PRIVATE POLICY
a circus in two acts

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*Production notes:

1. **Doubling**: This play should only be performed with six actors. Highly suggested doubling is as follows: the actress playing Marsha plays Rita and the actors playing Barry, Tyler, Marsha, and Becca play the reporters depending who is on stage at the time, leaving only Susan and Peter with no doubling. A production might choose to have the actor playing Peter play a reporter as well. The designations 1, 2, and 3 for the reporters in the script are merely there to separate the voices asking questions for the sake of rhythm. A production need not stick strictly to those numbers throughout the play, but the designations should be maintained within each scenelet.

2. **Pacing**: Special attention should be paid to pacing in this play. Specifically, pacing can be used as a way to separate public moments between Susan and the reporters and interactions between Susan and her family in private. Public scenes should feel paced quickly enough that Susan has no control but there should be a hint that control is just out of her reach. Private scenes should be slower. Do allow for gradual transitions between the two modes rather than abrupt changes in pacing. For instance, in Tyler’s first entrance, he might start out sounding like a reporter questioning his mother, but will ease into a more conversational tone. Towards the end of the play, the rhythmic styles might blend, suggesting the conflation of Susan’s public and private lives.

3. **Scenes**: There are no traditional “scenes” or “transitions” in this play. Each act is structured as a continuous experience for Susan. It is as if she were on a conveyor belt, pulling her through all of the encounters that make up a singular experience. In order to aid in the audience’s understanding of her experience, it is essential that each encounter begins before the previous one ends.
A near blinding light illuminates Susan at a table, and nothing more of the stage. Flash bulbs go off from actors playing reporters sitting amongst the audience. On the table is a microphone and a glass of water. Susan looks flustered for a moment--blinded by the flashes. She quickly recovers her confidence.

SUSAN
I guess no one ever asked me that question before.

Flash.

REPORTER 1
No one?

SUSAN
Well, my mother. She’s not here too, is she?

Susan laughs. The reporters politely laugh.

REPORTER 1
And what did you tell her?

SUSAN
I rarely tell my mother anything of consequence. Do you?

REPORTER 3
Please answer the question.

SUSAN
I’m sorry, I forgot the question.

Susan waits for more laughter. There is none.

REPORTER 2
Are you hiding something, Mrs. Turner?

SUSAN
What would I be hiding?

REPORTER 1
It sounds like you’re evading.

SUSAN
I’m not sure I could if I wanted to. If there was any reason to.
Well, if you don’t want to tell us, then...

There’s nothing to tell.

So you say.

Yes. Yes, I do say. I’ve been saying.

What else do you have to say?

More than you have to write by press time, apparently.

Tell us what you’re going to do next.

What do you mean “next”?

You know, now that you know what you know about him.

I don’t know anything about him. I mean, I know a lot but not what you’re...not what you want me to know, I guess.

But if you did know something, what would you do with that information?

What information?

You tell us!

I can’t be specific if you won’t.

We’re hoping you have more information regarding the recent legal action taken against your husband.
SUSAN
There’s no information to disclose.

REPORTER 1
But, is there information you are suppressing?

SUSAN
I can’t say.

REPORTER 2
Well, why not?

SUSAN
Because I somehow don’t think you can keep a secret. Sue me. Can I go now?

Susan stands up.

REPORTER 3
Well, what are you going to do about it? This information you don’t know.

SUSAN
Find out?

REPORTER 1
So, you’re saying, you think there’s something to find out?

Susan tries to answer but stumbles over her words. Flash bulbs go off like crazy.

SUSAN
That’s not what I’m saying.

REPORTER 2
What are you saying?

SUSAN
Just that I think all this fuss is a bit premature.

REPORTER 1
Do you think she thinks it’s premature?

SUSAN
I don’t know what she thinks.

REPORTER 2
But you know what she alleges.
I have heard what she alleges.

And if these allegations were proven true, would you still think these questions were premature?

Probably not.

But.

I maintain that these questions are premature.

Because...

Because the allegations are false.

How do you know that?

I just know.

But you don’t know how you know.

No I don’t know how I know.

But if you knew how you knew, you’d know why the questions are premature.

Yes.
REPORTER 2
But you don’t know, so you know there might be something to know but for now you don’t know.

SUSAN
I...what?

REPORTER 3
And if there was something you knew, but you knew we shouldn’t know, you’d tell us you didn’t know how you knew that there was nothing to know.

SUSAN
Yes.

ALL REPORTERS
YES?

Flash bulbs go off. She realizes what’s been said. At least she thinks it must have seemed bad.

SUSAN
No! I mean no! I don’t know!

A silence.

REPORTER 1
Mrs. Turner.

SUSAN
Yes?

REPORTER 1
You seem upset by the recent turn of events.

SUSAN
Yes.

REPORTER 2
Yes?

A flash. She winces. She shifts in her chair.

SUSAN
I’m upset by the allegations.

REPORTER 1
But not by the events.
SUSAN
I don’t know the events to have happened.

REPORTER 2
But if they had happened?

SUSAN
I could never imagine that he could do something like that. Never in a million years.

REPORTER 2
If the allegations were true. If what he’s been accused of were actually things he actually did...

SUSAN
Well, they’re terrible. Terrible things to accuse someone of anyway.

Yes.

REPORTER 3
Terrible things to say that someone is capable of.

REPORTER 2
You don’t think he’s capable of that?

SUSAN
I wouldn’t have married him if I thought he were capable of that.

But what if you were wrong?

REPORTER 1
What if he were capable of that?

SUSAN
Then I’m an idiot. Can we do this tomorrow?

Susan doesn’t move.

REPORTER 1
What would you say to your son. If it were true?

What would I say?

REPORTER 1
To Tyler.
If his father...

Would you tell him?

At some point.

What point?

When he’s old enough.

How old is old enough?

What?

To know that?

Susan takes a breath.

Well, I’m glad I won’t have to have that conversation with him.

I see.

You see what?

What?

You said you see. What, exactly do you see?

It was just a...

A what?
It was just something people say.

Just something people say?

Yeah.

My world is falling apart and you think now is a time to say ‘something people say’?

I didn’t think that much about it.

No. You didn’t. You know why? Because you don’t ‘see.’ You report, but you don’t see. People. You don’t see people. Would you want to have that conversation with your son?

Mrs. Turner, I think we’re getting off topic, here.

What is the topic exactly?

The topic is your...

My what? My situation? My shame?

Are you saying the allegations are true?

Do you think that’s what I’m saying?

Thank you for your time, Mrs. Turner. We didn’t mean to upset you.

Mom!

Susan tries to ignore the voice. Time and space are blending.
SUSAN
Do you think I would contribute in any conscious way to the destruction of my husband’s career, my son’s future?

REPORTER 2
No, we’re just trying to...

SUSAN
To what? To trick me into saying something incriminating?

TYLER
(offstage, getting closer)
Mom!

SUSAN
(To Tyler) Just a second! (To reporters) I’m not going to do that. But, I’ll tell you what I will do. I will walk through that door, I will walk out of the building with my husband, and we will go home, and have dinner with our son. Because, at the very least, I have that. For now, I have that. Tomorrow I may not, but right now, I do.

TYLER
(offstage)
Mom!

SUSAN
So, if there are no further questions, I’ll be on my way.

Flashes. Susan begins to look dizzy as she tries to figure out where Tyler’s voice is coming from. A cacophony of “Mom”s and “Mom! Are you ok?” in voice-over begins.

TYLER
(offstage)
Mom!

Mom!

SUSAN
And stay off my goddamn lawn.

Mom!

TYLER
Mom! Are you ok?
REPORTER 3
Mom! Are you ok?

REPORTER 1
Mom, can you hear me? Are you okay?

She begins to stand up. Flashes go off. The lights on the stage turn on to illuminate Susan’s kitchen. Tyler, a precocious 13 year old, is standing by the light switch. Susan avoids eye contact.

SUSAN
I’m fine.

TYLER
Fine about what?

SUSAN
What?

TYLER
What?

SUSAN
What are you doing awake?

TYLER
What are you doing awake?

SUSAN
I was going just going to bed.

TYLER
It’s seven thirty.

SUSAN
I know that.

TYLER
Okay. Me too. Have you been here all night?

SUSAN
Of course not.
Mom...

What?

You always tell me not to wear the same shirt two days in a row...

Right. I was testing you.

Oh.

Seeing if you’d notice.

Oh.

Tyler stares at his mother for a moment. He eventually gives up and goes to make himself something to eat. He starts spreading way too much peanut butter on a piece of bread. Susan tries to ground herself.

How was school?

When?

The last time you went.

Yesterday?

Yeah.

Fine.

Good.
Yeah.

SUSAN

Anything you want to tell me?

TYLER

Not really.

SUSAN

Anything funny happen?

TYLER

Funny?

SUSAN

Funny bad not funny funny.

TYLER

Oh...no.

SUSAN

Okay good.

TYLER

Funny things happened but not bad funny things.

SUSAN

That’s good. Funny funny is good.

TYLER

Like when I accidentally threw a pencil at Sammy when I sneezed.

SUSAN

That is funny.

TYLER

It didn’t hurt him. But it almost poked his eye out.

SUSAN

That’s funny.

TYLER

Well, that part isn’t funny.

SUSAN

Oh.
Pause. Tyler takes a bite.

Mom?

Yeah.

You should go back to bed.

No, that’s okay.

Dad’s still sleeping?

He is?

I’m asking you.

How would I know?

How would I know?

I’ll go back to bed.

Okay.

Can I make you some breakfast first?

Tyler places a sandwich in front of his mother.

Have a good day, mom.

Tyler kisses her on the cheek and walks towards the door.

Tyler!
Tyler turns around.

TYLER

What?

SUSAN

I love you very much. Just remember that.

TYLER

I’m gonna miss the bus.

SUSAN

I just want you to remember that. If anything happens today.

As Tyler and Susan walk away from the table and towards the door, Peter enters and takes a seat at the table. Marsha and Barry stand next to him, holding portfolios. They are now in a conference room.

TYLER

What’s gonna happen?

SUSAN

I’m not sure.

TYLER

This is really weird.

SUSAN

Your father does too. He loves you too. I know he does.

TYLER

Thanks...

SUSAN

Have a good day.

TYLER

Thanks.

Tyler goes to the door. As soon as he steps out of the doorway, the lights switch to illuminate the table.

MARSHA

The issue is not what happened.
SUSAN
It's not?

They usher Susan to the table.

MARSHA
The issue is what is believed to have happened. It’s really the central question of what we do.


You don’t do the same thing?

MARSHA
I am a member of the bar in this state. I have an advanced degree. You read a lot of Us Weekly and pray that Perez Hilton will be kind. Huge difference. Huge.

MARSHA
Whatever you say. In this state and all other states, I try to protect people, like yourselves from slanderous accusations like this one.

It’s not slander if it’s true.

MARSHA
We’re not here to assess the verity of the accusation. It could tarnish reputation, therefore, I treat it as slander.

PETER
(to Susan)
It’s not true.

She grabs his hand.

I know.

MARSHA
How nice. Anyway, we need to start with all of the details that you may have left out.

What do you mean?

MARSHA
Well, in order to figure out what details we need to leave out, I need to know the scope of the details, you know?
SUSAN
There are no details. You can’t have details if nothing happened.

BARRY
Of course.

MARSHA
But if there were details, hypothetically, what would they be?

SUSAN
He just said there is no truth to the accusation, how could he know details?

MARSHA
Any that pop into your head.

SUSAN
I’ve known this man for fifteen years. When he says there are no details, he means it. Don’t you listen?

PETER
They’re trying to help.

Marsha and Barry look at each other.

BARRY
Maybe we should start with you, Susan.

SURE.

BARRY
Let’s start with everything you’ve heard.

SUSAN
Some lowlife seeking her milliseconds in the spotlight.

BARRY
These things happen.

MARSHA
It’s very common nowadays. I’m not sure what came first, men being sleazy, or people finding out about it.

They all look at Marsha.

Not that this is that kind of case.
PETER
It’s not.
He looks to his wife.
It’s not.

SUSAN
All of the rumors we know are public. Rumors usually are. You don’t need us to tell you those rumors.

BARRY
Well, technically they’re a bit more serious than rumors. There is a written complaint. An ever-growing trail of legal documents, a major police investigation...you know...there’s stuff.

SUSAN
Rumors come in all shapes and sizes, Barry. Didn’t they teach you that in law school?

BARRY
So do indictments, Susan. Didn’t they teach you that in law school?

PETER
Let’s get back to your questions.

MARSHA
Great idea.

BARRY
Is there anyone you believe may have an interest in your...demise, for lack of a better word?

SUSAN
There are many better words.

MARSHA
Maybe we should come back at a more convenient time.

PETER
It gets more convenient?

MARSHA
Not without our help.

PETER
Give me a minute.
Peter pulls Susan aside. Marsha and Barry can hear them. They make faces to each other as Peter and Susan talk.

**PETER**

Do you want to wait outside?

**SUSAN**

What for?

**PETER**

If this is too hard for you.

**SUSAN**

I’m fine.

**PETER**

You don’t seem fine.

**SUSAN**

I’m not fine with these people wasting our time, no.

**PETER**

It will all be over soon. And you’re doing so great.

**SUSAN**

But the questions they’re asking...

**PETER**

I know.

**SUSAN**

They’re not listening.

**PETER**

They think I’m a stereotype.

**SUSAN**

They think I’m an idiot.

**PETER**

Well...

**SUSAN**

What?
Just kidding.

This isn’t funny!

It’s a little absurd.

It’s too public to be funny.

One day it will be.

It will be funny?

Sure. When this all blows over.

I didn’t tell Tyler.

Good.

He’s going to find out. Today. At school. Every person under the age of 16 worships a goddamn iPhone. Someone’s going to tell him.

He knows better than to believe what other people tell him.

He believes what we tell him.

That’s different.

He’s going to see me. On TV. Talking about you.

You did great, Peanut.
I didn’t.

Well, you were stressed.

I yelled. I scolded.

It was adorable.

Why is this happening to us, Peter?

It happens to the best of us. People get jealous. People get greedy.

You think?

Absolutely. This too shall pass.

I hope you’re right.

But right now we should listen to these people. They know what they’re doing.

They seem awful.

Not listening to them would be worse than sitting in a room with them.

You better be right.

Always have been.

Sure.
She laughs hesitantly. They turn back to Marsha and Barry.

I’m sorry about that.

Not a problem.

Where were we?

Oh yes. You were going to tell us what happened that night.

You’re kidding...

Susan...

I’m sorry, this is ridiculous.

You said you’d hear them out.

Fine.

So that night...

What night?

The night the...the night she specifies in her statement.

You were home.

I was.

The whole time?
Peter hesitates.

We need to know everything.

He was...at...Peter?

Peter doesn’t answer.

BARRY

Maybe if we met with you both individually.

MARSHA

Or really just Peter.

BARRY

Or both individually, we might have better luck.

SUSAN

Peter has nothing to hide from me.

PETER

Of course not.

SUSAN

He was at...wait...

BARRY

Even so, it just might be better.

SUSAN

How would it be better if he has nothing to hide?

MARSHA

Sometimes it just works.

SUSAN

Racquetball? A late meeting?

BARRY

Sometimes it allows people to speak freely.

SUSAN

About what?
MARSHA
Anything really...

SUSAN
You have nothing to tell them. He has nothing to tell you.

PETER
Let them do their jobs, alright Peanut?

She looks at him. Stunned.

Barry gestures towards the door. Peter gets up from the table and exits the conference room with Marsha.

BARRY
Thank you, Mrs. Turner. I know this can be difficult. We’ll be with you in a few minutes.

Barry exits. Susan goes to follow them. Becca appears in a diner booth on another part of the stage. Her voice catches Susan, who turns around to see her sister, giving up her pursuit of Peter.

BECCA
It’s bad.

SUSAN
It’s not that bad.

BECCA
Mom called. It’s bad.

Susan goes to sit with Becca.

SUSAN
It’s really not that bad, we have a team of people working on it.

BECCA
Mom said it’s bad.

SUSAN
What does mom know?

BECCA
A lot, I guess.
SUSAN

Not about this.

BECCA

What’s to know? It looks bad, it probably is bad. These things are usually as bad, if not worse than they sound.

SUSAN

We’ll be fine.

BECCA

Mom said she always wished you kept your job. That she didn’t raise her daughters to be dependent on a man.

SUSAN

Don’t tell me what mom said.

BECCA

She also said you’re avoiding her calls.

SUSAN

Well, that’s absolutely true.

BECCA

And she doesn’t appreciate what you said about her on TV. Those reporters mothers don’t appreciate it either, she said.

SUSAN

Becca.

BECCA

She also said she saw this coming the day she met Peter.

SUSAN

Come on!

BECCA

You have to admit, this kind of goes with the territory.

SUSAN

Of what?

BECCA

Being married to a politician.
There are plenty of politicians not implicated in sex scandals.

But it’s a possibility.

Not with Peter.

Men in power and all that.

Becca!

Power over women. Dominating. Fetishy stuff.

That’s disgusting.

I didn’t marry him, you did. We women with ordinary husbands don’t have to worry our heads about that. Stu wouldn’t fuck anything. Not even me.

I didn’t need to know that.

Every schmuck in America didn’t need to know about your hubby’s dirty little fetish, but here we are.

Wow. Thanks for your support.

Sorry.

Susan waves it off.

How’s Tyler holding up?

Haven’t seen him yet. He’s been at school.

You knew yesterday.
SUSAN
I was still processing. He was studying for an exam.

BECCA
You didn’t tell him?

SUSAN
I couldn’t.

BECCA
So you didn’t.

SUSAN
I thought he should find out himself. I justified.

BECCA
Why?

SUSAN
Better that way?

BECCA
Nu uh.

SUSAN
Shit.

BECCA
Poor kid.

SUSAN
I fucked up.

BECCA
Oh man. Poor kid.

Susan pulls out her cell phone and starts dialing.

BECCA
Too late.

SUSAN
He’s not answering.

BECCA
He’s pissed. They don’t answer when they’re pissed. Trust me.
He’s upset.

SUSAN

She dials again.

BECCA

He was going to find out one way or another.

SUSAN

Fuck. I fucked up.

BECCA

He’ll be okay.

SUSAN

Put another twenty in the therapy fund. I’m such an idiot.

BECCA

You’re not the idiot. And this will be a few hundred thou at least in that therapist’s pocket. You don’t bounce back from hearing your daddy’s a whore beater.

Susan stops dialing and looks at Becca.

He didn’t do it, Bec.

SUSAN

Oh.

BECCA

He didn’t.

SUSAN

Oh...great!

BECCA

He really didn’t.

SUSAN

I mean, I’m glad!

BECCA

Yeah. He wouldn’t do something like that.

SUSAN

Right.

BECCA
SUSAN
He wouldn’t do something that disgusting!

BECCA
Of course not.

SUSAN
He couldn’t. He’s not that kind of guy.

BECCA
No. Who could?

SUSAN
Well, someone, maybe, but not him.

BECCA
Right.

SUSAN
Not him.

BECCA
Right.

Becca takes a deliberate bite of her pancakes.

SUSAN
Don’t worry about mom.

BECCA
I’m not.

SUSAN
She’s a sensationalist.

BECCA
I know.

SUSAN
Conspiracy theorist.

BECCA
She is.

SUSAN
Don’t worry about me, either.
I’m not.

I’ll be fine.

I know.

I know what I’m doing.

I know.

So does Peter.

We’re going to be fine.

Of course you are.

And Tyler will be fine.

Yes.

Tyler will forget all about this.

Of course. Because nothing happened. Because these allegations against senators and governors and presidents and directors of the fucking CIA are always denied and are rarely true. Right? Because your husband is a rich dirtbag like all the other rich dirtbags but he’s different. Right? Elmo did it, but not Peter.

Right.
Becca takes another bite. She chews. A lot. A long, long silence.

He did it, didn’t he?

SUSAN

Becca keeps chewing. Tyler appears in the kitchen.

Did he do it, mom?

TYLER

I’m so sorry I didn’t tell you.

SUSAN

He never did any of that...to you? The hurting...

TYLER

Of course not.

SUSAN

But why? Why her and not you?

TYLER

I wish I could tell you. I wish I knew. I wish I could take it all away.

SUSAN

They say he broke three ribs and a wrist.

TYLER

Where did you hear that?

SUSAN

They say he used kitchen knives to engrave in her skin.

TYLER

Stop.

SUSAN

Letters. His initials maybe?

TYLER

Stop.

SUSAN

He branded her.
How do you know that word?

TYLER

It’s all over the news, Mom. All over. Sammy showed me on his iPhone.

SUSAN

Don’t watch anymore news. No more websites okay?

Okay.

SUSAN

It’s trash. It’s all trash.

Okay.

SUSAN

Promise me.

I promise. Geez.

Good.

Mom?

Susan looks at him.

What if he really did it? What if it’s not all trash?

I’m telling you it is.

That’s not what Jenna’s mom said.

Your dad needs us to believe in him. Okay? No matter what other people say.

Okay but...

I need us to believe in him.
Okay.  

Okay.  

A silence.  

Mom?  

Yes.  

Tyler picks up a knife block from the counter.  

One’s missing.  

Coincidence.  

Lights switch back to the press conference setting. The reporters are back in the audience, closer this time.  

He did it, didn’t he?  

Mrs. Turner.  

Mrs. Turner!  

I’m not sure.  

But you’re fairly certain.  

Where was he that night?
SUSAN
A basketball game, a business dinner...

Barry steps out into view and she looks to him.
He shakes his head.

SUSAN
My attorney advises that I not discuss those matters.

REPORTER 3
Do you feel remorse? Regret?

For what?

REPORTER 3
Towards the victim. For what she’s gone through.

SUSAN
Me? I never...Well... Yeah. I guess I do. I would, at least. If this had happened. I’m sure if there was something to feel remorse for, that’s what I would feel. What we’d all feel. I guess.

Flashes go off.

On the other side of the stage, lights up on Peter, also at a press conference. One in which he is far more in control. Susan watches.

PETER
The nature of a person who could think up such crimes should be questioned, no doubt. But do we question the person accused of these crimes, or the person who accuses another of committing them? As we all know, it has not been proven that these “events” ever took place. Evidence proving that these allegations are true has yet to be presented to any court or, more importantly, to me. So, if we’re looking at my “sanity”, versus that of a person who could say such things about a person such as myself, a public servant with a proven track record of caring for the citizens of the state of Pennsylvania, well then I think we can all agree that it’s probably a better idea to trust your trusted public figures rather than perfect strangers who are sick enough to make up what are pretty disgusting crimes. Don’t you agree?

REPORTER 1
Yes. I think I do.

PETER
Great! Need me to repeat any of that?
REPORTER 1
I think I got it.

REPORTER 2
But what happens if the allegations turn out to be accurate?

PETER
I’ve always wanted to write a book!

He winks. They laugh. Flashes go off, we’re back to Susan’s press conference.

REPORTER 1
Any comment?

SUSAN
On what?

REPORTER 2
On your husband’s statement.

SUSAN
Why don’t you just tell me what you want me to say so we can be done with this?

REPORTER 3
Well, we were hoping you could share your thoughts on how he looked. How he’s...holding up.

SUSAN
I’m not sure how he’s holding up.

REPORTER 2
Has he said anything to you about his psychological state?

SUSAN
Well, no we really haven’t had the time to discuss that.

REPORTER 1
Didn’t you have dinner together last night?

SUSAN
I can’t remember.

REPORTER 2
You don’t remember if you had dinner? You mentioned you were going to...
SUSAN
I’m sure I did. That sounds like something I would do. Eat, I mean.

REPORTER 1
Was your husband there?

SUSAN
Was he where when?

REPORTER 1
Last night.

REPORTER 2
For dinner.

SUSAN
Where is he now anyway?

Susan is trying to figure out ways to cross the stage to get to her husband.

REPORTER 1
What did you eat, Mrs. Turner?

REPORTER 2
What is his favorite meal?

REPORTER 1
Do you cook?

REPORTER 3
Do you?

Susan is blocked by reporters.

SUSAN
Excuse me. Could you let me through please?

Worlds melt. Tyler enters.

REPORTER 2
Did you have tuna casserole?

REPORTER 1
Are you prepared to make an official statement regarding the details of your sexual past and your knowledge of his involvement with the escort in question?
Did you have meatloaf?

SUSAN

Excuse me. Let me through please.

REPORTER 1

Are you a vegetarian?

REPORTER 2

Are your shoes faux leather?

REPORTER 3

Turkey or beef?

TYLER

Mom! Mom! I’m hungry!

SUSAN

Excuse me.

PETER

You’d read a memoir, wouldn’t you?

SUSAN

Peter?

BECCA

You need to call mom. Jesus, she’s driving me batshit. Just call her so she can say she told you so. Get it over with.

REPORTER 3

Does the senator like your cooking?

TYLER

Mom, seriously. All we have is crackers.

PETER

Did you know I was a little bit neglected as a child?

SUSAN

Peter.
TYLER
Not even good crackers! They’re the ones with the little seeds on them.

REPORTER 2
Which sexual positions does the senator prefer?

REPORTER 1
With you.

TYLER
They look like rat poop.

REPORTER 2
And which does he prefer with other women? While beating them?

REPORTER 3
Has anything been engraved in your skin?

TYLER
When’s dad coming home?

SUSAN
Peter.

REPORTER 1
Does he like any kinky shit?

TYLER
Tell him to bring a pizza.

SUSAN
Peter, look at me.

REPORTER 2
How’s your sex life?

REPORTER 1
Did you drive him to this?

REPORTER 2
You probably did, frigid bitch.

REPORTER 1
You probably did, frigid bitch.
Peter!

PETER
(as if still giving his speech)
You probably did, frigid bitch.

PETER!

Peter turns towards Susan, everyone else disappears.

Peanut!

You look surprised to see me.

I am surprised to see you here.

I’ve been here all along.

Really?

Yes, really.

I think I would have noticed that.

I was trying to get to you.

Are you sure?

They wouldn’t let me.

I’ll have a talk with them. Don’t worry. No wife of mine...

I know you did it.
Susan.

I know. Everyone knows.

What do you know?

Don’t try to tell me that you didn’t.

I didn’t.

Peter.

Susan.

This is your chance to tell me. Your get out of jail free card. Tell me and we’ll figure out a way to get through this together. But this is your chance. Your one chance.

Let’s talk about this at home.

Right now.

I’d rather discuss it in private.

Why?

It’s complicated.

It’s pretty much a binary here don’t you think? Either you did it or you didn’t.

Well what does it matter, then. You already know everything, right? You’ve already got the cuffs on.
SUSAN
It matters because I need to know from you.

PETER
If you love me you don’t need to know. You should already know.

SUSAN
You cut that woman. You paid that woman and hurt her. Her ribs her wrist. You...

PETER
Did I?

SUSAN
Yes.

PETER
Have I, in our 15 years together given you any indication that I could do something like that? Have I?

SUSAN
No.

PETER
How could you believe something like that about me?

SUSAN
Tell me. Just tell me if it’s true.

PETER
I can’t do that.

SUSAN
Why not?

PETER
What good will it do?

SUSAN
Because if you can’t look me in the eye and tell me the truth, then I’m next.

PETER
Susan...I would never.

SUSAN
But you did.

PETER
I didn’t say that.
SUSAN
You should. You should say something.

PETER
I won’t.

SUSAN
So you’ll allow the world to think you did unthinkable things to this woman?

PETER
I guess so.

SUSAN
And you’re okay with that?

PETER
Yes.

SUSAN
Why?

PETER
Because that means I’ve made it.

Marsha and Barry sit at the table with Susan. Peter comes over and joins.

PETER
The more public the public figure, the more serious the accusation.

MARSHA
The more public the public figure, the more serious the accusation.

MARSHA
(not looking up from her blackberry)
You hadn’t noticed?

SUSAN
Go away. Please.

MARSHA
(to her blackberry)
Damnit!

SUSAN
Where do you even come from?
MARSHA
(ignoring Susan)
Your interview with Time was pushed back to Tuesday.

PETER
Damnit.

BARRY
Damnit.

SUSAN
Peter, tell them to leave.

PETER
Fuck it. Print is dead.

BARRY
Right. Print is dead.

MARSHA
Call Larry King.

PETER
Also dead.

BARRY
Retired.

MARSHA
That’s what I meant.

PETER
Right.

SUSAN
Peter, get them out of here right now.

MARSHA
Let me think.

BARRY
Hannity.

SUSAN
Peter we need to talk about this. We owe it to Tyler.

MARSHA
Insignificant.

SUSAN
Tyler?
Hannity.

BARRY

O’Reilly.

MARSHA

Please.

SUSAN

I’m not okay with you going on television.

BARRY Hmm.
PETER Hmm.

SUSAN

Tyler’s hearing things at school. Peter!

I got it.

MARSHA AND BARRY

We do our own news special.

BARRY

MARSHA Oh my god.

Peter begins walking across the stage, smiling and waving at the flashing bulbs. He sits at a small couch on the other side of the stage.

BARRY Our own little corner of heaven.

MARSHA

Right.

BARRY

Barry and Marsha begin ushering Susan to the couch next to Peter. Susan tries to shake them off. Tyler sits down next to them.

SUSAN What are you doing here? Aren’t you in school?

BARRY

Shop it to all the networks.
Teachers let me out.

TYLER

What about Lebron?

MARA

That was different.

BARRY

Right.

MARA

Why?

SUSAN
(to Tyler)

I told them I was going to be on TV.

TYLER

We’ll have the wife, the kid.

BARRY

Brilliant.

MARA

He’s not doing this. Tyler isn’t doing this. Do you hear me?

SUSAN

Hey, kiddo.

PETER
(to Tyler)

Hi, Dad!

TYLER
(to Peter in reverence)

Look at those cameras! Pretty cool, huh?

PETER
(to Tyler)

Mom! Look at the cameras! We’re going to be on TV!

TYLER

No, we’re not.

SUSAN

Anderson Cooper.

BARRY
Anderson Cooper!
The silver fox.
So hot.

I’m not doing this. Tyler, you’re not doing this.

A team of people flurry around Susan, Peter, and Tyler, doing hair and makeup. Susan tries to get up. The makeup artists restrain her.

No. Diane Sawyer.

He’s gotta cry.

Peter, can you cry?

Sure!

He’s good.

You can’t make us do this.

Susan gets up again. Tyler grabs her hand.

Come on, mom. Sit down. Dad needs us to believe in him. Remember?

Tyler, we’re leaving.

In 5, 4, 3, 2....

She points to them.
PETER

Have a seat, honey. We’re on the air.

SUSAN

No, we’re not.

TYLER

Mom!

He gestures to the camera.

PETER

Susan, you can sit down, my collar is just fine. She’s always worrying about me.

He grins to the audience. Susan sits dumbfounded.

BARRY

That guy’s gonna go somewhere.

Where?

MARSHA

I dunno. Rikers?

BARRY

They laugh themselves offstage.

REPORTER 1

Tell me in your own words, Susan. What has this been like for you?

SUSAN

It’s been...umm...

REPORTER 1

Fascinating. Now, Senator, what are your plans for the upcoming election?

SUSAN

Upcoming election? You’re running again?

Becca enters the kitchen.

BECCA

He’s running again?
PETER
Well, Diane, so glad you should ask...

Peter continues talking in pantomime. Susan talks to Becca from across the stage.

I guess.

SUSAN
Does mom know?

BECCA
It doesn’t matter.

SUSAN
It might to her.

BECCA
Is she going to stop him?

SUSAN
No but she’ll never let you hear the end of it.

BECCA
You’re her messenger now? The bearer of ‘I told you so.’

SUSAN
Someone has to return her calls.

BECCA
Better you than me.

SUSAN
I happen to agree with her.

BECCA
I’m sure that’s very validating for the both of you.

SUSAN
Not really.

BECCA
Becca.

SUSAN
Are you leaving him?
All action on stage stops. Susan stands up and begins crossing towards Becca.

SUSAN
I hadn’t considered...I hadn’t thought of that as/ an option.

BECCA
--Bullshit.

SUSAN
Seriously. I haven’t had the time to...

BECCA
Everyone’s asking.

SUSAN
It’s been three days.

BECCA
Everyone’s asking.

SUSAN
Who is asking.

BECCA
CNN? Hoda Kotb? Everyone’s asking.

SUSAN
Well, tell them I don’t know.

BECCA
You must know.

SUSAN
It wasn’t the first thing that came into my head.

BECCA
That’s so noble.

SUSAN
I don’t even know what he really did.

BECCA
But you’re pretty sure.

SUSAN
There’s something. He did something.
But you don’t know.

Not from his mouth.

No, what’s coming out of his mouth is...

It’s unrecognizable.

They look over at a television in the corner of the kitchen. Peter is audible on the other side of the stage once again.

... and I truly believe, Diane, that the constituents want someone trustworthy. Someone who can turn to you and say, I know who you are, I see what you’re feeling and not only do I sympathize, I also empathize.

He winks at the reporter. She blushes.

These are the values I try to teach my son. These are the values I want to instill in America....the part of America that to this day doesn’t share these values. Like some of my colleagues across the aisle. You know which ones I’m talking about.

Tyler laughs and smiles up lovingly at his father.

That’s not him. It’s not. This whole thing is... so foreign.

And if you left?

What about it?

What would happen to him?

I don’t know.

Would it really affect him?
I don’t know.          SUSAN

And what about you?    BECCA

I would get by.         SUSAN

Would you?             BECCA

Of course I would.      SUSAN

And Tyler? What would happen to him?    BECCA

He’d get through it.    SUSAN

He would.              BECCA

I’d make sure of it.    SUSAN

You wouldn’t be able to. BECCA

You think...           SUSAN

I do.                  BECCA

REPORTER 1
Tyler, how do you think your dad’s been holding up through all of this?

TYLER
It think he’s doing great! I really believe in him.

The reporters laugh adoringly.

BECCA
You have to think that Peter would bounce back pretty quickly.
Not if he’s in jail.

He’s beloved.

I know.

It’s not like other families. Much more in the spotlight.

I know.

Everyone knows you. There’s a difference.

I know.

...In how he’d do, how you’d do.

Becca, I know.

You’re not as resilient.

That’s not true.

You’re not.

So?

I just wouldn’t do anything stupid is all.

And what would you consider stupid exactly?

They’ll take Tyler away.
That’s ridiculous.

BECCA
They’re not going to give him up--he’s too valuable. It’s all about how it looks.

The actress playing Diane Sawyer becomes Marsha once again. Throughout the following
Susan, Becca, Marsha, and Barry transition into
the conference room and sit down at the table.

MARSHA
It’s all about Norman Rockwell, my friend. Even today. Even today, in this fucked time
we inhabit. It’s all about Norman fucking Rockwell. NORMAN FUCKING
ROCKWELL.

I get it.

BARRY
It’s all about that you know?

MARSHA
Because you can’t trust shit in this world. You can’t trust shit. Everyone’s a piece of shit.
Everyone’s the piece of shit your husband is, frankly. You think there are people out there
that are better? There’s no one better.

So you think he did it?

MARSHA
Of course he did it!

BARRY
I have this rule, you know? Hookers don’t lie. That’s what I always say. Hookers don’t
lie. If she says it? It’s true.

I don’t know about that.

MARSHA
No, he’s right, whores don’t lie.

Ever?
Ever.

What about drugs?

Whores on drugs don’t lie either.

Seriously?

Honestly, what do they stand to gain?

Money, notoriety?

Who wants notoriety for being a whore?

Diablo Cody?

She was a stripper. Strippers are different.

Oh.

All I’m saying is, if this crack whore said your sleazy senator husband did something, he probably did. Why? Because if he didn’t, some other sleaze bag did and someone deserves to pay for it. But, the likelihood is, judging from what I’ve seen of that smug little bastard, he probably did it.

I believe it.

He probably did it.

Let’s just say, we’re operating off that assumption.

And he’s going to be fine? For this election he’s going to be fine?
Yes, and you know why?

Why?

Norman fucking Rockwell.

Americana bullshit.

Ameri-fucking-cana.

Oh.

And you, my friend, are a sleaze-ball’s dream trophy.

I went to Vassar. I went to law school.

That’s what I’m saying.

You didn’t say it, she did.

Same thing.

You’re the best kind of trophy. The chicks love you because you’re “smart” for a girl. The dudes love you because you have a great ass.

You really do.

The old people love you because of both things. And they think you keep him in line. And everyone in the goddamn country can whack off to the Norman Fucking Rockwell porn your dirty little family emits. You’re like a hot Hillary.

And the kid...
Oh the kid!!!!

That kid is gold.

Gold!

Total gold.

Absolute Norman Rockwell gold.

What did you pluck him off an Aryan farm?

Ha! Right!

What?

Where they keep all the blonde haired blue eyed mensa boys ripe for the picking?

Don’t talk about Tyler like that.

He’ll be on the covers of teen magazines. There are still teen magazines right?

But what if...

What?

What if I don’t want to?

Don’t want to what?

To do all of this?
I don’t understand.

What if I’m not up for exploiting myself, and my son, for...this. For his career.

Marsha and Barry look at each other and begin laughing.

Hilarious.

I’m serious, what if I don’t want to be the wallflower wife in the background of all the pictures? What if I don’t want my son around all of this? What if I want out?

We’re prepared for that.

How?

We have an offer.

Of what?

You’ll be very happy with it.

It’s more than fair.

What are you offering me?

It’s industry standard.

There’s a standard?

The going rate.

An offer of what kind?
Let’s call it a Norman Rockwell offer.

I like that.

Thank you.

A Norman Rockwell offer...

I don’t know what that means.

They’re offering you money, Suzie.

For what?

To stay. Imagine what Elizabeth Edwards would have gotten.

To stay with him?

More than she got by walking out the door.

You think Silda Spitzer stayed with that pervert out of the goodness of her heart?

Your son gets the same. Trusts of course. His is accessible at the age of 18. Furnished by a generous campaign donor so no strings attached. It’s totally yours.

If I stay.

And preserve the Rockwell name.

Rockwell Jr. will be set for life no matter what happens to Peter.

You know our name isn’t actually Rockwell, right?
MARSHA
Of course! (To Barry) We know that, right?

BARRY
What does it matter?

MARSHA
Right. So, what do you think?

Everyone on stage then turns to look at Susan.

SUSAN
I want to talk to my husband.

Everyone onstage groans.

MARSHA
You’re not quite grasping how these things work.

BARRY
It’s a time thing, you see? We need to get all this squared away before important people put more money into the campaign. Those important people need to see important documents proving you’ve accepted our offer.

SUSAN
I don’t need money.

BECCA
Right now you don’t.

BARRY
Think of this as an insurance policy.

MARSHA
In case things don’t go as planned.

BARRY
Creditors come out of the woodwork.

SUSAN
What creditors?

MARSHA
We just assume men like that owe money to someone. And if he goes away, and you’re all that’s left...
BARRY
How much are you making these days? Oh...right.

BECCA
Tyler will be taken care of. You’ll be taken care of.

MARSHA
For life. We’re talking...life money.

SUSAN
No matter what happens.

BARRY
If you stay.

BECCA
And you get to be with Tyler.

MARSHA
Well, I didn’t want to bring it up but...

BARRY
It might be the only way to guarantee that.

A phone rings in the kitchen. Tyler gets up to answer it.

TYLER
Hello?

BARRY
All you have to do is live out the life you already built for yourself.

MARSHA
Sounds like a no brainer to me.

BARRY
You’re getting this to do absolutely nothing.

MARSHA
Essentially.

TYLER
Mom?
And if I leave?

Marsha shakes her head.

Nothing?

Poor little Tyler.

Barry pulls out a giant stack of papers. And begins flipping through it.

The contract simply states that in exchange for X sum set up in two trusts: one in your name and one in Tyler’s furnished by a donor unrelated to your husband, his law practice, or his campaign, divorce is prohibited, as is any contact with the press outside of the parameters stated here, here, and here. Overseen by us, of course. Take a minute to peruse. We’ll just sit here and watch you.

I want a lawyer.

I am your lawyer. I’m here to protect you.

I want my own lawyer.

Norman Rockwell, don’t you want to be Norman Rockwell?

We never were.

Well, now you can be. The American dream. Am I right?

Mom?

You could be the next Camelot.

Mom! Phone for you?

Tell grandma I’ll call her back.
It’s not grandma.

Who is it?

She won’t say.

Tell whoever it is I’ll call back.

She says it’s urgent.

Tell her to hold on.

She won’t.

Susan goes to the phone. In the kitchen. The lights on the other parts of the stage go dark. The actress who plays Marsha appears in another pool of light on the another part of the stage. She is now Rita, dressed in a hospital gown, covered in bruises, casts. She’s was beaten very severely. We can tell she’s lived a non-virtuous life, let’s say. She is holding a phone receiver. The kind next to a hospital bed.

Hello?

Hello?

Who is this?

Who is this?

You don’t know who you called?

Just wanted to make sure it’s you.
It’s me. At least I think so.

You’re the wife.

Susan freezes.

Yes. You’re the...

Right.

How did you...how did you get this number?

He....

Don’t answer that. I don’t want to know.

Right...so...

So...

I just want to let you know I’m...I’m sorry, you know?

Sorry?

Yeah.

Oh.

I didn’t mean to...I saw you on TV. You look terrible.

Oh.
RITA
I didn’t mean to make you sad I just. I was doing my job.

SUSAN
Your job...

RITA
I don’t ask who he is you know? I don’t want to know I just want to wait until the end. I don’t know if he’s married or what I just wanted to...he had a nice car.

SUSAN
He picked it out on his 40th birthday.

Must be nice.

RITA
Yeah.

SUSAN
So I just wanted to tell you...

RITA
What?

SUSAN
I mean you probably already know.

RITA
Know what? About you?

SUSAN
And the others.

RITA
There are others?

SUSAN
Fuck, I thought you knew.

RITA
How long has he been...

SUSAN
He’s been coming around for years.
The same with them?

In my case he just got a bit out of hand is all.

Jesus.

It happens a lot you know, they get carried away and...

Carried away and what?

The fantasies these men have. I mean, they pay top dollar. Some girls let it go too far.

I don’t want to/ hear this...

--I just want you to be careful. I just want you to be safe. For that boy of yours. He’s really something else. I wouldn’t want to see him become like...

He’s never been rough or...

Never?

Never.

Guess he’s been saving it for us.

I guess.

Not worth it man. This’ll all cost me a fortune. They don’t exactly insure us you know.

Oh...I can send/ you some--

I don’t want your money.
Right. Sorry.

I don’t want anything from you.

I didn’t mean to...

I know.

A silence.

I have to go.

Yeah, you go. Tell that motherfucker I said hi.

I will.

Don’t actually do that.

Okay.

And I thought I had it bad.

Right. I’m sorry too. I... for what...you know.

I know.

So...uhm...

What’s your name?

Rita laughs. She hangs up the phone.

Dial tone.

END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO

Peter and Susan sit on a picnic blanket on the floor of the stage. It is fifteen years in the past and they are on their first date. They are laughing, mid conversation.

SUSAN
The look on her face when you just walked in and took your seat.

PETER
I thought her eyes were going to pop out of her head.

SUSAN
And you pulled out your book and...started writing.

And she said nothing.

PETER
Nothing!

SUSAN
She didn’t want to disturb everyone else. Not during the exam, of course.

And what did you say again?

PETER
I said that purple was her color.

You’re awful.

SUSAN
And she said nothing.

PETER
45 minutes late for the midterm.

SUSAN
I tamed the beast.

PETER
Unbelievable.
PETER
The famed Connie Gordon, professor of Con Law. Instilling fear in law students since 1963.

SUSAN
Her first name is Frances.

PETER
It’s better if it’s Connie. Makes it seem like she lives to teach Con Law.

SUSAN
She might.

PETER
Poor Connie.

SUSAN
Poor Connie.

Did she fail you?

PETER
B minus.

SUSAN
What?!

PETER
I cannot tell a lie.

SUSAN
Unbelievable.

PETER
What did you get?

SUSAN
It doesn’t matter.

PETER
Oh, come on.

SUSAN
B plus.

PETER
That’s great.
But I studied!

Clearly that’s a waste of time.

You might actually have to study before you graduate, you know.

I don’t know. It doesn’t seem necessary.

Let me guess...family firm?

Is it that obvious?

A long shot.

Listen, I should go.

Wait.

Thanks for the wine.

She gets up to go.

I’m not like that.

I know.

I’m not a “family firm” guy.

I’m sure you’re not. I just. It’s different for me. I don’t come from that.

That’s okay.
SUSAN

I know it's okay.

PETER

And I like you because you’re so...you’ve got so much...you’ve got this...

What?

SUSAN

You’re like a little peanut.

How am I like a peanut?

PETER

You’re just so...adorable and then you have this shell and I can crack it open to reveal...

SUSAN

A nut?

PETER

A legume actually.

SUSAN

I’m not sure this metaphor works.

I, for one, love peanuts.

SUSAN

They’re okay.

PETER

They’re way better than okay.

SUSAN

They’re not even in the fancy mixed nuts can.

PETER

They don’t consult me about such things.

SUSAN

I guess not.

PETER

Don’t go, okay? I’m not a bad guy.
SUSAN
I have a lot to study. I will actually have to study to get a job.

PETER
Ouch.

SUSAN
I didn’t mean it that way.

PETER
Yes you did.

SUSAN
But I don’t want you to know I meant it that way.

PETER
That’s fair.

SUSAN
Goodbye, Peter.

PETER
I’ll study with you.

SUSAN
Seriously?

PETER
Yeah. It’ll be good for me.

SUSAN
I don’t know.

PETER
I could use the help.

SUSAN
I like to study alone usually.

PETER
That sounds horribly boring.

SUSAN
It’s not supposed to be fun.

PETER
How do you know?
I guess I don’t.

PETER

I won’t take no for an answer.

Susan considers his offer.

Even Con Law?

SUSAN

PETER

What can I say? I’m a sucker for legumes.

He kisses her. As they kiss, flashbulbs go off. The reporters and Marsha reappear. Peter and Susan come back to the present at different rates.

REPORTER 1
Mrs. Turner? Are you going to forgive your husband?

PETER

Are you saying you forgive me for being so persistent?

I didn’t say anything.

SUSAN

Do you?

PETER

SUSAN

(to Peter)

Stubbornness is a virtue.

PETER

It’s only a virtue if I turn out to be right about us.

SUSAN

I guess. If you turn out to be wrong it’s mere stupidity.

PETER

So, are you saying I’m going to turn out to be right?

I didn’t say anything of the kind.

SUSAN
REPORTER 1
Are you prepared to make a statement?

REPORTER 2
Mrs. Turner! Susan? Are you staying with him?

REPORTER 1
Do you think the voters can look past these allegations as you have?

REPORTER 2
Would you vote for him?

REPORTER 1
Did you read the police report? Has she read the police report?

MARSHA
You don’t have to answer that.

SUSAN
I don’t have to answer that.

Susan starts becoming aware of the others as one becomes aware of waking up from a great dream. She resists.

REPORTER 2
What have you told Tyler?

MARSHA
You don’t have to answer that either. (To Reporters) Give her a second, guys.

REPORTER 1
Sorry.

REPORTER 2
Is he sorry?

SUSAN
(To Peter)
Are you sorry?

PETER
Sorry I tried?

SUSAN
Are you sorry?
REPORTER 1

Peter, are you sorry?

PETER

Yes. No. What for?

SUSAN

For...what you did?

Peter laughs. He is coming back to the present.

What did I do?

PETER

Peter!

SUSAN

Do you want some more wine?

PETER

You had them give me a gag order?

SUSAN

A what?

PETER

You sent them to do that.

SUSAN

It’s standard.

PETER

You sound just like them.

SUSAN

It’s better for you than it is for me.

PETER

I doubt that.

SUSAN

Your life is no different, just more secure.

PETER

No different?

SUSAN
PETER

Did you have other plans?

SUSAN

Did you?

PETER

Of course not, Peanut. We stick together.

SUSAN

I talked to her. I heard her voice.

PETER

Everything’s going to be fine, Susan. Things like this happen all the time. You just don’t always hear about it.

SUSAN

All the time? Do you know how terrible that sounds? It doesn’t happen all the time.

Sure it does.

SUSAN

People don’t beat prostitutes all the time.

How do you know?

Susan slaps him. He grabs her arm.

PETER

You get one of those.

How many did she get?

SUSAN

There are people in this world who are jealous. They’re jealous of you, of me. They’re jealous of our two car garage, they’re jealous of our intelligent, athletic son. They’re jealous that I’m white...

What do we tell Tyler?

SUSAN

What do you want to tell him?
SUSAN
I want to tell him it’s all a lie! I want to tell him none of this happened! That his life isn’t ruined, his family isn’t disgraced!

PETER
You can’t tell him that.

SUSAN
Because it’s not true.

PETER
We tell Tyler that families stick together. We tell Tyler that humans are human. We sit our son down and we tell him that there are truths in this world that never come out. There are stories that get distorted there are denials and monstrosities in the press, and then there’s the truth. The truth doesn’t exist. The truth happens and is instantly gone. That’s what you tell him.

SUSAN
You believe that?

PETER
I believe that you deserve a two car garage.

SUSAN
That has nothing to do with this.

PETER
That’s all this has to do with. That’s all there is.

SUSAN
There used to be more.

PETER
I’m moving on. For us.

SUSAN
They won’t let you.

PETER
They will. It’s just a matter of how. I’ll apologize, repent, rehab, reboot, whatever they need me to do. What happens after that more or less depends on you. You should take the money and move on with me. I won’t touch it. I promise. They made sure I couldn’t.

SUSAN
I don’t want the money.
PETER
Fine. Plead for sympathy until the day you die and hope that the voters will believe all of the horrible things I did to you. You can go on and on about how ruined you are and that might take you as far as a divorce settlement and perhaps a book deal or two. Maybe. But after that, you’re just a woman scorned with a destitute son.

SUSAN
Why are you doing this?

PETER
What will you do next? Pick up the pieces of a law career never started?

SUSAN
Because of you.

PETER
Because you trapped me.

SUSAN
What?

PETER
An unwanted law school pregnancy.

SUSAN
You wouldn’t do that to him.

PETER
And I am the man you drove away.

SUSAN
What?

PETER
I did the right thing, treated you well. But you were unkind. Unsupportive. Unsatisfying. Cold. Abusive even.

SUSAN
You wouldn’t.

PETER
Far too volatile to raise her sensitive son.

SUSAN
Stop it.
PETER
Take the money, and live your life.

SUSAN
I can’t do that.

PETER
You go with the plan we set up and you get your life back and then some. You can buy your mom a new house. Far, far away from you, where the phone lines don’t work.

SUSAN
You’re going to jail.

PETER
Maybe, maybe not. Probably not. I’m charming, remember?

SUSAN
This isn’t law school.

PETER
You’re right law school was hard.

SUSAN
You make me sick.

PETER
And even if I do go to jail, maybe I won’t get elected again, but my life is far from over. I may even have a new career waiting for me on the other side. Broadcasting? I hear satellite radio is taking anyone.

SUSAN
So what do you need me for?

PETER
I’m giving you the opportunity to put things back to normal.

SUSAN
We’ll never be back to normal.

PETER
Maybe not. But you have to try. For Tyler.

SUSAN
I have to try?
I want you to try. You can fix this.

SUSAN
I can’t fix this.

PETER
You can help me come closer than I can alone.

SUSAN
But you don’t need me.

PETER
No.

SUSAN
So what do you want me for?

PETER
I want you there with me.

SUSAN
Why?

PETER
Because that’s where you belong. You always have. I told you that from day one.

SUSAN
I didn’t believe you then.

PETER
I have a way of knowing these things.

She sizes him up.

SUSAN
Are you going to do it again?

PETER
I don’t know.

SUSAN
Then why should I do this?

PETER
Because you made a vow.
So did you.

PETER
You’re a better person than I am. Better at vows.

SUSAN
I know.

Peter remains on stage, frozen in Susan’s sightline. Tyler enters.

TYLER
Mom?

SUSAN
Yes, honey.

TYLER
The cameras are outside again. When’s it going to stop?

SUSAN
Soon.

TYLER
Mom?

SUSAN
Yes honey.

TYLER
Did he do it? You can tell me.

REPORTER 1
Did he do it? Mrs. Turner?

TYLER
Mom?

REPORTER 2
Do you have a confession, Mrs. Turner? Did he confess?

SUSAN
I’m not going to...

TYLER
Mom, people keep asking me things. I’m not sure what to say.
REPORTER 1
Mrs. Turner, do you have a statement?

TYLER
Mom? Are you getting a divorce? That’s what they’re saying at school.

SUSAN
I can’t tell you what he did or didn’t do.

TYLER
People say you don’t believe him.

SUSAN
I don’t know what I believe.

TYLER
What should I believe?

SUSAN
I don’t know.

TYLER
You said we had to believe in him.

SUSAN
I know what I said.

TYLER
You said you needed us to believe in him.

SUSAN
I did. I do.

TYLER
You sat next to him on TV.

SUSAN
I know.

TYLER
Dad wants you to help him.

SUSAN
He told you that?

TYLER
I just know. He needs us.
Tyler...

No. You have to help him. If you help him, all of the reporters will stop.

I don’t know if that’s true.

What are you going to say?

I don’t know.

You have to make a statement.

They’re expecting it now.

Please. Mom, please. It’s the only way to make it stop.

Susan considers for a while, then takes Tyler’s hand. Susan, Peter, and Tyler turn towards the audience. Susan addresses the reporters.

Someone once told me that the truth in history only exists at the time when it happens. After it happens, the truth is gone. All that’s left are stories. (She looks at Tyler.) Over the past few days I’ve decided that there are things that are more important than the truth.

So...uhm...what’s the truth?

I don’t know. I wasn’t there.

You weren’t there? Was there somewhere to be?

There probably was. It’s irrelevant now.

So you’re saying...
SUSAN
I’m saying, I am supporting my husband.

REPORTER 1
Supporting him how?

REPORTER 2
Are you staying with him?

SUSAN
I’m standing by him.

REPORTER 3
Why?

SUSAN
For now.

TYLER
You made a vow.

SUSAN
I made a vow.

REPORTER 2
So did he!

SUSAN
I’m better at vows than he is.

PETER
She really is!

SUSAN
Susan, still standing with Tyler and Peter, sees Becca at the corner of the stage.

There’s gonna be a trial.

BECCA
Of course there is. He’s going to jail for a long time.

SUSAN
He might not.
I hope he does.

BECCA

They walk to the table. The others disappear.

I should have gotten a job.

SUSAN

What?

BECCA

Mom was right. I had so many offers.

SUSAN

That was a long time ago.

BECCA

It’s not like being home made him stick around.

SUSAN

Don’t even start with that.

BECCA

What if it was my fault?

SUSAN

It wasn’t.

BECCA

I didn’t make time for him. I didn’t dress up for him.

SUSAN

It wasn’t you. Wives can drive their husbands away. They can’t drive them to be perverts.

BECCA

He told me politicians did better when their wives didn’t work.

SUSAN

In 1950 maybe.

BECCA

I wanted to believe him. Always. Anything he said.

SUSAN

I know.
I was in love.

SUSAN

I know.

BECCA

And then there was Tyler and I couldn’t leave him at home.

SUSAN

You couldn’t.

BECCA

And I didn’t have to. And the money....

SUSAN

It wasn’t an issue.

BECCA

Right.

SUSAN

Never was with him.

BECCA

It would be now.

SUSAN

Only if you go.

BECCA

He’s my whole identity now. Without him I’m nothing. A vapor.

SUSAN

You don’t have to have nothing..

BECCA

I’ll always know that I’m nothing without him.

SUSAN

But maybe this way’s better. More honest. Sure, you’ll have to be with him, but you’ll always know your terms at least. You’ll never be caught off guard again.

BECCA

It will never be the same.

SUSAN

It will never be the same. You’re right.
But...  
BECCA  
But nothing.  
SUSAN  
What?  
BECCA  
You don’t see me complaining.  
SUSAN  
What are you talking about?  
BECCA  
I think mom’s right.  
SUSAN  
That I deserve it?  
BECCA  
You knew what you were getting yourself into.  
SUSAN  
You think I had this coming to me.  
BECCA  
I think it was in the fine print.  
SUSAN  
Well I didn’t read it.  
BECCA  
But you have a gorgeous home and everything you could ever need.  
SUSAN  
It’s not about that.  
BECCA  
You’re making out pretty well.  
SUSAN  
I wouldn’t call this making out well.  
BECCA  
Well, if it would pay my bills...
She stops herself.

Sorry.

I can’t get her voice out of my head.

Who?

The...the girl.

Oh.

She sounded so young. And all I could think was...we’re exactly the same.

You’re not that young.

We both trusted him.

He’s charming.

We both did what he asked. I still am.

You’re not alone.

We both got fucked.

They laugh. A release.

They want to do another special. An official announcement of the new campaign.

TV?

In our living room.
Norman fucking Rockwell.

Wow.

They’re buying us new furniture.

I love your furniture.

Me too. My fine print furniture.

They don’t like it?

They want more Rockwell.

Weird.

Modern furniture is for the Swedes, they said. Not patriotic.

What are they going to ask you?

About...sticking it out through adversity.

The sanctity of marriage. Long lasting true love.

Right.

Gross.

Appealing to the masses. A modern day Camelot.
BECCA
How long are they going to make you sit there and lie?

SUSAN
There are no lies when there is no truth. Just stories.

BECCA
Where’d you get that anyway?

SUSAN
Where do you think?

Marsha and Peter enter. The space transforms into the conference room.

MARSHA
We’re going to have to ask you to sign now.

PETER
It will be fine.

SUSAN
The woman who stuck by it all to keep her family together.

BECCA
Why can’t he stick by anything?

SUSAN
I never believed all that bullshit.

BECCA
So give it all up. Pack your bags.

SUSAN
I can’t.

BECCA
Why not?

SUSAN
I guess I believe all that bullshit.

PETER
It’s really going to make it better for all of us. Think of Tyler.
BECCA
You’re doing the right thing. Think of Tyler.

BARRY
I’ve read through the whole thing, don’t worry.

MARSHA
It’s a formality really, we know your intentions are good.

SUSAN
What do you know about good intentions?

PETER
You have to sign now, Peanut.

MARSHA
We like to have everything in order.

PETER
Just a formality.

BARRY
Just so we are protected.

SUSAN
We?

BARRY
And you and little Tigger, of course.

SUSAN
Tyler.

MARSHA
Trust me, everything is much easier this way.

SUSAN
Can I ask you a question?

Sure.

SUSAN
What does she have to sign?

Who?
SUSAN
You know who.

BARRY
We’re not at liberty to discuss...confidentiality stuff, you understand.

SUSAN
Is she...

MARSHA
She’s taken care of.

SUSAN
What do you mean?

MARSHA
She’s compensated in a similar manner.

SUSAN
You’re paying her off?

MARSHA
She’s agreed to...

SUSAN
Being silenced.

MARSHA
I wouldn’t call it that.

SUSAN
What do you call it?

BARRY
An arrangement.

SUSAN
Medical bills?

MARSHA
And then some.

SUSAN
There are others. Other women.

MARSHA
No there aren’t.
There are.

We don’t know anything about any others.

How many arrangements are there?

Everyone is content with their terms.

Everyone?

Everyone.

And everyone includes...

We’re not at liberty to discuss...

Everyone includes everyone who knows...or suspects. Or could help to silence...

If you could just sign...

Everyone includes...my sister?

You know I can’t say.

My mother?

This isn’t exactly relevant to what we’re doing here.

I think it’s relevant.

Suzie...I’m so sorry.
SUSAN

Don’t.

BECCA

You knew.

SUSAN

I guessed.

BECCA

It’s just been so hard. Stu out of work and...I really did believe in...the stuff about Tyler.

SUSAN

Stop. Just stop.

Susan picks up a pen.

BECCA

Thank you.

BARRY

Just that line right there.

SUSAN

Shouldn’t I have a lawyer or something?

BARRY

You are a lawyer.

Susan signs.

BARRY

Best way to get everything back to normal.

SUSAN

So, what do I do now?

BARRY

Act normal.

They take the papers away.

SUSAN

Doesn’t that feel better now?

MARSHA
SUSAN
I just signed on to play myself in some fake reality.

MARSHA
Kinda!

Peter pats her on the back. Marsha hands Susan a bowl of food to put on the table.

PETER
Hungry?

TYLER
I am.

Peter and Tyler sit down for a meal. Susan reaches out to hug Tyler, he sits on the opposite side of the table.

PETER
Everything looks delicious.

There are pictures being taken of them as they eat.

SUSAN
I didn’t make any of it.

TYLER
Mac and cheese! My favorite.

SUSAN
You’re lactose intolerant.

PETER
How was your day, honey?

SUSAN
You know how my day was.

PETER
That’s nice dear.

He takes slow, deliberate bites.

TYLER
Mmm! This is great!
They eat in awkward silence. Susan watches.

You’re not hungry?

PETER

I don’t have an appetite.

SUSAN

Rita appears and takes a seat at the table. She’s still in a hospital gown.

Pass the asparagus please.

RITA

You.

SUSAN

She sloppily spoons lots of food onto her plate and eats very messily.

Good shit.

RITA

Tyler roars with laughter. Susan is surprised at seeing the wounds for the first time. She reaches out to touch them.

Does it still hurt?

SUSAN

Rita takes a bite.

Is that garlic? Delicious.

RITA

Did he mention me?

SUSAN

You can never get too much garlic. Keeps the monsters away. And the congressmen.

RITA

Rita laughs. Tyler and Peter join in.

How could you not know who he was? He’d been there before.

SUSAN

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RITA: I haven’t had a home cooked meal in a while.

SUSAN: Do you want more potatoes?

RITA: How was school?

TYLER: Fine.

RITA: Just fine? You didn’t learn anything?

TYLER: Math.

RITA: Math? Just math?

TYLER: Algebra.

RITA: Equations?

TYLER: Yeah.

RITA: I loved that shit.

TYLER: Mom!

SUSAN: What?

RITA: Sorry.

SUSAN: Tyler?

RITA: Did Mr. Lamb hand back the tests?
No.

Did he?

Yes.

How did you do?

What did you get?

A minus.

That’s great!

Why the minus, dummy?

He’s not dumb.

Didn’t check my work.

Always check your work.

I was great at algebra. Not so much geometry.

You were great at everything.

Peter kisses Rita violently.

Stop it!

You can show me later what else you’re great at.

He slaps her ass.
TYLER

Gross!

SUSAN

Stop it!

PETER

You have to appreciate what you got.

He winks.

TYLER

Grosser!

Peter grabs Rita’s breasts. Tyler laughs. Peter begins roughing Rita up, re-enacting his violation of her. He puts her on the dinner table and carves in her skin with a knife. Tyler roars with laughter.

SUSAN

Stop it! Stop!

Susan pushes Rita off the table violently. She begins kicking and beating the chair Rita was sitting in. The world slowly comes back into reality. Peter and Tyler see a chair fall. Flashbulbs erupt. It goes on for far too long.

After a silence.

PETER

Susan.

Mom.

TYLER

MARSHA

Damnit.

BARRY

We didn’t put in a crazy clause.

MARSHA

You said you’d done this before.

BARRY

I have.
Shoulda put in a crazy clause. Always put in the crazy clause. Now we’re stuck with her. The senator’s gonna be pissed.

Peter turns to the audience. He dresses Susan in a hospital gown as he speaks.

PETER
Susan is doing well, thank you for the concern.

REPORTER 1
Will this affect your campaign?

PETER
No. Of course not.

REPORTER 2
You’re not afraid you’ll be seen as insensitive?

PETER
Susan supports me in whatever I do. It is most important to her to help the people of this state. At this time, we are confident she will make a swift recovery.

REPORTER 1
How’s Tyler holding up?

PETER
He’s eager to get on the campaign trail.

Peter places her in a hospital bed.

REPORTER 1
And how does he feel about his mother’s illness?

PETER
Tyler is a supportive and patient son. We’ve both been by her side for the past week and we plan to be until she is one hundred percent better.

REPORTER 2
And then what?

PETER
And then we’ll see! Maybe we’ll kick her to the curb.

The reporters laugh.

PETER
I’m just kidding of course.
REPORTER 1
Senator, can you speak to exactly what caused her breakdown?

PETER
I can’t say. All I know is that she is the hardest working wife and mother there is. Women are asked to do a lot, you know. It’s way harder for them than it is for us.

He winks. A flash bulb.

REPORTER 1
She must be very proud of you, sir.

PETER
She is.

Peter exits. Susan calls after him. Barry is standing next to the hospital bed.

SUSAN
Peter?

BARRY
He can’t be seen speaking with you.

SUSAN
Why?

BARRY
We have to make sure it’s controlled. You understand.

SUSAN
I don’t.

BARRY
Things are a bit different than they were prior to your little...episode.

SUSAN
Yes, they are.

BARRY
Unfortunately, we’re going to have to change the arrangement on our end.

SUSAN
I want out of the deal.

Barry laughs.
BARRY
We’re both smart enough to know that’s not possible. That contract’s air tight. Except for the crazy clause goddamnit.

SUSAN
I don’t care about the money.

BARRY
Well, that’s fine but you signed.

SUSAN
You can have it back.

BARRY
Whether you spend it or not is your business but the check is written. The trust is in the bank.

SUSAN
We don’t need the money. We’ll figure it out ourselves.

BARRY
I don’t have time for this. You’re staying and we’re moving on. Now we have some clean up to do.

SUSAN
What do you mean?

BARRY
It seems with your little “episode”...

SUSAN
Stop calling it an episode.

BARRY
With your little outbreak...

SUSAN
I was upset.

BARRY
Whatever it was, it’s looking a bit hairy for the senator.

SUSAN
But the thing with the prostitute?

BARRY
That we could solve.
SUSAN

I see. But this...

BARRY

The current situation presents a difficult set of options for us. He could keep running, ramp up the rhetoric, deny any reports you’re still ailing. We throw you in some suits, you smile and wave, do some pharmaceutical commercials, no harm no foul.

Or?

BARRY

He quits the race, is seen as an heroic care-taker, makes millions when he gets a daytime talk show a la Dr. Phil and teaches other champs like him how to be the perfect man.

Do that one.

BARRY

Well, it’s not ideal.

SUSAN

Why not?

BARRY

Tons of work for the big guy. And, as you know, senators are not typically fond of work.

So he wants me to do the work.

BARRY

Yes.

SUSAN

He wants me to smile and wave.

BARRY

There is another option of course.

SUSAN

Another one?

BARRY

Peter didn’t exactly condone the idea but it could get both of you off the hook.
And what’s that?  
SUSAN

You go crazier.  
BARRY

Than I already am.  
SUSAN

Give him a reason to leave. Cause if he leaves, you’re all in the clear. There’s nothing in the deal about him leaving. If he leaves, the money is still yours.  
BARRY

I don’t want him to leave.  
SUSAN

Sure, honey.  
BARRY

I don’t.  
SUSAN

Anyway, think about it.  
BARRY

I’ve thought about it.  
SUSAN

Barry laughs.  

BARRY
It’s the merciful thing to do, you know? Get some rest, kid.  

I don’t need rest, I know what I’m doing.  
SUSAN

Now you sound crazy.  
BECCA

Thanks.  
SUSAN

Look...  
BECCA

I get it.  
SUSAN
BECCA
Just give me a chance to explain.

SUSAN
You did what you had to do. We both did.

BECCA
I guess.

SUSAN
How’s Tyler doing?

BECCA
Surprisingly well, actually.

Tyler appears in another part of the stage. He is on television. Becca and Susan watch.

TYLER
My mother’s doing just fine, thanks.

Flashbulbs go off.

SUSAN
How’s he going to turn out?

TYLER
She’s been getting fabulous treatment. Dad’s made sure of that.

Flashbulbs go off.

BECCA
He’s a great kid.

TYLER
We’re focusing on bigger and better things.

BECCA
You’ve rubbed off on him.

TYLER
Moving ahead, we look to helping those who struggle with mental illness.

SUSAN
He thinks I have a mental illness?
BECCA
That’s what they’ve told the press. You’ve gotten lots of support from the mental health community.

TYLER
Not everyone is lucky like my mother to have the support around them she does.

He’s got your brains.

BECCA

TYLER
That’s why I’m announcing the Susan Turner Foundation for mentally ill women.

Your passion.

BECCA

TYLER
In honor of my mother.

Your heart.

BECCA

REPORTER 1
Tyler, your parents must be very proud of you.

TYLER
My father’s really proud. He says I take after him. That’s the best compliment I ever got!

Flashbulbs go off.

And his charm.

BECCA

TYLER
Any questions?

Flashbulbs erupt.

Susan follows Tyler offstage. She encounters Rita. She isn’t sure how she got there.

RITA
I told them I wouldn’t talk to you.

I know.

SUSAN
They gave me a lot.

I’ll tell them it was my idea. They won’t take it away.

You really shouldn’t be here.

I won’t stay long. How are you feeling?

Like you care.

I do care.

But nothing ever happened, right? What happened happened and was instantly gone, right?

I didn’t come up with that.

You said it.

I did. But it was... It wasn’t me.

It’s who you’ve become.

You don’t understand.

I understand completely. All I’m saying is, be one or the other. Just fucking own it. Don’t pretend you are playing both sides because it just sounds like bullshit, okay? I signed their stupid stack of papers and you know what it got me? A hell of a lot.

I know.

The most I’ll ever have. The most I’ll ever see.
RITA
And, I’m off the hook. I face no prosecution, no criminal record. And you know what? It’s a fucked up thing to sign. It really is. I let him get away with it. Profit off of it.

SUSAN

Listen...

RITA
No, you listen. I signed it because it was the best possible setup for someone in my position. I can walk away from it all, I can go back to school.

SUSAN

That’s great.

RITA
It is great. And you know what I’m not doing with it?

What?

RITA
I’m not going up to all the other girls and flaunting it in their faces and pretending like I give a shit.

SUSAN

That’s not what I’m doing.

RITA
It’s not?

SUSAN

I just want to know what happened.

You know what happened.

RITA

I need to know from you.

You need to know from him.

RITA

He’s different. He’s not him.
RITA
I’m pretty sure this was him all along. You’re just seeing it now.

If you could just show me.

SUSAN
What?

RITA
Just show me what he did.

SUSAN
You’re crazy.

RITA
Please, show me what he did to you.

SUSAN
Susan starts moving toward Rita. Rita backs away.

Don’t get any closer.

RITA
I need to know what he did. I need to see it.

SUSAN
Susan tries to lift up Rita’s gown.

RITA
Get the fuck away from me.

SUSAN
I need to see it. I need to know. Show me. Please show me.

RITA
Get the fuck away from me. Get away from me.

SUSAN
I need to see it. I need to. Please. Please show me. It could have been me. It could have been me.

RITA
But it wasn’t. It was me. Now get your hands off me.

SUSAN
I’m sorry...
RITA
I’m not going to help you feel better about letting him get away with it.

SUSAN
That’s not what I want.

RITA
Do you think he did it?

SUSAN
I don’t know.

RITA
But you’re pretty sure.

SUSAN
I’m pretty sure.

RITA
Are you okay with sticking by someone who did that for the rest of your life?

SUSAN
It’s more complicated than that.

RITA
Are you okay with your son seeing him get away with it?

SUSAN
Don’t talk about my son.

RITA
Are you okay with being a part of this whole thing? Forever?

SUSAN
I don’t know.

RITA
I’m taking my stash because I have nothing to lose. I am taking mine because I want to. I’d rather live with knowing I let him get away with it because it lets me out of the game. I’m done. I don’t have to do this for any other scumbags. But you, if you stick around, this is all you’ll ever be. Forever. You’ll be a pawn. And that Tyler....

SUSAN
What about him.

RITA
He’s the prince, my love. Waiting in line to inherit the throne. The throne you gave him. Thanks mommy.
Tyler comes bounding in.

TYLER

Mom!

SUSAN
(to Rita)

I’m sorry for what this did to you.

TYLER

Did you see me on TV?

RITA

I’m sorry for what this did to you.

TYLER

Dad says I have to be more adult now that you won’t be around.

SUSAN

Why won’t I be around?

TYLER

He said you’re going to stay home when we go on the campaign tour.

SUSAN

He’s taking you out of school?

TYLER

The teachers said it would be a good learning experience. They said I’m lucky to have a dad like him.

Rita nods to Susan and exits.

BARRY

For the sake of the campaign, you’ll just stay home for a while. We’ll tell them all you’re recuperating--They started an adorable little charity, you know.

SUSAN

I’m not crazy.

BARRY

It’s the sympathy vote.

SUSAN

Sympathy for him?

BARRY

And the female vote.
Right, the female vote.

You want me to stay here?

For the campaign.

Thanks, Suzie Q. You’re a life saver.

Can I talk to you about something?

Anything.

But only for five minutes.

Only for five minutes.

Do you miss the way it used to be?

What do you mean?

Between us.

Like when?

Look at me. Do you miss the way it was?

You are the same to me you always were.

The same?

You’ve made me better. Stronger.
The wind beneath your wings.

Exactly.

Can we go back to before? Quit all of this and go back?

Susan.

Please. For me. For Tyler.

Tyler loves this stuff.

You say the word and we can go back to picnics in the park.

I don’t know.

You loved me once.

I still do.

I know. Look at me.

He does.

I don’t know how to stop it all.

You do.

We can’t afford it.

We’ll be fine.
It’s too late now.

Peter, please.

It’s too late.

Just try. For me. I’ll forgive you. Wipe the slate clean. Just the three of us.

It’s too late.

Time’s up.

That wasn’t five minutes.

It sort of was.

We’ll see you soon. Don’t worry.

Yeah mom. Don’t worry.

Barry whisks everyone away.

Peter.

What did you write in her skin?

Get some sleep, Peanut.

Susan is left alone on stage in her hospital gown.

She wanders for a while, then catches a glimpse out in the audience. She sits down at the table and adjusts her microphone. She is positioned the same way she was at the top of the play.
SUSAN

I’m ready now....

A flash.

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY.