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Email: [info@playscripts.com](mailto:info@playscripts.com)  
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**FINGER FOODS:**  
an evening of short plays  
by Nina Shengold

*Forty to Life*..... 9

LORRAINE FREUD, any age  
SUSIE WISMER, mid-40s  
PAUL KAPLOWICZ, same  
THE EX-BOYFRIENDS (3 or more)

*Lives of the Great Waitresses* ..... 17

YETTA, 50s, Bronx-Jewish, a pit bull with lipstick  
KAY, 40s, Black, born again  
TAMMIE SUE, 30s, Southern and dithery  
MELISSA, 20, smarter than she looks

*Lush Life*..... 25

MUSICIAN, street worn, mid-40s  
SARAH ZETTLER, high-strung and brittle, same age

*Emotional Baggage*..... 33

DICK, an irate Samsonite pullman  
PHYLLIS, a panicky carry-on bag  
LOUISE VUITTON, attaché case, a drag queen wannabe  
ROLLO, a drug smuggler's duffel, beat-up and beatific  
AMBER, brassy, an over-the-hill overnight bag  
MILDRED, a dignified, threadbare valise from the South  
OFFSTAGE CREW VOICE

*Finger Food*..... 43

DENNY, a food photographer  
MONA, a hand model

*No Shoulder* ..... 55

RUTH DANSON, 39, high-strung, haunted eyes  
BOBBIE, Unkempt, waifish, startlingly young

*Everything Must Go* ..... 67

KAREN FISHER, a Baby Boomer  
LEILA WYANT, her childhood friend  
THE CUSTOMERS, played by two (or more) chameleonic actors  
of any age, type or gender

## Acknowledgments

*Forty to Life* was originally produced at Actors & Writers on 11/17/2001, directed by Nina Shengold with the following cast:

SUSIE .....Shelley Wyant  
LORRAINE ..... Nicole Quinn  
PAUL .....David Smilow  
EX-BOYFRIENDS.....Mark Chmiel,  
Chris Karczmar, Adam LeFevre,  
Isaac LeFevre, John Seidman

*Lives of the Great Waitresses* was originally produced at Actors & Writers on 11/18/1995, directed by Nina Shengold with the following cast:

YETTA .....Carol Morley  
KAY ..... Nicole Quinn  
TAMMIE SUE.....Sarah Chodoff  
MELISSA .....Sybil Rosen

*Lush Life* was originally produced at Actors & Writers on 10/25/2003, directed by Nina Shengold with the following cast:

MUSICIAN..... Chris Karczmar  
SARAH .....Sarah Chodoff

*Emotional Baggage* was originally produced at Actors & Writers on 10/28/2000, directed by Nina Shengold with the following cast:

DICK .....David Smilow  
PHYLLIS.....Sarah Chodoff  
LOUISE VUITTON ..... Tad Ingram  
ROLLO..... Joe White  
MILDRED.....Carol Morley  
AMBER .....Shelley Wyant  
CREW.....Kevin O'Rourke

*Finger Food* was originally produced at Ark Theatre in 1984, directed by Chris McHale with the following cast:

DENNY.....Jeff Garrett  
MONA.....Mary Portser

*No Shoulder* was originally produced at Actors & Writers on 10/10/1998, directed by Nina Shengold with the following cast:

RUTH.....Shelley Wyant  
BOBBIE..... Nicole Quinn

*Everything Must Go* was originally produced at Actors & Writers on 10/12/1996, directed by Nina Shengold with the following cast:

KAREN.....Carol Morley  
LEILA.....Shelley Wyant  
CUSTOMERS..... Nicole Quinn, David Smilow

## **Cast of Characters**

LORRAINE FREUD, any age

SUSIE WISMER, mid-40s

PAUL KAPLOWICZ, same

THE EX-BOYFRIENDS (3 or more)

# FORTY TO LIFE

*(Setting: A precinct house in Hell's Kitchen. SUSIE WISMER rushes in. Mid-40s, wild-eyed, dressed for a date.)*

**SUSIE.** HELP!!!

*(Desk sergeant LORRAINE FREUD, ageless, seen it all, barely looks up from the counter.)*

**LORRAINE.** Wanna get more specific?

**SUSIE.** I'd like to report a...a theft. I was robbed! At a restaurant, that sidewalk café on the corner...called Bangkok Delight...

**LORRAINE.** *(Interested now, on the case.)* What exactly was stolen?

**SUSIE.** My sense of hope.

**LORRAINE.** Poof?

**SUSIE.** Thin air.

**LORRAINE.** What did it look like?

**SUSIE.** Um...maybe six-two, intelligent, kind, sense of humor...

**LORRAINE.** *(Nods grimly.)* Someday my prince will come?

**SUSIE.** He doesn't have to be a *prince*.

**LORRAINE.** Yes he does. *(Stands.)* We've been seeing a rash of these lately. I'm going to ask you to look at some possible suspects. Don't worry, it's one-way glass.

*(A Law & Order-style "ka-chung" as a height chart drops in from above. Susie's EX-BOYFRIENDS file in and stand in a sullen line, holding up numbers.)*

**SUSIE.** Oh my God. Where did you dig them up?? That's everyone I've ever dated!

**LORRAINE.** We'll find your perp. One of these men made you sob in your pad thai and he's gonna pay. Atten-HUT!

*(The EX-BOYFRIENDS straighten reluctantly.)*

Step forward one at a time and repeat this phrase: “Hey, it’s been great, but...”

**EX 1.** Hey, babe, let’s both be adults here, okay?

*(SUSIE shakes her head.)*

**LORRAINE.** Next!

*(The EX-BOYFRIENDS step forward in turn. [Three or four actors can play all parts, each moving down to the end of the line & flipping his number to become a new character.]*

**EX 2.** Two roads diverged in the woods, man. It isn’t a fault thing.

**EX 3.** This just isn’t fair to you. Or to my wife, or the twins.

**EX 4.** I’m not going to deal with your shit anymore. And hey, hello, I’m not the bad guy here. *You* made this happen. Your anger, your mood swings, your P.M.S.—

**LORRAINE.** Back in line, bozo!

*(EX 4 gives her the finger and stomps back to line-up.)*

**EX 5.** You’re going to find someone who’s perfect for you, I sincerely believe that.

**EX 6.** *(Second-grader:)* Mary Jo gave me candy, not just a dumb card.

**EX 7.** Leaving? Whoa, hold it, who said anything about leaving? No. No. No. You’re putting words in my mouth. You’re making—no, see, that’s exactly why—I did *not* use that word, I said—You need to listen! I am *not* being passive–aggressive!!!

**EX 8.** I’ll never forget you. You taught me to brush my tongue.

**EX 9.** It isn’t the sex, it’s your cats.

**EX 10.** You’re so good my pants hurt.

**LORRAINE.** How’d *he* get in here??

**SUSIE.** Wait.

**EX 10.** It’s not that contagious, I swear. It’s like no worse than crab-lice.

**EX 11.** It has nothing to do with you gaining that weight.

---

(EX 12 [PAUL KAPLOWICZ] *steps forward, opens his mouth, then starts suddenly, pointing at SUSIE.*)

PAUL. *She's the one! Stop, thief!*

SUSIE. What??

PAUL. She ransacked my id! I have witnesses!

SUSIE. (*To LORRAINE.*) I thought you said it was one-way glass.

LORRAINE. It usually is.

SUSIE. I don't even remember him.

PAUL. (*Struck to the heart.*) AAAAAUGH!

LORRAINE. This looks bad. (*Grilling Susie.*) Where were you on the night of December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1969?

SUSIE. I was in junior high school!

PAUL. Geometry!

SUSIE. Paulie??? Paul Kantrowitz?

PAUL. Kaplowicz!

SUSIE. How did you find him? We went out *once!*

PAUL. Twice!

SUSIE. Your bar mitzvah does not count!

PAUL. It counted to me! I've had three broken marriages. Systemic acne. A retrograde colon. My life is in shards because you, you, YOU threw me over for Julius Pitzkoff!

EX 8. (JULIUS PITZKOFF.) Hey!

PAUL. That bottle was pointing at *me!!!*

SUSIE. I don't believe this.

PAUL. And you kissed that...weasel. You frenched!

SUSIE. Thirty years ago!!!

PAUL. Thirty-two!

LORRAINE. Okay, you're under arrest.

**SUSIE.** But I didn't—

**PAUL.** *She wrecked my life!*

**LORRAINE.** Both of you. (*Whipping out handcuffs.*) You have the right to remain celibate. Any sex you indulge in may be held against you.

**PAUL.** I want a divorce lawyer!

**LORRAINE.** You should've thought about that in geometry class.

*(She handcuffs them back to back.)*

**SUSIE.** You can't do this to me! I'm the *victim!*

**LORRAINE.** We're all victims, lady.

**SUSIE.** But how about my hope?

**LORRAINE.** He's it.

**SUSIE.** ...Paulie Keplovitch?

**PAUL.** Kaplowicz!

**LORRAINE.** This is as good as it gets.

**SUSIE.** *Junior high school??*

**LORRAINE.** Take it or leave it. The jig is up.

**SUSIE.** Can't I at least have a grownup?

**PAUL.** I've grown up!

**SUSIE.** Like hell. You're still rehashing your first Spin the Bottle game. *He had potential.*

*(She points at EX-BOYFRIEND 5, pulling PAUL's hand with hers in the handcuffs. EX-BOYFRIEND 5 shakes his head violently.)*

**LORRAINE.** No plea bargains. You two are stuck with each other. Forty to life. The rest of you guys are free to go back on the street and start dating.

*(The other EX-BOYFRIENDS file off, lighting cigarettes, flipping sarcastic salutes, etc. LORRAINE faces SUSIE and PAUL.)*

Okay, now, you're gonna do serious time.

**SUSIE.** But—

**LORRAINE.** Shut up. Quit whining. He did this, she said that, boo fucking hoo. You're not going to find perfect mates, okay? *Ever*. You're forty-five. Nobody scarred you for life. No one saves you. There's no shining armor, no dream girl. You'll have to do.

*(Exhales hard.)*

I need a fuck and a cigarette.

*(She stomps offstage.)*

**PAUL.** HEY!!! You can't!

**LORRAINE.** Watch me.

**PAUL.** Don't I get a phone call?

*(No answer. He and SUSIE stand back to back, handcuffed.)*

**SUSIE.** These *hurt*.

**PAUL.** I'm allergic to metal.

**SUSIE.** Move *over*.

*(They glare at each other over their shoulders.)*

So what have you done with yourself for the last thirty years?

**PAUL.** Thirty two.

**SUSIE.** Three failed marriages? That took some work.

**PAUL.** Better than not getting married at all. Least I tried.

**SUSIE.** Oh, I tried, buddy. God knows I tried.

**PAUL.** With *that* pack of losers??

**SUSIE.** I'd like to see Wives, Number One, Two and Three!

**PAUL.** No, you wouldn't.

*(SUSIE pulls his arm upwards.)*

What are you doing?

**SUSIE.** I have an itch. Right behind my ear.

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## **Cast of Characters**

YETTA, 50s, Bronx-Jewish, a pit bull with lipstick

KAY, 40s, Black, born again

TAMMIE SUE, 30s, Southern and dithery

MELISSA, 20, smarter than she looks

# LIVES OF THE GREAT WAITRESSES

*(Setting: A greasy spoon diner, minimally indicated.)*

*(YETTA, KAY, TAMMIE SUE, prepping the breakfast shift. All in pink uniforms.)*

*(Lights up on YETTA, smoking a cigarette, soaking her feet. Late 50s, Bronx Jewish, a pit bull in lipstick.)*

**YETTA.** I'm not an actress. I have a career.

*(She stubs out her cigarette. Blackout.)*

*(Lights up on KAY, rolling flatware in napkins. 40s, black, born again.)*

**KAY.** You either got it, or you don't. If you don't, you won't ever. So don't even bother. Don't strain. Oh, there's things you can learn, sure. The fine points. The stance. "Heat that up for you?" "Toasted?" But honey—scratch that, make it hon—a truly great waitress is *born*.

You get what I mean? It's a feel thing. Deep under the bones of your bones. In your cells. Some reporter once asked Louis Armstrong what "swing" meant. Louis looked the guy dead in the eyeball and said, "If you gotta ask, you'll never know." *He* would've made a great waitress.

My very first diner, we had one. Flo Kelly. A goddess in Supp-hose. Flo was all waitress. She could fill two dozen shakers one-handed and never spill one grain of salt. She could carry eight Hungry Man specials lined up on her arm like a charm bracelet. Flo could serve pie a la mode so it looked like Mount Everest topping the clouds. She poured gravy like tropical rain. In Flo's maraschino-nailed fingers, the short-order carousel spun like the Wheel of Fortune, and never, not once, did a customer's coffee get cold.

Well, I mean to tell you, that diner was *hers*. If Jesus Himself Amen came in and sat down to supper, he would've tipped double. Then one Blue-Plate Special, right after the lunch rush, Flo hung up her hairnet, cashed in her checks and went sunnyside up. And that's when the Lord took my order. I knew what I was. I was called.

*(She steps closer.)*

Look in my eyes. I know mysteries way beyond menus. I have felt the Lord's love pierce my heart like a skewer through gyros. I have seen Jesus weep ice-kold milk with a K.

*(She holds out her hand.)*

Heat that up for you? Hon?

*(Blackout.)*

*(Lights up on TAMMIE SUE, filling up sugar shakers. 30s, dithery, slight Southern twang.)*

**TAMMIE SUE.** So this fella sits down at my counter. Scrawny, beat, banty thing, ugly as yesterday's home fries, and he's got the look. You all know that look.

*(She demonstrates.)*

There's this puppy dog whimpering back of his eyes, means he's looking for more than two eggs on a raft, wreck 'em, cuppa joe light. So I do what a girl's gotta do. I ignore him. No warm-ups, no sass, save my smile for the grandpas and wedding rings in the next booth. Comes the end of my shift, and this shriveled-up walnut, this cottage cheese curd, this crust of burnt toast is still sitting there. Dog in his eyes rolls right over and begs.

So I give him the deep-freeze. I shoot him a look that would flatten meringue.

*(She demonstrates.)*

And what's he do? Smiles at me. *Smiles.* Gatty teeth, great big space in the middle, looked just like a little ole kid with skinned knees on the playground.

Well, hell. That did melt me up. Kay's always telling me I got a heart as big as a Butterball turkey, and besides it's been way, way too long since my griddle got greased. So we go to the motor home up top his semi.

*Well.* I tell you that man had a mouth that could melt you like butter and syrup on top of a short stack of buckwheats. He did things with his fingers that should be illegal, or fattening. That little runt had him a secret self under his outfit.

We've all of us got one, but this was a secret worth spreading around. And he did. He most certainly did. He could love you up one side and back down the other and still leave the middle part gasping for more. That man had a gift. Mashed potatoes and gravy. I left him a tip, that's the God's honest truth.

So the next time you find yourself checking out someone's dessert case, remember, it isn't the Dream Whip that counts. It's the peach in the pie.

*(She pours sugar straight into her hand, sticks her tongue in it.)*

*(Blackout.)*

*(Lights back up on YETTA, drying her feet off and pulling on flesh-colored knee-highs and nurse's shoes.)*

**YETTA.** We got us a new one today. Little blondie thing. Brains like a dishrag. Marty says to me, Yetta, give her a try. What try. Way she walks into the *room* I can tell you the broad ain't no waitress. She's got this two hundred and ninety pound bag slung up over her shoulder, you just *know* that it's gonna be full of her face eight by ten. You *know* that she's gonna be hocking the customers, "Hi! I'm—"

*(MELISSA, 20, walks on with a musical comedy smile. Brand new uniform.)*

**MELISSA.** *(Overlapping.)* —I'm Melissa. Our specials tonight are a light cappellini with sauce Margherita—

**YETTA.** Spaghetti and meatballs.

**MELISSA.** —a baked beef and pork terrine—

**YETTA.** Meat loaf.

**MELISSA.** —and I want to thank my parents, my agent, and God for believing in me.

**YETTA.** A question. Does *anyone* care what's the name of the person who's pouring your coffee cup?

*(Nods, her suspicions confirmed.)*

*Thank you.*

**MELISSA.** Gemini. Capricorn rising.

**YETTA.** My *breakfast* is rising.

**MELISSA.** “The quality of mercy is not strained.”

*(Bright smile, starts to sing.)*

“Brigadoon, Brigadoooooonn...”

**YETTA.** Am I right or right? Hopeless. First lunch rush, her head’ll be spinning around like the milkshake machine. But she bats her big blues up at Marty and tells him yes, she’s got experience. Marty, being A) dense and B) male, does not ask her what kind. So it’s up to yours truly to break the kid in. Never mind I got migraines in both of my feet. Tammie Sue knows her ass from her elbow on good days, and Kay’s gonna try to convert her. Born *once*, she can just about handle, forget born again. So I give her the counter, okay? Let her piss off the regulars. Marty’s there working the register, maybe he’ll know from “experience” next time around. Which I bet you good odds is the end of this shift.

*(MELISSA takes pad and pencil out of her apron, approaches an imaginary customer on the fourth wall with a big nervous smile.)*

**MELISSA.** Hi. Can I get you some breakfast? Um, coffee? Uh huh...

*(She writes on her pad, very slowly and clearly.)*

Is that “regular” meaning not decaf, or regular with cream and—  
Right. What? Oh, *menus*, I’m sorry...Right back.

*(She scuttles out. YETTA smirks.)*

**YETTA.** And we’re off. And it doesn’t get better. Clear through to the lunch rush she’s mixing up eggs over easy supposed to be scrambled. She’s bringing the Western the waffles. She’s dropping forks right, left and center. The decaf goes dry. Then she loses an order, a party of six, and they walk without paying.

*(MELISSA rushes out, breathless.)*

**MELISSA.** I’m sorry it’s taking so long, I’m—...Hello?

*(She looks towards the exit, near tears.)*

**YETTA.** So I look over at Marty like, hey, get the hook, cause Miss Eight by Ten flunked her audition. And Marty just flashes his not-

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## **Cast of Characters**

MUSICIAN, street worn, mid-40s

SARAH ZETTLER, high-strung and brittle, same age

# LUSH LIFE

*(John Coltrane's recording of "Lush Life" [13:45; Prestige Records] may be played as an underscore throughout the play.)*

*(Setting: A New York subway platform, late at night.)*

*(A STREET MUSICIAN stands in front of the grimy tiles, playing a bluesy riff on a dented tenor sax. His clothes are worn and there's something subtly off-balance in his movements; he might be drunk or high. There's a Greek diner coffee cup on the pavement in front of his instrument case.)*

*(SARAH ZETTLER stomps down the stairs, clutching a program from Phantom of the Opera. She's in her 40s, dressed for a date that hasn't worked out. She looks tense and unhappy, eager to put the evening behind her. With the autopilot instincts of a long-term New Yorker, she gives the MUSICIAN wide berth, striding past without eye contact. He doesn't seem to look at her either, but reflexively dips the bell of his horn towards the cup on the pavement, hinting for change. She crosses offstage.)*

*(He plays the last note of his blues, and then, barely pausing for breath, starts blowing the classic ballad "Lush Life.")*

*(SARAH comes back onstage. She looks as if she's seen a ghost.)*

**SARAH.** ...Jimmy?

*(The MUSICIAN keeps playing. He's in 3/4 profile to SARAH, head bobbing, hair hanging in strands so she can't see his face clearly. She takes a few wary, tentative steps.)*

Oh Jesus, it *is*. Jimmy. Jimmy, it's me.

*(He turns, looking at her without recognition.)*

I recognized...what you were playing. I wouldn't have...

*(She trails off, shaken, then speaks in a rush.)*

That turntable down in your basement, the drop-down, we taped on a pile of dimes so the arm wouldn't skip, there were scratches in every cut...Am I babbling? I'm babbling. The cover, the purple-blue painting of John Coltrane...Lush Life!

**MUSICIAN.** *(First thing that's clicked into focus.)* Coltrane.

**SARAH.** You taped it up over your bed. Twenty years ago. More. Almost thirty, my God. I've wondered about you...so often.

**MUSICIAN.** Am I sposed to know you?

**SARAH.** *(Strained pause.)* Jimmy, listen. Does anyone know where you are?

**MUSICIAN.** You a cop?

**SARAH.** ...You really don't know me?

**MUSICIAN.** I'm clean, I'm not holding. I come here to play, is all.

**SARAH.** Do I look *that* different??

*(He stares at her blankly. Then reaches to gather his saxophone case and the change cup.)*

Jimmy, don't go, please!

*(She reaches a hand out.)*

**MUSICIAN.** *(Sudden, feral:)* Don't touch me!

**SARAH.** Okay. Okay. Not going to...I just can't believe this. It's *you*.

*(She's blinking back tears. He is watching her now with a different intensity, trying to work something out.)*

I ran into your sister a couple years back, when I went to my parents' for Christmas. She said she'd lost track of you last time you...

*(He's still staring at her, wary, blank.)*

Jimmy, are you on your meds? Can you hear me? It's *Sarah*.

**MUSICIAN.** How do I know you again?

**SARAH.** You're not taking them, are you. You really don't—

**MUSICIAN.** No, it's, I know we've...I'm, not on the thread, you know? Haven't been sleeping, this heat makes me vibrate, I'm...coming down.

**SARAH.** How do you know me. God. Where do I start.

*(Deep breath.)*

We met in eleventh grade. You sat behind me in history; I let you cheat. We have the same birthday. You gave me Thelonious Monk Underground and a bong that you made from a Log Cabin syrup jug; I gave you Siddhartha. We made out on that couch in your basement for months, and finally ripped off a six-pack of Trojans and climbed the fence into the graveyard behind the Stone Church and made love on a sleeping bag covered with mallards, and then you cracked up and got put into Bellevue, the first time, and everyone told me how lucky I was that you'd left me, it could have been me you attacked, but nothing that anyone said made a damn bit of difference and I would have given my life for you, Jimmy, this ring any bells?

**MUSICIAN.** *(After a beat.)* My name isn't Jimmy.

**SARAH.** I know every inch of your body.

*(He looks at her differently, trying it on.)*

**MUSICIAN.** ...So I was your first?

**SARAH.** *(Dead-eyed:)* You were.

**MUSICIAN.** Popped the champagne cork.

**SARAH.** And poured out the bottle. You did.

**MUSICIAN.** Thirty years is a long goddamn time.

**SARAH.** You would think.

*(She shakes her head, overwhelmed.)*

This is so...I could've walked right past you, Jimmy.

**MUSICIAN.** You did. You came back.

**SARAH.** When did you learn to play sax? You played piano back then.

**MUSICIAN.** Hard to carry. I picked up a tenor off some guy who owed me a...business transaction. I blew till it started to talk to me.

**SARAH.** You sounded good.

**MUSICIAN.** *(Shrugging it off.)* It's the tiles. This reed is fucked. Gives me splinters. My lips are in shreds. Can't stop biting 'em, play through the blood. So who took you to *Phantom*?

*(She's spooked that he knows this. He points at her program.)*

**SARAH.** Oh. No one. Some guy.

**MUSICIAN.** It's a pile of shit.

**SARAH.** It was. So was he.

**MUSICIAN.** Did he pay for you?

**SARAH.** Comps. He's an actor.

**MUSICIAN.** Good riddance.

**SARAH.** I guess. Nothing sticks, you know? Men. It's this city. It bleaches the life from you. Spits out the bones.

**MUSICIAN.** Spit 'em back. Hard. That's what I do.

*(He pockets two coins from the coffee cup. She watches him.)*

**SARAH.** Jimmy, is this how you...Where do you live?

**MUSICIAN.** I live.

**SARAH.** Helen would help you. You know she would.

**MUSICIAN.** Ellen?

**SARAH.** *(After a beat, disconcerted:)* Helen. Your sister.

**MUSICIAN.** What about you? Would you help me?

**SARAH.** *(Wary, unsure for the first time.)* With what?

**MUSICIAN.** I could use an infusion of cash. Buy myself some new reeds.

**SARAH.** I don't have much on me, but...

*(She opens her purse and takes out a few bills.)*

Here.

**MUSICIAN.** And a place to stay.

**SARAH.** *(Hesitating, uncertain:)* Well, see, my apartment, it's...

**MUSICIAN.** What are you, up in some penthouse or something? Those shoes you got on must've cost a month's rent.

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## **Cast of Characters**

DICK, an irate Samsonite pullman

PHYLLIS, a panicky carry-on bag

LOUISE VUITTON, attaché case, a drag queen wannabe

ROLLO, a drug smuggler's duffel, beat-up and beatific

AMBER, brassy, an over-the-hill overnight bag

MILDRED, a dignified, threadbare valise from the South

OFFSTAGE CREW VOICE

## **Costume Note**

All characters should wear normal human clothing, possibly tending towards leathers, tweeds and other luggage-like fabrics. They might also have airport stickers, tags dangling from glasses frames, ponytail holders, belt loops etc.

# EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

*(A near-empty baggage claim carousel at Newark Airport, on which a few stray suitcases circle forlornly. [Actors shuffle around the periphery of the stage shoulder to shoulder, as if swept along by a rotating belt.] PHYLLIS stands crookedly, leaning on DICK as if thrown there.)*

**DICK.** This sucks.

*(An attached case—LOUISE VUITTON—sidles after them.)*

**LOUISE.** *Where can my pickup be??*

*(PHYLLIS and DICK turn in unison, facing the side wall as the “carousel” circles upstage. DICK looks back over his shoulder.)*

**DICK.** How many times have you been around?

**LOUISE.** Please. I’ve stopped counting.

**PHYLLIS.** I’m dizzy. My straps hurt. I’m going to catch cold!

**DICK.** Quit whining. *(Shouts into the wings.)* YO, HEY!!! COME AND GET ME, YOU MORON!!!

**LOUISE.** Shut up or the redcaps’ll grab you.

**DICK.** Let ’em try it. I’ll smash their damn toes. Do you know what I *weigh*? I’m a Samsonite hardbody!

**LOUISE.** How hard?

**DICK.** I’m gonna flatten you.

*(He makes an impotent lunge, nearly toppling PHYLLIS.)*

**PHYLLIS.** Please! I’ve got mal de mer!

*(The carousel shuts off abruptly. They lurch to a sudden stop.)*

**LOUISE.** Uh-oh.

**PHYLLIS.** It *stopped!* The belt, the, the thing...it’s not—

**DICK.** *(Hissed whisper:)* Cheese it, the crew. Look inanimate.

*(DICK and LOUISE freeze in place. PHYLLIS continues to panic for a beat, then freezes suddenly. Long pause, all tense. Then:)*

**PHYLLIS.** What—

**DICK.** Sssh!

*(An exaggerated, stentorian “giant” voice booms from the wings.)*

**CREW.** *(Off stage.)* LOOKS LIKE WE GOT US A COUPLE OF UNCLAIMED BAGS. LUG 'EM.

*(PHYLLIS and DICK are “lifted” in unison [shoulders pulled up towards the ceiling as if picked up by giant hands], followed by LOUISE, who slaps her invisible lifter.)*

**LOUISE.** Hands off!

**PHYLLIS.** Where are they taking us??

**DICK.** Lockup. The big house.

**PHYLLIS.** *(Eyes wide.)* Not!

**DICK.** Unclaimed baggage.

*(The unseen hands “throw” them down onto a luggage rack.)*

**PHYLLIS.** Oh God!

**LOUISE.** My heart.

**DICK.** Fuckin’ screws!!!

**PHYLLIS.** *(Fearfully:)* ...Who are those other bags?

*(AMBER saunters on, followed by ROLLO and MILDRED.)*

**DICK.** Looks like rough trade. Maybe lifers.

**AMBER.** Hey, big boy, what’s in the bulge? Is that a travel umbrella, or are you glad to see me?

**DICK.** Fuck off, cowhide.

**AMBER.** *(Casing LOUISE.)* Hey, handsome. Nice logo.

**LOUISE.** I’m Louis Vuitton!

**AMBER.** Christ. They’re *all* gay. *(Eyeing PHYLLIS.)* It’s a good thing I swing both ways. Kidding.

*(She barks a short, humorless laugh and plunks into a chair with her arm around PHYLLIS.)*

**PHYLLIS.** OhGodOhGodOhGodOhGOD!!!

**ROLLO.** *(Sitting on PHYLLIS's other side.)* Chill, babe. What are you, a carry-on?

**PHYLLIS.** Yes! I'm a carry-on! I was made to be carried! I *would* have been carried if *she* hadn't bought so much Duty-Free Tia Maria! I was flying First Class!

**MILDRED.** So was I, my dear. So was I.

*(She sits with a thud.)*

**ROLLO.** What're you in for?

**PHYLLIS.** Beg pardon?

**ROLLO.** Lost tag, missed connection? You holding?

**PHYLLIS.** I don't...I'm...

**ROLLO.** You're just off the plane from Cancun, right? A little ahem talcum powder packed into the toilet kit? A few wonky Vitamin Cs? Sensemilla-stuffed diapers?

**PHYLLIS.** I flew down for a realtors' convention!

**ROLLO.** Did the beagle sniff you? I hate it when they sniff you.

**DICK.** Leave her alone or I'll pop you one right in the buckle.

**ROLLO.** Big man. I'm aquiver. First time in the joint?

*(PHYLLIS nods. ROLLO nods towards the audience.)*

We got some hard cases. Watch out for that camp trunk. And Rolf there, that rucksack, he'd eat you for breakfast. Most of the rest? Just a buncha lost luggage.

**PHYLLIS.** So what happens now?

**ROLLO.** Happens?? In *this* place?

**AMBER.** We wait. For our legs.

**LOUISE.** For our pickup.

**MILDRED.** A gentleman caller to claim us.

**ROLLO.** Godot. Lefty. Guffman.

**PHYLLIS.** How long?

**ROLLO.** Some cases make bail the first night. Some do the whole stretch. 30 days.

**PHYLLIS.** But...I'm carrying beach things rolled in a mesh bag! Her tankini's still damp! I could *mildew!*

**ROLLO.** So what? Little mildew won't kill you.

**PHYLLIS.** I'm *lined!*

**AMBER.** I was lined once. Won't last.

**PHYLLIS.** I have sand in my twill!

*(Breaking down in tears.)*

This is not what I thought it would be like at *all*. You know, when you're still in the warehouse, you dream about having somebody to carry you? *Well*. First, she removed all my tags. And it *says*. Right there in capitals: "Do not remove under penalty of *law*."

**ROLLO.** Oh, you poor baby. You're fresh from the store?

**PHYLLIS.** From a catalogue! I was just *ordered!*

**AMBER.** Fuck me. She's a virgin.

**ROLLO.** Lay off. Your first trip on a plane?

*(PHYLLIS nods.)*

And that bitch—if you'll pardon my German—she *lost* you??

*(She nods again.)*

That makes me so mad I could split a seam. Hell needs a separate ring for that kinda behavior. We're gonna take care of you, kiddo.

**DICK.** I *bet* you'll take care of her.

**ROLLO.** Stow it, you steroid-pumped piece a' petroleum. Can't you see the kid's scared?

**PHYLLIS.** The luggage compartment was bad enough!

**MILDRED.** Steerage! I was *flung* cheek by jowl with an R.E.I. backpack. The smell of that bedroll. I thought I'd expire, I most certainly did.

**ROLLO.** I was next to a *dog*.

*(Murmurs all around. This is bad.)*

Uh huh, yeah. Flew up from Miami alongside a doped-up Jack Russell. But not too sedated to squirt me.

**AMBER.** I hate that.

**ROLLO.** Hey. Piss is piss. Not the end of the planet, you get me?

**PHYLLIS.** What are you...in for?

**ROLLO.** My asshole missed his plane. Checks me in at the counter, right, goes to the men's room to snort a few lines, meets some dude hawking Ecstasy, next thing you know he's in Boca Raton and yours truly is doing the carousel cha-cha in Newark. Again. I wish he would just fuckin' lose me.

**PHYLLIS.** You don't really mean that.

**ROLLO.** Oh no? I came close a few times. Hotel lobby in Bangkok. My asshole puts me down and goes out for a smoke. I was sure I'd be lifted, you know, do a stint on the black market? Wrong. No one looked at me twice. Nother time he was running some kilos offshore a' Key West. I was praying he'd stuff me with cash, hand me over to someone with class. I could've been a container. Instead of a bum, which is what I am.

**PHYLLIS.** I think you're kind of cute.

**ROLLO.** Don't melt my heart with that garbage. I'm nobody's treasure chest.

**LOUISE.** You can say that again.

**ROLLO.** What's your monogram, kid?

**PHYLLIS.** P.M.S.

**ROLLO.** Aw. That's so sweet. My name's Rollo.

**LOUISE.** I may vomit.

**ROLLO.** What is your *problem*, Miss Thing? Is your toilet kit leaking?

**LOUISE.** I am perfectly packed.

**ROLLO.** Oh yeah? What's that you got rolled in that towel?

**LOUISE.** That's *personal!*

**AMBER.** What've you got, x-ray eyes?

**ROLLO.** You been through as many detectors as I have, you've got x-ray everything.

**DICK.** This guy's full of shit. He's a con man!

**ROLLO.** Whatever you need to believe. Though if *I* had those magazines sewn in my lining...

**DICK.** How did you know that??

**ROLLO.** We ain't so opaque as we think, my man. Not if you know how to look.

**DICK.** It's a trick!

**ROLLO.** Hey, I've *done* tricks. False bottoms, lead x-ray blocks. Not any more. I got nothin' to hide. What you see is what is. I've had some hard knocks, done the merchant marine, rode the rails outta Marrakech next to a fuckin' *goat*. Top of the bus, Guatemala. I ain't sayin' I ain't got some miles on me. But I'm ready to kick all that shit, settle down, have a coupla fanny packs with the right girl. End of the day, it's who you got loving you.

**MILDRED.** Even love doesn't last. I married a satchel, raised three matching garment bags. Where are they now? Do they call? Do they write?

**AMBER.** I used to hang out with a weekender bag, name of Morty. The zipper on him. I get goose bumps remembering.

**DICK.** Dumped you, huh?

**AMBER.** He would've gone to the ends of the earth for me! He was the genuine article. Leather. Top-grain. They don't make 'em like that anymore.

**MILDRED.** They're all microfiber. Synthetic.

**ROLLO.** Uh oh. Here comes.

**ROLLO** and **MILDRED.** Back in *my* day—

**MILDRED.** We were valises back then. We were carried by uniformed porters. Cunard Lines. The steamer trunks! *Bandboxes!* Linings of satin and peau de soie. Solid brass fittings.

**DICK.** Yeah, right. And your ancestors rode on the Mayflower.

**MILDRED.** As a matter of fact, they were portmanteaux. My great-great grandfather is still on display at Mount Vernon.

**DICK.** Well la di dah.

**MILDRED.** Thug!

**DICK.** Dust collector. White elephant!

**ROLLO.** (*Pulls DICK aside, confidential:*) Go easy on her. She's on Day 29 of a 30-day stretch. And the old bag don't know about this, but her legs had a cardiac 35 thou in the air over Greenland. He ain't coming back.

**PHYLLIS.** What...what'll happen to her?

**ROLLO.** The daughter-in-law picks her up, checks her insides for valuables, doesn't find nothing, she sends Portmanteau down the Red Mile.

**PHYLLIS.** (*In horror:*) The Salvation Army??

**ROLLO.** She got Clearance Sale written all over her tweed.

**PHYLLIS.** (*Rising panic:*) I want to get out of here! Somebody CLAIM me!!!

**ROLLO.** Hey, hey, hey. Kid, that ain't you. You're just outta the warehouse, ya dig? You got miles of blue sky up ahead.

**CREW.** (*Off stage.*) CAN I HELP YOU?

**LOUISE.** (*Tenses, alert with anticipation.*) Hssst! Freeze! It's a pickup!

**CREW.** (*Off stage.*) COULD I SEE YOUR CLAIM CHECK?

*(The suitcases sit forward, waiting expectantly. PHYLLIS closes her eyes tightly, crossing her fingers.)*

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## Cast of Characters

DENNY, a food photographer

MONA, a hand model

# FINGER FOOD

*(Setting: A commercial photographer's studio, minimally indicated by a white reflective umbrella and a standing flood lamp focused on one end of a long table. The lit end is elegantly set with a lace tablecloth, cut crystal wineglass and bottle of wine. The rest of the table is tacky and bare. There's a canvas director's chair and an empty carton, a telephone, Denny's camera equipment.)*

*(Lights up on DENNY, staring intently at the wine-bottle set-up. He starts making adjustments, moving the glass, turning the bottle: an artist at work.)*

*(Perfection. He glares at the door, annoyed. Strides to the phone and dials.)*

**DENNY.** Mitchell? Denny. My talent is late again... Runs in her *what?* I'm not shooting her pantyhose... Studio *Six*, Mitchell... No, not deodorant, beaujolais! ...Yeah, well she better shake it, there's Redi-Whip coming at quarter past four!

*(He hangs up and returns to his set-up. Turns on the flood lamp. Smiles. Holds one hand next to the wineglass and looks through his camera, rehearsing the shot.)*

Oh, baby.

*(He steps back for more distance and tries it again.)*

Gorgeous.

*(He steps back again and finds that he's too far away now to reach the glass. He tries anyway, stretching one arm towards the glass, leaning back with his camera. It looks ridiculous and it doesn't work.)*

Damn.

*(Sudden brainstorm. He rips off one shoe and sticks his bare foot on the table, gripping the glass with his toes. He picks up the camera and says to his foot:)*

Love ya. You're beautiful.

*(MONA rushes in, breathless. She is simply but prettily dressed and wears orange rubber dishwashing gloves. She carries a model's loose-leaf book. DENNY jumps up.)*

Carla!

**MONA.** Darling!

*(DENNY embraces her, kisses both cheeks. He draws back.)*

**DENNY.** You're not Carla.

**MONA.** No, I'm—

**DENNY.** I asked them for Carla. The hand model.

**MONA.** Then...you don't *know*?

**DENNY.** I have to have Carla.

**MONA.** Oh heaven. I thought they had told you. The agency.

**DENNY.** What happened?

*(MONA crosses herself with rubber gloves.)*

**MONA.** She was in... She had—Carla—a terrible accident. An elevator door.

**DENNY.** No!

**MONA.** Yes.

**DENNY.** Carla?

**MONA.** Yes!

**DENNY.** Is she all right?

**MONA.** She was maimed! She broke *two* of her nails! The thumb and the index! Oh god. I have nightmares.

*(She covers her face with her gloves.)*

**DENNY.** So the agency sent you instead?

**MONA.** *(Lowers her hands. He's so insensitive. Glacial:)* I'm her understudy.

**DENNY.** I'm not sure I can do it with somebody else.

**MONA.** Try me.

**DENNY.** You've done this before?

**MONA.** Hundreds of times.

**DENNY.** A hand job.

**MONA.** I live for it.

**DENNY.** I've never seen you.

**MONA.** My face, perhaps. No.

*(She touches a glove.)*

May I hang up my things?

*(DENNY grabs the carton from under the table and drops it contemptuously in front of her. MONA looks at it. Looks at him. Then she pulls off one rubber glove, finger by finger, like a stripper. He watches, transfixed. Underneath she is wearing a lacy black fingerless glove and crimson nail polish. DENNY moans. MONA smiles. She drops the glove into the box and takes off the second, finger by finger.)*

**MONA.** My name—

*(Drops the second glove.)*

—is Mona.

**DENNY.** Um... Uhhhh...huh. Ah. Denny.

**MONA.** Denny.

*(She touches his face. His eyes follow her fingers.)*

**DENNY.** I love what you're wearing.

**MONA.** Thank you.

**DENNY.** You, ah, only do hands?

**MONA.** I went to the elbows once. Laundry soap. It was awful. I felt like a slut.

**DENNY.** *(Rhapsodic:)* Just hands.

**MONA.** I've brought my portfolio. Will there be make-up?

**DENNY.** I...I have to see...

**MONA.** Pictures first.

*(She indicates with a graceful, game-show assistant gesture that DENNY should sit.)*

**DENNY.** Pictures. Yes.

*(He sits. MONA stands over his shoulder and guides him through the book. We do not see the pictures described.)*

**MONA.** Most of these are production stills from my video spots. Cold cream. Grape jelly. Men's shirts.

**DENNY.** Collar-smoothing. Oh Christ. Very nice.

**MONA.** *(Turning the page.)* Dishwashing liquid. Which is the coed and which is the 62-year-old grandmother? Neither! They're me! They're both me!!!

**DENNY.** No!

**MONA.** *(Nods proudly.)* I love doing character work. I *studied* that grandmother. I'm very Method.

*(Turns another page. Breathless:)*

Oh. This was my favorite job ever. Chocolate creme devil's food—

*(She breaks off, staring.)*

Denny. Your toes are nude.

*(DENNY looks. They are.)*

**DENNY.** Yes, well, I—

**MONA.** Denny, they're stunning!!!

*(She crouches and pets his toes.)*

Oh, Denny.

*(Grabs his right hand.)*

God. You have wonderful digits.

**DENNY.** I do?

**MONA.** Have you ever modeled? You could, you know. You have incredible cuticles.

**DENNY.** Thank you.

**MONA.** Your palms... Your knuckle hair...

**DENNY.** (*Impassioned:*) Mona...

*(Their hands twine. They look at each other meltingly. MONA drops his hand suddenly, embarrassed. All business. Back to the model book.)*

**MONA.** Nail polish. Not my best finger.

**DENNY.** (*Turns the next page, reacts with surprise.*) Who's that?

**MONA.** My teacher. Giancarlo. He taught me to grasp. To find the caress in it.

*(In a sensuous Italian accent:)*

“You must never just reach for a thing. You must *yearn* for it. *Grasp*, never grab.”

*(Wistful:)*

Giancarlo had knuckles like brussel sprouts. Those who can't do... He ran off with a thigh model.

**DENNY.** You were in love with him.

**MONA.** He was a genius. He taught Carol Merrill on “Let's Make A Deal.”

*(She does a game-show display gesture.)*

Door Number One...

*(DENNY grabs her hand.)*

**DENNY.** You're unbelievable!

**MONA.** Where can I change?

**DENNY.** (*Stalking her.*) Mona, I'm a professional.

**MONA.** *I'm* a professional.

**DENNY.** Trust me.

**MONA.** I trust you.

**DENNY.** This is not smut. This is advertising.

**MONA.** Stop *clutching!*

*(DENNY drops her hand, pulls himself together.)*

**DENNY.** And if you'll excuse me, I need to set up.

**MONA.** I need to warm up. Excuse *me*.

*(DENNY makes an elaborate show of busying himself with wine props and light meter. MONA turns her back to him, peels off her lace gloves and stretches her fingers. She takes a brown paper bag from her purse, unfolds it and puts it over her head. DENNY stares as she runs through a series of silly-looking finger exercises, the last few suggesting a cat. Petting, smoothing. Maybe a couple stray mews. Then she applauds herself.)*

**MONA.** *(Murmurs in Giancarlo's accent:)* Brava. Brava, mia Mona!

*(She takes off the bag very matter-of-factly, stops when she sees Denny's stare.)*

**MONA.** *(Referring to bag.)* It helps my concentration.

**DENNY.** Ah.

*(MONA stands. Very composed and serene.)*

**MONA.** Where's the cat?

**DENNY.** Cat?

**MONA.** Will you want petting or filling the kitty dish?

**DENNY.** Mona, we're doing a wine ad.

**MONA.** What? They told me tuna fish Friskies.

**DENNY.** Beaujolais.

**MONA.** But the agency *told* me—

**DENNY.** They're wrong.

**MONA.** *(Starting to panic:)* Oh my god. Wine? I have to rethink this. My whole preparation was tuna. Oh Denny. Oh! This is so sudden!

**DENNY.** What's wrong?

**MONA.** Tension. Look at this tension.

*(She holds up her claw-like hands.)*

**DENNY.** Here, let me rub them.

**MONA.** NO! Wine. Think of wine.

*(Drumming her fingers.)*

You asked them for Carla. I should have realized. Carla would never do cat food. She doesn't *have* to do cat food. Cheap trash like me does the cat food while *Carla* does beaujolais!

*(She bites on her thumbnail.)*

**DENNY.** Mona! Don't do it!!!

**MONA.** *(Realizing, in horror:)* Oh god! I knew it! I knew this would happen. That's why I'll never be one of the greats. I'm such a neurotic!

**DENNY.** You're not.

**MONA.** You don't know. Denny, I was a nail biter! Mom used to soak them in Lysol. I'd bite them and vomit. And that's not the worst of it! I sucked my thumb!

**DENNY.** Lots of kids do that.

**MONA.** Until I was twenty! I sleep in a straitjacket. I just can't trust myself.

*(About to bite her nails again, she lets out a cry of despair. Runs to the chair and sits on her hands, rocking back and forth.)*

Giancarlo, he warned me. He told me, "Carissima, you got the hands, but you don't got the temperament. I could make you a star, but you wacko!" Oh, Denny!

*(She breaks down in tears. DENNY reaches to comfort her.)*

**MONA.** DON'T lay a finger! Hands OFF!

**DENNY.** You misunderstand, Mona. I'm a professional.

**MONA.** *I'm* a professional.

**DENNY.** Steel. Like a doctor. I promise you, flesh leaves me cold. Flawless skin and warm naked tapering fingers are nothing. Color and form. Raw material. Meaningless.

**MONA.** Meaningless??

**DENNY.** I didn't mean *meaningless*.

**MONA.** (*Incensed:*) Meaningless? Look at this, buster!

(*She thrusts out a hand.*)

This is the species, right here. Evolution! Opposable thumb! Scratch that and it's monkeyville!

**DENNY.** I didn't—

**MONA.** Where would we be without hands? No *applause*, Denny! No backrubs! No volleyball! Think of great art. The Creation. E.T.!

(*She demonstrates Michelangelo's pose.*)

**DENNY.** Mona, please...

**MONA.** You think this just *happened*? I worked for this, buddy! I started out slapping men's faces on soap opera! Packets I ripped! I ripped packets! I modeled for aerosol roach sprays you see on the subway! In Spanish! And *after* all that I went home and did dishes!

**DENNY.** Hey, I've been there too, lady. I didn't start out shooting beaujolais, nosirreebob. They used to give me the ugly foods. Liv-erwurst. Cheese Whiz. Gefullte fish. I've had to shoot foods that make pigs anorexic!

**MONA.** You only shoot food?

**DENNY.** We've got our specialties too, you know. Some guys shoot black and white blue jeans. Some guys do nothing but lingerie. Hey, I'm not knocking it. Half-naked girls wearing satin and lace turns them on, that's *their* business.

(*Looks at her.*)

Me, I do food. I do food like I'll have you in tears from how good it looks. Bulging ripe melons with dew on their skins like a tropical rainforest. Corn on the cob dripping butter. Napoleons oozing cream. Hot...apple...PIE. A la mode and the ice cream's just trickling down off the crust through those thick, juicy...

**MONA.** Chocolate creme devil's food...?

**DENNY.** Pudding. Cannolis.

**MONA.** *(Rhapsodic:)* Just food.

**DENNY.** If it goes in your mouth, I'm your man.

**MONA.** You inspire me.

**DENNY.** Your hands and my lens, kiddo. We could make beautiful ad graphics.

**MONA.** Get your camera.

**DENNY.** I'm wearing it.

**MONA.** Shoot.

*(With a dancier flourish, she cups her hand under the bowl of the wine glass. DENNY comes in very close and circles seductively, firing off shot after shot.)*

**DENNY.** Beautiful. Baby. Great palm. Stroke the bowl. Can you give me more knuckle? Perfecto. That's super. A little more flex in the wrist. Honey. Angel. Oh yes.

**MONA.** *(Breathing heavily:)* Yes! You're wonderful!

**DENNY.** Fingers! More fingers! Oh, angel! OH!!!

*(He stops very suddenly.)*

**MONA.** Keep shooting! Don't stop, Denny! Shoot me!

**DENNY.** I'm out of film.

**MONA.** Hold my hand! Hold me!

*(He clasps her hand ardently.)*

God yes. You're ruthless. The sweat of your palms.

*(She lies on the table.)*

Take me!

**DENNY.** *(On fire:)* Mona!

*(He yanks off his camera and moves in to kiss her. She thrusts her hands in front of his face, palms forward. DENNY kisses them feverishly, licks her fingers.)*

*(Suddenly MONA pulls one of his hands away.)*

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## **Cast of Characters**

RUTH DANSON, 39, high-strung, haunted eyes

BOBBIE, Unkempt, waifish, startlingly young

# NO SHOULDER

*(Setting: Bare stage with four chairs representing the front and back seats of a car. Near-dark, with surrealistic suggestion of dashboard glow, headlights.)*

*(A deserted stretch of the Pacific Coast Highway in western Washington, way after midnight. A ghostly face hovers, lit only by the pale glow of dashboard lights. RUTH DANSON sips cold take-out coffee, struggling to stay awake by surfing radio channels. We hear fragments of country and pop, an evangelist, a deejay announcing “the Night-Owl Request Line.”)*

*(Loud squeal of brakes, angry honk and the low-angled swoop of twin headlights carving through blackness: an oncoming truck.)*

**RUTH.** Jesus!

*(She swerves back into her own lane, then, startled, pulls over. Heart pounding, she snaps off the radio. BOBBIE appears from the darkness beside Ruth’s car. She is dragging a knapsack. Her wet hair clings.)*

**BOBBIE.** Hey. Where you headed?

**RUTH.** I almost ran over you.

**BOBBIE.** Yeah, well. You missed.

**RUTH.** You shouldn’t be hitching at night. It’s too dangerous.

**BOBBIE.** Okay.

**RUTH.** At least get a flashlight. It’s pitch black.

*(BOBBIE holds one up.)*

**BOBBIE.** The battery died. Soaked, probly. Where’re you heading?

**RUTH.** *(After a beat.)* Forks.

**BOBBIE.** Cool, me too!

*(Off Ruth’s hesitation.)*

Cut me a break, it is *pouring*.

**RUTH.** Get in.

*(BOBBIE starts to climb into the back seat.)*

What do I look like, a taxi? You might as well sit with me.

**BOBBIE.** You sure? Cause it's been like a while since I had a bath.

**RUTH.** I've got the worst allergies ever. Pine pollen. I can't smell a thing.

**BOBBIE.** We're made for each other.

*(She climbs in. RUTH looks at her.)*

**RUTH.** Seatbelt.

*(BOBBIE rolls her eyes. RUTH doesn't budge. BOBBIE sighs, hauls on the shoulder belt.)*

**BOBBIE.** So how old are *your* kids?

**RUTH.** I don't have any kids.

**BOBBIE.** No shit. You sound just like my mom.

**RUTH.** Is that good or bad?

**BOBBIE.** Take a wild flying guess.

**RUTH.** So you don't get along.

**BOBBIE.** She should never've had me and blames her whole fucking life on me, but other than that shit, we get along fine.

*(Beat pause.)*

It's her birthday tomorrow. I hope she's not dead.

**RUTH.** *(Startled, concerned:)* Is she sick?

**BOBBIE.** No. People die.

**RUTH.** How long since you've seen her?

**BOBBIE.** Two years.

**RUTH.** Two *years*?

**BOBBIE.** You know something, I'm fucking soaked here. Have you got a cigarette?

**RUTH.** I just quit.

**BOBBIE.** Fuck.

*(After a beat.)*

Would you buy me one?

**RUTH.** Where? We've got forty miles of nothing but clearcuts and Doug fir ahead of us. Middle of nowhere.

**BOBBIE.** Tell me about it. I thought I was gonna grow moss.

*(Beat.)*

When we get to that truck stop in Queets, would you score me a pack?

**RUTH.** You shouldn't be smoking. How old are you anyway?

**BOBBIE.** Nineteen.

**RUTH.** Do I look like a moron?

**BOBBIE.** I just turned eighteen.

**RUTH.** Quit now while you can. It gets harder.

**BOBBIE.** You should've had kids. You've got mother all over you.

**RUTH.** Thank you.

**BOBBIE.** That wasn't a compliment, coming from me.

*(Pause. RUTH drives.)*

**RUTH.** I've got two Springers.

*(Off BOBBIE's look.)*

Dogs.

**BOBBIE.** Uh huh. Dogs you can train.

**RUTH.** Not *my* dogs.

**BOBBIE.** Dogs you can leave at the pound.

*(She stares out the window.)*

**RUTH.** What makes you so sure that your mom didn't want you?

**BOBBIE.** She told me like five times a day. We don't get along so hot cause of some shit that went down when I was still living with her and this mill-rat boyfriend she had. Except now she sounds into it, me

coming up for a visit. Things can change in two years, I mean, I don't know, maybe.

**RUTH.** Where do you live now?

**BOBBIE.** Your car.

*(Off RUTH's look.)*

Look, can I sit here, okay? Like just *sit*?

**RUTH.** Yes, of course you can.

**BOBBIE.** No offense or nothing. I'm just, I'm burned out. I been up for two days. I would kill for a cigarette.

**RUTH.** Sorry.

*(They drive on in silence. BOBBIE looks over at RUTH, then back at the windshield.)*

**BOBBIE.** Coos Bay. With my asshole ex-father. Where do *you* live?

**RUTH.** We don't have to talk.

**BOBBIE.** Somewhere back east, right?

**RUTH.** It's fine with me. Really.

**BOBBIE.** New York City.

**RUTH.** *(Surprised and pleased:)* How did you know that?

**BOBBIE.** I'm real good at accents.

**RUTH.** But I wasn't... Have I got a New York accent?

**BOBBIE.** Just a few words.

*(Beat.)*

And your luggage tag.

**RUTH.** Oh.

**BOBBIE.** *(Self-satisfied.)* Hitching rule number one: case the car out before you get in.

**RUTH.** You hitchhike a lot?

**BOBBIE.** Only when I want to get someplace. My boyfriend, he had a Camaro but it kind of died and besides we broke up, so I, yeah.

**RUTH.** You shouldn't take that kind of chances.

**BOBBIE.** *I'm* taking chances? Hey, you're the one stopped. I'm just here.

*(She pats her knapsack, menacing.)*

I could be packing an Uzi in here. Like that kid who mowed down his whole algebra class. You don't know shit about anyone, ever.

**RUTH.** No. You don't.

*(She drives. Pause.)*

God, I forgot how it rains out here. Sideways. Like spit.

**BOBBIE.** Seattle sunshine.

**RUTH.** Tacoma tan. Average rainfall: yes. I remember them all.

**BOBBIE.** So you *are* from around here.

**RUTH.** Not anymore.

**BOBBIE.** The Big Apple, right. Where'd you move there from?

**RUTH.** *(After a beat.)* Forks.

**BOBBIE.** No kidding. My mom is from Forks.

**RUTH.** So you told me.

**BOBBIE.** Small world, huh?

*(RUTH smears at the windshield.)*

**RUTH.** Petite.

**BOBBIE.** A petite fucking world. So, you just get divorced?

**RUTH.** How the hell would you know that?

**BOBBIE.** Line where the ring was. Feel-better French manicure chewed all to shit. Plus you're driving through Nowhere's Ass, Washington, all by yourself on a Saturday night. I don't get an image of marital bliss. Am I wrong?

**RUTH.** Yes.

*(Beat.)*

I didn't divorce him. He died.

**BOBBIE.** Shit. I'm sorry.

**RUTH.** I would have divorced him, though. Sooner or later.

*(Looks at her.)*

Nobody talks about that part. You wish they were dead, then they are. Puts your head through the wringer.

**BOBBIE.** I guess.

*(RUTH does a detailed mime of inhaling a cigarette. BOBBIE looks at her, startled.)*

**RUTH.** My hairdresser taught me this. Air cigarette. It might look insane, but it helps.

**BOBBIE.** Whatever butters your roll.

**RUTH.** I've tried it all. Ear staples, nicotine gum, the patch. I'm telling you, quit while you're young.

**BOBBIE.** You're doing your thing again. How come you never had kids?

**RUTH.** *(After a beat.)* It was never the right time.

**BOBBIE.** Hey. Didn't stop *my* mom.

**RUTH.** I couldn't get pregnant.

**BOBBIE.** You're not missing much. It's the pits.

*(RUTH looks at her, shocked.)*

**RUTH.** You've been pregnant?

**BOBBIE.** It happens.

**RUTH.** How old did you say you are?

**BOBBIE.** Old enough.

**RUTH.** Hardly.

**BOBBIE.** Yeah, well. Tell the asshole who did me.

**RUTH.** What happened to the baby?

**BOBBIE.** What baby? It got taken care of. No biggie.

**RUTH.** (*Chilled:*) I see.

(*Longish pause. RUTH drives, tense. BOBBIE glances her way.*)

**BOBBIE.** You're not Right to Life or like—

**RUTH.** No.

**BOBBIE.** Because I got a right to *my* life.

**RUTH.** I agree.

**BOBBIE.** I mean why should I have some creep's baby just because he stuck his thing in my body. It's not like I asked him. I did what I had to, got rid of it. Just like my mom should've done to me.

**RUTH.** Maybe she couldn't.

**BOBBIE.** Bullshit, it was legal back then.

**RUTH.** No. Maybe she *couldn't*. Maybe she felt you moving inside her.

**BOBBIE.** Come on, by the time she found out, I'm the size of a lima bean. How's she gonna be feeling that move?

**RUTH.** Maybe she knew she'd be thinking about you the rest of her life. That she'd live to regret it.

**BOBBIE.** Regret's ass. You did or you didn't, and don't waste my time. I've been through some serious shit, but I'm not gonna walk around sniveling poor little me. You wipe up the blood and get back on the pavement, you stay on your *feet* if you wanna get by. I was back on the street two hours later. I didn't tell nobody.

**RUTH.** Neither did I.

(*Off BOBBIE's look.*)

I had one. A long time ago.

**BOBBIE.** You told me you couldn't get pregnant.

**RUTH.** I can't. That was it. I've never told...anyone, actually. I lied to my husband. To all the fertility doctors. I don't know what made me...

**BOBBIE.** Your secret is safe with me. Honest.

**RUTH.** It feels like a lifetime ago. When I moved to New York, no one knew me. No reason to rake all that up. A clean slate.

*(Beat pause.)*

Maybe it's being back here, in the dark, in the rain, in the goddamn woods. He was a logger. He said.

**BOBBIE.** Hit and run?

**RUTH.** I will think of that man every day till I die.

*(She looks over at BOBBIE.)*

I was twenty-three. She would be, I suppose, around your age now.

**BOBBIE.** She? You found out the sex?

**RUTH.** I just knew.

*(Pause. She picks up her purse with one hand, fumbles through it and hauls out a packet of cigarettes.)*

**BOBBIE.** You quit, huh?

**RUTH.** Yeah, well.

*(She takes out the last cigarette, lights it, takes a deep drag. Then hands it to BOBBIE, who drags on it fervently.)*

**BOBBIE.** Oh man. Nothing like it.

**RUTH.** I *am* gonna quit, though.

**BOBBIE.** Uh huh, right. Next lifetime.

*(She exhales, blowing smoke rings.)*

**RUTH.** Give that back to me.

**BOBBIE.** Yes, mother.

**RUTH.** I *could* be your mother.

**BOBBIE.** No way would my mother be driving this car. Infiniti, right?

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## **Cast of Characters**

KAREN FISHER, a Baby Boomer

LEILA WYANT, her childhood friend

THE CUSTOMERS, played by two (or more) chameleonic actors  
of any age, type or gender

# EVERYTHING MUST GO

*(Setting: A yard sale on Labor Day Weekend. There might be an assemblage of creaky card tables and fading linens piled with oddly human household detritus: tarnished mirrors, a dressmaker's dummy, old crutches, a wig on a wig stand, a bald, staring doll. There might also be a bare stage, with no actual props. Use your judgment.)*

*(Early morning. Two fortyish women set up a yard sale. KAREN FISHER lugs cartons of junk from the house while her friend LEILA squats on the lawn, lettering poster board. LEILA holds up her sign. It reads, "HUGE!")*

**LEILA.** What do you think?

**KAREN.** Shouldn't it say something else? "YARD SALE"? "TAG SALE"? "TODAY"?

**LEILA.** It'd get *my* attention. Here, give me that carton.

*(Sniffs.)*

Smells kind of mildewed. What's in here?

**KAREN.** Oh, just some old boyfriends.

**LEILA.** Are you sure you want to get rid of these, Karen?

**KAREN.** They're junk. I've been meaning to ditch them for years. Spread them out on that Indian bedspread so people can see them.

**LEILA.** You're going to regret this.

*(Starts to unpack vintage toys.)*

God, I remember when you picked this guy up. At somebody else's garage sale.

**KAREN.** I fell for the paint job. But he never worked.

**LEILA.** Some of these don't look so bad. This one's cute.

**KAREN.** Take him home if you want.

**LEILA.** Please. My whole living room's full of ex-boyfriends. I'm all out of shelf space. Ooh. Look at the torso on this guy. What's wrong with *him*?

**KAREN.** Coke dealer. Flatulent. Calls women “babe.”

**LEILA.** He just needs refinishing. Strip off a few coats of varnish, give him a new haircut...

**KAREN.** He’s broken.

**LEILA.** He’s lonely.

**KAREN.** He drools on the pillow. Sings show tunes in bed.

**LEILA.** Toss him.

*(Throws toy on the bedspread and looks into carton.)*

I don’t see Richard in here.

**KAREN.** ...Richard?

**LEILA.** Your husband?

**KAREN.** Oh, him. I recycled him. Ages ago.

**LEILA.** I know, but—

**KAREN.** He’s gone, all right?? Out of my life.

*(Two CUSTOMERS enter. They’re upscale antique dealers, BOB and ROB.)*

**ROB.** Look, Bob, Fiesta ware!

**KAREN.** I’m sorry, we’re not quite set up yet.

**LEILA.** No early birds. Didn’t you see the ad in *The Suburbanite*?

**KAREN.** Not everything’s out yet. But go ahead, browse if you want.

**LEILA.** *(Sotto to KAREN:)* Are you out of your mind? They’re antique dealers!

**KAREN.** So?

**BOB.** *(Sotto to ROB:)* They’ve got *nothing*.

**ROB.** One peek.

*(Aloud:)*

Is that Havilland?

**KAREN.** What?

**ROB.** In the back. It's a sort of a...covered tureen.

**KAREN.** Oh, that's my virginity. Want to look at it?

**ROB.** Thanks. *Look*, Bob, isn't this utterly too?

**BOB.** (*Sotto:*) It's a fake. Check the watermark.

(*ROB turns it over, examines the bottom.*)

**ROB.** Back seat of a Fairlane, 1963... Senior Sock Hop. I think it's authentic... Oh, look, there's a ripped panty girdle! Do you know how rare these are? This is a find!!!!

**BOB.** Could you please stop *enthusing*?

**ROB.** Excuse me. Hon? What'll you take for this maidenhead?

**LEILA.** Thirty-five dollars. It's right on the tag.

**BOB.** How about five?

**LEILA.** *Five??* Are you kidding?

**KAREN.** It's yours.

**LEILA.** Who taught *you* to bargain?

**KAREN.** I'm moving. I want to get rid of this clutter. Thanks.

**ROB.** Thank you so much. We adore it... Five dollars!

(*They exit, exulting.*)

**LEILA.** They're going to charge 400 dollars for that in Manhattan.

**KAREN.** It's been in my basement forever. Let someone else dust it.

(*The CUSTOMERS reappear as MINNIE and PEARL, Floridian widows d'un certain age.*)

**PEARL.** Minnie, I'm leaving.

**MINNIE.** But Pearl, we just got here!

**PEARL.** (*Lofty:*) It's not our kind.

**MINNIE.** Don't be so sure. They've got boyfriends.

**PEARL.** (*Suspicious:*) Where?

**MINNIE.** Right over there, on the bedspread. Can you believe someone would throw these away? In our day we knew how to keep men.

**PEARL.** They're not your size, Minnie. Too young.

**MINNIE.** Look at these curls. Do you think he'd fit Sally?

**PEARL.** Your daughter does not want *another* used boyfriend. Not after you dragged that one home from the Salvation Army.

**MINNIE.** *Look* at him, Pearl. He's got eyes you could drown in.

**PEARL.** I wouldn't give you two cents for him, eyes or no eyes.

**KAREN.** Are you two collectors?

**MINNIE.** I've picked up a few in my time. I'm looking for somebody nice I can send to my daughter.

**PEARL.** You're wasting good money. I'll get in my seat belt.

*(She stomps away. MINNIE trails after her.)*

**MINNIE.** For heaven's sakes, Pearl. What's the harm?

**KAREN.** What do you think? Has she ever had sex?

**LEILA.** Once. With a schnauzer.

**KAREN.** The friend would have bought. She had hungry eyes. I know that look.

*(LEILA opens a lunchbox and stares inside.)*

**LEILA.** Karen, where did you get this?

**KAREN.** What?

**LEILA.** (*Pointing.*) This junior high gym class.

**KAREN.** I've had it for twenty-five years.

**LEILA.** This is mine.

**KAREN.** No, it's not. Yours has the public humiliation in the locker room. Mine's in the shower.

**LEILA.** Oh, right.

**KAREN.** I've been dragging that with me for years. I hope somebody buys it.

**LEILA.** Don't hold your breath. If there's one thing nobody wants, it's another eighth grade.

*(She slams down the lid with a shudder and exits, passing customers CRYSTAL and GRAYWOLF, aging New Agers. CRYSTAL picks up a burnt bra.)*

**CRYSTAL.** Look! It's Our Bodies Ourselves!

**GRAYWOLF.** You had one just like that. Remember?

**CRYSTAL.** Whoa. Check out these therapy sessions. Gestalt, Primal Scream... It's like, memory lane.

**KAREN.** If you're into the Seventies, I've got a whole carton of eight-tracks you might want to look at. Consciousness raising groups, Est, Guru Maharaj Ji...

**GRAYWOLF.** Have you got any bongos?

**KAREN.** Over there, next to the Nixon campaign.

*(Impetuous:)*

Tell you what, you can have the whole decade. Two dollars.

**GRAYWOLF.** For real?

**KAREN.** You can take 1980 as well. I was still getting Rolfed.

**GRAYWOLF.** Heavy duty.

*(To CRYSTAL:)*

Have you got two bucks?

**CRYSTAL.** Here you go. Susan B. Anthonys.

*(They leave and reenter without a beat. This time they're a family of four [each actor plays both a parent and child, with lightning-speed transformations.]*

**MOTHER.** Cut it out, Brittany!

**BRITTANY.** It wasn't me, it was Justin.

**JUSTIN.** Was not!

**FATHER.** If you kids don't stop fighting I'll boil you in oil.

*(To the MOTHER:)*

You *had* to stop, didn't you? Couldn't just drive.

**MOTHER.** Justin! Put that *down*!

**BRITTANY.** Lookit this snow dome.

**JUSTIN.** It's a music box. Gimme.

**BRITTANY.** What's it play?

**MUSIC BOX.** *(Also played by one of the actors, tinny-voiced:)* "Some daaaay my prince will -- " CRACK!!!

**KAREN.** *(Involuntary, a pained gasp.)* Oh, *no!*

**BRITTANY.** Look what you did!

**JUSTIN.** *I did??*

**FATHER.** You kids are dead meat.

**MUSIC BOX.** *(Stuck in a groove.)* "...come...come...come..."

**FATHER.** To the car, march.

**BRITTANY.** It's not fair! *He* broke it!

**MOTHER.** Oh dear. I'm so sorry.

**KAREN.** Don't worry about it. It's only a childhood illusion.

**MOTHER.** But you must have cherished it. Here, let me pay for it.

**KAREN.** There's really no need.

**MOTHER.** I insist. I had an illusion just like that when I was a girl. I kept it for years. Till I met my husband.

**BRITTANY.** Mo-om!

**MOTHER.** *Coming!*

(KAREN stares wistfully at the snow dome as LEILA returns with two large, battered suitcases.)

LEILA. I found these inside. Aren't you planning to sell them?

KAREN. Oh, those are my parents. I'm taking them with me.

LEILA. ...You're what?

KAREN. I might need them.

LEILA. The woman's completely cracked. They don't match.

KAREN. They never did. Even when they were brand new.

LEILA. Dysfunctional families are very collectable. Sell them.

KAREN. (*Stubborn:*) I want them.

LEILA. I thought you were trying to make a fresh start.

KAREN. I am.

LEILA. Well, you'll never get rid of that childhood you're lugging around if you don't sell your parents.

KAREN. I couldn't. I had a good day with my mother once.

(*Reconsiders.*)

A good afternoon.

LEILA. How old were you, four?

KAREN. I'll tell you what. Why don't *you* take them?

LEILA. What are you, crazy?

KAREN. They might work out better for you. And I'll throw in my stepfather, gratis.

(*She holds up a briefcase. LEILA is tempted.*)

LEILA. My mother *is* getting a little bit senile...

KAREN. (*Startled.*) You mean you've still got her? You sure you want *two*??

LEILA. I'll put mine in the Library Fair.

KAREN. They're yours.

**LEILA.** (*Hefting the luggage.*) New parents. Wow. I should have thought of this years ago.

**KAREN.** You and me both.

**LEILA.** If you change your mind...

**KAREN.** No, no, you're right. Get them out of my sight.

*(LEILA carries them off. KAREN raises one hand a few inches in private farewell.)*

'Bye, Mom.

*(She gets to work, pricing with determination. The CUSTOMERS enter as RICHARD, tweedy and pompous, and TRACY, his Generation X girlfriend.)*

**TRACY.** Hey, take a look at these dates. They're on 45!

**RICHARD.** That's how we all used to date, m'dear.

**TRACY.** Too strange. They're exactly like yours.

**RICHARD.** That's impossible. Mine were L.P.s

**TRACY.** Look, here's your prom tux. Your wedding vows.

**KAREN.** (*Turning abruptly.*) ...Richard??

**RICHARD.** Oh, Jesus.

*(They stare at each other.)*

**KAREN.** Small world, I suppose, would be putting it mildly.

**RICHARD.** You're selling our *wedding* vows? In a garage sale??

**KAREN.** I'm moving out west.

**RICHARD.** Did it ever occur to you I might have wanted those?

**KAREN.** You were the one who walked out, do I have to remind you?

**TRACY.** *That's* Karen? I thought she was fat.

**RICHARD.** Tracy, please.

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