

## ST. FRANCIS

By: Miranda Jonte

*Takes place in Arcata, a coastal town of Humboldt County in Northern California over six months.*

*There is no intermission.*

### Characters:

TESSA- 34, F, veterinarian turned rescue worker

MOLLY MATTIE - 18, F, Tessa's right hand gal. Smart, sweet, clever, and indispensable

WILL- 34, M, lawyer. Tessa's childhood sweetheart

### Ensemble:

NICK- 30's, M, local Sheriff

BILL- 60's, M, regular walker at the shelter

MADELEINE- 30's, M, entitled mom

GWEN- 40's, F, Molly's aunt

YOUNG MAN- 20's, M

COUNCILMAN STACEY - 50's, M

COUNCILWOMAN PORTER- 40's/ 50's, M

JOEY- 8yrs old, M

TYLER- 8yrs old, M

*The cast can be six actors. The ensemble should consist of two men, one woman. They each play several roles.*

One actor should play the first ensemble track of: NICK, YOUNG MAN, and JOEY

One actor should play the second ensemble track of: BILL, and COUNCILMAN STACEY

One actor should play the third ensemble track of: MADELEINE, GWEN, and COUNCILWOMAN PORTER

The actor playing WILL also plays TYLER in the second scene

*\*Playwright's note: There is a large chalkboard, which reflects that month's adoptions, fosters, intake, and tracks progress for some of the dogs. This board will be altered throughout the play. It should be the heart of the set. Board transitions in bold.*

***Board Set Up for top of show: April Adoptions. Date. Two Categories of Adoptions/Fosters, and Newbies. Date is 4/8. Under Adoptions/Fosters (A/F) are: MOOSE, JELLY BELLY, BANDO. Under Newbies are: ROSIE, POPPY, ROO***

*\*Sc1*

*The lobby of One Paw, Two Paw Animal Shelter. TESSA has been picked up by NICK, the local sheriff. She is dead drunk, but starts off presenting more sober than she should. TESSA is on a mission. She swings wildly in this monologue; it is dead serious, but darkly comic. Nick is very much part of the action. Their arguing precedes their entrance.*

TESSA

No I didn't!

NICK

Tessa! People saw you!

TESSA

Who saw me?

NICK

Everybody in the bar.

TESSA

I was in the parking lot

NICK

You're drunk, Tessa.

TESSA

You're drunk! *(She goes to the chalkboard and writes 'MY DOG' in big letters across board)*

NICK

You picked a fight with Randy- you had a run-in- look Tessa-this is bad. Everyone-

TESSA

Nicky! I did not have a run in with Randy Warren. You were my best friend in high school. Remember? My bosom buddy. I did not pick a fight. I said- ...I'm gonna cut off his ears.

NICK

What?!

TESSA

Well, he cut off his dog's ears, so survey says he'll like it.

NICK

Please tell me that's not why you had bolt cutters in your truck.

TESSA

No! Those aren't my bolt cutters. *(Goes offstage, returns with beer)* I found his dog lying on 'em, bleeding all over 'em. I picked her up and put her in my truck, and I grabbed the cutters too, cause they were rusty and someone could get hurt.

NICK

Wait. Tessa, you drove?

TESSA

That was like five hours ago, OHMIGOD. Yes. I drove. So I went to the clinic- and here I am again because I am always at the clinic- and those cutters were rusty, so I sewed her up. *(Indignant)* I would never use bolt cutters on someone. That's so barbaric. *(Fishes in her pocket, pulls out her prize, satisfied)* Scissors. That's gonna hurt. *(TESSA opens her jacket. She is covered in blood)* Shit. No, I'm good. This is not my blood, this is dog blood. *(Seeing the gore on her, NICK begins to help her out of her shirt. Her torso is also very bloody)*

NICK

This looks really bad, Tessa. No, not that. *(He means the blood)*. Oh, Tess. Tessa, you were waiting for him.

TESSA

*(Explains)* Randy's an asshole. Remember how mean he was to you in high school? *(NICK has found TESSA'S phone in her pocket. He begins to scroll through her contacts)* Why are you calling Julie? Don't call Julie; she's at home with her kids. C'mon Nicky. I did not lie in wait. I went to Maxine's after I sewed up his dog that's not Randy's dog anymore, BY THE WAY. I don't think so. You can totally commandeer a dog. *(Nausea from the booze kicks in. NICK gives her aspirin and water)* What was I talking about?

NICK

Cutting off Randy's extremities.

TESSA

Yeah, no. It wasn't pre-medicated. I'm not Ted Bundy. *(She builds her case)* I mean, who brings scissors to a fight? *(She has been smart about this)* I went to Maxine's to hang out and say hi to people. Randy just happened to come in after work. Like fate. *(He looks through her phone again)* Don't call my dad. My dad- *(She sits on the floor)* -I'm sitting down- my dad- everybody knows my dad hates me. My dad is an asshole. This town has a lot of assholes in it.

NICK

Yep.

TESSA

So, you're black, right? You used to be the only black person in town. And in high school- you were black in high school- and now you're the sheriff. That's just, it's poet- it's awesome. Nick, remember

how mean Randy was to you? We should go to Maxine's- and- do you have your gun on you? No- I'm kidding- oh, but you could hold him for me. *(TESSA curls up on the dog bed she has sat in, and passes out. NICK looks at her a moment, puts her coat over her)*

*Lights change*

**Board transition: set up remains the same.**

\*Sc2

*The shelter. TESSA wakes with a start, sees her mess, and gathers herself, wiping 'MY DOG' off the board. She puts on a clean scrub shirt. MOLLY enters, goes to board, changes date to 4/9. TESSA picks up a ringing phone.*

TESSA

This is Tessa. Hey Ro. What? OK, lemme look. *(She goes to her laptop, clicks, looks)* Oh God. Wha-

MOLLY MATTIE

What happened to his neck?

TESSA

Ok. Yes. We'll take him. Take him to Julie for vetting and emergency, bring him here for rehabbing. Oh, you're at Julie's? Good. *(Looks at laptop again)* Jesus Christ, I can't even tell what kind of dog this is. He's really skinny- is he Husky- he should be at least 60lbs. *(She goes to the board, writes KINGSTON, 31lbs)*

*A small, loud crowd has entered. It's a third grade class on a field trip. A woman is with the kids as their chaperone. She has a baby strapped to her. She looks like a hippie earth mother, but by design. A rich hippie. She carries a large Starbucks cup. She will spend most of this scene looking at her bejeweled phone. TESSA is with her helper, MOLLY MATTIE. The kids are played by the other cast members.*

TESSA

Hey kiddos. What are you doing here?

JOEY

Story time! Hi Tessa!

TESSA

Story time's tomorrow! Hi Joey. *(Remembering)* Today is field trip day! My name is Tessa, and we're going to talk to you about animals.

JOEY

I'm an animal!

TESSA

You are, but! I'm talking about the kind with four legs. Do you know what kind?

CHILDREN

Cats! / Monkeys! / Dogs! / Hippos! / Dinosaurs. (*The mother with them joins in*)

TESSA

Who said dogs? (*Points*) Was that you? Now, how many of you have pets at home? (*More than half raise their hands*) What kind of pet do you have?

JOEY

I have a goldfish!

TESSA

Does he have a name?

JOEY

Popeye!

TESSA

That's a good name!

JOEY

I have a cat too! He's Popeye too!

TESSA

(*Calling on another*) You have a pet?

TYLER

I have a guinea pig! He squeaks.

MOLLY MATTIE

They do squeak! Isn't it a funny noise?

MADELEINE

Especially when he squeezes him.

MOLLY MATTIE

Yeah I wouldn't do that. (*MADELEINE shrugs*)

JOEY

I have a pet! My little sister! (*Giggles ensue*)

TESSA

OK, how many of you know what a shelter pet is? (*Little hands raise*)

JOEY

Um...I forgot.

TESSA

That's okay. A pet is an animal that lives at home with you and your families. But a shelter pet is waiting for a family to take him home with them.

TYLER

Like adopting?

TESSA

*(Pleasantly surprised)* Yes! It is adopting.

TYLER

My brother is adopted.

MOLLY MATTIE

That's really cool. My aunt and uncle adopted me.

TYLER

He's my little brother. He's Chinese. I didn't know you could adopt animals! Can you adopt dogs?

TESSA

Oh, you can adopt dogs, and people- and rabbits- you can adopt anything!

MADELEINE

I might not want to use that word. Children who are adopted may feel as if they're being diminished if we start using 'adopt' for every little thing.

MOLLY MATTIE

If you're taking an animal into your home, your household, your family, and caring for them -

MADELEINE

Adopt a highway, adopt a tree, a whale- it reduces the importance of a child. Just a little something to snack on.

MOLLY MATTIE

You can also adopt an idea, or a stance- *(TESSA puts her hand on MOLLY'S arm. They resume with the kids)*

TESSA

Every animal that is in a shelter needs a family.

JOEY

Even horses?

TESSA

Even horses.

JOEY

He could sleep in my bathtub.

MOLLY MATTIE

Cooooool.

TESSA

What's my job?

JOEY

You're a shelter pet!

TESSA

Close. I have, with me right now, a shelter dog. You want to meet him? *(This is met with a chorus of cheers)*

MADELEINE

That's why we're here.

TESSA

Molly, my helper, is going to bring him in. *(MOLLY leaves)* I run an animal shelter. This is a rescue shelter, because it's full of dogs that we've rescued.

JOEY

Do you live here?

TESSA

No, but sometimes, if the dogs are sick, or really scared, I sleep here to make sure they're ok.

JOEY

My mom does that with me.

TYLER

My family all sleeps together!

MADELEINE

We have a communal bed.

TYLER

Are you an animal doctor?

JOEY

You're a vegan?

TESSA

I'm a veterinarian. Oh, someone's ready to meet you. He's a very nice doggie, and he loves kids, and we don't want to startle him. We're going to be nice and gentle.

TYLER

Do you have a family? (*MOLLY brings George onstage. The kids ooh and aah*)

MOLLY MATTIE

Everybody, this is George. (*The KIDS echo 'Hi George!'*)

TESSA

George is one of my favorite people.

TYLER

He's not a person! Can I pet him?

MOLLY MATTIE

Sure! You can say, 'Hi George,' then let him smell your hands, and then go ahead! He loves it when you scratch him right here. (*Indicates under her chin*)

JOEY

He's soft! He likes it!

MOLLY MATTIE

Does anyone else want to say hi to George?

JOEY

How come George has these funny lines on him? Ohhh are they scars?

TESSA

Those are scars. George was very sick last year. He had cancer.

JOEY

Animals get cancer too?

MADELEINE

(*Hushed tone*) We don't talk about cancer.

JOEY

Is he all better? (*TESSA nods*) Were you scared?

TESSA

I was very scared. George goes everywhere with me. Sometimes I let him drive.

JOEY

*(Matter-of-factly)* He's like your deputy.

TESSA

Yes he is.

TYLER

I have a dog at home.

MOLLY MATTIE

Oh, what's its name?

TYLER

It's a *boy*. And my dad bought him for me for my birthday. He cost \$7,000.

MADELEINE

I wanted to get two, a boy and a girl, but no. 'We can't afford it.' We can totally afford it.

TESSA

*(To the kids)* George knows some cool tricks. Want to see?

TYLER

My dog knows tricks. He's a purebred.

JOEY

What kind of dog is George?

TYLER

George is a mutt.

JOEY

What's a mutt?

TESSA

A mutt is my favorite kind of dog.

TYLER

My dog is a purebred Samoyed. He came from Siberia. His name is Vlad.

TESSA

Who here knows what a superhero is? *(They all say 'I do!')* Okay. A superhero has different powers, right? A mutt- is made of lots of different kinds of dogs. Some mutts have bloodhound in them: they

have a really good sense of smell and they help the police solve crimes. And some dogs have border collie in them, which means they can jump really high, and because they herd cows and sheep, they know where everyone in your family is in the house at all times.

TYLER

My dog can pull sleds and herd reindeer.

TESSA

California's got a big reindeer problem.

MADELEINE

Did you just patronize my son? *(TESSA looks at her. A tense moment, then)* Sorry, I just go all mama bear sometimes. Continue. *(TESSA resumes with the kids)*

TESSA

Now George- he has German Shepherd in him, so he's strong and really smart. He's also part cattle dog, so he is loyal, and brave. Which means a mutt is kind of like a superhero, because they have all these really cool qualities rolled into one- like mixing Superman with Spiderman and Batman.

TYLER

Batman doesn't have any superpowers, stupid. He's a self-made billionaire who makes his own gadgets.

JOEY

I thought he inherited his money.

TYLER

Vlad is the best dog there is. He's purebred Samoyed.

JOEY

*(Quietly to TESSA)* I like Mutts, too.

TYLER

My dog was \$7000. He's Siberian.

TESSA

Ok, well you named him after a Romanian despot.

MOLLY MATTIE

Transylvanian.

TESSA

*(Nods)* If we're getting all nuts and bolts.

MOLLY MATTIE

And that is nowhere near Siberia.

TESSA

Different continent.

MOLLY MATTIE

Unless it's way Western Siberia.

TESSA

This is true.

MOLLY MATTIE

Then it's arguable.

TESSA

But. It's like naming your African elephant, 'Hitler.'

MOLLY MATTIE

Those are endangered.

TESSA

I love that you know your geography.

MADELEINE

We don't talk about Hitler.

TYLER

You can't even sell your dog on eBay.

TESSA

How do you even know what eBay is? You're eight.

MADELEINE

I buy and sell on eBay. I craft. Etsy too. *(She hands TESSA her card)*

JOEY

Can I bring my sister to story time tomorrow?

TESSA

That would be great!

JOEY

Can she meet George?

MOLLY MATTIE

Yes! You guys can read to George, he loves it.

TESSA

Who wants to meet our workers? They're giving the dogs baths right now.

TYLER

I bet you my dad makes more money than you do!

TESSA

I bet he does, too.

TYLER

A LOT of money.

TESSA

Samoyeds are really nice dogs.

MADELEINE

*(Taking TYLER and leaving)* Thanks Trish.

TESSA

But they're prone to renal failure, known as Samoyed Hereditary Glomerulopathy. Plus diabetes, dysplasia, and progressive retinal atrophy. That means they go blind.

JOEY

Bye, Tyler!

*(Lights change)*

***Board Transition: Change date to 4/17, Kingston weight to 33, ROO is moved to A/F, BLUE is added to Newbies***

\*Sc3

*The shelter. The board now shows April 17th, with Kingston's weight at 33lbs. MOLLY MATTIE and TESSA are busy at the desk, going in and out. BILL comes through the back, post-walk.*

BILL

Thanks, Tessa. Gracie's happy as a clam.

TESSA

When are you gonna make an honest woman out of that dog, Bill?

BILL

In time, Doc. Wife's got to say yes. *(The rich hippie from the field trip has returned. She has the baby in a papoose, and a stroller, which is also full. She carries a Starbucks cup)*

MOLLY MATTIE

*(To TESSA)* Adopt a highway adopt a tree. *(She exits quickly)*

TESSA

What? HI! Madeleine. Hi.

MADELEINE

Tricia! Hello! How are you?

TESSA

I'm fine, thanks. Tessa.

MADELEINE

Madeleine. I need a dog.

BILL

I'm gonna take Gracie out again. *(Does a 180, exits through kennel door)*

TESSA

*(Eyeing her load)* I think you need a drink. *(Falls flat)* You need a dog.

MADELEINE

Well, my little men do! *(In a talking-to-children voice)* I just had a baby! Number five! And my little men missed it! They don't allow children in the delivery room. Oh! You have kids? *(Deciding)* You don't have kids. *(TESSA just watches her, says nothing)* So, if the mountain won't come to Mohammed- *(She smiles, but TESSA remains silent)* then Mohammed will come to the mountain! We would like to buy a girl dog for our boy dog. Well, I would. Mommy brain! We'd like to put puppies in the mommy's belly and have the boys watch the birth. Well, I would. I think the cycle of life is important. So- I need a dog. *(There is no reaction. Explains)* The Little Red Farm in Garberville lets kids watch goat births and cow births.

TESSA

They're an environmental education center.

MADELEINE

Well see, I want to educate my boys! They're home-schooled. And what better way than real-time gestation and delivery? You can't get that in public school science class. *(TESSA is simmering)* Oh! You're worried about the litter of puppies! Of course! We'll give them back to you.

TESSA

You'll give them back.

MADELEINE

Yes.

TESSA

You'll give them back to me.

MADELEINE

I promise. Girl Scout's Honor! I can sign a contract-*(TESSA turns and leaves through the exam room. MADELEINE follows)* Tricia? *(To MOLLY MATTIE, who comes back in)* Her energy is a little combative.

MOLLY MATTIE

*(Stepping in, with unfailing good cheer, which lasts throughout the entire exchange)* Hi! We met at field trip day. I'm Molly Mattie. You were a Girl Scout?

MADELEINE

No, I was never a Girl Scout.

MOLLY MATTIE

*(To stroller)* Hi fellas! Wow, you've got your hands full!

MADELEINE

I'm Madeleine. Maddy- you're another Maddy!

MOLLY MATTIE

No, it's different. So, what's goin' on?

MADELEINE

Well, I'd like to get a dog for my boys-

MOLLY MATTIE

Right, ok - you want a dog to bring home to your boys, inseminate her- it's the professional term- with your Samoyed and let the little ones experience the miracle of a live birth. Is that right?

MADELEINE

Yes! Oh, thank you.

MOLLY MATTIE

Well, Madeleine-

MADELEINE

*(Corrects her) Maddy, Maddy. (She is so completely obsequious and transparent)*

MOLLY MATTIE

Mattie. Like a boy. The thing is, Maddy, once a girl dog is brought to the shelter, we spay her. Every dog. We neuter the males.

MADELEINE

Every dog.

MOLLY MATTIE

Yep.

MADELEINE

You're telling me every single dog back there – every single one- is spayed.

MOLLY MATTIE

Yep. See, we're obligated by law, and our contract with the city; there are no unspayed bitches allowed on the premises.

MADELEINE

How dare you. *(MOLLY MATTIE is unswayed)*

MOLLY MATTIE

Tessa's in the back. I think she's got an eleven o'clock.

MADELEINE

I'm glad they're shutting you down. *(She leaves)*

TESSA

*(TESSA enters)* Molly Mattie. You can't do that.

MOLLY MATTIE

I just asked myself, 'what would Tessa do?' And you were gonna hit her, so... *(TESSA puts her face in her hands, then after a moment, is unable to contain herself)*

TESSA

What do you think she's driving?

MOLLY MATTIE

Landrover. *(They run over to the window together and peek out. It is indeed a Landrover. TESSA goes back to the desk. MOLLY MATTIE has spotted something outside, and goes to retrieve it. TESSA picks up the phone)*

TESSA

Hey Jerry, those Kurunda beds- we're here all day today if you want to swing by. Thanks Jerry. I've got

a six-pack here with your name on it. (*MOLLY MATTIE has come back in with a box. She knows TESSA will not be happy*) Jerry's dropping off the beds later- what's the box?

MOLLY MATTIE

Someone left it out front. (*She says no more*)

TESSA

That'll be the third dead dog this week. (*MOLLY shakes her head*) What's in it?

MOLLY MATTIE

Um.

TESSA

What's in the box, Mol? (*Quoting that oh so famous movie*) AH, WHAT'S IN THE BOX? (*TESSA walks over, looks, sighs*) Oh, no. No no no no no. Take 'em in the back, check 'em out, write it up. (*MOLLY MATTIE goes*) Fucking cats.

*Lights change*

\*Sc3.5

*Downstage. BILL's hardware store. BILL and TESSA sit opposite each other in chairs with headphones on. A small table with recording equipment and microphones sits between them.*

BILL

And all these middle-aged men in their underwear are running screaming through the campsite. Their bellies looked like glow-in-the-dark bowling balls.

TESSA

Where were you during all this?

BILL

Watching from my truck. Folks, once again, we're coming to you live from the top floor of Aaron Bros Lumber and Hardware here in the Arcata Sq, and this is the Hard Hat Hour with Bill Taylor. Stop on by, say hello, bring us some donuts if you're so inclined. (*To TESSA*) Say, I saw your dad at the VA last week.

TESSA

Oh.

BILL

He had Hank with him. I gotta say, the meanest SOBs they got there turn into marshmallows when Hank comes around.

TESSA

Hank's a good dog.

BILL

He's your dad's shadow. Your dad rescued Hank, is that right?

TESSA

Nice segue.

BILL

I do like the radio. Your dad- we're talking about Walter Bartlett here for those living under a rock, or you tourists driving through on your way up to Ashland. Your rescue is One Paw Two Paw, and you're on McMorrow Rd. right now- and folks, that's what we're here to talk about today- Doc Bartlett needs your help. She'll be at the City Council meeting two weeks from tomorrow, let's get on out and support her. If you can pass out flyers, bring some blankets by the shelter- *(To TESSA)* any requests?

TESSA

We're always looking for fosters for our pups, long or short term.

BILL

And for the love of Pete, I expect to see your cars in front of Bear Claw Bakery, and support not only the Doc here but your local mom and pops, not that Starbucks eyesore they're so hot-to-trot to get in here. *(His phone buzzes)* And I've just gotten a text from my wife telling me, 'Norma Rae, could you mow the lawn when you get home?' Tessa, thanks for coming by. Is there anything you'd like to tell the folks listening in?

TESSA

You going to come by and walk Gracie later?

BILL

You know it.

TESSA

She's a good match for you Bill. *(Bill's phone buzzes again)*

BILL

*(He reads from his phone)* 'Over my dead body.' Hey- before we wrap things up- how do you know a dog will be a good match for someone?

TESSA

Sometimes it's a feeling. You just know. Often it's just common sense. Not going to put a working dog with a sedentary owner, or a lapdog with an active one. It's just logistics, and a little bit of chemistry. Like you and Gracie.

BILL

Folks, if I'm not on the air tomorrow, it's because my wife has done me in. How did you know

Hank was the right dog for your dad? How'd you match them up?

TESSA

I didn't- he didn't get Hank from me. *(Beat)* I'm glad they found each other.

*Lights change*

**Board transition: BOOMER is added to A/F**

*\*Sc4*

*TESSA and MOLLY MATTIE are stationed in the town square, holding a spay/ neuter clinic and adoption event. GWEN, MOLLY'S aunt, power walks across the stage with earphones in.*

TESSA

Hey Gwen! *(Gwen doesn't hear, continues till offstage)* HEY GWEN!

GWEN

*(Jogs back on, laughing)* Hi Tessa. Hi sweetie. I was in the zone.

MOLLY MATTIE

Hi aunt Gwen!

TESSA

You in the market?

GWEN

Sorry ladies. We're good with three. You forgot your lunch. *(Hands it to MOLLY MATTIE)*

MOLLY MATTIE

I did! I left it in the fridge! Thanks Aunt G. *(GWEN hands TESSA a second bag)*

GWEN

Make sure she eats it.

TESSA

Oh I will.

MOLLY MATTIE

She's talking about you.

TESSA

You made me lunch?

GWEN

Molly says you don't eat.

MOLLY MATTIE

Coffee and jerky.

TESSA

I like jerky.

GWEN

This is turkey on sourdough, an apple, string cheese, and cookies.

TESSA

I- sourdough's my favorite.

GWEN

We know. *(TESSA exits)*

MOLLY MATTIE

She does that when people are nice to her.

GWEN

I know. Alright sweetie, I'll see you at home. Spay dogs!

MOLLY MATTIE

We will. Bye aunt G. *(MOLLY MATTIE is left onstage, in charge. WILL approaches. The following is charming)* Hi! Are you looking to adopt? Or do you have a dog that needs to be spayed?

WILL

Hi. Neither, actually-

MOLLY MATTIE

Or foster? We're looking for fosters, too, which is great practice for when you do become a dog parent.

WILL

Uh-

MOLLY MATTIE

You know, a lot of people don't realize how much they need a dog in their lives until they get one.

WILL

Are you hard-selling me?

MOLLY MATTIE

You seem like a hard sell. *(He indicates she should continue)* A dog won't hog the blankets, or borrow your clothes, like your stupid sister does, or *(Suspecting out the situation)* like a girlfriend who's trying to

stake her claim. A dog is always happy to see you, *and (Appealing to his age)* if you need to stay active to fight off that weight that creeps on as we get older, you've got a built in running partner, AND- a dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself.

WILL

You didn't know my mom.

MOLLY MATTIE

Past tense?

WILL

She passed.

MOLLY MATTIE

You definitely need a dog.

WILL

It's been seven years.

MOLLY MATTIE

*(She won't be deterred)* PTSD.

WILL

*(Amused and charmed)* Is this operation your baby? *(Referring to the whole shebang)*

MOLLY MATTIE

Oh no. I mean, yes, but no. Tessa owns it- do you know Tessa? It's hers, she runs it, she's my boss, but she's more like my older sister, or my aunt.

WILL

You're clearly not a silent partner-

MOLLY MATTIE

No, I'm 18! I started as a volunteer, when I was 14? I was in 4-H. But I've been a real, like on-the-books employee since I was 16. And it looks good on the college application- I'm gonna be a vet- so, really good- but I like it. I love it. *(Sees her opening)* Do you like dogs? *(She hands him a puppy)*

WILL

*(Appreciating her tactic)* Nice. A vet, huh?

MOLLY MATTIE

Yeah. I mean, Tessa went to Davis- she's a vet- and it's a really good school, like one of the best, and so I'm looking at Davis, but there's also Oklahoma (I have family there) – *(TESSA enters, and is finishing setting up. She doesn't see WILL)*

TESSA

Molly. I could hear you talking nonstop from a block away. You're not going to Oklahoma. It's not even in the top twenty, and, it's Oklahoma.

MOLLY MATTIE

But-

TESSA

C'mon Mol, earthquake or tornado? (*Age-old discussion*) You want to go to a top three school – MAYBE a top five, but that's only-

MOLLY MATTIE

Because Cornell dropped to number five. And Ivy League is Ivy League even if it's number five.

TESSA

Give me the top three. Current top three.

MOLLY MATTIE

Davis, Colorado, A&M.

TESSA

Good girl. Davis & Colorado have been in the top three for a long time kiddo. And Texas? (*TESSA indicates 'no.'* *She turns to introduce herself to WILL*) Hi, sorry about the hard sell, she's usually much more subtle than that. (*The words stop as she registers him*)

MOLLY MATTIE

This is Tessa!

WILL

Hi. (*TESSA is dumbstruck*) What's the matter, Tam Tam, cat got your tongue?

MOLLY MATTIE

Tam Tam?

TESSA

(*To Will*) Don't.

MOLLY MATTIE

Yeah, she hates cats.

WILL

Can I call ya 'Doc?'

MOLLY MATTIE

Oh, I wouldn't.

WILL

Wow, she hates a lot of things.

TESSA

*(Finding her voice)* What are you doing here?

WILL

Seeing my dad.

MOLLY MATTIE

You're visiting?

WILL

I'm moving back. *(Grinning)* How 'bout that, Tam Tam?

MOLLY MATTIE

Back?

WILL

I grew up here.

MOLLY MATTIE

WHY are you moving BACK?

TESSA

Molly Mattie!

WILL

My dad's retiring and I'll be taking over for him.

MOLLY MATTIE

A family business? That's so sweet, like Norman Rockwell! *(Explaining)* My grandparents love Norman Rockwell. How do you guys know each other?

TESSA/ WILL

*(In unison)* We grew up together. / Tessa was my girlfriend. *(They look at each other, then back at MOLLY, and try again)*

TESSA/ WILL

He was my boyfriend. / We grew up together

MOLLY MATTIE

No way!

WILL

Yep. All through high school and college.

MOLLY MATTIE

Really?? Oh my God, that's so romantic! Like Dirty Dancing! High school sweethearts- *(Gasps. To TESSA)* Was he your first kiss?

WILL

I was not. But what do you want to bet I was her best kiss?

MOLLY MATTIE

Oh my God you guuuuuuys!

TESSA

Great. *(To WILL)* Look what you did.

MOLLY MATTIE

I had my first kiss last year, but I didn't really like him, so it doesn't really count.

TESSA

Will, Molly, Molly, Will.

MOLLY MATTIE

You're really handsome.

WILL

I like her.

MOLLY MATTIE

Tessa doesn't have a boyfriend right now.

TESSA

*(To WILL)* Have you had lunch?

WILL

No-

TESSA

Go eat lunch.

WILL

Wow Tam Tam, you're wound a little tight.

TESSA

Don't-

MOLLY MATTIE

Where was your guys' first kiss? *(TESSA indicates she either can't remember or can't be bothered to remember)*

WILL

It was on her front porch after homecoming.

MOLLY MATTIE

*(Rapturous)* Tessa had me watch all of John Hughes' films, we had a movie marathon – do you know who John Hughes is? - And – *(She is swooning at the romance of it all)*

WILL

*(Playing along, referencing Pretty in Pink)* Ducky or Blaine?

MOLLY MATTIE/TESSA

*(In unison)* Blaine! / Ducky. *(They look at each other and try again. In unison)* Blaine! / Ducky

MOLLY MATTIE

Why do you call her Tam Tam?

WILL

Well, the good doctor here used to get carsick. And on a field trip to Mt. Tamalpais –

MOLLY MATTIE

I know Mount Tam! My parents take me to see the mountain play there every year!

WILL

So, you know how you park your car, then they bus you up to the top? *(She nods. He points to TESSA)* This poor kid got so bus sick they had to pull over so she could throw up all over the side of Mount Tam. She was GREEN. And she slept the rest of the trip with her head in my lap.

MOLLY MATTIE

What about when you got out?

WILL

We never got out. Stayed in the bus. She puked her poor guts out, then just sacked out on me and slept. Sixteen, sick as a dog, and fast asleep like a baby. We were stuck like glue ever since.

MOLLY MATTIE

Metaphors and similes! I love English.

TESSA

*(This has been niggling at her)* Our first kiss was in the cab of your truck after we had to put our Setter down.

WILL

Yes it was. *(She's been had)*

TESSA

That was sneaky.

WILL

It was crafty.

TESSA

Underhanded.

WILL

Shrewd.

TESSA

You married someone else.

WILL

Only after you did.

MOLLY MATTIE

This is like the Hallmark Channel!

WILL

So, you think you'll get into Davis?

TESSA

*(A fact, not a push)* She'll get in.

MOLLY MATTIE

I think I have a pretty good chance- and I'm really hoping I get a scholarship, or something. They're wicked expensive. Did you know that Germany is tuition free?

WILL

I did know that.

MOLLY MATTIE

That's pretty cool. I wish they did that here. My friend Chloe told me that you can sell your eggs? For like, a lot of money? And I'm eighteen- and I heard that you do it more than once?

TESSA

You're not selling your eggs. Just get into Davis first. (*MOLLY MATTIE skips off stage*) That kid.

WILL

She likes you.

TESSA

Well, there's no accounting for taste.

WILL

So, no boyfriend?

TESSA

So, you're married.

WILL

Divorced.

TESSA

In my spare time, I like to macramé, and go for walks on the beach, and have a glass of wine while looking at the sunset.. (*MOLLY MATTIE comes tearing back onstage, talking from before she's fully on*)

MOLLY MATTIE

I think you should take Rhet Butler- do you know the real Rhet Butler? Not like know him know him, that was Clark Gable, and he's dead. I love that movie- THIS Rhet Butler is a Bassett Hound/ Shepherd mix, and he's kinda funny lookin', but he's super smart and he sleeps at the foot of your bed. You'll have to pick him up and put him on it though, 'cause he's got those Bassett legs. Oh! You should get those doggie steps up to the bed, so they can go up and down- what kind of bed do you have? (*WILL looks at TESSA, who ignores him*) You should totally take him.

TESSA

(*Affecting MOLLY'S excitement*) Yeah Will, you should totally take him.

MOLLY MATTIE

Seriously, when I take him out, the women start talking to him in these really stupid baby voices. It's so obnoxious-- Rhet Butler is a total chick magnet.

WILL

*(Looking at TESSA) Sold.*

*Light change*

***Board transtion: 4/27, Kingston's weight is now 37lbs, erase BOOMER, CHICKEN is added to Newbies, MAX and RHETT BUTLER are added to A/F***

\*Sc5

*The shelter. April 27. Kingston's weight is now 37lbs. MOLLY MATTIE is in her usual spot, standing and manning the phone, and directing any traffic that comes through*

MOLLY MATTIE

Mrs. Randall- we're not that kind of shelter. You can't bring us wildlife- we're not the Lindsey Museum. It's what? It's hissing? Ok, that's a possum, and I wouldn't go near it. Bye Mrs. Randall. *(TESSA has come in with coffee. The phone rings again. MOLLY answers)* One Paw, Two Paw. Mrs. Randall- what do you mean it doesn't have any fur? *(Puts hand over receiver, to TESSA)* She says there's an animal she wants to bring us, it's hissing, and it doesn't have any fur.

TESSA

Ask her if it has legs.

MOLLY MATTIE

Mrs. Randall, does it have any legs? She says no. *(TESSA reaches for phone)*

TESSA

Mrs. Randall, hi, that's a snake, go inside. *(Noticing)* Why is Boomer's name gone?

MOLLY MATTIE

They returned him.

TESSA

What? After a week? Is he okay?

MOLLY MATTIE

He bit their cat.

TESSA

They don't have a cat.

MOLLY MATTIE

They lied. *(Shrugs)* They just really wanted a dog.

TESSA

Boomer: good with kids over eight, no cats.

MOLLY MATTIE

They didn't believe us.

TESSA

We vet all the dogs! We color code their personalities! We test them on cats, kids, and other dogs! Wait a minute- we did a home visit. There was no cat.

MOLLY MATTIE

They put him in the closet.

TESSA

Good. I don't want one our dogs with them. Call the other shelters too, and tell them not to give them a dog. *(MOLLY does)* Selfish. Fucking. Assholes. Don't say that, it's ugly. Ok. *(BILL walks through to the kennel door. He is wearing a ball cap and colorful sweatshirt. He keeps moving as he talks)*

BILL

Hey Tessa, morning Molly. Here to see my girl.

TESSA

Heya Bill, she's waiting for you. Have a good walk. *(He goes through kennel door. To MOLLY)* Good news, good news- a woman's been following Kingston's rescue on the website and brought in a ton of dog sweaters to keep him warm. We got video of the meeting; can you post it to-

MOLLY MATTIE

Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, yep, I'm on it.

TESSA

And pull out a thank-you card. Did you fill out your financial aid for Davis?

MOLLY MATTIE

Uh, yeah. *(Her demeanor has changed)*

TESSA

Do you want me to drive you to your interview? What's wrong?

MOLLY MATTIE

It's just really expensive.

TESSA

I can always call the dean.

MOLLY MATTIE

Do not call the dean. That's embarrassing.

TESSA

Ok. Julie's sending us a Rottie who just had puppies, we'll give them their own kennel, just do some shuffling- story time is in an hour- and the foster tree?

MOLLY MATTIE

We have three new foster moms and dads. Carlos interviewed them over the weekend. They're good to go.

TESSA

Good.

MOLLY MATTIE

The Andersons will take the bullies, Ricky and Eck.

TESSA

Together?

MOLLY MATTIE

Yes.

TESSA

Great. *(Writes RICKY and ECK the board, adding asterisk to denote they are fosters)*

MOLLY MATTIE

The Rileys are new to fostering, so we're placing TunaFace with them, *(Tessa writes TUNAFACE under A/F with asterisk)* and the Glens have fostered for years- they just moved here- Carlos thinks either Lola or Salami would be good for them.

TESSA

Have they done food guarding before?

MOLLY MATTIE

Yes.

TESSA

Then Salami. *(Writes SALAMI with asterisk under A/F)*

MOLLY MATTIE

My mom saw Bob White in the supermarket. He said he's thinking about another dog for Peanut. He wants to get a puppy.

TESSA

Peanut is 9 yrs old. She's not gonna want a puppy in her space. OK.

*Lights change*

\*Sc. 6.5

*Tessa is on the phone.*

TESSA

Bob, hey, it's Tessa. I'm good, thanks, how are you? Listen, I heard you're looking for another dog. Yeah...I've got your dog. She's a great animal. She's two. She's spayed, she's housebroken- *(The question she doesn't want to be asked. Hedging)* Uh, we've had her two years. It is a long time, you're right. Well, she's not the prettiest of dogs, but you don't want a beauty queen, you want a dog who'll go on your runs with you. No, she's not a Staffie, she's a Dogo. People mix 'em up all the time. Oh, Dogos are great dogs, they're smart, loyal, great with kids- and she loves other dogs, so she and Peanut will be friends for life. Well, like I said, she's not gonna win any beauty contests, so people have been a little shy about taking her home... she was- you know what a bait dog is? Bait dogs are used in dogfight- no, she...- yes! It's what it sounds like. Actually! Aggressive traits are deliberately bred OUT of Dogos, so she was just a sitting duck, poor thing. We found her, and we fixed her up, and the staff here loves her. Well, her left eye, the left side of her face, is, it's just a slope, actually- we call her Frankenstein; Frankie for short- but she's got full mobility, great guard dog, very protective of her people... right. Uh huh. Bob, I promise you, you couldn't ask for a better pet. Right. Got it. *(Can't help herself)* It's just, funny, you know. Just funny. I think it's funny. Because you married a woman with no tits and no chin. *(Hangs up)*

*Lights change*

\*Sc7

*WILL'S office. It is done in rich woods and greens. Deck, glass desk lamp. Oriental rug, bookcases, diplomas and a photo or two. It is both homey and professional. WILL sits at his desk. TESSA opens the door and pokes her head in.*

TESSA

Hi.

WILL

Well, hello.

TESSA

Hi. *(Cutting to the chase)* I need legal advice.

WILL

I'm well, thanks.

TESSA

Can you help me?

WILL

How are you? Not really, I hate all that social etiquette crap, especially when it's with someone you've shared bodily fluids with.

TESSA

I just have a question.

WILL

God Tessie, you used to be so fun. *(She gives up, turns to go)* Tam Tam- come back. What's your question? *(She hesitates, comes back into the room)* Just move that stick out of the way, and sit down. *(She looks for a stick, realizes he's teasing her)* Really. Have a seat. What's up?

TESSA

Can I *(Searches for words)* cash in my life insurance?

WILL

Why? What's going on?

TESSA

Can I? I can do that, can't I?

WILL

Uh...well I'd have to look at the documents, and the reasons why-

TESSA

I don't want to talk about why. Oh-and I know I should talk to the bank about this, could I mortgage my house? Put a second mortgage on it, I mean? The first was one for the shelter- but- could I?

WILL

*Is* this about the shelter?

TESSA

Yes, it's about the shelter. Ok. So- my mom started a trust for me- *(Checking in with him)* can I just talk? *(He indicates that she's already on a roll)* I've been wondering if I should ask my dad for early access to the trust that my mom left. I want to put Molly through school. She's talking about selling her eggs-

WILL

A lot of women do it, I've heard-

TESSA

I know. I don't want her to feel she has to. I did it a few years ago, and it was awful-

WILL

Why?

TESSA

Why was it awful or why did I do it?

WILL

The latter.

TESSA

Irrelevant. (*Relents*) I needed a cargo van and a mobile x-ray machine.

WILL

Did you get them?

TESSA

Yeah. Someone ended up donating their old van. It looks like a murder van, but it works. I got the x ray machine, and gave everyone else a check.

WILL

Aren't they volunteers?

TESSA

Yeah.

WILL

How much do you make?

TESSA

We rely on donations, fiscal and material, and on sponsors, and anything extra isn't really extra, and I put it right back in. A 'salary' is pointless.

WILL

Can you sell your eggs again?

TESSA

No.

WILL

Was it really so bad?

TESSA

(*Mocking*) Let me just jerk my eggs into a cup. Oh my god, that's what you think happens. So. The drugs make you feel like shit, (*Remembers his needle phobia*) and the shots-

WILL

*(He looks stricken and sick)* Needles?

TESSA

Needles. Every day.

WILL

*(Stops her)* Ok. *(Fascinated)* And you *can't* do it again?

TESSA

No. One, I've only just aged out of it-which is too bad, because this is prime real estate. And even if I hadn't, they won't do it again, they're worried about the long-term effect.

WILL

How many times have you donated?

TESSA

Six. *(Back to business)* I need a way to make this money- what? Stop looking at me. Like that. Stop. Don't feel sorry for me.

WILL

I don't.

TESSA

Look- I'm just- I'm sure you're still a super-nice guy. But- I need to find this money. Molly is so smart, and her skills- she'll skyrocket at Davis. She deserves a top-notch education.

WILL

You love Molly.

TESSA

Don't be sensitive.

WILL

*(Enjoying himself)* I've seen you naked.

TESSA

Ok. Borderline inappropriate.

WILL

Is it though?

TESSA

I have to get ready for my appeal.

WILL

For what?

TESSA

The city denied me the sale of a bigger shelter for us. Meanwhile, they're shutting me down because they sold my building to a Starbucks!

WILL

Is this the city council meeting on Thursday?

TESSA

Yeah. Me vs. them. I need a place to put these dogs. Plus Molly. Whether I win the appeal or not, every contingency plan I have- *(She's out of options. Shrugs. The truth)* I'm out of eggs. *(WILL pulls whiskey out of his bottom drawer, pours her some. She slugs it, and she slugs his too)* Thank you. *(Beat)* You saw me naked a long time ago. Things aren't where they used to be.

WILL

Can I see? Ok. OK, alright, this is what we're gonna do. I am going to refer you to Mel, an associate of ours.

TESSA

Why?

WILL

Because this is a conflict of interest. For me.

TESSA

What are you talking about, conflict of interest? *(He hesitates. She jibes him)* Because we used to go together?

WILL

Don't belittle me, Tessa. *(She says nothing)* Ok Tam Tam, look. My father is your father's lawyer, he's in charge of all his accounts, estate, will, trust, everything. I'm taking over for my dad, and I'm inheriting all of his clients- your dad, too. I can't counsel you with regard to him. I can only counsel HIM with regard to YOU.

TESSA

That is so unfair.

WILL

I know.

TESSA

Can you offer me advice as a friend? A peer?

WILL

Tessa, I've had access to all your father's documents, legal and otherwise-

TESSA

What's otherwise?

WILL

His personal statements-

TESSA

Personal st- *(A moment of clarity. She is unsettled)* About what?

WILL

Riders he included as to why certain things should be carried out certain ways-

TESSA

About me? *(He shakes his head to indicate he can't comment)* Like why the trust was changed? *(He won't look at her)* What did he say about me? What did you read about me? Do you know why he hates me? 'Cause I sure as fuck don't know why.

WILL

Tessa-

TESSA

Thank you for meeting with me.

WILL

*(He comes out from behind his desk and goes to her. He is truthful and genuine)* My hands are tied here, Tessa. Even if I gave you little bits of casual advice, it just wouldn't be above board- I'm going to send you to Mel- he's the best attorney around when it comes to estates, trusts, and assets- he's better than I am. Do you believe me? *(She nods)* I want to help, and this is the best way I can. For now. Are you ok? *(She nods)* Tessa. We'll figure it out. *(She exits)*

*Lights change*

***Board transition: Change date to 4/30, Kingston weight is now 40lbs. FOSSE is added to A/F, and ROOSTER is added to Newbies***

\*Sc8

*The shelter. TESSA is on her phone, MOLLY works on the computer, the office phone on her shoulder.*

TESSA

Is that so? After two days? *(To MOLLY)*

MOLLY

Tessa, can you- *(She points to the computer. TESSA looks. The following is very fast as TESSA is still*

*on the phone and that is simply their pacing)*

TESSA

You know this. *(Back to phone)* Well. Congratulations, you are officially a foster failure. It tends to happen with first timers. It's a good thing. Ok, we'll be in touch. *(Hangs up)* The Rileys would like to adopt Ricky and Eck. *(She erases the asterisk next to RICKY and ECK. MOLLY watches her. She is hesitant)* What are they describing?

MOLLY

Megaesophagus. M.E.

TESSA

Right. They're telling you that the elevated food bowl isn't working. *(MOLLY nods)* So what now?

MOLLY

*(Slow but picks up speed)* Elevate him. Vertical. Obviously head up. *(TESSA watches. Mm-hmms. MOLLY lands on it)* A Bailey chair!

TESSA

Yep. Wanna make a house call? I think Ro has one she'll give us. We'll go over and help with the first feeding. Ok. What do Ro and Nelson have for us?

MOLLY MATTIE

*(As this goes on, TESSA comments here and there)* There's a litter of puppies- looks like they might have Parvo-that's Julie. There are two senior dogs, 10 and 12- they're bonded-

TESSA

Yes.

MOLLY MATTIE

*(Moving down the list)* 11yr old lab with congestive heart failure and a really big tumor on his spine. Can't walk. It's inoperable. End stage.

TESSA

Call....call...Vanessa. She'll take him for fospice.

MOLLY MATTIE

*(Beat)* Oh my God. Someone bought our wish list on Amazon.

TESSA

What? *(Keeps writing on the board)*

MOLLY MATTIE

Someone bought everything we've been asking for on Amazon. Oh my God. William Landry? Do you know a William Lan- ohmigod! Is that Will? He bought one of everything. He's courting you! It's so

romantic! It's a 'big gesture!' He's wooing you! *(Tessa has come behind her to look)* Will and Tessa sittin' in a tree- k-i-s-s- *(A young man rushes in carrying a bloody, blanketed bundle)* Tessa- *(Stepping forward, TESSA takes the bundle. He says nothing for a moment, realizes it's expected of him. Then)*

YOUNG MAN

He was- hit by a car- *(TESSA takes the dog box into the exam/ operating room door, which is very distinctly separate from the kennel door. She is in vet mode. It has gone quiet in the room. The YOUNG MAN is standing, waiting. MOLLY MATTIE continues to do her job)*

MOLLY MATTIE

Are you ok? *(He nods. The phone rings)* One Paw, Two Paw. We're open till five. *(Hangs up)* Do you want to sit down? *(He doesn't answer. The phone rings again. MOLLY MATTIE watches him)* One Paw, Two Paw. We have three Chihuahua mixes here, would you like to come by? All three are good with kids- 10 to 5. *(Hangs up. To YOUNG MAN)* Hey- weren't you here like a month ago? *(The phone rings)* One Paw, Two Paw. Uh huh. Ok. Got it. *(She takes her phone and goes out front door, is gone for a few moments, then comes back in and continues conversation. She stands in front of the exit)* Like maybe six weeks ago or something? *(At this moment, a cry of 'GODDAMMIT!' is heard from behind the closed clinic doors. TESSA bursts out of the exam room, bloody and murderous. The YOUNG MAN takes off, slamming through the exit, shoving MOLLY MATTIE aside. TESSA follows him outside, comes back a moment later)*

TESSA

Call Nick. Give him the plate number. Don't EVER block the door when someone like that is around! That piece of shit is the kid who brought his dog in last summer; he'd been fighting her? He's Randy Warren's cousin. Call Julie to do a necropsy. The dog is dead. *(Exits through the vet door, swings back through)* I have the city council meeting. *(She looks down at her bloody shirt)*

*Lights change*

\*Sc 9

*City council meeting. TESSA faces the audience, where the COUNCIL MEMBERS are peppered. When she addresses them, she addresses the audience, too. WILL watches the proceedings)*

COUNCILMAN STACEY

Next is Tessa Bartlett, appealing the Arcata Council decision of March 1st to deny the right of sale to One Paw, Two Paw. Tessa, Whenever you're ready.

TESSA

Doctor.

COUNCILWOMAN PORTER

Excuse me?

TESSA

I said ‘doctor.’ I am a doctor of veterinary medicine. I went to U.C. Davis, I was a specialist in emergency and critical care, and was head of surgery at 29. I then began what was my clearly ignominious retreat into the far less noble world of rescue work, and it is the hardest thing I’ve ever done – it is so hard, it is, it is ugly, the things I see, the people I deal with- the Randy Warrens- who is the greatest example of a coastal redneck this town has ever seen. Please address me as doctor. I will be a vet for the rest of my days in our great state of California, because it is an ineluctable need.

I offer spay and neuter services– a service I insist on providing to this city for free – I stay a vet so that when I get a phone call on a Sunday to please make a house call to put down a 14yr old German Shepherd who is blind and incontinent, and who is the love of her owner’s life, **Stu**, I do it. I’m a doctor. I field offers to this day to run emergency rooms. I got a call from Burlington, Vermont, this morning, to head their teaching hospital. I know you wish I were there right now. But this is my home.

And right now I’m the only no-kill shelter in the county, and you- everyone here- you’re going to have to go home and tell your kids why there’s no more story time at One Paw, Two Paw. You’re going to have to tell your kids AND your parents what happened to all those dogs they love to read to, and walk with. And then once you tell them the ‘what,’ you’ll have to tell them ‘why.’

You don’t know what to do with me. I got that- I get it – I’m loud, I’m not polite, but you don’t need to know what to do with me. Just give me the place on Harkness- sell it to me – *I* know what to do.

Thank you to the council for your time and attention. I’m just going to end with this: The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.

COUNCILMAN STACEY

Thank you Dr. Bartlett. We will take this into consideration and vote once the meeting has adjourned. You set, Liz? Meeting adjourned.

WILL

*(Will approaches her)* Hey, you ok?

TESSA

*(Softens)* Thank you for coming.

WILL

You did good, Tam Tam. *(A lawyerly assurance)* It’s in their best interest to vote for you.

TESSA

You bought Amazon. *(There’s a pause full of excitement and friction; it’s not unpleasant)*

WILL

Well, not all of it. So, Doctor. *(She laughs)* I have a question for you.

TESSA

Is it Rhett Butler? Does he hog the covers?

WILL

Oh no, he and I have got a system all worked out. *(A moment, then)* Do you remember our last kiss?  
*(Her phone buzzes. She looks at it)*

TESSA

Oh shit. I have to go. *(She exits)*

*Lights change*

*\*Sc10*

*Afternoon. TESSA knocks on MADELEINE'S door. TESSA holds a little bitty dog in her arms. MADELEINE opens the door and eyeballs her. Her best defense is to shove first.*

TESSA

So it occurred to me you might need a dog.

MADELEINE

Didn't they shut you down?

TESSA

Almost. *(Awkward silence)* Boys not here?

MADELEINE

*(Hint of relief beneath the veneer)* No.

TESSA

*(Looking around the front yard)* There are a lot of...weapon toys. *(Referring to the dog in her arms)*  
This is Lulu. She's very sweet, she likes women, she loves attention, and just wants to be next to you.

MADELEINE

And?

TESSA

And I thought you might like having another girl around.

MADELEINE

I'm a charity case?

TESSA

Nope.

MADELEINE

Can she have babies?

TESSA

Nope.

MADELEINE

*(A reveal)* Good.

TESSA

Your Samoyed would crush her. *(She holds Lulu out to MADELEINE)*

MADELEINE

She looks funny. *(Takes her. TESSA watches)* I don't know what I would DO with another dog *(TESSA: mmhmm)*. I'm so busy with my boys, I'm their Boy Scout leader. *(TESSA: mmhmm)*. And I have my shop. *(TESSA watches)* I craft.

TESSA

You could make clothes for her. *(MADELEINE looks at TESSA)* I looked at your Etsy. You make doll clothes.

MADELEINE

She's not a doll. *(TESSA just watches)* You're giving her to me.

TESSA

Mmhm.

MADELEINE

*(To the dog in her arms)* Hello. I'm Madeleine.

TESSA

Madeleine, meet Lulu.

MADELEINE

Christie Brinkley.

TESSA

What?

MADELEINE

Her name is Christie Brinkley. *(To the dog in her arms)* Would you like a cookie?

TESSA

Just- she can't have chocolate-

MADELEINE

I'm not an idiot, why don't I just give her rat poison? *(To dog)* Well hello. Would you like to see your new house? We are going to have our very own bedroom, I have a canopy bed, it is so pretty and it will be you and me. Just us girls. *(MADELEINE keeps cooing to the pup in her arms. TESSA takes her cue, and begins to leave)* Well hello, little girl. Hello. You're so precious. Such a pretty girl. *(Without looking up)* Say bye-bye to Tessa.

*Lights change*

***Board set up remains same, except LULU is added to A/F***

*\*Sc 11*

*The shelter. Nighttime. It is empty but the lights are on, or partially on. There is a knock at the door.*

WILL

Tessa? You there? *(He has entered and now stands in the lobby)* Tessa? *(TESSA comes out from the kennel portion of the shelter, a book in her hand)* Hi. The door was open.

TESSA

Oh shit. Hi.

WILL

Molly told me where you were.

TESSA

Molly's at my house.

WILL

Yeah, I know-

TESSA

Oh! Sorry- yeah, she stays with George whenever I stay here. Is everything ok?

WILL

Yeah-

TESSA

Sorry. Gimme a sec, I'll be right back. *(She hands him her book, goes back into the kennel for a moment. He peruses book. She returns)* Sorry I ditched you at the council meeting on Thursday. Someone dumped a dog out in front– they don't care if we're closed- and she's really skittish, she needed a bath and grooming. But now she's all clean, and perfect – *(She writes LUCKY on the board during this)*

WILL

Are you staying the night?

TESSA

Yeah, she's got an infection on her back leg. It'll be fine, but I'm changing the bandage every four hours and keeping her company. *(He holds up the book. It's a kids' book)* I read to them.

WILL

That's unexpected. It's sweet.

TESSA

It's ten o'clock. What are you doing here? Where's Rhett Butler?

WILL

He's having a slumber party with Molly and George. You won, Tam Tam.

TESSA

Won what?

WILL

They voted in your favor. You got the sale.

TESSA

What?! Really?! Oh my God! You came over here to tell me that?

WILL

I did. Now, the second part.

TESSA

Oh God.

WILL

It's not bad. They're giving you a week to move. From tomorrow.

TESSA

WHAT?

WILL

Don't panic- *(She begins to go into work mode)*

TESSA

That building needs renovations! Is that a seven business day week? And I'll get the weekend too? Or-

WILL

Hey. Hey hey hey- it's ok. It's ten o'clock. You're not going to get much done right now other than work yourself into a lather.

TESSA

Are you going to tell me to relax?

WILL

Ohhh no. I value my life. But...I just thought you'd want to know. And celebrate. You were great today. *(He pulls out a bottle of wine, and grabs two mugs from the desk, too. He picks one up, and reads from it)* 'I like big mutts and I cannot lie.' *(He looks around and takes in the shelter. He notices the bookcase full of children and pre-teen books. He squats in front of it, looking at the titles)* Story time?

TESSA

Yeah. People donate books all the time, and Tuesdays one of the volunteers reads to the kids. But the kids come in all the time to do their homework and read to the dogs. It sounds silly, but it's actually great for both of them. *(She is suddenly taken with the idea of more space, more opportunity, and begins to see it)*

WILL

*(Picking up on her thoughts)* What'll you do with your new digs?

TESSA

Well. The building is 4,000sq. ft, plus the acre of land next to it- *(Panics)* oh God, how am I going to get the money together in a week?

WILL

Breathe Tessie. Drink your nine dollar wine.

TESSA

You spent nine dollars on me? People will say we're in love.

WILL

Tell me what you see for your new place.

TESSA

Oh, we can have a whole room for the readers- with benches, and pillows- and shelves on the wall- at different heights for the different ages of the kids who come? - and dog beds. Maybe artwork by a local

artist for the walls? Or photos of the kids' pets, and family pets, on the walls? *(Has an epiphany)* I can call Bill! You remember Taylor Construction?

WILL

Yeah, Bill Taylor.

TESSA

Bill is totally in love with Gracie, she's one of our dogs. He walks her all the time. He's retired, but Taylor Construction was his. His sons run it now. I wonder if he'd be foreman for the build.

WILL

You should ask the Aaron Bros. to donate the materials.

TESSA

Oh my God! That's a great idea! Ok.

WILL

Breathe, Tessie.

TESSA

*(She takes a deep breath and a big drink of wine)* This is the best nine-dollar wine I've ever had.

WILL

Did you really break a guy's nose last year?

TESSA

He's lucky I didn't pull his spine through his dick.

WILL

Why?

TESSA

He deserved it.

WILL

You just walked up to him and hit him.

TESSA

He was sitting on his porch talking to a friend. I walked up, he turned, and I hit him. *(She demonstrates a downward punch)*

WILL

What if he'd hit you back?

TESSA

No. I had two things going for me. Surprise, and gravity. (He was sitting on a bucket).

WILL

C'mon Tam Tam – show me a punch.

TESSA

You want me to hit you.

WILL

No – I just want to see how you handle yourself.

TESSA

If you expected a punch, I'd just kick you in the nuts. (*He gestures 'c'mon'*) You're – really?

WILL

I know you're going to do what you want. I can at least help you be effective.

TESSA

(*They put down their mugs, slowly circle each other, her with her fists up*) Are you sure?

WILL

Guard your face, Tessie. (*She goes to hit him, he blocks her easily*) Saw it coming a mile away.

TESSA

Well, I'm afraid of hurting you.

WILL

With your soft little girl hands? (*She attacks him fully; she's clearly a better fighter*)

TESSA

Wow. You make middle age look really good.

WILL

Fuck you, Tam Tam.

TESSA

Your language is atrocious.

WILL

Yes, you're such a delicate little flower.

TESSA

I am delicate.

WILL

*(Giving it back to her)* Eh. You're looking a little tired there, Tessie. Gotta take better care of yourself. Do some yoga.

TESSA

Fuck you, counselor. Be right back *(She disappears again to check on the pup. WILL pulls a book out of the little bookcase and looks at it. TESSA comes back)* She's good. I put her in with Petey. He's really good with the little ones.

WILL

Why do you say your dad hates you?

TESSA

Jesus. *(Honestly)* Because he does.

WILL

Why?

TESSA

I don't know.

WILL

You don't know. Nothing?

TESSA

Nothing. I have no idea. *(WILL holds up a book. TESSA smiles)*

WILL

Miss J read this to our sixth grade class, and you cried and cried.

TESSA

I did. It's a great book. So. *(The following is awkward, sweet courting)*

WILL

So.

TESSA

... You hang your shingle out?

WILL

Next week.

TESSA

Why are you being so nice to me?

WILL

Why not?

TESSA

You want to take your pants off? Jacket! Your jacket! Do you want to take your jacket off.  
*(Floundering)* Do you want some cookies? *(She leaves again, and WILL cobbles together a comfy spot for them on the floor out of dog beds, his jacket, and hers. She returns sans cookies)* I don't have cookies.

WILL

Where's your husband?

TESSA

I am not leaving this room again. Ex-husband. He's in Sausalito, with his wife. She's very blond. She's nice. Uh...both vets. They raise Golden Retrievers. Which are break-your-heart dogs. They send a Christmas card every year, and a check for the shelter. It's very sweet. They're good for each other. Where's your wife?

WILL

Ex-wife. France. Where do you sleep here?

TESSA

There's a cot, but I usually do this- sleeping bag on a couple of dog beds.

WILL

Do you miss emergency medicine?

TESSA

I miss the money-

WILL

Vets don't make that much-

TESSA

If you're a specialist – double it- but, no, I don't. This makes more sense to me. It sucks- but- and don't laugh – but it's like I found the right puzzle piece.

WILL

I get it. *(He picks up a book)* Read?

TESSA

You want me to read to you?

WILL

Yeah. *(She takes the book and he settles in. TESSA begins to read from Where the Red Fern Grows, or*

*The Art of Racing in the Rain. She gets halfway through the page)*

TESSA

This is so much fun. *(He brushes her hair off her face, and hands her his wine)* You always know when to give me booze.

WILL

Yes, ma'am. *(A moment, then)* What happened to you, Tam Tam? What happened to make you want to bar fight the world?

TESSA

This wine is terrible.

WILL

*(He laughs. A moment, then)* Molly idolizes you. *(She doesn't respond)* She's a great kid.

TESSA

I heard her say 'twat' yesterday. Twat! She called someone a 'twat!'

WILL

*(Feigning horror)* Where would she hear such a word?

TESSA

It's a great word, Will. People are twats! They're twats, Will, they're twats. People are twats. And assholes. Twat and asshole- those are my favorite.

WILL

Mine too. *(Beat)*

TESSA

Why'd you move back here?

WILL

My dad's getting older. Be nice to be closer to my nieces and nephews. And it's pretty.

TESSA

You glad to see your dad?

WILL

Yeah. He wants to fish. He and his lady friend want to travel across the U.S. in their airstream. It's nice to come home.

TESSA

You won't get bored?

WILL

Nah. You can get bored anywhere, Tessie. But no, I don't think so. Maybe have a kid or two.

TESSA

Let's hope your boys can swim at your age.

WILL

My boys can swim.

TESSA

Every man is so certain-

WILL

My boys are fine.

TESSA

You might want to ease up on that wine then-

WILL

Why?

TESSA

Alcohol can lead to infertility and impotency, and given your age-

WILL

Is there a reason I need to be potent in the next couple of hours?

TESSA

No, I- *(Beat. She addresses his earlier question)* It's the callousness I see. Every day. The lack of care. It's not the dogs who get beaten- and that's awful. I've seen dogs who've been set on fire-. It's bad. But. It's the dogs that people neglect, that are tied up and forgotten about, that are ignored. Your dog that sits starving to death in plain sight while you eat your food. The dog that ends up frozen solid in your backyard while you sleep warm inside. People talk about man's inhumanity to man, but it's people's total indifference to animals- whose sole purpose is to be your friend; who love you, and trust you- unconditionally- who would lay down their life for you- it is our **job** as humans to take care of them- and a dog can be bleeding out on a street, and people will walk right on by, and I don't- I don't get it, Will. I don't understand. I want to set **people** on fire. And this *(Referring to her anguish)*, It doesn't go away. I can't turn it off. I wish I didn't care. I've tried. Because it's all the fucking time. *(He hands her more wine)* 'The more I learn about people, the more I like my dog.' Mark Twain said that. Now this is where you say, 'but it's not a child. A dog is not a child.'

WILL

You can't compare 'em. You also can't prove they're different. I can leave my dog and go to the store, but I can't leave a newborn. It's the only measurable thing. It's just logistics. People are twats. *(She crosses and kisses him. He kisses her back. After a moment, she breaks it and steps away,*

*discombobulated*) I'll read? *(She nods. He picks up the book and begins to read aloud. A few sentences in, she crawls to him so she is now settled between his legs, his back against the desk. He continues reading. They are two perfect puzzle pieces. He takes another drink of wine. Halfway through the next sentence when she stops him)*

Will. TESSA

What's up? WILL

Thank you for the wine. TESSA

I'm afraid we just drank the last of it. WILL

TESSA  
You make it taste like twelve-dollar wine. *(She settles in again. He resumes reading aloud with the book. After several sentences, TESSA breaks in)* Will.

Yeah? WILL

TESSA  
I'm sorry I married someone else. *(He puts the book down. It is what he's been waiting for. They kiss and wrap around each other, sinking into the makeshift bed)*

*Lights change*

*\*Sc11.5*

*The next morning. The shelter. WILL and TESSA are curled around each other, fast asleep on the floor. MOLLY MATTIE lets herself in, and finding them there, reacts big but silently. She leaves. A moment later, WILL and TESSA stir, see each other, and kiss. TESSA checks her phone. There is a text)*

TESSA  
Molly got into Davis.

*Lights down.*

*\*Sc12*

*Afternoon. Outdoors. The backyard of Tessa's father. She has stopped for a visit. There is evidence of a project, i.e., a shovel on the ground, bag of potting soil, a cinder block or a couple of bricks. Just enough to suggest the place and activity.*

## TESSA

*(Offstage)* Dad? *(She finds him, attempts to get his attention)* Dad? Hey, dad! Hey. *(Leans against fence)* Hi. *(Surveys backyard)* What is all this, what are you doing? A pond? You're building a pond? Digging- a koi pond. You want some help? *(Making conversation)* I heard that Hank's hips are getting stiff. Julie told me. She said she gave him Rimadyl, and Julie's a great vet, but I brought you glucosamine.

I don't know if you heard, but I won my appeal, and the city is selling me the plot over on Harkness. It's a great place for us. The thing is, I've only been given a week to make the transition. Crazy, right? There's construction that has to be done. There are codes. Plus, we're at capacity, and the dogs keep coming. I'm the only no-kill shelter in the county; these dogs have nowhere else to go. If I could give them away, I would. But people want to pay \$7000 for a fucking over-bred piece of- sorry. Language. I love that you rescued Hank. Hank is a great dog.

*(Her big pitch)* The trust that mom left- I'd like to access it- not all of it, just enough to make the sale and cut a check so we can begin making the facility battle ready for the dogs. I've got the Aaron Bros. in town who will do the labor for free if I pay for the materials. Which is amazing, but I've only got seven days to make this happen, and it would kill me to have to turn down their offer Starbucks takes over next week- I need quick cash. So, I'm asking you if you'll grant me access. *(Corrects herself)* Early access. Dad, I know. I know it says when I'm thirty-five, but this can't wait until November.

Even if I went back to work at the hospital, I wouldn't get my first check for a month. I opened a shelter so I could be the on-site vet and put that money elsewhere.

So. Business proposition. You lend me the money, and in November I'll repay you from the trust. We can write up a contract and have it notarized and everything- and with interest. I'm not money-focused-

Why won't you help me? I know things have been not good since mom died. And lately people say you don't answer the phone or the door. What's going on? And don't tell me it's in my head. What did I do to you? *(Realization)* The ring. Mom's ring. This is about mom's ring. No. No. Dad, when you gave me that ring, you said, if you ever get into a tight spot and have to sell it, that's ok. You gave me the papers it came with! *(Stops herself)* You cannot be mad at me for this. I know it was an heirloom. I offered to let you keep that ring twice. And you said no both times. Do you think that was fun for me? Do you think I wanted to do it? I had to pay for George's treatment.

*(Gathers herself)* I didn't do it to upset you or to spite you- and I understand that you're angry. I'm sorry, dad. *(Baffled)* Dad? Dad? Walter!

Okay. See you around, Walter. *(Leaves, comes back)* Am I not an heirloom?

*Lights change*

**Board transition: The board is wiped clean to start a new month of dogs. April Adoptions becomes May Adoptions. Date is 5/3. Kingston's weight is now 45lbs. WILKE is added to A/F, and SPIKE is added to Newbies.**

\*Sc13

*The shelter lobby, afternoon. May 3rd. Busy as usual. MOLLY MATTIE opens the mail*

MOLLY MATTIE

Tessa! C'mere! *(Tessa enters from the back)* Look- the couple that adopted Cinnamon? They sent an update.

TESSA

I love updates! She looks so happy! I love it- put it on the board. *(MOLLY goes over to a big corkboard which has letters and photos from dogs' adoptive families. She tacks it to the board)*

MOLLY MATTIE

I love happy endings. *(Bill enters. It is not his usual non-stop visit)*

BILL

Hi Tessa.

TESSA

Hi Val. Oh! You need the keys for Harkness.

BILL

Yes, but that's not why I'm here. *(He takes off his cap)* I uh- I'd like to make it official. *(TESSA grins)* I'd like to adopt Gracie.

TESSA

*(She is very happy, comes out to hug her)* Yes! Congratulations. *(She writes GRACIE under A/F)*

VAL

Gracie- she uh, she's awfully friendly with that little dog.

TESSA

Pax.

BILL

Pax. You think Gracie'll be sad when we take her home?

TESSA

I think she'll be very happy when you take her home. *(Helping him along)* I think Pax might be sad. I think he'll miss her. *(He nods, taking this in)*

BILL

Tessa. I'd like to adopt Pax, too. *(TESSA adds PAX to A/F)*

TESSA

You think your wife will be ok with that?

BILL

I bought her a car.

TESSA

You want to take them tonight? Tomorrow?

BILL

Tonight.

TESSA

I'll get you all set.

BILL

Big day tomorrow-

TESSA

Yeah, for both of us. Thank you for helping.

BILL

I hope you adopt 'em all out.

TESSA

So do I. *(BILL heads back to the kennel. The phone rings, TESSA answers)* One Paw, Two Paw. Hi Julie. Goddammit. Alright. I know. Ok, thanks for letting us know. Me too. Bye. *(Hangs up)* We lost the parvo puppies.

MOLLY MATTIE

All of them? *(TESSA nods)* Poor things.

TESSA

Yeah. Ok. Well- we've got six vacancies. That's good.

MOLLY MATTIE

Yeah. I'll get the vans ready for tomorrow.

TESSA

Great. Let's make sure to take adults and seniors, no puppies this time. Finn, Brody, Willie Nelson, Frankie.

MOLLY MATTIE

*(She is texting someone)* It's the parking lot at Pitchford's- *(Explaining)* my aunt and uncle are coming tomorrow, I think.

TESSA

They're getting a dog?

MOLLY MATTIE

I think so. They keep talking about empty nest syndrome. *(GWEN walks in)* Hi Aunt Gwen!

GWEN

Hi sweetie.

MOLLY MATTIE

You're here! Where's Uncle B?

GWEN

He's helping the guys load the vans. Hi Tessa.

TESSA

Hey Gwen, nice to see you. How are you? A very loud little bird told me you're thinking about a dog.

MOLLY MATTIE

Ohmigod! I'm gonna show Frankie to Uncle B. *(She dashes outside)*

GWEN

We are.

TESSA

I think Molly will choose well for you.

GWEN

She adores you, you know.

TESSA

I'm sorry. I keep telling her to aim higher.

GWEN

Tessa. I don't- *(She finds the words)* thank you. Thank you for helping with Molly.

TESSA

Gwen, Molly is like my kid sister. I would be lost without her. So thank *you*. *(MOLLY bursts back in)*

MOLLY MATTIE

Aunt G! You have to meet Frankie! And tonight you can sleep on it and then when you come tomorrow you'll totally want to take her home! (You'll see. It works every time).

GWEN

She's hard to say no to.

TESSA

*(Takes off her Davis sweatshirt)* Mol, this is for you, and I'm going to go get Pax and Gracie ready for Bill. He's adopting them. *(She exits)*

MOLLY MATTIE

Ohmigod!

GWEN

Put it on! Ohmigod. *(BILL enters)*

BILL

Gwen!

MOLLY MATTIE

Bill! You're taking the dogs!! You're adopting Gracie!

BILL

I am. Gwen, I'm meeting the Aaron Bros. tomorrow morning at Harkness. They're donating the lumber and materials. We're gonna start on the construction around 8am. Can you still be available to run errands for us?

GWEN

Oh yeah- I'm all set, and I'll take care of lunch, too. When should we plan to paint?

MOLLY MATTIE

We got the 4-H to paint.

BILL

Terrific. Give it a few days, there's going to be a lot of sawdust and stuff floating around, so maybe mid-week. Sound good?

GWEN

Sounds great. I was thinking about putting planters out front; window boxes, and...you're pouring the walk last? *(BILL nods)* I've got some great old mosaic pots we can line the walk with.

BILL

I think she'd love that. *(He begins to talk about his plans for the place as the lights fade)* So, we're

going to create an open plan for the lobby-

*Lights change*

*\*Sc14*

*TESSA and WILL are at his place. It is late. They are asleep. TESSA'S phone rings. And rings. And rings. She rolls over into WILL, who wraps his arm around her. Her phone rings again. WILL hears it, leans over her, and picks it up)*

WILL

Tessa. *(Rousing her)* Tessa. It's Molly.

TESSA

What?

WILL

Molly just called. *(Looks at phone)* She's called four times. You have ten missed calls.

TESSA

*(Fully awake now)* What? Is she ok? Was there an accident? *(WILL'S phone rings, and there's a banging on the door)*

WILL

*(Answering phone)* Hello? Molly? Are you ok? What? She's here with me- where are you? Wait- there's someone at the door. *(He exits. TESSA has begun to listen to her messages. WILL comes back. The following is somber and careful)* Tessa. Nick's here. There's been a fire.

TESSA

*(She goes very still)* Where.

WILL

At the shelter. *(Stops her)* No- wait. Nick- *(Calling for him)* Nick?

TESSA

Nick? *(NICK fills the doorway. He is in plainclothes but with badge and gun visible)*

NICK

Tessie. Sit down? *(She shakes her head. He sits her down and kneels in front of her)* There was a fire at the shelter, Tessa.

TESSA

Is it bad?

NICK

Yes honey. It was bad.

TESSA

Is it out?

NICK

Yes.

TESSA

Can I go down there? I have to go down there- I have to find- I'll just take them to my place, I'll bring them all to my house, and-

NICK

Tessa. *(He shakes his head)* - It burned to the ground, Tessie.

TESSA

So- I've got to get the dogs-

NICK

*(Shakes his head)* There's nothing, Tessa. There's nothing left.

TESSA

George-

WILL

George is here, Tessa. He's in the garage with Rhett Butler.

NICK

*(He catches her as her legs buckle)* Tessa. Listen to me. I'm going to drive you down to the shelter, and Will's going to follow us, ok?

TESSA

I don't- how-

WILL

Honey. They think Randy Warren set the fire. Nick's got him at the jail now.

TESSA

Take me to the shelter right now. *(Leaves)*

NICK

*(To WILL)* I promise you, Randy will be not be able to walk tomorrow.

*Lights change*

*\*Sc15*

*Bare stage. It is early morning. BILL is front and center, ostensibly in front of the new place on Harkness. He is there to send everyone home, all while fielding phone calls.*

BILL

*(He addresses the audience as his workers)* I know you've all heard about what happened last night, and I know you got up early to be here, and I thank you for doing that. I know Tessa would appreciate it, but there's no building today, guys. Go on home. *(Answers phone)* Hi Dan. I know. We're not moving on this today. Thanks. *(As soon as he hangs up it rings again)* Mike, hi. You heard. Yeah. Just hold off on delivery. Ok. I'll tell her. *(WILL enters)* Hey. How is she?

WILL

*(He shakes his head)* Have you seen her?

BILL

No- is she ok? I thought she was with you.

WILL

I can't find her. She was at the shelter with Nick and me around 1am, and now she's gone. *(His phone rings)* It's my dad. If you see her, please call me.

BILL

I will.

*Lights change*

*\*Sc16*

*Two days later. TESSA has a shovel, a small pile of black garbage bags, which she is carrying to the back one by one. She is filthy. She says nothing in this scene)*

WILL

Tessa. I've been looking for you for two days. *(She keeps working)* I'm so sorry Tessa. I'm so sorry. Tessa. Let me take you home. *(She takes a bag to the back)* Honey- *(Fully takes in the situation)* what are you doing? *(He goes to look. She doesn't stop him)* Are you allowed to do this? How did you get them-*(Gets it)* I'll help you. *(She stops him)* Tessa. Honey, let me help you. *(She continues her task, focused on this and this alone. Helpless, he watches)*

*Lights change*

*\*Sc. 17*

*October. MOLLY MATTIE stands alone onstage. She wears the Davis sweatshirt.*

MOLLY MATTIE

The dorms are pretty cool, and one of the girls comes from like, an almond dynasty, and she only wants to study animals, but she gets a check for like \$250,000 grand EVERY YEAR from like almond residuals or something, and she doesn't even DO anything, it's her family's farm and she doesn't even want the money.

I wonder what that's like.

I'm doing organic chemistry and it's really boring. I'm good at it but OHHHHmygod. Next semester I get to start animal science and I'm so mad at you. I'm so fucking mad at you.

*(Deliberate)* Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck fuck!

I had my first kiss and I can't even tell you about it and you SUCK. You suck.

And. He's not a Blaine. He's a Ducky. He's kind of nerdy but he's really cute and he's got these big glasses and. I didn't know they could kiss like that. It's like at the end of Bridget Jones, where Bridget says to Mark Darcy (he's her **Mr.** Darcy), she says, 'wait a minute, nice boys don't kiss like that,' and he says, 'oh yes they effing do.' And they do! Where your stomach flips and you get all goosebumpy and kinda shivery?

I know you paid my first year tuition. Aunt G and Uncle B don't talk about it, but Aunt G cries whenever I bring it up, but it's kind of a sad/happy cry, you know? I think you're up north in Trinidad but no one really knows. I think Aunt G might know.

And um, Bill's adopted three more dogs, THREE, his wife is so mad - because people keep bringing dogs to the new place on Harkness even though there's nothing going on, there's nothing inside except a table and chairs, and Bill won't let anyone touch it because everyone's waiting for you to come back but I don't think you're coming back.

That awful lady, remember, that snotty one who had like the gang of kids- she does classes at Harkness- Bill said it's ok- she does crafting classes in the "lobby." Like making clothes for dogs. It's stupid, but it's kinda nice, because a lot of the senior citizens go, the ones who walked our dogs, and she's always got this little dog with her- it's Lulu! You remember Lulu, the little Yorkie/ Doxie mix, she looked funny but she was really sweet? And she puts her in tutus and makes her like rhinestone hoodies and....she's a lot nicer now.

OH. OHMIGOD- Starbucks- sorry- that-which-shall-not-be-named- is GOING OUT OF BUSINESS. Uncle B says they're hemorrhaging money. I really like that word, hemorrhage. First, no one in town will work for them and Bill- Bill and his friends, they sit in front of it every morning and they're scary. They sit in the parking lot and it's all his old construction buddies and a lot of them are Navy vets- and it's like this gang of old retired guys and if someone parks and starts to go in, they call 'em a scab, and I think that's a union thing and they're not a union but it's the principle and it's so cool.

The Bear Claw is booming.

I miss George.

I put your mail on the table.

I need someone to tell me what happens next if me and Ducky fall in love.

*Lights change*

*\*Sc18*

*November. Outdoors. A cabin in the woods. The faint sound of the ocean can be heard. TESSA comes around from the side with firewood in her arms. WILL is there. She is not expecting him. The first part of this scene should have space and room for uncertainty.*

WILL

Tessa. *(She says nothing)* It's nice here.

TESSA

Will.

WILL

*(He gestures to the firewood)* Do you need help with that? *(Still thrown, TESSA brushes him off with an 'uh uh,' and takes the firewood into the cabin, leaving WILL on his own. Unsure, he starts to follow her, then changes his mind. It is very awkward. TESSA returns a moment later. She closes the door behind her and walks down the porch steps and waits)* It's pretty. It's quiet. I bet you get a lot of wildlife. You practicing?

TESSA

No.

WILL

This is like the cabin we stayed in after graduation.

TESSA

I forgot about that.

WILL

You're what, like 10 miles from town? Oh, you can hear the ocean. That's nice. It's loud. The ocean's always loud. But I bet it's nice and quiet here.

TESSA

Usually. *(Beat)*

WILL

So look, uh. You know know why I'm here.

TESSA

No.

WILL

Well you don't have a phone. You claim not to have a phone. *(She doesn't respond)* You really forgot about the week we spent in the redwoods. *(She doesn't answer. TESSA hears a dog bark. It is not George)* Hank. That's Hank. *(TESSA is confused)* I've been taking care of Hank since the heart attack. You did know it was a heart attack. *(She nods)* The service was nice. The VA did a really nice job. It was pretty full. Lot of people. We thought you'd have. Come. *(She stays silent)* To- *(She simply looks at him)* To see your-

TESSA

My what? I don't know why you're here, but I'm not interested, Will. Whatever it is.

WILL

Molly misses you. She has lunch in my office with me whenever she's home on break. She started a movie night in the lobby of her dorm. It's called, 'What Would Molly Do?' It's a play on their names, hers and Molly Ringwa- *(TESSA is way ahead of him)* And uh, they drink mocktails. She's lost without you.

TESSA

She'll be fine.

WILL

Did you know Bill turned Harkness into a makeshift shelter? His wife is threatening to divorce him.

TESSA

Bill's wife is not going to divorce him.

WILL

Who do you think her lawyer is? *(Beat)*

TESSA

No. No, you do not get to come here and Atticus Finch me.

WILL

You abandoned your community.

TESSA

Fuck you.

WILL

You're not the only one who lost something, Tessa.

TESSA

You don't know shit about loss.

WILL

I lost you. *(Beat)* What you went through is devastating. I don't know if someone can ever fully recover from something like this. But it's always all about you and your pain and you know, I'm actually just here to do my job, so if you can take a break from your self-imposed tower of exile, I can leave sooner rather than later. *(Beat)* Your dad- *(Looks at her. In deference)* Walter- came in three months ago and amended his will.

TESSA

I don't/care-

WILL

GODDAMMIT. His financial assets are valued at 8 million. This does not include the house, plus the 30 acres of land. Two trucks. The barn. You were set to inherit half of 1%. The trust is 50K. *(TESSA breaks in)*

TESSA

We spent seven days at that cabin. It was right before you went back for law school and I went to vet school.

It had that red rug, that we-

I always wanted one of those big Turkish rugs with the tassels, that you can walk barefoot on. I told you we'd put one in every room of our house. Even the hallways would have runners. In reds, and blues. I love it when they get threadbare. That's the best. It was August but it was really cold because we were on the coast near Trinidad, and I wore your Stanford sweatshirt all week because I couldn't get warm. And there was that wedding ring quilt on the bed. We made coffee in that tarnished old moka pot on the stove every morning, and drank it on the deck. You were barefoot and in a t-shirt because you're a boy, and you made a fire every night. I love the smell of the redwoods in the afternoon.

And I know my dad cut me out of the will. I know he froze the trust and it's ok, Will. I don't care. If that's it, I need you to go. *(He watches her a moment)*

WILL

Your dad left everything to Hank. *(She laughs. It is absurd)*

TESSA

Drive safe, Will. *(She whistles for George, turns away to go into cabin)*

WILL

Tessa. Your dad left Hank to you.

*(Beat 1.2.3. She turns)*

***Blackout***