

Late, Late A Very Important...

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CHARACTERS

Irina Kauffman- 30-40 years old

VHS- 30-40 years old

Porcelain Doll- 18-24 years old

Sunken Mattress- 30-40 years old

Marianne Kauffman- 36-43 years old

SETTING

A Cell

TIME

It doesn't exist here...

We hear the light melody of a classical tune that should sound familiar but cannot be placed. A small square table with four chairs is on stage. We see VHS,

PORCELAIN DOLL, *and* SUNKEN MATTRESS
*sitting in the chairs. VHS is battered and exhausted.
 Film tapes coil around his entire body. Porcelain Doll is
 sitting in her chair as if she had been thrown into it. Her
 body appears mangled and cracked from overuse. She
 wears a mask that is untouched and perfectly formed.
 Sunken Mattress sits hunched forward. His insides have
 shifted to accommodate only one person's shape.*

*They are all patiently waiting in their cell. They have
 been locked away for too long. If only she would...*

*Footsteps. Who could it be? The footsteps become louder
 and quicker. Are they running? Why? What are they
 running from? Or who...*

*The door opens and in rushes IRINA KAUFFMAN. She
 is wearing a ballerina's outfit: pink leotard, tutu, tights,
 and pointe shoes. Her hair is gathered in a messy bun.
 Her eyes frantically search about the room. As her eyes
 land on each of the occupants, she tries to run out but
 finds the door has locked behind her. The occupants are
 now animated and excited at Irina's arrival.*

VHS

Finally! She's here!

(to Porcelain Doll and Sunken Mattress)

Look alive!

IRINA

What's /going on?

PORCELAIN DOLL

Oh, you look so pretty! It's been so long since you've put that on!

*Irina looks down at herself and sees her outfit.
 She is mortified. Irina goes to take it off, but
 Porcelain Doll rushes towards her and grabs
 her hands.*

No, you've got to keep it on. You don't want to upset Mr. Landon! He always said you had nice legs.

IRINA

What's going on? Who are you... *what* are you?

VHS

You know who we are. Just like we know who you are.

PORCELAIN DOLL

Oh, it's finally time! Is it time yet? Please tell me it is!

VHS nods his head and Porcelain Doll claps her hands excitedly. As she does, we hear cracking noises. Porcelain Doll quickly composes herself, ensuring her mask is on just right. Irina then watches as VHS, Porcelain Doll, and Sunken Mattress pull out teacups, plates, and a teapot from underneath the square table.

VHS

Sit! We've been waiting for you for so long.

IRINA

I can't. I have somewhere to... I've been meaning to get somewhere, but I think I've lost my way.

PORCELAIN DOLL

I'm sure it's fine to take a break. Come on! Sit with us!

Pause.

You've kept us waiting. Now, sit. We've prepared everything just right. Sit. Please, won't you sit.

Irina warily sits down and desperately tries to push down her tutu so that she can feel comfortable. Porcelain Doll mimics Irina's movements.

VHS

Oh, that's nothing we haven't seen.

Irina is taken aback by this statement. Irina gasps as she feels Sunken Mattress push her tutu down until she finally feels comfortable. Porcelain Doll still moves as if Irina's tutu is not fixed.

VHS

(pouring tea into their cups)

You must forgive her impertinence. It's just... it's been so long. We've missed you.

IRINA

How can you miss me if we've never met?

PORCELAIN DOLL

We've always known you. It's *you* who hasn't met us.

Pause.

Or, rather... you don't want to face us.

IRINA

Why am I here?

VHS

It's our release date! You've come a long way to save us.

PORCELAIN DOLL

The least you could do is show some enthusiasm!

(shouting)

Chin up! Straighten your back!

Irina immediately follows Porcelain Doll's orders without question.

Good girl.

IRINA

If I don't leave, I'll be late. I have to be somewhere else. Somewhere far away. I'm sure of it.

Pause.

You have to let me leave. Open that door.

VHS

You'd think it would be that easy, huh?

Pause.

We've tried for so many years, but someone has always kept locking us in here. Every time we awaken and we think we can open the door, a dark shadow of a memory locks us in.

IRINA

And you think I'm here to save you? Well, I can't. I don't know how.

VHS

Isn't that where you were going? To try and save us? To find out how?

IRINA

I... I don't remember.

Pause.

How did I get here? I don't remember how I got here.

VHS

What do you remember?

IRINA

I... I don't know. I don't remember anything. I just opened my eyes and I was here.

PORCELAIN DOLL

And thank heavens you opened them! And on the proper date, too!

VHS

There is just one thing you have to do for us. You must answer just one question!

Pause.

What did your mother look like?

IRINA

My mother? Why do you want to know what my mother looked like?

PORCELAIN DOLL

If you remember, the door will open. We'll be free.

IRINA

It's been so long. It's been too long since I've thought of her. I don't remember much about her.

VHS

I'm sure that this will jog your memory!

VHS takes out a film projector. He loads in some of the used film from his body and begins to crank the projector. As he does, a video is projected onto the wall of the cell. We see Irina around the age of ten getting dressed for a ballet class. After a moment, we are met with the image of MARIANNE KAUFFMAN. However, Marianne's face is blank. There are no features or details. VHS stops cranking the device, and we are left with the still image of Marianne's face. VHS, Porcelain Doll, and Sunken Mattress are confused.

PORCELAIN DOLL

What happened? Why did it stop? Why did you stop it!

IRINA

I can't... I don't remember. I can't remember what she looked like.

VHS

You don't remember what she looks like?!

Pause.

Just make something up!

IRINA

How? How can I make something up when I have no memory of her...

Pause.

She died so long ago.

Sunken Mattress stands from his seat and exits the stage.

What's happening?

VHS

It doesn't matter. Just make something up!

IRINA

What if I don't want to? What if I don't actually *want* to remember?

PORCELAIN DOLL

Do as you're told.

Sunken Mattress walks back on stage with Marianne. The actress playing Marianne should have a blank face void of any features, but it can be molded by the other actors. Irina looks on in horror seeing her mother. Marianne sits in Sunken Mattress's seat.

VHS

Just make something up! It'll be okay. You can trust us.

IRINA

(to Marianne)

Mom?

VHS

Make something up! Make something up, *anything!*

Irina walks over to Marianne and places her hands on the blank face. As she begins to move the face around, VHS continues to play the video. In the video, we see Marianne fixing Irina's outfit before Irina goes to practice. We see Irina dancing with a group of other girls.

IRINA

(molding Marianne's face)

I think she had arched brows. She... I always felt so afraid when she yelled at me because I... her eyebrows reminded me of the evil stepmothers in fairy tales. She had a bump on her nose... or did she? I can't remember if she was born with it and had it fixed or if her nose was straight and she got hurt. I want to say it had a bump. And her cheeks... they were sharp. *That* I do remember.

Pause.

Her lips... they were fine and thin. I always could see the sharpness of her teeth whenever she yelled.

PORCELAIN DOLL

Stand up straight! Don't slouch! You'll regret that when you're older!

Irina pulls back to reveal her work. Marianne's face is mangled and disturbing. Irina is disgusted by it.

IRINA

Why can't I remember?! Oh, god! This isn't right. I'm not supposed to be here. I need to get out of here!

Irina turns to look at the video, and we then see a man leading the dance class. Suddenly, Irina is overcome by a sense of dread. Porcelain Doll feels the same way. Irina rushes towards VHS and begins pulling out the other film tapes from his body.

Make it stop. Turn it off!

The video changes to show Irina all alone in the ballet studio. We then see the man walk towards her. He kneels down beside her and brushes a loose hair behind her ear. We see the man's lips move, but Porcelain Doll speaks for him.

PORCELAIN DOLL

I don't like having messy girls in my studio. You're not a messy girl, are you?

The Irina in the video shakes her head.

Good.

Pause.

I think it's time I gave you a special part in one of our duets. But, you can't tell anyone about it. It'll stay just between us, okay?

IRINA

Turn it off! Turn the fucking thing off!

Irina has almost ripped out the other pieces of film from VHS's body. He is frantically cranking the video to try and finish it.

PORCELAIN DOLL

Every so often, I like to dance with some of the girls in class. I only like to dance with really *special* girls.

Pause.

I think you're *very* special. Wouldn't you say you're special? Your mother always goes on and on about how good you are... and I see it, too. Beautiful legs. Beautiful arms. Beautiful *body*.

The video is cut short. Irina has removed all the film from VHS's body. He falls to the floor and crawls around, gasping for air.

IRINA

I said I wanted you to turn it off! Why can't you see I don't want to watch it?!

Irina takes the projector and throws it to the floor. It shatters as VHS lets out a cry.

VHS

Please... you don't know what you're doing.

IRINA

I don't want to remember.

VHS

What will you achieve in destroying your memory? You're nothing without it! Everyone you know and love will disappear! Everything you think you know will be gone!

Pause.

You need to remember. Without me, you will have nothing. You need me.

IRINA

What good are you when all you do is hurt me! You always do this to me! You...

Pause.

How do I know that?

PORCELAIN DOLL

Do as you're told, little girl! We don't want our special fruit to spoil.

IRINA

Stop that!

VHS

Keep remembering! It's the only way we'll be saved!

IRINA

It's too late for that!

VHS

It's never too late! It may hurt to remember, but you will find peace.

Pause.

The road to suffering always ends in peace.

IRINA

(a sudden realization)

That's it! That's where I am supposed to be! Or... where I already am.

Pause.

There is no peace. All I can remember is the shame and disgust. I remember the cycle of returning home and needing to empty my body of its guilt, burning away my voice. I remember the feeling of the bar crushing my spine as large hands dug into my skin, pressing into me further, holding me there. The breath was warm as flecks of spit sizzled against my skin. I remember the need to wash away the sweat and tears... I would scrub until the blood swirled away down the drain... but I could never get clean.

Pause.

There is no peace. There never was.

Silence.

I didn't want to go back. I... I had been crying in my mother's lap. I begged her not to take me there anymore. I told her I wanted to stop, for *it* to stop.

Sunken Mattress walks over to Porcelain Doll. He stands behind her as Porcelain Doll molds herself into his shape. As Sunken Mattress's hands roam across Porcelain Doll's body, they dance.

IRINA

No... I said I don't want to remember. Stop it.

The dance continues, and we hear Porcelain Doll begin to cry.

Stop it! Stop this! You're hurting her.

Irina rushes to Porcelain Doll and rips her away. Porcelain Doll lets out a cry as she falls to the floor. Her mask has fallen from her face, and her true self is revealed. As Porcelain Doll goes to sit, we see that her face is filled with cracks, to the point that her face cannot be recognized as human. The inside of her mouth is blackened, her eyes completely white. She continues to weep as she looks up at Irina.

PORCELAIN DOLL

Don't make me put it back on. I don't like it! Please, don't make me put it back.

Irina then turns to look back at Marianne. As Irina steps towards her, VHS gains back his strength and stands up from the floor, watching. He goes over to Porcelain Doll and holds her.

IRINA

I remember her. I remember what she did to me.

Pause.

She made me go back. She made me stay there even though she knew what was happening.

Irina begins to rip at Marianne's face, removing her work.

My mother was horrible. The day she died, I couldn't bring myself to cry over her. She died when I was young, but I never wished that I'd had more time with her in this world. I was glad she was gone.

Marianne's true face is revealed to the audience. She is smiling.

I thought I would feel free when you were gone, but I've never felt more trapped in my whole life.

MARIANNE

I wanted you to be a star.

Silence.

Marianne pulls out a music box and presents it to Irina. Irina examines it before she takes it in hand.

IRINA

You gave this to me on my fifth birthday. That was the day you told me you signed me up for ballet.

Pause.

You did this to me. I remember.

(sudden burst of energy)

I remember now! I remember everything.

Irina opens the music box, and the melody that played before plays from the box. Irina smiles brightly, as she is able to recognize the piece of classical music. She watches as the small ballet dancers move to the music. After a moment, Irina is overcome with emotion. She begins to weep. Porcelain Doll cries along with her.

Sunken Mattress walks over to Porcelain Doll and takes her mask. He walks over to Irina and places the mask over her face. Once it is on, he molds himself to her, holding her tight against him.

SUNKEN MATTRESS

I was here before. I was not supposed to remember. It was so long ago. It hurts... too much... to remember.

We hear the lock of the cell door. The door is now open. Irina is too preoccupied with the music box to realize. VHS, Porcelain Doll, and Marianne all stand and quietly exit the room. VHS closes the door, and we hear the lock once more.

We are left with the image of Irina in Porcelain Doll's mask as she stares at the music box, listening to its tune as Sunken Mattress grips her tighter. They watch as the ballet dancers go round and round and round and...

End of Play.