

Wound Care

a play about searching for what will make things right
by Jennie Webb

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Wound Care

Characters:

TERRA, F mid-30s but likely appears younger, any race

THE WOMEN, F 40s–60s to play multiple characters of different ages, any race

Setting: **Los Angeles and Northern California**

Time: **November & December, 2023**

Dialogue:

— *Indicates a character's dialogue is interrupted, by another character speaking, an event or a character abruptly shifting gears within a line of dialogue.*

... *Indicates a character is searching for words, does not complete a thought or leaves a line of dialogue open.*

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SYNOPSIS

After meeting her troubled, recently deceased mother—who gave her up for adoption as an infant—Terra is presented with the choice to take part in a government reparations program and runs into more of life’s surreal hurdles. *Wound Care* is a play about searching for what will make things right, uncovering what has value and perhaps healing what you didn’t know was broken.

SPECIAL THANKS

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Mary Alice Kier; the Playwrights Union.

Wound Care

We see a woman in her 30s, Terra. She is standing in an artist's studio, filled with canvases and sketches—or stylized representations—except everything is a bit fuzzy around the edges; earth tones fading into one another. We may hear a bit of 70s folk rock in the background. Terra is looking at an in-process painting on an easel. Maybe she's reserving judgement, something she's not very good at. Then she finds something in the painting that makes her smile.

TERRA:

(shouting off) Mummy Brown!

JUDITH:

(offstage) What?

TERRA:

Ha ha ha. It just— “Mummy Brown!”

JUDITH:

(offstage) Where did that come from?

A woman in her mid-60s, Judith, joins Terra, carrying two cups of coffee. Judith is dressed in a way that lets us know she's the artist and has probably slept in her outfit.

TERRA:

That's like, a real thing, right? I mean, a real paint color?

JUDITH:

It is, indeed! Mummy Brown!

TERRA:

I don't know why I thought of it. *(re the painting)* Just popped into my head when I was...

JUDITH:

Huh. I don't know that I'm particularly pleased by that association: No mummies were harmed in the creation of this—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Oh! I know! I mean, it's just— a lot of brown.

JUDITH:

It's not finished.

TERRA:

Of course not!

JUDITH:

Of course not?

TERRA:

I didn't mean— It totally could be finished!

JUDITH:

Well it's not. And what have you got against brown?

TERRA:

Nothing! I love brown!

JUDITH:

In small doses?

TERRA:

No! I...

She points to a cup.

Is that for me?

JUDITH:

Yes. *(handing the cup over)* Light and sweet.

TERRA:

Thank you.

JUDITH:

It's really good to see you, honey. Despite the fact you were not raised right.

TERRA:

No one to blame for that but you!

JUDITH:

Fair enough.

Terra gestures to the painting.

TERRA:

And I do like it!

JUDITH:

It's not—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Regardless, it's already... It's like it's full of secrets. A bit scary, actually. But beautiful.

JUDITH:

I don't know if beautiful matters.

TERRA:

It feels like you're digging into some deep, unknown place.

JUDITH:

Huh. I'm trying? I think I'm getting better. My teacher thinks so.

TERRA:

I love that you're doing this. You deserve it.

JUDITH:

Deserve?

TERRA:

Yeah! Painting! It may have started as physical therapy—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) It didn't— I have been painting for a long time.

TERRA:

But now you're doing it just for you!

JUDITH:

As opposed to creating for the betterment of humanity; leaving behind priceless works of art for you to sell off in your old age?

TERRA:

Who told you about my retirement plan?

JUDITH:

Drink your coffee.

Terra does and Judith joins her. They both look again at the unfinished painting. Then,

TERRA:

Do you think I'm being ridiculous?

JUDITH:

About?

TERRA:

The reparations program.

JUDITH:

Right. I guess that depends on how serious you are?

TERRA:

What do you mean? Why wouldn't I be—?

JUDITH:

(interrupting) I mean how much it means to you. How significant it is.

TERRA:

You don't think what happened was—?

JUDITH:

(interrupting) To you! What does it mean to you, personally?! She was your mother but she was my cousin and you don't even know for sure that—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Okay. Never mind. What is ridiculous was coming here. Talking to you about it; I knew I should never have—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) No no no! I'm glad you did! All I'm saying is this is totally out of the blue and it's a lot to dredge up, to deal with!

TERRA:

Oh, I am well aware of this! I've been living with it, thinking about it for almost a year, now! I mean, forced sterilization is not something I thought would ever be on my plate, you know?

JUDITH:

Of course not but why didn't you say something earlier? We all could've—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Ach! Maybe that's exactly why I didn't! This is my mother, my thing!

JUDITH:

Okay! I get it. And...

TERRA:

What?

JUDITH:

It makes sense, why you would want something good to happen.

TERRA:

That would be the point of "reparations?"

JUDITH:

Definitely! And if... If what she said happened to her—

TERRA:

(interrupting) There's documentation. Her tubes were tied when she was in prison. There's definitely a question of consent; a lawyer reached out to her before she died.

JUDITH:
Okay.

TERRA:
Otherwise she may not have ever known!

JUDITH:
Never have known it happened?

TERRA:
No! About the program! Never mind. I need to—

JUDITH:
(interrupting) No. Stay. Sit.

TERRA:
Stop talking to me like—

JUDITH:
(interrupting) Like my daughter, whom I love?

TERRA:
Like a dog. “Stay. Sit. Heel.”

JUDITH:
To be honest, “heal” would be a good thing.

Very short pause.

TERRA:
Hah.

JUDITH:
Drink.

They sit. They sip coffee.

Okay. So explain to me, again? About the whole “reparations” process?

TERRA:
Well. It seems pretty simple? I mean, as simple as anything was concerning her.

JUDITH:
I was going to say.

TERRA:

After they passed the bill that approved the program they started to collect information on possible cases, and someone found her; let her know she might be eligible.

JUDITH:

Might be eligible. When did all this happen?

TERRA:

The bill? In 2021. Prison sterilizations were happening up until like 10 years ago. Regularly.

JUDITH:

That is rather shocking.

TERRA:

It is! So, reparations.

JUDITH:

And your mother was one of these women? Possibly.

TERRA:

She said it happened in 1992.

JUDITH:

Well, that is when she was in Valley State. But you know we really didn't have any contact with her; you were already—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Yes, I know. It was a long time ago but they're finally doing something about it.

JUDITH:

So... you asked your mother about it, when you saw her?

TERRA:

She was the one who brought it up.

JUDITH:

Like in her last dying breath?

TERRA:

No, it wasn't—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) I'm sorry, that was unfair. But that was back in January, your visit. You haven't wanted to share much about it. At all. Which is fine, but can I ask why you're bringing this up now?

TERRA:

It's complicated. And you do remember I didn't even want to talk to her.

JUDITH:

I know. I am so sorry, honey. If I pushed you to do that. It wasn't like I pictured a happy death-bed reunification, but it just seemed like if you hadn't—

TERRA:

(interrupting) No, you were right. I'm glad I did. I needed to.

JUDITH:

But who knew you'd be opening yourself up to this sort of—

TERRA:

(interrupting) It's all right! I mean, if she hadn't've told me, it'd be like it never happened.

JUDITH:

And that would be a bad thing?

TERRA:

Seriously?

JUDITH:

God. Of course nothing having to do with your mother could have been at all... cut and dried.

TERRA:

Now that she's dead, "cut and dried," maybe not so far off.

JUDITH:

Hah. So you think that's why she got in touch? This program?

TERRA:

No. I think she got in touch because she was dying. This was just an added, administrative bonus.

JUDITH:

She was using you to get the money?

TERRA:

Honestly, no. She was handling it on her own. Seemed very proud of that, in our very brief meeting. A lawyer in the Bay Area was helping her; she's the one I was going to reach out to.

JUDITH:

A lawyer?

TERRA:

Because as a descendant there's a possibility I could get some cash.

JUDITH:

How much, can I ask?

TERRA:

\$35,000? Total?

JUDITH:

Well, that's not nothing!

TERRA:

No, it's not. And maybe more, but it's also... bizarre? Like, who came up with that amount? That's what a kid's worth to a woman?

JUDITH:

The possibility of a kid.

TERRA:

Or kids! I could have had siblings. Who knows how many?!

Pause. Judith looks her painting. She very intentionally picks up a brush.

Anyway. If it's money that was hers, someone should get it. I mean I can certainly use it. Is that terrible?

JUDITH:

Not at all. It's just that it's very... loaded.

TERRA:

What does that mean?

JUDITH:

I don't know what this lawyer will say, but I do know that it's unlikely any process involving the government is even remotely simple. Then there's everything surrounding your mother. Her past. Your past. Not to mention her death which has got to feel awfully strange, still. Raw. I know it does for me, even though it's been almost—

TERRA:

(interrupting) It's time.

Short pause.

And there's a deadline. I have to apply by December 31st.

JUDITH:
What? That's next month!

TERRA:
I know! I may not even do it. It just... it's *something*, you know.

Pause.

Mom?

Short pause.

JUDITH:
So how do you know "Mummy Brown?"

TERRA:
What?

JUDITH:
You mentioned it, earlier, the paint color. You—

TERRA:
(interrupting) Right! I was at a museum once?

JUDITH:
Once! Good for you!

TERRA:
Stop it. It was maybe the Getty? This woman was with this group; I was kind of interloping and she was describing this painting, the colors...

JUDITH:
Was it a Delacroix?

TERRA:
I have no idea. I just got a kick out of "Mummy Brown." That's what she said the artist used.

JUDITH:
Ha ha. Wild, huh?

TERRA:
Wild? It's brown.

JUDITH:
No, I mean did she tell you? It was actually made from mummies.

TERRA:
The paint?

JUDITH:
A key ingredient: ground-up mummies. It was all the rage for a time.

TERRA:
Dead mummy paint?

JUDITH:
Well, that's redundant. But yes! A rich, reddish brown.

TERRA:
Seriously?

JUDITH:
Absolutely. For hundreds of years, mummies were a hot commodity. Used for a number of purposes. Medicine. Mummy powder was thought to cure all sorts of maladies.

TERRA:
Uh, how do you know this?

JUDITH:
Ha ha. Research. Once I found out about the paint, it's quite the rabbit hole.

TERRA:
Mummies.

JUDITH:
Yes! It wasn't all that long ago that some fancy pharmaceutical company found some spare mummy parts locked away in a supply warehouse.

TERRA:
Stop!

JUDITH:
Ha ha ha. More coffee?

TERRA:
Yeah. I mean, no. I should be going. Give my love to Leon...

She looks for a place to set her cup amidst the paint supplies.

JUDITH:
(*reaching for the cup*) I've got it. And I will; he's back tomorrow. See you Thanksgiving?

TERRA:
Can I take you out before that? My treat.

JUDITH:
That is not necessary.

TERRA:
But that way I'd get you out of the house.

JUDITH:
You are sneaky. I do get out. I'm out all the time.

TERRA:
Ooookay!

JUDITH:
I am!

TERRA:
Obviously! Glad you didn't dress up just for me!

JUDITH:
Ha ha.

TERRA:
But you look good. You're good?

JUDITH:
I'm great!

TERRA:
You'd tell me if—

JUDITH:
(interrupting) Yes!

TERRA:
Okay, I'll let you know what I decide.

JUDITH:
About— Oh. Yes. Do. And if there's anything I can do to help...

TERRA:
Thanks. Love you.

JUDITH:
And you. So much.

As Terra starts out, the edges of the scene start to fray. Judith speaks as much to herself as anyone.

JUDITH:

“Reparations.”

TERRA:

What?

JUDITH:

I guess I was thinking, just what is it that you hope to repair?

Out of nowhere or everywhere, a blast of bright colors. We see city lights and colors curated to make an impact. The sounds become more distinct. Traffic. Distant sirens.

Terra is on a city street, wearing a coat. She appears to be waiting for someone, a bit nervously. Then we see Christine coming out of a building. She’s 40-something, dressed in bold colors; maybe her hair is colorful, too. She carries a large bag along with some file folders and is wearing a vintage coat, a long scarf and remarkable heels. That she can walk—and walk fast—in them is a testament to something super human.

TERRA:

Hi! Are you... Christine?

CHRISTINE:

Yes?

TERRA:

We talked on the phone. Yesterday. I’m Terra.

No light bulb.

You were my birthmother’s lawyer, a couple of years ago when—

CHRISTINE:

(interrupting) Oh! Yes! You came up from Los Angeles! I’m sorry I didn’t— Of course. Again, I wasn’t aware she had passed. I’m very sorry.

TERRA:

No, it’s— Thank you.

CHRISTINE:

But I think I told you, I wasn’t her lawyer, per se. *(gesturing toward the building)* I was working here and gave her some advice.

TERRA:

I know. About the...

CHRISTINE:

FISCP. Forced or Involuntary Sterilization Compensation Program. We contacted her when they were setting it up.

TERRA:

I know! She told me.

CHRISTINE:

But like I said, these offices are closing. We're not taking appointments; I was actually just here picking up some—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Right, you said you would be! I was hoping I could... run something by you?

CHRISTINE:

What sort of something?

TERRA:

About the program. I've been on the website—

CHRISTINE:

(interrupting) I really had nothing to do with that and now I'm not even—

TERRA:

(interrupting) I get that! I just need a little more information. About my birthmother. And where she was with the process?

CHRISTINE:

Oh, man. I don't— That was such an insane time. There were so many women we were working with who'd had tubal ligations, hysterectomies, all trying to—

TERRA:

(interrupting) But yesterday you said you remembered her.

CHRISTINE:

I— I did. I do. Okay. Walk with me? I've got to be at a meeting in fifteen...
(looking at her phone) Damn. Ten minutes.

TERRA:

Great! Thanks!

The women start to walk down a busy street; Christine is leading at a brisk pace, Terra trying to keep up, sometimes bobbing around other pedestrians and obstacles.

CHRISTINE:

I hope this doesn't sound terrible but I mostly remember her because she was sick. Because she told me she was sick, when we met. But she was very excited about the program! I mean, all of us were. California: the first state to compensate survivors of modern sterilization abuse in prisons. It was historic. We were, "Finally! A positive step!"

TERRA:

Yeah?

CHRISTINE:

Oh, yeah! We'd been doing mad outreach. So many women. I remember your mom—

TERRA:

(interrupting) My birth—

CHRISTINE:

(interrupting) She was amazed that we even found her. And appreciative. She was one of the ones we were like, "Yes, this is the way it's supposed to be!"

TERRA:

Ha ha. That's cool.

She inadvertently steps off the sidewalk and we hear the ring of a bicycle bell.

CHRISTINE:

So I really should've— I knew about the cancer so we should've kept in touch with her. Except if I remember correctly—and no guarantees, mind you—there were a few hiccups with her case, surrounding the operation.

TERRA:

Hiccups?

CHRISTINE:

I mean, it was far from cut and dried.

TERRA:

Ha ha!

CHRISTINE:

Sorry?

TERRA:

Nothing. It's just—

CHRISTINE:

(interrupting) Ugh! A poor choice of phrases when surgery's involved! And of course none of these cases are, to *any* degree.

TERRA:

Of course.

CHRISTINE:

But when she didn't follow up we must've assumed she'd decided against pursuing it? Or maybe I'm telling myself that now to make myself feel better and I truly apologize if we let the ball drop but it's been... Not the most successful compensation program, to put it nicely. Which is not to say there haven't been any happy outcomes...

TERRA:

Great!

CHRISTINE:

But after almost two years, last count—and this includes women who were in institutions: hospitals, etc., from years back—there were only about 500 applications.

TERRA:

That sounds— How many were you expecting?

CHRISTINE:

A lot more than that!

TERRA:

Really? Why do you think—? Ow!

A pedestrian has run into Terra; Christine doesn't pause.

CHRISTINE:

Actually "expecting" is not the right word, in a sterilization context. Hoping? It is a difficult thing for any woman to have to re-visit. And in the case of women who were incarcerated—trust in government, the system? Big issue. It's yet another reminder of a woman's power, a woman's choices, being taken away. It's profound and it's fucked up but you start to fill out these forms, in black and white, and all of the sudden it's like you can see hope welling up and lighting your way forward and then they turn our language against us and it all becomes the murkiest of gray areas. Not that we women aren't accustomed to navigating that territory...

TERRA:

Right...

CHRISTINE:

But we go on. We do what we gotta do. Man! I thought it was cold out but it's hot in the sun, right?

She unbuttons her coat as she moves, juggling files.

And please forgive me for not remembering the particulars of your mom's case. Maybe I can see if someone who's still working with the program can do a bit of digging for you? Especially if you can wait, because right now they're all in crunch time. Deadline for applications is the end of the year.

TERRA:

I know!

CHRISTINE:

There is a possibility it will be extended. They're doing a big social media push, trying to reach women before the clock runs out.

TERRA:

Uh huh. So when you said hiccups...

CHRISTINE:

Pardon?

TERRA:

You said her case may have had—

CHRISTINE:

(interrupting) Yes. Hiccups. Another unfortunate phrase. But it is absurd, the way this all played out. Kind of the last straw, for me and my work. I just couldn't—

She suddenly stops. Maybe Terra runs into her.

I'm sorry, but it's the fucking California Victim Compensation Board. Finally given the license to do something. You went on the website? "Recovery from Forced Sterilization" Nice! Guess how many applications they've approved? Guess how many women they've deemed worthy of "recovery?" Guess!

TERRA:

I don't—

CHRISTINE:

(interrupting) Just over 100. That's not even a quarter of the women who were undoubtedly re-traumatized, having to put themselves out there, "Hey! Look at me! I'm a victim! Really I am! I can prove it! Take my ovaries, please!" And then "Yeah, no. Not good enough!" I don't even have the—! Oh! My! God! It's like a million degrees out here! It's almost December!

She begins to unwrap the very long scarf that's around her neck as she resumes walking, struggling with her coat, bag and files.

TERRA:

Okay. But I was looking at the site. And it says that not only victims can apply, but descendants, as well.

CHRISTINE:

Yes...

TERRA:

I mean, I don't know where she left off. But I thought maybe I could pick things back up?

CHRISTINE:

I— I suppose...

TERRA:

I know it's a lot of red tape, but it does seem—

Christine stops again, caught up in a web of clothing.

CHRISTINE:

Wait. When did she die?

TERRA:

In January.

CHRISTINE:

Oh, that's great!

TERRA:

What?

CHRISTINE:

I last spoke to her early in 2021. If she had died right after, she'd be out of luck. But if she was alive in July, 2021...

TERRA:

She was.

CHRISTINE:

Then the case can move forward! I mean, if you want. After my probably too-candid disclosures. Like I said, I haven't wanted to get anywhere near this because after years and years of work with these women in prison, mostly women of color who had to deal every day with inhumane conditions and criminal actions—not theirs; perpetrated against them by the goddamn gatekeepers—my heart was finally broken, but...

TERRA:
But?

CHRISTINE:
I will do what I can. Maybe it'll make some sort of difference.

TERRA:
Thank you!

CHRISTINE:
I'm not promising anything, but you're welcome! *(looking at her phone)* Shit. I've gotta go.

TERRA:
Sorry!

CHRISTINE:
I have your number.

TERRA:
Yes!

CHRISTINE:
It's very nice to meet you, despite the circumstances.

She starts to leave, then turns back.

You know what's funny, though?

TERRA:
What?

CHRISTINE:
I don't remember her saying that she had a daughter.

TERRA:
Oh. Well...

CHRISTINE:
I could have sworn she said she had... a son. Huh!

And she is off, leaving Terra alone. Then, the sound of ripping and we're quickly bathed in red light. A woman laughs in the background then the red lights deepen and grow darker in a way that could be comforting.

Neon lettering appears, we start to hear indie rock and see that Terra is working behind a bar. Pouring a long row of tequila shots.

TERRA:

And I'm, like: Oh! Really! Nice! I'm flying all over the place and jumping through hoops to do the right thing for this disaster of a woman who abandons me when I'm an infant, and even before that put our family through hell so at some point they had to pretend she didn't exist—that was basically my whole, entire childhood! My mother is a non-entity but hey, who's this little girl in pictures all around us? What a sweet kid she was! How smart and sensitive! Apparently she never aged past 11 so who knows where *I* came from, but it's okay! It's all okay! I have a great mom and Leon and there's my grandma and aunties and uncles coming out of the woodwork so I do not waste time or energy fixating on what I cannot control. What I could never control. What I have no hope of ever controlling now that my so-called-mother is six-feet-under! Only... I could do this one thing, right? Something to set things straight for her, and for me in terms of a little cash infusion. But I think mostly it's for her.

She looks at the row of shots in front of her and downs one at the end; grabs another shot glass.

And then I find out this little detail. The woman apparently has no daughter, she has a son! So the fact of the matter is that for her, *I* don't exist! What the fuck is that about?

As she fills the new shot, Al, probably in her 50s but it's hard to tell in this light, moves toward her carrying a serving tray loaded with limes and a salt shaker. She is dressed in black but has a sense of understated style.

AL:

Hang on. She probably just got it mixed up.

TERRA:

My dear, departed non-parent?

AL:

No. The lawyer.

She begins putting the shots on the tray.

TERRA:

I don't think that's something a lawyer— *This* lawyer would get mixed up. She was all about the women, you know.

AL:

What exactly did she say? The lawyer?

TERRA:

That there was talk of a son. Not a daughter.

AL:

So you think your birthmother, what, changed your gender?

TERRA:

Uh, no! I would be aware of this!

AL:

No, that's not— I mean for the purposes of her legal argument?

TERRA:

What are you talking about? I have a birth certificate which clearly states—

AL:

(interrupting) I mean did she lie? On paper, a son is worth more? Not unheard of.

TERRA:

I... suppose.

AL:

Or maybe she was trying to protect you! Protect your identity!

TERRA:

She did not care one bit about protecting me.

AL:

Or maybe she *did* get it mixed up. You said she was a mess. Maybe all this time she thought she'd had a son! Maybe! To fuck with her, they told her she'd had a son!

TERRA:

That doesn't— Who's they?

AL:

Was she in prison when she had you?

TERRA:

No! That was a couple years later.

AL:

People do go in and out of prison, you know.

TERRA:

You speaking from personal experience?

AL:

You really wanna know?

TERRA:

Oh! I was joking.

AL:

So was I.

TERRA:

Oh. Ha ha. Sorry.

AL:

Or at one point she could have just succumbed to the suggestions of the patriarchy and convinced herself that she'd had a son!

TERRA:

In which case when I met her she would have said, "Oh! That's right! You're a girl!"

She picks up a shot from Al's tray and downs it, then pours another to replace it.

AL:

Look, Terra, you know I'm on your side. You haven't really talked much about it, but this whole year? It's got to have been tough. You've been dealing with a lot.

TERRA:

Thank you.

AL:

You are an amazing person and I can't pretend to know what you need...

Terra lifts another shot off of the tray.

TERRA:

Salud!

She downs it.

AL:

But I'm gonna suggest that maybe the gender issue is not the point, here. *Maybe* by focusing on whatever she said or didn't say...

TERRA:

Oh this is definitely a case of she said, she said!

AL:

What *I'm* saying is that you've been thrown for so many loops since this woman appeared. I know you say not everything's about being adopted...

TERRA:
Because it's not.

AL:
But now you're thinking of taking on something that's so not your responsibility, not in a million years?

TERRA:
There's a lot of money involved!

AL:
Sure, but I know you're also worried about your mom so here's what I'm asking: Right now, what is really going on. With you?

TERRA:
There's nothing going on! Absolutely nothing! I'm fine! 100%!

Very short pause. Then Terra reaches for a shot but Al picks up the tray.

AL:
All right.

TERRA:
Ahhhh! I am so sorry to dump this on you, Al! You are always there for me; I don't know why I'm making such a big deal out of this...

AL:
Because it is a big fucking deal!

TERRA:
It's just...! I'm not looking to solve the whole mystery. I just wanna figure out this one piece of the puzzle, you know?

Short pause.

AL:
Well.

TERRA:
What?

AL:
I don't know how helpful this will be...

TERRA:
Spit it out.

AL:
What if she had another kid?

TERRA:
My—? What part of “sterilization” don’t you understand?

AL:
I mean before that. After you. You said she shut your family out. What if she did have a son?

TERRA:
So now you’re saying I have a brother?

AL:
No. I’m saying it’s a possibility and it would explain why—

TERRA:
(interrupting) Why she conveniently forgot she also had a daughter?

AL:
No. She could have told the lawyer—

TERRA:
(interrupting) All about her shining star of a son but doesn’t even mention me? Me, the one who’s left to take care of everything? Clean up her mess and make it all—!

The booze has done its job and she breaks the glass in her hand.

Shit!

AL:
Hey! Are you—

TERRA:
(interrupting) I’m good!

AL:
You’re bleeding! Here...

Al moves behind the bar, wraps Terra’s hand with a cloth.

TERRA:
No, I’m...

And now the tears come.

AL:
 Good, good. You are good.

She holds Terra.

TERRA:
 Oh, man. I'm sorry. You're right. I'm a wreck.

AL:
 I did not say that! You know I adore you; I said you were amazing.

TERRA:
 Really? Awww. I love you.

Short pause, then Al looks at the tray of shots.

AL:
 I've gotta get these out. Should I...?

TERRA:
 I'm fine. I've got this.

She starts to clean up.

AL:
 I'll tell Ray to come, bring new ice.

TERRA:
 Right. Thanks.

A very tipsy Terra gives Al a soft kiss.

AL:
 Right.

She moves to the front of the bar and picks up the tray again. Another look at Terra, then Al starts out before realizing

 Oh! (*re the tray*) I need another shot.

TERRA:
 Don't we all.

They connect. Then there is dark. It's a thick black dark. A dark filled with things that are moving. Instead of music we might hear the electronic buzz of something cutting through something we don't want to see. Terra speaks from the black.

TERRA:
Hello???

We hear the sound of squeaky wheels. Maybe steps and people brushing against things. Hushed voices. Beeps.

What's going on?

Silence. More hushed voices.

Hey! I can hear you! Who's there? Will somebody tell me what—?

Blinding lights turn on revealing a lot of white. Terra is alone, sitting up in bed wearing a hospital gown. She wasn't expecting this.

What the fuck?

We hear a voice that's strangely amplified, like through an old-fashioned intercom.

NURSE'S VOICE:
Listen to you! I guess you're awake!

TERRA:
I... Yeah. Where am I?

NURSE'S VOICE:
Shhhhh don't worry. You're safe. We're taking care of everything.

TERRA:
What are you—? I shouldn't be here.

She starts to pull back the covers.

NURSE'S VOICE:
Oh, honey. You need to stay in bed. Rest. You're probably still feeling a bit woozy, huh?

TERRA:
I... Yeah, I am. I don't know what—

She lifts her hand; the cloth wrapped around it is soaked in blood.

Whoa!

NURSE'S VOICE:
Ha ha ha, how many times have I heard that: "Whoa, Nellie!"

TERRA:
No, I didn't say— "Nellie?"

NURSE'S VOICE:
Yes?

TERRA:
Where did that come from?

NURSE'S VOICE:
I'm sorry sweetheart, you need to make yourself clearer.

TERRA:
"Nellie!"

NURSE'S VOICE:
Yes?

TERRA:
I was asking— It's like from a long time ago, right? "Nellie?"

NURSE'S VOICE:
That's my name! Don't wear it out!

TERRA:
What?

NURSE'S VOICE:
That's my name! Don't—

TERRA:
(interrupting) Wait. You are Nellie?

Nurse Nellie, ageless and bigger than life, appears in hospital scrubs.

NURSE NELLIE:
Present and accounted for! What can I do for you, cupcake?

TERRA:
I...

She lifts her hand again.

This is a lot of blood. It was just a small cut. There shouldn't be this much blood, should there?

NURSE NELLIE:
You think that's a lot? Have you looked...?

TERRA:
Looked where?

NURSE NELLIE:
You know.

TERRA:
No! I don't! That's what I'm telling you! I don't—

NURSE NELLIE:
(interrupting) Down there!

Short pause. Then, in some comical fashion, Nurse Nellie indicates that particular region. Terra looks underneath the covers.

TERRA:
Jesus!

NURSE NELLIE:
It's not his shift, but I'll see if I can find him?

TERRA:
What? No! What happened?

NURSE NELLIE:
Are you in pain?

TERRA:
No! I don't— I don't feel anything!

NURSE NELLIE:
And that's just how we like it!

TERRA:
What did you do to me?

NURSE NELLIE:
Me? I'm just the nurse.

TERRA:
Nurse... Nellie?

NURSE NELLIE:
Indeed! Now. You're just out of surgery. Let me give you something to sleep.

TERRA:
What surgery? What's going on? Why am I here?

NURSE NELLIE:

You are just full of questions, aren't you?

TERRA:

I am! (*holding up her hand*) Because this, I remember. Only it wasn't...

She looks again at the blood soaked cloth around her hand, then easily slides it off.

NURSE NELLIE:

And just like that. As if it never happened.

TERRA:

But what about...

She indicates down there.

NURSE NELLIE:

Why don't we have a little look see?

She takes a peek under the covers.

Oh! That is impressive, isn't it?

TERRA:

Thank you?

NURSE NELLIE:

You are very welcome, sweetness. So! Do you think you're ready? We've taken care of everything in the lady parts department; no worries about getting into trouble, now!

TERRA:

I don't understand.

NURSE NELLIE:

Ha ha ha. All right! We can play it that way if you want.

TERRA:

What way?

NURSE NELLIE:

You girls: "I didn't know!" "It's not my fault!" "No one told me!"

TERRA:

Wait a minute. I didn't—

NURSE NELLIE:

(interrupting) Of course not. You never do, do you? But I think you have to agree with me on this: It is time.

TERRA:

Time?

NURSE NELLIE:

Time to take off the bandages!

TERRA:

I thought you said I just had surgery.

NURSE NELLIE:

Oh, now you remember?

TERRA:

No, that's what you—

NURSE NELLIE:

(interrupting) So are you ready or not?

TERRA:

I don't— All that blood! I feel like I'm still—

NURSE NELLIE:

(interrupting) You're feeling, again? Let's see what we can do about that.

TERRA:

No! I'm— How can I be healed, already?

NURSE NELLIE:

Because we gave you something very special! To make it all better. No expenses spared when it comes to down there!

TERRA:

What did you give me?

NURSE NELLIE:

Mummy powder!

TERRA:

What?

NURSE NELLIE:

We found some in the back room.

TERRA:

Mummy powder? From real mummies?

NURSE NELLIE:

We wouldn't give you the fake stuff! Now! Let's get to work, shall we?

Nurse Nellie crawls under the covers head first, and during the following we see a long strip of bandages being fed onto the floor, like an orange peel. When Nurse Nellie's voice comes from under the covers, it's again amplified.

TERRA:

Okay. I don't think this okay. None of this. I don't— I would have remembered if I was having surgery.

NURSE NELLIE:

(under the covers) Are you sure about that?

TERRA:

I... yes! There's nothing wrong with me! I didn't need to— I didn't ask to have any operation!

NURSE NELLIE:

(sticking her head out) Because here's the thing. Sometimes we ask in different ways. Some parts of us know what need before we do, and those parts take care of any unnecessary parts—parts no longer needed for business purposes, if you know what I mean.

TERRA:

No! I don't know!

Nurse Nellie dives back under the covers and the bandage flow resumes.

All of my parts are being used as they should be and as far as my business I don't see as how it's any of your— Ohhhh! What are you—

Nurse Nellie emerges with a large stack of cash.

NURSE NELLIE:

And looky here! It's our lucky day!

TERRA:

Where did that come from?

NURSE NELLIE:

If you have to ask, must not be yours!

She throws it onto the pile of bandages and goes back under the covers.

Now we see items—jewelry, coins and other household treasures—being thrown out as the stream of bandages continues. Terra continues to respond as her sensitive parts are unwrapped and physically explored—at times quite pleasurably which adds to the confusion—by Nurse Nellie.

TERRA:

Okay. I'm trying my best to make sense of this. Because it's true that I don't—I don't feel like myself. I don't know what's going on but— Ah! That's... Um, Okay! Wow. Be careful down there!

NURSE NELLIE:

(under the covers) Hah! I could say the same to you! We've all got to live with our decisions.

TERRA:

Decisions? Yes. Of course. Ooooh. Oh! Yeah! That's a little...

NURSE NELLIE:

(under the covers) Decisions that are not independent of other actions.

TERRA:

Okay. I'll have you know that I am and always have been a very independent person! My mom says— Ahhh!

NURSE NELLIE:

(under the covers) And if we make a decision that delivers a message, shall we say, then it's only natural that we follow through if an option is presented that, in effect, realizes our choice for us!

TERRA:

Uhhhh HUUUUHHHHHHH!

Nurse Nellie pops her head out of the covers.

NURSE NELLIE:

Just give yourself over, my dumpling! No unwanted repercussions now!

As Terra collects herself, Nurse Nellie leaps out of the bed. She picks up some jewelry, gathers coins.

And look at all of this! This'll pay some bills, huh? You don't mind if we cash in a few family treasures?

She holds up a large silver teapot.

TERRA:

Wait. I have never seen that. Whose family are you talking about?

Nurse Nellie fashions the bandages containing the items into a baby-looking bundle.

NURSE NELLIE:

Never you mind; just leave it all to me.

TERRA:

I— No. I'm getting... I'm getting up.

Terra puts her legs over the side of the bed and takes off her hospital gown; she wears a T-shirt and shorts underneath.

NURSE NELLIE:

Getting up to no good, if you ask me! Don't say I didn't try my best. But there's only so much a mother can do.

TERRA:

Mother? You're not my—

NURSE NELLIE:

(interrupting) Thank the lord for small favors!

Nurse Nellie is gone. Terra sees something left on the floor where the bandages were. It's a small figurine.

TERRA:

(shouting off) Hang on. You left this! It's— *(picking in the object)* Wait. Have I seen this someplace?

She again shouts off.

Nurse Nellie! Where did this come from? This little blue kitten?

Silence. Terra looks around the room.

And why does this all look like...

The lights start to fade and soften; warm yellows and golds are are injected into the room. Fresh greens. We may hear birds chirping, sounds of nature. It's like an opaque, surreal film has been stripped off. And Al comes in, wrapped in a cozy blanket.

AL:

Hey! You're awake!

TERRA:

Al!

AL:

Expecting someone else?

TERRA:

Um... No. Of course not.

AL:

Grabbed the blanket off the couch; you don't mind?

TERRA:

No...

AL:

Good! Brrrr let's get back in bed!

Al hops in bed and arranges the blanket. Terra still stands, holding the blue kitten.

You okay?

TERRA:

Yeah, I... I guess I was dreaming.

AL:

Ooooooh! What was it you told me? "I never dream!"

TERRA:

I don't. I mean, not that I remember. But this was... This was like...

AL:

A very good thing, I'm thinking?

TERRA:

God no. It was very strange!

AL:

I mean, it's a good thing you're dreaming! Or that your dreams are speaking to you; that you remember them! Means your unconscious is trying to tell you something.

TERRA:

Ugh. I think I'm in deep trouble, then.

AL:

Was it a nightmare? Are you upset?

TERRA:

No. I mean yes. And no. I was upset—in the dream—but it was more like I was trying to make sense of it, trying not to be upset?

AL:

That figures.

TERRA:
What does that mean?

AL:
“Trying not to be upset?” You are allowed to—

TERRA:
(interrupting) Yeah, yeah, yeah...

AL:
Hey! Even in your dreams you're pretending it's no big deal! This is what I've been bugging you about: There's shit going on demanding you look at it, Terra. So commere. Talk to me: What'dja dream? What happened?

TERRA:
Never mind.

She slips into bed, kitten in hand.

AL:
Like it's gonna kill you to share some of this with people who care about you?

TERRA:
You are including yourself as one of those, I take it?

AL:
Yes. I am. And you are a brat.

TERRA:
Hah. Okay. Remember before Thanksgiving, when I cut my hand at work?

AL:
Of course! That was a very memorable night.

TERRA:
It was!

They smile at one another.

Thank you again for driving me home.

AL:
And thank you again for breakfast!

TERRA:
You are most welcome.

Smiles that could lead to something more, then

TERRA:

Well. It was kind of about that.

AL:

Uh, breakfast?

TERRA:

No, actually. The cut.

AL:

You can barely see it now.

Al runs her fingers over the wound.

TERRA:

I know. And in the dream, I think there was like, some mix up. And they'd performed surgery?

AL:

On your hand?

TERRA:

No. It was... I don't know exactly what they did. But apparently I was miraculously healed due to their use of magical mummy powder! Made from actual mummies, you know!

AL:

Ha ha. I do!

TERRA:

You— Really? Mummy powder?

AL:

Oh yeah. I was obsessed with mummies when I was younger.

TERRA:

Sorry, but that's weird.

AL:

Ha ha, you think so? I took this class. I don't even remember what it was— ancient something—and ended up dropping out but... the mummies!

TERRA:

Yeah?

AL:

They were thought to have healing powers, from way back. Ground up mummy put in salves and tinctures.

TERRA:

My mom told me this.

AL:

Okay! So she's a little weird, too?

TERRA:

Definitely.

AL:

But here's what's important, dream-wise: You said the powder healed you?

TERRA:

That's what I was told!

AL:

How did you feel about that? In the dream.

TERRA:

How did I—? I don't know.

AL:

Come on! Work with me here!

TERRA:

I was... I was surprised. I wondered whether it was... authentic?

AL:

That sounds like you.

TERRA:

Wouldn't you want—?

AL:

(interrupting) The real stuff? Of course!

TERRA:

Thank you! And actually? I don't think it bothered me. Maybe I was glad I was being taken care of? Mostly I was trying to figure out what was going on. Because it seems that this powder was used to heal... my lady parts!

AL:

I was not aware they needed healing! But that's good information to have.

TERRA:

Lord help me, in the dream they were definitely healed!

AL:
So it was that kind of dream?

TERRA:
Not really. Only... tangentially. There was a nurse, and she was...

AL:
She was, was she? Tell me more!

TERRA:
No. Leave me alone. I'm done.

AL:
My god. Do you know how adorable you are?

TERRA:
Absolutely but it's your turn. Tell me about mummies.

AL:
Wait. That's all I get from dream excavation?

TERRA:
Maybe later.

AL:
Not fair.

TERRA:
My bed, my rules.

AL:
Ha ha ha. Okay. So. Mummies. Thought to cure everything from internal bleeding to hiccups. Which kind of makes sense when you're talking Medieval apothecaries, right? Woo woo in the woods before modern medicine?

TERRA:
But it lasted longer than that, right?

AL:
Oh, it did! People loved the idea of special mummy powers and they became big business. Cleared out landfills all over Egypt; people would eat the flesh!

TERRA:
Yikes!

AL:
Pretty soon, mummies were used for all sorts of things.

TERRA:
Like paint!

AL:
Yes! Paint! Ah. Your artist mom?

TERRA:
Uh huh.

AL:
Hey. How is she doing, anyway?

TERRA:
Seems to be okay! They put her on a new medication. It seems to be helping.

AL:
That's good!

TERRA:
Yeah! She's in a very positive space.

AL:
She sounds very... Were you two always this close?

TERRA:
Mostly? She was a single mom and I was an only child so that was like a bond, I guess. Wasn't a particularly easy teenager, though; "You're not my real mother!" was used on more than one occasion.

AL:
Ohhhhh that's tough.

TERRA:
Yeah, I pretend to forget; she's gracious enough not to remind me. And there was other family around, for both of us. Plus Leon, my mom's husband. He didn't turn up until I was in high school, though. He's a good guy.

AL:
Did you ask her about the brother potential?

Very short pause.

TERRA:
Not yet. But I will.

AL:
Terra! You know you can't just keep all this to yourself. I mean, you can, but it's just going to keep—

TERRA:

(interrupting) More about the mummies, please?

Short pause.

AL:

Yes. Where were we? So by the 18th, 19th Centuries, Europe and America—falling all over themselves for everything Egyptian. Mummies, especially. Anyone who visited brought home parts as souvenirs: heads, hands, feet...

TERRA:

Ew!

AL:

And in Victorian England, they used to have these big old mummy unwrapping parties! There'd be hundreds of yards—a never-ending strip of linen almost filling up the room! In some parts of Egypt they wrote messages on the material for protection.

TERRA:

Kind of late if they were already dead.

AL:

For the afterlife! Spells and prayers and incantations. At the parties they'd cut up the bandages—everyone would go home with a piece, like a calling card.

TERRA:

Oh, dear.

AL:

But if you were lucky you'd get a death's door prize! They'd find coins and trinkets as they unwrapped the body, family treasures in the layers of bandages!

TERRA:

What?

AL:

The Egyptians would tuck in valuables and symbolic creatures to keep the dead company on their next journey. Cats were big. A lot of little cat statues.

TERRA:

Okay. This is too weird.

She gets back out of bed.

AL:

Hey! I warned you! Sometimes they'd mummify actual cats, too!

TERRA:

No. I mean, in my dream! There were all these bandages around me and while they were being unwrapped there was a lot of, I don't know, money and stuff, and then I found...

She looks at the little blue kitten, then shows it to Al.

AL:

Oh! Where'd that come from!

TERRA:

It was on the floor. I found it after—

AL:

(interrupting) It must have fallen out of my bag.

Short pause.

TERRA:

What?

AL:

It's just a little something. I saw it in this antique shop and it made me think of you.

TERRA:

Wait.

AL:

I was thinking I probably should have wrapped it, but I didn't want you to feel awkward because, Christmas coming up? If that's a thing for you? It's not like it's really a "gift"...

TERRA:

This is from you?

AL:

I thought it was cute.

TERRA:

Ha ha ha yes! It is! I love it! It's kind of... familiar?

She gets back into bed.

AL:

I don't know. But see on its collar there? There's a little tab with a hole?

TERRA:
Yeah?

AL:
They used to make these little figurines, a family of animals but they were all connected by these little chains? The kittens to their mama cat.

TERRA:
But this is just the kitten. Without its mother.

AL:
Right. She was all alone in the shop. I guess I thought she needed a— Oh god. This is not like a message or anything. I just saw it and—

TERRA:
(interrupting) Really?! An abandoned little kitten, looking for its—?

AL:
(interrupting) No! Fuck! I'm sorry!

TERRA:
Ha ha ha. It's okay. I actually love it. Thank you.

AL:
It is very cute. As are you. And I *really* didn't mean to—

TERRA:
(interrupting) Maybe it's a kitten who's broken free of her mother! Unchained herself so she can do what she has to do, go her own way!

Very short pause.

AL:
Maybe!

TERRA:
Thank you.

She gives Al a kiss.

I can't convince you to go out and grab coffees, can I?

AL:
Terra, it's insane that you can't make coffee here! I'd be happy to bring—

Another kiss.

TERRA:
Please?

AL:
You do not play fair.

She gets out of bed, then snatches the blanket.

TERRA:
Hey!

AL:
Ha ha. Be right back!

She leaves. Terra smiles. Then grabs her phone. Makes a call.

TERRA:
Hi, mom!

I'm good. You guys?

Excellent. Are you around, this morning?

Ah. Got it. Is everything— I mean, just a “normal” doctor’s visit?

Ha ha ha. Good.

No, in the afternoon I have an appointment with... this is going to sound fancier than it is, but, my State Assemblyperson. Her office.

Ha ha, no it's about the reparations program. She's the one who pushed it through, and she might have information about—

No, I never said I was going to drop it.

Right, but it'll be worth it if they—

Well, I could really use the money and—

No! I don't need— I'm fine. I didn't mean—

Will you stop, please? This is not why I called!

Because there's something I wanted to talk to you about! In person. What's your tomorrow like?

Okay, then. I'll come by— Wait. I'll pick you up and we'll go have a glass of wine.

TERRA:

Yes, we will. You told me they said it was fine. Or even a cocktail. I'm not working tomorrow. Is 5 okay?

Ha ha I will tell you when I see you.

Right. Love to Leon. Bye.

Oh! Wait, are you still there? Good. Really quickly: When I was a kid, did I have dreams?

No, I mean like, at night when I was sleeping, dreams.

I don't remember, either.

Well, because last night, it was very strange. I dreamt—or I think I did; there was all sorts of stuff going on. But I think I dreamt... that I'd been sterilized.

We are suddenly in black again. A dusty black. We hear the sound of a busy office. Phones ringing, printers printing, a FAX tone or two. It may feel rather like a prison. To those of us who've never been in prison.

Fluorescent lights blink a few times then come on to reveal a somewhat jaded woman in her 60s sitting at a counter. It's all very gray. Maybe accented by beige. The woman is playing a game on her cellphone. She's almost certainly losing.

AIDE:

Crap! How is anyone supposed to...

The phone on the counter rings and she picks it up.

California State Assembly District Office.

No. This is not the Assemblywoman. I'm her Aide, how can I help you?

Assemblymember, assemblyperson, assemblywoman, what is it you—?

No. No comment.

She starts to put the receiver down, then adds

Have a nice day.

She hangs up and again considers her cellphone. Maybe she looks around the office to see if there are other distractions before she is rescued by a bell and the sound of an elevator door opening. We see Terra coming into the office.

TERRA:
Hi! Is this the...?

AIDE:
California State Assembly District Office.

TERRA:
Great. Is the—

AIDE:
(interrupting) The Assemblywoman is not in today. How can I help you?

TERRA:
Oh! I called. I had an appointment!

AIDE:
An appointment?

TERRA:
Yes.

AIDE:
That's not possible.

TERRA:
Why not?

AIDE:
Because I'm the one who makes the appointments.

TERRA:
But I talked to... John, was it?

AIDE:
Was it?

TERRA:
I... yes! I think that was his name? And he told me to come in—

AIDE:
(interrupting) John is not an Aide in this office. John is an Associate Aide. Associate Aides cannot make appointments for the Assemblywoman nor anyone else. So I'm sorry to say, whatever John's illusions of grandeur, that you did not have an appointment. For today or any other day. Unless it was me who made the appointment and I would have—

Very short pause.

AIDE:

Ah. Where are you from?

TERRA:

I... live on Avenue 50.

AIDE:

You're not from a newspaper? TV station?

TERRA:

No!

AIDE:

Blogger?

TERRA:

I'm a bartender.

AIDE:

Oh! Well that's good.

TERRA:

It's a job.

AIDE:

Let's start over, then. How can I help you?

TERRA:

Well, if the Assemblyperson isn't here...

AIDE:

I'll ask again. How can I help you?

TERRA:

Can I make an appointment? To talk to—

AIDE:

(interrupting) You don't need an appointment. You're already here.

TERRA:

But you said the—!

AIDE:

(interrupting) How can I—?

TERRA:

(interrupting) Never mind! Thank you! You've been super helpful!

She turns to leave.

AIDE:

I can be!

TERRA:

You just don't want to be?

AIDE:

Here's how it is: There is nothing that goes on here without me knowing about it or making it happen so I am the one you need to talk to. What is it you need?

Very short pause.

TERRA:

I had some questions about the... FISP.

AIDE:

There's no such thing.

TERRA:

Yes, there is.

AIDE:

No, there isn't.

TERRA:

The Forced or Involuntary Sterilization Program?!

AIDE:

You mean the FISCP.

Very short pause.

TERRA:

Oh! Yes. I do. I left out the—

AIDE:

(interrupting) Compensation. You don't want to do that.

TERRA:

No! I don't.

AIDE:

And your questions?

TERRA:

Yes. I know the Assemblyperson got the bill passed—

AIDE:

(interrupting) Why don't we say the office got the bill passed. To compensate victims who were in State-run institutions from 1909-1979 and prisons after 1979. The program went into effect January 1, 2022 and the window for applications closes—

TERRA:

(interrupting) At the end of the month! I know. I'm looking to file as a descendent.

AIDE:

Good! And?

TERRA:

And I was told that there was a possibility the deadline would be extended.

AIDE:

Well. There *was* a possibility. But I'm afraid that ship might have sailed. In light of recent developments. That, shall we say, muddy the waters.

She sets a stack of papers onto the counter.

TERRA:

What developments are those?

AIDE:

The Assemblywoman's DUI?

Another stack of papers.

TERRA:

Oh?

AIDE:

You didn't hear? The press has been all over it. Thank god no one was hurt; only some parked cars. She had a blood alcohol level over twice the legal limit and someone caught her on video: falling down, slurring her words. A man gets arrested—some recording's released—it's a whole different deal. But for an *Assemblywoman*? Not the best PR and let's just say she's a tad distracted.

TERRA:

I'd... Yeah.

AIDE:

As of now, the deadline is December 31. You still have almost three weeks, but with the holidays, if I were you I'd put a move on.

She retrieves an even larger pile of papers.

TERRA:

That's not... Shit. Sorry. I just thought maybe... I thought maybe I had more time. I don't really know enough about what happened and I'm waiting on this lawyer—I even bought a plane ticket to see her!—and it's turned out to be like a lot and I just need... I just need more time!

Maybe tears come that she didn't expect.

Sorry. I'm not usually like this, it's just...

The Aide considers Terra, then sets down the papers on the very full counter.

AIDE:

Why don't we take a seat?

TERRA:

Thank you.

AIDE:

I was about to take a break, anyway.

TERRA:

It's all so overwhelming and I feel like I can't get a break, you know?

AIDE:

I do know. Here.

She arranges two chairs in front of the counter.

Tell me. It was your... mother? Grandmother?

TERRA:

Um. Mother.

AIDE:

So. Prison?

TERRA:

Uh huh.

AIDE:

Listen. All you have to do is file by the deadline. Just send something. But I wouldn't get your expectations up. We all had high hopes for the program but it has been very disappointing. From the rollout to the limitations to the data breach.

TERRA:

Data breach?

AIDE:

Earlier this year. Almost 900 people: names, information, clinical details, family medical histories misfiled and out there in cyberspace for anyone and everyone to find.

TERRA:

That's terrible!

AIDE:

You don't have anything to worry about; those records were from the '40s, '50s. But talk about a whole other layer of violations.

TERRA:

Yes!

AIDE:

And then there's the women at LA County Hospital in the late '60s and early '70s, essentially sterilized as a means of population control? Over 200 of them, mostly Latinas, when Eugenics was still legal in the state. We tried include them but no go. Because it was the County, all they got was an apology.

TERRA:

Did you say Eugenics?

AIDE:

Oh. Sure. California has a long, proud history: center of the Eugenics movement. It all started right here in Pasadena.

TERRA:

I had no idea.

AIDE:

We've been encouraged to forget. And trying to track down those women, most of whom have been dead for a long, long time...? Last I heard there were only three applications out of thousands of cases.

TERRA:

Really.

AIDE:

I don't know what they were thinking: opening the window at 1909? Largely symbolic because that's when the laws were put into place...

TERRA:

Eugenics laws.

AIDE:

Yes. But still...

Short pause.

AIDE:

Do you want some coffee?

TERRA:

I'd love some.

AIDE:

I'll be right back.

The Aide leaves.

TERRA:

Thank you! That's very kind.

AIDE:

(offstage) It's nothing. I'll make a fresh pot.

TERRA:

Oh, you don't have to—

AIDE:

(interrupting, offstage) Oh, I do. You don't want to know how long that's been sitting there. Let's just say John is not a coffee achiever. Do you take milk?

TERRA:

Yes, please! And sugar.

AIDE:

(offstage) You've got it.

TERRA:

Thank you!

We hear sounds of a nearby office kitchen. Cabinets, refrigerator opening, etc.

I really should get a coffee maker for my apartment. It's stupid I don't have one. I drink coffee every day! I guess I just like going out for coffee? Or having coffee with people? But I do end up spending a lot of money on coffee. That's what I need the reparations money for, ha ha ha.

No response.

I'm kidding.

We hear the sound of water pouring.

TERRA(cont'd):

I know I should have started this way earlier. When I found out about it, at the beginning of the year? But the thing is that my mother—my birthmother... Well, I'd just met her, actually! I met her exactly once. And then she died.

Goodness. I don't mean to sound dramatic. The truth is that I never really wanted to meet her! I mean, I guess part of me was curious about her but I knew enough to know that... it was a good thing she wasn't part of my life, right?

My mom—who raised me since I was six months old is great, plus I have tons of other family. Extended family. So I had a very "normal" childhood. But it is kind of weird when you grow up. I guess it's this way for everyone. When you're a kid you don't know you're different until someone tells you you are, right?

Oh, other kids have dads? Oh, other kids came out of their moms' vaginas?

I did fantasize about my birthmother when I was little, though. I'd look at this one photo and I'd pretend she was my sister, living in some other country. I'd tell myself the girl in the picture missed me soooo much and wrote letters to me every day. I'd read the imaginary letters before I'd go to bed. They put me to sleep at night.

Then when I got older, I guess I couldn't hide from who she was even though nobody knew where she was or what she was doing. But when I found out more about what she *did*, for a while I got really, really mad at her. Of course I took it out on my mom. And probably Leon. And then... I don't know. I just stopped caring one way or another.

And then! At the beginning of this year, my mom calls me up and says my mother has reached out to them. She's got Stage 4 Cervical Cancer and, lo and behold, wants to meet me. I was like, "Fuck her!" And they were like, "Whatever you want!"

"But this isn't something where you will ever have another chance."

So I met her.

I don't know what I was expecting, but she was... really old. Did not look anything like that little girl. She was very friendly but like a complete stranger. She asked me about my life. (She honestly didn't know anything. Maybe I'd had some fantasy that she'd been... following me, or something?) So I filled her in, the way you would talk to a school counselor? Didn't take long, actually.

Then I thought it'd be her turn. She'd tell me all about her messed up life and how she was so sorry and why she— But no. Instead, she spills her big news: She's getting some money! Like that was supposed to impress me? She was all excited because she was going to score big bucks through this... FISCP.

TERRA(cont'd):

Because of what they'd done to her in prison. "Closed for business," was the term she used. Said the doctor told her, "I'm doing you a favor. What are you going to do with kids? You're never getting out of here!"

Short pause.

But she did get out.

Then what?

We hear a bell and the sound of an elevator door opening. A mummy comes into the office. Carrying a large handbag. Terra takes this in. Then,

MUMMY:

Excuse me. Do you work here?

TERRA:

Um, no. I'm just... waiting for coffee.

MUMMY:

I'm here to speak to the Assemblywoman.

TERRA:

She's not in.

MUMMY:

But I had an appointment.

TERRA:

Did you talk to John?

MUMMY:

I didn't get his name.

TERRA:

You talked to John.

MUMMY:

If you say so!

TERRA:

I guess he can't make appointments. I'm sorry. The same thing happened to me. I thought I had an appointment...

MUMMY:

For coffee?

TERRA:
For the Assemblyperson.

MUMMY:
So we are kindred spirits!

TERRA:
I...

Short pause.

I like your outfit.

MUMMY:
Why, thank you! A lot of work went into it.

TERRA:
I'll bet.

MUMMY:
It's a classic. Appropriate for any season.

TERRA:
Especially in LA.

MUMMY:
There is that.

We hear noises again from the kitchen.

TERRA:
I came here to ask about the FISCP. You?

MUMMY:
I have no idea what that is.

TERRA:
The Forced or Involuntary Sterilization Compensation Program.

MUMMY:
That sounds horrendous!

TERRA:
Exactly!

MUMMY:
Except for the compensation part.

TERRA:
Yeah.

MUMMY:
You certainly have my sympathies, my dear.

TERRA:
Thank you.

MUMMY:
To never be a mother, have that taken away from you and at so young an age. I don't expect any dollar amount would make up for that!

TERRA:
No! It's not me, it was my birthmother. After she had me, of course.

MUMMY:
Of course. How many children do you have, then?

TERRA:
I don't have any children.

MUMMY:
I am so sorry!

TERRA:
It's totally okay!

MUMMY:
Then... You're waiting?

TERRA:
You could say that. To be honest, I doubt I'll ever have kids.

MUMMY:
Other female issues?

The mummy sets her bag atop the papers on the counter; she peruses a paper.

TERRA:
In a way? I mean, everything... works. As far as I know. It's complicated.

MUMMY:
True of so many things, I find.

TERRA:
Right. Which is not to say that I've entirely ruled it out. I've never thought about this, but being adopted, maybe that makes it even more complicated?

MUMMY:

I was adopted, too!

She drops the paper to the ground.

TERRA:

Oh.

MUMMY:

I should have registered that earlier: “birthmother.” What are the chances?!

TERRA:

Actually—

MUMMY:

(interrupting) Two souls aligning, like I said. You see, in my culture, adoption is a little—a lot—different.

TERRA:

Sure.

MUMMY:

In royal families like mine, it’s almost unheard of. Egyptians are very big on blood lines, you know.

TERRA:

Royalty?

MUMMY:

Yes. But I don’t like to make a fuss about it.

She examines a few more papers.

TERRA:

It’s cool, though! Does that mean you were adopted by a...

MUMMY:

Pharaoh. Like I said, all about the blood relations—tracing the lineage. The only reason they plucked me out of some river, I always imagine, is that they were concerned that the lines had become a bit too pure, ha ha ha.

She drops the papers and starts rifling through a larger stack.

TERRA:

I don’t understand.

MUMMY:

The queen kept giving birth to boys and when they got older, she got tired of doing double duty, if you catch my drift.

TERRA:

Not really.

MUMMY:

Marrying yet another son, my older brother? That's where I came in.

TERRA:

Oh! So... *you* married him?

MUMMY:

Of course, no one knew the truth.

TERRA:

That you were his sister?

MUMMY:

That I was adopted! I didn't even know until I was pregnant with my first child!

TERRA:

Wow. That's... that does not make me want to have children.

MUMMY:

To each his own. In this world, anyway. And I apologize if get too personal. My companion Sheba always tells me I overstep. However, the minute I walked in I felt something and then: another adopted woman! Who knew!?

The mummy throws the papers up in the air.

TERRA:

Ha ha ha. Want to hear something funny?

MUMMY:

Oh, yes, please! I have an excellent sense of humor.

TERRA:

Okay, so in high school? I had this group of friends. We all came from different middle schools, so didn't really know each other.

The mummy laughs uproariously.

That's not— Anyway, I don't know how long it was, but it came up: "Wait, you're adopted, too?" "Hey, I'm adopted!" "And me!" There were five of us in a very small group. It was... kind of funny.

MUMMY:

It sounds like the fates connected you in a very fortuitous way.

TERRA:

Maybe?

MUMMY:

And why is that funny?

TERRA:

Strange is what I meant. Although in the scheme of things...

MUMMY:

I wish I'd been given friends like that. I did have Sheba and other people were always around. But they were mostly servants.

TERRA:

Did you feel different from them?

MUMMY:

Naturally. They were entirely different; they were servants! They were born to—
Oh.

TERRA:

Uh huh.

MUMMY:

I see what you mean. I could have been one of them!

TERRA:

Or it could have been worse, right?

MUMMY:

We are going to banish that thought.

TERRA:

I mean, even among my friends, we all had such different stories, experiences, but we were all pretty lucky. No one adopted into royalty...

MUMMY:

Between you and me, it's not all it's cracked up to be.

She begins to add more papers to the collection on the floor, admiring the effect.

TERRA:

But there was also—to varying degrees—a sort of, “What if?” You know?

MUMMY:

Hmmm.

TERRA:

I remember we all got those genetic testing kits, when they first came out? For medical reasons. But also for my friends: “Who did I get my eyes from?”

MUMMY:

I didn’t look a thing like the Pharaoh. I’m not sure how they explained that, but I’d bet a priest was involved.

TERRA:

And I was raised by my family. So even though I do *not* see myself in my mother—even remotely—I could always find eyes that are like mine, hair that’s like mine, faces and bodies and expressions... which is a lot more than genetics, I know. But I always had that.

MUMMY:

Because they are blood relatives!

TERRA:

Ugh. I suppose?

MUMMY:

It’s not true?

TERRA:

Yeah, that’s not really an aspiration for adopted kids. “Blood is thicker than water?” Does not go over well.

MUMMY:

What about these tests?

TERRA:

It’s just more information to have. They tell you ancestry, medical history—like I said—and also people you’re related to can pop up. One of my friends is in touch with her birthmother now, and a few half siblings. Which is not always a particularly positive thing but she’s glad she knows? I actually never did mine—I still have it. I mean, I never felt the need to find anyone. I have a family!

MUMMY:

You never wondered who your father was?

TERRA:

The story was that *everyone* wondered who my father was, even my birthmother, so I don’t really see the point. Maybe someday.

MUMMY:

When you decide to have children!

Very short pause.

TERRA:

There's a very small chance I might have a brother.

MUMMY:

Oh! That would change the picture, wouldn't it?

TERRA:

Maybe not in the way you're thinking.

MUMMY:

Not marriage material?

TERRA:

Uh, no. And there's a whole thing that... I was actually a crack baby. I found out when I was a teenager.

MUMMY:

What is a crack—?

TERRA:

(interrupting) My birthmother was using drugs... like poisoning herself when she was pregnant with me.

MUMMY:

Oh, I'm sorry; that must be very hurtful.

TERRA:

It is. Thank you. My mom—my family—was always very open about everything but that one, they waited until I was "old enough." They probably also waited until they were sure I was... all right.

MUMMY:

From the poison! Are you?

TERRA:

Yeah, I am completely healthy! 100%!

MUMMY:

Congratulations!

TERRA:

Thanks? But it's not like I can really take credit for it. Like winning a race or something.

MUMMY:

It's a hurdle cleared, anyway.

TERRA:

I guess.

Very short pause.

Seems like for me, they keep coming, though.

MUMMY:

Hurdles?

TERRA:

I get over one, there's another, and another. Sometimes I feel like I'll never get to that place where I feel like I can... take off, you know? Like other people.

Short pause.

MUMMY:

I told you I never knew I was anything but a Pharaoh's daughter. Which is not exactly the truth. I think the things that happen to us stay with us in ways we're not aware of. We can't say it didn't happen. It's part of who we are.

TERRA:

But only a part. We're not *just* any one thing.

MUMMY:

True. What matters is how we hold it, perhaps.

Short pause.

Are you still in touch?

TERRA:

With?

MUMMY:

Your friends from high school?

TERRA:

Oh! Yeah! A couple of them. I mean, not as close...

MUMMY:

Time does take its toll on relationships.

TERRA:

And you? What about you and... Sheba, was it?

MUMMY:

It was! It is! And as a matter of fact, we're closer than ever. Inseparable, really.

TERRA:

I love that!

MUMMY:

I'll introduce you.

The mummy pulls out a mummified cat from her bag.

This is my cat, Sheba!

TERRA:

Wow!

We hear a plaintive meow.

MUMMY:

(to Sheba) All right, sweetheart. We'll not wait any longer. *(to Terra)* We have to catch a bus, and public transportation in this city...

TERRA:

Oh, I know!

The mummy puts Sheba back into her bag and turns to leave.

Um... Do you want to leave a message? For the Assemblyperson?

MUMMY:

I'd best speak to her personally. She totaled my car.

TERRA:

Oh! The DUI.

MUMMY:

Uh huh.

TERRA:

At least it's not a hit and run?

MUMMY:

Thank Isis for small favors!

TERRA:

And videos.

The mummy turns to leave again, then turns back. She tears a small square of bandage from her chest and hands it to Terra.

MUMMY:

Here. Take this.

TERRA:

For the Assemblyperson?

MUMMY:

For you.

TERRA:

Really? What does it....

She tries to read it.

Is this like a spell, or something?

But the mummy is gone.

Hello?

She tries to take a step; her feet are stuck in the pile of papers on the ground.

Shit.

She looks at the square still in her hand. As Terra struggles, we start to hear noises again from the office kitchen. Perhaps we smell fresh-brewed coffee and the Aide's voice takes on a different, more assured and hopeful tone.

AIDE:

(offstage) Okay, then! Be right out.

TERRA:

Good! I'm having a little trouble here.

AIDE:

(offstage) Won't be a minute; just stay put.

TERRA:

I don't seem to have any choice! There's all this paper and I can't—!

AIDE:

(interrupting, offstage) Oh, believe you me, I get it.

TERRA:

No, I mean I can't move!

AIDE:

(offstage) I know the feeling.

TERRA:

I don't think you do!

AIDE:

(offstage) I absolutely do! And here's something that helps me: this little song.

You may be stuck, you may be trapped
You maybe feel your spirit is zapped
What do you need? Is it a map?
Is it a sign? "Wake up from your nap!"
All that's to say you got what you need
To go where you're goin, be who you'll be
Sure! Search all around but look inside
Then when you find it, grab it tight and
Hold on!
Keep holding on...
Until you're there!

Terra reaches into a pocket and takes out the small blue kitten. She manages to step out of the sea of papers as the space fades around her. She considers the message on the square, then wraps the kitten in it.

Hesitating, she takes another step and then another, until she is absorbed by a red light that's somewhat comforting but perhaps dangerous around the edges.

We hear upbeat voices, soft indie rock and neon lettering appears, letting us know we are in the bar where Terra and Al work. We see Judith, dressed up and a bit awkward about it, sitting at a table with two glasses of wine. Terra hurries in.

TERRA:

Mom! What happened? I said I was going to pick you up!

JUDITH:

I know! You did!

TERRA:

So what happened?

JUDITH:

When you texted me earlier about coming here, I thought you'd changed your mind.

TERRA:

Why would I—? You texted *me*! Asking where we were going.

JUDITH:
I know I did.

TERRA:
You gave me shit about coming here.

JUDITH:
I just didn't understand why, if you have the day off, you'd want to—

TERRA:
(interrupting) I thought you liked it here.

JUDITH:
I do! And now I get it! Drink your wine.

TERRA:
What do you “get?”

She sits and takes a sip of wine.

JUDITH:
It's very good. Our server suggested it.

TERRA:
Who—? Oh.

JUDITH:
She apparently knows what you like!

TERRA:
Ha ha ha.

JUDITH:
And I will be honest: I woke up today and had in my mind I was supposed to be meeting you someplace but I didn't write down where and thought I forgot.

TERRA:
Because I was picking you up!

JUDITH:
I know! I'm sorry! My brain is...

Very short pause.

TERRA:
I should have reminded you.

JUDITH:

Don't do that. It was completely my fault but it all worked out. I got a little time alone to chat with AI!

TERRA:

Oh you did, did you?

JUDITH:

I did! Hence the reason for this particular meeting spot?

TERRA:

I guess I knew she was working...

JUDITH:

You are a terrible liar. She seems great. Doesn't dance around much, does she?

TERRA:

What does that mean?

JUDITH:

"Are you Judith? I'm AI. Terra and I have been seeing each other."

TERRA:

Oh, god.

JUDITH:

"The wine's on me."

TERRA:

Ha ha, that's smooth! Where is she?

JUDITH:

She had to go.

TERRA:

What?

JUDITH:

She said she'd gotten a call. She didn't—?

TERRA:

(interrupting, taking out her phone) No. I haven't heard from—

We hear a sound from her phone; she reads a text as Judith sips. Terra types a reply.

JUDITH:

Is everything okay?

TERRA:

She got news about her mom? She'll fill me in later.

JUDITH:

What's going on with her mom?

TERRA:

I don't know. I didn't even know she had a mom.

JUDITH:

Excuse me?

TERRA:

I mean, I guess I thought her mom was dead. She's never mentioned her.

JUDITH:

Ah.

Terra's phone makes another sound. She reads a text and smiles.

What?

TERRA:

Nothing.

JUDITH:

Doesn't seem like nothing.

TERRA:

(reading from her phone) "I met your mom. She's hot."

JUDITH:

Ha ha. She has good taste.

TERRA:

Yes, she does! She picked me! Salud!

They toast.

And you do look nice.

JUDITH:

I feel silly.

TERRA:

No! You are hot!

JUDITH:

Stop it. So. How old is she?

TERRA:

AI? I don't— Maybe in her 40s?

Judith has her doubts.

What? Maybe older. Is that a problem?

JUDITH:

No, honey! Not at all. I was just— I like her! I look forward to getting to know her!

TERRA:

Yeah!

They sip wine.

How awful is it I didn't know she had a mother?

JUDITH:

Ha ha ha.

TERRA:

Why didn't you tell me you had such a selfish child?

JUDITH:

Oh, I did. You were too wrapped up in yourself to listen.

TERRA:

Hah. How are you doing, then?

JUDITH:

I'm fine.

TERRA:

Really?

JUDITH:

Yes. New medication's making me a little foggy—at least I'm blaming it on that. They may switch it.

TERRA:

But you still like your doctors?

JUDITH:

I do.

TERRA:
Good.

Very short pause.

JUDITH:
Now that that's out of the way, let's talk about you, again.

TERRA:
Thank god! I really didn't think I could go much longer...

JUDITH:
Ha ha. I'm glad we're doing this. And I'm very happy the reason was meeting your— meeting Al.

Very short pause.

What?

TERRA:
Yes, that. But also, I wanted to...

JUDITH:
Is this about your dream?

TERRA:
My dream?

JUDITH:
You had a dream where you were sterilized?

TERRA:
Yeah! I did. I... Life's been weird lately.

JUDITH:
Life is weird. And about that reparations program: I don't know what good is going to come—

TERRA:
(interrupting) It's my decision.

JUDITH:
I know, but like I told you: If you need money we can—

TERRA:
(interrupting) No! I'll figure it out. Or not. I did get an email last night from the lawyer. Who was helping my mother?

JUDITH:
What did she say?

TERRA:
That she'd call me on Monday. Something about a "new wrinkle."

JUDITH:
That doesn't sound promising.

TERRA:
It doesn't.

JUDITH:
Although why are wrinkles always a bad thing? Very ageist in terms of language, isn't it?

TERRA:
So here's what I wanted to ask you about: I know you said no one kept in touch with my mother after you—

JUDITH:
(interrupting) That was her choice. We tried our best to—

TERRA:
(interrupting) I know. You said. But when we first talked about all of this, I remember you knew when—and where—she'd been in prison. We've never spoken about that; like in detail.

JUDITH:
She was convicted of robbery. We told you that.

TERRA:
But who told you?

JUDITH:
Um... The courts, I think? It was a long time ago. We were informed, but not by her.

TERRA:
Okay. So were you—was anybody—informed whether, before that, she had another child?

Very short pause.

Is there any chance that I have a brother?

Judith takes a long sip of wine.

TERRA:
 Mom?

Short pause.

JUDITH:
 We learned that she was pregnant when she went to prison.

TERRA:
 What?

JUDITH:
 She gave birth in prison.

TERRA:
 To a boy?

JUDITH:
 That's what we were told.

TERRA:
 Why didn't you—? Wait. You kept me, but not my brother?

JUDITH:
 It wasn't something I could—

TERRA:
 (interrupting) And you never told me?

JUDITH:
 We were—

TERRA:
 (interrupting) What happened to him? Did she keep him?

JUDITH:
 His father's family took him. It was the best—

TERRA:
 (interrupting) His father?

JUDITH:
 Who was not yours.

TERRA:
 Of course not! But all this time. Growing up, I could've had a—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) That was not an option. The family wanted nothing to do with us.

TERRA:

With me.

JUDITH:

I'm sorry.

TERRA:

Did it never occur to you, it might have been important for me to know that I was not alone!

JUDITH:

It wasn't up to us, and you were far from alone! I'm sorry you—!

TERRA:

(interrupting) Wait. What if he's applied?

Very short pause.

JUDITH:

What?

TERRA:

For the reparations. I'll bet he's the wrinkle!

JUDITH:

Honey, I don't—

TERRA:

(interrupting) I mean, that's okay. He can have the money. But this means I can find him, right?

JUDITH:

I don't think so.

TERRA:

If he applied, then I should be able to—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) He didn't apply.

TERRA:

And you know this? What else are you—?

JUDITH:

(interrupting) I didn't know how to—

TERRA:
Tell me!

JUDITH:
He's dead.

Short pause.

He has been for... almost 20 years.

Pause.

TERRA:
Guess the money's still up for grabs, then.

JUDITH:
Honey...

TERRA:
Why didn't I know about this?

JUDITH:
We tried to tell you after it happened. You were 14.

TERRA:
When he died? And he was...?

JUDITH:
12.

TERRA:
Jesus.

JUDITH:
I know. Do you remember we had a conversation, where we told you about your mother's drug use?

TERRA:
The crack baby talk?

JUDITH:
Yes, the crack baby talk. That was when Leon and I had planned to tell you about this boy.

TERRA:
My brother.

JUDITH:

But after hearing about your mother, you were so upset. Hysterical.

TERRA:

I was?

JUDITH:

You were inconsolable.

TERRA:

I do not remember that.

JUDITH:

Good, because it was heart breaking and we honestly didn't know if you'd ever recover, that's what it felt like. I just couldn't bring myself to tell you the rest!

TERRA:

Which is?

JUDITH:

Do you really want to—?

TERRA:

(interrupting) Yes! I really do!

Short pause.

JUDITH:

Your mother was an addict. No one really knew how or why and for all of her—and our—efforts, she could never seem to—

TERRA:

(interrupting) I've heard this part.

JUDITH:

Yes. Well, she had a child in prison. And the baby—for a multitude of reasons probably including her drug use; they could not rule that out—was not completely okay. We were all very grateful that he was taken by his father's family, although we didn't know anything about them except they didn't want to know us. As I said, we were not in touch with them for many years, until someone reached out to tell us that he had died.

TERRA:

How did he die?

JUDITH:

He was hit by a car.

TERRA:
He was 12?

JUDITH:
We were informed that he had developmental problems. So mentally, younger than that? And when your mother came back into his life—

TERRA:
(interrupting) What?

JUDITH:
After she got out of prison, she apparently tried to do the best she could. To be a parent.

TERRA:
To my... disabled brother?

JUDITH:
The story was that she had cleaned up for a while, but then started using again. He was with her. For the afternoon, or the weekend, I'm not sure. But she left him alone and he ran into the street. A car hit him and he didn't make it.

Silence.

TERRA:
What was his name?

Short pause.

JUDITH:
I don't know.

TERRA:
You don't remember?

JUDITH:
I don't know if I ever knew?

TERRA:
You never asked?

JUDITH:
It was a long time ago, I can't—

TERRA:
(interrupting) Bother to recall the name of my brother, jewel of my mother's eye?

JUDITH:

Terra...

TERRA:

My brother with special needs which entirely eclipsed mine, apparently. She never asked to spend weekends with me, during her “clean up” phase?

JUDITH:

The situation was entirely different!

TERRA:

It was, was it? What else would you like to tell me? How exactly was the “situation” so different that she—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) You should be glad she didn't try to see you! Your mother— We loved her—we really did—but you're right: You don't know the half of it. And there are some things you will never know because I will never tell you. I never want to remember them. Like how you were living when we found you. I know you're obsessed with these goddamn “reparations” but nothing is going to make up for what you miraculously survived and I'll tell you this: That she was not able to have more children—even if it wasn't her choice—might have been a very good thing.

A long pause, then Terra stands. She takes the wrapped kitten figure from her pocket and holds it tightly in both hands. Then leaves without a word. Judith takes a long drink of wine. Her hand shakes uncontrollably.

The lights fade into deep red again, which begins to pulse; maybe it's like a heartbeat. Or a throbbing open wound. It might be painful, until we are hit with a cool wave of blue.

We see Terra sitting alone on a couch in what might be a studio apartment. Fresh, clean and spare.

TERRA:

I hope it's okay I came over.

AL:

(offstage) Completely okay.

TERRA:

I know it's probably crazy right now for you...

AL:

(offstage) Hey! This way I've got a ride to the airport!

TERRA:

Have you gotten any more updates?

Al comes in with a travel bag.

AL:

About my mom? Won't hear from my sister until the morning. It's late, there.

TERRA:

It's— late?

Al moves to a dresser and begins to transfer clothes into the bag.

AL:

Late for the Midwest. I told you all she broke was her ankle?

TERRA:

But you need to take care of her?

AL:

I'll be helping my sister. So it won't just be me, thank god. Mostly, I think the fall scared her. Into an attempt at reconciliation, which I never in a million years thought would happen.

TERRA:

You don't know how long you'll be gone?

AL:

No. I told them at work to take me off the schedule.

TERRA:

But it might not be—

AL:

(interrupting) At least a few weeks.

TERRA:

Really?

AL:

It's easier to stay through the holidays.

TERRA:

That means you'll be gone Christmas, and New Year's, too?

AL:

I was lucky to get a flight today; it's just going to get crazier and my mom and I... there's a lot to unpack, as they say.

She closes a drawer and moves to a closet.

TERRA:
Yeah.

AL:
You know how it is. It's different, but even despite everything, aren't you glad you met your birthmother?

TERRA:
Honestly? I'm not sure, anymore.

AL:
Did something happen with your mom this afternoon?

TERRA:
Yeah, but... I don't want to make this about me.

Al grabs a coat and a scarf, sets it by her bag.

And I don't want to just sit here and watch you. Can I help?

AL:
Just throwing stuff together. If I forget anything, the town does have a Walmart!

She continues packing, finding items around the apartment; Terra follows her.

TERRA:
So how long has it been?

AL:
I go back every so often.

TERRA:
I mean, since you and your mom...?

AL:
Oh. My parents threw me out when I was 16. In all that time I've talked to my mother exactly once. When she told me I shouldn't come to my sister's wedding.

TERRA:
Jesus. Did you go?

AL:
Fuck yeah! I love my sister! My mom didn't say a word to me, though, and that's the last time I saw her. My dad died. Since I was giving the eulogy, she chose not to attend the funeral.

TERRA:
That's awful!

AL:
But you understand why I need to do this.

TERRA:
Because you've been summoned?

AL:
I'm not expecting a miracle, or anything. But she asked for me, that's pretty big.

TERRA:
Sounds pretty complicated!

AL:
Wish it were as simple as "complicated"—it may be completely impossible and I'll be home sooner than I think!

Terra hugs her too tightly.

TERRA:
Ohhhhhh would you hate me if I secretly wish for that?

AL:
Nooooo but please don't...

TERRA:
I am going to miss you! I wish you didn't have to—

AL:
(interrupting) Can you hand me that charger?

Terra lets go and does.

Thanks.

Al adds it to her bag.

So you gonna tell me what happened after I left today? You and your mom?

TERRA:
Maybe later.

Al leaves the room. Terra sits back down on the couch.

I asked her about my brother.

AL:
(offstage) Do you have one?

TERRA:
Not anymore.

AL:
(offstage) Huh?

TERRA:
I have a dead brother.

AL:
(offstage) Wait! Hang on!

TERRA:
Does that count?

AL:
(offstage) Oh, it definitely counts! And it makes sense! The lawyer, right?

TERRA:
Yeah! The lawyer! It's all crystal clear, now! And when I talk to her on Monday I'll get every answer I've ever needed!

Al comes back with a toiletry bag.

AL:
What all'd your mom tell you?

TERRA:
Brother died when he was a kid. Mother even more of a trainwreck than I thought and apparently somewhat to blame.

AL:
Oh, man!

TERRA:
What else? I'd say I got the full story but you never know with my mom. Probably more hidden secrets lying around; maybe that's what I'll find underneath the Christmas tree this year!

Short pause, then Al sits next to her and laces up a pair of boots.

She said some things— We both said some things, and I couldn't... I walked out on her. I've never done that before. It's like, suddenly, we're in new territory. It doesn't feel good and I don't know how to find my way back.

AL:
Or forward?

TERRA:

I don't... Why is everything so easy for you?

AL:

Easy?

TERRA:

It's like you have it all figured out. Your mom, my mom, me...

AL:

Terra! I have been dealing with this for a while; none of it has been easy and I am scared shitless right now. I don't know if I'm doing the right thing but I'm gonna try because there's a whole lot of lost time and not all that much time left, you know?

Short pause, then she stands and puts on her coat.

TERRA:

I'm sorry.

AL:

Thanks.

She picks up her scarf.

TERRA:

Hey! How about I go with you?

AL:

Maybe another time?

TERRA:

Yeah?

AL:

I wouldn't want you to miss all that Shawneetown has to offer.

TERRA:

Like the Walmart?

AL:

Walmart Superstore!

TERRA:

You're coming back though. Right?

AL:

As soon as I possibly can.

The sound of sudden motion and we are swept away. Shades of blue transition into earth tones and we are back in Judith's studio. But everything might have a sharper focus this time.

The painting from the beginning of the play is still on an easel but displayed more prominently. We hear voices from the other room.

JUDITH:

(offstage) I've got that.

TERRA:

(offstage) Stop it. I can do this. Go on, will you?

JUDITH:

(offstage) Will you let me just—

TERRA:

(interrupting, offstage) I am a trained professional! Go in and sit down!

JUDITH:

(offstage) You're giving me orders in my own—?

TERRA:

(interrupting, offstage) Mom!

Very short pause, then Judith comes into the room, again in her artist's garb. Terra follows her, balancing two cups of coffee and a plate of cookies. Judith sits as Terra deposits the plate and cups on a table littered with art supplies, then also sits. They pick up their cups and look at the painting for an awkwardly long time. Then,

JUDITH:

We missed you at Christmas.

TERRA:

I know.

Short pause.

I missed you. I missed everyone.

JUDITH:

Everyone asked about you. You could have called. Returned my text.

TERRA:

I know.

Very short pause.

TERRA:

Except somehow I couldn't. I tried, but I... I'm sorry if you were worried.

JUDITH:

It's my job to worry. I don't get holidays off.

They both sip coffee.

TERRA:

So what did you say?

JUDITH:

About?

TERRA:

Me not being there.

JUDITH:

I said you were spending Christmas with Al.

TERRA:

Oh. That's pretty good.

JUDITH:

I thought so. Even though I knew it wasn't true.

TERRA:

You did?

JUDITH:

Yes. I called her. She said she was in Illinois.

TERRA:

How did you get her—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) The restaurant. I told them I was your mother and since you'd called in sick, you'd asked me to get in touch with her.

TERRA:

That was sneaky of you.

JUDITH:

You're surprised?

TERRA:

No, actually.

They sip coffee.

TERRA:

Well. This ought to make you happy. I talked to the lawyer.

JUDITH:

Oh?

TERRA:

And as it turns out, there's more than one wrinkle. With the case. There's the fact that there's some "messiness" with my mother's tubal ligation, it being categorized as "medically necessary" after she gave birth. On the official documentation. And then there's the issue of me.

JUDITH:

What about you?

TERRA:

The question of whether the program considers me a legitimate descendant.

JUDITH:

"Legitimate?"

TERRA:

In the eyes of the law, if a child is legally adopted, in most cases she is no longer her biological parent's heir.

JUDITH:

Oh!

TERRA:

Right. But she says there may be a loophole and I've still got time if I want to—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) Why would that make me happy?

TERRA:

What?

JUDITH:

You said—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Because you didn't want me to file for—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) That doesn't mean if *you* want to I won't support you! Even if—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Even if it interferes with the stories you decide I should hear?

JUDITH:

I am sorry, Terra! I am so sorry. But I was afraid that getting involved in this whole—

TERRA:

(interrupting) You are not involved! This is me! My thing!

JUDITH:

I know! It is! But how can it not involve me, I'm...!

She starts to pick up her cup with a shaking hand; sets it back down.

TERRA:

You okay?

JUDITH:

I'm fine.

TERRA:

Do you need—?

JUDITH:

(interrupting) I'm fine!

She picks up her coffee again, takes a sip. Almost unconsciously, Terra unwraps the little blue kitten.

Oh! Look at that...

TERRA:

(holding up the kitten) This?

JUDITH:

Yes!

TERRA:

Al gave it to me.

JUDITH:

Really? Huh. But do you... Do you remember?

TERRA:

What?

JUDITH:

You had a little kitten like that.

TERRA:

I did?

JUDITH:

Yes. It was... Your grandmother gave us these sets of animals—me and your mother—that were chained together. They were old fashioned but we loved playing with them when we were little girls; mine was dogs.

TERRA:

And she had cats? My mother?

JUDITH:

She did. I was older and graciously allowed this.

TERRA:

So she gave me this kitten?

JUDITH:

Well, not that one. They were mass produced; it's highly unlikely that—

TERRA:

(interrupting) Yeah, but... did she give it to me?

JUDITH:

She'd left it, and I thought you might like it.

TERRA:

She left it? When?

JUDITH:

Oh. When she was young; years before you were born.

TERRA:

Ah.

Very short pause.

So did I? Like it?

JUDITH:

You loved it! For a long time—you were maybe 4 or 5—you spent hours playing with it. And the dogs.

TERRA:

What happened to the rest of the cats?

JUDITH:

I suppose they got lost when your mom was a kid.

TERRA:

So it was only the kitten.

JUDITH:

Uh huh.

TERRA:

But I stopped playing with it?

JUDITH:

You did.

TERRA:

Why?

JUDITH:

I told you it had been your mother's.

TERRA:

What did I do, then?

JUDITH:

With great force and dramatic flair, you threw it in the trash can. And went into your room with the dogs.

TERRA:

I don't remember the dogs, at all. What happened to them?

JUDITH:

I have no idea.

They both sip coffee. Then,

TERRA:

Why did you never have children?

JUDITH:

What?

TERRA:

Why did you—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) I do have a child. You.

TERRA:

No, I mean were you ever pregnant?

JUDITH:

Yes. Twice.

TERRA:

Twice? What happened?

JUDITH:

You mean...?

TERRA:

To the—

JUDITH:

(interrupting) I terminated the pregnancies.

TERRA:

You had abortions.

JUDITH:

Yes.

TERRA:

Because you didn't want kids?

JUDITH:

I didn't want— It was not the right time, either time. Everything in my life was so uncertain; I felt like I had so much ahead of me and it wasn't the right thing to do. For me or for anyone.

Short pause.

But I did want you. That, I knew was right. I have never been so sure of anything in my life and I have never looked back.

Terra might want to move to Judith but stops herself.

TERRA:

You're not going to die, are you, mom?

JUDITH:

Oh, I'm absolutely going to die. I'm not planning on anytime soon...

TERRA:

And the doctors agree?

JUDITH:
100%.

TERRA:
Good!

JUDITH:
But things will change. I don't know exactly how, or when. And there will be times when I won't be fine. That I'll need... I will need you, Terra.

TERRA:
And I will be there.

She moves to her mother and the women hold each other tight; it lasts a long time and fills them both. Then,

JUDITH:
All right, then, I should be—

TERRA:
(interrupting) Yeah, let me...

The women both stand; Terra picks up the piece of bandage to wrap the kitten.

JUDITH:
And what have you got there?

Terra looks at the bandage, then hands it to Judith.

TERRA:
It's for you. For protection.

JUDITH:
(looking at the writing) What does it say?

TERRA:
It's an ancient Egyptian spell. It talks about how we can hold our truths in different ways, in different places. They are ours to keep and even when it's time to share them, they are still ours. No one can take them away because they are wrapped around us and inside of us. And when life cuts us open and tries to tear us apart, they are there to help us become whole, again. So we can find our way to each other and to who we truly are.

Very short pause.

A very loose translation.

JUDITH:
Thank you.

Terra pockets the kitten; they pick up their cups and look again at the painting.

Did you notice? I added some blue.

TERRA:
I like it!

JUDITH:
There are some other colors, too. You have to look for them, though.

TERRA:
Right. It's very... there's a lot there.

JUDITH:
You think there's too much?

TERRA:
No, I think it works.

JUDITH:
So... maybe it's finished? Not that anything is every really finished.

Terra smiles.

TERRA:
Yeah, well... Wouldn't want things to be all cut and dried, now, would we?

The women take one another in, perhaps ready to enter into new territory as we see some very different colors play across the stage, in very different ways.

End of Play