

SMOKE
OR
EVERYTHING WE DON'T SAY

by Amanda Rockhold

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Characters

MARIAH	29, female, recent MFA graduate
MILLER	37, male, calm, charming, waiter
JJ	19, female, isolated, poet
PHILIP	34, MILLER's best friend, bartender

Time

June

Location

Wheeling, West Virginia

SCENE 1

Setting: Crossroads, a low-key dive bar. The kind that still let you smoke when it gets late enough. Above the bar are two crummy, one-room apartments. The kind with shared kitchens and bathrooms. One belongs to MILLER, the other to JJ.

In MILLER's abode, there should be a real record player that works. Here there's also empty beers cans and ash trays. It's a bachelor pad, but he has taste for what he can get with a server's income. There's a mini fridge, an old brown couch, and a sunken-in, greasy red chair.

In JJ's place, empty beer cans. It's pretty empty.

At Rise: 1960s jazz. Lights are dim on PHILIP and MILLER in his place. They're smoking a joint. Lights up on the bar, where JJ writes in a journal from behind the bar. MARIAH enters the bar, distraught, carrying an old yellow suitcase.

MARIAH

Are you old enough to pour me a big fucking shot?

JJ

We don't open til three p.m.

MARIAH

The door was unlocked. What time is it?

JJ

Look, you're just gonna have to wait.

MARIAH

I'm just gonna wait here, then. My room at the Super 8 won't be ready for another hour.

(Awkward pause.)

Do you have siblings?

JJ

No.

MARIAH

Thank your lucky stars, little girl. My brother's a fat incompetent fuck. And a dog killer. I'm not the dog killer. It was his fault. God. What did I do? When do I get a break in life?

JJ

Are you okay?

MARIAH

It wasn't my damn fucking fault. I get home this morning, right? He's snoring, sunk into his greasy red recliner, as usual. First thing I notice, it fucking reeks. I'm like what's that smell? The fat guy who hasn't showered in a week, right? No. Unfortunately, he's lived with me for nine years and I've grown immune to his sweaty, sour stench.

JJ

Why doesn't he shower?

MARIAH

Because he's a five-hundred-pound forty-year-old and we have to rent a crane to lift him into the bathtub. I spot the dog shit on the carpet. I think, that's what I'm smelling. He insisted on getting a dog. He has to use a Long Reach Comfort Wipe he ordered off an infomercial to clean his ass after he shits, and he thinks he can take care of a dog. So I wake him up. I'm like, Ralf where's the dog, there's shit on the carpet. He tells me, in his dog bed. I look at the dog bed. No dog. Okay. Ralf, did Clara stop by? No, he says. Clara's our neighbor. I told her to check in with him while I was gone for the weekend. To make sure he didn't burn the kitchen down again. Apparently, he told her that she didn't need to stop by. He's a grown man. He doesn't need people checking in on him. I'm like well obviously you do, Ralf, because you can't even clean up the dog shit that's now stuck to the carpet. I go into the kitchen to get paper towels and carpet cleaner. There's the dog. Napping on the kitchen floor. Strange he didn't get up to greet me, right? Then I spot the chewed up bottle of ibuprofen. I was like, fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. He had to have been there a couple days, it smelled so bad. That poor thing. I could have killed him. I swear, if my hands could fit around his fat neck, I would have strangled my brother until he stopped wheezing.

(Beat. Maybe tears.)

How could he do that? How could he let that poor animal die right there in the kitchen? God, what am I supposed to do? I can't be responsible for him anymore, I just can't. I'm going insane. I'm not responsible for him. Or that damn dog. Nine fucking years.

JJ

Here, have a glass of water.

MARIAH

Thanks. You're a good bartender. It's just. I mean. Fuck, I just wanna run away and never look back. Hop onto seventy in my overpacked Volkswagen and just keep on driving. You ever feel like that?

JJ

I don't have a car.

MARIAH

Let's drive out west. I'll give you a ride. A ride to the moon. You wanna go to the moon?

(Lights down on them. UP on MILLER and PHILIP above the bar.)

MILLER

I'm stressed. I don't get stressed. They cut me down to just Mondays, Wednesdays, and Sundays. No one makes fucking shit on Sundays.

PHILIP

At least you'll have the weekend off for your brother's wedding now.

MILLER

True.

PHILIP

You find a date yet?

MILLER

Nope.

PHILIP

Did you ask corn dog chick?

MILLER

She's in Vermont.

PHILIP

What about her sister?

MILLER

Also in Vermont.

PHILIP

What about that red head waitress you work with? Uhhh...

MILLER

The one who's married with two kids? Nah, tried her, too, dude. I've asked like all the girls I know.

PHILIP

Ask the neighbor girl. She's not old enough to drink but she's eighteen, right?

MILLER

JJ? I think she's nineteen. She's socially awkward. And you know she doesn't like to be around people much.

PHILIP

What about your hot cousin?

MILLER

I'm not in the business of fucking my cousins.

PHILIP

Marriage, dude.

MILLER

What?

PHILIP

She's your uncle's step-daughter. So who cares?

MILLER

True. I don't know. It's still weird. Do you know any girls?

PHILIP

(Thinks.)

Ask your cousin. I know she likes you.

MILLER

She is already going to the wedding.

PHILIP

See. You two could just, go together.

MILLER

But dude. She's my cousin. And the whole family's gonna be there. I haven't talked to her since my brother's fiancé's Malaleuca party last year. I don't even know what the fuck Malaleuca is. I pretended to have a stomach bug and bounced outta there real quick.

PHILIP

Ah, yeah, Malaleuca's where they throw parties and try and sell you shit. Pyramid schemes. You know, where you gotta get people to buy a buncha shit and then they have to sell said shit to other people. The more people sell under you, the more money you get. My mom used to do it. To try and make some extra money so we could go to the Splash Pad. That plan backfired. She spent a thousand dollars on all these beauty products and nobody wanted them.

MILLER

Don't some people sell like kitchen utensils. Knives, cheese graters and shit?

PHILIP

They got a scheme for anything and everything today. Clothes, household goods, diapers. But only a few people actually make money. The ones at the top of the pyramid who have all these chumps selling underneath them.

MILLER

Guess it would be a good gig if you're at the top.

PHILIP

Well my mom was not. She was at the bottom of the pyramid, along with air, food, and water.

MILLER

I wonder if my cousin does it, too.

PHILIP

I don't know. But I do remember your cousin last summer's Fourth of July. At the lake. Yeah, it was warm last summer, but not so warm she had to be in her bikini the whole time. Pretty sure that was for you, my friend. She was hanging all over you. Or did you not notice?

MILLER

No, I noticed. That blue striped bikini...

PHILIP

...Was the only thing anyone was noticing. They were practically falling out. That bikini was just a little too small. Not that I was complaining.

MILLER

(Thinking about the bikini.)

Mm. Maybe I will ask her. Wouldn't be so awkward, would it? And everyone in my family knows we're related by marriage.

PHILIP

Only if you make it awkward. And no one will be there for what happens after the wedding, you know what I'm saying.

MILLER

True, true, true. Maybe I'll just text her and see what she's been up to lately. See if she's already bringing a date. I'm pretty sure I still have her number.

(MILLER takes out his phone and starts texting.)

(PHILIP looks over his shoulder.)

PHILIP

Dude, don't bring up the fact that you're cousins.

MILLER

I just thought it'd be best to get it out in the open.

PHILIP

No, that makes it weird.

MILLER

This whole thing is weird.

PHILIP

But that's even weirder.

MILLER

What should I say then?

PHILLIP

Not, Hey, I don't know if you think it's cool for cousins to be wedding dates, but...
Man, just ask her if she already has a date. If not, see if she wants to go with you.

MILLER

Cool.

(Texts.)

Done. Hey, can you give me a ride to the gas station later? I don't get my car back
til later this week.

PHILIP

Sure, I can take you after work. For what?

MILLER

For JJ.

PHILIP

I see.

MILLER

Don't say it like that. I don't know. She doesn't have anybody, ya know.

(Lights down on them. Up on MARIAH and JJ.)

(MARIAH's phone goes off.)

(She looks at it.)

MARIAH

Who's this?

(Reads.)

Wedding?

JJ

Don't recognize the number?

(Beat.)

MARIAH

What's the stupidist thing you've ever done?

JJ

I'm not stupid.

MARIAH

Okay, what's the craziest thing you've ever done?

JJ

Dropped acid and fought a bear.

MARIAH

Yeah, right.

JJ

Then I fought Lucifer.

MARIAH

You didn't fight a bear.

JJ

But you think I fought Lucifer.

MARIAH

Everybody fights the devil. I just got this text from a random person. Asking if I want to be their date for a wedding this month. I'm gonna ask for a picture. Is that bad? Is that too crazy? I'm gonna do it. If you fought a bear, why the fuck not?

(Texts.)

There. So. Tell me more about this bear acid trip.

(Lights down on them. Up on MILLER and PHILIP.)

MILLER

Dude, she responded.

PHILIP

That was fast.

(MILLER looks uncertain.)

What?

MILLER

She wants a picture.

PHILIP

Really? Damn, dude. Sexting cousins.

MILLER

Nah, don't think it's like that. She said she doesn't have a date yet. But she hasn't seen me in a while. Send me a pic.

PHILIP

Wants to make sure you didn't get fat or go bald.

MILLER

Fuck, man. I suck at taking pictures.

PHILIP

Send her one you already have.

MILLER

I don't have any good updated ones. They're all from forever ago.

PHILIP

I'll take one for ya. Here, give me your phone.

(Takes the phone.)

Okay, smile.

(MILLER smiles.)

Try and look happy while you're smiling.

(He tries.)

(PHILIP takes the picture and looks at it.)

Oof.

MILLER

Let me see.

PHILIP

No, let's try not smiling. Ummm, think about that blue striped bikini. Coming out of the water after cooling off, dripping wet. Bathing in the sun. There we go. Ah, yeah, think we got it, dude.

(They look at the picture.)

MILLER

Okay, I'll send her this one.

(Lights down on them. Up on MARIAH and JJ.)

MARIAH

What are you writing?

JJ

Nothing.

MARIAH

You're just writing the word nothing over and over again in that journal. You're pretty far into it.

JJ

They're love letters to Lucifer.

MARIAH

Looks like verse.

JJ

Stop looking, it's none of your business.

MARIAH

Fine, sorry.

JJ

Just cause you bust in here and vomit your life story doesn't mean I wanna tell you mine.

MARIAH

So, you're writing your life story. Okay, you're right. Fuck, I'm a mess.

(Phone goes off.)

He sent a picture. What do you think?

JJ

That's him? That's the guy who texted you?

MARIAH

Yeah. Not bad, right?

JJ

He's, uh, not bad. And you've never seen this guy before? So. Are you gonna do it?

(Lights fade on them.)
(Lights up on MILLER and PHILIP.)

PHILIP

Ah, shit, I forgot. Ruby and I are driving downtown for dinner after my shift. I don't know if I'll have time to take you to the gas station.

MILLER

Won't take long. Ten minutes tops.

PHILIP

Alright.

MILLER

You guys going to that new Ponderosa?

PHILIP

Supposed to be pretty good.

MILLER

I've never been to a Ponderosa.

PHILIP

Really?

MILLER

Couldn't ever afford it growing up.

PHILIP

Damn, sorry. Look, I'd invite you to come, but Ruby—

MILLER

No, that's awkward. That's not what I meant.

PHILIP

Oh, okay. I wasn't trying to offend you in any way.

(Beat.)

MILLER

She responded.

PHILIP

What'd she say?

MILLER

Ha ha.

PHILIP

Damn.

MILLER

Oh, she sent more.

(Reading.)

Yeah, we can go together. Let's grab a drink before hand. At Crossroads. Smiley face.

PHILIP

Fuck yeah, man. Fucking cousins. I gotta get back downstairs. Who knows what JJ's doing.

MILLER

Told you not to leave her alone down there with all that booze.

(PHILIP exits.)

(Lights down on MILLER.)

(Lights up on bar.)

MARIAH

Where's the bathroom?

JJ

That way.

(MARIAH exits.)

(PHILIP enters.)

PHILIP

Good, you didn't burn the place down. I said you could play darts until we opened. Get out from behind the bar.

JJ

Fine. I didn't even do anything.

PHILIP

Just like the time when you didn't sneak two shots of Patrón.

JJ

Ew. It was Jack.

PHILIP

Whatever it was. If you don't cut it out, I'm not gonna let you hang out here anymore.

JJ

Just like last Sunday when I got to close down the bar with Miller.

PHILIP

Sundays are different.

JJ

I promise, I didn't.

PHILIP

Who's yellow suitcase is that?

JJ

Don't know. Some lady's.

PHILIP

Some lady's?

JJ

Yeah. She's in the bathroom. She wants a big fucking shot when she gets back. But be careful. She's a dog killer.

(JJ exits.)

(Lights down.)

(End scene.)

SCENE 2

(Day of the wedding.)

(Lights up on MILLER in his room. He wears a tux. He struggles to get his bowtie right.)

(Lights up on the bar.)

(Music plays 1960s jazz. That's what the bartender likes.)

(MARIAH enters in a fancy green dress. She's a glittering emerald.)

(She sits at the bar.)

MARIAH

Can I have an Old Fashioned?

PHILIP

A what?

MARIAH

An Old Fashioned.

PHILIP

What kinda bourbon you want?

MARIAH

Bullet's fine. Rye.

(PHILIP makes her one and she watches.)

(Slides it to her.)

Oh, can I have an extra Brandy cherry?

(PHILIP adds another.)

(She hands him cash.)

(She sips her drink.)

(MILLER enters, his bowtie a mess. He sits a seat away from

MARIAH. PHILIP gives him a shot of fireball and a glass of beer without him having to ask.)

(MARIAH notices and recognizes him.)

PHILIP

Looking spiffy. One Bud. One Fireball.

MILLER

Make that two Fireballs. Thanks.

(He checks out MARIAH.)

(They make eye contact.)

I like your dress. It's very...

MARIAH

Green.

MILLER

Becoming. I was going to say becoming.

MARIAH

Thank you. Nice tux.

MILLER

I'm on my way to a wedding.

MARIAH

Yours?

MILLER

No. My brother's.

MARIAH

Just thought you'd get a drink before? No open bar?

MILLER

The bride's dad's a recovering alcoholic. No champaign toasts.

MARIAH

Bummer. None even at the reception?

MILLER

Maybe later in the night. But definitely no open bar.

MARIAH

You in the wedding?

MILLER

Yeah. Best man. But, I, uh. I'm actually waiting on my date. We're having a drink beforehand.

MARIAH

Or a few, I see. What time does it start?

MILLER

About an hour.

MARIAH

You going to figure out that bowtie between now and then? I can help. May I?

(She goes over and fixes his bowtie.)

What're you going to do if she doesn't show?

MILLER

Well. I don't know. I'd say you're already dressed up. But dressed like that I'm sure you have plans. You waiting on a date?

MARIAH

I'm meeting someone here.

MILLER

He'd be an idiot to not show.

MARIAH

Maybe he's already here.

MILLER

You want me to check the bathroom?

MARIAH

You come here a lot, I take it. The bartender knew exactly what you wanted when you walked in.

MILLER

Yeah. Yeah, I do.

MARIAH

You must like jazz.

MILLER

I live upstairs. The owner here loves jazz. Nineteen-sixties jazz is all he plays.

MARIAH

It's nice. I feel like I'm almost in a different time.

MILLER

Well, you definitely don't look like you belong in this bar.

MARIAH

What's that supposed to mean?

MILLER

I just mean. You, that dress, those heels, drinking what looks like an Old Fashioned. Almost...yeah, like you're from a different time yourself. A different place.

(Beat.)

I'm sorry. I meant it as a compliment.

MARIAH

To be told that you're out of place?

MILLER

But in a good way.

MARIAH

Does it ever feel good to be made out like you don't belong?

MILLER

I just meant. No, it doesn't. I didn't mean to offend you.

MARIAH

It's okay.

MILLER

I just mean. You're. Breathtaking.

MARIAH

I already said it was okay.

MILLER

Right.

(He takes his other shot of fireball.)

So, who are you meeting here?

MARIAH

I don't really know.

MILLER

Blind date?

MARIAH

Something like that. I've never done anything like this before.

MILLER

Trust me, I bet he's more nervous than you are.

MARIAH

You think? I don't know. I feel like I could puke. But. It's also kind of thrilling. Like the type of stuff you see in the movies.

MILLER

You expecting prince charming to swing in and sweep you off your feet?

MARIAH

I guess that sounds childish, doesn't it.

MILLER

I don't know. I think anyone at any age wants to be swept away. Just have to be careful where you're swept away to.

MARIAH

Or who's doing the sweeping.

MILLER

We're not all bad. Some of us are just waiting to get swept off our feet, too.

(She watches him.)

(Makes a decision.)

MARIAH

I have to come clean.

(She pulls up the conversation that MILLER thought he was having with his cousin.)

(She slides it to him across the bar.)

(He reads.)

MILLER

Woah. Wait. Do you have my cousin's phone?

MARIAH

Yes, I kidnapped her and I have her tied up in a motel room. Wait, your cousin? You date your cousins?

MILLER

Marriage. Don't worry about it. Tell me what's going on.

MARIAH

Well, your cousin must have got a new number or something. Or you must have had the wrong number or put it in wrong. Because. You texted me.

MILLER

And you just decided to impersonate someone? What the fuck?

MARIAH

I know. I probably seem like a psycho.

MILLER

I'm just...I don't know what to do. I've never been in a situation like this before.

MARIAH

Me either. I don't know what came over me. I got that text from you and I just...

MILLER

I could have been a creep.

MARIAH

That's why I didn't know what to do when I got here. I was like, shit, I'm in over my head. Why did I do this? But. Then we started talking.

MILLER

And deemed I wasn't too creepy.

MARIAH

You're charming.

MILLER

You're weird. Who are you?

MARIAH

Earlier this month. I uh. I was a gargoyle cemented on top of one of those gothic castles. Except, I kept waiting to come to life. You know, how they do when the sun goes down. But I never did. Stuck night and day. A statue people walk by and admire for a little while. But then you become mundane, like a dying tree or a crummy abandoned house that you pass and never notice. That you ignore. I've never been adventurous or impulsive and maybe...Why are you looking at me like that?

MILLER

And you thought maybe I'd be that adventure.

MARIAH

Do you want to be?

MILLER

I don't know yet.

MARIAH

And now you don't have a date for the wedding. God. I'm so sorry.

(He takes her in.)

(Drinks his beer and stands up.)

MILLER

Come on.

MARIAH

What?

MILLER

You can't look that good and not have eyes on you tonight. And technically you are my date.

MARIAH

Do you think I'm crazy?

MILLER

We'll figure that out later.

(She takes his hand.)

MARIAH

Wait, what about your drinks?

MILLER

Right. Uh, yeah, we got time. Philip, another Old Fashioned for...

MARIAH

Mariah. And that's okay, Phil. I'll have a beer.

(The lights dim.)

(End scene.)

SCENE 3

(Lights up on MILLER's place.)
(MILLER and MARIAH enter, coming back from the wedding.)
(He's carrying a six-pack.)

MARIAH

Woah, Miller. We just walked right in. You never lock your door?

MILLER

Uh, no.

MARIAH

So dangerous. You ever been robbed?

MILLER

Not yet. Don't jinx me.

MARIAH

I won't jinx you. Not much to steal anyway. Oh, except for this rustic, frayed, faded red recliner. Oof, that'd be a treasure.

MILLER

Hey, don't hate on my throne. You want a Miller Lite?

MARIAH

Oh, man. I'm already feeling pretty good.

MILLER

Okay.

MARIAH

But I could feel better. Yeah, give me one. Tonight was fun.

MILLER

I agree.

MARIAH

You wanna know a secret?

MILLER

You really are my cousin?

MARIAH

Another secret. I'm living at the Super 8.

MILLER

The jank one on Clairsville. With all the hookers?

MARIAH

I had this nice house, ya know? Bought it from my professor, Daniel Cutty. Teeny tiny. Beautiful. Yellow cottage. With a red door. Cute little porch where I'd read Donna Tart. Rose garden in the back. Close to campus, too. So I could ride my bike when the sun was shining and the breeze was warm.

MILLER

What happened?

MARIAH

My fat fuckin brother. His hot air balloon sized body overstuffed that quaint little place like The Blob's hand in a Thanksgiving turkey. He might be dead by now. Or he ate the dog that he let die. Not fucking me. Him. I have no idea. Maybe he had a heart attack. Fell and couldn't get back up. Maybe his Long Reach Comfort Wipe impaled him on the toilet. Not my problem now.

MILLER

We don't have to talk about it.

MARIAH

It's okay. It was a pretty shitty situation. For nine years, I was basically his mother. His caretaker. And he's eleven years older than me. But I'd had enough. I'd had enough of his goddamned stupid voice. The way he said my name. Mariah, get me my cookies. Mariah, I can't find the remote. Mariah, did you pay the Netflix account? Mariah, I'm stuck on the toilet. Mariah, Mariah, Mariah. Say my name, Miller.

MILLER

Uh, Mariah.

MARIAH

That's nice.

MILLER

I'm glad you approve.

MARIAH

I'm not helping my chances of getting laid tonight by talking about my fat brother, am I?

MILLER

Ah, so that's your end goal?

MARIAH
You know what I wanna do?

MILLER
What?

MARIAH
I wanna dance.

MILLER
We danced at the wedding.

MARIAH
Yeah, but not like this. Here. In your smoky apartment. With the record player on. Come here. Play some Billie or some Duke.

MILLER
I don't think I have any.

MARIAH
Yeah you do.

MILLER
I don't want jazz right now. I'll play something for you.

MARIAH
Really?
(He grabs his banjolele.)
What is that?

MILLER
A banjolele.

MARIAH
Like if a banjo and ukulele had a kid?

MILLER
Exactly.

(He plays some 1930s or 40s song. He may or may not sing.)

MARIAH
I like this.
(MARIAH dances.)
How long have you been playing?

MILLER
Since right outta high school.

MARIAH
Do you know something more tender?

MILLER
Tender?

MARIAH
Romantic.

MILLER
Maybe. It's a banjolele.

(He plays again.)

MARIAH
This is nice.

(She kisses him.)

MILLER
Woah, don't you wanna hear the rest of the song?

MARIAH
Do you want me to stop?

MILLER
You can hear the rest later.
(They kiss and then get friendly on the couch.)
(There's a knock on the wall.)

MARIAH
What's that?

MILLER
It's all right.

(They get back to it.)
(JJ knocks again.)
(Again.)

MARIAH
Miller. Who's knocking on the wall?

MILLER

That would be JJ.

MARIAH

What's JJ want?

MILLER

I gotta run to the gas station. Can you give me a ride?

MARIAH

Why do we have to go to the gas station?

MILLER

Can you drive?

MARIAH

Nah, I'm too buzzed. You can drive my Impala. Are we getting something for JJ from the gas station?

MILLER

You want more beer, right?

MARIAH

We have the rest of that six-pack.

MILLER

Yeah, I'll drink that by myself.

MARIAH

Really?

MILLER

Yeah.

MARIAH

Damn, okay. Then I guess I need more beer. Something better than your dirty water Miller High Lite.

(Beat.)

Or, we can just say fuck that and...you can come over here and help me unzip my dress.

MILLER

Uhm. Yeah, I can do that.

(JJ knocks again, but it doesn't matter.)

(MILLER's already over on MARIAH.)

(The lights fade on them.)
(End scene.)

SCENE 4

(Lights up on MILLER's place. The day after the wedding.)
(MILLER is dressed for work, waiter's apron.)
(MARIAH wears one of MILLER's T-shirts, underwear and socks.
She's still sleepy-eyed.)

MILLER

Do you feel like you've come to life yet?

MARIAH

I can't believe it's after three. I never sleep this long. Well, I guess we didn't go to bed until...when?

MILLER

I don't know. Four?

MARIAH

You're a bad influence. Nice apron. Why's it so long?

MILLER

I could ask the same about your shirt.

MARIAH

It feels like a dress on me.

MILLER

It's a good look.

MARIAH

Is it cool if I hang out here while you're at work?

MILLER

Sure.

MARIAH

Can I...be here when you get back?

MILLER

I was gonna be real disappointed if you weren't.

MARIAH

See ya.

(MILLER exits.)
(MARIAH gets up and locks the door.)

(She then rummages through MILLER's albums and tries to figure out how to get the record player to work.)
(JJ tries MILLER's door, but it's locked. She's used to just walking in. What gives?)

MARIAH

Hello?

(JJ knocks.)
(MARIAH answers the door.)
(JJ holds up money and slowly walks in, avoiding making any physical contact with MARIAH.)

MARIAH

Uhm. Can I help you?
(Recognizes JJ from the bar.)
Hey. You're—

JJ

—Did you lock the door?

MARIAH

Uh. Yeah, I locked it. After Miller left.

JJ

He leaves it unlocked. You should leave it unlocked.

(JJ puts the money somewhere MILLER will find it. A specific place, where MILLER and JJ have agreed many times in the past. Like an ash tray.)
(JJ walks away.)
(MARIAH goes to reach for the money.)

MARIAH

What's this for?

JJ

Don't touch it.

MARIAH

Wasn't going to. You put it in an ash tray.

JJ

It's for Miller.

MARIAH

Do you usually walk into Miller's place when he's not home and leave him wads of cash?

JJ

That's really none of your business.

MARIAH

I see. Well, I guess it's none of your business what I do with whatever just might be lying around when you walk out that door.

JJ

He'll know you took it.

MARIAH

Oh yeah? How's that?

JJ

I'll tell him.

MARIAH

And he'll believe you over me? You're the girl from the bar. What's your name?

(JJ doesn't answer.)

Ah, also none of my business. I'm not going to mess with the money. You're also the knocker? Aren't you.

JJ

And you're the woman Miller fucked last night.

(Pause.)

Thin walls. You're also the reason Miller didn't take me to the store last night.

MARIAH

Do you still need a ride? I can take you.

JJ

I'm good.

MARIAH

You knew it was Miller when I showed you the picture on my phone. Remember? At the bar. Why didn't you say anything?

(JJ doesn't answer.)

(Beat.)

Do you know how to get this record player to work? I'm afraid I'm gonna break it or something.

(JJ goes to leave again.)

MARIAH (con't)

Hey, wait.

(Pause.)

Do you run into girls here a lot? I mean, like. Yeah, do you?

JJ

Why?

MARIAH

Just wondering.

JJ

You wanna know if you're special?

MARIAH

Not really if I'm special. Just...

JJ

If he fucks around. I haven't had sex with him, if that's what you're asking. I mostly come in here while he's at work.

MARIAH

You don't think that's a little invasive to come into someone's place when they're not home?

JJ

You're in here, too, ya know.

MARIAH

I was invited to stay.

JJ

Miller and I have an understanding.

MARIAH

Ah. He buys you booze and you leave him money. How do you make said money?

JJ

What, you think I'm a prostitute or something?

MARIAH

Is that what you do?

JJ

I wash dishes at Bernie's Pizza.

MARIAH

That where Miller works?

JJ

Yeah. Are you a prostitute?

MARIAH

I'm a writer.

JJ

What have you written?

MARIAH

Jack shit. I've been too stressed.

JJ

Isn't that the best time to write? When you need it the most?

MARIAH

How would you know? I recently got my MFA in Creative Writing from West Liberty University. I worked under Professor Daniel Cutty.

JJ

Is he supposed to mean something to me?

MARIAH

Cutty's brilliant. He's out teaching in California now. Bastard. I bet it's in the seventies and sunny out there. The opposite of cousin-fucking, muggy Appalachia country.

JJ

I've never been out of West Virginia.

MARIAH

He wrote me a letter about a month ago. Wherever he's teaching, they don't use phones a lot. Some communal village or something. Anyways. He invited me to come visit sometime. Maybe I should.

JJ

Why don't you? Why're you hanging around with Miller?

MARIAH

Is there something wrong with him?

JJ

He's not an academic.

MARIAH

Is that a rule? Academics have to stick together. No crossing over into the regular people society. You make me sound like an alien.

JJ

Just sounds like you'd rather be somewhere else. I bet you're smart.

MARIAH

I guess my degree says so.

JJ

You are smart. I can tell. My grandmother was smart.

MARIAH

Who's your grandmother?

JJ

She's gone.

MARIAH

Sorry to hear that. Gone, like...

JJ

Like she died. Last year.

MARIAH

Is that why you live here now?

(No answer.)

What about your parents? Where are they?

JJ

I live here because I want to, okay?

MARIAH

Oh. Okay.

(Beat.)

What made your grandmother so smart?

JJ

She was an English teacher.

MARIAH

Did you have her in class?

JJ

No. But she was always trying to teach me things. I wasn't a good student.

MARIAH

Believe it or not, I wasn't a very good student either. I failed tenth grade English.

JJ

Glad you weren't my teacher.

MARIAH

My teacher had us do these super long vocabulary books. I found it grueling. So I just never did them.

JJ

I hated those. I always coped off of Jerky Jakey Thomas before class. His handwriting was hard to read, though.

MARIAH

I should have done the same thing. Apparently it was a big part of our grade. But I was kind of grateful. I was able to take this fantasy science fiction class instead of twelfth grade English. So I was reading Jurassic Park while the rest of my senior class was reading Beowulf.

JJ

I've never read either one.

MARIAH

Have you seen the movies?

JJ

Nope.

MARIAH

Do you like movies? What do you like to do?

JJ

I don't know.

MARIAH

You must like something.

JJ

Why are you so interested?

MARIAH

Just making conversation.

JJ

I'm not the best to make conversation with. I don't like anything.

MARIAH

Well, I can't believe that.

JJ

Why? Why can't you believe that? Is it a rule for someone to like something?

MARIAH

Or someone.

JJ

I don't like anyone.

MARIAH

Do you like Miller?

JJ

Miller? He's fine. He's good for a transaction.

MARIAH

I see.

JJ

Your professor dude. Does he teach poetry?

MARIAH

Yeah. I was a grad assistant for his poetry class.

JJ

Cool. Hey. Were serious about giving me a ride?

MARIAH

Sure. Where do you need to go? Are you hungry?

JJ

Starved. But that's not why I was asking. Forget it. I'll have Miller take me tonight.

(JJ goes over to the record player. She picks a record and puts it on.)

You just lift up this little lever and put it back down once you have this in the right spot. Miller showed me. We work on music together. I help him with lyrics. And he strums.

(Lights dim.)

(End scene.)

SCENE 5

(MARIAH is rummaging through the fridge, trying to find room.)
(She finds a to-go box.)

MARIAH

This sausage pizza has mold on it.

MILLER

Oo. Yeah.

MARIAH

Is this the pizza you brought home from Bernie's two weeks ago? Why haven't you thrown it away yet?

MILLER

Just haven't.

MARIAH

Oh, god. What's this sticky shit? Did you spill caramel or something in here?

MILLER

Could have. Never know.

MARIAH

You could use this fridge for other stuff besides cheap ass Budweiser and moldy sausage pizza, ya know.

MILLER

Yeah. I know.

(End scene.)

SCENE 6

(Lights up on MILLER's place.)

(JJ is there. She's grabbing a beer out of the mini-fridge. She opens it. Then she puts money into the ash tray.)

(She drinks.)

(She writes in her journal.)

(She hears MARIAH.)

(JJ quickly puts the beer in the fridge, just as MARIAH enters with a box of her stuff.)

JJ

(Heading out the door.)

Hey.

MARIAH

Hey, you don't have to scurry off.

JJ

What's in the box?

MARIAH

Oh, just some random things. Tooth brush, makeup, a few books.

JJ

Doesn't sound random to me.

MARIAH

Well, maybe not.

JJ

A framed picture of your cat. Looks to me like you're settling in.

(MARIAH puts her stuff down.)

MARIAH

What are you doing here? Creeping around again?

JJ

Shut up, I'm not a creep. Miller has better lighting.

MARIAH

Lighting for what?

JJ

Nothing. I gotta go to work.

(JJ exits.)
(MARIAH wonders if JJ really left for work.)
(MARIAH knocks on the wall separating their places.)
(Is she expecting a knock back? She doesn't get one.)
(She spots JJ's journal.)
(Should she peek? She does and reads some of her poetry.)

MARIAH

Blue Lilacs. An epic poem. Question mark. Blooming from the ashes.

(She settles in and reads as the lights dim.)
(MILLER enters.)

MILLER

What's up?

MARIAH

Nothing, just reading a bit.

MILLER

What are you reading?

MARIAH

Not sure yet. How was work?

MILLER

Shitty. A couple of old fucks stiffed me. What's this? Bringing more stuff over?

MARIAH

Not that much.

MILLER

Pile of books. Your pink pillow on the bed. Notebooks. A Scooby-Doo frame with a picture of a cat. You know Scooby was a dog, right?

MARIAH

Shut up. Gary Cat was my best friend growing up. I guess I have been staying over a lot.

MILLER

That's true. You have.

MARIAH

Like almost every night.

MILLER

Every night.

MARIAH

For the past month. And I thought it would be okay if I brought over a few personal things. Is that okay?

MILLER

I've enjoyed having you here.

MARIAH

I've enjoyed being here.

MILLER

That's good.

MARIAH

Do you want me here. All the time?

MILLER

Would that be crazy?

MARIAH

Do you think I'm crazy?

MILLER

The air's sweeter with you around.

MARIAH

Yeah?

MILLER

Like nectar. Like lilacs.

MARIAH

Lilacs? Blue lilacs?

MILLER

Do they smell different than the purple ones?

MARIAH

(Picking up JJ's journal and reading.)

She'd find the ashes in her garden. She wrote, the Blue Lilacs always smelled like stale cigarettes.

MILLER

What are you reading? Is that JJ's journal? She's super secretive about that. You should stop and give it back.

MARIAH

You're probably right.

MILLER

You're still reading it!

MARIAH

I can't help it. It's enticing me. Giving me inspiration.

MILLER

Inspiration for what?

MARIAH

I don't know. That maybe. I won't always be a gargoyle. I don't have to be a stone statue in a garden. That petals can bloom from the forgotten, the hand-me-downs scattered into the Goodwill pile like ashes.

MILLER

Don't be dissing Goodwill.

MARIAH

I'm not. It's what she wrote. Ashes. Blue lilacs. Miller, have you ever been to California?

MILLER

No.

MARIAH

Me either.

(Lights down on them.)

(Lights up on bar. JJ enters.)

PHILIP

JJ, come on.

JJ

I know. I'm not here to try and swindle a drink. No one's here. I just wanna play darts. Philly cheesesteak. Can I please please just play one game?

PHILIP

Fine, one game. But that's it. Here.

(Hands her the darts.)

Don't you gotta work tonight?

(JJ throws a dart.)

(Lights fade.)

(End scene.)

SCENE 7

(Lights up on MILLER's place.)

(It's cleaned up. No more beers cans or ash trays.)

(No more stale cigarette smell.)

(MARIAH has made it smell like sweet nectar.)

(And it's obvious MARIAH has all but moved in. There's flowers in a vase where the ash try used to be. There's probably a new cute throw and a few pretty pillows on the couch. Books. Stuff like that.)

(MILLER enters. He was outside smoking a cigarette, since he's not allowed to inside anymore. He puts his cigarettes and lighter down.)

(He goes to the mini-fridge and is a little disappointed that it's filled with bland sparkling water. Like La Croix or Schweppes. Gross.)

(He closes the fridge.)

MILLER

La Croix? Schweppes? What the hell, Mariah? Where am I gonna put my Labatt's?

MARIAH

That Labatt Blue is fucking nasty.

MILLER

Your bland fizzy water is nasty.

(End scene.)

SCENE 8

(Later that night.)
(Lights up on JJ in her place.)
(MARIAH is there, reading JJ's poetry journal.)
(She's holding a joint. One of JJ's.)

I'm a flicked cigarette.
Piled atop the others.
Outside my grandfather's drinking porch swing.

(The door knob moves.)
(JJ's home.)

JJ

(Offstage.)
What the fuck?
(Harsh knocks.)
Hello? Who's in there? Miller?

MARIAH

It's me, J Baby.

JJ

Unlock my door!

MARIAH

(Setting the journal down.)
Fine, coming.
(Unlocks the door.)

JJ

Don't fucking call me that.

MARIAH

Welcome home.

JJ

Get out.

MARIAH

God, so rude.

JJ

You think it's cool to just come into my place. You think it's okay for you to just prance your happy ass wherever you want.

MARIAH

You go into Miller's place all the time. I thought it was cool.

JJ

There are rules. For example. No entering JJ's abode. Everyone knows that.

MARIAH

Everyone?

JJ

Everyone.

MARIAH

The door was unlocked. If you don't want people coming in your place while you're not home, you should really lock your door.

JJ

I shouldn't have to.

MARIAH

You have to admit, that's stupid.

JJ

Where the fuck did you get that?

MARIAH

On your nightstand.

JJ

Fuck me, people going through my shit.

MARIAH

If you locked your door...

JJ

Don't smoke what's not yours.

MARIAH

Another rule?

JJ

You didn't even light it. What were you, just holding it, pretending?

MARIAH

I don't know how to do it.

JJ

You're so lame, give it here.

(JJ lights it.)

(Takes a hit.)

So what else did you go through, my underwear drawer? Perv.

MARIAH

You don't have an underwear drawer. You don't have much furniture at all.

JJ

I'm a minimalist.

MARIAH

Right.

JJ

A dishwasher's motto. Here.

MARIAH

Like this?

JJ

Just inhale and hold it in your mouth. And if you can, take a deep breath.

(A smoke beat.)

(I'm sure MARIAH would make a big deal about coughing.)

(Or maybe she takes it like a pro.)

Something stupid happened at work today.

MARIAH

Oh, my god. You got fired.

JJ

Worse. I got promoted.

MARIAH

That's good, right?

JJ

Apparently my talent to scrub crusty cheese and pepperoni off of baking sheets and plates is far superior to the newbie washers. That I now have to train. Bernie dubbed me Washing Station Captain.

MARIAH

Cool, like the captain of a pirate ship.

JJ

A ship sinking in a greasy soap pond I'll drown myself in before I'm thirty.

MARIAH

I'm almost thirty and I haven't drowned myself yet.

JJ

You've never been a dishwasher at Bernie's Pizza. Your hands become pruny sponges that sop up pizza grease water. And you can't wring the smell out. I used to sleep with my hand beneath my cheek. No anymore. I can't go to sleep to the scent of my worthless job.

MARIAH

What would you rather do?

JJ

I dunno. Nothing.

MARIAH

That's sad, nothing?

JJ

Everyone wants to do nothing.

MARIAH

That's not necessarily true. People don't want to do nothing. They don't want to do the nothing that others tell them they have to do. People want to do whatever they want. And if you say you want nothing...I don't know what to tell ya, kid. But I don't believe you. I think you want something.

JJ

Pass that back.

(She takes a hit.)

Ewww. Why's it so wet?

MARIAH

I don't know.

JJ

Did you put the whole thing in your mouth? You don't eat it. Just put it between the front of your lips like this.

MARIAH

Okay, I'll try again. What did you wanna do when you were a kid?

JJ

I can't remember, really. This church family took me in and for a while I thought I wanted to be a youth pastor.

MARIAH

What happened?

JJ

Pastor Dave drove me to my grandmother's.

MARIAH

Where were your parents?

JJ

Mom went into the ground before I was three. Dad. Dad...He dumped me at The First Baptist Church like a stray cat. Hoping the godly would be willing to feed me. He sat with me through the entire sermon. I just thought we were there going to church. We put a couple coins in the offering bucket. He let me toss them in. I was seven. Sermon ended. He bent down and whispered in my ear, "I gotta take a piss, sweetie. Stay right here til I get back." Those are the last words he ever said to me.

MARIAH

You never saw him again after that?

JJ

Do dreams and pictures count?

MARIAH

So your grandma raised you. Man, I can't imagine what it would be like.

JJ

No mom to have the girl talk with you. Old granny had been there done that and was all dried up when I hit puberty. No dad to get overprotective when you went to prom. Like I even went. No one to teach you how to drive.

MARIAH

Your granny didn't teach you how to drive?

JJ

She said she couldn't remember if she ever learned. But I knew that was bullshit. She was just too old and sick.

MARIAH

Sick with what?

JJ

Life's diseases. I was the one who found her. When I got home from work. In her red recliner. Jeopardy was blaring on the TV. She couldn't hear for shit. She looked like she was just. Taking her old granny nap.

MARIAH

God, I'm so sorry.

JJ

Can't do anything about it. But she did leave behind all these.

(Pulls out a shoebox from under the bed or somewhere hidden.)

MARIAH

Holy cow, JJ. That's a lot of medication.

JJ

She never took them but always refilled them. She had a bad memory. Or granny was planning on going out as a dealer or something. At least that's what I tell myself so I don't feel bad for selling these to Miller and Phil and his friends.

(Beat.)

I guess I just wanted to be something more than...I don't know.

MARIAH

A flicked cigarette?

JJ

Yeah, exactly.

(Seeing the journal.)

You read my journal.

MARIAH

What? No. I mean, I opened it up to see what it was, and sure I may have seen a couple of lines. I may have glanced over a few words, like "pile" and "ashes" and "the." And I found out it was yours. That's why I'm here. I brought it back to you. Here! You left it at Miller's.

JJ

You knew what it looked like. You knew it was mine. And you opened it up anyways and read poetry that wasn't meant for your nosy eyes to see.

MARIAH

So it is poetry? If not for my eyes, then for who?

JJ

Fuck, Mariah, I've never met anyone so invasive.

MARIAH

I didn't snoop on purpose. It captivated me. Your words. I couldn't stop reading. They. Spoke to me. For the first time in a really long time. I didn't feel. Alone.

JJ

Really?

MARIAH

Have you ever heard of The Brotherhood of the Sun?

JJ

Is that a band?

MARIAH

It's a beautiful farm. Where people serve one another. No one takes advantage. Everyone is equal. It's a dessert bit with plenty of water to drink. And at night. The open sky twinkles at you.

JJ

What is this place?

MARIAH

It's a paradise. Professor Cutty lives there. He's their teacher. I'd like to study under him again.

JJ

Where is it? The Brotherhood...

MARIAH

Of the Sun. It's. Uhm. Not in Wheeling.

JJ

Like Europe or something?

MARIAH

That's be nice. I'm flying out there.

JJ

To the sun?

MARIAH

Southern California. To see Professor Cutty.

JJ

When?

MARIAH

Next week. And I'm going to talk to him about you. I bet he'd love to see some of your writing—

JJ

—Woah, Mariah, I don't know about that—

MARIAH

—And you could come with me. If I move out there.

JJ

Yeah right.

MARIAH

I'm serious.

JJ

California?

MARIAH

It's like a dream. You just sit tight here. For a week, that's how long I'll be gone. Professor Cutty. He'll love you.

(End scene.)

SCENE 9

(Lights up on MILLER's place. MILLER and MARIAH are super hungover. MILLER drinks a beer.)

(MARIAH is super hungover.)

MARIAH

Ew, how can you even look at alcohol right now?

MILLER

I'm hoping it'll cure my hangover. Shit. I'm never hungover.

MARIAH

Because you haven't been drinking as much lately.

MILLER

Because a month ago you turned my beer fridge into your own personal bland bubbly water cooler.

MARIAH

It's for your own good.

MILLER

How do you feel?

MARIAH

Like a fucking jack rabbit's thumping the side of my brain.

MILLER

Have a warm beer.

MARIAH

Barf.

MILLER

I gotta be at work soon. I'm gonna try and shit.

(He grabs his warm beer, cigarettes and heads out to the bathroom.)

(Lights down.)

(End scene.)

SCENE 10

(MARIAH, MILLER, and JJ are at the bar after hours. Jazz plays. Everyone has been drinking A LOT.)

MARIAH

So, let me get this straight. You write lyrics. For Miller.

JJ

Miller here's been trying to write an original song for like ever. He's so funny. I'm like, how is that going to change anything? You're still gonna end up playing at Bernie's pizza on Saturday nights. With the white-haired, beer-bellied farts screaming out Free Bird, Free Bird every two seconds. Miller doesn't even play that kinda shit.

MARIAH

(To MILLER.)

You don't?

JJ

He plays 1930s and 40s songs that no one even knows about.

MARIAH

I didn't know you played at Bernie's.

JJ

He gets nervous. He has to drink a whole pitcher and like four shots before he can even get up there.

MILLER

Hey, but I get up there, don't I? Who wants another round?

JJ

Yes please!

MARIAH

So Philip just lets you close down the house?

MILLER

Just on Sundays.

MARIAH

Miller. When we get to California, do you think, like, we're gonna be the parents and JJ's our kid?

JJ

Mariah butt-hole, I'm way too old to be your kid.

MARIAH

Not Miller. He's old as fuck.

MILLER

I ain't going to Cali. Too fast for me.

MARIAH

Oh, Miller. You don't know what you're talking about. The Brotherhood of the Son is a peaceful paradise where you don't have to rush a thing.

MILLER

Whatever you say.

JJ

You'd be like the shittiest parents in the world.

MILLER

She's right. We'd be getting super fucked up with our kid. Parents should be good influences.

MARIAH

She's an adult, though.

MILLER

Yeah but she's not old enough to drink.

JJ

I'm drinking right now!

MARIAH

She can drink with us. We're family. We'll be a golden California sun family.

JJ

What about your brother?

MARIAH

What?

JJ

You know, the fat one you were complaining about when you came into the bar earlier this summer.

MARIAH

Oh.

JJ

He's your family.

MARIAH

Not anymore.

JJ

Did you kill him?

MARIAH

You ever read Poe?

JJ

Creepy dude, right?

MARIAH

Read Poe. Edgar had some good ideas on what to do with dead bodies.

JJ

So you're never gonna talk to him again?

MARIAH

He was a suffocating glutinous blob that turned you to stone with his hungry, ignorant eyes. So no. I don't want to be stone anymore. It's time for freedom. The golden California sun is going to bring me to life. A gargoyle I'll be, no more. And you, JJ baby.

JJ

Ew, stop.

MARIAH

You're going to bloom from the West Virginia ashes. You'll bloom into the Blue Lilac that you are. You'll tell our story, JJ. You'll tell our story.

(Lights down.)

(End scene.)

SCENE 11

(The morning of MARIAH's flight.)

(MILLER's passed out somewhere, the couch maybe.)

(Same deal with MARIAH. But she's just woke up and thinks she missed her 6 a.m. flight.)

Fuck fuck fuck fuck!

MARIAH

What?

(Stirring awake.)

MILLER

Fuck!

MARIAH

What happened?

MILLER

Fuck!

MARIAH

Are you okay?

MILLER

Do I sound okay?

MARIAH

What time is it?

MILLER

Half passed too fucking late. Half passed I'm fucked. Half passed I fucked myself.

MARIAH

I told you not to drink so much last night.

MILLER

Not helpful, Miller.

MARIAH

It's too late to be helpful. Shit. It's almost noon.

MILLER

No shit. Why do you think I'm freaking out? My flight was at 6 a.m.

MARIAH

MILLER

Call and tell them you're sick.

MARIAH

Tell who, the fucking airport? Are you an idiot?

MILLER

Tell Professor What's His Nuts that you had some kind of emergency and you're gonna have to reschedule your flight.

MARIAH

Like what?

MILLER

Like, I don't know. You had a death in the family, maybe one of your grandparents.

MARIAH

All of my grandparents are already dead.

MILLER

It's perfect then.

MARIAH

Quit being an asshole.

MILLER

It's not my fault you closed the bar down with JJ. Up reading poetry and shit.

MARIAH

I knew you were secretly upset about that.

MILLER

I don't give a fuck. I'm just saying don't be mad when you oversleep after drinking all night.

MARIAH

I'm not mad.

MILLER

You're not mad?

MARIAH

Fuuuuckkkk!

MILLER

I don't know what to tell you.

MARIAH

I know you don't. I know you don't know what to tell me. You never have anything to tell me. You just go through life jerking off to your banjolele and chugging Bud.

MILLER

How did you missing your flight turn into a shit on Miller session?

(He gets up to get a beer.)

MARIAH

Okay. I'm just so damn mad I don't know what to do.

(Beat. She takes a breather.)

How can you even fucking think about drinking a beer right now?

MILLER

(Seeing the ticket on top of the mini fridge.)

Hang on. Is this your ticket? Your flight's not until 6 p.m.

MARIAH

What? No, I swore it was 6 a.m. Give me that. Oh, shit, thank god.

MILLER

Welp. I'm downing this and going back to bed. Wake me up when it's time to leave.

(End scene.)

SCENE 12

(MILLER and JJ hanging out at his place.)
(The record player is going.)
(They've been drinking.)

MILLER

This is nice.

JJ

Mariah's gonna be pissed when she sees all that beer.

MILLER

She's not here now, is she.

JJ

We can just hide whatever's left over at my place.

MILLER

If there is anything left. We'll restock it a couple times before she's back, for sure.
Grab us a couple more. What do you do over there, anyways?

JJ

Where?

MILLER

Your place.

JJ

Ah, come on.

MILLER

What?

JJ

Don't ask me that kinda shit. I hate that.

MILLER

What?

JJ

What I do to pass the time, shit like that. Can't you just worry about what I'm like
when you're around me? Like right now. What am I doing?

MILLER

Avoiding answering my question.

JJ

It's none of people's business what people do when they're alone. It's only important to that person. Being alone means being alone for a reason. Because they're alone. And at that time, that's all that matters. You don't need to be involved with what I do when I'm alone because you're not there. It's just me.

(He drinks.)

MILLER

You excited for Cali?

JJ

It's not like she's forcing me.

MILLER

This is what you want.

JJ

Yeah. Sure. What else do I have going on?

MILLER

I don't know. You don't tell anyone.

JJ

That's because there's nothing to tell. You know, we don't hang out as much with Mariah around.

MILLER

It's annoying sometimes.

JJ

You don't like hanging out with me?

MILLER

No, I mean Mariah's annoying.

JJ

Really?

MILLER

Sometimes. I don't mind the cleaning. But the no smoking inside and the no storing up beer in the fridge. It's more expensive to only drink while going out, doesn't she know that?

JJ

I guess. It's been nice, though. Hanging out with Mariah. I like you guys together.

MILLER

Me too. Even if she is out in California visiting some hoity-toity know it all.

JJ

Yeah, her professor.

MILLER

Who used to be her professor.

JJ

Dude, she won't do anything, don't be jealous. She's not like that.

MILLER

Yeah. Come on. Pull out whatever words you have in that there journal and let's write a kick-ass banjolele tune.

JJ

(She opens her journal.)

Here we go. Ready?

MILLER

Shoot, Tex.

JJ

(Reading.)

She was the smell of blue lilacs after a rain. They bloomed from the wet cigarettes, those her husband flicked in her garden.

MILLER

Oh, that's good. JJ, that's fucking good. Probably gonna have to put it in simpler words, but yeah, dude, nice.

JJ

You think so?

MILLER

Let me get to strumming here. Okay. How does it go again?

JJ

Lilac petals on the tips of cigarette stems. Scent of blue lilacs after a gentle rain.

(MILLER plays and sings.)

(It could be a gorgeous melody.)

(Might be okay.)

(Or comedically god-awful.)

JJ (con't)

Miller. We did it. We wrote a song. Well, maybe the chorus of a song. It's really good. Play it again.

(He does.)

Holy shit, we did it! Let's celebrate.

MILLER

Jay, you're already trashed.

JJ

So are you. Best time to celebrate.

(Searching through his place.)

You gotta have something better in than beer here. Like champaign or something.

MILLER

No champaign, for sure.

JJ

Oh, what's this? Who's Johnnie Walker? Blue Label.

MILLER

Woah. That would be scotch. I haven't seen that in a hot minute.

JJ

You didn't know you had it?

MILLER

I forgot. It's my dad's.

JJ

Scotch can last that long?

MILLER

How old do you think I am?

JJ

I don't know. Like forty.

MILLER

I'm thirty-seven. Asshole.

(MILLER gestures for her to have a seat.)

Have a seat.

(He grabs a bottle of scotch and two glasses.)

(Pours and offers.)

Here. To—

JJ

(Interrupting.)

—Shots?

(JJ takes it down in one gulp.)

MILLER

No, what the fuck? You don't drink scotch like that.

JJ

Oh, shit. I didn't know.

MILLER

That one glass cost like twenty bucks.

JJ

Really? Didn't taste like twenty bucks.

MILLER

Doesn't matter because you don't get anymore.

JJ

Come on, let me try again. I promise. I'll drink it like a man.

MILLER

You don't have to drink it like a man. Just drink it with...respect. And appreciation.

(He pours her a little bit.)

That's all you get.

(JJ takes a small sip.)

There ya go.

JJ

I've never had scotch before.

MILLER

I can tell. Do you like it?

JJ

I don't know.

MILLER

This scotch is the last thing I have of my dad. He owned a used car lot. Decently nice cars, you know like Toyota Tercels, Chevy Cavaliers, nice ones like that. I worked out on the lot sometimes, but mostly I'd wash the cars when they came in. Clean out the inside. I had just turned sixteen. And we get in this dope ass

MILLER (con't)

Ford Pinto. Lime green. Dad and I took her out for a little spin. He let me drive. It was February and forty degrees but you better believe I had them windows down. I was cruising, baby. I turned down a backroad outside of town and this fucking deer jumps out in front of me. I slam on the breaks hard as I can. Hit that deer with the tip of my bumper and he ran off. Fucking close one, my dad said. I go to put in the clutch and I bump something with my foot. This bottle. Johnnie Walker Blue Label had slid out from under my seat. Unopened. Dad said, Son, you ain't old enough yet. But you take this as a present from your dear old dad. This here is good stuff. Drink it when you're older and I'm long gone. Welp, he's been long gone for a while now. Let's drink up.

JJ

You don't know what happened to him?

MILLER

Word got out that he was selling stolen cars. He took off in that green Ford Pinto and I haven't heard from him since. Probably in jail or dead.

JJ

Shit. The only thing I ever stole was...I guess a glass of scotch.

MILLER

Don't feel bad. The bottle was technically stolen, too.

(End scene.)

SCENE 13

(The next day.)

(MILLER's asleep next to the empty bottle of scotch.)

(JJ knocks on MILLER's door and enters.)

MILLER

Didn't I already take care of you yesterday.

JJ

Yeah. Yeah. I don't need a ride.

MILLER

Well, what do you want, JJ?

JJ

Well, that song turned out so great last night, I got excited. I was actually up early this morning writing some new lyrics. Want to hear?

MILLER

JJ. Dude. No. My stomach is churning. I don't even know how you're so bubbly right now after drinking all that scotch last night. Shit, we shouldn't have done that.

JJ

Why?

MILLER

Nothing left of my dad, now. I got nothing.

JJ

Oh. Sorry.

MILLER

It's whatever, dude. Just. Let me be. I'm gonna sleep some more before work.

JJ

Okay.

(Lights down as JJ exits.)

(End scene.)

SCENE 14

(At the bar.)

PHILIP

What's up, JJ?

JJ

Hey, Philly Man. I know you gotta open soon. And I hate to ask. But could you give me a ride to the store? Gotta grab some stuff. Some booze, instant mac, some Cheetos, shit like that. Running low on food.

PHILIP

Jay, I would, but we open in like fifteen. I'm still restocking the beer. Doesn't Miller usually take you?

JJ

I haven't run into him for a couple days. I keep missing him.

PHILIP

I got some bar nuts. You want some of those to snack on?

JJ

It's cool, don't worry about it.

(End scene.)

SCENE 15

(MILLER lounges with a cig, beer, and maybe some greasy fatty food. He's taking full advantage of MARIAH being gone.)

(His door knob moves.)

(Then a knock.)

JJ

Miller? Hey, it's JJ. Why's the door locked? Dude, I know you're in there, I can smell smoke and cheeseburger grease from under the door. Dude, Miller, what's going on?

(End scene.)

SCENE 16

(MILLER at the bar.)

PHILIP

JJ's been looking for you.

MILLER

Yeah, I figured.

PHILIP

What's going on? She do something to piss you off?

MILLER

Nah, nothing like that. With Mariah outta town, I've honestly just been enjoying doing nothing. I've been able to smoke in my place again, eat whatever the fuck I want without her nagging that I should eat healthier. I even took a day off this week. JJ will be alright for another day or so. Just need a breather.

(End scene.)

SCENE 17

(Early afternoon.)

(MILLER is passed out on the couch.)

(MARIAH returns from her trip.)

(She enters with her yellow suitcase.)

(Goes to the fridge for a Cucumber Water Melon La Croix...some icky flavor like that.)

(It's all gone. The fridge is full of beer again.)

MARIAH

You sneaky bastard Miller. I'm gone for a week. See how he likes his beer all shaken. I'll show him what bland fizz is like.

(She shakes up a beer vigorously.)

(She might even slam it on the ground, which wakes MILLER up.)

Miller. Hey, honey. Wake up.

MILLER

Hey. I missed you. Give me a kiss.

MARIAH

Oh, god. Your breath is awful. Here, take a swig of this beer. Just got it out of the fridge for ya.

(MILLER opens it.)

(It sprays and/makes a mess.)

MILLER

Ah, shit.

MARIAH

HA! That's what you get, Miller Low Life Ass Face!

MILLER

Dammit, Mariah.

MARIAH

I'm gonna go wake up JJ now. So many things to tell her. She's gonna love California.

(Lights up on JJ in her place.)

(JJ's on her bed, unmoving.)

(MARIAH knocks.)

MARIAH

JJ, you awake? I have so much to tell you.

MARIAH (con't)

(Knocks again.)

Come on, JJ Baby. I know you hate it when people come in uninvited.

(She tries the door and it's unolcked.)

(She enters.)

(JJ doesn't stir.)

(There are her granny's pill bottles.)

(Lots of empty beer cans.)

Oh, god. Did she take this whole fucking bottle. No.

(She touches JJ and jumps back.)

(She's stone, like a gargoyle.)

Fuck. JJ, no. Fuck, fuck, fuck. JJ, please. This isn't how things were supposed to go. Miller. Miller, you drunk lazy mother-fucker.

(She beats on the wall separating their places.)

How did you let this happen? You killed her! You fucking killed her, Miller! You're just over there drinking a goddamn beer right now. While our friend. While JJ...

(She looks back at her dead friend.)

(She breaks.)

(Lights fade.)

(End scene.)

SCENE 18

(In MILLER's place.)

(A few weeks later.)

(MARIAH has packed her stuff, and has a box of JJ's journal.)

MILLER

We can split the fridge down the middle. You get one half for your fizzy water and I get the other half for. More fizzy water. JJ liked us together.

MARIAH

Yeah. I know she would have. But she's not here. Doesn't matter anymore.

MILLER

How can you say we don't matter?

MARIAH

It doesn't matter what she wanted. What mattered is what she had to say. All the words she didn't say. All the words in this journal. She wrote an epic poem, Miller. It's all here. Blue Lilacs. That's what it will be called. Her grandmother called her Blue Lilac. Did you know that?

MILLER

No. I didn't even know she had a grandmother.

MARIAH

She died last year.

MILLER

Why'd she call her that?

MARIAH

Because sometimes the bluest of people are often the sweetest. Have you ever smelled a lilac?

MILLER

She always smelled like cigarettes and booze to me.

MARIAH

She thought so too. Her grandfather would throw old cigarette ashes in her grandmother's lilac garden. But like you, she was wrong. She was the smell of lilacs on a blue, rainy day.

MILLER

What are you going to do when you get out there?

MARIAH

Work with Professor Cutty. Grow some turnips in the community garden. I'm going to show Cutty her poetry. Maybe he can help me get it published or something. A little coffee table poetry book.

MILLER

Would she have wanted that?

MARIAH

Why are you so obsessed with what she wanted? She's gone, Miller. People should hear her story.

MILLER

She always said her story, what she did alone, was no one's business but hers.

MARIAH

Well, she's not alone anymore. She's our memory. She had a lot of potential. I can't help but think we...we didn't give her what she needed. Just a forgotten petal fallen into ashes.

(Beat.)

Miller? Will you play her song?

(And he does.)

END OF PLAY