazy for thinking something like this would happen.

MIRA

I thought you trusted me. You said you were proud of me!

NADINE

I am! I just I had to stay mentally prepared. Besides, it wasn't you I didn't trust, it was Erik!

MIRA

That doesn't matter! I *chose* to be with him again. And there you go again, always having to meddle in my life.

NADINE

And it was my meddling that just saved your life!

MIRA

And it's you're meddling that's going to get me thrown in prison!

NADINE

Excuse me?

MIRA

Shit.

(MIRA's mind starts racing.)

NADINE

Mira, what is going on?!

(MIRA sighs, looking defeated. There is no way around this.)

MIRA

I'm sorry mom.

NADINE

What? What is it.

MIRA

Those pills.

NADINE

Mira, are you telling me what I think you are right now?

MIRA

Yeah. I'm sorry.

NADINE

You've been using.

MIRA

(muffled)

And dealing.

NADINE

And what?

MIRA

(softly)

And dealing.

NADINE

You've been— but you had your one year— and what?! You're a drug dealer??

MIRA

And you're a murderer. Now we've both done things we aren't proud of.

NADINE

This is insane! It was his idea, wasn't it? I told you that boy was no good!

(toward Erik)

You filthy scum. Look at what you did to my daughter. You turned her into a drug lord!

MIRA

You know, I'm far from a drug lord, more like a drug disciple, if that makes you feel better.

NADINE

I just never thought you would be so gullible to fall for something like this. You were supposed to be turning your life around!

MIRA

Well maybe I was so desperate that I'd do anything to get away from you! You always have to say something! Everywhere I go, everything I do! You don't care about me, you only care about controlling me.

NADINE

Are you serious? Everything I've ever done, was *for* you! I put my entire life aside so I could be there. I killed that boy for Christ's sake! I have sacrificed so much and every time, all I'm met with is that attitude!

MIRA

Well maybe because I never asked you to do all that!

Maybe it would've been better if Erik did kill me.

MAYBE that's the only way I'll ever have some peace of mind!

NADINE

Don't you dare say that!!

MIRA

What if it's fate? What if I was supposed to die?

NADINE

Mira, don't. Remember what the therapist said.

MIRA

(almost laughing)

No, mom. Dad was supposed to kill me, then Erik was supposed to kill me, now I just gotta wait for the next one.

NADINE

STOP IT! Stop it! You're father was a maniac and you did what you had to do to still be here. The mantra! Remember the mantra! I am here, I am present, and that is enough. Here, repeat it.

(MIRA rolls her eyes.)

MIRA

I am so fucking tired of the stupid mantras. The stupid pills. Nothing works!

NADINE

I am here, I am present, and that is enough. I am here, I am pres —

MIRA

—It doesn't work mom. I still get nightmares where he's choking me. I can sometimes still feel the gun in my hand. I think fireworks are gunshots. Even when I was trying to stop it, nothing *ever* worked.

(MIRA takes a seat on the porch. NADINE'S face falls and she goes to MIRA'S side.)

NADINE

I never wanted any of this for you. If I could take it all back, I would.

MIRA

Everything still reminds me of Dad: this house, this porch. Even Erik.

(NADINE pulls MIRA in for a hug. MIRA resists at first but then gives in and starts sobbing.)

NADINE

I know, I know. I still feel so guilty. It's my fault I stayed with him. It's my fault I didn't give you a better role model.

MIRA

Stop. You didn't leave Dad, I didn't leave Erik. It's over now.

NADINE

But, there's so much I could've done. No, that I should've done. You were the one that saved us from your father. I, I failed.

MIRA

You did your best. I truly don't blame you for that.

NADINE

I wish you would. Out of all the things I've done I wish you wouldn't forgive me for that.

MIRA

Well, I guess we're even now.

(pause)

Holy shit, for a second I completely forgot he was in there. That is so freaky.

NADINE

Oh God that is unsettling.

MIRA

Mom, I'm sorry. It's my fault you have blood on your hands now.

NADINE

Don't start thinking that. It's hard to come back from it. We just have to collect ourselves and move forward. I just... I just don't know what that is to be honest with you.

MIRA

Let's just call the police. I'm ready to face the consequences now.

NADINE

The consequences? This was self-defense.

MIRA

Um, mom, I know we just had a moment right there, but did you really just forget about the drugs?

NADINE

No, wait.

MIRA

I'll send you letters. I can finally put those cursive skills from fifth grade to good use.

NADINE

You've worked so hard to keep you out of there. This can't be it.

(NADINE becomes lost in thought.)

MIRA

Mom? You're kinda freaking me out.

NADINE

I can't lose you like this.

MIRA

It's okay. You did what you could but, I need to finally face the music. I am not going get away with this.

NADINE

You are not leaving Mira. I know I make your life difficult *sometimes* but it's only because I love you, and to be honest, I kind of need you.

MIRA

(mocking)

Aaaw, you need me?

(offended)

Wait, sometimes?

NADINE

Okay, I get it. You haven't made it easy on me either you know. Next time, please just pick up some extra hours at the diner. Or maybe even have a garage sale. I don't know when I taught you that drug dealing was a stable career.

MIRA

Right after you taught me my ABC's.

NADINE

Listen. We don't have a lot of time. Just don't tell them anything. Not about Erik, not about the drugs. I will figure this out. You will be okay, alright?

MIRA

Okay. But, if anything does happen. If your plan doesn't work—

NADINE

It will. It has to.

(We hear police sirens.)

MIRA

I love you.

NADINE

I love you too.

(NADINE and MIRA both take a deep breath and put their hands up. Blackout.)

SCENE 7

MIRA (O.S.)

Take care of her Pierce.

PIERCE (O.S.)

What?

MIRA (O.S.)

That was the last thing. I need you to take care of her.

PIERCE (O.S.)

You will be able to.

MIRA (O.S.)

But what if I can't? Please. Just tell me that you will.

PIERCE (O.S.)

I will. I promise.

SCENE 8

(We are in a court room. The JUDGE is at the front of the room. MIRA, NADINE, and PIERCE are all there. MIRA gets up and goes to the stand. She has a piece of paper and starts reading it to everyone.)

MIRA

(shakily)

Your honor, everyone in this court room. I stand before you embarrassed, apologetic, and humbly asking for forgiveness.

.

I spent my time, working to fix my previous mistake. I have hurt many through my decisions in the past, and the decisions I made leading up to this moment.

(MIRA crumples the paper and throws it away.
NADINE holds her hand to her heart.)

MIRA

I could sit up here and tell you that this was all Erik's fault. That he made me do things. I can try to use your empathy to get a verdict that is comfortable for me.

(to Nadine)

I'm sorry mom.

(to the court)

I needed a wake up call. I thought I already had it but I was stupid thinking that the same actions that got me to that point wouldn't bring me to this one. My mom wants to blame herself, but the evidence shows that what she did was in defense of me. I am responsible for my own actions and I do not need my lawyer, my mother, my boss, or anyone to take any blame. I thought I was immune from saving. I thought I was meant to die. I thought, that it didn't matter what I did because I would always just end up here. Now... I know that isn't the case. I don't need you to pity me. I don't need you to go easy on me, because I am fine no matter what. It's my turn to sacrifice something for my actions instead of those around me. So um, Pierce? If you could.

(PIERCE brings up a small chip to the stand.
MIRA holds it up.)

MIRA

I present to the court my 1 year chip. Or, I guess it is no longer mine. I think giving it up, right here in front of everyone is the first thing I can do. It's all I have but it's now the court's. But, I am going to get it back. I am going to get this one back, my 3 year one and then my 5 and then my 10. I know I have destroyed any kind of believability I had. I know I have done nothing to gain your trust except tell my story, and throughout this trial the prosecution have proven that I have been prone to lie. So I truly have nothing to offer, except this chip. But no matter what I lose, my chip, my freedom, my future, my loved ones, I have lost something actually relieving. I have finally lost the burden. I am not to blame myself for the abuse I experienced, from my dad or Erik. I no longer think I deserve that kind of treatment. It took a lot for me to get to this point, but I am finally free from the burden of taking the blame for their actions. So, take me to prison, I'm fine with that. I have finally accepted this and so now, I don't need the pills or the money or the freedom. I don't need anything except those that actually care for me. The love I deserve

comes from my mom, Pierce and Rita. They have unconditionally loved me and I can finally receive that love without feeling all this guilt. I feel like the biggest weight has been lifted off my shoulders and that is enough. Thank you for the opportunity to tell my story. That's what means more to me than freedom.

(MIRA goes back to sit next to her seat.)

JUDGE

Thank you. When we come back on Monday and I will have my sentence.

PIERCE

You did good.

MIRA

I don't even know what I said, but it felt right.

PIERCE

I feel the same.

MIRA

Good. I just hope my mom does. Oh my God, she's sweating buckets!

(NADINE is using a handkerchief to wipe away all the sweat.)

PIERCE

She'll be okay. I'll check up on her.

MIRA

Yeah, yeah. You don't think she'll pass out, do you?

PIERCE

I feel like if she was going to she would've done it by now. How's your head?

MIRA

It's been worse but it'll be better when I know what's happening.

SCENE 9

(EVERYONE is back from recess.)

JUDGE

Thank you to the jury for your decision. I've had time to consider all the facts and have come to a decision I think would best serve the defendant. This outcome has been building for quite a while... I remember watching your first case on the news, I sentenced Erik Faulkner, and now we're here.

(They sigh. They point to NADINE.)

JUDGE

I sat through her testimony and now we are here, with the last piece of the puzzle. This case is different. In hers, it was an examination of reaction, but this one was about intention, involvement and whether the defendant will continue to offend. Everything has revolved around the defendant, it has snowballed into this perfect storm and has brought us here, today. The defendant has shown a pattern of behavior to this court. We may want to blame circumstances or substances but I can only judge you by your actions. This court has found that your actions were your own, regardless of who else was involved. Therefore, I am sentencing you to...

(Lights fade.)

SCENE 10

(MIRA is again in the holding cell. Now she is reading a law book. NADINE and PIERCE both enter. MIRA looks back up and runs to the edge of her cell.)

MIRA

Mom!

NADINE

It's been too long.

(NADINE goes up the bars.)

MIRA

Mom, it's okay, we're all here now. Thank you for setting this up Pierce.

PIERCE

Don't mention it. I've been hearing good things about you, I wanted to hear about it in person. How have you been feeling?

MIRA

Like everything is in 4k!

NADINE

Oh ignore him. We have a lot to catch up on.

PIERCE

Alright, I get it. I'll leave you two for a minute.

(PIERCE exits. NADINE is tearing up.)

MIRA

I missed you too.

NADINE

Oh, I got you something.

MIRA

Oh, you really didn't have to.

NADINE

No, this is important. Close your eyes.

(MIRA rolls her eyes but does it anyways.
NADINE grabs something from her pocket.)

NADINE

Okay, now you can open 'em.

(MIRA does. NADINE displays a 1 month of
sobriety chip.)

MIRA

No way! I actually forgot how much time it's been!

NADINE

Yup! And soon you'll have your year one back and then your—

MIRA

—Woah woah. We have plenty of time for all that. How's the garden been?

NADINE

The police took away most of it for "evidence" so it allowed me to start completely fresh! I think I did an even better job this time around.

MIRA

I'm sure it looks incredible. I hope you're taking care of the bell peppers.

NADINE

I thought you didn't like them.

MIRA

Well stuff changes when you can't have the things you're used to.

NADINE

Oh Mira, I wish you could come back home.

MIRA

I know but this is where I need to be right now. And in a weird way, I am glad. Because Mom, I'm finally here.

MIRA

I am finally present.

MIRA

And that is enough.

END OF PLAY

ORAL PRESENTATION

For the oral presentation of this project, I held a table reading, which is a preliminary reading that has one or two rehearsals with the actors but is seated and gives the audience more insight into the writing and major points of the script versus the blocking or full development of it. I partnered with the Latinx Play Project Club for the logistic requirements, like binders, chairs, and the space. Once I had this coordinated, I held auditions for each of my characters. We had one full read through. Although we initially intended for everything to be in person, we ended up on Zoom. I posted my email in the chat for any constructive criticism and was also able to record.

Luckily, this allowed for the session to be recorded and accessible to even more people. On May 7th, 2024 at 7 PM LPP and I sent the link out through Instagram so anyone interested could attend but also directly to my faculty mentor. The reading featured:

Por Tupsamphan, a 3rd year TFDP major, as the Stage Direction and the Judge

Kali Chittapuram, a 4th year Psychology major, as Mira

Rachel Barrett, a 4th year Gender and Sexuality Studies major, as Nadine

Thomas Cazneau-Mercado, a 4th year TFDP major, as Pierce

Ethan Dizon, a 4th year Psychology major, as Erik

Sabrina Liu, a 3rd year Business Administration major, as Rita

I did an introduction that covered the project background, a highlight of the cast and, my inspiration, which wasn't recorded. The table read ended up at 2 hours and 20 minutes, including

the introduction and a brief intermission. Having a table read like this helped me to develop this script and give it history before I send it out to playhouses to maybe be developed further.

Bonds of Rubber and Iron Table Read: May 7th, 2024:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UojTYPITt13FzKuvYa0Ch1pj5vSjLolI/view?usp=sharing>

INTERVIEW

After watching the table read, my friend and fellow TFDP student, Danny Carr, asked to film an interview revolving the creation of this play, my inspiration, and the steps it took to get to this point. I have linked it below.

Interview:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CCN-zq7N-xU0A9hazyzoFvzrvTGM7djg/view?usp=sharing>

CONCLUSION

I set out to create a piece that revealed an emotional truth through live theatre that captured what it was like to be in an abusive relationship. I utilized my faculty mentor, research of other plays, and research into generational trauma and IPV to get a deeper understanding of the subject and also inspiration. I have learned a lot about my own process as a playwright, play development, and how research can be utilized within a creative context. Through this project, I believe I achieved everything that I wanted to and more through the collaboration of my peers. My hope for this project is that it will strike a connection with its audience from now, onwards and that it will be a step in the right direction towards starting the conversation about why so many have experiences with IPV. It is through these conversations that we can enact the change that is needed to help people. IPV is an epidemic that can affect multiple generations, so our goal needs to be trying to end it here so that our future generations won't have to live with its affects.

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