

# **The Head that Wears the Crown**

A Play

by Hope Villanueva

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## CHARACTERS

ANISA	The Girl with the Hair. Tech savvy from a young age and the primary narrator
BETHANIE	The Girl with the Body. She's gotten by for a long time on her looks and playing dumb, but too afraid to break out of it.
CAROLYNN	The Girl with the Eyes. The leader of the pack and can be at turns a terrified child and a cold, vengeful teen.
DANIELLE	The Package. Average in all the best ways. Her kindness and openness makes her vulnerable, but also attracts people to her.
THE GUY	Plays all the named and unnamed Men in the story, to include:
LOGAN	A needy teen boy with an overbearing crush on Danielle.
ZACH	Carolynn's boyfriend. A selfish jock.
XANDER	Bethanie's boyfriend. Smart and looking for something beyond just the hot girl.
ORIN	Danielle's adulthood beau. Endearing. He has embraced his awkwardness.

## SETTING

Now. The play moves quickly between places and times. These transitions should be seamless. The Where is often less important than the When.

Characters take turns speaking outside of the time of a given scene or time. These are indicated by an (Out). They all play their characters' high school selves, then later as adults.

## ACT 1

*ANISA holds a small, flat wooden box. As she talks about each new person, they appear in her space.*

ANISA (Out)

Mom said, "Sit still and be quiet" and put my hair into spongy pink curlers overnight, I woke up with ringlets. Mom held up my doll and said, "Look! Just like her." I'd put on something pink and shiny and spin and my mom would clap. The next doll was blonde girl, too. Long plastic legs. A tiny waist. We curled her hair. We curled my hair. Mom said, "One day, you'll be beautiful like her".

So I practiced. I walked with a book on my head. Turn to wave at the crowd, go up the five steps to the ceremonial platform. Hold in your stomach so no fat pinches out.

*ANISA sucks in her stomach.*

ANISA (Out)

And stay there. Take in a new breath without letting your stomach out. Wave. And smile. Never forget to smile.

*She runs out of air and releases.*

ANISA (OUT)

I'm kinda hot. Not as hot as my friends were, but I'm kinda hot. Bethanie had the body.

*BETHANIE appears.*

ANISA (Out)

Like she could literally stop traffic. I saw it once in San Diego. This bike messenger rode straight into the back of a taxi cab cause he was looking at her tits. Flipped completely over.

Carolynn has these eyes, like Elijah Wood. You could swim in them. And huge pouty lips. They guys said she had DSL. That has nothing to do with the internet.

*CAROLYNN appears.*

ANISA (Out)

She wasn't afraid of anything and she would look people directly in the eyes when she'd talk to you. I watched boys try to ask her out on dates and she'd just stare at them until they stopped talking and ran away with their tails between their legs.

They tell me I do this toss thing with my hair. It's really long, all the way down my back. Caro says that it isn't actually my hair, but the way my hair makes people follow it down to my ass.

The three of us have known each other since we were in elementary school. We were nobody back then. But oh, puberty.

Ok, so I do the hair toss on purpose. You use what you have. What's wrong with that? Bethanie got discounts at restaurants because she wore a tight shirt. Guys always offered to help her take her cheerleading bag to the car. And Caro, she used those lips of hers.

*THE GUY appears. All three women take him in. As ANISA narrates, the women react as THE GUY becomes each of the men described.*

ANISA (Out)

You do what you have to do to get what you want. Of course, it doesn't start easy. In third grade they pull your -

*As a child, THE GUY runs past ANISA and yanks on her hair.*

ANISA

Ouch!

BETHANIE (Out)

In fifth grade, they drop ice down your -

*THE GUY drops an ice cube down the front of BETHANIE's shirt. BETHANIE screams and wiggles the ice out.*

CAROLYNN (Out)

In sixth, they try to grab -

*THE GUY tries to grab CAROLYNN's ass as he runs past.*

CAROLYNN

Jerk!

*THE GUY runs away, exiting.*

ANISA (Out)

In seventh, they filled your locker with tampons.

BETHANIE and CAROLYNN

Asshole!

ANISA (Out)

You'd stop crying to your mother because her only response is –

BETHANIE

Boys only pick on you because they like you.

CAROLYNN

He's too embarrassed to admit it.

ANISA

Boys will be boys.

BETHANIE

Someday, you'll like it.

CAROLYNN (Out)

All excuses for why boys are allowed to treat you badly and we have to take it.

ANISA (Out)

And in eighth grade, you show up on that first day after the summer break and the game has suddenly changed. You learn that by turning the right way or tossing your hair, you can stop traffic. And you find that guy, the one you really want -

THE GUY (To Anisa)

Can I kiss you?

ANISA

Will.

THE GUY (To Caro)

We're not actually doing anything, Caro. It's just your mouth.

CAROLYNN

Zack.

THE GUY (To Bethanie)

Bethie... (sigh) Yeah. (Beat) Where'd you learn do to that?

BETHANIE

Xander.

ANISA (Out)

These boys had different names, but they're all the same. Then, senior year -

*DANIELLE, a high school senior, enters. All others stop and look at her. She is sweet natured and friendly.*

DANIELLE  
Hi. I'm new.

ANISA (Out)  
Danielle didn't have Bethanie's body -

DANIELLE  
I'm supposed to find room 231.

ANISA (Out)  
-Carolynn's stare -

DANIELLE  
Could you help me?

ANISA (Out)  
or my way of tossing my hair.

*THE GUY turns toward DANIELLE and becomes LOGAN.*

LOGAN  
I can show you.

ANISA (Out)  
But she had a little of everything and then something more.

LOGAN  
What room was that again?

DANIELLE  
Um, 231.

LOGAN  
Hi, I'm Logan.

*BETHANIE and CAROLYNN quickly sidle up between DANIELLE and THE GUY.*

CAROLYNN  
We can show you where to go. That's Trig, right?

DANIELLE  
Yeah.

BETHANIE  
Caro has that class. Don't you, too, Anisa?

I do. Follow us.

ANISA

Thanks.

DANIELLE

We've got it from here.

CAROLYNN (to Logan)

*BETHANIE and CAROLYNN usher DANIELLE away. LOGAN stands befuddled, then vanishes.*

ANISA (Out)  
Maybe if she'd met us in the beginning, when we were having our hair pulled or ice dropped down our shirts, she could have been one of us.

*ANISA opens the box carefully and eyes what is inside.*

ANISA (Out)  
From the moment we saw her, we wanted to get back at her for...

BETHANIE  
She was awful.

ANISA (Out)  
Something?

CAROLYNN  
She deserved exactly what she got.

ANISA  
But what was it? (Out) Something we imagined she did? But we brought her in and held her close. (Transition) We mostly hung out at Bethanie's house.

### SCENE 1.2

BETHANIE (Out)  
Dad worked a million hours to avoid Mom and Mom liked nothing more than spending Dad's money, so... She didn't mind me spending it on make up or clothes or my friends. She thinks I should care about my appearance.

*All four girls are in BETHANIE's bedroom. They are playing with clothes and make up. ANISA is on her laptop and looks closely at a lipstick BETHANIE hands her.*

ANISA

I can't believe your Mom let you buy this lipstick.

BETHANIE

It's not that much.

CAROLYNN

It's \$18!

ANISA

My Mom would die.

BETHANIE

Well, my mom says that money doesn't do any good sitting around.

CAROLYNN

Thank you, Mom!

*They try it on. DANIELLE appears, soon joined by the other girls.*

ANISA

(to DANIELLE) User name?

DANIELLE

Oh, I don't know.

BETHANIE

I can't believe you don't have any social media.

CAROLYNN

She does now.

DANIELLE

Just pick something.

ANISA

"DaniGirl123"

BETHANIE

That's so dumb.

ANISA

Exclamation point.

DANIELLE



Ok...

ANISA

Password: -

CAROLYNN

“SluttyKitty69”!

DANIELLE

Oh no!

ANISA

God, Caro!

CAROLYNN

Shit. I’m kidding.

DANIELLE

Let’s not pick that.

ANISA

Ok. “9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1” (Silence) You can always change it later.

DANIELLE

Fine.

CAROLYNN

So we’re going shopping tomorrow after school.

DANIELLE

I have a Physics test on Friday.

CAROLYNN

That wasn’t an invitation.

*Awkward pause.*

ANISA

She’s just screwing with you.

BETHANIE

Don’t be a bitch, Caro.

DANIELLE

Oh, yeah. (weak chuckle)

ANISA

I need new jeans.

BETHANIE

And I just need to get out of here and do something.

DANIELLE

Away from what?

CAROLYNN (moving on)

I'll drive. Meet me at the car after 6<sup>th</sup>.

BETHANIE

I'll follow. I have to do some forced parental thing. Dad's in town.

CAROLYNN

Yeah, cool. You two with me. You're not bigger than a 4 are you?

DANIELLE

I usually buy a size 6.

CAROLYNN

Salad for you.

BETHANIE

It's only two months till the Winter Ball. It's all salad, all the time.

ANISA

Some of us have to work at looking like this.

BETHANIE

Like I don't?

CAROLYNN

(Glib) Yeah, you're all hags.

*They laugh... It has to be funny because they're afraid it's true.*

*BETHANIE pulls a dress out of her closet.*

BETHANIE

Now, go start try that on.

*DANIELLE scurries away with the dress.*

CAROLYNN

We're doing hair next.

ANISA

Her hair is fine. She's one of those girls. Doesn't have to try.

*BETHANIE awkwardly imitates Yoda.*

BETHANIE

"Do or do not. There is no try."

*Blank looks.*

CAROLYNN

And we have reached our nerd quotient for the day.

ANISA

When you date a smart boy, some of the nerd is going to rub off.

BETHANIE

Yeah. NOT my fault Xander's into sci-fi.

CAROLYNN

Gross.

*From offstage...*

DANIELLE (O.S.)

It's kinda short.

BETHANIE

That's the point.

DANIELLE (O.S.)

And tight.

CAROLYNN

Salad!

ANISA

Chill, Caro.

*The bedroom stops and CAROLYNN steps out.*

CAROLYNN (OUT)

I don't really do "chill". Can't say I ever did. Maybe when I was really little, before I knew that people are they way they are and the world was the way it is... I can't say.

I've always had this overwhelming sense of being watched. Measured. Judged. It's the oldest feeling I can remember. You could say I'm high achieving. My parents don't have a ton of money – we're ok, but not a ton – so I hand wash all my nice clothes to make sure they're clean and cared for. Mom vacuums my room three times a week and I do it the other four. I'm taking a full slate of AP classes. I have a 4.4. But that's not what people say when they think of me. That's ok. At least I'm on their minds.

*Shift to the shopping trip on Thursday. The trio are waiting for DANIELLE to come out of the changing room. XANDER approaches and gives BETHANIE a quick kiss.*

BETHANIE

What's up?

XANDER

We're catching the new Marvel. Just saw you duck in here. Thought I'd say hi.

BETHANIE

Well, hi.

*DANIELLE comes out. The outfit, like the one in the bedroom, is short and tight.*

DANIELLE

Oh.

*DANIELLE makes to go back in the changing room.*

XANDER

It's cool. I have to go. Xander.

*He offers a handshake.*

DANIELLE

Danielle. I'm new.

XANDER

You look great, by the way.

CAROLYNN (Out)

Bethie's boyfriend.

ANISA (Out)

Um, yeah.

*DANIELLE and XANDER lock on each other and don't move.*

CAROLYNN (Out)  
You should flirt.

BETHANIE (Out)  
She was just saying hi –

CAROLYNN (Out)  
Obviously that’s what we do.

BETHANIE (Out)  
Right?

CAROLYNN (Out)  
But you don’t flirt with someone’s boyfriend. Your friend’s boyfriend.

ANISA (Out)  
She’s not chasing after them –

CAROLYNN (Out)  
Maybe she didn’t mean to but still. Danielle would say hello or wave to some guy across the room and -

*ZACH bounds over to DANIELLE at a football game.*

ZACH  
Did you enjoy the game?

DANIELLE  
I don’t know much about football. I came to watch my friends. They’re on the squad.

ZACH  
Why aren’t you a cheerleader?

DANIELLE  
I don’t –

ZACH  
You’d be hot in that uniform.

DANIELLE  
Thanks. Um. I’m really just here for my friends –

ZACH  
I could be your friend.

*DANIELLE recoils.*

DANIELLE  
I'm good, thanks.

BETHANIE (Out)  
I thought Caro would kill him.

CAROLYNN  
He's dead.

ANISA (Out)  
Or break up with him.

CAROLYNN  
He's so dead.

BETHANIE (Out)  
Something. And not like it was just once or twice. This was all the time. And not just Caro's guy.

*Another day, in chemistry class.*

XANDER  
You want to make sure that's level.

DANIELLE  
What?

XANDER  
If you don't level off the tops of your measurements, it doesn't come out right.

DANIELLE  
Thanks.

XANDER  
You mind if I... (Indicating her sample)

DANIELLE  
Sure.

XANDER  
(Taking her sample) Hold it up at eye level, and look across. Cause of the adhesion, the water sticks to the sides. When you look at an angle, the water lies. Here.

*XANDER hands the tube back. DANIELLE imitates how he looked at the water line.*

Like this? DANIELLE

Yeah. Better. XANDER

Oh I see it now... DANIELLE

It's a good trick. XANDER

Thanks. DANIELLE

We were in lab. ANISA (Out)

Lab partners. BETHANIE (Out)

Xander's good at chem and wanted to help her out. ANISA (Out)

Yeah. That's what he wanted. CAROLYNN (Out)

I don't know why you always assume the worst. BETHANIE (Out)

I'm usually right. CAROLYNN (Out)

*LOGAN sees DANIELLE fumbling with her books and bag.*

Need a hand? LOGAN

Thanks. I'm kinda a mess today. DANIELLE

I seem to do this a lot. LOGAN

DANIELLE

Do what?

LOGAN

Remember? It was your first day and you were looking for room 215 or something. I offered to show you –

DANIELLE

Oh yeah! Hi. I'm sorry I didn't –

LOGAN

It's cool.

*A moment. CAROLYNN has an aside with BETHANIE and ANISA.*

CAROLYNN

I'm kinda done with this.

ANISA

It's the novelty of being the new girl.

CAROLYNN

Or she could just be a thief.

LOGAN

Hey look, maybe you'd like to do something sometime?

CAROLYNN

We made her popular and look what's happening.

LOGAN

A movie or lunch?

DANIELLE

That's really sweet –

LOGAN

Sweet? That's never good.

DANIELLE

You are. I'm just...

LOGAN

It's fine. Maybe another time?



DANIELLE

Maybe.

*DANIELLE excuses herself and exits. He approaches ANISA.*

LOGAN

Do you think you could talk to her for me?

ANISA

You can talk to her yourself.

*LOGAN turns away. BETHANIE and CAROLYNN chuckle.*

BETHANIE

Really?

*Another day, DANIELLE crosses, minding her own business. LOGAN hops alongside her.*

LOGAN

There's a restaurant that has board games and old pinball machines. They have this ancient Ms. Pac Man where you sit at a table opposite each other –

DANIELLE

Look –

LOGAN

Yeah?

DANIELLE

I'm not up for dating just yet.

LOGAN

You're not that new anymore.

DANIELLE

I'm sorry... You're sweet but -

LOGAN

Yeah. I get it. Sweet.

DANIELLE

Sorry.

*The GIRLS snicker.*

LOGAN  
What?

CAROLYNN  
Nothing. You seem –

LOGAN  
Sweet?

ANISA  
Yeah. You do, actually.

*Another day. ANISA, BETHANIE and CAROLYNN walk to class. LOGAN appears in their path.*

LOGAN  
I just thought you might give me her number.

BETHANIE  
Oh? Um...

ANISA  
Didn't she tell you no already?

LOGAN  
I'm a cool guy. If she'd get to know me -

CAROLYNN  
Yeah, ok.

*LOGAN shoots her a look. CAROLYNN locks eyes, unafraid)*

LOGAN  
Well? Will you? (Silence) Or here. (He scribbles on a scrap from his pocket.) Give her my number.

*LOGAN places the paper in BETHANIE's hand and exits.*

*DANIELLE returns to the group. BETHANIE offers her the paper.*

DANIELLE  
Logan again?

BETHANIE  
Do you want it?

Yeeessss... I mean... DANIELLE

God. You don't have to. CAROLYNN

I'm just not interested. DANIELLE

He's persistent. ANISA

Which sucks for us. CAROLYNN

I'm sorry. DANIELLE

*Another day. CAROLYNN walks, LOGAN falls into step. He fingers a folded note.*

You gave her my number, right? LOGAN

Yeah. Sure. CAROLYNN

Thanks, Caro. LOGAN

Yeah. CAROLYNN

What did she say? LOGAN

About what? CAROLYNN

When you gave her – LOGAN

Oh, right. She said thanks. CAROLYNN

LOGAN

I wrote this for her. Just, um...

*He offers it.*

LOGAN (cont')

Please.

*CAROLYNN rolls her eyes a little, but takes it.*

LOGAN (cont')

You're the best.

*THE GUY (as Logan) exits. Shift.*

ANISA (Out)

It was obnoxious, but kinda nice in it's way. Logan was expressing continued interest. I didn't know high school boys had this kind of attention span. I met Will because he asked me to a dance. Football player and cheerleader. It made sense and I needed a date. Xander took a minute with Bethanie... I don't even think he was pushing her that hard the first time. Caro picked Zach out sophomore year and she was sleeping with him within a month. He's super good looking. I don't think they really talked. Will and I don't. What can you say? You can't tell a boy about your problems with school or at home. You want to keep a guy, you need to be fun. You're their escape, not the other way around.

*CAROLYNN joins the group a few days later.*

CAROLYNN

Anyone else think this is Logan guy is getting creepy?

BETHANIE

It's a little much.

*Another day and the group walks down the hallway. LOGAN approaches DANIELLE and she steps right up to him.*

DANIELLE

Will you please stop now?

LOGAN

Stop what?

DANIELLE

I told you I'm not dating.

LOGAN

Look, I only –

DANIELLE

It's not you. I'm not dating anyone. Okay? Leave my friends alone.

LOGAN

But -

DANIELLE

And leave me alone!

*Laughter from everyone in the school hallway. LOGAN is crushed.*

CAROLYNN

He's not worth worrying about. He's nobody.

*He exits at a run. DANIELLE, stung with guilt, exits a different direction.*

BETHANIE (Out)

Caro was one to judge. Her boyfriend, Zach, was a dog. Six months after they started going out, he was already on to chasing his next piece of ass. I think she knew.

ANISA (Out)

She must have known.

*CAROLYNN and ZACH are mid-fight back in high school.*

CAROLYNN (to Zach)

You fucking asshole!

ZACH

Calm down! Shit.

CAROLYNN

You said we were exclusive.

ZACH

No. You said we were exclusive.

CAROLYNN

You agreed!

ZACH

We're 16. It's not like we're married or something.

BETHANIE (Out)

It was a huge scene.

ANISA (Out)

In the courtyard. In front of everyone.

BETHANIE (Out)

But they stayed together. No one wants to be single, but... Well. Junior year –

*Another high school fight, starting a feel like a habit.*

ZACH

Will you get off my back? You're so paranoid.

CAROLYNN

Everybody knows! You have any idea how this makes me look?

ZACH

Cause that's what matters.

CAROLYNN

Fuck you.

ZACH

(A dare) Then break up with me.

*Time. He has called her bluff.*

ZACH (cont')

You know who I am. You decided this is what you wanted. If you don't want me anymore, then break up with me.

*Beat.*

ZACH

Right.

*ZACH walks away, CAROLYNN is flummoxed. BETHANIE and ANISA join her.*

ANISA

You okay?

CAROLYNN (not okay)

I'm fine. He's such an ass.

BETHANIE

I know.

CAROLYNN

Why can't he just...?

ANISA (careful)

Just break up with him, Caro. It's not worth this.

BETHANIE

There's a school full of guys.

CAROLYNN

But. They're not him.

ANISA (Out)

What can you say to that?

BETHANIE (Out)

Zach managed to ride the straight and narrow for Senior year. We think.

ANISA (Out)

He wasn't really worth it.

BETHANIE (Out)

Carolynn hates to lose.

ANISA (Out)

We needed a distraction.

*Back during Junior year of high school –*

### SCENE 1.3 – College and Social Media

*The girls transition into ANISA's bedroom, playing with make-up. CAROLYNN is working on DANIELLE. ANISA is on her laptop again.*

BETHANIE

This is super big decision, guys. You only get this shot once.

CAROLYNN

You have your top three?

BETHANIE

There's NYU of course. Looking at University of Pennsylvania, and Austin. Berkeley, of course, but I don't know if I want to stay in California.

*Silence.*

BETHANIE (cont')

Don't look at me like that. Anisa's looking at Boston.

ANISA

My parents' idea! Not mine.

CAROLYNN

Right!

DANIELLE

Those are really good schools.

BETHANIE

I'm a little worried my grades aren't quite there –

CAROLYNN

But Bethie... Why would you want to go so far away?

*They measure each other carefully before -*

BETHANIE

It's the best. Don't you want the best for me?

ANISA

Yes!

BETHANIE

Caro?

CAROLYNN

I know. Yes, of course.

DANIELLE

You're totally going to get it. I feel it.

*BETHANIE might squeeze DANIELLE's hand, receiving her encouragement.*

BETHANIE

It's scary, though. You guys are all I know. NYU would be like going back to zero, from before. (tries to bolster herself) But maybe this is like, the right time for it, you know? Dad's out of the house, and Xander is being kinda –

ANISA

Oh?



BETHANIE

It's probably nothing. He's a guy. But things are all weird right now. What if that's the universe telling me to look for a new start? College.

CAROLYNN

I get it. But -

BETHANIE

You could move away, too.

CAROLYNN

We have it good. I don't want to start over. I'll be... (shift) Look, it's not a big deal. College is only four years.

ANISA

Yeah.

CAROLYNN

After that, we can get back together. It'll be like we were never apart.

*A pause. ANISA types.*

ANISA

We've got to get your follower count up.

DANIELLE

Is it really that big of a deal?

*DANIELLE instinctively tries to rub her eye, but CAROLYNN swats her hand away from her face.*

BETHANIE

You're going to smear it.

CAROLYNN

Don't rub.

DANIELLE

You want to put that in my eye?

CAROLYNN

Then close your eyes. (examining her work) It's crooked.

DANIELLE

My lips are sticking together.

ANISA

So don't do that with your face. Relax. Part your lips just a little, like this.

*ANISA demonstrates. DANIELLE tries to imitate.*

ANISA

Hold that.

*ANISA snaps a picture from the laptop camera.*

DANIELLE

Don't post it if it's bad.

ANISA

There'd be nothing in your account if I wasn't constantly posting for you.

BETHANIE

You've got to be better about that.

DANIELLE

There's this guy...

CAROLYNN

Who?

DANIELLE

He plays the trombone. In the band. He saw me in the bleachers at the game last week and he came and said hi.

ANISA

I told her it was a bad idea.

DANIELLE

Why? He seems nice.

CAROLYNN

Some band geek isn't going to improve your status.

DANIELLE

At least he's not a stalker.

*BETHANIE shows mock horror. The others laugh.*

BETHANIE

Did Dani just say something mean?!?

DANIELLE  
No! I mean, I didn't mean it –

ANISA  
Relax.

BETHANIE  
Logan kinda was a stalker.

DANIELLE  
Bethie, don't –

ANISA  
Why not?

BETHANIE  
It's true. I still catch him looking at you in class. Ugh.

CAROLYNN  
That's besides the point. No band geeks. We can do better.

DANIELLE  
You can do better.

CAROLYNN  
No. WE. That's how it works.

ANISA  
Hey. (She levels with Danielle) You've been here months. You hang with us.

CAROLYNN  
We picked each other. We're an "us" now.

BETHANIE  
That means you, too.

ANISA  
Yeah. Totally. Okay?

DANIELLE  
Yeah?

*They all look to CAROLYNN, who nods agreement.*

*DANIELLE sees some cuts on ANISA's wrists.*

DANIELLE (cont')

Anisa, what are those?

*ANISA tugs her sleeves down.*

BETHANIE

What was that?

*DANIELLE takes ANISA gently by the forearms.*

ANISA

Nothing. Scratches. Our new kitten is an asshole.

CAROLYNN

They'll be better by the Ball.

DANIELLE

Anisa...

ANISA

God, Danielle. I'm not bleeding out or anything.

DANIELLE

But you're -

CAROLYNN

Put some cover up on them.

ANISA (taking the cover up)

Thanks.

*CAROLYNN shifts gears back without pause. The GIRLS follow.*

CAROLYNN (cont')

Don't waste your time chasing someone who isn't going to get you anywhere. You want an athlete. A smart guy is okay -

DANIELLE

You can't predict who you like.

BETHANIE

But you do pick who you date.

CAROLYNN

You want to make a good choice, don't you?

*DANIELLE is cut off.*

DANIELLE

Of course. What do I know? I've never had a boyfriend. I haven't even had a real kiss yet.

BETHANIE

Ever?

DANIELLE

Does Eric Gonzales under the jungle gym in 4<sup>th</sup> grade count?

ANISA (giggling)

Um, no.

CAROLYNN

Definitely not!

DANIELLE

I didn't think so either.

BETHANIE

Maybe a trombone player knows how to use his lips?

*She purses her lips and makes a horn type sound. Giggles. ANISA turns the laptop around so they can be picked up by the camera.*

ANISA

Come on. Group pic.

*They pose. Camera flash.*

ANISA (Out)

Everything was fine. Then out of nowhere –

*BETHANIE sobbing.*

BETHANIE

Xander dumped me.

CAROLYNN (Out)

We went into full Jesus savior mode. Shopping trips. Nicholas Sparks movies. Anything Ryan Gosling. Cookie dough ice cream. When necessary, frozen cookie dough right out of the tube.

*The four GIRLS gather. BETHANIE is sucking the last bits out of an empty tube of frozen cookie dough.*

BETHANIE

I just don't know how this could have happened.

CAROLYNN

He's an asshole.

BETHANIE

I didn't gain weight, did I?

ANISA

No!

DANIELLE

You look great.

BETHANIE

I don't know how this could have happened.

CAROLYNN

He's an asshole.

BETHANIE

And the Winter Ball is in a month. The Winter Queen can't go stag!

DANIELLE

How do you know you're gonna –

ANISA, BETHANIE and CAROLYNN

We know.

CAROLYNN

She was first Princess at Homecoming and this year's Homecoming Queen moved with her family to Oregon. Bethanie is IN for Winter Queen.

ANISA

It's just how it is. We'll handle it.

CAROLYNN

Handled. This is us. It's so handled.

*BETHANIE is comforted and they all smile.*

ANISA

We'll find you a date.

DANIELLE

There must be lots of guys who want to go out with you.

CAROLYNN

You've got this. Right, Bethie? You've got this.

*BETHANIE nods, still sniffing.*

ANISA (Out)

Fast forward –

CAROLYNN

You've been single for two weeks. It's time to pull your shit together.

ANISA (Out)

Caro can be kinda bitchy, but she had a point. I'd catch Bethie hiding watery eyes if she bumped into Xander in the hall.

DANIELLE (to Bethanie)

You need anything?

BETHANIE (to Danielle)

I'll be okay...

CAROLYNN

Here. (gives tissue) Fix your make up.

*A buzz of the school speaker system.*

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

...And be sure you've picked up your tickets to this year's Winter Ball. Less than three weeks away. You can buy tickets at the ASB office.

*The GIRLS start changing clothes ritualistically, over different blocks of time. They begin by changing into shirts and blouses of coordinating colors. CAROLYNN instructs DANIELLE as they go.*

CAROLYNN

This calls for planning. Anisa emailed you the schedule for this week?

ANISA

I did.

DANIELLE

(Pulling it up on her smartphone) This is a little intense.

CAROLYNN

Thank god someone around here has organizational skills.

BETHANIE

I hope you brought those shoes...

ANISA (Out)

Everything carefully coordinated for color and to be sure that we pulled attention as a group, but also to make sure that the focus was on Bethanie.

DANIELLE

Is this too bright?

BETHANIE

I'm in the pale blue, so you're fine. But I wanted to wear my hair down today.

*The other three start pulling their hair into various up-dos.*

ANISA (Out)

Compliment and counter-balance.

DANIELLE

Can I do half up?

CAROLYNN

No. Ponytails.

*DANIELLE starts pulling her hair up.*

ANISA

I have a hair tie.

ANISA (Out)

If she wanted to wear pink lipstick, we made sure ours was never brighter than hers.

CAROLYNN

Teamwork and sacrifice.

ANISA (Out)

If she wore heels, ours could never be as high.

BETHANIE

It might look like this is just about me, but it isn't.



CAROYLNN

We back the winning horse.

BETHANIE (supportive)

If I thought Anisa would be the best bet, I'd totally be about it.

CAROLYNN

But she's not. (To Bethanie) And you need to step up now. No more of all that... weeping crap. Save it for your coronation.

ANISA

I have make-up wipes, eye liner and mascara stockpiled. We're ready.

*BETHANIE promenades around the room, practicing her wave and walk.*

CAROLYNN

You look like it's work!

ANISA (to Danielle)

Once you seem like you're trying, some of the magic goes out of the thing.

CAROLYNN

Taller. Suck it in!

*BETHANIE follows the instruction. Smiles. Waves.*

ANISA (Out)

Not like we were actually worried that she wouldn't win.

CAROLYNN

In! Not out!

BETHANIE (not breathing)

It is in!

*BETHANIE continues "queening".*

CAROLYNN (Out)

You're looking at me right now like... I was making this huge deal out of nothing. It's high school. Another four years and no one will give a crap. But you couldn't know. You were normal. Your mom packed you lunch. My mom left crap food behind so she could go out and when the elementary school kids started calling me Jigglypuff – yeah – she told me they were right. That they were letting my fat stomach off the hook easy. I had a fake tooth put in after I *accidentally* hit my mouth on a doorknob when I was 9. had to walk around with that broken tooth for a week before I saw a

dentist. Not because we couldn't afford to fix it. Because I deserved it. So if losing weight, throwing up a few lunches, makes me popular, then I'll do it. If it's 5 minutes in some boy's car, whatever.

Bethie? Daddy's little girl until Daddy ran away. Her Mom just pours another glass of wine. Like Bethanie has even a crumb of self-esteem. And you've seen Anisa –

*CAROLYNN grabs ANISA by the wrist and pulls her over.*

ANISA (Out)

Let me go.

CAROLYNN (Out)

You've seen this right. Long sleeves all summer? It's not because she likes open shoulder shirts –

*CAROLYNN starts pulling up ANISA's sleeves. ANISA struggles.*

ANISA (Out)

Stop! Stop it!

*ANISA breaks loose.*

CAROLYNN (Out)

They have to see. We're not normal. Things like dances and boyfriends and matching clothes matter because it's what we've got. If we don't have that, then what's... What do we even...?

*CAROLYNN can't make the fear into words. She turns back to BETHANIE.*

CAROLYNN (cont')

And smile! Look happy!

*BETHANIE fades back, still working with CAROLYNN.*

*ANISA pulls DANIELLE aside.*

ANISA

Xander.

DANIELLE

He talked to me first.

ANISA

Bethanie's Xander?

*XANDER appears and DANILLE is pulled into a moment with him. There is something young and authentic between them.*

XANDER  
Danielle, please -

DANIELLE  
Bethanie is one of my best friends.

XANDER  
It's been weeks.

DANIELLE  
And she's so pretty.

XANDER  
So are you. (More important) But you're interesting. I like chemistry class cause I want to talk to you. Come see a movie with me. That's all.

*XANDER vanishes and DANIELLE is back with ANISA.*

ANISA (to CAROLYNN)  
She can't.

DANIELLE  
We're just hanging out.

ANISA  
You can't!

CAROLYNN  
It couldn't be anyone else?

DANIELLE  
Who, Logan? No.

*XANDER re-appears with the last of a tub of popcorn. DANIELLE is at the movies with him.*

XANDER  
Want to finish it?

DANIELLE  
I'm full.

*XANDER does a "Cookie Monster" and shoves too much popcorn in his mouth.  
DANIELLE can't help but giggle.*

XANDER

This is hot, right?

DANIELLE (still laughing)

Oh totally.

*He tosses a piece at her.*

XANDER

So we should do this again.

DANIELLE

I don't know.

XANDER

You had fun, right?

*He tosses another piece at her. She's trying unsuccessfully not to smile.*

XANDER (cont')

So, next weekend?

*She stalls and he throws another. She catches it and throws it back.*

DANIELLE

Hey!

XANDER

I'm not saying we should run off and elope. Let's just... hang out. Movies.

*One more kernel.*

XANDER (cont')

Okay?

*DANIELLE nods. XANDER vanishes and DANIELLE is back with ANISA.*

DANIELLE

(an honest thought) Please don't tell Bethie. I told Xander that we have to keep it quiet. Nobody can see us hanging out or think anything is going on. I don't want to hurt Bethanie. Especially right before the Winter Ball. Maybe nothing will come of it anyhow.

ANISA

If Bethanie gets wind of this –

DANIELLE

She won't.

*DANIELLE exits. BETHANIE re-enters, with CAROLYNN at her shoulder.*

BETHANIE (Out)

Do you remember what you were like when you were seventeen?

ANISA (Out)

I had to tell Caro.

BETHANIE (Out)

Angry? Jealous?

CAROLYNN (Out)

And I wasn't going to keep it from Bethanie.

*Silently, CAROLYNN and ANISA give BETHANIE the news. BETHANIE turns out.*

BETHANIE (Out)

This was not what my senior year of high school was supposed to be. I had a... Daddy was supposed to take us to Rome. The whole family. He showed me pictures of this place. Straight out of "Gladiator". You know, with Russell Crowe back when he was hot. It's a real place. I knew that. I did. But we were going to go there. He'd take my picture in front of the Coliseum. Between the giant pillars, like a real queen. Then Xander dumped me. Daddy moved out of the house. And then Danielle. I thought we were friends. This wasn't how it...

*ANISA and CAROLYNN form a unit around BETHANIE.*

CAROLYNN

Danielle can't just go around doing whatever she wants.

BETHANIE

I can't believe she would steal him.

ANISA

She didn't mean for -

*BETHANIE starts to lose it.*

CAROLYNN (sharp)

Stop it.

*BETHANIE wipes all feeling off her face.*

BETHANIE

She's a traitor. She's not a real friend.

ANISA

What are we going to do?

CAROLYNN

Why don't we get her a first real kiss?

ANISA

What are you talking about?

CAROLYNN

I still have Logan's number. Anisa, find him on Snapchat.

*ANISA pulls out her smartphone.*

CAROLYNN (cont')

What's his last name?

BETHANIE

Miller.

ANISA

Found him. What now?

CAROLYNN

Have Dani friend him.

ANISA (Out)

I set up all her accounts. I had all the passwords.

BETHANIE (giggling)

You're really –

ANISA

Done.

*A beep.*

CAROLYNN

And he accepted her already.

BETHANIE

God, he's so lame.

CAROLYNN

Give me that. You've got some pics of Dani, right?

ANISA

Yeah.

*ANISA hands over the phone and BETHANIE and CAROLYNN huddle over it.*

CAROLYNN

Dani said she's never had a real kiss.

ANISA (Out)

Selfies start out as fun. "Look at me, look how clever I am."

CAROLYNN

Your first kiss should be special.

ANISA (Out)

"See how much I don't care. Do you?"

CAROLYNN

Something to remember.

ANISA (Out)

Nobody wants to see the real you. Because if I really took it all off and you could see who I am, without any distraction...

*DANIELLE and XANDER in Chemistry class. DANIELLE stares straight ahead, but XANDER tries to take her hand. She pulls away.*

DANIELLE

Someone might see us.

XANDER

So? I don't like hiding.

DANIELLE

It's for Bethie.

XANDER

She'll get over it.

DANIELLE

You promised. We were going to lay low until after the Ball.

XANDER  
I know. (Beat) Okay.

DANIELLE  
I'm sorry.

XANDER  
Can I call?

DANIELLE  
I'm with Bethie and the girls so much of the time –

XANDER  
Okay, no calls. I'm only this patient because you're worth it, you know?

*She seems embarrassed by this.*

XANDER (cont')  
You have no idea.

*He squeezes her hand and exits.*

ANISA (Out)  
If you could see who I am. If you knew about the things that happened and the things I did and the things that I don't really remember, except in the last blink of a nightmare., and the things that maybe didn't happen.

*CAROLYNN and BETHANIE are texting with LOGAN on ANISA's phone, pretending to be DANIELLE. We see their texts.*

LOGAN (text)  
Mind if I save this number?

DANIELLE (text)  
Why else would I give it to you?

LOGAN (text)  
Cool.

*They send a pic of DANIELLE via text. They laugh.*

ANISA (Out)  
That flash just before you wake up. Your eyes open and you're gasping for air and reality and you tell yourself that it was just a bad dream.



*CAROLYNN calls out to ANISA.*

CAROLYNN

Anisa! We're going to need some more pictures than this.

ANISA

So take some.

CAROLYNN

You think Dani's going to let us take pictures of her to send to Logan?

BETHANIE

We have a bunch of group pictures.

ANISA (Out)

You're awake now.

BETHANIE

Can't we just crop her out?

ANISA (Out)

You can see what's real.

CAROLYNN

And can we do something about some of these frumpy things she's wearing? Anisa, can you Photoshop some of this?

*ANISA goes to her laptop, pulls up a group selfie that includes Danielle. She begins to manipulate the image as she speaks.*

ANISA (Out)

Do you know what you need to have to set up an email account? Nothing. No identification or proof. The internet is a magical fairyland where you can be exactly who you want to be.

*She has cropped the picture so it's just Danielle and then starts to alter her image, lowering her neckline.*

BETHANIE

Please put some real lipstick on this girl.

CAROLYNN

Yes!

*ANISA works on DANIELLE's make-up.*

ANISA (Out)

You can be taller and thinner and prettier. You can have longer hair and bigger boobs. You can have a tan without the skin cancer. You can make people look at you.

*ANISA has a now slightly sultry picture of Danielle.*

CAROLYNN

Much better.

ANISA (Out)

Make them see you.

BETHANIE

Are we really sending that?

ANISA (Out)

Make them love you.

CAROLYNN

It's just a picture! Save it for the right moment.

*DANIELLE and XANDER pass each other in a hallway, but stop and look back at each other.*

ANISA

And what do I -

CAROLYNN

Just say whatever to make him happy.

BETHANIE

We do that all the time. It's easy.

*CAROLYNN and BETHANIE leave ANISA with her laptop.*

ANISA (Out)

That nightmare is always there in the back of your head. Being put into bed under Powerpuff Girl bedsheets that Mom threw away when you were seven. Looking up at the unicorn mobile on the ceiling. Groping hands between the bedsheets.

*CAROLYNN exits, but BETHANIE stops and puts herself in XANDER's way.*

XANDER

Hi.

*He tries to move on, but BETHANIE is right there. DANIELLE runs away.*

BETHANIE

Hey. (Awkward pause) So, you excited for the Winter Ball?

XANDER

I guess.

BETHANIE

It's so soon.

XANDER

It's still three weeks off.

BETHANIE

I got a great dress. Different, but classic you know.

XANDER

That sounds nice, Bethie. Look, I have class.

BETHANIE

Yeah. Of course.

XANDER

See you around.

*He starts going...*

BETHANIE

See you at the dance!

*He's gone. She is utterly rejected...*

ANISA (Out)

Sometimes the memory is there for no reason... I mean... you're not sure if that was just the nightmare or if some part was real. I can't tell. Like it flashed white and got over exposed.

*BETHANIE exits.*

ANISA (Out)

An over-edited selfie. It isn't real.

*CAROLYNN appears and is texting DANIELLE.*

DANIELLE (text)

Check it out!

*DANIELLE texts CAROLYNN a picture of herself, trying on her dress for the Ball.*

Really cute.

CAROLYNN (text)

Just bought. On sale.

DANIELLE (text)

Even better!

CAROLYNN (text)

Need shoes.

DANIELLE (text)

Have some. Come over after school tomorrow.

CAROLYNN (text)

K.

DANIELLE (text)

*DANIELLE exits. CAROLYNN starts a thread and sends the pic to ANISA.*

You know what to do.

CAROLYNN (text)

Yeah.

ANISA (text)

You're the best.

CAROLYNN (text)

*And ANISA texts it to LOGAN, pretending to be Danielle. CAROLYNN exits. We only see the texts and ANISA.*

Wow.

LOGAN (text)

Thanks. It's for you.

DANIELLE (text)

I shouldn't say...

LOGAN (text)

Tell me. (Beat)

DANIELLE (text)

It's okay. You're not gonna freak me out.

LOGAN (text)

You're so hot.  
I just want to touch you.

*Time.*

LOGAN (text)

You're freaked.

*ANISA is freaked, but she responds.*

DANIELLE (text)

No. No, I'm not.

LOGAN (text)

Yeah?

DANIELLE (text)

Tell me about it.

*LOGAN keeps texting and she reads a bit before turning out.*

ANISA (Out)

I imagined it in a bad, bad dream. If that actually happened, no one would ever touch me again. If everyone saw that I was less...

*CAROLYNN approaches BETHANIE, both entering.*

CAROLYNN

Ready?

BETHANIE

What?

ANISA (Out)

Less innocent.

CAROLYNN

Have your dress?

BETHANIE

Oh. Yeah.

ANISA (Out)

Less tarnished.

BETHANIE

That was expensive, even for me.

*BETHANIE seems unfocused.*

ANISA (Out)

Just less.

CAROLYNN

What's up?

BETHANIE

It's... I don't know.

CAROLYNN

You're okay.

*CAROLYNN puts an arm around BETHANIE.*

ANISA (Out)

What if no one wants you?

BETHANIE

Xander didn't even want to talk to me.

CAROLYNN

He doesn't matter now. You're gonna be okay. We'll get through this dance and it'll be fine.

*BETHANIE fades away and ANISA continues her texts with LOGAN. ANISA is a little concerned by what she's reading.*

*DANIELLE comes to the forefront, with a dress covered in a plastic bag. She talks as if she's addressing the girls.*

DANIELLE

I like him. I really do. And we've been so careful about everything. I don't even look at him when we're at school. I don't want Bethie to...

ANISA (Out)

Logan said some things.

DANIELLE

He wants to meet me at the Ball, in the courtyard after the crowning.

ANISA (Out)

People are into what they're into, right?

DANIELLE

We'll have a minute alone. We haven't been alone since the movie.

ANISA (Out)

And guys say some crazy shit. Probably watches too much porn.

DANIELLE

I asked if he wanted to see a picture of my dress.

ANISA (Out)

But he was into it.

DANIELLE

He said that I would look good in whatever I wore.

*CAROLYNN and BETHANIE join ANISA and read over her shoulder.*

BETHANIE

Oh gross.

CAROLYNN

He's not serious. That loser?

ANISA

He's never dated anyone. Not at this school.

CAROLYNN

Exactly. Horny high school boy fantasies.

BETHANIE

I'd never. And I've done a few things.

CAROLYNN

Sex with Xander kinda vanilla?

ANISA

Caro!

CAROLYNN

Sorry. Too soon. Sorry, Bethie.

BETHANIE (deep breath)

It's fine. I'm fine.

ANISA

He wants to meet her at the dance. The hall behind the arts building. By the copy room.

BETHANIE

Sounds simple.

CAROLYNN

Time to go old school.

*CAROLYNN starts writing a note.*

CAROLYNN

Change of plans. Not courtyard. Arts building. Copy room.

BETHANIE

Won't she know that's not his handwriting?

CAROLYNN

We all text. Do you know Xander's handwriting?

BETHANIE

I guess not.

ANISA

All we have to do was get her there alone.

DANIELLE

I'm nervous. Should I be nervous?

BETHANIE

It's just a kiss.

CAROLYNN

Yeah. A real kiss.

ANISA (Out)

Should we have been nervous?

CAROLYNN

And we'll be there to pick up the pieces.

*SCENE 1.4 – Getting Ready*



*The other girls' dresses appear in the space. They all start slinking into them, doing hair and make-up.*

DANIELLE

I didn't go to any of the formals at my old school.

BETHANIE

Isn't that half the point of high school?

DANIELLE

I just wasn't that popular and I didn't want to go without a date. Mom and Dad's accident was right before freshman year.

*BETHANIE stops.*

DANIELLE

I just wasn't feeling it. Grams tried to make me go. I'm lame, I know.

BETHANIE

I didn't mean to bring it up. Your parents.

DANIELLE

It's okay. My mom would have thought I was being lame, too.

ANISA

I bet she would have liked your dress.

DANIELLE

She would have.

*They primp a few moments in quiet.*

BETHANIE

I'm going to be Winter Queen and he's going to go back to being a nobody.

CAROLYNN

Right.

BETHANIE (to herself)

I'll be the Queen...

CAROLYNN

It's going to be perfect.

ANISA (Out)

But when did we decide this was such a big deal?

*BETHANIE has a moment of weakness, remembering.*

BETHANIE

It should be Xander with me up there.

ANISA (Out)

- that this was the most important thing?

CAROLYNN

He's a high school boy, just like all the others. It's not like we're gonna marry these guys.

*LOGAN appears somewhere else. He finishes a beer while the GIRLS continue.*

*BETHANIE is ready to go and the others finish themselves up. CAROLYNN finds her purse and pulls out a small flask, offering it to the group. BETHANIE and ANISA take a sip, then pass it to DANIELLE who sniffs it.*

DANIELLE

That's not beer.

CAROLYNN

This is not a normal day.

*DANIELLE takes a sip.*

BETHANIE

You're gonna want more than that tonight.

DANIELLE

We drink at parties but –

ANISA

If you don't want to –

BETHANIE

It might be a bigger night for you than for me.

DANIELLE

Wait. You know?

*BETHANIE nods.*

BETHANIE

It's ok. I'm ok.

*DANIELLE is hugely relieved.*

DANIELLE

I'm so glad that I'm here. For high school. For right now. I don't know what I would have done this year without you.

*All look at each other except DANIELLE.*

DANIELLE (cont')

Tonight is going to be the best.

BETHANIE

Yeah. It's going to be something.

*LOGAN finishes his beer and crushes the can. He exits.*

*The four GIRLS enter the dance to swells of dance music, taking all the attention of the party goers. They join the events the dance continues.*

ANNOUNCER

Alright everyone. The time has come to present this year's Winter Ball Royal Court.

*The dancing stops and ceremonial music begins. The ANNOUNCER begins to speak the names of the various court members in an incoherent voice.*

*BETHANIE's name is called out, as they anticipated. She takes center stage, waving to her people. More cheers and applause. She receives her crown.*

*The dancing continues. CAROLYNN feeds DANIELLE another drink.*

*BETHANIE steps into the courtyard and joins XANDER, who is waiting.*

BETHANIE (posing with crown)

Well? What do you think? Does it suit me?

XANDER

You always wanted to be treated like royalty.

BETHANIE

Why do you have to be that way?

XANDER

This is why it wasn't going to work. I'm waiting for someone, so...

*XANDER tries to walk away.*

BETHANIE

Look, Xander. I'm sorry. I didn't... I didn't mean to pick a fight. The opposite really. I think we should get back together.

XANDER

Why? You want, I don't know, something that isn't me.

BETHANIE

Maybe I've gotten perspective.

XANDER

I've never quite been cool enough for you.

BETHANIE

Come on –

XANDER

I have the surface stuff, football and grades. But it wasn't enough. You were always looking around the corner, you know?

BETHANIE

That's my mistake. What do you want? I can change –

XANDER

I want someone who makes me feel like I matter exactly how I am. Like I'm going to matter in the world and that I matter more to them than they matter to themselves. Can you do that, Bethie? I'm not sure you can.

*BETHANIE doesn't say anything. He walks away and BETHANIE tries to hold it together.*

ANISA (Out)

It was a prank.

*BETHANIE rejoins CAROLYNN and DANIELLE. She takes a drink from the flask and DANIELLE grabs at it, already a little wasted.*

BETHANIE

Okay, slow down already.

CAROLYNN

Sloppy is not attractive.

ANISA (Out)

She was going to walk down that hall, a little drunk and out of it. And he'd kiss her. Try and feel her up or something.

DANIELLE (trying to focus)

Right. Right.

ANISA (Out)

Danielle doesn't have any experience, so that would totally freak her out. She's scream or hit him and come running out of the room.

CAROLYNN

Your court awaits.

ANISA (Out)

It's funny.

*BETHANIE takes the center of attention and oversees the Ball.*

CAROLYNN (to Danielle)

So does yours.

*DANIELLE sways. BETHANIE waves to her and she waves back.*

ANISA (Out)

It was supposed to be funny.

CAROLYNN

Are you ready?

DANIELLE

Yeah, time to go.

*DANIELLE stumbles a little.*

ANISA (Out)

She'd come find us, crying. And we'd be there.

DANIELLE

He really likes me.

CAROLYNN

He does.

ANISA (Out)

She'd call him an asshole.

DANIELLE

Bethie says it's okay. Is she –

CAROLYNN

She's fine. She's a queen.

*They look over again to BETHANIE in her crown. ANISA turns to DANIELLE.*

ANISA (Out)

Look at her. She was so happy.

*The Ball fades away and DANIELLE steps toward the room.*

ANISA (Out)

We walked with her. I took one hand and Carolyn took the other. We walked her to the door and sent her through.

*BETHANIE joins ANISA and CAROLYNN. Ceremonially, they lead DANIELLE one after the other. Under all the substances everything is surreal to her.*

*Finally, they hand her to LOGAN. DANIELLE barely looks at him and he leads her through a door, into the dark.*

*After a moment, there are some sounds of struggle from the room. ANISA moves toward the door and CAROLYNN and BETHANIE stop her.*

*Then a scream that is suddenly muffled. They lunge for the door to open it – and find it locked. They fight the locked door and hear the suffering on the other side.*

*End of Act I.*

ACT 2, SCENE 2.1 – Grown Ups

DANIELLE (Out)

What caught my eye was the note was moving back and forth between two girls who were usually pretty decent students. Freshmen. I let it slide for a little while, but they didn't stop. So on one of my laps circling the classroom, I took it from them and slipped it in my pocket without stopping my lesson on "A Separate Peace". They just stared. After class, they lingered. I waited to see if they would ask for their note, but they left. I moved the note from my pocket to the top drawer of my desk.

At the end of that day, I opened the top drawer to retrieve my car keys. It was raining. No one knows how to drive in Southern California when it's raining. I felt something bite my hand. A paper cut from the side of the folded note. I sucked on the cut and unfolded the note, one-handed, on the desk.

BETHANIE (as Student #1)

He did it again last night.

CAROLYNN (as Student #2)

Did it hurt?

BETHANIE (as Student #1)

Not as much as last time.

CAROLYNN (as Student #2)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry he does that to you. Sad face.

DANIELLE and CAROLYNN (as Student #2)

You need to tell someone.

BETHANIE (as Student #1)

I can't. No one will believe me.

CAROLYNN (as Student #2)

You can't stay there.

BETHANIE (as Student #1)

He's my dad. I don't have anyone else.

*DANIELLE lets the note fall from her hands.*

DANIELLE (Out)

I was just a student teacher. (Beat) I called the authorities and went through the proper channels at our school. When the principal showed up during their class the next day and called them out of the room... The way they looked at me. Like I'd done something wrong. I wish someone had told for me. Right afterwards -

*The GIRLS are their high school selves.*

CAROLYNN  
How was it?

DANIELLE (numb)  
Fine.

CAROLYNN  
Boys. Right?

*She looks to ANISA and BETHANIE who only nod. She changes the subject without hesitation.*

CAROLYNN (cont')  
Are you going to Napa again for Christmas?

BETHANIE  
We were, but plans keep changing.

DANIELLE (Out)  
They didn't ask for details. I thought they would. Maybe it was me. They were more experienced -

CAROLYNN  
Zach thinks he's something -

BETHANIE  
I wish he'd brush his teeth before.

*CAROLYNN just chuckles.*

ANISA (cont')  
He picks me up and tosses me on his bed.

DANIELLE (Out)  
There wasn't a bed.

ANISA  
And he smiles at me. That part doesn't get old.

BETHANIE  
He just does it. Like he doesn't think about me during.

DANIELLE (Out)



He just did it.

BETHANIE

But in the beginning, he was warm. It seems like a long time ago.

DANIELLE (Out)

The moment passed.

ANISA (Out)

Bethanie was Prom Queen, too. Then graduation. Carolynn stayed close for college. Her parents are both UCLA grads, so that's that.

*They are now on a group Skype.*

CAROLYNN

I barely had to rush. The sororities all came to me. And Zach's here.

BETHANIE

It rains all the time.

ANISA (Out)

Bethanie went up to Washington. U Dub.

BETHANIE

All. The. Time.

ANISA

I'm cold.

BETHANIE

It's winter. You're the one that picked Boston.

ANISA

I miss California weather. Theses coats... They're not warm enough when you go outside and you roast to death when you go inside.

BETHANIE

You're an idiot.

ANISA

Shut up.

BETHANIE

But for reals, you're okay, right?

ANISA

I guess so.

BETHANIE

Good.

ANISA

Dani?

DANIELLE

Yeah. Sorry.

ANISA

You good?

DANIELLE

You know. I'm the boring one who didn't go anywhere.

ANISA

Only eight more weeks until the winter break.

DANIELLE (Out)

I did the community college thing for a while. It's cheaper.

ANISA (Out)

I think she was embarrassed. She didn't seem like she cared about it too much.

DANIELLE

I'll get some of the GEs out of the way and figure it out after that.

ANISA (Out)

She was smarter than me about it. I showed up for class on time and got a little side job at a video game store at nights. Did most of my assignments. But something was off. My Mom says I never really got my legs under me there. She likes the blame the weather. That's fine. After just a year in Boston, I transferred back and was at the junior college with Danielle.

*ANISA turns back into the scene.*

ANISA

I feel like such a loser.

DANIELLE

It's not a big deal. Get some credits, then go wherever you want. Seriously.

ANISA

Yeah?

*DANIELLE nods, then turns out.*

DANIELLE (Out)

It was nice to have a friend back. I didn't have my legs under me either, but having someone to eat lunch with again... it helped. And there were other things that didn't change, even in the mix of college...

*CAROLYNN is venting.*

CAROLYNN

Zach's fucking some girl. Some senior.

BETHANIE

Again?

CAROLYNN

She lives in the sorority next door.

DANIELLE

Break up with him already.

CAROLYNN

I can't break it off. His family is taking us skiing in January. And I really don't want to deal with dating right now.

BETHANIE

How about finding a boyfriend who knows the meaning of monogamy?

CAROLYNN

Zach will grow out of it. And not like I've never gone looking for anything else. It's just college.

ANISA (Out)

They stayed together. Bethanie left the guy she was seeing for a hot second -

BETHANIE

I had better things to do.

ANISA (Out)

- and she changed majors to Marketing. Danielle transferred into CSULA and got a job as a teacher's aide at an elementary school. She got... lighter. That school was a good place for her, around all those kids. Zach proposed and Carolyn said yes. I didn't know what I was doing. Signed up for whatever classes they pointed me at, then took my credits over to CalTech. It was fine, I guess. I was cutting less. And then, college was gone as fast as it came.

SCENE 2.2

*DANIELLE starts screaming. ANISA turns to her and CAROLYNN and BETHANIE step away.*

ANISA

Wake up! Danielle! It's okay.

DANIELLE

I... I'm sorry...

ANISA

You dozed off.

DANIELLE

Are we late?

ANISA

We have time. Are you okay (DANIELLE breathes) It's fine. You dozed off on the couch and you looked like you needed it. We don't have to leave for like half an hour still.

DANIELLE

You know, those kids at the school wear me out. Every time you turn around there's another disaster and...

*ANISA says nothing.*

DANIELLE (cont')

And I have these nightmares. I'm seeing a psychologist. She wants to put me on sleep aids. I have to do some preliminary tests.

ANISA

You don't have to talk about it if you don't -

DANIELLE

She says I need to. I'm having a hard time focusing. At work, I'm always busy. But when I'm alone, or still, I can't get it out of my head... I can't sleep. I'll go for a walk... I see shadows moving in the dark. My heart beats like I'm...

ANISA

I know. Sometimes, I think I remember something that happened. This nightmare that keeps coming back around every so often. Sometimes the dream is clear. Other times, it's really blurry. And my heart races like that.

What happened?  
DANIELLE

I'm not sure.  
ANISA

Is that why you...  
DANIELLE

*DANIELLE gently touches ANISA's wrists and ANISA pulls away.*

(False) I'm okay.  
ANISA

I'm not okay.  
DANIELLE (cont')

ANISA (Out)  
But the world keeps moving whether you're okay or not. You pretend that things are okay when people ask how you're doing. And you smile when they succeed. You smile through your jealousy.

DANIELLE  
I nailed that interview. I'm sure they're going to hire me. My own classroom!

That's great.  
ANISA

BETHANIE  
Finally! I grabbed a spot on the marketing team for promoting a major shift into alternative energies. This is huge!

Congratulations.  
ANISA

DANIELLE (Out)  
And five seconds after Carolyn's wedding –

CAROLYNN  
Guess what? We're pregnant! I need you guys to help me plan. We have to decorate the baby's room –

BETHANIE  
Is it a boy or a girl?

CAROLYNN

It's too early to tell.

ANISA (Out)  
Then almost as suddenly -

CAROLYNN  
I lost it.

BETHANIE  
Wait -

CAROLYNN  
I lost the baby.

*Quiet.*

BETHANIE (Out)  
What do we say?

*Quiet.*

BETHANIE (Out)  
Anisa -

ANISA (Out)  
I don't know.

DANIELLE  
I'm sorry, Caro.

*The three exit slowly, leaving CAROLYNN talking to herself.*

CAROLYNN  
I'm okay. We'll try again. I'm fine.

DANIELLE (Out)  
But it wasn't. When he went on to law school -

*CAROLYNN, making excuses. ZACH addresses the various girls (unseen) as he flirts)*

CAROLYNN  
He's at class all day and his internships. And he spends every other night at the campus library.

ZACH

I'm forming a study group for intro to intellectual property.

*THE GUY sidles up close to her.*

ZACH (cont)

You should come out.

CAROLYNN

He has so much more responsibility in at the firm now. He has to pretty much be there whenever they want him to be so -

*Jumping ahead in time...*

ZACH

If you keep giggling like that, someone's going to hear you...

CAROLYNN

He's committed. That's what it takes to make partner.

*Jumping ahead again, ZACH moves offstage and we can hear him stifling moans offstage.*

CAROLYNN (cont')

But there's lots of hours. I bet all the lawyers' wives go through this.

*Louder.*

CAROLYNN (cont')

I'm fine. Everything's great.

ANISA (Out)

And there was Carolyn, at every function, hair done and in full beat, in three-inch heels and smiling. Even after the second miscarriage. Even two years later, after thousands of dollars of IVF treatments and pumped full of hormones, when she was finally carrying her baby to term and ready to burst.

CAROLYNN

Everything's great.

*Transition to a restaurant, the year after college. CAROLYNN, BETHANIE, and ANISA are mid conversation. CAROLYNN is on the verge of bursting with pregnancy.*

CAROLYNN

Bethie, no, seriously. You have to come back.

ANISA

You have two job offers and one is obviously better.

CAROLYNN

You said the one here pays more.

BETHANIE

Yes. (to an unseen passing waiter) Can I add the calamari? Thanks.

ANISA

You know you're not going to touch it.

BETHANIE

I love calamari.

CAROLYNN

The LA job is high profile.

ANISA

You barely touch anything you order.

BETHANIE

So is the job in Seattle.

CAROLYNN

Is there a guy?

BETHANIE

Why does there have to be a guy?

ANISA

There is totally a guy.

CAROLYNN

You're staying.

BETHANIE

God, Caro. You talk like it's your life instead of mine.

CAROLYNN

I'm pregnant.

BETHANIE



I can see that. Don't you ever want a change? To be able to get on a plane and land someplace you've never been before? Don't you ever want to just get the hell away from here?

CAROLYNN

I take ski trips and go up to Napa –

BETHANIE

With the same small minded people we grew up with -

CAROLYNN

- and we're spending New Year's in San Francisco.

BETHANIE

You might as well stuff yourselves into a balloon and float around together until you suffocate to death. Anisa doesn't leave –

ANISA

I did.

BETHANIE

- At least she tried it once and can say she has an educated opinion on the subject. Danielle would understand. She lived other places.

DANIELLE

I guess so.

CAROLYNN

I can't do this alone!

BETHANIE

It's got nothing to do with you! I just want to be somewhere else. Okay? I hope that's fucking okay with you Caro!

CAROLYNN

Then you should go.

*Uncomfortable quiet.*

ANISA (Out)

Of course she stayed. Caro was going to have a baby. Bethanie was here but she worked even harder. We started seeing her ads on TV and on billboards, constantly flying back to Seattle for meetings. She was always on her phone or some plane and rarely really here.

*Later, DANIELLE joins ANISA in a park.*

Bethie's not dead. DANIELLE

I know. ANISA

DANIELLE  
I bet every circle of friends go through this. It's not like we can be like we were.  
Hanging out in your bedroom, shopping every weekend.

I get that. ANISA

DANIELLE  
Caro has the baby. Bethie has her job –

ANISA  
You have your students – And I erase.

DANIELLE  
Your graphic design skills are amazing.

ANISA  
I erase. I erase arms and thighs and double chins to make the hot hotter.

DANIELLE  
I couldn't do it.

ANISA  
Those women, who are already so tall and thin I could thread a needle with them? I think how much I want to be them. I think about what it was like on set for the shoots, where they had water and maybe a few pieces of fruit because they were afraid to be bloated. Then I take my cursor and I erase what little bit of them is left.

*DANIELLE's at a loss. ANISA changes the subject.*

ANISA (cont')  
You know why I like this park? I stare at a screen for eight hours a day. And I need to look at something real.

DANIELLE  
So change jobs.

ANISA  
To what?

DANIELLE

You're in graphic design. Magazines, newspapers, websites. You could work anywhere. Don't be so scared.

ANISA

What would you know about...

*A long quiet. A man, ORIN, moves into the space quietly.*

ANISA

I thought I'd be someplace better. That I'd be something better than I am right now.

DANIELLE

You're really capable. I always thought so.

ANISA

Maybe. I'll think about it. The job thing. I have to head back. Call me?

DANIELLE

Always.

*ANISA exits. When she is gone, ORIN approaches DANIELLE, who jumps.*

ORIN

I'm sorry. Sorry.

DANIELLE

You're okay.

ORIN

I didn't mean to freak you out. I work... I'm a law clerk over... (He indicates a nearby building). You're here a lot.

DANIELLE

It's summer. I'm off. Teacher.

ORIN

I cut through here on my breaks, to go to that hot dog cart over there, and I've seen you.

DANIELLE

You eat hot dogs every day?

ORIN

No. Not every.

DANIELLE

That can't be healthy.

ORIN

My mom called me her little dumpster. Look, I probably have you freaked and convinced I'm a stalker, but I promise I'm relatively normal. I'm Orin.

DANIELLE

Like the dentist in "Little Shop of Horrors"?

THE GUY (as Orin)

Unfortunate, I know. People don't forget my name though.

*ANISA reappears elsewhere.*

ANISA (Out)

I could never figure it out. How Danielle was able to reel these guys in when she was so... without skill.

She was, in every way, entirely ordinary.

These boys, then men... They get too close and it's like water droplets.

Inevitably, they become one.

And she didn't know what to do with them.

Logan either. I looked him up once, the guy who got us all here.

Everything is online. He'd stayed through graduation. He tried to talk to Danielle once but we were able to intercept him and he kinda gave up after that. God, I hadn't thought of his name since then. What was his last name?

ORIN

I dunno if you're, like,... but... here's my card.

That top number is my cell.

Figure if I'm here and you're here, summer will end eventually...

and it'll get rainy

and maybe you'd change your mind and want a coffee.

*He holds out his card. DANIELLE looks at it.*

DANIELLE

I don't drink coffee.

*ANISA goes to her laptop and types.*

Miller. Generic.

*She types more and finds what she wanted.*

*ORIN retracts his card and starts to put it away.*

ORIN  
That's cool. I'm sorry I bothered you or scared you...

ANISA (Out)

I wanted him to be in prison. Or maybe dead from a car accident or something. But he was still alive and well. He'd moved to North Carolina for college – he was smarter than we gave him credit for. There's not a ton of pictures, but enough.

*ORIN pockets his business card and lingers awkwardly. DANIELLE looks down.*

ANISA (Out)

Him in his college track uniform. Camping and hiking. Looks like there was a girlfriend who became a wife who became a mother.

ORIN

So...

ANISA (Out)

He has two boys. One has their mother's eyes –

*ORIN starts to walk away.*

DANIELLE

Wait.

ANISA (Out)

And one has Logan's.

DANIELLE

Hot chocolate.

*ORIN turns back to her.*

DANIELLE (cont')

I like hot chocolate.

ORIN (very serious)

Do you use water or milk?

DANIELLE

Oh. Milk.

ORIN

You're okay then.

*He offers the card again and she takes it, reads it.*

DANIELLE

I'm Danielle.

ORIN

Hi. If you want, you give me a call. Whenever.

DANIELLE

I can do Monday.

ORIN

Monday's good.

*ORIN exits with a smile and DANIELLE looks at the card.*

*Shift to BETHANIE and CAROLYNN on the phone, as BETHANIE drives.*

BETHANIE

Well, next time I'm not even going to call.

CAROLYNN

Don't be dramatic.

BETHANIE

Don't yell at me.

CAROLYNN

I'm not!

BETHANIE

I rearranged my meetings to be there tonight. The last one ran long.

CAROLYNN

Just get here, okay?

BETHANIE

I told you. I'm coming.

*They hang up.*

DANIELLE (Out)

Weekly girls' nights became lunch every other week.

*ANISA and BETHANIE on the phone, while CAROLYNN stands beside ANISA.*

ANISA

I mean, should we order?

BETHANIE

Yeah, don't wait for me. I don't know what time I'll be there.

CAROLYNN (hissing)

We reserved for four.

ANISA (calmer)

We did reserve for four people.

BETHANIE

I'm sorry.

DANIELLE (Out)

And that became dessert at Caro's house once a month, if that. Sometimes I couldn't make it either.

*Back on the phone...*

ANISA

But even Bethie is here this time!

DANIELLE

The kids turned in a big writing project. I'm drowning in papers.

CAROLYNN

How long could the papers be? Doesn't she teach kindergarten?

BETHANIE

(to CAROLYNN) Second grade.

ANISA

(to DANIELLE) You really can't make it?

DANIELLE

I wish I could.

ANISA

Okay.

DANIELLE (Out)

I was surprised when I started being relieved. What kind of friend was I to be happy to not see my friends?

*All the girls appear, out of time, with DANIELLE apart from the other three.*

BETHANIE (Out)

I thought we were friends.

ANISA (Out)

I can't make the excuse that we were young.

DANIELLE (Out)

Maybe between my parents accident right at that age when I was supposed be making lots of friends and Grams sheltering me a little bit too much... Maybe I didn't really understand how friends worked?

ANISA (Out)

Maybe we didn't really know what that meant.

DANIELLE (Out)

I had always assumed I was the one who was a bad friend.

CAROLYNN (Out)

Friends are the people you call.

ANISA (Out)

Like when you want to go out to a movie.

BETHANIE (Out)

When you get a new job or promotion.

CAROLYNN (Out)

When you find out you're pregnant.

BETHANIE (Out)

You called us. That counts.

DANEILLE (Out)

I had those old instincts to call Anisa or Bethie or Caro.

ANISA (Out)

Or when you don't want to be alone.

DANIELLE (Out)

And then something started stopping me.



CAROLYNN (Out)

I called. For things.

ANISA (Out)

Do we even we know what friendship is?

CAROLYNN (Out)

Then why are we still together?

DANIELLE (Out)

How did it start?

ANISA (Out)

What was the first thing that brought us together?

CAROLYNN (Out)

I can't remember.

ANISA (Out)

I can.

BETHANIE (Out)

You fell, Anisa. Off a swingset –

ANISA (Out)

Some kid had pushed me too hard. I fell.

BETHANIE (Out)

Yeah. And you (to CAROLYNN) were nearby and saw Anisa start to cry. You went right up to the boy who pushed her –

CAROLYNN (Out)

And I punched him in the face. Hard.

ANISA (Out)

Then he punched you back. You spun and grabbed the chains of the swing for balance. I heard you growl, like you were going to kill him.

BETHANIE (Out)

I heard the kids chanting "Fight! Fight! Fight!" and came running to see what was happening. Got there just in time –

CAROLYNN (Out)

I was pissed.

*She's starting to giggle at the memory.*

BETHANIE (Out)

- to see you grab this kid by the hair and start shaking him.

CAROLYNN (Out)

He starts screaming like a baby!

BETHANIE (Out)

Then Anisa rolls over and kicks him square in the balls!

ANISA (Out)

He goes down right as a teacher shows up. Everyone scatters.

BETHANIE (Out)

I found you both in the girls' bathroom. Caro with a black eye and you with scraped knees.

CAROLYNN (Out)

You helped Anisa wash out the scrapes and pat them dry.

ANISA (Out)

And you covered up Caro's black eye with make-up. Even then you had make-up in your backpack.

BETHANIE (Out)

The boy didn't have the guts to tell the teacher he'd been beaten up by a girl.

*DANIELLE tells a different story...*

DANIELLE (Out)

One day, I showed up at my new school. High school. Too old to be starting over. A boy stood a little too close to me and offered to walk me to class. I didn't want him to. Then you three were there. You stood between him and me. And you showed me the way to class.

ANISA (Out)

I think that's what friends do.

### SCENE 2.3 – Screaming Babies

DANIELLE (Out)

Bethanie finally moved to Seattle. The promotion was just too good. But she visited some.

*ANISA, BETHANIE and DANIELLE gather in CAROLYNN's living room. The baby can be heard screaming from the back room, where CAROLYNN is trying to quiet it. They try to keep chatting.*

ANISA

That sounds dreadful.

BETHANIE (refer to baby crying)

No, that sounds dreadful.

DANIELLE

I know. But it wasn't. His firm does copyright law and he's working on research for a gum commercial. You know, not as many people chew gum anymore? Mints are making a comeback.

BETHANIE

He sounds... rapturous.

*They all giggle.*

DANIELLE

He's nice.

BETHANIE

Nice?

DANIELLE

Not boring nice. Good nice.

ANISA

Let me know if he has a brother.

DANIELLE

It's good to have you back, Bethie.

BETHANIE

It's too bad it's only the weekend.

*Another scream. ANISA calls toward CAROLYNN off stage.*

ANISA

Do you need help?

CAROLYNN (O.S.)

No!

BETHANIE

You couldn't pay me.

DANIELLE

Maybe you'd be good at it.

BETHANIE

I'm too busy. And I don't want to. All the puking.

ANISA (Out)

After the baby, Caro tried doing all the things she saw in the parenting books. She held it and rocked it and gave it a bottle.

CAROLYNN

Why won't it stop crying?

ANISA (Out)

She painted the room pink. She sewed tiny satin bows onto the lace trimming of the bassinet. She imported high-end knives from Japan and then scowled when her in-laws gave them an even more expensive set.

CAROLYNN (to ANISA)

You cook. Take them. Why do I need two sets?

ANISA (Out)

She made organic baby food from vegetables she found in the farmers' market on Saturday mornings after she'd gotten up at 6am to go jogging. She took the baby with her, of course.

CAROLYNN

I don't have choice. I'd rather leave her at home, but what would people say?

ANISA (Out)

She'd wash the produce using chemical-free cleansers and run the vegetables through the processor and pour the lumpy slop into small single-serving jars. Butternut squash, zucchini and carrots.

CAROLYNN

Never strawberries. Or peanuts. The baby could get an allergy.

ANISA (Out)

And as for Zach –

CAROLYNN

He won't let me hire a nanny.

DANIELLE

Why? You have plenty of money.

CAROLYNN

He thinks that she needs to have her mother.

BETHANIE

That's not exactly crazy.

CAROLYNN

We have someone who comes and mows our lawn. We have a woman who does the laundry and grocery shopping and a different woman that scrubs the toilet. And you're telling me I can't have someone to change these stupid reusable diapers?

*CAROLYNN throws them down in a fit, then pulls herself back together and gathers them up again.*

DANIELLE (Out)

Suddenly Caro grew... less bitchy. It was weird. We weren't sure what to do with that, but it was a nice change. She kept sewing bows. Started knitting.

After about a year and a half, when everything was covered in bows and the cabinet was filled to the brim with stacked jars of homemade, organic baby foods, she walked out of the house one day –

*DANIELLE and ANISA enter and open front door at CAROLYNN's house.*

DANIELLE

Carolynn? The door was open. She's not home.

ANISA

Carolynn? Zach?

*The baby is crying from the back room.*

DANIELLE

Is that –

ANISA

Carolynn?

DANIELLE (Out)

Zach came home later that night.

ZACH

What do you mean she's not here?

ANISA

I mean, she's not here. What else do you want us to tell you?

ZACH

You call her?

ANISA

Why don't you call her?

ZACH (getting loud)

She's supposed to be here... handling things...

DANIELLE

Quiet. The baby is sleeping.

ZACH

She wouldn't. She's just trying to make a point. She'll be home any minute.

ANISA

Her purse is gone.

*ZACH is completely at a loss. He looks around.*

ZACH

She didn't take her avocado hair treatment or her paraffin hand gloves. She wouldn't go without those. The baby... She'll come back.

DANIELLE (Out)

But she never did.

ZACH

She has to.

DANIELLE (Out)

Finally, a full time nanny moved into the house. She changed the diapers.

ANISA

The baby has satin sheets and embroidered pajamas, but no parents.

DANIELLE (Out)

We left her messages, but she never picked up and never called back.

ANISA

They never called the baby by her name.

DANIELLE

They didn't, did they?

ANISA

Isn't that strange?

*CAROLYNN has a pen and a postcard wherever she is. The other GIRLS take out their cell phones and text.*

DANIELLE (Out)

One by one, we got postcards from her. She never sent them to Zach or to her family. Just the three of us. Postcards from Mount Rushmore. The Bean in Chicago. The Liberty Bell. Graceland –

CAROLYNN

“I'm safe.”

ANISA

I have a postcard from the Florida Keys.

BETHANIE

Bourbon Street –

CAROLYNN

“Don't look for me.”

DANIELLE

London –

BETHANIE

Bermuda -

ANISA

Prague.

CAROLYNN

“I had to go.”

BETHANIE

Monaco –

ANISA

Johannesburg –

DANIELLE

Dubai -

CAROLYNN

"This is the last one." I'm free.

SCENE 2.4 – Third Wheel

ANISA (Out)

Carolynn was gone and Bethanie had been inching away from us for years, if I'd been paying attention. It was just Danielle and I.

*DANIELLE and ORIN appear, arm in arm.*

ANISA (Out)

And Orin, it turned out. I took Dani's advice though, and found a new job.

*DANIELLE, ANISA and ORIN are having lunch.*

DANIELLE

That's great.

ANISA

It doesn't pay as well. By a lot. But it feels a little better to be doing layout design for a website than spending all my time Photoshopping thigh gaps.

DANIELLE

Right.

ORIN

Where are you again?

ANISA

"Bella". It's lifestyle, but less fashion.

DANIELLE

Anisa doesn't give herself credit.

ANISA

Shut up.

ORIN

Who does? We've been programmed to believe that A leads to B and B leads to C, when none of the math really works out that way. What if someone looked at us square in the face when we were like seven and said, "You're not good at everything, but hey you're good at this" and let us do what we do, you know?



ANISA

And what is it we “do”?

ORIN

It’s not “we”, but what “you” do. Yours won’t be the same as mine.

DANIELLE

He talks weird. I know.

ANISA

It makes a kind of sense though. You’re a lawyer?

ORIN

Um, no. Clerk.

ANISA

You should consider philosophy.

*ORIN leaves ANISA and DANIELLE alone. Later that night.*

ANISA (cont’)

He’s alright.

DANIELLE

I really wanted you to. I would have invited Bethanie if she was in town.

ANISA

Do you like him?

DANIELLE

He’s great. So far and everything. We haven’t... I can’t... (she can’t say the word “sex”) I’m just not ready to -

ANISA

How long has it been, Danielle?

DANIELLE

A long time. He doesn’t know why I can’t sleep with him yet, but he’s being really patient.

ANISA

And that’s good enough?

DANIELLE

I guess. For now.

*ANISA steps away and ORIN approaches her sweetly. He places his hands on her waist and hugs her. Taking his time and checking in with her at every moment, he pulls her close and gives her small kisses. DANIELLE continues to speak, both enjoying it and fighting off fear.*

DANIELLE (Out)

Orin is a Good Guy. That's what I wanted all along. And I've been wrong so many times.

ORIN

Danielle...

DANIELLE (Out)

Boys that didn't see me. Boys that pretended like they saw.

*LOGAN's voice from somewhere, too close.*

LOGAN

Danielle.

DANIELLE

I'll go for a walk or try to read -

LOGAN

You are so beautiful.

DANIELLE

- and I see shadows moving in the dark.

LOGAN

Just let me -

DANIELLE

Like it's going to shatter my ribs.

LOGAN

It's gonna feel so good.

DANIELLE

Stop it.

LOGAN

Come on.

DANIELLE

Stop!

*DANIELLE is screaming by the end and ORIN recoils.*

DANIELLE

I'm sorry.

ORIN

(Quiet) This isn't supposed to be scary.

DANIELLE

I know.

ORIN

You can tell me. Whatever this is about. When you're ready.

DANIELLE (Out)

One night, I did. With details I never even told my best friends. About the taste of his hands when I was trying to scream. About the bruises on my wrists and arms and legs. About how hard I concentrated the next days just to walk because he'd left every bit of me tender. How I couldn't look anyone in the eye when I got back to school and how I ran past the copy room any time I couldn't avoid it. The way I was relieved when Xander moved to college because I'd never have to see him again. I told Orin how I shiver when someone touches my skin. I'm afraid that it will never go away. He listened to me until I was done.

ORIN

Why didn't you tell anyone before?

DANIELLE

I don't know.

ORIN

Wasn't there anyone you could have trusted?

*A high school moment bleeds in.*

BETHANIE

You don't want to report this.

ANISA

What?

CAROLYNN

After you report it... If this gets out, well...

DANIELLE (Out and In)

I thought they would be on my side.

CAROLYNN

Everyone will know, you know.

ANISA

What are you saying?

CAROLYNN

That you're damaged.

BETHANIE

People won't look at you the same after something like this.

DANIELLE

But I'm not like that.

CAROLYNN

When you report this, he'll be arrested. But you were drunk –

ANISA

Caro!

DANIELLE

You gave me the rum –

CAROLYNN (bulldozing over ANISA)

It doesn't matter.

BETHANIE

They always blame the drunk girl.

ANISA

Wait -

CAROLYNN

Look, there's only 6 months left of high school. There's class trips coming up. Prom.

DANIELLE

I can't go to another dance!

BETHANIE

I think the best thing is just to forget about it.

DANIELLE (to ORIN)

But... How am I supposed to forget?

*The others fade away and DANIELLE is back alone with ORIN.*

ORIN

You can't.

*DANIELLE shakes her head.*

DANIELLE

But I made it. I made it out. Just barely.

*He comforts her gently.*

*Elsewhere, ANISA and BETHANIE are on the phone together.*

ANISA

It's been almost a year. Shouldn't we be worried?

BETHANIE

She doesn't want to be found.

ANISA

You're not so easy to get a hold of either.

BETHANIE

I'm busy. We're all busy.

ANISA

Danielle returns my messages.

BETHANIE

Everyone loves Danielle.

ANISA

Still hanging onto that? It was a decade ago.

*Changing the subject.*

ANISA (cont')

What if something happened to Carolynn?

BETHANIE

Did you ever think that Caro was the something bad that happens to other people?  
(Silence) What would be different? Her baby might have had a real mother, someone who wanted it instead of just being a checkmark in a list of goals. You and I wouldn't have done... We might be different.

ANISA  
You're you. I'm me.

BETHANIE  
Yeah.

ANISA  
Carolynn didn't make us who we are.

BETHANIE  
What if we'd made friends with Danielle on the playground instead?

ANISA  
She wasn't there.

BETHANIE  
But if she was.

ANISA  
She wouldn't have punched that kid.

BETHANIE  
Doubt it. But there could have been less fights. Less drama. Maybe we would be softer somehow. I could just be making it up. You know, I saw Xander.

ANISA  
When?

BETHANIE  
About a month ago. Mom took us out to dinner on the water. I was wearing a pale spring dress and he saw me while I was waiting near the docks for the valet to bring Mom's car around.

*XANDER turns back to BETHANIE, older and more sure of himself.*

XANDER  
Hi.

BETHANIE  
Hi.

XANDER  
Well?

BETHANIE  
Well, what?

XANDER

How did I turn out?

BETHANIE

Pretty good. And me? How am I?

XANDER

Still a princess. It's what you always wanted. Well. Good job.

*XANDER exits. BETHANIE returns fully to ANISA.*

BETHANIE

I watched Xander go. Then I went home and threw up.

*BETHANIE turns away.*

ANISA (Out)

When Danielle and Orin got engaged a year and a half later, we tried calling Bethie. We left two messages. On the third try, the number was disconnected. We didn't try to find Carolynn. There hadn't been a postcard in years. I stood on my own in the wedding party, next to Orin's two sisters.

DANIELLE

Small.

ORIN

We could afford something flashier with my promotion, if you want.

DANIELLE

I don't want you to pay for all of it.

ORIN

I told you I don't mind.

DANIELLE

But I mind. It'll still be great.

ANISA (Out)

So was the little condo they found. Even had a little plot of grass and dirt in the back. I gave them one of those upside-down tomato growing things.

*ANISA sits down at DANIELLE and ORIN's house.*

DANIELLE

We planted basil, onions and some bell peppers. A couple flowers.

ORIN

No room for a dog yet. But eventually.

DANIELLE

Anisa, your tomatoes made the best pasta sauce.

ANISA (Out)

Sometimes, they had me over for dinner or out with some friends of Orin's.  
Afterwards -

ORIN

Ben, that junior partner? He wants your number.

DANIELLE

She was always a hit with the guys.

ORIN

He's in my Tuesday running group.

DANIELLE

You should call him.

ANISA (Out)

I wasn't interested. (to ORIN) Sorry, I'm just not... um...

*ANISA squirms away.*

ORIN

What's up with that?

DANIELLE (Out)

She started fading away. Like Bethanie and her job. And Carolynn. She'd say that she didn't feel up to it. Her eyes hurt from staring at the computer screen all day. Weeks went by. Months.

*ANISA approaches DANIELLE in the park.*

DANIELLE

I almost gave up on you.

ANISA

Cut me some slack.

DANIELLE

You've ditched out on me twice in a row.



ANISA

I've been really tired from work.

DANIELLE

Could've at least sent me a text so I wasn't waiting like an idiot. What's going on?

ANISA

I haven't wanted to be around anyone. You're the only person I've talked to at all.

DANIELLE

Orin came with me last time because he wanted to be here, but he couldn't make it today.

*DANIELLE clearly has news.*

ANISA

What?

DANIELLE

We're having a baby.

*Long pause.*

DANIELLE (cont')

Say something, Nisa.

*ANISA grows increasingly odd and frantic.*

ANISA

God. It's so odd, you know. After the way it used to be and what happened to you. And you actually did it.

*ANISA slowly starts to unravel.*

ANISA (cont')

Here you are, looking perfect and married and with a job you love and now a baby. It's like life decided that you'd had your quota of bad luck all at once.

DANIELLE

Anisa -

ANISA

How are you so okay? I'm not okay and I didn't even go through what you went through. How is it even possible?

DANIELLE

I'll never be okay. Never.

*ANISA slides up one of her sleeves to show fresh cuts.*

ANISA (cont')

I don't think I can stop. It used to be safety pins. That's how it started. And for a while... for a while, I almost didn't need it. But then I had to. I found a set of dental tools in the drugstore. They're sharp and a little bigger... I don't feel anything anymore unless it's this.

DANIELLE

You told me once that you have a dream that you're not sure if it's real.

ANISA

Yeah.

DANIELLE

I don't remember much from that night. It was dark and I was drinking. When it comes back to me, I don't see faces. But one time, it did. And it wasn't Xander.

*ANISA doesn't say anything.*

DANIELLE (cont')

You knew?

ANISA

I hoped, after all these years, you'd stopped thinking about it. Xander would never have done something like that.

DANIELLE

I know that now.

ANISA

Do you remember who –

DANIELLE

No. Not for sure. (Beat) And now, I don't think knowing would make any difference. It won't fix me. Only I can do that.

*DANIELLE takes ANISA by the wrists and places her palm over the scars.*

DANIELLE (cont')

The feelings, those nightmares are real. If it's making you do this, they're real.

*After a moment, ANISA exits.*

DANIELLE (Out)

That was the last time we talked. I saw her here and there for a while, but that was the last time we actually had a conversation. I know she stayed in town.

*ANISA returns, in her own place, with the flat box.*

DANIELLE (Out)

But she stopped returning my calls and then I knew it was just Orin and I.

Bethanie and Carolynn. Anisa was just like them... they all decided to run away.

Orin's family is great. His youngest sister moved closer with her job and she's only 45 minutes away now.

We have a good sitter, but Emily loves her aunt.

ANISA (Out)

People should look the way they are. We should see it right on the surface. Wear it like a scarlet Michael Kors bag of shame.

We shouldn't be able to hide our crimes behind a smile and make up and secret it away inside a ranch-style house.

ANISA (Out)

I had always thought in the back of my mind that the shoe would drop and that one day, we'd be held accountable for what we did. I was still waiting and that day was long over due. What if that was the weird justice of the thing? That the three of us would grow up to be so unhappy and that Danielle would be fine. That it would be Bethanie, Carolynn and I that couldn't forget. We should look like what we are. Jealous. Hateful. Selfish... Sorry.

*ANISA toys with the knife as she fades into the dark.*

DANIELLE (Out)

Emily. Our daughter. She has Orin's energy. But she has a... watchfulness. A caution about things. I wish she didn't and maybe she'll grow out of it. She gets that from me, I think. I wish she had that wonderful fearlessness I see in other kids. Swinging higher than they should swing without a worry in the world. Even now as a baby, I can tell Emily's not that way. She's alert to sounds, to movements in the dark.

But Emily not afraid to be touched. Emily loves being touched and cuddled and tickled. At least I didn't pass that fear along.

ORIN  
Em is finally sleeping.

DANIELLE  
Good.

ORIN  
She seems twice as big as last week. It's weird.

DANIELLE (amused)  
It is.

ORIN  
I guess growing up is what happens, huh?

*He puts his arms around her.*

ORIN  
Iron Chef is on.

DANIELLE  
Again.

ORIN  
Yeah...

DANIELLE  
Okay. Sounds good.

*DANIELLE nestles into ORIN.*

***END OF PLAY***