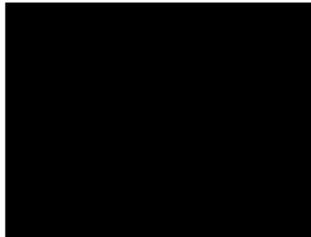
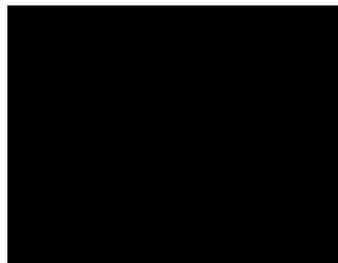


Co-op(erative)

A full-length play

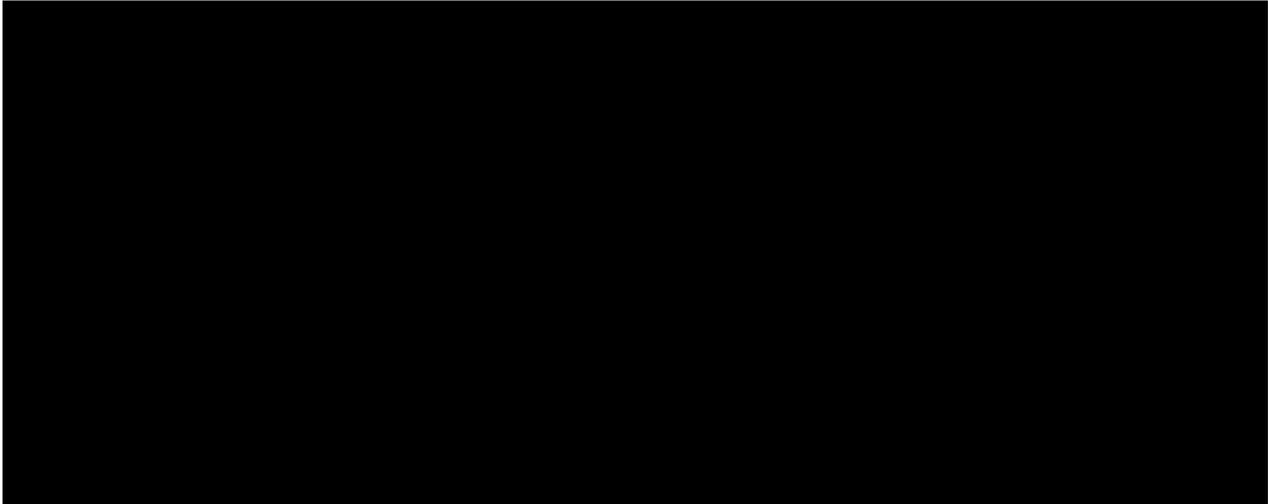


Contact:



Synopsis: A brash, new artist disrupts the tranquility of a sleepy artist's co-operative with her unconventional work. A riotous dark comedy, *Co-op(erative)* explores the transience of relationships, sexuality, civility, and community.

Performance history: *Co-op(erative)* has no performance history. A staged reading to benefit Syracuse's ArtRage Gallery was to take place in April, 2020 before being canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.



LAVINIA, F, 50'S
JASPER, M, 60'S
JENN, F, LATE 30'S
ELEANOR, F, 60'S
VALERIE, F, 60-70'S
DOUG, M, LATE 30'S
TRACY, F, 40-50'S
SADIE, F, LATE 30'S
LOGAN, M, 30'S
PLACE: AN ARTISAN'S CO-OPERATIVE IN UPSTATE NY
TIME: THE PRESENT

ACT I

SCENE 1

An artisan's cooperative. There are about a half dozen visible sales 'areas'; a corner of wooden bowls, acrylic paintings of local environs on the back wall, a glass counter of polished stone jewelry, etc. The stage right wall of the shop, closest to the outdoor entrance and the cash-out counter, is conspicuously empty with nails still littering its surface. A previous artist has obviously recently vacated and left some debris leaning against the wall. A large display window is far stage right featuring autumnal decor. Center stage is occupied by Lavinia's floral watercolors, a bit overstocked on a free-standing shelving unit. Stage left is stacked with Jasper's garish and whimsical bird houses, sitting on shelves and hanging from the ceiling. Decoupage frames of "The Rainbow Bridge" hang in the same area on the wall or rest on shelves with the birdhouses. A coffee cart with cookies sits further left, alongside Jasper's well-worn lawn chair, with a curtained entry leading to a back storage room far left. Music plays as LAVINIA, 50's, dressed immaculately though sensibly, enters with a ladder and duster. She sets up the ladder near her shelving unit and climbs up carefully, and begins cleaning her framed art. JASPER, 60's, dressed for comfort, enters from the back room and puts a new package of cookies on the coffee cart and eats one. He observes Lavinia cleaning and becomes self-conscious, heads over to one of his bird houses and blows the dust off of it. He nods in approval, picks up the coffee carafe, and heads off left. LAVINIA looks at the large, naked wall at right and becomes inspired.

She climbs off the ladder, takes one of her watercolors, and hangs it on one of the nails. She steps back to admire her work. JASPER enters from the back room, replaces the carafe on the coffee cart, crosses the room to the front door and flips the sign to 'Open' as the music triumphantly concludes.

JASPER

Making a move?

LAVINIA

What?

JASPER

Your stuff would be very eye-catching there.

LAVINIA

Oh, I don't know. It would look nice under these lights, but to lose the center space? My center space?

JASPER

You don't always have to be in the center. Mix things up a little.

LAVINIA

Taking her art off the wall and replacing it on the shelving unit center.

No thank you.

JASPER

Heading to the coffee cart for coffee.

I'll tell the new girl you want the wall and that you have a senior position.

LAVINIA

I don't think we need to use the word 'senior' while discussing me with the 'new girl,' Jasper.

JASPER

What time is she supposed to be here?

LAVINIA

Heading to the sales counter and retrieving a post-it note.

Oh, Valerie wrote it down but I can't remember, hold on - who had the evening cashier shift yesterday?

JASPER

If there's a half-eaten sub under the tissue paper, it's mine.

LAVINIA

Setting the sandwich on the counter.

Jasper, it's tuna.

JASPER

Heading over to the counter to retrieve it.

Melt! It used to be a tuna melt, but now it's just lukewarm tuna with cheese. I'll take it.

LAVINIA

Finding the Post-It Note.

Huh. It says she was supposed to be here before we opened. Well, now we know she's not punctual.

JASPER

Eating the tuna melt.

Aw, c'mon, Lavinia, give her a chance.

LAVINIA

Flipping through Jenn's paperwork.

She had a chance to prove that she's punctual and it didn't work out. I'm sure she has good qualities even though she doesn't respect the time of others. After all, she's very young at ... 39 years old.

JASPER

That copy of her license is for Valerie, not you.

LAVINIA

She lives on ... oh, Jasper, she's in your neighborhood.

JASPER

Heading to his chair.

Well, now we know she doesn't have any money.

LAVINIA

Closing the file.

Poor, late Jennifer. I have to admit I did enjoy her presentation.

JASPER

Creative-types are never punctual. Artistic license applies to every aspect of our lives, including time and what passes for lunch.

LAVINIA

Gesturing to her watercolors.

I'm always punctual and *I'm* creative.

JASPER

Looking at her artwork.

(half-heartedly)

Yeah, okay...

The bell on the shop door rings as ELEANOR MACAFEE enters, a delightful contemporary of Jasper's who normally exudes spunk, but is currently quite frantic.

LAVINIA

Good morning Mrs. Macafee.

ELEANOR

Breezing past her.

Good morning, Jasper!

JASPER

Hello, Eleanor! Back again so soon?

ELEANOR

Oh, Jasper, I've got terrible news.

JASPER

Not Tabitha -

ELEANOR

Yes, she's -

JASPER

I'm sorry to hear it. And so soon after Max!

ELEANOR

It's a tragedy.

JASPER

How did she go?

ELEANOR

I'd rather not say.

JASPER

I understand. My sincerest condolences.

ELEANOR

I was hoping you had another framed print of "The Rainbow Bridge."

JASPER

But you already bought one last week for Max.

ELEANOR

I know, but the way you personalize them so nicely with the decoupage frame - it makes each one so special.

LAVINIA

Cleaning the cashier counter.

Oh, brother.

JASPER

Pulling one from a collection of several in his area.

You're right. Every one of them is unique - just like our pets.

ELEANOR
(getting emotional)

Yes ...

JASPER

Moving to the counter to personalize the frame with a pen.

Now come over here and let's give her the send-off she deserves.

He reads directly from the decoupage frame after clearing his throat. LAVINIA is a mortified onlooker.

A girl's name.

ELEANOR

Oh, Tabitha!

JASPER

Writing the name on the frame where required.

Tabitha ... now, a verb.

ELEANOR

Struck.

JASPER

Struck ... and finally, a noun.

ELEANOR
(stricken)

Lawn mower.

JASPER looks up, aghast. He shoots a look at LAVINIA who is wide-eyed.

JASPER

He writes this final word on the frame.

Lawn mower. Shall I read it aloud?

ELEANOR

No. I'll do it later today at her funeral in the back yard. How much do I owe you?

JASPER

Well, this is your third print in six months ... and the third one is always free, so take it with my regards.

He hands the framed print to LAVINIA who wraps it in tissue paper and bags it up.

ELEANOR

Jasper Edwards, you are just about the nicest man I know.

JASPER

However, if you'd like to make a purchase, you may want to look at one of my bird houses -

ELEANOR

Oh, no, I couldn't possibly. You see Tabitha was chasing a bird away from one of your birdhouses in the backyard when I - when I - oh, I hate to fly, but I'm really in a hurry.

LAVINIA

Holding out the bagged frame.

Where're you off to?

ELEANOR

The Lakeview Animal Shelter. The house is very lonely without my Tabitha running around anymore. I also have to finish ... mowing the lawn. Thank you for the poem, Jasper. Goodbye, Lavinia.

ELEANOR is about to head out the door, but she is blocked by JENN who is struggling to open the door while carrying a large box of framed pieces.

LAVINIA is immediately aware of who it is and makes no effort to help. JASPER moves quickly to the door.

JASPER

Let me get that for you.

ELEANOR
(to LAVINIA)

He's such a gentleman.

JASPER

Looks like you're moving in!

JENN

I am!

She sets the box down just inside the doorway.
She seems to be effortlessly artsy in her style,
something others might perceive as sloppiness.

ELEANOR

A new artist!

JENN

Yes! Unless you gave away my spot.

LAVINIA

We thought about it.

JASPER

I'm Jasper - this is Mrs. Macafee.

ELEANOR

Eleanor, please.

JENN

Hello!

ELEANOR

My cat died.

JENN

Oh. I'm so sorry.

JASPER

(quickly)

And that's Lavinia - watercolors.

JENN

Hi!

LAVINIA

We weren't sure you'd ever show up.

JENN

I'm so sorry I'm late. I had a - I'm a little behind the eight-ball today.

JASPER

You're perfectly fine, uh ...

LAVINIA

Jennifer.

JASPER

Jennifer.

JENN

Oh, it's Jenn. With two N's.

LAVINIA

Jennnn?

JENN

Just 'Jenn.' Sorry, I feel like I barged in on your conversation.

JASPER

Don't think anything of it. We're happy you're here.

ELEANOR

Is that your art?

JENN

Oh, yeah. Well, some of it.

JASPER

Gesturing to the open, empty wall.

And this is her wall!

ELEANOR

Oh, my goodness! It's a real place of honor.

LAVINIA

I don't know about that. It's kind of off to the side. Not really front and center.

JENN

It's perfect. I love it.

ELEANOR

Is this your first time selling your work?

JENN

Uh, yeah, actually. I've kind of been through some life-changing shit lately and gotten back to my art, which I haven't taken seriously since college for various reasons I won't bore you with. I've had an energized few weeks recently and I'm just ... fuck it, right? Just throw your stuff out into the universe and see what comes back at you.

ELEANOR

I like that.

JASPER

Me too. Fuck it!

JENN

I'm sorry, I'm sure I'm making a terrible first impression.

LAVINIA

Oh, no! That happened earlier when you weren't here.

JASPER

Lavinia is our co-op class clown. She's consistently full of mirth and glee.

JENN

Your name is so beautiful.

LAVINIA

Thank you.

JENN

Very unusual.

LAVINIA

I was named after a Roman princess who's hair burst into flame.

JASPER

(pause, then to JENN)

It suits her. You'll see.

The bell on the front door suddenly rings as
SADIE, dressed in Yoga attire for work, tries to
enter the shop with another large box full of art.
JASPER runs to hold the door open.

SADIE

Jenn?

JENN

Got it!

Taking the box from her arms and placing it on
the floor.

SADIE

I thought you were coming back out.

JENN

Sorry, I was just meeting the other artists. This is Jasper, Lavinia, and Eleanor.

ELEANOR

Oh, my, I'm not one of the artists! I'm just here because my cat died.

SADIE

Oh. I'm Sadie. My cat's alive.

JENN
Sadie's my girlfriend.

LAVINIA
Mmm hm.

ELEANOR
Oh, *very* artsy!

SADIE
Well, at least we're doing *something* right today. Listen Jenn, I've got to get to work. This morning has already been a disaster -

JASPER
Show us some of your art!

JENN
(to SADIE)
Will you help me unpack first?

SADIE
Jenn, I don't think that's a great idea -

ELEANOR
Oh, come on - what's your medium?

JENN
Uh, well, watercolors mostly, but I'm trying not to limit myself.

LAVINIA
Yes, show her the watercolors from your presentation to the association members. They're a bit more rustic than mine, Eleanor.

JENN
Alright. Sadie, can you help?

SADIE is not pleased. JENN flips through one of the boxes and chooses one of the larger framed pieces. SADIE shakes her head 'no' as JENN implores her with her eyes. SADIE relents and she helps her pop the piece out of the box to be viewed.

It is an enormous, colorful watercolor of male genitalia. SADIE looks away as JENN proudly displays it to the gawking group.

ELEANOR

That *is* rustic.

LAVINIA

Oh my God.

JASPER

Impressive.

ELEANOR

I wasn't planning on seeing one of *those* today.

JASPER

Well, hang it up, don't be shy!

JENN

(demurely)

Oh, no, I can do that later.

ELEANOR

Hang it up! I want to view it from a distance!

LAVINIA

I think there's been a misunderstanding -

JASPER

I hope not! It's marvelous!

SADIE

Is it?

JENN

Sadie -

SADIE

I appreciate an unbiased opinion.

ELEANOR

Do you - do you have any more?

SADIE

They're all like this.

JASPER

All of them?

JENN

She's right.

LAVINIA

The color palette is so ... full!

JASPER

The color palette is girthy.

LAVINIA elbows JASPER.

SADIE

Jenn, I have clients waiting.

LAVINIA

Jasper, we should ask Valerie if we can put some of these in the window. Christmas is coming.

JASPER

Oh ... I -

SADIE

Jenn -

JENN

Yes, right, I'm so sorry everyone, this is not how I imagined things going today and I'm sorry for ... and now I'm apologizing for my art.

(reasserting herself)

Hello everyone, my name is Jenn, with 2 N's, I'm an artist, my work has value, and more importantly, I like it, and that's my space over there. That big, beautiful wall. I'm going to hang my artwork on that wall and ... I was about to apologize *again* in case my art offended anyone but I'm not doing that.

(to SADIE)

I'm not doing that anymore. It's really great meeting all of you, your co-op is lovely. I hope to make a lot of money here.

SADIE smiles faintly and squeezes JENN's hand.

SADIE

I'll pick you up at 5.

JENN

Great. Hey, thank you.

SADIE smiles and takes JENN's hand, then looks at the others.

SADIE

Excuse us.

The others suddenly look away from them and examine art or look at the ceiling. SADIE and JENN look into each other's eyes and take several deep breaths together before SADIE speaks.

SADIE

I am strong.

JENN

I am strong.

SADIE

I am independent.

JENN

I am independent.

SADIE

I am loved.

JENN

I am loved.

ELEANOR

Amen!

SADIE

We're working on Jenn's anxiety. And self-esteem. And work ethic -

JENN

OK.

SADIE

OK. Goodbye, everyone. It was really nice to meet you. I hope you like her art more than I do.

JENN

Sadie!

SADIE

Oh, I didn't mean it like that.

JASPER

We love it.

He gives JENN an enthusiastic thumbs up.
SADIE turns to go.

SADIE

She's very talented.

(pause)

She paints other things, too.

(pause)

She painted my cat.

(pause)

My cat's not a penis.

JENN

OK.

SADIE

OK. Goodbye! Come to Lakeview Yoga and I'll get you \$5 off one of my sessions!

ELEANOR

Crossing to SADIE

Wait, dear, tell me everything about your little fur baby at home. I'm on my way to get a replacement right now!

They exit together. JENN lets out a deep breath and pulls off her coat, looking for a place to put it. She eventually just drops it on her own box of art, not wanting to overstep with her personal space quite yet. She starts to unload her framed pieces, leaning them against the wall. JASPER looks out the window after Eleanor, maybe waving, but she's already gone. LAVINIA returns to the ladder to continue dusting.

JASPER

Alright, kiddo. Where do we begin? There's so much ground to cover.

JENN

Great!

JASPER

There's always cookies for customers. I put them out.

LAVINIA

And he eats them, too.

JASPER

And I eat them, so I always buy the kind I like. There's coffee, too. Do you want any? You've had an exciting morning.

JENN

Yes. That sounds ... thank you.

JASPER rushes to the coffee cart.

LAVINIA

I don't remember seeing those pieces when the association juried your portfolio.

JENN

Oh, well that was 2 months ago. These didn't exist then.

LAVINIA

I don't want to put a damper on our exciting morning, because it really *has* been an exciting morning -

JASPER

Cream?

JENN

Two, please!

LAVINIA

- but I'm not sure this is what the association agreed to when you were accepted for a probationary 6 month period.

JENN

Because my artwork is penises and not pastel flowers?

LAVINIA

In a way, yes. I'm just looking out for you, honey. Us watercolor gals need to stick together.

JENN

OK, should I talk to someone? The president's name is Val, right? Can I just call her?

LAVINIA

No, no. Don't be silly. I'll take care of it. She and I have been friends for a long time so ... she'll listen to me.

JASPER

Here you go Jenn with 2 N's - take the cookie too.

JENN

Thank you so much!

JASPER

Sure thing, roomie!

LAVINIA sighs. JASPER starts to help JENN hang the pieces up. He is very engaged with each piece as they come out of the boxes.

JASPER

Would you look at that.

(he whistles)

What's the story behind these, if you don't mind me asking.

JENN

Oh, not at all. These are all the men I've slept with.

LAVINIA

Just the two boxes?

JENN

Yeah, but some of them are smaller than others. The frames, I mean.

JASPER

Did you paint them from memory?

JENN

Uh, yeah, I guess you could say that. The penis itself is actually inconsequential -

JASPER

Is it? I had no idea.

JENN

I think so. It was really just a way for me to capture the essence of each partner. Like you do with your flowers, Lavinia.

LAVINIA

Oh, please don't compare our work. And speaking of flowers, the art you showed to the association members were woodland scenes. Moss covered stones and mushroom caps.

JASPER

Gesturing to the art.

Well, these are very similar to stones and mushroom caps.

LAVINIA

I'll call Valerie right now to make sure you're in the clear. I'll just, uh ... I'll just use the phone in the back room. Jasper why don't you show her around?

She exits to the back room.

JASPER

Yes! Have you ever been here before?

JENN

Yeah, uh, once when I was in high school. That was a long time ago. I remember there was an area that was strictly wind chimes? My girlfriend Sadie and I, well, before we started dating we were friends from high school, we came in looking for something for her mother's birthday. I think we were high and we walked right through this space full of wind chimes, arms wide open, and - well, you can imagine the sound.

JASPER

I can! You made the same sound coming in here today - with a bang!

JENN

Oh, geez.

JASPER

That was Audrey Cotes old space. Wind chimes. Right over there.

JENN

But they were weird somehow. They were -

JASPER

Flattened silverware, old tin cans ... a real adventurous sensibility. I think she took apart the motor of a '36 Mercury just to hear what it would sound like dangling on a tree branch. That woman had a remarkable brain. She caught a lot of flack from these people when she wanted in.

JENN

What happened to her?

JASPER

Her chimes weren't selling, so one day she boxed everything up and sold it for scrap. It was the biggest sale she ever made. Don't do what she did. Don't sell your art for scrap money.

JENN

(smiling)

OK. I won't. I promise.

JASPER

Good. This is Lavinia's space, front and center - watch the ladder. A rolling stone gathers no moss, but a neglected watercolor sure does gather dust. Some of these have been here for as long as I have.

JENN

That's a shame. They're nice. It's exciting to match an artist with their work - it's always surprising to see inside their head, you know?

JASPER

(excited)

Wanna see inside *my* head?!

JENN

Oh. Yes! Which booth is yours?

JASPER

Guess.

JENN looks around for a moment while JASPER smiles. She creeps toward his corner of the store and turns playfully, grabbing a nearby vase. She incredulously inspects the signature on the bottom before setting it down. JASPER is humorously tight-lipped.

JENN

(exuberantly)

Bird houses!

JASPER

Bird houses! Every one of them is unique. I just sit with the naked wood and let the colors speak to me. Sort of like you with your dicks over there.

JENN

(laughing)

Yeah, I guess so.

JASPER

And on the wall over here, framed prints of my favorite poem “The Rainbow Bridge.”
But I decoupage the frame with cut up Mad Libs to reduce bereavement. People should
laugh and smile when they think of their deceased pets, don’t you think?

JENN

I ... sure. I had a dog once.

JASPER

Wonderful! I have three boys at home. Beau, Bob, and Skeeter.

JENN

(reading)

“The Rainbow Bridge” ...

JASPER

Yep, but it’s my own version of the poem. Did you know that three people claim they
came up with “The Rainbow Bridge”? Imagine three people getting bent out of shape
over the publishing of a dead dog poem. That’s why people are awful and animals are the
best.

(he reads aloud slowly)

“The pain is gone, your suffering through.
Your loyal days well-counted, too.
You gave me love, no joy withheld
You’ve earned your rest, my friend, sleep well.
So bound across a meadow green
And live again within my dreams
Across The Rainbow Bridge you go
My friend, please wait for me.”

JENN

(touched)

That’s beautiful. You wrote that?

JASPER nods, on the verge of tears.

And what’s the frame say?

JASPER

“The doctor pulled a noun out of my body part.”

JENN
(laugh-crying)

Oh, no!

JASPER
See? You can't stay upset about things. You know, half the artists in this asylum would love to see my bird houses out on the curb. They don't even try to hide it any more. But I'm in for life.

JENN
How?

JASPER
I bought the building!

LAVINIA
Entering from the back room.
Jennifer, I've got some bad news - what's going on with you two?

JASPER
Wiping tears away.
Jenn was just talking about her dog.

JENN
What did Valerie say?

LAVINIA
That's the bad news - I couldn't get a hold of her. But I did call Tracy Allen, our vice-president, and she doesn't think it's going to go well for you.

JENN
She doesn't?

LAVINIA
No. In fact, when I told her about your little bait and switch she insisted on coming down here and seeing them for herself.

JENN
Why?

JASPER

To see if she recognizes any of those dicks, I should imagine.

LAVINIA

Now that your future with the co-op is in serious question I'd really like to understand why you insist on this manipulation.

JASPER

I suppose you could just swap these out for your old watercolors of twigs and berries.

JENN

But that's not who I am right now. That's not who I am *anymore*. It wouldn't be honest.

LAVINIA

Perhaps not, but at least you'd be able to stay.

JENN

I'm sure Valerie will make a decision that reflects the artistic integrity of the co-op.

JASPER

I'm sure she will.

LAVINIA

Let's hope so.

JENN

But in the meantime, I'm going to finish my wall.

JASPER

I can help -

JENN

Thank you.

LAVINIA

Jasper.

JASPER

You know, if we just turn some of these upside down, we might be able to fool a few customers into thinking they're buying a watercolor of a chipmunk dashing through a thicket.

LAVINIA

Jasper.

JASPER

Yeah?

LAVINIA

There's a stack of mail on the counter. Would you mind walking it down to the post office?

JASPER

Oh, sure.

(to JENN)

You've got to be a team player around here, Jenn. That's the only way a co-operative works!

He retrieves the mail from the counter.

I'm glad you're here.

He exits through the front door whistling.

LAVINIA

Sometimes I send him on trips just to get some quiet time to myself. That's how a co-operative works for me.

JENN

OK.

LAVINIA continues to dust her watercolors on the lower shelves. JENN hangs a piece upside down and starts laughing, thinking of Jasper. LAVINIA shoots her a look. JENN notices and flips it back around. She is ready to hang some of her work higher up on the wall and looks several times in the direction of the ladder.

Could I use the ladder?

LAVINIA

No, I don't think so.

JENN

Okay ...

JENN, confused, looks around for something else to stand on, but nothing will do.

Sorry, I just need it for a second -

LAVINIA

It's being used.

JENN

(pause)

How is it being used?

LAVINIA

I may decide to head back up at any moment and it wouldn't make any sense for me to give it to you when I'd just have to take it back -

JENN

(sarcastically)

Oh, sure, that makes a lot of sense. I'm sorry I asked.

(she winces)

Actually, I'm *not* sorry I asked. Just let me know when you're done with it, if that's not too much trouble.

LAVINIA

I will. It might be a while, though.

JENN tries to go back to work, hesitates and sighs, straightens up and heads over to LAVINIA, determined to play nice. She moves the ladder out of the way in order to access LAVINIA'S art. She settles on a piece and picks it up under LAVINIA'S watchful eye.

JENN

Oh, I love this one!

LAVINIA

You do?

JENN

Yeah, it reminds me of something my grandmother had in her house. Before she died. Of old age.

LAVINIA

Well, she must have had excellent taste in art.

JENN

Not particularly. She had dementia so I'm not sure if she ever knew what was hanging on her walls. She could have had a giant penis hanging in her living room and she would have gone about her day as if it was a watercolor of a Pekinese.

LAVINIA

That poor, deranged woman. My condolences.

JENN

Thanks. Where did you go to college?

LAVINIA

For art?

JENN

(sitting on the ladder)

Yeah. I went to NYU. The art department there is -

LAVINIA

I've heard it's remarkable.

JENN

It is. It doesn't guarantee a remarkable *livelihood* but yes the program is remarkable. I studied under Ishida Ano - are you familiar with her?

LAVINIA

No.

JENN

Her work is - revelatory. A lot of classmates thought my work was very much like hers. What about you?

LAVINIA

BOCES continuing adult education courses. I went to college to become a nurse.

JENN

Oh. Do you - do you like your instructor?

LAVINIA

Yes, but life has not been kind to her. She went to NYU. Couldn't make it as a legitimate artist. I can get you in touch with her if you'd like. You seem to have a lot in common and maybe you could sub for her on occasion.

JENN

Oh, I don't think so.

LAVINIA

Why not?

JENN

I just don't think I'm 'there' yet.

LAVINIA

'There' where? Working for money?

JENN

Uh, no. I just don't think I'm ready to give up yet.

LAVINIA

Charming. Make sure you start your cover letter with that credo.

JENN

What the hell is your problem with me?

LAVINIA

No problem.

JENN

You won't let me use the ladder but Jasper brings me coffee and cookies.

LAVINIA

Jasper is a golden retriever with bad knees.

JENN

(walking away)

This was a mistake.

LAVINIA

The mistake was ours. Had you been honest at your juries you would have been rejected immediately. All that effort your girlfriend exerted dragging your pornography in here could have been avoided. Do you want help packing up?

JENN hesitates for a moment and then crosses to the ladder. She drags it noisily over to her wall and begins hanging her artwork up high, slamming it into place. LAVINIA heads for the back room.

I'm just gonna give Valerie another call. I can guarantee she won't mistake any of those for a Pekinese.

She exits to the back room. JENN looks after LAVINIA and starts to cry a bit once she has left the stage. Standing on the ladder she calls SADIE.

JENN

(on the phone)

Hi. Yes, I'm crying. Because the woman here is a bitch! She doesn't like my artwork - well, I know you don't like it either, Sadie, but she doesn't like it because *I* made it, *you* don't like it because it's ... a reminder. She wants me to work with senior citizens. Well, I don't need a job that badly - no, I don't - well, I'm sorry I called in the middle of your class, *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry* -

DOUG is seen outside the display window on the sidewalk, looking for the street address around the door. After deciding this is the right place, he bursts into the shop carrying a large paper or re-usable shopping bag, which he almost immediately throws on the floor.

And I have a job, by the way, I'm selling my art - I'm *going* to sell my art. - *To gay men*, I don't know!

DOUG

Jenn!

JENN
(on the phone)

Fuck, I have to go.

DOUG
Jenn!

JENN
Yes, it's Doug. - Yes, I'll get rid of him.

DOUG
Get rid of me?

JENN
What do you want, Doug?

She pockets her cell phone.

DOUG
I want to talk to you.

JENN
I'm all talked out after your psychotic outburst in Sadie's driveway this morning. You made me late on my first day of work.

DOUG
Just answer my question. You're a -
(he lowers his voice)
You're a lesbian now?

JENN
(whispering)
Yes, I'm a
(yelling)
Lesbian now.

DOUG
Shhh!

JENN
Who told you?

DOUG

Your brother.

JENN

Seriously?

DOUG

We still play D&D together, Jenn. Just because you dumped my ass doesn't mean I have to abandon my social life.

JENN

D&D is not a social life, Doug. It's a rest stop on the road to a social life.

DOUG

You're being mean. Come down off the ladder.

JENN

No. I like it up here.

DOUG

Well, it's fuckin' weird. Come down.

JENN

No.

DOUG

Jenn.

JENN

No!

DOUG

Jenn, you're being mean!

JENN

And you're not listening to me! Do you see why this doesn't work?

DOUG

It doesn't work because you don't want it to work! It doesn't work because one day you decide you're a fucking lesbian and there's paperbacks of "Goblin Market" and "The Price of Tea" laying around the apartment.

JENN

“The Price of Salt.”

DOUG

I don't care if it's tea or salt!

JENN

But I do care, Doug. And I choose salt.

DOUG pauses to take this in, then runs up the opposing side of the ladder. JENN is simultaneously annoyed and touched.

DOUG

Please come back. It's bad without you, Jenn. I'm alone and I don't like to be alone and the apartment ... feels weird, it's really weird without you and I don't like it. Come on. I won't watch TV when you paint, I won't stay out late on weekdays, I'll call more, I'll text more, I'll ... buy you shit, whatever you want, within reason - do you want to go on a trip? We can take a vacation, that might help.

JENN

Stop talking and listen to me.

DOUG

OK.

JENN

Do you know when things changed? Because I do.

DOUG

(nodding)

Is it because I can't stay hard during sex sometimes?

JENN

(getting down)

Jesus Christ -

DOUG

It's just a thing that happens, it's not because I don't find you attractive -

JENN swings around and glares at DOUG.

- 'cause that is not a thing, I swear!

JENN

You need to leave.

DOUG

He hurries down off the ladder.

Fuck!

JENN

Would you calm down? I work here now!

DOUG

Wait a minute. I brought you some stuff.

He retrieves the shopping bag.

JENN

What stuff?

DOUG

Stuff you left behind. Clothes mostly.

JENN

Fine. Thanks.

DOUG

That was nice of me, wasn't it?

JENN

Doug -

DOUG

The painting you made of Rocco is in there too.

JENN

You can keep that. It was a Christmas gift.

DOUG

I keep Rocco. You keep the painting.

JENN

Okay. Thanks.

DOUG

I'll need the bag back.

JENN

This bag? This bag that cost a nickel?

DOUG

Yeah, well I'm paying the full rent for the apartment now, so, you know ... savings account.

JENN

Right. I'll give it to you now -

DOUG

No, that's okay. We can meet for dinner and a movie next week and you can give it back then.

JENN

Dinner and a movie, Doug? What? No. Just take it now please.

She empties the bag.

DOUG

Okay, not dinner and movie, but ... hey. I'm *trying* here.

JENN looks at the painting of her dog.

JENN

Ohhh, Rocco ... little stinky butt. I'm going to miss you.

DOUG

You don't have to miss him. You can see him whenever you want. I won't make it weird. I promise.

JENN

Don't make any more promises, Doug. We both know you can't keep them.

DOUG

Listen, Jenn -

JENN

Besides, I won't have to miss him. I'll have him here with me all day.

She hangs his portrait up on the wall. He's an adorable pug in vibrant colors.

DOUG

Jenn, come on. I'm anticipating your needs. *Anticipating. Your needs.*

JENN

Not for sale!

DOUG

He notice the art hanging around the dog portrait. He steps back slowly, his gaze rising

What. The fuck. Is *this* shit?!

JENN

My art.

DOUG

Are all of these ... me?

JENN

Are you serious? They don't even look alike!

DOUG

These are all ... different guys you've slept with?

JENN

It's none of your fucking business, Doug!

DOUG

It is my business! Now explain to me how you can be a lesbian after you've sampled all of these cocks like a box of chocolates!

JENN

Would you get out of here before I get fired?

DOUG

(pleading)

Come on, Jenn. Rocco won't even look at me anymore!

JENN

Try maintaining an erection for more than 2 minutes! That'll probably get his attention!

DOUG

I knew it! I fucking knew it!

JENN

She shoves DOUG towards the front door.

Would you get out of here?!

DOUG

Jenn, I love you!

JENN

You don't even know what that means!!!

DOUG

My bag! My bag!

JENN

Christ!

She grabs the bag and throws it at him.

Would you take the fucking bag and get out already?!

LAVINIA

Entering from the back room.

Jennifer.

JENN

(pause)

Hey.

LAVINIA

Hi.

JENN

This is my ex-boyfriend -

DOUG

(approaching LAVINIA)

Boyfriend. Not ex. I'm Doug. Jenn and I are working through some things.

LAVINIA

Sounds like she's already worked through them. When are *you* going to start working through them?

DOUG

Soon. I ... just don't want to. This is a nice store.

LAVINIA

Thank you.

DOUG

Are those your bird houses?

LAVINIA

How dare you. Get out.

DOUG

What if I want to buy one of those birdhouses?

LAVINIA

Nobody wants to buy one of those birdhouses.

DOUG

Jenn, come on.

JENN

It's her store, Doug. You should go.

DOUG nods several times and crosses to the wall, looking frantically at all the painted penises before deciding on 'the one,' he pulls it off the wall and holds it up triumphantly to Jenn and Lavinia.

DOUG

These are my balls and I'm taking them back!

He exits dramatically.

LAVINIA

I have to say, Jenn with 2 N's, you are one surprise after another. The way the 10 plagues kept surprising the Egyptians.

JENN

Did you get a hold of Val?

LAVINIA

Yes.

JENN

I probably need to pack up my things, huh?

LAVINIA

Feel free to use the ladder.

JENN looks at LAVINIA blankly for a moment. There is quiet as JENN drags the ladder closer to her wall and climbs it. She has started to cry and LAVINIA, who has started re-arranging items in the window display, takes notice.

LAVINIA

I was serious about the BOCES class. I can get you in. If you need the money.

JENN

Thanks. I might need to.

LAVINIA

I'd take your class. I wouldn't necessarily choose the same subject matter. My ex-husband's genitals do not deserve to be painted and mounted on a wall. Well, maybe just mounted on a wall. But your use of color is ...

JENN

Colorful. I know. Thank you.

LAVINIA

It's wonderful. I admire it a great deal.

JENN

Why are you being so nice to me now?

LAVINIA

Because you're leaving, Jennifer. Here, hand that down to me. It'll go faster.

JENN

This place is fucked up.

She begins to hand her artwork to LAVINIA,
who takes them two at a time to the boxes.

LAVINIA

Yeah, but it's our fucked up. Come on.

JASPER

Entering excitedly.

She's coming!

LAVINIA

A little faster, Jenn. Let's go.

JASPER

Wait a minute, are those going up or coming down?

LAVINIA

Down. Jennifer is leaving us.

JASPER

But you can't do that.

JENN

I don't understand.

LAVINIA

What are you so worked up over?

JASPER

Eleanor called Valerie as soon as she got home and just raved about your dick wall, Jenn.

JENN

I don't know if we should call it that -

JASPER

So who do you think is on her way here right now?

LAVINIA

(concerned)

Valerie?

JASPER

Valerie!

LAVINIA

Oh.

JENN

OK. I don't know what I'm supposed to do -

JASPER

Get 'em up! Get 'em up! She's on her way to see them!

JENN

That's not right. Lavinia just talked to Valerie and she said I had to pack up.

JASPER

She did? Lavinia?

LAVINIA

I did talk to Val, yes.

JENN

And? She said to for me to pack up, right?

LAVINIA

Not exactly. I just didn't stop you from assuming that she said you should pack up.

JENN

This place is fucked up.

JASPER

Oh, Lavinia. That's beneath you.

LAVINIA

No, its not.

JENN

Lavinia?

LAVINIA

Yes?

JENN

This is my ladder now.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2

Two weeks later. Night. The co-op is decorated for Jenn's reception. Finger foods are visible around the spaces and a table with wine and plastic cups has been added. All of Jenn's paintings are proudly hung, although some have been tagged with 'Sold' stickers during the evening. A large placard with Jenn's headshot and bio sits on an easel nearby. Music chosen by Jenn plays while the guests mingle and admire Jenn's work. They move through the rest of the co-op too. JASPER, LAVINIA, JENN, ELEANOR, TRACY ALLEN, VALERIE, and perhaps other unnamed guests are eating and chatting.

JENN is standing between her work and the front door, pre-occupied, but maintaining a conversation with TRACY, who is in her late 40's, probably paints cat faces on coasters for the co-op, and is completely spellbound by the Jenn's art. JENN looks out the front window and door often as Tracy speaks.

TRACY

At first, when I saw these magnificent pieces, I thought you were an animal lover, because I had never seen so many elephants in one place before. She's obsessed with pachyderms, I thought! But it turns out you're just obsessed with ... dicks.

JENN

That's not exactly true -

TRACY

And once I realized they were dicks, I could have sworn I recognized some of them.

JASPER laughs from somewhere in the shop upon overhearing this.

But that's impossible, right? I mean, what are the chances that you and I -

JENN

Oh, none, I hope.

TRACY

But then I thought maybe they're like those ink blots where you just project whatever you're thinking about onto the painting -

JENN

I think that's the point of art in general, actually -

TRACY

And I said Tracy, get a grip. I think that I see my college boyfriend's dong up there but in actuality it's because I *think* about my college boyfriend's dong a lot, so this was bound to happen eventually.

JENN

Oh, wow.

TRACY

I think you're brave to put together an art installation of your sexual conquests -

JENN

Oh, actually, the penises are inconsequential -

TRACY

Some of them are, yes. Can I buy one of the thicker, consequential ones?

JENN

Oh, God, yes please. Which one do you want?

TRACY

I can't decide which one is my favorite! Which one is your favorite? Oh, wait, please, don't tell me. I should make that decision on my own!

ELEANOR

It's like looking into a pet store window, isn't it? They're all so adorable!

VALERIE

Taking the center of the room and tapping on a plastic wine glass with a plastic knife. She is in her mid 70's and an unabashed work of art herself who enjoys the prestige of her title as president of the artist co-op.

Attention everyone, excuse me, thank you!

JENN

Shit.

She moves to the door and opens it, looking out onto the sidewalk.

VALERIE

I'm Valerie Sherman-Bradley, president of the Lakeview Artisans co-operative, and I wanted to thank everyone who came to our little reception tonight. It's not every day that an artist possessing such a powerful voice comes into our co-op, demanding that her controversial work be seen and sold.

LAVINIA

Thank God for that.

JASPER

Shh!

VALERIE

But Jenn claimed her place here 2 weeks ago without apology and without her portfolio of rocks and toadstools. I say *good*. I say wonderful! The last thing we need is another booth full of watercolor birds and flowers! Instead, she brings Lakeview Artisans kicking and screaming into the here and now!

The assembled clap and whistle, except LAVINIA. SADIE suddenly enters through the front door and JENN greets her concerned.

JENN

Where have you been?

SADIE

Work. I told you.

JENN

Val's giving a toast. You're missing it.

VALERIE

Not only are we ecstatic that Jenn has sold several of her pieces tonight -

ELEANOR

I've got mine!

TRACY

It better not be the one I want!

VALERIE

I also see an expansion of her space in the near future! Front and center is where Jenn belongs and if I have anything to say about it, that's exactly where she'll be!

LAVINIA blanches as the crowd applauds.

JASPER

Speech! Speech!

JENN smiles and waves demurely, stepping forward to speak.

JENN

Thank you so much to everyone who came out tonight. I am completely overwhelmed by the warmth Lakeview Artisans has shown me after a bit of a rocky start.

The crowd murmurs and laughs as if they have heard the embarrassing details. DOUG suddenly walks through the front door, brazenly at first, but he then becomes self-conscious when he sees everyone staring at him silently. He coughs and waves nervously. SADIE rolls her eyes and slips her hand into JENN's who holds it firmly.

I also want to thank my partner Sadie, for being the most selfless person I have ever met.

DOUG

Pfff.

DOUG then types quickly on his phone.

JENN

Every night that I crawl into bed too late and still feel your arms around me, every cup of tea you make me when I'm absorbed in my work -

DOUG

(under his breath)

I'd make you fuckin' tea if you asked for it -

ELEANOR

Who is that young man?

SADIE

Nobody.

JENN

Every time you genuinely engage with me and speak honestly about my art, even when I don't ask for it, or like what you have to say -

The crowd giggles and coos.

I'm here because of you.

DOUG

And me.

He returns to texting.

SADIE

Gesturing to the wall of art flippantly.

And all those men.

JENN

(frustrated)

Sure. Well, anyway, thank you to *everyone here!* How's that? Please, enjoy the rest of the evening and buy a birdhouse! Over there. Buy a birdhouse!

DOUG

Psst! Hey, Jenn -

JENN

(to SADIE)

I'm going out back for a smoke.

SADIE

Jenn, don't smoke, just work on your breathing. If you smoke, he wins!

JENN refuses to look at DOUG as she speeds off left to the back room. SADIE glares at DOUG who grimaces.

Shit.

VALERIE sails over to DOUG to introduce herself. SADIE drinks.

VALERIE

Hello there, I'm Valerie Sherman-Bradley, president of Lakeview Artisans. Are you a friend of Jenn's?

DOUG

I'm a former model of hers.

SADIE drinks again.

VALERIE

Oh, how exotic. Do you have any pictures of your work?

DOUG

(confused)

Oh, yeah, I've got lots of those kind of pics. Hang on, I'll find a good one.

DOUG slides through the photos on his phone.

VALERIE

I'm glad you're here to help us finish off the food and wine.

DOUG

I've got someone coming, too. I hope that's okay.

VALERIE

Certainly. I love seeing young people in our shop.

LAVINIA

(crossing)

I'm sorry, the bathroom is for customers only.

VALERIE

Lavinia, this is a former model of Jenn's. He was just about to show me his work.

DOUG

Showing VALERIE a dick pic on his phone.

Here's a good one. I think the way the sunlight is hitting it really makes the veins pop, you know? My painting used to be on the wall but I took it back. Out of principal.

VALERIE walks away speechless and stunned.

LAVINIA

I think she went to get a pair of readers from her purse to see it better. It doesn't exactly fill the screen, does it?

DOUG

Funny. Is this the part where you throw me out again?

LAVINIA

No. But if you find a way to make Jenn cry tonight, make sure I'm in the room when it happens, okay?

DOUG

(looking at his phone)

OK. Give me two minutes.

LAVINIA

Two minutes.

LAVINIA glides away from DOUG smiling.
SADIE goes into attack mode.

SADIE

Why can't you take a fucking hint?

DOUG

Why can't you understand that you're a fucking rebound? You've been together for a month, right? That's nothing.

SADIE

Time doesn't matter. Mutual respect and admiration does. We're in love.

DOUG

Well good for you. 'Cause so am I.

The door opens and in walks LOGAN, who is in his mid 30's, well-dressed, and surprisingly, for Doug, normal. LOGAN embraces DOUG.

LOGAN

Hey.

DOUG

Hi, handsome.

LOGAN gives DOUG a peck on the cheek.
SADIE is stunned. LOGAN is oblivious and beams.

LOGAN
(to SADIE)

Hi. I'm Logan.

SADIE

I'm ... uh ...

LOGAN

Where's your ex's artwork?

DOUG

Right over there.

LOGAN

Jesus. You weren't kidding. She *is* obsessed with you.

SADIE

None of those are his.

LOGAN

Don't worry, I can tell.

DOUG

Go check it out. I'll be over in a minute.

LOGAN

Okay!

DOUG slaps LOGAN's ass as he walks to the wall of art. SADIE remains incensed.

SADIE

What is wrong with you?

DOUG

Nothing, Sadie.

(raising his voice)

Are you saying there's something wrong with me dating a man?

SADIE

Would you keep your voice down. I know exactly what kind of shit you're trying to pull.

DOUG

I figured you'd be familiar with it.

SADIE

If you're trying to make her jealous, it's not going to work. And if you're trying to prove a point, you're really just being an ignorant asshole!

DOUG

You don't get to dictate my sexual fluidity, Sadie. My body, my choice.

SADIE

That's not what that means and *you're not gay!*

DOUG

Well, neither is Jenn!

(pause)

Where is she?

SADIE

Find her yourself.

She gestures to LOGAN, who is gazing at the wall of art.

And don't forget your prop!

DOUG

He's a real person, you know. With real feelings.

SADIE

I know that, Doug! Do *you* know that? Fuck!

SADIE heads toward the back room where JENN had previously exited. DOUG joins LOGAN.

VALERIE

Look at all these young faces, Jasper! People are finally looking at your birdhouses!

JASPER

Sadie! There you are.

SADIE

Hi. I'm sorry, I'm trying to find Jenn.

JASPER

I am, too. Can you believe this reception?

SADIE

No, it's really wonderful. You did a great job.

JASPER

I brought the cookies.

SADIE

That was really nice of you.

JASPER

It's amazing that Jenn got this far. The last young lady who had that wall walked out 20 minutes after meeting Lavinia.

SADIE

Jasper, why do you keep her around?

JASPER

She pays the rent on her space every month, what am I supposed to do?

SADIE

She's an emotional terrorist -

JASPER

Who gets her rent in the first of every month. She's very punctual.

SADIE

I have to find Jenn. Excuse me.

LOGAN

Yes, they're bold, but what are they really saying?

VALERIE

That's depends on the sensitive transmission of thoughts and emotions between the art and the observer.

LOGAN

I'm Logan. I'm an artist too.

VALERIE

I could tell immediately. You must bring me some of your work.

LOGAN

I'd love to.

TRACY

(pause, to LOGAN)

Since you're an artist, could you tell me what these dicks are really saying?

LOGAN

Absolutely.

TRACY

And do you recognize any of them?

LOGAN

Absolutely.

TRACY

Me too.

JASPER overhears this and laughs again.

DOUG

(pompously)

I find them presumptuous.

VALERIE

May I ask why?

DOUG

You may, but I'm surprised you can't see why yourself.

VALERIE bristles at the condescension.

ELEANOR

I'm going to hang mine right by the front door. I'll be able to tell a lot about my guests based on their reaction to something so provocative.

JASPER

That's brilliant.

ELEANOR

I knew you'd think so.

VALERIE

Life's too short for hazy pastels!

LAVINIA overhears this, reacts, and exits through the back room entrance.

ELEANOR

I agree! I just want it, BAM, right there in my face!

LOGAN

She's fun.

TRACY

Well said, Eleanor! BAM! My college boyfriend right there in my face!

LOGAN

Do you all want to get drinks after this?

DOUG

Dude, stop, that's not why you're here.

LOGAN

(annoyed)

Then why *am* I here, *dude*?

DOUG

She'll be out in a second, just relax.

DOUG cranes his neck in the direction of the back room as LAVINIA enters with a large framed piece of art. We cannot see what is painted on it. She addresses the crowd.

LAVINIA

Hello, everyone. Sorry, excuse me. Hello. I'm Lavinia Dorset. I paint watercolors and ... oh, they're over there ... if you'd like to ... they're for sale. Anyway, I know tonight is Jenn's night, but what I'd like to say is truly an affirmation of her presence here at Lakeview Artisans.

DOUG

She's out back having a smoke.

LAVINIA

She moves to the center of the room.

Oh, that's fine, she doesn't need to hear this. In the short time Jenn and I have gotten to know each other, I have learned so much about my own limitations, artistically speaking. She has, without knowing it, pushed me to take risks and explore areas of my talent that, until now, I didn't I possessed.

JASPER

Yikes.

LAVINIA

She's not only a great inspiration for Lakeview Artisans -

VALERIE

Hear, hear!

LAVINIA

OK, let's not get crazy - ahem - she's also a great inspiration to me. And as a token of my esteem, I'd like to present my latest work of art, a bold testament to a bold role-model and friend.

JASPER

Yikes.

DOUG

She's not back yet.

LAVINIA

That's fine, it doesn't matter. I give you a new watercolor by Lavinia Dorset: "Jenn with two N's."

LAVINIA flips the painting around and reveals a portrait of Jenn in explosive watercolors. The portrait is not particularly flattering, with lack of skill parading as artistic expression.

LAVINIA beams as the crowd gasps and applauds, some more heartily than others.

JASPER

Yikes.

LAVINIA

Thank you. Thank you so much. It's for sale. It's for sale.

LAVINIA crosses to the easel and removes Jenn's placard, tossing it to the floor, and places her artwork on the easel instead.

VALERIE

Everyone please grab a glass of champagne!

TRACY

Way ahead of ya, Val!

She drinks. Someone cheers Tracy on. JENN enters with SADIE from the back room entrance.

VALERIE

Let's toast to - ah, here she is!

JENN

That's his date?!

SADIE

Breathe!

JASPER

You're gonna need this.

He hands JENN a glass of champagne.

VALERIE

To Jennifer!

JENN

(yelling, pissed)

DOUG.

LOGAN

Is she going to hit you?

DOUG

(terrified)

I don't know ...

VALERIE

Gesturing to Jenn, then the portrait of Jenn.

Or should I say: Jenn with two N's *and* "Jenn with two N's"!

ALL

To Jenn!

DOUG

And her men!

DOUG kisses LOGAN passionately on the mouth, which takes LOGAN by surprise.

SADIE

Breathe, Jenn!

JENN

Fuck breathing and fuck Doug!

JENN tears away from SADIE and runs across the room. DOUG breaks the kiss and his eyes widen when he sees JENN heading toward him.

He pushes LOGAN aside and jumps behind the easel as JENN reaches him and throws her champagne. It hits the painting and instantly destroys it. LAVINIA yells as the crowd reacts.

LAVINIA

Jennifer!!!

JASPER starts laughing uproariously.

JENN

I ... I'm sorry.

DOUG

She doesn't mean that. She won't apologize for anything anymore.

JENN

I do mean it.

She gestures toward the destroyed art.

What was this supposed to be?

VALERIE

That ... was the rebirth of Lavinia's artistic spirit, destroyed by her muse.

JENN

What?

ELEANOR

Lavinia painted a portrait of you, Jenn.

JENN

Oh. Lavinia, I ... I don't know what to say. I'll pay for it, obviously. Sadie, can you write Lavinia a check?

SADIE

Can I write Lavinia a check?

JENN

Please?

SADIE

(pause)

Unbelievable.

SADIE crosses to the front door and leaves.

JENN

Sadie, wait.

LAVINIA

I don't blame her. You must be the most selfish person I have ever met. You're late, you're sloppy, you're rude, and maybe my opinion doesn't matter around here anymore but I think painting a wall full of cocks you've met face to face is the tackiest gimmick I've ever seen.

VALERIE

Lavinia!

LAVINIA

(to VALERIE)

I don't know the exact point at which this place went off the fucking rails, but if this is what's valued over ... 'hazy pastels' and birdhouses, I want no part of it. Congratulations, Jenn. You and Valerie can start your expansion right away. I'm done.

LAVINIA wipes a tear away and exits through the back room door.

JENN

Lavinia ...

JASPER

I'll take care of it, kid. Remember Audrey Cotes.

JENN nods. He follows Lavinia out.

DOUG

Jenn, can I talk to you?

LOGAN

Are you serious right now?

DOUG

Would you stop, this doesn't concern you.

LOGAN

Oh, I'm aware of that. You're an asshole.

He shoves DOUG and exits out the front door.

DOUG

K - bye!

He looks awkwardly at the crowd and shrugs his shoulders.

Men, amiright?

VALERIE

Well. Let's not have the champagne lose all its bubbles. Thank you, Jenn, for being a ... force of nature! I'm happy you're here.

Everyone drinks half-heartedly.

And with that, I wish everyone a peaceful good night. Namaste.

The crowd begins to murmur and file out of the shop quietly after saying good night to JENN.
TRACY writes a check at the counter.
ELEANOR takes the watercolor she purchased off the wall.

ELEANOR

(to JENN)

It was a beautiful reception, dear. I love this and I can't wait to display it proudly. Good night.

JENN

Good night, Eleanor.

ELEANOR exits through the front door.

TRACY

Handing JENN the check.

Speaking as vice-president of the board, you have nothing to apologize for.
(whispering)

Congratulations.

She winks then chooses her favorite piece, pulls it off the wall, and exits out the front door.

VALERIE

(to JENN)

Those with very little talent will always try to pull down those who have a great deal of it. Don't compromise your values to placate small minds and smaller hearts.

She follows TRACY out. DOUG has managed to camouflage himself in the space until everyone has left.

DOUG

Champagne?

JENN

(laughing incredulously)

No.

DOUG

Need a ride home?

JENN

What are you doing, Doug?

DOUG

Trying to get your attention.

JENN moves away and eats one of Jasper's cookies.

I think Logan broke up with me.

JENN laughs in spite of herself.

JENN

He's right. You are an asshole.

DOUG

Speaking of assholes, you broke a woman's spirit tonight.

JENN

Oh, my God, Doug. She painted a portrait of me and I destroyed it.

DOUG

(laughing)

I know!

JENN

I wasted a whole glass of champagne on it!

DOUG

You feel bad about the champagne?

JENN

No, I feel bad for her. I do. I really do.

DOUG

Do you feel bad for me, too?

JENN

(pause)

Promise you'll apologize to that poor guy.

DOUG

I promise.

JENN

Really?

DOUG

Yes.

JENN

Doug!

DOUG

Yes! I promise! Christ!

JENN

Good.

DOUG

He stares at JENN for a moment, smiling.

Fuck, you drive me crazy.

He moves closer to JENN.

So ... you want a ride home or not?

JENN

You're insane.

DOUG

I'm okay with that. Are you?

They are very close now. A kiss seems imminent.

JENN

What you did tonight was really rude.

DOUG

I told you - you drive me fucking crazy. Weren't you a little jealous? Just a little?

JENN

Depends. Did you get any action?

DOUG

No. But I'd like to.

JENN

Goodbye, Doug.

After a suspended moment, DOUG acquiesces and spins away toward the front door with a frustrated, playful grunt. He stops and turns back to JENN.

DOUG
Can I keep that picture of you?

JENN
Are you serious?

DOUG
Can I?

JENN
It's ruined.

(pause)
I don't care.

DOUG
OK. Thanks.

DOUG nods and heads toward the easel, stooping to pick up the placard of Jenn's headshot and bio. He tucks it under his arm and waves goodbye as JENN shakes her head in disbelief, strangely touched by this.

Oh, and don't feel too badly for Lavinia. She wanted me to make you cry tonight. Good bye, Jenn.

DOUG exists wistfully through the front door. JENN is alone in the co-op and walks to the easel, taking the painting in both hands. Music plays as she moves downstage staring at it, terrified by her own 'reflection.' She throws it to the floor suddenly as the lights
BLACKOUT.

ACT II

SCENE 1

Two and a half months later. It's the holiday season. Holiday music is playing and snow is falling outside the display window. The store is decorated for the holidays with open boxes labeled 'Xmas' scattered around.

The ladder is once again present. Jenn's wall now has several new pieces, explosively colorful self-portraits, no doubt inspired by Lavinia's piece. Some of the male genitalia pieces remain, but only a few. Lavinia's shelves are almost empty, with a large sign stating '50% OFF,' crossed off and corrected to read '75% OFF' in red marker, taped to one of several remaining watercolors. JENN enters from the back room and heads to her wall carrying Lavinia's ruined portrait, leaning it against a box of decorations. She now moves with the confidence of someone comfortably in charge. She pulls two of her paintings down as JASPER enters with a plate of cookies. He triumphantly places them on the coffee cart as the music ends.

JASPER

Making a move?

JENN

What?

JASPER

You should move some of your stuff to Lavinia's area. It's like her dandelions got hit with weed killer.

JENN

Oh. No, I'll let the rest of her stuff sell.

JASPER

All she had to do to become a popular artist was to quit being an artist.

JENN

I think the fire sale helped too.

JASPER

Oh, sure. Gingerbread?

JENN

No, thanks.

JASPER

It's not Christmas without gingerbread. I made it myself and I *never* bake.

He eats. JENN hangs up the portrait by Lavinia on her wall. JASPER lets out a mischievous giggle.

Oh, you are a wonder.

JENN

I mean it was just sitting in the back room. I ruined it, Lavinia didn't want it, Sadie won't let it in the apartment, but I think it has artistic merit. Someone will buy it.

She writes out a tag for '\$200' at the counter.

JASPER

Dorian Grey, most likely. How is Sadie, by the way?

JENN

Uh. Good. Things are good. Hey, I have to send receipts from last month to the artists. Do you know where those files are on the computer?

JASPER

Check with Lavinia.

JENN

How am I supposed to do that?

JASPER

Oh, right.

JENN

Do you know anything about a reimbursement for Tracy Allen? I can't find the paperwork anywhere.

JASPER

It'll turn up.

JENN

Does Lavinia know where it is?

JASPER

Probably.

JENN

Jesus Christ.

JASPER

Did the newsletter go out to the membership?

JENN

What newsletter?

JASPER

Lavinia would always send out a monthly newsletter.

JENN

Was I supposed to send one out last month, too?

JASPER

Probably.

JENN

What? How do I get into the email? What's the password?

JASPER

Let's see ... check with -

JENN

Don't say 'check with Lavinia.'

JASPER

OK, I won't. I won't say 'check with Lavinia.' But don't check with me, because I don't know.

JENN

Listen, Jasper, I love you, but you have to keep me up to date on these things.

JASPER

Sorry, kid. I haven't had to think about this stuff in a very long time.

The bell on the door rings as VALERIE enters, shaking the snow from her shoulders.

She is barely visible in an enormous, colorful, felted scarf and Russian cossack fur hat. She is followed by TRACY, who is also bundled up.

VALERIE

Coffee, Jasper, if you don't mind.

JASPER

Coming right up! Some for you, Tracy?

TRACY

Oh, I -

VALERIE

She doesn't need any.

TRACY

I guess not. Thank you.

JENN

Hi Val. Hello, Tracy.

TRACY

Hi Jenn!

VALERIE

Hello, my little Ishida Ano.

JENN

Oh, God, I wish!

VALERIE

Don't be modest, it doesn't suit you.

TRACY

Indicating the ruined portrait by Lavinia.

Oh, is this new?

JENN

Kind of. It was Lavinia's watercolor of me. That I ruined.

VALERIE

Ruined? I see an improvement. Anyone else would have thrown that in the trash but you have the vision to recognize it's value. You threw the transformative champagne and now it's *art*. *Your* art. Raise the price to \$400. I have two people in mind who would buy that in a heartbeat.

TRACY

Three, if you include me. Maybe don't raise the price since I want it.

VALERIE

Honestly, Tracy, don't cheapen her work. I'll call the serious buyers this afternoon. They'll drop in and look at it.

JENN

Val, that's amazing.

TRACY

You're amazing.

JASPER brings VALERIE her coffee and holds another for himself. He hands it to her.

JASPER

I'll drink to that. Shall we tell her?

TRACY

Yes!

VALERIE

I think we shall.

JENN

Tell me what?

VALERIE

You've only fulfilled 3 months of your probationary period here at the co-op, but Jasper and I have been talking -

TRACY

And me, too.

VALERIE

Tracy, a vice-president doesn't have any *real* responsibilities. You know that.

TRACY

Then at least let me tell her!

VALERIE

Fine, go ahead.

TRACY

We're making you a full member of Lakeview Artisans effective immediately!

JENN

What? Are you sure?

TRACY

Yes!

JASPER

Very sure.

JENN

That's ... don't you have to vote or something?

VALERIE

All in favor?

VALERIE, TRACY, & JASPER

Aye!

JENN

I don't know what to say. Thank you! All of you!

VALERIE

And come June, we'll get you on the board of directors.

JENN

Wow.

VALERIE

You like working here, don't you?

JENN

Yes. I mean, I'm sorry Lavinia's gone -

TRACY

(laughing)

Oh, come on!

JENN

But I appreciate the hours. And the money. I just wish the learning curve wasn't so steep with Lavinia gone.

VALERIE

And you don't mind Jasper?

JASPER

You don't have to answer that. It's a trap.

JENN

Ha! No, I don't mind Jasper. Jasper's my favorite.

JASPER

Aw.

VALERIE

Agree to disagree. And since you're a member now, you can give me -

TRACY

Us -

VALERIE

Us your honest opinion of a new artist to take over Lavinia's area. He'll be here in about 5 minutes, which is how long it's going to take me to get out of my winter gear. God help me, how I hate the cold! Tracy, my coat.

TRACY

Yes, of course! I love your scarf.

VALERIE

Perhaps I'll make you one. Although, you should be warned that wearing a work of art is not for the faint of heart. Jenn could wear one ...

VALERIE starts to pull off her coat, scarf, and hat with TRACY's help as they head to the back room, VALERIE passing her coffee off to JASPER as they exit. JENN walks away and shakes out some of her nerves with the news of her speedy ascension. JASPER thrusts the coffee onto the counter and goes to her.

JASPER

You've done it!

JENN

You had something to do with it, don't lie.

JASPER

So I bent her ear a little bit. But you did this on your own. With your work. Why are you so anxious?

JENN

You don't understand. I don't - fit - anywhere easily. I didn't fit with Doug - my furniture still doesn't fit in Sadie's apartment, the only way I fit here is with Lavinia gone -

JASPER

You're being too hard on yourself.

JENN

I don't think I am.

JASPER

You are.

JENN

It's just ... it's a new feeling for me. I don't know what to do with it.

JASPER

Enjoy it.

JENN

OK.

JASPER

You fit here.

JENN

But Lavinia -

JASPER

Don't turn the tears on over *her*. You didn't hang up that portrait as part of a Lavinia Dorset retrospective. You hung it up because she hurt you and you want to hurt her back.

JENN

I did. I should take it down.

JASPER

You should double the price, like Valerie said. You fit here.

JENN

You keep saying that -

JASPER

And you don't believe me. You're ready to shatter like one of Tracy's cat coasters. Relax, would you?

JENN

I'm trying.

JASPER

Doesn't Sadie tell you to breathe?

JENN

Sadie doesn't ... do that anymore.

JASPER

Oh?

JENN

(tearing up)

I think she might be giving up on me. But I don't blame her. Like I told you ... I don't fit.

JASPER
(sighing)

C'mere.

JASPER hugs JENN.

See? You fit.

JENN returns the hug tearfully.

JASPER
Don't squeeze too hard, that gingerbread isn't sitting right.

JENN
(laughing)
Then you probably shouldn't offer it to other people!

JASPER
Nonsense. I'll offer it to Lavinia when she gets here.

JENN
She's coming in?

JASPER
To pick up her check. For the artwork that sold since she left.

He heads to the counter to fish the check out of a file. He sets it on the counter.

JENN
Jasper, I have to take that painting down.

JASPER
Double the price.

JENN smiles in spite of herself. He hands her a marker from the counter. JENN hesitates and then takes it and heads to the portrait, scratching a red '4' over the '2'. JASPER nods in approval as LOGAN enters the shop holding a large artists portfolio case by its handles. JASPER pipes up.

Sorry, young man, we don't open for another half hour.

LOGAN

Oh, I have an appointment with Valerie.

JENN

(recognizing him)

You're the new artist?

LOGAN

Depends. Hopefully Valerie likes my work.

JASPER

Oh, not just Valerie. All of us.

LOGAN

Oh. You, too?

JENN

Yes. I think so.

JASPER

Yes.

JENN

Yes. Me too.

LOGAN

Oh. Should I just leave then?

JENN

Why?

LOGAN

Because I slept with your ex-boyfriend.

JENN

I'm sorry, what?

JASPER

Now hold on a minute. Valerie's expecting you. I'll go get her. You two work out ... whatever ... you need to work out.

LOGAN

Can you stay professional about this?

JENN

Can *I* stay professional?

JASPER

(to LOGAN, annoyed)

Hey. You want some gingerbread?

JENN

No, Jasper.

LOGAN

I like gingerbread.

JENN

Not this gingerbread. Trust me.

JASPER

See? She already has your best intentions at heart. How professional.

LOGAN

OK. I'll stay.

JASPER

Good. I'll get Valerie.

(pause)

And use the bathroom.

He exits quickly to the back room. JENN shifts uncomfortably.

JENN

So.

LOGAN

So.

JENN

What's your medium?

LOGAN

Doug's doing really well.

JENN

Oh. That's not -

LOGAN

But it's what you wanted to ask, right?

JENN

No. I wouldn't expect you to know how Doug is doing. That was over two months ago.

LOGAN

Have you talked to him since the party?

JENN

No. What he did to you was horrible.

LOGAN

It was. What he did to me was really shitty.

JENN

I agree.

LOGAN

And what he did to *you* was really shitty.

JENN

Yeah.

LOGAN

But we worked through it.

JENN

You worked through it?

LOGAN

Yeah. That's what you do when you care about someone.

JENN

I - what? Do you mean -

LOGAN

We're still together.

JENN

(laughing)

But he used you -

LOGAN

And we worked through it.

JENN

He's not ... gay. Is he?

LOGAN

Apparently you weren't either, right?

JENN

Right. I mean, no, I don't think it's as simple as that. But, Doug? Did he send you here to fuck with me?

LOGAN

He told me you would say that. He says you focus on yourself a lot.

JENN

Only because he never focused on me at all.

LOGAN

He hung up that picture of you in his apartment -

JENN

He did?

LOGAN

And I have to walk by it every day and pretend it doesn't bother me. But if he needs the time to get over you, I'm willing to wait.

JENN

Why?

LOGAN

Because he and I work in ways that you and he didn't. Do you understand?

JENN

No. He's taking this way too far, it's ridiculous! You ... you slept together? Is that what you said?

(pause)

You know what? It's none of my business.

LOGAN

Like I said, he and I work in ways that you and he didn't. Now do you understand?

JENN

Yeah. Holy shit. I think I do.

LOGAN

Good. I like you. You're extremely talented. I want to be in this shop because you're in this shop. But I think that's where our similarities end.

(pause)

Actually, we both think Dungeons and Dragons is a spectacular waste of time, so there's one more thing we have in common.

JENN

(laughing)

Yes! Uh, sorry, I'm in a state of shock, I think, just ... I don't know. Just be careful. Doug can be pretty thoughtless.

LOGAN

True. But he's also very sweet and funny, so it evens out. And he's great in bed.

JENN

He is?

LOGAN

With me.

JENN

Oh, God, everything is becoming very clear.

LOGAN

Great, then let's talk about my art.

JENN

(laughing)

Yes, let's talk about your art!

LOGAN

Can I show it to you? I think you'll find it very moving.

JENN

Yeah, of course. Hang on.

She walks to the back room door.

We're ready, Val!

She heads back to LOGAN.

How's my little stinky butt Rocco doing?

LOGAN

Rocco?

JENN

Yeah.

LOGAN

Doug ... didn't ... tell you?

JENN

I told you I haven't talked to him since the party - tell me what, exactly?

VALERIE

Entering, followed by TRACY and JASPER

Hello, Logan!

LOGAN

Crossing to VALERIE and shaking her hand
vigorously.

Hello! Thank you so much for seeing me today!

VALERIE

I'm Valerie Sherman-Bradley -

LOGAN

Yes, I remember.

VALERIE

This is our vice-president Tracy Allen -

TRACY

I'm running for president in June.

VALERIE

We'll see. And this is our treasurer and building owner Jasper Edwards.

JASPER

Can't wait to see your art!

LOGAN

I think ... maybe I should come back another time ... with different work.

VALERIE

Nonsense! We've got our newest Lakeview Artisans member Jennifer Merritt here to help us determine if you would be a good fit for our little co-operative.

LOGAN

I'm pretty sure I won't be a good fit.

JENN

Logan, what's wrong?

LOGAN

I think I should go.

VALERIE

I did not travel all the way here from my 1923 Craftman-style bungalow 2 blocks over just to get wrapped back up in my handcrafted, wool and felt scarf 10 minutes after I arrived without seeing Your. Work. Now, what do you have for us today?

TRACY

We're all very excited.

LOGAN looks at JENN nervously. Something has obviously changed.

JENN

Go ahead. We can talk after, no matter what it is.

LOGAN

OK.

LOGAN kneels and unzips his portfolio case, pulling out three large, highly abstract acrylics. He lays them side by side so that they create a cohesive, three panel piece. Through the din of his own design, we can at least recognize the shape of a pug dog.

VALERIE

How beautifully esoteric.

TRACY

Do they all go together like that?

LOGAN

Yes.

TRACY

Oh. Maybe I need to step back a bit.

She does so.

Oh. OK.

(pause)

I'm sorry, what is it?

JASPER

It's a dog.

TRACY

You're kidding.

JENN

Is that ... Rocco?

LOGAN

(haltingly)

Yes. This is Rocco. This is Jenn's dog. Who passed away last week.

JENN

What?

LOGAN

Doug told me he called you. You were right, he's a thoughtless prick -

JENN

Rocco's dead?

LOGAN

He ate one of Doug's socks and it obstructed his bowels and he had to have surgery -

JENN

What?!

LOGAN

And it cost a fortune, but that's not the point. He died on the operating table.

JENN

Are you fucking kidding me?

LOGAN

But he was old. Wasn't he old? I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, Jenn.

JENN

Oh my God. Oh my God.

JENN runs off to the back room.

JASPER

It's not your fault. But you should probably go.

LOGAN

Of course.

JASPER follows JENN off as LOGAN
scrambles to put his art back in the portfolio
case.

VALERIE

This is very upsetting.

TRACY

I liked your painting, for what it's worth.

VALERIE

Honestly, Tracy.

TRACY

Well, I did.

LOGAN

Thank you. I'm sorry about this.

VALERIE

We'll be in touch very soon.

LOGAN

OK. I'm sorry, I really am. I'm really sorry.

LAVINIA enters the shop as LOGAN blasts by her onto the sidewalk. He runs past the display window as LAVINIA watches him. She turns to VALERIE and TRACY.

LAVINIA

Another satisfied customer?

VALERIE

Hardly. He doesn't know it yet, but he's taking over your space.

LAVINIA

I assume he doesn't paint hummingbirds and daffodils.

TRACY

No. Dead dogs.

LAVINIA

Sounds about right for where this place is headed.

VALERIE

Doing some light Christmas shopping, Lavinia? We have some out-of-season pieces on sale.

She gestures to Lavinia's area.

LAVINIA

No. I came to pick up my check.

VALERIE

And to collect the rest of your unsold pieces I hope. The sooner that depressing clearance section is gone, the better.

LAVINIA

Very charming, Valerie. Very presidential.

VALERIE

Don't get huffy with me, Lavinia. You're the one who walked out on us. Jealous of a kid's art -

LAVINIA

She's not a kid. She's 39.

VALERIE

Yet she somehow possesses more maturity than you. I think I speak for the entire membership when I say that you are missed, Lavinia -

TRACY

She's right -

VALERIE

But there are aspects of your personality we are better off without. Come along, Tracy, we'll go out the back.

TRACY

Goodbye, Lavinia. Oh!

(whispering)

Please tell Jenn I want to buy her latest painting. Don't let her sell it to anyone else.

LAVINIA

Sure. Sure.

VALERIE and TRACY exit to the back room. LAVINIA falters for a moment before collecting herself. She checks her watch and looks at the closed sign on the door.

LAVINIA
(calling out)

Jasper? It's 10 o'clock.

She heads back to the door and flips the sign to 'open.' She then heads for the counter, taking her coat off as she goes, and flips a switch, which turns on additional store lighting. She spots her name on the envelope placed there earlier. She looks at the amount on the check inside and seems equally delighted and incredulous. She places the check in her purse and heads to an open box of holiday decorations. She empties whatever garland is inside on the floor and walks over to her area, picking up her remaining artwork and places it in the box. Once completed, she chucks it to the floor. She has second thoughts about leaving the pile of holiday decorations on the floor and picks them up. She places some garland on a shelf of vases, picks up another and looks around the store deciding where to put it.

LAVINIA
(imitating Tracy)

"I want to buy Jenn's latest piece. Don't let her sell it to anyone -"

She suddenly spots her artwork on Jenn's wall with the corrected '\$400' price tag. She walks toward it slowly, tossing the garland in her hands aside. She touches the price tag and ruminates for a moment.

She then looks at Jenn's painting of Rocco, which Jenn placed on the wall in the first act, and pulls it down. She walks to the counter, pulls a pair of scissors out of a nearby pencil holder, and stabs and slashes the painting of Rocco. She then replaces the painting on the wall and rips the '\$400' price tag off her own art. She places it on the freshly damaged dog portrait. Satisfied, she steps back as SADIE enters the store.

SADIE

Oh. Hi, Lavinia.

LAVINIA

Hello.

SADIE

I didn't think you worked here anymore.

LAVINIA

I don't.

SADIE

Is Jenn here? She's supposed to be working today.

LAVINIA

I don't know. I just got here.

SADIE

How are you?

LAVINIA

Things could be better.

SADIE

Yeah, they could be better. Have you considered Yoga? I can get you \$5 off a session. I'm on my way to work right now.

LAVINIA

Do you encourage primal screaming in your Yoga class?

SADIE

No.

LAVINIA

Then it's probably not for me.

SADIE notices the damaged Rocco painting.

SADIE

Jesus. Maybe Jenn needs to double up on *her* sessions.

LAVINIA

Maybe. Seems like she's in a really dark place.

SADIE

So you noticed your impact on her work?

LAVINIA

Excuse me? No. What are you talking about?

SADIE

Ever since the champagne incident she's been obsessed with self-portraits. Notice any similarities between your work and hers?

She gestures to the many self-portraits hanging on Jenn's wall; colorful, tortured pieces, reminiscent of Lavinia's portraiture style.

LAVINIA

Oh. No, I hadn't noticed. Oh, my.

SADIE

It's been 2 months of non-stop self-reflection.

LAVINIA

I had no idea. That's very ... touching. Strangely touching.

SADIE

You inspired her. She'd never admit it to your face. Not after what happened.

LAVINIA

I can understand why.

SADIE

I told her no one is going to buy paintings of her own face, but you know how stubborn she can be.

LAVINIA

Yes.

SADIE

Very stubborn.

(pause)

Too stubborn.

LAVINIA

Things not going well between you two?

SADIE

No. They're not.

LAVINIA

I'm sorry to hear that.

SADIE

Are you?

LAVINIA

Yes, but it's none of my business.

SADIE

My mother says I have a Jesus complex, that I try to miraculously fix things. And people. I told her that's my job as a Yoga instructor but I know that's not what she meant. She also says I collect damaged girlfriends like stray cats.

LAVINIA

Do you?

SADIE

Maybe.

LAVINIA

Are you here to break up with Jenn?

SADIE

(pause)

I really can't figure you out, Lavinia. Are you the anti-Christ or a Good Samaritan.

LAVINIA

I was a nurse for 30 years so ... I guess a little bit of both. See? I took care of people, too. Are you breaking up with her?

SADIE

Yes.

LAVINIA

Because she's difficult?

SADIE

Because she's too difficult.

LAVINIA

You sound like my ex-husband.

SADIE

Cute. I'm sure it's very different.

LAVINIA

And I can assure you it's not. She's emotional, unpredictable, passionate, but irresponsible.

SADIE

You're irresponsible?

LAVINIA

Ask me how many times I cooked dinner for my husband during 15 years of marriage. I can count them on one hand.

SADIE

You were painting instead?

LAVINIA

Always. I always listened to my own voice before I listened to his.

SADIE

But he didn't mind because he believed in you.

LAVINIA

For a while. Yes.

SADIE

And then he stopped?

LAVINIA

He found someone else who'd stopped being an artist. I wouldn't stop being an artist. We don't fit with just anyone, you know.

SADIE

(becoming anxious)

I want to be that person for her. I really do. I'm caring, I'm open with my feelings, I give her space when she needs it, but maybe it's not enough. Maybe she needs less space, I don't know. Do I smother her? *Should* I smother her?

LAVINIA

It's an idea. Now don't get worked up. Take some deep breaths. Breathe.

SADIE

Fuck breathing. I just need to end things with her.

LAVINIA

You don't mean that.

SADIE

I do. I do mean that.

LAVINIA

Don't give up on her. It's really shitty when people give up on you.

SADIE

(laughing)

That's hilarious coming from you. You gave up on her before you even met.

LAVINIA

I have a good excuse.

SADIE

What is it?

LAVINIA

I'm bitter.

SADIE

(realizing)

Oh my God.

(pause)

Did *you* slash her painting of Rocco?

LAVINIA

Well, yes. But it's part of my process to not be bitter anymore. You see?

SADIE

What?! No.

LAVINIA

I'm working through it. I'm *trying*. You need to try, too!

SADIE

Is Jenn here or not? I'm going to be late for work.

(calling out to the back room)

Jenn?

LAVINIA

Please don't abandon her, Sadie. We deserve a second chance. Shit!

SADIE parts the back room curtain and calls out. LAVINIA runs over to the wall and pulls the damaged portrait of Rocco off the wall and hides it behind her back.

SADIE

Jenn, are you back here? It's Sadie.

She walks back toward LAVINIA.

I appreciate the advice, but I'm going to listen to *my* voice.

JENN enters from the back room followed by
JASPER.

JENN

Hi. What are you doing here?

SADIE

I need to talk to you.

JASPER

Hello, Lavinia. Did you get your check?

LAVINIA

Oh, yeah. Thanks.

She has edged her way over to the counter and
drops the portrait into a garbage can with a
thud.

JENN

What do you need?

SADIE

To talk to you. I just didn't think we'd have an audience.

JENN

Rocco died.

SADIE

What?!

LAVINIA

Oh, fuck.

JASPER

Death by sock.

JENN

He died at the vets. He's dead.

SADIE

Oh, my God. I am so sorry.

SADIE hugs JENN, who cries. SADIE then looks over her shoulder at LAVINIA who shakes her head 'no.' JASPER heads to his area and pulls a framed copy of 'The Rainbow Bridge' off the wall.

JASPER

I know this isn't enough, but it does help. Eventually.

SADIE

Thank you, Jasper.

JENN

Thank you.

She takes the framed print.

JASPER

Do you want to go home? Can you stay with her for the rest of the day?

SADIE

I would, but I have clients waiting for me.

JENN

No. I'm not leaving. I'm fine. I'll be fine.

JASPER

We'll take care of you. Right, Lavinia?

LAVINIA

Um, yes. Absolutely.

SADIE

Thanks.

JENN

What did you want to talk about?

SADIE

Nothing. I just ... wanted to give you a kiss and tell you I love you.

She kisses JENN.

I love you. I do.

JENN

I love you, too.

SADIE

But, after things with Rocco get settled, we're going to talk about a few things.

JENN

OK. Yeah, I know. OK.

SADIE

OK.

JENN

Go to work. I'll be here.

SADIE

See you tonight.

JENN

OK.

SADIE

Oh. Lavinia has something she'd like to share with you.

LAVINIA

No, I don't.

SADIE

Yes, you do.

LAVINIA

Can't think of what it could be.

SADIE

Look in the trash can. That'll jog your memory.

LAVINIA

Please don't make me.

Make you do what?

JENN

Tell the truth.

LAVINIA

What did you do?

JASPER

LAVINIA sighs heavily and pulls the damaged Rocco portrait out of the trash. She tears the price tag off of it before gingerly stepping over to JENN.

What the fuck?

JENN

Oh, Lavinia. That's beneath you.

JASPER

No it's not.

LAVINIA

Oh, Rocco ...

JENN

She takes the portrait from LAVINIA, passing 'The Rainbow Bridge' print to SADIE.

Oh, Rocco ...

I didn't know he was dead. I was just so ... you're selling my painting for \$400!

LAVINIA

You told Doug you wanted to see me cry at my reception! You're damn right I'm selling it.

JENN

She's upset.

SADIE

Don't speak for me, please. Fuck.

JENN

SADIE

Alright. I won't. We'll talk tonight. Goodbye everyone.

SADIE hands 'The Rainbow Bridge' print back rather roughly to JENN and exits. JENN walks back to her wall and hangs the Rocco portrait back up. She takes the portrait by LAVINIA down and hangs 'The Rainbow Bridge' print up in its place, next to Rocco's portrait.

JASPER

I think Christmas is my favorite holiday. Everything feels better at Christmastime.

JASPER pulls some garland out of a box and continues to decorate the store as LAVINIA awkwardly watches them both. Moments pass.

LAVINIA

I guess I'll just get my coat and head out.

JASPER

Suit yourself. Did you get your check?

LAVINIA

Yes, thank you.

JASPER

Nice little chunk of change.

LAVINIA

All it took was selling my art for scrap. Reminds me of Audrey Cotes.

JASPER

Yeah. I'm surprised you'd mention her name.

LAVINIA

Yes ... well ... Goodbye, Jenn. I'm sorry about your dog.

JENN is silent, snatching some discarded garland off the ground and placing it on a shelf.

And the ... the other dog ... the dog portrait. Rocco.

No reply. She heads for the front door, then suddenly turns back to JENN.

You know, you should anticipate Sadie's needs more.

JENN

Slowly turns and looks at LAVINIA.

You've got a lot of nerve, you know that?

LAVINIA

She loves you. Not all of us get to enjoy something like that. Right, Jasper?

JASPER

Want some gingerbread, Lavinia?

JENN

No, Jasper. Look, Lavinia, what do you want? Do you want to be best friends, because I don't see it happening.

LAVINIA

I like your new artwork.

JENN

(pause)

Thank you.

LAVINIA

They're very powerful.

JENN

I, uh ... it's been a very reflective 2 months.

LAVINIA

Who was your muse?

JENN

Myself. Mostly.

(pause)

You. Mostly.

LAVINIA

That's what Sadie said.

JENN

Sadie? You talked to Sadie?

LAVINIA

You're making her very unhappy. She's going to leave you.

JENN

She shakes her head in disbelief.

Oh. My. God. You just can't help yourself, can you. You're so fucking miserable you have to ruin things for everyone else.

JASPER

Jenn -

JENN

No. From the moment I walked in here she's felt threatened by me. You chased out the girl who had that wall before me. Jasper told me all about it. And God knows what you did to Audrey Cotes. No wonder she gave up being an artist, you probably drove her insane.

LAVINIA

Audrey Cotes was the bitch my husband left me for!

JENN

Good! Good for him! I don't blame him, you're fucking infuriating!

JASPER

Jenn!

LAVINIA

You're a second rate Ishida Ano!

JENN

I'd rather be a second rate something than a first rate nothing!

LAVINIA

I want my painting back.

JENN

(pause)

What?!

LAVINIA

I want my painting back you plagiarizing bitch.

JENN

Crossing to the wall where Lavinia's damaged portrait of Jenn is leaning. She picks it up.

This? You want this back? This piece of shit that Valerie said wasn't art until I ruined it by accident? You want this back, Lavinia?! Well, take it! Take it! Take it!

JENN smashes the portrait on the floor over and over again until it's a tangled mess of splintered wood and paper. JENN is breathing heavily as she throws the remains to the floor.

JASPER

Yikes.

LAVINIA

Tracy Allen was going to buy that.

JENN

Maybe she still will. Only now, it's a sculpture. Lavinia, can you please, please leave.

JENN sits in Jasper's lawn chair, exhausted and sweating.

LAVINIA

(pause)

I don't want to leave. I want to come back. Please let me come back. I don't fit anywhere else.

JASPER

(pause)

I say yes.

JENN looks at JASPER, exasperated.

JASPER

She pays her rent on time! But Jenn needs to agree, too. She's a full member now.

LAVINIA

Shit. I mean ... well deserved. Honestly.

JENN stands and looks at JASPER and then LAVINIA. She approaches LAVINIA who is not sure if she is going to get hugged or punched.

JENN

You need to write the newsletter.

LAVINIA

OK.

JENN

And finish payroll. And find Tracy's reimbursement check. And do all the other shit you used to do.

LAVINIA

Deal.

JENN sighs and nods her head, looking quickly at JASPER before she heads back to her space. LAVINIA wipes a tear away from her eyes before heading to her central area, unloading her old watercolors from the Xmas box she packed earlier. JASPER walks over to the counter and flips a switch and holiday music begins to play. He smiles and crosses to a box of decorations. LAVINIA crosses to the counter and flips through some mail. JASPER pulls a wreath out of the box and sets it on top of the smashed portrait on the floor and steps back to admire his work. JENN, who is moving the ladder to her area, sees this and laughs.

LAVINIA

Jasper, can you take this mail to the post office?

JASPER

You got it, boss!

JASPER pulls his jacket off his lawn chair, takes the mail from a revived LAVINIA and heads out the door. LAVINIA and JENN share a look as they continue their work.

LAVINIA

Working on any new pieces?

JENN

I don't know if we need to talk, you know, right away.

LAVINIA

You got it, boss.

LAVINIA pantomimes zipping her lips when car tires are heard screeching followed by a dull thud. LAVINIA and JENN, who is up on the ladder, look at each other in terror as ELEANOR races through the front door as JENN quickly descends the ladder.

ELEANOR

Oh, Lavinia, call an ambulance. It's Jasper!

JENN runs outside with ELEANOR as LAVINIA frantically dials the phone.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2

Perhaps 2 weeks later. The store is in the half light of dusk which comes in through the still-snowy display window. No store lights are on. Most of Jasper's birdhouses and frames have been taken down and placed in boxes, although at least one of his 'Rainbow Bridge' prints remain.

The emptiness of his space evinces a state of flux. Some finger foods, sandwiches, coffee mugs, wine bottles, and glasses have been added, reminiscent of Jenn's reception in act one. On the replaced easel is an enlarged photo of Jasper, smiling, perhaps holding one, two, or all three of his dogs. The sign on the door has been flipped to 'closed.' LAVINIA is seen opening the door with a key. She stamps her feet before entering. She looks around the store for a moment and at Jasper's large photo. She kisses her hand and touches his face.

LAVINIA

Hi, boss.

She heads to the counter and turns the store lights on. She removes her coat as the door opens, with VALERIE and TRACY leading several other people into the space. They are dressed in mourning, carrying flower arrangements, and obviously arriving from a memorial service. They place the flowers on the empty shelves in Lavinia's space. DOUG, in a suit, walks a very distraught ELEANOR in on his arm. She sniffles and blows her nose as SADIE and JENN enter last.

ELEANOR

It was a lovely service.

DOUG

I think so, too.

ELEANOR

I just don't know how to shake this horrible feeling.

VALERIE

Time heals all wounds, Eleanor.

ELEANOR

I just didn't see him crossing the road and the snow made the pavement so slippery. I braked. I braked very hard.

TRACY

No one's blaming you, Eleanor.

VALERIE

It's not your fault, dear.

ELEANOR

I just can't get the look on his face right before impact out of my head. I swear to you, for a split second it looked as though he recognized me and was trying to wave hello.

LAVINIA

He was so fond of you, Eleanor. He was probably thrilled to see you. Until, you know, you hit him with your car.

ELEANOR

It all just happened so fast. He was such a wonderful man. I think I was in love with him.

JENN

He had a lot of admirers.

ELEANOR

Poor, sweet, Jasper. And to see his little dogs at the service. I'm just heartbroken. They looked so confused with him lying in the casket there, wagging their tails and waiting for him to wake up. And then staring at me with their big dark eyes, licking their sharp teeth.

SADIE

I don't think that happened.

ELEANOR

Thank goodness Doug has been able to look after them.

SADIE

It was very nice of you to arrange it with him.

ELEANOR

It's the least I could do after ... after ... oh, those poor, sweet, angry dogs.

JENN

I'm going to get a very large glass of wine. Does anyone else want anything?

ELEANOR

Just a coffee, please. Black.

JENN

Sadie?

SADIE

Red wine, if they have it. I can get it, Jenn.

JENN

(smiling)

No, let me. I insist.

SADIE

(smiling)

OK. Thank you.

JENN moves to the refreshments. DOUG follows.

VALERIE

Everyone, please help yourself to a birdhouse before you leave. If you'd like to make a donation to Lakeview Animal Shelter, a charity very close to Jasper's heart, you can leave a check on the counter.

TRACY

And eat. Don't forget to eat.

The guests mingle with each other and look at the birdhouses. DOUG perceives this as the right moment to speak to JENN.

DOUG

Hi.

JENN

Hey.

DOUG

I'm sorry about ... this is fuckin' awful, isn't it?

JENN

Yeah, it is.

DOUG

How are you?

JENN

I plan on getting drunk. How about you?

DOUG

I'm going to offer to take Jasper's dogs. Permanently.

JENN

Doug, that's very sweet, but it's also a lot of -

DOUG

Responsibility?

JENN

Well, yeah.

DOUG

You don't think I can handle it?

JENN

No. I mean, yes, I do. If you say you can, you can.

DOUG

I can.

JENN

That's beautiful.

DOUG

I miss having Rocco around the apartment, you know? It's been really hard.

JENN

I know.

DOUG

I'm sorry I didn't call you when ... you know ... since it was my fault.

JENN

It was an accident.

DOUG

It was my sock.

JENN

It was an accident. You didn't feed him the sock, Doug. He was a tiny garbage disposal, please do not blame yourself.

DOUG pulls Rocco's collar out of his pocket.
He hands it to JENN.

DOUG

Here's his collar.

JENN

Oh, thank you.

DOUG

Maybe, you know, don't wave it around in front of Eleanor. Collars are probably an emotional trigger for her.

JENN

I bet you're right.

DOUG

(summoning courage)

Um - Logan's the real reason we're keeping the dogs. I don't think he can part with them. You should see them all playing together, it's ... it's adorable.

JENN

(incredulously delighted)

Yeah ... you're gonna have to explain that whole thing to me in detail someday. And please include the moment you started using the word 'adorable.'

DOUG

I don't even know what the details are. It just feels right, you know?

JENN

Yeah, I do.

DOUG

I wanted to hurt your feelings, like *really* hurt your feelings -

JENN

OK -

DOUG

And look what happened!

JENN

Logan happened.

DOUG

Logan happened.

JENN

Where is he, by the way?

DOUG

Packing his car.

JENN

Packing his car?

DOUG

He'll be here, don't worry.

VALERIE

Jenn, I hate to interrupt, but I must borrow you for a moment. It's very important.

JENN

Oh, of course.

(to DOUG)

Would you mind ... ?

She hands the coffee and wine to DOUG.

DOUG

Oh, sure.

JENN follows VALERIE away from DOUG to where LAVINIA is standing. DOUG calls after her.

By the way, Logan thinks D & D is cool.

JENN

No he doesn't.

DOUG

Ah, I fucking knew it.

DOUG gives the wine and coffee to SADIE and ELEANOR.

VALERIE

Lavinia. Jennifer. This is from Jasper's lawyer. It concerns you both. I don't know when the opportune time to read it would be, but I would like to be present when you do.

LAVINIA

Does it concern you, too?

VALERIE

No, I'm just nosey. Oh, by the way, it's good to have you back, Lavinia.

LAVINIA

It is?

VALERIE

Yes.

LAVINIA

I'd love to know why you think that, Valerie.

VALERIE

Well ... talent is one thing. Experience is another. Let's hope the two of you can play nice.

LAVINIA
(smiling)

Let's hope.

VALERIE smiles at both women and sails away content.

ELEANOR
Attention, everyone. I have something I'd like to say. First of all, I'd like to thank you all for not treating me like a pariah. This has been a very difficult few weeks for me, particularly since I also lost my new parakeet Brutus in a freak vacuuming accident.

DOUG
Jesus.

ELEANOR
As you all know, Jasper's dogs were a huge part of his life. Aside from Lakeview Artisans, which he loved very much, the dogs *were* his life. I think it's only fitting that we read aloud his bastardized version of 'The Rainbow Bridge,' which has brought so many of us comfort in times of deep distress. *Multiple* times of deep distress. For some of us, it has brought us constant comfort, much like Jasper did. Jenn, would you be so kind?

ELEANOR moves to Jasper's area and takes a framed copy from the wall. She moves to the center of the room.

JENN
Me? Oh, I don't know.

SADIE
I'm sure he'd love that.

JENN
OK. I just hope I can get through it.

JENN takes the framed print from ELEANOR and looks around nervously. She is trembling. She reads aloud.

"The pain is gone, your suffering through.
Your loyal days well-counted, too.

You gave me love, no joy withheld
 You've earned your rest, my friend, sleep well.
 So bound across a meadow green
 And live again within my dreams
 Across The Rainbow Bridge you go,
 My friend, please wait for me."

JENN hugs ELEANOR and they comfort each other as the others respond in kind.

DOUG

(crying)

I have to go through *that* with his dogs?! Three times?!

LAVINIA

Read the frame, Jenn.

JENN

Oh, right.

(she clears her throat)

"Hold my body part and verb, you're the only noun for me."

The assembled laugh and console each other.

ELEANOR

Thank you, Jenn. That was beautiful. Do you mind if I keep that?

JENN

No, of course not.

ELEANOR

It isn't because I accidently killed Jasper, it's because I accidently killed my parakeet.

JENN

Yes, I know. You didn't have to explain.

The door opens and LOGAN enters, carrying a box of his artwork. DOUG rushes to his aide.

DOUG

Hey, babe! You made it.

LOGAN

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the timing is weird, this feels really weird, but it wasn't my call.

TRACY

No. It was mine.

VALERIE

Tracy, what is this?

TRACY

My single act as vice-president. Logan is going to be our newest artist and he's going to take Jasper's old space.

VALERIE

For God's sake, Tracy, the man's only been dead for 2 weeks.

TRACY

Shut up, Valerie. The last thing Jasper would want is his space to look like some sort of deranged mausoleum.

VALERIE

But that's the way it always looked.

TRACY

You know what I mean. He'd want there to be art. So there's going to be art. Doug, set his pieces right over there and help him set up, please.

DOUG

Let's do it.

LOGAN and DOUG head over to JASPER's space and begin unloading his artwork.

ELEANOR

Oh, this is so exciting. What do you paint, young man?

LOGAN

Animals, mostly. I think Jasper would've liked that. Here's a bird.

LOGAN holds up a wildly abstract painting of a 'bird.'

ELEANOR

There's a bird in there?

LOGAN

Yes.

ELEANOR

I'll take it. It's animal artwork for me from now on. I'm done with the real thing.

TRACY

Well, thank heavens for that!

DOUG

(to LOGAN)

I'm glad we took the dogs before she could.

LOGAN

Yep.

LAVINIA

Jenn? Should we ...

She waves the large envelope.

JENN

(to SADIE)

I'll be right back.

She gives her a peck on the cheek and crosses to LAVINIA, who has opened the envelope and pulled out two smaller envelopes. She places the large empty envelop on the counter and hands JENN the one marked 'Jennifer Merritt' and keeps the other one marked 'Lavinia Dorset.'

LAVINIA

What if he's in Tahiti and he's telling us to join him.

JENN

(she laughs)

I wish that were true.

They read their letters quietly to themselves.
JENN turns to SADIE.

JENN

Sadie, can you come here for a minute?

SADIE

What is that?

JENN

I want you to hear this. Jasper left me Lakeview Artisans.

LAVINIA

What?

SADIE

But ... when?

JENN

I don't know. Sadie, this is our store now.

LAVINIA

He left me the building.

JENN

Oh.

SADIE

Oh.

JENN

JENN and LAVINIA study each other quietly
for a moment.

OK.

LAVINIA

OK.

They smile at each other as SADIE and JENN turn and head back to the others, admiring Jasper's departing birdhouses, or LOGAN's emerging artwork.

VALERIE

Oh, dammit, I missed it. Lavinia, what did Jasper's lawyer say?

LAVINIA

He said, let's sell some art.

LAVINIA flips a switch, which turns the holiday music on in the store. VALERIE is annoyed and moves to JENN, badgering her with questions as the laughter and conversation rises from the others. There is an overwhelming sense of joviality from all as LAVINIA moves to the front door and flips the sign from 'closed' to 'open.' Lights fade slowly as she leans against the door and smiles broadly.

END OF PLAY