

**ASSASSIN' S ANTHOLOGY**

**A 80-Minute Play**

**By**

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### CHARACTERS

Candlestick Maker- (aka Candle) Woman, Black, age 18-25. quirky, enjoys comics, playing the piano, and explosives. Overly curious, but is cared for by the other characters, especially Butcher and Baker. The newest assassin.

Hangman- Man, white, age 25-40. Leader. Attractive. Charismatic. Intelligent. But oftentimes overly exacting of his rules and intense. Mistrusting and careful not to show little if any vulnerabilities.

Chemist- Woman, Person of Color, age 25-40. Highly intelligent and persuasive. As a healer, is nurturing to other characters. Takes no bullshit from anybody. Fierce.

Lover- Woman, age 22-35. A theatrical, cold, seductress, who has vowed to never love. Sarcastic, strategic, quick witted, and insightful. Has a complex relationship with Fighter.

Fighter- Any Gender, age 22-35. Ex-convict with extraordinary fighting skills in several areas of combat. Business oriented, tough, but can be easily distracted. Close with Lover.

Butcher- Any Gender, age 30-55. Tough personality, blunt, impulsive, functional-alcoholic, with a bit of a temper but has a sense of humor. Close with Baker. Sarcastic.

Baker- Woman, age 30-55. Passionate about Baking and has a comprehensive knowledge of poisons. Protective. Warm. Chipper. Close with Butcher. Occasionally a ball of anxiety and nervousness.

*(Characters whose race is not specified can be of any race or ethnicity, **but the cast should be diverse please avoid "only(s)" i.e. one person of color, one white person etc.** Some characters may have accents or dialects, as they may not all be from the U.S.A.)*

**RUNTIME:** Estimated at 90 minutes, **with option of intermission after Scene 8, making it a Two-Act Play.**

**SETTING:** Anytime from 2009 - present. Large mansion on an estate, somewhere at an undisclosed location in the USA.

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**SYNOPSIS:** Seven assassins live together on an estate, each with their own specialty. Hangman, their leader, has a secret he has yet to reveal to the others, until the truth is discovered by the newest addition to the team, Candle. As the youngest assassin, Candle struggles to confront her past and must decide whether or not the new life she has chosen is worth living.

**GENRE:** Drama, Thriller, Crime, Comedy, Cynical

**STAGE CONCEPTS:** Scenes are meant to be rather ominous, plain rooms, scarce set pieces, only what is needed to tell the story.

**SCENE 1: RESURRECTION**

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Aside to Audience.)* There's only one way to become a True Assassin— you have to die— *(Sound of CHEMIST pounding on casket and screaming for help.)* Well, *legally* speaking anyway. It doesn't matter if you're cremated, or if you have an open-casket funeral, it needs to be public, published, and documented. And when you wake up six feet below, you better hope someone's there to get you out.

*(Spotlight on HANGMAN who enters. Ambient sounds of nighttime. HANGMAN opens the casket or possibly rolls CHEMIST out from a morgue drawer?)*

CHEMIST

*(Sits up.)* Are you from the Company?

HANGMAN

I work for no one but myself.

CHEMIST

Who are you?

HANGMAN

*(Confidently.)* The question isn't, "who am I," but who were you? The person you were is on that gravestone, dead. The Company wanted you dead, I made you appear dead, so it's best they think you are dead, wouldn't you agree?

CHEMIST

*(Contemplates then nods.)* Yes.

HANGMAN

Good. *(Helps CHEMIST up.)* So, here you stand before me, in the flesh, which means you're not a ghost. So, *what* are you? *Who* are you?

CHEMIST

My name is—

HANGMAN

*(Interrupts.)* No. No, that person is dead, we've gone over this— you're far too intelligent to not be able to keep up. But let's be clear, you don't have a name. That's rule number one.

*(HANGMAN and CHEMIST freeze, Spotlight on CANDLE.)*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Aside to Audience. Stands.)* Rule number one— maintain your anonymity— no *real* names. A well-known assassin is an oxymoron— assassins have no names. If you're nameless, you're blameless, and you can't kill a "no one".

*(Lights fade on CANDLE, HANGMAN and CHEMIST unfreeze, lights shift.)*

HANGMAN

So *what* are you? *Who* are you?

CHEMIST

What exactly do you want? Money?

HANGMAN

My apologies, I should have explained, I don't negotiate— that's rule number two.

*(HANGMAN and CHEMIST freeze. Spotlight on CANDLE.)*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Aside to audience. Overlapping lines.)* Rule number two— never negotiate with a target. Most targets will bargain for their lives and offer more money. Remember, if you don't take down the target someone else will, and the ones who hired you will make you their next target. As much as assassins value money, we value our lives more.

*(Lights shift. HANGMAN and CHEMIST unfreeze.)*

CHEMIST

Stop feeding me rules and riddles—

HANGMAN

*(Cuts her off.)* You haven't answered my questions.

CHEMIST

You haven't answered mine.

HANGMAN

*(Smiles.)* Fair enough. But never ask too many questions, that's rule number three.

*(HANGMAN and CHEMIST freeze. Spotlight on CANDLE)*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Aside to Audience. Read aloud, overlapping HANGMAN's lines.)*  
Rule Number three— Don't ask too many questions. There's a fine line between being an assassin and becoming a target. The more you know, the more threatening you are to a client. Don't take jobs you can't survive.

*(Lights shift. CANDLE exits. HANGMAN and CHEMIST unfreeze.)*

HANGMAN

I get that you don't trust me— you shouldn't trust anyone, but asking too many questions will get you killed.

CHEMIST

I thought I was already dead?

HANGMAN

*(Amused.)* Good. You're starting to learn. You're listening—

CHEMIST

What do you want?!

HANGMAN

Yes, embrace that passion! Use it to think critically. Someone with degrees in psychology, biology and, of course, chemistry, should be able to formulate an idea of *what* and *who* I am. So tell me.

CHEMIST

*(Analyzing.)* Your tone of voice suggests confidence, perhaps a bit of arrogance. Which is consistent with your posture, you may even be a bit narcissistic. You carry some slight tension in your right arm, *(Pause.)* more so now that I've mentioned it, and especially in your hand near the gun you're concealing. You're a violent person but mask the common signs of aggression in your face to appear at ease. You may also be suffering from mild paranoia, but this is not uncommon in those who are in the more violent, and or... *illegal* professions. You're a leader. You weren't threatened by me before but you are now because all of what I've been saying is true.

HANGMAN

What am I?

CHEMIST

*(Beat.)* You're an assassin.

HANGMAN

We are assassins, you and I.

CHEMIST

You must be confused.

HANGMAN

I'm offering you a job. A career change, if you will.

CHEMIST

Hard pass. *(Turns to leave.)*

HANGMAN

*(Beat.)* Look, committing suicide would have been a mistake.

CHEMIST

*(Turns back.)* What? How did you... how long have you been following me?

HANGMAN

Long enough to know you're too valuable to be killed. Now, about the job offer—

CHEMIST

I'll have to decline. *(Turns to walk away.)*

HANGMAN

Tell me, where will you go? (*CHEMIST stops walking away.*) Surely you know they'll find you and kill you, *permanently* this time.

CHEMIST

I have family—

HANGMAN

No. You *had* a family. Seeing them again would put them in danger. Which is why you were going to take your life in the first place. You know this and yet you deny the obvious?

CHEMIST

Obvious? You ask me, "Who I am? What I am?" the truth is I don't know. Then you tell me that I'm dead, but not *really* dead, that I'm alive, but that it's too dangerous to tell my family?

HANGMAN

I offer a chance to live. A lab to continue your research. The chance to make a difference. (*Pause.*) I'm offering survival!

CHEMIST

I've had everything taken from me through no fault of my own—pulled out of my own grave and spared a death that part of me still wants, and for what? A job?! (*Laughs.*) To "make a difference"? I tried to make a difference and look where I ended up (*Motions to the casket*). This world is too corrupt for me to change. We both know who and what I am— a failure. And to the public, a conspiracy theorist, fired by a company for blowing the whistle on a drug that killed thousands. (*Beat.*) I failed to stop them. The deaths of all of those people are on my conscience. I— I don't need anymore.

HANGMAN

I know you did everything you could to prevent the sale of that drug. I promise that those responsible will pay with their lives. But to deny the world a talent such as yours— *that* would be your ultimate failure. I'm offering you the opportunity to... (*Finding the words.*) dance with death. So tell me, *what* are you? *Who* are you?

CHEMIST

I don't...



HANGMAN

*What* are you?! *Who* are you?!

CHEMIST

I... I'm a chemist?! I'm just a chemist.

HANGMAN

No. You are *thee* Chemist. We won't be heroes. We won't be villains. We're criminals, just like everybody else— only we're not stealing packs of gum from corner stores. (*Beat.*) We don't play by the rules of religion or obey laws. As you'll come to learn, the rules we have are our own. (*Reaches out hand, CHEMIST is hesitant.*)

CHEMIST

And why should I follow you?

HANGMAN

(*Sighs and smiles.*) The *Noble Cause*.

CHEMIST

*Noble Cause*? What *Noble Cause* could you possibly serve?

HANGMAN

I hold the unaccountable, accountable. People who are so far up in this world that they can act with impunity, while the rest of us suffer.

CHEMIST

So, you play God?

HANGMAN

(*Smiles.*) No. (*Serious.*) God is merciful. I show no mercy. Because the people I kill show none themselves.

CHEMIST

So you act out of vengeance?

HANGMAN

(*Beat.*) I like to think of it more as... *justice*.

CHEMIST

This *Noble Cause* of yours, sounds like it'll get you killed.

HANGMAN

Doesn't matter when you're already dead. (*Offers out hand.*)

(CHEMIST takes HANGMAN's hand.)

HANGMAN (cont'd)

I'm Hangman. You can call me *H*.

(Lights fade. HANGMAN Exits.)

**SCENE 2: THERAPY SESSION**

(Lights up. CHEMIST sits in a chair across from CANDLE who writes in a notebook.)

CHEMIST

And that was the first time I met Hangman.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Whoa. Intense.

CHEMIST

That was years ago. Before the other assassins came to the estate. (Beat.) Candle, you've been with us for a few months now. Do you think you might want to share a bit about yourself?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Sure. I'm the Candlestick Maker, I'm quite good at explosives, I like the color blue and the number 15-

CHEMIST

Candle-

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Well. What is it you want to know?

CHEMIST

You've been waking up with night terrors. Do you want to talk about it?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I want to know more about you and Hangman. Was there ever something between the two of you?

CHEMIST

Alright, Candle, if you don't want to talk- (Gets up to leave.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Okay. (Beat.) I'm writing. Collecting stories. It started out as a journal, like you said I should do. But now it's turned into something more. A curiosity of sorts.

CHEMIST

Oh. So you're talking to the others about their pasts?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Do you think that by getting to know their stories I might understand them better? Trust them more?

CHEMIST

Possibly. Or perhaps better understand your own story? (Beat.) Your first official job is coming up, isn't it? How do you feel about taking your next step as a true assassin?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I feel like I'm ready. But, part of me still has so many questions about this... profession.

CHEMIST

It's alright if you're feeling some nervousness. You're still processing. But I am concerned. (Beat.) Your inability to discuss the loss of your parents-

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I didn't lose them- I wasn't careless. They were murdered. You don't have to remind me.

CHEMIST

Candle I only meant-

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I just remembered I'm needed in the kitchen. (Stands up.)

CHEMIST

Candle. I need you to finish that book. You must do whatever is necessary to make peace with your past. Hangman needs to know that he has your full commitment. (Beat.) If he has doubts-

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Beat.) I have to go. (Exits)

CHEMIST

Right. Of course. I'll see you later! (Exits.)

**SCENE 3: THE KITCHEN**

(Lights up on the Kitchen, BAKER stands stirring soup and cutting veggies, while BUTCHER chops meat. Sounds of boiling. CANDLE sits writing in a notebook, becoming distracted by BUTCHER's loud slamming of the cleaver, flinching each time BUTCHER slams it down. CANDLE then stands and begins to eat the carrots BAKER is cutting for the soup. The conversation is interrupted now and then by BUTCHER's slamming of the cleaver. All but the kitchen utensils and carrots are pantomimed.)

BAKER

Candle, I said help with dinner, not help yourself.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Butch, you ever tried being vegetarian?

BUTCHER

Here we go again... look, I'm all about reducing my carbon footprint, but I draw the line at my meat.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Did you know there are entire cultures that are vegetarian?

BUTCHER

Tell me, how many Butchers do you know that are vegetarian? It's unnatural in this profession. It's like telling Baker not to have sugar. *(Beat.)* You know Candle, for someone who cares for the environment, and animals, you don't seem to have a problem assassinating people.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

True. But we don't eat the people we kill.

BUTCHER

*(Sarcastically.)* Oh, good. At least we know we're morally superior to cannibals.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Besides, I haven't even gone on my first job yet.

BAKER

But it's coming up soon! How exciting! So, what is it that are you writing?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

It's a work in progress.

BAKER

*(Takes a look at the cover. Reads.)* "The Anthology". Hmm. Sounds interesting.

BUTCHER

*(Mumbles.)* What the fuck is an anthology?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

A book of stories, poems, even songs.

BAKER

What are the stories and poems about?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Assassins.

BAKER

*(Looks up from book.)* Is this about us? Oh, how wonderful!

BUTCHER

Holy shit! *(Slams cleaver down. Looks at CANDLE, arms crossed.)* You better not have put me in there.

BAKER

Oh Butch, why not? I think we should be supportive.

BUTCHER

Alright. Fine. What do I gotta do?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You don't have to do anything. Or tell me anything, unless you want to.

BAKER

We want to. We want to help. You know, I always wanted to write my own cookbook.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

After dinner, I'll come and find you. We can chat then. (Exits.)

BAKER

How do you think her first job will go?

BUTCHER

Who knows. Candle knows what she's doing. Hangman trained her well. It's up to her if she's ready or not.

BAKER

But she's running out of time. I can just tell Hangman is losing patience. He's being ever so secretive, more so than usual.

BUTCHER

If something was going on, Hangman would tell us. If it's important enough. Stop stressing. (Tries to go and comfort BAKER)

BAKER

(Continues pacing.) And now, she has her head in this book she's writing. She's losing focus.

BUTCHER

I think Candle needs a little distraction. If writing this book is going to help, so be it.

BAKER

(Beat.) I think the job will go well. It has to. If doesn't-

BUTCHER

If it doesn't. Hangman will do what has to be done.

BAKER

You mean kill her? Hangman will kill Candle?

BUTCHER

(Beat.) He'll have no choice.

BAKER

Of course he has a choice! He could give her more time. He could- he could-

BUTCHER

(Comforting BAKER). I know. I know. He could do a number of things that he isn't gonna do. He took a risk bringing Candle into the fold. We've never had someone so young. But he can't baby her forever.

BAKER

I know. But there must be something we can do.

BUTCHER

(Beat.) We're not gonna let anything happen to her. We'll figure something out.

BAKER

We will? Yeah. We will! Even if it goes against Hangman's wishes?

BUTCHER

Well, truthfully, I hope it doesn't get to that point.

BAKER

Oh, Butch, something's going on with Hangman. Something is wrong, I can just feel it.

(BUTCHER slams the cleaver down one last time. Lights fade on the Kitchen as BUTCHER and BAKER exit. Lights up in the hallway.)



**SCENE 4: TEST RESULTS**

*(In the hallway. CHEMIST enters.)*

HANGMAN

*(Enters.)* Chemist!

CHEMIST

Fighter said you wanted to talk. What is it?

*(In the hallway, CANDLE walks past the briefing room, backtracking, to hide behind the wall and eavesdrop, unseen.)*

HANGMAN

We missed you in the briefing.

CHEMIST

I was looking into the target you had assigned. *(Hands HANGMAN report.)*

HANGMAN

*(Nodding in recollection.)* The one I asked you about last week?

CHEMIST

The blood tested negative for any exploitable allergens. However, in the standard testing— diseases, viruses, infections we could be exposed to— I found something else. *(Points to a section of the report.)*

HANGMAN

*(Looks up.)* Something else?

CHEMIST

The blood showed high levels of alpha-fetoprotein or AFP. I also found other indicators that would suggest the same thing. This target has liver cancer. It's still early, so symptoms won't begin to show severely, if at all. But we should move up the job before our client finds out. *(Pause.)* Unless that's a problem?

HANGMAN

*(Lost in thought.)* No. No, it's fine. *(Folds report.)* Thank you Chemist. *(Beat.)* And Chem, I'll be working late tonight.

CHEMIST

And...?

HANGMAN

Well... if you, by chance, are up... I may stop by.

CHEMIST

*(Dismissive.) I'll see you at dinner, H. (Exits.)*

*(HANGMAN places a report in his desk drawer, turns and exits. CANDLE enters the room, looks around, and then goes to open HANGMAN's desk. CANDLE pulls out several opened envelopes and loose papers, looking each over with concern.)*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*He's dying. Hangman's dying. (Puts letters back. Exits.)*

*(Lights fade.)*

**SCENE 5: DINNER**

*(BUTCHER enters. A dinner table is set with plates and silverware positioned in a way that each character will face out, styled like the last supper. The table is being set by CANDLE. FIGHTER enters. Dinner can be pantomimed.)*

BUTCHER

Fighter. Dinner's in five. *(Looking around.)*

*(HANGMAN enters.)*

HANGMAN

*(Acknowledging)* Fighter.

FIGHTER

Hangman.

*(FIGHTER nods to HANGMAN and they have a seat.)*

FIGHTER *(cont'd)*

Any word on Lover?

HANGMAN

Nothing yet. I'm sure the job is going fine. She's been on plenty of solo missions before.

*(BAKER enters from the Kitchen with another entree, and sits down. HANGMAN sits at one end of the room while CHEMIST enters and sits opposite. There is clearly tension between them, as he pulls out a seat for her, but she doesn't take it. CANDLE sits between everyone.)*

HANGMAN

*(Takes a seat.)* Thank you to those who helped prepare this meal. I know it's been a long week for everyone, so let's enjoy—

(LOVER enters- or rather, 'makes an entrance'. She enters in a disguise from her last job. BUTCHER's about to take a bite of food when-)

LOVER

Well, surely you weren't going to start dinner without me?

(BUTCHER sets food down disappointedly. FIGHTER gets up to greet LOVER. These two conversations happen in quick succession but not overlapping too much.)

BUTCHER

(Sarcastically.) Wouldn't dream of it. (To CANDLE.) She's always gotta make an entrance.

FIGHTER

Hey! (Crosses to LOVER)

BAKER

Oh stop it. Maybe someone just needs to learn a little patience?

FIGHTER

You're back so soon? I thought you said it could take a few days.

LOVER

What can I say? I'm just that good. (Kisses FIGHTER.)

FIGHTER

Admit it. You missed me.

LOVER

Never.

HANGMAN

Lover. I wasn't expecting you to be back yet. How did it go?

LOVER

(Removing part of her disguise.) It's done. The objective believes Sylvia Richards, my alias, died in a fiery car crash. The target's been eliminated.

HANGMAN

Good. Now, if we could get back to dinner-

(Interrupted by the sound of an alarm going off. Everyone, but CANDLE, pulls out a weapon)

BAKER

*(Stands up excitedly.)* Everything's fine! It was just my cooking alarm. *(Exits to the kitchen.)*

(Everyone relaxes and begins to eat. CANDLE looks at BUTCHER who just pulled a cleaver knife out of nowhere.)

BUTCHER

(Turns to CANDLE and shrugs.) What? It's a habit. Like a soldier's response.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

More like a trauma response. *(Beat.)* I'm not sure I'd be cut out for the life of a soldier.

HANGMAN

Because you lack discipline?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

That, and because I always wanted to be an architect. But, with a family in construction, I was drawn to demolition-

BUTCHER

*(Smiling nervously, eyeballing HANGMAN, cutting off CANDLE.)* Uh, that's nice Candle... here, try the chicken *(Goes to stick a piece of chicken into CANDLE's mouth).*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Pushes it away.)* I'm vegetarian!

BUTCHER

*(Smiles, trying not to make a scene. Teeth clenched.)* Pretend it's a carrot, and chew with your mouth shut.

LOVER

Why Butcher? You never do.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Ignoring BUTCHER.)* Music! Before architecture, I fell in love with music. Whether it was classical, or jazz-

BUTCHER

*(A little louder.)* Candle, why don't you go and help Baker with dessert-

CANDLESTICKER MAKER

I took a turn, and began a life of crime- stealing from the rich and giving to the streets-

HANGMAN

*(Slams utensils down on the table.)* Candle!

*(There's silence. Everyone stops eating and looks up at HANGMAN. BAKER enters.)*

BAKER

*(Chipper.)* Dessert isn't quite done- *(Feels the tension.)* I'll check on it later. *(Sits.)*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Sorry. It just... slipped out.

CHEMIST

*(Breaking tension, calmly.)* It's alright, Candle.

HANGMAN

*(Picks utensils up.)* I wasn't asking for your opinion, Chemist. Candle knows the rules.

CHEMIST

Hangman, stop being so insufferable.

HANGMAN

*I'm* being insufferable? I'm the one suffering through this meal.

FIGHTER

*(Trying to lighten the mood.)* Come on, the food isn't that bad. We're all together. Safe and sound-

CHEMIST

*(Cuts FIGHTER off.)* Candle was just sharing some general information-I'm not sure what the harm is?

HANGMAN

*(Looks at CHEMIST.)* Don't.

*(The room is tense, everyone looks back and forth between CHEMIST and HANGMAN, some avoid eye contact.)*

CHEMIST

*(Pause.)* Don't what? Pretend like we all don't come with baggage? Obey your rules and keep our mouths shut?

HANGMAN

*(Coldly.)* The rules are clear, without exceptions. *(Changes tone, continues eating.)* If Candle wants to share with you, Chemist, in a clinical setting, fine.

LOVER

What Hangman is trying to say, Candle, is that he could give two shits about any of us.

BAKER

Language!

HANGMAN

*(To LOVER.)* You know, I don't need your snide comments, Lover. If I wanted your mouth opened, I would have unzipped my pants.

LOVER

*(Gripping her knife tightly, giving HANGMAN a look, now hostile.)* Don't flatter yourself.

BAKER

Hangman, that was distasteful-

BUTCHER

-Even for Lover.

LOVER

Hey!

HANGMAN

You're right, Baker, that was rude of me. (*Reluctantly*) My sincerest apologies.

LOVER

All is forgiven. It's not as though your anger was *misdirected*, or anything, obviously. (*Looking between CHEMIST and HANGMAN.*)

BAKER

Dessert! (*Stands to exit.*)

CHEMIST

Lover, since you so kindly spoke up, why don't you share something personal?

LOVER

(*Condescendingly, yet balmy.*) Aw, Chemist. (*Passive aggressively smiles.*) Why don't you shove a test tube up your ass?

BAKER

Language! For the second time. This is dinner and you are all being quite ill-mannered. (*Quickly exits to the kitchen for desserts.*)

CHEMIST

(*Maintaining eye-contact with LOVER*) What? Are you afraid of opening up and appearing *human*?

HANGMAN

(*Stands*) That's enough!! No more discussion. This is going to be a silent meal.

BAKER

(*Enters with a tray.*) Ready for dessert?!

CHEMIST

(*Breaking the silence*) Thank you, Baker. (*Takes a dessert.*) Would anyone else like some?

(*BAKER smiles uncomfortably and takes a seat.*)



BAKER

*(Smiles awkwardly, laughs nervously, shoving pastry into her mouth until it's full and then speaks, holding up the tray.)* Dessert?

*(HANGMAN stands up, walks to CANDLE.)*

HANGMAN

*(To CANDLE)* I hope you enjoyed your little show. *(To CHEMIST)* We need to talk.

BUTCHER

*(Under breath.)* Oh shit.

CHEMIST

I agree.

BAKER

So... did everyone enjoy dessert?

*(Lights fade, scene transitions.  
Spotlight on CANDLESTICK MAKER reading  
from her anthology.)*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Aside to Audience.)* Hangman says, consciously or subconsciously we are driven towards three things— love, money, and power. Everything else is just a means to those ends— sex, a career, family, religion— it all boils down to those three things. The catch is— the three things we want, we can seldom have together. For you see, love spoils money and power— power spoils love and money— and money— money can ruin just about anything.

*(CANDLESTICK MAKER exits.)*

HANGMAN

*(Read as an Aside to CANDLE as if a character in her anthology.)* "Each spoil requires ambition and luck. Patience is essential before taking action— ambition is what killed the assassin. And if we're not careful, if we misstep, we may find ourselves tripping our own wires, poisoned by our own soup, or hanging by our own noose." *(Exits.)*

*(HANGMAN exits.)*

**SCENE 6: WE NEED TO TALK**

(On the balcony, CHEMIST enters followed by HANGMAN. Lights up.)

HANGMAN

How are the sessions with Candle going?

CHEMIST

She's coping. She's adjusting. I can understand—

HANGMAN

I'm running out of patience with her. She's creating division. Asking questions. She needs to be ready and she's not.

CHEMIST

I know.

HANGMAN

(Beat.) You know? The plan was pretty clear. You were supposed to begin her healing process. She was supposed to grieve and be more receptive to learning our profession.

CHEMIST

I didn't know how much she was dealing with— is dealing with. That's why I gave her the journal.

HANGMAN

The journal. What a brilliant idea! Now she's obsessed with finding out everyone's past, forcing them to relive those things they're better off forgetting.

CHEMIST

She needs to confront her past in order for her to move forward.

HANGMAN

And what if she can't?! What if digging into her past causes her even more pain? (Beat.) What if—

CHEMIST

What if we're not talking about Candle at all? Maybe she's making you question those things?

HANGMAN

(Bringing the focus back to the problem at hand.) Look, I could excuse her curiosity if it wasn't making her bolder in questioning my authority- our rules.

CHEMIST

She's young. I know she's not where either of us thought she would be, but she's learning. She's so smart, H, and talented.

HANGMAN

You sound like Baker. Singing her praises. They had a job to do as well, and failed because they got too close to her. Don't make the same mistake.

CHEMIST

I'm making progress.

HANGMAN

You're losing your objectivity and you know it. I'm so desperate, I'm considering asking Lover for help. Do you have any idea how embarrassing that is? If you can't butter her up, I'll have Lover and Fighter scare her into the fold.

CHEMIST

I find that Candle is struggling with *honesty and trust*.

HANGMAN

Was that directed at me for some reason?

CHEMIST

Candle isn't the only one struggling.

HANGMAN

(*Turns to CHEMIST.*) Yes? Is there something you'd like to say?

CHEMIST

I was hoping you would tell me of your own volition but somewhere along the line, I lost your trust.

HANGMAN

I can't imagine how!

CHEMIST

I trust you with the truth when I know you will do the right thing. But I'm not even sure you know what that is anymore. *(Beat.)* The blood work you had me run, it's yours isn't it?

HANGMAN

*(Beat.)* I wanted to tell you.

CHEMIST

*(Nods head.)* Did you? What were you waiting for, your deathbed? *(Livid, but remaining professional. Thinking out loud.)* So, now what? We find a donor, get you some help— it's early, which is good— great actually, we have time. *(Beat. Turns.)* The others! Oh god, we have to tell them.

HANGMAN

No.

CHEMIST

*(Pause.)* No? They have a right to know—

HANGMAN

You misunderstand. No. No to all of it. No treatment, no intervention, just— no. I'm not going to do the whole recovery, the anti-rejection drugs, the uncertainty if the cancer will return. I'd be weak— putting you all at risk. And for what?

CHEMIST

So... what are you saying? We do nothing? You're just giving up? Are you *that* suicidal?

HANGMAN

Don't psychoanalyze me. I know what I'm doing. What I need from you is simple. I need you to take my place as leader. *(Beat.)* Now, there will be resistance at first—

CHEMIST

Stop. Stop talking. I am not your way out of this.

HANGMAN

It's what's best for everyone—

CHEMIST

You mean easiest for you—

HANGMAN

Chemist! (Beat.) Chem. There's one more thing I need you to do... kill me.

CHEMIST

I'm sorry, you need me to what?

HANGMAN

If you kill me, no one will dare challenge your authority and I'll know you're able to do what needs to be done. You can tell everyone the truth once I'm dead.

CHEMIST

It may be a bit inconvenient for them to express their opinions on the matter, if the decision has already been made. You think I'd let you complete premeditated suicide? (Beat.) What am I saying? I'll just go and tell everyone now. (Turns to leave.)

HANGMAN

(Points gun, aimed at CHEMIST's back. Commanding.) I am still in charge! (Beat.) Which means you will comply. Until I'm dead, I'm the one who's in control.

CHEMIST

(Turns around to look him in the eyes.) Are you? I don't think you are. And that's not my personal opinion, it's my medical one. (HANGMAN lowers gun.) Don't point a gun at me unless you intend on using it. I can always call your bluff.

HANGMAN

Then you know I'm not bluffing about my decision.

CHEMIST

I know. (Beat.) So now what?

HANGMAN

So now nothing. I'll handle it. I always do.

CHEMIST

And Candle?

HANGMAN

I'll talk with her. But if she doesn't fall in line, I'll be her executioner.

(Both exit. Lights fade.)

SCENE 7: THE EXECUTIONER

(LOVER enters, changed out of her disguise. HANGMAN enters in passing.)

HANGMAN

Lover.

LOVER

H.

HANGMAN

I need you to do something for me. (Whispers something to LOVER.)

LOVER

That's all? Consider it done.

(HANGMAN exits. FIGHTER and CANDLE enter.)

FIGHTER

So this guy had me, right? We were going round after round and he kept coming. I knew if I let him get one more hit in, I'd be finished.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Furiously writing in her notebook.) Yeah, then what happend?

FIGHTER

Well I- (Notices LOVER.) Hey! Out of that disguise finally.

LOVER

What a relief.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(To FIGHTER.) So, what happened?

FIGHTER

Oh, right. (Forgetting about LOVER.) So I said to him, "if I hit you one more time, you'll fold like a chair". I said "I've fought guys bigger and tougher than you. I've made men twice my size cry out to their god and plead for mercy. I've made grown men fall to their knees-

LOVER

(Has a drink. Smiles.) So have I-

FIGHTER

Look, I've had my ass handed to me more times than I'll ever admit. But I didn't tell him that. Then I said, (Beat.) "And if there's one thing I know, it's when a fighter is going to go down. It's in their eyes. It's in your eyes." And at this point I'm bluffing. And you know what, he thought about it. Then he thought about it for another second. And he reached out his hand, (Reaches hand out to CANDLE.) and I shook it. (Shakes CANDLE's hand.) And that was that. (Beat.) See, a real fighter, well they know when to walk away, while they still can walk.

LOVER

So Candle, how are you adjusting to your new life?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm doing well.

LOVER

I've heard other reports. I hear you're about to go on your first job. Are you nervous? I would be.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Maybe a little.

FIGHTER

First kill is always tough.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

But they won't be the first person I've killed.

LOVER

And they won't be the last.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Changing subject) Lover, how do you kill your targets? I assume you seduce them in some way?

LOVER

Of course, there is a seduction element to it. But it's more than that. I make them fall in love with me. Sometimes my mark, that is the person I am to seduce, isn't the target at all.

FIGHTER

Yeah. Sometimes they're just the poor schmuck who the killing gets blamed on.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Understanding.) Ahhh. (To LOVER.) And you've never fallen in love with any of them?

LOVER

Love? (Laughs.) Never.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Who was the first person you made fall in love with you?

LOVER

Hard to say. (Beat.) But I do know the first person who ever truly loved me.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Who?

LOVER

My mother. From the moment I was born, her love for me made her heart beat so fast, that it stopped, and she died. I suppose she's the first person I ever killed. (Beat.) My father never recovered.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm sorry, she died.

LOVER

I didn't ask for your pity. I certainly never offered you mine.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

May I ask, what happened to you father?

LOVER

Love.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Love? Love killed him? How?



LOVER

My dear girl, how naive you are. (BEAT.) How naive I was. You see, (Beat.) Every year on my birthday, I'd wish my mother was there. A foolish wish, you see. (Beat.) However, on my 11<sup>th</sup> birthday, instead I wished she'd never loved me... because if she never loved me, her heart wouldn't have stopped beating and she'd still be alive. My father had wished the same thing for years- I just didn't know it until that night. (Beat.) We lived in a rural area- And there was a boy who lived across the road. One day he tried to ride one of the wild horses. He got on, but the horse tossed him off-trampled him- and he died. (Beat.) I could never blame the horse for what it did. But I'll never forget the sound of the gunshot that killed the horse- because it was the same sound I heard on my 11<sup>th</sup> birthday- when my father pulled the trigger of a shotgun aimed at his head. (Beat.) I've seduced countless men, women - driven people to treason, murder, even suicide... I've learned a great deal about what love can do. But my parents were my greatest teachers. They taught me that love kills. It killed my mother. It killed my father. I was damned if it was going to kill me. (BEAT.) Haven't ridden a horse since. (Beat.) Now, shall we drink to a job well done? (Takes a sip of wine.)

FIGHTER

Cheer up, Candle. You're gonna do great.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

My parents taught me many useful skills as well, Lover. Skills that make me a valuable asset to this team.

LOVER

Of course. But really, Hangman will make that determination. (Beat.) Look, Candle, I would never want to dissuade you from being an assassin. Don't make me out to be the Executioner.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

What does that mean?

LOVER

It's a saying we assassins have. (Beat.) Surely, someone must have mentioned it before.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Yes, but what does it mean?

LOVER

No one's told you about the Executioner?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Who's the Executioner?

FIGHTER

It's some old legend- a myth, a wife's tale, about an Assassin who went by the title of the Executioner- the Assassin's Assassin. Hired by no one, motivated only to kill killers. A true assassin, through and through.

LOVER

Fighter, we don't want to scare the girl. Surely she's not interested in some silly myth? Right Candle?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Looks to LOVER and then FIGHTER.) Go on then. Tell me. I want to know.

FIGHTER

Well, it's a bit more than a myth... though it is difficult to prove the Executioner's existence when no one's ever actually lived to tell the tale.

LOVER

(Pours a drink for herself and for FIGHTER.) Convenient? Right?

FIGHTER

From what I've been told, the first Executioner was a defective assassin. I guess they figured it was a means of redemption. Made the discovery that the only way to stop killing targets was to start killing assassins. But that's not the most interesting part, you see. It's the way the Executioner killed them. If the assassin's skill was strangling, the executioner strangled them. If it was fire, they would be burned. Always the same. Whatever the assassin's specialty was, that's how they died.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Fascinating. (Beat.) Were they ever found?

FIGHTER

Never. But it's said that once the Executioner dies, another assassin must take their place. And so it goes on and on and on. (Takes a drink.) The tale became so popular amongst the locals, you know, where the Executioner is said to have first started, that there's even a song.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Song?! Well? What is it?

FIGHTER

Nah. I couldn't. (Takes another sip of his drink.) Besides, Hangman isn't a fan of the song.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Why is that?

FIGHTER

It mentions a hangman.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Do you think the song might be how Hangman got his name?

FIGHTER

Hard to say. And he'll never tell.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You have to sing it. (Beat.) Come on. It's a rite of passage. Isn't that what soldiers do before a battle, sing songs?

LOVER

You'll hardly be going into a battle.

FIGHTER

I don't know.

LOVER

Baby, come on. You know you want to sing it.

FIGHTER

Yeah. You're right. What harm could it do? Just a few verses. (Beat.) I'll need another drink first.

(LOVER fills his drink.)

FIGHTER  
(Sung.)

*The Hangman's rope fell 'round his neck,*

*He had no chance to catch his breath,*

*The floor left his feet,*

*Onlookers to feast*

*On his suffering,*

*As a pendulum he'd swing*

(Begins to stomp his foot in  
rhythm.)

*Executioner tugged,*

*The Hangman snapped,*

*There were no tears,*

*Nor were there laughs,*

*His heart drummed,*

*The Hangman danced,*

*The Hangman danced,*

*The Hangman danced,*

(Begins to get up and dance with  
LOVER. CANDLE keeps the rhythm. LOVER  
laughs and actually has a good time.  
They dance until- HANGMAN enters after  
hearing the song.)

HANGMAN

(To FIGHTER) Who said you could sing that song?

(HANGMAN voice silences the room.)

LOVER

We were just having a little fun. We didn't mean anything by it-

HANGMAN

(Cuts her off.) I wasn't talking to you, Lover.

FIGHTER

He was talking to me. (Beat.) Yeah, so I sang the song. (Challenging)  
Then what? It's just a song. (Walking back the challenge a little.) No  
need to get bent out of shape.

LOVER

What's wrong Hangman? Feeling triggered by a few music notes?

HANGMAN

(Turns to CANDLE) Did you start this?

FIGHTER

She had nothing to do with it- I sang the song 'cause I wanted to sing it.

HANGMAN

Well. Go on then sing it! Dance! Drink. Don't let me stop you.

(No one speaks. And then-)

That's what I thought. (Turns to CANDLE)  
You should be preparing for tonight.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Yes. Yes, Sir. (Makes a mocking salute and marches out and exits.)

(HANGMAN exits in a different  
direction than CANDLE.)

FIGHTER

What the hell's up with H? Something's got him on edge.

LOVER

At first, well-

FIGHTER

What is it?

LOVER

A moment ago, Hangman asked me for a favor, and now-

FIGHTER

And?

LOVER

(Smiles, brushing the thought away.) It's nothing. I hope.

(LOVER and FIGHTER exit the room. Lights  
fade. CANDLE exits. Scene change.)

**SCENE 8: FIRST JOB**

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Aside to Audience. Sets up the wires for the bomb. Holding wire cutters and the bomb switch in hand. Walks backwards, carefully.) Today is my first official mission. It's not just holding doors, or watching the perimeter. Today, I kill a person— a target. The target's name— I mean— the target is known as Mr. V. He's a relatively wealthy man, whose closest business partner wants him dead. Mr. V has caused a great deal of suffering with his business endeavors from mass layoffs, to covering up oil spills and, I'm sure, kills puppies too. (Beat.) Honestly, I have no idea. I just like to think that I must be killing some monster. But it's never that easy.

(HANGMAN enters followed by CANDLE.  
They are outside the target's house.)

HANGMAN

And you're sure you weren't seen?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm sure. It'll look like an electrical malfunction.

HANGMAN

And the target?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

They're unconscious.

HANGMAN

And if they wake up before the explosion? Then what would you do?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Kill them before they had a chance to call for help?

HANGMAN

And how would you kill them? They've left the house now. You're not a sniper, you can't shoot them from far away?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I've also rigged their car to explode. The same car they use every day for work. As observed.

HANGMAN

Good. That was plan B. But now that plan A is in motion? How do you get rid of the evidence?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

The car is in the garage and will go up with the house.

HANGMAN

Excellent. Well planned. Now, let's see if you can execute it. (Beat.) All my lessons, my lectures, my rules, have a purpose and that is to make you a *true assassin*. But this is your moment of truth Candle.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

How would you kill him?

HANGMAN

Me? This isn't my mission.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

But what if it was? Humor me.

HANGMAN

How do you think I would do it?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Well, your specialty is pushing people to suicide. My guess is, you would wait until Mr. V was alone. A place private, but where he would feel comfortable. At ease.

(Lights change. MR. V enters and sits in a chair at a desk. HANGMAN begins to act out the scenario as CANDLE describes it.)

HANGMAN

His home office.

CANDLESTICKER MAKER

I'd disable the cameras the day before, so you would enter unseen.

HANGMAN

I knew having a young techy would be good for the team.



CANDLESTICK MAKER

Mr. V takes a phone call. He's distracted. You enter the room, unnoticed. You hold your gun to the back of his head, just as he turns around to notice you. He panics, and before he can cry for help, he reaches in his left drawer for his handgun. But it's too late.

(HANGMAN Holds his finger to his lips to signal to MR.V to remain silent or else. Removes MR. V's hand gun from the drawer and puts his own away.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You take his handgun-

HANGMAN

But before I shoot him, I tell him to look up, as if there were something on the ceiling.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Then you shoot him, under the chin.

(Sound of gunshot.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER (cont'd)

You place the gun in his hand-

HANGMAN

Which hand?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

His left. Because he's left-handed.

HANGMAN

Good. But that was all hypothetical. I'm not going to kill him for you, Candle.

(MR.V exits. Lights change.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I know that.

HANGMAN

So stop stalling.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Beat.) So, who is he?

HANGMAN

Who is he? He's the target. (Beat.) What you're asking- what you're thinking- does he have a family, children, people who count on him, is he a husband and if he is, is he a loyal husband? Or is he a vicious man? Has he done terrible things, will he do terrible things? He's just a man. You can't ask those questions. You'll never be able to complete the job if you do. (Beat.) I could lie to you- tell you a story. I hear you like those...

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Everyone likes a good story.

HANGMAN

Is that what you want from me? You want my story? To add it to your collection? Or are you stalling, again?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm not stalling

HANGMAN

Then do it. You've done the challenging part of wiring the house undetected. Now all you have to do is flip the switch.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(About to flip the switch, then stops) It just-

HANGMAN

(Exhales, after holding breath in anticipation.) What?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I flip this switch here and a man dies over there. It seems so... easy.

HANGMAN

Taking a life is never easy. Not for us.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Us?

HANGMAN

People with a conscience.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Oh. Right. No, what I mean is, I don't mean that I don't feel anything, it's just-

HANGMAN

I know. I'm just giving you a hard time. I thought it might help you to relax.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Relax? I'm relaxed. Cool as a cucumber. (Beat. Hears tree leaves rustle. Jumpy) What was that?

HANGMAN

Maybe it's the Executioner.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

That's not funny.

HANGMAN

Candle-

CANDLESTICK MAKER

No, I'm serious. That's not funny.

HANGMAN

Is that what this is about? Fighter tells you a story and sings you a song and suddenly, you're worried you'll be punished by some fictional boogieman? If that's all it takes to scare you, then you chose the wrong profession.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

No, I'm not afraid of some fictional person that I can't even see.

HANGMAN

Sometimes, it's the things we can't see that are the most terrifying.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Beat.) Are you afraid of me?

HANGMAN

What?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Do you fear me?

HANGMAN

Umm... no? Should I?

(CANDLESTICK MAKER hits HANGMAN's arm.)

HANGMAN

Oww. What was that for?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

How 'bout now? (Hit's HANGMAN again, but harder)

HANGMAN

Okay, now I'm annoyed. Not scared. Stop that.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm real, aren't I? I'm standing right here. I'm supposed to be this badass assassin. A shadow in the night. But I look around sometimes, and it doesn't feel real. I don't feel real. I don't know. I'm not explaining this very well.

HANGMAN

Just, take a breath.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Steps away from HANGMAN for a moment to herself. Beat.) Part of me is terrified, that this is all a nightmare I can't wake up from. But the other part of me is terrified... that I am the nightmare.

HANGMAN

(Hold CANDLE's shoulders.) You have to stay grounded Candle. I know you're talking with Chemist, she can help you if you let her.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Snaps) What would she know? She gets to watch her parents grow old, even if it is from afar. How could she possibly understand what was taken from me? (Calms down. Beat.) I'm sorry. Look. I know everyone's trying to help. Let's just- let's finish this job and get back home.

(CANDLE flips the switch. Sound of an explosion. Lights fade.)

**SCENE 9: THE ANTHOLOGY**

(The scene begins with CANDLE entering the study with a notebook, flipping through the pages— characters appear and disappear as parts of their stories are read as asides to CANDLE.)

FIGHTER

*(Boxing in the air.)* My dad was a cop. *(Beat.)* Only time he wasn't mad— just meant he was about to be. Anything could set him off— *(Throws some tough punches.)* "Tough love," he'd call it, when he'd beat us around. Graduated high school the year my parents got divorced. Last I'd heard of that man— he was dishonorably discharged.

*(Spotlight fades on FIGHT, Spotlight up on BAKER)*

BAKER

*(Mixing together ingredients in a bowl.)* My mother taught me three rules— one— pay your pimp, two— don't blow cops, and three— keep your needles clean. Not the greatest or most helpful of advice for a nine year-old, but that woman loved me. Every week she'd take me to this bakery. *(Smiles.)* She used to say '*sugar's always sweet, even when life is not*'. *(Beat.)* We were walking home from the bakery one day, when a group of men began to catcall her. Must've recognized her from The Strip. She refused their advances but... they weren't going to take no for an answer.

*(Spotlight fades on BAKER. Spotlight up on FIGHTER)*

FIGHTER

*(Beat.)* I never understood my father until I went to prison— non-violent drug charge if you can believe it. *(Beat.)* I didn't become a true criminal until I went to prison. In prison, you see the worst in people every day, the parts of us that are animal because there are no people in prison. That would require us to be treated as *human beings*. In prison, you learn pain and isolation. You feel fear but you can't show it, *(Remembering.)* anger... and a whole lot of aggression— doesn't matter if you're the inmate or the guard. You're surrounded by that mentality. It changes you. It changed my father. Just like it changed me.

(Spotlight fades on FIGHTER who exits.)

BAKER

(*Beat.*) She told me... she told me it would just take a few minutes. I hid behind the dumpsters... watched as two of them held her down in the alley. They left her... lying there— crushed her windpipe so hard she could barely breathe. I screamed— no one cared. To them, she was just a whore— subhuman. (*Beat.*) I held her hand but she was gone. That's when the local baker found us, and took me in.

(Spotlight fades on BAKER who exits.  
Spotlight up on BUTCHER)

BUTCHER

(*Beat.*) We were playing in the street when the car hit my little sister. They never caught who did it. (*Beat.*) Some days, I used to think she was the lucky one. My father never struck my sister and me. Our mother took most of his beatings. It was only a matter of time before he'd go too far. She was an immigrant, and didn't have any family around, so it was just the three of us and the priest at my sister's funeral. (*Beat.*) But with my mother's funeral, there were no condolences, no priest, no flowers, no casket— instead my father gave me a shovel. He didn't say a word. When it was over, he patted me on the head and took me out for ice cream. (*Beat.*) I never liked ice cream after that.

(Spotlight fades on BUTCHER who exits.  
Spotlight on CANDLE who closes the notebook. HANGMAN enters the room.  
Lighting changes.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Faces HANGMAN.) Is this where you tell me that I'm not ready to be an assassin?

HANGMAN

Candle, you're talented. Spirited and I know you have what it takes to be an excellent true assassin. But you're not ready. You're still allowing your past to hold you back. You're struggling to follow the rules. Asking too many questions. You're becoming a liability. I tried to give you time. Chemist tried to work with you-

CANDLESTICK MAKER

But she's not the one giving up on me. Is she? You are.

HANGMAN

Don't put this on me. You've made it very clear that you're more than just hesitant towards this profession. (*Changing the subject.*) (Beat.) Maybe Butcher and Baker were too soft on you. Maybe I was too soft on you. I was like you once. But then the bodies started piling up around me and I had to learn the hard way.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I have been nothing but an attentive student. I've done everything you have ever asked of me. I got the job done.

HANGMAN

Candle-

CANDLESTICK MAKER

But for some reason, that's not good enough for you? (Beat.) Tell me, what else- what else can I say to show you how committed I am to this?

HANGMAN

It's not what you can say, it's what you can do.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Hangman, if this is another lecture-

HANGMAN

I'm dying, Candle. But you already knew that.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(*Beat, caught off guard.*) Why haven't you said anything?



HANGMAN

You shouldn't have been snooping.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Pushing back.)* A true assassin knows their enemy.

HANGMAN

Is that what we are, now? Enemies?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Beat.)* I hope not.

HANGMAN

*(Beat.)* Candle, what if I made a deal with you...

CANDLESTICK MAKER

A deal? What kind of deal?

HANGMAN

There's something I need you to do.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

And what's that?

HANGMAN

I need you to die.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Beat.)* Okay, I'm not exactly jumping on the offer here. *(Beat. Pause.)* You're serious. *(Beat.)* Will it hurt? *(HANGMAN shakes head no.)* When?

HANGMAN

Soon.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Will I know when—

HANGMAN *(cont'd)*

*(Beat.)* Candle, what if I helped you finish your book?

*(Lights fade. Both exit. Sound of an Explosion.)*

**SCENE 10: THE FIRST TIME HANGMAN KILLED ME**

(CANDLE enters dressed in a black overcoat.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Aside to Audience, as if writing in her notebook.) The first time I met Hangman, he saved me from being taken. I had been living on the streets for about a year.

(Sound of a few gunshots.  
HANGMAN enters running, CANDLE runs alongside him until they find a place to hide. They hide in an abandoned shop.)

HANGMAN

(Looks out the door.) The coast is clear. No one's following us.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Why did you save me? And who are you?

HANGMAN

First, you're welcome and two, that's a complicated question. And three, (notices he's been shot.) ow.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

They shot you! Are you okay?

HANGMAN

Yeah. (Catching his breath.) I just need a minute. They just grazed my arm. Nothing serious.

(CANDLE Looks around the room for something to bandage his arm but can't find anything, panics and holds her head. She realizes she can use her headband. She takes off her headband and wraps the cloth around his arm.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER

That was stupid. You could've died.

HANGMAN

What was I supposed to do, let them take you?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

If you were smart, you would have. Now they'll be after you and me.  
(Beat.) I had everything under control.

HANGMAN

Did you? You were blind folded and gagged in the back of a van, with your hands tied. Were you setting up for a magic trick?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Yeah. Right now. I plan on disappearing. (About to leave.)

HANGMAN

You can't leave, not yet, they could still be out there. And I'm in no condition to try and save you again.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I didn't ask to be saved. I had a plan.

HANGMAN

And what was that?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I was *allowing* them to take me.

HANGMAN

Those were traffickers, bad men. For what reason could you possibly have to go with them?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

They took my friend.

HANGMAN

(Beat.) I'm sorry.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I was going to get her back. I was going to make them all pay for what they did.

HANGMAN

Is that what you do? Make bad men pay? Do you like hurting people?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I do what I have to do to survive.

HANGMAN

That sounds more like revenge. (Beat.) I have to admit something, and I hope it doesn't frighten you. But what if I told you that I do the same thing. I punish bad people.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Mockingly.) "I punish bad people". Yeah, okay Batman.

HANGMAN

Batman?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You think I can't clock a rich white boy in some costume playing hero? I'm not interested in being some vigilante or whatever weird shit you're into. (Goes to leave.)

HANGMAN

What if I told you I've been observing you for sometime now.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Pulls out a knife, holds it to HANGMAN's throat.) I'd say you're about as creepy as those traffickers. I'd say you won't be observing anything anymore.

HANGMAN

Easy now.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Who are you?

HANGMAN

(Puts hand up, not showing resistance.) A knife? But that's not really your speciality, is it? You're more into bombs and explosives aren't?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Realizes he knows who she really is.) H-how do you know that?

HANGMAN

Your parents, one was an engineer, the other an electrician. I saw their deaths on the news over a year ago. I heard about what happened, how they witnessed something they shouldn't have. How their daughter did as well but got away.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Look, I don't know who the fuck you are and I don't care. Just leave me alone. (Starts to leave, then stops.)

HANGMAN

It was a sloppy job by those hitmen. But I never expected you to do what you did next. Now, *that* was impressive. That got my attention. It seems I'm not the only one. The government is interested. They've labeled you a domestic terrorist.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Lies. All lies.

HANGMAN

Of course they are. But that's what the government does when they don't know how to control a citizen. That's how people are "disappeared". Their names and reputations with them.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Is that who you are? Some government hitman here to finish the job?

HANGMAN

Let's be clear, assassins are neither hitmen nor mercenaries— we will not kill for gangs out of loyalty, nor will we fight in wars for currency.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

So, you're an assassin?

HANGMAN

A *true* assassin. And I live by three rules.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You're an assassin with rules? That's kind of a contradiction. (Beat. Becoming curious.) So, what are the rules?

HANGMAN

One- anonymity, Two- never negotiate with a target, and Three- don't ask too many questions. Simple enough.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Am I the target? Have you come to kill me?

HANGMAN

No. (To Candle, Candidly unapologetic. As if being an assassin is just another job.) I know what you must be thinking, and no. I'm not a sociopath or psychopath- I don't enjoy killing. Nevertheless, I'm good at what I do- and the money is enough to compromise my morality. (Beat.) It's not that I don't value human life- on the contrary- I value it very highly. The difference between myself and a humanitarian is that I put a price on life. There's little distinction between what I do compared to any other politician, preacher, or corporate capitalist. All governments practice murder for compensation. In fact, they award such behaviors with badges, medals, and tax breaks. Each profession has its vices. The benefit of being an assassin is the anonymity from a sex scandal, or the pressure of a boardroom to make profits. I work when I want to and select my own jobs.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Why are you telling me all this?

HANGMAN

Because I think you would make an excellent addition to my team.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You have a team?

HANGMAN

I don't always go on solo missions. I partner with five other assassins, each with their own specialty, and we're the best at what we do. (Beat.) I'd nearly forgotten to introduce myself. I'm their leader. I find the connections, wire the money, and make the final decisions. They call me Hangman. I'm the one who pulls the strings. (Offers CANDLE a hand to shake.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER

This is insane. How in the hell am I supposed to believe any of this?

HANGMAN

Well, for one. It's far too ridiculous for it to be made up. And two.

(CHEMIST Enters.)

CHEMIST

H, it's time to go. We have the vehicle ready. Butcher's already working on body disposal. (To CANDLE.) Hi, I'm Chemist. I know that this is a lot to take in, but we think we can help you if you let us.

HANGMAN

(Beat.) So, what will it be?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Beat.) What if I decide to stay where I am? What will you do?

HANGMAN

There's nothing I can do. But I wouldn't wish this profession on anyone I thought had a chance in this world. But after what you've done, the government will come for you. They'll have to. I don't want you to end up rotting away in some prison. All your potential wasted. If you work with us, we can protect you.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I have to think about it.

HANGMAN

Think quickly. I don't offer this often, and I'm already second guessing myself for offering this opportunity to you now. (Beat.) I suppose you could run some more?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm tired of running.

HANGMAN

I could find a place for you to lay low for some time. But it couldn't be permanent.

CHEMIST

I had to make this decision too once. It was terrifying. So I know exactly what you're feeling. You're wondering if you can trust us. (Turns to HANGMAN.) Give her your gun.

HANGMAN

Chemist, is that really the best option?

CHEMIST

H. Give her the gun.

(CANDLE takes the gun.)

CHEMIST (cont'd)

Now, if you feel unsafe, just point the gun at him.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(To HANGMAN.) I like her.

HANGMAN

(To CHEMIST.) I'm liking her less by the minute. (Beat. To CANDLE.)  
Look, if I'm being honest, I don't want you to stay on these streets.  
If you stay here, you'll most likely end up dead or worse.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Beat.) I want to live.

HANGMAN

Living is a good start. Now, let's go!

(ALL exit except CANDLE. Lights fade.  
Spotlight on CANDLE.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Aside to Audience.) After we left, Hangman faked my death. Published,  
public and documented. And that was when I became a True Assassin.  
That was the first time Hangman killed me. Until- (This line moves us  
directly into the next scene. CANDLE will exit once the attention  
shifts.)



**SCENE 11: DYING LIKE FLIES**

(CHEMIST and HANGMAN sit across from BUTCHER and BAKER and are being interrogated.)

HANGMAN

(To BUTCHER) And you say you found the body?

BUTCHER

What was left of it anyway.

BAKER

Candle. Her name was Candle! She's not just a body.

CHEMIST

I understand this is difficult for the two of you. We know how much you cared for her.

BUTCHER

We need to find out who did this.

HANGMAN

And we will. We are. I checked the perimeter. There's no one. No alarms were tripped, not a window broken, not an unidentified door opened or ventilation entered. Fighter is checking the cameras, and the Deep Web for any postings for jobs against us.

BAKER

One of us is already dead, and I have a feeling I know who did it— Hangman.

HANGMAN

I'm sorry, are you accusing *me*?

BAKER

It's awfully suspicious and convenient.

HANGMAN

And why is that?

BUTCHER

Is this because she was writing that book? That *anthropology*?

BAKER

(Whispers to BUTCHER.) Anthology, honey.

BUTCHER

Yeah. That's what I said. Anthology. Was this punishment? To send a message?

BAKER

Did something go wrong on her first mission that you didn't tell us about?

CHEMIST

Baker, if you just calm d-

BAKER

(To HANGMAN.) What did she ever do to you? All she ever did was care about people and the environment— and you go and kill her for it!

HANGMAN

Why don't the two of you tell me? You were supposed to look after her. Make her feel welcomed, get her to do what she was instructed to do. But you got too close to her, didn't you? The two of you forgot the mission. (Beat.) I'm not entirely convinced that this was an assassination.

CHEMIST

What?

HANGMAN

Are you sure it's not at all possible that this was a suicide?

CHEMIST

Stop. Stop talking.

HANGMAN

And you missed the signs. The two of you. What a pair you make.

CHEMIST

Enough! (Pulls HANGMAN aside to talk.) What the hell are you doing? This has nothing to do with them and you know it.

HANGMAN

You know as well as I that it's possible Candle did this to herself. We all know there's only one way out of this profession and it's not the front door! (Beat.) I thought we were trying to get them to speak up about what they knew about her state of mind.

CHEMIST

I'm starting to wonder about your state of mind right now. Can you handle yourself?

HANGMAN

Let's talk. All I want to do is talk.

CHEMIST

You look more like you want to shoot someone.

HANGMAN

I'm calm.

CHEMIST

(Beat.) For now.

(CHEMIST and HANGMAN have a seat.)

CHEMIST (cont'd)

Look. We all just lost someone close to us and I know this is painful. But if either of you can think of any reason Candle would harm herself- something maybe she said?

BUTCHER

I can't think of anything specific-

BAKER

She did seem like she was burdened by something, but I assumed it was nerves after her first job. I didn't think it could be something more. (Beat.) Maybe, maybe we did miss the signs. I had been so focused on getting my poisons ready, that I neglected my other job.

BUTCHER

No, Baker, this isn't our fault. It's Chemist' fault.

CHEMIST

Me? What did I do?

HANGMAN

Now, let's hear him out.

BUTCHER

You've got Candle out here writing *apologies-*

BAKER/HANGMAN/CHEMIST

(Corrects.) *Anthology.*

BUTCHER

All right, already. Her book. Candle was doing just fine before you made her start writing about her feelings. Now, as an expert, I can attest to the benefits of burying said feelings. (Takes out their flask and takes a sip.) What? If it works for me.

BAKER

Honey. Now's not the time.

BUTCHER

(Stands up, in a drunken stupor.) Then when is the time? Huh? (Beat.) Our sweet Candle's gone Baker. And there wasn't no reason for it. She was here one minute and gone the next. And- and all the pain and misery she suffered in her short life was for nothing. She treated me kindly. Made me feel like I was worth something. She even put up with my jokes, even though I know I'm not that funny or an easy person to be around. She could make you feel like the most important person in the room. (Beat.) Now she's gone. And I don't why. (Beat.) And you've got us sat here like we had something to do with it, go on, point your fingers, ask your questions. (Holds HANGMAN by the collar.) You do what you've gotta do to make yourself feel better!! (Let's go of HANGMAN.) For the rest of us we drink. What else is there for us to do?

(BAKER gives HANGMAN a look.)

BAKER

I think that will be all.

(BUTCHER and BAKER exit. HANGMAN tries to stop them but CHEMIST holds him back.)

HANGMAN

I should have let the gang's you fell in with, finish you off!!  
How ungrateful the lot of you are!!!

CHEMIST

Stop. Let them go. You need to get a hold of yourself and calm down.  
We still have to talk to Lover and Fighter. Maybe they will know something.

HANGMAN

We aren't making the progress I hoped we would be.

CHEMIST

We aren't making any progress. You seem more interested in agitating our friends and colleagues than you are in figuring out what really happened to Candle. Now, I am digging deep right now to suppress my emotions because that's what the situation calls for. But it's also what we are trained to do. (Beat.) I need help. I need some stability from you, alright? Right now, we are *fractured*. I'm doing my best to hold things together. But I am struggling.

(LOVER and FIGHTER enter and have a seat in the interrogation chairs.)

LOVER

Well the two of you look serious. Who died? Oh, right. Well, let's get this over with, shall we?

CHEMIST

Lover, is there a reason you're being so flippant? Do you, perhaps, have something to hide?

HANGMAN

Now, Chemist, let's not be too hard on the girl.

CHEMIST

(To HANGMAN.) Shut up.

HANGMAN

(Puts his hands up.) I said nothing.

CHEMIST

(To HANGMAN.) You're still talking. (To LOVER.) Lover, can you tell me where you were in the past six hours?

LOVER

I was in bed. Planning a funeral for that outfit you have on.

CHEMIST

At least I can wear something other than bitchy. (Beat.) What, no retort?

FIGHTER

I'm sensing some hostility. Why don't we just tell you what we know?

CHEMIST

Thank you, Fighter.

FIGHTER

Yesterday, I chatted a bit with Candle, you know, helping her with her stories. Nothing major happened.

LOVER

A few nights ago, we talked with her, I did as Hangman asked and tried to scare the girl a little before her first job.

FIGHTER

I told her some old fighting stories... I might have mentioned the Executioner. I thought it would be a good story for her book. I didn't think anything of it. But, maybe I went too far?

CHEMIST

You think the story might have scared her?

FIGHTER

I don't know what to think.

HANGMAN

No. I spoke with Candle on her first job. She didn't believe in that silly nonsense. There must have been something more. Something we're missing.

LOVER

I heard you talking to Butcher and Baker. You think Candle did this to herself?

CHEMIST

We don't know that for sure.

LOVER

But you suspect?

CHEMIST

It's possible.

LOVER

If she did kill herself, let's see, whose specialty is that? Oh, right. (Looks at HANGMAN, asks CHEMIST.) Why aren't you interrogating him?

HANGMAN

(Stands up to confront LOVER) Deflecting, that's no way to answer our questions.

LOVER

See, I think, your little plan to get us to scare the poor girl failed. I think you ended up having to scare her. But it worked too well, didn't it?

FIGHTER

Love, please, he's not worth it.

LOVER

Didn't it? And now, you have some lingering guilt for what you did, what you made Candle do. Don't you?

HANGMAN

You have no idea what you are talking about.

LOVER

(Beat.) What is it Candle wanted from you? Was it something you couldn't give, *Hangman*? But I suppose Chemist would know all about that, with all you've put her through over the years.

CHEMIST

Lover-

## LOVER

(Beat. To HANGMAN) Look at her. She loves you so much it'll probably kill her. It's quite masterful- and they say I'm the expert on the subject. I'm not the only one in this old, run down, mansion capable of manipulation. You make it look like art. (Beat. Laughs. Looks around the room.) A leaky roof here, a spot of chipping paint there- and you at the center of it, trying *desperately* to hold it all together. But look around you. Things are falling apart. Chemist knows it. Clearly she's trying to protect you from your own madness. Hell, even Candle saw the fractures- Thought she could mend it with a few words, a few stories. (Beat.) But that's the game isn't it. You like us broken. (Beat.) You expect loyalty and trust from all of us in return for nothing but accusations and suspicion? We didn't kill your precious Candle, I had no quarrel with the girl. Whatever her fate was, I'm sorry it led her here.

## HANGMAN

(BEAT.) (Begins laughing. Laughter builds to a crescendo. Then begins to slow clap.) This has to be a joke. Is everyone's memory so short? Everyone wants to all of a sudden explore their past. (Stands, passionate, possible descent into madness?) So let's explore! A few years pass, and all is forgiven? (As a preacher does, raises hand to the sky) Sweet Mary Magdalene, she's saved!! She's saved!!

(Reaches to clasp FIGHTER's hand trying to get him to join in, but he pulls his hand away after a few moments.)

She's SAVED! (Begins laughing again, takes a deep breath and sighs.) She saved you once, didn't she Fighter? Oh. But that was before she *abandoned* you at a crime scene. How did it feel to end up in prison again because your precious Lover, your partner in crime let you take the fall.

## FIGHTER

And I'd do it again.

## HANGMAN

I bet you would. Lover, you begged me to help you get this...sorry excuse, out of the prison you put him in. That's the deal we made. But she's still got you in that prison, huh? Ironic, you can talk about my love life, but she'll never, love, you, Fighter, will she? You're just- convenient.



(FIGHTER Stands, ready to fight  
HANGMAN.)

CHEMIST

*(Addresses the room.)* I think we should all take a real break. Anyone else need coffee or tea? It's time for some R and R. *(Reaches in her sweater pocket for a syringe and turns to inject HANGMAN in the neck.)* But mainly for you H.

FIGHTER

Uhhh... Chemist what the fuck...

LOVER

Now, why couldn't you have done that a few minutes ago?

(HANGMAN falls to the floor, out  
cold.)

CHEMIST

*(Hands up.)* I can explain. There's something you need to know.

(BLACKOUT, ALL exit.)

**SCENE 12: THE HANGMAN DANCED**

*(Lights up. Spotlight on CANDLE who enters humming the tune of the song "The Hangman Danced" while wrapping the rope around the balcony rail. The rest of the stage is dark. CANDLE is dressed all in white.)*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Sung.)*

*The Hangman's rope fell 'round his neck,*

*He had no chance to catch his breath,*

*The floor left his feet,  
Onlookers to feast  
On his suffering,*

*As a pendulum he'd swing*

*Executioner tugged,  
The Hangman snapped,  
There were no tears,  
Nor were there laughs,  
His heart drummed,  
The Hangman danced,*

*The Hangman danced,*

*The Hangman danced,*

*Fresh flesh on limp bones,  
His rot would soon offend the nose,  
Heat, thick with death and fear,  
Held in the air, the puppeteer,  
Hung by a rope of his own,*

*The Hangman's jig done,  
His head tipped down, in final bow,  
Embraced his friend of great renown,  
And perhaps, too late,  
The Hangman found,  
That a dance with death*

*requires sure footing,*

(Music stops. HANGMAN sits, propped up, with a noose around his neck, hands tied, unconscious.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER (cont'd, SUNG)

*(Sung.) That a dance with death requires sure footing.*

(CANDLE hums while exiting, the spotlight remains on HANGMAN. Lights Fade.)

(BLACKOUT.)

(Lights up on the Main Hall. Scene begins with everyone, except CHEMIST, HANGMAN, and LOVER, lying dead. CANDLE isn't on stage. BAKER lies on the ground, foaming at the mouth, BUTCHER's head has been cut off, FIGHTER's face is bruised badly, CHEMIST stands pointing a gun at LOVER. Sound of a gunshot. LOVER bleeds out from the chest having just been shot. HANGMAN wakes up.)

HANGMAN

Chemist?

CHEMIST

Finally, you're up.

HANGMAN

What's going on? Why am I tied up? *(Noticing SNIPER.)* What... What is this? Did... did I just watch you kill Lover?

CHEMIST

So many questions.

HANGMAN

You drugged me!

CHEMIST

I had to.

HANGMAN

Why?

CHEMIST

You were out of control—

HANGMAN

No, why is everyone dead?

CHEMIST

*(Beat.)* Because it's what you wanted. You ordered me to kill you.

HANGMAN

What?

CHEMIST

What I couldn't figure out is what you want? Money? No. Power? You already have it. Which left love. But the only thing you've ever loved is your job, or more so, the integrity of a true assassin— your rules, your little games of hangman. Am I close?

HANGMAN

Untie me.

CHEMIST

And why would I do that?

HANGMAN

*(Struggling against the ropes.)* Chemist! *(Calming down.)* Chemist, I asked you to take my place, but you refused. I had to improvise.

CHEMIST

You mean manipulate the outcomes in your favor?

HANGMAN

It wasn't like that. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

CHEMIST

Set up this elaborate twisted game as a test to see who was worthy of your title. Pinned us against each other like gladiators in your arena—

HANGMAN

Chemist, I'm all but dead. You are my legacy, I chose you.

CHEMIST

That's the problem, you're always choosing for us. You dug us up when our circumstances had us backed into a corner.

HANGMAN

I could have left you. Instead I offered you a life—

CHEMIST

*(Corrects him.)* You gave us the choice of death— remember— *(Beat.)* of survival. We die, so that we can live— *that is the bargain.* That's not *life.* We've been trying to rebuild our lives—

HANGMAN

And how's that going?

CHEMIST

*(Continues.)* As well as you planned, with your venomous efforts to make us just like you— distrustful, paranoid, unfeeling. Well congratulations. Now we're all just as dead as you are. *(Beat.)* We were right here. We were right fucking here! You chose to abandon us. To lie to me. To leave us in the dark fighting—

HANGMAN

No, you chose to fight. It's true, I made the conditions— conditions only a true assassin could survive. I needed a leader because if they had found out I was dying— this would have happened anyway.

CHEMIST

You don't know that—

HANGMAN

It's happened before—

CHEMIST

Then tell me!

HANGMAN

(Beat.) My parents were assassins. They lived here with eight others. My mother was called the Executioner— no, not *thee* Executioner. But she lived up to her name. When she had me, the others saw me as a weakness, a child— I made her weak. And because of me, they all began plotting against her. So my mother set up a game similar to mine. One by one they fell like flies. My parents were the only two left standing. (Beat.) When assassins sense weakness, they kill. It's in our nature.

CHEMIST

You're wrong. Your parents would've done anything to ensure you had a chance at life. The other assassins lost sight. They forgot their humanity, and so they underestimated it. It was their undoing.

HANGMAN

Did you think I didn't know this was coming? After the assassinations, my father was diagnosed with liver cancer. Before he died, he hung himself. I was the one who found him. I couldn't save him.

CHEMIST

Must have been difficult for you and your mother.

HANGMAN

Difficult for my mother? (Laughs.) She took everything in stride.

CHEMIST

Sounds like someone else I know.

HANGMAN

She was never warm... but she was never the same after he died.

CHEMIST

But she loved you.

HANGMAN

She had a twisted way of showing it.

CHEMIST

(Pressing for answers.) Who gave you your title? Was it your father or your mother?

HANGMAN

Both.

CHEMIST

What does that mean?

HANGMAN

I was 12, my mother buried me alive— not to become a true assassin, but teach me a lesson. She thought of a befitting title for me, something to serve as a reminder of who my father was... how he died... and of the most dangerous game I had entered into...

CHEMIST

*(Beat.)* Hangman.

*(HANGMAN nods.)*

CHEMIST (cont'd)

And you resented her for it?

HANGMAN

It's hard for me to resent her... because in the end, she took a bullet for me. *(Beat.)* That's the truth—

CHEMIST

Why tell it now?

HANGMAN

Because there are some things that are too heavy for the grave. *(Steps up on the block.)* Candle was right.

CHEMIST

What are you doing?

HANGMAN

What I should have done before all of this happened. Will you help me?

CHEMIST

*(Nods, hesitantly. Goes to tighten the ropes.)* Okay.

HANGMAN

Chem, I thought pushing you away would make this easier. But it didn't. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. *(Steps off the block.)*

(Sound of a cleaver being slammed down on the bottom of the rope's suspension block. Rope falls, hanging loose around HANGMAN's neck— he stumbles and falls to the ground. HANGMAN picks up the rope at the end and looks at it.)

CHEMIST

You saved me once. I figured I owed you a debt. I'm not asking you to survive for me, I'm asking you to live for yourself, something you've been so afraid of.

HANGMAN

Live? Live for what? Everyone's dead.

CHEMIST

Hangman, you know an assassination *seldom* goes as planned. See... while you were playing your game, I was playing mine. You would gain nothing by killing Candle, you would lose power if you had. The very idea that Candle could somehow compromise us would be unimaginable to you, because if Candle could undermine you, so could we all. You needed Candle because she had something you lacked— an understanding of each of us.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(*Enters.*) Faking my death with exploding meat? Interesting tactic. Not very vegetarian. But I suppose it's better than me being dead. So, I guess I was what, your insurance policy in the event that you all killed each other?

CHEMIST

We nearly did. Until I could prove that Candle was still alive and locked in the game room.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Took Chemist nearly two hours to convince everyone of the plan.

HANGMAN

The plan?

(As CANDLE speaks, characters begin to wake up as mentioned. Eventually, all surround Hangman)



CANDLESTICK MAKER

Baker simulated poisoning, Butcher used a spare head— I didn't ask where from— Fighter, with the help of Lover used a bit of makeup and fake blood, and Lover, a master of theatrics, wore her Kevlar coat—

HANGMAN

(Beat.) Candle let me just expl—

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You don't realize the damage you've done.

HANGMAN

Candle, I'm... I'm—

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I know. You're sorry for what you did, but not why you did it. You love your games, just as much as I love writing. But Chemist was right— I wasn't ready to pay the price.

HANGMAN

(Beat.) I didn't trust you with the truth. I never gave you a choice. However, I'm giving you one now. If any of you want to leave the estate, opt out of our deal, you may, right now... no strings attached.

(Lights fade. ALL but HANGMAN exit.)

**SCENE 13: THE CONFRONTATION**

(HANGMAN goes to sit alone in a chair.)

HANGMAN

Well that's it. They're all gone now.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm still here. And Chemist isn't going anywhere.

HANGMAN

Well that's something, I guess.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You guess? Don't we mean anything at all to you? You played your games on us and you act like you don't care but I saw you in there. For the first time, you opened up, and I saw you. That was real. They all love you- in their own way. We kill for you. We'd die for you and you the same for us. How is that not family?

HANGMAN

That's not family. We're not *people*. I don't want you to dream. I don't want you to hope. And trust. It'll get you killed. That's what I was taught. But it was all a lie, wasn't it?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Why did you choose me?

HANGMAN

Candle, I saw something in you. I see something in you.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

And? It seems like all I can do is disappoint you. I'm failing to meet your expectations.

HANGMAN

Then why did you agree? Why are we here Candle?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Because.

HANGMAN

Because?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Because I saw something in you too. Someone who was confident, and powerful.

HANGMAN

You are those things too.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You had everything. You were offering it to me. (Beat.) Was it so wrong that I wanted to get to know them? They were just like me. Butcher and Baker, Lover and Fighter, even Chemist. They had been through things too. People who might care for me. A chance at a family.

HANGMAN

And where are they now? Gone. Now, do you see where your actions have led to?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

My actions? You think I did this?

HANGMAN

We did this. Together. You and I. We made a plan. You got everything you wanted. You got your story. Didn't you? Because that's what this was all about. Us helping you to cope.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

You should've just left me on the streets where you found me. I was getting by. Stole what I needed-

HANGMAN

Until you stole from the wrong people.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Well what else was I going to do? Let them get away for what they did? What they took from me? My life. My life. When they killed my parents they took everything from me. I couldn't go home, they'd be back to finish the job, so I did what I had to do to survive.

HANGMAN

You were going to be caught eventually.

## CANDLESTICK MAKER

So what. They got theirs, didn't they? They never even saw me coming. I was the last thing they would ever see. People said they heard the explosion from over a mile away. (Beat.) I didn't know. (Beat.) I didn't know that the fire would catch the next building. I was so caught up in my revenge, I didn't care who I hurt. Everyone got out safely. But this little girl- she wasn't fast enough. (Beat.)

(HANGMAN goes over to comfort CANDLE but she pushes him away.)

## CANDLESTICK MAKER (cont'd)

She was nearly burned alive. I did that. Me. (Beat.) That's when I knew I didn't belong in the world anymore. Not their world. (Beat.) Now, I'm a little bit more like you. I'm colder. Less forgiving. Just like you-

## HANGMAN

Candle.

## CANDLESTICK MAKER

You think I don't know how to survive? You think I don't know how much this world didn't want me in it? It never hid that fact from me. That doesn't mean that I didn't deserve to be in it. That I didn't deserve happiness. The world took a lot from me. You took a lot as well. You asked for so much and I didn't realize the price. But I'm starting to. Because if someone you thought cared for you can treat you this poorly, then there isn't much hope for any of us.

## HANGMAN

I know you're upset.

## CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm f-fine.

## HANGMAN

Well you're not acting like it!

## CANDLESTICK MAKER

I'm trying. Can't you see, I'm trying. Unlike you, I actually want to let people in. I'm trying to trust again. I didn't know if I even could.

HANGMAN

That's not what I taught you.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I put my trust in you.

HANGMAN

And I what, let you down? Is that it?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Yes.

HANGMAN

So you want me to suffer? You want me to feel all the pain and anger you're feeling towards the world and direct it at me? Well come on. Let's have it. I'm Chemist's punching bag, so why not yours too? (Beat.) Go on, say it. Say you blame me for all your problems.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Beat.) I can't.

HANGMAN

What's that?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I can't! I won't blame you. I'm taking responsibility. I chose to become this.

HANGMAN

Then mean it. The time is now. You have to decide. Can you put it all behind you? All the useless guilt, all the shame and pain. *Can you put it behind you?*

CANDLESTICK MAKER

I shouldn't have to!

HANGMAN

But you do! (Beat.) Yes you do. Or you'll end up just like me. (Beat.) You think I can't see that you are willing to risk it all? That you feel you have nothing left to lose? I've been there! I am there! I lived there for years! I nearly let it kill me. (Beat.) It still might. (Beat.) You asked me once if I was afraid of you. Candle, I'm terrified. You make me care. (Beat.) And once you care for something or someone, the world always manages to take it from you. Doesn't it?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

*(Stands away from HANGMAN.)* Maybe the trick is appreciating what you have when you have it. When you realize that the people in our lives were never really ours to begin with.

HANGMAN

You're too clever sometimes. Both of us had to grow up so fast.  
(Beat.) I wish I could give you the world, Candle. I wish I could take back all that was stolen from you, and make it like it never happened, like it never was- all the ugliness and pain. Instead, all I can do is offer you more of the same.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

No. You had a purpose. You gave me an opportunity that no one else could. You offered me a chance at redemption. (Beat.) People can go their whole lives without that kind of purpose. I want to hold the unaccountable accountable. I want that kind of purpose.

HANGMAN

(Beat.) So, what is it going to be?

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Beat.) I want this. I need this. I've sacrificed for this and it is *mine*.

HANGMAN

Now, I believe you.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

(Beat.) And besides, how can I say no to a dying man? (Beat.) Are you still planning on dying?

HANGMAN

(Beat.) I want to live.

CANDLESTICK MAKER

Good. (Beat.) Living is a good start.

BLACKOUT

**END OF PLAY**