

Otis

A Play

by
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CHARACTERS

NICHOLAS. 30's. Caucasian. Sensitive. Struggling to find a way to come out of his grief.

BERENICE. 70's. Elegant, chic, worldly Jewish older woman with a mash of an accent that is part Jewish, part upper crust New York. She is direct, confrontational and imperious. She knows better than anyone. Funny without realizing it.

STARLA. 30's. African-American. A free-spirited, voluptuous, plus size woman who is very comfortable with her body. She has grown up on the streets of New York and has managed through sheer will to become a very successful fashion maven. Funny and vulnerable. A big generous spirit.

ALFRED. 70's. A rascal. Been there done that. Quick witted. Salt of the earth.

BODHI. 20's. Indian or Middle Eastern. Gay, with a secret desire to be a dance club DJ. A little overly dramatic and self-centered but also very empathetic.

*CELLIST. A live cellist (in silhouette) accompanying the play is ideal. The cello should indicate the movements of the elevator. Certain melodies should also indicate the feelings of each character when specified in the script. There should be no music during dialogue.
*If it is not possible to include a cellist in the production, a taped recording will do.

SETTING. A gorgeous vintage elevator in a historic apartment building near Tudor City in Manhattan.

TIME. Present. Autumn.

**Author's Note: It is not required that there must be an actual elevator on stage. The realistic "Ding" of elevator doors opening and closing should be used to help with specificity. This is a Designer's play. I encourage imagination in creating the world of Otis. The projections I have suggested are open to interpretation.

***For reference purposes: The play is set in a ten story building. ALFRED and NICHOLAS both live on the top floor. STARLA lives on the 8th floor. BERENICE lives on the 6th floor. BODHI lives on the 4th floor.

Otis

(Scene 1)

LIGHTS UP ON:

INT. VINTAGE ELEVATOR - HISTORIC APT. BLDG. - MANHATTAN IN
AUTUMN

Nicholas, stands alone in the elevator. He wears a hand
tailored suit.

NICHOLAS

Will this nightmare never end? I thought he was calling to check up on how I was doing. Instead, he says he's calling to inform me that my dad's estate owes the law partnership substantial money, so I need to liquidate some of my inheritance-- and you're not going to believe this -- that amount 'just so happens' to be roughly the value of the apartment. He's telling me that I need to sell our apartment-- our home-- to meet my dad's obligation! How could my dad owe them anything? He was head of the firm. I finally told him-- I said, "Do you realize that today is the one year anniversary?" And he goes, "Oh. No. I didn't. But, we need to take care of this as soon as possible." What the hell? The guy was like family to us. He was supposed to help take care of things-- of me. He's become a different person. I was shaking. I tried everything to calm down-- I don't think the Valium is working anymore. But, then I remembered...what dad used to do. So, I went through his record collection. It's massive. I suddenly realized that I hadn't listened to music- any music in a very long time. Django was his favorite. Played that for a while. It did help-- a little. Made me want to go into their room. Finally. You know, I haven't been in there since the funeral. But, I gotta tell you something-- so weird. I opened their bedroom door and I saw dad's suit... perfectly laid out on the bed. I don't know who did that. I didn't do it. So, I put it on. Look. (He models it) It fits perfectly. How can that be? How does a little boy one day fit into his father's clothes? (He smells the suit) It still smells like him. He always wore a nice suit when we went out to dinner. Geez, I haven't been out to a restaurant in a long time. I mean, what's the point? Everything can be delivered. You can order anything you want online. I even order soap and toilet paper. It's really easy to order a gun. But, Cyanide? They make that a little tougher--

The lights in the elevator suddenly go out. It's pitch
black.

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

Whoa. What's going on?

*Cello music indicates that the elevator is moving down. From this point on it should be assumed that the cello indicates all movements of the elevator.

The only realistic sounds should be the familiar “*DINGS*” of the doors opening and closing. *ONE DING* for “OPEN.” *TWO DINGS* for “CLOSE.”

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

Stop! Oh my God, stop!

It suddenly stops.

The lights come back on.

Door opens.

In walks, STARLA, a voluptuous life force.

STARLA

Hi! I didn't think anyone else would be up at this hour. Wow, don't you look fancy?

Nicholas is panicked.

She presses the “Lobby” button deliberately.

STARLA (cont'd)

Lobby.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

STARLA (cont'd)

I'm Starla. I just moved into the building. I'm an insomniac. What's your excuse? Are you going to a party?

He shakes his head, “No.”

STARLA (cont'd)

You live here?

NICHOLAS

(mumbles)

Mm. Hm.

STARLA

So, you must live in one of the penthouse apartments. I notice the elevator came down from above. I moved in a few days ago. I'm still unpacking. I didn't even realize it was like three in the morning. I don't think I ate anything yesterday. I'm just so excited. This place is very cool. Like from another time, you know? Boy, did I get lucky. Some old lady who lived in my apartment just died. She lived there for like sixty years or something.

NICHOLAS

(startled)

You bought Lenore's place?

STARLA

Aww. Lenore. That's a nice name. She must have been a lovely person because I can still feel her energy. It's very positive. I was hoping I'd see her ghost or something because I know she would be a nice ghost, not like my grandma. Lenore probably left peacefully because she felt like her work here was done. But, when my grandma died, there was noise in the kitchen every night. Pots and pans banging around. I knew it was her. So, one night I stayed up and waited. Suddenly, a piece of paper came floating out of the cupboard. I picked it up and what do I see? The secret recipe for my grandma's lemon pie! It's handwritten and everything. She never wanted to share it before. But then, she must have realized, "Oh, my God, I'm dead. Who's going to make this for grandpa now?" It was his favorite. So, I went ahead and made it for him and poof! Next day, she was gone. She was a mean old lady but I loved her anyway. Truth is, I didn't even get to know her until I was all grown up. My mom and her did not get along, 'cause like my mom got pregnant with me when she was a teenager, you know? And then she put me in foster care, so... (beat) You know, I can make that pie for you sometime if you like. Oh my goodness, I'm starving. Do you know that place around the corner, Rosie's? Their pancakes are amazing. They put peanut butter in them. Luckily they're open 24 hours. I'm heading there right now.

The elevator suddenly stops.

STARLA (cont'd)

What's happening?

NICHOLAS

I don't know.

Silence. They wait.

STARLA

Mmm. Doesn't feel like we're in any danger. In fact, it feels very peaceful in here.

She looks around the elevator.

STARLA (cont'd)

It's beautiful, isn't it? I don't think I've ever seen such a gorgeous elevator. Must be original. These walls...what is this? Mahogany?

She runs her fingers across the wood sensually.

STARLA (cont'd)

Oooh. Brass handrails. And look at that light fixture. Art-deco. Gorgeous.

They both look at the fixture.

STARLA (cont'd)

So weird because I never noticed this building before. I'm in the neighborhood all the time. I like to eat my lunch in the park that overlooks the river. It calms me, you know? Then a couple of months ago, I saw a double rainbow! There it was right in front of me on the East river. I decided to follow it. It led me straight to 43rd and 1st, and ended up right on top of this building! I was like, "Wait. What is this place?" You know how that is? You walk past something everyday and you never notice it, but then when you're ready to see it, you do? Then, I saw that little sign that's all covered in ivy. I mean it's practically hidden, but I saw it said, "L'Étoile." And, I thought, "Wait a minute. "L'Étoile" means, "the star" and my name is Starla!" So, I spoke to the doorman, Pablo-- And he told me how the apartment just came up for sale. I mean, come on! Getting an apartment like this in Manhattan? That's crazy. It's like something pulled me here. Totally meant to be. I put in a cash offer immediately. (Smoldering) Something they couldn't refuse.

Nicholas stares at her.

STARLA (cont'd)

I bet you're wondering how I have that kind of money, right?

NICHOLAS

No. I'm wondering if we should call for help.

STARLA

I'm a fashion designer. I created my first line when I was nineteen and ended up selling it to a very big company. "Phat Ass". Spelled with a P. to the H. A. T. Phat. I started off with fashion sweatsuits. Little velour hooded jackets with the drawstring pants and the words PHAT ASS written right across the butt. It was meant to be ironic. But Black girls, White girls, Latina, Chinese, Korean, Filipino-- everybody wanted a PHAT ASS. You must have heard of it? Or, maybe seen your wife lounging around in it?

NICHOLAS

I don't have a wife.

STARLA

(smiling)

Oh.

He looks away uncomfortably.

STARLA (cont'd)

So, do you have any kids?

NICHOLAS

(affronted)

Excuse me?

STARLA

Well, you don't need to be married to have kids. Just wondering because I think you would make a really good dad.

He is in disbelief.

NICHOLAS

I think I should press the "call" button.

Before he has a chance to do it, the elevator moves.

STARLA

Whoa! Here we go again. This is fun. You never know what's gonna happen in this thing.

They ride the rest of the way in silence.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Starla steps out.

Sound of RAIN.

STARLA (cont'd)

Oh, yay, it's raining! I love the city in the rain.

She takes a fold up umbrella from her purse.

STARLA (cont'd)

Aren't you coming out?

NICHOLAS

I forgot my umbrella.

He urgently presses the button to close the doors.

STARLA

Okay. Bye! Hey, what's your name?

Nicholas pretends he doesn't hear her as he hides and frantically presses the close button.

Door closes.

(Scene 2)

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Nicholas rides all the way back up to the top floor.

Elevator door opens.

He doesn't leave.

NICHOLAS

What is going on? No one ever uses you at this hour. What is happening? It's like people are dying and the vultures are moving in. You seem to be a little off. I'll get Pablo to take a look at you. (beat) Starla. Like of one of those birds that chatter and chatter. God, people. Don't get me started on people. Always asking questions. The only one who should know any of my business is you.

(Scene 3)

INT. ELEVATOR - LOBBY FLOOR - SAME AFTERNOON - 4 PM

Berenice, stands in the elevator fixing her lipstick.

The door is about to shut.

Alfred, carries his mail as he yells after her and catches it in time.

ALFRED

Hold it!

Berenice isn't all too pleased with having to ride with Alfred. There is an underlying tension of years of attraction that has never been fulfilled.

BERENICE

(Upper crust New York/Jewish accent)

Oh, be careful , Alfred! These doors are going to slice your fingers off one of these days.

Alfred presses his floor button.

ALFRED

Maybe, then, you'll pay some attention to me.

BERENICE

Don't be so macabre.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

ALFRED

(nonchalant)

Where's Carlo?

BERENICE

Oh, I had to drop him off at the vet. We were in the park. I was feeding my squirrels as I usually do. They all know me. I'm not sure what happened, but Carlo got very upset or jealous, I don't know. Suddenly, he went after one of the squirrels, and all hell broke loose. They all ganged up on him.

ALFRED

Hooligans. Is he alright?

BERENICE

Miniature poodles are very sturdy. The vet said that he needed a few stitches, so it's probably better if he stays there overnight. He's up there in years, but he's in good shape. I've taken very good care of him. I take good care of all my animals. You remember, Marco.

ALFRED

How could I forget? He always humped my leg at your dinner parties.

BERENICE

(affronted)

You know I don't care for that language.

ALFRED

Though I will say, he was very well groomed. That puff ball on the top of his head made him look quite the bon vivant.

Berenice smiles approvingly.

ALFRED

He and Carlo could be twins.

BERENICE

(insulted, yet again)

Oh no. Marco was much handsomer than Carlo could ever hope to be. Stuart adored that dog. He taught Marco many tricks.

ALFRED

Stuart was a good one for teaching dogs to turn tricks.

BERENICE

Huh!

She gives him a look.

ALFRED

I've often thought of when we all used to walk to the park together with the dogs in the afternoons. You and Stuart. Corinne and I.

BERENICE

(softens at the memory)

You had that beautiful collie.

ALFRED

Lucy.

BERENICE

Lucy. I could never remember her name because she didn't look like a Lucy to me. Though I do remember that she was very good with the frisbee. Very talented. (Suddenly realizing) Oh, and then she got hit by the bus. That was terrible. You never did get another dog after that.

ALFRED

Oh, no. Corinne was heartbroken. She felt it was all her fault because she threw the frisbee too far.

BERENICE

Corinne was always very athletic.

ALFRED

She was. She had a good arm.

Alfred stares at Berenice longingly. She ignores him.

The elevator stops.

Door opens.

Berenice starts to exit, Alfred holds the door open.

ALFRED (cont'd)

Well, since Carlo is away for the evening, would you, perhaps, care to go to the new french bistro that opened up down the street, for a little dinner?

BERENICE

(taken aback)

Tonight?

ALFRED

Yes, if you have nothing to do.

BERENICE

I have plenty to do. Besides, I don't go out to dinner with just a few hours notice. That's not how it's done.

Berenice steps out onto her floor.

ALFRED

Then how about some dancing?

Alfred shakes his hips as if doing the cha-cha.

BERENICE

Stop that.

ALFRED

C'mon, Berenice. You were always the first one out on the dance floor.

BERENICE

Enjoy your dinner, Alfred.

She leaves.

Door closes.

Alfred laughs to himself as the elevator brings him to the top floor.

Door opens.

Alfred leaves.

(Scene 4)

INT. ELEVATOR - FOLLOWING EVENING - 7 PM

BODHI approaches the elevator. We HEAR the DJ club music he is listening to on his iPhone.

He presses button.

Door opens.

Bodhi steps in.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

Bodhi breaks into full DJ mode; dancing, pretending to flip switches, check the bass, entertain the crowd, etc.

Elevator stops.

Bodhi stops; the music stops with him.

He adjusts himself to look “cool.”

Door opens.

He leaves.

(Scene 5)

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY 3 - 3PM

Starla and Alfred are in the elevator. Starla is crying on her phone. Alfred listens in.

STARLA

(crying)

What? I can't hear you. Well, what business is it of hers? Huh? What business-- Hello? Hello? No, I'm stuck in an elevator-- Hello?

She cries loudly.

ALFRED

Are you okay?

STARLA

I just found out that my boyfriend was cheating on me with his wife.

ALFRED

The nerve.

STARLA

He told me they were separated.

ALFRED

Oldest line in the book.

STARLA

Is it?

ALFRED

You're the person who bought Lenore's place.

STARLA

Yes. I'm Starla.

She offers her hand, he shakes it.

ALFRED

Alfred.

STARLA

Now, I feel stupid. I mean, I always asked him why they weren't getting a divorce and he said it was because of the kids. I understood that, but now I find out that he's not even really separated from her. Sure, he has his own place in the city but that's just because he doesn't want to commute to Jersey every night. Apparently, he goes home on the weekends and sleeps in their bed. I said, "What? You still sleep in the same bed?! You're not separated, you're married!" And he said, "No, we sleep in the same bed but we don't have sex."

ALFRED

Sounds like marriage to me.

STARLA

And now, he's trying to turn everything around on me.

ALFRED

Was that him screaming at you on the phone?

STARLA

Yeah. 'Cause last night, I slept over at his place and then this morning after breakfast I was running late because I had to get ready for my meeting. So, I told him I'd clean up. He usually washes all the dishes by hand, then dries them and puts them away in the exact spot-

ALFRED

Sounds a bit anal.

STARLA

You have no idea. He told me to make sure to clean everything up before I left. Well, I didn't have time, so I just put the dishes in the dishwasher. And this is where it gets confusing; his wife went to his apartment and she looked in the dishwasher. She saw our two cups, two saucers and our two spoons. Then she called him and started screaming at him about who loaded the dishwasher, blah, blah. I mean to drive all the way from Jersey just to look in a dishwasher? She must have finally figured something out on her end. And now, he's screaming at me, saying, I did it on purpose.

ALFRED

But, if she didn't look in the dishwasher, wouldn't she have seen something else of yours? Your toothbrush or clothes or something?

STARLA

He always makes me take all my stuff home.

ALFRED

Huh. Well, maybe you did do it on purpose?

STARLA

How?

ALFRED

Maybe, deep down inside you knew. Maybe, you left the dishes there as a message to his wife.

STARLA

I'll have to think about that.

Elevator moves.

ALFRED

There we go.

STARLA

Funny. It's like this elevator stops on purpose or something--

ALFRED

You realize you don't have any shoes on, right?

Starla looks down at her feet.

STARLA

I was just heading down to the lobby to get my mail.

ALFRED

Well, we're going up.

STARLA

That's okay. I like talking to you.

ALFRED

Maybe you'd like to join me for dinner sometime and we can chat some more?

STARLA

I would love that.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Alfred exits to his floor.

STARLA (cont'd)

Oh, you live on the top floor. You know, there's a guy I met the other night, I think he lives on your floor as well. He's a little shy--

ALFRED

(surprised)

You met Nicholas?

STARLA

Is that his name?

ALFRED

He's very sweet, but be fair warned, he guards his privacy.

STARLA

(smiling to herself)

Nicholas...

ALFRED

(under his breath)

Oy.

He leaves.

(Scene 6)

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY 4 - AFTERNOON

Bodhi is alone in the elevator. We HEAR the music that he's listening to on his iPhone. He pretends to DJ to another song.

Elevator stops.

Bodhi stops. He adjusts himself to look "cool."

We stop hearing his music externally but he still hears it through his ear buds.

Door opens.

Berenice enters looking very chic and wearing fabulous sunglasses. She is ready to go out for a day of shopping.

They acknowledge one another with a nod. He continues to listen to his music.

Berenice presses button.

Door closes.

Suddenly the elevator stops.

BERENICE

Oh, dear. It's been acting very strange lately. It'll stop for a few moments and then go on. Pablo says it's fine. Nothing to worry about.

Bodhi keeps listening to his music. A few moments go by. Berenice taps Bodhi on the shoulder.

BERENICE (cont'd)

Bodhi.

Bodhi takes out an ear bud. He tries to politely listen to Berenice while his music is playing in his other ear.

BODHI

Yeah.

Berenice lowers her sunglasses,

BERENICE

I haven't seen you in a while.

BODHI

My parents are away, so I'm just checking up on their place.

She puts her sunglasses away in her purse.

BERENICE

Oh. Where did they go?

BODHI

Italy, I think.

He tries to put his ear bud back in but Berenice continues to talk.

BERENICE

You didn't want to go with them?

BODHI

It's their time alone. You know?

BERENICE

Of course. It's just that now every time I hear of parents going on holiday without their children, I think of poor Nicholas. Do you know him?

BODHI

I know of him.

He tries to put his ear bud back in again.

BERENICE

Very sad. He always went on holiday with his parents. I suppose that comes from being an only child. Of course, the one time they go without him, they get killed in a plane crash. Poor fellow. Well, everyone has their own way of coping with these things. Imagine, losing your parents in a plane crash? Terrible.

BODHI

Well, mine are on a cruise, so...

BERENICE

Oh, that's nice. I was going to book my cruise this year, but I don't think I can afford it.

Bodhi listens to his music as Berenice chatters on-- he intersperses an "uh-huh" and a couple of "yeahs" here and there pretending that he is listening to her.

BERENICE

Everything is very expensive. I have to be careful with my money. Besides, I'm very worried about Ebola. Awful. You certainly don't want to be stuck on a boat with that kind of thing going around. In my day, we worried about polio. My sister, Pat, contracted polio. It was very frightening. Then, Jonas Salk came up with his wonderful vaccine. Very bright man. Jewish. Oh, my sister played the piano beautifully. She worked for Carol Channing for years. But her legs always bothered her.

She waits for a response from Bodhi but soon realizes that he hasn't been listening to her at all as he has his eyes closed and is deep into his music.

She taps him on the shoulder.

BERENICE (cont'd)

Excuse me, but that's very rude.

BODHI

(genuine)

Sorry.

He presses the elevator button.

BERENICE

Why do you need all of that? Don't you young people know how to make conversation, anymore? In my day, it was something to aspire to. I could never be friends with someone who wasn't curious. How are you ever going to get to know one another?

Bodhi raises his hands in surrender and pulls out both ear buds.

She smiles approvingly.

Awkward silence.

BERENICE (cont'd)

So, do you have a girlfriend?

BODHI

No.

BERENICE

Apparently, a new gal just moved into Lenore's old apartment. I hear, she's very nice and very rich.

BODHI

I'm gay.

Berenice's eyes widen, but she keeps her composure.

BERENICE

Oh. (beat) Well, you don't look gay.

Another awkward silence as Berenice goes through her mind of what the 'appropriate' way forward in this conversation should be.

BERENICE (cont'd)

Do you have a boyfriend?

BODHI

Yep.

BERENICE

That's nice. (beat) Now, which one of you is the woman?

BODHI

(without missing a beat)

Whoever's cooking that night.

Berenice laughs uproariously.

BERENICE

Well, isn't it wonderful that you can all live out in the open these days.

Berenice's manner charms him more than anything.

BODHI

His dad hates me.

BERENICE

Oh. That's a shame. Does he hate you or does he hate the fact that his son is gay?

BODHI

I think he hates that we're gay.

BERENICE

It's very difficult for some people. I never had children, so I don't know. Just dogs. (beat) I remember when you were about twelve or thirteen, you walked Carlo for me when I had my hip surgery.

BODHI

Oh, yeah. I remember that--

BERENICE

You were always a very nice boy. That father should get to know you.

Bodhi smiles.

BERENICE (cont'd)

Carlo is not doing so well. He got attacked by a pack of squirrels a few days ago.

BODHI

No way!

BERENICE

Oh, yes. I don't know if he's ever going to recover. He won't go on his walks. I'm a little worried.

BODHI

That sucks.

BERENICE

Well, I'm no spring chicken myself. Though, I do go to the club for my swimming every day. I try to keep my figure.

She subtly searches for a compliment.

BODHI

You're still looking good, Mrs. Hetkin.

BERENICE

Well, thank you, dear. (Flirts) A lot of people think I'm in my fifties.

Bodhi smiles politely.

Beat.

BERENICE

You know, I have a friend, Marty. He's not speaking to me at the moment, but I am still his friend, if he wants me to be his friend-- I will be his friend. I believe that he's gay. He's never spoken to me about it. It's none of my business. He used to be married to an acquaintance of mine. We come from a very different generation.

The elevator moves.

BERENICE (cont'd)

Oh! There we go. Like me, it just needs to take a break every once in a while. We all just need to keep our gears oiled.

She laughs at her own joke as she puts her sunglasses back on.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

BERENICE (cont'd)

Okay--

She exits to the lobby.

BODHI

(yells after her)

Mrs. Hetkin--

She turns back.

BODHI (cont'd)

I can come by tomorrow if you want me to. See if I can get Carlo to walk?

BERENICE

(touched)

Oh, that would be very nice, Bodhi. I would appreciate that.

(Scene 7)

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY 5 - 3:15 AM

Nicholas paces in the elevator. He stops.

NICHOLAS

He said I have to list the apartment. Now. Right now. I told him, "I'm not allowing anyone in." He says that I don't have a choice in the matter. Well, fine. He'll just have to carry my dead body out first. See how that feels. (beat) I wish I could just... cry. I feel like crying but I can't. I don't know how. Do you know that I haven't cried once since the accident? Isn't that weird? I gotta tell you, some really strange things are happening lately. Today, I walked into our library. That was mom's space. She loved hanging out in there-- reading on the couch. She always carried a book with her wherever she went, right? Always sticking out of her purse...you know.

The elevator vibrates softly. Then stops. Nicholas hardly notices.

NICHOLAS

So, I walk in there and I pull a book randomly from the shelf. It was L'Etranger. She loved Camus. I opened it and there on the first page, the first sentence, she had underlined it, "Mama died today. Or yesterday, maybe. I don't know." And, I froze. Suddenly, I felt this pressure, like someone's arms around me. It was nice. Enveloping, gentle, and I could have sworn I smelled her perfume. I didn't want it to end. And, just as quickly, she was gone. I waited, but she was gone. I think she's trying to tell me something. I think she wants me to be with them. And why not? We deserve to be with the people who want to be with us, right? (beat) Like Camus said, "We all have to die sometime. What does it matter when it happens?"

Elevator suddenly shakes side to side as lights flash quickly. It is eerie and unsettling. Nicholas catches his balance.

NICHOLAS

Whoa. Whoa. Whoa-- stop.

Elevator stops.

It suddenly starts moving down faster than normal.

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

No, no, no, no, no! Let me out first.

He presses the buttons frantically.

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

Why are you so busy all of a sudden?

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Starla enters full of joy.

STARLA

Oh, hi Nicholas! Funny, how the two of us always seem to be roaming around at this hour. I was just working on my new swimsuit line. I get really creative in the middle of the night. I came up with this idea for a one piece that has circles cut out of it in really sexy places and that made me think about pancakes. Peanut butter pancakes. Wanna join me?

NICHOLAS

No! (beat) No, thank you.

STARLA

So, what do you do?

Nicholas darts his eyes around trying to avoid hers. She goes to press the button for the lobby.

STARLA (cont'd)

Hmm. Were you headed downstairs 'cause I don't see that any of the buttons were pushed. Just like last time.

She deliberately presses the "Lobby" button.

STARLA (cont'd)

Lobby.

Door Closes.

Elevator moves slowly.

She smiles at him.

STARLA (cont'd)

I'm guessing you must have a lot on your mind, right? I've done that too, where I'll be thinking about something and I'll get in an elevator, and I'll forget to press the button. I'll be standing there for like five minutes before I realize, "Hey, I'm stuck in a box and I'm not going anywhere."

She laughs. Nicholas turns his body away from her.

STARLA (cont'd)

Are you okay? You seem like something is bothering you. 'Cause you know, the best thing to do, is to talk about it. Get whatever it is off your chest. It always makes me feel better. Like, last week, I got into a really big fight with my boyfriend. Well, he's not my boyfriend anymore. I just wanted to call in sad. But then, after talking it through with my friend, I felt so much better. Also, it made me see how I was living with these blinders on, you know? I think deep down inside I knew he wasn't good for me but---

NICHOLAS

(a little too loud)

Please STOP!

STARLA

Huh?

NICHOLAS

Please stop talking. I'm sorry, but I don't care. I don't want to know about you or your boyfriend or your peanut butter pancakes, okay? So, please just stop!

They ride the rest of the way in a painful awkward silence.

Elevator finally stops.

Door opens.

Starla leaves.

(Scene 8)

INT. ELEVATOR - AN HOUR LATER - 4 AM

Bodhi enters the elevator. He is trying not to throw up.

BODHI

Uhhhhh...

He leans over trying to keep it together.

BODHI

Fuck.

He straightens himself.

BODHI

Fuuuuuuck.

He leans over again.

Starla sings to herself as she enters the elevator. She goes to press her floor button. Bodhi stops her.

BODHI

No-- !

Starla looks at him. He doesn't look good.

BODHI (cont'd)

I got the spins. Sorry. I don't want to throw up.

STARLA

You drank too much.

BODHI

Way too much. Give me a few minutes. If this thing moves right now I'm gonna lose it.

Beat.

BODHI (cont'd)

(realizing)

What time is it?

STARLA

(checks her wristwatch)

Four a.m.

BODHI

Thank God. I couldn't have taken the stairs anyway.

STARLA

Why not?

BODHI

You're new, right?

STARLA

Yeah, and I know who you are. You're Bodhi.

BODHI

I'm guessing no one told you. We need to leave the elevator free between three and four in the morning. Use the stairs if you have to. It's for Nicholas.

STARLA

Nicholas? Why? I ran into him earlier--

BODHI

What? Where?

STARLA

Here. In the elevator.

BODHI

Wait. You saw him? That's crazy. He's like the Phantom of the Opera of this place. Nobody ever sees him. (beat) What was he like?

STARLA

What do you mean?

BODHI

Was he okay that you ran into him?

STARLA

Not really. What does he do in here?

BODHI

No one knows--- oh, man I'm gonna barf-- uuuuhhhh--

She quickly moves out of the way. He doesn't vomit, but ends up sliding to the floor.

BODHI (cont'd)

Sorry.

Starla looks at him for a moment then leans her head back and looks up.

STARLA

Oh, wow. Those are stars up there.

BODHI

Huh?

STARLA

Look.

He looks up at the ceiling.

BODHI

Those dots?

STARLA

No. They're stars.

BODHI

Damn, you're right. How weird. I've lived here my whole life and I never noticed that before. Wonder who came up with that idea? I mean, hardly anyone ever looks up.

STARLA

Someone who thought about the people who do. (Suddenly realizing) Les Étoiles!

Bodhi contemplates in his drunken stupor.

BODHI

So, is it all in the stars? Like, is this supposed to be my life?

STARLA

What do you mean?

BODHI

Do I have a choice?

STARLA

“We all hold the ticket to a life of our own choosing.”

BODHI

What?

STARLA

Something my foster dad once told me when I was bitching about stuff. Sounded all new-agey, but damn he was right. Shit happens but I get to decide how I want to deal with it.

She continues to take in the stars.

STARLA (cont'd)

So, why did you drink so much?

BODHI

I was mad.

STARLA

You actually look sad.

BODHI

Whatever. My boyfriend and I had dinner with his dad last night. It was horrible.

STARLA

What happened?

BODHI

First off, his dad kept sending his drink back, yelling at the waiter that he didn't know how to make a Negroni, whatever the fuck that is--

STARLA

Old man drink.

BODHI

Old man fucker drink. You know it's never going to be a good night when someone is yelling at the waiter. I tried engaging him in conversation. Talk about yachts or whatever the fuck he's into. But, he kept ignoring me. He acted like I didn't exist. Which made me wonder why he had agreed to have dinner with us in the first place. Maybe Jay pressured him into it? I don't know. They've got some weird father-son bullshit going on. His dad totally controls him with money. Then, this was unbelievable! His dad started talking about some girl that Jay had dated in high school-- obviously, before he came out.

How he ran into “Melissa” and how she’s some financial hot shot at AMG and how she’s still single and was asking about Jay... it was weird. Then he went on about how he always thought Jay and Melissa should have gotten married and Jay smiled and my stomach dropped. Then my heart started racing. And all of a sudden it felt sinister. Like it was a set up--

STARLA

From Jay?

BODHI

No, his dad. Like his dad finally agreed to have dinner with us because he had a plan to humiliate me or something. It made me feel sick. And Jay didn’t say a word. So, I finally just got up and left. I walked out of the restaurant.

STARLA

Damn.

BODHI

I thought he would have followed me. But, nope. He stayed back.

STARLA

Well, it’s his pops and everything--

BODHI

He should have stood up for me. For us.

STARLA

Maybe, he did? After you left.

BODHI

Nope. I talked to him like a half hour ago. He said that’s just how his dad is and I have to deal. That asshole even told Jay when he first met me that I looked like a terrorist.

STARLA

What?!

BODHI

Said he was joking. Why are people so fucked up?

Elevator moves.

STARLA

C’mon, I’ll help you home.

Starla helps Bodhi up.

(Scene 9)

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY 5 - NOON

Alfred and Berenice ride together. Berenice smiles with an extra twinkle in her eye, as she adjusts her scarf.

ALFRED

You're looking especially vibrant today.

BERENICE

Thank you. I just came from my swimming. At our age, we must do what we can to keep our bodies in motion.

ALFRED

My sentiments exactly.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

ALFRED (cont'd)

Dinner later?

BERENICE

(haughty)

Good-bye, Alfred.

Berenice leaves.

ALFRED

(to himself)

Good-bye, Berenice.

Door closes.

(Scene 10)

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY 6 - 2 AM

Nicholas has just entered.

NICHOLAS

I thought if I came an hour early, we could avoid getting interrupted by you-know-who. You understand that you're the only thing keeping me sane right now, right? You're the only one I can talk to. It's too noisy in the apartment-- even if it's quiet. It's noisy-- in my head. I can't handle having one more thing taken away. I just can't. (Long beat) Listen, I thought about something that I haven't thought about in a long time. No one thinks I remember, because I was so young, but I do. You don't even know this about me and you know everything. I mean, you know I was adopted by mom and dad but you don't know about my birth mother-- 'cause no one ever talked about her or mentioned her, ever. The thought of losing my apartment...losing you-- made me remember all of it-- again. She had red hair and green eyes. I remember those colors. I don't exactly remember her face. But, I remember the look in her eyes that day. She was carrying me, but in a different way. Like, I could sense she was thinking-- feeling something different in her body. I just knew. We walked into the elevator of our old building. I was only two years old but I remember how dirty and smelly everything was in that place. I remember the moment she placed me on the floor. It was deliberate. I understood that I wasn't supposed to move. I watched her press the button for the doors to close, but she didn't press any floor buttons. And then, when the doors finally did start to close, she ran out. She ran and she didn't look back. She left me there. So, I sat and I waited. I didn't cry. I just waited. Finally, someone called for the elevator. When they found me in there, they took me back to our apartment and found that my mom had died of an overdose. I remember, everyone wondering why I didn't cry when I was left in there for so long. I think I must have known it was a safer place than home. Obviously, my mom thought so.

(Scene 11)

INT. ELEVATOR - SAME EVENING - 10:30PM

Starla and Alfred scream laughing as they enter from the lobby. They've had a few drinks.

STARLA

I mean, who says, "Sorry" to a dishwasher? It's a machine. Not a person. But, that's what I did. I totally forgot that I had turned it on earlier so when I opened it to put a dirty dish in, all this steam came rushing out, 'cause it was in the middle of it's cycle, and I said, "Oh, sorry." To the dishwasher! And then I shut the door really quick. Like I had walked in on someone changing their clothes or something. You know what I mean?

ALFRED

Sure. Like when you walk in on someone sitting on the crapper.

They both laugh.

STARLA

Hahahahaha. Totally. Right?

ALFRED

Totally.

They enter the elevator.

Alfred presses the appropriate floor buttons.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

ALFRED

Sounds like you and dishwashers got a thing.

STARLA

What do you mean?

ALFRED

The first one let your ex's wife know your business and now this one's telling you to stay out of it's business.

STARLA

Hey, you're right. I better hand wash for a while.

ALFRED

Or get a real dishwasher in there. (Flirts) A guy who actually enjoys doing the dishes.

Beat.

STARLA

Thanks again, for taking me out to dinner, Alfred. That was fun. I love sitting down to a nice meal and talking to people-- finding out their story-- but damn, I never would have guessed you were born in The Bronx! You're a lot more interesting than I thought you were.

Alfred laughs.

STARLA

And that restaurant was all kinds of happy. Felt like we were on vacation or something.

ALFRED

It's got a lot of "joie de vivre." Just like you.

STARLA

Mmm. I love the way you speak French.

ALFRED

And let me tell you something, your "restaurant French" isn't half bad either.

STARLA

I always remember to say, "Je Voudrais--" 'cause that means, "I would like." So, if you start any sentence with that, it sounds like you know what you're talking about.

ALFRED

(amused)

Oh, yeah?

STARLA

Try it. Think of something you would like-- and then say, "Je voudrais--blah, blah, blah"

The elevator jerks suddenly and throws Starla unto Alfred.

STARLA (cont'd)

Oh, my God!

Her body is splayed all over him.

ALFRED

Je voudrais the elevator to do that more often.

STARLA

Hahahahaha! You're so funny.

She hits him playfully.

The elevator picks up speed and quickly heads back down to the lobby.

Starla holds on tight to Alfred's arm.

STARLA (cont'd)

What's going on? It feels like we're heading back down.

The elevator stops.

Door opens.

Berenice is standing there. Her eyes goes wide as she sees Starla hanging all over Alfred.

BERENICE

Oh, dear.

ALFRED

Hello! Come on in. We were just heading up from dinner. Seems the elevator has it's own agenda lately.

Alfred and Starla make way for Berenice.

Berenice squeezes in.

She presses button.

Door closes.

Alfred is flanked by the two women. Now that Berenice is in there with him and Starla, he looks very uncomfortable.

Elevator moves.

ALFRED (cont'd)

Berenice, have you met Starla? She's who bought Lenore's place.

BERENICE

I don't believe I've had the pleasure, but I see that you have.

ALFRED

Oh, yes. A great big pleasure. We had a wonderful time.

Starla moves closer to Berenice.

STARLA

It's very nice to meet you. I like your hat. It's very chic. It's like Spanish or something. And I like all that stuff around your neck. You look amazing.

BERENICE

(complimented in her usual narcissistic manner)

Well, thank you, dear. As a matter of fact, I did get this hat in Spain, quite a few years ago. I found it in a little boutique in Seville (pronounces it with a New York and Spanish accent combined: say-vee-yah). I keep it in a hat box so it keeps it's shape.

Another awkward beat.

ALFRED

Well...yes.

More awkward silence.

ALFRED (cont'd)

How's Carlo?

Berenice moves to the other side of Alfred, sidling up to him.

BERENICE

A little better, now that Bodhi has been taking him on his walks.

ALFRED

Since when did Bodhi get involved?

BERENICE

A couple of days ago. He's a very nice boy.

STARLA

Oh, yeah, Bodhi. He's cute.

Starla says the word "cute" in a way that conveys that Bodhi is adorable. Berenice hears it as Starla being attracted to Bodhi.

BERENICE

(setting her straight)

He's gay.

Starla gives her a look.

ALFRED

I never knew that.

Uncomfortable beat.

BERENICE

So, where did you go for dinner?

STARLA

Oh, Alfred took me to Le Coq. (Unwittingly pronounces it "La Cock.")

Berenice shoots a look to Alfred. He smiles to himself.

STARLA

It's a new French bistro on 1st and 44th. He spoke French to everyone and they all thought I was his girlfriend 'cause that's how they do it in France, you know. Older men with younger girls.

BERENICE

I'm sure Alfred enjoyed that very much.

ALFRED

(to Berenice)

Well, I did offer to take you--

STARLA

Oh, Berenice, you should definitely go with Alfred, sometime. We should all go and maybe we could invite that Nicholas too?

BERENICE

(scolding)

Listen, dear. One thing you need to understand, is that all of us in this building have been here for a very long time. We respect one another. So, when it comes to Nicholas, it is best to leave him alone.

STARLA

Well, he seems a little lonely.

BERENICE

That's none of our business. Now, what is it that you do, dear? What is your business?

STARLA

I'm an artist. I design clothes.

ALFRED

(to Starla)

Do you know that Berenice studied at the School of Fine Arts in Paris when she was just fourteen?

STARLA

Whaaaaat- ? I love Paris.

BERENICE

Not just any school of fine arts but the Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux-Arts. (pronounced with a French and New York accent combined)

STARLA

Wow. That sounds dope.

BERENICE

(full of herself)

It's a school that's over three hundred years old. Many of the most famous artists in Europe were trained there. Rodin applied there three times but was refused. Me, I got in right away.

STARLA

You must have been a prodigy. I didn't design my first line until I was nineteen.

ALFRED

That's still very impressive, Starla.

BERENICE

Unlike most prodigies who peak at a young age, I seem to be improving. I've just finished a wonderful reproduction of a Picasso. No one can tell the difference. In fact, I think it's a bit better than the original.

STARLA

Well, I don't think I could come up with a better name for my line. Phat Ass--

Starla looks to see if Berenice recognizes the brand name.

BERENICE

I don't appreciate that kind of language, dear.

STARLA

No, "phat" means good. It's spelled with a "P" and an "H". Everybody wears it.

BERENICE

I wouldn't be caught dead--

ALFRED

I think it's a very clever spelling.

STARLA

Thank you.

BERENICE

I also did a lovely portrait of Charles de Gaulle that I have hanging in my study--

ALFRED

You should show that piece to Starla.

BERENICE

Well, I don't know if she'd care to see it. Not everyone knows about Charles de Gaulle--

STARLA

I do. I think it's a very nice airport.

Berenice and Alfred share a look.

The elevator stops.

BERENICE
This is my floor.

Door opens.

Berenice hesitantly steps out not wanting to leave Alfred alone with Starla.

BERENICE (cont'd)

(turns back to Starla)
Well, are you coming?

STARLA
Oh! Yes, of course.

Bodhi rushes up.

BODHI
Oh, my God! Mrs. Hetkin, I've been trying to get a hold of you!

BERENICE
What's going on, dear?

BODHI
I didn't know what to do. You don't have a cell, so I couldn't text you or call you-- Jesus Christ! You don't even have e-mail! How am I supposed to-- I didn't know what to do!

ALFRED
Calm down, Bodhi. What happened?

BODHI
Carlo is dead.

Berenice gasps. Alfred rushes to her aid

(Scene 12)

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY 7 - 2AM

NICHOLAS

It's over, Otis. This is it. Mr. Tuchman says there is someone who is willing to pay twice what the apartment is worth-- sight unseen. (beat) I told you what would happen if it came to this-- I'm going to do it--

The elevator ALARM rings. Nicholas covers his ears.

NICHOLAS

Aaagghhh!

He tries pressing buttons to get it to stop.

NICHOLAS

Stop. Sssh. Sssh. Sssh. Stop. Please stop. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I won't do anything--

Alarm stops.

Nicholas catches his breath.

Elevator seems to be catching it's breath as well.

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

(to himself)

I shouldn't have said anything to you.

He presses the button to open the door.

The door doesn't open.

He presses again.

NICHOLAS

Let me out. Please.

Elevator suddenly spins, lights flicker as it shoots down.

Nicholas hangs on, scared out of his wits.

It stops.

Door opens.

Starla appears.

STARLA

Hey, what you doing in here at this hour?

Nicholas tries to get his breathing to slow down.

She enters.

Doors close.

STARLA

Was that the alarm I heard? Are you okay?

She presses the button to go down to the lobby.

NICHOLAS

I need to get back to my apartment.

He presses the button to head back up.

The elevator doesn't move.

NICHOLAS

I need to get back--

He keeps pressing the button.

STARLA

Look, I was trying to give you your space. You're not supposed to be in here.

NICHOLAS

What?

STARLA

I was trying to leave before you needed it.

NICHOLAS

What do you mean, before I needed it?

STARLA

Your time is from three to four, right? That's what everyone said. It's only two.

NICHOLAS

(panicked)

What do you mean, "Everyone said?"

STARLA

People in the building. But, see, I didn't know that before and now I do. So I'm sorry if I bothered you.

NICHOLAS

(freaked out)

Everyone knows that I talk to him?

STARLA

Talk to who?

Nicholas shuts down.

STARLA (cont'd)

Look, did you hear that Berenice's dog, Carlo died? He got killed by squirrels.

NICHOLAS

I need to get out of here.

He keeps pressing the buttons.

STARLA

Do you need someone to talk to?

NICHOLAS

What are you talking about? I don't know you. You don't know me. Where do you get this kind of presumption?

STARLA

I was just trying to be nice--

NICHOLAS

No, you're being intrusive. That's the opposite of nice.

STARLA

Excuse me?

NICHOLAS

You think you're being charming or that you're some kind of Auntie Mame but you're not.

STARLA

Look, I don't know who your Auntie Mame is but don't you dare speak to me like that--- It's not my fault that I keep running into you, dude. I just moved into this place and I'm a night owl and I like to go places. I bought your friend Lenore's apartment and I figure I should be a part of this community like I'm sure she was--- I was just trying to be a good neighbor--

NICHOLAS

Just because you moved into Lenore's apartment doesn't mean that you get to take over her life. It doesn't make you one of us--

STARLA

What?! Who's trying to take over her life?

NICHOLAS

You don't belong here!

This takes Starla's breath away.

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

Shit.

He desperately presses buttons. Elevator won't budge. He is cornered.

STARLA

No, I didn't grow up in some penthouse apartment with some goddamn silver spoon stuck up my ass, talking to God knows who in a friggin' elevator, but I did grow up out there. In the open, with all kinds of people, and the one thing I learned is that I belong wherever I want to belong. So fuck you.

She presses the button.

The door opens.

She leaves.

(Scene 13)

INT. ELEVATOR - A WEEK LATER - 3AM

Cello music plays over the following sequence. It should reflect each character's state of mind.

Music for Berenice is dark and loopy.

She stands barefoot in the middle of the elevator. She wears a bright red Kimono housecoat and drinks a glass of whiskey. She wears no jewelry or make-up.

Door closes.

**Projection. Trees with Autumn leaves in Central Park originates from the elevator.*

Berenice communes with the elevator in a drunken dance.

Elevator moves. Her body bends backwards.

The elevator stops. Her body straightens.

Door opens.

She walks to the edge of the elevator and peeks out.

BERENICE

Hello?

No one is there.

She presses a button.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

She picks up a vibe from the elevator but can't quite figure out what it is.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

She peeks out again. Hall is empty.

She presses another button. We soon realize that she is aimlessly pressing buttons, taking the elevator for a ride.

Door closes.

Elevator moves slightly from side to side.

She tries to keep her balance and down the rest of her drink.

Elevator stops.

She looks around, a little frightened.

Door opens.

She leaves in a hurry.

The elevator is EMPTY for a few moments.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Alfred enters. He is carrying a pet urn.

Music for Alfred is quirky yet romantic. Nothing sentimental.

**Projection. The red "Park Avenue Tulips" originates from the elevator.*

He is distracted. He doesn't press a button.

Door closes.

At this point, it appears that the elevator is making its own decisions.

Elevator moves.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Alfred leaves.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Starla enters.

Music for Starla is angry and spasmodic.

She's still harboring anger from her earlier confrontation with Nicholas.

**Projection. Lightning in the nighttime sky originates from the elevator.*

Door closes.

It doesn't move.

She takes a deep breath to calm herself. She looks up at the stars on the ceiling.

A cold gust of wind enters the elevator.

She tries to warm herself.

Suddenly, a *purple light* washes over her. By the time she notices the light, it disappears. She's not sure of what has just transpired.

Elevator moves.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

She finds herself in the lobby.

She peeks her head out, she spots Bodhi.

STARLA

Bodhi!

BODHI

(yells from the lobby)

What are you doing in there? It's three-thirty. We have to take the stairs.

STARLA

(yells back)

Nicholas isn't using it--

Bodhi runs in.

(Scene 14)

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

BODHI

What do you mean he isn't using it?

STARLA

I told him to fuck off.

BODHI

What?

STARLA

He was being a goddamn stupid mother-fucking asshole.

Bodhi pulls her out to the lobby.

BODHI

You don't understand-- he's going through a really rough time--

STARLA

I've been hearing that my whole life. Packing my shit up since I was a kid-- moving from foster home to foster home 'cause I don't belong--

She breaks away from him and re-enters the elevator.

STARLA

He told me I don't belong-- but I tell you what, I worked hard to get here and I'm not going anywhere.

Door closes.

Elevator does not move.

BODHI

Of course, you're not. I doubt if he meant it that way. Like, how did it even get to that?

STARLA

I just mentioned to him that people in the building leave the elevator free for him and then he got really weird--

BODHI

Oh, shit. You told him we knew?!

STARLA

I didn't know that he didn't know--

BODHI

He's not supposed to know--

STARLA

Well, how was I supposed to know that?

BODHI

This is not good--

STARLA

You people are cray cray. Tell me why it's not good?

BODHI

Nicholas is just like-- like you're totally not supposed to get in his space--

STARLA

Well, what about my space? And why would he think that the elevator would be consistently free at that hour?

BODHI

He shouldn't have to think about it Starla! It just is. (beat) He must be freaking out.

STARLA

Well, no one told me about the guy. You never mentioned the guy--

BODHI

What guy?

STARLA

Some guy. I don't know. He said there was a guy.

BODHI

A guy?

STARLA

Yeah, like he was freaked out that everyone knew he was talking to a guy-- in here.

BODHI

In here?

STARLA

That's what he said.

BODHI

Holy shit. That is messed up.

Bodhi looks around the elevator.

STARLA

How long has this been going on with him?

BODHI

About a year. Ever since his parents got killed in a plane crash. Fucking terrorists.

STARLA

Oh, my God.

BODHI

I know. My mom said he just shut himself up for a while. Then Lenore figured out that this was where he hung out at three in the morning. She ran into him like once or twice, then thought it would be nice if all of us just left it free for him if he needed it. Even Pablo makes people take the stairs--

STARLA

Lenore? The lady who used to own my apartment?

BODHI

Yeah. She was like the only person who could talk to him.

Beat.

STARLA

Still, no one has any business telling someone they don't belong.

BODHI

Shit, it happens to me all the time-- people don't even have to say anything-- they just have that look. I know what they're thinking. I've just learned to ignore it.

STARLA

No, you haven't.

BODHI

Whatever.

STARLA

Well, I refuse to let anybody make me feel ashamed about who I am-- and where I'm from--

BODHI

I'm not giving Nicholas a pass, Starla-- but--

STARLA

But, what?

BODHI

He is talking to people who aren't here! Shit, he could be hearing voices or something-- I don't know.

STARLA

So, you're saying I moved in here and I screwed everything up?

BODHI

No! Look, if anybody screwed things up, it's me. Have you seen the way Berenice wanders the halls? It's because I killed her dog.

STARLA

You didn't kill him. The squirrels did.

BODHI

I forced him to go outside before he was ready to.

STARLA

You were only trying to help.

BODHI

Everything is fucked up.

Elevator door opens.

They are still in the lobby.

Alfred enters. He's holding an urn.

ALFRED

Hey, kids. Say hello to Carlo.

He pushes the urn towards them. Bodhi is horrified.

BODHI

I can't take this.

STARLA

Why do you have him?

ALFRED

I picked up his ashes for Berenice, but I can't seem to track her down.

BODHI

She's gone mad and it's all because of me.

ALFRED

Don't get overly dramatic, Bodhi. She'll be fine.

STARLA

(to urn)

Hello Carlo, I'm sorry I never met you, but I hope you're having fun on the other side, running around and barking and stuff.

ALFRED

"Woof."

BODHI

I need a drink.

ALFRED

I wouldn't mind one either.

STARLA

You know what? Me too. Why don't we all go back to my place and have a little party for him? I bet he'd like that. Wouldn't you Carlo?

ALFRED

"Woof." "Woof."

STARLA

You're a good boy.

BODHI

Oh, my God.

(Scene 15)

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS - 3:15 AM

Berenice carries another whiskey. She walks up to the elevator.

Door opens on its own.

BERENICE

Hello, elevator.

She steps in.

The door closes.

She raises her drink.

BERENICE (cont'd)

It's me Berenice. (pronounces her name the Italian way; Bear-a-nee-chay)

She chuckles to herself and repeats under her breath.

BERENICE

Ha! Bear-a-nee-chay.

She takes a sip of whiskey and looks around the elevator.

BERENICE

I will say, you still look as magnificent as you did when we first met. Everyone says the same about me. And, I haven't had any work done. I don't mind getting older, it's just with the passage of time, we lose our loved ones. I miss Carlo terribly. Supposedly, Alfred went to pick up his ashes today but I don't know where they are. I'm not sure I'm ready to see him like that, anyway.

Door opens.

She peeks her head out.

BERENICE (cont'd)

(worried)

Nicholas? Where's Nicholas? He should be here--

The door closes.

Elevator moves.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Starla is waiting.

STARLA

There you are! I've been looking all over for you. We're having a party for Carlo at my place--

BERENICE

(her anger rises)

You have Carlo?

STARLA

Well, Alfred has him, but he couldn't find you--

BERENICE

(as if giving an order to a servant)

Will you send for him please?

Starla is about to react to Berenice's tone of voice but she sees the state Berenice is in. It's not pretty.

STARLA

Sure.

She leaves.

Berenice waits in the elevator.

The door tries to close.

She stops it by putting her leg against the door.

BERENICE (cont'd)

No. Don't close--

The door squeezes against her leg. She is trapped in an awkward position.

BERENICE (cont'd)

Oh, dear.

Alfred finally shows up holding Carlo's urn.

ALFRED

Jesus Christ, you're going to get squashed to death. Are you okay?

BERENICE

Just open the door, Alfred. I'm fine.

Door opens.

Alfred steps in.

Door closes.

ALFRED

I was looking all over for you--

BERENICE

No you weren't. You were having a party--

ALFRED

We were celebrating Carlo's life.

He holds out Carlo's urn.

BERENICE

Carlo-- ?

She takes the urn. She lets out a little sob and collapses to the floor.

ALFRED

It's okay.

BERENICE

Oh, dear. I'm a mess.

ALFRED

You're beautiful.

She wipes her tears.

ALFRED (cont'd)

You are. You've always been a striking woman Berenice, but never more so, than right in this moment--

She looks up at him. They take in one another. He makes a motion to kiss her. Because she is drunk, she looks at him a beat too long and starts to open her mouth to kiss him back, right as their lips are about to touch, Berenice comes to her senses and pulls back.

BERENICE

(blaming him for her vulnerability)

What in the world are you doing, Alfred?

She pulls herself up.

ALFRED

I'm here for you. I've always been here for you. I don't understand why you won't allow me into your life? We've both lost our spouses. We're lonely. I know I certainly am. If there is anyone you would be able to find comfort with, it would be me.

BERENICE

I'm sorry Alfred, but I could never find comfort with a man who cheated on his wife.

ALFRED

(shocked)

What?

BERENICE

Please, don't deny it.

ALFRED

How did you-- ? (Long beat) Did Corinne know?

BERENICE

I have no idea if she knew or not. One of the gals at the club started talking-- I don't get involved with things like that.

ALFRED

It was a stupid affair. I broke it off as soon as --

BERENICE

Please, Alfred. You don't owe me an explanation.

ALFRED

(pained)

But, I do. It was you that I had feelings for-- that I loved. I still do. I love you. I know you felt the same.

BERENICE

I would have never acted on it.

ALFRED

I know. It was childish. I'm sorry.

He reaches for her, she pulls away and presses the button.

BERENICE

I'd like to ride alone please.

She steps to the back of the elevator.

Door opens.

Confused, Alfred steps back out onto Starla's floor.

The door closes.

(Scene 16)

INT. ELEVATOR- DAY 15 - LATE NIGHT

Bodhi and Starla sit on the floor of the elevator. Bodhi is smoking a joint. Starla eats her snacks and drinks a soda.

BODHI

Our whole relationship was a lie.

STARLA

He said that?

BODHI

Why would I make that up?

STARLA

How could he be in that much denial?

He offers her the joint.

BODHI

Wanna hit?

STARLA

Oh, no. I don't do drugs.

BODHI

Money changes everything. His dad threatened to cut him off, so he went back into the closet.

STARLA

Are you sure he said...love?

BODHI

He said, he realized that he never stopped loving her. That I was just a phase he was going through.

STARLA

Some men can be real fucking assholes.

BODHI

No shit.

STARLA

(looks at the joint)

Goddamit, I'll take a toke off of that. Why the hell not?

Bodhi passes the joint to her.

BODHI

That's right.

Starla takes a hit.

STARLA

Mmm. Mm. Been a long time. (coughs) A long time.

BODHI

We had something real. I know I'm not making that up. How could he just turn on me?

STARLA

Wasn't ready to have someone who could really love him in his life.

Starla takes another hit, she passes it to Bodhi, he takes another hit. They sit for a moment.

*Their new dialogue should overlap. Like they are one. They're also a little stoned so...

BODHI

And you know what the worst part is? I keep hoping that he'll call me--

STARLA

To tell you it's not true--

BODHI

Exactly--

STARLA

Me too-- I keep hoping my old boyfriend would call--

BODHI

Or text. I keep checking my texts--

STARLA

--anything-- telling me he's made a mistake--

BODHI

--that he loves me--

STARLA

--that he can't live without me--

BODHI

I want him to want me--

STARLA

--to want me.

BODHI

Out in the open--

STARLA

Out in the wide open--

BODHI

We deserve better--

STARLA

Way better--

BODHI

So much better--

They finally say the same thing at the same time...

TOGETHER

We deserve to be with people who want to be with us!

Beat.

BODHI

We've been stuck in here for longer than normal. Don't you think?

STARLA

Luckily, we had our snacks with us.

She pulls out more bags of snacks from her oversized bag. He checks his phone.

BODHI

My fucking battery ran out.

STARLA

I never get reception in here. I kinda like it.

BODHI

What if we're in here all night?

STARLA

What if we're in here for days?

BODHI

For months?

STARLA

For years?

BODHI

What if they finally get to us and we're like old people?

STARLA

What if we had babies in here?

BODHI

Ew.

STARLA

Sorry.

BODHI

Makes me think of Jay and Melissa.

STARLA

Don't think about them.

She eats her snacks, offers him some. He eats.

STARLA

You know, I'm still pissed off at Nicholas and everything but -- I mean, I've been coming in here at all hours -- whenever I want -- two, three, four in the morning-- I never run into him at all anymore.

BODHI

So? You should be happy.

STARLA

Yeah...but...it's been over a week. You think he hasn't left his apartment in a week?

BODHI

Honey, he hasn't left this building in a year.

STARLA

Damn. He's acting crazy. Maybe we should go knock on his door. Make sure he's okay?

BODHI

Now, you're the one who's acting crazy. Why would you do that? Leave him alone.

STARLA

I'm not sure he should be left alone.

BODHI

He likes to be alone.

STARLA

Nobody likes to be alone. And from what you told me-- it sounds like this was the only place outside of his apartment where he could go and talk to someone-- whatever-- Seriously, he might have some real mental health issues, you know? I don't have to like the guy or be his friend, but we can still check up on him, make sure he's okay--

BODHI

That's a good point.

C'mon. Let's make a move.

STARLA

The elevator starts to move.

Holy shit--

BODHI

STARLA

(looking around the elevator)
See? It agrees with me.

Elevator travels to the top floor.

Bodhi puts out the joint.

Door opens.

They rush out.

The elevator stands empty.

*OFFSTAGE (We HEAR Starla pounding on the door while she and Bodhi yell to get Nicholas's attention)

LONG BEAT.

Starla and Bodhi make their way back into the elevator.

Door remains open.

STARLA (cont'd)
Should I try again? Maybe he didn't hear me?

BODHI
Oh, he heard you. I think he just doesn't want to talk to you

STARLA
Maybe something is really wrong?

BODHI
He's probably humiliated and embarrassed.

STARLA

Something doesn't feel right, Bodhi. He's depressed. And sometimes, when people are that depressed, they do crazy things--

BODHI

What kind of crazy things?

STARLA

It was quiet, man. Too quiet.

BODHI

(realizes)

It was really quiet.

STARLA

Right? 'Cause I was making a lot of noise and he could have just yelled for me to go away or something.

BODHI

What if he took a sleeping pill and he just can't hear you?

STARLA

What if he took a lot of sleeping pills?

Their eyes go wide.

BODHI

Oh my, God.

STARLA

I took a bottle of aspirin once in high school when my boyfriend broke up with me.

BODHI

What happened?

STARLA

I got rushed to the hospital to have my stomach pumped.

BODHI

What if Nicholas needs his stomach pumped?

STARLA

Or what if he was drunk and he tripped and hit his head?

BODHI

Oh my God. What if he tripped and hit his head and he's bleeding?

STARLA

What if he's bleeding and he could hear me but he couldn't speak--

BODHI

--'Cause he's bleeding. And he's thinking, "Goddammit, just knock the fucking door down."

STARLA

We should get Pablo.

BODHI

(suddenly very scared)

Or what if--

STARLA

What?

BODHI

What if he hanged himself?

STARLA

Oh, my God.

BODHI

And Pablo has to cut him down?

STARLA

Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Don't say that. What should we do?

BODHI

Let's try one more time, just to make sure--

They run out of the elevator.

Beat.

Alfred appears.

He enters the elevator.

He waves the lingering smell of their joint away.

(Scene 17)

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

He presses the button.

Door closes.

Elevator goes down to Berenice's floor.

Door opens.

Alfred hesitates at the door. He wants to go out but changes his mind. He steps back in.

Door closes.

Elevator does not move.

Alfred thinks about how to make it up to Berenice.

Door opens.

Berenice appears. She's holding Carlos' urn.

ALFRED

Berenice.

BERENICE

Are you on your way down?

ALFRED

I was coming to see you.

BERENICE

I'm going up.

She enters.

ALFRED

To see me? (hopeful)

To see Nicholas.

BERENICE

She presses the button.

Door closes.

BERENICE

Starla got me thinking about that poor boy. Maybe he does need us to bother him a bit.

The elevator doesn't move.

Alfred stares at her.

She presses the button again.

BERENICE (cont'd)

(talking to the elevator)

Oh, c'mon, now.

ALFRED

It's waiting for you to forgive me.

Alfred gives her "puppy dog" eyes. He is truly sorry.

She turns away. She still doesn't quite forgive him.

BERENICE

Oh, Alfred.

The elevator moves.

They ride up to the top floor.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Berenice leaves.

Alfred follows her.

(Scene 18)

INT. ELEVATOR- CONTINUOUS

The elevator stands empty for a long time.

It is quiet for a long time.

Finally, Berenice, Starla, Alfred, and Bodhi slowly make their way back to the elevator. They are in shock. Their dialogue should overlap as they are trying to make sense of things.

BERENICE

(softly)
We need to find Pablo--

STARLA

What have I done?

BERENICE

You didn't do anything wrong, dear--

BODHI

He was all alone--

BERENICE

I should have reached out to him sooner. Why didn't I reach out to him?

ALFRED

He built a wall around himself--

BERENICE

I was uncomfortable--

ALFRED

You didn't want to intrude--

BERENICE

No. His misfortune made me feel uncomfortable.

Door opens.

They enter. Alfred presses the button.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

No one speaks.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Starla and Bodhi exit.

Alfred waits for Berenice.

BERENICE (cont'd)

I'll wait for you up there.

He leaves.

Door closes.

Elevator moves.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

Nicholas is waiting.

(Scene 19)

INT. ELEVATOR- CONTINUOUS

BERENICE

(gasps)

Nicholas? Nicholas is that you? Are you okay?

He steps into the elevator.

NICHOLAS

(speaks to no one in particular)

I couldn't do it. Not sure why. But, I just couldn't.

Thank God.

BERENICE

He finally realizes that Berenice is in the elevator with him.

NICHOLAS

But, I don't know where I go now.

BERENICE

What do you mean?

NICHOLAS

They're selling my apartment.

BERENICE

Who?

NICHOLAS

Mr. Tuchman.

BERENICE

Samuel Tuchman?

Nicholas nods.

BERENICE

Why?

NICHOLAS

He said my dad owes the firm money-- so I need to pay his debt--

BERENICE

Have you spoken to anyone about this?

Nicholas gives a quick glance to the elevator.

NICHOLAS

Not really.

BERENICE

I should have known better-- after what he tried to pull with me.

NICHOLAS

You?

BERENICE

Dear, you know very well that my husband, your father, and Samuel Tuchman built that firm from the ground up. After Stuart passed, I experienced a very ugly situation with those two.

NICHOLAS

With my dad?

BERENICE

Well, I thought your father was involved, but it was Samuel who was being duplicitous. Oh, he wined and dined me. I thought he was being a friend. I was vulnerable like you are now-- but then he made a very big mistake.

NICHOLAS

What was that?

BERENICE

He made a pass at me. I was appalled. Look, I know I'm a very attractive woman but I'm not stupid. He knew exactly how much money was owed me and thought that I hadn't a clue. I suppose he thought I would be charmed by him and he would take advantage of me. Au Contraire. I immediately hired a new lawyer which confused your father, he thought I was being irrational but in the end, I was proved right. Samuel never said another word. Oh, he's disgraceful. He wants to play this game again? Well, guess what? We'll hire you a lawyer and get to the bottom of this dirty business.

NICHOLAS

So, I could fight this?

BERENICE

Of course, you can fight this.

NICHOLAS

I can stay?

BERENICE

Yes, you can stay.

NICHOLAS

(realizing)

I can stay.

Berenice watches him as he takes this in. Relief washes over him.

NICHOLAS

I can stay.

He goes to hug her-- she pulls away reflexively. He pulls back, horribly embarrassed.

BERENICE

We should let the others know that you're okay.

Nicholas turns away from her.

She presses the button.

Door closes.

The elevator moves.

She realizes what she is doing, yet again in her life. She suddenly presses the STOP button.

BERENICE

(to herself)

Oh, dear--

Elevator stops.

BERENICE

(turns to him)

You know how much your parents loved you. It didn't matter that you were adopted. They chose you. (beat) Oh, I'll never forget the night they brought you home. No one will. I'm sure you've heard the story a million times.

NICHOLAS

What story?

BERENICE

Your parents never told you about the storm?

NICHOLAS

I don't think so.

BERENICE

(she loves a good story)

Oh! Lightning had struck the Con Edison plant over on 23rd. Your parents had just entered the elevator with you, it must have gone up a couple of floors or so, when suddenly there was a blackout. Everyone found out very quickly that you were trapped in here. Your cries entered every locked apartment. It shattered the peace of this building. Oh, it alerted the dogs! They started howling. We all rushed down the stairs to the lobby. Poor Pablo, he almost had a nervous breakdown trying to get to you. Then suddenly, it got very quiet. You had stopped crying. We all sat listening to that rain, hoping you were okay. And suddenly the power came back on. The elevator shot down to the lobby, the doors flew open and there you were-- (she gestures to the middle of the elevator floor) right here!

Nicholas looks down to where she's pointing. He smiles.

BERENICE

Sound asleep in your mother's arms. (Suddenly realizing) Huh. This elevator has always watched over you.

NICHOLAS

Otis.

BERENICE

Excuse me?

NICHOLAS

His name is Otis.

Berenice nods but doesn't quite get it.

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

Mom introduced me to him.

Nicholas points to a brass plaque on the wall, bearing the manufacturer's name, Otis. She finally understands.

NICHOLAS

She said he was taking care of us in the dark. That's why I stopped crying. But, I never knew...

BERENICE

Of course. (Reads the plaque) "Otis. Maximum occupancy six."

She very carefully reaches out to touch Nicholas's arm.
They both look at the touch. Nicholas takes in that this is
the first time he has been touched in a year.

BERENICE

You were always a very sensitive child.

She pulls her arm away gently.

BERENICE

Even if you never said much we all knew how intelligent you were. Otis is a very
intelligent name. I almost see him wearing glasses. Can you imagine the stories he knows
about all of us? My God, he could write a book.

Nicholas smiles.

BERENICE (cont'd)

What's so funny?

NICHOLAS

Thinking about Otis sitting down and writing a book.

BERENICE

We all have dreams, dear.

Nicholas laughs. Bernice laughs.

BERENICE (cont'd)

You know, he might even be responsible for bringing Starla into our lives.

Nicholas frowns.

The elevator suddenly shoots to the bottom.

Door flies open.

Alfred and Bodhi are waiting.

BODHI

(jaw drops as he spots Nicholas)

It's you.

ALFRED

(relieved, but angry)

Goddamn it. You're alive! Do you know what we all just went through? We thought for sure you went ahead and--

Starla runs up to them.

STARLA

I can't find Pablo anywhere! Maybe we should call the police--

She stops cold.

STARLA (cont'd)

Nicholas.

NICHOLAS

Starla.

STARLA

Shit.

She turns to walk away.

NICHOLAS

Starla, stay.

Starla waits a moment before she decides to turn back to him. Berenice takes the opportunity to leave the elevator and "shoo" Alfred and Bodhi away to give Starla and Nicholas privacy.

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

I'm sorry. I was a shit to you. You deserve so much better. Lenore would be so happy to know that it's you-- please stay. I'll leave--

STARLA

Don't go.

NICHOLAS

It's okay, you don't have to say that.

Nicholas presses the button to close the doors. They won't close.

Starla decides to enter the elevator.

Door closes.

(Scene 20)

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Nicholas and Starla stand side by side, facing forward, taking up equal room in this space.

NICHOLAS

(softly)

Thank you.

He turns to her. He hesitantly reaches his hand out. She stares at it. He leaves it there. Waiting. She looks at him long and hard, then finally opens her arms out to him.

Nicholas falls into her. She is surprised and confused about what to do next...

She gently puts her hand on his back. He weeps into her shoulder. She wraps her arms around him. He grabs onto her for dear life.

THE STARS ON THE CEILING SLOWLY START TO ILLUMINATE.

They hold onto one another as Nicholas sobs.

STARS BEGIN TO SWIRL.

They both experience their newfound connection. He finally pulls away.

LIGHTS DISSOLVE BACK TO NORMAL.

Door opens.

(Scene 21)

INT. LOBBY- CONTINUOUS

Alfred, Berenice, and Bodhi are waiting. Berenice is still holding on to her urn.

BERENICE
May we come in now?

STARLA
Sure.

Berenice, Alfred, and Bodhi squeeze in.

BODHI
Is there room?

They jostle one another as they find their space.

BERENICE
Of course, there's room. It says right there--

She points to the plaque on the wall.

BERENICE (cont'd)
Maximum occupancy six. All of us and Carlo.

She presents the urn.

STARLA
Hey, I never noticed that name before. Otis.

BERENICE
And now you do.

They are on top of one another, yet it feels comfortable, like a family.

The door closes.

Elevator moves.

Elevator stops.

BERENICE (cont'd)

What's going on, Otis?

Everyone stares at Berenice.

BERENICE (cont'd)

He should be taking us back to our homes now. It's very late.

ALFRED

I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm suddenly starving.

They all talk over one another about how nice it would be to get something to eat etc...

STARLA

Me too-- I don't know the last time--

BODHI

Yeah. I'm super hungry--

BERENICE

I guess I'm feeling a bit peckish. But, I don't know what would be open at this hour-

Nicholas finally speaks.

NICHOLAS

Rosies.

They all look at him.

NICHOLAS (cont'd)

For pancakes. Peanut butter pancakes.

Starla smiles.

BERENICE

Do they allow dogs?

Everyone is stunned, then break into laughter; except for Bodhi.

ALFRED

I can carry him if you want me too.

BERENICE

No. I'd like Bodhi to take him on one last walk.

Berenice hands the urn to Alfred, it gets passed along until it reaches Bodhi.

BODHI

Come here, boy.

BERENICE

Now my hands are free.

She offers her hand to Alfred. He takes it.

Elevator moves.

Elevator stops.

Door opens.

They pile out.

BERENICE (cont'd)

Oh, there's a draft in here. I wonder if I should get a wrap?

ALFRED

I'll keep you warm.

He wraps his arm around her shoulder.

BERENICE

Oh, Alfred.

She snuggles in next to him as they make their way out Bodhi follows.

Starla realizes that Nicholas is still in the elevator.

STARLA

Nicholas?

NICHOLAS

You all go ahead.

STARLA

Nicholas.

NICHOLAS

I'll catch up with you later. Go on.

Starla hesitantly leaves.

Door closes.

(Scene 22)

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Nicholas takes a moment to himself.

He looks around the elevator.

He slowly sits down in the middle of the floor.

A warm light envelopes him.

He experiences Otis as he did when he was a child.

He finally stands up, takes a breath, steels himself, then steps out into the world and leaves.

Otis's light shines brighter and brighter...

BLACKOUT.

END