

Main Drag

By

Ryan Thorsen

thorsen.ryan@gmail.com
952-486-1646

FADE IN:

New York City skyline.

The multitude of lights and skyscrapers are set in stark contrast against the night sky.

INT. 69 CLUB, DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

A hive of activity as a gaggle of drag queens mill around in various states of undress, getting ready. The music bumping from onstage reverberates through the cramped quarters.

Drag queen STELLA DAZE (30's) appears in front of a vanity mirror, throwing her head back as she dons a perfectly styled wig.

Stella is slender with angular features. Her big, soulful eyes betray a hint of sadness.

She readjusts her shimmering dress and touches up her makeup.

A bigger queen, JANICE (30's), bumps into Stella causing her to smear.

STELLA

I don't know how you manage to bump
into my station every night, Janice.

JANICE

Sorry, honey.

Janice struggles to pull a cincher around her ample bosom.

Stella watches her grapple with it. She snatches the cincher from Janice.

STELLA

Here, gimme that fucking thing.

Stella wraps the cincher around Janice's chest, pulling it tight.

STELLA

How's that?

JANICE

(strained)
Perfect. So long as I don't breathe.

STELLA

That's how it's supposed to feel.

JANICE

Thank you, baby.

Janice strikes a pose in a mirror and shakes her hips.

JANICE

Ooh, these hips are working overtime
tonight, bitches!

The other queens respond with "woos", and "ow-ows".

The music onstage ends. Applause from the crowd.

Ray's voice is heard over the speakers.

RAY (O.S.)

Give it up once more for Daisy DeVine!

More claps and cheers.

RAY (O.S.)

Now, don't anyone go anywhere, cuz we
still got a whole lotta show left for
you tonight.

DAISY (30's) rushes into the dressing room wearing a skirt
resembling giant daisy petals. She quickly changes into a
different outfit.

The club owner, RAY (40's), is right behind her.

Ray is fit and well-groomed. He sports an expensive-looking
suit and gaudy jewelry. He checks his coiffed hair in a
mirror.

JANICE

Uh-oh, a rooster in the henhouse.

The girls squeal with delight.

RAY

I like men.

The girls laugh. One throws a pair of stockings at him.

Stella completely ignores Ray and continues to primp.

RAY
(to Stella)
Five minutes. You sober yet?

Stella flips him off.

RAY
I'll take that as a yes.

Ray saunters back out of the dressing room.

Stella inserts her padding--artificial breasts, hips, and buttocks--into her outfit.

She takes an unmarked PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE from the vanity drawer and shakes out two pills, washing them down with a pull from a hip flask.

Looking into the mirror, she forces a smile.

INT. 69 CLUB, STAGE - NIGHT

Faded prints of famous drag queens cover the cracked walls of the tiny club. A busted neon sign hangs above the bar:
"SIXTY-NINE CLUB, SERVING YOU SINCE '69."

The scuffed up stage is circled by a small crowd of twenty, or so people.

Stella waits behind a curtain to go on as Janice performs. Janice sweats bullets under the stage lights as she dances.

Stella steals a glance at the small audience through a slit in the velour. She sighs.

Janice finishes her number and prances offstage. She brushes past Stella on her way back to the dressing room.

JANICE
Those lights are burning my ass up.

Ray comes onstage and speaks into the microphone.

RAY
Let's hear it for Janice Luxe!

Applause and whistles from the crowd.

RAY
Now, you've been a great crowd
tonight, but I want you to really give
(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)
it up this time for the 69 Club's very
own, the glamorous Stella Daze!

The stage lights fade to black.

Stella's music booms over the speakers, and the stage is flooded with light as she bursts onstage.

A boisterous round of applause from the small crowd.

Stella performs her choreography and lip syncs to the lyrics as though she's done it a thousand times. She sports her practiced, plastered-on smile.

Several people in the crowd hold dollar bills. She snatches them, giving each patron a peck on the cheek.

Stella tears off her dress to reveal a studded, shimmering set of bra and panties and drops to the floor in the splits.

More cheering as she gets back to her feet, hiding a grimace.

The song ends. Stella blows kisses to the patrons as she walks back down the catwalk and offstage.

The stage is swallowed up in darkness as the lights and music fade out.

INT. 69 CLUB, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Stella's phony smile vanishes as she ducks back through the curtain. She slips her hip flask out from her garter and takes a swig.

INT. 69 CLUB, DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Stella sits in front of her vanity, counting her meager tips. She listens to music on her phone as she nurses a cocktail.

The dressing room is less crowded now. A young queen, MIMI (20's), sits across from Stella prepping herself.

Stella catches Mimi's reflection in her mirror and sneers. Mimi blows her a facetious kiss.

Ray appears behind Stella in her mirror, startling her. She throws her headphones down.

STELLA
Don't you ever fucking knock?

RAY

There isn't even a door.

Ray pulls up a chair next to her.

RAY

You okay?

Stella keeps counting her tips.

STELLA

Livin' the dream.

Stella takes a sip from her drink.

STELLA (CONT.)

I can't do the splits anymore. It's killing me.

MIMI

Wouldn't want you to prolapse, ya ancient bitch.

STELLA

Fuck you.

Stella slams her wad of cash down on the table.

STELLA

(to Ray)

When are you going to let me sing?

Ray stands.

RAY

No one wants to hear your re-arrangement of Ethel Merman's greatest hits. What year do you think it is?

STELLA

I asked you for one thing.

Ray clinks her cocktail glass with his finger.

RAY

It's not exactly subtle, Stella. I can smell it on you the second you walk through the door.

STELLA

You think any of them notice?

The argument has drawn the attention of the rest of the queens still hanging out in the dressing room.

STELLA
(to the other queens)
Everybody getting this so far?

The other queens roll their eyes, cluck their tongues, and pretend to not pay attention.

RAY
I'm not gonna have some tanked up
queen singing show tunes in my club.

STELLA
Just some tanked up queen?

Ray sighs and takes a step back, regathering himself.

RAY
How would you feel about doing an
interview tonight after the show?

STELLA
What?

RAY
This local reporter. He wants to do a
piece about New York drag culture for
his travel blog, or some shit. Be a
chance to see your name in print.

MIMI
At least this time it won't be in a
police report.

Stella glares at Mimi.

RAY
I'll give ya twenty bucks.

Stella thinks about it. She sighs and nods her head.

RAY
He'll be waiting for you at the bar.
Mimi, on in five to close it out.

MIMI
Thanks, honey.

Ray smiles at Mimi and saunters out of the dressing room.

STELLA

(to Mimi)

You're a real cunt, you know that?

MIMI

Sticks and stones, bitch. Not my fault
you lost your passion.

STELLA

How long have you been doing this,
princess?

MIMI

Seven months.

STELLA

Talk to me in seventeen years. We'll
see how passionate you still are.

Mimi ignores her and heads for the stage. Stella blocks her path.

STELLA (CONT.)

You think you know who you are, but
you have no idea.

MIMI

You're in my way.

Mimi scoots around Stella and out of the dressing room.
Stella follows her with eyes like daggers.

INT. 69 CLUB, BAR - NIGHT

Stella sits at the bar, still in drag. Yet another cocktail
in front of her.

Next to her is a handsome young REPORTER (30's). He wears
glitter-covered everything.

Stella undresses him with her eyes as he hits record on his
phone.

REPORTER

Stella Daze. Is that your real name?

STELLA

What, you don't like it?

REPORTER

It's just that most queens I've talked
(MORE)

REPORTER (CONT'D)
to go by their real name when they--

STELLA
I'm not most queens.

The reporter gestures to her outfit.

REPORTER
And you still wear drag when you're
not performing?

STELLA
Thought I'd paint you a full picture.

Stella tugs on a small press tag hanging from his lapel.

REPORTER
That's my press tag.

STELLA
Okay, Cronkite.

The reporter tries to side-step the comment.

REPORTER
So, uh... you've been performing at
the 69 Club for almost twelve years
now? I guess that makes you a fixture
here.

STELLA
Like a light socket.

REPORTER
Have you ever thought about moving on?
Bigger venues, bigger crowds?

STELLA
What kind of fag rag are you gonna run
this in?

REPORTER
(taken aback)
I'm sorry?

STELLA
Just curious.

REPORTER
Uh, our magazine is called "The
(MORE)

REPORTER (CONT'D)
Rainbow Connection."

STELLA
(stone-faced)
Cute.

The reporter squirms in his chair.

STELLA
No, I'm not going anywhere. I mean,
how could I leave all this?

The club is dark, dank, and not even big enough to fit a hundred people.

REPORTER
Is this always what you wanted to do?
Drag, I mean.

Stella reflects.

STELLA
I wanted to be the next Liza Minnelli,
or Barbra Streisand.

REPORTER
Who?

STELLA
You're gonna get your card revoked for
that one.

An uncomfortable laugh from the reporter.

REPORTER
So, you're a singer?

STELLA
You're just touching on all the nerves
tonight, aren't you sweetie.

The reporter clears his throat. He fumbles with his phone, trying to get back on track.

REPORTER
Well, what made you come here?

Stella glances at Ray, closing out the bar till.

STELLA

Let me give you some advice, never
shack up with your boss.

REPORTER

(following her gaze)

Oh...

STELLA

He saw me on a street corner and
thought I made a pretty woman. So, he
gave me a job. Beats turning tricks, I
suppose.

REPORTER

You were a, uh--

STELLA

I don't like labels.

The reporter tries to avoid her stare.

STELLA (CONT.)

Ray took me in. You'd never know it,
but he used to be kind.

REPORTER

I'm sorry, I--

STELLA

And here I am, all those years and
false eyelashes later. Still squeezing
my fake titties together for wrinkled
singles.

REPORTER

Why stay here?

STELLA

Where else would I go?

She glances at Ray again. Her eyes linger on him.

REPORTER

Well, I think that's all I need--

STELLA

Great. So, wanna fuck?

REPORTER

Huh?

STELLA

You're right. I suppose I should at least get your name first.

REPORTER

Uh, it's Matthew.

STELLA

Don't worry Matthew, I'll be discreet.

Stella reaches out and touches his knee. Matthew jumps, banging his knee against the bar.

REPORTER

I, uh, I have a deadline.

Matthew hastily grabs his belongings, and makes a beeline for the door.

STELLA

Shit.

Stella downs the rest of her drink.

Ray makes his way over.

RAY

It only took you five minutes to scare him off. New record?

STELLA

I seem to have that effect on men.

She opens her phone and starts idly trolling through Grindr.

RAY

Why are you determined to be miserable?

STELLA

Have you seen this place?

RAY

You know I need you here, right? You bring in more than any of the other performers.

STELLA

Gee, Ray. I didn't know ya cared.

RAY

What do you want me to say?

STELLA

I used to mean more than receipts to you.

Ray shakes his head.

RAY

I can't do this with you. I don't have the energy to have this conversation for the thousandth fucking time.

STELLA

When can I sing? Just give me that and I'll leave you alone.

Ray scoffs.

RAY

Poor Stella. Still thinks she's going to be the queen of Broadway.

He saunters off, leaving Stella alone at the bar. As soon as he's gone Stella reaches over the bar and grabs a liquor bottle from the top rack.

EXT. STELLA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A crumbling brownstone in the middle of the Village.

INT. STELLA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The tiny square room is barely big enough to fit a bed.

The walls are festooned with ornate collages of gay icons-- Cher, Streisand, Garland, Minelli--all meticulously cut out and pieced together from magazines.

Stella sits in front of her vanity in a dressing gown, out of drag now. Pieces of her wardrobe are littered on the floor.

A lit cigarette dangles from her mouth as she scrolls through images of fashion models on her phone.

Stella holds the screen up to her face in front of the mirror, pursing her lips and arching her eyebrows like the model in the image.

A frown spreads across her face as she looks at herself in

the mirror. Wrinkles here and there. Eyes weary, careworn.

The liquor bottle she swiped from the bar sits on the tabletop. She takes a healthy swig from it.

An old PHOTO of Stella and Ray is lodged in the corner of the mirror. They lie on their backs in the grass.

Stella plucks it from the mirror, and stares at it. It slips from her fingers and falls to the floor.

She takes another drag and puts out her cigarette.

Matthew's reflection pops up in the mirror. He sits, half-naked, in Stella's bed.

REPORTER

You gonna come back to bed?

STELLA

Are you still here?

INT. STELLA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Stella sleeps, still wearing her dressing gown. Matthew lies next to her in the bed. Her PHONE sits on a nightstand next to the bed. The time on the display reads 11:45 am.

It rings. Stella ignores it and rolls over. A few seconds later, it rings again. Stella groans and reaches for it. She knocks the phone off the stand and onto the floor.

STELLA

Shit.

Feeling around for it on the floor, Stella loses her balance and tumbles to the floor after it. She grabs the phone and looks at the screen, it's Ray.

STELLA

(answering)

Why the fuck would you call me this early?

RAY (V.O./FILTERED)

It's almost noon. In what universe is that early?

STELLA

What do you want?

RAY (V.O./FILTERED)
I need you to come in tonight. Mimi
twisted her ankle last night.

STELLA
Goody.

RAY (V.O./FILTERED)
Can you do it?

STELLA
It's my day off.

RAY (V.O./FILTERED)
I didn't wanna ask.

STELLA
Time and a half.

RAY (V.O./FILTERED)
Fine. Just be here by ten.

STELLA
Eat me.

Stella hangs up. She leans against the bed and massages her
temples. She groans.

The phone rings again. Stella fumes.

STELLA
Motherfucker.

But this time it's a number she doesn't recognize. She almost
declines it, but at the last second answers.

STELLA
Hello?

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)
Jeffrey? Jeffrey, it's me.

STELLA
Who is this?

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)
It's Claudia.

STELLA
Who?

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)
Your sister.

Stella sits in stunned silence.

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)
Hello? Hello, Jeffrey?

STELLA
Why are you calling me?

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)
Jeffrey. I, uh, I have something to
tell you...

STELLA
What?

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)
It's Mom, Jeffrey. She's dead. She
died three days ago.

Stella doesn't respond.

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)
Jeffrey?

STELLA
I'm here.

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)
It was her heart. There was nothing
anyone could've done. Uh, can you meet
me downtown this afternoon? I'm
meeting with a lawyer. I really think
you should be there.

Stella can barely muster a reply.

STELLA
Yeah...Okay.

She hangs up. Her hands tremble. She falls to the floor and
tucks her knees to her chest.

Matthew stirs and rises from the bed, oblivious to what has
just happened.

MATTHEW
Should I make eggs?

STELLA
Get the fuck out.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

Stella sits in front of a desk in an office decorated with mounted fish and framed diplomas. A huge pair of Versace sunglasses hides her face.

Seated next to her is her older sister, CLAUDIA (40's). She wears a pantsuit and faux diamond rings.

A copy of Claudia's latest book, "Being the Best You" sits on the desk. Stella glances at it and shakes her head.

A LAWYER (40's-50's) with slicked back hair breezes into the room. He sits across from the pair at the desk.

LAWYER
Thank you both for coming in. I'm terribly sorry for your loss. These things are never easy. There are a great many things that need to be taken care of...

He shuffles papers around on his desk.

LAWYER
Were you hoping to have a service of some kind?

CLAUDIA
Um...She was very reclusive.

LAWYER
I see.

He continues to rummage around on his desk.

LAWYER
I'm sorry. I thought I had it. Will you excuse me?

He walks back out, leaving Stella and Claudia alone again. Claudia casts a sidelong glance at Stella.

CLAUDIA
It's funny. You live in the same place as someone, but you never see them.

STELLA

Well, it certainly doesn't pay as well as peddling psycho-babble.

CLAUDIA

You should read it. It could help you, too.

STELLA

What'd it take you, a three day weekend to write this thing? You know what, I will take it. I could use a laugh.

Stella slips the book into her bag.

The room falls silent.

CLAUDIA

It's good to see you, anyway. Mom would've liked to see us together.

STELLA

I'm sure she'd be weeping with joy.

CLAUDIA

You were her favorite, Jeffrey.

Stella's lip trembles, but she doesn't acknowledge her.

The lawyer returns with the missing file in hand.

INT. CREMATORIUM - DAY

The harsh fluorescent lighting casts a bleak pall on a plain ceramic URN sitting on a metal tabletop.

Stella and Claudia stand in front of the table, staring at it.

CLAUDIA

Not even a funeral. What kind of person am I?

STELLA

Who would've come?

CLAUDIA

I suppose we should at least say something.

STELLA

Go for it.

Not being able to think of anything else, Claudia bows her head and begins reciting the Lord's Prayer.

CLAUDIA

"Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come, thy will be done, on Earth as it
is in Heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread..."

As Claudia speaks, Stella stands with her arms folded, staring at the urn.

CLAUDIA (CONT.)

...For thine is the Kingdom, and the
power, and the glory, forever and
ever. Amen."

Claudia picks up the urn and cradles it in her arms.

STELLA

I'd like to say she would've wanted it
this way, but...

CLAUDIA

(tearing up)
Yeah.

STELLA

You okay?

Claudia nods.

EXT. CREMATORIUM - DAY

Stella and Claudia stand on the steps outside the crematorium. The din of New York City Traffic surrounds them.

Claudia's phone chimes and she hands the urn to Stella.

CLAUDIA

Thanks. My arms were killing me.

She glances at her phone.

CLAUDIA (CONT.)

I'm running late. I hope the next time
I see you, it'll be under better

(MORE)

CLAUDIA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
 circumstances.

STELLA
 Me too. You're a real ugly crier.

They share a muted chuckle.

They embrace, awkwardly at first, then more comfortably as they wrap their arms around one another.

Claudia walks to the curb to hail a cab, but then stops.

She turns back toward Stella who is already walking down the block in the opposite direction.

CLAUDIA
 Jeffrey, wait!

Stella stops.

STELLA
 What?

CLAUDIA
 I need to tell you something.

STELLA
 Christ. You're killing me.

Claudia tries to find the right words.

CLAUDIA
 Promise you won't be mad.

STELLA
 Never.

CLAUDIA
 I, I wouldn't say it if it weren't important, I just want you to know that I don't mean to--

STELLA
 Spit it the fuck out!

CLAUDIA
 It's about Dad.

Stella seizes up, her whole body tense.

STELLA
 What about him?

CLAUDIA

I tried to call him the other night, after Mom died. The last number I had for him, anyway. It was disconnected. I called the phone company, and they said they had no record of him. Lord knows he doesn't have a cell phone or a computer...I'm worried about him.

STELLA

Why?

CLAUDIA

I have no idea where he is. I think something might've happened to him.

STELLA

You say that like it's a bad thing.

CLAUDIA

Please don't joke.

STELLA

Who's joking?

CLAUDIA

You know he's had health problems.

STELLA

I don't care.

CLAUDIA

We need to find him, Jeffrey. He's the only family we have left now.

STELLA

That man is not my family!

CLAUDIA

He deserves to know about Mom. They were married for years, someone has to tell him.

STELLA

So figure it out.

Stella turns to walk away again.

CLAUDIA

I have a book tour.

Stella's face flushes red.

STELLA

You can't be serious.

CLAUDIA
 You can't keep running away from him
 for the rest of your life.

STELLA
 Watch me.

Stella turns and marches up the street once more.

CLAUDIA
 Jeffrey, please--

STELLA
 Fucking forget it!

Claudia tries desperately to head Stella off, dodging people
 on the sidewalk.

CLAUDIA
 Jeffrey, I know this is hard for you.
 I know how you feel. I grew up with
 him, too--

Stella abruptly halts.

STELLA
 You know how I feel?! He
 never laid a finger on you,
 Claudia. You have no fucking
 idea--

CLAUDIA
 I had to watch our mother
 die!

Claudia openly sobs on the street. She collapses onto
 Stella's chest.

CLAUDIA
 Please, please.

Stella doesn't touch her. She sighs, regaining composure.

STELLA
 Fuck.

CLAUDIA
 Say yes, Jeffrey.

STELLA
 What?

CLAUDIA
 Say yes. I need to hear you
 say it.

A beat.

STELLA
 (barely audible)
 Yes.

CLAUDIA

Thank you.

Claudia's phone chimes again. She hugs Stella one last time. Stella doesn't return the embrace.

Stella watches her sister walk to the curb and hop in a cab.

The taxi pulls away from the curb and merges into traffic.

Stella realizes for the first time that she still has the urn in her hands. She yells after the cab.

STELLA

Hey! What the hell am I supposed to do with this?

But the cab is already lost in a sea of cars.

EXT. 69 CLUB - NIGHT

Stella staggers down the seedy alleyway adjoining the club. Already in drag, she clutches her wig in one hand and a bottle in the other.

She trips as she serpentine through the alley, running headlong into a brick wall.

She falls to the ground and lies there, watching the world spin. Blood trickles from a fresh wound on her forehead.

Her dress is torn and stained as she pulls herself back to her feet, but she doesn't notice.

INT. 69 CLUB - NIGHT

Stella tumbles inside and leans against the stage door, trying to get her bearings.

Wincing, she runs her fingers across the gash on her head.

Ray passes by. Upon seeing Stella, his jaw drops.

RAY

What the hell?

STELLA

I'm here. What more do you want?

Stella pushes him aside and lurches toward the backstage waiting area to go on.

INT. 69 CLUB, STAGE - NIGHT

Stage lights flash and Stella's music plays, but she is nowhere to be seen. People in the audience murmur and shrug.

After about ten seconds, Stella falls through the curtain and lands face down on the stage. She gets to her feet and staggers down the catwalk.

One of her heels breaks. She trips, and her wig flies from her head. She snatches it up from the floor and places it on her head. Backwards.

Stunned silence from the crowd. Some laugh uncomfortably.

BACKSTAGE-

Janice watches Stella fall around onstage, shaking her head.

JANICE

Oh Baby, what are you doing?

Mimi stands next to her, eating it up. She takes out her phone and starts recording.

BACK OF HOUSE-

Ray watches from the back of the audience in dismay. He rushes down to the stage.

ONSTAGE-

Several audience members also have their phones out now, recording Stella drunkenly meandering around the stage.

Stella gets up close and personal with the audience, sipping from their drinks and grabbing articles of clothing.

The patrons stare at her, bewildered.

She throws her broken heel at the audience, shattering a glass. Gasps and angry shouts from the crowd.

Ray jumps onstage and grabs Stella by the arm. Stella wrestles free and takes a swing at him. She misses.

STELLA

I'm trying to work here!

RAY

Off. Now.

BACKSTAGE-

Janice watches horrified, while Mimi laughs.

MIMI

Leave her up there, Ray, she's doing
great!

ONSTAGE-

Stella throws another punch at Ray. This time she connects. The blow is just hard enough to stun Ray and draw a small trickle of blood from his nose.

Out of instinct, Ray strikes back, hitting Stella square in the jaw.

Stella falls to the floor, but this time there is no getting back up. She writhes on the floor, moaning.

She crawls to the lip of the stage, and vomits off the edge.

The music finally stops.

Ray scurries over to Stella. He jerks her up, heaves her over his shoulder, and scurries offstage.

BACKSTAGE-

Ray bumps into Janice and Mimi backstage.

RAY

(to Janice and Mimi)
Get the fuck up there and vamp!

They hurry onstage as Ray keeps walking with Stella slung over his shoulder.

INT. 69 CLUB, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Stella is hunched over a toilet, her wig sitting on the floor behind her. Ray stands at a sink, pinching his bleeding nose.

The toilet flushes. Stella falls back against the stall partition. She sits with her eyes closed, breathing deeply.

The wound on her head has stopped bleeding, but her jaw is swollen and purple.

STELLA
 (slurring)
 Pretty good show, don't you think?

RAY
 Just wait till that shit hits the
 Twittersphere. You'll finally be
 famous.

He stuffs a wad of toilet paper into his nose.

RAY (CONT.)
 What the hell is going on? This is
 bad, even for you.

STELLA
 Just one of those days, I guess.

RAY
 Every day is "one of those days" for
 you, Stella.

He kneels down next to her and inspects her wounds. Stella
 notices the blood from his nose.

STELLA
 I'm sorry I hit you.

RAY
 I got you worse than you got me. Think
 you have a concussion?

STELLA
 I don't know. I'm still pretty drunk.

RAY
 Come on. I guess I'll take you to get
 checked out.

Ray helps her up. He gets her halfway to her feet--

STELLA
 My mom's dead.

--and drops her.

RAY
 What?

She lands back on the floor with a thud.

RAY
Shit! Sorry!

STELLA
Why don't you just shoot me?

RAY
When did this happen?

STELLA
Three days ago.

RAY
Why didn't you tell me?

STELLA
I only found out this morning from my
sister. Great to see her again.

Ray sits beside her.

RAY
Stella, I--I'm so sorry.

STELLA
She asked me to hunt down my father
and tell him about it. And for some
reason, I said yes. I haven't seen the
fucker in seventeen years.

RAY
Jesus.

Stella suddenly perks up.

STELLA
You still have a car, don't you?

Ray rises to his feet.

RAY
Oh, no.

STELLA
You have to come with me.

RAY
Nope!

STELLA
I can't do this alone.

RAY
Why do it at all?

Stella ponders the question.

STELLA
I thought that acting like he didn't
exist would help me move on, or
whatever...

Stella looks down at a series of small circular burn scars on
her inner forearm.

STELLA (CONT.)
...But seventeen years later, I'm
still in the same place.

Ray is at a loss.

RAY
I--Stella...

STELLA
Please. If you do this for me, I'll
never bother you for anything again.
Ever.

Ray sighs.

RAY
Where are we going?

INT. 69 CLUB - NIGHT

Stella sits alone in a booth, well past closing. She still
wears her tattered drag ensemble.

She has her phone glued to her ear as she references a pad of
paper on the table in front of her.

STELLA
No, last name is Sandas...S-A-
N...yeah. Frank...or Francis...I don't
know what his middle name is...Because
I'm an idiot, alright?

She hangs up, and crosses out a name on a long list of
scratched off names. She sighs and move on to the next one.

INT. 69 CLUB - NIGHT

Ray sits slumped in a bar stool nursing a beer, close to nodding off.

He's jolted wide awake as Stella sidles up next to him. She drops the pad of paper on the bar.

STELLA

Des Moines.

RAY

What?

STELLA

That's where we're going. Des Moines, Iowa.

RAY

Jesus Christ.

STELLA

He won't help us. Not where we're going.

RAY

You been there?

STELLA

Born and raised. My backyard was a corn field.

RAY

I never knew you were from Iowa.

STELLA

I don't like to advertise it.

RAY

You found him?

STELLA

Yeah...I think.

RAY

You think?

STELLA

(Looking at her notepad)
There's this senior co-op, or something, called The Clover on the

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)
outskirts of Des Moines. They confirmed they have a Frank Sandas as a resident, but they wouldn't give me anything else. It was the only hit I got. So, either that's him or...

She shrugs as she trails off.

RAY
(sighs)
When do we leave?

STELLA
Tomorrow. Bright and early. Take us a couple days to get there.

RAY
Great.

Ray gets to his feet and shuffles toward the door.

STELLA
Ray?

Ray turns to face her.

STELLA
Thank you.

He gives her a weary half-smile.

STELLA (CONT.)
Now go sleep. You look like shit.

INT. STELLA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Stella lies in bed looking at her phone. She shakes her head as she watches the video Mimi took of her stumbling around onstage. Mimi can be heard in the background cackling.

STELLA
Bitch.

She tosses her phone on the floor and takes a drink from her flask. Her eyes fall on the URN, sitting on the nightstand.

She drains the flask and closes her eyes.

STELLA
Good night, Mom.

INT. STELLA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Stella snores. The clock on her phone, still sitting on the floor, reads 11:00 am.

Stella awakens with a jolt. She scurries over to her phone, and is thrust into panic mode.

STELLA

Shit!

In her haste, she bumps into the nightstand. The urn is thrown off kilter, wobbling, then falling to the floor with a CRASH.

Ceramic shards and ash are scattered everywhere.

STELLA

Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck.

Scanning the surrounding area, she searches for something, anything.

Her eyes fall on an empty NOXZEMA CAN on the floor.

EXT. STELLA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Stella exits her apartment, having finally cleaned herself up. She wears a skimpy top and her sunglasses.

She marches down the sidewalk carrying a suitcase, her handbag, and the NOXZEMA CAN.

EXT. 69 CLUB - DAY

Ray paces back and forth outside the club next to his car, a bucket of bolts from the mid-90's. He glances at his watch every few seconds.

RAY

(sotto)

Bright and early.

Stella rounds the corner, baggage in tow.

RAY

I've been waiting here for three hours.

STELLA

Last second emergency. Nothing
(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

trivial.

Stella loads her belongings into Ray's car. Ray catches sight of the Noxzema can.

RAY

What's that?

STELLA

It's a can.

RAY

What's in it?

STELLA

My mother.

RAY

What?

STELLA

Look, she won't take up a lot of room,
and she doesn't eat much.

RAY

A Noxzema can? I thought I was cheap.

STELLA

Fuck off. It was the best I could do.

Stella regards Ray's car with disgust.

The fenders are rusted, the tires are bald, and a faded "Kerry/Edwards" bumper sticker is plastered on the back.

STELLA

Does this thing run?

RAY

Yeah...I think so.

STELLA

When's the last time you drove it?

He has to think about it.

STELLA

For Christ's sake, just get in.

They both climb into the car.

INT. RAY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The stained, torn up upholstery compliments the car's decrepit exterior.

Ray sits in the driver's seat.

RAY
You ready?

STELLA
I don't know.

A beat.

STELLA (CONT.)
Let's go.

Ray turns the ignition.

EXT. RAY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The CAR nudges out of the parking lot and into the street. It stalls.

RAY
(muffled)
Fuck!

It starts again and lurches forward.

The car merges with traffic as it boards the expressway.

INT. RAY'S CAR - DAY

They whiz past a road sign: THE GARDEN STATE WELCOMES YOU

Stella listens to music on her phone, singing along.

STELLA
(singing)
"Bring a bucket and a mop for this
wet-ass pussy, Give me everything you
got for this wet-ass pussy..."

Ray glares at Stella, clenching the steering wheel.

The music from the headphones stops as Stella's phone dies. She smacks it a couple times. No use.

STELLA

Shit.

She plugs her phone in to the cigarette lighter to charge.

STELLA

(glancing at speedometer)

You drive like old people fuck.

Ray ignores her and keeps his eyes on the road.

STELLA

Wanna play I Spy?

RAY

No.

STELLA

How about the license plate
game?

RAY

No.

Stella pulls a PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE from her bag and pops a couple of pills into her mouth.

RAY

What are those?

STELLA

My own little pharmaceutical cocktail.

RAY

Please don't OD in my car.

STELLA

Relax. I know what I'm doing.

Stella washes the pills down with a pull from a LIQUOR BOTTLE stashed underneath her seat.

RAY

Why the fuck do you do that to
yourself?

STELLA

Alcohol is the anesthetic for the
operation of life. Someone famous said
that.

RAY

What if a cop sees us?

STELLA

(shrugging)

I'm not the one driving.

Stella takes another pull from the bottle. She tries the radio.

RAY
It's busted.

STELLA
Goody.

INT. RAY'S CAR - DAY

Ray still drives while Stella snores in the passenger seat. He smacks her, startling her awake.

STELLA
Ow! What?

RAY
Your snoring. You sound like a wood chipper stuck inside another wood chipper.

Stella rubs her eyes and takes in the surrounding scenery--

Trees, fields, livestock.

Her phone is jury rigged to the dash with a hair clip. The GPS shows that they're almost to the Pennsylvania/Ohio border.

A small mom and pop gas station comes into view by the side of the road.

RAY
We need gas.

Ray slows the car and pulls into the station.

STELLA
You think we could use your phone for a bit? I wanna put some music on.

RAY
No thanks. Anyway, I forgot my phone at the club.

Stella rolls her eyes as Ray hops out of the car.

She looks in the rearview mirror, and sighs at the bags under her eyes. She touches up her face with some concealer.

Rummaging through her bag, she finds her sister's book.

She flips through the pages, landing on a chapter titled "Reconnecting in order to heal."

Ray re-enters the car.

RAY
Light reading?

STELLA
My sister, the "author," wrote it.

RAY
Here. Maybe this'll keep you awake for
a few minutes.

He hands her a coffee cup.

As she takes it from him, Ray again catches a glimpse of the burn marks on her arm. He tries not to stare, but Stella notices.

Ray clears his throat.

RAY
I, uh, don't know how I never noticed
those before.

Stella folds her arms.

STELLA
Yeah.

Ray turns the phone's GPS off.

RAY
You know...we've got time.

Stella looks at him, apprehensive but grateful.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

They sit on the hood of the car. Stella tears pages from her sister's book while Ray crumples them into balls and shoots them at a garbage can next to the gas pump.

Stella points to a scar on her eyebrow.

STELLA
See that one? I was fifteen years old
(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

and I tried wearing makeup to school. He told me to clean it off. When I refused, he held my head under water and scrubbed it off with a pad of steel wool. The last thing I remember before blacking out is him slamming my head against the faucet. Didn't stop me from wearing makeup, but every time he caught me, I got a new scar.

Ray shoots a paper ball at the garbage can. He misses.

A beat.

RAY

Why didn't you ever tell me about any of this? I mean, there are support groups, for Christ's sake.

STELLA

Always seemed like a lot of baggage to unload on someone.

RAY

Since when are you shy about your baggage?

Stella tears the pages from the book until the spine is picked clean.

RAY

What about her?

He points to the PHOTO of Claudia on the dust jacket.

STELLA

He hated me, but he loved her. Didn't beat the shit out of her, anyway. She was older. She knew that it was fucked up, but she didn't do anything about it.

Stella throws the spine of the book at the garbage can.

RAY

Maybe she was scared.

STELLA

She had no reason to be, he never paid attention to her. She got a free pass.

RAY

He didn't love her, Stella. He just didn't care about her.

Stella doesn't respond.

Ray glances through the windshield at the Noxzema can sitting on the backseat.

RAY

What was your mom like?

STELLA

She always wanted another girl. I remember when I was six or seven, she let me wear one of her house dresses. She taught me how to waltz. When Dad saw us, I asked him if I was pretty. He grabbed me by the neck and threw me down the hall. He hit Mom, then disappeared for a couple days. That's pretty much when it started.

RAY

And I thought I hated my father.

Two BURLY MEN in trucker's caps walk past them. They mutter to one another and glare at Stella as they pass by.

STELLA

What the fuck have I gotten myself into?

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

The flashing neon sign of the roadside inn shines through the pouring rain. Ray's car is the only one in the parking lot.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

The peeling wallpaper is covered by taxidermied deer heads. Two twin beds have visible stains on the covers.

Freshly showered, Stella, sits on one of the beds in a bathrobe massaging her feet.

STELLA

Fucking Balenciagas. Do you have any aspirin.

RAY

No.

Ray stands next to the window, eyes glued to his car outside.

STELLA

Would you stop babysitting it?

RAY

I don't trust that fucking rust bucket
in the rain.

Stella opens up a drawer and finds a bible. She wrinkles her nose and closes it again.

STELLA

God, you're tense. Want some head?

She presses her tongue into the side of her mouth, moving her cheek in and out.

Ray shakes his head, dismissing her.

RAY

What the fuck am I doing here? What
about the club? I've never closed the
place for this long before.

STELLA

Okay, your freaking out is freaking me
out.

Stella opens the mini bar and tosses Ray a tiny bottle of booze.

STELLA

Cheers.

They crack the bottles open and drink.

RAY

How're you so relaxed?

Stella watches the rain pitter-patter against the window.

STELLA

Must be the rain.

RAY

I hate the rain.

She looks at her reflection in the glass.

STELLA

As the son of a belligerent dirt farmer, you learned to appreciate it. Rain meant that the crop might grow, and we might eat.

She polishes off the mini bottle of booze.

STELLA (CONT.)

Y'know, it was the only time I ever saw both my parents happy...when it rained. They'd even dance in the rain together. They never knew, but I'd always watch them. Made it seem like things might actually be okay.

She shakes herself from her reverie. She fogs the glass with her breath and draws a little smiley face on the window.

She eyes a giant puddle outside in the parking lot. Her lips curl into a mischievous smile.

Stella darts out of the hotel room.

RAY

Where are you going?

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Stella prances out into the rain, arms outstretched.

She soaks in the drops under the glow of the motel's neon sign.

She opens her mouth, letting a few drops land on her tongue.

Stella splashes in the puddle. Gleeful, like a child.

Ray joins her outside, watching from the safety of the motel awning.

Stella dances in the rain. She's absolutely drenched, and for once, entirely carefree.

INT. RAY'S CAR, MOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

In the driver's seat now, Stella checks herself out in the side mirror. She wears her sunglasses and a white blouse.

Ray opens the passenger door and flops into the seat with a sigh. He pours over a receipt.

RAY

On the way back we're sleeping in the car.

Stella still eyes herself in the mirror.

RAY

(gesturing to her behind the wheel)
Why am I letting you do this?

STELLA

You don't trust me?

Ray stares back at her, deadpan.

STELLA

I'll be careful, I swear.

She puts the car in gear. It lurches backward, throwing Ray forward in his seat.

EXT. RAY'S CAR - DAY

The car careens down the highway, swerving in its lane. It whizzes past rolling, golden cornfields.

A faded ROAD SIGN advertises THE WORLD'S LARGEST CORN MAZE, ANGOLA, INDIANA NEXT RIGHT.

INT. RAY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Stella at the wheel. Ray sits in the passenger seat, clutching the "Jesus handle" above the door.

STELLA

Would you relax? I haven't seen another person for miles.

RAY

I'm not worried about other people,
I'm worried about me.

Ray digs for the bottle of liquor under the seat and takes a swig. Stella grabs it from him and does the same.

RAY

I've been thinking, Stella.

STELLA

Just calm down. I'll handle it. I can eye-fuck my way out of anything.

Stella grabs her makeup kit and gives herself a slapdash makeup job. She throws on a long blonde wig.

STELLA

How do I look?

RAY

Like a man in a wig wearing too much makeup.

A barrel-chested COP (40's) in aviator sunglasses taps on Stella's window. She rolls it down.

The cop takes one look at her and takes an uneasy step back.

COP

Uh, you know why I pulled you over?

Stella puts on her best innocent little girl act. She speaks in a breathy voice and bats her lashes.

STELLA

I'm so sorry, officer. Was I going too fast?

Stella caresses her shoulders, making direct eye contact with the cop.

COP

Limit here is fifty-five. I had you clocked going at--

STELLA

(to Ray)

Oh! Doesn't he look just like that actor from that one TV show? Y'know...the one.

Ray stares at her, slack-jawed and silent.

STELLA

(to cop)

How does such a fine-looking man end up in law enforcement?

The cop hikes up his belt, and spits. He leans in to the open driver window, inches from Stella's face.

COP

I don't know who you think you're dealing with, but I ain't gonna be part of this little freak show you got goin' on here.

STELLA

Excuse me?

COP

License and registration now, sir, ma'am, whatever the hell you are.

Stella drops the act.

STELLA

That's going to be a problem.

COP

Don't move.

The cop saunters back to his patrol car.

RAY

Bravo.

STELLA

Shut up.

RAY

No, really. I thought you had him. Kudos on the eye-fucking.

STELLA

Just act normal.

The cop is back at the window.

COP

(to Stella)

Out of the car.

EXT. RAY'S CAR, SIDE OF THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Stella steps out of the car.

STELLA

Look, I'm sorry about--

The cop grabs Stella, forces her arms behind her back, and plants her face on the hood of the car.

Ray bursts out of the passenger door.

RAY
Hey, what the hell--

In one deft motion, the cop un-holsters his gun and pistol whips Ray across the face.

STELLA
Ray!

Ray falls to the ground with a grunt.

He sits there, dazed, as blood pours from his nose and mouth.

RAY
Fuck...

The cop stands over him, brandishing his gun.

COP
I don't believe I asked you to exit the vehicle. We aren't gonna have a problem now, are we?

Ray frantically shakes his head, eyes wide with fear.

COP
Good.

The cop turns his attention back to Stella. She raises her trembling hands as he plants himself in front of her.

The cop wipes Ray's blood from the barrel of his gun onto Stella's white blouse.

COP
You know what happens to people like you in jail?

He yanks her wig off of her head and throws it on the ground.

Stella swallows hard, too afraid to breathe.

The cop waves his gun in Stella's face, toying with her.

COP (CONT.)
Now, I'm willin' to live and let live...

He moves even closer, nose to nose with Stella. She closes her eyes, choking back tears.

COP (CONT.)
...but I got no use for people like
you.

Ray watches from the ground, helpless.

COP (CONT.)
Tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna
do you a courtesy and give you one
chance to get the hell out of my
sight. But by God, if I see you again,
I can guarantee you that no one else
will ever see you again. You get me?

Stark terrified, Stella can only manage a meek nod.

COP (CONT.)
I'm glad we understand each other.

The cop re-holsters his gun and walks back to his patrol car.

He mockingly tips his hat to Ray, as he passes him.

COP
You take care now.

The patrol car speeds off.

Stella collapses on the shoulder, hyperventilating. She
touches the still-wet blood on her blouse.

INT. RAY'S CAR - DAY

Stella glances in the rearview mirror every few seconds as
she drives. Ray sits in the passenger seat, holding a cold
compress to his face.

They sit in stone silence as they drive down the road.

Ray takes a swig from the bottle of booze.

STELLA
How are you?

He just stares straight ahead.

More silence.

STELLA
Ray, I--I'm...

RAY

Where the fuck do you think we are right now? This isn't New York, Stella. We're in the middle of the God damn heartland, here. These motherfucking guns, and Jesus MAGA motherfuckers don't like people like us, and they aren't afraid to show it.

STELLA

How could I have known that the cop was gonna--

RAY

Because he's a cop!

Ray drinks from the bottle.

RAY

I know how much you just love to put on a show, but do us both a favor and keep it in check, huh?

Stella clenches the steering wheel, blinking back another wave of tears.

RAY

I thought he was gonna kill you.

Stella looks down at her blouse. The blood has dried to a crusted brown.

STELLA

How's your nose?

RAY

Broken...I think.

Ray looks at his face in the rearview mirror. It's a swollen, bloody pulp.

RAY

Fuck me.

Stella hands Ray her sunglasses.

STELLA

Here, put those on.

Ray gives her a small smile and puts the glasses on.

STELLA

See? You're still pretty.

EXT. RAY'S CAR - DAY

The now-familiar surroundings of farmland and silos clip past as the car cruises down the road.

INT. RAY'S CAR - DAY

Stella drives as Ray looks at his wounds in the mirror.

RAY

I think the swelling's going down.

STELLA

Yeah, you look almost normal now.

They both sit and ruminate for a beat.

RAY

What're you gonna do, Stella?

STELLA

What, like, in life?

RAY

With your father. This had better be worth it. What're you gonna say to him?

STELLA

I don't know.

A faint metallic CLANKING SOUND from under the hood of the car.

RAY

You hear that?

STELLA

What?

RAY

Listen.

The clanking sound is heard again. Louder this time.

RAY

What the hell is that?

The clanking grows in intensity and duration until it is constant.

A deafening BOOM erupts from under the hood.

Jets of black smoke funnel out from the engine. Stella and Ray look at each other, panic-stricken and screaming.

RAY
What's happening?

STELLA
I don't know!

RAY
Did we hit something?

STELLA
I don't know!

RAY
What's wrong?

STELLA
I don't know!

Stella loses control of the car. It veers from side to side across the highway.

They both scream in high-pitched squeals as Stella tries desperately to regain control.

She grabs the E-break, and the car screeches to a halt.

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The car eases onto the shoulder. It comes to rest with a thud.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Stella and Ray sit and gawk at the smoke billowing out from the engine.

RAY
I'm never going anywhere with you
again.

EXT. CAR, SIDE OF THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Stella jumps out of the car and stands in front of the hood. Ray joins her. Stella tries to lift the hood. She burns her hand and unleashes a cloud of black, acrid smoke.

STELLA
Dammit!

They hack and wheeze through the smoke.

RAY
It's cooked.

STELLA

Don't you maintain this thing?

RAY

How's this my fault? You
were the one driving.

STELLA

It's your car!

RAY

What now? Do we hitchhike?

STELLA

Hitchhiking? Do you want to be serial
killed?

RAY

What, then?

STELLA

I don't know.

Stella sinks to the ground by the side of car, defeated.

RAY

Triple A?

STELLA

Just stop saying things.

An old green and yellow TRACTOR comes into view about a half
a mile behind them. It rises and falls on the crests and
valleys of the road.

Stella and Ray exchange glances.

They wave their arms in the air and shout as it approaches.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Stella, Ray, and an old FARMER (70's) sit bunched together
atop the tractor as it ambles along the highway. It tows
Ray's still-smoking car behind it.

The farmer sings "Sweet Betsy From Pike" as he steers the
tractor. Stella sings along. Ray sits in silence, pouting.

BOTH

(singing)

"Did you ever hear tell of sweet Betsy
from Pike, who crossed the wide
mountains with her lover Ike. Two yoke
of oxen and an old yeller dog, a tall

(MORE)

BOTH (CONT'D)

Shanghai rooster and a one-spotted hog. Singing too-ra-li-oo-ra-li-oo-ra-li-ay..."

FARMER

I can take you to the next town over. It's no more than a few miles.

The farmer scrutinizes Stella's smeared make-up.

FARMER

Your blending needs work.

She and Ray share a look of utter surprise.

The farmer keeps singing as the tractor rolls down the highway.

FARMER

(singing)

"The Shanghai ran off, and the oxen all died. That morning the last piece of bacon was fried..."

EXT. AUTO BODY SHOP - DAY

A single-car garage next to a rusted filling station. The place looks like it's been frozen in time for decades.

Stella and Ray stand side by side watching a greasy, portly MECHANIC (40's) tinker under the hood of the car.

The mechanic emerges from under the hood, wiping his hands on an oil-soaked rag. He plods over to the pair. He stops dead in his tracks and shamelessly gawks at Stella.

Stella snaps her fingers in front of his face, breaking him out of it.

MECHANIC

Uh...What you got here is a blown head gasket.

Blank stares from Stella and Ray.

MECHANIC

Gonna take a while to fix.

RAY

Great.

STELLA

(to mechanic)

Is there a city nearby? Within walking distance?

MECHANIC

Nearest city is South Bend. About 15 miles away.

RAY

Great. We're stuck here.

(to Stella)

I am going to go drink now.

Ray stomps away.

STELLA

(to mechanic)

It's been a day.

EXT. AUTO BODY SHOP - DAY

Stella stands outside the garage smoking a cigarette. She tries calling Claudia on her phone. She gets her voicemail.

CLAUDIA (V.O./FILTERED)

You've reached the voicemail of Claudia Sandas Publications, Incorporated. Please leave a message and one of our representatives will--

She hangs up.

Two scrawny GAS ATTENDANTS (late teens) standing by the fuel pumps point and snicker at Stella. She notices.

They immediately stop chuckling as she marches over to them.

STELLA

Wouldn't it be embarrassing if you had to explain to all your friends that you got your ass kicked by a dude wearing makeup and heels?

The teens sheepishly scurry off. Stella smirks as she watches them scatter.

EXT. AUTO BODY SHOP - NIGHT

Stella and Ray sit against a fuel pump under the station's flickering lights. They take turns drinking from a liquor

bottle as they watch the mechanic work on the car.

RAY
(referencing the bottle)
How much of this did you bring?

STELLA
This is the last bottle that I swiped
from your bar. Make it count.

RAY
God dammit, Stella.

Ray winces in pain.

STELLA
Still hurting?

RAY
It comes and goes.

They drink in silence.

STELLA
Thank you for doing this with me.

Ray smiles. He touches the bridge of his nose and groans.

STELLA
Can I get you anything for that?

RAY
The cold compress. It's in the car.

STELLA
I'll be right back.

Stella strolls over to the car while the mechanic tinkers.

The mechanic stops and stares at her as she approaches.

STELLA
Relax, I don't bite...much.

The flustered mechanic goes back to work as Stella rummages through the car.

Stella finds the compress. She's about to close the door and walk back, when--

A BUZZING SOUND stops her in her tracks.

She hears it again, a muffled vibration coming from inside the car. Stella zeroes in on the noise. It's coming from the glove box.

She opens it to find a CELL PHONE. Ray's cell phone. It buzzes once more with an incoming text.

It's from Mimi.

Puzzled, Stella picks it up. She guesses the security code and unlocks the phone.

Her mouth falls open as she reads the unread messages.

ON PHONE SCREEN

Miss you, Boo <3

and your C===3

The phone shakes in Stella's hands as she scrolls.

I got somethin special waiting for you when you get home

Followed by a coy photo of Mimi posing completely naked.

Stella can't take anymore.

She marches back to where Ray sits.

STELLA

Got your compress.

She tosses it in his lap.

RAY

Thanks.

STELLA (CONT.)

Oh, and remember that phone that you forgot in New York?

She holds it up in her hand.

Ray's face sinks.

STELLA (CONT.)

Will wonders never cease?

She flings the phone at him.

Ray looks down at the screen and realizes he's caught.

RAY
Stella, I--

STELLA
How long has this been going on?

RAY
I'm not going to--

STELLA
Yes you are! Answer me!

Stella slaps Ray about the face and body with both hands while Ray shields himself.

RAY
Stop! What do you want from me? It's not like it means anything.

STELLA
It never means anything with you, does it? Were you two fucking when we were still together?

Ray averts his eyes. His silence speaks volumes.

STELLA
You son of a bitch!

RAY
I don't have to explain myself to you.

STELLA
I loved you!

STELLA
You have no idea how hard it is to walk into that club and see you every night.

RAY
Grow the fuck up. We had some good times--hell, some great times. But it's in the past. Jesus, let it go.

Tears well up in Stella's eyes.

STELLA
I spent years of my life in that shit-hole for you. I gave you everything I had. For nothing.

RAY
Nothing? I gave you a job. I gave you
(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)
a place to live. I let you perform
drunk. Did you like it better on the
corner?

Stella slaps him across the face.

STELLA
Fuck you.

Ray massages his red, raised cheek.

A pregnant pause.

RAY
I can't do this anymore. This shit
isn't worth it. I almost got killed
for you today. As soon as the car's
fixed, I'm going back to New York.

STELLA
Good.

Stella turns and heads back to the car. She removes all of
her belongings, including the Noxzema can.

She trudges down the road, luggage in tow.

RAY
The hell do you think you're doing?

STELLA
I came this far, I'm sure as hell not
stopping now.

Ray is left standing alone as the lights go out and the
station closes.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Stella lugs her belongings down the dark, unfamiliar highway.
The headlights from a passing car cut a stark silhouette of
her as she trudges along.

The car honks as it passes.

STELLA
(at car)
Fuck you!

She stops and throws her luggage down, letting out a loud,

guttural scream of despair.

The Noxzema can lies on the shoulder.

She picks up the can and heaves it off into the ditch.

STELLA

Fuck this! Fuck you! Fucking fuck!

Collapsing on the side of the road, Stella takes the half-full liquor bottle from her suitcase.

She sits taking long, heavy pulls from the bottle.

After draining the last of it, she falls onto her back and passes out.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Stella lies on the shoulder of the road. Her chest moves slowly up and down. Her makeup has run down her cheeks, and her clothes are torn and splotched with mud.

A large STRAY DOG with matted fur approaches her. He sniffs her and licks her face. She doesn't stir. The dog licks her repeatedly until Stella wakes.

STELLA

Wha-what the hell?

She struggles to sit up.

STELLA

Oh, God.

Her phone is in her hand, but it's dead. She rubs her temples and groans.

Pulling herself to her feet, she looks down the vast expanse of highway. Miles of grassy fields stretch out on both sides of the road.

The dog pads over to her side and licks her hand.

STELLA

Stop that! Get. Shoo.

But the dog just stands there, gazing up at her.

Pacing back and forth on the side of the road, Stella tries to orient herself. The dog follows behind her every step.

She spots her luggage strewn by the side of the road. She searches through it.

STELLA
Where is it?

Looking off into the ditch, she remembers.

The NOXZEMA CAN sits upside down in a tuft of weeds. Stella climbs down after it.

She loses her footing, and tumbles the rest of the way down.

Can in hand, Stella climbs back up the embankment and gathers up the rest of her belongings.

She looks at herself in her compact mirror.

STELLA
Fuckety hell.

With a heavy sigh, Stella continues walking in the same direction.

The stray dog follows her.

STELLA
Go away.

The dog keeps following at a distance.

STELLA
Get!

The dog waits a few paces, then continues to follow her.

Stella picks up a stick from the side of the road and wags it in front of him.

STELLA
Want the stick, boy? Want the stick?
Who wants a stick?

The dog cocks his head and wags his tail.

STELLA
Yeah? Go get it!

Stella throws the stick, and the dog gives chase. Stella turns and marches down the road at a quicker pace.

She stops and glances behind her. The dog has returned, stick in mouth, wagging his tail.

STELLA

I'm not getting rid of you, am I?

She extends a hand and gingerly pats him on the head.

Re-gathering her belongings, Stella keeps walking. The dog stays behind this time.

Stella turns and looks at him.

STELLA

Well, you coming?

The dog trots to catch up. He prances alongside her.

The two of them make their way down the highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Stella and her new companion continue on their path. Stella sings as they walk.

STELLA

(singing)

"...Don't bring around a cloud to rain
on my parade!"

(to dog)

You like that? It's my favorite song.

The dog stops and licks his crotch.

STELLA

There's no accounting for taste.

Stella crouches beside the dog.

STELLA

I hate to say it, but unless you've
got a secret stash of food squirreled
away somewhere, we aren't gonna make
it...If worse comes to worse, I guess
I've eaten worse things than dog
before.

The dog whines.

STELLA

It was a joke.

The BLARE of a truck horn.

Stella stands up to see a semi approaching behind her.

The semi slows and comes to a stop on the shoulder.

The cab door is thrown open to reveal a WOMAN (30's) sporting sleeves of tattoos and several piercings.

TRUCKER

Lost?

Stella stares, speechless for a moment.

TRUCKER

Hello?

STELLA

(remembering herself)

Yes, incredibly.

TRUCKER

You look like you've had a rough night.

STELLA

It's been a weird few days.

TRUCKER

Where you headed?

STELLA

Iowa. Des Moines.

TRUCKER

Well, you're not that far off. This road feeds right into I-80.

STELLA

That means nothing to me.

The trucker points a finger West.

TRUCKER

Des Moines is a few hundred miles that way. Gonna take you a long time to walk there.

Stella sighs. She looks down the highway.

STELLA
You wouldn't be willing to--

TRUCKER
Thought you'd never ask. Hop
in.

Stella hesitates.

TRUCKER
I'm harmless. I swear.

STELLA
Guess I'll take your word for it.

TRUCKER
That your dog?

The dog sits on his haunches by the side of the road.

STELLA
No.

TRUCKER
Where'd he come from?

STELLA
I don't know.

TRUCKER
Whaddya wanna do with him?

Stella thinks about it.

EXT. SEMI TRUCK - DAY

The truck barrels down the highway.

INT. SEMI TRUCK - DAY

The dog sits sandwiched between Stella and the trucker in the cab of the truck.

The cab is plastered with bumper stickers. A pair of fuzzy dice hang off the rearview mirror.

Stella notices a decal above the driver's seat: LOVERBUCKET.

STELLA
I'm afraid to ask.

TRUCKER
It's the name of my rig. I'm Joanna.

STELLA

I'm Stella. You've already met...that.

She gestures at the dog.

STELLA (CONT.)

You give rides to strangers on the side of the road often?

JOANNA

Sometimes, if they need it. And you really looked like you needed it.

The dog rests his head in Stella's lap.

STELLA

Is this how people get a dog?

JOANNA

What's the story?

STELLA

I just found him by the side of the road.

JOANNA

I meant you, sweets. What's your story?

STELLA

It's a long one.

JOANNA

It's gonna be a long drive.

Joanna notices the beaten up Noxzema can.

JOANNA

Whatcha got there?

STELLA

Dead mother.

JOANNA

This oughta be interesting.

EXT. RAY'S CAR - NIGHT

The car tears along the desolate highway.

INT. RAY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ray sits in the driver's seat, tears in his eyes. He looks over at Stella's sunglasses in the empty passenger seat.

He slams on the brakes. The car squeals to a halt on the side of the road.

Ray breaks down, banging his fists on the steering wheel.

RAY
God dammit!

EXT. RAY'S CAR - NIGHT

The car slowly turns back onto the road and continues down the highway.

INT. SEMI TRUCK - NIGHT

Stella, Joanna and the dog cruise down the highway. The song "Maybe This Time" blasts from the stereo. Stella and Joanna sing along. The dog pants and wags his tail.

BOTH
(singing)
"...It's gonna happen, happen
sometime. Maybe this time I'll win."

The song ends, and Stella holds the last note.

JOANNA
Damn, you can sing!

Stella scoffs.

STELLA
Please...

JOANNA
Serious! You could be on Broadway and
shit.

STELLA
You have no idea. I always wanted to
be a stage diva.

JOANNA
What got in your way?

Stella realizes that she's sitting on something. She reaches

underneath her and pulls out her flask.

A sigh.

STELLA
Life mostly.

Joanna watches as Stella turns the flask over in her hands.

Joanna reaches into her pocket, pulling out a large coin. She flips it to Stella.

It's an AA chip.

STELLA
You're not gonna get all Jesus-y on me, are you?

Joanna laughs.

JOANNA
Nah. Just...I've had that monkey on my back before, too.

Stella squeezes the chip in her hand, losing herself in thought for a moment.

Joanna changes tack.

JOANNA
But you like singing?

STELLA
(snapping out of it)
I love it.

JOANNA
So do it.

Stella chortles.

STELLA
It's not that simple.

JOANNA
Life's short, baby. you gotta do what you love. Otherwise what's the point?

Stella absorbs this for a moment.

STELLA

Do you love being a trucker?

JOANNA

I'm good at it.

STELLA

That's not what I asked.

JOANNA

My grandpa was a trucker, my dad was a trucker, my mom was a trucker's wife. It's in my blood.

The dog sleeps in Stella's lap.

JOANNA

Looks like you've got a friend there.

STELLA

Thank God. I don't have many left.

A beat.

STELLA

Hey...

JOANNA

(waiting for her to continue)

Yes?

STELLA

Why are you being so nice to me?

JOANNA

You think you're the only person I've ever given a ride to?

STELLA

I don't mean to sound suspicious, it's just that...I don't know how to finish that sentence.

JOANNA

(chuckling)

You think I'm hauling a bunch of dead hobos back there or something?

STELLA

I was leaning more towards you being a ghost, but...

Joanna laughs.

JOANNA

Nah, it's just...I don't get to meet a lot of people, y'know. Most of the time it's just me and these four walls. Shit gets lonely after awhile.

STELLA

Yeah.

A beat.

JOANNA (CONT.)

So...drag, huh?

EXT. TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

The parking area is deserted except for Joanna's rig.

Joanna waits outside a port-a-potty. She raps on the door.

JOANNA

How's it going in there?

STELLA (O.S.)

I'm not used to changing in a port-a-john.

JOANNA

Hurry up, I wanna see.

STELLA (O.S.)

Patience is a virtue.
(a tearing sound)
Ow, dammit!

JOANNA

What?

STELLA

I didn't shave before I left.

Joanna giggles.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

Joanna waits, breath bated, with her hands over her eyes.

STELLA (O.S.)

Keep 'em closed!

JOANNA
Just come on!

The port-a-potty door swings open to reveal Stella.

She steps out in a stunning red dress. She wears a blonde, Marilyn Monroe-esque wig. Her makeup is flawless.

STELLA
Open!

Joanna opens her eyes and her jaw hits the ground.

JOANNA
Walking, talking Jesus.

STELLA
Blush.

Stella strikes a pose.

JOANNA
You just bring this stuff with you
wherever you go?

Stella gives the boy scout hand salute.

STELLA
Always prepared. Actually, it's the
only outfit I had left in my suitcase.

JOANNA
Ten. Perfect ten.

STELLA
I don't know how long it'll last. I
seem to go through dresses the way
most people go through toilet paper.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

Joanna and Stella, still in full drag, lay on the asphalt passing a joint back and forth.

JOANNA
Can I ask you a personal question?

STELLA
Shoot.

JOANNA
What do you do with it?

STELLA
With what?

JOANNA
You know...

Joanna grabs her crotch.

STELLA
Oh, God.

JOANNA
I'm curious.

STELLA
I should keep a running tally of how many times I'm asked these questions.

JOANNA
Where does it go?

STELLA
Where do you think?

Stella makes a cupping, tucking motion with her hand. Joanna laughs.

JOANNA
I'll never understand how men live with those things.

STELLA
I've only known you for three hours, and you already know everything about me. And my penis.

JOANNA
Not everything.

STELLA
Hmm?

Joanna inhales and passes the roach to Stella.

JOANNA
What was your childhood like?

Stella puffs and inhales.

STELLA

That's a loaded question.

JOANNA

C'mon, spill.

STELLA

I remember one Thanksgiving, when I was like fifteen. First time my mom tried cooking dinner for the family. She'd spent all morning on this beautiful turkey. My father came home, piss drunk, and stumbled over to the oven. He stuck his head inside, and puked all over the turkey my mother had been slaving over for hours. Then he hit his head and passed out on the floor. He had these two little lines burned into his forehead from the oven rack for weeks.

They both laugh.

JOANNA

Ah, the holidays.

STELLA

My mom didn't come out of her room for two days after that.

Stella inhales and passes the joint to Joanna.

STELLA

A few years later, I left and came to New York.

JOANNA

To do what?

STELLA

Get away.

JOANNA

What was the last thing you said to your father?

STELLA

I don't remember saying anything. I just...left.

Stella takes another puff.

STELLA

Wanna see the one thing that my dad
actually taught me?

Stella leaps into the cab of the truck and rummages through
her handbag. She comes back out holding a POCKETKNIFE.

STELLA

He gave this to me when I was a kid.
Told me I'd need it one day, when I
became a man.

She opens the blade and trots over to a grassy area at the
edge of the parking lot. Joanna and the dog follow.

Stella kicks her shoes off.

STELLA

You want to get the blade as close to
your foot as possible. The closest
person wins.

Stella throws the blade at the ground.

The knife stakes itself in the grass, missing her foot by
less than an inch.

STELLA

Ha! Still got it. Here, try.

Joanna takes the blade.

JOANNA

What happens if I stick it in my foot?

STELLA

You lose.

Joanna throws the blade. The butt of the knife hits the
ground with a thud.

STELLA

Cheater.

JOANNA

What?

STELLA

You gotta take your shoes off.

JOANNA

What?

STELLA

Them's the rules.

Joanna slips her shoes off.

STELLA (CONT.)

And ya gotta throw it harder. Straight down, no spin on the knife. Here, I'll show you.

Stella grabs the knife and stands behind Joanna. She places the knife in Joanna's hand, holding Joanna's hand in hers.

Together, they lift the knife up over their heads. Joanna looks back at Stella, their noses only a few inches apart. Their eyes lock.

STELLA

And straight down.

Stella propels Joanna's arm downward. Joanna yelps.

The blade sticks in the ground right next to Joanna's foot.

STELLA

I think you win.

JOANNA

C'mon, I wanna show ya how to really blow off some steam.

A playful smile creeps across Stella's face.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

A vacant lot, hell and gone from everything.

A couple of old, junked cars sit in the middle of the bare patch of ground.

Stella waits by the semi cab door with the dog, while Joanna searches inside.

STELLA

What is this place? Is it even legal for us to be here?

JOANNA

Never had a problem before.

Joanna hops out of the cab holding a 12-GAUGE SHOTGUN and a box of shells.

STELLA

Holy shit! Has that been in there this whole time?

JOANNA

Relax. I know what I'm doing.

STELLA

Oh, no. Any time someone says that it means they're full of shit. I know, I say it all the time.

Joanna loads five shells into the shotgun.

She takes aim at one of the dilapidated cars. She fires and a headlight shatters with a boom.

JOANNA

Fucking-A, right!

Stella screams and hits the dirt. The dog cowers underneath her. Joanna pumps the action on the gun, takes aim again, and destroys the windshield with another blast.

JOANNA

Hot damn! Here, give it a try.

She thrusts the butt of the gun down at Stella.

STELLA

No fucking way. I don't know how to use one of those things.

JOANNA

It's easy. You point and shoot.

Stella reluctantly takes the gun.

STELLA

I can't do this.

JOANNA

The hell you can't.

Stella tucks the butt of the gun against her shoulder.

JOANNA

You'll feel better. Trust me.

Stella aims and pulls the trigger.

The recoil sends her backward, almost off her feet. The shot blows the back window to shards. Stella squeals with delight.

STELLA

Oh, my God! That was
amazing!

JOANNA

Hell yeah!

She fires again, this time aiming at the other car. She takes out a taillight with the blast.

STELLA

How have I never done this before?!

Stella takes aim again. This time the buckshot strikes the exposed gas tank of the car.

The tank is pierced, ignites, and promptly EXPLODES in a BALL OF FIRE.

Fragments of the car fly in all directions.

Stella and Joanna collapse onto one another on the ground. Bits of debris rain down around them.

They sit up and survey the carnage. What is left of the car is engulfed in flames.

They both break into peals of laughter. The dog howls.

Stella and Joanna fall on their backs and gaze at the sky.

STELLA

You're right. I definitely feel
better.

JOANNA

Yeah. So, ya hungry?

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - NIGHT

Joanna's rig pulls into a diner just off the highway. The parking lot bustles with travelers coming and going.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - NIGHT

The greasy spoon joint is packed. Short order cooks slave

over hot grills.

Old tin signs festoon the walls. A small dance floor is carved out in the middle of the diner, where a few patrons dance to of out-of-tune karaoke.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - NIGHT

Stella and Joanna sit opposite one another in a booth.

Stella, still done up in drag, slurps from a straw, while Joanna wolfs down the last few bites of a cheeseburger.

STELLA

If I die right now, I die happy.

Stella lets out a burp.

Joanna casts a furtive look at the dance floor.

JOANNA

Wanna dance?

STELLA

What?

JOANNA

Dance with me, you goose.

STELLA

Are you serious?

JOANNA

C'mon!

Joanna grabs Stella and half-drags her to the dance floor.

The other couples stare at the pair. Some move further away.

Joanna takes Stella's hand, placing her other hand in the small of Stella's back.

They dance as slow music plays. They stand some distance apart for awhile, a la junior prom, but then embrace each other more closely. Stella steps on Joanna's foot.

JOANNA

Ow!

STELLA

Sorry. It's been awhile.

JOANNA

I thought you did this for a living.

STELLA
Different kind of dancing, sweetie.

JOANNA
Just follow me.

Stella lets Joanna lead her in the dance as Joanna counts out the measures.

JOANNA
1,2,3... 1,2,3... 1,2,3...

STELLA
Really, with the counting?

JOANNA
Just trying to help you out.

They sway together on the floor. Joanna pulls Stella closer.

The song ends, but the two of them keep dancing for a couple beats after.

An MC approaches the microphone.

MC
Now, ladies and gentlemen, it's time
for our karaoke contest. Who has what
it takes to take this week's prize?

He holds up a small gilded trophy.

MC
Who's gonna be our first contestant?

Joanna elbows Stella in the side.

STELLA
Ow!

JOANNA
Get up there.

STELLA
Oh, no.

JOANNA
Oh, yes.

STELLA
Here?

JOANNA
Yeah!

JOANNA

I know.

Joanna smiles at her and walks back into the crowd, clapping.

JOANNA

Whoo!

Stella glances over at the MC, who now stands behind the karaoke console.

STELLA

(to the MC)

"Maybe This Time"?

The MC shrugs, and the music plays over the speakers.

The stage lights shift, and bathe the stage in a deep pool of color.

The microphone shakes in Stella's hand.

STELLA

(singing)

"Maybe this time, I'll be lucky. Maybe this time, he'll stay. Maybe this time, for the first time, love won't hurry away..."

Stella's eyes meet Joanna's. Her trembling voice becomes steadily stronger as she sings.

STELLA

(singing)

"He will hold me fast. I'll be home at last. Not a loser anymore. Like the last time and the time before..."

The other patrons' stares of puzzlement turn into smiles. Some couples even get up and dance.

Stella sways with the music as she belts out note after note.

STELLA

(singing)

"Everybody loves a winner, so nobody loved me; 'Lady Peaceful,' 'Lady Happy,' that's what I long to be. All the odds are in my favor. Something's bound to begin, it's got to happen, happen sometime. Maybe this time I'll

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

win."

The restaurant erupts in applause. The patrons whistle and cheer as Stella finishes the song.

Stella's eyes well up as she soaks in the adoration. Joanna approaches her with a coy smile.

JOANNA

Not bad.

Joanna leaps into Stella's arms. Stella twirls her around in an ecstatic embrace.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - NIGHT

Stella leans against the semi, cradling the karaoke trophy in her hands. She can't help but smile.

Joanna pops out from the cab.

JOANNA

Wouldn't ya know it, in the midst of
all the mishegoss, I forgot to pay the
tab. I'll be right back, superstar.

Joanna give Stella a playful hip-check as she walks back into the restaurant.

Stella gives a contented sigh.

She gazes across the highway, and spots--

EXT. GAY NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Like a glitzy flower blooming in the middle of an arid desert. The NIGHT CLUB crops up against the vast darkness surrounding it. The blinking sign reads DEJA VU.

Stella blinks, shaking her head. Had that been there before?

The iridescent lights and colors draw Stella, like a beacon. She moves toward them, almost floating.

INT. DEJA VU - NIGHT

The raucous club bumps to the beat of the music blaring over the speakers. It's saturated in gogo lights and fog machines.

Lithe men wearing nothing but speedos perform in cages above

a packed dance floor.

A troop of drag performers on an elevated stage dance and lip sync. It's as if they're performing directly to Stella.

Patrons throw back drinks and wave glow sticks.

Without even realizing it, Stella finds herself at the bar.

A burly, leather-clad BARTENDER greets her.

BARTENDER
What's your poison?

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - NIGHT

Joanna whistles as she exits the diner. She has a stack of pull-tabs in her hand.

She skips back to the truck--

JOANNA
Figured today is our lucky day.

--to find that Stella is gone.

Puzzled, Joanna searches all around the truck for her until she spots the club on the other side of the highway.

INT. DEJA VU - NIGHT

The bartender sets a full whiskey glass in front of Stella.

Stella stares down at the drink in front of her. She reaches for the glass. It's almost to her lips when--

--Joanna's hand stops her.

Stella meets Joanna's eyes.

JOANNA
Hey.

Stella shakes herself out of her stupor.

STELLA
Hey. I, uh...

Joanna puts her hand on Stella's shoulder.

JOANNA

Let's get out of here, huh?

Joanna leads her through the throng of people and out of the club.

The undrunk glass of whiskey sits on the bar.

EXT. ROADSIDE REST AREA - NIGHT

Quiet, secluded. Headlights buzz past on the nearby interstate.

Stella and Joanna lie side by side on top of the parked trailer. The dog lies between them, snoring.

They listen to the radio on a small portable speaker. They peel open the pull-tabs, tossing the losers aside.

A song ends and the radio announcer comes on.

ANNOUNCER (V.O./FILTERED)

You're listening KKDT. Up next,
Chicago Bulls Basketball--

Joanna clicks the radio off.

JOANNA

Sports. Barf.

Down to the last pull tab.

JOANNA

Kiss for luck?

Stella smooches it. Joanna peels it open.

JOANNA (CONT.)

Damn. These games are rigged anyway.

She tosses it aside with the rest.

They lie in silence for a moment.

Joanna pats Stella's hand.

JOANNA

You wanna talk?

Stella sighs, processing.

STELLA

It's like...I don't even know why I
drink anymore. I don't even like it. I
think I do it just to punish myself.
Like, it's what I deserve, y'know...

JOANNA

Yeah. I do.

Another moment of silence.

JOANNA

But You don't deserve that. No one
does.

Stella absorbs this.

She reaches into her purse and pulls out her flask.

She stands and hurls it off the edge of the truck. It clinks
on the on the pavement and disappears into the darkness.

Stella lays back down next to Joanna.

Joanna smiles at her and turns the radio back on, tuning the
dial to a different station. An old slow jazz tune plays.

JOANNA

I've never had another person up here
before.

STELLA

I'm honored.

They turn on their sides and face one another. They interlock
their fingers, holding hands.

JOANNA

Your hands are so big.

STELLA

Well, I am a man.

JOANNA

What does it feel like?

STELLA

Being a man?

JOANNA

Being onstage. Performing.

Stella reflects.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER, STAGE - NIGHT

Back in the diner as Stella recalls. The slow jazz tune from the radio continues to play, but all else is silent as Stella speaks.

STELLA (V.O.)

You're just so painfully self-aware.
All those eyes just boring into you.

Stella on stage, immersed in the purple hue of the lights.

STELLA (V.O.)

Your heart races. You can hear the
blood pulsing in your ears.

The sound of pulsing heartbeat, racing, thump-thump, thump-thump.

Stella takes the mic.

STELLA (V.O.)

Then the music starts...and all that
just melts away.

The pulsing fades as Stella sings before the cheering crowd.

STELLA (V.O.)

It's like you go away to a different
place, where it's just you and the
music.

Lost in the music and the moment, Stella belts her heart out.

EXT. ROADSIDE REST AREA - NIGHT

A dreamy look on Stella's face as she finishes reminiscing.

Joanna moves closer, resting her head on Stella's shoulder.

They lie in silence gazing up at the night sky.

INT. 69 CLUB - NIGHT

Ray sits in the back office with his feet propped up on his desk. A towel covers his face. Papers, folders, and desk drawers are strewn across the floor.

Mimi ducks inside the office, out of breath.

Ray speaks through the towel on his face.

RAY
Go the fuck away.

Mimi surveys the wreck that is the office.

MIMI RAY
Jesus Christ. What the hell do you want?

MIMI
You gotta get out there. The audience
is out of control. Some guy just
jumped on stage and bit me!

RAY
That's something, alright.

Mimi grabs hold of his feet and throws them off of the desk.
Ray is unfazed.

MIMI RAY
Fuck you. I got bit. What Bite 'em back.
the hell do you want me to
do out there?

MIMI
What the hell is the matter with you?

RAY
You're a big girl. I'm sure you can
handle them.

MIMI RAY
I can't work like this, Ray. Who gives a fuck?

Mimi bawls. Ray removes the towel from his face. His eyes are
moist and red.

RAY
Stop it.

MIMI
What's going on around here? You've
only been back two days, and the whole
place has gone to hell.

RAY
This place went to hell a long time
ago.

MIMI

Are you still hung up on that bitch?

Ray kicks a stack of papers on the floor, scattering them around the room.

Mimi sobs.

RAY

Go home. Come back when you knock that shit off. You're here to entertain people, for Christ's sake.

Mimi rushes out the door. Ray sits down and puts the towel back over his face.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Stella and Joanna stand beside the rig, next to a diesel pump, gazing out at the sun-parched highway.

Stella holds the Noxzema can in her hands.

The dog sits in the cab with his head out the window.

STELLA

Thanks for taking him.

JOANNA

Who could say no to that face?

Joanna pats the dog on the head.

STELLA

What's next?

JOANNA

Heading South. New Orleans. Get me some beads.

They chuckle.

STELLA

Oh--before I forget...

She pulls Joanna's AA chip from her purse, handing it to her.

JOANNA

Keep it.

Stella smiles, squeezing the chip in her hand.

STELLA

Okay, none of this weepy good-bye,
nice-to-know-you shit--

Joanna throws her arms around Stella.

JOANNA

Do what you have to do. He's not a
monster, Stella. He's just a man.

Joanna climbs into the cab with the dog. The truck's engine
roars to life.

The rig slowly pulls away. The truck's horn blares as it
turns out of the parking lot.

Stella stands by the pump and watches the truck until it
vanishes from sight.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - DAY

"Honest Bob's Cars," just off the highway.

The lot is scattered with old, battered cars. It is more a
car graveyard than a dealership.

The sign, missing a few letters, reads: "HO T BOB'S."

INT. HONEST BOB'S CARS

Stella strolls into the small wood-paneled office, luggage in
tow. The one light that isn't burnt out flickers dimly.

A rotund MAN in a cheap, sweat-through suit (50's), waddles
to the service desk to meet her.

He eyes Stella for a moment, then shrugs.

STELLA

You Honest Bob?

RALPH

Bob died twenty years ago. I'm Ralph.

STELLA

I need a car, Ralph.

RALPH

What'd you have in mind?

Stella produces a wad of crinkled bills from her dress, and

slams it on the counter.

STELLA

What can I get for that?

Ralph eyes the pile of crumpled cash.

EXT. HONEST BOB'S CARS - DAY

Stella and Ralph stand in front of an old 1960's convertible. A sleek machine in spite of a few spots of rust and cracked upholstery.

RALPH

She still runs, by God. I rebuilt the engine myself.

Stella circles the car, running her fingers along the fenders. The paint sparkles in the sun.

The words "Hauling Ass" are emblazoned on the back in big chrome letters.

STELLA

It's perfect.

EXT. HONEST BOB'S CARS - DAY

Stella sits behind the wheel of her new car. It roars to life in a plume of black smoke. Ralph stands by the driver's side door thumbing through the wad of bills.

RALPH

Pleasure doing business.

Stella opens the glove box and finds an old pair of sunglasses. She puts them on.

She peels out of the lot and takes off down the highway.

EXT. STELLA'S CAR - DAY

Stella's wig flutters in the wind as she cruises down the highway. A cigarette dangles out of her mouth.

The car in all its nostalgic, American-made glory glints in the mid-day sun as it rolls along.

Stella sings along to the radio, drumming her fingers on the steering wheel.

She steps on the gas and the car speeds down the road.

EXT. ROADSIDE HIGHWAY - DAY

Stopped at a T intersection. Stella holds her phone up above her head, searching for a signal, but she's getting nothing.

She sighs and tilts her head toward the sun.

STELLA

Well, fuck.

Stella turns her head to the left and gazes down the road. She turns her head to the right and does the same.

Taking a quarter from her purse, she flips it in the air and catches it. She looks down at the coin and shrugs.

She turns the ignition, and jerks the car to the right.

Moments later, the car screeches to a halt and reverses.

The car makes a violent turn and flies down the road in the opposite direction.

EXT. STELLAS'S CAR - DAY

Whizzing past a road sign: IOWA, FIELDS OF OPPORTUNITY.

INT. STELLA'S CAR - DAY

Stella clenches the steering wheel. Her face is pale and covered in beads of sweat.

The car sits on the shoulder directly in front of a sign that reads: DES MOINES, POP. 191,003.

Stella takes deep breaths as she clutches the steering wheel. She throws the door open, and scurries outside.

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

She doubles over and vomits on the side of the road.

She pulls herself up and eases back behind the wheel.

EXT. STELLA'S CAR - DAY

The car winds through the streets of downtown Des Moines, a city too big to be small, but too small to be big.

Passing by the state capitol building, with its distinctive domes.

Ambling through the downtown district, the car passes by the quaint, historic buildings of the city's center.

INT. STELLA'S CAR - DAY

Stella steals a glance at a piece of paper in her hand as she drives.

EXT. STELLA'S CAR - DAY

Stella's car rounds a corner onto a residential street.

Kids play jump rope on the sidewalk. Neighbors chat with one another over their fences.

The car creeps along until--

--it screeches to a sudden halt.

EXT. CLOVER HOSPICE - DAY

Stella stands at the foot of a long driveway leading to a huge Mediterranean style building.

A sign at the end of the drive reads: CLOVER PALLIATIVE CARE AND HOSPICE.

Stella stares at the sign, reading it over and over again.

Taking a deep breath, she starts her long walk up the drive to the sprawling estate.

INT. CLOVER HOSPICE, COMMON ROOM - DAY

Sun pours through the windows, bathing the atrium in a warm glow.

Stella takes it in as she walks up to a visitor's station, where she's greeted by a matronly NURSE (50's).

NURSE

Can I help you?

STELLA

Um...I'm looking for someone.

The nurse turns to her computer.

NURSE
Name?

STELLA
Frank. Sandas.

The nurse stops scanning her monitor.

NURSE
Frank? He hasn't had a single visitor
since he's been here.

STELLA
So, he's here?

NURSE
And who might you be?

STELLA
I'm--

She catches herself.

STELLA (CONT.)
--his son.

INT. CLOVER HOSPICE, HALLWAY - DAY

Numbered doors line the hall. Stella stays a few paces behind the nurse as they walk.

NURSE
Here we are.

The nurse knocks on a door. Stella retreats a few steps.

NURSE
Are you all right?

Stella sinks to her knees in the middle of the hallway.

STELLA
Just trying not to throw up.

INT. CLOVER HOSPICE, FRANK'S ROOM - DAY

Dark, dank, and musty. A hospital bed is wedged into a corner, next to a slew of I.V.s and monitors.

A small crucifix hangs near the door. A folded American flag and a couple medals sit on a bookshelf.

FRANK SANDAS (60's-70's) sits in his wheelchair next to the window, dozing. He wears a threadbare Vietnam-era Army jacket. Tubes run from his nose to an oxygen tank.

The nurse slowly approaches him, gently rousing him awake. Stella stays firmly planted outside the doorway.

NURSE

Hi there, Frank. How are we doing today? You've got a visitor.

Frank grunts.

The nurse wheels him over to Stella, and he comes into view, blinking against the sun.

Frank is withered and frail. His grey shoulder-length hair is pulled back in a pony tail. A permanent scowl is etched on his face.

Stella takes a cautious step toward him. Her hands tremble.

Frank furrows his brow as he stares up at Stella.

FRANK

Who the fuck are you?

INT. CLOVER HOSPICE, FRANK'S ROOM - DAY

Frank again sleeps by the window as Stella and the nurse stand in the doorway. Stella can't take her eyes off of him.

NURSE

He got the diagnosis a few months ago. Stage 4. He's pretty heavily medicated most days, so he's not always all there. He's a fighter, though.

STELLA

He's not even the same person.

NURSE

Sickness has a way of aging people.

STELLA

It wasn't supposed to happen like this.

NURSE

I'm sorry?

A beat.

STELLA

Fuck it. He's gonna listen to what I have to say, God dammit.

NURSE

Like I said, he's sedated. I don't know if he's gonna be able to understand you.

STELLA

He never understood me.

Stella marches across the room.

She steels herself, and nudges her father awake.

Stella crouches down in front of Frank.

STELLA

Hi, Dad.

Frank's face draws down and his eyes widen as he finally recognizes her.

EXT. CLOVER HOSPICE, GARDENS - DAY

Stella pushes Frank in his wheelchair along a path leading through the ground's gardens. Beds of tulips on either side of them. Butterflies alight here and there among the flowers.

Stella carries the Noxzema can under one arm.

They stop in the middle of a large commons area next to a small waterfall. Stella parks the wheelchair and sits on a bench opposite Frank.

Neither of them make eye contact.

Stella watches the waterfall, letting the slow trickle soothe her frayed nerves, trying to think of something to say--

FRANK

Smoke?

Frank's voice escapes his mouth in a gruff croak.

STELLA

Huh?

FRANK

Do you have a smoke?

Stella fumbles with the cigarettes in her purse. She shakes out two and passes one to Frank along with a lighter.

STELLA

You probably shouldn't be doing that.

FRANK

I'm gonna be dead in five minutes, who gives a shit.

Frank removes the oxygen tube from his nose.

He struggles to light the cigarette with his shaking hands.

Stella grabs it from him.

STELLA

Here.

She lights both cigarettes in her mouth. She offers one to Franks, who apprehensively takes it.

FRANK

(pointing at her outfit)

So what, you show up here after two decades just to rub that in my face?

STELLA

No. This is just a happy coincidence.

Frank sneers.

Another beat of awkward silence.

Frank closes his eyes and inhales with a contented sigh.

FRANK

Camels. I always used to smoke Camels.

STELLA

I remember.

She turns over her arm to reveal the burn scars on her forearm.

FRANK

Hope you didn't come all this way just to tell me you hate me. I already

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)
 knowed that.

He stares off into the distance and smokes.

FRANK (CONT.)
 Say your peace and go.

Stella shakes her head.

STELLA
 That's all you've got to say to me?

FRANK
 I got nothin' to say to you.

Stella watches the cigarette smoke waft among the flowers in the breeze. She chokes back a tear.

STELLA
 Mom's dead.

Frank's breath catches in his throat.

FRANK
 What?

STELLA
 She's right here if you wanna say hi.

She taps her fingers on the can.

FRANK
 Reckon I'll see her soon enough.

STELLA
 Not exactly the requiem I'd expect for your wife.

FRANK
 She left me!

STELLA
 She escaped you!

STELLA
 We all did.

She lets her words sit for a moment.

STELLA (CONT.)
 I did everything I possibly could to distance myself from you. Moved across the country, took a different name, a
 (MORE)

STELLA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
different face--but now...here I am
again.

Stella looks out over a small man-made pond at the edge of the garden. Frank pretends to ignore her as she speaks.

STELLA (CONT.)
There was so much I wanted to ask you.
I wanted to know why you did all those
things to me...why you hated me so
much just for being me, but...I don't
think I need to know anymore. I don't
care what you think. It wouldn't
change anything.
(beat)
I'm not sorry for who I am, Frank.

Frank's lip quivers as he absorbs Stella's words.

Stella pulls the knife from her bag that Frank had given her years ago.

STELLA
Remember this?

Stella tosses the knife in his lap.

STELLA (CONT.)
For when I became a man, remember? You
can have it back. I don't want to be a
man like you.

The cigarette falls from Frank's lips and tumbles to the ground.

He curls his fingers around the knife.

A dim flame grows behind his Frank's eyes. His face contorts in a mixture of rage and anguish. He breathes in heavy, erratic breaths.

The old man quakes in his chair.

Frank LUNGES out of his wheelchair at Stella, suddenly bursting to life.

Frank falls into Stella's arms as he feebly stabs at her with the knife.

The blade slices through her dress sleeve, but does little

else.

Stella overpowers him, pinning him to the ground. The knife falls from Frank's hand.

Stella holds him down by his wrists.

STELLA

No more. Enough.

She releases her grip on her father and stands back up, looking down on him.

Frank lies on the ground, breathing heavily, avoiding Stella's eyes.

Stella bends down to help him back up, throwing his arms around her neck.

She sets him back down in his chair, but he doesn't let go.

Tears stream down Frank's cragged cheeks as he wraps his arms around Stella, clinging to her.

Stella is bewildered. The first time in her life that her father has shown her affection.

Frank wails in Stella's arms. He speaks between sobs.

FRANK

I'm sorry...God, I'm so sorry...

Stella eventually returns her father's embrace.

She pats him on the back, soothing him.

EXT. CLOVER HOSPICE - DAY

Stella stands at the edge of the small pond. The surface is still, clear as glass.

She holds the Noxzema can in her hands.

Frank sits in his wheelchair several feet away from the water's edge, watching.

She removes the lid and stares at what is left of her mother.

She scatters the ashes over the water.

Stella walks back over to Frank and lays her hand on his

shoulder. They watch the sun play on the water.

INT. CLOVER HOSPICE, FRANK'S ROOM - DAY

Stella and the nurse stand in Frank's Room. Frank is parked in his chair by the window again.

NURSE

Thank you so much for coming. Why, I was sure there wasn't a single soul who even knew he existed.

STELLA

I knew. I just tried to forget.

Stella walks over to Frank, kneeling in front of him once more.

Frank brings his hand to her face.

Stella flinches, as if afraid he's going to hit her.

But Frank simply lets his hand rest on her cheek, caressing it gently with his thumb.

A faint breath escapes Frank's lips, and his hand falls back to his side.

INT. CLOVER HOSPICE, HALLWAY - DAY

Stella walks back down the hall toward the building's main atrium. The nurse follows her.

NURSE

Can we expect you again?

Stella sighs, shaking her head.

STELLA

No.

She keeps walking down the hall.

EXT. STELLA'S CHILDHOOD HOME, DES MOINES - DAY

A lonely derelict house at the intersection of two country dirt roads, surrounded by barren farmland.

Stella walks up to the front porch, taking it in.

STELLA

Still here.

She tries the front door. The knob falls off in her hand. She spots the initials "J.S." carved into the door frame.

She pushes the door open and steps inside.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house is completely empty. Water and mildew stains cover every surface.

Stella steps across the decaying floor, and sits in the center of the room with the empty Noxzema can in her lap. She gazes around at the interior of the house.

She gets back to her feet, leaving the can on the floor.

EXT. STELLA'S CHILDHOOD HOME - CONTINUOUS

She stops by the initials chiseled into the door frame.

She takes a nail file from her hand bag. She scratches off the "J" and etches the letter "D" next to the "S", so that the carving instead reads "S.D."

STELLA

That's better.

EXT. STELLA'S CAR - DAY

Stella climbs behind the wheel of her car. She starts the engine and takes one last look at the house. She puts the car in gear and slowly drives away.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY SKYLINE - DAY

The familiar smog-shrouded skyscrapers and the cacophony of city life.

EXT. STELLA'S CAR, NEW YORK - DAY

Stella's car drives down a street teeming with cars. She pulls over to the curb and turns the car off.

Her wig is wind-blow and tangled. She takes off her sunglasses and rubs her weary eyes.

She sits, leaning her head against the headrest. She closes her eyes, listening to the throngs of people and cars around

her. Home again.

EXT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Stella gawks at the lavish building with its ornate art-deco architecture.

STELLA

Je-sus.

INT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING, HALLWAY - DAY

Stella knocks on Claudia's apartment door. Footsteps from the other side.

CLAUDIA (O.S.)

Who is it?

STELLA

Open the door, Claudia.

The door opens. Claudia's eyes widen as she sees Stella standing in front of her.

CLAUDIA

What are you doing here?

STELLA

I'm great, thanks for asking.

She barrels past Claudia and into the apartment.

INT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Claudia's garish apartment is filled with expensive pieces of furniture furniture and blown-up photos of Claudia's book covers. Stella doesn't even try to hide her contempt.

She gestures to one of the blown-up portraits.

STELLA

You just can't help yourself, can you?

CLAUDIA

How'd you find me?

STELLA

Your shameless self-promotion made it pretty easy.

CLAUDIA
You look like you haven't slept or
bathed in days.

STELLA
Only two.

CLAUDIA
Please sit down.

STELLA
I'd rather stand.

CLAUDIA
What happened? Did you find Dad?

STELLA
Yeah.

CLAUDIA
And?

STELLA
Wasn't quite what I was expecting.

CLAUDIA
What do you mean?

Stella takes off her wig, scoffing at the tangled up mess
that it's become.

STELLA
Did you know he had cancer?

Claudia takes a couple of steps back. She tries to avoid
Stella's glare.

CLAUDIA
I-I, uh--

STELLA
Why the fuck didn't you tell
me?!

CLAUDIA
I tried to tell you, but you
were so angry--

STELLA
Of course I was!

CLAUDIA
I'm sorry that you had to actually do
something for once!

STELLA
"I think something might've happened
to him." That's what you told me,
right? You knew something happened to
him, and you sent me to take care of
(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)
it for you.

CLAUDIA
No, it's not like--

STELLA
You conniving twat!

CLAUDIA
How dare you!

They circle each other like roosters in a cock-fighting ring.

STELLA
I went through eight circles of hell,
Claudia. Then I finally get there, and
he's rotting in hospice!

CLAUDIA
What?

STELLA
He's on the jamb of death's
door, Claudia!

Claudia half-faints onto a sofa.

CLAUDIA
Oh, my God. I had no idea he had
gotten so bad.

STELLA
Didn't stop him from trying to knife
me, though.

Stella pokes her finger through the slit in her dress sleeve.

STELLA (CONT.)
This dress cost eighty dollars!

Claudia's eyes are brimming with tears.

CLAUDIA
Oh, God. I'm so sorry.

Stella calms herself. She sits next to Claudia on the sofa.

STELLA
It's okay. I'm glad I went. I told him
everything that I should have told him
years ago. "Reconnecting in order to
heal," is what you would call it, I
guess.

CLAUDIA
You read my book?

STELLA
I tore right into it.

EXT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Stella and Claudia walk down the grand stairs leading up to the building.

Claudia points to Stella's car.

CLAUDIA
Is that yours?

STELLA
That's my ride.

Claudia reads the lettering on the back, "Hauling Ass."

CLAUDIA
It suits you.

Claudia pulls a business card from her pocket and hands it to Stella.

STELLA
What's this?

CLAUDIA
That's the name of my booking agent.
He organizes appearances for me. I
think he could help you. Maybe land
you a few singing gigs.

STELLA
Seriously?

CLAUDIA
I mean, no promises, but I'll put in a
good word for you.

Stella eyes her sister suspiciously.

STELLA
Why are you being kind right now?

CLAUDIA
Because I love you. Plus, I figure I
owe you one.

Stella hugs her first this time.

She slips the business card into her dress, and skips down the steps to her car.

They each wave goodbye.

The car eases into traffic, and cruises down the busy street.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. 69 CLUB - NIGHT

Stella's car rattles up the alley, and comes to a halt in front of the stage door. The engine is killed and Stella steps out.

The second she closes her door, the front bumper falls off and smoke pours out from under the hood.

STELLA

Naturally.

INT. 69 CLUB - NIGHT

The stage door flies open as Stella marches into the backstage area.

The first person Stella sees is Mimi, primping herself in a compact mirror.

Mimi sees Stella and drops the mirror on the floor, breaking it.

Stella strides right past, not acknowledging her.

INT. 69 CLUB, OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

She finds Ray sitting at his desk. He is disheveled and drinking from a liquor bottle. He sees Stella and stands bolt upright.

RAY

Oh my God, you're alive.

STELLA

Don't sound too shocked.

RAY

How did you...

Stella stares at Ray, waiting for him to continue.

STELLA

You waiting for me to say something,
or...?

RAY

I didn't know where you went, or what
happened to you--

STELLA

A lot of things happened to me, Ray.

RAY

Stella, I'm so sorry. About
everything. What happened at
the gas station--

STELLA

Don't bother.

Ray reaches out to touch her, but Stella blocks his hand.

STELLA

Don't.

RAY

What do you want from me?

STELLA

I don't want anything from you. I
quit.

RAY

Don't say that. I need you
here.

STELLA

Not my problem.

RAY

You can sing. Tonight, if you want to.

STELLA

I don't need your permission to live
my life.

RAY

You're pissed off, I get it.

STELLA

You don't get it, Ray.

RAY

So what, you're gonna just leave? And
do what? You've got nowhere to go,
Stella.

STELLA

It is so nice to see you being
desperate for a change.

RAY
You can't just--

STELLA
Yes, I can.

Stella marches out of the office, slamming the door behind her.

INT. 69 CLUB, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stella makes her way back to the stage door. Mimi stands in the hall, piecing her compact back together.

Stella slaps her across the face without breaking stride.

Mimi let's out a yelp, and drops her compact again.

EXT. 69 CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Stella exits the club. She walks past the still-smoking car, and back down the alleyway.

STELLA
(singing)
"Don't tell me not to live, just sit
and putter, life's candy and the sun's
a ball of butter. Don't bring around a
cloud to rain on my parade..."

Stella continues singing as she rounds the street corner and disappears from view.