

INTRODUCTION TO THE UNNATURAL AND ACCIDENTAL WOMEN



Marie Clements is an award-winning writer, performer, and artistic director of urban ink productions. Her eight plays, including *Age of Iron*, *Now look what you made me do*, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and *Urban Tattoo*, have been produced and presented on stages across Canada, the United States and Europe, and published in a variety of anthologies and other books. Her latest play, *Burning Vision*, was commissioned by Rumble Theatre and developed in collaboration with Playwrights Workshop Montreal and produced by Rumble Theatre in association with urban ink, and it was nominated for five Jessie Awards. It was presented at the prestigious Festival des Ameriques in Montreal and the Magnetic North Festival, Ottawa, Spring 2003. *Burning Vision* and *Copper Thunderbird* (a commission by Les Ondinnok Theatre) have evolved over the last two years through writer's residences at Rumble Theatre, Playwrights Workshop Montreal, The National Theatre School, Banff Playwrights Colony and Firehall Arts Centre. In 2002, Marie worked in the writing department of the television series "Davinci's Inquest," and she is currently working on the film adaptation of her stage play, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* through a fellowship with the BC Film commission.

The Unnatural and Accidental Women is a stunning, complex, and multi-layered piece of theatre, drawing upon a range of forms, genres, and media that extend from fairy tale and legend through political documentary to filmic quotations, musical numbers, call-and-response, stand-up, and sit-com. It is in turn wildly funny, horrific, warm, sensual, and celebratory, all in service of a powerful political critique that links overarching Native, feminist, environmental, anti-colonial, and class-based concerns with a specific and localized attack on systemic racism and sexism in a justice system that has consistently turned its back on the serial murder of women in Vancouver's downtown eastside since the mid 1960s. Her focus here is on a series of murders committed there between 1965 and 1987, all by the same man using the same *modus operandi*. His victims' deaths were nevertheless astonishingly ruled by the coroner, and reported in the press, to be "unnatural and accidental," finding "no evidence of violence or suspicion of foul play." What perhaps sets this play apart, however, is the way in which it offers a trenchant critique of state neglect and tacit approval of gendered and raced violence while at the same time celebrating the women, not as victims, but as vibrant, sensual, funny, and life-affirming individuals (even after death), and members of a loosely defined but deeply interconnected community of women. That community is perhaps best represented by Rose, one of the murdered woman and a kind of spectral telephone operator who stitches together the play's action simply by doing her job: "I am in between people," she says, "connecting."

There is something maternal about it, the wanting to help, the trying, going through the motions on the switchboard, but in the end just being there always it seems, just listening to the voices looking for connection, an eternal connection between women's voices and worlds.

363, 375, 388-9, 391-2, 423, 424,
425,

The Unnatural and Accidental Women is also at once poetic, spiritual, and fanciful while remaining firmly grounded in its downtown eastside landscape and in the history of Vancouver, from the loggers' skid roads to the present day Skid Row, from trees to hotels, tree stumps to bar stools. The play is most obviously structured as a transformational collage, in which scenes blend and bend into one another with astonishing fluidity (as do people and furniture, material and spiritual realms), modelling transformation as at once a natural process and a template for change. All of this is grounded in what might be seen as a quest narrative, except that Rebecca's search for clarity and for her Native mother, "Aunt Shadie," is shadowed and complicated by Aunt Shadie's simultaneous search for Rebecca as the mixed-race daughter she had abandoned twenty years earlier to save her from seeing Native women the way her white father did – "the way white people look up and down without seeing you – like you are not worthy of seeing. Extinct, like a ghost." But Aunt Shadie really is a ghost now, one of the murdered women that form the play's central community and drive its other grounding structure, that of revenge tragedy. Like that of the Senecan tragedies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the action of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* is prompted by murders that cry out for revenge, and like them its action is initiated and witnessed by a chorus of revenants. Unlike those sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramas, however, the mood of this play's conclusion is celebratory rather than tragic, and the feast with which it ends is neither grotesque nor horrific, but healing, as the fulfillment of the quest and the achievement of revenge come together in a ritual "first supper – not to be confused with the last supper." Finally, as if these structural components—post-modern collage, pre-modern quest narrative, and early modern revenge tragedy—were not enough, the whole is framed and given extra depth and resonance by the story of the land, the tide, the wind, and the trees – the landscape from which the play emerged at the outset, and to which it returns at the conclusion.

CHARACTERS

REBECCA (ages 4 and 30): Mixed blood/Native – a writer searching for the end of a story.

ROSE (age 52): English immigrant – a switchboard operator with a soft heart, but thorny.

AUNT SHADIE (age 52): Native – mother qualities of strength, humour, love, patience.

MAVIS (age 42): Native – a little slow from the butt down, but stubborn in life and memory.

THE WOMAN (age 27): Native – looks and moves like a deer.

VALERIE (age 33): Native – a big beautiful woman proud of her parts.

VERNA (age 38): Native – sarcastic but searching to do the right thing, the right way.

VIOLET (ages 27 and 5): Mixed blood/Afro-Canadian – an old spirit who grows younger to see herself again.

The Barbershop Women: **MARILYN** (age 25): Native. **PENNY** (age 30): Native. **PATSY** (age 40): Native. A beautiful, sexy threesome that can move and sing.

THE BARBER (ages 30s and 60s): White – short, balding, nice and creepy.

THE LOGGER, THE MAN, THE ROMANTIC PARTNER, THE PILLOW, THE DRESSER, THE MAN'S SHADOW, THE AIRLINE STEWARD.

RON (age 35): A cop – handsome, with a nice body and a good sense of humour.

SFX voices: **EVAN** (age 8): Valerie's oldest son, wise and angry. **TOMMY** (age 5): Valerie's youngest son, naive and sweet. **THE OPERATOR:** A polite but repetitive telephone recording. **FATHERLY MALE VOICE:** The Woman's adopted father. **"Can I buy you a drink?":** The Barber's Voice.

SETTING

ACT ONE: Scenes involving the women should have a black-and-white picture feel that is animated by the bleeding-in of colour as the scene and their imaginations unfold. Colours of personality and spirit, life and isolation, paint their reality and activate their own particular landscape within their own particular hotel room and world. Their deaths are a drowning-down of hopes, despairs, wishes. The killer is a manipulative embodiment of their human need. Levels, rooms, views, perspectives, shadow, light, voices, memories, desires. Rebecca's journey through Act One should be a growing up through memory. Being in a memory, but present in time. Walking. Seeing. Time going by. Life – colour of memory and the searching. Aunt Shadie and Rose are on the top level from the beginning. In their own spaces and places. They are in their own world. Happy hunting ground and/or heaven. Elements: Trees falling, falling of women, earth, water flowing/transforming.

ACT TWO: Scenes in Rebecca's apartment are present and in Kitsilano, but reflect the symptoms of urban isolation even without being on Hastings Street. Flow: Scenes of hearing, shadow-seeing, consciousness, unconsciousness of what is around us/within us.

THE UNNATURAL AND ACCIDENTAL WOMEN

MARIE CLEMENTS

DEATH BY ALCOHOL THE VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 22, 1988

"She was found lying nude on her bed and had recent bruises on her scalp, nose, lips, and chin.... There was no evidence of violence, or suspicion of foul play," noted Coroner Glen McDonald.

"...a native Indian, had been drinking continuously for four days before she died.... Coroner Larry Campbell concluded her death was 'unnatural and accidental.'"

"...drank enough to kill her twice. That's the conclusion of a coroner's inquiry into the native Indian woman's death. She was found dead, lying face down on a foam mattress with a blanket covering her, in Jordon's barbershop.... At the time of her death, Coroner Campbell said there was no indication of foul play."

"To get the blood-alcohol reading that... had at the time of her death, experts say she would have had to drink about 40 ounces of hard liquor all at once. The mother of four died at Jordon's barbershop.... Coroner Mary Lou Glazier concluded... death was 'unnatural and accidental.'"

"She had the highest blood level-alcohol reading of all the women.' ...He believes Jordon was finally stopped because he killed his daughter, who was not an alcoholic and who has family that insisted police look into her death. 'He picked the wrong person. She was someone that someone cares about.' ...No coroner's report has been issued."

ACT ONE

SFX: A collage of trees whispering in the wind.

SLIDE: THE UNNATURAL AND ACCIDENTAL WOMEN

SFX: The sound of a tree opening up to a split. A loud crack – a haunting gasp for air that is suspended. The sustained sound of suspension as the tree teeters.

SLIDE: FALLING BACK – Beacon Hotel

Lights dim up on a small room covered with the shadows of tree leaves and limbs. Lights up on a LOGGER looking up at a tree, handsaw in hand. He shouts across time.

LOGGER

TIM-BER...

AUNT SHADIE

Re-becca...

A big woman suddenly emerges from a bed of dark leaves. Gasping, she bolts upright, unfallen. Nude, she rises leaving the image of herself in the bed. She follows the sounds and images of the trees.

SLIDE: Rita Louise James, 52, died November 10, 1978 with a 0.12 blood alcohol reading. No coroner's report issued.

SFX: Real sound of REBECCA slamming a glass of beer on her table.

SFX: The sound of trees moving in the wind increases.

SLIDE: TIMBER

Lights fade up on REBECCA as she sits, and thinks, and drinks at a round table with a red terry cloth cover. She takes her pen and writes in her journal.

The LOGGER continues sawing...

SFX: Sound of a long saw sawing under softly in lengths.

AUNT SHADIE walks through the forest, covered by the leaves/branches, in them.

REBECCA

Everything here has been falling – a hundred years of trees have fallen from the sky's grace. They laid on their backs trying to catch their breath as the loggers connected them to anything that could move, and moved them, creating a long muddy path where the ends of trees scraped the ground, whispering their last connection to the earth. This whispering left a skid. A skid mark. A row. Skid Row.

The LOGGER lays down his saw and picks up a chain saw...

SFX: Sound of a chain saw under.

Throughout – a blizzard of sawdust chips swarms the backdrop, covering AUNT SHADIE and tree parts. One by one, the trees have been carved into a row of hotels.

Hotels sprung up instead of trees – to make room for the loggers. First, young men sweating and working under the sky's grace. They worked. They sweated. They fed their family for the Grace of God. And then the men began to fall. First, just pieces.

AUNT SHADIE

Fingers...

REBECCA

...chopped down to the palm.

AUNT SHADIE

Legs...

REBECCA

...chopped up to the thighs.

AUNT SHADIE

Years...

REBECCA

...went by. You never knew what might be fallen. A tree. A man. Or, a tree on its way down deciding to lay on its faller like a thick and humourous lover, saying...

AUNT SHADIE

"Honey, I love you – we are both in this together. This is love till death do us part – just try and crawl out from under me."

REBECCA

Some of the men survived their amorous lover. Rows of men sweet-talked that last fallen tree into moving an inch to get that human limb out. Maybe just a leg – or part of it. Whispering...

AUNT SHADIE

"God, if you just do this for me. Jesus, just get this log off me... and..."

REBECCA

Well, a whole crew of men sitting in their rooms drinking and thinking of the weight of that last tall love.

The LOGGER finishes, looks around and looks right at REBECCA.

REBECCA mouths "I love you" to him silently.

The LOGGER cups his ear and shouts towards her.

LOGGER

Eh? (*He waves his hand "never mind" and continues.*)

REBECCA

Saying "Eh?"

The LOGGER continues the buzz with the chain saw. Wood chips blizzard on the backdrop. The chain saw buzzes under transforming to a bar saw.

AUNT SHADIE

(laughs) Saying "Eh?" a lot. Could you repeat that? Their voices yelling over the sound of the power saw buzzing thirty years ago, or was it last year? Never mind, the buzz rings in their ears just as the sawdust used to rest in their belly buttons after a hard day's work. Honest work. A tree for...

REBECCA

...a thumb.

AUNT SHADIE

A tree for a...

REBECCA

...leg.

AUNT SHADIE

A tree for their...

REBECCA

...hearing.

AUNT SHADIE

An honest trade made between a logger and his trees. No malice between the two – just an honest respect for the give and take of nature.

SFX: The full buzz of a bar under.

The woodchip blizzard clears, and crudely made stumps that look like bar stools remain behind her and deepen the look of the bar – The Empress Hotel. AUNT SHADIE walks across the bar but is also covered by it, in it.

REBECCA

Now the loggers sit like their lovers, the trees – they sit like stumps, and drink, and think. And think the world has gone to shit. They think of a time when cutting down a tree was an honest job, a time when they all had their good-looking limbs, a time when they were respected by the tallest order, a time when drinking was not an addiction.

AUNT SHADIE turns up a flight of stairs as we watch her shadow ascend.

AUNT SHADIE

And the woman. Oh the women strolled by and took in their young sun-baked muscles and happy cash.

REBECCA turns back to her journal.

REBECCA

If you sit long enough, maybe everything becomes clear. Maybe you can make sense of all the losses and find one thing you can hold on to. I'm sitting here thinking of everything that has passed, everyone that is gone, and hoping I can find her, my mother. Not because she is my first choice, but because she is my last choice and... my world has gone to shit.

She looks around the room and raises her glass.

Cheers...

Lights up on the same hotel room, as AUNT SHADIE takes two old suitcases out from under her bed. She lays them out on the bed and opens them slowly, hesitantly. Cree words spill out everywhere. She opens and closes the sound and begins to laugh. Affectionately, she snaps them shut, picks them up and walks towards the door and up. The suitcases get heavier and heavier as she rises.

SLIDE: THE SWITCHBOARD – Reception

AUNT SHADIE walks towards small lights that fade up and down. As she approaches, lights fade up on the back of ROSE sitting at her switchboard. Her lobby is a 1960s hotel. ROSE is dressed conservatively in 1960s attire. The switchboard beeps and lights. She connects throughout. AUNT SHADIE buffs herself forward.

AUNT SHADIE

Excuse me.

ROSE

(not looking at her) Can I help you?

AUNT SHADIE

Yeah sure. I'm looking for a place to leave my baggage for awhile.

ROSE

I'm sorry, I can't do that.

AUNT SHADIE

Why, because I'm In...

ROSE

...naked. Yes, that's it. You'll have to register first. I can't be taking just anybody's baggage now, can I? Can you write your name?

AUNT SHADIE

Listen, I'm naked not stupid.

ROSE

Oh. Well, I'm just trying to help you people out.

AUNT SHADIE

Why don't you look at me when you say that?

ROSE turns slowly around revealing a black eye and bruises on her face.

Wow, they sure dragged you through it.

ROSE

Humph. (*ROSE looks away from AUNT SHADIE's nakedness.*)

AUNT SHADIE

Haven't you ever seen anybody nude before ?

ROSE

Not up front.

AUNT SHADIE

I'm not sure if I should feel sorry for you or not. Well, I went to bed wearing clothes, and then I woke up naked as a jailbird.

ROSE

I woke up naked once.

AUNT SHADIE

What, a million years ago?

ROSE

Pardon me?

AUNT SHADIE

I said, good for you.

ROSE

Aren't you cold?

AUNT SHADIE

Of course, I'm cold.

ROSE

Here, put this on.

ROSE takes a big beige cardigan from her chair and hands it to her.

AUNT SHADIE

Now I feel ugly.

ROSE

It's from England.

AUNT SHADIE

Like I said, now I feel ugly.

ROSE

It's the same one the Queen wore on her inaugural visit to Canada.

AUNT SHADIE

Like I said, ugly. (*looking at the sweater*) Ugly. For a Queen, you'd think she'd dress better. It's almost like she's punishing herself. If I had all her money, I wouldn't be wearing all those dowdy dresses. Just once I'd like her to wear a colour. Something not beige or plaid. Something blue maybe. Something that gives her colour: Red!

ROSE

Mothers of countries do not wear red.

AUNT SHADIE

She's a mother alright. Always did love those white gloves though. They remind me of white swans, especially when she waves. It's kinda pretty actually.

ROSE

My mother always wore gloves. She used to say a lady wasn't a lady unless she wore gloves.

AUNT SHADIE

Hmm. My mother wore mitts. They were white though, and furry. Big rabbit mitts. When my mother waved, it wasn't so much pretty as it was sad.

ROSE

Waving can be sad.

AUNT SHADIE waves like a queen.

Where you going?

AUNT SHADIE

I'm dying for a smoke.

ROSE

What about registering?

ROSE watches as AUNT SHADIE signs her name.

Rita Louise James.

AUNT SHADIE

There, you satisfied?

ROSE

Just doing my job.

AUNT SHADIE

What's that?

ROSE

I'm taking account.

AUNT SHADIE

Reminds me of the government. Taking count but not accountable.

She picks up her suitcases and begins to leave.

ROSE

You're going like that?

AUNT SHADIE

(looks down on herself) Why not?

ROSE

You sure you don't want me to find you some pants?

AUNT SHADIE

It's alright. There's a good draft...

ROSE

Oh please.

AUNT SHADIE

...and frankly, if the pants look anything like the cardigan, I might as well be dead.

ROSE

Suit yourself.

AUNT SHADIE

I always have.

AUNT SHADIE keeps on walking. Lights fade on ROSE. AUNT SHADIE stops and sits on her suitcases. She reaches inside one of them and pulls out a pack of tobacco and rolls a cigarette. She reaches in and picks up an outfit from when she was a housewife. She smells the material and closes her eyes in memory. The

clothes talk to her and she to them. She drapes them over her body and smokes her thinking smoke. Lights fade leaving a bright butt and smoke rising up.

SLIDE: Rose Doreen Holmes, 52, died January 27, 1965, with a 0.51 blood alcohol reading. "Coroner's inquiry reported she was found nude on her bed and had recent bruises on her scalp, nose, lips and chin. There was no evidence of violence, or suspicion of foul play."

Lights fade up on ROSE, as she affectionately touches her switchboard. It responds with light flashes and beeps and muffled voices.

ROSE

I've always been right here. No matter where I am, I am in between people connecting. I like to think I'm the one who connects them, but mostly I like to think that they have to go through me. If nothing else, it gives me a place. A place in the making, the flashes of being... the feeling of feeding that beeping energy into a whole that understands it, and soothes it, into a gentle darkness. A small whimper when it enters – a connection between the here and there – a giant light it becomes. It begins and ends with the beeping, but it goes through me. I wait for the cry like a mother listening, hoping to slot the right thing into its void – hoping to be the one to bring about the pure answer. Again, the pure gentle darkness that says I have listened and you were lovely, no matter how loud your beeping cry becomes, no matter how many times I wanted to help but couldn't. There is something maternal about it, the wanting to help, the trying, going through the motions on the switchboard, but in the end just being there always it seems just listening to voices looking for connection, an eternal connection between women's voices and worlds.

ROSE leans over and nosily watches AUNT SHADIE enter REBECCA's world.

Everybody always thinks that the switchboard operator is listening in to their conversations, and they're not always wrong. The tricky thing is to act like you don't know a thing. I swear on the Queen, it's a tricky thing.

AUNT SHADIE enters dressed as a young housewife. She is carrying her suitcases and a folded piece of paper. She sets the suitcases down and places a paper on the table. She turns to leave, but stops as REBECCA picks it up.

SLIDE: RUNNING SHOES

SFX: Sound of wind in the trees.

Backdrop gradually brings in close-ups of Hastings Street when it was the centre of shopping. The Army and Navy, Woolworth's – late 1960s/70s.

REBECCA

My dad – The Character was still full-limbed but hard-of-hearing when he died. Still asking “Eh?” after every sentence I spoke, but quick to hear the sound of change falling to the ground. Death was no big surprise for him. The thing he couldn’t get out from under was the day she left. I found him holding a piece of paper she had put on the kitchen table. He held it for a long time and then simply folded it and put it in his pocket. “Where’s Mom?” I asked.

SFX: Sound of tree falling and landing.

He said, “She went for a walk.” I thought maybe she had gone to the IGA or something. Somebody was always having to go to the IGA. When she didn’t return and he didn’t move, I started complaining about the big fact that I was supposed to get new running shoes today. I was supposed to go downtown today. I was supposed to get a hamburger today... milkshakes, fries and ketchup at Woolworth’s. It was supposed to have been a great day, and now we had to wait. I was getting pissed off, because I was getting tired of going to The Salvation Army for smelly clothes, and I felt like I was gonna be normal like everyone else when Mom said we could go to The Army and Navy and get something new, something that smelled good, something that nobody had ever worn. Blue suede running shoes – three stripes on either side. I had to have them. It was unbearable, and my dad just standing there, and my mom deciding to go to IGA. I thought it was a master plan. Both of them against me being normal. I started yelling – the injustice too great. My dad just stood there like he didn’t hear anything. “Get in the truck,” he said. We went. I ate hamburgers and floats and fries and everything I could see in the posters of food on the walls of the Woodworth’s cafeteria on Hastings Street. We went to The Army and Navy. We went home. No Mom. Again.

“Where’s Mom?” again. He said, “She left us. I didn’t know anything was wrong.” He sat down. I took my running shoes off. I would never wear them again. Nothing was going to be normal.

REBECCA takes the running shoes off and kicks them. AUNT SHADIE turns around and silently picks them up, putting them properly under her chair. She exits. Fade out.

SFX: Sound of car streams, transforming into the tide.

SLIDE: FOUR DAYS: DAY 1 – Glenaird Hotel

SFX: Sound of tide hitting the edge of the island/bed.

The hotel room is an ocean of blue. The bed an island. The lone woman sits on her island. She is wet and holds a white pillow that shapes her different needs. The comfort of a child, a lover. The woman reaches over and grabs a drink from

the table beside her. She places it down and in... in her own drinking rhythm. The ocean gets deeper in its colour.

Rhythms of a drinking room: 1) Tide – Time. 2) Light vs. Shadow. 3) Drinking Rhythm.

SFX: Sound of the tide begins to increase and finally sprays to telephone static.

SLIDE: I’M SCARED TO DIE I

A click of light on. MAVIS sits in a huge beaten-up armchair. Her hotel room matches the chair. It is beaten and slightly tinged with hues of brown. As she sits, MAVIS leafs through her address book looking and reminiscing about each entry. She urgently picks up the phone and dials. A light flashes up on the switchboard, and we hear ROSE speak in the darkness.

MAVIS

Hi, Mona? It’s me.

SFX: Weird static and otherworldly connection.

ROSE

I’m sorry, you’ve reached the operator.

MAVIS

The operator? I didn’t want any operator. I dialed the numbers myself. I’m more than capable of calling a long-distance number.

ROSE

I’m sure you are. At any rate, you’ve reached the operator. (*very polite*) Can... I... help... you?

MAVIS

Well, I guess if you’re just sitting on your ass you could put me through – save me the time of letting my fingers do the walking.

ROSE

I’m sorry, I can’t do that.

MAVIS

Are you gonna help me or not?

ROSE

Well, to be honest... no one’s ever reached me on the phone before, and I just don’t know if it’s house policy or not.

MAVIS

What kind of house are you in where people call and you don’t help them?

ROSE

Don't raise your voice to me. I'm just following rules.

MAVIS

Whose rules?

ROSE

Management.

MAVIS

(covers the receiver with her hand) Bitch!

ROSE

Pardon me?

MAVIS

I said, isn't that rich.

ROSE

I'll put this call through just this once as a special favour, but this is highly unusual.

MAVIS

Sure... whatever.

SFX: Sound of real telephone connection.

(ring) Hi, Mona. I just thought... *(ring)* ...got to thinking of you and thought I'd call. Actually, I just thought I'd call cause *(ring)* I wondered if you and Bill might be coming into town sometime. You know, change of scenery and all... *(ring)* Doing good here, though *(ring)* just would be nice to hear your voice. I'll try back later, okay? *(ring)* We'll talk about all sorts of things. What I need is a good laugh. *(ring)* You know, a laugh so hard liquid comes from your nose like that time.... *(ring)* Well, anyways, here I am going on.... Just would be nice to talk about some old times maybe. *(ring)* I'd like that. I'd... like... that...

She slowly places the receiver to her chest.

SFX: Sound of telephone ringing empty.

MAVIS looks back at her address book. Picks it up, and begins tracing names and thinking on each entry. Lights fade.

SFX: The telephone starts to buzz like a chainsaw under.

SLIDE: REBECCA – Hastings Street

The backdrop gives us a close-up of Pigeon Square. The buildings become smaller like stumps of logs. REBECCA sits at her table drinking. She holds a harmonica in her hand.

SFX: Sound of harmonica takes over the buzz of the chainsaw.

When she hears the sound of the harmonica, she gets up. A man enters and sits on one of the stumps. He watches her.

REBECCA

I'm dancing in Pigeon Square. It's not a dream, it's a memory. I'm four years old, and I don't have to ask why they call it Pigeon Square. There's pigeon shit everywhere. At four a genius... I know. A row of old men sitting like stumps... smoking, laughing, tilting their heads back in a chuckle or a slug of rum. They are talking to The Character – my dad. He's playing the harmonica. I'm pretending I'm a dancer. We don't know who's pretending more. Me, or him. But my feet are hitting the squares like I know what I'm doing, and he's hitting all the notes they can hear. They take their pennies out and splash them down around my dancing feet. The coppers fall... it is the most beautiful sound you can imagine, because you see I am very special, and talented, and the "poor bastards," as my father would say, are happy, clapping. I bow. My dad takes my hand. We say goodbye. Some of them touch my cheek like they remember a daughter, some smile and wave a mitt, not a glove...

The man finishes clapping, and reaches up to her..

...and one reaches his glove to surround my braid. My dad – The Character, takes his hand and says to the man in the clearest logger voice "I could kill you" "Enough." The man lets go of my braid. My father, in the clearest voice "I love you" squishes my shoulder in a hug and says, "It's time to get the chain for the power saw. It should be fixed by now."

REBECCA turns back to the table and takes a drink. The man gets up and leaves.

It should be fixed by now.

SFX: Sound of rhythmic clapping echoes, and start of laughing.

SLIDE: THE BARBERSHOP QUARTET 1 – Barbershop

SFX: The real sound of a man laughing drunkenly.

Lights up on the interior of a barbershop. It is old and worse for wear. Mirrors reflect back. MARILYN sits in one of the barber chairs, her back to us. Her hair flows over the back of the chair as the BARBER cleans and preps his utensils. He exits briefly. MARILYN looks closely into the mirror, as a reflection of

herself as MARILYN à la Farrah Fawcett looks back at her, becoming larger and more beautiful in the mirror. MARILYN à la Farrah Fawcett begins to sing softly. She enjoys her hair dream. The BARBER enters dressed in hyper whites and drapes a white cape over her, and her hair dream. He turns the barber light on, and it begins to slowly rotate – a red and white swirl. He places a bottle between her legs and tenderly begins to braid her hair in one long braid. He suddenly grabs her braid roughly and takes his scissors to cut it. She grabs it back in a tug of war.

MARILYN

Enough.

He leans over her and grabs the bottle. He brings it to her lips tenderly. She drinks. It spills.

BARBER

Down the hatch, baby.
Twenty bucks if you drink it right down.
Down the hatch, baby.
Right down – finish it right down.

She gulps and they laugh. He starts to twirl the barber chair faster and faster.

Fade out.

SLIDE: ROOM 23, WHEN YOU'RE 33 – Clifton Hotel

Lights up on an old beat-up room. It is animated by an old DRESSER with an ugly personality. Small and battered, it has three drawers with a mirror on the top. VALERIE stands in front of the mirror thinking about 23-year-old tits and adjusting her tits in her shirt.

DRESSER

You have a nice set.

VALERIE

Oh, shut up.

DRESSER

Really.

VALERIE

Why... don't... you... shut up?

DRESSER

Why don't you make me?

VALERIE

Just shut your drawers.

DRESSER

Make me.

She takes her shirt off and is trying to get her bra off. It's stubborn.

VALERIE

If I have to tell you again, you're gonna get it.

DRESSER

Get what?

VALERIE

A big fat punch in the chest.

DRESSER

Valerie. Pick a drawer – any drawer.

The DRESSER displays each drawer.

VALERIE

Pick it yourself. Can't you see I'm busy here?

DRESSER

Too busy to pick a drawer.

VALERIE

Too busy to pick my nose.

DRESSER

Too busy to pick your ass.

VALERIE

Too busy to pick your ass.

They laugh.

DRESSER

Pick a drawer.

VALERIE

What do I get?

DRESSER

What do you want?

VALERIE

Nice lingerie.

DRESSER

What colour?

VALERIE

Red.

DRESSER

What do I get?

VALERIE

You get to watch me put it on.

DRESSER

Maybe you're not my type.

VALERIE

Eeeee – an uppity dresser. I got a real problem if you're my type, don't I? What is your type, old squat one?

DRESSER

A tall chest with two big knobs.

VALERIE

You're a pig of a dresser.

DRESSER

You're a pig.

VALERIE

Come over here and say that.

DRESSER

You come over here and say that.

VALERIE

Pig!

DRESSER

Whore!

VALERIE

I'll knock your drawers off.

DRESSER

Why don't you just get my drawers off?

VALERIE

That's no way to talk to a lady.

DRESSER

What lady? I don't see any LAY-DEE.

The mirror of the DRESSER starts to reflect a man's face.

VALERIE

And I don't see any-BODY. So shut up!

DRESSER

Okay, baby. Okay. Do you want to see what's in my drawers?

VALERIE

Probably skid marks.

DRESSER

Come on, baby... take a peek.... Come on, baby. That's it, baby.

She draws closer to the top drawer. It slides open slowly. She leans over to look in. A hand comes out and squeezes her tit.

VALERIE

Fuckin pig!

DRESSER

Let go! You fuckin whore!

She squeezes the drawer on his hand.

VALERIE

Say Valerie is the prettiest one of them all.

DRESSER

Val-er-ie is the pretti-est? ...CHUG of them all.

VALERIE

That's a bad dresser.

She squeezes the drawer harder on his hand. He screams.

DRESSER

Valerie is the prettiest lay-dee of them all.

VALERIE

And smart.

DRESSER

...and smart.

VALERIE

And she still has a great set of tits.

DRESSER

...and she still has a great set of tits.

She lets go of his hand, and it sbrinks back into the drawer. She turns.

VALERIE

I had two sons, you know... and I still have great tits.

DRESSER

Yah, you're a regular Hollywood dairy cow.

VALERIE

What did you say?

DRESSER

I said, you're a real Pocahontas.

VALERIE

Fuck you.

DRESSER

WHORE!

VALERIE

PIG!

She kicks him in the drawers. He groans. He moves towards her, they wrestle, and fall on the floor wrestling. Fade out.

SFX: Sound of the tide. A slower rhythm.

SLIDE: FOUR DAYS: DAY 2 – Glenaird Hotel

It is dark. The woman stands on her bed/island and clicks on the light hanging from the ceiling. A pillow is propped up like a person next to her. The light of the light bulb sways slowly, back and forth. As she listens, she lifts the drink to her mouth and places it down slowly in her drinking rhythm. Repeats gesture, listening

SFX: Voiceover – a fatherly male voice.

VOICE

"Once upon a time, a very long time ago, there was a deer who lost its mother, because someone shot its mother. Something like the story of Bambi, except that the little fawn was adopted by a human family that

loved it. And then someone said that the fawn that grew to a deer should be with its own kind, so the father of the human family, who lived on the mainland, took a ferry and dropped the deer on an island miles away and hoped it would be happier. Well, the deer wasn't happy without the only family it had ever known, and it swam all the way back to its human family, and everything was going great, everything was going great, until it ate some lettuce from the neighbour's garden, and the neighbour shot it dead."

Rhythms of a drinking room: 1) Tide – Time. 2) Light vs. Shadow. 3) Drinking Rhythm. 4) Conversations – recent and past.

The hanging light stills. Fade out.

SFX: Sound of tide blends into the electronic sound of static.

SLIDE: I'M SCARED TO DIE II

Lights fade up on MAVIS sitting in her chair. She sits in the exact same spot and manner. She is leafing through her address book. She finds a name and stops and smiles. Slowly, she runs her hand over herself, not so much sexually but as if remembering sex. She picks up the phone and dials him. Lights fade up on ROSE's switchboard.

MAVIS

Hello, John... it's me...

ROSE

It's me, Rose – your operator. What number were you calling?

MAVIS

This is an emergency, if you have to know. Big Nose.

ROSE

You don't have to be rude – I was just trying to be helpful. I have a very demanding job, and I don't need this static from you...

MAVIS

Well, I have a lot better things to do than talking to people I didn't want to talk to.

ROSE

Listen, Madame.

MAVIS

Don't use that tone with me.

ROSE

Don't think that all I do all day is sit on my big fanny and wait for people to talk to me like this – people who have no appreciation for the fine art of communication.

MAVIS

It gets pretty damn bad when you can't even make a phone call without having a conversation with someone you don't want to talk to. Nose.

ROSE

And about that nose business. I don't have a big nose. If the facts be known, I have quite a fine upturned nose, and if you're referring to the fact that I asked you who you were calling – well, that has nothing to do with nosiness and everything to do with...

MAVIS

I'm asking you for nothing – but for you – to *shut up* – and put me through to who I need to talk to – and not have to go through – this talk... talk... talk. Cluck.... Cluck.... Cluck...

ROSE

Practically every time I pick up the phone...

MAVIS

...like a goddamn BEAKY chicken!

A long, hurt silence.

ROSE

I'll thank you very much to refrain from making comments about my features.

MAVIS

Don't think that just because you use bigger words than me and you went to reception school or something, that makes you better than me.

ROSE

I'm just doing my job, and that's all you can ask out of anybody – is a person do the job they were meant to do, and I try to do my job a million times a day.

MAVIS

Like you know it all, when you don't know me and you don't give a damn how I'm feeling or what I'm worried about or why I can't get off my ass and just leave my room.

ROSE

...a million times a day.

MAVIS

I'm so scared I can't move.

ROSE

...a million times a day..

MAVIS

I can't breathe.

ROSE

I get this static a million times a day..

MAVIS

I listen.

ROSE

...times a day..

MAVIS

I cry.

ROSE

...from the static of nothing.

MAVIS

A million times a day.

ROSE

I want...

MAVIS

I reach out for it.

ROSE

...and nothing.

ROSE plugs her through. A surprising click for everyone.

SFX: Voiceover – "I'm sorry, the number you have reached has been disconnected. Please call your operator..."

MAVIS tries to talk over the recording as if nothing is wrong.

MAVIS

Hey, John. It's me. Remember me? Mavis. Mavis Gertrude Jones. Played baseball real good. You know, you used to say I had the best arm on the team. You know, you used to say I was the smartest person you'd ever met, because I was always reading those *Britannica Encyclopedias* with the letters

on them. You used to say I had the best body in town – just kidding... and a pretty good bannock maker too. The queen of bannock making.

SFX: Voiceover – “I’m sorry, the number you have reached has been disconnected. Please call your operator and...”

I miss your smile. I remembered your smile the other day. Going into a piece of that bread and coming out all greasy, with butter and lard – all sassy. You could always make me smile... make me feel safe with those big brown arms of yours. John? Anyways, I remembered those big arms of yours, and I was thinking I’d really like to borrow them for a few weeks. I know, that seems silly, but I’d really like to have that feeling with me right now. Just until I can get away from this feeling. Shake it away with your big arms wrapped right around me. John? John.

Arms of the brown armchair extend like real arms and curl around her. She hugs them and love-coos in comfort.

Thank you, John. You always were sweet to me. Sweet Johnnie.

She love-coos to herself and Johnnie’s arms, and finally falls asleep.

SFX: Soft sound of pigeons cooing grows underneath.

Pigeon wings mix and blur and land on the backdrop behind. AUNT SHADIE slowly emerges from them and walks towards REBECCA’s table. She sits down silently.

SLIDE: WHITE BIRDS – Hastings Street

The Huge “W” of the Woodward’s building is brightly lit red and appears above it all.

REBECCA

My mother. I see her in half-looks everywhere. I call it seeing the white bird look. This white is not the colour of skin, but the flutter of hope.

Women’s white birds. Sometimes you witness it, and it makes you cry. Sometimes I see it across a coupled room, and when I do see it – I see my mother’s chin bending down limp to her chest.

A young AUNT SHADIE’s chin drops down to her chest. REBECCA looks in her direction.

Not to look at me, though the crease in her neck makes it possible for her to look at me, with tenderness, or to look at her man with tenderness, or to look at anything smaller than her, with tenderness. But to bend that long neck down, till her beak reaches her collar bone, and sits for a long time

before it comes up. It sits so long, you ask: “What’s wrong, Mom? What’s wrong?”

AUNT SHADIE doesn’t answer.

So long that your heart starts to beat, because something is wrong, so wrong, and nobody will speak. Not your dad – The Character, who spoke words and made this bird-killing silence.... And finally, she lifts her head... finally she lifts her head, but something is gone. Something dead sits in her eyes, and rests itself on the tone of her voice, when my dad – The Character asks, irritated: “Jesus, Rita. What’s wrong now?”

AUNT SHADIE raises her chin slowly. Smiles faintly.

She slowly smiles oddly. “Nothing.” My dad – The Character continues talking, as if nothing has died. But I saw it flutter and die. “Are you alright, Mom? Mom?”

AUNT SHADIE rises and slowly walks away.

She is silent, and gets up and walks to the washroom, or we leave the restaurant, or she goes to the other room, and that hope dies without him even knowing it had anything to do with him. A man kills enough. A woman keeps on walking.

REBECCA gets up and watches her leave.

SLIDE: SWITCHBOARD – Reception

Lights up on AUNT SHADIE as she arrives at the reception counter. She is putting trapper clothes over her young housewife clothes. She leans on the reception counter, putting on a parka and rabbit mitts. ROSE’s face is no longer bruised. AUNT SHADIE lays the sweater on the desk.

AUNT SHADIE

Thanks for the sweater.

ROSE

You’re welcome, Rita.

AUNT SHADIE

You’re welcome, Rose. Call me Aunt Shadie. Everybody else does.

ROSE

Alright, Aunt Shadie. Where did you get the clothes?

AUNT SHADIE

I found them in my baggage.

AUNT SHADIE begins to leave.

ROSE

Nice gloves.

AUNT SHADIE

Mitts.

She looks proudly at her mitts.

I used to be a real good trapper when I was young. You wouldn't believe it now that I'm such a city girl, but before when my legs and body were young and muscular, I could go forever. Walking those traplines with snowshoes. The sun coming down sprinkling everything with crystals, some floating down, and dusting that white comforter with magic. I would walk that trapline like a map, knowing every turn, every tree, every curve the land uses to confuse us. I felt like I was part of the magic, that wasn't confused. The crystals sticking to the cold, and the cold sticking to my black hair, my eyebrows, my clothes, my breath. A trap set. An animal caught. Red. If it squirmed, I would take my rifle and shoot it as fast as I could. Poor thing. I hate to see an animal suffer. *Meegwetch*, and thank you.

ROSE

It sounds barbaric.

AUNT SHADIE

Shopping at the Woodward's food floor is barbaric. You never know what you are eating. Even if it says ground hamburger meat on the package, how do you know it is ground hamburger? What is ground ham-burger? And why do they have to grind it? Everybody just eats it. No one questions where it came from. Must be the big hamburger animal. That big "W" in the sky doesn't stand for Woodward's, but for "what." WHAT did I just eat?

ROSE takes out a pair of long, white gloves and puts them on.

ROSE

I like that swan metaphor.

AUNT SHADIE

The what for? Swans are the great hamburger animal?

ROSE

Don't be silly. Gloves look like swans.

AUNT SHADIE

Well, actually, if I was to really think about it... probably more like skinned rabbit mitts.

ROSE

I like the swans.

AUNT SHADIE

Did you ever feel like hugging a swan?

ROSE

Yes, I have.

AUNT SHADIE

You? You have hugged a swan.

ROSE

Yes, I have. I have an appreciation for animals too, you know.

AUNT SHADIE

No, I mean. I'm sure you do in your own polite way, but... a swan.

ROSE

It felt good.

AUNT SHADIE

You got me kinda worried here. What kind of hug was it?

ROSE

Just a quick peck on the cheek. But it wasn't a kiss. I just walked up to it real quiet, foot by foot, and placed my arms around it just for a second. Nice swan.

AUNT SHADIE

Have you ever hugged a swan so much you almost squished it?

ROSE

No, I haven't actually. What kind of animal lover do you think I am?

AUNT SHADIE

Every time I see a swan, I feel like hugging it hard. The kind of hug where you just can't stand how much you love it, or feel for it, and you're hugging and hugging it, and you just get carried away.

ROSE

How many swans have you hugged?

AUNT SHADIE

I never hugged a swan. I just figured anything that beautiful wouldn't want to be hugged. My nephews... yes... my daughter when she was small, my parents when they were old, my pillow when I was lonely... myself when I was stupid.

ROSE

How many things have you squished while hugging?

AUNT SHADIE

I never really squished anything. I was just trying to get across to you that feeling of loving something so much you could squish it. I think everybody should have that feeling at least once.

ROSE

Hugging till you squish, or being squished?

AUNT SHADIE

Both. But...

ROSE

What?

AUNT SHADIE

It makes you kinda want to be the squished one, doesn't it?

ROSE

Yes... yes, it does actually. Tea?

AUNT SHADIE

Sure.

REBECCA moves from her table and slots some coins into the juke box.

SLIDE: FOUR DAYS: DAY 3 – Glenaird Hotel – CONT.

As the lyrics of the song fade, the music remains under. She waltzes to it and to the voiceover of a conversation.

SFX: Sound of the tide fades up and eventually takes over.

SFX: In a convincing male voice, like music...

MALE VOICE

"You move so beautifully."

She steps.

WOMAN

Thank you. *(She stumbles.)*

MALE VOICE

"You have the most beautiful brown skin."

She steps.

WOMAN

Thank You. *(She stumbles.)*

MALE VOICE

"You don't have to be scared. I would never let anybody hurt you."

She steps and loses her balance. She takes her face out of her pillow's shoulder and looks down. She looks down at her legs as if something is wrong with them. The silhouette of a deer's legs and hooves look back from the floor. She begins to cry, confused. The pillow becomes a man, dressed like a pillow. He lifts her chin slowly, and dries her tears. Lights out.

Rhythms of a drinking room: 1) Tide – Time. 2) Lights vs. Shadow. 3) Drinking Rhythm. 4) Conversations – recent and past. 5) Music/Movement – romantic.

SFX: The phone rings.

SLIDE: I'M SCARED TO DIE III

MAVIS wakes in a start and picks up the phone.

MAVIS

It's okay, Johnnie... it's probably just my operator. You need your rest. Hello, who is it?

ROSE

It's Rose.

MAVIS

Rose who?

ROSE

Rose – you know very well, Rose who.

MAVIS

What do you want?

ROSE

I thought I'd call and check in with you. I heard somebody breathing funny on your line.

MAVIS

I just got company that's all.

ROSE

What kind of company?

MAVIS

Man company. He just kinda showed up out of the brown.

ROSE

Humph. I never did trust a man that just showed up.

MAVIS

Well, some of my best romances came from men that just showed up.

ROSE

Suit yourself... as long as nothing is wrong.

MAVIS

Listen, Rose, I appreciate your worry. It's just been nice and peaceful for a change. I just been having a creepy feeling, and that's why I don't go out much. But with John here it's not so bad.

ROSE

What kind of creepy feeling?

MAVIS

(softly) Death.

ROSE

Mavis, I can't hear you when you talk soft like that.

MAVIS

(louder) Nothing.

ROSE

Mavis, I think there's...

MAVIS

My sister. It's my sister.

ROSE

You're scared of your sister?

MAVIS

Isn't everyone?

ROSE

Why don't you to talk to her? I'm not doing anything anyway.

MAVIS

Sure. I'll be brave. *(She adjusts herself.)* Put me through, Rose. *Meegweetch.*

ROSE

Fine, just put me through... no, thank you... no, that's great of you, Rose... thanks for taking the time to.... Well, McWitch to you too!

MAVIS

Meegweetch, Rose. *Meegweetch*. It means "Thank You."

Click of call going through. It rings and...

Hi, Laverne. It's me... Ma...

SFX: Answering machine.

MACHINE

"Hi. You've reached Laverne..."

MAVIS

Laverne?

MACHINE

"We're not in right now, but if you leave a message we'll get back to you as soon as possible, or you can reach us on the pager at (204) 266-4325, or fax us at (204) 266-5646, or at work at (204) 456-1425, or just leave a message after the beep, I guess."

MAVIS

Gawd. Hi... it's me. Mavis... your sister. Yeah, it's been a long time, but I was thinking of you and... I'm doing real good. I just thought I'd call and say... it's good to hear your voice, even if it's on the answering machine. It sounds like you got a lot of stuff... Laverne. You know when someone wants your chair, your place? Not like our mother, or an elder, or someone we know, but when someone you don't like wants your place, and you can feel them thinking about it... just waiting for you to get up... concentrating on you getting up so they jump in your place, and never give it back. I can feel someone getting closer and closer, inch by inch, stepping closer, and pretty soon they'll be in my seat. Breathing where I should be sitting. I know that sounds weird, but it's just a feeling.

SFX: Answering machine clicks off.

ROSE

I wouldn't call if I'd been drinking or anything. I love you... I didn't mean to sound stupid.

SLIDE: THE BARBERSHOP QUARTET II - Barbershop

SFX: The sound of MARILYN singing softly.

The interior of the barbershop flares up. The red and white swirl of the barber light is twirling. PENNY sits drunkenly in the barber chair as a beautiful MARILYN à la Farrah Fawcett emerges. Reaching her hands out to PENNY, she begins to clear PENNY's hair from her face gently. PENNY looks into the mirror and sees herself as PENNY à la Pat Benetar. They both laugh. The BARBER enters dressed in hyper barber white. He places a white cape over PENNY, and her hair dream. The BARBER takes the bottle and places it between her legs and begins to braid her hair in one long braid. MARILYN's song gets strained as she reaches for the bottle in an effort to take it from them. The BARBER grabs it and raises it to PENNY's lips seductively. He moves to climb on top of her.

BARBER

Down the hatch, baby.
Twenty bucks if you drink it right down.
Down the hatch, baby.
Drink it right down.

Fade out.

SLIDE: KEEP ON WALKING – Hastings Street

Lights up below on REBECCA as she walks. Backdrop of Hastings Street. Signs in windows advertising for help. AUNT SHADIE's face appears in the images.

REBECCA

Where do women walk to when they have been fallen? Sure, you could say some of them walk on to something better. They leave their bastardly husbands, get a job, and free themselves from suffocating domesticity. They learn to type, or waitress, or become your chambermaid, your housekeeper, your cleaner, your babysitter and pretty soon it feels like this new-found freedom is not so free – the man's face has just changed. If they can stand this, they stay. If not, one day they just keep walking.

SLIDE: THE WRONG ROOM – Balmoral Hotel

VERNA

...one fuckin day at a time.

Lights up on VERNA sitting on her bed in the hotel room. A bottle of wine sits on the bedside table eyeing her. She fondles the bottle wanting to take a drink but touches a toy plane in her lap instead. She talks to her ex-husband on the phone...

Yeah. I'm serious. I got a gift for him... for his birthday. If you come and pick me up... maybe we could take the kid for Chinese food, and I could give him his present then. Yeah, I'll be downstairs out in front waiting. I'll be down there... I told you...

SLIDE: ROOM 23, WHEN YOU'RE 33 – Clifton Hotel

The room is dishevelled. VALERIE is lying on the floor, the DRESSER is lying on the floor. They are both trying to get themselves back together.

DRESSER

You have a nice set.

VALERIE

Oh, shut up.

DRESSER

Really.

VALERIE

Why don't you shut up?

DRESSER

Why don't you make me?

VALERIE

I made you already.

DRESSER

I made you already.

VALERIE

No reason to be a sore loser.

DRESSER

Pick a drawer.

VALERIE

Go away.

DRESSER

Go on, pick a drawer. I'll bet you'll like this drawer.

His bottom drawer slides open. The TOMMY drawer speaks.

SFX: Voices of her two sons.

TOMMY

Mommy?

VALERIE

Tomm...

TOMMY
Mommy.

VALERIE
Tommy.

TOMMY
Hey, Mom.

VALERIE
Hey, Tom. Tom... what are you doing in there?

TOMMY
Mom, I'm a real good dancer now. I can even dance better than Evan.

His second drawer opens. The EVAN drawer.

EVAN
Yeah, right.

TOMMY
I can.

EVAN
Like hell!

VALERIE
Don't swear.

EVAN
Don't tell me what to do.

VALERIE
I'm your mother.

EVAN
Yeah, right.

VALERIE
How are things?

TOMMY
Good.

EVAN
How do you think things are?

TOMMY
When are you coming home?

EVAN
Probably never.

VALERIE
Soon... real soon.

EVAN
Soon... liar.

TOMMY
When are you coming home? It's been a long time now.

VALERIE
It's hard to come right now. But soon. I'm gonna get this job and soon...

TOMMY
How soon?

EVAN
Soon. Liar.

TOMMY
How long is soon?

VALERIE
I can picture you in my head.

EVAN
Take a picture – it lasts longer.

VALERIE
Maybe, I could take a couple days off...

EVAN
...drinking.

VALERIE
...working. And we could get together...

EVAN
Soon.

VALERIE
Just me, and my two little men.

TOMMY
Mom?

EVAN
Mom?

VALERIE
Yeah?

The drawers don't respond. She gets real close to the drawers.

VALERIE
Yeah, I'm listening. I'm right here. I'M RIGHT HERE.

DRESSER
Yeah. Here you go, bitch!

The DRESSER lets her have it with the drawers. One of the drawers slams her head, the other her stomach and legs – it buckles her. It keeps punching her till she lies on the floor semi-conscious.

The DRESSER slowly opens the TOMMY drawer.

TOMMY
Mommy?

She barely wakes.

VALERIE
I'm coming... I'm coming.

She crawls to the DRESSER. The top drawer slams her in the head. She slumps down, her head on the TOMMY drawer.

The DRESSER's hand comes out of the top drawer and reaches down across her chest fondling her breasts. Lights out.

SLIDE: Valerie Nancy Homes, 33. Died November 19, 1986 with a 0.04 blood alcohol reading. "Jordon arrived at the Vancouver police station with his lawyer to report the death. He said he and Homes had been drinking for two days."

SLIDE: FOUR DAYS: DAY 4 – Glenaird Hotel – CONT.

SFX: Sound of the tide starts under. The slowest rhythm. The distorted sound of love whispers between a man and a woman.

The light bulb fades up slowly on the ocean that has become the room. The WOMAN is lying flat on her bed. A pillow lies on top of her. Her hand over the side of the bed holds a drink. She drinks and floats, making a slow swimming motion with her pelvis.

SFX: Voiceover – A fatherly male voice- faster, more emotional.

FATHERLY MALE VOICE

"Someone had told her a story, a very, very long time ago, about a deer who lost its mother, because someone shot its mother. Something like the story of Bambi, except that the little fawn was adopted by a white family that loved it, and then someone said that the fawn that grew to be an Indian girl should be with its own kind, so the father of the white family, who lived on the mainland, took a ferry and dropped the Indian girl on an island miles away, and hoped she would be happier. Well, the Indian girl wasn't happy without the only family she had ever known, and she swam all the way back to her white family, and everything was going great... everything was... going... great..."

The pillow on top of her becomes the man dressed as a pillow. He grinds into her, adding a violence to the swimming sex rhythm. She is totally disconnected to what is happening, staring straight up to the story.

WOMAN

...everything was going great, until she decided that she really didn't belong anywhere. So she decided it would be better to surrender to the ocean, to just let go, than to swim so hard, for so long, just to get to the mainland and be shot by a neighbour over a head of lettuce. (*She laughs.*)

Blackout.

SFX: Sound of the glass hitting the floor.

Rhythms of a drinking room: 1) Tide – Time. 2) Light vs. Dark. 3) Drinking rhythm. 4) Conversations – recent and past. 5) Music-Movement-romantic. 6) Sex.

Lights fade.

SLIDE: THE BARBERSHOP QUARTET III – Barbershop

SFX: Sound of MARILYN and PENNY singing softly.

The interior of the barbershop flares up. The red and white swirl of the barbershop light is circling. MARILYN à la Farrah Fawcett and PENNY à la Pat Benetar reflect out towards PATSY as she falls from the chair and begins to crawl away. The BARBER dressed in whites follows after her with the scissors. The scissors make a chopping noise as he grabs her braid. The red and white swirl of light intensifies the struggle. The song of MARILYN and PENNY intensifies as they call to her.

BARBER

Down the hatch, baby.
 Twenty bucks if you drink it right down.
 Down the hatch, baby.
 Right down. Finish it right down.
 Down the hatch, baby.
 DRINK IT – DROWN.

The BARBER emerges from the swirl with PATSY's braid. He covers her body on the floor with his white cape. He turns and leaves, as WOMAN's reflections in the mirror begin to multiply and become surreal.

SLIDE: KEEP ON WALKING – Hastings Street – CONT.

The backdrop of windows of the hotel buildings. AUNT SHADIE's face appears in and out of the images.

REBECCA

One might walk here. One story among a rooming house full of walking stories. I've come to find her story. My mother. My mother's one story. I walk through these streets. I walk through the women standing on legs like stilts. No pantihose, but varicose seams everywhere, blue and yellow on their plastic skin. Skirts hiked up and shirts hiked down, their faces hollowed to a pout.

SLIDE: THE WRONG ROOM – Balmoral Hotel – CONT.

VERNA

I'll be down there – I told you. Okay, thirty minutes. Yes – I said thirty minutes. Right out in front. THIR-TEE minutes. *(She hangs up.)* Ree-tard. *(She starts talking to the plane.)* My son'll like you. Almost spent my whole skinny cheque. I hope he likes you. I hope he likes me. I hope he's not mad. My son has a temper just like his mother.

The plane lifts from her hand, and its wings wave a "yes." VERNA laughs. She takes the plane and opens the door to go out. She forgets her purse and lets the plane idle.

SFX: Buzz of plane flying.

You stay here.

She turns to get her purse, and the plane is flying down the hallway. She calls to it.

It's not like you have to hold my hand – just wait up for me, will yah?

She loses sight of the plane as it descends down the stairwell. She follows it a flight behind. Floor 7.

SFX: Sound of plane descending.

SFX: A slight whispering. A male voice that grows louder under and...

MALE VOICE

"Can I get you a drink?"

SLIDE: I'M SCARED TO DIE IV

Lights up on MAVIS sitting in her chair with JOHN's arms wrapped around her tightly.

SFX: Sound of phone ringing.

MAVIS picks it up.

MAVIS

Rose?

Lights up on ROSE plugging into MAVIS' line but getting a busy signal.

SFX: Voiceover – the phone beeps an aggressive, electronic:

VOICE

"Can – I – get – you – a – drink?"

Lights down on ROSE.

MALE VOICE

No. It's downstairs. I can't seem to transfer a call to you. She says she's your sister. Do you want to come and take it down here?

MAVIS

Laverne? My sister.

MALE VOICE

Do you want to come and take it down here?

MAVIS

(puts her hand over the receiver) My chair? Laverne. My chair? Laverne. Aahhh shit, I was just getting comfy. Okay, I guess I'll be right down.

She gently kisses Johnnie's arms and moves them gently to the side. She looks suspiciously around the room and murmurs under her breath.

MAVIS

You even think of sitting in my chair and I'll kick your ass.

She drops the receiver and runs for the door and exits.

SFX: Sound of quick footsteps down a flight of stairs.

(offstage) Laverne? Goddamn it! (slams phone)

SFX: Sound of quicker steps up a flight of stairs.

(mumbling up) My sister... my ass...

She emerges in the doorway. Her chair has been turned around to face her. A man sits in it.

Get out of my chair!

MAN

Can I get you a drink?

MAVIS

Where is John?

MAN

John who?

SFX: Voiceover – sound of static from the receiver and...

VOICE

"If you need help, just hang up and dial your operator... if you need help, just hang up and dial your operator."

Lights fade.

SLIDE: Mavis Gertrude Jones, 42. Died November 30, 1980 with a 0.34 blood alcohol reading. An inquiry concluded Jones' death was "unnatural and accidental."

Verna follows the plane down floor 6.

SFX: Descent of plane.

SFX: Louder. A MALE VOICE that grows louder and louder...

MALE VOICE

"Can I get you a drink?"

SLIDE: KEEP ON WALKING – Hastings Street – Cont.

Backdrop of close-up of grocery store. Faces/bottles. AUNT SHADIE's face appears and disappears.

REBECCA

I walk through the elderly and the mentally ill and people stir-fried on Chinese cooking wine. I walk, and when I get tired I stop for a pack of smokes at the corner store and look at the Aqua Velva people in front of me in line. They are not blue. I then look at the Aqua Velva bottles all lined up pretty on the shelf next to the Aspirin. The most normal of refreshments to sell. I look into the woman punching the figures into the till. She could be my mother except that she is Asian. I look for some kind of clue that allows a hard-working woman that's worked hard all her life to ring up a bottle of Aqua Velva and sell it to an old man who is not "The Aqua Velva Man" but "Man with Huge Red Nose." She rings it in, all business, no trace of remorse. She stocks it for him – refreshment meeting cologne. Seller meeting buyer. It stinks, and I need a drink that isn't blue.

REBECCA exits.

AUNT SHADIE stands in front of the barbershop mirror. Three slides emerge, and three women stand behind the images of their slides. They begin to emerge from the barbershop mirror as AUNT SHADIE calls to them in song and they respond, in song, in rounds of their original languages.

The women in the barbershop call to each fallen woman, in each solitary room. The women respond and join them in song and ritual as they gather their voice, language, and selves in the barbershop.

Throughout, the song floats in and out of each scene, submerging under some, and taking over others, flowing like a river. Each call and response a current. It grows in strength and intensity to the end of Act One where all their voices join force.

WOMEN

Do I hear you sister like yesterday today.

Ke-peh-tat-in/jee/ne-gee-metch

Das-goots/o-tahg-gos-ebk

Abnotes/ka-kee-se-kbak

SLIDE: Marilyn Wiles, 40. Died December 04, 1984 with a 0.51 blood alcohol reading. An inquiry at the time concluded Wiles' death was "unnatural and accidental."

Patsy Rosemary Forest, 25. Died July 03, 1982 with a 0.43 blood alcohol reading. At the time of her death, the coroner said there was no indication of foul play.

Penny Florence Ways, 45. Died June 08, 1985 with a 0.79 blood alcohol reading. The coroner concluded her death was "unnatural and accidental."

VERNA follows the plane down floor 5.

SFX: Descent of plane.

SFX: Louder. A MALE VOICE that grows louder under and...

MALE VOICE

"Can I get you a drink?"

Lights dimly up on VIOLET.

"Can I get you a drink?"

WOMEN

Do I hear you sister like yesterday today.

Ke-peb-tat-in/jee/ne-gee-metch

Das-goots/o-tahg-gos-ehk

Abnotes/ka-kee-se-khak

Under water – under time

Ee-tam-pehg/eetam-ehg

Te-pi-be-gun

SLIDE: VIOLET – Niagara Hotel

VIOLET, as she sits on the floor of her hotel room. Her focus upwards. The shadow of a man casts itself long on the walls. Her face reaches him mid-groin.

VIOLET

I've swallowed it all. I've swallowed it all... downtown, right between my lips. I didn't know if it was the neck of the bottle I was swallowing or his penis. Both have that musty kind of smell at the opening of it. Like it has been around for a while, waiting for the next set of lips but not cleaning in between deaths. Musty – you never know where it's been. I swallowed. Man's fingers weaved in my hair pulling down and up, down and up, down and up so many times I didn't know if it was the salt that filled me or the sting of the vodka. I don't even drink usually.

VIOLET's head falls down.

SLIDE: Violet Leslie Taylor, 27. Died October 12, 1987 with a 0.91 blood alcohol reading. "She had the highest blood alcohol reading of all the women." No coroner's report has been issued.

WOMEN

Do I hear you sister like yesterday today.

Ke-peb-tat-in/jee/ne-gee-metch

Das-goots/o-tahg-gos-ehk

Abnotes/ka-kee-se-khak

Hear your words right next to mine

Ee-pee-ta-man/ke-ta-yaur-e

Win/me-too-nee/o-ta

VERNA follows the plane down floor 4.

SFX: Descent of plane.

MALE VOICE

"Can I get you a drink?"

WOMEN

Do I hear you sister like yesterday today.

Ke-peb-tat-in/jee/ne-gee-metch

Das-goots/o-tahg-gos-ehk

Abnotes/ka-kee-se-khak

SLIDE: FOUR DAYS: THERE IS NO DAY FIVE – Glenaird Hotel

SFX: No sound.

The light bulb fades up. No movement. The WOMAN lays flat on her bed, alone in the hotel room. Clothes up when they should be down. No pillow. The light becomes brighter and brighter revealing an ocean floor in low tide.

Light clicks out.

Rhythms of a drinking room: None.

WOMEN

You are not speaking and yet I touch your words.

Ee-ka/ee-I-am-e-en/maga-e-tahg-in-a-man/ke-ta

Ya-mi-win

SLIDE: Brenda A. Moore, 27. Died September 11, 1981 with a 0.43 blood alcohol reading. Coroner's report concluded her death was "unnatural and accidental."

VERNA is on floor 3. She stops and listens for the buzz of the plane. Nothing but the sound of a man's voice coming from ROOM 315. VERNA approaches it slowly.

MALE VOICE

"Can I get you a drink? Can I get you a drink – a drink? Can I get you a drink?"

WOMEN

So the river says to me drink me feel better.

Kwa-ne-ka-isit-/se-pe-b

Me-knee-qua-sin/me-thwa-ya

Like the river must of said to you first

Tas-koch-e-to-key/ka-key-e

Tisk/ne-s-tum

Below lights up on Rebecca as she sits at a table in The Empress Hotel.

VERNA enters room 315. The man dressed as an airline pilot seats her. Her son's plane buzzes around her head as he hands her a drink.

PILOT

Can I get you a drink?

REBECCA looks up from her small, red, terry-clothed table. She motions two glasses.

SFX: The plane sputters and sputters and smashes to the ground.

Lights out.

SLIDE: Verna Deborah Gregory, 38. Died September 25, 1986 with a 0.63 blood alcohol reading. Gregory's death was ruled "accidental as a result of acute alcohol poisoning."

WOMEN

Drink me – feel better.

Me-knee-qua-sin/me-thwa-ya

There is no sadness just the war of a great thirst

Moi-ch/ke-qua-eb/ka-quat-ta-keye-ta-mo-win

SLIDE: VIOLET – Niagara Hotel – Cont.

Lights fade dimly up on VIOLET as she detaches from her shadow. She leaves herself there with the man. She becomes smaller and more childlike, as she backs away and finally sits back on a swing and just stares, watching her woman self there with the man. Her body begins to become purple as AUNT SHADIE moves tenderly behind her and begins to swing her.

VIOLET

It was the back and forth of it. Like being on a swing when I was a girl. My father pushing the swing into the sky. Back and forth, that's where my mind went from the past and up from the past and up and up... I thought if I got any higher the swing would wrap around the pole and I would choke, but I went up after the last push, and after the last... my legs pumping the air for flight.

WOMEN

Do I see you sisters like yesterday today.

Ke-peb-tat-in/jee/ne-gee-metch

Das-goots/o-tabg-gos-ebk

Abnotes/ka-kee-se-khak

AUNT SHADIE stops the swing and takes VIOLET's hand. They turn and begin to walk into a shadowy forest.

SFX: Loud sound of pool balls being broken.

The WOMEN suddenly turn their attention, song and focus on the bar. VERNA leads them into the bar.

VIOLET suddenly turns with the sound of the pool balls being broken and looks towards all the WOMEN walking in the bar.

VIOLET

Can I go with them?

AUNT SHADIE

No, you're too young. Besides, I need someone to walk with me.

VIOLET

Heh? Who's that?

ROSE walks towards the two.

WOMEN

See you as if you were sitting right here next to me.

Ee-wa-pa-me-tan/tas-koots

Ota-e-iy-ya-pee-in

Below, the BARBER gets up, and VERNA follows him as he walks towards REBECCA, who rummages through her purse, takes out some money and leaves it on the table. She looks for something she thinks she's lost and dismisses it. She grabs her journal from the table just as VALERIE goes to look through it.

Under the water – under the earth.

Eetam pehg/etam-as-keke

AUNT SHADIE

I'll introduce you to uppity. That's Rose.

VIOLET

And I'm Violet.

AUNT SHADIE

Exactly. And I'm poopoo ka ka. Anyways...

ROSE reaches them and hugs VIOLET.

WOMEN

My bodies floating where all the days are the same.

Ne-eow/e-pa-pam-mau-ho

Tebk/eddie-tab-to-ke-sik

Kow/pe-ya-kwun-nobb

REBECCA walks towards the exit where RON is playing pool and MAVIS is making him look good.

Long and flowing like a river.

E-ke-knock/aqua/e-pe-mow-

Ho-teak/tas-kooch/se-pe-h

VIOLET

She's squishing me.

AUNT SHADIE

She's hugging you.

VIOLET

No, she's squishing me.

AUNT SHADIE

Hugging – squishing. It's all the same thing.

VIOLET

The same what?

AUNT SHADIE

Love.

MAVIS bumps RON and he stumbles into REBECCA, who drops her journal. Newspaper clippings of the WOMEN fall to the floor. The WOMEN slowly pick them up, look at themselves and then slowly place their clipping back into REBECCA's journal.

WOMEN

My root – my heart.

Web-geese/ne dee

The BARBER reaches her table and looks down, as VERNA places REBECCA's wallet on the table. He looks around and puts it in his jacket. He watches as REBECCA begins to exit.

The WOMEN shift all their energy towards the BARBER.

Lights begin to fade.

My hair drifts behind me

Nes-ta-ga-yab/e-pim-mow

How-te-key

Lights out.

ACT TWO

SFX: A distorted radio-sounding version of "Natural Woman" by Aretha Franklin drifts in and through. The WOMEN's voices pick it up softly.

SLIDE: THE MORNING AFTER – Rebecca's Apartment – Kitsilano

It is dark in the bedroom. The neon face of the clock on the bedside table shows 4:08. It clicks.

A figure stirs in bed. A blue hue splashes down on white sheets and a figure underneath. REBECCA awakens.

REBECCA

I remember drinking something blue, or was it thinking something blue? All I know right now is... I have to pee. That means I have to get up, which means you have to... get up. Get up, I dare you. Get up.

Her body doesn't move.

I'd like to lay here for an eternity, but I feel like I've eaten a squirrel and I need something to wash it down, and something to scrape it off my tongue. Don't feed the squirrels – eat them. Brilliant. Okay, I'm getting up, which means we're getting up.

The WOMEN sit or stand in the darkness. They can be vaguely seen, but REBECCA cannot really see or really hear them. MAVIS her Chair Ass sits.

REBECCA's body gets up, protesting. She stumbles through her bedroom. She makes walking, stumbling curses. She stubs her toe on the foot of the bed.

REBECCA

Ahhwww... fuuuuuuuuck, that hurts. Fuck you, bed.

MAVIS

Watch where you're going, big feet.

REBECCA

(to herself) Big Foot.

She walks through her bedroom into the hallway, not turning the lights on but doing the blind wall-feel.

VERNA

Right on my little toe. Not this way or that, but right on my baby toe.

VALERIE

This... is a handicapped zone.

MAVIS

Well, you better hope she doesn't park on your toe.

VALERIE

Oh yeah. Too late – she just parked on my toe with the corn. What the hell is this?

VERNA

It's the fuckin' toe walk.

REBECCA walks into the wall, forehead first.

REBECCA

Fuuuuck ouch.... Fuck you, wall.

ALL

Fuck you, big head.

REBECCA

(to wall) What did you say?

Nothing. Silence.

That's what I thought you said.

VALERIE

(mimicking) That's what I thought you said.

REBECCA reaches the fridge and opens the door. A bright light filters through like a tunnel, revealing the insides of the fridge and the inside of her apartment. The WOMEN are all seated in a line. They are in various hues of shadow and dressed in white. Their hair is short.

REBECCA

Ouch! Shit, that hurts.

VALERIE

Wow, let there be light.

VERNA

And there was light... I remember that.

REBECCA squints inside her fridge. Picks up a carton and tilts it back in a drink. Picks up another carton and another and another.

VALERIE

Let there be skim milk.

VERNA

And there was none.

VALERIE

Let there be orange juice.

VERNA

And there was none.

VALERIE

Let there be water.

VERNA

And there was none. Shit, she's making me have to go to the bathroom.

REBECCA closes the fridge door. Darkness. She stumbles along to the bathroom. She sits down on the can and takes a pee. The sound of a long pee.

MAVIS

You think she could close the door.

VERNA

You think she could go for me?

REBECCA

Oh, that feels good.

REBECCA flushes the toilet.

MAVIS

At least she didn't do number two.

VERNA

At least she didn't do number two while reading a newspaper.

VALERIE

Only men do that.

VERNA

Women read novels.

MAVIS

Like what?

VALERIE

Well, real smart novels. They leave it in the can so they can make themselves look good.

MAVIS

Like what?

VERNA

I actually finished the whole AA bible. Not one day at a time but one shit at a time. It took me a year... if you were going to ask.

MAVIS

I wasn't going to ask, but since you answered – why did it take you so long?

VERNA

I kept having to introduce myself. There was always a big silence after I said, "Hi, my name's Verna." It left me kinda empty.

ALL

Hi, Verna.

VERNA

Thanks.

REBECCA gets herself to the front of the sink. The loud sound of her brushing her teeth. The sound of her taking a drink from the tap. She reaches over to turn the bathroom light on. When the bathroom lights blast on, the images of all three WOMEN reflect back in the mirror. REBECCA looks closely in the mirror. The WOMEN scream in horror.

REBECCA

Wo-ow... I look like shit.

REBECCA turns off the light.

ALL

Speak for yourself.

The sound of REBECCA returning on her journey back to bed in the darkness.

MAVIS

Ouch...

VERNA

Ouch...

VALERIE

Fuck! Oh yeah... right on the same toe, why don't yah!

REBECCA crawls into bed. Grabs her pillow and pulls it closer to her. She pulls it closer and feels it. She feels it harder, her hand exploring it. IT has legs. IT has a butt. IT has a penis. IT moans. REBECCA screams.

IT

Hey...

REBECCA

Oh, fuck me!

VERNA

Too late.

VALERIE

The penis talks.

REBECCA jumps out of bed and turns on the bedroom light.

IT

Hey, what did you do that for?

They squint at each other.

REBECCA

It's time to get up. I mean... I mean... it's time for you to get out. Leave.

MAVIS

That's cold.

VERNA

I like it. Thanks, and it's time to get up. Get in, get out... and it's time to leave. It's to the point. Move on.

REBECCA

Listen. I'm having a really bad morning.

IT

Well, you had a really good night.

REBECCA

If you say so.

IT

You said so.

REBECCA

That's really... special... but I have um... I have to get myself together here pretty soon and go to work. Work is good. Work.

IT

You don't work.

REBECCA

Everybody works. You're right. I don't work. I write. Writing is work, and I really should work or write and um... it's not easy to write when...

IT

You have a strange man in your bed.

REBECCA

I was going to say, when there are people around.

IT

Oh.

REBECCA

Are you strange?

IT

Okay... I'm not strange. I'm a stranger.

REBECCA

That's better. At least you're not weird.

IT

Who's to know?

REBECCA

Okay, if you weren't a stranger, would I know you were weird even if I knew you? I mean, does anybody ever know anybody's true weirdness?

IT

This is weird.

REBECCA

This is hurting my head, Ted.

IT

It's Ron.

REBECCA

I know... it was just a rhyming thing. Yeah, Ron... Ron (*to herself*) ...Ron with the nice butt leaning over the table.

MAVIS

Turn over, Ron. Turn over a new leaf.

REBECCA

You were playing... we ended up playing pool.

RON

You're surprised I'm here.

REBECCA

Well, no. I mean, yes... I mean, who wouldn't be surprised? A guy like you. A girl like me. Listen, I'm swimming here. Let's just call this a day. Okay, Ron. Thanks, it was great. Really. Ron. It was great. Great.

RON

What was great?

REBECCA

Oh, you know – the conversation, the beautiful dinner, your great car... your great suit, how you put yourself together, your great words, your greatness, your all-over greatness... your money... your tireless dick. Is that good? You are great. Great.

WOMEN

Tireless dick? Let's see the great dick.

RON

We didn't do it.

REBECCA

O-kay... it just looks like we did.

RON

Well, there was a point when that was an option, but...

REBECCA

What?

RON

You started crying.

REBECCA

People do that sometimes.

RON

When they're making love?

REBECCA

No, when they're fucking and it reminds them of love.

RON/WOMEN

Ouch.

REBECCA

Sorry.

Silence.

Listen... I don't mean to be rude...

MAVIS

...maybe just a little peek...

REBECCA

...but I'm really not at my best right now, and maybe you should just leave.

RON

What's your best?

REBECCA

Coffee, fresh-squeezed orange juice, eggs benedict, morning sex.

RON

Do you bring a lot of men home?

REBECCA

What, to mother? No, *Ron*, I don't bring a lot of men home. Actually, you are the first man I've thought to bring *home* in ten years. And really, what if I did? What if I liked sleeping with men? What if I enjoyed sleeping with men so much I slept with men? What then, *Ron*... would that make me a slut? Or better yet, maybe I should've let you buy me a steak and potato and a bottle of plaid wine, and you could at least feel decent...

He buries his head in the sheets.

Don't go to Sunday mass on me now, Ronny. (*He looks up.*) I would get a good meal and a plaid wine, and you could feel like you deserved to fuck me. Fuck you, Ronny, and fuck the full meal deal.

RON

Are you finished?

REBECCA

I'm tired. I need a nap.

RON

Come here.

REBECCA

It's okay.

RON

Come here.

REBECCA

It's okay, I said.

RON

It's o-kay.

She goes towards him.

REBECCA

Okay. Don't you have a job?

RON

A day off.

REBECCA

Off?

RON

I'm a cop.

REBECCA

A cop.

RON

A problem?

WOMEN

A problem.

REBECCA

No, just weird. I don't usually do men with badges.

REBECCA and RON settle into each other and fall asleep. The WOMEN turn the lights off and walk into the living room. Lights up in the living room.

MAVIS

A cop.

VALERIE

You ever do a cop?

VERNA

Well, if I would have known they have nice butts and tireless dicks, I would've reconsidered.

MAVIS

A dick is a dick.

VALERIE

...is a dick.

VERNA

Is a prick.

MAVIS

I always kinda fantasized about it though... kinda like a Harlequin Romance set in Canada. The Mountie, the horse and the Indian maiden.

VERNA

Exactly – the horse and the Indian maiden.

VALERIE

The Mountie would probably just be watching.

VERNA

You'd probably have a better time with the horse anyways...

MAVIS

You ever seen a horse's di...

VALERIE

Too much of a good thing.

MAVIS

You said that kinda fast.

VERNA

Maybe a Mountie with a dick the size of a horse.

MAVIS

Dream on.

VALERIE

I am.

VERNA

Thanks... now I'm getting all horny here. Let's make some tea and talk about our ex's or something... that should calm us down.

They follow each other into the kitchen. A kettle is set down and begins to heat. Lights out. Steam forms.

SLIDE: VIOLET DREAMS

Lights slowly up on a figure above REBECCA's bed. The lights are different hues of violet. VIOLET is on a swing, slowly swinging back and forth above REBECCA's bed. She drops small pebbles over them as she talks.

VIOLET

She's sleeping. Dreaming parts of worlds, yours and mine and hers.
 Dreaming and pressing into things... old memories and loves and waking in
 moments wondering where people ended and why even in sleep it hurts.
 Even in sleep, it occurs and reoccurs and you wake half here, half there,
 everything separated.

REBECCA

Everything not quite there, because you can't quite touch your own loss.
 Because it is so hollow.

VIOLET

So...

REBECCA

...So far away – when you scream, it echoes.

VIOLET

Oh, Jesus, we have all died for our sins.

REBECCA

...Oh, Jesus, you say...

VIOLET

...We have all died for our sins.

REBECCA

There are great days when everything is perfect. Cool days on your skin,
 when the breeze hits you just right and you can touch and taste the lips of
 those you loved. Cool, beautiful days when a tint of colour touches you...
 just so. Just so.

VIOLET

...Just so lovely.

VIOLET places a petal on REBECCA's lips.

REBECCA

You want to feel it on your lips forever. Just so. Just so until it ends, and all
 you can do is put your hand over your mouth. Gulping down the loss.
 Gulping down... down until you eat the scream. Blood vowels getting stuck
 between the sheets and pillows, between his legs and your throat, and all
 you want to do is say: Please help me. Please help me. Do you remember
 me? Because I remember me. I remember everything. Everything.
 Everything. And I can't breathe. And I would gladly die if I knew any
 better, but there is nothing to do but keep gulping silently. And it hurts
 my throat and God I want everything. I want to place my face in my
 mother's palm and say... and feel my lips on her lifeline and palm softness

and whisper... I love you, you fucking bitch. I love you and where is
 everyone?

SFX: The WOMEN's kettle screams from the kitchen.

The violet lights slowly fade and cross-fade, bringing purple on...

SLIDE: SWITCHBOARD – Reception

*AUNT SHADIE and ROSE move around a large family table, setting it for
 tea. They stop to notice the switchboard and get caught up in its flashing beauty.
 The calls are lighting up different hues of purple.*

ROSE

It's so beautiful.

AUNT SHADIE

It gives me a headache.

ROSE

If you sit in a room and sit in a room... pretty soon... *(She listens.)* you can
 hear noises and voices coming through the wallpaper like a whole bunch of
 flowers sitting on a kitchen table. You become a part of that family of
 sounds just by hearing them. You can hear them eating and arguing, loving
 and fighting and breathing.

AUNT SHADIE

And snoring.

ROSE

And... snoring.

AUNT SHADIE

Is that why you became a switchboard operator?

ROSE

Partly.

AUNT SHADIE

The other part?

ROSE

It was a job, but after a while it made me a part of something bigger than
 my own loneliness. As if every time I connected someone I had found an
 answer.

AUNT SHADIE

I've heard her voice through the wall. As if I've had my ear to her as she's grown up. Just listening, not touching. Not able to soothe her, even when she was a child, because I wasn't there.

ROSE

Maybe she was listening back to you.

AUNT SHADIE

I didn't want her to see me the way he began to look at me. It wasn't that he said anything cruel, but men can be cruel with the twist of their face. I could feel myself disappearing, becoming invisible in his eyes; and when I looked in the mirror, what I held good like a stone deep inside was gone. I could no longer see myself. In life, you see yourself in how the people you love see you, and I began to hate seeing myself through his eyes. I began to hate my reflection. The stone though... loved his strong arms and body, loved the way his body tanned to meet mine in the summer times, loved the way he used to love me. I thought my silence complimented his voice, thought my redness, my stone, gave him weight. I have this child – light and dark, old and new. I place my stone in her and I leave. I was afraid she would begin to see me the way he saw me, the way white people look up and down without seeing you – like you are not worthy of seeing. Extinct, like a ghost... being invisible can kill you.

ROSE

I see you, and I like what I see.

AUNT SHADIE

I see you – and don't worry, you're not white.

ROSE

I'm pretty sure I'm white. I'm English.

AUNT SHADIE

White is a blindness – it has nothing to do with the colour of your skin.

ROSE

You're gonna make me cry.

AUNT SHADIE

You better make us some tea then.

ROSE

That will help?

AUNT SHADIE

No, but it gives you something to do.

ROSE goes through her serious ritual of making tea. The violet lights fade and cross-fade to REBECCA's bed. They light up the bed like the bottom of a river, rocks scattered, rocks curled. VALERIE and VERNA have come back to the bed riverside. They are sitting around drinking tea, looking like large boulders. They laugh and sing softly. VIOLET eventually comes down from the swing, childlike.

SLIDE: SHE SLEEPS LIKE A ROCK

REBECCA

My heaviness has shifted – I'm all lopsided. Right now, I am deep down laying between friends, tumbling over each other, because we are round and hard and loving every minute of it, because it is so far down the only language we have to know has moulded from the earth – its tears and blood, its laughter and love – gone solid. I hold it in my heart, it keeps me attached to the gravity of a perfect knowing.

VALERIE

A mother opens the heart of her child and places her rock inside the flesh. Inside, so no one – no man, no ugliness, will ever place its grabby hands on it.

VERNA

A mother buries its knowledge inside the child. *Kiss-ageeta-ooma. (Salish)* It drops inside the eternity of blood and earth. *Kiss-ageeta-ooma. (Salish)* I love you, silly face.

REBECCA

It makes me hit the riverbed like a rock. Water shining over me new, over me new, a new reflection of my true self, knowing I am heavy.

VALERIE

A mother opens the heart of her child and places her rock inside the flesh. A growing child takes a rock from the earth it walked from and places it in a leather pouch and hangs it around her neck. A woman walks heavy.

VIOLET

She sleeps like a rock.

VERNA

She sleeps like a rock.

VIOLET

She dreams like a rock.

VERNA

She dreams like a rock.

VALERIE

A woman walks heavy. A woman walks heavy. Like a rock molded from the earth – its tears and blood, its laughter and love – gone solid.

SLIDE: THE LIVING ROOM

MAVIS her Chair Ass is at *REBECCA*'s desk. She goes through her phone book and dials a number. *AUNT SHADIE* picks up the phone from the switchboard.

MAVIS

Hi, Aunt Shadie.

AUNT SHADIE

Verna?

MAVIS

No, it's me... Mavis. We're a little late.

AUNT SHADIE

Get your ass home.

MAVIS

Don't yell at me – I'm the one who's considerate.

AUNT SHADIE

I tell you, Rose is making tea for everyone...

MAVIS

(pinched operator's voice) "To continue your call, please deposit more coins in the telephone or we'll have to..."

AUNT SHADIE

Don't even try that with me.

VERNA walks in from the bedroom.

MAVIS

Pardon me. You want to talk to Verna?

VERNA shaking her head – no, no, no.

Aunt Shadie wants to talk to you. Seriously.

VERNA

Hi, Aunt Shadie.

AUNT SHADIE

Like I was telling Mavis, get your asses home.

VERNA

We just got caught up. Like I told you, we'll be up there in thir-tee minutes. Seriously. Thirty minutes.

She screams out for VALERIE.

Hey, Valerie it's Pizza Hut. What kind of toppings do you want on your pizza. Here, you talk to them... I don't get what they're saying. They're talking too fast. Like you said, us Salish girls aren't so bright.

VALERIE marches in and grabs the phone. *VIOLET* follows.

VALERIE

We want everything. We want the special. Give us the special. Give us two specials. Hey, do you have any two-for-one specials?

VIOLET walks in from the bedroom.

VIOLET

Ham and pineapple.

AUNT SHADIE

You're gonna get something real goddamned special when you all get home.

VALERIE puts the receiver in her chest.

SFX: Muffled voice blabbing away.

VALERIE

I don't think this is Pizza Hut.

VIOLET

Why?

VALERIE

Because Pizza Hut just swore. You can never make Pizza Hut swear.

VIOLET

How do you know?

VALERIE

Because, sometimes when I'm bored, I phone them up and play with them.

VIOLET

Like how?

VALERIE

Well, I ask what they got and then I ask 'em if they have any pizza made with bannock and then I pretend I forget what they got and then I ask them what they got, what certain toppings are, and then anyways it goes on quite awhile. Indians aren't as much stupid as they are aggravating.

VERNA

It's not Pizza Hut, stupid. It's Aunt Shadie.

VALERIE

I thought I recognized her voice.

VERNA

Here, you talk to her. She won't yell at you, because you're a baby.

VERNA picks up the receiver, listens to it and pushes it on VIOLET. VERNA goes into another room.

VIOLET

Hi, Aunt Shadie. It's Violet. How are you? We're fine. We're all good. No, we're just hanging around. You know, talking and stuff. How's Rose?

AUNT SHADIE

Save it.

VIOLET

She said save it.

VALERIE

She's pissed.

AUNT SHADIE

Rose made tea for everyone, and now it's cold and...

VIOLET

(to VALERIE) Rose made tea for everyone and now...

VALERIE

Who cares? She's a weird duck anyways... she can take the Red Rose manifest destiny and shove it up her ass...

VIOLET

...a teapot.

VALERIE

Exactly. Free the leaves, baby. Free the tea leaves of Canada. Say goodbye already... we'll be there as soon as we can.

VIOLET

Goodbye already... we'll be there as soon as we can. Aunt Shadie, sorry about the tea...

AUNT SHADIE

Just you hold it a...

Click of phone.

VIOLET

Sorry.

VALERIE

Where's Verna? She's awfully quiet all of a sudden.

VIOLET

She's always quiet.

VALERIE

Just because a person doesn't say anything doesn't mean they're quiet. I can hear her thinking all the time. Where's Mavis? Now, her silence scares me. You know there's something wrong when you can't hear her talking.

They tiptoe around and peek in the bedroom. MAVIS is on the bed just about to pull the sheet off of RON's ass.

Mavis, you pervert.

MAVIS

I was just lookin', it's not like I was going to touch it or anything.

VALERIE

Go ahead, I dare you.

MAVIS

I dare you.

VALERIE

Shit, I wouldn't touch anything that beige.

VIOLET

Why?

VALERIE

Jesus, Violet, you don't want to be lookin' at that.

VIOLET

Why?

VALERIE

You might go blind.

MAVIS

I thought that's what happened when you masturbated.

VALERIE

Well, you should know.

MAVIS

Like... I... said. I thought that's what happened when you masturbated – I never heard of anyone going blind by touching a white ass.

VALERIE

You shouldn't say masturbate in front of the kid.

MAVIS

Masturbate, masturbate, masturbate. Why?

VIOLET looks at VALERIE intensely.

VALERIE

It's a big word... with a... lot of responsibility.

MAVIS

Number one, she's not a kid – she just seems like one.

VALERIE

Well, maybe this isn't an ass – it just seems like one.

MAVIS

Only one way to find out. Touch it.

VALERIE

You touch it.

MAVIS

No, you touch it.

VALERIE

Scared of the real thing? You've been dying for it for so long. Go crazy.

MAVIS

You go crazy.

VALERIE pinches it hard.

RON

Oh!

RON wakes up and looks around. The clock neons 6:30. He crawls out of bed. Walks around the living room, picks up a newspaper, walks to the bathroom and shuts the door.

MAVIS

Now he's gonna take a shit and stink up the place.

VALERIE

Let a guy into your bedroom, and he thinks he can take a big dump in your can.

MAVIS

I bet he turns on the fan.

Sound of the toilet flushing and bathroom fan turns on.

VALERIE

Like that's gonna help.

They wait. Silence. Smell. They both start waving their hands in front of their face like a fan.

Shiiiiiiiiit...

VIOLET starts looking for VERNA. VERNA wants to be alone and is sitting slumped down against a wall. VIOLET sits down next ber.

VIOLET

Why do you think we're here?

VERNA

Is this the BIG question? Because, if it is... I'm not up to it, okay? Why don't you go ask "know it all" Mavis or something?

VIOLET

I'm asking you.

VERNA

And I'm telling you I don't know. I mean, why is anybody anybody? Why does anybody end up anywhere? Why does... I never figured it out, okay. I just don't know... if I knew I wouldn't be here or maybe I would. I just don't know.

VIOLET

Why don't you know?

VERNA

Why don't you shut up?

VIOLET

You don't have to be mean.

VERNA

(in a whiny voice) Why is the world mean? Why doesn't Mommy love me? Why is Daddy touching me there? Why? Why? I don't know. Why me?

VIOLET

Why aren't you nice?

VERNA

(raises her voice) Why aren't you in bed?

VIOLET

Why are you yelling?

VERNA

I'm not yelling.

VIOLET

Why are you mad?

VERNA

Because I'm dead, and I'm still thirsty.

VIOLET

Thirsty?

VERNA leans over and screams at her silently.

VERNA

THIRSTY, you fuckin parrot. I'm thirsty for... for... my kids, my man. I'm thirsty, thirsty, thirsty, THIR-sty, THIRSTY, dehydrated, dry, parched, thirsty. Get IT?

VIOLET

You didn't have to get mad. *(She puts her head down and pouts.)*

VERNA

(lowers her voice and gets up) It's the only way I know how to get from here... to there.

VIOLET looks up, and VERNA has disappeared. VERNA makes her way to the Empress Hotel.

RON walks through all the WOMEN with coffee. They all stop and look at his parts.

SLIDE: THE MORNING AFTER – CONT.

RON walks into the bedroom with two cups of coffee. He hands one to REBECCA.

RON

I made some coffee. You don't have any cream. You have a carton, but you don't have any cream.

REBECCA

That doesn't surprise me.

RON

So.

REBECCA

So. Ron. How are you this morning?

RON

I feel like shit.

REBECCA

Well, since we're doing the true confession part of the morning – me too .

RON

You were talking in your sleep... and you pinched my ass.

REBECCA

I talk in my sleep, but it wasn't me that pinched your ass.

RON

I pinched my own ass.

REBECCA

Stranger things have happened. Maybe you were feeling hard done by.

RON

I am actually, but that's another story. What were you doing down there?

REBECCA

The Empress? Thinking and drinking. What were you doing down there?

RON

Drinking and playing pool. We usually go in after work and have a couple of beers. Why do you drink there?

REBECCA

Well, I don't always drink there, but it's a good place to go and think, and I can usually have a drink in quiet without some suit coming up and trying to dazzle me. The worst thing that can happen is an old beat-up suit will sit down and try and dazzle me, which is usually more sad than it is offensive. Besides, I am looking for someone.

RON

Who - Mr. Right?

REBECCA

I married Mr. Right. And divorced Mr. Right. So, now I'm looking for Mr. Fun.

RON

So, who are you looking for really?

REBECCA

I'm looking for my mom. She went for a walk twenty years ago, and I haven't seen her since.

RON

And you think she's down there.

REBECCA

Yup.

RON

Why?

REBECCA

She was last seen down there.

RON

Why now?

REBECCA

Why now what?

RON

Why do you want to find her now?

REBECCA

I'm not mad anymore.

RON

Remind me not to make you mad.

REBECCA

Well, sometimes it helps to be mad.

RON

You think she's down there. Like living down there? It's not the greatest place to live.

REBECCA

No, really?

RON

I'm just saying the people that live down there are mostly drunks and junkies and Ind... First Na...

REBECCA

And what? You were going to say Indians. Oh, don't get all politically correct on me now..

RON

Okay, Indians. You got a thing for Indians?

REBECCA

Yeah, I got a thing for Indians. You got a thing against Indians?

RON

No, I was just saying...

REBECCA

Never mind. Save it for your job.

RON

What's that supposed to mean?

REBECCA

Listen. I'm not really into Education 101 this morning. So why don't you take your pale bum home.

RON

Let me guess... you're Indian.

REBECCA

Part Indian.

RON

Which part?

REBECCA

The good part.

RON

I thought you were Italian or something.

REBECCA

I thought you were white or something. And I was right. So we both win.

RON

It's just that you don't seem Indian.

REBECCA

That begs the question – what does an Indian seem like? Let me guess – you probably think that, if an Indian goes to university or watches TV, it makes them the same as every other Canadian. Only less. The big melting pot. The only problem is you can't melt an Indian. You can't kill a stone. You can grind it down to sand, but it's still there sifting through everything forever. There, you got it.

RON

Wow, and it's not even nine o'clock in the morning.

REBECCA

I haven't even finished my first cup of coffee.

RON

Since you're there, why do you think so many end up down there?

REBECCA

Since you asked, I don't think so many of them end up down there. I think so many people end up down there. Period.

RON

Why?

REBECCA

It's an accident. Something heavy falls on them. It might just be one thing... one thing and then everything seems to tumble down and pretty soon there is no getting up.

RON

What do you mean?

REBECCA

Like an accident – people drive by in their nice cars and stare at people on those streets, because they realize for a moment it could happen to them. So they might be saying “poor bastards,” but what they're really thinking about is themselves and their own potential tragedy.

So these nice people finally look away and—to console themselves from that one conscious thought—think it couldn't happen to them. It's

happening to “those” people. Even better if “those” people are mentally ill or brown or addicted to one thing or another. Because these nice people can park their nice cars in their nice driveways and open the doors to their nice homes and take a couple of nice valiums, or call up that nice Betty Ford and go for a nice little vacation “just to get away.” They think they are safe. It doesn't matter where your room is – you still have to face the face.

RON

The room?

REBECCA

Yourself. Alone.

RON

So you're saying that's why people end up there.

REBECCA

Yes, they're alone and they know it but there's nothing more comforting than being with a group of people that know they are alone...

RON

...It's like going to hear the Blues when you're feeling like shit. It makes you feel better.

REBECCA

(She looks at him.) Yeah...

RON

Gotcha.

REBECCA

Well, this has been a lot of fun, but I really have to get a move on.

RON

That means I have to leave.

REBECCA

That means – yeah... you have to leave. I have to get dressed. Day stuff.

RON

Can I give you a call?

REBECCA

Mmmmm?

RON

Maybe I could take you out for supper.

REBECCA

Steak and potato and a good red wine.

RON

Sure... make me an honest asshole.

REBECCA

Make me an honest woman. My life is kinda clustered right now but...

RON

But...

REBECCA

Yeah... maybe... I think I've told you too much.

RON

I don't think you've told me enough.

REBECCA

Well, I wouldn't have told you anything, but I didn't think I'd see you again.

RON

And now?

REBECCA

I've probably said too much.

RON starts to get his clothes together and puts them on. He leaves. REBECCA rolls over to sleep.

SLIDE: THE LIVING ROOM – CONT.

The WOMEN are in different areas of the apartment touching and using REBECCA's things. VALERIE is going through REBECCA's laundry that's lying in a basket. She's pulling out different pieces of underwear and trying them on. MAVIS is sitting at REBECCA's desk playing with the phone. VIOLET has been in REBECCA's bedroom swinging on her swing and playing with REBECCA's pretty things. Gradually, the WOMEN pick what they want of REBECCA's clothing and make-up, and put them on.

MAVIS

She's gonna know you were in her drawers. Women always know when someone's been in their drawers.

VALERIE

So. Like, what's she gonna do about it?

MAVIS

The point is – you shouldn't be wearing her underwear. It doesn't even fit you.

VALERIE

It fits parts of me. And why don't you get off your ass and find out where Verna went?

MAVIS

I will after... I finish this one last call.

VALERIE

Who the hell are you talking to anyways?

MAVIS

Talked to my Aunt Bertha. She died when I was eight. She thought I'd forgotten all about her, but I said I always remembered her on account she told me I was beautiful when I was little. I always remember people who said I was beautiful.

VALERIE

Well, that's got to be real hard on your memory.

MAVIS

What?

VALERIE

I said, are you going to see where Verna is or do I have to?

MAVIS

You have to.

VALERIE doesn't leave but eavesdrops on MAVIS' conversation.

Hi... Dad. It's me. Mavis. Well, I just thought I'd call and say "hi." No reason. Like I said, I just got to thinking about you and thought – what the hell, I'll just give the old man a call just out of the blue. How have you been? (*She shrugs.*) How do I think you've been? Well, good I guess. Dad? Geez, he hung up on me.

VALERIE

What did you expect?

MAVIS

I thought he would've mellowed a bit in death.

VALERIE sniffs the air, and VIOLET tiptoes back into the room.

VALERIE

I think she's been into the perfume.

MAVIS

How do you know?

VALERIE

Can't you smell her coming?

MAVIS

Geez, she smells like an old whore.

VALERIE

What's that supposed to mean?

MAVIS

Just that she stinks I guess.

VIOLET

She's got lots of perfume.

VALERIE

We know.

VIOLET

I love perfume. I always wanted lots of perfume. That a drop could make you smell good all over, feel good all over, is kinda amazing.

VALERIE

That's the way I feel about lingerie. I got my first real bra when I was 12, you know one of those God-ugly white things from the Sears catalogue. The first day I come to the city, I went into a lingerie store – it was the most beautiful thing. Red and silk and satin and nylons and things that went up your butt and things that went down your butt and pulled things together and separated other things. That's a fuckin miracle happening if you ask me. I guess lingerie was my downfall.

MAVIS

How so?

VALERIE

I always wanted to show it to people.

MAVIS

Give me a pair of clean cotton undies any day.

VALERIE

What do you know about lingerie? You never get off your ass to appreciate anything on your ass.

MAVIS

Listen, Valerie... enough about my ass, okay?

VALERIE

Okay, okay – touchy, touchy.

MAVIS

...and since you're worried about everybody's ass, go and see if Verna's in the can.

VALERIE moves towards the bathroom.

VALERIE

Probably reading her one-shit-at-a-time AA book. A capital-letter SOB story if you ask me.

VIOLET

She's not in there.

MAVIS

So now what?

VALERIE

Well, I guess we look good enough to go look for her.

They stop and look in REBECCA's mirror. They put on the finishing touches of make-up and scarves, etc. They look good. They turn to go.

Ready?

MAVIS

Ready.

They leave. VIOLET picks up some red lipstick and puts it on.

The phone rings. Lights up on REBECCA, as she mutters and gets up and picks up the phone. Lights up on AUNT SHADIE at the switchboard.

REBECCA

Hello?

AUNT SHADIE—recognizing REBECCA's voice—stops, breathes slowly and sits down, not able to answer, cradling the phone.

Answer, why don't you?

Nothing.

(sarcastically) I love you too.

REBECCA places the receiver down. Lights out on AUNT SHADIE.
REBECCA enters the bathroom and starts the shower and gets in.

The phone rings. She wraps herself and stumbles towards it, dripping. She picks it up.

SFX: A male voice talking under.

Ahhhh... enough already. (picks up phone) Hello? Am I missing something? (to herself) Well, why don't we just play a little game. I'm not sure yet – why? Why didn't you just say that? I must've lost it when I was down there last night. Yeah, I'll be down this afternoon. How will I know you? Okay, yeah. I'll ask the bartender. You can tell me by the picture on my driver's license, or at least I hope you can. Thanks... yeah this afternoon. I'll be there – I told you. Thanks.

She hangs up the phone.

(to herself) Weirdo.

REBECCA searches through her laundry basket for her new underwear. She looks under things, the search continues.

Oh, that's great. I finally get a set of great underwear, and the dryer eats it. Here, underwear. Oh, this is not a good day. I should just go back to bed. Go back to bed. Okay, I can do it. Seventy dollars worth of gonch disappeared... feeling like shit.

The phone rings. It's RON.

Hello. I mean... (sexy) hel-lo. Just kidding. How you doing? I haven't seen you for at least a couple of hours. Dinner? What do you feel like eating? Steak. Perfect. No, great choice. How can I refuse when you say it like that? I have some running around to do today, but later tonight sounds good. Okay – see you then... there... whatever. Bye.

She gets up, walks past a mirror and looks in.

Feeling good... looking like shit... lost my wallet... talking to myself... and a slut to top it off. Perfect.

She walks into her bedroom. Stops suspiciously and looks at the bed's toes.

Don't even think about it if you want to live.

Lights down.

VIOLET makes her way slowly up the stairs.

SLIDE: SETTING THE TABLE

ROSE is going around the table placing plates.

ROSE

You smell pretty. Do you want to help?

VIOLET

Okay.

VIOLET picks up a pile of cutlery and begins handing it to her. AUNT SHADIE sits quietly by herself weaving snowshoes. She places her feet in each, testing them out. ROSE and VIOLET place the silverware in a setting ritual.

Why do you think we're here?

ROSE

That's a big question.

VIOLET

That's a big question – that's what everybody says.

ROSE

I spent most of life waiting for the big answer. Waiting to fall in love, waiting to have children, waiting to give.

VIOLET

Waiting for the right things to happen that would make everything alright.

ROSE

Waiting.

VIOLET

(more like a woman than a child) But not making a choice.

ROSE

Sometimes the right moment in time...

VIOLET

The right waiting is our own making...

ROSE

...our knowing that everything has a time and a place.

AUNT SHADIE puts both snowshoes on and is practicing. Proud of her limbs and her snowshoe expertise.

AUNT SHADIE

That we've never forgotten.

VIOLET holds the last knife for a moment and then places it on the table in its setting. She turns to look at AUNT SHADIE. AUNT SHADIE nods and VIOLET walks back down like a woman.

SLIDE: THE EMPRESSES

The BARBER sits at a red terry-cloth table sipping beer. He is dressed in a suit, though shabby around the edges. VERNA is seated beside him, leaning into him, talking. The BARBER is scoping out the place and oblivious to her chatter.

VERNA

Listen, you moron. I'm talking to you. Oh bald one. Don't think I even went around with you because you are good-looking or nothing – you're ugly. Ugly... look at those glasses – four eyes – big eyes bulging out like you're looking at headlights or something. Big dumb.... Stupid.

VERNA slaps him upside the head. His glasses fall off. He picks them up and places them back on his head. The slap changes his focus. He looks through the bar where his barbershop slowly lights up. In a hunting hallucination, his instinct sharpens as he sees a flash of brown moving. He attempts to stumble up. VERNA sits him down roughly.

Not so fast, ree-tard. I got a few more things to get off my chest.

He staggers back down, his eyes fixated on an image coming through the mirrors of his barbershop. A forest forms in the mirrors. The flashes of brown become closer, getting clearer.

GILBERT

Okay, baby... that's it, baby... that's it.

VERNA

Nee.chin whikth quan.knit to squaw.kwaw – I already took the liquor.

He concentrates single-mindedly on his vision.

GILBERT

Oh, it is brown – the colour of my thirst.

VERNA

It's my drink – *tay squaw.kaw*

The brown blurs form into a beautiful projection of MARILYN, PENNY AND PATSY, who are dressed in their hair dreams, seductive and sensual. The projections accent their legs and limbs and eyes. VALERIE and MAVIS step

into the image and slowly emerge from the mirror, beautifully in deer-like grace, in unison – part woman, part animal seduction. As they emerge, VIOLET follows behind them – high woman vogue. The following is a collage of images, song, language and movement. Intoxicating and potent.

Quaw.swbat.tus.at.na.ay.quee.quaw – as it reaches my stomach,
Tob hat.toe.know.a.tone.nas.new.whakt – of my sacred beliefs.

VALERIE and MAVIS get closer to him, moving slow and sensual. They stop to apply lipstick seductively, suggestively, for him.

Thirsty for living.

GILBERT

I watched.

They stop mid-lipstick.

VERNA

Thirsty.

WOMEN

I held my breath.

GILBERT

Like animals before her, she was there when I needed to take.

VERNA

Hungry.

The WOMEN seductively pour beer down his throat.

WOMEN

He was afraid of making a mistake.

VERNA

Hungry.

GILBERT

Like animals before her, I wished to look in her eyes...

He tries to pull VALERIE closer. VALERIE places her lips on his and feeds him beer.

VERNA

Hungry.

WOMEN

I saw the smallness.

VERNA

...lies...

GILBERT

I took them before they could really see me.

VERNA

In desperation.

They sniff.

WOMEN

I smelled him.

VERNA

Hungry for me.

GILBERT

Like animals before her, there was a stillness.

He staggers for them. They pull away. Stop.

VERNA

My heart.

They stop and sigh.

WOMEN

...a stillness...

VERNA

The real me.

WOMEN

...a peacefulness...

VERNA

Waiting.

GILBERT

A gasp.

They pose and sigh.

VERNA

Waiting.

GILBERT

Expecting...

They moan seductively.

VERNA

...to laugh at...

GILBERT

...deliverance.

VERNA

...Salvation.

They walk away slowly, beautifully, eyes on him.

WOMEN

There was only my God laughing when he said...

GILBERT

"...There are more ways than one to skin an animal."

WOMEN

There was only my God laughing when he said...

GILBERT

"...Everyone thinks it, they just don't do it."

WOMEN

There was only me laughing when he said...

GILBERT

Die. Die.

WOMEN

Only me.

VERNA

Seeing...

GILBERT

...the look in their eyes.

VERNA

Pointing...

WOMEN

...back...

VERNA

Leaving you...

GILBERT

...wondering – can an animal laugh?

VALERIE and MAVIS and VIOLET slip back into the mirror and through the images of MARILYN, PATSY AND PENNY. The mirror reflecting many women.

WOMEN

Oh yes. Oh yes. Forever

GILBERT starts pounding his drinks, shaken.

GILBERT

I am a good and decent man.

I am a good and good-living man.

MAVIS Her Chair Ass and VALERIE and VIOLET appear behind VERNA. VALERIE places her hand on VERNA's shoulder.

VALERIE

It's time to go, Verna – he's not worth it.

GILBERT

I am clean.

MAVIS

He's just a man.

GILBERT

I am.

VERNA

An ugly man to boot.

GILBERT

I am.

VIOLET

An ugly man to boot.

GILBERT

I am.

MAVIS

You should feel sorry for him.

GILBERT

Therefore, I am.

VERNA

Sorry? *(pause)* All I feel sorry for is his little dick and his ugly face. Besides, I'm tired of feeling sorry for white people.

GILBERT continues to get blasted.

MAVIS

Okay, enough of this ugly.

VERNA

What? You got something for him, Mavis?

MAVIS

I never had anything for him, Verna. I thought he was someone else.

VERNA

Well, that's easy to say now..

VALERIE

That's enough, Verna. We all thought he was someone we knew. Someone we needed. Okay, leave it alone.

VERNA

Skinny bastard.

MAVIS

We should go, Verna.

VERNA

You go.

VALERIE

We're not leaving you here, Verna.

VERNA

Why the hell not?

VALERIE

It would be too pitiful.

VERNA

You wanna make something out of this, Valerie?

VALERIE

Verna, you know I could make you in a minute.

VERNA gets up from her chair to challenge VALERIE.

VERNA

Make this...

MAVIS

Hello – it's her Rebecca.

VALERIE & VIOLET

Oh shittttttttttttttttttt...

REBECCA approaches them. The WOMEN back away slightly.

REBECCA

Excuse me?

WOMEN

Ahhhh... yeah?

GILBERT

(bazy drunk) Yeah? What do you want? *(He looks at her intensely.)* I mean... how can I help you? Miss.

REBECCA

Umm... the guy at the front said you were the one that had my wallet. I mean you were the one that found it. Remember, you told me to get the bartender to point you out.

GILBERT

Right... right. Mind isn't what it used to be. *(laughs)* Have a seat.

REBECCA sits.

I saw you in here last night. It must of fell from your jacket or something. I'm just glad I could help.

VALERIE

Help this, you fuckin pig! *(She squeezes her boobs together.)*

REBECCA

Well, thanks. It's always a big hassle when you lose your ID.

WOMEN

I'll say.

GILBERT

What's a nice girl like you hanging around a place like this?

MAVIS

Oh, that's original.

REBECCA

Just playing pool.

GILBERT

Can I buy you a drink?

VIOLET

No.

REBECCA

No, it's okay.

GILBERT

Seriously, you look like a lady that was lookin' for something.

He hands her over a beer. She watches the beer slide over.

REBECCA

O-kay... Well, it's a long story.

GILBERT

I got all the time in the world.

REBECCA

Really. I have been looking for my mother. She was last seen in this neighbourhood. Seems I just get close to where she last lived, or where she used to hang out, and I somehow miss her.

GILBERT

You gotta picture? I've been around here for a long time.

REBECCA shuffles in her purse and pulls a picture out. She shows it to him. All the WOMEN look at it.

VALERIE

Holy shit, she was beautiful.

MAVIS

Kinda looks like me when I was young.

VERNA

Yeah, right.

GILBERT

I think I know her. I think her name was – well... I don't know her real name, but they used to call her Aunt Shadie or something...

REBECCA

Aunt Shadie?

WOMEN

Aunt Shadie?!

GILBERT

Aunt Shadie. Come to think of it, I had a drink with her awhile back.

REBECCA

How long ago is a while back?

GILBERT

I lose track of time – you know how it is? Anyways, she left some things with me to hold for safekeeping... she said she was gonna try and look up a daughter she hadn't seen in awhile. I'm always tryin' to help some of these women out.

REBECCA

Really.

GILBERT

If you want, we can finish these off and head over to my barbershop. I think I got something of hers there.

The BARBER watches her as REBECCA downs her beer. They get up, and he stumbles and tries to pull himself together. REBECCA looks around, she stops.

WOMEN

It's alright.

REBECCA

(to herself, them) It's alright.

Lights down.

SLIDE: WHEN SHE WAS HORNY AND WANTED SEX – The Barbershop

They enter the barbershop. GILBERT walks around and shuts the blinds to his storefront. REBECCA walks around the shop, keeping her distance. He stares intensely at her.

REBECCA

It's a nice shop. Do you have a lot of clients?

GILBERT

Just my regulars. They like the service I've always given them.

REBECCA

I'm sure they do.

GILBERT

I'm good at my job. Been doing it for thirty years now.

REBECCA

Really?

GILBERT

You could say this has been my calling.

REBECCA

What do you like best about it?

GILBERT

I'm in control, and I know what they want.

REBECCA

What do they want?

GILBERT

That depends.

REBECCA

I love barbershops. Always loved them. Ever since I was a little girl I used to come with my dad and watch him get shaved and have his hair cut.

She touches his utensils.

GILBERT

You used to have long hair?

REBECCA

Yeah, but I cut it because I... you wouldn't understand. I cut it to my shoulders a couple of months ago. It will grow, and I'll braid it like I used to when I was a kid.

GILBERT

Braids?

REBECCA

My dad used to do it for me... he used to say I looked just like my mom when he finished. I used to love that.

GILBERT

Can I braid it? I like women in braids.

REBECCA

No, it's alright. Thanks...

He grabs her hair from behind. She grabs her hair back.

Enough.

GILBERT

(He turns and says to himself:) You fuckin uppity bitch.

REBECCA

Pardon me.

GILBERT

Pardon me? *(mimicking her)*

He gets out a bottle from his cupboard.

Do you want a drink?

REBECCA

Sure, I guess. Shouldn't you be working?

GILBERT

I am.

Long awkward silence.

REBECCA

So... can I see what you have of my mother's? I don't usually drink in the afternoon, so this is really a special treat. It really goes straight to my head...

GILBERT

Here, I'll just top you up.

REBECCA

Yeah...

She watches him pour the drink.

GILBERT

I'm just gonna go freshen up a bit. Don't want to be in the company of a beautiful young woman looking like I need to brush my teeth.

GILBERT exits to go to the bathroom.

REBECCA

And you're only worried about your teeth... fuckin scary.

She goes to pull out a drawer and then stops and looks at the red and white barber light. She stops for a long moment and breathes. She walks directly towards it, taking the bottom off the light. A handful of long black braids fall to the floor. She gasps and touches each one until she gets to her mother's. She picks her mother's braid up and buries her face in it and sobs. REBECCA hears GILBERT approaching. Shaken, she takes her jacket off and covers the braids and tries to get herself together.

Here, Gilbert, why don't you have a seat. I always found shaving men sexy. It makes me horny. Can I shave you, Gilbert?

GILBERT

I don't know... it's not usually how things work.

REBECCA

Things they are a changin'...

GILBERT

What?

REBECCA

Just a song I had in my head. Oh, come on.

GILBERT

Okay.. you have to be careful.

REBECCA

I'll be gentle.

He reaches up to touch her. She grabs his hands.

You have beautiful hands. I've always loved men's hands. How they move. Your hands are so soft and white. I bet you've loved a lot of women.

GILBERT

I've had my share of women.

REBECCA

You're being modest.

GILBERT

Women have always taken to me. I know how to make a woman happy. I know what they want to hear.

He places his hands on her breasts.

REBECCA

Slow down, Gilbert. Slow down, we have lots of time. Would you like a drink? Can I buy you a drink? Can I get you a drink?

GILBERT

What do you mean?

REBECCA

I mean, can I pour you a drink?

GILBERT

Sure, I guess.

REBECCA

Here you go. You sure you don't want more? You look like you can handle your liquor.

GILBERT

I'm not scared of anything.

She pours him a beap.

REBECCA

Of course not. Okay, baby. Can I shave you?

GILBERT

You have to be very careful.

REBECCA

I'd never do anything to hurt you. Do want your bottle? Here, why don't I place it right here, so it can be close to you? Do you like that? It's right here so it can be close to you. Do you like that?

She grooves it into his crotch. He moans.

I'll just place this over you now. Like this?

She places his barbershop cape over him. It covers his body.

GILBERT

That's right.

REBECCA

That's right.

He grabs her hand. She keeps him from forcing her hand down.

GILBERT

That's right. Right down here... you fuckin...

REBECCA

Gilbert. Shhhhhhhh... just wait... just wait. Close your eyes and relax. Relax. I'm here, baby.

GILBERT

Yeah. I'll relax when I'm stuffing you with my...

REBECCA

Should I use this? *(She grabs the shaving cream bottle.)* So, I take it in my hand... spray it out like this? You tell me, you're the professional.

GILBERT

That's it. That's it. Jesus Christ, just do it.

REBECCA

Just close your eyes – let me do all the work.

She smoothes the foam over his face sensually.

GILBERT

Mmmmmmm.

He closes his eyes. As she spreads the foam on his face, a forest reflects in the mirrors as it is being covered by billowing snow. A beautiful, crystallized snow scene.

A voice from the dark approaches through the landscape. It gets closer and closer. At first, just a movement and glimpses of brown.

AUNT SHADIE

I used to be a real good trapper when I was young. You wouldn't believe it, now that I'm such a city girl. But before, when my legs and body were young and muscular, I could go forever. Walking those traplines with snowshoes. The sun coming down, sprinkling everything with crystals, some floating down and dusting that white comforter with magic. I would walk that trapline...

REBECCA

I would walk that trapline...

AUNT SHADIE

...like a map, my body knowing every turn, every tree, every curve the land uses to confuse us.

REBECCA

...like a map, my body knowing every turn, every lie, every curve they use to kill us.

REBECCA & AUNT SHADIE

I felt like I was part of the magic that wasn't confused.

REBECCA

The crystals sticking to the cold and the cold sticking to my black hair, my eyebrows, my clothes, my breath. A trap set.

REBECCA braces herself. She takes the razor and is about to cut his throat.

An animal caught.

The BARBER's eyes suddenly blaze open. He grabs her hand and they struggle with the blade. The blade draws closer to her neck and is about to cut her open. AUNT SHADIE emerges from the landscape as a trapper. She stands behind REBECCA. She puts her hand over REBECCA's hand and draws the knife closer to the BARBER's neck. He looks up and panics as he sees AUNT SHADIE and the WOMEN/trappers behind her. Squirming, they slit his throat.

AUNT SHADIE

Red.

They look at each other. Blood seeps on his white gown.

REBECCA

Red.

AUNT SHADIE

If it squirmed, I would put it out of its misery as fast as I could.

The trappers follow through, as REBECCA and her mother stare at each other. The trappers take the razor, wash it and replace it. REBECCA hands each woman her braid. The WOMEN leave in a line. Her mother remains standing. REBECCA reaches in her pocket and hands her mother her braid of hair.

Re-becca.

AUNT SHADIE raises her hand and touches her face.

REBECCA

Meegweetch and thank you.

AUNT SHADIE hugs her and falls behind the line of WOMEN/trappers. She falls in behind the rest of the trappers, as the lights fade on the landscape and the WOMEN tracking their way back.

SLIDE: THE FIRST SUPPER – NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE LAST SUPPER

REBECCA watches the long line of WOMEN as they take their heavy trapping clothes off, their long, long hair spilling everywhere. They begin to sit down to a beautiful banquet à la the Last Supper. Lights fade on them, and the sound of their voices becomes the sound of trees.

SFX: Sound of tree leaves moving in the wind.

REBECCA exits from the barbershop. She walks in the wind and trees.

SFX: The loud sound of a tree falling...

She stops and listens to the sound.

The barbershop is empty except for the BARBER in his chair. Barber lights swirl red and white throughout the barbershop. The red light intensifies and takes over the room. Fade out.

SFX: The sound of the tree hitting the ground with a loud thud.

REBECCA closes her eyes for a moment and then continues walking.

Fade out.

The end.