

ANNA, EMMA, EDNA, ETCETERA

(A Deep Comedy)

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE SUICIDES

Anna Russian Beauty

Emma French Cutie

Edna Southern Belle

THE STALKED

Hester Sexy Puritan

Isabel Free-Spirited New Yorker

Charlotte Gone-Crazy Writer

THE EXPERTS

Carl New Age Jungian

Cady Strong-Willed Womynist

Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell American Neurologist

THE MONSTERS

Lucy Seductive Vampire

Bertha Bitter Spitfire

Cathy Moor-Covered Night-Haunt

AND FEATURING...

Jo Everybody's Favorite Tomboy

CHARACTERS BY THE BOOK

ANNA, EMMA, EDNA, ETCETERA

Heroine	Book	Author	Date of Publication
Anna Karenina	<i>Anna Karenina</i>	Leo Tolstoy	1877
Emma Bovary	<i>Madame Bovary</i>	Gustave Flaubert	1857
Edna Pontellier	<i>The Awakening</i>	Kate Chopin	1899
Hester Prynne	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	Nathaniel Hawthorne	1850
Unnamed	<i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>	Charlotte Perkins Gilman	1892
Isabel Archer	<i>The Portrait of a Lady</i>	Henry James	1881
Lucy Westenra	<i>Dracula</i>	Bram Stoker	1897
Bertha Mason	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Charlotte Bronte	1847
Catherine Linton	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	Emily Bronte	1847
Jo March	<i>Little Women</i>	Louisa May Alcott	1869

SETTING:

ACT ONE:

Alternating Scenes: Orientation

A Psychiatric Institute in California's Wine Country
A Safe House in San Francisco, California

Over two months

ACT TWO:

Scene I: Optimism

A Unitarian Church in Berkeley, California
Three months later

Scene II: Complications

Same setting
Six months later

Scene III: Desperation

Sidewalk Cafe in Berkeley
That afternoon

ACT THREE:

Scene I: Ghosts

Hospital Room
Later that afternoon

Scene II: The Duel

Hospital Room
The next morning

Scene III: The Ball

Unitarian Church
Three months later

ANNA, EMMA, EDNA, ETCETERA

ACT ONE

The stage is divided into two "rooms." The action will flow back and forth, illuminated by a spotlight or other energy. The safehouse room has a door to the street. The winery room has a large picture window showing grassy grounds.

Outside of the "rooms" the stage is accented with elements of a 19th century parlour: a tea service, a corseted mannequin, a harp, a sewing machine, needle-point, a letter-writing desk, etc.

The movement of the actors in both rooms will be choreographed in concert. At times, there will be music in one room and movement in the other. At other times, when all attention is to be paid to one room, the actors will be napping, reading novels, sewing, getting massages, etc.

A piano should be accessible from both sides.

In between scenes, when no action is noted, during Act I Anna will sob and write furious notes, Emma will read novels, Edna will sketch and paint; and Charlotte will write in her journal or on the walls, Isabel will read novels, and Hester will sew.

SCENE ONE

A mish-mash therapy office displaying tribal, Jungian, New Age, and feminist art and symbology. A giant dream catcher with tampons hanging down; an Andy Warhol Marilyn with a primal scream superimposed; a Buddha statue with an African mask; side-by-side posters of Nietzsche & Christopher Reeve, labeled "Man" and "Superman."

In the other "room" CADY alone does yoga poses in a spotlight.

As the curtain opens, three women "come to" primly and awkwardly on ugly chairs in a semi-circle. ANNA is dressed in a smart, elegant travel suit, but her hat is dented and askew, and she has train tracks across her face. EMMA is in a pretty dress, but with vomit down her front. She has a crumpled wreath, and may be holding a crucifix, which she throws. EDNA is wet and naked and slumped over, unconscious.

ANNA:

Pointedly examines her surroundings after shifting with exaggerated discomfort.

Zo thees ees Hell!

EMMA:

Happily excited, laughing a little hysterically, with charming French accent.

It's just like "No Exit"!

turns to Anna

But of course you know Jean-Paul Sartre? I've read everything.

ANNA:

You needn't exert yourself to address me in English; my French is impeccable.

EMMA:

I'm afraid the same can't be said for your grooming. O la la! Que pretentieuse!

ANNA:

Oh, great! Stuck in eternity with a French tart!

EMMA:

Sotto voce

Becheuse.

The spotlight moves to reveal CARL, grunting to get out of lotus position on a mat. He wears a frayed leather vest, a tie-dyed shirt, love beads, a pony tail, political buttons, and bare feet. Knocks over his Tibetan prayer bowl and gets everyone's attention. The women look down and notice him for the first time.

CARL:

To Edna, who is stirring.

Oh, you've come to!

Hands out his first of many boxes of tissues.

Here, let's dry you off! I'm afraid I don't have a towel, let's see...

He grabs a couple handfuls and ineffectually dabs them on her skin.

EMMA:

Here, allow me, madame!

She wraps her pretty shawl around Edna. Her fingers linger.

You have such strong-looking shoulders!

CARL:

Rings his prayer bowl.

Ahem, Shalom, my feminine shadows, my animas, I can sense by your vibrations that you've just had a terrible shock. You're going to rebalance your inner harmony here, at the Winery for Women. Let's calm our chakras, let's reharmonize, by breathing in and out once -- uhhhh -- exhale -- huhhhh-- I mean inhale -- now exhale! -- uhhh -- and saying OM together to positivize the unchill vibes in this, our sacred sanctuary, our pregnant purgatory, our new welcoming womb...

OMMMMMMM!

The three women look around silently in stupefaction.

EMMA AND ANNA:

Ummmmm?

CARL:

Welcome to the Suicide Survivor's Support Circle. I'm Dr. Young. I'll be your path guide. "Psychiatrist" is such a patriarchal term, not to mention passe. I want you to feel safe. Let's go round and say our names.

ANNA:

Karenina. Surely all of civilized society knows the stigma of *that* name!

EMMA:

Bovary. Oh, how I curse the day I became a Cow!

EDNA:

As she opens her mouth she gags and coughs out a large shrimp.

CARL:

Fumbles to hand her tissues, gives up, pats her on back..

Umm...okay, maybe we should try our first names! We're going to be very intimate here. I'll start. I'm Carl.

ANNA:

I'm Anna

EMMA:

I'm Emma

EDNA:

I'm Edna

CARL:

Marvelous, my animas! Now let's do it with a drum!

He passes them each a hand drum.

ANNA:

An-na

EMMA:

Em-ma

EDNA:

Ed-na

CARL:

Good! Good for you! Louder!

This is repeated as a chant as they all join in: An-na, Em-ma, Ed-na. As they go round, the voices grow more confident, and the chant 'n' drums becomes more rhythmic. Then it fades into a background rhythm and the spotlight moves to the other room.

CUT TO:

SAFEHOUSE

The living-room is unmistakably feminist, with touches to show it is an old Victorian in San Francisco. The walls are lavender. There is a poster of Melissa Etheridge rocking out, and Rosie the Riveter – Yes We Can! Worn couches. A stuffed cat sleeps in various spots, including laps. At the outside door is a broom. Occasionally, when Charlotte is the only one looking in a particular direction, we will see a ghost in the window, and Charlotte will startle. The ghost scrapes the window and says, “Let me in!”

Onstage is CADY. She is bra-less and doing increasingly fierce warrior poses to the drumbeat.

To the beat of the drums, three women walk onstage in bathrobes, one at a time, all disoriented. First comes CHARLOTTE, in a threadbare bathrobe, hunched over, bed-headish, creeping against a wall, skittish and acting insane. Then comes ISABEL, in a stylish robe, all peppy. Then HESTER, in a white terry cloth bathrobe with a big red A stitched on it. She is carrying a sewing basket, with red cloth spilling out the side.

CHARLOTTE:

Crawls and creeps against the wall, flattening herself and pausing when spooked.

ISABEL:

Walks in, looking about pertly.

Oh what a lovely place! It's too enchanting!

Picks up the cat.

What a perfect little darling!

To the cat:

What's your name?

CADY:

Walking in.

Alice Walker.

ISABEL:

Oh, Alice Walker, you adorable creature!

To Cady:

How old is your house? Is it Elizabethan?

CADY:

It's a Victorian, and it's owned by a non-profit.

ISABEL:

How very delightful!

HESTER:

Running into the room, rushes to window.

Pearl! Little Pearl! Where art my devil-child?

CADY:

In an awesome outstretched pose. Oblivious to their panic.

Good morning, strong womyn! Be proud of yourselves for bravely getting out of bed to face the day!

ISABEL:

What day would that be? I should like to have a train schedule!

She is still curiously looking around and picking stuff up.

HESTER:

Rushes at door.

Hath he snatched my witch-baby?

CADY:

Runs to block door. Jangles with a ring of keys.

Oh, you don't wanna go out there!

The women continue to slink around the perimeter in confusion. Jane keeps "creeping" and jumping when she sees the other women "creeping." Jane picks up a marker and begins writing on the walls. Hester and Isabel pick up items and study them quizzically. Finally Isabel spies a book, picks it up, curls up with it. Hester sits down to sew.

CUT TO:

WINERY

CARL:

Now ladies, I know this will be a difficult juncture in our heroine's journey, but we have to face our shadow, embrace our shadow!

ANNA:

Women with a shadow usually end badly.

CARL:

Okay, then, let our skeletons out of the cupboard!

So let's just get it over with. Catch!

He tosses a box of tissues to Anna.

Breathe? Okay -- go! How did we do it?

ANNA:

Do it?

CARL:

Do it!

EMMA:

I seenk he is talking about the sex!

CARL:

Sex as in death!

EMMA:

The little death?

CARL:

Losing patience. He explodes.

The Big Death!

EMMA:

Oh....!

CARL:

Sighs, then brightens.

Oh, I know, let's play a game of Clue. We'll pass around a basket. Choose the totem that triggers a stirring of what's suppressed in your subconscious.

He pulls an antique revolver out of a sewing basket and passes the basket to Emma. He strokes the barrel, then puts it in his mouth.

EDNA:

drawls

Oh, your mean our method.

CARL:

Yes! Good, yes!

EMMA:

You know what they say about a pistol making an appearance in the first act.

CARL:

Oh, no worries! Nothing's loaded here.

He puts the gun in his mouth, pulls the trigger to no effect. The women cringe. He laughs.

EMMA:

From the basket Emma pulls out a large knife, and uses it as a preening mirror. She gasps, scowls, and begins to powder her face.

Mon Dieu!

EDNA:

Pulls out a rope. It just keeps coming and coming, to comic effect.

ANNA:

Pulls out a candlestick.

This is preposterous! I don't need a mneumonic. It was a train!

EMMA:

Arsenic!

EDNA:

The Gulf of Mexico!

A ring of the prayer bowl!

CARL:

Points the revolver at his chest.

Now let's center in the anahata, the heart chakra. How are we feeling?

ANNA:

Holds her head in her hands.

Like a wreck!

She begins to sob, and does so off and on for the duration of Act One.

EMMA:

Sick to my stomach.

Reaches for tissues as she vomits.

EDNA:

Bloated.

Folds over in her chair, head down. All women are miserable. They moan.

Emma uses a tissue box to wipe up the vomit on her dress front. Anna sobs.

Emma picks up a novel to read; it happens to be Anna Karenina. She curls up, enrapt.

CUT TO:

SAFEHOUSE:

Cady pouring tea, and handing a cup to each woman.

CADY:

It's Yerba Mate. It's caffeine-free. Really good for PMS.

ISABEL:

An afternoon drink, then?

HESTER:

Art thou an herb-gatherer? My --

CADY:

Here, have some tea. It's soothing.

ISABEL:

In England I was accustomed to taking tea much later in the day.

HESTER:

Art thou from England? I sailed from England!

ISABEL:

No, I only drank tea in England. I was brought up in Albany, some say badly.

HESTER:

Oh, is that one of the Colonies? I live in Boston!

CADY:

Jane, why don't you come away from the wall and join the tea party.

CHARLOTTE:

She is hunched against the wall.

gasps.

Jane? By that name, do you mean me?

ISABEL:

Hmph! Well, I live on the Continent now!

CADY:

Actually, you live in San Francisco now!

ISABEL:

Are we in Spain then? I should be able to catch a train to Rome!

CADY:

Um, New Spain.

CHARLOTTE:

Now is writing in a notebook, and talking aloud.

I'm not aware that my name was Jane. But I can't recall for the life of me what my name was...

ISABEL:

I'm afraid I haven't the least idea how I've come to arrive here. But I know my name and I'm not at all crazy!

CADY:

Oh, nobody's crazy. Your abuser may be crazy-making you, but it's not you!

ISABEL:

Speak for yourself! I must board a train to Rome at once! Gilbert gets angry if I'm away!

CARL:

Shouts over from the other room:

Ix-nay on the ain-tray! Anna's very vulnerable-vay!

Meanwhile, Hester has made another red A and holds it up for inspection, opens her robe, and pins it to her sexy black lace teddy.

CADY:

Settles everyone with tea.

Let's sit down for an orientation.

Welcome to the San Francisco Safe House for Women.

Flipping through a binder or clipboard.

Let's start with ... Esther?

HESTER:

Looks up. Hand to clavicle.

That's Hester.

CADY:

Oh, okay ... with an H. That's different.

Scribbles correction on clipboard.

Registered sex offender, convicted of a serious sex crime, and incarcerated. Gave birth to a baby while in prison. Currently on parole.

A beat.

Is this all true?

HESTER:

Yes.

CADY:

Shit, that means I'm required to report you to the neighbors. But I can't, your whereabouts are confidential.

Hmm.

Being stalked by estranged husband –

HESTER:

I felt no love, nor feigned any!

CADY:

--who threatened violence to the father of the child if his identity was discovered.

HESTER:

He said, "Thou will not reveal his name?"
I said, "Ask me not! Thou shalt never know!"

CADY:

Okay...

The State battled for custody of the child due to negligence.

HESTER:

It was a question of Moral negligence.

CADY:

What?

HESTER:

A lack of Christian nurture.

At the age of three, she could not say who had made her.

CADY:

You mean the father?

HESTER:

Her Heavenly Father.

CADY:

Okay...

Must carry visible I.D.

Let's see your I.D.

HESTER:

Holds up the "A."

Here is my badge of shame!

CADY:

Okay, we'll go back to you.

So, then, Jane.

CHARLOTTE:

Well, I can't say my name is Jane!

CADY:

Well, your intake form says Jane Doe.

ISABEL:

Intake form?? Am I being held against my will? I'm very fond of my liberty.

CADY:

We'll get to you next, Lady Liberty.

ISABEL:

This must be one of Ralph's pranks!

CADY:

So, Jane.

Receiving psychiatric treatment for post-partum psychosis. Visual hallucinations. May be dangerous to self.

Looks alarmed.

CHARLOTTE:

No, no, I just think I would get better if I got out!

CADY:

Soothing, condescending tone.

But first you need to get better.

CHARLOTTE:

She and the audience only see Cathy flit by window.

Gasp! Was that a ghost?

CADY:

A hallucination.

To continue, your husband was physically and emotionally controlling, not allowing you to work outside the home.

CHARLOTTE:

Yes, and that's why I couldn't get better!

CADY:

Your sister-in-law took over care of the baby.

CHARLOTTE:

The baby was bad for my nerves.

HESTER:

The baby! Where is my devil-baby?

CADY:

We don't allow any name-calling in the safe house.

pause

Next, Isabel.

Do you go by Izzie or anything?

ISABEL:

Oh, no, I'm quite fond of my own name.

CADY:

Okay. Isabel. Stalked by two men and played by another.

Must be hard being that popular!

ISABEL:

But most agree that my sister Edith is prettier.

CADY:

So...

Controlling boyfriend acts like he's her fiance....he stalks her from Boston to New York to Europe. In England, her uncle's neighbor, a powerful landowner, tries to use his wealth and influence to tie her down.

A cousin comes out of the woodwork –

ISABEL:

That's Ralph.

CADY:

– and bets on her like she's at the races. Then she's seduced by a pair of grifters.

ISABEL:

It was an inside job!

CADY:

Ralph?

ISABEL:

Oh, no, he wanted me free for vicarious adventures.

CADY:

So what happened?

ISABEL:

I had an adventure in Rome. That's where I got trapped.

CADY:

You mean married?

ISABEL:

Gilbert seemed so different from the chaps in England and America. I thought he had such artistic taste. Now I see that I was just overwhelmed by the Roman Architecture!

CADY:

And so your husband is controlling you –

ISABEL:

Jumps up.

Oh, no! ... But I should get back...he hates it when I'm away....

CADY:

Pops up, blocking her way.

Wait--

First we have to do our Sun Salutations!

She gets into pose. The women disrobe, revealing some manner of corset. They begin to do yoga in their corsets. They continue to do yoga throughout the meditation in the other room.

CUT TO:

WINERY

Meditative new age music. Everyone's eyes are closed; they are swaying.

CARL:

Meditation voice. Women holding animal totems: Anna, horse; Edna, parrot; Emma, cow. Carl holds a wolf. Emma sneaking peeks at a book in her lap.

You felt different from other women, your passionate natures set you apart, made you want to experience more, your feelings went deeper. You craved true love, you felt alive when you were in love, and simply dead – oops, my bad – um, unaroused, unawakened when treated like property. You yearned to be in a society where you could follow your passion openly, in a time where it was socially acceptable to lift up your skirts, show your ankles, and run with the wolves!

He howls.

The women sit up in alarm and open their eyes. Edna drops her totem loudly.

ANNA:

All right! Enough of this charade. Where's my Seryozha?

CARL:

Your – what's that?

EMMA:

Still holding copy of Anna Karenina open.

Her son – Sergei Alexeievich!

ANNA:

My darling boy!

Sobbing.

EDNA:

Covers mouth in embarrassment.

Oh, dear! The children! I completely forgot about them!

EMMA:

Who cares about the children! I need to know how many francs I owe for my stay at this sophisticated hotel! You know I'm hopelessly in debt. Rodolphe won't give me any more money! Lheureux is after me! They will take away the furniture! You better hide the crystal!

Picks up candlestick or goblet and hides in her bag.

CARL:

Ladies, ladies, this is a fresh start. It is a gift. You are free agents, but you are not alone. I am your path guide to a brave new world of unequaled freedoms!

EMMA:

You mean I don't owe any money?

CARL:

Blank slate!

EMMA:

Ah! Quel soulagement!

CARL:

So, let's begin our new lives with a spa treatment!

They begin to put on facial masks.

EDNA:

It's just mud.

They do spa treatments; Carl gives Emma a pedicure; some massage.

CARL:

So tell me, girls! Have you ever fainted? What does it feel like when the world is closing in? Were you revived with smelling salts? Did your corsets restrict your breathing?

EDNA:

It was the heat.

CARL:

Could we do a role-play? Can I try on one of your corsets?

EVERYONE:

No!

EMMA:

You'll stretch it out!

CARL:

Oh...

Continues to paint Emma's toes.

CUT TO:

SAFEHOUSE

CADY:

Cady is in official mode, reading from a clipboard, and each woman is following along with a binder. They are back in robes and funny slippers.

Let's go over the San Francisco Safe House guidelines. After we've reviewed the rules, I'll need a signed agreement from each resident.

First off, this is a safe space for animals too, which means this is a vegan household. So no animal products. That includes meat, poultry, seafood --

ISABEL:

petting the cat.

What about the kitty cat?

CADY:

Oh, Alice Walker is vegan, too.

So I was saying, all of these animal products are forbidden in the house: meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy products, honey, fur, leather, wool, silk, gelatin, lanolin, rennet, whey, beeswax, and shellac.

Don't worry--you'll love soy milk and tofurkey. Tonight we'll make a substitute cheese sauce with nutritional yeast.

HESTER:

Are yeast animals?

CADY:

No!

CADY:

The length of stay is two months. During the first month, you will rest in the house. During the second month, you may venture out with a pre-approved pass and chaperone. You may not make outgoing phone calls. You may not give out the safe house address or phone number. You must keep the curtains drawn. Any breach of confidentiality will result in your immediate eviction. The strict confidentiality is imperative to ensure protection from your abuser.

ISABEL:

Wait! I've never been abused! I have no idea who referred me here. I've always done as I pleased!

flounces off

CADY:

Yells after her.

Yes, I'm sure it seems that way. After we go through our "DV" training program you will see how men have exerted their power and control over you. Some might go so far as to say that men have created you!

Silently a woman in 19th century dress begin to skulk around the perimeter of the safe house, peeking in the windows.

There are three residents, plus me, each with her own bedroom. No guests. No drugging. No drinking. Each resident tidies up the common areas, which include the kitchen, the parlour, and the one bathroom.

A loud flush is heard. Isabel skips back happily.

ISABEL:

I just adore indoor water closets! What are these pretty little things?

CADY:

It's soap.

ISABEL:

How delightful!

CADY:

Okay. I do a run to the library and the video store every Monday. We keep a running list on the fridge.

I thought about using Netflix, but if we order too many chick-flicks, they might get wise to us.

During your two-month stay, you will receive training in assertiveness techniques and job interviewing. We will also work out a housing plan so that you can live independently by the end of your stay.

For your safety, never answer the door or the phone.

Just then, a knock at the door. The women skittishly duck for cover. Cady cracks the door to Jo March.

JO:

Whistling.

Puts in a booted foot, then an umbrella, like the Cat in the Hat.

Oh, do let me in! I want to let a room in your ladies' boardinghouse.

CADY:

Runs up to the door, hugging her clipboard, and pushes up the chair to block further entry. They talk on either side of the door.

How did you find out about us?

JO:

I'm no fool, Daisy! I saw dancing shadows in the curtains.

CADY:

We don't accept walk-ins. We're at full occupancy right now. You have to apply and meet the admittance criteria and wait for a vacancy. Here's my card. Call during office hours. I care.

JO:

Oh, Christopher Columbus! Between you and me, I'm out of my element.

CADY:

Picks up clipboard and pen.

Okay. I guess it wouldn't hurt to start. ... Name?

JO:

Josephine March.

CADY:

Perks up.

Jo!?

excited

Jo, do you have a significant other you are trying to escape?

JO:

Yes, I've come all the way out West on the Pacific Railroad.

CADY:

And do you have any independent means?

JO:

Well, I'm an authoress. I've got this thrilling little tale I'm trying to sell. As a last resort, I can always sell my hair.

CADY:

And your S-O, is she, or he, trying to --

JO:

Oh, no, he never wants me to cut my hair, of course...

CADY:

Oh, "he".. So... he's, um, controlling of your...

JO:

Oh, Teddy would never so much as say so...

CADY:

Okay, let's do it this way. Has your partner ever done one of the following behaviors: For instance, has he ever extinguished a cigarette butt on your arm? "Lost" the car keys so you couldn't drive to your

sister's house? Made disparaging remarks about your poetry?

JO:

Mercy me, no! My husband is a consummate gentleman! He would never put down my writing!

CADY:

Drops clipboard, dejected.

I'm afraid you're not qualified.

JO:

But I was forced to marry against my will by those niminy-piminy chits in Louisa's book club. Honestly, if I'da wanted to get hitched, I would'a said yes to the boy next door! We always had fun!

CADY:

Fun?

Peeks back into front room. Opens door.

Okay, just between you and me. Second door on the right!

JO:

Stealthily slips into Cady's room. Only Jane sees her "creeping" and gives a start.

CHARLOTTE:

Gasp!

Everyone emerges from hiding.

I saw a woman – creeping!

CADY:

You must have great imaginative power!

CUT TO:

WINERY FOR WOMEN

The women have been giving each other the spa treatment. Have mud facials. Excited about various new gadgets and holding them up: blow dryer, pantyhose, a vibrator...

They are looking at magazines and holding up pictures in an effort to orient to modern reality.

CARL:

This is a motor car.

EMMA:

But what is this?

CARL:

That is a tennis bracelet.

This is an airplane.

EDNA:

But what is this?

CARL:

That is a Speedo.

This is an iPod.

ANNA:

But what is this?!

CARL:

That's George Clooney.

EMMA:

And this?

CARL:

Brad Pitt.

EDNA:

And *this*?

CARL:

President Barack Obama.

ALL WOMEN:

Mmmmm!!!

All three women continue to peruse the magazines, turning them around, moving them closer, making sounds of surprise.

An attendant brings in a service of wine, and they set up and pour.

CUT TO:

SAFEHOUSE

Charlotte creeps out with a manuscript (which we have been watching her write) and places it on a table near the door. Pens a little note, and sneaks back, in time to see...

Door opens and Jo, haphazardly dressed, hurries out of Cady's room. Charlotte spies her again. Cady, wrapped in a sheet (with one droplet of red blood), wearing a cowboy hat, and pointing a western cowboy gun, pops her head out and motions, "Call me."

CADY:

Subdued voice.

Call me!

JO:

As Jo exits, whistling, she spies a little card atop the manuscript.

"For the young lady writer in the jaunty boots and bonnet." That's me! "From Your Secret Admirer." Oooh! But who are you?

She glances around, shrugs happily, picks up the manuscript, puts it in her satchel, and skips out singing:

Oh, my darling/oh, my darling/oh, my darling Clementine/Thou art lost and gone forever/Dreadful sorry, Clementine.

CUT TO:

WINERY

There are a couple bottles of wine on the table. Everyone is sipping from wine glasses. Wearing spa getups.

EMMA:

Ooh! What pretty wine goblets!

ANNA:

Dr. Young, you are certain that it is fashionable for ladies to indulge in this sort of drink?

CARL:

Absolutely! Por supuesto! All women drink wine!

EMMA:

But in the afternoon?

CARL:

Especially in the afternoon!

He refills their glasses.

Salud!

ANNA:

Has anyone seen Edna?

They look around and then go to the window.

EMMA:

There's something splashing in the koi pond.

ANNA:

Lifting up her opera glasses.

She's naked!

CARL:

Lunging.

Let me see! I mean, let me help her!

He runs out with a towel.

Edna walks in wrapped in a towel. Carl is trotting behind her carrying her things.

EDNA:

I feel so alive!

A big goldfish is attached.

The women continue sipping wine, looking at magazines, etc.

CUT TO:

SAFEHOUSE

Cady is giving a Domestic Violence (DV) training.

CADY:

This is the Cycle of Violence. This circle is the rising tension, when you feel like you are walking on eggshells.

CHARLOTTE:

But aren't they non-vegan?

CADY:

That's not funny.

This circle is the Violent Outburst, which can be either verbal or physical. Because of your domestic proximity to the abuser, you will often be blamed and targeted in this burst of tension release. Here's a tip: Stay out of the house on Superbowl Sunday.

No matter what you do or say, you are never to blame for his behavior!

HESTER:

But I am blameworthy! I hath committed adultery!

CADY:

Oh, for heaven's sake! Adultery's not even against the law any more. Unless you're in Afghanistan.

HESTER:

But I committed a sin!

CADY:

Sin is so passe! It's an outdated construct.

HESTER:

But I sinned in the eyes of God!

CADY:

Huh! Like God can talk! Don't get me started on God! God was the biggest bully of 'em all! Just think of what He did to Lot's wife when He lost His temper. The controlling bastard! Telling her where to look, where not to look!

CHARLOTTE:

Lot's wife: did she have a name?

CADY:

Well, she's unnamed in Genesis, but according to Wikipedia, her name was Edith, like Archie Bunker's wife, who, by the way, was the victim of verbal abuse. I don't find that show funny.

The third circle is called the Honeymoon Period. This can last for days, weeks, or months. He may weep, quote Shakespeare, buy you flowers, take you to Hawaii, make you a rainbow, vow never do it again. But he will. Often with escalating force. Think of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean!

Now, like a mystery story-teller; the lighting changes; a man stalks around the perimeter of the house.

The most dangerous period of all is when you are plotting your escape.

HESTER:

Gasps in recognition.

Like when I tried to book passage on the Bristol ship...

CHARLOTTE:

When I tried to get out of bed.

CADY:

But you're all safe now.

Let's fill out our Restraining Orders together, and then we can make some carob soy cupcakes!

Okay: Roger?

HESTER:

Chillingworth. Well, that was his appellation.

CADY:

His what?

HESTER:

His alias.

CADY:

Okay: John...?

CHARLOTTE:

Doe.

CADY:

And...Isabel, what is Gilbert's last name?

ISABEL:

Gilbert is not an abuser!

CADY:

What about Caspar?

ISABEL:

Oh, Caspar is a splendid young man!

CADY:

Yes, but stalking is against the law.

ISABEL:

I don't think it's against the law in Europe!

CHARLOTTE:

I think it's called dating in Argentina.

CUT TO:

WINERY:

Several wine bottles on the table.

ANNA:

A bit drunk. Slams down her wine glass.

Alexei was a mean, horrible creature! He smothered everything in me that was alive. He never once even thought of me as a living woman who needed to be loved!

CARL:

Wait -- is that Alexei Karenin or Alexei Vronsky?

EMMA:

Geez, how could you possibly think she was talking about Count Vronsky?

CARL:

It's hard to keep the names --

ANNA:

Oh, Vronsky, Vronsky!!! (*begins weeping*) "Such a man as all the world!"

He was probably relieved when I died!! I freed him up! His mother probably gloated!

EMMA:

No, he loved you!

ANNA:

How would you know!

EDNA:

Fanning herself.

How could he not? You inspire such passion!

EMMA:

To Anna.

At least you got to have a great passion! I never experienced passion, or bliss, or ecstasy.

Wistful.

Those words looked so beautiful in books...

ANNA:

This isn't about you—it's about Vronsky!

EMMA:

Oh, I'm sure it was frightful for him! He probably went mad! Maybe he tried to shoot himself! I bet he was prostrate with grief, I'll bet he couldn't eat, I'll bet it destroyed him.

CARL:

But I'll bet he survived. And you will, too.

CUT TO:

SAFEHOUSE

ALL TOGETHER:

(chanting and movement to drums)

Plain
Jane
Not my
Name
Doe
Ho Ho
Out you
Go

CADY:

The exorcism is complete! You are un-Janed!

She begins to light candles.

These are soy candles. No beeswax.

Let the Re-Naming Ceremony Begin!

CHARLOTTE:

Books scattered all around her.

Women are given a lit candle; stand in a circle; trying to do balance poses.

Well, I've been reading a lot of names ... so it's a tough decision that I'm choosing to leave to fate. I'll pull my name out of a hat. In alphabetical order, I've chosen:

As she says each name, she drops a folded paper into a hat.

Agatha
Beatrix
Charlotte
Dorothy
Elizabeth
Franny
George

CADY:

Wait -- George is a guy's name.

Everybody falls out of pose.

ISABEL:

No, I'm pretty sure George Eliot and George Sand were gals.

CADY:

Yeah, maybe...but if you name yourself George, everyone will think you're a dude.

CHARLOTTE:

So maybe it's time to bring it back as a girl's name.

CADY:

Teasing.

O, Georgette!

CHARLOTTE:

No.

CADY:

Georgina...!

CHARLOTTE:

No means no!

Ahem. To continue..

Everybody gets back in pose and hums.

Harriet

Imogene

Juliet

Kitty

Lenore ... no, Lolita!

Trades folded papers.

Margaret

Natasha

Ophelia

and

Pippi!

Stops.

Everyone falls out of pose, like "Huh??"

CADY:

"Pippi"? That's it? What kind of name is "Pippi"?

ISABEL:

Haven't you ever heard of Pippi Longstocking! The little girl with the crazy braids in the South Seas. She lives without parents and talks to her horse and has superhuman strength!

CADY:

Hmm...that's a little fanciful. What about the name Virginia?!

ISABEL:

What about Wendy? The girl who flew out her bedroom window!

CHARLOTTE:

Yeah...I didn't make it that far down in the alphabet. I got stuck on Q.

CADY:

That's too bad...I would've chosen Virginia...

CHARLOTTE:

Well, I didn't want to end up like Virginia...

CARL:

Across the stage:

Or Zelda!

Each woman picks up a lit candle and does a yoga balance pose. Lights dim.

A bongo drum roll.

CHARLOTTE:

And the winning name is

ISABEL:

Looking over her shoulder:

Ophelia!

CHARLOTTE:

Throws the paper in horror.

Oh, god! I can't be an Ophelia! It had sounded so romantic in Hamlet.

ISABEL:

Bounces to retrieve folded name on floor.

Boo! I was kidding you. Look again!

Opens and hands it to Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE:

Charlotte! Yeah, that should do.

Hester slips out.

They pop a bottle of champagne, and toast.

EVERYONE:

To Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE:

Isn't champagne against the safe house rules?

CADY:

No worries, it's sparkling kombucha cider! Non-alcoholic!

CHARLOTTE:

Takes a sip. Appreciates its potency.

Whoo, I'll say!

HESTER:

Comes back. She's holding a pin cushion.

I made you a present.

ISABEL:

Is that a poppet?

HESTER:

Time for a new robe.

She presents a robe, with a gorgeous lavender "C" embroidered on it.

CADY:

But how did you know????

Charlotte slips on the new robe, and she hugs Hester. Then they all hug her, and bid each other goodnight, and head off to their bedrooms.

ISABEL:

Turns to Hester:

Are you a witch?

HESTER:

Stabs needle into poppet pin cushion.

No, just quick with my stitch. I had 24 letters ready. I felt safe skipping Q and X.

They part ways. The stage is empty. Then there is a scream. Charlotte runs out, with Cady following.

CHARLOTTE:

It was that ghost again! Creeping at my window!

CADY:

Oh, Charlotte. Your nervous condition...I'll make some more kombucha...

CHARLOTTE:

Her voice is so chilling...she sounds so desperate...

CADY:

You're projecting how you felt when you were trapped in your marriage...

ISABEL:

Running out.

A ghost??!

You ought to see ghosts in this romantic old house!

CADY:

There's no romance here!

ISABEL:

Charlotte, I would like you to show me the ghost!

CHARLOTTE:

I might show it to you, but you'd never see it. The privilege isn't given to everyone; it's not enviable. It has never been seen by a young, happy, innocent person like you. You must have suffered first.

ISABEL:

I'm afraid of suffering. But I'm not afraid of ghosts. And I think people suffer too easily. It's not absolutely necessary to suffer; we were not made for that. Only if you don't suffer, they call you hard.

CHARLOTTE:

It's a merit to be strong.

Isabel picks up a copy of Anna Karenina and heads off to bed. She will continue reading it.

CUT TO:

WINERY

Emma has thick copy of Anna Karenina on her lap.

CARL:

When it feels like there is no other alternative, when you again feel despair, how are we going to react this time?

EMMA:

I'll never despair again! Fooled me once! This time around, my eyes are opened!

CARL:

Yes, but, it's possible that ... all people at some time feel overwhelmed...with the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.”

EDNA:

Yes, I was overwhelmed by the sensuous touch of the sea, enfolding my body in its soft, close embrace...

EMMA:

Mmm....and how did it feel, to be taken?

CARL:

Ahem, and so next time you feel overwhelmed, you will --

EDNA:

Well, I'm going to become a much better swimmer.

CARL:

Yes, and you have my number to call in case you...

EDNA:

And how would that work?

CARL:

Ummm, and, Anna....now that you are in a less impulsive state of emo, how would you react differently?

ANNA:

My situation was impossible! Don't you see? There was no alternative! I had to choose between my passion and my son! I couldn't be happy!

EMMA:

Like Sophie's Choice.

Anna begins to sob again.

Vronsky or Seryozha!

ANNA:

Passion or death!

EDNA:

Yes, but couldn't you have just been a bit more discreet? Wouldn't that have helped things out a little?

ANNA:

How could you understand? Your husband was a Creole! He was so permissive!

CARL:

Now, let's not get into name-calling.

ANNA:

to Carl

Well, what would you have done?!

CARL:

Hmmm...well...ummm....

EMMA:

I wish Count Vronsky had shot your husband in a duel! That would have been so romantic!

ANNA:

Which is exactly why my husband wouldn't challenge him. He is so cold, so cruel!

A few beats.

EDNA:

Y'know, from what you've said, it was your button-up husband who unwittingly set you up. He thought he'd tucked you into a train car with a safe old society matron, but he placed you precisely in Vronsky's path. The old dowager sang her son's praises the whole train ride...you were favorably predisposed.

EMMA:

It was your brother who set you up! He sent you into Kitty's household knowing you'd cross paths. Maybe he wanted to shake things up so that Kitty could end up with his friend Levin.

CARL:

Who was the better catch, after all!

ANNA:

Ahem!

CADY:

Yells across rooms.

Vronsky was a stalker!!

JOIN SCENES:

Out walks a giant check (like game show prize or Publisher's Clearinghouse) held by two women in

glittery little burlesque costumes and fishnet stockings. The check stations itself between the two rooms.

A VOICE:

Flashing lights.

Congratulations to Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, Edna Pontellier, Hester Prynne, Isabel Archer, and Charlotte X.

The women look up, starstruck.

You are each the recipient of a generous grant from the Society for the Preservation of 19th Century Literary Feminist Heroines, or SPNFH.

But before we continue, we would like to recognize the runners-up who were short-listed in a very tight pool. Our difficult selection process was based on three factors: the challenges endured by the fictional heroine during her life in the 1800s, the independence of her spirit, and her chances for 21st century success.

And the runners up were: Josephine March Bhaer, Bertha Antoinetta Mason Rochester, Catherine Earnshaw Linton, and Lucy Westenra.

And now we turn to the winners...Anna, Emma, Edna, Hester, Isabel, and Charlotte.

You have each received a one-year seed grant to jump start your new life in the 21st Century.

Note that this is a non-renewable grant; you should have your eye toward sustainability and be working on funding sources for the following year.

In order to be compliant with the grant, you must attend attend quarterly team support meetings for the duration of the year. Failure to comply will result in the withholding of grant monies.

Society gave you a raw deal the first time around. Here's to a different outcome!

Passes out little plastic cards.

(Audience applause.)

CUT TO:

SAFE HOUSE:

The women are drinking tea. Hester walks in carrying a mouse by its tail and deposits it in the trash without Cady seeing.

CHARLOTTE:

Petting the cat.

But I don't understand how you could settle for Osmond after turning down a Lord!

ISABEL:

I haven't the least idea!

CHARLOTTE:

Lord Warburton would have given you complete freedom...license to experience anything...

ISABEL:

I know! I don't know!

HESTER:

That's really lame, Isabel.

ISABEL:

I know!

CADY:

Don't you blame Ralph?

ISABEL:

Oh, no! Ralph's a dear!

CADY:

But he totally messed with you!

ISABEL:

Only philosophically. He also admired me!

CADY:

As entertainment!

ISABEL:

Well, people needed something before there was TV...

HESTER:

It was that nice, cultured lady who preyed on thee.

CADY:

Well, she was in cahoots with ---

They are interrupted by the sound of a card being dropped through the mail slot.

Isabel bounds up to retrieve it.

ISABEL:

Charlotte! It's for Charlotte.

CADY:

But how would anyone – who could – who even knows -- ?

The women jump up to peek out the window, but see nothing.

ISABEL:

Vicarious romantic thrill.

Maybe she has a stalker!

CHARLOTTE:

With a cheerful alacrity that surprises the others, snatches the card.

“I loved your stream-of-consciousness interior monologue of a trapped woman – so honest and immediate! Please accompany me to a lecture at the university sponsored by the Women's Studies department. I trust you will find it of interest.”

She is so overcome she runs off to her room.

CADY:

Yelling after her.

But who's it from??? You have to tell me!! No, wait, that's totally unhealthy. You can tell me if you want to, I'll just listen!

CUT TO:

WINERY

Edna is standing at a full-length mirror trying on bathing suits (goggles, flippers, bathing caps?). A slapstick nod to the plight of all women trying on bathing suits.

Anna is sobbing and writing furiously on note-paper. Hands Carl an envelope.

ANNA:

Carl! Please deliver this note right away!

CARL:

To Russia with Love?? There's no address!

ANNA:

Give it to my footman—he'll know!

CARL:

Your – which one is he?

EMMA:

Now addicted to online shopping, dating, etc. She is on a laptop and/or an iPhone, entranced.

All you have to do is punch in the number from this little plastic card – it's like a dream! I can get anything I want! Oh, what cute slippers!

CARL:

But don't forget – there's a limit.

EMMA:

Laughing with glee!

No worries—I did a currency conversion. I have an account of, like, a hundred million francs! I'm the richest woman in my village! Charles only had an income of 270 francs a year!

CUT TO:

SAFEHOUSE:

Cady rolls out a red carpet and Hester walks out in sexy lingerie.

CHARLOTTE:

Holding a hand-held camera, filming Hester.

Okay, now turn. Look sideways. Now up on the pedestal!

Hester poses still on a chair or something.

Chin up! Tits up! Fabulous!

HESTER:

Jumps down. Twirls.

To the others:

It is my submission for Project Runway. It's a real-world fashion design contest. I saw it on TV.

CHARLOTTE:

I'm working on some sound bites:

Hester's Secret.

Hester Undressed Her.

Nighties for a Night of Iniquity.

ISABEL:

Skips in with backpack.

Ta da! I have an eTicket confirmation number and a very tiny travel trunk that will fit in the overhead bin. And a maple leaf patch. Hester, can you sew it on for me?

CHARLOTTE:

All roads lead to Roma!

CUT TO:

WINERY:

ANNA:

With stenographer's notebook.

Okay, give it to me straight. Who's dead or alive?

Clark Gable.

CARL:

Dead.

ANNA:

Damn!

Hemingway?

CARL:

Dead.

ANNA:

Method?

CARL:

Shotgun.

ANNA:

Elvis?

CARL:

Hard to say...

ANNA:

Method?

EMMA:

His own vomit.

ANNA:

Oh, gross! At least Hemingway was a man about it.

A beat.

Kurt Cobain?

CARL:

Very manly.

ANNA:

Rock Hudson?

CARL:

Manly, and gay.

ANNA:

Oh, good. I like a man who's not too serious.

CUT TO:

SAFE HOUSE:

Cady is leading a yoga pose chant. Carl is leading a drumming chant.

CADY:

This is from Sage Publications, Inc., copyright 1995, *Pattern Changing for Abused Women*.

Your Bill of Rights.

You have the right to be safe!

All join in chant, one room at a time. Safehouse regular; Winery in caps:

You have the right to be safe!

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS.

You have the right to be you.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BARE ALL.

They all strip their shoulders.

You have the right to be treated with respect.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO COMMIT ADULTERY.

You have the right to make mistakes.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO SPEAK TO AN ATTORNEY.

You have the right to ask questions.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT.

You have the right to your own privacy.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO OWN PROPERTY.

You have the right to grow and change.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO GROW 25 MARIJUANA PLANTS FOR YOUR OWN PERSONAL USE.

You have the right to your own opinion.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO CHANGE YOUR MIND.

You have the right to be angry--!

Everyone is in warrior pose. Including the Winery women.

Then, a knock on safe house door. Jo has come to pick up Charlotte.

CADY:

Jo! It's good to see you! You really shouldn't use the front door; you should come to my window...

She dives in for a kiss; Jo extends her hand to shake.

JO:

Good to see you, too, Cady! I'm actually here for Charlotte.

CADY:

Charlotte?

Wait, I don't understand! I thought we felt something for each other.

JO:

Oh, you felt spandy-nice!

CADY:

Instantly mad and in victim mode. Isabel and Hester (Carl, too) are still doing warrior pose in solidarity, but Charlotte has ducked out to get ready.

You owe it to me to process this.

JO:

Oh, fiddlesticks! I've done a review of the rules of 21st century dating etiquette: Miss Manners, Dear Abby, Dr. Laura, and Savage Love. I never told you that we were exclusive. You were jolly and "GGG."

CADY:

But you were my hero!

JO:

Caustically.

Yes, sometimes it hurts to distinguish fantasy from reality.

CADY:

Wipes tears from her eyes.

JO:

Oh, dear, what a blunderbuss I am! The sharp words fly out before I know what I'm about.

Charlotte skips out to meet Jo. She is a changed person.

JO:

Here's my pussy-cat!

CADY:

To Charlotte.

You seduced her under my nose!

CHARLOTTE:

But I didn't break any safe house rules.

CADY:

To Jo:

Are those boots made of leather? Do you mind waiting outside?

To Charlotte:

Remember the goddamn curfew.

Cady slams the door. Then, to the two others:

Alright, let's go!

ISABEL:

Wait—wouldn't that be, like, stalking?

CADY:

I have the right to be there, too. It's a free lecture.

ISABEL:

Whatev!

Curtains are drawn to block out the rooms.

SEGUE TO INTERMISSION:

Jo and Charlotte enter and sit in the front row of the audience. The others slip in at another spot. There is a lectern at stage front, center. Anyone dressed in 19th century garb had been seated in the front row.

The year would be 1873 and Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell walks in loud stiff shoes to the lectern to present a paper on "The Rest Cure."

At the lectern are a couple remnants of 19th century medicine, including, prominently displayed, a large glass flask with liquid, labeled Drink Me; one with salts, labeled Smelling Salts, or Sal Volatile; and one with powder labeled Arsenic.

INTRODUCTION:

As part of our visiting professor series, it is my pleasure to present to you Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, esteemed doctor of medicine, and the founder and first president of the American Neurological Society. He has served presidential terms for the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons, and the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Science. He is a surgeon and professor at the Philadelphia Orthopaedic Hospital and Infirmary for Nervous Diseases. He is here from Philadelphia to present his paper on the innovative breakthrough treatment of female maladies, The Rest Cure. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell.

(Applause)

DOCTOR:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

As you all know, we are swept up in an alarming epidemic of ladies with nervous diseases in the midst of modern society. The three common female diseases of the nerves are neurasthenia, hysteria, and erythromelalgia.

The presenting symptomology is a thin and anemic appearance.

The cause of this cluster of maladies is an Overactive Imagination, brought on by the reading of novels.

The frightening behaviors caused by novel-reading are expressive outbursts and romantic notions.

Mad laughter is heard off-stage.

I present to you today a new treatment called the Rest Cure. The treatment must be carried out with precision by the husband. Confine the lady to bed. The confinement must last two months. Restrain her if necessary to ensure that she cannot roll over. Restrict her diet. Husbands may apply massage and electricity to parts unknown.

Begin to hear banging in stage wings. Looks around, distracted. Speaks louder.

Eliminate all distractions. Limit contact with the baby and family members. Absolutely remove all novels. It is imperative that you reduce all stimuli for two months. Restrict her access to the outside world. Husbands will have to enforce the rules; it's for the best.

Banging of door; muffled noises.

Dr. Mitchell clears his throat and tries to continue.

This is to ensure a state of complete relaxation. The lady will have no worries, no books, and no stress.

We are expecting a high recovery rate.

Just then there is a chilling scream. Lucy runs across the stage in a flowing Victorian nightgown, a pale petite beauty with long hair flowing behind her, and blood dripping down her neck. Dr. Mitchell is completely confused.

Pardon me, Mademoiselle? Are you in need of medical assistance?

She runs around, laughing and screaming erratically.

Perhaps I can be of assistance. I am a medical doctor.

She leaps up and throws her arms around him, trying to bite him. He tries to pull her off.

Madame!! I beg of you to mind yourself!

Lucy continues to bite him.

Madame, unhand me! Ow!!

Then the pounding increases and a door bursts open. Out runs a monstrous woman, wild and strong.

BERTHA:

I am Mr. Rochester's wife! His lawfully wedded wife! My husband was my jailer. The famous leading man, Mr. Rochester. He locked me up all these years! I was his captive!

ANNOUNCER:

Excuse me, ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to --

Bertha pushes announcer out of the way.

She runs up to the doctor, punches/pushes him, picks up Lucy, who has fainted, and runs out through the audience. Lucy's dainty Victorian shoe has fallen off, and Dr. Mitchell picks it up, looks around, and strokes or sniffs it. He continues to stand in one place, dazed, stammering, looking around in bewilderment.

Amidst this cacophony Cathy runs onstage and dashes off with the flask of arsenic. Carl sneakily pockets the bottle of smelling salts. Audience members throw symbolic relics of female oppression: gloves, shoes, corsets. Or, alternately, paperback romance novels. Jo stands up and whoops, lets her hair down or loosens her garment. Charlotte begins laughing freely, runs up and has a slug of "Drink Me," and is still laughing when Jo spies Anna and makes a beeline for her.

JO:

Hello, pussycat!

ANNOUNCER:

Ladies and gentlemen, I apologize for the disruption. It seems the doctor will be unable to continue his talk at this moment. Let's take a brief intermission in order for him to regain his bearing. Thank you, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell.

Applause.

CHARLOTTE:

Still holding the Drink Me flask. Notices that Jo is gone.

Jo? Jo? Where did you go?

**** INTERMISSION ****

ACT TWO

SETTING

Unitarian Church in Berkeley, California. Drab room with circle of chairs. Poster of mission statement: Social Justice for Palestine and Transgendered, Open Mic with Country Joe, Community Urban Garden Planting, No Scented Lotions.

SCENE ONE

The time is three months later, for the first mid-grant audit.

Tea and cookies are served on table.

Together Cady and Carl struggle to hang up a big banner: SPNFH Quarterly Audit Meeting.

Then they roll out a red carpet. In runway style, one by one the women enter the room and take a seat. They are all now modernized. Anna is in an elegant, perfectly fitting black dress, looks upon entering through her opera glasses. Emma is very fashionable, accessorized, almost manically happy. Edna is wearing swim club wear, tan, short hair.

Isabel is a bouncy backpacker, with a Canadian maple leaf patch. Hester wears a sexy negligee of her own creation. And Charlotte is a wispy, distracted writer, maybe with purple tips.

Cady and Carl co-present.

CARL:

Teary.

Ladies, it is so wonderful to see you again!

CADY:

Elbows him.

Women.

CARL:

Thriving and alive.

CADY:

Of course they are!

So, the grant people – uh, “Spin-Fuh” -- requested that Carl and I co-facilitate this first quarterly audit

meeting.

It's pretty simple. There's some forms to fill out. The purpose is to ensure that everyone is on track.

Either Carl or I or one of your co-grantees can interview you, then we'll do a report back. But first we have a community-building ice-breaker “mingle.”

To Carl.

Are these cookies vegan? Who brought them?

CARL:

Who cares? *(takes a big bite and starts crunching)*

CADY:

Okay, so first, we're going to break into groups of three. The first group to find a commonality, call it out! Okay? Mix up!

The group of six scatters in a square dance, then reconfigures. In between each call-out, Cady uses a whistle, Carl a singing bowl.

ISABEL, CHARLOTTE, HESTER:

We're all from the Northeast!

ANNA, EMMA, EDNA:

We all took a lover!

EMMA and EDNA:

Or lovers!

ANNA:

No, just lover.

Scatter.

ANNA, EMMA, ISABEL:

We all speak French!

Nous parlons francais!

Scatter.

EMMA, CHARLOTTE, HESTER:

Our husbands were all physicians!

Scatter.

ANNA, EDNA, CHARLOTTE:

Our husbands were highly respected in society.

ANNA:

Sarcastic.

What a fine chap! Such a remarkable man! C'estait un miserable!

CADY:

Ok, now dyads!

Big scatter. The monsters run in. Cathy and Bertha begin stuffing their faces. Isabel grabs Lucy's arm.

ISABEL, LUCY:

We each had three marriage proposals!

LUCY:

Just fancy! Three proposals in one day!

CADY:

Excuse me, ma'am...I think you're at the wrong meeting...the Vampire Fetish Ball is down the street at the First Congregational...

Someone steers her out.

Scatter.

BERTHA, EDNA:

My husband was a Creole, and Bertha here is a Creole!

Bertha says something in Creole.

CADY:

Bertha??

Consults her clipboard.

Bertha and Cathy squeal and run out.

EMMA, HESTER:

We had an only daughter.

Scatter.

CHARLOTTE, HESTER:

We are both Puritans.

Scatter.

ANNA, HESTER:

We are both fallen women.

Scatter.

EMMA, ISABEL:

We are both bookworms.

ISABEL:

But not “bookish.”

Scatter.

ANNA, EMMA:

I inspired the greatest novel ever written.

EMMA:

It was French.

ANNA:

No, it was Russian!

Scatter.

EMMA, ISABEL:

We were both raised without mothers. Our fathers were widowers.

Scatter.

EMMA, HESTER:

We both like lace.

Anna walks up and touches Hester's arm.

ANNA:

And so do I. Especially on that enchanting ... "dress." It's most original.

HESTER:

Thank you. It's actually negligé.

ANNA:

I've never seen a collar like this before. What do you call it?

HESTER:

It's my original style, a post-Puritan, Elizabethan fusion.

As a Project Runway contestant, I've got a commission to do a lingerie collection for the first lady of America. I'm calling it 'First Lady after Dark.' She's going to choose her favorite nightgown to wear after the State Dinner.

ANNA:

Really? I must accompany you to meet her! The first lady is too charming! I will not take no for an answer! I'll act as your model.

HESTER:

Okay! It will be my new debut. It would be nice not to be alone on a pedestal this time.

Anna and Hester sit and look at designs.

Now let's see...with your graceful, voluptuous figure...

Emma is looking at a picture on her phone or laptop. Isabel walks over and peeks.

ISABEL:

Oooo, can I see?

EMMA:

It's an exclusive online dating site called Doctors without Lovers.

I'm down to three candidates. The next stage is dinner.

Bachelor #1 is Acton; he's a cardiologist in Boston, divorced, Type A, driven, loves golf and sunsets. So he's balding a bit; he has a great portfolio.

Bachelor #2 is Ellis, a neurologist in San Francisco. Loves sunset horseback rides on the beach and the sound of the fog horn from his Russian Hill pied-a-terre. He's a "Metrosexual" – it's the new thing, like a hybrid -- no child support, no STDs!

Bachelor #3 is Curren, a plastic surgeon in Los Angeles; ambitious; drives a Maserati, loves moonlit walks on the beach. He's only 5' 10", but zero complaints lodged against his malpractice insurance policy! He's promised me a boob job.

CADY:

Wandering over, munching on a carrot.

Are you sure you're focusing on the right things?

EMMA:

Absolument! I have so learned my lesson. Charles was a dullard, his blood was thick, he wasn't ambitious, he wasn't even competent. Il est pauvre type!

ISABEL:

What does *your* profile say?

EMMA:

Well, *did*. I of course took it offline.

"Your very own Martha Stewart in a pretty French bow. I love cooking gourmet meals, lighting candles, and spicing up your sheets. I also love sunset walks on the beach. I'll give you the space you crave to pursue your ambitions."

Stops reading.

ISABEL:

Lemme see your picture.

Everyone leans in for a look.

CADY:

Are you wearing anything? Carl!

Carl wanders over. Cady glares at him.

CADY:

Carl, she's – she's --

CARL:

Drops his prayer bowl.

Beautiful!

CADY:

Naked!

EMMA:

We're supposed to give our “relationship history” over dinner. This is what I'm going to say:
--Carl, can we role play?--

Carl takes her hand “across the table.”

My poor widowed father encouraged me to marry very young. I unexpectedly outlived my devoted deceased husband. But that is a story from the past. I'm ready to dedicate myself to pleasing my new husband.

CARL:

Misty.

Oh, that is so touching!

ISABEL:

What's the rush?

EMMA:

It's only a one-year seed grant! I need to situate myself.

ISABEL:

I've got the itch to do the opposite!

CADY:

“Situating myself”? Carl! Didn't you do any assertiveness training?

CARL:

I have my own style of equipping women for the real world.

CADY:

So what skills are you equipped with, then, Emma?

EMMA:

Skills? ... Well, embroidery, needle-point ... piano. Tho I haven't played much lately, or more like I just pretended to play.

EDNA:

Oh, let me hear you!

EMMA:

Really? I'm not very good. I didn't go to my lessons.

EDNA:

Yes, I must. During analysis we concluded that it was while listening to piano that I released my dormant passions. I wonder if I have any left!

CARL:

Yes, Edna, let it all out!

Emma begins to play hesitantly.

CADY:

Approaches Charlotte, with clipboard.

So -- ! Give us the last three months in a nutshell.

Romantic music starts up.

CHARLOTTE:

Well, first we went to an old writers colony in New England --

CADY:

We.

CHARLOTTE:

The stimulation of society did me good! It was so good for me to have some excitement and change!

CADY:

Stimulation.

CHARLOTTE:

My nervous depression vanished! We awoke with a wood stove and tea and wrote, then walked through the woods, picked blueberries from a delicious garden. Then a lively dinner discussion, and then reading by the fire.

CADY:

It sounds romantic.

CHARLOTTE:

Yes, it felt so good to do 'congenial work' again. It was encouraging to have 'companionship about my work.'

CADY:

But what about your insomnia? Your nightmares?

CHARLOTTE:

What nightmares? I kept the window wide open...to let in the warm, humid night air. I felt an affinity with the climate, the crickets, the lightning bugs...we had a lovely canopy bed draped with mosquito netting...

CADY:

Cuts her off, irritated.

Okay, I get the picture!

CHARLOTTE:

So Jo introduced me to an agent at the retreat...

CADY:

Jo.

CHARLOTTE:

And the agent sold my notebook! -- I mean my "novella." Simon and Schuster named it 'the lavender walls.' All small-caps.

CADY:

Wait! That violates our confidentiality agreement.

CHARLOTTE:

No -- it's being marketed as fiction. There are no intentional references to persons or places.

CADY:

What about the lavender???

CHARLOTTE:

You didn't invent the symbology!

CADY:

But I was an early adopter!

Getting emo, turning away.

And you, Ms... Madame! ... Karenina?

ANNA:

Kitty once wished me in lilac! How innocent we all seemed at the beginning!

CADY:

O-kay.... Uh, can we focus on three months ago?

ANNA:

I was an innocent abroad indeed! I had booked my first aeroplane ride to Petersberg to ascertain the whereabouts of my descendants. It turns out I have a great-great-great-great nephew the spitting image

of Seryozha – little Alexei! With blue eyes, a sweet, shy smile, and darling brown curls! How adorably he recited his English phrases!

CARL:

So, who (*clears throat*) did you stay with?

ANNA:

“Whom.”

Surprisingly, both the Karenins and the Oblonskys insisted on putting me up. I had not disgraced the family name after all; au contraire, I had left behind the aura of a tragic heroine.

In fact, my aunt Katarina – we call her Aunt Katya -- used my mystique to have us invited to a presidential dinner; we don't have emperors any more.

We had an exotic 'fresh fusion' menu—botvinya with mango, chicken kiev with rosemary on a bed of arugula, and vegan borscht. Served with a not-very-good wine.

The kids asked me about Andrey Ternovskiy, the inventor of Chat Roulette—we played it once with Carl—Andrishka landed in New York, but he's probably out west in Palo Alto by now--Volodya wanted to try a round, but he was especially interested in the President of the New World. I told him, very handsome, maybe a bit on the thin side.

EMMA:

“Volodya?”

ANNA:

Oh, Vladimir. He's quite virile for his age. He kissed this glove.

She holds out her glove; Carl kisses it.

CARL:

With gruff exaggerated Russian accent.

Perestroika!

ANNA:

Laughs.

Oh, Carl, you silly, that was Gorbachev!

EMMA:

He can never keep them straight!

CADY:

But how are you *doing*??? Like *emotionally* doing?

ANNA:

Holds out her glove.

Just fine, thank you! And how are you emotionally doing?

CADY:

I'm all tongue-tied! I can't believe I'm talking to Anna Karenina!

ANNA:

Yes, my Petersburg people tell me I became a legendary femme fatale! Like Marilyn Monroe or Princess Di. Carl caught us up on pop culture.

CADY:

And so how do you feel about men now, after how they ruined you?

ANNA:

Counts them off on her ringed fingers.

Carl informed us about the five fingers of freedom: no-fault divorce, joint custody, paternity testing, property laws, and the Pill. It's all good!

CARL:

But were you able to get back on a train again...like we talked about?

ANNA:

Oh, nobody takes the trains anymore! My driver had a Mercedes.

CADY:

To Edna.

And where have you been?

EDNA:

On my own!

CADY:

With a clipboard.

Okay--

What are your 3-month goals?

EDNA:

To be a member of the Alcatraz 100 Club.

I've joined the Dolphin Club, and I'm training for the annual escape from Alcatraz.

I was a little unprepared for my last long swim.

CADY:

Oh, is that what happened?

EDNA:

But this time will be different. Coast guard speed boats will be following the swimmers from Alcatraz Island. I'll be totally safe.

CADY:

But you were all alone for your virgin swim in the Gulf of Mexico...swept up in the sea of change...

EDNA:

It was the most delicious feeling! Standing naked in the breeze, under the sunny sky! I felt so strong, so in my element! The water was warm. It carried me away! And now here I am!

CADY:

The water's colder, huh?

EDNA:

Yes, but nowadays they have neoprene.

CADY:

But isn't it true you like swimming in the nude?

Edna turns sharply to Carl.

EDNA:

Carl....!

CARL:

I didn't tell her that! I signed a confidentiality agreement.

EDNA:

I'll be wearing a cold water wetsuit.

A luxury not afforded to John Paul Scott, the only Alcatraz inmate who reached the shore by swimming. He was found suffering from hypothermia.

CADY:

I support this “enacting a prison break” metaphor, but what about question #4: how do you intend to make a living?

EDNA:

Oh, Ah'm doin just fahn sketching portraits at Pier 39!

CADY:

Really? How can you afford to live in the Marina District?

EDNA:

There's something in the air that gives one energy. I'm staying at the Marina Motel. I walk to Aquatic Park, I paint on the piers, I walk to Ghiradelli Chocolate, and I see any person I please!

CARL:

And do many please you?

EDNA:

Many.

CARL:

Fans himself. Hot!

So then this interesting woman must be --

ISABEL:

Miss Archer!

A cheerful handshake.

CARL:

You're quite...

ISABEL:

Oh, yes, of course I'm lovely!

CARL:

We all wondered what would become of you...

ISABEL:

As did I! I don't like to have everything settled beforehand. I like more unexpectedness.

CADY:

And so?

ISABEL:

My life was in ruins; I recognized nothing but the Coliseum.

CARL:

What about the Spanish Steps?

ISABEL:

What about MY steps?? They were covered in Eurotrash! Total strangers sipping wine on the portico. Not a trace of Gil or Merle or Pansy. I'd still thought it possible that "California" was the name of a futuristic amusement park, and not the actual future.

CARL:

So Cady didn't really explain...

ISABEL:

I was all alone with no puppet strings...so I decided to bop around the Continent—I like so much to see people--this time I didn't need a chaperone! Although there was this creepy French guy who followed me around the Eiffel Tower...

EMMA:

Oh, la Tour Eiffel!

ANNA:

Corrects her pronunciation.

La Tour Eiffel!

ISABEL:

It turns out that the Continent is not the end-all anymore. The trendy destination for developing young ladies is now the India--Thailand--Bali loop! And there's not a single reason to have to settle down with one guy. I want to find enlightenment...and I want to see a tiger!

ANNA:

Oh -- I can help you with the tiger. Volodya...

EMMA:

Volodya?

ANNA:

Yes, Vladimirshky. His little pet tigress cub, Mashenka or Milashka. She is such a little dear! So soft!

CADY:

Wait! You know the president of Russia?

ANNA:

Yes, my brother Stiva was fond of his great-great-great-uncle.

I must write Miss Archer a letter of introduction!

Begins to write a note.

EDNA:

Oh, Emma, won't you play us another! You need the practice!

Upbeat piano music as everyone exits happily. The curtains close and the music continues.

SCENE TWO

Six months later. Cady and Carl carry in food for two tables: one with tea, veggie snacks, etc. and one with wine, desserts, etc. Of course no-one touches the veggie table.

Edna is missing and does not appear. Anna is late.

Unlike Scene One, where everyone was together as a group to start, people walk in one by one.

Emma is dolled up and excited. Isabel is adorned with remnants of Bali, a train of prayer flags trailing from her backpack. Charlotte brings a copy of her book. Hester walks in – gasp – pregnant. Anna saunters in looking like Jacki O or Elizabeth Taylor, with a blond wig and big sunglasses.

CADY:

Picks up a cute cupcake, salivating!

Do these cupcakes have eggs?

CARL:

Of course they do, they are feminine!

CADY:

Ugghhr!

Throws it at him. He laughs.

Turns her head to Emma coming in. Cover-up sarcasm.

Why, Emma, don't you look fetching!

EMMA:

I hope Ellis thinks so! He's picking me up at the French Hotel right after this meeting. I keep a darling little room there. It will be our proposal dinner.

To Carl:

He's taking me to Chez Panisse to propose!

CARL:

Wait – is this the guy with the car, or the one who likes sunsets?

CADY:

Sarcastic.

They all like sunsets!

EMMA:

Pouting.

It's Ellis. You know...my almost-fiance.

CARL:

Eating a cupcake.

Oh, the golf guy. Are you sure he's gonna have time to pamper you to your heart's content?

EMMA:

Oh, Carl, you silly. The golf guy is Acton...he's in Boston!

ISABEL:

Strides in.

Well, I have some news! I know, I can't believe it myself! It's totally out of character!

She holds up her hand.

I don't have a ring-- it's a Tibetan commitment tattoo.

CARL:

Ooooooh! Did you go through some sort of tribal ritual?

ISABEL:

Actually, I don't really know if it was a religious or state ceremony. Hmm....I couldn't really understand the language.

All I know is that my visa ran out and Putu couldn't get back into the U.S. with me unless we were married.

CADY:

Big surprise! Everybody wants to marry an American traveler!

ISABEL:

Oh, no, this is, like, totally different. Putu is my soul mate. We are so hot for each other!

EMMA and CARL:

Oh, how romantic!

ISABEL:

Yes, it's so different than with Gilbert. Only now can I see how stifling he was. And how he used me for my money. I was so naïve then; it feels like another lifetime. I feel so free with Putu ...he doesn't demand anything of me at all...!

CADY:

Except U.S. citizenship.

ISABEL:

Oh, Cady, you are speaking from such an unenlightened vibration. You love yoga so much, you really should go to India.

CHARLOTTE:

Carrying a straw bag. Dropping things.

I brought everybody a copy of my book.

EMMA:

holding it.

It's not very thick.

CHARLOTTE:

I know. It's a "novella." More marketable than a long short story.

EMMA:

Is it true?

CHARLOTTE:

Well...we had to decide between memoir, narrative nonfiction, autobiography, autobiographical fiction, self-help, women's studies, literary fiction, fantasy, diary, or romance. The lawyers at Simon & Schuster decided to go with fiction, so, no, it's not.

CARL:

Studying the cover.

Is that a ghost in the window?

CHARLOTTE:

Yes, she's been haunting me. On my book tour, when I'm alone in a hotel room, after I've fallen asleep, I hear a scraping at the window. A ghost clawing at the window. Cold, white fingers clutching, then sliding down the glass, leaving long, desperate streaks. I've seen the face; she's blond, pale, moss in her hair, dirt in her nails...it's too frightening.

EMMA:

Thrilling.

It's so Gothic!

CARL:

It sounds to me like PTSD.

CHARLOTTE:

I wish Jo would think so. She's getting annoyed with my late-night calls. She thinks I've been drinking.

CADY:

Of course you haven't!

CHARLOTTE:

Well, I have, but that's beside the point. I love lecturing on book tours, but I hate being all alone in some hotel room. I'm afraid to fall asleep because of the night-haunt!

It's the recurring nightmare that started at the safe house...

CARL:

What really happened in the safe house that frightened you? Did you use vibrators?

ISABEL:

Kicks Charlotte.

You know we can't answer that! We signed a confidentiality agreement.

Hester walks in. She is pregnant, wearing a sexy maternity negligee. Everyone stares in shock.

ISABEL:

O-M-G!!

CARL:

She's fabulous!

CHARLOTTE:

She didn't get *that* from a vibrator!

CARL:

Can I touch it?

HESTER:

Well, I did it!

CADY:

We can see that!

HESTER:

No, I did it, as in I got my own label ... "Hester's Secret." Here's my signature 'H'. I've opened up shop in New York.

I have another order for Michelle O.

CADY:

What, is she pregnant?

HESTER:

No, this one's for me.

ISABEL:

So, can we take a shrewd guess at the father?

HESTER:

Ask me not! Thou shalt never know!

CADY:

Are you protecting someone? Because you know you don't have to. You can prove his identity with paternity testing!

HESTER:

I don't have to prove anything. I know his identity!

CADY:

That bastard owes you half his income – times 18!

HESTER:

Laughing.

I don't need his money. I sold a whole lingerie line to Oprah--plus and petite sizes--and another set to Carla Bruni, the Italian model. I met Carla through Anna.

CADY:

So, what, did the condom break? Did he say he was fixed?

HESTER:

Curious, aren't you?

CADY:

No, I think men are disgusting.

Anna makes her grand entrance, dashing in as if escaping a mob, in a fur coat, blond wig, and big glasses. She pauses, poses, fans herself with a tabloid, then tosses it to the floor.

ANNA:

Please pardon moi for being late, but I was detained by the paparazzi. They're just outside. My bodyguard, Nikolai, is blocking the door.

She takes off her disguise, lets it fall to the ground, and looks stunning in mod, late '60s spywear. Carl picks it all up.

CARL:

Holding up a tabloid.

Anna, can this be true? The National Enquirer, the Globe, and the Post say you're a triple spy!

ANNA:

I don't know what they can mean. When I had my tete-a-tete with Nicola --

EMMA:

Nicola?

ANNA:

Nicola Sarkozy – Kolya! – and his very charming wife, Carla, although she is a bit too thin...the French girls smoke too much...

Carl?! Can you give this note to Nikolishka --

CARL:

In – France?

ANNA:

No, Nikolai, right outside the door!

HESTER:

Coming up to her.

Anna, you're all right!

They kiss cheeks.

ANNA:

Fanning herself with a tabloid.

Oh, these paparazzi are more incorrigible than the Parisians! Things are so much more dignified in Petersburg. Although it does make one's heart race passionately!

HESTER:

We haven't seen each other since our trip to Washington!

ANNA:

Turns to the others.

Oh, what fun we had! After the State Dinner – we had carmelized okra, goat cheese ice cream, and a Napa Valley Savingnon Blanc, much better than the wine they served in Moscow -- we played charades out on the South Lawn...

HESTER:

Michelle had her hair styled in messy curls, *very bedroom*, I could tell it would look fantastic later when her hubby stripped her down to her teddy...

ANNA:

Yes, her shoulders deserve to be naked...Barack couldn't take his eyes off her, he is so in love...

EMMA:

'Baracky'?

ANNA:

Barroccoli, the president. Even blind-folded, playing 'Marco-Polo' he didn't flirt with me. He is so straight-laced, it's really too disgraceful, don't you think, Hestya?

HESTER:

Hmmm...?

ANNA:

As Jo would say, he's prim as a dish!

CADY:

Jo?

ANNA:

Yes, Josefinya.

I met her at that fascinating lecture. We've been exchanging belle-lettres.

CADY:

What does she say? No, don't tell me!

What is her handwriting like? Do you have a letter? Can I see it?

ANNA:

Has anyone seen Edna? She was completing my portrait. She had me pose by the sea. She said the fog brought out the gray of my eyes.

EMMA:

Edna is so idiosyncratic!

CARL:

Then you haven't heard. Of course you haven't. Breathe out. *(Coughs.)* No, first breathe in. Okay.

Where's Timber?

He picks up his wolf totem for comfort. He speaks somewhat incoherently.

Edna hasn't been seen since....she disappeared during....she was swept out to sea!

He breaks down.

ANNA:

What are you saying!

CARL:

I told her to call me!

EMMA:

There was nothing you could do.

She pets Carl.

CADY:

So, yeah, the official report is that Edna was one of the registered swimmers transported to Alcatraz Island. The Bay was enveloped in a heavy fog. She never returned to shore. They never found a body. I'm sorry.

ISABEL:

She was so independent. She always did what she felt like doing. I admire her!

EMMA:

The one that got away!

Oh, I gotta go! Time to meet Ellis!

SCENE THREE

Two charming cafe tables, each with two chairs. Homeless “monsters” sitting on overturned plastic milk crates. Bertha has a sign that reads, “Escaped from Thornfield.” Catherine is a waif with a sign: “Domesticate Me.” Lucy runs down sidewalk, biting a muffin.

Someone dumps a trunk of possessions onto the sidewalk.

Leaving the SPNFH meeting, Anna and Hester walk up to a table and have a glass of wine. They are speaking very intimately and happily. Charlotte and Jo meet at another, have a pot of tea, talking over a book, or writing. They chat and giggle, but don't interact with street scene.

Into this scene Emma walks happily. Sprays some perfume. Maybe singing, “Tonight...tonight....won't be just any night...”

But she stops short when she sees a pile of stuff outside her hotel.

EMMA:

Gasp!

But that's my hat box! What's going on?

She turns and sees Bertha and Cathy playing dress-up with her fine clothing: Pumps, hats, long beads, long gloves.

CATHY:

Burying face in silk spread.

Such beautiful shirts!

EMMA:

Turns to Cathy, grabbing a shirt out of her hands, then to Bertha.

Hey, those are my gloves! Don't stretch them out!

She begins pulling the gloves off; a struggle ensues.

BERTHA:

Talking to everyone.

The proprietor said some fancy dame hadn't paid her rent in two months. Probably a prostitute. They dumped all her stuff on the sidewalk. Look at all this loot!

Our street monsters overturn sitting crates and begin gathering the loot into the crates and turning them back over, sitting on them. They also stuff a baby stroller. Emma furiously grabs what she can.

Lucy runs off with the stroller.

ELLIS (AKA, DR. MITCHELL):

Walks up with a bouquet of flowers. Kicks at pile of stuff.

Goddam homeless people! Ruining the neighborhood!

Looks around, impatient, at his watch.

Where the hell is she?

Emma comes running up to him with an armful of clothing, hysterical and disheveled, touching his arm.

ELLIS:

Get your hands off me, you Schizophrenic!

EMMA:

You have to help me! They --

ELLIS:

Stay away from me, you screamer! Get some meds!

He spies a bracelet on Cathy's wrist.

Hey, that's the tennis bracelet I just bought for my --

EMMA:

Rushing him.

Ellis! It's me, Emma!

ELLIS:

Oh, my God! She's a crazy person! She totally played me! Talk about misrepresenting yourself online! What a fucking waste of time!

He throws the bouquet behind him. Bertha catches it, proudly, like a bridesmaid (she'll bring that bouquet to the hospital).

He walks away rapidly, almost running.

EMMA:

like: "Stellaaaaa!"

Elllliiissss!

He runs faster.

Elllliiissss!

She falls to the sidewalk sobbing.

I'm ruined!!

On all fours, pawing at the ground like Scarlet O'Hara, spills her purse, picks up a carrot, holds on to it. Takes a bite, grimaces, throws it.

Spies the flask of arsenic, held by Cathy like a precious possession. She grabs it, downs it, throws the bottle, lies on the sidewalk crying.

One by one, characters from the play walk by without noticing her or the others, even kicking stuff out of the way, maybe even kicking her.

Charlotte and Jo skip hand in hand. Anna and Hester walk arm in arm, leaning into each other. Isabel and Cady walk out, in lively discussion.

JO:

Let's go trainspotting!

CHARLOTTE:

Okay! I've got a pocketful of Liberty nickels!

HESTER:

His smile, his shoulders, his arms....I just melted in his presence...I had no thoughts...

ANNA:

Thoughts are over-rated.

ISABEL:

Yeah, there's definitely a need for crisis-trauma counseling in Burma. I bet your yoga would work wonders!

CADY:

Hmm....I've been wanting to go to Thailand....

Nobody looks Emma's way.

EMMA:

Emma fumbles in purse and pulls out phone, but can't dial.

Carl! Carl!

She is writhing and groaning. Finally he runs up to her, holds her. She goes limp.

CARL:

Emma! What happened? Did you faint?

yells

She's fainted!

He pulls out his new vial of smelling salts and waves it under her face to no effect.

Goddam smelling salts don't even work!

He tosses the bottle and just holds her.

Oh, Emma! Oh, Edna! Oh, God! I can't lose two patients!

As the street people grab the loot and run off, Bertha grabs the phone and dials, walking off.

Emma doesn't respond.

CARL:

like "Stella!"

Emmmaaaaaa!!!!

He cries over her until the curtain closes.

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

A hospital room. Two beds and a window. Very tight space. Green wrap-around hospital curtains.

Emma wakes up; touches vomit on front of dress, swears in French, and starts wiping up. The crucifix has reappeared. Lucy is in the bed next to her, getting a blood transfusion, maybe a bit of morphine-induced moaning. Bertha is nursing them, posed as hospital staff.

EMMA:

Someone saved my life again!

BERTHA:

Putting Ellis' bouquet in a vase. She is in a nursing disguise.

You don't have to be so dramatic about it. Nowadays you just call 9-1-1 and they pump your stomach.

LUCY:

giggling, pulling at one of the flowers

He loves me, I love him not, He loves me....

BERTHA:

So...it looks like you're both gonna make it. I'm gonna go get a latte.

To Emma:

Making a P.U. gesture.

You might wanna buy yourself a new blouse, honey.

Darts out as Doctor Mitchell enters.

DOCTOR:

Was that the nurse?

Picks up clipboards from foot of beds one at a time.

So ... what do we have here?

Lucy West-en-RA.

Picks up limp wrist.

Yes, hmmm... definitely pale, thin, and anemic. Most likely a Nervous type.

She starts giggling.

Scribbles on clipboard.

After the transfusion is complete, we'll get you on iron and a sun lamp...but for now, my dear, you must rest...

He holds up her wrist, poised to bite it, but unfamiliar with this urge, looks around sharply, drops her arm.

LUCY:

Leans forward, jumps, gasps.

Did you see -- ? Out the window!

The audience sees a large rubber bat bobbing out the window.

Lucy begins breathing with difficulty, heavy, labored. She holds her neck.

EMMA:

It looked like a bat!

DOCTOR:

Ha, ha! In daylight! I don't think so. Probably a crow. Nurse! Where'd she go?

He closes the curtains.

Keep these curtains drawn. Outside distractions are too unsettling for (*looks at chart for name*) Lucy's (*with fingers*) "nerves."

Lucy continues her beleaguered breathing.

And...Emma...Bovary!

What were you thinking? A girl as pretty as you...it can't be that bad...

tsk tsk tsk

Let's tidy you up a bit...

He begins gently washing her neck. Loosens her top button. Moves in for a bite.

We should get this top off!

Starts to unbutton her blouse. Just then, Carl bursts in with a bouquet of flowers.

CARL:

Rushes the Doctor:

Keep your hands off her!

Goes in for a punch with the hand holding the flowers; spills the flowers.

DOCTOR:

Oh, are you her -- ?

CARL:

Psychiatrist. Well, former. Psychiatrist-in-training. Failed psychiatrist-in-training.

Drops arms to side, sags. Begins to weep.

I thought I'd lost her. I thought I'd lost both of them!

DOCTOR:

Gives him a jaunty slap on the back.

Relax, she's gonna be fine!

Let's just get rid of this stack of romance novels. She's a bit too unstable to be reading this nonsense!
Danielle Steel, Eat, Pray, Love, what crap!

He opens the window and tosses them out. He tosses the spilled flowers, too.

What both of you ladies need is some Jell-O pudding!

He scribbles on both their charts, then strides out.

Cady walks in.

CADY:

I brought some vegan brownies.

EMMA:

Oh, the food is terrible here!

Meanwhile, Lucy, in a billowy nightgown, pulls out of her IV and goes to the window in a trance, opens the curtains, leans out, wind (a fan) blowing her hair and gown ...

CADY:

Walks over to Emma, munching brownies and talking with her mouth full.

Yeah, I was having carob cravings last night so the residents and I made these...I can't tell you their real names...but let's just call one of 'em Alice.

Cady hands her a brownie. Emma holds it but doesn't eat. Cady strokes her hair.

Goddess, it's not fair! You're so pretty, even when you're un-dead.

Ugh, but we should get that vomity shirt off you. Don't they even clean you in these places?

Begins to unbutton her blouse.

CARL:

Recovering.

No, wait. I've got that covered. I've been taking care of her.

EMMA:

No, you 'aven't!

CARL:

Well, I wanted to! But that “doctor” was here.

EMMA:

You're jealous of Dr. Mitchell because he's so handsome. I wonder what kind of car he drives?

CARL:

Don't worry your pretty little head about him. Let me rub your pretty little feet.

CADY:

Let me!

Carl and Cady simultaneously begin rubbing, two hands on each foot, elbowing each other, averting their noses.

CARL:

O, Emma, Emma, why why why did you do it?

DR. MITCHELL:

Entering, reading from her chart.

Because she is an hysterical. It's a nervous disease she caught from reading novels.

CARL:

It's true, she does read a lot of novels.

CADY:

Drops Emma's foot with a thud, twirls around with hands on hips to face doctors.

Oh, please! Don't give me that crap! Emma did it because all men are assholes and she had been led to believe otherwise!

DOCTOR:

By a fairy tale, no doubt.

Both men smirk in mock defense.

EMMA:

Yes, it's true. When I was a little girl in Normandy, my mother read me Cinderella, by the French author Charles Perrault.

CARL and DOCTOR:

Glance at each other, smirking. Shrug.

CADY:

A fairy tale written by a man! A Frenchman!

DOCTOR:

On his way out, swings by Emma's bed and drops a piece of paper on her.

Oh, by the way, here's your bill. Plus a \$500 fine for being uninsured.

Tsk tsk

EMMA:

Gasps and moans. Pulls the sheet over her head.

Take that vile thing away from me!

CADY:

Snatches it up.

Ambulance... \$4,000.

Gastric lavage ... \$10,000.

skims, murmurs...

Paper towels ... \$2,000.

Jell-O pudding ... \$350.

Q-tips ... What! This is ridiculous!

EMMA:

Still under sheet.

Will this misery last forever? Is there no escape?

CADY:

Pulls sheet off.

No, there's no escape! Will you get a grip?? We just need to set you up with a credit counselor, geez! What did Carl do, sit around painting your toe nails all day? I guess he didn't give you any financial management training?

EMMA:

It felt like enough to last a lifetime!

CADY:

I'm not sure what feelings had to do with it.

Brightens.

Hmmm....maybe we can use some of the grant money left over from Edna.

CARL:

How dare you bring up Edna at a time like this?

CADY:

What, were you in love with Edna?

CARL:

No, I was in love with Anna, but she was out of my league.

CADY:

Isn't that highly unethical?

CARL:

I have the right to my own feelings.

HESTER:

Steps in, baby-carrier strapped to chest, with a bi-racial baby doll.

I am feeling so blissed-out with hormones!

In baby-talk voice:

Say hi to Perseppony Prynne!

CARL:

trancelike

Goddess of the Underworld!

CADY:

Oh, so you gave her your name!

HESTER:

She walks over to Emma's bedside.

Here, I made you a present!

She slips off Emma's vomity blouse and helps her into a sexy kimono.

CADY:

So, are you going to reveal the identity of the donor when she gets older?

HESTER:

New millenium, same old gossip. People really don't change much...

She sits down and rips a velcro panel, and begins to breastfeed. She makes noises of calm and of being turned on. Lucy is writhing to the sounds at the window sill.

Ahhhh....mmmmm....oxytocin is the best drug!

Lucy will slink to the ground.

Hester falls asleep in a chair, baby at breast.

CADY:

I've gotta get back to the Safe House.

She closes the window, stepping over Lucy without noticing; the curtains are open.

CARL:

Can I give you a lift?

CADY:

Wags finger.

Oh, no ya don't! You're not gonna find out where it is!

She leaves. Charlotte walks in.

CHARLOTTE:

Hi, Emma, I thought you might need some books. God knows I could have used some during my confinement.

Trips over Lucy but doesn't look. Replaces the stack that the Doctor chucked. A more literary selection! All hardbacks, as opposed to the pink and lavender paperbacks.

EMMA:

Oh, thanks! They're making me stay here for 72 hours.

CHARLOTTE:

She looks around.

Ugh, why is the color of hospital walls always so repellent?

Turns to Emma.

Shall I read to you a little while?

EMMA:

Oh, please. It will distract me from the “deep hopelessness of my plight.”

Puts on a sleeping mask.

CHARLOTTE:

Picks up the top book from the stack.

“Chapter 1. 1801. I have just returned from a visit to my landlord—the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with. This is certainly a beautiful country! In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthrope's Heaven: and Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name.”

Everyone has fallen asleep. The lights dim. Carl is holding Emma's hand. Lucy is passed out on the floor. Hester is asleep with the baby at her breast. Charlotte nods off with the book open on her chest.

A scraping is heard at the window. Charlotte starts awake. Everyone else slumbers on.

There is a waif at the window. A spotlight on the window.

CATHY:

Let me in! Let me in!

CHARLOTTE:

Shaking with nerves, drops the book.

The ghost!

Oh, I can't take this anymore!

She runs out.

Bertha is blocking the door, holding a tray of pudding.

CHARLOTTE:

Let me out!

BERTHA:

Maybe you should let her in!

CHARLOTTE:

Wha--? The ghost???

CARL:

Waking up.

Yes, Charlotte, open the window and let your ghosts out – or in!

CHARLOTTE:

You haven't *seen* her! She's all white, with long creepy fingers...

Bertha pushes Charlotte over to the window, opens it wide. Cathy grabs on to an arm. Charlotte screams. Cathy climbs in. Cathy has the tossed flowers weaved in her hair.

CATHY:

Finally! It was so cold out there! Ooh, is that a tapioca pudding? Thanks, Bertha!

Begins to eat ravenously.

CHARLOTTE:

Still shaking.

You know her?

BERTHA:

We're both on the lam. Escaped from our abusers. Cathy's on the waiting list for a safe house in San--

CHARLOTTE:

Holds up hand.

Wait! Don't say where it is!

CATHY:

Yeah, I kept trying to break in, but that yoga chick always keeps the windows locked.

BERTHA:

I didn't qualify because I have a record – arson! The homeowner's insurance wouldn't cover the risk.

CHARLOTTE:

Arson?!

BERTHA:

But I swear it was in self-defense; I couldn't breathe in that attic!

CHARLOTTE:

Yes, I understand! When I was confined to that horrid room, there was a peculiar odor -- a yellow smell! --it used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell. Yet I took pains to control myself. Perhaps that's what exhausted me so. It seems you didn't lose your strength.

BERTHA:

Yes, my husband left me alone. He hired an attendant to control me.

CATHY:

Eating container after container of hospital pudding and tossing the containers.

Peering at Charlotte:

You're the lady in the back window. Why didn't you ever let me in?

CHARLOTTE:

Oh, well, my husband, John, who is a physician of high standing, and has an intense horror of superstition, says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency.

EMMA:

Rousing.

My husband was a physician, too. Of a more middling standing. But he said the same thing!

Leans over and vomits a trifle. Everyone averts face in revulsion.

CHARLOTTE:

I never said this to a living soul, but perhaps that is why I did not get well faster.

EMMA:

It's ironic that my husband the physician sat by my side as I lay dying, and didn't do a damn thing! Absolutely ineffectual! And he called me fanciful! In what way was he ever practical? He could'a thought to stick two fingers down my throat!

HESTER:

My husband posed as a physician, having secretly sworn the anti-Hippocratic oath. He had more devilish intentions. Revenge!

CARL:

And what about me?

ALL WOMEN:

Oh, Carl, you're not a *real* doctor!

EMMA:

Shh! Shhh!

My show's coming on!

HESTER:

Oh, is it a reality show like *Project Runway*?

EMMA:

It's called *What Happened to our Lives*.

It's about an emergency room doctor, Dr. Brock Hunkley, and yesterday he had to operate on his ex-fiance after she'd been in a car accident, trying to commit vehicular suicide because she thought Dr. Hunkley was having an affair with Nurse Nancy, but he wasn't, she was just paranoid. Can you believe the coincidence?

Oh, look how he holds his chiseled jaw. He is so decisive!

DR. MITCHELL:

Striding in.

Ha! He doesn't even know how to hold a stethoscope! That guy is such a phony!

EMMA:

Dr. Mitchell! How can you say that after he repaired his ex-fiance's aorta?

DR. MITCHELL:

He wouldn't know an aorta from a --

Trips on Lucy. Looks down.

Lucy! What are you doing down there? Silly goose, I told you to stay in bed.

He lifts her, deposits her, fondles her foot, looks at it meaningfully, resists urge to bite.

Cathy and Bertha curl up with Lucy like a cat and fall asleep. Carl is sitting by Emma's side.

As the doctor begins to exit, Anna strides in with a long cigarette holder and a cigarette, diva style.

DOCTOR:

Hey, you can't smoke in here!

ANNA:

I have the right to be me!

DOCTOR:

Should I know you?

ANNA:

Only Anna Karenina!

She poses. A dramatic beat.

DOCTOR:

Am-in-a Ka-rinda-mum.

Sorry, doesn't ring a bell.

Grabs her cigarette holder and exits.

ANNA:

gasp.

Uh!

Where did you go to med school, Bermuda?

EMMA:

Anna, you came to see me!

ANNA:

Yes, I figured Carl would be here.

Turns back to Emma, turns to Carl.

So I was holding my stupid animal totem and brushing my teeth and I had a breakthrough about Vronsky.

EMMA:

Rolls eyes.

Not Vronsky again!

CARL:

Turns from Emma.

Ooh, tell me!

ANNA:

Intuitively, I realized it at the horse race. I had thought Vronsky would be my knight, galloping in to rescue me, solve the situation, but he was too weak. He couldn't slay the dragon and pull me out of the turret. He couldn't even stay on his horse!

CARL:

You're mad at him because he didn't win the competition.

ANNA:

Don't you see? The horse is me! She had to be put out of her suffering!

CARL:

He couldn't save her.

EMMA:

But he didn't stop loving her.

ANNA:

How would you know?

EMMA:

Holding Anna Karening.

Well, I do read a lot.

CARL:

So you projected your feelings of disappointment on to him. You imagined he didn't love you.

ANNA:

He couldn't love me enough.

CARL:

Could anyone?

HESTER:

The Reverend Dimmesdale didn't have enough power to take on the village mafia. But I didn't think Arthur too weak; I thought society too evil.

CARL:

Could any one man have enough power?

EMMA:

Superman!

ANNA:

Talk about tall, dark, and handsome! Carl, is Superman dead or alive?

CARL:

I'm sorry, he's dead.

ANNA:

Damn! All the hot men are gone.

CARL:

Looks dejected.

EMMA:

But I thought he was infallible ... except for kryptonite! What could have happened?

CARL:

It was a riding accident. He was thrown from his horse in an equestrian competition.

EMMA:

Tolstoy had a gift for omens.

ANNA:

I'm going to "journal" about this.

She sits and writes intently.

Edna walks in looking like Jackie O. in her yachting days: big sunglasses, scarf, pastel dress. With a touch of having gone native—wild animal-toothed necklace.

EDNA:

Emma. I guess the new doctor didn't work out?

CARL:

You're alive!

EDNA:

Of course I am! I told you it would be safe! Didn't you see my yacht blog? Here's a picture of Rising Sun.

CARL:

Your what? Where were you?

EDNA:

Well, I was stretching out on the sand before the Alcatraz swim. There were thousands of spectators. We were all enveloped in a chilly fog. This guy named Larry approached me on the shore. He said he'd been watching me train. He said he'd swing his yacht around the backside of the island. It was so foggy the entire island was shrouded in obscurity. He offered me a jaunt to the South Seas. How could I say no?

CARL:

Pouting, with arms crossed.

You could have called!

EDNA:

Oh, Carl, I tried tweeting you at 17 degrees by 149 degrees but there was no signal.

CARL:

You only care about yourself!

EDNA:

I have the right to put myself first.

CARL:

That's just so selfish!

EMMA:

Carl, it's not like you to be so sulky!

CARL:

I know, it's my inner woman talking.

EDNA:

Well, my inner woman is walking!

She turns abruptly and exits, flinging the hospital curtain closed behind her.

SCENE TWO

Dr. Mitchell opens the curtain to reveal Emma and Lucy both lying in bed, alone in the room, asleep.

Cathy scrapes on the window: "Let me in! Let me in!"

Dr. Mitchell tiptoes in guiltily, and Cathy ducks out of view. The Doctor, using his stethoscope as a prop, loosens Emma's top. He is sweaty and agitated. He looks around, door closed, and leans into Emma's bodice, burying his head.

Carl walks in, makes an exclamation.

CARL:

Unhand her, you--you zombie freak! She's just an innocent country girl! Don't you dare debase her with your deviant kinks!

He pulls his unloaded gun on the doctor.

DOCTOR:

Hands up. Laughs nervously.

Woah, woah, woah, calm down, buddy. I am **not** a zombie! Zombies eat brains.

CARL:

I'm not your buddy! You were drawing blood on Emma!

DOCTOR:

It's a new experimental treatment for nervous women.

CARL:

Emma's not nervous!

EMMA:

Rousing.

Yes, I am!

DOCTOR:

Sweating it. Carl is still pointing gun.

Nurse, nurse! Damn it, where are they when you need them?

EMMA:

It's not a new treatment! Blood-letting was practiced by the ancient Greeks and the Aztecs! My husband performed blood-letting! And it didn't even work! That's how George Washington died! You doctors only pretend to know what you're doing!

CARL:

Don't group me together with that big city sick-o!

DOCTOR:

Hey, I've helped a lot of women.

EMMA:

What have you doctors ever understood about a woman's broken heart?

DOCTOR:

What are you talking about?

CARL:

I am devoted to women's hearts.

EMMA:

No, doctors don't get the sickness of heartbreak. Poor Kitty ... poor Natasha ... poor me!

Begins to cry.

DOCTOR:

Ignoring Emma and focusing on Carl.

My cure must be working okay...at least I haven't "lost" any of my patients.

CARL:

Also turning his back on Emma.

Edna's not lost! She visited us!

DOCTOR:

Sure, she did. In your psychedelic dream state!

CARL:

Emma, you saw her, right? Tell him that you saw her!

EMMA:

Sighs, irritated.

I'm not sure....it could have been a dream... I've been seeing such funny things since you gave me that...

CARL:

Puts a hand over her mouth.

EMMA:

Let me alone! You'll rumple me!

Then Cady comes in and mis-perceives the situation, thinking Carl is taking advantage of Emma, and pulls her cowboy gun on Carl.

CADY:

Step away from the patient!

CARL:

It's not what you think!

CADY:

They always say it's not what you think when it's just what you think!

It's all your fault that she's lying here in bed like a nincompoop! AND you lost Edna! You gave your patients fanciful notions that they were special...you--you “enabled” them.. when what they really needed were some goddam survival skills!

CARL:

No, no, Edna's not lost! She found us! And *then* she walked out again...

CADY:

Out the window. Into the fog. Not this ghost crap again!

CARL:

Turns the gun on Cady. Doctor tries to slink out.

Your problem is that you have no imagination.

CADY:

I have no imagination—so you have to kill me?

CARL:

Not to mention that you have no sense of humor!

CADY:

Well you have no sense of decency! Abusing your power and dating your patients! I could report you!

CARL:

I haven't dated anybody! I haven't even had sex with anyone other than myself in --

CADY and DOCTOR:

Eww--too much information!!

CADY:

Suddenly turns to Doctor—caught!

And you! Are you some sort of vampire fetishist? Did you meet on Craig's list?

DOCTOR:

Raising his hands in surrender.

I don't know! I've never had these feelings before! Is there a name for them?

CARL:

Also turns gun on Doctor.

Gasp! You're in love with Emma!

DOCTOR:

No, no, no, I'm in love with the woman who fits the shoe, but I don't know who!

He pulls out the dainty Victorian shoe.

CADY:

Lemme see!

Grabs shoe, puts down the gun, tries it on, it's too small.

Wow, talk about foot-binding...

DOCTOR:

Grabs her gun. Turns to Carl.

Have you been giving Emma morphine!?

CADY:

Grabs Carl's gun, over Carl's hands, and turns to doctor.

Or date-rape drugs?

ANNA:

Walks in. Assesses the scene. Runs up and takes the gun from Doctor.

Ooh, a role play game! I think I'm ready to face up to it now.

Suddenly points Cady's gun at Carl. Severe.

Carl, you be Alexis.

CARL:

Wait! Which one!

EMMA:

Her husband—duh! Haven't you been listening?

Turns to Carl, violently.

You have to challenge him to a duel; he has cuckolded you! You must defend your honor.

CARL:

Wait! Wait! What are the rules?

CADY:

You need a safe word!

ANNA:

Take 5 paces back, turn to face me, and draw!

CARL:

And then what?

ANNA:

One shot!

EMMA:

No! The first to draw blood!

They go through the motions.

ANNA:

She poses.

I want to shoot you through your unfeeling heart so that I may be free to give Anna the happiness she deserves.

CARL:

But I love Anna, too! She is my lawful wife and the mother of my heir! How dare you tear my family asunder!

ANNA:

Well, it's not fair that you refuse to inspire her passion! And then deprive me of the natural easy pleasure of giving her joy!

CARL:

I am her devoted husband. I burn with desire for her.

ANNA:

You do not!

Breaks character. Riding the emotion.

Carl, if I pulled the trigger, would it release the full extent of my fury?

CARL:

No! Pulling the trigger would make you feel bad!

ANNA:

Raising and points gun again.

And the way your ridiculous ears stick out under your hat! You should see yourself!

DOCTOR:

May I cut in as your second. You're getting a little off-track.

He takes the place of Anna.

I want to see your blood spill, if ye have red blood! But maybe it's blue!

CARL:

I have tender feelings!

ANNA:

From sidelines.

No you don't!

CARL:

I want to, but I don't know how!

DOCTOR:

I'll show you how!

I love this woman passionately, with all of my soul!

ANNA:

Oh, Vronsky!

She rushes to embrace the doctor.

EMMA:

Grabs gun from the doctor; points it at Anna. Fierce!

That's it! I swore that if I had to hear Vronsky's name one more time I was going to shoot somebody!

ANNA:

Vronsky, Vronsky, Vronsky!

EMMA:

What was so great about Vronsky!

ANNA:

Who can say? His whole self drew me to him. He owned my emotions.

I wonder when a man will awaken me that way again!

CARL:

Come to me, my darling! Let's start anew!

EMMA:

Gun on Anna.

Stay away from him!

CARL:

Emma! You care for me!

In his excitement, turning toward Emma, he trips over Lucy, who had slunk to the floor, and his gun goes off, pointed at her.

A gunshot. Carl jumps, gasps, and drops the gun.

DR. MITCHELL:

Lucy!!

He trips over Lucy on his way to running out of the room, clutching Lucy's shoe.

Gunshot wound! Stat!

He runs back in.

LUCY:

On the floor, pops up to sit in upright position.

Doctor startles.

LUCY:

Laughing, jumps up.

Don't worry—I'm already dead!

Gives him flirtatious embrace.

DOCTOR:

Lucy, what a fanciful sense of humor you have!

EVERYONE ELSE:

Laughs, relieved.

EMMA:

But the duel must go on!

No blood was spilled!

DOCTOR:

Yes, we must! My passion is stirred!

He pulls out his fetish shoe. Sniffs it big.

Oh, whose dainty foot will fit the shoe, and be my bride?

He holds up the shoe. Emma reaches out for it, and begins to squeeze her foot into it.

EMMA:

It fits! It fits me!

DOCTOR:

Hmmm...it's not really your style.

ANNA:

Emma, it's time to admit that “he's just not that into you.”

LUCY:

Lucy crawls under her bed or rummages under the sheets. She emerges holding a shoe.

Is this what all the fuss is about? I seem to have misplaced the other.

DOCTOR:

Drops to one knee and holds up the shoe.

Lucy...

LUCY:

Sits up and holds out a pretty foot, delighted.

Another proposal! This is my fourth!

DOCTOR:

Lucy, will you--

LUCY:

Oh, doctor! I feel so miserable, tho I am so happy!

She dives in to bury her face in his neck, starts kissing and biting.

DOCTOR:

Ow! Ow! Stop that! I mean it! You bitch!

He slaps her away (she falls) and holds a hand to his neck; a stream of blood. A spotlight hits his neck. Lucy laughs and bounces back up.

EMMA:

Rings the prayer bowl.

And the winner of the duel, the first to draw blood, is....Lucy Westenra!

Pulls Ellis' bouquet out of vase and hands it to Lucy, lift hand in air like Olympics or boxing.

Standing in for! – Anna, was she standing in for Vronsky or --

ANNA:

Preoccupied with texting.

Oh, who cares! That's all a story from the past. At present Bono is waiting for me outside in a taxi ...

I-B-right-down!

Puts on some fashionable accessory.

Turns to others.

Ooo-VEE-dim-sia!

She runs out.

CADY:

To Doctor and Lucy.

I'm filing restraining orders for and against both of you!

She stomps out, hugging her clipboard.

The two couples start to get hot and heavy, sitting on hospital beds. Cady pulls the hospital curtains closed on both couples.

SCENE THREE

Last audit meeting, one year from the first. Cady is adding two banners: no scented candles, no scented shampoo. Everyone will walk single file to their folding chair in a half-circle. Carl first, goes to the far seat, followed by Hester, Anna, Isabel, Edna, Charlotte, Emma, and Cady.

CADY:

To Emma:

Are you wearing scented shampoo?

EMMA:

No, it was my bath bubbles.

CADY:

Do you mind changing seats...I have multiple chemical sensitivity?

EMMA:

Stays put; crosses her arms.

Perfume has a lot to do with attracting a lover, you know!

CADY:

Maybe in France.

Gets up in a huff, kicks Carl, they change places.

CARL:

Walks up. Kisses Emma. Looks past her at Anna. Coughs. Drops his wolf totem.

Anna!

ANNA:

Well, I got back on the train like you said. The California Zephyr!

CARL:

Good for you! How did it feel?

ANNA:

The sleeper was very comfortable. The lounge seats had plush upholstery. And I had an encounter with

a most dashing stranger!

ISABEL:

Oh, do tell!

ANNA:

His name was George. I noticed him when he boarded in Denver because he stood so straight by the doors. Il etait correct.

EDNA:

Anna, you're blushing!

ANNA:

Oh, that's George tweeting me now!

EMMA:

Let me see his photo.

Looking at picture.

That's George Clooney! The ER doctor!

CADY:

Or it could be George W. Bush. Look at that smirk!

ANNA:

I don't know his last name! We didn't talk much. He had a certain charisma...

CARL:

Did he happen to mention an Elisabetta?

ANNA:

I didn't have the pleasure of meeting any of his travel companions. He boarded alone. Il etait tres charloroux, tres amiable!

ISABEL:

Just so ya know, George Clooney is an incorrigible bachelor!

ANNA:

Then I want to be an incorrigible bachelorette!

O, pardon!

She starts tweeting back.

I-B-at--

CADY:

Our final audit meeting. So let's just go around and say where we're at!

HESTER:

With Perseppony in carrying contraption.

Anna and I are sharing a domicile on the Upper East Side. We have a Russian tea to entertain visitors on Mondays.

ANNA:

You must come by!

HESTER:

And watch the Oscars! A pregnant nominee will be wearing one of my creations!

Takes Perseppony out and hands her to Anna, who bounces her.

ISABEL:

Oh, who!?

HESTER:

It's hush, hush!

ANNA:

Coochy-coochy-coo!

And next week we'll be interviewing nursery schools for Perseppony.

Isn't that right, Pippi?

Bouncing her on the knees.

Pippi Prynne!

Little Pippishka!

CADY:

Isn't she only, like, three months old?

ANNA:

We can't decide between a French or Mandarin immersion. Do you think they would interfere with each other?

ISABEL:

I've been teaching Cady some French so that she can communicate with the women of the Congo.

CARL:

The heart of darkness.

ISABEL:

Cady and I are founding a humanitarian effort!

CADY:

We'll be doing trauma recovery.

ISABEL:

I should have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demands.

CADY:

We'll mostly be hugging, and breathing, and doing yoga. You don't need to know the language for that!

EMMA:

Por quoi elle resiste pour la langue?

ISABEL:

Je ne serieux!

EMMA:

Incroyable!

CADY:

To Isabel, turning to Emma.

What'd she say?

Turning back to Isabel.

What'd you say?

ANNA:

Of course I'll be spending the summer in Russia. I have to keep my sweet sister Princess Tatiana company in the countryside. Dear little Alexei can't wait for his Aunt Anna to visit and bring him a little American treat! He's asked me for a "Pokemon."

CARL:

And Hester, as a recovering Puritan, how are you treating yourself? What are you doing for pleasure? All work and no play makes a dull Jane!

HESTER:

Crosses her legs, sultry.

Oh, I have a someone I like to meet in Central Park on stormy afternoons.

thunderclap!

CADY:

To Isabel.

So, what about Putu? Is he coming with us to the Congo?

ISABEL:

Nah, he just wants to stay in the states and take computer classes.

CARL:

And, Anna, I mean, Edna--

coughs.

CADY:

It's good to see you back.

EDNA:

Well, I now have an official America's Cup sponsor. Oracle is promoting my attempt to swim the Bermuda Triangle. If I do it, I have a contract with Timex and Wheaties.

CARL:

But don't people disappear down the Bermuda triangle?

EDNA:

Yes, but the water's really warm!

ANNA:

Still tweeting.

And George is warm, very warm, hot!

CHARLOTTE:

Well, I'm heading for colder climes. I've been offered a position in the poetry department at a small New England college. But—Jo won't come with me. It's because she can't stand my poetry! She calls it “pills in jelly.”

General disavowals...it can't be true!

ISABEL:

Maybe it's that she doesn't fancy the weather.

EDNA:

Oh, I'm sure you're wrong. Charlotte, why don't you recite a poem for us?

CHARLOTTE:

Well, okay. Um, I just wrote this in my journal. Okay.
My new poem is called *New England Winter of my Soul*.

How I imagine the winter will be
Like empty tin pails for my maple-less teats
The horse-hair blanket from my cold shoulders
caught in the craggy naked night branches
under the dark starry you-less sky

Complete silence; everyone looks around awkwardly.

CARL:

Claps. No one joins in.

Hooray for Charlotte!

ISABEL:

Charlotte, I really did love your novelette!

EDNA:

A beat.

What was with the “poetry voice?”

CHARLOTTE:

It's the style.

EDNA:

Hmmm...

EMMA:

I thought that poetry would make me feel more in love, but it leaves me strangely unmoved...

CHARLOTTE:

Jo says she's going to wait out my “poetry phase.”

EVERYONE:

Nodding uncomfortably.

Yeah....

CARL:

Ting! Ting! Ting!

And now I have an announcement!

As this is my last “Spinfa” grant-related duty, and I am about to become a civilian again, ha ha, I would like to publicly announce my engagement to the former Madame Bovary, soon to be the charming Emma Young.

CADY:

You don't have to change your name, you know!

EMMA:

Oh, yes I do! I hate cows!

CARL:

Oh Emmie, I've seen you at your worst, vomiting down your dress, and I still love you!

EMMA:

I'm registered at Bath & Barrel. It'll be a June wedding, of course. You can all be my bridesmaids!

HESTER:

What fabric for the bridesmaids' dresses?

EMMA:

I have to coordinate with Lucy. We're having a double wedding.

CADY:

Wai-, wai-, wait! How come it's only the heteros who are getting hitched here?

CARL and ISABEL:

Who you callin' a hetero?

CADY:

I'm just saying, in light of the political climate, there should be more same-sex representation at the altar.

CHARLOTTE:

But I don't want to get married again! I was so depressed as a wife.

ANNA:

Jo says she wants to stay a spinster because she has fallen in love with so many pretty girls and never once the least bit with any man.

CADY:

You talked to Jo?

ANNA:

Yes, we want to reclaim the name “Spinsta.” Like “queer” or “nigga.”

CADY:

Wait! You can't say that word!

ANNA:

Which one?

ISABEL:

Cady, if it matters so much to you, why don't YOU get married? You live in San Francisco!

CADY:

But maybe I should move to Portland.

ISABEL:

And meet the dyke of your dreams?

CADY:

No, I don't believe in fairy tales.

EMMA:

Well, I do! It's a most serendipitous story. Lucy was my hospital mate for three days. She contracted some sort of blood condition. Anyway, Carl sat by me so sweetly, and Dr. Mitchell had Lucy's lost slipper. Those two are both sort of into the same kinks, believe me!, so maybe it's a good fit.

CADY:

But marrying a doctor! It's such a cliché!

EMMA:

But really good health care benefits.

EDNA:

All right, I'll be a bridesmaid, but I refuse to wear pink!

EMMA:

And I forbid you to get a Speedo tan. You'll be wearing a strapless gown.

HESTER:

Yes, with those shoulders you must.

She takes out a tape measure to measure Edna's shoulder width.

CARL:

I was thinking of a tribal marriage ritual. How do feel about a sweat lodge on Mt. Shasta, or a peyote pilgrimage in Sedona?

EMMA:

I want a midnight ball! I'll wear white satin, and have a dance card, and the ushers will carry candelabras.

ISABEL:

Or you could just spare yourself the headache and donate the amount you'd spend on 200 plates of Chicken Cordon Bleu to help save victims of violent rapes in the Congo.

Hands her a postcard.

EMMA:

Congo Yoga?

Breathe, Pray, Hug?

CADY:

It's sickening...the conspicuous consumption of the wedding industry. And all the pretty little brides are stressed out and crying from crash dieting, their mascara running...

EMMA:

Tosses postcard.

Oh, no ya don't! No-one is going to guilt-trip me out of the dance of my dreams! Not all of us were lucky enough to grow up getting bored of balls. I was raised on a farm, sneaking novels into the barn, curled up with a cow to keep warm! Besides, Carl told us about waterproof mascara.

HESTER:

Will you be needing some maternity lingerie in the near future?

EMMA:

Quelle horror! I want to forever remain l'enfant terrible!

ANNA:

Carl! Let's role play the first dance! It will be a quadrille! I think I still remember the moves.

EMMA:

Me, too!

Music begins.

ANNA:

texts out loud:

“Yo, Jo, Ho, where U B at?”

Introductory music is played.

CARL:

Reaches out his hand and Emma gets out of the folding chair daintily.

Mademoiselle, may I have this dance?

Cady signals to Isabel with her gun.

Jo bursts into the room, dashing in a tux, and pairs up with Anna.

Charlotte and Cady both watching Jo.

Doctor and Lucy run across the stage unawares and crash the party.

Then dancers disperse and swirl around into different positions and reconfigure. Line up into two sets of four couples. Then the dance begins for real, an authentic quadrille, in the traditional form of the 1800s, with traditional music. Any practiced dancers in 19th century dress may join in.

Dapper gentlemen could get a slot on the dance card of Cathy, Bertha, Charlotte.

Then the second quadrille: post-modern, with house beat. They strip out of the 19th Century.

During the music of the second dance, the actors take bows.

{Fin}