

LEAVING LEBANON

Two teenage girls have very different reactions when they're forced to relinquish their newborns.

By Richard Fouts

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

LEAH RYAN, Caucasian female, age 17 (later, age 40). Defiant, opinionated, not afraid to challenge authority.

ZOE SILVA, Hispanic female, age 17 (later, age 40). An introvert and independent thinker; uses sarcasm to cover her insecurities.

MRS RYAN, Caucasian female, age 40-50. A social climber consumed with what her peers think of her and her family.

NURSE MARY BINGHAM, African-American female, age 40 plus. A no-nonsense rule-keeper, but has a lost of empathy for "her girls."

SISTER MARGARET, Female, any race, age 35 plus. Cold, judgmental and self-righteous. Personally offended by teen pregnancy.

ROY DELARA, African American male, age 35 plus. Kind, understanding and empathetic but leads with rules and compliance.

PLACE AND TIME

Scene 1: The Congregation Room at Our Lady of Hope, a Catholic Maternity Home for unwed girls in Lebanon, Tennessee, It's November 9th, 1963.

Scene 2: Same room, January 9th, 1964.

Scene 3: A hospital room, January 23, 1964.

Scene 4: The General Manager's office at Our Lady of Hope, February 1987.

Acknowledgements

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SCENE 1

Scene opens to the Congregation Room at Our Lady of Hope. Downstage, we see a vinyl sofa and two steel chairs. A stack of books sits on a coffee table along with a small plant that appears to be dying. Upstage, there's a small table with two to four chairs. There's a window, stage right, with closed drapes.

ZOE, nearly seven months pregnant, is sitting on the sofa, reading. NURSE MARY BINGHAM enters the stage carrying an open 3-ring binder. It's November 9th, 1963.

NURSE BINGHAM

Zoe S?

ZOE

Zoe Silva? That's me.

NURSE BINGHAM

Dear, we don't use surnames, just your initial. You have an appointment with Dr. Miller in 16 minutes. Just tell him you're Zoe S, got it? And don't go anywhere.

ZOE

Where would I go?

NURSE BINGHAM

LEAH? LEAH R? Your appointment is right after Zoe!
(talking to herself)

Where the hell did she go?

(LEAH, also nearly seven months pregnant, walks onto the stage.)

LEAH

Please don't yell, I'm right here. Nurse, I need to make a call, where's the phone?

NURSE BINGHAM

You need to call your mother?

LEAH

My boyfriend, Ronny.

NURSE BINGHAM

(looks in her book)

The only names on your approved list are your parents and your family priest. Boyfriends aren't allowed /

LEAH

Hand me your book, I'll add his name and number /

NURSE BINGHAM

How dumb do you think I am? Now, I have your assumed names. Leah, you'll be Sally .. and Zoe, you'll be /

LEAH

Sally?

NURSE BINGHAM

We give you alternate names to protect your real identities.

LEAH

From who?

ZOE

Can I be Zelda?

LEAH

Like Zelda Fitzgerald? The artist?

ZOE

I'm impressed you know who she is.

LEAH

I'm not an idiot, I'm Leah.

(glares at NURSE BINGHAM)

Leah RYAN.

(NURSE BINGHAM sits down at the table, flips through her binder, writing notes.)

ZOE

Pleasure to meet you, apparently I'm Zoe S, unless Nurse Bingham is offering Bathsheba?

NURSE BINGHAM

Don't tempt me. Girls, if you don't cooperate I'll have to write you up.

LEAH
(to ZOE)

You're very odd.

ZOE
Thanks, you're not so odd yourself.

LEAH
Nurse, I'll stick with my given name, if it's all the same to you. And sorry Zoe, you don't look a thing like Zelda Fitzgerald.

ZOE
Then I'm stuck with Zoe, unless Cleopatra is still available? Nurse?

NURSE BINGHAM
(Gets up, then faces ZOE)
Word to the wise, you think you're funny now, but the nuns won't find that mouth of yours amusing, in the least, *capito?* Now girls, it's tradition to adopt another identity, just while you're at Our Lady of Hope. You sure?

(LEAH glares at NURSE BINGHAM then turns to face ZOE.)

NURSE BINGHAM
(shaking her head)
Okay, don't say I didn't offer.
(writes in her book)
And if the nuns ask, tell them you declined. I ain't takin' the blame for the likes of you two.

LEAH
When's your due date?

ZOE
January 23rd.

LEAH
I'm January 22nd!

ZOE
Figures a girl like you would try and steal my thunder.

LEAH
A girl like me?

NURSE BINGHAM

(as she exits the stage)

Dinner is at 5:30. Zoe, don't forget Dr. Miller in 14 minutes. Leah, you are ...

ZOE

(slightly annoyed)

... right after me, yes Bingham, we got it.

NURSE BINGHAM

(as she exits)

NURSE Bingham, if it's all the same to you.

LEAH

Wow, what's her deal?

ZOE

She's actually pretty nice compared to the nuns, who refer to us as tramps. So rude.

LEAH

What happened to, "Do unto others as you would do unto them?"

ZOE

You saying we should call THEM tramps?

(Both girls start laughing.)

LEAH

Why are the drapes closed?

ZOE

To discourage peeping Toms, I guess.

LEAH

Like catching a glimpse of a pregnant girl is such a turn-on?

(LEAH walks to the window and starts opening the drapes.)

ZOE

That might be against regulations.

LEAH

I'm not fond of rules, unless I'm breaking them.

ZOE

You might wanna re-think that. I hear the nuns love to punish girls like us ... for the smallest of infractions.

LEAH

Ten years of Catholic school taught me how to handle a bunch of uptight virgins.

ZOE

If you say so.

LEAH

Wow, this plant has seen better days.

(LEAH moves the plant from the coffee table to the window, then walks over to the water cooler and pours water into a glass.)

ZOE

What's your boyfriend like?

LEAH

Ronny? He's a dream, looks just like Dean Martin. I don't care what those bitches say, the day we met I knew we'd get married, he says so too.

ZOE

And you're one of the cute girls?

LEAH

(pours water onto the plant
she moved to the window)

Until I became one of the Nasty Nine.

ZOE

Oh that's precious. The nine pregnant girls from the *Class of '65*?

LEAH

It's so dumb, I'm not a slut, or a fast girl, or any of the other stupid names they call me. I don't sleep around, I'm in love with Ronny and he's in love with me.

ZOE

How romantic.

LEAH

It is, even though I can tell you're being sarcastic.

ZOE

Sorry, I get it from my mom. But if you're getting married, what are you doing here?

LEAH

Our parents won't allow it. I think we should get married anyway, but Ronny's letting his twisted mother influence him. She hates me, thinks I seduced her boy, blah, blah, blah.

ZOE

Well, did you? Seduce her boy?
(puts both hands on her
stomach)

Jesus Christ!

LEAH

Excuse me?

ZOE

Baby just kicked out of nowhere. Has that happened to you?

(During this ZOE gets up and
switches chairs).

LEAH

Love taps? All the time. What were you asking?

ZOE

Did you seduce your boyfriend, Ronny?

LEAH

It wasn't like that. We want to get married and have a family someday, so we figured it was okay ... to have sex.

ZOE

You mean he thought it was okay.

LEAH

I didn't exactly play hard-to-get.

ZOE

Oh my, you are a little seducer.

LEAH

Oh, cut that out.

ZOE

(struggling to get
comfortable)

Hey, takes one to know one.

LEAH

Oh shit, I just got your Bathsheba reference. Here, try this pillow.

(ZOE takes the pillow, puts it
behind her back.)

LEAH

Anyway, as I was saying, me getting pregnant just moved things up a bit, or so we thought. At first Ronny was really surprised, shocked actually.

ZOE

You sure you want to marry him? He doesn't sound that bright.

(During this, LEAH walks over to a
water cooler and pours water into
her glass.)

LEAH

I know how it sounds, but I really didn't think I'd get pregnant. That's what I told him anyway. Here, drink some water.

ZOE

But then I'll have to pee.

LEAH

You gotta stay hydrated.

ZOE

(takes the glass)

Why would you think you wouldn't get pregnant?

LEAH

Okay, so one day I overhear my mother talking to my Aunt Joyce, who's complaining that she's not getting pregnant because, she ... she wants to have another baby.

ZOE

Your Aunt Joyce wants another baby?

LEAH

Are you listening? So my mother says, "Keep trying, you know how long it took you to get pregnant the first time." So I'm thinking, wow, it's really hard to get pregnant.

ZOE

Probably best not to spread that around.

LEAH

Yeah, well a little late now.

(pause)

So, what's your story?

ZOE

Story?

LEAH

Yeah, how'd you find yourself at Our Lady of Hope? Was the Salvation Army all booked up?

ZOE

Very funny, but it's ... personal.

LEAH

Oh come on, it's all personal, and I just told you everything.

ZOE

I didn't exactly put a gun to your head.

LEAH

Oh please, it's not like we'll ever see each again.

(pause)

Was it a teacher? Because one of the girls in my school got knocked up by her coach.

ZOE

No, no, nothing like that, but you're not far off.

LEAH

Okay, now you have to tell me!

ZOE

If I do, and I'm not saying I will, it stays between us. It's serious, even a little dangerous.

LEAH

Was it someone in your family? Like a cousin?

ZOE

God no! Jesus, who are you?

LEAH

A girl with an active imagination.

(pause)

Zoe, if you don't tell me I'll imagine an even worse scenario. Just say it.

ZOE

Promise not to tell any of the girls, or the nuns. Or your parents. I'm not kidding around, you can't tell *anyone*.

LEAH

I won't. Cross my heart.

ZOE

A friend of my Dad. One of his teammates.

LEAH

Like a football team?

ZOE

Baseball.

LEAH

No shit? Okay, listen to this, I flirt with my history teacher all the time and he flirts back. AND, he's from Europe! God, I sound terrible. Who exactly was it?

ZOE

I can't tell you that, he's ... kinda well-known. And he's married.

LEAH

(playfully)

JUICY, what a story. What'd your daddy do when you told him?

ZOE

I knew I shouldn't have told you.

LEAH

Okay, relax, I didn't mean to make light.

(pause)

Zoe, I'm sorry, I really am. So, what did your dad say, when you told him, you know, who knocked you up?

ZOE

I didn't.

LEAH

You didn't ...

ZOE

I told him I wasn't sure who the father was, because I didn't want him to kill the guy. Seriously, if my dad found out it's one of his players, he might go after him.

LEAH

So it's better he thinks you're sleeping around? Are you crazy?

ZOE

Probably. But, my dad was super-calm when I told him. Said, "You're going to a Catholic home that will take care of the adoption, where you won't have to worry about anything. A man in my position can't have a pregnant daughter in high school." He never even raised his voice.

LEAH

After graduation, Ronny and I were planning to get married, so we figured our parents would be okay, maybe even a little excited, to hear, you know ... our news.

ZOE

Oh? And how excited were they?

LEAH

All right, tou-che.

ZOE

I was being serious, what happened?

LEAH

My mother went on a huge rant, called me a whore. And my daddy just let her go off on me. And now my little sister calls me a slut.

ZOE

Does she even know what that means?

LEAH

Oh who cares.

(pauses, takes a breath)

You know, maybe I have shamed the family. Otherwise why would they send me away? My mother's not even letting me come home at Christmas.

ZOE

I'm sure my dad would let you come with me. Or would you rather go to Ronny's?

LEAH

Oh please, I went to see Ronny's mother, hoping to get her on our side, but she went off the rails, called me a tramp, and other names even I'm embarrassed to repeat; said if I went near Ronny again she'd call the cops. The cops!

ZOE

Can you imagine? Hello, police? Come quick, there's a tramp in my yard.

(ZOE laughs.)

LEAH

You wouldn't laugh if you'd seen the look in her eyes, like a rabid dog. Scared the crap out of me.

ZOE

I don't mean to laugh, but the cops?

LEAH

Yeah, it was pretty stupid. The thing is, Ronny's dumb-ass mother likes me! And my mother likes her. But now everyone hates each other and Ronny has stopped calling. I'm so confused.

ZOE

Who wouldn't be?

LEAH

My parents fight constantly, blame each other for my *misguided behavior*, as they call it. I even overheard my mom mention divorce. Are your parents still together?

ZOE

My mother wants a divorce but my dad said the only way the marriage ends is if one of them dies.

LEAH

Your family's Catholic?

ZOE

Uh huh, though my mom hasn't gone to church in years.

LEAH

And you said his name was ..

ZOE

My dad's name is Gustavo, people call him Gus.

LEAH

No silly, your boyfriend.

ZOE

Oh him, he goes by Jay, short for Jamal.

LEAH

But it's against the law isn't it?

ZOE

Hell if I know, is it? Wait, what are we talking about?

LEAH

Sex with a minor?

ZOE

Oh I thought it was because I'm Cuban .. and he's Nee /

LEAH

You're Cuban? Like the people that wanted to bomb us?

ZOE

That was Russia, wasn't it?

LEAH

Oh who cares. Cubans can get marry Americans, look at Lucy and Ricky. What's his name again?

ZOE

Ricardo?

LEAH

No Zoe, your baby's father.

ZOE

Jay.

LEAH

Would Jay ever leave his wife?

ZOE

Not a chance. I'm screwed.

(Both girls start laughing)

LEAH

Oh I don't mean to laugh. I'm sorry, I really am.

ZOE

Forget it. Marriage isn't for me, not now, maybe never.

LEAH

I know you don't mean that.

ZOE

My life isn't a Brenda Lee song.

LEAH

(pauses, looks around)

You know, my mother complained it was costing a lot of money for me to be here, but this place is kind of a dump don't you think?

ZOE

Can't say I disagree. The food's not horrible though. Guess they need us to have healthy babies.

LEAH

Ronny calls this place as a baby factory.

ZOE

Wow, guess it is when you think about it.

(LEAH walks over to look out the window.)

LEAH

I miss him. He feels bad he's not allowed to visit. I told him to come anyway, pose as a family member. But I have a feeling he won't.

(pause)

It's starting to rain again.

(pause, then turns serious as she continues to stare out the window)

Zoe, can I ask you something?

ZOE

Sure, but I may be running low on answers.

LEAH

My mom told me the baby comes out, the same way it went in. Is that really true?

ZOE

Does your mother ever lie to you?

LEAH

(suddenly turns around)

All the time.

ZOE

Congratulations, this is one time she didn't.

LEAH

Really? I thought they just cut it out.

ZOE

You know about the water breaking?

LEAH

And labor, blah, blah, blah.

(turns serious)

Oh Zoe, what are we going to do?

ZOE

Have our babies, they'll take them, we go home and finish school.

LEAH

And we walk out of here like nothing happened ... do the right thing as my mom says. Well, lemme tell you something, nothing about this feels right.

ZOE

Maybe so, but you can't change it.

LEAH

Don't be so sure.

(ZOE gets up again, moves to the sofa and groans)

LEAH

Hard to get comfortable, right?

ZOE

You seem much better at this than me.

LEAH

This is going to sound weird, but

ZOE

Most things you say are weird, what?

LEAH

I actually love being pregnant. You're bigger than me, which means, wow ...

(picks up a book)

Are all these books yours?

ZOE

Sister Margaret, she's the boss of all the nurses, confiscated some of them.

LEAH

Because they were too racy?

ZOE

Exactly, but I hid my favorite, *Cat's Cradle*. It was a gift from Jay. No way she's getting that one.

LEAH

I know that book, it's by the guy that wrote *Piano Player*.

ZOE

That's twice you've impressed me. Hand me that pillow?

LEAH

(hands pillow to ZOE)

You really think pretty girls are dumb don't you?

(LEAH picks up another book; turns
it over to read the back flap.)

LEAH

Their Eyes Were Watching God. Guess the Sister isn't as smart
as she thinks she is. This is about a girl who has a child
from rape. Talk about a deceptive title.

(LEAH puts the book down,
picks up another and shows
it to ZOE.)

Wow, how did Sister Maggie miss this one?

ZOE

Lolita? I told her it's about an Italian nun who becomes an
opera singer.

LEAH

(laughing)

That's hilarious. It was banned at my school, so naturally we
all read it. Though I admit, I didn't finish it.

ZOE

My dad says, if you want to write a book you need to read a
lot of books. He buys me one every week. I'm going to be a
famous novelist.

LEAH

All I ever wanted was to be a wife and mother, but now I've
screwed that up ... with my *accidental pregnancy*.

ZOE

It's not like you caused that accident by yourself.

LEAH

Yeah, well I'm the one that's trapped in this goddamn place.

ZOE

You'll wash dishes for a week if the nuns hear you talk like
that.

LEAH

At least I'll have something to do. What time did you get here?

ZOE

About noon. Feels like a year. The sisters eye us like criminals and all the girls have bought into this crap that they are damaged goods and no guy will ever marry them, unless they do the right thing.

LEAH

Meaning, give up their baby?

ZOE

That's the way it works here, so ... yeah.

LEAH

Can I ask you something else?

ZOE

Again with the questions.

LEAH

I really don't feel like I did anything wrong, even though I know I did. Do you ever feel that way?

ZOE

I think we weren't careful. And guys don't take responsibility for anything. Now my mother is using this as a reason to disown me, like I did this to her.

LEAH

I'm so sorry.

ZOE

I never liked her anyway. Would you believe she never asked about the father?

LEAH

Oh shit, are you going to tell her?

ZOE

I want to, so she'll scream at my dad instead of me. She offered to help me get rid of it, by a doctor she knows in Chicago.

LEAH

An abortion? I could never do that. You obviously said no.

ZOE

I wanted to say yes, even talked to my school counselor about it.

LEAH

What happened?

ZOE

The counselor freaks, runs to the principal, who calls my dad, who goes crazy on my mom.

LEAH

But conversations with school counselors are confidential.

ZOE

Oh sure, they expelled me on the spot.

LEAH

I was thrown out too. Me, an honor student. My teachers wouldn't even look at me when I left. Being stuck at home with my mom was hell. After a few weeks she says "You're starting to show, I want you out of this house."

ZOE

Nice.

LEAH

So she dumps me here and says, "If you plan on keeping the baby, don't come home."

ZOE

Your mom's a real peach.

LEAH

She'll stop by at least once to remind me how I've shamed the family. It's all she can talk about.

ZOE

You're from the South?

LEAH

Memphis. You?

ZOE

Moved to Kansas City four years ago with my dad. But I grew up in Miami.

LEAH

I want to go live with my grandmother at her orchard in Port Orange. It's also in Florida. I'm going to write to her. Is your dad making you give your baby away?

ZOE

I can't raise a kid, not now.

LEAH

I hate the idea of adoption. We need our parents permission to get married, but even if they give it, Ronny's not Catholic.

(places her hand on her
stomach)

Am I crazy to think I can raise a child alone?

ZOE

My dad's doing it, but I've learned to take care of myself. He's sort of ... along for the ride.

LEAH

Father O'Malley lectured me for half an hour when I said I wanted to keep my baby. I finally agreed to adoption just to shut him up. But then my dad says, "Don't decide now, you might feel different after you deliver."

ZOE

No wonder you're confused. Why would he say that?

LEAH

When my mom got pregnant with me, they panicked, cause they weren't ready to be parents, had no money, lived in a tiny apartment, blah, blah, blah. My dad said all that vanished the instant they put me in his arms.

ZOE

Your dad sounds sentimental. I kinda hate that crap.

(LEAH walks over to the radio and
turns the switch.)

LEAH

Does this thing work?

ZOE

You need permission to do that. Oh that's right, you don't do rules.

("So Wrong" by Patsy Cline comes on.)

LEAH

If I go through with this adoption thing, I want to decide who gets my baby. But my mom said, "THEY decide." Did you know that Zoe? That we don't get a say in who gets our baby?

ZOE

I actually never thought about it, but that doesn't feel right at all. Maybe we insist, or we ... we don't hand our baby over to them unless we get the deciding vote. That's fair, right?

LEAH

Of course it is! My dad says people have more power than they think. He works at GE, like Kurt Vonnegut.

ZOE

I'm starting to like your dad.

LEAH

He's taking me to dinner on Saturday, *without* my mother. You should come!

(walks over to the window,
switches to a serious tone)

It's been raining all day.

(slight pause)

Zoe, even if you get to pick, you're really okay ... giving your baby to strangers?

ZOE

Come on Leah, I'm 17.

LEAH

(turns around to face ZOE)

Come on Zoe, answer the question.

ZOE

If it's a nice family, one that will give my kid a good life.

LEAH

And a good life means never knowing your real mother?

ZOE

My dad said it's better for the kid if the real mother disappears, let the adopted mom can take over.

LEAH

I don't buy that. And why do all these men claim to know what's best for our babies? And us?

ZOE

Because men make the decisions.

LEAH

Yeah, well maybe it's time we change that. Why don't you make THAT your first book? Gloria Steinem can't do all the work.

(LEAH takes a seat in one of the chairs.)

ZOE

Who's that? Anyway, I was hoping Jay would take my baby since he's the father.

LEAH

What?

ZOE

That was his reaction. He and Bernice, that's his wife, already have a daughter so the baby would have a big sister.

LEAH

Have you met Jay's wife?

ZOE

I met her at church, she sings in the choir and she's a composer. When I told her I'm a writer, she asked me to do the lyrics for her new song. She even paid me.

LEAH

Zoe, that's fantastic, a little weird, but ...

ZOE

She's nice. But Jay says I'm a lunatic to even suggest giving them the baby.

LEAH

Can you imagine the look on her face? "Honey, I'm home, and I brought a baby." Wow, there's a song.

ZOE

I told him I'd do it.

LEAH

Write a song about a married guy who /

ZOE

No, offer my baby to his wife.

LEAH

You really are a lunatic!

ZOE

Hey, a girl can try.

(Both girls start laughing.)

LEAH

Oh, I wish Ronny would just rescue me and drive us to Florida already. I really need to call him.

(A phone rings, offstage.)

ZOE

Speak of the devil.

LEAH

Where's that coming from?

ZOE

Sister Margaret's office. But you know the rule about calling boyfriends.

LEAH

Stupid fucking rules! Sorry, there I go again. My mom says I lack self-control.

ZOE

I got grounded for a month when I used that word, and if the nuns hear you say it? I can't imagine.

LEAH

It only comes out when I'm really, really mad. I'm a nice person. Hell, I'm a goody too-shoes.

(Both girls laugh.)

LEAH

Hey, do you want to be roommates?

ZOE

We all sleep in the same room, so, we already are.

(looks at her watch as NURSE
BINGHAM enters the stage.)

Oh crap, Dr. Miller.

NURSE BINGHAM

ZOE, I've been calling you, are you deaf? I reminded you twice about your appointment. And who opened the drapes?

(NURSE BINGHAM walks to the window
to close the drapes).

ZOE

Sorry Bingham, we got to talking and I lost track /

NURSE BINGHAM

Dear, listen to me. Dr. Miller is a very busy man! He has better things to do.

ZOE

Like what?

NURSE BINGHAM

Leah, I'll be back for you in 19 minutes. And if Sister Margaret hears that radio? Do everyone a favor and turn the damn thing off. NOW.

(NURSE BINGHAM and ZOE start to
exit the stage.)

ZOE

(as she's leaving)

Bye Leah.

LEAH

Bye Zelda.

(The song ends, LEAH reaches over
and increases the radio volume.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER

That was *So Wrong*, by Miss Patsy Cline. In today's news, President Kennedy will head to Texas in ten days to launch his re-election campaign. In sports, the Oakland Raiders crushed the Kansas City Chiefs, 22 to 7. We'll be right back with the weather, but don't expect the rain to end anytime soon.

END OF SCENE 1.

(takes the list)

I did, I'm just telling you the truth about Lila. Why is Donna on this list? She's 12.

LEAH

The trouble with these little girls is they think they're grown.

ZOE

Donna found out her mother never wanted her so now she wants to keep her baby. What do you expect us to say to a 12-year old?

SISTER MARGARET

So you're not as smart as you think you are. You think you can change the rules, spit on the church, alter the will of God.

LEAH

That's not what we think at all.

SISTER MARGARET

Whores can't claim a child conceived from sin. It's

SCENE 2

The Congregation Room at Our Lady of Hope. LEAH is sitting at the table writing a letter as ZOE enters the stage. It's 10pm, January 9th, 1964, two weeks before both girls are scheduled to deliver.

ZOE

Leah, what are you doing? Lights-out was an hour ago.

LEAH

Sister Margaret let me stay so I could finish this.

ZOE

What is it?

LEAH

The most important thing I've ever written.

ZOE

Your last will and testament? Do I get your cheerleader outfit?

LEAH

Zoe, sometimes your attempt at humor is just annoying. I'm re-writing the letter to my grandmother.

ZOE

Why?

LEAH

To offer her a deal. As long as you're here, will you read it? I tripled checked my spelling AND sentence structure, since I know you're a stickler for those things.

ZOE

(reading the letter LEAH has
just handed her)

The dutiful granddaughter who loves her grandmother, nice opening, very ... authentic. And your sentence structure? Even I'm impressed. Leah, you're a good writer.

LEAH

Yeah, yeah, skip the intro paragraphs, I know they're good, flip to page two.

ZOE

(studying the letter)

It's interesting ... superbly organized, but, you really think she'll go for this?

LEAH

Knowing my grandmother, she'll seriously think about it. Besides, she's the one that always says, it cost nothing to ask.

ZOE

Yeah, I saw where you quoted her, that was good. What about Ronny?

LEAH

If this works, I'll ask Ronny to marry me. If he says no? Oh hell, I'll still go.

ZOE

You're really prepared to raise a kid alone?

LEAH

I'm confident Ronny will say yes. He said he was excited to be a dad ... once he got over the initial shock.

ZOE

Where'd you get all these numbers?

LEAH

I worked for my grandmother last summer. I remember her labor rates because I helped with payroll.

ZOE

Just how large is this orchard?

LEAH

Five acres. She knows my bookkeeping is stellar because my dad taught me. How can she resist me working for free? Well, not free exactly, but a huge discount, I have to support myself and my baby after all.

ZOE

Does she even know you're here?

LEAH

She will soon.

ZOE

Oh Leah, a surprise like that could backfire, she might even feel betrayed. And her generation is worse than your mother's, isn't it?

LEAH

She doesn't give a shit what people think. She's cool, you'd like her.

ZOE

I don't know Leah, showing up with a baby?

(ZOE folds the letter and puts in an envelope LEAH has already addressed.)

LEAH

I could use some support, ya know.

ZOE

But you're running out of time.

LEAH

Which is why I said it's urgent she call me.

ZOE

Is she on your approved list?

LEAH

Like they'd refuse a call from my grandmother? Her house is huge, she won't even know we're there. And how can she turn down her great-grand daughter, which I offered to name after her?

ZOE

But, you don't know that.

LEAH

Yes I do, look.

(gets up and turns around)

From the back, I don't look pregnant, right?

ZOE

Actually you don't.

LEAH

Which means I'm having a girl. If you look like a whale from behind, it's a boy.

(LEAH turns back around as ZOE turns around her back toward LEAH.)

ZOE

Like this?

LEAH

Precisely.

ZOE

According to my mom, I have child-bearing hips.

LEAH

Not that you care, but you're having a boy. Zoe, come with me. I'll show you Hemingway's house.

(SISTER MARGARET enters the stage, carrying a long stick.)

SISTER MARGARET

Zoe, why aren't you upstairs?

ZOE

I came looking for Leah, when I couldn't find her /

SISTER MARGARET

Be quiet. Leah, did you finish your letter?

LEAH

It's right here.

SISTER MARGARET

I'll post it first thing tomorrow, with a five cent stamp.

LEAH

Thank you, you're very kind.

(LEAH and ZOE get up to leave.)

SISTER MARGARET

One moment girls, I need a word. You've been late for morning Mass all week and it's become intolerable.

LEAH

With our after-dinner chores, early morning is the only time we have for homework. Sometimes it makes us late.

SISTER MARGARET

Zoe, where were you today?

ZOE

I had another false labor, thought I told you. Sorry.

SISTER MARGARET

I know very well you are faking those. Girls, it's important you focus on why you're here, to expunge your unspeakable sins. Fortunately for you, and with my help, an opportunity for redemption is still possible even though you've committed unthinkable wrongs.

LEAH

The only thing I did wrong was agree to come here. And my chance at redemption is to marry Ronny.

SISTER MARGARET

Don't be stupid, it's too late for that. I spoke to your mother and /

LEAH

She's wrong, I'll convince Ronny to become Catholic, so we can get married in the eyes of the Church /

SISTER MARGARET

(grows angry)

You think your low-life boyfriend can convert at the snap of a finger ... and marry you during childbirth? When you give birth from premarital sin, you surrender the child to a married woman who can't bear children of her own. A girl like you doesn't deserve a baby.

LEAH

But if I have a Misses in front of my name, I do? Can you see how confusing that is?

SISTER MARGARET

Dear, look deep inside your filthy core, find what little is decent, and offer it up to a merciful God. Maybe that will untangle your misguided confusion.

LEAH

(stands up)

I'm tired. May we be excused?

SISTER MARGARET

Sit down! Another serious issue must be addressed. Immediately.

(LEAH sits down, but ZOE remains standing.)

ZOE

What is it?

SISTER MARGARET

You're contaminating the other girls and it needs to stop, or I'll be forced to take serious action.

ZOE

Contaminating the girls?

LEAH

(quietly, as if talking to herself)

Oh my God.

ZOE

I don't understand.

SISTER MARGARET

Oh really? The two of you, talking as if keeping the baby is an option? You know very well, it isn't ... for any of these girls, including yourselves.

ZOE

I have told you a thousand times, I have no need for a baby.

SISTER MARGARET

Yet, you think you're entitled to participate in adoption decisions? You have no such authority, none of the girls do. Five girls came to me yesterday demanding they approve their child's adoptive parents. I nearly had a riot on my hands.

ZOE

Maybe those girls trust me more than they trust you.

(Shocked and appalled, SISTER MARGARET slaps ZOE across the face.)

SISTER MARGARET

You just got two days in detention.

ZOE

That hurt. You can't put me in detention, I didn't do anything.

SISTER MARGARET

Keep it up, I'll deny your meals.

LEAH

(gets up from her chair)

She's bluffing. Come on, Zoe, let's go to bed.

SISTER MARGARET

SIT DOWN. Zoe, you're a troublemaking tramp that needs to be taught a lesson.

(SISTER MARGARET raises her stick to strike ZOE. LEAH quickly gets between the two of them.)

LEAH

Sister Margaret, put that down. What are you doing?

SISTER MARGARET

This doesn't concern you, leave now.

(SISTER MARGARET tries to push LEAH out of the way, but LEAH stands firm.)

LEAH

I'm not going anywhere.

SISTER MARGARET

I said get out, unless you want /

LEAH

It's my fault, don't blame Zoe.

SISTER MARGARET

So you're willing to /

LEAH

I'll do whatever you want, I'll talk to the other girls, tell them we were wrong, that giving our babies for adoption is God's will.

SISTER MARGARET

That if they don't, they'll never get married?

ZOE

Come on Leah, let's get out of here /

(SISTER MARGARET tries to strike ZOE again, but LEAH blocks her.)

LEAH

Absolutely, that if they don't give their baby up, no man will ever touch them.

SISTER MARGARET

What else?

(During this, SISTER MARGARET raises her stick and tries to get to ZOE, but LEAH keeps blocking her.)

LEAH

That they will never be blessed with other children, that if they don't do the right thing, God will make sure they never have another baby, ever.

ZOE

Leah, you know you don't mean that.

SISTER MARGARET

(puts her stick down and backs away)

Excellent. Now I have a list of girls I need you to straighten out. Tell them everything you just told me. Zoe, you'll help Leah, unless you'd prefer 20 whacks.

LEAH

(looks at the list)

Sharon? Sister, she's lost half her mind, doesn't understand most of what I say, mostly just talks to herself.

SISTER MARGARET
(whacks her stick against a
chair)

Follow my orders!

LEAH

Please don't yell.

SISTER MARGARET
I AM NOT ... yelling, now, can you read my writing?

LEAH

Susan, Mindy, sure. But Lila, she's terrified of keeping her
baby, isn't she Zoe?

ZOE

She wants nothing to do with it, told me yesterday she never
wants to see it, ever.

SISTER MARGARET

Did you not hear me?

LEAH

Sister, I know what Ronny and I did was wrong, but it was
hardly unnatural, our baby was conceived from love.

SISTER MARGARET

(starts laughing)

If you actually believe that, you are truly destined for
hell. What could a criminal, a criminal like you, possibly
know about love?

LEAH

Having a baby is not a crime.

SISTER MARGARET

Except when the mother is a selfish slut that allowed herself
to be seduced by Satan. You disgust me.

LEAH

I shouldn't even be here.

SISTER MARGARET

You're here because you'd rather whore with the boys than
pursue a moral life. You're less than trash. And now you have
the audacity to think you can escape the price.

ZOE

Sister Margaret, Leah knows what she did wasn't cool with the Church, she just doesn't want to hand her baby to strangers. And I want my baby to go to people I trust, that I feel good about.

SISTER MARGARET

STOP IT BOTH OF YOU.

(whacks her stick against the side of a chair)

Whores aren't entitled to make those decisions!

ZOE

Was Mary Magdalene entitled?

SISTER MARGARET

She was the worse kind of sinner.

ZOE

But she was forgiven.

SISTER MARGARET

And you think a tramp like you can be compared to Mary Magdalene? I do not find you amusing.

LEAH

I do.

(SISTER MARGARET is enraged, pushes LEAH into a chair and starts hitting her anywhere she can.)

SISTER MARGARET

I will not tolerate backtalk from the likes of a filthy, little whore.

ZOE

Sister, please. You don't have to do this.

(ZOE gets between them, and successfully gets SISTER MARGARET to stop.)

ZOE

Sister Margaret, you need to stop.

(SISTER MARGARET finds a chair, sits down, and calms down.)

SISTER MARGARET

(with exasperation)

Why do you continue to challenge me? I've gone out of my way to help you, to give you structure and purpose, provide good teachers so you don't fall behind in your education. I guide you down the path of righteousness even though you don't deserve it.

LEAH

And I know I should be grateful, but /

SISTER MARGARET

STOP TALKING.

(gets angry)

Now you're going to get yourself to the chapel for one hour of prayer before you go to bed. You'll rise at 5am for Mass, which you will attend ON TIME. As for you Zoe, you'll be in detention until you deliver.

LEAH

That could harm her baby.

SISTER MARGARET

(rises from the chair)

You want to join her?

ZOE

Leah, be quiet, this is not a fight you can win.

LEAH

If it means getting away from you /

SISTER MARGARET

SUIT YOURSELF. I will tell you something else. There was a girl here who thought she could raise her child alone, but he drowned after she left him alone in a bathtub.

LEAH

I don't believe you!

SISTER MARGARET

Fine.

(whacks her stick on the
table)

Deliver that baby in the gutter for all I care, because the gutter is where you belong. Now, get out of my sight. God is watching you!

(ZOE puts her arm around LEAH who starts to cry. They two girls slowly exit the stage.)

ZOE

God is watching you too, Sister.

SISTER MARGARET

GET OUT.

(LEAH keeps her head down, but ZOE turns slightly to see SISTER MARGARET tearing LEAH's letter to bits.)

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3

Scene opens to a room with two hospital beds, where ZOE and LEAH are recovering from childbirth. ZOE is writing in her journal. Clipboards hang from the foot of each bed frame. It's 9:25am, January 23rd, 1964.

LEAH

Zoe, do you see a phone? I need to call Ronny.

(NURSE MARY BINGHAM enters the stage.)

NURSE BINGHAM

Girls, you'll be happy to know you both did fine, just fine.

ZOE

At what, reciting the pledge of allegiance?

LEAH

Nurse Bingham, did my grandmother call? Bring me a phone so I can call her back?

NURSE BINGHAM

Is she on your approved list?

LEAH

She's my grandmother!

NURSE BINGHAM

All right, I'll check in a minute. Zoe, put that notebook down, you're supposed to be resting. What are you writin' now?

ZOE

Oh nothing, just a handbook for teen mothers.

NURSE BINGHAM

Do you think you could give that mouth of yours a rest? For one day? Now, how y'all feeling?

LEAH

Nurse, the phone? I also need to call Ronny.

NURSE BINGHAM

How many times have I told you, no boyfriends?

LEAH

But he's the father.

NURSE BINGHAM

I said no.

ZOE

Come on Bingham, you have no idea what we've been through.

NURSE BINGHAM

I do so! I've had TWO babies, I told you that.

LEAH

I know you got to keep them.

NURSE BINGHAM

Oh Lord, I'm sorry, I .. I didn't mean it like that. It was insensitive of me.

(studies the girls' charts)

Well I'll be damned! The doctors didn't have to induce labor after all. Zoe, you delivered that baby just before midnight. Leah, you popped after Zoe, just after lam.

LEAH

Why don't I remember anything?

ZOE

I remember being tied down, then waking up here.

LEAH

Nurse Bingham, I had a girl, right? After they knocked me out?

NURSE BINGHAM

You think you can trick me? I'm not telling you anything.

ZOE

Then take us to the nursery.

NURSE BINGHAM

Now girls, we talked about this! The less you remember, the better. Makes it easier.

ZOE

How would you know?

LEAH

Just bring me my baby /

NURSE BINGHAM

LEAH PLEASE. It's time to forget you were ever here. It's time to move on.

LEAH

If I hear that one more time I'll scream. Nurse Bingham, the least you can do is let me hold my daughter ... or did I have a boy? DEAR GOD, TELL ME. NOW.

NURSE BINGHAM

Leah, the whole house can hear you, I'll get written up.

LEAH

Then tell me!

NURSE BINGHAM

Honey, please ... if I tell you, will you promise to stop that godawful screaming?

LEAH

Yes, yes, I promise.

NURSE BINGHAM

Now, you didn't hear this from me, I'm serious, you heard nothin' from me but ... you both had boys.

LEAH

I was so sure I'd had a girl!

NURSE BINGHAM

For the last time, lower your voice.

LEAH

I'm going to name him John Fitzgerald, after President Kennedy. Oh my God Zoe, are you excited?

ZOE

I'm excited he'll never have to go through THIS shit. Nurse, what's my baby's skin color?

NURSE BINGHAM

Why?

ZOE

I want people to know he's bi-racial.

NURSE BINGHAM

Because you think that will help him get adopted?

ZOE

Don't play dumb, you know it will.

NURSE BINGHAM

Maybe you should have thought of that before you had relations with a married black /

ZOE

Bingham stop! I'm just saying, maybe they'll think he's, you know, Italian. Sometimes people think that about me.

NURSE BINGHAM

Honey, when it comes to your baby, I wouldn't be so sure.

LEAH

Then let's see for ourselves. Take us to the nursery.

NURSE BINGHAM

Forget it, both of you. I'm not allowed, not now, not ever.

LEAH

Then who the hell is?

NURSE BINGHAM

I'm getting the General Manager, he can explain

LEAH

That it's my baby?

NURSE BINGHAM

Which you agreed to surrender! Now Leah honey, your folks were very clear that you never see him. I'm sorry, I really am, but it's in the agreement that you /

LEAH

No, no, no, no, no. My mother and Father O'Malley bullied me into signing those papers this morning. But I've changed my mind. I'm taking him home.

ZOE

She's serious as a bloodhound, Bingham. It's all she can talk about.

NURSE BINGHAM

But Leah, you and your folks already /

LEAH

I know what I was forced to sign, but it was a mistake. Now bring me what's mine, RIGHT NOW.

NURSE BINGHAM

Not without parental consent.

LEAH

But I'm the parent!

ZOE

She's got you there, Bingham.

NURSE BINGHAM

Zoe that's enough! All right Leah, I don't want to create false hopes, but I know contracts are sometimes nullified, torn up, IF the baby hasn't been promised and IF everyone agrees, but /

LEAH

He hasn't, right? Been promised?

NURSE BINGHAM

That's between your parents and the Church.

LEAH

Then call my father at the Conrad Hilton. He'll straighten this out.

NURSE BINGHAM

Okay, but do not leave this room. The two of you are a big pain-in-my-behind, you hear me? A big pain-in-my /

ZOE

Just say it Bingham, we're a pain-in-the ass.

LEAH

Tell my dad to get here as soon as he can!

NURSE BINGHAM

Settle down, I'll be right back.

(speaks quietly as she exits
the stage)

My Lord, a big pain-in-my-behind.

ZOE

Ass, Bingham, ass!

LEAH

Zoe, can you believe our babies are right down the hall and we can't go see them? Let's sneak into the nursery. Don't you want to see your baby?

ZOE

I can barely walk to the bathroom. And the nursery is locked, you know that.

LEAH

We could break in ... in the middle of the night. I'll call Ronny to come get us.

ZOE

And go where? Look, I sure as hell don't want my baby, are you absolutely sure you still want yours?

LEAH

Are you deaf?

ZOE

But there's no arguing with the Church, everything is stacked against you. Leah, you can't win!

LEAH

So I'm supposed to walk out of here as if nothing happened?

ZOE

It's the way this works! And I don't think your grandmother received your /

LEAH

This is so easy for you, isn't it? Leave your baby behind, forget you were ever here ... well I'm not like you.

ZOE

Fuck off.

LEAH

Zoe, I'm sorry, I know you're not a total bitch, I didn't mean to imply ...

ZOE

How am I supposed to raise a kid by myself, in New York?

LEAH

I know, I know, you're going to be a famous writer. Well, now you have a little boy that you can read your stories to.

ZOE

Except I'm not ready to have my whole life change. Are you? Your mother already said she won't let you go home with a baby.

LEAH

Oh, screw her. And it's not a question of being ready. It's ... it's the wrong question!

ZOE

Then what's the right one?

LEAH

The responsibility I have to my child. I'm his mother and he needs me. It's that simple.

ZOE

And that complicated.

LEAH

Okay, fine, I admit it won't be easy, but for me there's one choice. You're doing what you think is right for your kid, well, so am I.

ZOE

Fine!

LEAH

Fine!

ZOE

(pause)

Maybe the night nurse will take a bribe. You have any money?

LEAH

They took it when I got here.

ZOE

I have enough for a cab to get to the bank. There's a few thousand dollars in my college fund, I could ask the bank manager to /

(NURSE BINGHAM enters the stage.)

LEAH

(in a sweet, almost childlike
voice)

Nurse Bingham, if you let me see my baby, I promise I'll stop bothering you.

NURSE BINGHAM

Leah, stop tellin' me what to do! Now, you have a visitor.

ZOE

Bingham, can you help me to the bathroom?

NURSE BINGHAM

Of course. Won't you please come in Miz Ryan? Zoe, come with me.

(MRS RYAN enters the stage as NURSE
BINGHAM and ZOE exit the stage.)

LEAH

What are YOU doing here?

MRS RYAN

The doctor said everything went fine. You're being released on Monday.

LEAH

Mamma, remember when Daddy said I might change my mind about adoption once I had my baby? Well I did, I'm taking him home. Is Daddy parking the car?

MRS RYAN

Your father had business in Atlanta. Who said you had a boy? And what do you mean, you're taking him home?

LEAH

I've decided to take responsibility for my actions.

MRS RYAN

Then honor our agreement and make the baby available for adoption. Deep down, you know it's the right thing to do.

LEAH

Stop putting words in my mouth. I hate you!

MRS RYAN

DON'T YOU DARE SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT.

LEAH

THEN DON'T MAKE ME DO THIS.

MRS RYAN

We have NO CHOICE. Leah, what will people say?

LEAH

That I have a beautiful baby boy. I know Daddy would love to see his grandson. Don't you want to see him too?

MRS RYAN

I already did.

LEAH

You did? How much does he weigh?

MRS RYAN

I don't know, 6 pounds?

LEAH

What color eyes does he have?

MRS RYAN

Hard to tell with a newborn, maybe blue.

LEAH

Then he has Ronny's eyes?

MRS RYAN

I don't know and I don't care!

LEAH

Then help me out of this bed so I can see for myself.

(LEAH tries to get out of bed, MRS RYAN stops her.)

MRS RYAN

Leah! You're not married.

LEAH

Then let me marry Ronny!

MRS RYAN

He's not Catholic! Now stop acting like a child.

LEAH

Mamma, I know I shamed myself, that I shamed the family, but now that you've seen him, can't we just rip up those papers and take him home? You can show him off to your friends.

MRS RYAN

Show him off? He's a bastard.

LEAH

No Mamma, his name is John, he weighs 6 pounds, he has Ronny's eyes. He's part of the family.

MRS RYAN

(grows impatient and angry)

Leah, you think you can do this now, but Father O'Malley told me all about young girls that get seduced by Satan's illusions, thinking they can raise a child alone.

LEAH

What does a priest know about having a baby?

MRS RYAN

Father O'Malley has taken confession from dozens of single, young mothers who soon discover that raising a child is too hard, too time consuming, too inconvenient. In the beginning they think they know what they're doing. But they soon run to the nearest priest to beg for absolution .. after throwing their child to the curb.

LEAH

O'Malley is full of shit.

MRS RYAN

LEAH! That's the devil talking. Now, I failed you once, I won't fail you again. But you have to do your part. You have to try and save yourself.

LEAH

I don't need saving, I need to see my son. Please, I promise to stay behind the window.

MRS RYAN

I SAID NO.

(LEAH screams, then throws the water glass at the wall, which shatters.)

MRS RYAN raises her hand as if to strike LEAH as NURSE BINGHAM and ZOE enter the stage.)

MRS RYAN
WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU? I swear to God ...

NURSE BINGHAM
(very startled)
Miz Ryan, it's best you leave now. Leah, you're upsetting my other girls! The whole house can hear you. They'll write me up. Zoe, did you do something to upset Leah?

ZOE	LEAH
Like what?	Zoe is the only one who isn't crazy! Now help me out of this damn bed and take me to the nursery. NOW.

ZOE
What's the harm in letting her see her baby, one time?

MRS RYAN
Zoe, stay out of this!

LEAH
Please, I just want to see him.

NURSE BINGHAM
I'm sorry Miz Ryan, but protocol says I gotta sedate her if she's disturbing my other girls. Hold her down. I'll help.

(MRS RYAN holds LEAH down while NURSE BINGHAM pulls out a syringe.)

LEAH
DON'T YOU DARE PUT THAT FUCKING NEEDLE IN ME! Get the hell off me. I swear I'll burn this evil place down!

(NURSE BINGHAM injects LEAH with a syringe; LEAH slowly lays down.

After LEAH is calm, MRS RYAN slowly gets up.)

MRS RYAN
Nurse, can you take it from here? I have somewhere to be.

NURSE BINGHAM

Of course Miz Ryan, and thank you again for coming.

(ZOE, who has been standing in the doorway, rushes over to LEAH's bedside. LEAH starts moaning.)

ZOE

Leah, it's Zoe, can you hear me?

MRS RYAN

(as she exits the stage)

Young lady, get away from my daughter or I'll have you forcibly removed. Nurse, keep a close eye on her. I'll be back Monday morning. Good day.

LEAH

(her voice fading)

They knocked me out when I had him, and now ...

NURSE BINGHAM

Honey, you gotta let him go.

LEAH

But I never even saw him.

(Lights go black for a quick scene adjustment.)

NURSE BINGHAM and LEAH exit the stage. When the lights come up, ZOE is alone, packing up to leave. NURSE BINGHAM enters the stage.)

NURSE BINGHAM

Zoe, I want to talk to you.

ZOE

Came to say goodbye? How adorable, I'll be sure and sign the guest book on my way out.

NURSE BINGHAM

You're lucky you weren't sent to Juvenile Hall. What were you and Leah thinkin', breaking into the nursery at 3am?

ZOE

She just wanted to see him. Please don't tell my father.

NURSE BINGHAM

I should, but I won't. Your daddy's driver called just now, to take you home, no stops on the way.

ZOE

Hey, those two guys that came for Leah? Where'd they take her?

NURSE BINGHAM

Like I'm going to tell YOU? /

ZOE

Then tell me what you gave her. She couldn't even say goodbye.

NURSE BINGHAM

That's not your concern. *(beat)* Your head's been buried in that journal for two days. Have you gotten any rest at all?

ZOE

I needed to finish my story for the Young Writers contest. Even wrote a poem, about a nurse.

NURSE BINGHAM

Please don't do me any favors.

ZOE

It's not about you. Couldn't find a word to rhyme with Bingham.

NURSE BINGHAM

Well thank God for that. *(beat)* Here, you have a letter, postmarked Kansas City.

ZOE

(takes the letter)

Why has it been opened? Is it from my dad?

NURSE BINGHAM

We're instructed to open all the girl's mail, and no, it's not from /

ZOE

(reading the letter)

It's from Jamal.

NURSE BINGHAM

Rules say I should destroy it, but I felt you should see it.
Now read it, then burn it. Or let me do it.

ZOE

He's leaving? For California?

NURSE BINGHAM

He was traded to a team in San Francisco. You would have
found out soon enough, it's all over the news.

ZOE

I need to see him before he goes.

NURSE BINGHAM

No Zoe, you don't. If this thing ever blows up, well, I can't
imagine what it would /

ZOE

He deserves to know he has a son.

NURSE BINGHAM

Against my better judgment ... I'll find a way to tell him.

ZOE

Oh God, what a mess I've made. I suppose it really is time I
put all of this behind me.

NURSE BINGHAM

Good girl. But before you go, I thought you'd want to know,
your boy is doing quite well, doctor says he's alert, weighs
nearly eight pounds.

ZOE

And his skin color?

NURSE BINGHAM

He's darker than you, I can tell you that. They moved him to
Belmont.

ZOE

What's that?

NURSE BINGHAM

An infirmary for black people.

ZOE

So that's why I couldn't find him when we broke into the nursery.

(pause)

You disapprove of me, don't you?

NURSE BINGHAM

You could've landed Jamal in jail for a long time. Did you think of that?

ZOE

I just wanted him ... and he wanted /

NURSE BINGHAM

You lied to him, but hey, it ain't my job to judge, I'm a delivery nurse.

ZOE

Then you saw my baby's birth certificate. Does it say he's half-Cuban?

NURSE BINGHAM

Says he's all Negro, like his father. The doctors don't care what the mother is.

ZOE

But you can change it, right?

NURSE BINGHAM

I couldn't if I wanted to, which I don't.

ZOE

Then he'll never get adopted. Take me to see him? I'll give you five bucks.

NURSE BINGHAM

I'm not taking a white girl into the Belmont nursery!

ZOE

But I'm not white.

NURSE BINGHAM

As far as I'm concerned, you are. Now, your daddy made the same deal as Leah's mamma, that you weren't to see him. Ever.

ZOE

I don't understand why he'd do that.

NURSE BINGHAM

Pressure from the nuns. And Father O'Malley convinced him that it's best you never see the baby.

ZOE

Leah's right, this place is evil.

NURSE BINGHAM

(Looks at her watch.)

Oh Lordy, I got three girls just went into labor. Zoe, I wish you well, I really do, but please don't let me see your sorry ass back here, ever again.

ZOE

Not a chance. After I graduate, I'm moving to New York to fulfill my destiny. By the way, can I get my books back? The one's that Sister Margaret took /

NURSE BINGHAM

She had them destroyed. Honey, you need to go, and so do I, take care of yourself.

(takes the letter from Zoe's hand)

I really do wish you well. So long.

(NURSE BINGHAM exits the stage.)

ZOE

So long, Bingham.

(turns to look toward the doorway.)

You too beautiful boy.

(Lights go to black.)

END OF SCENE 3

SCENE 4.

Twenty-three years later, the office of Roy Delara, the general manager at Our Lady of Hope. There's a large desk with a phone and a few files and papers strewn about. There's also a large window.

(As the lights come up, we see ROY DELARA at his desk; LEAH, age 40, enters the stage.)

LEAH

Mr. DeLara? I'm Leah Ryan. I spoke to your assistant?

MR DELARA

Of course. Welcome to Our Lady of Hope, or rather, welcome back. Is Ms. Silva joining us?

LEAH

Zoe? She's parking the car. Oh God, I'm so nervous. My, this place has really changed hasn't it?

MR DELARA

It's still run by Catholic Social Services, but the Sisters don't work in the Maternity Home, just the adjacent school. Do you also live in New York?

LEAH

Zoe and I lived in Greenwich Village until 1969, before I got married and moved to San Francisco ... where I got involved in the anti-war movement. Watching those mothers send their sons to Vietnam broke my heart.

MR DELARA

Those were turbulent times. Now then, I pulled your information /

LEAH

No, no, let's wait for Zoe.

(ZOE walks over to the window, looks at the dormitory.)

LEAH

My God, if these walls could talk. We all shared the same room. Early in the morning and late at night, I'd hear girls crying into their pillows. There were nearly 30 of us back then.

MR DELARA

We still get that many, but since 1973 we get far fewer teen pregnancies.

LEAH

Because of Roe v. Wade?

MR DELARA

Those words are forbidden around here, but yes, that decision changed everything.

LEAH

But you still get a lot of girls?

MR DELARA

We help women experiencing any type of crisis pregnancy, not just unwed girls (*beat*) So ... how do you like California? My wife and I vacationed there last year.

LEAH

To tell you the truth, I've been pretty distracted over the years, what with raising two daughters and pursuing my PhD.

MR DELARA

What are you studying?

LEAH

Anthropology, at Stanford. I never told Kevin, he's my husband, that I had a son, and as time went by it got harder to come clean. Then something happened.

MR DELARA

It's none of my business, but may I ask ... what?

LEAH

Couple years ago my youngest begged me for a little brother. When I couldn't stop crying Kevin assumed I'd had an abortion. When I finally confessed I had a son, I was terrified of his reaction, but he was very understanding.

MR DELARA

Sounds like a great guy.

LEAH

My husband's a saint. I always wanted to find my son, you know, to see if he's okay, how his life turned out, explain what really happened .. but I kept putting it off. When it became unbearable, Kevin encouraged me to come here.

MR DELARA

You're lucky.

LEAH

Yeah, compared to Joan of Arc I suppose I am.

(pauses to think)

You know Mr. DeLara, I never felt ashamed about my pregnancy until I came here. But the real shame was giving him up. Zoe was different, independent as hell, but respected authority. Or maybe she was just scared, this place was very intimidating.

MR DELARA

We've worked hard to diminish that image, which is why we tore down the old dormitory. We're here only to help. Does the biological father know you're here?

LEAH

I called him; he wants to be kept in the loop.

MR DELARA

That's rare, most the fathers ...

LEAH

Ronny was my whole life. We were crazy in love and he wanted to marry me. But, he's wasn't Catholic, so Mumsey put the kabash on that. And of course, his mother hated me because she thought I'd seduced her darling boy.

(pauses and thinks)

I'm sorry, did you have any questions for me?

MR DELARA

There is one item that sparked my curiosity.

LEAH

You mean my parents trying to have me committed? After my meltdown? Don't tell me that's in my file.

MR DELARA

No, no, nothing like that, it's actually about, Ms. Silva. How exactly did she come to arrive at Our Lady of Hope?

LEAH

Same as the rest of us, her parents forced her.

MR DELARA

But in 1963 maternity homes were segregated.

LEAH

Oh that! Years later, Zoe's dad confessed he wrote a big, fat check, which he brokered through the mayor of Lebanon, who was also /

MR DELARA

Mayor Thaddeus Bingham? He was the city's first black mayor, also the father of one of the nurses that used to work here.

LEAH

That's right, Mary Bingham. What happened to her?

MR DELARA

She moved to Brooklyn, where her husband is from, right before I came here in '81. Unfortunately she passed away a few years ago, heart attack. She was only 56.

LEAH

It's sad when people go too soon. We were a pain-in-her-behind, and I think she resented Zoe, but she was decent.

MR DELARA

She led the effort to desegregate Our Lady of Hope.

LEAH

Good for her. You know who Zoe's father is, right? Gus Silva, the ball player?

MR DELARA

Gustavo Silva, the pitcher? For the Kansas City Monarchs?

LEAH

After he retired he went to work for some TV-sports-thingy.

MR DELARA

ESPN. I just saw him on the Sunday morning roundup.

LEAH

Zoe's throwing him a 65th birthday-bash and invited me. We thought it a good opportunity to come here in person since no one would help us over the phone.

MR DELARA

We can't verify who you are over the telephone, I hope you understand, it's for your own protection.

(ZOE enters the stage, and extends her hand to MR DELARA).

ZOE

Mr. Delara, I presume? I'm Zoe Silva.

MR DELARA

It's a pleasure to meet you. Your reputation precedes you.

ZOE

I hope in a good way, I know my books don't appeal to everyone. Unless you're talking about my dad?

MR DELARA

No, no, I was referring to you and Ms. Ryan. Is it true the two of you actually broke into the nursery?

ZOE

Oh my, did you hear about it, or is it actually in our files?

LEAH

Oh who cares, you helped me see my son, which is all I really wanted. I'll never forget his face as long as I live.

ZOE

I remember that night so clearly. Neither one of us could stop crying. My God Leah, this place ...

LEAH

.. brings back memories, right? Remember how so many girls knew nothing about sex? I'd been doing it with Ronny for almost a year, but remember Susie? She didn't even recall having sex.

ZOE

Because she got drunk at a frat party ...

LEAH

.. and was probably raped. Then there was Mindy, she was also raped, I think by her uncle?

ZOE

No, that was Donna, the poor little 12-year-old. God, every time I looked at her I'd recall the description she gave of her assault.

LEAH

Then which one was Mindy?

ZOE

Mindy got knocked up by her coach.

LEAH

Oh that's right. What do you suppose happened to those girls?

MR DELARA

Let's move on, shall we? Ms. Silva, my wife is a big fan of your novels, especially *Along for the Ride*.

LEAH

I've tried to get Zoe to write one about our experience here.

ZOE

Let's just say, there are plenty of topics to explore without re-living Our Lady of Hope.

MR DELARA

Well, you know what they say about sleeping dogs.

LEAH

No. I don't.

MR DELARA

Let sleeping dogs lie? Leave the past in the past?

LEAH

Well that's stupid.

ZOE

As you can see, my friend Leah doesn't have much of a filter. Please convey my gratitude to your wife. I'd be happy to send her /

MR DELARA

That's very generous, but by law, I'm not permitted to reveal how I know you, even to my spouse. People talk, stories leak

ZOE

... and law suits get filed, I understand. Oh well, it's nice to know I have a local fan, even though leaving Lebanon was one of the best days of my life.

MR DELARA

Were you also inquiring about your adoption file?

ZOE

No, no. I'm only here for Leah. I'm not sure how I feel about poking into my own adoption records.

LEAH

Okay, we've stalled long enough. Mr. Delara, you said you pulled my information?

MR DELARA

I did, and ... for the past 23 years, your file has had no inquiries.

LEAH

Then can you tell me how I might start looking for my son?

MR DELARA

Your adoption was closed, as was Ms. Silva's.

LEAH

But where is my son living?

MR DELARA

I can only tell you he was adopted on February 5th, 1964 then returned in early April, by a couple that admitted they weren't cut out to be parents after all.

LEAH

Weren't ... cut out?

MR DELARA

According to their statement, he wouldn't stop crying, and it was interfering with their /

LEAH

Oh my God, he went into foster care?

MR DELARA

No, no, it looks like he was re-adopted on June 12th of that same year by a couple that proved more forgiving. I'm sorry but many our records back then ... had issues.

LEAH

What the hell does that mean?

MR DELARA

No one anticipated birth mothers showing up 23 years after a closed-adoption. With some of these cases, there's no reliable information at all.

LEAH

Because ...

MR DELARA

Biological parents gave false names, or no names at all. Or the adopted parents were listed as the birth parents.

ZOE

So you're saying Leah's son could be anywhere?

LEAH

Even out of the country?

MR DELARA

It's how closed adoptions work in Tennessee. Your son's name, and the identities of his adopted parents ... are private.

ZOE

But Leah's in California, where the adoptee's amended birth certificate can be requested. The one that shows his adopted parents names? Even addresses?

MR DELARA

California is moving toward open adoptions, but Tennessee is not. I'm not sure it ever will.

LEAH

Another reason to hate this place. Now I see why my husband told me to hire an attorney.

MR DELARA

Many people have taken legal action to open their records, but they've been unsuccessful.

LEAH

Same old story, denying a mother an opportunity to see her own son. What's with you people anyway?

MR DELARA

Ms. Ryan, these arrangements were designed to protect all parties. You see, your son well ...

LEAH

Well what?

MR DELARA

He may not want ... to see you.

ZOE

Because she gave him up? That's not exactly true, is it?

MR DELARA

Actually it is. In 1964, the Ryan family clearly stipulated

LEAH

In 1964, specifically January 23rd, at 1:07AM when I delivered my son, I was told I wasn't entitled to hold him, that I was unequipped to raise a child. My mother called my boy a bastard, the nuns referred to me as trash.

MR DELARA

And I apologize for the nuns, that was inappropriate, but at 17, you weren't of legal age to /

LEAH

Do you know your people wouldn't even allow me to see him, even though I promised to stay behind the goddamn window?

MR DELARA

They were respecting the terms of your agreement.

LEAH

Father O'Malley said, "Forget you were ever here, it's easier that way." Kept calling my little boy, THE baby, as if he were some nameless, piece of collateral damage born from the unspeakable sins I'd committed. Now I'm told my son might not want to see me. Why? Oh I don't know, maybe he's been filled with lies and bullshit about his birth-mother being some horrible bitch who didn't want him, who found him inconvenient, who would just as soon throw him to the gutter so she could MOVE ON ... No offense Mr. DeLara, but you people suck.

MR DELARA

Ms. Ryan, I assure you none of that is true, and I won't be lectured like this. Now, you're welcome to leave your information in the adoption file; that way if your son ever inquires about his birth mother ...

ZOE

.. and when might that be?

MR DELARA

Tomorrow, a year, maybe never. Now if you don't mind /

ZOE

Can you reach out to Leah's son? Tell him she was here ... and ... would like to connect?

MR DELARA

That would be a clear violation of the law. The adoptee must initiate the first step. Ms. Ryan, consider your daughters, do they know?

LEAH

Not yet.

MR DELARA

Which is why we practice strict compliance. It's for your own

LEAH

... protection, yeah I get it.

MR DELARA

Ms. Ryan, with all due respect, you and your parents agreed to a closed adoption, which clearly states ...

LEAH

... that I would never go looking for him, I know what I was bullied into signing, I'm not an idiot. I just thought Our Lady of HOPE had evolved. I can see I was wrong.

MR DELARA

I wish there was more I could do.

LEAH

(pauses, then speaks with defeat)

Look, none of this is your fault Mr. DeLara, you're just doing what you *think* is your job. My apologies, you too Zoe, sorry if I embarrassed you. This is just very hard ... and horribly unfair.

ZOE

Leah, it's okay, we all understand, and you could never be an embarrassment to me, you know how I feel about you.

(ZOE and LEAH embrace, both choking
back tears.)

ZOE

Now, how about you tell ... tell Mr. Delara about the letter
you wrote. Do you have it?

MR DELARA

A letter to your son? For your adoption file?

LEAH

That's right, I want him to know that I didn't give him away,
that he was taken from me.

MR DELARA

But Ms. Ryan, I can't allow that. It could place Our Lady of
Hope in legal jeopardy.

LEAH

Oh for chrissakes, why is this place so obsessed with
covering its holy ass?

ZOE

Hold on, Leah.

LEAH

Apparently I misunderstood when you said you were here to
help.

ZOE

Mr. DeLara, can she sign a waiver, holding your organization
harmless of any decisions she and her family made, with
regard to her child's adoption?

MR DELARA

Similar language is in the original agreement, but we can
attach an additional waiver to her letter, for our added
protection.

LEAH

(to ZOE)

Well look at you, talkin' all lawyerly.

ZOE

In my business, you deal with a lot of attorneys. I'm so
sorry Leah.

LEAH

No, no, I should have known this would be a fucking waste. Mr. DeLara, can you be sure my letter goes into the file? Seems the least you can do.

(LEAH hands MR DELARA an envelope.)

MR DELARA

I'm sorry we couldn't provide more information.

ZOE

Leah, is there anything I can do?

LEAH

I should have listened to you 23 years ago when you said "This is a fight you can't win." But I assure you Mr. DeLara, I'm not letting this go. All right Zoe, looks like we're done here, at least for now.

(LEAH gets up to leave.)

MR DELARA

(pause)

Not exactly. Ms. Silva, there has been some activity on your file. According to the intake log it was just two weeks ago.

ZOE

Activity?

LEAH

What does that mean?

MR DELARA

Ms. Silva's son made an inquiry, and left a note.

LEAH

Two weeks ago?

ZOE

A note? For me?

MR DELARA

That's right. He also requested a copy of his original birth certificate, which in Tennessee, is made available to adoptees when they turn 21.

ZOE

He has his birth certificate? So he knows my name? And the name of his father?

MR DELARA

Only first names. Your parents didn't include your surnames on his birth records. Your full names are in your adoption file.

LEAH

Which you also showed him?

MR DELARA

No, under Tennessee law, those remain sealed.

LEAH

Of course they do.

ZOE

You're saying my son doesn't know anything about me, or where to find me, or his biological father?

MR DELARA

That's right. Just your first names, where and when you were born.

LEAH

Did he come here alone?

MR DELARA

He did. Left a bit disappointed, but he did leave Ms. Silva a note, actually a letter of sorts.

ZOE

Am I ... obligated to read it?

LEAH

Of course you should read it! My God Zoe, this is actually happening.

ZOE

But this day was supposed to be about you.

LEAH

Oh hell, if we came all this way at least one of us should make a little progress. Where's the letter?

MR DELARA

(pulls a letter from a file)

I have it right here. I'll give you a moment. If you need me, just call reception.

(MR DELARA exits the stage as ZOE opens the letter, but then, her shaking hands try to re-fold it and return it to the envelope.)

LEAH

Zoe, what the hell are you doing?

ZOE

I don't know, Leah. Am I ready for something like this?

LEAH

It's the wrong question!

(Both women start to laugh, but ZOE starts to choke back tears.)

ZOE

Oh my God, I'm so stupid. I've been lying to you for twenty-three years. You know how you always ask me if I think about him? And I always say no? Leah, it's not true, because I think about him every day. Every, single, blessed day.

LEAH

Oh please, I knew you were lyin'. Now open that damn letter, I'm dyin' to hear it! Unless you don't want me to?

ZOE

No, no, that's not it.

LEAH

Then how about I read it to you?

ZOE

Oh that's perfect. Thank you.

LEAH

(opens the letter)

Look Zoe, it's handwritten ... on exquisite stationary. And he has beautiful penmanship. Wouldn't it be amazing if he's a writer?

ZOE

LEAH!

LEAH

(Starts to read the letter)

"Dear Birth Mother. My name is Jamal and I'm not sure you'll ever receive this, but I'm told if you ever come looking for me, it will be given to you."

ZOE

His name is Jamal? Oh my God, Leah, what else does he say?

LEAH

"I'm told my biological father is also named Jamal. My parents liked the name very much, hence passed it on to me." Oh, that is so funny.

ZOE

He said that?

LEAH

No, that was me.

ZOE

Oh give me that.

(ZOE looks at the letter and freezes, as if she's seen a ghost.)

Jesus Christ.

LEAH

Good thing you're sitting down.

ZOE

But how is this even possible?

LEAH

Oh, did I mention he lives in New York City! Did you see where?

ZOE

East 76th.

LEAH

And you're on West 73rd. How would you even calculate those odds?

(MORE)

LEAH (CONT'D)
(ZOE hands the letter back to
LEAH.)

LEAH
Oh, I love this part. "Every year my mom would place a special candle on my birthday cake. When I was nine, my dad confessed it was to honor the woman who gave me life."

ZOE
Oh that's so sweet, what else?

(LEAH hands the letter back to
ZOE.)

ZOE
"I'm including my phone number. I have questions that only you can answer and, perhaps you have some for me. Do not feel guilty about anything, just call. All my love, Jamal."

(MR DELARA enters the stage.)

MR DELARA
Ladies, you need anything?

LEAH
Got any champagne?

ZOE
Or a bottle of scotch?

MR DELARA
I keep some on hand for moments like this, but first, Ms. Silva, care to use my telephone?

ZOE
For what?

MR DELARA
To phone Jamal.

ZOE
Then you knew?

MR DELARA
He introduced himself to me when he came by, and I must say, he's a fine young man. You saw the photo? In the envelope?

(ZOE pulls a photo from the envelope the letter came in).

ZOE

Oh look Leah, he's beautiful.

(pauses, then says quietly)

Dear God, he's actually wearing ...

LEAH

.. a baseball shirt. And he has your green eyes!

MR DELARA

Jamal would love to hear from you. Shall I place the call?

ZOE

Leah, what do you think?

LEAH

My God Zoe, what other answer could I possibly give you? I would kill to have this moment.

ZOE

But, maybe I should take 24 hours to /

LEAH

Oh no, no, no, no, no. I am NOT giving you 24 hours to talk yourself out of this. Zoe, you know I'd trade places with you in a heartbeat. I've imagined a moment like this for 23 years! And you saw what he wrote?

ZOE

(looks at the letter, still
choking back tears)

Do not feel guilty just ... just call.

LEAH

Honey, it's your decision and I'll support you either way, but ... oh hell, what are you waiting for? Do it.

ZOE

You're right, yes. YES! Place the call.

(MR DELARA places the call)

MR DELARA

Hello Jamal? It's Roy DeLara from Our Lady of Hope
wonderful to hear your voice too!

(MORE)

MR DELARA (CONT'D)

Listen, we had a response to your file inquiry ... and, well it seems your birth mother is right here ... in my office ... oh I'm quite serious ... anyway, she'd like to say hello not to worry, it's quite normal to be nervous ... okay, here she is.

ZOE

(Takes the phone from MR
DELARA as lights begin to
fade.)

Hello .. Jamal?

(pauses, then looks at LEAH)

It's your mother.

(Lights fade to black.)

END OF PLAY